
Digital access to the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission: archives of war

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic and then the war in Ukraine have disrupted access to archives, intensifying scholars' concerns about a return to Cold War conditions for research. These concerns are especially pronounced for study of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, a field where specialists have often struggled to locate and assimilate information even before recent crises. This article examines digital options for accessing the records of the Extraordinary State Commission (*Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiia*, ChGK), established by Stalin's government on November 2, 1942, to gather evidence of Axis war crimes. Through an analysis of the digital projects launched over the past two decades, this article demonstrates that enhanced online access to Soviet documentation of Nazi atrocities has gone hand in hand with the radicalization of Putin's regime. The politicized rhetoric that frequently accompanies these undertakings has obscured the value of the digital resources themselves. Scholars of the *Shoah* should approach the ChGK's records as products of mass mobilization rather than uniform pronouncements from a "totalitarian" state. Equipped with this knowledge, together with the scale and comparative reach of digital methods, researchers can deepen understanding of the Holocaust against the backdrop of a new generation of war crimes in the former USSR.

Introduction

Access and approaches to information have always influenced how people understand the *Shoah* in the Soviet Union. Stalin learned of the mass murder of the European Jews no later than August 1941, when the first secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party reported, "The Jewish population is being subjected to merciless annihilation."¹ The following month, the Soviet government published a booklet that quoted a Ukrainian former prisoner

of war detained in Minsk who recollected, “For us life was excruciatingly difficult, but the life of Jewish prisoners was nightmarish.” Yet elsewhere, this publication obscured the Jewish identity of victims in Lviv.² When Soviet dispatches on mass shootings at Babyn Yar reached the British Joint Intelligence Committee in October 1941, the chairman reflexively dismissed the news as “the product of Slav imaginations.”³ In the decades since, Soviet, post-Soviet, and Western stakeholders have worked sometimes together, more often against one another, to explain the Holocaust in the East. On March 1, 2022, a Russian missile attack that damaged the Babyn Yar memorial and killed five people marked the latest transformation of these conversations, now carried out in increasingly polarized directions amid new accusations of genocide.⁴ The current war in Ukraine imposes not only logistical, but analytical impediments to future scholarship. This article examines digital options for marshaling Soviet archival records to demonstrate how technology can enable research on the *Shoah* to advance even amid a new generation of war crimes in the former USSR.

Historians have frequently misrepresented the Soviet regime as obstructing knowledge of the Holocaust, with interpretations evolving only incrementally since the end of the Cold War.⁵ Contradictions between presumed Soviet ill will and Soviet actions perpetuate the confusion. Marina Sorokina asserts that the Kremlin resolved to “seal up” investigatory materials assembled during the Second World War, “even to its own people,” but also notes that such documents were used in numerous public trials.⁶ In his foreword to Father Patrick Desbois’s *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, Paul A. Shapiro, at the time Director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), blames “Soviet secrecy and anti-Semitism” for Western ignorance of the genocide in the USSR. Yet he observes, “No other country was as steadfast in pursuing retribution against the killers.”⁷ Martin Dean, a former applied research scholar at the USHMM and former senior historian for the Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit in London, has demonstrated the value of Soviet documentation for shedding light on the *Shoah* while finding fault with this usefulness. He ventures: “It is certainly arguable that considerably more war criminals could have been prosecuted in the West had the Soviet authorities granted access to their extensive collection of KGB search files in time for the Western governments to act.”⁸

Ambivalent evaluations in the literature reflect diverse Soviet responses to the Holocaust. Rather than a uniform project of a totalitarian state, Stalinist investigations of Nazi crimes represent contributions from millions of ordinary people pursuing their own motivations. Disparate grassroots endeavors were then subject to interventions by state representatives who embodied the full spectrum of the Soviet system, in which official hypercentralization and local improvisation reproduced one another. For example, locating witnesses for the Trial of the Major War Criminals at Nuremberg required central Soviet officials to launch letter-writing campaigns with lower-level counterparts, without any methods to verify the information received. The search for Velta Iul’evna Veske, a Latvian woman forced to work as a nurse in the children’s hospital while a prisoner at the Salaspils concentration camp near Riga, resulted in two separate claims. One Latvian leader declared that Veske was no longer located anywhere within the borders of the republic, while another protested that the address provided for her did not exist.⁹ Central investigators resorted to adding Veske to a list of “witnesses who had departed from [their] permanent place of residence,” which described her as “convicted, unknown where confined.”¹⁰

No body of sources better captures the potential benefits of digitally reconstructing Soviet information networks than the records of the Extraordinary State Commission (*Chrezvychainaia gosudarstvennaia komissiia*, ChGK), the organization that first brought Veske to the attention of Stalin’s regime.¹¹ Established on November 2, 1942, by the end of 1945, the ChGK had overseen investigations across the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Karelo-Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, and Moldavian SSRs, with

some seven million people generating 54,784 official reports and over two hundred fifty thousand eyewitness testimonies that identified more than eleven thousand “fascist criminals.”¹² Today, these records comprise 43,616 files in Moscow and an estimated thirty thousand files scattered across other post-Soviet national and regional archives.¹³ ChGK documents found their way into French and German state repositories, while duplication projects undertaken by Yad Vashem and the USHMM have further disseminated these records.¹⁴ The fact that the ChGK investigated mass killings not documented elsewhere demands use of these materials, but thus far the scholarship has tended either to adopt the central perspective of Moscow or extrapolate conclusions from single case studies that offer only parts of a far more complicated picture.¹⁵

The dangers of “white spots” (lacunae) in assembled source bases are on full display in analyses of the ChGK’s treatment of Jewish victims.¹⁶ Scholars alternately argue that the ChGK identified Jews at the beginning of the war but not the end, or toward the end but not in the beginning; mentioned only foreign Jews; and that its discussion of Jews progressively vanished as reports moved from the local level to Moscow, and so on.¹⁷ A more holistic perspective reveals that the ChGK highlighted Jewish victimhood when it was convenient, which amounted to roughly half the time.¹⁸ The first and last of the ChGK’s communiqués addressing atrocities on Soviet territory were released two years apart nearly to the day, and both feature Soviet Jewish victims.¹⁹ In locations such as Lviv oblast, investigators specifically sought out Jewish survivors.²⁰ In addition, the Lviv oblast auxiliary of the ChGK explicitly documented Jewish property losses by requiring local commissions to calculate the value of possessions stolen from Jews prior to their murders and then submit these totals along with lists of Jewish victims.²¹ Surviving Jews, like other individual citizens, never received any reparations that the USSR extracted from Germany.²² Still, Soviet data are available to be mined by scholars who know how to find it. This article identifies the most promising digital starting places for researchers who wish to persevere.

A post-Soviet patchwork

The ChGK’s scope is simultaneously a blessing and a burden. The European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) portal provides information about thirty auxiliary commissions on the republic, territory (*krai*), and oblast levels, such as those that operated in the regions of Poltava and Zhytomyr in the Ukrainian SSR.²³ In doing so, EHRI pursues its mission of illuminating “hidden collections.”²⁴ In the case of ChGK records, lack of visibility is due to a combination of funding issues, political factors, and the counterintuitive postwar and post-Soviet trajectories of archival materials. Yet, by design, the EHRI portal simply refers scholars to holding institutions, which in the case of the Poltava and Zhytomyr oblast archives have no public-facing digital collections.²⁵

The USHMM acquired selected duplicates from the regions of Poltava and Zhytomyr several years ago. Today, records accessioned from Poltava in 2001 are accessible via microfilm, while documents obtained from Zhytomyr in 2006 are freely available online, although with “white spots.”²⁶ Like Yad Vashem, early collection development policies at the USHMM focused on Jewish experiences. As a result, the Poltava and Zhytomyr selections constitute single reports stripped of the broader context of case files that illuminate them *in situ*. In some cases, selections consist solely of the pages of a document that discuss Jewish victims. The USHMM archives hold many more ChGK materials on Poltava, Zhytomyr, and other regions in the formerly occupied USSR, but they are “hidden” from Western scholars. In 2015–2016, the USHMM significantly expanded upon duplicates that they obtained from the central ChGK’s records in Moscow in 1995. These more recent acquisitions remain uncataloged in Washington, DC. Instead, the finding aid refers researchers to the website of the State Archive of the Russian Federation, a redirection that is of little help without knowing which files the USHMM duplicates include.²⁷

Amid mounting hostility toward much of the outside world over the past two decades, the Russian Federation has continued to offer significant resources for digital study of the ChGK and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. In 2006, *Svobodnaia Evropa* (Free Europe), a Russian publisher associated with the Kremlin, released three document collections on Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazi regime, purportedly in response to a resurgence of fascism in the Baltic countries. ChGK records constitute the majority of materials: in the Latvia volume, 36 of 58 (62.1 percent) documents come from the ChGK, compared with 71 of 114 (62.3 percent) for the Lithuania volume and 43 of 51 (84.3 percent) for the Estonia volume. These publications repeatedly highlight Jewish victimhood at the hands of ethnic Baltic perpetrators.²⁸ All three volumes have been continuously available free of charge via various online platforms, which, as Jewish historian David Shneer observed with some irony in a review in 2009, makes them “some of the most accessible books in Russian about the Holocaust in the USSR.”²⁹

In 2020, in conjunction with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Soviet victory over Hitler, the Russian government debuted a project titled *Bez sroka давности* (Without a Statute of Limitations) in partnership with the *Federal'noe arkhivnoe agentstvo* (Federal Archival Agency, Rosarkhiv). *Bez sroka давности* soon published twenty-three volumes of archival documents devoted to “crimes of the Nazis and their helpers against the peaceful population” of different regions in the former Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.³⁰ As with the *Svobodnaia Evropa* volumes, ChGK records form the core of the *Bez sroka давности* campaign, with 370 archivists, as well as sixty-six historians and academics assembling 5,835 documents for the twenty-three publications.³¹ These texts became freely available for download on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2021.³²

Searchable databases provide additional avenues for accessing ChGK records and other documentation of the Holocaust housed in Russian institutions. Alongside the debut of the *Bez sroka давности* project in 2020, Rosarkhiv introduced a website focused on the victims of Nazi atrocities that has made searchable more than twenty-six hundred documents, ten hours of sound recordings, and three hours of newsreels.³³ In contrast to *Bez sroka давности*, which addresses the Russian republic exclusively, the Rosarkhiv undertaking covers the whole of occupied Soviet territory.³⁴ The Rosarkhiv database facilitates searching by name (69,633), location (13,594), and theme, in the latter case via ninety-six tags (hyperlinked keywords) on topics such as “ChGK” and “official reports of the ChGK.”³⁵ Researchers employing retroactive terminology will be disappointed. For instance, a search for the word “Holocaust” retrieves only newspaper clippings assembled by a Jewish survivor in the 1990s, while “genocide” produces three ChGK reports from a single file for which a zealous cataloger contributed detailed, descriptive titles.³⁶ Employing the “Jews” tag introduces the opposite challenge of scope by presenting 773 resources, including photographs and film.³⁷ Catalog records articulate relevant names, tags, and locations according to their status as of 1941 (e.g., Belorussian SSR) as well as in the present day (e.g., the Republic of Belarus).

As an example, the record for the official report completed on April 23, 1945, by the Rechitsa raion commission (today Gomel oblast, Belarus) lists seven villages discussed in the document, six local agricultural communities, and so on. A total of 132 people are identified, with researchers able to view brief biographies and click on names to pursue other materials associated with specific individuals. As with any online collection, the utility of tags attached to this document varies, with “eyewitness testimonies” holding greater promise for Holocaust researchers than more subjective designations such as “humiliation” and “torture.” Here and elsewhere, scholars can consult transcriptions of documents that appear at the bottom of catalog records, in addition to examining the images themselves.³⁸ In all cases, researchers can download high-resolution copies of archival materials, including photographs, audio, and film. For certain publications, Rosarkhiv links to digital files hosted by the Russian National Electronic Library.³⁹

Another robust Russian resource for materials on the Holocaust is the Electronic Library of Historical Documents, initiated by the Russian Historical Society in 2017 with the goal of providing access to “all historical documents published in Russia since 1991.”⁴⁰ The Russian Historical Society was originally a nineteenth-century public organization that Vladimir Putin reestablished after returning to the presidency in 2012, officially dubbed the “year of Russian history.”⁴¹ With the support of the Russian state apparatus, the society’s Electronic Library has enabled research that would have been unthinkable during the Soviet years. For example, as mentioned earlier, during preparations for the Trial of the Major War Criminals in Nuremberg, Veske, a prisoner forced into the role of a nurse at the Salaspils concentration camp, was relegated to a list of witnesses whose whereabouts were unknown. Searching for her name in the Russian Historical Society’s Electronic Library produces two interrogations of Veske, along with other materials from Soviet counterintelligence agents. These documents reveal that as of spring 1945, Veske was under arrest in Riga based on her connection to a collaborator with the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD).⁴² The original documents are part of the records of the Latvian republic auxiliary of the ChGK, a collection housed in Riga for which the Latvian State Historical Archive has made the finding aid available online, but not the documentation itself.⁴³ In this way, present-day researchers of the Holocaust can pursue information pathways that were untraversable for Stalin’s government thanks to a subsequent repressive regime in Moscow.

The archival front

The Russian document collections and databases this article discusses are far from neutral venues. Chaired by Sergei Evgen’evich Naryshkin, current chief of the Foreign Intelligence Service and former head of the Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History at the Expense of Russian Interests, the Russian Historical Society is fixated on whitewashing the Soviet past, particularly regarding the Second World War.⁴⁴ The *Svobodnaia Evropa* publications are forerunners of this undertaking, with the texts claiming to present “only documents that speak for themselves and need no commentary,” even as the titles give away their conclusions by foregrounding Baltic “collaborators.”⁴⁵ Yet, non-Russian scholars who dismiss the contents outright as “supposedly based on archival research” for the propagation of “Soviet myths” go too far.⁴⁶ Like the *Bez sroka davnosti* and Rosarkhiv projects, the distortions embedded in the *Svobodnaia Evropa* volumes lie in selectiveness, not falsification.⁴⁷ As the USHMM and Yad Vashem duplicates of ChGK records show in their own ways, presenting one document and not another always has the potential to mislead—a risk that begins with the original archival repositories.⁴⁸ For example, Soviet archivists preserving the ChGK’s procedural records, such as correspondence, separately from the investigation files they reference, undoubtedly contributed to the decisions of Holocaust research institutions to copy only the end products of the ChGK’s work. These choices have compelled researchers in the West to hypothesize about the ChGK’s reasoning and workflows. Rather than disregarding collections driven by malicious intentions, the solution is to confront the forces that shape the development of all historical source bases.

The current war in Ukraine has raised the stakes for knowledge of the Holocaust on the Eastern Front. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the notoriously inaccessible Central Archive of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation and the Russian State Military Archive have transferred documentation to the Rosarkhiv database that sheds new light on Nazi persecution of Jews on Ukrainian territory.⁴⁹ As Putin’s regime annexed Donetsk and Luhansk, these regional archives formally joined the Rosarkhiv project, with a press release proclaiming “Russians, Ukrainians, and Jews—they all rest together in one mass grave.”⁵⁰ Not to be outdone, on the eighty-second anniversary of Hitler’s invasion of the USSR, the *Bez sroka davnosti* website spotlighted a recently declassified account of “Ukrainian nationalists” in Nazi-occupied Crimea who

supported the mass shootings of Jews.⁵¹ With equal enthusiasm, *Bez sroka davnosti* has amplified the release of open-access volumes devoted to Soviet atrocity reporting, as well as supposed present-day “Ukrainian crimes against humanity.”⁵² These still-evolving campaigns can be traced back to the naming of Stepan Bandera as a “Hero of Ukraine” in 2010 despite his antisemitism, a designation that Jewish and Russian observers widely condemned at the time.⁵³ Like the best Soviet propaganda, the strength of Putin’s warmongering rhetoric today lies in its kernel of truth, which well-meaning opponents do not wish to acknowledge.

There are different ways of fighting back. In response to the Russian invasion, the USHMM launched an initiative to make materials copied from the Ukrainian state archives freely available online. “During the Soviet era, there was no acknowledgement that Jews were singular victims,” the press release for this undertaking declared. It went on to claim that “all who were killed by the Germans and their collaborators were referred to as ‘victims of fascism’ or ‘peaceful Soviet civilians.’”⁵⁴ This statement revives received wisdom that has presumed the existence of a Stalinist mandate not to “divide the dead.”⁵⁵ Specialists working with the support of the USHMM collections and fellowships have long since disproved the existence of any such “conspiracy of silence” on Jewish victims.⁵⁶ Perversely, strategic forgetting of the contributions that the Soviet system made to developing knowledge of the Holocaust serves to substantiate Putin’s anti-Western rhetoric.

The histories of the Second World War and its aftermath on the Eastern Front have been shaped by unexpected consequences. In particular, Soviet investigations and other responses to the *Shoah* neither began nor ended with the Kremlin. In the Russian republic, prewar experiences with denunciations and public letter writing led local residents to form self-described “commissions” for reporting on Nazi atrocities as early as January 1942, more than nine months before the ChGK was founded.⁵⁷ These complex origins ricochet into the present, as evidenced by the rich documentation of the Holocaust that has appeared digitally as the Putin administration waged another war of aggression in Ukraine. As in all crises, ordinary people have been forced into situations in which some become heroes, some victims, and others villains, with many assuming multiple roles to different degrees depending on the circumstances. Like Stalin before him, Putin appreciates the power of “ordinary” accounts of extreme suffering. Scholars who wish to penetrate the veneer of propaganda should recognize contradictions within ChGK documentation as the rule rather than exceptions. To this end, researchers can capitalize on the enhanced scale and cross-case comparison made possible by digitization to search out the ordinary voices that make authoritarian messaging persuasive. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the digital collections outlined in this article each would have seemed unthinkable two decades ago. While no one can predict the exact consequences of Russian aggression in the long term, digital resources hold the promise that historians of the Holocaust in the USSR will be able to meet all future challenges.

Paula Chan is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at All Souls College, University of Oxford (2023–2028). Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Slavic Review* and the *Journal of Contemporary History*, with pieces forthcoming in *Information & Culture* and the *Journal of Modern History*. She is currently preparing her first monograph, *Eyes on the Ground: Soviet Investigations of the Nazi Occupation*, and researching a second monograph project tentatively titled *Between Us: Jewish Survival and Betrayal in Soviet Riga*. Prior to her doctoral training, she worked as a digital archivist.

Notes

1. “Zapiska P. K. Ponomarenko I. V. Stalinu ‘O polozhenii v okkupirovannykh oblastiakh Belorussii,’” August 19, 1941, in *Partizanskoe dvizhenie v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, ed. S. V. Kudriashov (Istoricheskaia literatura, 2015), 55.

2. E. Kingisepp, ed., *Zverstva germanskikh fashistov* (Gospolitizdat, 1941), 27 (quote), 32–39. The State Publishing House for Political Literature sent this booklet to the printer on September 24, 1941.
3. Arieh J. Kochavi, *Prelude to Nuremberg: Allied War Crimes Policy and the Question of Punishment* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 16.
4. A few examples among many: Eugene Finkel, “What’s Happening in Ukraine Is Genocide. Period,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/05/russia-is-committing-genocide-in-ukraine/>; Masha Gessen, “The Holocaust Memorial Undone by Another War,” *New Yorker*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/04/18/the-holocaust-memorial-undone-by-another-war>; Linda Kinstler, “Who Will Remember the Horrors of Ukraine?,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/06/13/opinion/ukraine-russia-babyn-yar.html>.
5. For an overview of this literature, see Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 330–33n3.
6. Marina Sorokina, “People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 4 (2005): 801–2, 804.
7. Paul A. Shapiro, “Foreword,” in Father Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, trans. Catherine Spencer (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2008), viii, x.
8. Martin Dean, “Soviet War Crimes Lists and Their Role in the Investigation of Nazi War Criminals in the West, 1987–2000,” in *NS-Gewaltherrschaft: Beiträge zur historischen Forschung und juristischen Aufarbeitung*, ed. Alfred Gottwaldt et al. (Hentrich, 2005), 456–70; Martin Dean, “Crimes and Comprehension, Punishment and Legal Attitudes: German and Local Perpetrators of the Holocaust in Domachevo, Belarus, in the Records of Soviet, Polish, German, and British War Crimes Investigations,” in *Holocaust and Justice: Representation and Historiography of the Holocaust in Post-War Trials*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Yad Vashem in association with Berghahn Books, 2010), 265–80 (quote appears on p. 278).
9. Head of the ChGK’s department for the accounting of damage to industry, transport, communications, and the communal economy Semenov to first secretary of the Communist Party of the Latvian SSR Kalnberzin, October 23, 1945, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. R-7021, op. 125, d. 4, l. 76; Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Latvian SSR Lebedev to chairman of the ChGK Shvern timer, October 26, 1945, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 116, d. 342, l. 43; Kalnberzin to Semenov, ca. October–November 1945, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 116, d. 342, l. 52.
10. “Svideteli, vybyvshie s postoiannogo mesta zhitel’stva,” ca. October–November 1945, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 116, d. 342, l. 17.
11. The Extraordinary State Commission’s full title is Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and Their Accomplices and the Damage Inflicted by Them on Citizens, Collective Farms, Social Organizations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR. For Veske’s initial testimony, see “Protokol doprosa,” Veske, March 7, 1945, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 93, d. 48, ll. 58–61.
12. “Otchet o rabote Chrezvychainoi gosudarstvennoi komissii po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlo-deianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov i prichinennogo imi ushcherba grazhdanam, kolkhozam, obshchestvennym organizatsiiam, gosudarstvennym predpriatiiam i uchrezhdeniiam SSSR,” Shvern timer to Malenkov and Stalin, December 30, 1945, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii, f. 17, op. 125, d. 329, ll. 8–9, 13, 4, respectively; Shvern timer to Stalin, Molotov, and Malenkov, ca. December 1945, GARF, f. R-7021, op. 116, d. 328, l. 43.
13. I reached the estimate of thirty thousand by calculating the average number of files for the twelve case studies in my book manuscript, *Eyes on the Ground: Soviet Investigations of the Nazi Occupation*, as well as additional collection records available within the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) portal, and then multiplying that figure by the number of regions where the ChGK operated. For the 43,616 files in Moscow, see GARF, “Kartochka fonda,” accessed February 22, 2024, <http://opisi.garf.su/default.asp?base=garf&menu=2&v=4&node=139&fond=1141&opis=&cf=820355>.
14. “Akt,” Rava-Russka raion commission, September 24–30, 1944; and Aleksandrov to director of the bureau of the Main Commission to Investigate German War Crimes in Poland Pilikhovskii, January 18, 1968, Service historique de la défense, 325 22P 3017, d. 9; see also Bundesarchiv Zentralstelle, B162/29309. Selected copies from the latter collection are also accessible at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-14.101M. For major examples of duplication projects undertaken by USHMM and Yad Vashem, see USHMM, “Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory from the USSR, 1941–1945,” last modified September 2016, <https://collections.ushmm.org/>

- [findingaids/RG-22.002M_01_fnd_en.pdf](#); Yad Vashem Documents Archive, “M. 33 - The ChGK Collection: Documentation Collected by the State Extraordinary Commission for Investigation of Nazi War Crimes in the Soviet Union, 1943–1945,” accessed January 15, 2026, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/4019619>.
15. Recent publications based on the Yad Vashem and the USHMM duplicates include: Kiril Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus* (Yad Vashem, 2016); Eric C. Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine* (Cambridge University Press in association with the USHMM and the German Historical Institute, 2015); Anika Walke, *Pioneers and Partisans: An Oral History of Nazi Genocide in Belorussia* (Oxford University Press, 2015).
 16. “White spots,” or *belye piatna*, is a common term already in use during the Soviet era to signify gaps in knowledge.
 17. For examples of these respective theories, see Anita Kondoyanidi, “The Liberating Experience: War Correspondents, Red Army Soldiers, and the Nazi Extermination Camps,” *Russian Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 452–53, 458–59; S. Shvarts, *Evrei v Sovetskom Soiuzie s nachala Vtoroi mirovoi voiny (1939–1965)* (Izdanie Amerikanskogo evreiskogo rabocheho komiteta, 1966), 148; Yitzhak Arad, “The Holocaust as Reflected in the Soviet Russian Language Newspapers in the Years 1941–1945,” in *Why Didn't the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Yeshiva University Press in association with KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 211–12; Nathalie Moine, “Defining ‘War Crimes Against Humanity’ in the Soviet Union: Nazi Arson of Soviet Villages and the Soviet Narrative on Jewish and Non-Jewish Soviet War Victims, 1941–1947,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 52, nos. 2–3 (2011): 448–49.
 18. Thirteen of the ChGK’s twenty-seven communiqués published by the end of 1945 mention Jews in some way, with the total figure of twenty-seven publications including reports focused on economic damage, as well as violent crimes that targeted other victim groups, such as Soviet prisoners of war. *Sbornik soobshchenii Chrezvychainoi gosudarstvennoi komissii o zlodeiianiiakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov* (Gosizdat politicheskoi literatury, 1946), 13, 42–43, 117, 173, 211, 219, 278, 280, 285–86, 298, 301, 306, 339, 365–66, 368, 370–72, 378, 391–93, 410, 457.
 19. “Soobshchenie Chrezvychainoi gosudarstvennoi komissii po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeiianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov i prichinnogo imi ushcherba grazhdanam, kolkhozam, obshchestvennym organizatsiiam, gosudarstvennym predpriiatiiam i uchrezhdeniiam SSSR o zlodeiianiiakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov v g.g. Viaz'me, Gzhatske i Sychevke Smolenskoii oblasti i v gor. Rzheve Kalininskoii oblasti,” *Pravda*, April 7, 1943, 1–2; “Soobshchenie Chrezvychainoi gosudarstvennoi komissii po ustanovleniiu i rassledovaniuu zlodeiianii nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov i ikh soobshchnikov o prestupleniiakh nemetskikh zakhvatchikov na territorii Latviiiskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki,” *Pravda*, April 5, 1945, 2–3.
 20. “Plan rassledovaniia nemetsko-fashistskikh zlodeiianii po Gorodokskomu raionu,” ca. October 1944, Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukraïny, f. 11, op. 1, spr. 987, t. 3, ark. 15–16; Sergei Trofimovich Kuz'min, *Sroku davnosti ne podlezhit* (Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1985), 59–60, 74.
 21. For instance, “Akt” and “Spisok rasstrel'nykh evreiskikh semeistv, prozhivavshikh v Krasnoarmeiskom Raione gor. L'vova,” March 13, 1945, Derzhavnyi arkhiv L'vivs'koii oblasti, f. P-3, op. 1, spr. 279, ark. 61–68.
 22. Nathalie Moine, “‘Fascists Have Destroyed the Fruit of My Honest Work’: The Great Patriotic War, International Law and the Property of Soviet Citizens,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 61, no. 2 (2013): 188.
 23. EHRI, “Derzhavna nadzvychaina komisiia SRSR po vstanovleniiu i rozsliduvaniuu nanesenykh zlodiiian' nimets'kymy zaharbynkamy Poltav's'kii oblasti, m. Poltava Poltav's'koii obl.,” accessed February 22, 2024, https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/ua-003328-p_3388?dlid=eng; EHRI, “Zhytomyrs'ka oblasna komisiia zi vstanovlennia zbytkiv, zapodiianykh nimets'ko-fashysts'kymy zaharbynkamy pid chas Velikoï Vitchyznianoi viiny, m. Zhytomyr,” accessed February 22, 2024, https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/ua-003337-p_2636.
 24. Sheila Anderson and Tobias Blanke, “Infrastructure as Intermediation—From Archives to Research Infrastructures,” *Journal of Documentation* 71, no. 6 (2015): 1183, 1189–90.
 25. In the case of the ChGK auxiliaries, not even the finding aids are available online. Derzhavnyi arkhiv Poltav's'koii oblasti, “Otsyfrovani opysy,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://poltava.archives.gov.ua/arkhivni-dokumenty/otsyvrovani-arkhivni-dokumenty>; Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zhytomyrs'koii oblasti, “Opysy pislia 1917 roku,” accessed February 22, 2024, https://zhytomyr.archives.gov.ua/?page_id=278.

26. USHMM, “Records of the Ukrainian Extraordinary State Commission,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irm509312>; USHMM, “Selected Records Related to the History of Jews in Zhytomyr Region of Ukraine,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irm524241>.
27. For collection development policies and the USHMM accessions, see Yad Vashem, “Listing of the Record Groups in the Yad Vashem Archives,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/en/archive/list-of-record-groups.pdf> (the relevant collection is M.33, “Records of the Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory”); USHMM, “Extraordinary State Commission.”
28. *Estoniia: Krovavyi sled natsizma 1941–1944 gody: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov o prestupleniakh estonskikh kollaboratsionistov v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Evropa, 2006); *Latviia pod igom natsizma: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov* (Evropa, 2006); *Tragediia Litvy: 1941–1944 gody: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov o prestupleniakh litovskikh kollaboratsionistov v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Evropa, 2006). At the time, *Svobodnaia Evropa* was run by Gleb Pavlovsky, who served as a political consultant to the Kremlin from 1996 to 2011. By 2016, he had lost enthusiasm for Putin’s regime; see Gleb Pavlovsky, “Russian Politics Under Putin: The System Will Outlast the Master,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 10–17.
29. David Shneer, “Probing the Limits of Documentation,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 1 (2009): 130. Today these volumes can be accessed via, among other locations, the Electronic Library of Historical Documents maintained by the Russian Historical Society: <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/indexes/values/625503>. Only the Lithuania volume has been translated into English: *The Tragedy of Lithuania 1941–1944: New Documents on Crimes of Lithuanian Collaborators During the Second World War* (Aleksii Iakovlev, 2008).
30. Bez sroka давности, “Sborniki materialov,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://xn--80aabgieomn8afgsnjq.xn--p1ai/biblioteka/sborniki-po-regionam/>. Subsequent publications have focused on Kaliningrad oblast and trials of accused Japanese war criminals that took place in Khabarovsk in 1949.
31. Poiskovoe dvizhenie Rossii, “23 toma. 5835 dokumenta [sic]. 66 istorikov, 370 arkhivistov’: Elena Tsunaeva anonsirovala izdanie sbornika arkhivnykh dokumentov ‘Bez sroka давности,’” November 12, 2020, <http://rf-poisk.ru/news/9577/>. As of January 5, 2026, the “News” section of this website goes back only as far as August 27, 2021. Readers interested in the November 12, 2020, piece may contact the author for a copy. For an example of the scope of this campaign in a single region, see Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Krasnodarskogo kraia, “Novosti,” June 22, 2020, https://kubgosarhiv.ru/news/?ELEMENT_ID=3300.
32. Poiskovoe dvizhenie Rossii, “Sborniki arkhivnykh dokumentov ‘Bez sroka давности’ opublikovany v otkrytom dostupe!,” January 27, 2021, <http://rf-poisk.ru/news/9969/>. This website’s “News” section currently extends only to August 27, 2021; readers seeking the November 12, 2020, piece may contact the author.
33. Rosarkhiv, “O proekte,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/o-proekte>. As of January 5, 2026, this website is available only by accessing it from outside the United States (whether geographically or via a VPN) and disregarding the expired security certificate. It is also subject to outages.
34. Rosarkhiv, “Regiony,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/maps>.
35. Rosarkhiv, “Ukazateli,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/lists>; Rosarkhiv, “Tegi,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/tags>.
36. The keyword search function is available at Rosarkhiv, “Perechen’ dokumentov,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/perechen-dokumentov>.
37. Rosarkhiv, “Evrei,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/term55-evrei>.
38. Rosarkhiv, “Akt komissii o zlodeianiiakh, sovershennykh nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami na vremennno okkupirovannoi territorii Rechitskogo raiona Gomel’skoi oblasti Belorusskoi SSR,” accessed February 22, 2024, <https://victims.rusarchives.ru/index.php/garf-23-04-1945-akt-komissii-o-zlodeyaniiakh-rechitsky-rayon-bssr>.
39. For example, see Natsional’naia elektronnaia biblioteka, “Chudovishchnye zverstva nemetskikh fashistov,” accessed February 22, 2024, https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_005254857/.
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53. Haviv Rettig Gur, "Researchers, Jewish Activists Gather for Conference Opposing 'Dilution of Holocaust' in Eastern Europe," *Jerusalem Post*, March 15, 2010, 6; David R. Marples, ed., "Historical Memory and World War II in Russia and Ukraine," special issue, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54, nos. 3–4 (2012); Zvi Gitelman, "Comparative and Competitive Victimization in the Post-Communist Sphere," in *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Indiana University Press, 2013), 226.
54. USHMM, "Museum Makes Holocaust-Related Ukrainian Archives Available Online," June 29, 2022, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-makes-holocaust-related-ukrainian-archives-available-online>.
55. To the best of my knowledge, none of the secondary literature cites any evidence that such a policy ever existed, not even works that feature it in the title; e.g., Olena Palko, "How Does Jewish

Identity Relate to Modern-Day Ukrainian Identity? Beyond the Refrain of ‘Do Not Divide the Dead’: Othering the Jews as a Technology of Power in the Soviet Union,” *Eastern European Holocaust Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 31–35.

56. In what remains the definitive study of Soviet wartime propaganda, Berkhoff states: “The media did not follow any particular policy of reporting on what today is known as the Holocaust because the leadership—meaning, ultimately, Stalin—did not choose one,” while in the postwar years, “Public portrayal of the Holocaust largely remained inconsistent.” Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 165–66, 279. For more recent confirmations of these findings, see Diana Dumitru, “Learning About Jewish Destruction from the Newspaper *Pravda*,” History and Civilization Department Colloquium Lecture, European University Institute, Florence, April 28, 2021; Paula Chan, “Patterns of Silence: French Witnesses of Nazi Crimes in Occupied Ukraine,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 57, no. 3 (2022): 597–620.
57. NKVD of Orel oblast, “Vypiski iz aktov o zverstvakh i nasiliiah okkupantov v Orlovskoi oblasti,” ca. February 11, 1942, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Orlovskoi oblasti, f. P-691, op. 1, d. 15.