



# Babi Yar

*Karel C. Berkhoff*

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## Context

The name Babi Yar, or Babyn Yar in Ukrainian, means Old Women's Ravine and for centuries referred only to one of several ravines, a natural obstacle to invaders, situated on the northwestern edge of Kiev (Kyiv). The geological formation consisted of nine spurs running east and west for approximately a kilometer that had steep, ten-meter slopes. In the nineteenth century, cemeteries for Jews, Karaites (non-Rabbinical Jews who do not recognize the Talmud as divinely inspired), Muslims, and Orthodox Christians were established nearby, as well as Russian Imperial army camps with firing ranges. Early in the Soviet period, armored Red Army units were also stationed in the area. Otherwise, few other people could be seen in Lukianivka, the Kiev district next to Babi Yar, which, despite the presence of a freight train depot, was difficult to reach or to traverse. Melnikov Street, the main street, ended where the ravine began. Babi Yar was above all a place of natural beauty where young people enjoyed wandering, swimming, and playing.

The mass shooting of at least 34,000 Jews of Kiev in late September and early October 1941 in and near this ravine stands out in the history of the Holocaust for several reasons. It represented the first time that a metropolitan city in Europe lost virtually every one of its Jewish inhabitants to deliberate murder. And it also involved the slaughter of a greater number of people in a two-day period than any other single German massacre during World War II.

Babi Yar was thus the site of the largest single German massacre of Jews, although it was not the first large mass slaughter; that ominous distinction goes to Kamianets-Podilsky (Rus. Kamenets-Podolskii), a Soviet Ukrainian town near the prewar Polish border where 23,600 Jews, including thousands expelled by Hungary, were summarily shot in August 1941. Until late July, commando units of Einsatzgruppe C, Einsatzgruppe D, and Police Regiment South in Ukraine had primarily executed Jewish men, but women and children were subsequently murdered as well. Babi Yar symbolizes the extermination of entire Jewish communities beginning in mid-September 1941.

Babi Yar also stands as a symbol of the crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht*. The startlingly rapid mass murder of Kiev's Jews would have been impossible without the close cooperation of army units and ultimately of the Sixth Army central command.

Babi Yar has come to symbolize what has occasionally been referred to as the Holocaust by bullets : mass shootings of Jews in eastern Europe, by contrast with the better known stationary gas chambers used at Auschwitz and other death camps. In the eastern Holocaust, the vast majority of Jews were slain in mass shootings, near their homes and within a short span of time—days, weeks, or at most months.

In the Soviet Union, Babi Yar was considered to be the principal symbol of fascist killings of not only about 60 percent of Ukraine's pre-war Jewish population, but also of numerous non-Jews. At the same time, Soviet authorities attempted to ignore the site itself, banning Jewish commemorations, and a monument erected on the site in the 1970s was mute regarding the victims' Jewish identity. Traces of this obfuscation continue to be apparent: As of 2015, Kiev has no Babi Yar Museum and lacks even a semblance of consensus concerning the precise location of the shootings and the victims' remains, and there is no agreement on the proper way to treat the killing site, which has been encircled by the rapidly growing city since the war.

## Decision-Makers, Organizers, and Actors

When Germany invaded the expanded Soviet Union in June 1941, the population of Kiev stood at approximately 850,000 people, about a quarter of them registered as Jews. As the Germans approached, most Jews left, but others were unable to board trains or even deliberately stayed behind. Some Jews chose not to abandon frail or elderly relatives, while others had an attachment to belongings. Some, disbelieving the suddenly alarmist Soviet media, hoped for better lives under the Germans, a hope shared by many non-Jews.

Even before Kiev was occupied on September 19, 1941, the German police, SS, and military forces began planning harsh measures against the city's Jews. An advance unit of *Sonderkommando* 4a, under the command of Paul Blobel (1894-1951), part of *Einsatzgruppe* C, arrived in Kiev the very same day and immediately took advantage of assistance from other Germans. The *Wehrmacht* created camps for Jews and others and put Jewish men to work doing hazardous forced labor. These actions mainly involved divisions of the 29th Army Corps, which was under the command of *General der Infanterie* Hans von Obstfelder (1886-1976) and which was part of the Sixth Army that was led by Walter von Reichenau (1884-1942). As early as September 22, von Obstfelder issued orders for the arrest of the male Jewish inhabitants of Kiev. The infantry divisions involved in various ways in this early wave of persecution were the 75th (under Ernst Hammer), the 95th (under Hans-Heinrich Sikst von Arnim), the 99th (under Kurt von der Chevalier), the 113th (under Friedrich Zickwolff), the 299th (under Willi Moser), and probably also the 71th and 296th (under Alexander von Hartmann and Wilhelm Stemmermann).

The first city commander was *Generalleutnant* (lieutenant general) Alfred von Puttkammer (1882-1946), commander of the *Rückwärtiges Armeegebiet* (Rear Army Area) 585. He was succeeded on September 23 by the commander of Field Command 175, Kurt Eberhard (1874-1947). It was and remains unclear when formal command over Kiev was transferred from the rear army area (and hence from the 29th Army Corps and the active Sixth Army as a whole) to *Rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet Süd* (Rear Army Group Area South), which was under the command of Karl von Roques (1880-1949), and to the 454th Security Division, commanded by Hermann Wilck (1885-1967). Although von Roques claimed to have been in charge since September 23, von Obstfelder of the Army Corps, encouraged by von Reichenau, continued to issue orders until late September.

On Wednesday, September 24, bombs exploded in buildings in the city center, igniting a large fire. Explosions continued throughout the evening and night and into the following day. Red Army engineers and officers of the NKVD, or Soviet political police, had placed bombs, and Soviet agents now helped to spread the conflagration by launching bottles of fuel. Approximately two hundred Germans may have lost their lives in the blasts or in the effort to extinguish the fires. German mass arrests of Communists, NKVD agents, and Jews began with the help of apartment block custodians and new auxiliary policemen. The German occupiers shot several Jews, leaving their bodies in the streets, adding a sign they had set off mines, and killed more Jews in other places, probably including trenches dug by the Red Army near Babi Yar.

It is likely that on September 25, Blobel's *Sonderkommando* 4a and the military authorities, including von Reichenau, agreed to murder all of Kiev's Jews in a single stroke. On the evening of that day, von Reichenau and von Obstfelder met, as did all of the leaders responsible for the security of the city. (No conclusive evidence of a request or order from von Reichenau has ever been located, however.) One day later, on Friday, September 26, Eberhard met with the key mass murderers, including Blobel, *Einsatzgruppe* C commander Otto Rasch (1891-1948), and the Higher SS and Police Leader for Ukraine, Friedrich Jeckeln (1895-1946). The significance of these meetings is evident, because the Army Propaganda Company 637 activity report for September 25-26 refers to a critical step in preparing the upcoming massacre: the printing of two thousand wall posters demanding that the Jewish population of

Kiev show up at a particular place.

Further meetings took place on September 27, at least one of which was chaired by Gerhard Schirmer (1909-?), intelligence officer (Ic) of the 29th Army Corps; the evacuation of the Jews was discussed during this meeting. Everyone was aware that this was a reference to mass murder, if only because no mention was made of provisions for a supposed mass evacuation. The executions of Kiev's Jews had in fact already begun, supported by a generous new shipment to Jeckeln's office from the Army on that same day of 5,000 gun bullets and as many as 100,000 machine gun bullets.

On Sunday, September 28, the new Ukrainian police posted the printed but unsigned order in Russian, Ukrainian, and German ordering every Jewish resident of Kiev and the surrounding area to appear at the intersection of Melnikov and Degtiarev Streets before 8:00 a.m. the following day and to bring documents, money, valuables, and also warm clothing, underwear, and the like. It is clear that no one involved in composing the text knew much about Kiev, because the claim that the intersection was located near the cemeteries was incorrect. (The Jewish and Orthodox cemeteries were located further down Melnikov Street.) The text added that *zhidy*, or kikes who disobeyed the order to assemble would be shot. *Sonderkommando* 4a spread a rumor that the Jews would be resettled.

All day on Monday, September 29, Jewish men, women, and small children along with non-Jewish spouses and other close friends and relatives streamed towards the designated street corner, where they were instructed to continue walking west, down Melnikov Street, which was lined with soldiers and members of the German Order Police. The advancing line reached a point of no return near the intersection with Pugachev Street. Most of the Germans here belonged to the *Feldgendarmarie*, the uniformed military police, who counted off a specific number of people and urged them on, while restraining the others. After passing the two cemeteries, the terrified people were forced to surrender their belongings and valuables and enter a vicious gauntlet of German sub-machine-gunners, who rushed and beat them.

The Jews reached level ground, where men who spoke Ukrainian forced them to remove most of their clothes. They were sent to high points with narrow aisles leading down into Babi Yar, where they saw the shootings and the corpses only at the last moment, after turning a corner. There were various entrances and groups of German shooters, totaling about a hundred, not all of whom shot all day long. Incoming victims were compelled to lie down on top of dead and dying people or, later in the day, were placed on a ledge and shot from the other side of the ravine. The corpses and still-living victims were covered with a layer of chloride of lime, sand, and soil.

When darkness fell on September 29, those Jews who had not yet been shot were pressed into garages for the night, only to be shot the next day. Other Jews also arrived and were shot, that day or soon thereafter. Almost immediately afterward, in early October, Soviet prisoners of war from a German camp at Kerosynna Street were ordered to level the covered mass grave, and then, or somewhat later, *Wehrmacht* Pioneer Battalion 113 exploded a portion of the slopes.

The October 7 secret activity report of the murderers made no mention of the killing site, but it was otherwise very explicit: In collaboration with the [*Einsatz*]Group Staff and two commando units of Police Regiment South, *Sonderkommando* 4a executed 33,771 Jews on September 29 and 30. Indeed, the first known group of shooters came from the *Sonderkommando* 4a and the Staff of *Einsatzgruppe* C. The second group consisted of two battalions from Police Regiment South, which was under Jeckeln and was commanded by René Rosenbauer (1882-?). These were Reserve Police Battalion 45 from Ústí nad Labem (Aussig) in Bohemia, under the command of Martin Besser (1892-?), and Police Battalion 303 from Bremen, commanded by Heinrich Hannibal (1889-1971). Sources strongly suggest that members of these two battalions did not simply guard and direct the victims, but also formed shooting squads.

The identity and origin of the auxiliaries remain unknown. Survivors tend to say that they were Ukrainians, if only because they were speaking Ukrainian. Activists from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), founded in 1929 in Polish-ruled western Ukraine, moved into central Ukraine in 1941 and arrived in Kiev with the Germans. Memoirs by these activists place only one of their members, Roma Bida (1905-1942), who was supposedly forced to guard Jewish clothes, near the site of the ravine on September 29. Two formations created or commanded by the OUN (Melnyk faction) are known to have been present in the city during the massacre. One was a police company of the new Ukrainian Police commanded by Ivan Kediulych (1912-1945). The other was the Bukovinian Battalion, which included hundreds of Ukrainians from Bukovina under the command of Petro Voinovsky (1913-1996). No conclusive evidence places either of these two groups of Ukrainians at Babi Yar during the massacre, however. Moreover, the murderers included or brought with them a number of Ukraine-born ethnic Germans in civilian clothing who could and probably did speak Ukrainian or Russian.

## The Victims

When the poster appeared, most Jews began to fear for their lives. After all, they would be shot for *not* showing up, so what exactly awaited them? It was widely known in the city that Jews arrested earlier never returned, and there was news of earlier massacres. According to an account published on April 5, 1943 in the Soviet Yiddish periodical *Eynikayt*, on September 19, 1941, Germans also reached Darnytsia, an eastern district across the Dnieper River, where many refugees and soldiers had been stranded. As early as September 20, any of them who even looked Jewish were shot by the Germans and their bodies dumped into a mass grave. At least some of the Jews in the city had heard almost immediately about this earlier massacre.

The survivor Genia Batasheva (1924-2000), who was seventeen years old at the time, has recalled being somewhat reassured by one detail—the sight of smiling Germans in a truck driving in the opposite direction, which suggested to her that nothing horrible could be in the making. Because the designated assembly point was near the freight train station, Jews were also able to tell themselves that they would be sent away. Still, eyewitness accounts (see section D- The Witnesses) strongly suggest that most were deeply afraid.

Unlike criminal investigators, who are compelled to employ precise figures, historians are nowhere close to agreeing about the exact number of fatalities from the massacre at Babi Yar, either for the primary slaughter from late September to early October 1941 or for the entire period of Nazi rule. Nor is there any semblance of consensus about the proportion of Jews versus non-Jews who were murdered at the site.

The *Einsatzgruppe*'s own exact figure of 33,771 Jews for the principal massacre essentially resurfaced in a laconic reference by the *Wehrmacht*'s 454th Security Division to about 34,000 Jews, killed over the course of several days. It would be incorrect to explain the original exact number only by counting (a German was assigned to count Jews as they arrived) and the forced surrender of identity papers by the victims. The circumstances were not under complete German control, and Germans were witnessed burning identity papers on the spot. The precise figure more likely indicates that Blobel's men wished to represent themselves to their superiors as meticulous.

It is nevertheless clear that non-Jews were also slaughtered at Babi Yar. Some died with their Jewish spouses in late September, while others, Roma or non-Jewish prisoners of war, were murdered after September 1941. City commander Eberhard also initially announced reprisal shootings. One hundred Kievans were shot on October 22, 1941. Individuals who were randomly rounded up one morning after an explosion rocked the former Duma building on Kalinin Square appear to have been among the victims. (From this roundup, in accordance with German army instructions regarding hostages, those able to prove

Ukrainian nationality were let go.) During the two final nights of October, unknown individuals set fire to several houses and objects at a Kiev market; on November 2, Eberhard proclaimed that earlier that day, by way of punishment for the increasing number of cases of arson and sabotage, he had ordered the execution of three hundred inhabitants of Kiev. Later that month, there were instances of sabotaged telephone and telegraph wires, and on November 29, there was an announcement that, because the perpetrators had not been found, four hundred men had been shot. Their corpses ended up either at Babi Yar or in nearby pits and anti-tank trenches.

This was the last German announcement of shootings, but shots continued to resound from Babi Yar. In February 1942, Kiev's second German-supported mayor Volodymyr Bahazii (1902-1942) was killed, as were some members of the OUN. Later, many members of the auxiliary police deemed to be disloyal nationalists were also killed. Although not all of these executions took place at Babi Yar, the Nazis probably continued to dump the corpses at the site or in the area.

Former members of the staff of the *Sicherheitspolizei*, or Security Police, and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), or Security Service, established in Kiev under the command of Erich Ehrlinger (1910-2004) when the city was incorporated into *Reichskommissariat* Ukraine and thus no longer remained under military command, were questioned in judicial interrogations. They recalled that shootings and gassings in a mobile gas van occurred regularly. For instance, *SS-Sturmbannführer* Hans Schumacher (1907-1992), commander in Kiev of the *Gestapo* and the *Kriminalpolizei*, or Secret State Police and Criminal Police, said that in the eight months following early November 1941, hundreds of Jews and non-Jews were murdered. The person who prepared the execution lists for Ehrlinger to sign concluded that approximately fifty people were shot each week. This may nevertheless be an understatement, for other veterans referred to two weekly rounds of executions.

As early as 1942, the Nazi leadership attempted to erase as much as possible of the physical evidence of the mass graves in the eastern reaches of the Reich. Codenamed Operation 1005, this initiative was conducted by Blobel and was given top priority after the discovery of mass graves by the Soviet Union in the Russian city of Rostov. Kiev was also included in Operation 1005, and for six weeks, beginning in mid-August 1943, SS troops forced approximately 300 prisoners from the Syrets concentration camp adjacent to Babi Yar to extract and burn the corpses from the ravine and the nearby pits. A sky-high pall of smoke and a powerful stench hovered over the city. Even during the burnings, however, the killings continued. One Jewish camp prisoner who was forced to pull corpses out of a German van and incinerate them, Zakhar Trubakov (1912-1998), determined from their clothes that these freshly gassed people were villagers, as well as elderly men, adult women, teenagers, and young children from the city. Whether they were Jews or not was unclear.

Various slave laborers who escaped on the final day of the operation estimated how many corpses they burned. The earliest estimates by seven survivors were collected in the 1940s and varied widely. One survivor spoke of 45,000 dead (Steiuk), but other figures were far greater up to 70,000 (Berliant, Brodskii, Davydov); over 80,000 (Budnik); 95,000 to 100,000 (Kuklia; soon modified into 90,000 to 95,000); and even 100,000 (Doliner). Another survivor merely stated that there had been 25 to 30 pyres, each of which incinerated 2,500 to 3,000 corpses (Ostrovskii).

When the NKVD returned to Kiev, it organized its own excavations at Babi Yar and at the former Syrets camp. It settled on a high estimate, concluding that the Nazis had attempted to burn 100,000 corpses at Babi Yar. That count included about 70,000 Jews for September 1941 alone, a far higher (and unsubstantiated) figure than the killers' own numbers. The other regional NKVD estimates were approximately 20,000 prisoners of war and 10,000 (non-Jewish) civilians. The Soviet Extraordinary State Commission report on Kiev, which was published in March 1944, also referred to over 100,000 men, women, and children and old people in Babi Yar, in addition to 400 victims in Lukianivka Cemetery.

In the 1960s and 1980s, three Jewish survivors of Operation 1005 increased their personal estimates respectively to over 100,000 (Steiuik), 125,000 (Davydov), and at least 120,000 (Budnik). They thus either matched or exceeded the official Soviet count. Two more corpse-burning survivors now offered their estimates of 120,000 (Kaper) and 125,000 or at least 120,000 (Trubakov).

An examination of the total number of inhabitants of Kiev offers a further perspective. In October 1941, immediately following the primary massacre, a war-time German estimate established the city's population at approximately 400,000. In January and April 1942, some 330,000 and 352,000 respectively were recorded as inhabiting the city. This figure had dropped below 300,000 by mid-1943. This reduction since September 1941 was due not only to shootings and gassings, however, but also to deportations to Germany, flight, and deaths from famine.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that more than 34,000 Jews were shot in late September and early October 1941, nearly all of them in the two-day period of September 29 and 30. Several thousands more, not only from Kiev but also from the surrounding countryside, were subsequently shot at Babi Yar or gassed in vans as they were driven there. The proportion of non-Jews murdered continually increased, but Jews remained the vast majority of the victims whose corpses ended up at Babi Yar.

## The Witnesses

Non-Jewish Ukrainians and Russians have recalled that few Kiev residents considered the possibility of mass murder, and that many non-Jews believed that the Jews were being deported. Few of them failed to witness or at least glimpse the procession on September 29. In her diary, the middle-aged Russian teacher L. Nartova described the view from her balcony that day: People are moving in an endless row, overflowing the entire street and sidewalks. Women and men are walking, young girls, children, old people, and entire families. Many carry their belongings on wheelbarrows, but most of them are carrying things on their backs. They walk in silence, quietly. How awful. It went on like this for very long, the entire day and only in the evening did the crowd become smaller. (She added that this continued for several more days.)

The Ukrainian engineer Fedir Pihido (1888-1962) was on Lviv Street at approximately eleven o'clock that Monday and saw how many thousands of people, mainly elderly but middle-aged people were also not lacking were moving towards Babi Yar. And the children my God, there were so many children! All this was moving, burdened with luggage and children. Here and there, old, sick people who lacked the strength to move by themselves were carried on carts without any assistance, probably by sons or daughters. Some cried, others consoled. Most were moving in a self-absorbed way, in silence, and with a doomed look. It was a terrible sight. Doctor Fedir Bohatyrchuk (1892-1984) reported witnessing Jewish children who seemed not to suspect a thing, but Jewish adults had stony faces, paralyzed with fright. They already instinctively foresaw what was going to happen to them.

By no means all of the onlookers of the procession were sad. In various places, locals jeered at the Jews leaving their homes. Bohatyrchuk recalled quite a few of my co-religionists watching this exodus with a happy face. It appears that the denunciation and looting of Jews was also rampant, both in September 1941 and afterwards. On September 30, the second day of the massacre, dozens of locals in the Podil district engaged in a pogrom that eventually killed seven Jews, who were hastily buried in graves dug nearby.

It is unclear how many non-Jews saved or tried to save Jews. One case involved Aleksei Glagolev (1901-1972), ordained an Orthodox priest in October 1941, and his wife Tatiana (1905-1981). The couple hid Jews and provided them with false identity papers. Quite a few other non-Jews petitioned the authorities to exempt particular Jews. These efforts never had the desired result, however, and

intermediaries, including the first new mayor, Oleksander Ohloblyn (1899-1992), were gruffly instructed to keep out of German affairs.

It did not help that the new city administration of Kiev, although it was systematically subordinate to the Germans, was dominated until early 1942 by OUN activists. On October 2, the Kiev newspaper *Ukrainske Slovo*, or Ukrainian Word, which they edited, defined the Jew as the greatest enemy of the People. Over the course of the twenty-three years while they supposedly ruled Ukraine, the Jews had no mercy. May now they also not hope for it.

Outside the German zone of influence, the first news report related to the massacre appeared six weeks later. On November 16, 1941, the New York City-based Jewish Telegraphic Agency relayed the news from somewhere in Europe that fifty-two thousand Jews, including men, women, and children, were systematically and methodically put to death in Kiev following the Nazi occupation of the Ukrainian capital, according to information received today [November 14] by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency from an unimpeachable source. This particular source is unknown.

The *New York Times* ignored the JTA report, but the Soviet media, referring to the Overseas News Agency, an outgrowth of the JTA, did not. On September 19, the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* wrote: As the correspondent of the Overseas News agency reports from a location in Europe, the information has been received from reliable sources that the Germans killed 52,000 Jews men, women, and children in Kiev.

Early in December 1941, Joseph Stalin received a report from the Ukrainian NKVD-in-exile about the murder of up to 30,000 Jews in Kiev. In January 1942, Foreign Affairs Commissar Viacheslav Molotov issued a note to Allied governments in which he cited the JTA estimate of the number of victims: Horrible slaughter and pogroms were committed by the German invaders in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. In only a few days, the German bandits killed and tortured 52,000 men, women, old men, and children, mercilessly crushing all Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews who displayed their devotion to Soviet rule in any manner. Employing data from the testimony of an escaped Soviet prisoner of war, Molotov specified that during one large execution, a large number of Jews, including women and children of all ages, were assembled in Kiev's Jewish cemetery; before the shooting, they all were stripped naked and beaten; the first group selected for shooting was forced to lie in the bottom of a ditch, faces to the ground, and were shot with submachine guns; the Germans then sprinkled earth lightly over those shot, and then on them the next layer of those to be executed were placed, and were again shot with submachine guns.

## Memories

The Nazi bureaucracy generally managed to keep the *Einsatzgruppen* reports of the massacre secret, although Foreign Ministry and other officials were informed. (The idea appears to have been that they should know what kind of activities could be expected of them if they were billeted in the east.) The *Wehrmacht* attempted to impose total silence about the affair, but it was not entirely successful. Regardless of official army records, informal German oral and written reports of the massacre spread widely across Europe due to personnel transfers and holiday leaves.

After the war, Babi Yar was mentioned in West Germany in connection with trial proceedings and books, such as a memorial volume prepared by the sociologist Erhard Roy Wiehn (1991). It is still not uncommon for Germans to assert that the massacre has been forgotten, as revealed by the titles of a film (*Babij Jar. Das vergessene Verbrechen* [2003; dir. Jeff Kanew; prod. Artur Brauner]) and a television documentary (*Babij Jar. Das vergessene Massaker* [2012; Christine Rütten and Lutz Rentner, for ARD public television]). There appears to be a sense that the massacre has not been adequately discussed or commemorated.



Considerable progress has been made towards acknowledging the massacres that took place at Babi Yar, however. The participation of policemen from the city of Bremen in the massacre has been included in the municipal teaching program for new policemen, for example. The mayor of Regensburg has publicly mentioned the link between Babi Yar and his city, where former Police Regiment South commander René Rosenbauer used to live. Since its publication in 2014, the novel *Vielleicht Esther (Maybe Esther)* by the Kiev-born Jewish writer Katja Petrowskaja, which is about Jewish family memories of the massacre, has received wide acclaim.

After the Germans were expelled from the city on November 6, 1943, the NKVD, intelligence agencies, and the Extraordinary State Commission produced reports and interrogation records and conducted excavations. The commission's report of January 1944 about Nazi crimes in Kiev, however, completely omitted referring to Jews. This studied neglect could only intimidate the roughly ten survivors who remained in the city, who generally kept a low profile. The few who became known included Genia Batasheva and Dina Pronicheva (1911-1977).

Indeed, until 1991, the Soviet leadership consistently refused to acknowledge that the massacre of September 1941 amounted to an unparalleled war crime, namely, the attempt to kill every single Jew in the city at the time; and it prohibited meaningful commemorations. This refusal to acknowledge that the victims were primarily Jews and to properly commemorate their deaths was consistent with a general Soviet pattern that stemmed partly from Communist ideology, which contended that Jews did not belong and should assimilate. But the principal cause was the anti-Semitic notion that Jews had been and remained alien and hostile, a belief compounded beginning in the late 1940s by official Soviet animosity towards the State of Israel.

By the late 1940s, the ravine, still full of ashes, bones, and human hair, was an unofficial rubbish dump scoured by marauders. Ukraine's Communist party, under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), wanted to keep any commemorative activities surrounding Babi Yar to a minimum, located on only a fraction of the killing and burial grounds, and without any avowed connection to Jews. Off the record, certain Communist officials even criticized the Jews for having obeyed the German order to assemble.

In May 1945, it was decided to place a monument at Babi Yar and to transform the mass grave into a park with lanes. Over the course of the year 1950, the authorities, including Oleksii Davydov (1907-1963), chair of the executive committee of the city soviet, made a secret decision to obliterate Babi Yar. They perceived two benefits from this action: the growth of the city, and the disappearance of the supposedly purely Jewish site. In fact, the ravine gradually became a lake, as nearby brick factories pumped in muddy water. On March 13, 1961, however, one of the dams collapsed, and a massive landslide pushed into the city, killing over 145 people. The project to fill in the ravine was resumed after this incident, which is often called the Kurenivka Tragedy.

The Jewish writer Lev Ozerov (1914-1996) investigated Babi Yar for a Soviet *Black Book* on the Nazi murder of the Jews, edited in 1945 by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, but the book was never published in the Soviet Union. Soviet film theaters did show Mark Donskoi's film *The Unvanquished* (1945), which depicted the massacre. The loosening of censorship in the late 1950s and mid-1960s enabled the Russian writer Viktor Nekrasov (1911-1987), who lived in Kiev, to inquire in a periodical in October 1959 why no monument at Babi Yar had been erected. In September 1961, the poem "Babi Yar" was published by Yevgeny Yevtushenko (b. 1932), repeating Nekrasov's question, adding, "In their callous rage, all anti-Semites must hate me now as a Jew." Khrushchev publicly condemned the poem. A documentary novel entitled *Babi Yar* by the Kievan Anatoly Kuznetsov (1929-1979) was first published in 1966 in *Yunost*, a Moscow monthly with a circulation of two million. The book version was withdrawn from Soviet libraries, however, after Kuznetsov requested political asylum in the United Kingdom.

Neither the mudslide nor these attention-grabbing publications was successful in impeding the obliteration of Babi Yar. Multi-story apartment blocks were constructed on the site, lining a new major road that was completed in 1969. When foreign tourists asked to be taken to Babi Yar, Soviet tourist agency guides told them it was far away and of little interest. Yet the absence of a memorial drew increasing anger both inside and outside of the Soviet Union. Faced with a large unofficial commemoration in September 1966 at which the Ukrainian writer Ivan Dziuba (b. 1931) issued a denunciation of anti-Semitism, as well as attempts to repeat the gathering in the years that followed, the government of Soviet Ukraine ordered that the few remaining spurs of the ravine be filled in.

The long-delayed Soviet memorial finally opened in July 1976. Amidst a small, artificially shaped terrain that was part of the long-planned Park of Culture and Recreation, a large bronze sculpture commemorated the citizens of the city of Kiev and the prisoners of war killed at Babi Yar between 1941 and 1943. September 29 became a municipal memorial day devoted to the memory of the victims of the temporary German-fascist occupation. Secret documents openly stated that official commemorations at the site were intended to preclude gatherings by nationalist Jewish citizens. The words *Babi Yar* continued to be used primarily as rhetorical weapons against foreign countries, in particular Israel, the United States, and West Germany, which were denounced for whitewashing and condoning fascism.

In September 1991, one month after Ukraine declared its independence, the first ever official national Ukrainian commemoration of the massacre took place. Acting President Leonid Kravchuk (b. 1934) stated that it was appropriate to ask forgiveness from the Jewish people. Texts in Russian and Yiddish were added to the Soviet memorial, and local Jews placed a bronze menorah at another location.

But construction in the former killing zone continued unabated in the post-Soviet period. In 2000, a metro station was even opened near the former ravine. In 2002, an emotional debate was held in Kiev, primarily between Jews from two competing Babi Yar memorial committees, concerning the plan of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to construct a community center. The opponents of the project said it would disturb human remains, and they prevailed.

In 2007, Babi Yar became a National Historical-Memorial Reservation under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. As of 2015, however, visitors were still likely to be confused by the presence of many other memorial objects devoted to Jews and non-Jews that have been placed at Babi Yar after 1991. They commemorate, for example, members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (1991), Russian Orthodox priests (2000), the children murdered at Babi Yar (2001), and the people deported to the Reich as forced laborers from Ukraine (2005). The human remains, meanwhile, seem to have vanished along with the original ravine. Locals often use the area for festive purposes, and the former killing grounds are far from representing a commemorative space that respects the dead of Babi Yar and those who wish mourn their deaths.

Outside of Ukraine, there are Babi Yar memorials in Nahalat Yitzchak cemetery in Givatayim, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and in Denver, Colorado. Generally, awareness of Babi Yar has often come from translations of Yevtushenko's poem and Kuznetsov's book, brief reenactments in the American TV mini-series *Holocaust* (1978) and *War and Remembrance* (1988), and visits by U.S. President George Bush (1991) and Pope John Paul II (2001).

## General and Legal Interpretations

The premeditation of the principal Babi Yar massacre has never been in doubt. In Germany, a fierce debate in the 1990s over the involvement of the *Wehrmacht* in the Holocaust and other Nazi mass crimes produced

several new studies. Drawing on German military and judicial records, these studies shed light on the organization of the massacre and on the thinking of the Germans in Kiev at the time. (See, for example, Rüß 1998.) It became clearer than ever that top SS and police officials, together with army officers, made the joint decision to eliminate Kiev's Jews. It is now rare to find the traditional view among German historians, that the *Wehrmacht* was only marginally involved. Other German researchers have helped provide insights into the mental processes of the German killers and into the precise methods that they used to conduct the killings.

In Ukraine itself, research on the perpetrators remains rare. Alexander Kruglov considers as the main organizers Rasch, Blobel, August Meier (of *Sonderkommando 5*), Jeckeln, Rosenbauer, and Besser, plus the only army official Eberhard. Kruglov refers to indirect responsibility with regard to von Reichenau, von Puttkammer, von Obstfelder, and Zickwolff.

Two competing Babi Yar memorial committees in Kiev have published some notable collections of documents, memoirs by survivors, and studies. Audiovisual interviews of survivors and witnesses have not been analyzed in detail, however.

It was not the Germans who were the first to be investigated and sentenced for killing Jews in Kiev, but a Ukrainian and two Russians who participated in the pogrom in the Podil district of September 1941. The three men were hanged in a Kiev street in January 1944. In Kiev in January 1946, Babi Yar was also at issue during the trial of an Austrian and fourteen Germans, including Lieutenant General Paul Albert Scheer (1889-1946), the former commander of the Order Police and Gendarmerie in the Kiev region; survivor Pronicheva testified. Most of these men were hanged in what is today the city's Independence Square. Almost simultaneously, Jeckeln was hanged in the Latvian capital Riga after a trial that focused on his crimes in the Baltics and Belarus.

The shootings and exhumations at Babi Yar were included in the first International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg (November 1945-October 1946). After a trial specifically about the *Einsatzgruppen*, Blobel was hanged for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the Babi Yar massacre, in 1951 in West Germany.

In 1968, a court in the German city of Darmstadt sentenced eight former members of *Sonderkommando 4a*, including Kuno Callsen (1911-?) and August Häfner (1912-1999), to prison for jointly aiding and abetting murder, including the killings of 33,771 people at Babi Yar. Three veterans of Police Battalion 45 were tried in Regensburg in 1971, but only one, Engelbert Kreuzer (1914-?), was judged to be fit to continue to stand trial. Kreuzer, the former commander of the battalion's Second Company, was sentenced to seven years for creating a firing squad, commanding it at Babi Yar, and shooting Jews there.

From 1965 to 1979, eleven *Staatsanwaltschaften*, or state attorney's offices, and *Landgerichte*, or regional courts, investigated Police Battalion 303. But ultimately few of the many veterans were charged and none were convicted, not even its former commander, Heinrich Hannibal. Police Regiment South commander René Rosenbauer was investigated as well, but in 1971 the Regensburg *Landgericht* declared him permanently unfit to stand trial.

In 1961, the Karlsruhe *Landgericht* sentenced former Security Police and SD commander Erich Ehrlinger to twelve years for crimes in Kiev and elsewhere, but the verdict was overturned on appeal eight years later. He remained at large and lived a long life. In 1969, four leaders of Operation 1005 were convicted in Stuttgart during a trial in which three Jewish survivors testified.

No *Wehrmacht* general, officer, or soldier was ever tried for contributing to the Babi Yar massacre. Two

key figures were no longer alive – von Reichenau died in 1942, and Eberhard killed himself in American captivity in 1947. But above all, the West German government feared that trials would impede the development of the *Bundeswehr*. A meager archival record also played its part. Eberhard's war diary was lost, and the intelligence records of the Sixth Army and of the 29th Army Corps had gaps specifically for late September and early October 1941. If they were not destroyed during the war itself, then it is possible that German prisoners of war employed by the US Army's Historical Division removed these documents.

It must be concluded that although judicial investigations produced a massive record that can support historical research, the vast majority of the murderers never stood trial and went unpunished.

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