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Saul Borovoi's Evolution as a Historian of Ukrainian Jewry in the Early Soviet Period

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Brian Horowitz examines the life of the Soviet historian Saul Borovoi and his intriguing scholarship on the Jews of Ukraine. Professor Horowitz describes the intellectual context in pre-Soviet Odessa and the elements that shaped the evolution of Borovoi's methodology. Borovoi was born into a literary family that was involved in the movement to resurrect Hebrew as a modern language. In his youth Borovoi fell under the spell of the best historians of his day, Semyon Dubnov, Shaul Ginsburg and Sergei (Israel) Tsinberg. Horowitz shows how Borovoi developed as a historian under the impact of the events of the 1920s and then 1930s. At the forefront of Borovoi's studies stood economic factors. He also featured the Ukrainian-Jewish relationship that took central significance in Odessa at the time. Horowitz relays Borovoi's explanation for his survival when many other Jewish scholars either emigrated or died in party purges. However, Horowitz claims that Borovoi's self-image in his memoir as an outsider and provincial contradicts the facts of his life. Borovoi was a highly regarded historian with professional success and prestige. His life and oeuvre tell us a great deal about the historical profession and Jewish Studies in Russia in the first decades of Soviet rule.

Keywords: Saul Borovoi, Jewish culture, early Soviet period, Jewish-Ukrainian relations, history of the Jews of Imperial Russia.

In the late 1980s, a revival of Jewish historical studies in the Soviet Union took place. A leader in this process was Saul Abramovich Borovoi (1903–1989), the historian whose life spanned from before the Revolution of October until a mere two years before the break-up. His younger colleagues widely praised him. In 1994, in the academic journal, *Fatherland History* (*Otechestvennaia istoriia*), the noted historians, Rafail Ganelin, Sergei Lebedev, Iakov Lur'e, and Arsenii Tartakovskii, stated that Borovoi had been more than just a historian of Jewish life, but had written widely about Odessa and Ukraine. In addition, his voluminous work included such diverse topics as the origins of banking in Russia, the Decembrists, Alexander Pushkin, and aristocratic culture of the nineteenth century. "Saul Iakovlevich Borovoi's contribution to our nation's historical scholarship was so broad and multifaceted that one can only regret that fame and appreciation during his life were not extended to him in full" (Ganelin et al., 1994: 161).

However, it is primarily as a Jewish historian that Borovoi is remembered today through such definitive monographs as *Jewish Chronicles of the 18th Century: The Epoch of Khmel'nitsky* (*Evreiskie khroniki XVII stoletii: Epokha 'Khmel'nichiny'*) and *Jewish Agricultural Colonization in Old Russia: Politics, Ideology, Economics, Everyday Life* (*Evreiskaia zemledel'cheskaia kolonizatsiia v staroi Rossii: politika — ideologiia —*

khoziaistvo — byl). Furthermore, his memoirs offer a fascinating view of his life as a Jewish historian in the Soviet Union.

Borovoi provides a unique voice among historians of Jewish life in Soviet Russia. In his studies of Jewish history he reflected the evolution of Jewish scholarship from intellectual history as it had been practiced in late-tsarist times to a distinctly Soviet kind of scholarship in which economic and class issues took prominence. Additionally, he focused on Ukrainian-Jewish relations, a subject that received support in Ukrainian academic circles of the time. In contrast to many historians who emigrated in the 1920s, his intellectual biography coincides with changes in Soviet politics — from the NEP period to full-blown Stalinism, followed by post-Stalinist revisionism.

In explaining his survival, when other Jewish intellectuals were repressed, Borovoi claims that he benefitted from extraordinary good fortune (Borovoi, 1993: 326). For example, in an official report from the early 1920s he was identified as a class enemy and described as “a typical intellectual, petit-bourgeois ideology” (Sokolyansky, 1993: 18). Later in 1953, he was the object of a more extensive denunciation in the prominent Odessa newspaper, *Blacksea Commune* (*Chernomorskaia kommuna*) in an article with the title, “Bourgeois Nationalist Under the Mask of a Scholar” (“Burzhuaznyi natsionalist pod maskoi uchenogo”). According to Borovoi, on the paper’s margins was a secret denunciation with the words of an anonymous official, “Long live the Jewish bourgeoisie” (Borovoi, 1993: 137). It is likely the secret police did not know that Borovoi had a brother, Boris, who had left Soviet Russia and was living in Palestine. That relationship might have caused Borovoi even more complications.

At the same time, Borovoi protected himself by “meeting the needs” of the Soviet historical establishment. He selectively interpreted the past, adopted aspects of the Soviet ideology from his time, and presented Jews in ways that conformed to the political climate and demands of the Communist Party. In fact, he became an accepted member of the intellectual elite. Although he was not the outsider implied by his memoir, he was not politically subservient. His works retained integrity as serious studies of Ukrainian and Russian-Jewish history.

In general the Soviet intellectual milieu in the 1920s was characterized by contradictions. Judaism was condemned and its representatives (rabbis, communal leaders, and teachers) were repressed, but at the same time the government offered support for secular and pro-Communist Jewish culture (Pinkus, 1988: 123–124). The Communist government frequently funded Jewish schools, museums, and scholarly institutions. In Kiev and Minsk special Jewish scholarly institutions especially for Yiddish were established, scholars were employed and valuable libraries and artifacts (expropriated from other centers) were collected for study.

Strides made by scholars in the last years of tsarist Russia significantly advanced Jewish studies. Yet the Soviet government wanted to keep such scholarly work within strict ideological bounds. In particular, the authorities prohibited mentioning Zionism or using Hebrew, while promoting Yiddish as the language of the Jewish working class. In the mid-1920s, there was a push to integrate Jewish scholarship into the general literary life of the Ukrainian Soviet republic. The production of Judaica in Ukrainian noticeably increased (Kelner, 1998: 190). In this way the government showed sensitivity to Ukrainian language and culture as part of a policy to cultivate the loyalty of the national minorities (Martin, 2001: 175).

In the mid-1920s, in Soviet historical and educational institutions — libraries, graduate schools, and the like — the initial attempt to replace representatives of the former pre-revolutionary intelligentsia with new cadres was deemed a failure (Slezkine, 2004: 247). As

a result, many non-Communist experts found employment. By virtue of their knowledge and experience, the inclusion of professionally-trained scholars to positions of responsibility had a positive effect. During the 1920s, several significant volumes of historical scholarship appeared, including the last issue of *Evreiskaia starina* (1924), *Evreiskaia mysl'* (1922, 1926), and three volumes of *Evreiskii vestnik* (1924–1928) (Greenbaum, 1978: 13). Significantly, such talented representatives of the old school as Sergei Tsинberg, Shaul Ginsburg, and Israel Sosis contributed.

As a historian, Saul Borovoi came of age in the period between the Bolshevik Revolution and the start of World War II. He was born in Odessa to parents that enthusiastically supported modern Hebrew literature. Family guests included Mendele Mocher Sforim, Hayim Nachman Bialik, and Yehoshua Ravnitsky. Borovoi's father, involved in the transportation of grain, was a funder of Moria, the renowned Hebrew publishing house. Borovoi writes that "H[ayim] N[ahman] Bialik was a close friend of our family. Not a single family event, birthdays, holidays, and so on, was held without him" (Borovoi, 1993: 42). In 1924, Borovoi received a law degree from Odessa's Commercial Institute (Odesskii Institut Narodnogo Khoziaistva). During the same period, he enrolled in the Institute of Archeology. He moved his studies to Odessa's main library, where he worked on his dissertation (*kandidatskaia*), which was awarded to him in 1938. Soon thereafter, in 1940, he defended his doctoral dissertation with a thesis on the Jews in Ukraine in the 16th and 17th centuries. Although there were voices against his promotion, influential scholars supported his advancement (Ganelin et al., 1994).

Borovoi obtained a position on the faculty at the Commercial Institute in Odessa in 1932. During World War II, he spent three years in Samarkand, and after his return to Odessa, he resumed employment. In 1952, he was targeted for arrest during the Doctors' Plot, but apparently escaped harm by virtue of his cramped living quarters. According to Borovoi's account, NKVD agents were disappointed to find that he lived in a communal apartment when as a professor he could have acquired a three-bedroom flat. In fact, he left Odessa to escape arrest and stayed with relatives in Moscow. Stalin's death saved him from further harm and within a year he was rehired at the Commercial Institute. Unable to publish on Jewish history, Borovoi turned to general economic history with the 1958 monograph, *Credit and The Banks of Russia* — a work that has been acknowledged as one of the first and fundamental treatments of the subject (Ganelin et al., 1994: 162).

His memoirs, *Vospominaniia (Memoirs)* published posthumously in 1993, provide a masterful portrayal of Jewish Odessa. Vividly transmitting the atmosphere of pre-Soviet and then Soviet Odessa, Borovoi gives notable portraits of the age as well as disquisitions on central historical themes and academic problems that he himself experienced.

Odessa plays a major role in his life and work. Odessa's significance evolved in the Soviet period and no longer possessed the colorful aura of the turn of the twentieth century. In Jewish consciousness of the nineteenth century, Odessa was imagined as a center isolated both from its Ukrainian surroundings and also other Jewish cities. It was the antithesis of Vilna and Minsk. It was not the shtetl, and certainly not similar to such Ukrainian towns as Zhitomir, Brest, or Uman, known as centers of Hasidism. In contrast, Odessa was modern, secular, and economically forward-moving. It was a place where Jews lived like non-Jews, and partook of secular pleasures. As an international city with relative economic opportunity, Odessa implied freedom, individuality, and raw capitalism.

In the pre-revolutionary period Odessa had been the cradle of modern Jewish literature, with writers such as Ahad-Ha'am, Mendele Mocher Sforim, and Hayim Nachman Bialik.

It was also a center of Jewish politics of all varieties—integrationism, nationalism, and Zionism. It was the home of Osip Rabinovich, Ilya Orshansky, Leo Pinsker, and Vladimir Jabotinsky. For modern Jews, it was a Russian city, where one went to learn Russian language and see how “Russians” lived. Transcending the *shetl*, Jews embraced Russian and Hebrew, instead of Yiddish.

As the Soviet system evolved, the image changed. Every city in the former Pale of Settlement fell under the same regulations and Odessa’s unique status was threatened. It no longer held the same attraction to non-religious and ambitious Jews. This period also witnessed the waning of Odessa’s economic fortunes. Lacking its former strong connections with the imperial Russian capital, post-revolutionary Odessa gradually entered into the orbit of Ukraine. Indeed, its fate was similar to that of the region as a whole. Occupied after the Revolution by German and French soldiers, the city subsequently came under the authority of Petliura and other White forces. A short-lived Ukrainian Republic gave way in 1921 to Bolshevik rule.

The earlier paradigm with Russians in the posts of administration, Ukrainians in the countryside, and Jews in the role of middlemen, vanished. The instability immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution no doubt influenced Borovoi’s fascination with political and social upheaval. He adapted to the emphasis on Ukrainian politics and surveyed the relations between Jews and non-Jews and examined the evolution of a new kind of Jewish identity — less traditional, fully independent of the Jewish community, at home in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural world.

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In his articles from the early and mid-1920s, Borovoi portrayed the types that would reappear throughout his work. They include tsarist-era converts to Christianity, Jewish nihilists and revolutionaries, Jewish advisers to the tsarist government, and even merchants who collaborated with anti-Semites — “bad Jews”— in the words of Shulamit Magnus, a specialist on modern Jewish history (Magnus, 2010: 135). The article, “New Information about A. Kovner” (“Novoe ob A. Kovnere”) describes two Jewish nihilists, Abram Kovner and Yehuda-Yosef Lerner, followers of the Russian radical social critic Dmitry Pisarev (Borovoi, 1926a). In the same work we read about Boris Fedorov, a government censor in Kiev, whose original name was Grinbaum, and Moses Gurovich, a government adviser in Vilna, both high officials who converted from Judaism to Russian Orthodoxy. Borovoi also focuses on the internecine fighting among non-religious Jews from various factions, including radicals and government experts. Each side attacked the other using denunciations and gossip even though they had the same goal, radical russification.

In the 1926 article, “Jewish Newspapers in Judgement before the ‘Jewish Advisers’” (“Evreiskie gazety pred sudom ‘uchenykh evreev’”), Borovoi describes Abraham Gottlob’s attempt to open a Hebrew-language newspaper in Odessa, *Haboker Or* in 1867. The idea was suppressed due to the exertions of Solomon Mandelkern, a Jewish intellectual with considerable influence among government officials (Borovoi, 1926b).

In this early period Borovoi shows a debt to Jewish historians from the pre-revolutionary period — Semyon Dubnov, Israel Tsinberg, and Shaul Ginsburg, all of whom had promoted intellectual history. Their efforts were concentrated on portraying the elite, the maskilim (Jewish secular intellectuals) in a struggle with traditional Judaism to modernize and integrate Jews into Russian society (Kelner, 1998: 192). At the same time Borovoi’s attention to the tactics of the maskilim — denunciations and deceit — revealed the morally

negative aspects of the Haskalah movement, a movement that was usually portrayed in positive terms.

Borovoi's contrarian treatment is evident in the comparison of his representation of Abram Kovner with the treatment by Sergei Tsinberg in the widely read historical journal, *Perezhitoe (Experience)* (1910) (Tsinberg, 1910: 130–159). Tsinberg depicted Kovner as a hero for his innovative critical analysis of a budding Hebrew literature. Furthermore, Tsinberg praised Kovner's talent as a Hebrew writer even as he gave a sympathetic portrayal of Kovner's psychological collapse (Eliasberg, 2005: 145–148). Borovoi by contrast maintained an emotional distance from Kovner and focused only on a brief period in Kovner's youth. Borovoi's criticism of Jewish radicals would have been favorably viewed during the Soviet period for its criticism of "nationalist deviations". It should be noted that Tsinberg himself was arrested in 1936 for his Jewish national sympathies (Beizer, 1991).

Perhaps Borovoi's experience as a student in Odessa endowed him with a sensitivity to the use of denunciations among the maskilim. As he wrote about his graduate student years: "What did the denunciation consist of? I don't know. You have to presume that he [the denouncer] spoke about my lack of 'political trustworthiness' and maybe my social 'alienation' <...> I remembered forever the feeling of revulsion that I felt and my vulnerability and humiliation" (Borovoi, 1993: 137).

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Under the influence of the first Five-Year Plan and collectivization of agriculture, Borovoi turned to economic issues. He was particularly interested in the tsarist government's encouragement of the formation of Jewish agricultural colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He viewed the agricultural colonies as a necessary response to an economic crisis following the partitions of Poland. "The last decades of the eighteenth century consisted of hard shocks for East European Jewry. These were years of rising impoverishment and the intentional uprooting of Jews from their old economic positions, years of political crises and decisive changes" (Borovoi, 1928: 7).

Borovoi treated the crisis in all of its many facets. Both the Russian government and its elite (merchants and aristocracy) were unprepared to integrate Jews to a socio-economic paradigm. Instead, legal liabilities were imposed. "The new administration quickly mastered the simple anti-Jewish political-rhetorical tradition of Polish times, but could not acquire understanding of the special economic-legal position of Polish Jewry. Russia still did not develop 'models' [to deal with] Jews. In order to resolve a series of 'Jewish questions,' it utilized tools designed in a different historical context" (Ibid: 14). Borovoi noted the government's inability to place Jews into Russia's clearly-defined social classes (*soslovie*). He even wrote with a certain sympathy for the government's dilemma, when he stated about its Jews: "Russian got a nasty 'inheritance'" (Ibid: 12). In Borovoi's interpretation, the remaining solution was the settlement of Jewish farmers on the enormous southern territory of Ukraine. This in turn would relieve overcrowding and competition in the traditional areas of Jewish habitation (Ibid: 15).

His own experience frequently provided insights in the Jewish past. He noted these parallels between past and present in the introduction to his authoritative monograph, *Jewish Agricultural Colonization in Old Russia: Politics, Ideology, Economics, Everyday Life*:

"The population of the Jewish town suffered terribly from every kind of marauder, the regular soldiers of various 'governments' (Petliura's boys, the volunteers, etc...). But when the threat of physical elimination was sidelined, it became clear that in the new socio-eco-

nomie framework created by the October socialist revolution, the Jewish town with its idiosyncratic cultural and historical way of life lacked the conditions for sustenance; and things weren't going to go back to the way they were. What were the thousands of petty traders, multitudes of agents, artisans (usually of low qualification), 'people who make money out of air,' and the like, going to do in the new society under construction? Soviet industry had only just taken its first steps. There was still high unemployment in the cities, they could not swallow the 'excess' population of the towns with offers of jobs. <...> The problem could only be resolved by transporting the Jewish masses to the countryside, creating Jewish agricultural colonies" (Ibid: 179).

It should be noted that his research on Jewish agricultural colonization followed the brief period of activity with Agro-Joint, which provided American aid to Jewish farmers in the Soviet Union (Dekel-Chen, 2005: 69–75). Borovoi hoped for successful results from this collaboration. The book's conclusion states, "Presently Jewish agricultural colonization is experiencing the first years of a new epoch in its history. Only promising perspectives appear ahead and big successes have already been noted. Still this period won't soon become an object of historical study. But of course its time will come and a much more joyful book will appear than the one presented here to the reader" (Borovoi, 1928: 197–198).

Borovoi was especially attuned to the relevance of historical questions in contemporary Soviet society. How to undo outmoded artisanal structures, how to integrate the Jews into the new Soviet economy? It is now known that such agricultural attempts among in the Crimea were misguided, but as did others, he underestimated the difficulties in establishing agricultural settlements (Dekel-Chen, 2005: 129).

Jewish Agricultural Colonization demonstrates Borovoi's evolution from "bourgeois" intellectual history in the direction of a Marxist interpretation of Jewish history. In this context he portrayed poor and powerless Jews who could be construed as in effect a Jewish peasantry and proletariat. It cannot be denied that he took a risk in studying a distinct ethnic group. In Soviet times Jews had the reputation of being at one and the same time petit-bourgeois individualists and collective nationalists. Nonetheless, the study of economic issues regarding Jews had validity in view of Ukraine's large Jewish population.

In *Jewish Agricultural Colonization*, Borovoi again discovered "bad Jews," such individuals as Nota Notkin and the so-called "Jew" Girshovich, who broke with the traditional collective. Notkin, who advised the government, promoted the idea of choice for Jews who might wish to become farmers. Although Notkin rejected the use of force to remove Jews from the countryside, he voiced the interests of the Russian aristocracy in his opposition to factory construction (Borovoi, 1928: 23–24).

Significantly Notkin had little patience with the opinion of Jews themselves and in this aspect he resembled the Russian officials whom he served. It is telling that he refused to criticize Gavriil Derzhavin's *Memorandum* of 1804 and its libelous message that Jews were responsible for exploiting and ruining the Russian peasant (Klier, 1986: 102–103). However, Jewish Deputies who came to St. Petersburg to complain in the early 1800s were equally ineffective, although they succeeded in delaying the government's evacuation of Jews from the countryside (Borovoi, 1928: 34).

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In the mid-1930s, Borovoi faced a perilous political situation directed against historians who "deviated" from the party line. Arrests for "bourgeois" leanings and "nationalist deviations" were just some of the trumped up charges. During this period, Borovoi began his

analysis of Jews in the Ukrainian uprising in the seventeenth century. Although he portrayed Jews who broke from the Jewish collective, here he also emphasized Ukrainian-Jewish unity.

Making use of documents that had not been available to scholars earlier, Borovoi took issue with the conventional interpretation that Jews were innocent victims, torn between Polish noblemen and Khmelnytsky's Cossacks (Borovoi, 1934: 141). According to Borovoi, Jews were fully engaged on the side of the Polish landlords whom they served and on whose victory their livelihood depended (Borovoi, 1940).

At the same time Borovoi made an unexpected discovery — that there existed Jewish Cossacks who aided the Ukrainians. In his view two kinds of Jews lived among the Cossacks. One group consisted of Jews who converted to Russian Orthodoxy and joined as fighters (rarely) or as Christian clergy. For such Jews membership in the Hetmanate offered escape from the sale of captured Jews as slaves or for ransom. According to Borovoi, Cossacks also found allies in merchants who abetted the exploitation of peasant labor. Jews who earlier had bought and sold the peasants' produce for the Polish lords fulfilled the same function for the Cossacks. In this way Jews helped expand trade with the Turks in the South and Europeans in the West. Eventually, fortunes for the Cossacks fell as the tsarist government shifted trade routes to avoid a Cossack transit tax (Borovoi, 1934: 184).

Although documentary evidence offers little information about Jews who came to live in the Hetmanate, Borovoi identifies certain individuals by name — for example, Moisei Gorlinskii and Musia Iosifovich. Surprisingly, he claims that Jews who worked for the Cossacks were not objects of discrimination. "Our materials testify with enough conviction that Jews in the Sech (Cossack camp) at this time were not subject to any special discipline and did not experience any special inhibition in their activities. Therefore, we have the right to speak of Jewish 'equality' in the Sech, of course in that framework where equality could exist for the non-Cossack population of Zaporozh'e [that was] restricted in participating in its political life" (Ibid: 184).

Oddly Borovoi uses the term "ravnopravie" — "equality," a goal of Jews in tsarist Russia — in a contradictory situation of coercion based on fear of Cossack violence. Rather than criticize Jewish Cossacks for betraying their co-religionists at a time of crisis, Borovoi focused on their unity with the Ukrainian Cossacks. Although the number of Jewish Cossacks was statistically insignificant, Borovoi exaggerates their importance, presumably to demonstrate the friendship between Jews and Ukrainians.

Continuing the theme of Ukrainian-Jewish alliance in the twentieth century, Borovoi published a fundamental article, "The Destruction of Odessa's Jewish Population during the Romanian Occupation" (Borovoi, 1999: 118–153). After returning from evacuation, Borovoi gathered evidence about the atrocities that occurred in the city between October 1941 and April 1944 for a chapter in the famous *Black Book of Nazi Crimes on Soviet Territory*, edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vladimir Grossman (Grossman, Ehrenburg, 1980). Borovoi's article, however, was not included in the volume and was not published until 1999.

Borovoi portrayed the heroism of the Soviets and the suffering of Jews as two moral absolutes (Borovoi, 1999: 180). Estimating that only six hundred individuals survived from the city's original 60,000 Jews who were in the city when the Romanians arrived (before the war there were close to 150,000 Jews in Odessa), he explains that Jews fortified their will to live by remembering Soviet patriotism. "Yes, it was hell. But all these people did not lose faith for a moment in the future, in their salvation. <...> They preserved their spirit and cul-

tivated an indestructible feeling of moral and intellectual superiority over the executioners and the whole bestial fascist gang. They believed in the indomitable Soviet Army, in whose ranks so many relatives and friends fought; they believed in the immortality of their people” (Ibid: 146).

Refusing to differentiate between Ukrainians and Russians, Borovoi underscored the link between Jews and the local non-Jews. Although noting examples of collaboration by officials and certain intellectuals, he expressed pride in the help extended by Odessa’s non-Jewish population. He writes, “‘Towards the end of spring of 1942, they [Jews] began to receive a tiny ration (around 200 grams of bread, frozen potatoes, and so on). Furthermore, their position gradually worsened. Although Jews lived and worked in isolation, nonetheless between them and the local population some contact developed. The majority of the local population related to Jews with sympathy, and this was something fundamental, almost essential, that helped save those whom the bullet of the executioner and epidemics had missed. Thanks to the peasants they [Jews] could somehow feed themselves and hold out until liberation day’” (Ibid: 143). Borovoi also gives special praise to Soviet partisans who perished in the flight against Fascism, noting that a number of these patriots were Jewish. Scholars of our own day corroborate Borovoi’s observation that the Soviet population in the area provided aid to Jews under Nazi persecution (Dumitru, Johnson, 2011).

Yet Borovoi never forgot Jewish suffering during this period. Having acknowledged the pain inflicted on all Soviet peoples by the Nazi invasion, he described the martyrdom of the Jewish people in particular. Transmitting eye-witness accounts of mass shootings, the suffering of marches in the terrible cold, and other impossible horrors, Borovoi mapped out the areas of Odessa and its suburbs that had been transformed into a killing field. “The Domanev territory located in the north-eastern part of Odessa county was the most abandoned and far from Odessa’s train routes. It was designated as the best place for the creation of the ghetto — or to put it precisely — the place of mass extermination. Bogdanovka entered into our tragic history forever as the Majdanek of the Transnistria...” (Borovoi, 1999: 128). And we have this description: “The other terrible place that one should remember is Akhmechet Headquarters — a real death camp located twelve kilometers from the village of Akhmechet on a pigfarm. It was not a coincidence of course that pigfarms were chosen as places of extermination. In this [decision] the ‘humor’ of the fascist executioners was expressed” (Ibid: 142).

Although Borovoi had earlier minimized the significance of the Jewish collective, here he expressed his deep sympathy for the martyrs. At the same time Borovoi expressed his deep disdain for Jews who denied their heritage to save themselves (Borovoi, 1993: 243). It is possible that Borovoi felt survivor’s guilt. With his escape from Odessa as a member of the institute’s faculty, he left his father and brother in danger. His father died on the road and thousands of his neighbors went to their graves because they did not have sufficient influence to acquire a spot on the list of the saved. In any case he now praised the Jewish collective that he had earlier viewed with skepticism.

Regarding his own life, Borovoi asserted that anti-Semitism did not play a significant role. Yet he commented on post-war Odessa. “I looked hard at the traits of my native city. A great deal was new, that was difficult to get used to, and to which one could not become reconciled. On the gates of many houses one could see crosses painted haphazardly. It signified that the house had been cleansed of Jews. The house managers and officials were not hurrying to erase them. They were still visible almost a year after liberation. More than once and for a long time one could hear from behind, ‘The pests have come back.’ The word

‘pest’ in the mouth of Odessites who had survived the occupation acquired a distinctly ethnic connotation” (Ibid: 290).

In the last years of Stalin’s rule the Jewish theme was off-limits even to Borovoi. His book on the Jews in Ukraine in the seventeenth century was never published, although a leading Moscow publishing house, the Sabashnikov Brothers, had accepted it for publication. Nonetheless, parts of the book appeared as articles in journals (Borovoi, 1940). Such a prohibition presented problems for Borovoi’s concentrated research on Jewish history. As he noted, “But the most important thing is that I lost my subject. I was deprived of almost all openings to publish on the Jewish theme, this defined my [future] scholarly-literary work” (Borovoi, 1993: 192).

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The goal of this article has been to concentrate on Borovoi’s identity as a Jewish historian in the Soviet Union (Sokolyansky, 2003). Was Borovoi a Marxist-Leninist? According to Mark Sokolyansky, he was embarrassed by the Marxist nomenclature obligatory at the time he wrote his books. Sokolyansky claims that Borovoi would have formulated differently if that had been possible (Sokolyansky, 1993: 12). At the same time it should be emphasized that a number of Borovoi’s acute insights occurred within his focus on economics and class identity. Sokolyansky notes, “So, in his last few years of life, Professor Borovoi was able to ensure a certain modicum of continuity in this field of historical studies” (Ibid: 12).

Borovoi described his emphasis on peasant themes in passages such as this one:

“In contrast to all the previous historians of Odessa, I emphasized that it was impossible to exaggerate the role of foreigners in the establishment and development of the city, so that one can only understand its history by connecting its fate with the processes of control by the local peoples over the southern plains of New Russia. The creation of the city and its rapid development are the result of difficult act of heroism by the Ukrainian and Russian peasants who under the conditions of serfdom, nonetheless were able to bring the Northern Coast of the Black Sea to a renewed life in order to begin dismantling the system of serfdom and developing capitalist norms earlier than in other regions of the country, despite the paralyzing interference of serfdom” (Borovoi, 1993: 282).

Incidentally, this quotation comes from Borovoi’s memoirs in which he was entirely free to write as he liked.

Regarding how he conceived of the region’s identity, in his Jewish writings Borovoi focused on Ukraine. He viewed Jews as defined by and integrated in the local economy and social fabric. In this sense too he differed from his predecessors and teachers, Dubnov and Tsinberg, who viewed phenomena from the perspective of the center, St. Petersburg, and the response of the state. In his works Borovoi minimized the importance of the state. In this sense he was an innovator with his colleague, Il’ya Galant, in demonstrating the local, intimate, and quotidian aspects of Ukraine and its Jews (Galant, 1908).

Borovoi’s longevity (he died in 1989) was due in part to his low profile and his refusal to join to the Communist Party during the purges. He also refrained from defending his dissertation until he was thirty-five. He always affirmed his loyalty to the Soviet Union. In his memoirs Borovoi stated, “Nonetheless I have been happy in my life. I survived the difficult years of revolution, civil war, hunger, and epidemics. I was not repressed in the thirties or the early fifties, and that was a happy coincidence. The most serious illnesses passed me by. I was able to spend my life engaged with my favorite subject. I was lucky to meet many good, kind, and smart people...” (Sokolyansky, 1993: 18).

His treatment of anti-Semitism also rejected the idea of Jewish victimization in several important respects. The government, always a villain in Dubnov's work, is analyzed in a more balanced fashion. Borovoi depicted the Jewish-Cossack fight not as ethnic conflict, but as part of an economic struggle in the region. In his book on Jewish Agricultural colonies, Borovoi finds fault with Derzhavin's 1804 Memorandum, but he criticizes the prejudice of others — the Polish merchants, enlightened Jews, and Russian officials.

Although Borovoi conformed with his times, it would be wrong to view him as an ideological spokesman for the party. His treatment of history is far from one-dimensional. Borovoi offered compelling studies that showed the fissures, internecine conflicts, and internal weaknesses among the Jews of Eastern Europe. The absence of a Jewish collective gave Borovoi the ability to depict Jewish individuals differentiated by class and identity, educational achievement, and professional status. Even so-called "bad Jews" were symbols of modernity and radical change. Although Borovoi practiced an ideologically acceptable Soviet historiography, his life and work revealed an engaged participant who benefitted from and helped form the particular set of circumstances that constituted his life.

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ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ САУЛА БОРОВОГО КАК ИСТОРИКА УКРАИНСКОГО ЕВРЕЙСТВА:
ЖИЗНЬ И ТВОРЧЕСКИЙ ПУТЬ ЕВРЕЙСКОГО УЧЕНОГО ИЗ ОДЕССЫ В СОВЕТСКОЕ
ВРЕМЯ

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Данная статья посвящена жизни и творческому пути советского историка Саула Борового (1903–1989). Автор рассматривает интеллектуальную жизнь еврейской Одессы, родного города Борового, и обстоятельства, которые повлияли на эволюцию используемых этим ученым подходов к изучению истории.

Рассматриваются факты личной биографии Борового, которые влияли на творческий путь историка. Боровой родился в интеллигентной еврейской семье. Его отец участвовал в движении

возрождения иврита как современного литературного языка. На ранние работы Борового повлияла методология Семена Дубнова, Шаула Гинзбурга и Сергея (Израэля) Цинберга. События 1920-х и 1930-х годов явились переломными для него как историка. Они повлекли за собой особый интерес Борового к экономическим факторам истории и социальным классам. При этом в центре его исследований находились отношения между евреями и украинцами.

В своих воспоминаниях Боровой отмечает, что долгая жизнь среди еврейских историков — это редкость. Ведь он оказался единственным среди всех историков еврейского народа, который не уехал из Советского Союза в 1920-е годы и не погиб там в сталинское время. Боровой приписывает свое везение разным факторам, в том числе тому, что он был аутсайдером, который жил в провинции (Одессе). Профессор Хоровиц спорит с этой точкой зрения. Боровой был известным историком, его работы имели успех, а их автор пользовался престижем среди коллег.

Судьба и творческий путь Борового отражают историю академической жизни советского времени и роль евреев в ней.

Ключевые слова: Саул Боровой, еврейская культура, ранний советский период, еврейско-украинские отношения, история евреев в Российской империи.

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