

Stenogram of conversation  
with comrade I.I. Stabrovsky

5 pages.

[L.1]

Commission on the Compilation of a Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War.

Stenogram of conversation with comrade I. I. Stabrovsky, *Iosif Iosifovich*  
Conversation conducted by researcher comrade M.V. Misko  
Comrade O.A. Rosliakova records.  
Slonim. December 12, 1944.

Researcher of the Slonim  
District local history  
museum.<sup>1</sup>

Year of birth 1870. Belarusian.  
Non-party.

Son of a captain of the Murom Musketeer company,<sup>2</sup> a defender of Sevastopol who was seriously wounded during the defense of the Volyn redoubt near Sevastopol.<sup>3</sup> I was raised at the state's expense at the Polotsk cadet corps.<sup>4</sup> After finishing the cadet corps I studied at the Aleksandrovsk military school.<sup>5</sup> Finished the Moscow Archaeological Institute<sup>6</sup> with a diploma and after that took advanced architecture<sup>7</sup> courses at Samara University.

I finished the Archaeological Institute in the year 1914, before the war. I went to war as a field officer.<sup>8</sup> I was there through the whole war. Received the rank of

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<sup>1</sup> The museum still exists and functions today, and carries the name of the interviewee, who founded it.

<sup>2</sup> The Russian Musketeer companies that the interviewee's father appears to have been a part of were regular infantry units who carried the name "musketeers" by tradition carried over from earlier times.

<sup>3</sup> The Volyn redoubt was a fortification named after the 53<sup>rd</sup> Volyn Infantry Regiment, who participated in its building and defense during the Siege of Sevastopol (October 1854-September 1855), part of the Crimean War (1853-1856). The redoubt was located at the Kilen-Balka heights on the southeast side of Sevastopol Bay within the present-day city limits of Sevastopol. It was constructed in February 1855 and captured by the French on May 26, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> The Cadet corps in the Russian Empire trained boys to eventually become commissioned officers. The Polotsk Cadet Corps was established in 1835 for the training of children of noble heritage from most of the regions that comprise modern-day Belarus, as well as the Smolensk government.

<sup>5</sup> A Russian imperial military academy training infantry officers, located in Moscow. Opened in 1849.

<sup>6</sup> A higher education institute in Moscow that opened in 1907.

<sup>7</sup> Likely a typo. Should read "archeology".

<sup>8</sup> Officers of a rank above the lowest ranked officers but below the highest. In the Russian imperial army, field officers were colonels, lieutenant colonels, and majors.

colonel. I participated in almost every battle with the 55<sup>th</sup> division.<sup>9</sup> Was a division commander and so on. Was decorated: Vladimir with swords and bows<sup>10</sup> and Anna on the neck with swords.<sup>11</sup> I finished my service having attained the rank of lieutenant colonel.<sup>12</sup> I served so long that I could have left a general.

You could say I was interested in archaeology from a young age. I excavated more than 150 kurgans<sup>13</sup> in the Slonim and Baranovichi regions. These were mostly Slavic burials from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

During the time of the revolution I ended up in the staff of the Zavolzhskii Military District.<sup>14</sup> Stayed there for a year, year and a half. I was a clerk in charge of supplying the front with artillery and engineering equipment. When the Riga tractate<sup>15</sup> was concluded, they started disbanding this staff, and I ended up at the Main Directorate of Institutions of Higher Education in Samara. From there I returned here via re-evacuation by that same commission, since my family had remained here. I spent the whole war in Yaroslavl. I had property 14 kilometers from Slonim and gardened, planting a large garden of about a thousand trees. Now this is all smashed up and they burned down the homestead.

Here in Slonim I have a little house under my daughter's name. And I started a tiny garden here, with 50 fruit trees.

I established the museum in 1929. It existed even before this, but President Mościcki<sup>16</sup> came here in 1929 for the opening. The act, written on parchment, has been preserved. The museum was not sustained at all under the Poles. I got a little room thanks to the county administrator. This building is the museum's eighteenth building. They constantly transferred it from one building to another. They raided it

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<sup>9</sup> This most likely refers to the 55<sup>th</sup> Artillery Park Division.

<sup>10</sup> Referring to the Order of Saint Vladimir award. These were given to civil servants and military officers for outstanding service. Given "with a bow" for military merits. It was second to the Order of Saint George in significance among imperial Russian orders and itself had several classes.

<sup>11</sup> Referring to the Order of Saint Anna award. These were given to civil servants and military officers for outstanding service. Given "with swords" for military merits. It had several classes. The "Anna on the neck" refers to the second class, where the cross was worn on a neck ribbon. Chekhov wrote a short story called "Anna on the neck," partially in reference to this order.

<sup>12</sup> The Wikipedia article on the interviewee seems to suggest that he finished his service as a colonel.

<sup>13</sup> A mound built over a grave, found across Eastern Europe as well as adjacent regions.

<sup>14</sup> a Red formation of the civil war era around the Middle and Lower Volga regions with the staff located in Samara.

<sup>15</sup> This refers to the Peace of Riga, ratified in April 1921, which officially ended the Polish-Soviet War and set the Polish-Soviet borders for the interwar period.

<sup>16</sup> Ignacy Mościcki was the president of the Republic of Poland, also known as the Second Polish Republic, from 1926 to 1939. Slonim was part of the Second Polish Republic from the aforementioned Peace of Riga, in 1921, up to the Soviet takeover of eastern Poland as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939.

several times. The Poles raided it when they retreated. The museum was especially smashed up this time.

Prof. Kozachkov let me down a bit. His son is at death's door and he promised that he would not leave the building because he cannot abandon his dying son and there was a good basement here. I let him have this basement as a shelter and hoped that he would stay here until [L. 1 reverse] the very end. Battles began near Slonim, and the city began to burn. I checked from time to time and the museum remained intact. I relied on him. It turns out he went from the museum to the trenches and left the museum unsupervised. How the boys struck it. It's a horror, what they did here. They smashed out the windows and broke the display cases. I had my own personal microscope. They smashed it to smithereens. They destroyed a photo camera made out of red wood and took silver coins. Adults participated in this also, of course. In short, the destruction was reckless. Lev Sapega's<sup>17</sup> chessboard was displayed. This was a local *starosta* of the 1600s. A major figure of Belarus, a patron of Belarusians before the Polish kings. He protected Belarusians. They stole this board, made out of ivory with inlays. Evidently, connoisseurs participated. There was a bronze medal with an image of the head of Christ and some kind of inscription in Biblical Hebrew. A completely similar medal was found near Krakow, but that medal is made of pure gold and is at the Krakow museum. It was ascertained that this is that Caesarius<sup>18</sup> that was given to Christians for the right to enter the catacombs.

One day I went out to the city and it felt like there was nobody in the city. No authorities. People come out, look around, and say that there is nobody there. I went to the main street. It really did turn out that there was nobody there. The authorities had left at night. Only the Jews were carrying bread from somewhere. I too went to get this bread. It turns out they were baking this bread on Ruzhanskaya Street.<sup>19</sup> Many people crowded together there. I got in line when the bread was still in the oven. At this time a German airplane came flying, descended extremely low, and started firing on us. Everybody scattered. I pressed myself against a wall. It fired and fired and flew away. Right after it flew away, two tanks burst out of the Ruzhanskoe Chausee. They were small tanks and they started firing down the length of the street. They flew by. I went after them. I see that I won't be able to get bread here. People scattered again. They grabbed not-fully-baked loaves, took them away in bags, and

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<sup>17</sup> Lev Sapega, or Lew Sapieha, was a major statesman of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which included the territory of present-day Belarus. He lived from 1557 to 1633.

<sup>18</sup> There are a few Caesarius' that are saints in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. What is referred to here is possibly that a coin with an iconic image having something to do with one of these Caesarius'. The interviewee is saying that this item was given to Christians to enter the catacombs in ancient Rome, in which they hid from Roman persecutors.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarius>

<sup>19</sup> Ruzhanskaya Street is a centrally-located street in Slonim. The Great Synagogue in Slonim, built in the mid-1600s and still standing, is very close to this street.

then ran home as fast as possible. I came out after the tanks and saw that five corpses, killed by them, remained on the parade ground after they had flown past: four Red Army men and one policeman. After that these tanks turned onto the main street and went around the market stalls. They destroyed a Russian tank on the way, which had apparently wanted to slip by to Kozlovshchina.<sup>20</sup> After this they stopped, opened their hatches and started to look around. At that point I was already walking completely calmly. They did not fire at this time. A few Red Army men ran up to me: "Tell us, where is the road to Baranovichi?" Before they had a chance to turn, a third tank jumped out and rushed after them. They scattered.

After this I went home with an accelerated step. I walked past the city garden.<sup>21</sup> At this time a shell hit near the cathedral.<sup>22</sup> There was a children's hospital there, and it caught fire. There was a lumber yard nearby, and it caught fire as well. People rushed to pull logs away so that the fire would not spread. But this did not help. The fire did not spread to the side that the logs were pulled away from, instead going over to the church. There was a small two-floor house next to the church. It [L. 2] caught fire, and after it the church caught fire.

I had the impression that there were very few Germans around. A lot of motorcycles drove by on the streets. After that the persecution of Red Army men began. The bridges were seized. The Red Army men threw themselves point blank, wanting to get across the chaussee, beyond which was a little forest where there were still Russian troops. The Germans gave chase after them. Shooting erupted on the streets and in the vegetable gardens.

In particular, there was such an episode near my house. The main path to this chaussee was here. This one Red Army man was heavily wounded here. He somehow crawled along and hid at the neighbors' in the courtyard basement. At night people brought him food. On the next day they sent an orderly from the hospital and took him. Another Red Army man was fleeing not far from my house. Six Germans were shooting at him point blank. He fought back the whole time. He was heavily wounded but still shot back. In the end, he was killed.

The Germans immediately issued an order for people not to stop working, for people to show up to work and remain completely calm. After that an hour was designated after which it was forbidden to walk the streets. I think that one could walk the streets until nine o'clock in the evening.

Various directorates began to be formed. At first, they didn't touch anybody, no one was persecuted. It was fairly calm. Then, under the threat of severe

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<sup>20</sup> Kozlovshchina is a village about 30 kilometers north of Slonim.

<sup>21</sup> This could be referring to what is now the city park (park miejski/городской парк), not far from Ruzhanskaya street.

<sup>22</sup> This could be referring to the Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy cathedral (Спасо-Преображенский собор) located very close to the city garden the interviewee refers to just before this.

punishments, they ordered weapons and various state items be given up. For example, for a found weapon – shooting on the spot. Even cartridges and ammunition – all of this had to be turned in. Aside from that one had to register what one's occupation was. A registration department was opened. Laws under the Germans were very severe. Any little thing, punishment immediately on the spot - beating with rubber sticks. Most of the time this was due to mutual lack of comprehension: our people can't understand what the German wants, and the German can't understand our people.

They started to put up malicious posters directed at Russia. Various caricatures, though produced well in colors - but so caustic that some were even obscene. They threw around various appeals and hung up posters. They set up a radio point<sup>23</sup> at the parade ground, where it still is now. From there announcements were made in the German language, and then in Russian.

At first, they organized a Belarusian committee, but it turned out to be too patriotic. They closed it immediately and established a new Belarusian directorate.

The persecution of partisans began. An appeal to the people in the forest to immediately lay down their weapons followed, saying that no punishments will be employed against them and that they will be sent to work, etc. Of course, nobody among the partisans showed up voluntarily.

Some time passed and the persecution of the Jews began. First, they marked some houses with a Jewish six-pointed star and wrote: "Juden." That is, Jews might be living in these houses. Eventually, they assigned a designated place for them between the canal<sup>24</sup> and the Shchara river.<sup>25</sup> They enclosed this quarter with barbed wire. They forced the Jews themselves to do the enclosing. They selected an authorized Jewish representative, who was to answer for all of this. What's more, there was an order from the Jewish committee<sup>26</sup> not to take any domestic items with them. But in fact, people using carts took various domestic items there. Searches began in houses where Jews lived. They gathered a lot of flour, sugar, salt, and clothing. The local inhabitants, of course, profited.

[L. 2 reverse] The Germans entered. Now the destruction of the stores began. The things that were occurring here! The Germans somehow did not pay attention to

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<sup>23</sup> What the interviewee likely means by "radio point" (радиопункт) is a public loudspeaker set up for making announcements and the like.

<sup>24</sup> This most likely refers to the Slonim Ghetto created in the "On Island" neighborhood (between the canal and the river) and surrounded with barbed wire. This ghetto was created by July 12, 1941.

<sup>25</sup> The Shchara river runs for about 300 kilometers through parts of the Brest and Grodno regions of present-day western Belarus. Slonim is in Grodno region. The Shchara flows through the central areas of Slonim.

<sup>26</sup> Jewish councils were set up by the Nazis as an administrative instrument for a small group of Jews to control larger groups of Jews, usually in ghetto settings. The councils often operated under heavy coercion of the Nazi authorities.

this. What didn't they take. Footwear, clothing, foodstuffs. In particular, the bookstore KOGIZ<sup>27</sup> was looted clean. I remember that so many books were strewn about the streets that one could not avoid walking on them.

Immediately, they ordered: all Russian books are to be given up immediately. Designated places were allocated, where the books had to be carried and brought to. A lot of books were brought and carried there, because everyone was afraid.

I asked to be allowed to pick out books with scientific content from these, for the museum. I knew the head of the police. He gave me permission on behalf of the Germans. I was able to save many valuable editions of books under the pretext that they were scientific. Later, we hid these books nice and deep. The Germans suspected nothing. We were able to save books, portraits, and paintings. They treated these books monstrously. They heated ovens with them and destroyed them.

There was a Khmara here, a dishonest and bad person. He compiled lists and because of him over 200 people died on this Petralevicheskaya hill.<sup>28</sup> He ran a library. The Germans put stamps on the books that were permitted for use, indicating that they were permitted to be consumed. He took the other books back to the libraries. Two large rooms were buried in books. It was a very rich library, because it had been formed from seven city libraries. The sorting of the books was done at the city council in two rooms. I asked the city head to allow me to pick out books for the museum. He didn't want to at first but allowed it in the end. I was able to bring about three cartloads of those books here. They've opened a library now thanks to these books. Many Russian as well as Polish books of scientific content were destroyed, mainly in the course of sorting.

Then the persecution of the Jews began. One day, without any warning, all the streets of the city were filled up by the police. Traffic along the streets was suspended. It turned out that the police had surrounded the Jewish ghetto. There was a whole slaughter there. They shot the Jews right inside the ghetto, and after that set the ghetto on fire from multiple sides. The ghetto caught fire, and terrible shooting began. Moans, crying. It was a horror, what was going on there. I will say that the role of the police in this situation was not a good one. The police looted, and then police officers sold gold rings, watches and so forth. It was hard to know and see what was going on in the ghetto. It was later possible to know what the police were doing there from the stories of the population. Apparently, there had been an order to

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<sup>27</sup> KOGIZ , or Booktrading Union of State Publishers, was the name for all Soviet bookstores during a certain time period, lasting into the 1950s.

<sup>28</sup> Petralevicheskaya hill is a height northeast of the center of Slonim where thousands of Slonim residents were killed by the Nazis, including about 2000 already in summer 1941.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1gdlt79lQ6aZ2-1vme7mGQvAK6fE4kOdv&ll=53.10893120000002%2C25.34595060000001&z=18>

kill all the Jews. A huge amount of corpses were lying right on the streets. Even when they allowed traffic again, a huge amount of corpses were still lying on the streets.

They were relaying how one Jewish woman fell through into a latrine. She was begging to be pulled out and promising to give all of her buried possessions. They shot her where she was.

They were reporting about another case where two Jewish children were rushing about the courtyard, not knowing where they should hide. A German supposedly ordered a police officer to shoot them. The police officer did not comply for a long time, not wanting to. Then the German [L. 3] threatened him with a revolver. After this he brought them to the concrete circle and shot them and threw them down into that little well.

Soon after that Lithuanians or Latvians arrived. When these foreign troops arrived, the Jews were afraid that this was specifically targeted against them. And indeed, an immediate surrounding of entire quarters began. They drove everyone out onto the streets, undressed them and drove them to Petralevicheskaya hill.

There were two locations where they shot Jews: these were Petralevicheskaya hill and the Jewish cemetery. They drove them there in entire groups of several tens of people, and sometimes took them in trucks. Later the Ukrainians showed up and the same roundup of Jews began and they also did not allow one to walk on the streets. These Ukrainians came after the Jews furiously: they scoured houses and root cellars of burned down houses. Those who they found, they shot on the spot.

The Germans forced Lithuanians, Latvians, and Ukrainians to do this. They themselves didn't shoot so much.

Near Petralevichi there is a village called Zhirovichi. All of the inhabitants of Zhirovichi were ordered to come outside. Immediately, they undressed everyone. They took all the Jews to the forest, where enormous pits were prepared. They shot about 200 people with machine guns and covered them with earth. They would take a group to near Petralevichi, shoot them, bury them. Then a second group and again and again.

There was a case where they buried a Jewish girl and woman alive in this pit. There was a moment when the earth on top of the pit started to stir. Some had regained consciousness and were trying to free themselves from under the earth. One of the Germans came out and shouted: who's alive, crawl out and go home. They started crawling out of this grave, but they immediately shot them on the spot.

The girl who I was talking about earlier was afraid and pressed herself up to another Jewish woman and that is how they laid together until late at night. Late at night they crawled out of there. They ran to infirmary as wounded and stayed in the infirmary. But after a few days they found them and shot them.

After that, scenes of shootings of partisans, and Russians in general whom the Germans were suspicious of about anything at all. Every day one or two police

officers take someone to the Jewish cemetery, where there was a pit dug. They'd shoot and pour some earth on, shoot and pour some earth on.

They started hanging partisans. Quite a few gallows were set up. They brought them, often starved them, and then hung them. They would put them in the dungeon. There is a little window there. People would go there and throw them pieces of bread. I myself did this. The punishments were very severe.

Then the raids on the villages started. The slightest suspicion regarding ties with the partisan, and horrific punishment. They burned and killed by entire villages. Not far from Slonim there is the village Azarichi.<sup>29</sup> There they shot almost everyone in the village for ties with the partisans.

Downright robbery began. They drove livestock from the villages in whole herds. Cows, sheep, pigs. Automobiles full of chickens, geese, ducks, and domestic items.

Jewish property, plundered from the ghetto, was taken to the synagogue and then given away and sold in various villages. They took furniture from Jewish houses to the city council: buffets, beds, mirrors. The majority of this was bought by villagers.

As concerns the food situation, they set up [L. 3 reverse] a card system. They gave all working people bread fairly reliably, 250 grams each I believe. Institutions procured certain kinds of food products for their employees. They gave salt to everybody, and didn't give anything else. There was a case where they gave out eggs which were defective.

Those who had cows had to bring a liter or two of milk every day. Anyway, it was established who had to bring how much milk. A very harsh regimen was established. If you showed yourself outside at an hour that had not been specified, they shot without warning.

When the partisans started really bothering them, they established a guard of the local population, the so-called self-help. But one cannot praise this organization because it also acted as a looter. About this self-help organization, the inhabitants of the villages said that if it shows up in a village, it will take away more food than the Germans. They set up a watch. They gathered the local inhabitants up to a certain age, old men mainly. They forced them to patrol all the streets. From evening to dawn they were supposed to be on watch without interruption. Then, when the partisans began to come close to the city and even break through into the city, they made a bunch of trenches for shooting along the street.

The partisans were effective here. This was evident because every day around nine or ten o'clock one could hear automatic fire and explosions. They downed a huge number of trains from the railway roadbed.

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<sup>29</sup> Azarichi is about 15 kilometers straight north of central Slonim.



There were cases where partisans and Germans co-existed: the Germans pretended that they don't see the partisans, the partisans pretended that they don't notice the Germans. There were cases where Germans live at one end of the village and partisans at the other. Those who felt themselves stronger stayed, and those who felt themselves weaker left.

Then they started spreading appeals to the partisans, saying that who gives up their weapons we'll send to work in Germany and there will be no forfeiture of rights, and so on. Nobody came out.

In the library after Khmara there was Osipchik, a person of limited intelligence and education. Under him too, a re-sorting of books also began. A huge number of books were destroyed under him. They mostly went after Polish and Russian books. If Russian textbooks were preserved, then it was only in our museum.

They treated the museum well. We reformed the museum according to their instructions. Of course, they hung a portrait of Hitler. There were also a few German publications, Belarusian newspapers, and journals that were released openly and secretly under Poland.

Their most high-ranking chief, Erren,<sup>30</sup> was at the opening of the museum. At the opening he officially declared that the museum does not interest us, and that we don't have any designs on the museum. We asked for only one thing – that they secure this building for us. They promised they would do it. The city directorate repaired this house at the city's expense.

At first they treated the intelligentsia alright. But when they started conducting crackdowns, the intelligentsia suffered [L.4] the most. They took innocent people away, and people died. For example, they took away the lawyer Volodkovich, a most educated person, and shot him. There was a one-armed photographer, a good photographer, didn't engage in any kind of politics. They grabbed him at night and shot him. Eventually, the persecution of the intelligentsia began. They killed Poles in particular. If a Pole was a member of the intelligentsia, his fate was decided. They arrested them at night and took them away to Petralevicheskaya hill.

What kind of resistance can there be here? Everyone trembled for themselves. An automobile makes noise outside, and everyone trembles. We knew that the automobile was coming in order to arrest somebody. Everyone feared for themselves.

At first the Germans promoted Poles. Even the city head was a Roman Catholic priest. After the Roman Catholic priest, Krashevski was the city head. He committed an offense. They kicked him out and a Belarusian became the city head.

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<sup>30</sup> Gerhard Erren was the *Gebietskomissar* (regional commissar) for the German-designated Slonim region. He oversaw and implemented the killing of thousands of Jews in and around Slonim.

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gebietskommissar>;

<https://holocaustinlatvia.org/index.php?en/Cases/case-1942-Slonim/slonim-100-Erren.ssi>

The Germans started sucking up to the Belarusians. They constantly agitated for independent Belarus,<sup>31</sup> for the liberation of Belarus. Always “Belarus, Belarus” – it didn’t leave their tongue. There was even an announcement that the only language in the directorates is the Belarusian language and after that German. The courts – in the Belarusian language. Nobody understood the Russian language. All the legal procedure had to be translated into<sup>32</sup> the Russian language.

A Belarusian under the Germans and a Belarusian under the Soviets – two completely different characters. There were people there who catered to the Germans and acted according to their instructions. A Belarusian under the Soviets – a completely different person. A Belarusian under the Soviets has a completely different mindset.

The population feared the Germans awfully, particularly in the countryside. The countryside did not go to the side of the Germans. In the cities one had to fulfill their demands whether one wanted to or not, because there was immediate specific punishment for non-fulfillment. They threatened you with death for the most minor offense.

I myself was at one of the sessions at the People’s House,<sup>33</sup> where they gathered the overseers. They gathered them and announced that anyone who produces moonshine becomes subject to the death penalty and that he who is caught will be shot on the spot.

In reality they produced moonshine all around all the the villages, and in the city entire streets were engaged in this. The Germans themselves drank this moonshine and demanded: give it. Later, they washed their hands of this matter and said: the state procurements are fulfilled, and aside from that we don’t care. If someone has a reserve of grain, let him do what he wants. This was not good in the sense that the inebriation of the people began. Once they get drunk, robbery and unruly behavior of all kinds begins. There were even attacks by various drunkards on the streets.

It was very bad with the market. The market functioned weakly. The Germans erected a stone wall and allowed people to trade along this wall. They were trading in unneeded things, brought out by the citizens. One could not trade in butter. At first they allowed trade in milk, and then prohibited it. Nobody brought it. Sometimes they surrounded the market and fished out roosters, chickens, and geese, and took away eggs.

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<sup>31</sup> For “independent,” the interviewee uses the Belarusian word *самостийная*.

<sup>32</sup> This was possibly mistyped or missaid, as “*from* the Russian language” would make more sense in light of the preceding text.

<sup>33</sup> People’s Houses were built in the Russian empire for a few decades before the revolution to offer cultural and leisure resources to those of lower social classes.

One could see every day how the German walks around the bazaar and inspects, as the tradeswomen run from him.

There was such a case when I was there. Some person wearing a flashy coat is standing there, pockets bulging. [L.4 reverse] A German came up to him and turned his pockets inside out. He discovered four kilos of butter and took it all away. The other got riled up and says you are not a bandit. "Here!" – he gave him a few small coins and left.

They brought all sorts of rubbish from Germany: brooches, various buttons. The countryside crowded over – there were entire lines for these brooches. These brooches were pretty elegant.

They had a directorate of industry, but one had to ask the clerks for them to give authorization for the repair of shoes, let's say. Sometimes they would give material for clothing. This authorization was very hard to get.

They set up an exhibition under the Belarusian flag. The exhibition was quite good.

No private trade could take place. Everything was considered to be of the state.

They conducted raids on the villages and took away fur coats. He who voluntarily gives up his fur coat becomes exempt from searches and from everything.

Most interesting of all was how they undressed the population in the middle of the street. Suddenly a German took a liking to a pair of boots. Stop! and goes straight for the boots: take them off. That one runs off barefoot. There was a time when people were afraid to go out onto the streets. They took a lot of boots off. Then an announcement appeared: he who had his boots taken off should declare this and receive some kind of reparation. People received wooden sole shoes or something similar.

The movies were German. The military department was well organized in them. Everywhere, the total defeat of the Bolsheviks was shown. Going by their movies, one was given the impression that the defeat of Russia is total because everywhere everyone surrenders, and thus one after the other falls. The photographs were outstanding. The German is depicted in this way: extraordinary calmness, standing there with a pipe, smoking, puffing away and firing from a machine gun. Shells are exploding all around, its complete pandemonium, and he's calmly standing and smoking. This is to show the heroism of the Germans. Indeed, they did display miracles of bravery. One cannot deny them in this. I will say that, from among all peoples, there were no shortage of heroes in this war.

Feature films – this is dull material. Those who wanted to, went to the Belarusian movies. At first, they allowed some, by special pass, to go to the German

movies. As a matter of fact, I had this permission. One had to pay ten marks and one could attend these movies the whole season.

At the theater they staged short little Belarusian comedy plays. The Germans would also go. They left the first rows for them.

They did not engage with the religious question, though they beat up one Catholic Priest. He was hiding a Jew or something. They turned one of the Catholic churches into an Orthodox church and established a German cemetery near the Catholic parish church. Catholic priests were forbidden from engaging in politics. It was announced that nobody has the right to engage in political affairs.

At the beginning of the war Slonim was almost unruined, just burned out a bit. But during the time when the Germans were leaving, the city was subjected to destruction. Special teams went around and set houses on fire. They caught two of the arsonists: one was a Hungarian, the other a German. [L.5]

When the Soviets were advancing, there were about ten cannons on the Soviet side and about eight on the German side. One battery stood beyond the river, the second on the Ruzhanskiye hills. They reciprocally shelled each other, but it was mostly the Germans who fired into the city.

Before their withdrawal they set fire to some of the provisions warehouses in the city, the guard department, and the fire department. Before that, they took out all the food stocks that there were. They began the evacuation about two months in advance, one could say.

They wanted to set up a peat factory in Zhirovichi. They brought machines here, and then they changed their minds. They packed up and took everything back.

They didn't just want to establish some kind of industry here, they wanted to form their own colony here so that it would be possible to bring various goods here. They put up posters, on which enamel and faience dishes and so forth were depicted. This clearly stated: you give us this (raw material), and we will give you this. This was done in order to instill a desire in people for German goods. For state procurements they gave sometimes handkerchiefs, sometimes stockings, but mainly those brooches.

As soon as they arrived, they ordered weapons to be given up first of all, and then valuables: photo cameras, microscopes, radios - under the fear of severe punishment. One had to give up copper handles from doors and windows, and in return receive wooden ones with an additional payment of 15 rubles. They would check whether you had anything metal, right down to the kitchen. People hid things, buried things. They demanded samovars. In a word, they took everything that one possibly could.

They ordered currency of all kinds to be given up: gold, silver. From the Jews, they took literally everything.

They began to take away timber. The village population carried out unbearable logging work. They took entire trainloads of timber away from here. They would take away the best timber, for bridges, as they say. Blocks of it. At the sawmill they made the finest goods. After that they began the production of turpentine and resin. They would demonstrate how to produce this resin. They would buy straw, and by the way fix completely miserly payment. If you give up such and such amount of kilograms, you will get a kilogram of salt. They paid particular attention to peat.

As regards peat, they put a good idea forward here. For display, they brought a little display case from Berlin of everything that could be made out of peat. This really is astonishing. It is possible to make a whole range of good products from peat: phenol, paraffin wax, gasoline, alcohol for drinking, glass, glass dishes, celluloid, buttons, spoons. What didn't they bring in this little display case.

Belarus' only abundance – peat. There are gigantic deposits of peat. The Glovchinsk swamps contain inexhaustible reserves of peat.

Once Burgomaster Kislyi,<sup>34</sup> the city head, told me in the course of a conversation that the German Erren wants to bring the extermination of the Jews to such a point that even the memory of Jews dies here.

They ordered all the things from the museum to be given up to the *Gebietskommissariat*.<sup>35</sup> We gave up various Jewish books and items of the religious cult that we had gathered in the ghetto. Among other things, we had gathered a huge number of handwritten Bibles on parchment. It was difficult for one person to lift this one Bible. I, for example, [L.5 reverse] did not have the strength to lift this Bible. These were expert scribes. One could not make an error in the copying of Torahs. If he makes an error by accident, he had to get a new leaf and start again. Slonim Torah scribes were renowned worldwide. Slonim received orders from England, from America. The Torahs were very expensive. There were so many of these Torahs that they stuffed more than half of the room with these Torahs and items of the millennia-old religious cult. The Germans took all of this and brought it back with them. These Torahs were lying about the streets. People would come from the countryside and take them. Good leather, outstanding stitching. Thin leather, from calves, well made. They sewed shoes from these Torahs.

When the ghetto was destroyed, local inhabitants swept down from the villages with crowbars and axes and set about digging around in all the garbage. They found buried money. A huge amount of tsarist money was lying about this ghetto.

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<sup>34</sup> Aleksandr Kislyi was appointed the Burgomaster of Slonim not long after the Germans occupied the city. <https://shtetlroutes.eu/ru/slونim-cultural-heritage-card/>

<sup>35</sup> The Nazi-led regional administration, of which Gerhard Erren, mentioned earlier, was the head for the Slonim region. [https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source\\_view.php?SourceId=30218](https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source_view.php?SourceId=30218)

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