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## CHORNOBYL IN PHOTOS FROM THE TCHERIKOWER'S COLLECTION SHOWING POGROM VICTIMS AND POGROMISTS (1919)

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**Purpose.** The article describes photos from Tcherikower's collection about the anti-Jewish pogroms in Chornobyl. Photographs act as markers of temporality: attention is drawn to the circumstances of their creation; the use of these photos as documentary evidence and violence during the anti-Jewish pogroms, by Jewish organizations and the archiving of photos as part of Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv Collections in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (The Center for Jewish History). **Research methods.** The methods of archival heuristics and description, interdisciplinary approaches were used, in particular the concept of «temporality» in historical science to determine the time markers of an era in this case, the anti-Jewish pogroms, the photos of which flew around the world and determined politics, influenced social relations, became a collective part of historical memory. **Research results.** An attempt was made to classify collection about the anti-Jewish pogroms in Chornobyl, to detail the descriptions, the history of the creation of this collection and their significance through the concept of temporality in historical science is described. **Conclusions.** Tcherikower's photo collection about Chornobyl is a unique collection of images depicting events related to the establishment of power in the Chornobul's region by Otaman Struk and anti-Jewish pogroms. At the center of the photo selection is Otaman Struk, his army and his victims. Time markers are the traditions of self-images that date back to the First World War and are part of the worldview of the military of that time, even if it is a private army that owns a small territory, such as Struk's. It is a display of weapons that is supposed to assert masculinity, even children and teenagers are photographed with weapons. Although the soldiers have poor clothing, they are well armed. It is also a depiction of rituals showing respect for the dead: funerals of fallen soldiers, victims of pogroms. The depictions of victims and victims are as lifelike and detailed as possible; they contain inscriptions in French, and were apparently used by Tcherikower during the Schwarzbard trial. The collection of photos also demonstrates the work of investigating anti-Jewish pogroms: visiting cemeteries with the graves of the murdered, destroyed houses, interviewing the victims and their relatives, collecting photographs from before life.

**Key words:** anti-Jewish pogroms, Tcherikower, Chornobyl, Struk, Ukraine.

## ЧОРНОБИЛЬ НА СВІТЛИНАХ ІЗ КОЛЕКЦІЇ ЧЕРІКОВЕРА, ЩО ВІДОБРАЖАЮТЬ ЖЕРТВ ПОГРОМІВ І ПОГРОМНИКІВ (1919 Р.)

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**Мета.** У статті описуються фотографії з колекції Черіковера про антиєврейські погроми в Чорнобилі. Фотографії виступають маркерами тимчасовості: звертається увага на обставини їх створення; використання цих фотографій як документальних доказів та насильства під час антиєврейських погромів єврейськими організаціями та архівування фотографій у складі Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv Collections в YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (The Center for Jewish History). **Методи дослідження.** Використовувалися методи архівної евристики та опису, міждисциплінарні підходи, зокрема поняття «тимчасовість» в історичній науці для визначення часових позначок епохи – в такому випадку антиєврейських погромів, фото яких облетіли світ і визначали політику, впливали на суспільні відносини, стали колективною частиною історичної пам'яті. **Результати дослідження.** Зроблено спробу класифікації фотографій колекції, деталізації описів, описано історію створення цієї колекції та її значення через поняття тимчасовості в історичній науці. **Висновки.** Колекція фото Черіковера про Чорнобиль – це унікальна збірка зображень, що відображає події, пов'язані зі встановленням у регіоні влади отамана Струка та антиєврейськими погромами. В центрі добірки фотографій є отаман Струк та його армія. Часовими маркерами є традиції зображень себе, що беруть початок з Першої світової війни і є частиною світогляду військових того часу, навіть якщо це приватна армія, що володіє невеликою територією, така як була у Струка. Це демонстрація зброї, що має стверджувати маскуліність, навіть дітей та підлітків фотографують зі зброєю. Хоча вояки мають поганій одяг, вони є добре озброєними. Це також зображення ритуалів, що демонструють повагу до загиблих: похорон загиблих військових, жертв погромів. Зображення жертв та постраждалих є максимально натуральними

та детальними, вони містять написи французькою, і вочевидь використовувались Черіковером під час судового процесу Шварцбарда. Колекція фото також демонструє роботу з розслідування антиєврейських погромів: відвідування кладовищ із могилами вбитих, зруйнованих будинків, опитування постраждалих та їхніх родичів, збирання прижиттєвих фото.

**Ключові слова:** антиєврейські погроми, Черіковер, Чорнобиль, Струк, Україна.

**Introduction.** The article describes photos from Tcherikower's collection about the anti-Jewish pogroms in Chornobyl. An attempt was made to classify them, to detail the descriptions, the history of the creation of this collection and their significance through the concept of temporality in historical science is described. Photographs act as markers of temporality: attention is drawn to the circumstances of their creation; the use of these photos as documentary evidence and violence during the anti-Jewish pogroms, by Jewish organizations and the archiving of photos as part of Mizrahk Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv Collections in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (The Center for Jewish History).

Elias Tcherikower (1881, Poltava – 1943, New York) was historian and publicist. At the end of 1918–1921 he was in Ukraine, worked at the «Editorial Board for Collecting and Investigating Material Pertaining to the Pogroms in the Ukraine». During this work, he collected photographs, documents, and eyewitness accounts of anti-Jewish pogroms, which he took with him to Berlin in 1921 (Center for Jewish History). He was engaged in the history of anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine, participated in the preparation of trials over Shalom Schwarzbard (1926–1927); in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1934–1935). When Hitler came to power, he was forced to move to France and in 1940 to New York, where he worked at the YIVO Institute of Jewish Studies. He managed to save part of his archive, now it is stored in Mizrahk Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv Collections, it is fully digitized, with open access. He is the author of the works «Antisemitism un pogromen in Ukraine, 1917–1918» (1923) (Черіковер, 1923) and «Di Ukrainian pogromen in 1919» (1965, published posthumously). The Elias Tcherikower Collection is a unique collection of documents, including photographs, an important source of Ukrainian history.

The researchers use the Chornobyl series of photos of Struk's soldiers, choosing those for comic effect due to old-fashioned trends (actually very common at the time for such images) to demonstrate that they are an army of bandits (Veidlinger, 2022).

**Research methods.** The methods of archival heuristics and description, interdisciplinary approaches were used, in particular the concept of «temporality» in historical science to determine the time markers of an era – in this case, the anti-Jewish pogroms, the photos of which flew around the world and determined politics, influenced social relations, became a collective part of historical memory.

### **Struk and his army in the Elias Tcherikower Collection**

The first mention of the Chornobyl was in 1193. After the second division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the 18th century,

Chornobyl passed to the Russian Empire Until 1920, Chornobyl was the center of Chornobyl Hasidism (the Chornobyl Hasidic dynasty was founded by preacher (Magid) Menachem Nahum Tversky), who after 1920 moved to Skvyr (Ukraine). In the 19th century, Jews became the largest national group in the city, so in 1897 they made up 60% of the population. During the Struk pogroms on April 7–12, 1919, about 10 Jews were killed in Chornobyl, and about 85 Jews were killed in nearby Komarin. The total number of victims among Jews from Strukovites is unknown. As of 1926, due to the pogroms of 1905 and 1919 and migration, the share of Jews decreased to 40%. The Jewish community of Chornobyl was almost completely destroyed by the Nazis in 1941–1942 (Pereverzev, 2013). Now Chornobyl is the center of the exclusion zone after the disaster at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant. This territory has been at the center of the Russian-Ukrainian war since February 24, 2022. As more than 100 years ago, this path was used by the Russian army to attack Kyiv. Soldiers of the Russian army committed mass murders of the local population in this area of Motyzhyn and Ivankiv.

The anti-Jewish pogrom in Chornobyl took place simultaneously with the Kureniv Uprising in Kyiv, April 7–9, 1919. In March 1919, Chornobyl was captured by the Bolsheviks, but on April 7, the troops of Otaman Ilya Struk recaptured the city.

Ilko Timofiyovych Struk (1896 (1922 – died while crossing the border with Poland) (1969, Czechoslovakia). He is a teacher of the Zemstvo folk school. In 1914, he was drafted into the Russian army and took part in the First World War. When the revolution began, Struk returned to Ukraine. Struk's biography is quite well-known, as it was recorded by Mykhailo Obidny in 1920, a Ukrainian ethnographer, head of the Main Military Historical Museum-Archive at the General Headquarters of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Prague (Mashtalir, 2019). This is an ego-document that requires source criticism. There is no way to check in which units Struk fought, and he is also not in the lists of those awarded. That is, this is his story, told the way he wanted to tell it.

During 1918, **Struk** captures Chornobyl, Mozyr, Ovrutsky and half of Kyiv County as an independent chieftain.

Struk tells about himself: «My headquarters was in Chornobyl, I had the Dnieper flotilla, I had my own printing house and published the newspaper «Free Land». The editor of the newspaper was Ivan Vasylenko. The newspaper was a daily newspaper, published under the banner of the UNR. The army subordinate to me was officially called the First Insurgent Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and I was called the Army Commander.

I had Colonel Klymenko-Kyphel Richard Richardovych as my Chief of Staff, and Captain

Martynenko as my lieutenant. The civil administration was called «Ukrainian People’s Administration» headed by: Brestet, Chornenko, Mykola Sydorчук» (Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities of Ukraine, F. 3504, op. 1, ref. 2).

The first mention of the pogroms involving Struk can be found in his memoirs. He says that at the end of December 1918 he was arrested by the authorities of the Directorate of the Ukrainian People’s Republic for pogroms, released by Laznyk’s deputy, and then «after the report» he was rehabilitated.

Events that are reflected in the Tcherikower’s collection are the anti-Jewish pogrom organized by the Strukovites in Chornobyl. Tcherikower’s photo collection about Chornobyl consists of several series.

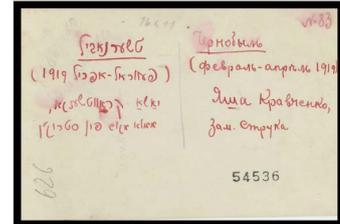
The first, earliest photos show Struk and his army. Most likely, it was February 1919, before the arrival of the Bolsheviks in Chornobyl.

All photos were taken in the same studio in Chornobyl. In the same studio, a photo card of one of the victims of the Jewish pogroms M-lle Kaplan was made.

Perhaps not all photos from this series show Struk’s army. Several photos depict officers of the Russian army during the First World War. The «Strukovites» themselves are poorly dressed, have no uniform, or their uniform is eclectic, with elements of military clothing of various troops of the Russian army during the First World War. Also, the signatures on the photo cards do not match the list of comrades-in-arms in Struk’s memoirs. All photos are of interest, we made their detailed description and attribution.

They are characteristic of their era: the demonstration of weapons as a symbol of masculinity; artificial poses that are frowned upon today – such photos reflect photography trends dating back to the First World War. But let’s focus on the characters appearing in «The Crimson Book» by Husev-Orenburgzky (publication date 1922, contains the section «Chornobyl Chronicle (Diary of a Jew)» (Gusev-Orenburgskiy, 1983).

The first photo shows **Ilko Struk** (signature on the back). At the time of the event, he was only 23 years old. In general, among the photos there is a



**Yakiv Kravchenko, «Struk’s deputy,» Chornobyl, February–March 1919**

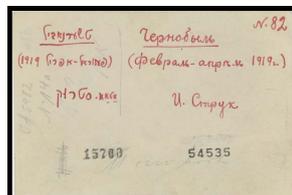
(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Folder: 626B. Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)

fairly significant part of young men and boys who are photographed with weapons in their hands, which is not uncommon in this period, and also has a certain symbolism.

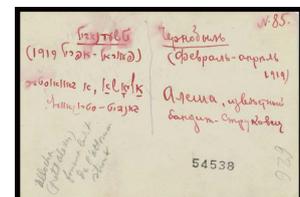
The second photo shows **Yakiv Kravchenko**, Struk’s deputy. The gimnasterkat is decorated with some kind of breast badge, similar to the badge of a graduate of a military institution, perhaps it is also an element of decor.

Yakiv Kravchenko is mentioned in Serhiy Gusev-Orenburg’s «Crimson Book» as a deputy of Struk. At first, Kravchenko defiantly demanded a monetary tribute from the population, then money for stopping the pogrom. Then he reports that the pogrom was supposed to stop in 24 hours, but the boys are «difficult to hold». Later, he demands tribute for permission to bury the Jews drowned in the river. He was called the organizer of the anti-Jewish pogrom in Komarin. Apart from *The Crimson Book*, there is no information about him.

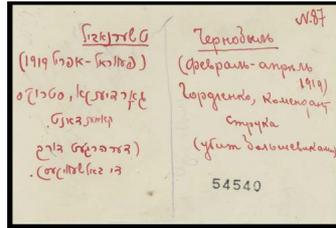
**Alyosha**, a robber and murderer, is mentioned among the participants in the pogrom in *The Crimson Book*. One of Tcherikower’s photos is signed «Alyosha, a famous bandit from Strukovets». On it is



**Ilko Struk, Chornobyl, February–March 1919**  
(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Folder: 626B. Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)



**«Alyosha, a famous bandit from Strukovets,» Chornobyl, February–March 1919**  
(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Folder: 626B. Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)



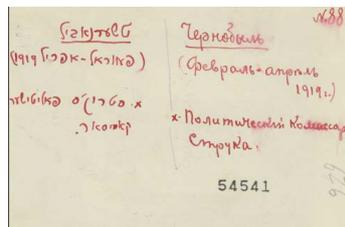
«Gordienko, commandant of Struk (killed by the Bolsheviks)», Chornobyl, February–March 1919

a young man with a small mustache and a clean face. He sits casually in a photo studio and holds a revolver in his right hand, which is sloppily bandaged with a white bandage. He has a saber with him.

The next photo is signed «Gordienko, commandant of Struk (killed by the Bolsheviks)». This is middle-aged man with a small moustache, wearing a gymnasterkat and breeches with boots, stands leaning on a chair in a photo studio. Since at the time of the pogrom on April 7 in the «Chornobyl Chronicles» of *The Crimson Book* Gordienko was already killed, most likely the entire series of photos in the studio was taken in February 1919.

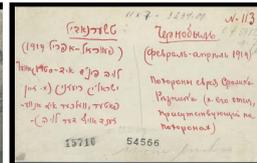
(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Folder: 626C. Mizrakh Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)

In the photo, two men are standing in the studio in the uniform of the Kuban Cossack army: a cap and a winter overcoat, one of them with a small mustache. They carry revolvers and sabers. As for the Politruk, Struk's political program had little content; he sought to keep his region, consistently opposed the Bolsheviks, and could join a coalition with anyone who was against them. His attitude towards the Jewish population was cruel: Struk saw the Jews as a source of filling his military coffers, he could flirt with the non-Jewish population in order to gain favor for the opportunity to rob the Jews, and he treated the Jewish population as spies and potential supporters



«Politruk of Struk»

(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Folder: 626C. Mizrakh Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)



of the Bolsheviks. Although he never admitted to the pogroms, and denied his involvement to the Jewish pogroms, explaining the aggressive actions of his army with military needs, the struggle against the Bolsheviks and their spies. Struka's army obviously existed due to tribute from the townspeople, pogroms of the remnants of lordly estates, sugar and vodka factories, and the Jewish population. He shared his booty with the local people, could give away the looted sugar, or allow the looting of the property of Jewish population. The Politruk may have been a tribute to fashion, like the Bolshevik Politruk's, which explained the policy of the Soviet government to the soldiers and carried out army purges.

The next series of photos shows people from Struk killed during the capture of Chornobyl and their funerals, at which Struk is present.

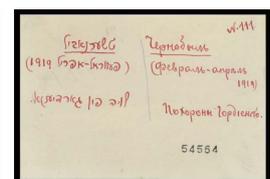
These are funerals according to the Orthodox and Jewish rites. That's right, in the two photos – Isrolik Reznik, a Jew from «Strukivtsi», killed by the Bolsheviks. Reznik, dressed for burial, lies on a stretcher, wrapped in a white blanket. His father (marked with an asterisk in the photo) bent over his head. Ilko Struk is third on the left; his soldiers are on his left and right.

Another photo shows the killed Gordienko from the Struka detachment. The funerals took place most likely on April 7–10, 1919, during the Anti-Jewish pogrom, or after it.

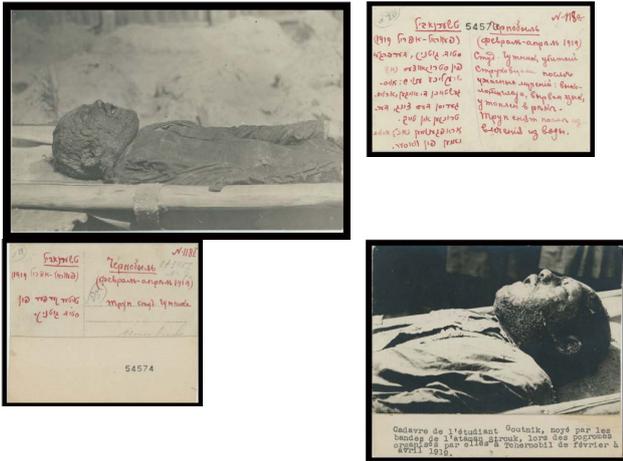
The next case consists of photos of the victims of the Struk detachments.

There is a photo of two victims – a Russian officer and a Jewish student. The photo is captioned: «Student Gutnyk, killed by the Strukovites after terrible torture: tongue torn out, eyes gouged out, drowned in the river. The body was photographed after it was pulled from the river».

There is also the already mentioned portrait «M-lle Kaplan, a victim of Otaman Struk's gang, during the Chornobyl pogrom». The photo was



### 3. Victims of anti-Jewish pogroms in the Elias Tcherikower Collection



«**Mikhael Berdychevsky, a victim of Strukovites, received 10 wounds with a saber (checker).** Chornobyl, summer–autumn 1919 (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Folder: 626I. Mizrakh Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)

taken in the same studio where Struka's squad was photographed. The girl's hairstyle and headscarf are similar to those of the wives and daughters of the «Strukivtzi», perhaps all the women in the photo are local.

There is also a photo of the surviving victim. The photo has the inscription: «**Mikhael Berdychevsky, a victim of Strukovites, received 10 wounds with a saber (checker).**» The boy has a scar from a blow with a saber across his left eyebrow and the bridge of his nose, numerous scars on his hands. Another photo shows that Michael is a very young guy; his left hand is wrapped in a white bandage.

The next folder consists of photos of cemeteries and houses.

In the first photo «Part of the cemetery where the victims of Struk are buried» is a Jewish cemetery. The photo itself is of significant historical value, as most of the Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine were destroyed. The date of the photo is incorrect, judging

by the trees covered in leaves and thick grass, it is late spring or summer of 1919. The next photo shows that monuments have already been installed on the graves of the victims of the pogrom (about ten victims).

The next photo is «**Tomb of Drowned Rabbi Kaner.**» In the background of the crypt with an open door is an old man, possibly a melamed of one of the Chornobyl Khesedes with his students.

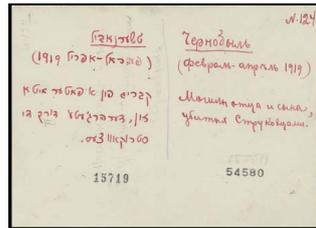
During the pogrom in Chornobyl, a rumor was strange and silly spread that Jews and Christians



«**M-lle Kaplan, a victim of Ataman Struk's gang, during the Chornobyl pogrom,**» Chornobyl, February–March 1919 (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Folder: 626I. Mizrakh Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)



«**Tomb of Drowned Rabbi Kaner,**» summer–autumn 1919 (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Box: 156, Folder: 1592. Elias Tcherikower Collection, RG 81)



«Graves of a father and son, killed by the Strukovites,» summer–autumn 1919

(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Folder: 626K. Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)

would celebrate Easter according to the Jewish tradition, and Jews would throw a bomb into the church. People of that time were not very familiar with the ideology of the Bolsheviks regarding religion, but they already knew that the Bolsheviks did not recognize the church: in Chornobyl, they threw out icons from the local gymnasium and did something (what exactly, it is not known) in the local church, as well as rumors that they killed priests, and churches are turned into stables. This became a reason for the persecution of Jews on religious grounds. The Rabbi Kaner daughter said that her father was a Galician Jew who did not understand the Russian language well. On April 7, their apartment was surrounded by a squad of 200 people, probably led by Struk, they forced their father to swear allegiance to the army, which he did, and the squad left. But later on, soldiers repeatedly broke into them, demanding money and looting property. The father was very depressed and together with 8 old men went to pray in the synagogue, but in the morning the daughter came and saw that the synagogue was empty. Jews who lived near the river said that the soldiers mocked the old people, made them sing and dance,



(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Folder: 626K. Mizрах Yidisher Historisher Arkhiv, RG 80)

and then threw them into the river. Later, the father's corpse was fished out of the river. But the synagogue continued to work; Struk organized the payment of tribute through a general meeting in the synagogue.

The next photo is «Graves of a father and son, killed by the Strukovites». The same cemetery, the monuments can be seen up close, with Hebrew inscriptions on them. Two boys, dressed in untidy city clothes, are sitting around the monuments. One boy is barefoot, the other in heavy oversized boots, so it is difficult to determine what month of the year is in the photo. The third monument has no inscription, someone is leaning on it, but only a hand is visible.

Final photo «Jewish self-defense unit led by Lavrer (on horseback)».

The photo shows armed young people. They are located in three rows (68 people) with rifles, one man has a machine gun, one of the young men has a grenade in his hands, he pretends to be ready to throw it. Commander Lavrer is on horseback to the left of the squad. Interesting children lie and stand to the right and left. The February–April dating of the photo is incorrect, it is late spring or summer, or early autumn, the grass is thick. Self-defense units were widespread. Even German Mennonites, whose religion did not allow them to take up arms, managed to create self-defense units. German youth offered armed resistance to Makhno's troops. However, each of the warring parties tried to disarm the population (Krichker, 2012).

At first glance, these are a large detachment, but at that time about 900 well-trained soldiers were needed to control, for example, a city like Zhytomyr. Such was the number of Galician shooters who restored order in the city after the first pogrom in Zhytomyr.

Today, Chornobyl is a ghost town, as a result of the nuclear disaster, it will never be suitable for human habitation.

**Conclusions.** Tcherikower's photo collection about Chornobyl is a unique collection of images depicting events related to the establishment of power in the region by Otaman Struk and anti-Jewish pogroms. At the center of the photo selection is Otaman Struk and his army. Time markers are the traditions of self-images that date back to the First World War and are part of the worldview of the military of that time, even if it is a private army that owns a small territory, such as Struk's. It is a display of weapons that is supposed to assert masculinity, even children and teenagers are photographed with weapons. Although the soldiers have poor clothing, they are well armed. It is also a depiction of rituals showing respect for the dead: funerals of fallen soldiers, victims of pogroms. The depictions of victims and victims are as lifelike and detailed as possible, they contain inscriptions in French, and were apparently used by Tcherikower during the Schwarzbard trial. The collection of photos also demonstrates the work of investigating anti-Jewish pogroms: visiting cemeteries with the graves of the murdered, destroyed houses, interviewing the victims and their relatives, collecting photographs from before life.

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