Review of the article

“The propaganda machine in the USSR concerning the Holocaust: Based on materials from the Soviet press, 1941–1945”

The article is written on an extensive documentary base: approximately ten publications covering all the years of the war were studied directly, including the magazine *Ogonek* (unfortunately, there are virtually no references to it, although the Holocaust was already mentioned in the first war-time issue of the magazine), national newspapers, and the provincial paper *Sovetskaia Sibir'* [*Soviet Siberia*],[[1]](#footnote-1) as well as numerous document collections. These Russian-language publications have not been studied previously in such detail, and the bibliographic component of the article is valuable in itself. The article’s undoubted merit is its indication of the portrayal of the persecution of Jews in anti-Nazi books of various genres of the 1930s and in the mid-1940s. The footnotes indicate which articles the author’s predecessors utilized, which highlights his contribution to the study of the topic.

Of particular importance is the conclusion that in comparison with 1941–1942, from 1943 through the first half of 1945 Jews appear no less frequently in reports about victims among the civilian population. This is a significant elucidation; however, it is not complete. As the author correctly writes concerning the reports of the ChGK (the Extraordinary State Commission) for the Smolensk *oblast*, where only one example was cited, “the actions to exterminate Jews in other places in the *oblast* were ignored.” Nevertheless, in general, the array of sources identified is impressive and of undoubted interest to researchers of the Holocaust on the territory of the USSR.

Unfortunately, the author’s analysis does not do justice to the amount of work accomplished. Contact analysis was not performed; information about publications could be tabulated with the study’s goals in mind; no attempts are made to verify the degree of reliability of published information about the number of victims (or at least to raise this question); sources of information in the media are not systematized.

The author has identified more than 300 original articles (it would be good to provide the definition for this term), but it is difficult to say how many were published in the Soviet mass media, taking reprints into consideration. The figure of 1000 publications is unsubstantiated.

An attempt is made to identify Jewish authors (while omitting the fact that many non-Jewish writers had Jewish relatives, which shaped their interest in the subject), but the question of the authorship of the articles requires separate treatment.

The Russian historiography on the Holocaust is practically ignored (as are the works of I. Arad, who first studied the Soviet press on the topic). It would be better to place in the conclusions section some observations made in the text that do not coincide chronologically with the main text. Perhaps one should think about consistency in the structure of the work. While it makes sense to present articles from 1941 chronologically (which definitely highlights their subject matter), thereafter the thematic-geographical principle is appropriate. That is how the text is organized (not always consistently) for the years 1944–1945.

A significant omission is the absence of an analysis (or references to the works of other authors) concerning photos in articles about the Holocaust and the annotations under them without mention of Jewish victims. If one incorporates the literature of the mid-1940s, this should also be reflected in the title. To allot a separate “chapter” of the text to Ehrenburg is questionable (much has already been written about him).

We will illustrate these proposals with specific comments and suggestions on the text:

Most of the notes above are irrelevant; however I added some explanations, like: 1. “Checking the statistics of victims and the reliability of other information then published is not the purpose of this article”. 2. “A critical review of these bibliographies has already been presented by Karel Berkhoff in his article, who reviewed the coverage of this topic in several mainstream newspapers. We have no reason to revise his review”. 3. “Ogonёk may have occasionally published photographs of Jewish victims without specifying their ethnicity. Due to this uncertainty, such publications of the magazine, as well as of newspapers, where it was said about the victims as exclusively “Soviet people”, remained outside the scope of this study”.

1. Is it true that “All publications passed through at least a three-stage censorship—personal..., editorial, and [the] official office”? (p. 1) **yes**
2. The assessment regarding radio is inaccurate. Stationary radio worked: “a significant part of the information about the extermination of Jews did not reach the radio listener” (p. 1)—radio rally 24.08.41, Simonov in August 1944 concerning Majdanek. fixed
3. [The article] examined “printed sources of information in Russian that were the most accessible in the USSR.” But the newspaper *Trud* [*Labor*]—the organ of the VTsSPS—is not among them. The national newspapers included *Krasnyi voin* [*The Red Soldier*]—the publication of the Moscow Military District—and *Krasnyi flot* [*The Red Fleet*]—the organ of the People’s Commissariat of the Navy of the USSR. *Vecherniaia Moskva* [*Moscow Evening*]was not a “national newspaper.” *Stalinskii sokol* [*Stalin’s falcon*] was utilized only for 1943. Of the provincial newspapers, only *Sovetskaia Sibir'* [*Soviet Siberia*] was viewed. But without analyzing the media of the occupied regions, as well as the republic[-level] newspapers of the Ukrainian SSR and the Belarusian SSR, which were published in the evacuation, it is impossible to discuss the characteristics of the Soviet propaganda machine. Irrelevant
4. [The article] said that Altshuler discusses why an incorrect, stereotypical opinion has emerged in the West concerning the prohibition of publications about the Holocaust (p. 2)—but this point remains a mystery to the reader. For more information a reader can read Altshuler’s article**.**
5. The thesis that criticism of anti-Semitism in Germany became important for the USSR is debatable, because it was after the “appearance of [the] national socialist theory” [that] it became possible for Soviet propagandists to expose this “vicious ideology,” which became “a full-fledged rival to the Soviet system.” (p. 2) The emergence of fascism in Italy and the spread of these ideas in other countries also provided such an opportunity. Subsequent text [in] the article itself concerning the criticism of fascism specifically, and not race theory, confirms this. Changed
6. The peak of anti-Semitism coverage in the Soviet media—after Kristallnacht—is not mentioned at all . . . Added
7. To clarify. On page 5, it is written that “During the four years of the German-Soviet war, about three hundred original references to the special persecution of Jews and, more often, [to] their extermination, were printed in Soviet Russian-language newspapers.” What is the source of these numbers? This is more for the conclusions. What is considered original? Changed
8. Noting the “balanced approach [of] Shcherbakov in covering the issue of Jewish victims.” an unsubstantiated opinion that he agreed on an approach to such an important issue with Stalin at the beginning of the war. Clearly there were more important topics. And on this issue, it is necessary to specify Lozovsky as the actual head of the Sovinformbiuro [the Soviet Information Bureau]. Added And the very fact of the mention of Jewish victims is not due to the absence of anti-Semitism—but as a way to highlight the most verifiable and egregious crimes of Germany that became known by the beginning of the war. The actual importance of supporting Jews abroad became clear to the authorities no earlier than the middle of August 1941, rather than at the beginning of the war.
9. About Yulia Barlitskaia (p. 6): she fled from Poland, not from the Warsaw ghetto. **That’s not true** Her article resonated not only among Jews, because its pathos concerned the situation in Poland as a whole.[[2]](#footnote-2) It was not mentioned that the article was included in the collection *Under the Yoke of Hitler’s Robbers* (Chkalov: Chkalovskoe izdatel'stvo, 1941 [Chkalovskaia Kommuna] [Chkalov: Chkalovsk Publishing House, 1941 [Chkalovsk Commune]). And that it was reprinted everywhere (see, for example, *Ural'skii rabochii* [*The Ural Worker*], Sverdlovsk, June 28) (Уральский рабочий. 1941. № 151 (uraic.ru)).
10. The author does not share (or does not specify) information about the Holocaust in Poland and Romania and in territories of the USSR that had been transferred to it in 1939–1940: Belostok [Bialystok], Edvabno, Lomzha. Deportation of 100,000 Jews across the Dniester.
11. No attempt is made to confirm the number of victims—Kiev [Kyiv], Taganrog, and others.
12. It is true that the Soviet authorities tried to oppose the German propaganda that claimed that Germany was destroying only Jews and communists. But Ehrenburg’s article about this in *Pravda* in October 1941 is not listed. **That’s not true** It is important that in September of 1941 he wrote to Shcherbakov: “In my opinion, an article by a Russian with a name (Sholokhov or Tolstoy) about the Jews is desirable, debunking the myth that Hitler’s wrath is directed only against Jews . . .” But on p. 35, this indisputable fact with reference to the data of G. V. Kostyrchenko the author is accompanied by the word “allegedly” . . .Changed
13. The example of mentions of the names of famous Jews who died is not applicable to 1941. This information is needed in the conclusions. Irrelevant
14. The article begins with an epigraph from Stalin’s speech about the Jewish pogroms, but the text itself never mentions that all Soviet media published this speech . . . **That’s not true**
15. There are no references to the historiography of the articles and poems cited by the author (Maxim Shrayer wrote about Ilya Selvinsky and his works on the Crimean Holocaust, David Shneer wrote on the publications of other authors concerning the murder of the Jews of Kerch). Added
16. The interpretation of the appearance of the joint declaration by countries of the United Nations of December 18 on the extermination of the Jewish population of Europe carried out by the Hitlerite authorities” is incorrect. The initiative came from both the Polish government in exile and the British Foreign Office. Irrelevant
17. The statement from the NKID (the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) Information Bureau is mentioned by the article. The book by L. A. Bezymensky, *Budapeshtskii messiia* [*The Budapest Messiah*], discusses the work on this statement. The statement has also been analyzed in articles by other Russian historians of the Holocaust. Irrelevant
18. There is no comment on the information about the total destruction of the families of communists and front-line soldiers, which did not happen: “In August, A. Verbitsky wrote in an article about occupied Gomel: ‘At first, they completely destroyed the families of communists, front-line soldiers and Jews. ’” Irrelevant
19. After the report from the Stavropol ChGK, an article by a member of this commission, Aleksey Tolstoy, is mentioned. But he was one of the nine members of the “main ChGK,” and not simply a writer. Irrelevant
20. The thesis that “As is well-known, the topic of Jewish resistance in the pages of Russian-language newspapers was not very welcomed by the authorities” needs to be clarified. This contradicts the information on p. 25 about the third plenum of the EAK (the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee) in 1944 (“The published quotations from the reports indicate that the presenters spoke mainly about the contribution of Jews to the resistance”) and the analysis of Ehrenburg’s articles. there is no contradiction here
21. For some reason, a poem by the Uzbek poet Gafur Gulom, published at the end of 1941 under the title “I am a Jew (A Response to Hitler),” is mentioned in the analysis of the press for 1943. fixed
22. It is a controversial thesis that the replacement of Jews with civilians was based upon readers’ understanding what was under discussion. This was not so, because by this time information about reprisals against other categories of victims had become known. fixed
23. p. 26 confirm the last name [of] Ponomarenko fixed
24. In the section about 1944–1945, the chronology is disrupted, the geography is emphasized. [M. b.] this is more consistent with the methodology of media analysis . .
25. No attempt is made to analyze the completeness and accuracy of information, including that which is obviously incorrect: “The *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* correspondent Anatoly Kalinin wrote from Romania: ‘Hundreds of Jews from Jassy [also Iaşi] were taken away in sealed train cars to no one knows where. According to rumors that reached the city, many of these Jews met their deaths in the notorious German extermination camp near the city of Lublin.’” Irrelevant
26. P. 32–journalists could not publish the army newspaper *Sokol Rodina* [*Falcon of the Motherland*]. **That’s not true**
27. There is some valuable information about Auschwitz (the author uses Oświęcim), but there is no analysis of the degree of verifiability of the victims. And for some reason, the final report of the ChGK on the investigation of the crimes in this camp, dated May 7, 1945, which was published in the national newspapers, is not mentioned.
28. Not only is the nationality of journalists important, but also [that of] their wives. For example with the case of M. Merzhanov—Weiner Anna Yakovlevna. Irrelevant
29. It follows from the conclusions that the authorities “tried to balance between mention of Jews as the main victim and mention of them as one of the many victims of crimes against the Soviet people.” But Jews were never specified as the main victims—this is not recognized either quantitatively or ideologically. see the quotes in my article
30. To clarify note 290 on p. 48. Ehrenburg published a 9-volume collection of works. In the 1960s and 1970s (and even since the late 1950s) there were numerous publications: Nekrasov, Yevtushenko, Kuznetsov, Rybakov. It was just example

I believe that, provided that the article is revised in accordance with these comments and, perhaps, with a different structure, it can be published.

1. Apparently, the following site served as the basis for the selection [option: the sampling] of these media [outlets]: Фронт и быт. Газеты, выходившие во время Великой Отечественной войны (nekrasovka.ru) = *The Front and Everyday Life. Newspapers Published during the Great Patriotic War* [nekrasovka.ru is the website of the Nekrasov Library in Moscow]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thus, in the diary of S. V. Golubev, deputy head of the Fire Protection Department (UPO) of Leningrad: “A Polish woman, Yulia Barlitskaia, who arrived in Moscow on June 26, reported: there are one and a half million people in Warsaw. They live very poorly. There is no fat [possibly “oil”], meat, milk, sugar. Poles are beaten, sometimes killed. The German authorities banned the treatment of Jewish children under the age of three and the elderly over sixty years old. Jews are subjected to forced sterilization. The city is divided into three parts: German, Polish, and Jewish. The conditions [option: regime] correspond to the nationality. Poles receive 350 grams of bread a day, Jews 750 grams a week” (See *Zabveniiu ne podlezhit* [(*[This] Should not be Forgotten*) St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2015], p. 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)