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## “THE GERMANS EQUATED THE KARAITE AND THE JEWS”: THE SHOAH AND THE KARAITE POLICY IN MELITOPOL’ DISTRICT (1941–1943)

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the Holocaust, German Karaite Policy, and Jewish–Karaite relations in Melitopol’ region during the Nazi occupation. The author uses unpublished sources from Ukrainian, Israeli, German, and Lithuanians archives, as well as oral history testimonies from his private collection to demonstrate that Jews in Melitopol’ were murdered by the Germans and their collaborators throughout the entire period of occupation, with the culmination of this policy occurring in the first days of the Wehrmacht’s arrival in Melitopol’. The property of the murdered Jews was confiscated by the local administration and handed over to the German army. Jews who concealed their nationality and went into hiding in Melitopol’ or nearby villages were persecuted by the Germans and their collaborators throughout the entire period of occupation. Local Karaite activists, with the support of local self-government officials, managed to convince the employees of SK 10A that the local Karaites had nothing in common with the Jews and were in fact a Turkic people professing “their own religion”. Close examination of the archival materials reveals that the Karaite narrative in Melitopol’ had already fallen under the strong influence of Karaite Turkic nationalism in the pre-war period. Within this narrative, there was an attempt to eliminate any Jewish elements from the everyday culture of local Karaites. The Holocaust is mentioned in this narrative only in general terms, most often in the context of the fact that the Germans sought to eliminate the Karaites, but the latter managed to convince the former that they were a separate ethnic group altogether. The research demonstrates that the subject of the Holocaust is practically absent from the postwar trials of collaborators in Melitopol’, as evidenced by the trials of members of the local self-government, Andrei Putov and Vasili Pereplechikov. The documents prove that representatives of the Melitopol’ local administration participated in the looting of Jewish property after the first mass executions. However, the role of the local government in the first and bloodiest Aktion remains unclear. The Ilarion Kurylo (Krymchak) trial highlights the role that members of the rural self-government played in not only the persecution but also the rescue of Jews, as well as attempts to influence the local administration of OUN (b) and OUN (m).

### KEYWORDS:

Holocaust, German Karaite Policy, Jewish-Karaite relations, Melitopol’, Karaite Turkic nationalism

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According to the First General Census of the Population of the Russian Empire from 1897, the city of Melitopol' had a population of nearly 15,500. In terms of demographic composition, Russians were the largest group (6,630), followed by Jews (6,214) and Ukrainians (1,366).<sup>1</sup> The census did not provide data on the Karaite population which appeared in the city after the Crimean War, but the local census data from 1865 indicated that 194 Karaites resided in the city at that time. A subsequent Soviet-era Census of 1939 recorded 336 Karaites in Melitopol', and by the time of the Nazi occupation there were about 130 Karaites living there.<sup>2</sup> The period of German occupation from 1941 to 1943 altered the city's demographics drastically. Despite the fact that later on, during the period of independent Ukraine, Ukrainians and Russians became the dominant groups in the city and remained so at the time of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, Melitopol' became a symbol of local multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup> This was particularly true following the resettlement of Crimean Tatars in the city after the occupation of Crimea in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of viewing the events of the Shoah and the Nazi occupation through the lens of multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup> This perspective is particularly relevant in regions like southern Ukraine. We know that Karaites were executed alongside Ashkenazi Jews in some locations, such as Krasnodar.<sup>6</sup> In other areas, such as Crimea, the Germans and their allies left the Karaite

<sup>1</sup> *Pervaja Vseobščaja perepis' naselenija Rossijskoj Imperii 1897 g. Tablica XIII. Raspreделение naselenija po rodnomu jazyku*, 50 vols (Sankt-Peterburg, 1903–1905) <[http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census\\_types.php?ct=7](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/census_types.php?ct=7)> [accessed on 10 September 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Nikolaj Krylov, 'Karaimy v Melitopol'e (istoričeskij očerk)', in *V surovyje gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny, Karaimy Melitopol'ja (Melitopol')*: Dolja, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Natal'ja Džatkova, 'Šest' gorodov učatsja u Melitopol'ja interkul'turnosti', *Mestnye Vesti - Melitopol'*, 25 November 2010 <[https://misto.zp.ua/article/partners/shest-gorodov-uchatsya-u-Melitopol'ja-interkulturnosti\\_6473.html](https://misto.zp.ua/article/partners/shest-gorodov-uchatsya-u-Melitopol'ja-interkulturnosti_6473.html)> [accessed on 28 June 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Gubernskij, 'Krymskie tatory Melitopol'ja: sochranjaja tradicii', *Krym.Realii. Radio Svoboda*, 17 May 2018 <<https://ru.krymr.com/p/5612.html>> [accessed on 25 July 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Juri Radchenko, 'Novi perspektyvy doslidžennja Holokostu v Ukrajinі z pozyciji mul'tykul'turalizmu', *The Ideology and Politics Journal*, 21 (2022), 89–109.

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (Warsaw: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 306.

population unharmed.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary studies of the Nazi's Karaite policy in Ukraine reveal that the final decision on whether the local Karaite population would survive was often made by *Einsatzgruppen* commanders "on the ground", similarly to the approach taken in regards to the local Romani population.<sup>8</sup> Notably, even prominent Holocaust historian Andrej Angrick does not mention the "Karaite issue" in his research on the crimes of Einsatzgruppe D in Melitopol', Mariupol', Krasnodar, Novorossiysk, and other locations.<sup>9</sup>

What was the attitude of the German occupation authorities towards the local Karaites in the context of the murders of Jews in Melitopol', one of the largest Karaite population centres in mainland Ukraine at the beginning of the Soviet-German war? An important issue studied by contemporary scholars is the relationship between the Karaites and the Rabbinic Jews during the Shoah. Contemporary research shows that the range of these relationships was quite broad. For example, Karaites, who at some points in time were considered a Turkic ethnic group, sometimes served in collaborationist structures and even contributed to the murders of Jews. On the other hand, Karaites could help Jews survive by providing them with fake Karaite documents, hiding them, etc.<sup>10</sup> What were the relationships between Jews and Karaites before and during the war? How did they change in the context of the genocide of the Jewish people? What were the sentiments among the Karaites during the occupation? How were these moods reflected in post-war narratives? All these issues are particularly interesting in light of the spread of Turkic Karaite nationalism among the Melitopol' Karaites.<sup>11</sup>

The subject of representation of Karaite and Jewish issues of the occupation period within the Soviet official discourse remains understudied. In this context, it is interesting to examine how Soviet investigative agencies approached the inquiry into the specifics of Nazi and collaborators' policies towards the Jews and Karaites in the occupied USSR, particularly

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Yuri Radchenko, 'Okkupacija, kategorizacija naselenija i izbiratel'nost' genocida: slučaj karaimov Char'kova (1941–1943 gg.)', *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2022), 131–60.

<sup>9</sup> Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord. Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), pp. 307–23.

<sup>10</sup> On the subject of these proceedings, see Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, pp. 350–68; Kiril Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016), pp. 255–308.

<sup>11</sup> On the subject of Turkish Karaite nationalism, see Mikhail Kizilov, 'National Inventions: The Imperial Emancipation of the Karaites from Jewishness', in *An Empire of Others. Making Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, ed. by Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2014), 369–94; Mikhail Kizilov, 'Social Adaptation and Manipulation of Self-Identity: Karaites in Eastern Europe in Modern Times', in *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations*, ed. by Dan Shapira and Daniel Lasker (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2011), 130–53; Michail Kizilov, 'Stanovlenie etničeskogo samosoznaniia i istoričeskikh vzgljadov vostočnoevropejskich karaimov v kontekste obščeevropeskoj istorii konca XVIII – načala XXI veka', in *Klal' Israel': Evrejskaja etničnost' i nacionalizm v prošlom i nastojaščem*, ed. by Michail Členov and Artem Fedorčuk (Moskva: Memoris, 2007), pp. 329–50; Evrejskij muzej i centr tolerantnosti, *Lekcija 'Karaimy i ideologija: pojavlenie karaimskogo nacionalizma'* | Maksim Gammal, online video recording, YouTube, 13 August 2013 <<https://youtu.be/tWDNVGU0j1U?si=58D7BU5xSttSj97O>> [accessed on 21 July 2021].

in Melitopol'. What aspects draw their attention? What did they overlook? In recent decades, researchers have primarily focused on archival judicial and investigative cases that had long remained inaccessible in the archives of the former KGB.<sup>12</sup> Among other questions raised by contemporary historians is the role of local urban and rural self-government in the Shoah at the grassroots level.<sup>13</sup> Just how these processes took shape in Melitopol' and its surroundings remains unclear. Local historians have touched upon these issues very superficially and descriptively, without delving into this aspect of the local history of the Shoa,

In the Melitopol' region, a Gebietskomissariat<sup>14</sup> was headed by Georg Heinisch, while the city mayor was the German colonist D. D. Klassen, who died in December 1942. Shortly thereafter, a certain E. Goronovsky was appointed to this position. Starting 10 March 1943, a former director of the local museum, the elder of the Voznesenka village, "Professor" I. P. Kurylo-Krymchak (the second part of his surname is a pseudonym), assumed this role. During the Nazi occupation, local workers and the German administration managed to put into operation a power station (directed by Stamboli), an OGPU<sup>15</sup> plant, a malleable iron plant, and an oil mill. In the city centre, markets and shops resumed trading, shopkeepers appeared, and bakeries became operational (on Pochtovaya-Sverdlova Street). Only primary schools were in operation, with textbooks undergoing strict scrutiny – many pages were either ripped or blotted out. The city housed a Ukrainian Drama Theater, a cinema (Deutsche Lichtspiele), a variety show, restaurants, and so forth.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tanja Penter, 'Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators', *Slavic Review*, 64 (2005), 782–90.

<sup>13</sup> Markus Ajkel', 'Sposobstvujaja provedeniju Cholokosta: organy mestnogo samoupravlenija v okkupirovannoju nemcami central'noj i vostočnoju Ukraine (1941–1944)', *Holokost i sučasnist'*, 1 (2009), 9–26; Yuri Radchenko, 'Accomplices to Extinction: Municipal Government and the Holocaust in Kharkiv (1941–1942)', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 27 (2013), 443–63.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'Gebietskomissar' was used during the Nazi era during the Second World War as an official title for civil servants who headed the administration of a district or regional commissariat. They were roughly equal in rank to district administrators or NSDAP district leaders in the German Reich. Chief commissioners ranked above them. Regional commissioners were appointed in Norway from 1940 after the military attack on Norway and Denmark and in 1941 after the military attack on Russia in the civil administrations of the occupied eastern territories in the Reich Commissariat Ostland and Reich Commissariat Ukraine.

<sup>15</sup> The Joint State Political Directorate (Russian: Объединённое государственное политическое управление), abbreviated as OGPU (Russian: ОГПУ), was the secret police of the Soviet Union from November 1923 to July 1934, succeeding the State Political Directorate (GPU). Responsible to the Council of People's Commissars, the OGPU was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky until 1926, then by Vyacheslav Menzhinsky until replaced by the Main Directorate of State Security (GUGB) within the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD).

<sup>16</sup> Boris Michajlov, *Melitopol': priroda, archeologija, istorija* (Zaporozh'e: Dikoe Pole, 2002), pp. 20–35 <<https://vMelitopol'e.ru/istoriya/Melitopol'-v-velikoj-otechestvennoj-vojne-1941-1943/gitlerovskaya-okkupatsiya>>.

The relationships between local collaborators and the Karaites during the nearly two years of the Nazi occupation remain largely understudied.<sup>17</sup> We know that activists from OUN(b) and OUN(m) sent their cadres to southern and eastern Ukraine with the aim of gaining positions in the self-government and police during the Nazi occupation. These people were tasked with creating elements of a pro-German Ukrainian statehood “on the ground”. There are some biased studies about the activities of one of Melitopol’s mayors, Illarion Kurylo-Krymchak,<sup>18</sup> but the question of the strength of the influence imparted by OUN(b) and OUN(m) on these authorities remains open. This is particularly relevant in the context of studying the biographies of OUN party members who served in the *Ein-satzgruppen*, *Abwehr*, police, self-government, and propaganda agencies in the occupied territories of Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, little is known about the ideological influence of these parties on the Shoah and the Karaite policy in the region. In this article, I will consider all these questions.

#### THE SHOAH IN MELITOPOL’ AND ITS ENVIRONS (1941–1943)

In the pre-war period, Melitopol’ and its environs were part of the Zaporizhia oblast of the Ukrainian SSR. In 1939, some 43,321 Jews lived in this region of Soviet Ukraine, the majority of whom (35,744) resided in Zaporizhia and Melitopol’. With the arrival of the Nazis, the oblast became divided: most of it was incorporated into the General District of Dnipropetrovsk (German: Generalbezirk Dnjepropetrowsk), while the Melitopol’ district became part of the General District of Crimea (Taurida; Generalbezirk Krim/Teilbezirk Taurien), which for some time was called the General District of Melitopol’ (Generalbezirk Melitopol’).

The killings of the Jews in Zaporizhia oblast were carried out by the 1st SS Motor Brigade, as well as *Sonderkommando* 6, 10a, and 12 of *Ein-satzgruppen* D. The murders of Jews began in all locations where they had lived from the very start of the occupation. For instance, several waves of shootings started in Zaporizhia in November 1941. Most of the Jews in Zaporizhia oblast, about 10,000 people, had been killed by the end of

<sup>17</sup> Per A. Rudling, ‘The OUN, the UPA and the Holocaust: A Study in the Manufacturing of Historical Myths’, *Carl Beck Papers. The in Russian & East European Studies*, 2107 (2011), 1–72; Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist. Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2014); John-Paul Himka, *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust: OUN and UPA’s Participation in the Destruction of Ukrainian Jewry, 1941–1944* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Jurij Ščur, *Žyttja i borot’ba Ilariona Kuryla-Krymčaka* (Toronto: Litopys UPA, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> On this subject, see Yuri Radchenko, ‘The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Mel’nyk Faction) and the Holocaust: The Case of Ivan Iuriiv’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 31 (2017), 215–39; Yuri Radchenko, ‘The Biography of the OUN(m) Activist Oleksa Babii in the Light of his “Memoirs on Escaping Execution” (1942)’, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, 6 (2020), 239–79.

March 1942. In Zaporizhia proper, most Jews had been killed by the end of March 1942 as well.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, the situation in Zaporizhia oblast largely reflects the pattern seen in many parts of eastern Ukraine, where the Einsatzgruppen, supported by the Wehrmacht, local police, and self-government, conducted operations to kill the majority of the local Jewish population by the end of spring 1942. Afterward, throughout the entire occupation period, the Germans, their allies, and collaborators continued their "hunt" for Jews, who had to conceal their identity. In the southern Zaporizhia oblast, specifically in the Melitopol' district, the situation resembled what occurred in Kyiv and other cities in northern Ukraine, where the Germans killed the majority of the local Jewish population extremely quickly, within less than two weeks of their arrival. According to the 1939 census, there were 6,040 Jews in Melitopol'.<sup>21</sup> The city was occupied on 6 October 1941, and three days later, on 9 October, Sonderkommando 10A (SK 10A) arrived, led by SS *Obersturmbannführer* Heinz Seetzen.<sup>22</sup> Similarly to many other cities, like Kyiv, posters were circulated summoning Jews to "register", ostensibly for "resettlement". The Germans and collaborators appointed a Jewish Council of Elders (*Judenrat*), whose exact composition was unknown but likely included high-profile Jews known from pre-war period. The *Judenrat* compiled lists of Melitopol' Jews' names and addresses.

Subsequently, the Jews were ordered by the Germans to gather in a local school. Members of SK 10A searched the homes of those Jews who did not go to the school voluntarily, taking them there by force. At the school, the Jews had to leave their belongings, money, and valuables. Starting 11 October 1941, they were taken in groups of 100 a few kilometres away from Melitopol', to an anti-tank trench located between the villages of Kostiantynivka and Voznesenka, where they were shot. Those condemned to death had to wait about 500 meters away from the trench, with their outer clothing removed. Then, in groups of 30, they were forced into the trench, where they were ordered to lie down on the ground. They were shot by SS men who were standing two meters behind them. As the post-war investigations demonstrate, the Jews were shot in rounds of fire on the command given by Seetzen. The next group of victims had to lie on the bodies of those just murdered. When the pile of corpses reached a certain height, the SS men would move further along. On the first day of the shootings, at least 1,000 Jews from Melitopol' were killed. The killings of Jewish civilians

<sup>20</sup> *Cholokost na territorii SSSR: Ėnciklopedija*, ed. by Il'ja Al'tman (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2011), p. 326.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 578.

<sup>22</sup> Aleksandr Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija. Dokumenty o prestuplenijach operativnykh grupp i komand policii bezopasnosti i SD na vremennno okkupirovannoj territorii SSSR v 1941–1944 gg.*, 4 vols (Dnepropetrovsk: Lira, 2010), IV, p. 44.

continued the following day.<sup>23</sup> As noted by Andrej Angrick, the shootings on 11–12 October became an important example for SK 10A of how to carry out their work efficiently and systematically in other locations, such as Berdiansk, Mariupol, and Krasnodar.<sup>24</sup>

An OUN(m) activist, SS-Untersturmführer Ivan Iuriiv, was among the staff of SK 10A who participated in the killings of Melitopol' Jews.<sup>25</sup> It is not clear what specific functions he performed at that time, but there is information that he participated in shootings and torture at other locations. For instance, Adolf Raile, a native of the village Chervonyi Khutir in the Shyriayevsky district of the Odesa oblast, who was 22 years old at the start of the German-Soviet war, reported the following in his testimony on 21 October,

Among the officers in our team, I also recall Obersturmführer (senior lieutenant) Winkelthau and Untersturmführers Pfeifer, Bonn, Iuriiv, and Hertz. Whether the duties were divided among these officers, I do not know. What I do know is that all of them took an active part in the interrogation and mass shootings of Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality in the cities of Mariupol and Taganrog.<sup>26</sup>

The anti-tank trench between Kostiantynivka and Voznesenka also became a grave for Red Army Jewish prisoners of war. On 10 and 15 October, respectively, 49 and 26 people were murdered there. They were probably brought from some prisoner concentration sites located nearby, but not from Melitopol' itself. A few days later, on 12 October 54 more Jewish prisoners were sent from Army POW Camp No. 12 in Melitopol' to the site where Jewish civilians had been shot.<sup>27</sup> It seems that executions continued periodically at this location, but these anti-tank trenches were not the only places where civilians and prisoners of war were killed during the Nazi occupation. In total, about 2,000 people were murdered between the villages of Kostiantynivka and Voznesenka.<sup>28</sup>

An analysis of the recollections of non-Jewish residents of Melitopol' proves that the shootings of Jews became known immediately after they occurred. The Germans and their collaborators did not conceal this fact from the local Christian and Muslim population of Eastern Europe, and Melitopol' was no exception. In the post-war testimonies for

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 215–16.

<sup>24</sup> Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, pp. 310–12.

<sup>25</sup> Staatsarchiv München (hereafter SM) 35308/7, Bl. 1553.

<sup>26</sup> SM 35308/32, Bl. 87.

<sup>27</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> *Cholokost na territorii SSSR*, p. 578.

the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK)<sup>29</sup> that took place in the first months after the end of the German occupation, Polish woman Eugenia Ponizovskaya and Karaite woman Aza Stamboli reported that such actions by the occupation authorities caused shock and fear,

...The first orders required the Jews to register and wear six-pointed stars. No one understood what this was for or why it was necessary. People went to register, not knowing they were heading to a terrible, cruel death. Neighbours and acquaintances started to worry why the people who had gone with their entire families for registration were not returning. We learned the horrible truth, which defied human comprehension: six to seven thousand peaceful, innocent civilians had been shot there, beyond the Berdiansk Bridge, in the anti-tank trenches. The elderly, women, and children were executed...<sup>30</sup>

The significantly inflated number of victims was likely caused by Aza Stamboli's stress and psychological trauma. It is also significant that she, herself a Karaite, was under the threat of being killed.

Other recollections of Melitopol' Karaites that were recorded after the collapse of the USSR describe attempts to execute Karaites as a Jewish group. At the same time, references to the shootings and persecution of Jews in the city are mentioned only in passing. Here is what sisters Larisa and Raisa Irtlach relate on the rescue of Melitopol' Karaites,

War is a trial for every person and the entire nation alike. In 1941, Melitopol' was occupied by the Germans. At that time, around 130 Karaites lived in the city. Many Karaite families could not evacuate and were in mortal danger. The Germans equated the Karaites with the Jews and therefore wanted to murder them along with the Jews.<sup>31</sup>

By and large, this perspective can be explained by the strong impact that Turkic Karaite nationalism and the ideas of Seraya Shapshal imparted on Melitopol' Karaites. These influences intensified in the 1990s, just when these recollections were recorded.

<sup>29</sup> The Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Atrocities of the German Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK) was the state commission of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War (also known as the Eastern Front of the Second World War). The commission was formed by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 2 November 1942.

<sup>30</sup> Gosudarstvennyj archiv Rossijskoj Federacii (hereafter GARF), f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 40–40-ob.

<sup>31</sup> Iz vospominanij L[arisa] I[lyinichna] and R[aisa] I[lyinichna] Irtlač, in *V surovye gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny, Karaimy Melitopol'ja* (Melitopol': Dolja, 2004), p. 27.



After the murder of the majority of the Jewish population in October 1941, the occupation authorities continued to search for Jews who had concealed their identity and moved to various villages in the Melitopol' district. The police and Melitopol' SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or Security Service), whose members were appointed by the leaders of SK 10A,<sup>32</sup> the local administration, actively participated in the raids and the killings of Jews. Much of what happened in the Melitopol' district between winter 1941 and autumn 1943 mirrored the situation in the military administration zone, where the second phase of the Shoah began in the spring of 1942, with a 2- or 3-month delay.

According to many sources – such as the verdict of the 1st Senate for Criminal Cases of the Karl-Marx-Stadt District Court dated 11 June 1976 in the case of the former SS Sonderkommando 10A Oberscharführer and driver Johannes Kinder – those Melitopol' Jews who did not go to a school as ordered by the Germans or concealed their identity hid in the nearby villages during the winter of 1941–1942. If discovered, these people were killed. Most often, the executions were carried out by members of SK 10A, SD, and the local police,

During Sonderkommando's stay in Melitopol', on its way to Simferopol from October to December 1941, the team (with the involvement of collaborators) was very active in identifying party and state functionaries, youth organization officials, and other citizens loyal to the Soviet state. The capture of citizens of Jewish nationality who had escaped the massacre in Melitopol' and fled to the villages was constantly on the agenda... In Astrakhanka, a Jewish woman who had fled here from Melitopol' was murdered.<sup>33</sup>

Evdokiya Bochkova, a cleaner at the SD prison in Melitopol', reported that after the executions of the Jewish families (presumably referring to the shootings that took place in October 1941), "individuals who had been hiding in villages and hamlets began to arrive".<sup>34</sup> One such recorded case took place in March 1942 and was carried out by SK 10A in Melitopol'.<sup>35</sup> We do not know for sure whether these were local Jews who had been hiding in the city and its environs, or Jews who had been brought from neighbouring regions.

In December 1941, the Nazis in Melitopol' started rounding up and killing children of mixed Jewish-Slavic marriage. By February 1942,

<sup>32</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224–25.

<sup>34</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 139.

the executions had only intensified.<sup>36</sup> Bochkova recalled that the SD prison, not just the previously mentioned anti-tank trench, became the killing site for this category of the local population. This location likely refers to the place where Melitopol' Jews had been shot in October 1941. Often, during such *Aktionen*, the Slavic parents of these children were also murdered. For Jewish parents, the murders of children from mixed families became a form of humiliation and moral oppression prior to their own execution,

Sometime in late February 1942, children from families where the father was Jewish and the mother was Russian started arriving at the prison. These children came in large groups of 30 or more, ranging in age from one year to fifteen. Their mothers also came to the prison. The mothers were put in a separate room where they were told that their children would be sent to a camp where they would be provided for, and the mothers were offered work. The mothers refused to leave their children and asked to be taken along to care for them. The next group of children arrived without their mothers, who were not let inside the prison. The children were kept in the prison for about 56 days to determine their Russian heritage. Once large groups of children had been assembled, they would be shot along with their mothers in the prison. Later on, they started transporting them by truck and killing them in the anti-tank trench. Jewish men in the prison were forced to transport the dead bodies of their children and wives. Infants held by their mothers were put to sleep by holding something close to their mouths to inhale; afterwards, the mothers were shot. Some mothers who managed to convince the executioners that their children were not Jewish were released... Parcels from parents were accepted, but the children never received them.

All these atrocities in the prison were carried out by German officers from the SS gendarmerie...<sup>37</sup>

Although the main wave of raids and killings of children from mixed Jewish-Slavic marriages occurred in February 1942, this policy continued throughout the occupation. For instance, on 9 October 1942 Maria, the Slavic wife of a local Jewish man named Trachtenberg, was arrested by the security police and the SD in Melitopol'. She was taken to prison with

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 138. As we will demonstrate further in this article, similar persecutions took place as early as December 1943.

<sup>37</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 18–18-ob.

her child, where both were killed.<sup>38</sup> In the same month, the Germans arrested the Matukhnov family – the husband, Viktor, was Russian, while his wife, Anna, was Jewish. The couple had three daughters: 15-year-old Lydia, thirteen-year-old Olga, and four-year-old Tamara. Anna was six months pregnant at the time of the arrest. The SD took the entire family to prison; Viktor was eventually released, while the rest of the family members were killed.<sup>39</sup> One should note that the search for and killings of children from mixed marriages in Melitopol' began only six to seven weeks after the first mass shootings of the Jewish population. In contrast, in neighbouring Mariupol, this category of the population began to be persecuted a year later, in December 1943.<sup>40</sup>

Melitopol' region was a hub for various Einsatzgruppen. For instance, SK 11B was based in Melitopol' from February to April 1943, while SD teams from Ukraine and various cities in the North Caucasus were stationed in the village of Lichtenau<sup>41</sup> in the spring of the same year.<sup>42</sup> The presence of these units worsened the situation for Jews who had concealed their real identities. The situation was also intimidating for the local Karaites, whose status could be “reconsidered” at any moment.

## THE RESCUE OF MELITOPOL' KARAITES: HISTORY AND NARRATIVES

The Nazi regime's policy towards the Karaites from 1933 to 1945 was contradictory and chaotic. Some Nazi “experts on racial questions” viewed Turkic-speaking Eastern European Karaites with suspicion or even outright hostility up until the spring of 1945. After the Nuremberg Race Laws had been enacted in Germany in 1935, its small Karaite community of just over a dozen people, primarily former Russian prisoners of the First World War, was subjected to discrimination. Mikhail-Mussa (Moshe) Kovshanly, the leader of the German Karaite community, mentioned in a letter in 1943 to the spiritual leader of the Karaites, Gaham (Gahan) Seraya Shapshal, that from 1933 to 1939 the Karaites had faced harassment, humiliation, and physical violence from the German police. Gestapo officers and

<sup>38</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 98.

<sup>39</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 103.

<sup>40</sup> SM 35308/43, Bl.32.

<sup>41</sup> Now – Svitlodolins'ke, Melitopol' rayon, Zaporizhsk'ka oblast'.

<sup>42</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, pp. 179, 232.

some White émigrés collaborating with the Nazis mistook Karaite names for Jewish ones.<sup>43</sup>

Under these circumstances, the Karaite community repeatedly appealed to the German authorities to exempt them from the Nuremberg legislation, citing their legal status in the Russian Empire. They were also supported by the head of the Karaite community in Paris, Semen (Serge) Duvan.<sup>44</sup> As a result, in 1939 the Imperial Genealogical Office granted this request. Later, this decision was extended to some 200 Karaites in occupied France. The Karaite question was actively discussed within various Nazi agencies throughout the German–Soviet war. In Trakai, Lithuania, in August 1941, German authorities consulted Seraya Shapshal, one of the most active proponents of Karaite nationalism in the interwar period. Consequently, on 25 September 1941 a directive was issued in the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* that prohibited the “equation of Karaites with Jews”. On 1 October 1941 it was approved by the political department of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories. A decision was made to refrain from “harsh measures” against the Karaites.<sup>45</sup>

By October 1941, it seemed that the Karaite question had been resolved at the highest levels, and all lower-ranking authorities were supposed to follow the state policy. Surprisingly, however, the local occupation authorities acted as if no centralized clarifications or instructions had ever existed. The Nazi authorities were less interested in Karaite non-Rabbinical Judaism and more focused on the racial classification of the members of Karaite communities. For example, in Lithuania and Ukraine, German officials and local collaborators consulted various “experts” to determine the status of Karaites on a case-by-case basis.

The case of the Karaite community in Melitopol’ was quite indicative of this tendency. As previously mentioned, by the time German troops and SK 10A entered Melitopol’, civil administration in parts of the occupied USSR had already issued instructions prohibiting the treatment of Karaites as Jews. However, at that time there were no specific instructions coming from the SS leadership. On 5–8 December 1941, when SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler made a decision not to persecute Karaites alongside the Jews, the directive was not publicly announced,<sup>46</sup> therefore it was unclear whether it would be promptly communicated to all Einsatzgruppen

<sup>43</sup> To the Hakham of the Karaites, Hadji Seraya-Bey Shapshal. A report on the situation of the Karaites during the existence of the National Socialist regime in Germany and during the war, from 1939 to the present time in the countries occupied by Germany in the West and the East. Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių biblioteka (hereafter LMAVB), f. 143, 1053, p. 5–6.

<sup>44</sup> Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, pp. 297–99.

<sup>45</sup> *Cholokost na territorii SSSR*, p. 386.

<sup>46</sup> Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, p. 272.

and SK commanders. Even after this decision, SK 4A executed about two dozen Karaites in Kharkiv.<sup>47</sup>

In light of all this, it is evident that between October 1941 and January 1942 some members of the Einsatzgruppen as well as many other German and collaborationist agencies were not particularly interested in the specifics of the Karaite question. For the Nazis, Jews were the “anti-race”, subject to immediate extermination. The local non-Jewish population, except for *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans), was considered second-class, and their deaths were not seen as a significant issue or tragedy.

Concurrently, Melitopol’ Karaites managed to create a semblance of a community from among the activists and former Karaite clergy. These people would protect Karaite interests vis-a-vis the occupation authorities, as was done in Kyiv, Crimea, and many other places. One of the leaders of this community was Heliy (Hillel) Yalpachik. On 10–13 October 1941, together with his friends and a former hazzan Semen (Shimon) Budun, at the request of SK 10a, he compiled the *Brief Historical and Ethnographic Reference on the Karaites*. The original of this document has been lost. The *Reference* was written under the direct threat of execution. Similarly to the Jews a few days prior to it, the local Karaites were gathered by the Germans in a separate building while their identity and fate were being determined.<sup>48</sup>

The exact argument that Yalpachek, Budun, and others used while preparing the *Reference* text is not known. For example, it is unclear whether any anti-Jewish rhetoric was used in it, as was the case with Kyiv Karaites and their letter to the Kyiv collaborationist administration in October 1941.<sup>49</sup> We can say with certainty that Melitopol’ Karaites portrayed themselves as a Turkic people who, both ethnically and religiously, felt “far from Jews”. In his memoirs written in the early 1990s, Yalpachek emphasized the assistance provided by the Head of the Melitopol’ City Administration, Vasilii Pereplechikov, who stood up for the Karaites by proving their “non-Jewish status” to SK 10A officials,

The Germans considered Karaites a special category of Jews... They gathered more than a hundred of us and asked, ‘Who are you, what kind of a nation?’ I explained that we were like Old Believers

<sup>47</sup> On this subject, see the following articles: Radchenko, Yuri, “...prosymo... zabezpechyty karaimiv vid nezasluhovanykh obraz...”: karaimske naselennia, OUN (m) ta Holokost u Kyievi, *Ukraina Moderna*, chyslo 34, 2023, 262–291; Yuri Radchenko, ‘Okkupatsiya, kategorizatsiya naseleniya i izbiratelnost genotsida: sluchai karaimov Kharkova (1941–1943 gg.)’, *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2022), 131–60.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Jalpačik Gelij Semënovič (1912–1993)’, *Oficial'nyj sajt krymskich karaimov (karaimy, krymskike karaimy, karaimy tjurkti)*, n.d. <<https://karai.crimea.ru/183-jalpachik-gelij-semjonovich-1912-1993.html>> [accessed on 25 July 2024].

<sup>49</sup> See more: Radchenko, Yuri, “...prosymo... zabezpechyty karajimiv vid nezasluhovanykh obraz...”: karajims’ke naselennja, OUN (m) ta Holokost u Kyjevi, *Ukraina Moderna*, 34 (2023), 262–291.

adhering to the Old Testament, that we had our own Turkic language, our own religion, our own traditions... And Pereplechikov... came to the Gestapo to protect us. He said he knew for sure that in the Tsarist times the Karaites had the same rights as Russians and served in the army...<sup>50</sup>

Although this strategy worked for the Karaites in Melitopol' and they were released after a few days, the fear of the Germans changing their mind remained strong throughout the entire occupation period. This fear was exacerbated by rumours that Germans and collaborators had shot Karaites along with Jews in some parts of the USSR. Evgenia Ponizovskaya and Aza Stamboli reported the following to the ChGK,

People barely had time to recover from the horror of the shootings of six to seven thousand Soviet citizens (Jews – note by the author) when a new threat loomed over the city: the Karaites were called in for registration. Their ethnicity was not seen as separate from the Jews, and they faced the same fate. One could see mortal fear in the eyes of loved ones; children looking into the eyes of adults, not understanding what was happening to their relatives; adults averting their gaze from the inquisitive eyes of children who were facing a terrible death. For two and a half years, the fear of death never left the Karaites. There were reports that the Karaites were being murdered as well in many occupied regions. It happened in Krasnodar and in the Kuban region. At a certain nefarious Simferopol newspaper, someone's blood-thirsty mouth demanded the same fate for the Karaites as for the Jews. It is terrifying to recall just how many Karaite families close to us, in the city of Melitopol', were expected to die at any hour, for two years; all the while they longed to live to see liberation, to once again breathe freely and say that the terrible nightmare had passed and would never return.<sup>51</sup>

In the memoirs and interviews of Melitopol' Karaites recounting their escape from the shootings, one observes a noticeable conscious distancing from the Jews, which might be linked to the active spread of Karaite nationalism since the early 1990s (especially through various articles and pamphlets by Seraya Shapshal). In this context, an interview with Hillel's daughter, Sofia Yalpachik, is particularly interesting. In the Yalpachik

<sup>50</sup> Gelij Jalpačik, 'Nas spasali dobryj ljudi (zapisano so slov v 1992 godu)', in *V surovye gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny Karaimy Melitopol'ja* (Melitopol': Dolja, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 40–40-ob.

family, both before and after the Second World War, no religious traditions were observed – Hillel did not pray or keep kosher. This was largely due to the fact that “there was no longer a *kenasa*”. In the courtyard where the Yalpachiks lived alongside Slavic families (Ukrainians and Russians), they kept a pig, which was later slaughtered, and Hillel and his relatives would eat pork.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, Sofia Yalpachik emphasized that she always – “since my childhood” – considered herself a Karaite, and “people similar to us” were prohibited to marry Tatars and Jews. In this Karaite narrative, mixed marriages with Jews and Tatars led to misfortune: in the case of a Jewish–Karaite marriage, one might suffer during the Shoah; in the case of a Tatar–Karaite marriage, one might suffer during the deportations of May 1944. One should note that Sofia, like most Melitopol' Karaites during the post-Soviet era, was far from being religious and had almost no knowledge of the Karaite *halacha*. Nevertheless, according to Karaite Turkic Nationalism, a genuine full-fledged Karaite is considered to be someone whose parents are both Karaites, which corresponds to the halachic rules of Karaism.<sup>53</sup> With that being said, Sofia references not some religious authority but her father, who acts as a kind of a bearer of “folk Karaism”.<sup>54</sup> In the practice of “folk Karaism”, the important identity markers are constructs such as “Kara-im language”,<sup>55</sup> “our own faith”, and “Karaite cuisine”. With the decline of religious life, the food construct (“Karaite pie”) often comes to the forefront as a primary marker of identity.<sup>56</sup>

Since my childhood, I felt like a Karaite... I knew that Karaites existed; it was a separate ethnicity. They had their own language, their own faith, their own food... It was complicated. Karaite marriages were highly respected, and efforts were made to avoid Jewish-Karaite and Karaite-Tatar marriages because these nations had something in common. [It was important] to show that it was a distinct ethnic group... One group that is close [to us] in terms of language is the Tatar, even though the Karaite language exists as a separate language. And the second group (the Jews – note by the author) [follow] the Old Testament. And us – we follow the Old Testament,

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Sofia Yalpachik, 17 June 2021. Private collection of the author.

<sup>53</sup> On the subject of the Karaite *halacha*, see Michael Corinaldi, *Ha-ma'amād hā-'iši šel haq-qārā'im* [In Hebrew: *The Personal Status of the Karaites*] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> On the phenomenon and practice of “folk Judaism” and how it differs from normative Judaism, see Idei bez granic, 'Marija Kaspina. Narodnyj iudaizm v SSSR', online video recording, YouTube, 24 November 2016 <<https://youtu.be/GNkP17tRRmw?si=PohMWtjDFtBaTpeB>> [accessed on 25 August 2022].

<sup>55</sup> Centr Sefer, 'M. Gammal «Drugie evrejskie jazyki» #2 «Karaimskij jazyk»', online video recording, YouTube, 7 April 2022 <<https://youtu.be/iRfzrfxKBfk?si=j-jPOHqtMetCGEmw>> [accessed on 25 August 2022].

<sup>56</sup> Irina Levčenko, 'Karaimskie recepty v stichach rasskazyvaet Sofija Jalpačik', online video recording, YouTube, 5 December 2018 <<https://youtu.be/ZW6vkMeWvo0?si=mSqVpZ6t4jDulixx>> [accessed on 10 July 2022].

but without the Talmud. [Karaites] do not recognize [the authority of] the Talmud. Are they Crimean Jews or Jewish Tatars? Aunt Fania was married to a Tatar man, and she was deported in 1944... My dad said that a Karaite was someone whose father and mother were Karaites.<sup>57</sup>

In the Karaite Melitopol' narrative, which has undergone almost complete de-Judaization under the influence of Karaite nationalism, a person who caused the Germans to doubt the Turkic status of the local Karaites was a member of the community who was married to a Rabbinic Jewess. As Sofia Yalpachik reported, she heard such story in the early 1990s,

In Melitopol', one of the Karaites was married to a Jewess. And when his family was taken away, he started saying, 'Take me together with my wife!' – 'No! We do not touch the Karaites'. – 'Please, take me! How can she manage without me? We are so close [Jews and Karaites – note by the author]!' And he came to the courtyard, a big Karaite courtyard. And he said, 'Forgive me, but you all might also be taken away and shot. Because I wanted to stay with my family, I just blurted it out'.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to mention that as far as the Karaite rescue narrative in Melitopol' is concerned, the library of Budun, a former *hazzan*, played a significant role as it allegedly contained some "ancient books" on the "Turkic past" of the Karaites. Clearly, while the Karaite leaders in Melitopol' were preparing the report for the Germans, they used not the "ancient Karaite books" but rather pamphlets by Shapshal and similar authors. Concurrently, in the memories of the carriers of Turkic-Karaite identity, one reads that Budun "would always seclude himself and pray, reading the prayers in his own manner (!)".<sup>59</sup> Thus, this *hazzan*'s praying in Hebrew, not in Turkic, as was sometimes practiced in the 1920s–1930s (as well as nowadays), made him a "stranger".

An important element in memories regarding the rescue of the Karaites is the idea that while the Jews could not be helped directly, the Karaites contributed to the survival of abandoned Jewish infants,

They summoned the Karaites. There were about 90 of them at that time. In short, they were given a deadline... A week or so. They had

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Sofia Yalpachik, 17 June 2021. Private collection of the author.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



to write a historical explanatory note about who they were. And then... one of the educated ones [Hillel Yalpachik], who lived next to Budun [the former hazzan] and who had a lot of old Karaite literature... Several educated Karaite families wrote this note for the local German authorities... Local Karaite, auntie Shura Makarova – her mother... The headman of Melitopol' was married to a German woman. And this German woman was friends with a Karaite grandmother. She went to her and said, 'Look, here are the photographs – Karaites in the Tsarist army, the Russian army. Jews were not conscripted into the army. Clearly, it's a completely different ethnicity. Not because...' Later, I told my dad, 'How could you ask just like that? Those poor people were shot, and we were left [to live]. How is that possible?' – 'Well, you see, I couldn't help them.' Still, when the Jews were being led to be shot, this one woman came to me. Her grandmother... Two Jewish children were abandoned right in the courtyard of the Karaites, the Khadji family. Precisely because of their appearances. And she saved them, and then gave them to an orphanage. So, we always coexisted amicably with the Jews, but tried to never undermine the distinctiveness of our two groups.<sup>60</sup>

The Karaites were also extremely frightened by the shootings of about a hundred Roma (we do not know exactly whether they were nomadic or settled) in Melitopol' in January 1942.<sup>61</sup> In many ways, such actions by the occupiers led the Karaites to wonder whether their "question" might be reconsidered,

It was January 1942. Gypsies, up to 100 people, are being escorted through the streets of the city. Among them there are few men, only women and children. The children are small and dark-eyed – trembling with life... In the morning, the residents of the village of Kostiantynivka reported a new atrocity against the Gypsies. The entire group had been shot. For what? Why? After all, Gypsies are Christians by religion, and all the Germans have 'God is with us' written on their belts. They say that the Gypsies allegedly handed out the nails during the crucifixion of Christ<sup>62</sup>...<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *Peresliduvannja ta vbyvstva romiv na terenach Ukrajinu u časy Druhoji svitovoi vojny: Zbirnyk dokumentiv, materialiv ta spohadiu*, ed. by Mychajlo Tjahlyj (Kyjiv: Ukrajin's'kyj centr vyvčennja istoriji Holokostu, 2013), p. 200.

<sup>62</sup> A different version of this Romaphobic legend suggests that a Romani blacksmith forged the nails used to crucify Jesus, Aleksej Gorškov, 'Gvozdi dlja raspjatijsja Christa', *Proza.ru*, 16 February 2015 <<https://proza.ru/2015/02/16/1385>> [accessed on 20 June 2022].

<sup>63</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 40-40-ob.

This fear was sustained by the fact that the executions of Roma continued throughout the entire occupation of Melitopol'. For instance, on 9 April 1942, *Ortskommandantur* No. 882 in the city of Mykhailivka reported the transfer of "40 Gypsies" to the SD in Melitopol'; they were subsequently shot.<sup>64</sup>

Within these narratives, the story of rescue is intertwined with the assumption that the Karaites in Melitopol' and other locations did not collaborate with the Germans in any shape or form. However, as we will argue later in the article, this was not so. Often in these stories we come across the date of the Karaites' "investigation" being moved forward by one month, to November 1941. For example, sisters Raisa and Larisa Irtlach recalled in the 1990s,

The Germans equated the Karaites with the Jews, so they wanted to execute them together with the Jews. On 20 November 1941, by order of the German occupation authorities, the Karaites were gathered by the mill (where the *kenesa* used to be) to determine their origins. With the help of encyclopaedias, historical materials, and the latest scientific data, representatives of the Karaite community (S[emen] M[arkovich] Kumysh, Budun, I.S. Irtlach, and H[illel] S[emenovich] Yalpachik) managed to prove that the Karaites were an independent ethnicity of Turkic origin and had nothing in common with the Jews. The mayor of the city, Vasiliy Demyanovich Perepletchikov, who was familiar with the history of the Karaites, also spoke in their defence. Thus, the Karaites of Melitopol' were saved. None of the Karaites, including those from Melitopol', collaborated with the Germans, and no one became a traitor...<sup>65</sup>

It is telling that such demonstrative loyalty to the Soviet power was mirrored by the Karaites in their interactions with the occupying authorities and collaborators in Kyiv. In October 1941, Kyiv's Karaite community reported in a statement to Alexander Ogloblin, the Head of the City Administration, that "not a single" Karaite was a member of the VKP(b) or served in the punitive organs of Soviet power,

The political stance of the Karaites is easily revealed by the fact that in twenty-three years [of Soviet power – Y.R.], not a single one of them became a communist or a commissar. Also, prior to the entry of German troops into Kyiv, not one Karaite evacuated from Kyiv".<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 141.

<sup>65</sup> From the memoirs of L[arisa] I[l'yinichna] and R[aisa] I[l'yinichna] Irtlach, in *V surovee gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny, Karaimy Melitopol'ja* (Melitopol': Dolja, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> Deržavnyj archiv Kyjivs'koji oblasti (hereafter DAKO), f. 2412, op. 2, spr. 261, Ark. 2-2-zv.

Within the Karaite narrative, the events of October 1941 in Melitopol' are often intertwined and juxtaposed with what had happened there almost two years later. In late September–October 1943, while facing the advancing Red Army, the Germans began evacuation – essentially, expulsion of the city's population. During that time, Melitopol' Karaites made themselves scarce and tried to return home to their cities at the first opportunity,

The last months of the occupation (September–October 1943) further united the Karaite families. In September, the population was driven out onto an open steppe. Several Karaite families banded together and settled on the steppe together: the family of Ilya Semenovich Yalpachik, six people; the family of Ilya Savelyevich Irtlach, five people; Sofia Ilyinichna Gabay with her daughter Shura; Savelii Markovich Raffe with his wife, Raisa Abramovna; Naum Moiseyevich Choref with his wife Stella Savelyevna and their niece Nadia. Having occupied three sections of an anti-tank trench, they made a shelter to protect themselves from rain and wind. They lived in such manner for 35 days, under bombing and shelling. They went to a well far from our 'camp' for water and would often come under fire.

Among them, the oldest one was Naum Moiseyevich Choref (the Germans paid less attention to elderly persons); he was the only one who went into the city and brought back the remaining food from the apartments of those who stayed at this 'camp'. They cooked dumplings and porridge for everyone from these provisions.

In the last days, when the fighting had reached the city, they moved to a small hut in Novyi Melitopol', and that's where they were met by the Soviet Army.<sup>67</sup>

It so happened that some Karaite families bonded with their Slavic neighbours, with whom they were friends during the pre-war and war periods. For instance, the Karaite family of Stamboli and the Polish family of Ponizovsky, along with other six people (Ukrainians and Russians), were hiding for a while in Melitopol', in the Stambolis' house, as well as in gardens in the city area known as Chervona Hirka. However, after two weeks, the Germans found them and forced them to relocate to the village of Mykolaivka. Along the way, the families escaped and returned to Chervona Hirka. They were caught a second time and, along with a group

<sup>67</sup> From the memoirs of L[arisa] I[lyinichna] and R[aisa] I[lyinichna] Irtlach, in *V surovye gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny, Karaimy Melitopol'ja* (Melitopol': Dolja, 2004), p. 27.

of people, were then marched under the supervision of policemen and Cossacks. On the way, they managed to find work at a German military unit. When the German retreat began, they remained there until the Red Army's advance in late October 1943.<sup>68</sup>

In the Karaite narratives about the events of September–October 1943 in Melitopol' and the surrounding area, it is often stated that when the Germans drove the families out of the city "onto the steppe", they could "mistakenly be taken for Jews" and shot because of their appearance ("black eyes").<sup>69</sup> Some of the expelled Karaites did not return to Melitopol' but moved to Crimea, where they met the arrival of the Red Army and the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in May 1944. Only then would they return to Melitopol' in the summer of 1944. For example, the Yalpachik family was helped to flee towards Crimea by a certain Russian or Ukrainian "volunteer" from some Wehrmacht or SS units. Thus, the Yalpachiks went to Bakhchisarai and later returned to their native Melitopol'.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that the Karaite community of Melitopol' was not exterminated by SK 10A or other units within Einsatzgruppe D is of great historical interest. SK 10a, which left Melitopol' immediately after the execution of the Jews and the permission for the Karaites to return home, subsequently killed the Karaites along with the Jews in several other places. A few days later in Berdiansk, subordinates of Seetzen shot about 700 local Jews.<sup>71</sup> Among those killed in Merlikov Gulch, there was at least one Karaite: Solomon Akav.<sup>72</sup> It is possible that he was married to a Jewish woman. We know of a Karaite woman being killed together with her husband in December 1941 in Kharkiv.<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, in August 1942 in Krasnodar, SK 10 shot almost fifty local Karaites along with Jews.<sup>74</sup> The indictment by the KGB Directorate of the Krasnodar region, dated 18 June 1963, in the case against Alois Weich and eight other collaborators, provided details of that execution,

In Krasnodar, the SS repeated their provocation of gathering the Jewish population for relocation to other settlements by posting announcements throughout the city, urging Jews to report to the assembly points. When hundreds of families arrived, SS Sonderkommando members transported the Jews out of the city over the course

<sup>68</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 44–44-ob.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Sofia Yalpachik, 17 June 2021. Private collection of the author.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 210.

<sup>72</sup> Sergej Šajtanov, 'Spisok ubitych i zamučennykh karaimov v gody vojny', *karaims.com*, n.d. <<http://www.karaims.com/page.php?cod=ru&page=225&node=&p=288>> [accessed on 5 June 2022].

<sup>73</sup> Grigorii Ganzburg interviewing Aleksandra Ganzburg, 10 July 2022. Private collection of Grigorii Ganzburg.

<sup>74</sup> Šajtanov, 'Spisok ubitych i zamučennykh karaimov v gody vojny'.

of two or three days to the area of sovkhoz [state farm] No. 1, near the Electromechanical Plant, and shot them in an anti-tank trench.<sup>75</sup>

Within the Karaite narrative, it was common to blame the Jewish leaders in Krasnodar for allegedly “informing” the Germans about the religious traits that Jews and Karaites shared. For example, one of the Karaite leaders, Boris Kokenai, accused a certain Tarnovsky, a Jewish leader of Krasnodar, of this.<sup>76</sup> The narrative from Krasnodar overlaps somewhat with the Karaite narrative from Melitopol’. The latter implied that the reason the Melitopol’ Karaites underwent “Jewish identity verification” was a certain Karaite married to a Jewish woman, who had informed the Germans that Jews and Karaites were “closely connected”.

Most likely, this motif was related to the differing approaches of SK 10A members towards the Karaites in different locations. The Karaites were not perceived as a homogeneous community. SK 10A individually assessed the “degree of Jewishness” of the Karaites in each separate locality, assuming that the Karaites in a particular area could be Jewish. In the case of Melitopol’, it is possible that the fact that the Sonderkommando left the city relatively quickly played a role, leading to a hasty decision not to engage the local Karaites.

Subsequently, it became evident that the occupation authorities represented by the Wehrmacht were generally uninterested in the Karaite question in Melitopol’, as well as throughout mainland Ukraine. For instance, in the report of Group IV Wi<sup>77</sup> dated 28 October 1941, there was no mention of a story about the rescue of Karaites. Instead, the report focused on the execution of Jews and a number of Volksdeutsche present in the city at that moment,

Melitopol’, located in Eastern Ukraine on the Molochna River, is a city of 85,000 residents; currently, it has approximately 40,000 residents, including 215 Volksdeutsche who have been issued certificates. The administrative and party organs fled on 28 September 1941. 1 Red Army soldier, 24 suspicious individuals, and 2,000 Jews were handed over to the SD. Allegedly, there are 600 party members in the city.<sup>78</sup>

**Jewish-Karaite Relations in Melitopol’ against the Backdrop of the Shoah** As we have previously mentioned, an important element

<sup>75</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> Kizilov, *The Sons of Scripture*, p. 355.

<sup>77</sup> Group IV Wi – a secret name of the headquarters of the Chief Procurement Officer of the 11th Army.

<sup>78</sup> Kruglov, *Bez žalosti i somnenija*, p. 50.

of the contemporary Karaite narrative in Melitopol' involves not only a complete distancing from the Jews but also an emphasis on the assumption that the Karaites did not collaborate with the Germans during the occupation, and that they saved Jewish children. This narrative is not confined to Melitopol' alone. For example, a popular story recounts how a captured Jew, Yakov Rys, was helped by a certain Karaite "Uncle Yefim", who taught him a few Karaite words, thus saving his life.<sup>79</sup>

Various sources document instances of Karaites helping Jews in Melitopol' in 1943. The assistance was often provided jointly by Karaites and Slavs. Notably, the Karaites held certain positions in the occupational administration. In January 1943, the German civil administration arrived in Melitopol', and the aforementioned Evgenia Ponizovskaya was appointed an attorney at the city's Legal Advisory Office, while Aza Stamboli, a Karaite, worked there as a secretary. Her husband, Fyodor (Efraim?) Suleymanovich (Solomonovich) Stamboli, worked as the chief engineer of Melitopol' power station during the occupation.<sup>80</sup> Nina Demidova, also of Karaite background, participated in the rescue of Jews in the city,

Buraya was also a Karaite... Or perhaps, half-Karaite. Her son was so handsome. But when she presumably died, he lived in poverty, one might say. Aunt Tanya constantly helped him. They would help him, but he would still keep on begging... They would say to him, 'Don't disgrace Karaites'... This family was also related to the Karaite community.<sup>81</sup>

Ponizovskaya, Stamboli, and Buraya provided assistance to several Jewish women in Melitopol' in 1943. This assistance often involved forging documents, offering shelter, and providing opportunities to move to an area where nobody knew them. Such help was typically extended to women and children and was often successful. For example, in the case of the rescue of Sarra Tsipper, a fake passport was prepared for her and people were found who were willing to "confirm" that she had been born into a Russian family and adopted by Jews.<sup>82</sup> Ponizovskaya and Stamboli later recalled,

We experienced so much anxiety... regarding the fate of the young woman, a Komsomol member, a Jewess Sarra Tsipper, who sought

<sup>79</sup> Phone interview with Sofia Yalpachik, 9 January 2021. Personal collection of the author.

<sup>80</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 42-06-43.

<sup>81</sup> Phone interview with Sofia Yalpachik, 9 January 2021. Personal collection of the author.

<sup>82</sup> According to information received from the ChGK, the entire family of Sarra Tsipper was killed by the Germans in October 1941, "... the entire family of S.V. Tsipper, a worker at the Pump and Compressor Plant who resided at 14 Tolstoy St., was captured and exterminated over a two-year period. This included her mother, brothers, grandmother, and others – a total of 19 people, including 8 children aged from one to thirteen years" (GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 42).

our protection and help. We had to change her last name from Tsipper to Tsistrova, and her first name from Sarra to Alexandra. Then we found people who confirmed that she had come from an orphanage and was Russian. Thanks to this, Komsomol member Sarra Tsipper lived to see the day of liberation from the Nazi beasts.<sup>83</sup>

Sarra Tsipper herself recounted the details of her rescue to the Soviet investigators on 16 November 1943,

We found people who agreed to confirm that my father and mother were Russian – my mother presumably had died in childbirth, and my father had decided to put me in an orphanage in the city of Zaporizhia. 89-year-old Filimon Petrovich Kolosov, who worked as a doorman at School No. 11, where I had studied for seven years, turned out to be my saviour during the occupation. He confirmed that my father, Vladimir Melnichuk, a Russian, served with him in the navy in Sevastopol. After my mother – Darya Yakovlevna, also a Russian – died, my father and Filimon Petrovich went to Zaporizhia and put me in an orphanage. Four hours later my father left for Sevastopol, while Filimon Petrovich remained in Zaporizhzhia. He came across a certain Jewish man, Vladimir Tsipper, who told him that he had a good life but unfortunately was childless. Filimon Petrovich advised him to take the little girl Alexandra from the orphanage, explaining that she was Russian. Together with Filimon Petrovich, Vladimir Tsipper went to the orphanage and adopted this girl Alexandra. They held a christening ceremony in the canteen and then parted ways.<sup>84</sup>

A number of people, including Sarra's classmate Klavdia Shcherbina, her mother Ulyana Kalmykova, as well as Alexander Dragunov, the owner of the house where Sarra had lived, reported that the girl's adoptive mother Bertha did not acknowledge her Jewish identity, regularly beat her, and called her "*katsapka*" (a derogatory term for Russians). All these sworn "testimonies" were submitted to the Melitopol' police along with a statement. The local police took a long time to investigate and eventually handed the case over to the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*). Subsequently, Sarra was called in by the SD, who subjected her to harassment and "racial examinations". However, in the end she was released and quietly lived in

<sup>83</sup> GARE, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 42.

<sup>84</sup> GARE, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 14-ob.

Melitopol' with her Slavic husband and their son, periodically bartering clothes for food in the villages,

The police investigated for a long time, tormenting me at the SS and SD. The SD took me in for verification, that is, at the SD they stripped me naked, measured my nose, forehead, torso, took blood tests. The SD confirmed that I was Russian. The gendarmerie tormented me as well, finally issuing a Russian passport. I stopped going to the city centre and went to the villages instead, bartering clothes. My husband did not have any work for two years. We lived in great hardship. Often, the whole family – me, my husband, and our son – stayed in the villages.<sup>85</sup>

However, sometimes the rescuers were out of luck, and they themselves could become victims of the occupation regime,

In December 1943, two Jewish women came to us (to Ponizovskaya and Stamboli – note by the author). [At the time], we lived as two families at 41 Chernyshevsky Street. The women were Sarra Zakharovna Pushkar, the wife of Fyodor Antonovich Pushkar, an employee of the power station, and Sofia Grigoryevna Viktorova, the sister of Vitikhin's wife, who hid L[azar] M[oiseyevich] Kaganovich during the revolution. Sofia Grigoryevna Viktorova and her 12-year-old daughter Galochka did not register and went into hiding for some time, living with Nina Demidovna Buraya... The two women came asking for documents to prove Viktorova's Russian background. Using the stamp and seal of the Melitopol' Legal Consultation, which I, Ponizovskaya, had kept, we prepared the documents stating that Sofia Grigoryevna Viktorova had sought help before the war, in 1941, to obtain a certificate from the registry office regarding her birth from Russian parents. However, the registry office's books for that particular year were missing, and the statement could not be mailed. Instead, an inquiry was issued to get a passport at the regional police station.

With this document, Viktorova was supposed to hide in the village, but one day before her departure, she and Buraya were betrayed and then captured by the SD. After being released from prison, Buraya told Sarra Zakharovna Pushkar that she had been tortured; her back had been burned to force her to admit

<sup>85</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 12, l. 14-ob.-15.



that Viktorova was Jewish. They also wanted her to reveal the source of Viktorova's document. Despite the torture, Buraya did not confess that Viktorova was Jewish, and neither did she disclose the source of the document. Buraya did not manage to convince SD of the authenticity of the document; as a result, Viktorova was shot along with her child.<sup>86</sup>

This group also helped Jewish men, often involving Ukrainians and Russians in the rescue efforts. In the summer of 1943, a Jewish man from Sevastopol hid for about two weeks in the office premises "until he received a passport through comrades Anna Nikolayevna Poliatskaya and Tatiana Ovsiannikova". Aza Stamboli brought along the necessary document. The women rescuers collectively gathered funds for this man's journey, and he was "safely sent away".<sup>87</sup> It is likely that he survived.

In another instance, Ponizovskaya and Stamboli were approached by people seeking to save their Jewish employees. For example, in the summer of 1943, the head of the children's playground, Anna Semenovna Miliukova, requested help with "obtaining a passport for the playground's watchman, who was Jewish. He had stayed in hiding but had been identified by a policeman".<sup>88</sup> Through their contacts, "comrades Poliatskaya and Ovsiannikova, Ponizovskaya and Stamboli secured a passport belonging to Petr Sibilev".<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, Ponizovskaya and Stamboli reported to the ChGK investigators,

The passport was altered to match the age of the person in need and handed over to Miliukova for the Jewish man in hiding. Comrade Stamboli obtained a pass in the name of Petr Sibilev, and this individual was safely sent out of Melitopol'. He is currently alive and well, residing in the Donbas region.<sup>90</sup>

The Ponizovskaya-Stamboli group was involved not only in rescuing Jews but also in preventing the deportation of city residents to work in Germany. They managed to save Savelii Irtlach, a Karaite, from being sent to Germany for forced labour.<sup>91</sup>

Members of the Stamboli family themselves faced Nazi persecution in the spring of 1942. However, it is likely that their Karaite origin and the support they had given to the Jews did not play a significant role in

<sup>86</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 42-42-ob.

<sup>87</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 43.

<sup>88</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 43-ob.

<sup>89</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 43-ob.

<sup>90</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 43-ob.

<sup>91</sup> Yad Vashem Archives, RG M. 37, F.N.1178, P.2.

these arrests. The probable cause for the arrests was the trading of flammable materials from the power station rather than any connection to the Soviet partisans, as reported to Soviet investigators by Ponizovskaya and Stamboli,

In April 1942, Fyodor Solomonovich Stamboli, the chief engineer of the power station, was arrested on charges of squandering fuel materials, which were in short supply at the station. Stamboli was associated with two partisans: Konstantin Peremet, who worked at the railways, and his brother Ivan Peremet, who worked at the power station. It was alleged that per agreement with the partisans, the fuel was deliberately misused. Furthermore, Stamboli was repeatedly summoned by SD because a certain party member named Kislov, who was purged by the Germans and sent to hard labour in Crimea, had worked at the station. Stamboli was placed in a death cell, and all his property was confiscated by the German Schutzpolizei. His family, consisting of his wife, Aza Markovna Stamboli, their two sons aged 9 and 11, his 80-year-old mother, and his 65-year-old aunt were taken under guard to the village of Priazovye and abandoned in an empty house without any means of subsistence. Severely ill Aza Markovna Stamboli, suffering from a heart condition and a hernia, supported the entire family through hard work at the former collective farm called Second Five-Year Plan. She maintained regular contact with me, Ponizovskaya, receiving the news of the Red Army's victories and the German defeats. Aza Markovna Stamboli shared this information with the collective farm workers, instilling in them hope for victory and the final defeat of the fascist scoundrels.<sup>92</sup>

Information about Fyodor Stamboli's arrest can be found in another testimony from Melitopol' by resident Petr Timofeyev. Timofeyev, who was persecuted by the occupation authorities as a communist, received help from Fyodor and Aza Stamboli,

The Stamboli family was purged by the Germans. Fyodor Solomonovich Stamboli was under arrest for four months, while the Stamboli family's property was confiscated.<sup>93</sup>

Subsequently, it became clear that the Stamboli family (primarily, Fyodor) was not persecuted by the occupation authorities for their

<sup>92</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 44.

<sup>93</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 49.

activities, nor because they were Karaites. For instance, they were able to freely move around Melitopol' and its environs during the occupation, receiving a certificate from the police of the Priazovye district in Zaporizhia oblast on 24 June 1942,

This certificate is presented to citizen Aza Markovna Stamboli, a resident of Melitopol', permitting her to travel with her family of five to Melitopol' for treatment.<sup>94</sup>

## THE SHOAH AND KARAITE POLICY: POST-WAR REFLECTIONS IN JUDICIAL MATERIALS

Some essential documents for studying the history of the Second World War (the Shoah, collaboration, etc.) in Ukraine are judicial and investigative case files from the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) Archives. For the most part, these sources contain testimonies of the accused and witnesses. The documents date back to the final years of the war up until the late 1980s. It is highly likely that the accused gave their testimonies under torture or severe psychological pressure. Collaborators sought to hide as many crimes as possible from the investigation, portraying themselves as people who simply were not given any other choice. During this period, the Soviet authorities were not always interested in publicizing information about the collaboration of Soviet citizens with the German occupiers.

When public trials took place during the war, the floor was most often given to a German who testified about the crimes of the Wehrmacht, SS, SD, and similar agencies. For instance, at the Kharkiv trial in December 1943, a former Gebietskomissar of Melitopol', Hans Heinisch, was interrogated. He stated that between 1 and 14 September 1942 some 4,000 people had been killed in Melitopol', without specifying their ethnicity or origin.<sup>95</sup> The crimes committed by the local administration and police, however, were not mentioned.

In this context, one cannot but agree with John-Paul Himka's view that Soviet investigators and defendants were often invested in attributing numerous crimes to the Germans.<sup>96</sup> Still, the archival sources help us study

<sup>94</sup> GARF, f. 7021, op. 61, d. 17, l. 57.

<sup>95</sup> Voennyj Tribunal 4-go Ukrainского Fronta, *Sudebnyj process o zverstvach nemecko-fašistskich zachvatčikov na territorii gor. Char'kova i Char'kovskoj oblasti v period ich vremennoj okkupacii* (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1943), p. 54.

<sup>96</sup> John-Paul Himka, 'The Ukrainian Insurgent Army and the Holocaust. Paper prepared for the forty-first national convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, 12–15 November 2009', *Academia.edu*, n.d. <[http://ualberta.academia.edu/JohnPaulHimka/Papers/1123498/The\\_Ukrainian\\_Insurgent\\_Army\\_UPA\\_and\\_the\\_Holocaust](http://ualberta.academia.edu/JohnPaulHimka/Papers/1123498/The_Ukrainian_Insurgent_Army_UPA_and_the_Holocaust)> [accessed on 25 June 2022].

the history of the Shoah and the occupation at a micro-level, providing an understanding of the perpetrators' personality and motivations. At the same time, it is evident that information obtained from such documents should be cross-referenced with other sources and contemporary research.

An important aspect of this process is related to how the Soviet investigative authorities described the occupying forces' policy regarding the Karaites, namely which aspects had been documented and which were omitted, consciously or subconsciously. These documents largely reflect the official stance of the Soviet authorities on the "Karaite question". Based on my personal experience working with these documents since 2009, I can ascertain that the Karaite theme is extremely rare within the SBU archival materials throughout Ukraine. In particular, in the Kharkiv SBU Archive, the Karaite subject is mentioned in only one case involving a Kharkiv police officer, Semen Loktev. In this particular instance, an Ashkenazi Jew, who was being led to execution, claimed to be a Karaite in an attempt to save himself.<sup>97</sup>

The largest known case from the archives of the former KGB is the trial of a former collaborator from Crimea, Viktor Beletskii. The files were kept at the Archive of the SBU Main Directorate in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea until 2014, and a copy can now be viewed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive.<sup>98</sup> The trial took place immediately after the war, in 1946–1947. Although the case consists of only one volume, like most similar documents of the time it contains rather detailed and interesting information about the Karaite policy of the Nazis and their collaborators in Crimea in the years 1941–1944. The file includes interrogations of three Karaite women who had lived in Crimea during the occupation. Soviet investigating agencies used various documents and reference books for the duration of the case. For instance, the Beletskii case contains copies of articles from the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, as well as from the pre-revolutionary *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary*.<sup>99</sup> Having obtained these articles from the main public library in Yevpatoria, Beletskii studied them while preparing a report on the Karaites for the occupying authorities in December 1941.

Cases of collaborators serving in the local administration during the war years shed light on the Shoah and the Karaite policy in the Melitopol' region. Among them is the case of Vasyl Pereplotchikov, the first burgomaster of Melitopol' during the German occupation. Born in 1882 in Chernihiv governorate, Pereplotchikov received a 10-year prison sentence

<sup>97</sup> Archiv Charkivs'koho oblasnoho upravlinnja Služby bezpeky Ukrainy (hereafter AChOUSBU), Spr. 30508.

<sup>98</sup> Archiv Holovnoho upravlinnja Služby bezpeky Ukrainy v Avtonomnij respublici Krym (AHUSBUARK), Spr. 10153, Ark. 94-zv. (copy from USHMM, RG-31.018M, Reel 10).

<sup>99</sup> AHUSBUARK, Spr. 10153, Ark. 195-198.

in 1946 for collaborating with the Germans. He held his position of a burgomaster from October 1941 to 1 February 1942, during the peak of the Shoah in the region, when the fate of the local Karaims was being decided. Subsequently, he was dismissed and managed the city's economic affairs until July 1943.<sup>100</sup>

Perepliotchikov obtained the position of burgomaster through the patronage of SK 10A members. On 7 October 1941, he was summoned to the SD, where an officer (possibly Seetzen) offered him the task of restoring the pipeline system in the building of the former *zemstvo*<sup>101</sup> hospital, where German soldiers had been treated. Perepliotchikov agreed to help, and the work was completed the same day. The next day, 8 October, with his assistance, an officer of SK 10A convened a "meeting of a narrow circle of Melitopol' intelligentsia", where Perepliotchikov was appointed a burgomaster.<sup>102</sup>

The Shoah is rarely mentioned in Perepliotchikov's case. For example, there is no information about his or the city administration's role in the killings of the local Jews. It is only noted that he engaged in looting, ordering the collection of warm clothes from the murdered Jews for the German army during the winter of 1941–1942.<sup>103</sup> In his testimony from October 8, 1945 Perepliotchikov remarked,

Under my direction, warm cloths of Soviet citizens were collected for the German army, while items belonging to executed Soviet citizens were distributed to the Germans returning from Germany.<sup>104</sup>

In the case of another Melitopol' collaborator, Andrei Putov, a native of Vladimir governorate, who was 54 years old at the beginning of the war, the theme of the Shoah is mentioned in passing in the context of the Germans' attitude towards the Karaites. From 15 October 1941 to July 1942, Putov was the director of the 11th secondary school, while also holding the posts of advisor to the burgomaster and chairman of the budget commission of the city administration. From July 1942 to August 1943, he worked as the director of a technical school for training personnel in metalworking. After the Red Army liberated Melitopol' in the fall of 1943,

<sup>100</sup> Archiv Zaporiz'koho oblasnoho upravlinnja Služby Bezpeky Ukrainy (hereafter AZOUSB), Spr. 5472, Ark. 99.

<sup>101</sup> A *zemstvo* (Russian: земство, IPA: ['ziɐmstvə], pl. земства, *zemstva*)[a] was an institution of local government set up during the emancipation reform of 1861 carried out in Imperial Russia by Emperor Alexander II of Russia. Nikolay Milyutin elaborated the idea of the *zemstvo*, and the first *zemstvo* laws went into effect in 1864. After the October Revolution, the *zemstvo* system was shut down by the Bolsheviks and replaced with a multilevel system of workers' and peasants' councils ("soviets").

<sup>102</sup> AZOUSB, Spr. 5472, Ark. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Akr. 100.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Akr. 59-zv.

Putov moved to Kyiv, where in 1946 he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to eight years in prison.<sup>105</sup>

The case file contains testimonies of the two previously mentioned Karaites: Hillel Yalpachik and Fyodor Stamboli. During his interrogation on 5 April 1946, Yalpachik stated that he had known Putov since 1932, and that Putov taught at the Melitopol' Institute of Agriculture and interacted with Yalpachik "as a teacher would normally do".<sup>106</sup> Yalpachik reported that at his request Putov intervened on behalf of the Karaites, emphasizing the threat of the Germans possible decision to address the "Karaite question" in the same way as with the "Jewish" and "Roma" ones. Based on the questions that were asked, it is evident that the investigator had a general understanding of Karaite nationalism. It appears that the Soviet official might have familiarized himself with these ideas through interactions with Yalpachik or by reading Soviet encyclopaedias of the 1920s–1930s, in which Karaites were described as a "distinct Turkic ethnicity". The investigator was interested in the particularities of the "Karaite policy" in Melitopol' as well as the role Putov played in these processes. The investigator also seemed aware of the differing attitudes of the occupiers and collaborators towards the Karaites in the occupied USSR,

Question: Was there a situation when you personally, during the German occupation, approached Andrei Yevgrafyevich Putov with a request that if the German authorities were to ask him about the Karaites, he would explain that the Karaite ethnicity was a distinct ethnicity?

Answer: Yes, there was such a situation when, approximately in October or November 1941, I ran into Putov on a street in Melitopol' and asked him about this. He responded along the lines of, 'Okay, if they ask, I will say the following...' or simply say 'Okay'.

The phrasing of such a question to Putov was due to the fact that the Germans tended to equate the Karaites with the Jews or Roma, who were subject to extermination during the German occupation.<sup>107</sup>

The investigator posed similar questions to Fyodor Stamboli on 1 April 1946, as he did to Yalpachik. The investigator was interested in Putov's attitude towards the "Karaite question" and his participation in rescuing the Karaites of Melitopol'. One could clearly deduce from Stamboli's

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Spr. 1678, Ark. 158–159.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Ark. 54.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

replies that Putov did not have unequivocally good, “serene” relations with the Karaites during the occupation. Not all Karaites at that time had an idea about Putov’s role in their rescue. Most likely, the narrative about his actions was spread by Yalpachik, Budun, and other Karaite activists in the post-war years, becoming well-known only after the collapse of the USSR. It is evident from the interrogation that Putov tried to use the theme of the Karaite rescue to shield himself from the Soviet purges after the return of Soviet power to Melitopol’.

Question: Do you know Andrei Yevgrafovich Putov, and how would you describe your relationship?

Answer: I have known Putov since 1932, when I was a student at the Melitopol’ Institute of Agricultural Engineering. Putov was the Head of the Academic Department of the Melitopol’ Institute. My relationship with him was ordinary; we had no personal conflicts.

Question: What do you know about Putov’s collaboration activities with the Germans during the occupation of Melitopol’?

Answer: Regarding Putov’s collaboration activities during the German occupation, I only know that Putov worked as an advisor to the burgomaster...

Question: Was there an instance when you, an engineer at the Melitopol’ power station during the German occupation, approached Putov for advice on what to do with the oil that the power station had concealed from the German authorities?

Answer: Regarding the oil that had been concealed from the Germans – no, I did not seek such advice from Putov. However, there was an instance when I stopped by the City Administration and saw Putov. He asked me if the rumours he had heard were true, that I was trading oil and exchanging it for food. I told Putov that this was untrue, and even if it were true, it was being done with permission of the German authorities. I did not have any further discussions with Putov on this topic.

Question: Did you approach Putov for consultation on the legal status of the Karaites during the German occupation, particularly when the Germans raised the issue of the Karaites’ connection to the Jews?

Answer: I never had any discussions with Putov on the issue of the Karaites, and I never consulted him on this matter (emphasis appears in the original text – note by the author).

Question: Then why does Putov claim that you approached him with these questions?

Answer: After the Red Army entered Melitopol' in 1943, I ran into Putov. He told me to mention, if the subject ever comes up, that he supposedly knew I had been trading oil but he, Putov, never informed the Germans.<sup>108</sup>

Of great interest is the case of a Crimean Tatar Ilarion Kurylo, a native of the Melitopol' region, who was 38 years old at the onset of the Soviet-German war. During the German occupation, he held several positions in the region: the headman of Voznesenka village (from 6 October 1941 to 15 March 1943) and burgomaster of Melitopol' (March 1943 to 18 September 1943). After the war, Kurylo was sentenced to death for his collaboration with the Germans.<sup>109</sup>

Kurylo's fate is particularly intriguing in the context of his collaboration with the Ukrainian nationalists (members of the Bandera and Melnyk factions), who arrived in the Melitopol' region from the West between 1941 and 1943. We know that during the Nazi occupation of eastern Ukraine, members of the OUN-B and OUN-M attempted to infiltrate the police and local self-government or recruit Ukrainians already working there.<sup>110</sup> At times, members of the Melnyk faction would arrive in Melitopol' as part of the Einsatzgruppen. For example, OUN-M activist Ivan Iuriiv was part of SK 10A in Melitopol'.<sup>111</sup>

In late October 1941, two members of the Bandera faction – Mykhailo Vyntoniv and Ivan (whose surname Kurylo could not recall during the trial) – arrived in Voznesenka. They were sheltered by Kurylo and began their propaganda activities. A month later, in November 1941, with the support of a headman, a meeting of OUN-B activists with the local intelligentsia took place on the premises of Voznesenka secondary school.<sup>112</sup> In the first weeks of the occupation, the Bandera faction succeeded in effectively organizing the propaganda through posters, leaflets, and appeals in various districts of the Melitopol' region. During his trial, Kurylo recalled the following,

From the very first days of the German occupation of Melitopol' district, alongside German posters, announcements, and orders, some leaflets began to appear on various buildings, street corners, and

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Ark. 48–49.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Ark. 437–38.

<sup>110</sup> On this subject, see Yuri Radchenko, "Joho čoboty ta esesivs'ka forma buly zabryzskani krov 'ju...": tajemna pol'ova policija, policija bezpeky ta SD, dopomižna policija u terori ščodo jevreviv Charkova (1941–1943 rr.), *Holokost i sučasnist'*. *Studiji v Ukrajinu i sviti*, 10 (2011), 46–86; Yuri Radchenko, 'Ukrajins'ka policija ta Holokost na Donbasi', *Ukrajina Moderna*, 24 (2017), 64–121; Yuri Radchenko, "We fired all cartridges at them": Ukrainische Hilfspolizei and the Holocaust on the territory of the Generalbezirk Kharkiv, 1941–1943', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 41 (2013), 63–98; Jurij Radchenko, 'Niemcy znaleźli u nich zrabowane żydowskie rzeczy i dlatego ich rozstrzelali': Kureń Bukowiński, Holocaust w Kijowie i świadectwo Marty Żybaczynskiej', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, 14 (2018), 580–617.

<sup>111</sup> Radchenko, 'The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Melnyk Faction) and the Holocaust'.

<sup>112</sup> AZOUSB, Spr. 1678, Ark. 437–38.



other prominent locations. These leaflets, addressed to the Ukrainian people, stated that a Ukrainian national government led by Stepan Bandera had already been established and called for the consolidation of Ukrainian forces to organize an independent Ukrainian state. The leaflets also expressed gratitude to the German government for 'liberating' the Ukrainian people from the yoke of communism.<sup>113</sup>

With the onset of German repressions against the OUN-B in the fall of 1941, the military administration, having learned of Kurylo's connections with the Banderites, decided to "deal with him accordingly" and forbade him from maintaining contact with Ukrainian nationalists. The former headman of Voznesenka recalled during his trial,

In late November 1941, a representative of the Ortskommandantur, Hess, who had previously appointed me a headman, came to the village council. During our conversation, he stated that the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists was interfering with the German command's objectives and was therefore severely persecuted.<sup>114</sup>

Apparently, after this intervention Kurylo refrained from openly communicating with the Banderites. Still, the "preventive conversation" did not entirely sever these connections. Later on, another OUN-B activist named Mykola Bureviy arrived in Voznesenka, likely in late 1942 or early 1943. He discussed with Kurylo specifics of the relationship between the OUN-B and the Germans, the formation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), and other events in Volhynia and Galicia. The emissary emphasized that "Germany will be defeated in this war, while the Soviet Union will be weakened".<sup>115</sup>

During the occupation, Kurylo was in touch with at least one member of OUN-M. In August–September 1942, a gendarmerie officer named Khabalyk visited the police in Voznesenka. It is likely that he, like Iuriiv, served as an interpreter for some German agency (such as the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, or Secret Field Police). While at the agency, he met the headman and mentioned that he was a member of Andriy Melnyk's party, conducting political agitation and spreading information about the "leader of the OUN".<sup>116</sup> After Khabalyk's departure from the village, there is no further information about OUN-M activities in Voznesenka during the German occupation.

<sup>113</sup> AZOUSB, Spr. 13885, Ark. 44–44v.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Ark. 59.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Ark. 45–48.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Ark. 51.

Knowing the anti-Semitic stance of OUN-B and OUN-M during the war, one might question what Kurylo's attitude towards the Jews was at the time. The materials from his trial indicate that, at least in one report to the Germans dated 8 December 1941, he employed anti-Semitic rhetoric. In that report, he described the "poor situation" with personnel in the local administration, pointing out among other things that one of the school principals, Vladimir Grechishkin, was not only a communist but also a Jew,

I am well aware of all the activities in the Melitopol' district, and I must inform you that strong leadership in the district is lacking; the community leaders do not understand the importance and seriousness of their duties, nor do they assume responsibility for their work. As a result, former communist activists have found opportunities to infiltrate the administration and act according to their own agenda.

Vladimir Grechishkin (a Jew, communist, activist, employee of the District Committee of the Communist Party), currently a principal of the seven-year school in the village of Semenovka, previously a school principal in Novo-Filipovka, often discusses defence matters with the village head, a certain Minko, in Filipovka. Citizen Duka from Filipovka can confirm that Minko is an NKVD agent.<sup>117</sup>

In the realities of the Nazi occupation, being a member of the Communist Party (VKP(b)) did not necessarily entail immediate death. There are known cases in which former members of the Communist Party and even NKVD officers served in collaborationist administrations and police forces. However, being a Jew did mean a certain death.

Later on, in February 1942, after the Congress of the Village Headmen of the Melitopol' district, Kurylo, along with other members of the Congress Presidium (Perepliotchikov, Klassen, and Smikhanovsky), sent a telegram to Hitler. In it, using anti-Semitic rhetoric, the local collaborators congratulated the leader of the Third Reich on the 9th anniversary of his rise to power on behalf of the administration of the Melitopol' district, "We rejoice and thank the German people for liberating the Ukrainians from the Jewish-Communist yoke".<sup>118</sup>

At the post-war trial, Kurylo reiterated that he had always helped the Jews whenever possible. During the interrogation on 12 June 1946, he stated that he had saved two people, a female pharmacist and a male paramedic, in the autumn of 1941. These testimonies are used by the authors

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Ark. 458.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

of a hagiographic biography of Kurylo-Krymchak, where he is depicted solely as a hero and a patriot of Ukraine.<sup>119</sup> In these actions of aiding the Jews, Kurylo was reportedly assisted by his secretary, a Ukrainian man named Bondarenko, as well as a Greek man named Kefal, a chief physician at a village hospital,

[...] in early November 1941, a citizen named Onishchenko (I do not know her first name or her patronymic), who at that time worked as a nurse in the village of Voznesenka, personally handed me a written statement regarding a pharmacist from the same hospital, a Jewish woman whose last name, first name, and patronymic I do not remember. The mentioned statement was handed to me by Onishchenko in my personal office at the office of the village administration, where my secretary, Hryhoriy Semenovych Bondarenko, was also present. As far as I can recall, the statement indicated that the pharmacist, a Jewish woman, allegedly during a quarrel with Onishchenko, had threatened that Onishchenko would have to answer for everything when the Bolsheviks return.

Based on this statement, I summoned the pharmacist through a messenger and asked her if the fact mentioned in the statement was true. She confirmed that the incident had indeed taken place. Therefore, I warned her that this statement could end badly. I then issued the pharmacist a document stating that she had worked at the hospital before the war and was still working there at that time. The document was signed by me and my secretary, Bondarenko. I tore up the statement in Bondarenko's presence.

Approximately a week later, the pharmacist left the village and went somewhere, and nothing more was known about her, but the written statement against her was not acted upon.

[...]

In October 1941, during the registration of the Jewish population, a paramedic of Voznesenka hospital (I don't remember his name), a Jew, approached me and asked me to issue him a document stating that he belonged to a different ethnicity. I discussed the matter with the chief physician of the hospital, Kefal, and together we signed and issued a document to the paramedic, stating that he was of Moldovan ethnicity.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Ščur, *Žyttja i borot'ba Ilariona Kuryla-Krymčaka*.

<sup>120</sup> AZOUSB, Spr. 13885, Ark. 31-31-zv., 33.

Were these testimonies an attempt to save himself, or did Kurylo genuinely help Jews during the Nazi occupation? The following case of assistance to a mixed Jewish-Slavic couple in the winter of 1941 suggests that his help to Jews was likely genuine. During the trial, Kurylo stated,

Around December 1941, the priest of Voznesenka, Volodymyr Ivanovych Tykhanovych, approached me with a request to help rescue the children of his daughter, who were living in Melitopol' at the time and whose father was Jewish. I instructed my coachman, Ivan Skoryk, to transport Tykhanovych's daughter and her children from Melitopol' to Voznesensk, and he did that.<sup>121</sup>

These testimonies are corroborated by a report from 23 January 1946, presented to ChGK by Volodymyr Tykhanovych himself. The report stated that in Melitopol', children from mixed marriages began to be persecuted as early as December 1941, and that Kurylo assisted with this process,

Later on, they started persecuting children from mixed marriages. I was forced to move from Melitopol' to Voznesenka because my daughter had been married to a Jew but was now widowed with two children. When I saw what was happening under the orders of the German authorities, the way they were persecuting children from mixed marriages, I had to take action to save my children. The parishioners of Voznesenka invited me to come over, and I agreed to move there. Starting November, I lived in Voznesenka. I moved all my belongings and stayed there.<sup>122</sup>

Evidently, Kurylo – despite his antisemitic rhetoric that may have been politically motivated at the time, as well as his betrayal of at least one Jewish communist – still provided assistance to the Jews of Melitopol' district during the Nazi occupation. Notably, the investigator directly questioned him about the mass murder of Jews, likely already aware of the full picture from the ChGK materials,

Question: Tell us about your participation in the mass execution of the Jewish population.

Answer: I did not participate in any arrests or executions of the Jewish population, as there were only two people of Jewish ethnicity in the entire village. Those two worked in the hospital, and I provided

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Ark. 31-31-zv., 33-33-zv.

<sup>122</sup> Yad Vashem Archives, M 53, 103, P. 71.

them with documents, as I already explained in detail during the previous interrogation.<sup>123</sup>

What happened to Ilarion Kurylo bears some resemblance to the case of OUN-B activist Fedir Vovk, who was Head of the Agricultural Department of the Nikopol District Administration. Before the war, Vovk and his wife, Yelyzaveta Shkandel, taught at a school in Nikopol. The city was occupied by the Germans on 17 August 1941, and a massacre of Jews was carried out on 3 and 5 October of the same year. Sara Bakst, also a teacher by profession, was married to a Ukrainian and was the mother of two young children. She was a friend of Vovk and his wife. Concerned about her fate, Vovk contacted Sara's husband and learned from him that Sara had survived the Aktion and was hiding with her mother, Yelyzaveta Bakst, and her two-year-old nephew, Volodymyr. Vovk and his wife decided to help Sara and her relatives.

First, they took Sara's older son, Viktor, into their home. Then they reached out to their friend Maria Mizina, who agreed to shelter Sara in her time of need. Then Vovk obtained fake papers for Yelyzaveta Bakst and sent her to his friends in the village of Varvarivka, where she worked as a cleaner at a school throughout the German occupation. No one knew that she was Jewish. Little Volodymyr lived in the same village, and the family that looked after him was also unaware of his Jewish descent. Meanwhile, Sara remained in hiding at Mizina's for three months. During the day, she stayed in the basement; at night she would come upstairs to get a warm bath. Eventually, Vovk managed to secure fake documents for Sara, helping her leave Nikopol for a rural area. Sara settled in a remote village, and only Vovk and his wife knew her whereabouts. Once she had settled, Vovk brought her son Viktor to her. Sara's younger son, Oleksandr, stayed with his Ukrainian father in another location throughout the occupation. After the liberation on 8 February 1944, the survivors returned to Nikopol and continued to maintain contact with their rescuers for many years. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union on 12 July 1998 did *Yad Vashem* award Fedir Vovk, his wife Yelyzaveta Shkandel, and Maria Mizina the title of Righteous Among the Nations.<sup>124</sup> However, there have been no attempts to bestow such a title upon Ilarion Kurylo-Krymchak.

We know that OUN(B) and OUN(M) activists participated in pogroms against the Jewish population in the summer of 1941 in the regions of Galicia, Volhynia, and Bukovyna. They were also involved in the anti-Jewish

<sup>123</sup> AZOUSB, Spr. 13885, Ark. 37-zv.-38.

<sup>124</sup> Yad Vashem, Vovk Fedor & Shkandel Yelizaveta, Yad Vashem, n.d. <[https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=%D0%92%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BA&searchType=righteous\\_only&language=en&itemId=4045141&ind=o](https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=%D0%92%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BA&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4045141&ind=o)> [accessed on 25 June 2022].

Aktion in the fall of 1941 in the central, eastern, and southern parts of Ukraine. Some members of these parties served in the police and local administration during the occupation, thus contributing to the Shoah. Ukrainian partisan groups led by Bandera, Melnyk, and Bulba<sup>125</sup> appeared and gradually strengthened in the spring of 1943. Despite their resistance, the Germans continued killing Jews who had been hiding in the forests. Furthermore, the propaganda originating from these three partisan groups between 1941 and 1945 was rife with anti-Semitic slogans.<sup>126</sup> In this atmosphere, the activities of individuals like Kurylo-Krymchak or Vovk were exceptions rather than the rule. These actions were taken on their own initiative, of which their organization's leadership was likely unaware, and which they probably would not have supported had they known about them. The cases of Kurylo and Vovk differ in that there is no evidence to suggest that Vovk disseminated anti-Semitic rhetoric or betrayed those Jews he found disagreeable to the Germans.

The Karaite question does not appear in Kurylo's case. This can be explained by the fact that in Voznesenka, where Kurylo was a headman, this issue did not arise due to the absence of a Karaite population. By the time Kurylo-Krymchak took the position of a mayor of Melitopol' (March 1943), there had been no clear attempts to "reexamine" the non-Jewish status of Melitopol' Karaites. Overall, when analysing archival judicial and investigative cases, one notices that the Jewish question was of little interest to the Soviet investigators as they did not specifically investigate Holocaust-related crimes. More often than not, the persecution and murder of Jews were bundled with other charges, such as service in the police and local administration, deportation of non-Jewish populations for forced labour in Germany, etc. The Karaite issue rarely surfaced; if it did, it was only in regards to cities where the Karaite population exceeded a few thousand people. Most likely, Soviet investigators in Kharkiv who were studying collaborators' crimes were unaware of who the Karaites were and had no general understanding of the specifics of the Germans' policy towards them. Up until now, not a single collaborator (policeman, member of the local administration, etc.) from mainland Ukraine has been known to be convicted for persecution of Karaites.

<sup>125</sup> Taras Dmytrovych Borovets (Ukrainian: Тарас Дмитрович Боровець; 9 March 1908 – 15 May 1981) was a Ukrainian resistance leader during the Second World War. He is better known as Taras Bulba-Borovets after his nom de guerre "Taras Bulba".

<sup>126</sup> Yuri Radchenko, 'Stavlennja OUN do jevrejiv: dyskusija bez «spil'nych deklaracij». Častyna 1', *Historians.in.ua*, 3 July 2016 <<http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/dyskusija/1932-yurii-radchenko-stavlennja-oun-do-ievreiv-dyskusija-bez-spilnykh-deklaratsii-chastyna-1>> [accessed on 20 July 2022]; id., 'Stavlennja OUN do jevrejiv: dyskusija bez «spil'nych deklaracij». Častyna 2', *Historians.in.ua*, 5 July 2016 <<http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/dyskusija/1935-yurii-radchenko-stavlennja-oun-do-ievreiv-dyskusija-bez-spilnykh-deklaratsii-chastyna-2>> [accessed on 22 June 2023].

## CONCLUSION

On 12 August 2020, a Holocaust memorial monument titled *Weeping for the Unborn* was unveiled in Melitopol'. This monument, envisioned by the project's lead sculptor Oleksandr Diachenko, symbolizes an entire generation of unborn children who never had a chance to come into the world due to the tragedy of the Holocaust.<sup>127</sup> The unveiling ceremony was attended by representatives from all ethnic communities in Melitopol', including Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks, and Crimean Tatars, among whom were also representatives of the Karaite community.<sup>128</sup>

The fates of Jews and Karaites in Melitopol' during the Nazi occupation were often closely intertwined. On the eve of the Nazi occupation, both groups represented a highly assimilated element within Soviet Ukrainian society. In Melitopol', throughout the entire occupation period Jews were systematically killed by the Nazis and their collaborators, with the culmination occurring in the first days after the Wehrmacht's arrival in Melitopol'. Within just a couple of days, SK 10A swiftly registered, gathered, deported, and executed the local Jews in the suburbs of Melitopol'. The property (primarily, warm cloths) of the murdered Jews was confiscated by the local administration and transferred to the German army. Those Jews who concealed their identity and hid in the district centre or nearby villages were pursued by the Nazis and collaborators throughout the occupation. The local administration (mayors and village headmen) played a crucial role in identifying these individuals and handing them over to the Melitopol' SD.

Approximately two months into the occupation of Melitopol', persecutions targeting people of mixed ethnic background, primarily children, began in the city and its environs. The SD prison in the district centre became one of the execution sites for these individuals. It is likely that the local SD initiated these purges. The Aktion aimed at murdering people of Jewish-Slavic descent began in Melitopol' nearly a year earlier than in other cities nearby. Indirect evidence suggests that this was connected to the local administration, whose representatives, under Himmler's authority, sought to "cleanse" the territory of the remaining Jewish population as quickly as possible.

The Karaite population of the city faced a serious threat of execution in late October 1941. Local Karaite activists, with the support of local self-government officials known from the pre-war period, managed to

<sup>127</sup> Karta "Evrei Ukrainy", "Memorial žertvam Cholokosta g. Melitopol'", *U-jew.com.ua*, n.d. <<https://ujew.com.ua/objects/zaporozhskaya-oblast/Melitopol'/memoriala-zhertvam-xolokosta-g.-Melitopol'>> [accessed on 14 June 2022].

<sup>128</sup> Phone interview with Yelena Arabadzhi, 20 July 2022, private collection of the author.

convince members of SK 10A that the local Karaites had nothing in common with the Jews and were, in fact, a Turkic people following their own distinct religion. Paradoxically, this same Sonderkommando later executed Karaites alongside Jews in Berdiansk and Krasnodar. This was due to the fact that Seetzen's subordinates selectively assessed each Karaite community within the occupied Soviet territories, carrying out a "verification process" for each one individually.

Against the backdrop of an almost fully secularized society, the Karaite narrative in Melitopol' had already come under the strong influence of the Karaite Turkic nationalism of the pre-war period. This influence intensified during the occupation (for obvious reasons, there was a need to distance themselves as much as possible from the persecuted Jews) and continued into the post-war period. This narrative reflects an attempt to eliminate all Jewish elements from the everyday culture of the local Karaites. The Holocaust is mentioned by Melitopol' Karaites in general terms, often in the context of a statement that the Germans almost succeeded with executing the Karaites as well but let themselves be convinced that Karaites were a "different people". Melitopol' Karaites' stories express empathy towards the persecuted Jews. A popular story, for example, describes how a Jewish woman on her way to execution gives her child to a Karaite family, thereby saving that child.

Our research confirms that this narrative is not just a story. In fact, the evidence demonstrates that Melitopol' Karaites, such as Aza Stamboli, together with the local Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians, helped save Melitopol' Jews, as well as those arriving from other locations. This assistance included providing shelter, food, fake documents, and helping people relocate to safer places. It is worth mentioning that Jews were always provided with "Slavic" passports, while their names and ethnicities were "corrected" in existing documents. There has never been a case of a fake Karaite document being issued, unlike in other parts of Eastern Europe. Karaites themselves lived in constant fear that their "non-Jewish" status could be "revised" by the military administration, collaborators, or SK 10a, which could return to the city at any time. This fear was compounded by instances of local Karaite administration officials being arrested for economic crimes, and by the fact that SK 10A had executed Karaites in other locations.

Soviet investigators conducted thorough research into the Holocaust during the war and post-war periods, making archival judicial-investigative cases from the former KGB archives a valuable and often indispensable source for studying the persecution, robberies, and murders of the Jews in the occupied USSR. However, the subject of Nazi policy towards the Karaites



is poorly represented in these documents. The situation is different with cases involving former collaborators from the Melitopol' region, where the Holocaust is scarcely mentioned, as evidenced by the cases of Andrei Putov and Vasiliï Perepliotchikov. These cases demonstrate that the Melitopol' self-government was involved in the looting of Jewish property after the first mass executions. However, the exact role of these agencies in the first, bloodiest Aktion remains unknown. The case of Ilarion Kurylo-Krymchak illustrates the role that members of the local self-government could play in both the persecution and rescue of Jews. It also shows the attempts by Bandera and Melnyk supporters to influence the local administration.

One promising area of study is the extent of the influence that OUN(B) and OUN(M) members imparted on the apparatus that exterminated the Jews in the region. For instance, what role did the Melnyk supporter Ivan Iuriiv<sup>129</sup> play in the Holocaust in Melitopol' and in the "solution of the Karaite question" in October 1941? Additionally, the attitudes of Romanian troops, who were also present in the region, towards Jews and Karaites remain completely unexplored. It is also important to research the attitudes of the Crimean Tatar population who lived in Melitopol' towards Jews and Karaites during the German occupation. Further study of the archival judicial-investigative cases from the former KGB archives as well as private Ukrainian, Jewish, Karaite, and Tatar archives from various parts of the world would contribute to this research.

<sup>129</sup> On Ivan Iuriiv, see Radchenko, "The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Mel'nyk Faction) and the Holocaust".

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