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Oleg Zaitsev*

PhD in Cultural Studies, Honoured Worker of Culture of Ukraine

Uzhhorod, Ukraine

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8571-2186>

Itinerant Jewish Yiddish theater troupes in the theatrical landscape of Transcarpathia (1920s-1930s): A cultural perspective

Abstract. The relevance of this study was determined by the need for a scholarly understanding of the evolution of Jewish Yiddish theatre within the theatrical space of Transcarpathia during the 1920s–1930s. As of April 2026, the travelling Jewish theatre in Transcarpathia had not been systematically studied; therefore, this topic had remained insufficiently explored in academic research. The aim of the study was to investigate and systematise travelling Jewish Yiddish theatres, as well as to examine the origins and dynamics of theatrical performances within the theatrical culture of Transcarpathia in the 1920s–1930s. Jewish theatre remained an important component of Ukrainian cultural heritage, evolving from theatrical studios and state theatres. Yiddish theatre served as a centre of artistic life, transmitting Jewish culture through theatrical art. The research methodology was based on the application of dialectical, analytical, culturological, historical, biographical, and generalising methods. The study analysed the influence of travelling Jewish Yiddish troupes on the development of the region's theatrical culture and established that theatre touring routes passed through the major cities of the region, including Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Khust, and Berehove. The repertoire of these theatres was characterised by considerable genre and thematic diversity, encompassing all age groups of audiences. At the same time, in accordance with public preferences, musical performances were given particular prominence on stage. Alongside entertainment productions, the theatres staged plays based on national Jewish dramaturgy, which highlighted issues of Jewish identity and belonging. The creative staff of the theatres consisted of talented actors, directors, and musicians from Romania, Poland, Austria, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Their destinies coincided with the cultural flourishing of the theatre, but ultimately ended in repression, emigration, deportation to concentration camps, and extermination centres. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using its findings for the study of theatre history and their application in theatre studies and cultural studies, particularly in preserving national identity through the investigation of regional theatrical art

Keywords: Jewish heritage; regional culture; performing arts; theatre production; actor; emigration; Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of the mass migration of the early 20th century, Yiddish theatre flourished, playing a decisive role in transmitting cultural traditions, styles and ideas during the mass migration movements in Europe and beyond. Its theatrical practices and modes of expression influenced the development of Ukrainian and global theatre. In theater studies and cultural studies, the topic of Jewish Yiddish theater in Transcarpathia had never been

specifically addressed, although its role in shaping the region's theatrical culture had been examined in a piecemeal fashion. Numerous sources shed light on the historical and sociocultural processes underlying the formation and genesis of Jewish Yiddish theater. An analysis of scholarly publications had shown that researchers have focused on studying Jewish theater in various regions of Ukraine. At the same time, scholars have devoted significant attention

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*Corresponding author (zaitsev1967@gmail.com)



to the history of Jewish theater in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv, and Chernivtsi. T. Ovcharenko (2009) noted that Jewish theater – a phenomenon that for hundreds of years was shaped at the intersection of religious prohibitions and human spiritual and cultural needs – in the cultural space of Ukraine, it not only developed but also rose to the level of highly professional theater and played an important role in global theatrical and cultural processes. O. Bezarov (2025) emphasised that the processes of the formation of Jewish theater in neighboring Austria-Hungary were not straightforward. Also, in Galicia and Bukovina, the conditions for the development of Jewish theatrical culture proved to be not very favourable – the Orthodox segment of the Jewish community did not approve of Jews' enthusiasm for theatrical performances for religious reasons. Scholar A. Bakanursky (2013) explored the role of Jewish theater in Odesa, noting that having travelled a complex path through European countries from the Netherlands and Germany through Austria-Hungary and Romania to Poland, Galicia, and Western Ukraine, Jewish theater, by refining and expanding its repertoire and expressiveness, as well as the diversity of characters and performers, approached a landmark date in its history – the professional period of its development. Researchers T. Brahina *et al.* (2025) noted that Jewish theater in Kharkiv became an important stage in the development of Jewish stage culture and art in Ukraine. Its activities reflected the complex dialectic between tradition and modernity, the national and the Soviet, art and politics. V. Polonskyi (2024) analysed the centuries-long history of the Jewish minority in Ukraine and traces the development of Jewish folk culture, music, and theater. Scientist noted that due to its favourable geographical location, Ukraine has for many centuries attracted people of various nationalities, who formed national minorities within the state, became active members of society, and contributed to the enrichment of diverse forms of art. A. Quint & A.M.-K. Seigel (2023) uncovered the untold stories of female artists in Jewish theater from Romania to the United States, from Argentina to South Africa. Also, researchers examined the interwar Yiddish theater scene in Kaunas, highlighting Jewish theater actress Rachel Berger, who performed in Uzhhorod in 1924. Researcher I. Bercovici (1982) was the first to trace the evolution of Jewish theater in Romania from its origins to the postwar period, analysing the work of prominent figures in Jewish theater. The aim of this study was to examine the dynamics of itinerant Jewish theater troupes within the theatrical culture of Transcarpathia in the 1920s and 1930s.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology for studying itinerant Jewish Yiddish theater troupes in the theatrical landscape of Transcarpathia was developed using a combination of methods: dialectical, analytical, cultural-historical, biographical, and generalisation. The dialectical approach occupied a central place in the methodology, aiming to understand Jewish theater within the theatrical culture of Transcarpathia

through the prism of the contradictions and transformations inherent in its historical context. This approach acknowledged the dynamic interaction of cultural forces, socio-economic conditions, and artistic forms of expression over time. It was employed an analytical approach to examine the repertoire, acting techniques and Jewish cultural influence on the region's theatrical culture of the 1920s and 1930s. After all, it was Jewish theatre that had become a story of journeys, with its migration of artists, the travels of various theatre companies, and encounters with audiences across different regions. The cultural-historical method enabled to analyse the development of itinerant Jewish theatre troupes in Transcarpathia: "Haor" (1921–1922), "Habamah" (1926–1933), the theater troupe of Leon Berger (1924) and Paul Baratov (1932), "Vilner Trupe" (1933), the troupe led by Solo Prizament and Giza Haiden (1937), the "Zigler-Postor" troupe (1937), and the troupe of Moise Lipman (1938). Biographical analysis had contributed to the study of the touring activities of Jewish theater and the participation of leading figures of Yiddish theater in productions (Solo Prizamant, Clara and Solomon Stramer, Giza Haiden, Herman Tunis, Sara Kanner, Leopold Jungwirth, Dolly Nahbar, Pavel Baratov, Dina Koenig, Joseph Kamen, Moisha Ziegler, Sylvia Pastor, Moisha Lipman, Nohem Turkov). The generalisation method was used to systematise information about travelling Jewish theater troupes in the cultural space of Transcarpathia. Based on this method, conclusions were drawn regarding the research findings and future directions for the study of Yiddish theater. Hungarian local newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s had to be proved to be valuable sources for this study: "Rusinszkói Magyar Hírlap", "Kárpáti Magyar Hírlap", "Zsidó Néplap", "Uj Közlöny", and "Határszéli Ujság", which published announcements and reviews of Yiddish plays in their pages and introduced audiences to the repertoire of Jewish travelling theatres in Transcarpathia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The issue of Jewish national identity had become one of the key, defining issues in Ukraine's theatrical culture. The history of the Jewish Yiddish theater in Transcarpathia had remained a blank spot on the map of research into the history of Transcarpathian theatrical culture. This was the first attempt to investigate and synthesise information about the origins and development of Yiddish theater in the region's theatrical culture of the 1920s and 1930s. After all, the travelling Jewish theater always encouraged its audience to feel a connection to the Jewish world. Audiences of plays and concerts took pride in their Jewish identity, as Jewish actors embodied Jewish vitality. Starting in the 1870s, Jewish artists known as the Broders ("singers from Brody") began touring the cities of Austria-Hungary. Artists got their name from the founder of the genre, Berl Broder (real name Berl Margulis, 1815–1868), who started the tradition of travelling performers, whose shows took place in wine cellars and taverns. The Broders' repertoire included comic sketches that parodied various types of

Jewish society and required the performer to possess a talent for stage transformation and the ability to improvise (Rindyuk *et al.*, 2018). Thanks to their performances in taverns on the occasion of the Purim holiday, singers from Brody established themselves as artists in Jewish communities. The foundation for professional Jewish theatre was established through their activities.

The origins of Yiddish theater were linked to the Ukrainian Jew A. Goldfaden (1840–1909), who staged the first performance at the Pomul Verde Theater (Ionel, 2021). A. Goldfaden's theater was an immediate success and began touring Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe. After all, Jewish theater had always been a form of theater, in which the social function was far more important than the quality of the texts or the actors' performances. The theater served as a gathering place for the Jewish community, where they could speak their own language. The first playwrights after A. Goldfaden were actors and musicians, who wrote for their own troupes, as they were forced to stage a new play every week. After the end of World War I, Transcarpathia (renamed "Subcarpathian Rus") became part of Czechoslovakia. In Subcarpathian Rus, which had become part of Czechoslovakia, lived the poorest Jewish community. In this predominantly rural, small-town region, Jews were mostly engaged in agriculture and local trade, and unemployment was high among them (Madi & Sakal, 2023). The region's Jews actively participated in the civic and cultural life of their towns – opened movie theaters, run taverns, factories, workshops, banks, and the "Korona" and "Central" hotels (Khust), where travelling theater troupes perform. The great flourishing of these cities as centres of Jewish theater can be explained by several reasons. First, during the interwar period, numerous of Yiddish-speaking Jews settled in Subcarpathian Rus, fleeing difficult living conditions and antisemitism. For most of these Jewish immigrants, attending theater performances was a common cultural practice, given that at that time Yiddish theater troupes were performing throughout Europe. Yiddish was the primary spoken language of Eastern European Jewry, which had always occupied "a decidedly low place in the multilingual hierarchy of Ashkenazi Jewish culture" (Caplan, 2014).

Travelling theater troupes were often family businesses, consisting of a husband, wife, children, and relatives. As a folk theatre tradition of a nomadic people, Yiddish theatre consistently required improvisation under changing circumstances; however, it was frequently noted by Yiddish-speaking actors and critics that constant travelling prevented the Jewish stage from attaining the artistic standards achieved by other theatres (Caplan, 2014). Performances took place in permanent city theaters in Mukachevo (1899) and Uzhhorod (1907), as well as in hotels, cafes, casinos, and on summer stages. It was very common for travelling theatre troupes to visit during Jewish festivals (Hanukkah, Purim, Sukkot). For example, during Hanukkah, theater groups performed scenes from plays, in which the main characters were always Esther, King Ahasuerus,

Mordecai, and Haman. Theater scholar I. Meleshkina (2015) asserted that travelling troupes of Jewish actors visited virtually every town, while the theatre itself enjoyed considerable popularity among the public, maintained close contact with audiences, and responded to their needs. Yiddish drama uniquely reflected the issues that concerned Jewish society. National theatre performed in the native language – both Jewish and Ukrainian – was regarded as a powerful means of self-identification, fostering national dignity and encouraging resistance to humiliation, which often provoked strong dissatisfaction from the authorities. In August 1921, the Jewish theater "Haor" from Bratislava, led by Shloyma Pryzament, arrived in Uzhhorod. Theater scholar Yu. Shereheiy (1993) noted that in the 1920s the "Haor" theatre, directed by Prizamant, staged productions such as "The Destruction of Jerusalem", "Esther's Love", and "The Jewish Hamlet". Although the troupe was large, relatively little attention was devoted to stage design. At the same time, the "Habimah" theatre, directed by Shtramur, presented operettas and dramas including "The Dybbuk", "The Blind Violinist", and "Kol Nidre". On 17 January 1922, "Haor" (artistic director: Shlomo Prizamant) returned to Subcarpathian Rus and began its tour in the city of Uzhhorod, this time with a new theatre poster (Fig. 1). Uzhhorod newspapers reported that "the Jewish theater troupe "Haor" began its performances in Uzhhorod yesterday. The public has high expectations for the reorganised troupe. We hope it will live up to expectations" (The Jewish theatre has opened, 1922).



Figure 1. "Haor" theater poster, 1920s

Source: Leaflet: Jewish Theatre – opera, 1921 (1921)

Director Shlomo Pryzament (Salo, Solomon Pryzament, 1889–1973) was born on September 6, 1889, in the small town of Uhniv near Rava-Ruska (Lviv region). In 1910, composer became the director of the "Ukrainska Besida" theater (Lviv). During the 1920s in Czechoslovakia, the "Haor" society was established on the initiative of Zacharis Franziska, Itshak Mestel (Yakov Mestel, 1884–1958), and Shlomo Prizamant (Museum of the Yiddish Theatre, n.d.b). The first performance was "The Wild Man" by Y. Gordina. The performance took place during the Purim celebration in the grand hall of a restaurant in Bratislava. Later, the troupe went on tour to Czech and Carpatho-Rusyn cities with the following productions: "The Savage" by J. Gordina, "Ahasuerus", "Sulamith" by A. Goldfaden, "The Sacrifice of Isaac" by A. Goldfaden, "Jewish Happiness" by B. Tomashevsky, "The Father" by A. Strindberg, "Kol Nidre", or the "Secret Jews of Madrid" – A. Sharkansky, "The Jewish Spark" – B. Tomashevsky, Z. Mogulescu, music by A. Perlmutter, G. Vol, "The White Slave". In 1922, the "Haor"

society ceased its activities due to the local Jewish population's limited command of Yiddish and the resulting low attendance at performances (Museum of the Yiddish Theatre, n.d.b). In 1923, Prizasament moved to Poland, became a member of the Union of Jewish Artists of Poland (Fig. 2), met the actress Gizi Haydn, who became his wife, and later founded a new theatre company.

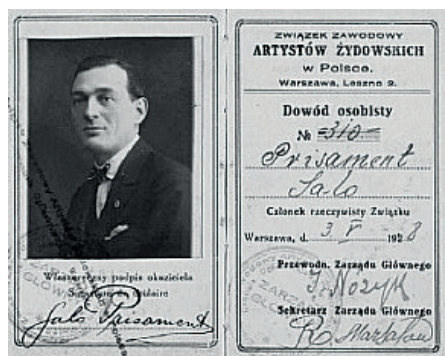


Figure 2. Solo Prizament – a member of the Union of Jewish Artists in Poland, 1928

Source: Museum of the Yiddish Theatre (n.d.a)

During World War II, Prizamant and Gizi (Haydn-Prizamant, 1906–date of death unknown) fled to the Soviet Union. In 1943, they settled in Samarkand, in the 1940s, the family returned to Poland. In 1949, he emigrated to Buenos Aires (Argentina) and continued to work in the country's theaters, in 1960, his monograph "Di Broder Zinger" ("The Broder Singers") was published in Argentina (Museum of Family History, n.d.). In 1973, Shlomo Prizamant died in Buenos Aires. The Transylvanian Jewish professional theater "Habimah" was founded by Stramer in the 1910s. Beginning in the 1920s, the troupe actively toured cities in Romania and Czechoslovakia. Between 1926 and 1933, theater performed in the cities of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, and Berehove (Museum of Family History, n.d.) (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Theater poster, 1930s

Source: Leaflet: Jewish Theatre in Mýto (1927)

Director, actor, and impresario Solomon Stramer was born in Eastern Europe on June 6, 1888. After the end of World War I and the incorporation of Transylvania into the Kingdom of Romania, Stramer moved to Cluj and began performing with his theater troupe, which featured actors Clara Stramer, Albert Segalesco (1889–date of death unknown), Isidor Ashkenazi (1897–date of death unknown),

Sarah Kanner (Friling, 1882–1959), Marcus Glikman (1883–1928), Solomon Friedman (1889–date of death unknown), Avram Ash (Avraham Averbukh, 1895–1942), and Sarah Sylvia (1893–date of death unknown) (Bercovici, 1982) in various European cities (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Stramer's theater troupe. Romania, 1920s
Source: based on I. Bercovici (1982)

In November 1923, "Habimah" performed in the region's major cities (Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Berehove) with A. Goldfaden's play "Hetskele the Milkman". The plot centres on the comical adventures of the quick-witted Hetskele, who managed to extricate himself from complicated situations. The play was rich in folk humor, songs, and dances. Jewish theatre functioned not merely as a performance medium in the Hebrew language, but also as a cultural phenomenon embodying Jewish identity and traditions. Although the troupe did not stage complex dramatic works, its productions were characterised by professionalism, conviction, and enthusiasm. Among the performances presented were "Kol Nidre" and "The Golem". Particular attention was devoted to the artistic contributions of Solomon Stramer and Clara Stramer, Elsa Rabinovich, Aranka Blind, Gersh Rabinovich, Herman Tunis (Chaim-Gersh Owend, 1900–date of death unknown), Michael Preis (1904–1978), and Ben-Zion Sigal (1900–1942), who perished together with his wife Rachel Weissberg and their children in the Belzec concentration camp. It was also noted that the travelling activity of Jewish actors contributed to the dissemination of Jewish culture from one town to another. In the early 1930s, faced with escalating anti-Semitism and economic hardship in interwar Europe, Solomon Stramer emigrated to Argentina in 1933 along with the actors (Solomon and Clara Stramer, Israel and Ana Feldbaum, Elsa Rabinovich, Esther and Anje Rapel, Adolf and Clara Streitman, Sarah Silvia (1893–date of death unknown), Samuel Silberberg (1892–date of death unknown), and Joseph Schein). The artist's key work whilst in exile consisted of staging musical productions and performing in plays such as "The Blind Clown" and "The Girl's Secret" (Fig. 5). During World War II, Solomon Stramer continued to work in Argentina at the "Soleil", "Excelsior", "Mitra", and "Ombú" theaters (Ansaldó, 2020). In addition to his theatrical activities, Stramer made a significant contribution to the development of sound recording, beginning in the 1920s with recordings of Yiddish couplets, folk songs, and theatrical excerpts.



Figure 5. Play poster: Solomon and Clara Strammer, 1931
Source: The New York Public Library Digital Collections (1931)

In June 1924, a Jewish theater troupe from Bucharest, led by Leon Berger, performed in Uzhhorod at the Corona Hotel. The local newspaper “Zsidó Néplap” reported that the actors did not receive sufficient support from the Jewish community; nevertheless, the performances were characterised by considerable ambition and artistic professionalism. The leading performers of the troupe included Leon Berger, his sister Sarah Kanner, his wife Rachel Berger (1907–date of death unknown), and Eni Smilovich (Shmilovich) (Theatre, 1924). Starting in August 1926, a Jewish theater troupe performing known as “Habimah” (managed by Zacharias Franzos) began touring the region for three-day engagements (Monday, Wednesday, Friday). At the Uzhhorod City Theater, the actors – Yakov Weisman, Morris Weisman (1880–date of death unknown), Moise Lerer (Adolf, Aron Lerer, 1888–date of death unknown), Zacharias Franzos, and guest stars: Leopold Jungwirth (1891–1942, died in the Krakow ghetto), and Ms. Sonya Berson (Paris) showcased their artistry in the productions: “The Street Musician” by J. Latayner, and “The King of Beggars”. As for the theater’s director, Zacharias Franzos – a notorious theater impresario who illegally appropriated the name “Habimah” – would appear on the scene every year, collect money, and vanish, leaving debts in his wake. Franzos, acting as concessionaire and impresario of the Yiddish-language theatre troupe, generally avoided indicating the authors of staged plays in order to circumvent the payment of royalties. Therefore, director gave false titles, but showed respect only for the plays of Goldfaden, Gordin, Kobrin, Pinsky, Kalmanovich, and other authors, whose works belonged to the “best” of Jewish theater (Dalinger, 2003).

In February 1927, a troupe led by Zacharias Franzo performed at the city theater under the “Habimah” banner, presenting three plays: “The Golden Wedding”, “The Jewish Soul”, and “Cain and Abel”. A newspaper Habamah Ungváron (1927) reported that all fifteen actors demonstrated a high level of artistic mastery and presented productions unprecedented for the theatrical life of Uzhhorod. Both the operetta and the dramatic one-act performances were characterised by considerable ambition and professionalism, while the artistic efforts of the troupe were regarded as deserving broader support from the Jewish audience of the city. Thus, on February 24 1927, the troupe presented

the drama “The Seven Hanged Men” by A. Leonidov to a small but enthusiastic audience. On February 25 1927, they performed the operetta “The Romanian Wedding”. Particular distinction among the actors was attributed to Basha Libgold (Basya or Barbara, 1942–date of death unknown), who later perished together with her daughter and husband Zalman Libgold in the Treblinka concentration camp, and whose performance was characterised by strong artistic temperament. The cast also included Frenkel, Rosa Gutman (1889–date of death unknown), and Rachel Weinberg (1901–1942), who perished together with her husband Ben-Zion Sigal and their two children in the Belzec concentration camp. Their performances were noted for a high level of preparation and expressive personal humour. It was also reported that the theatre auditorium was filled to capacity, while the audience enthusiastically applauded the actors and joined the performers in singing the verses (Habamah in Uzhhorod, 1927).

In July 1927, the “Stramer Troupe” arrived in Uzhhorod. The Hungarian newspaper “Ruszenszkói Magyar Hírlap” reported that the renowned director Stramer, having recently returned from a trip to America, arrived in Uzhhorod for a two-day guest performance accompanied by a highly regarded ensemble. The performances, scheduled for 20–21 July, were presented with the participation of the city theatre orchestra (The guest performance of the Strammer..., 1927). The performers (Solomon and Clara Strammer, Elsa Rabinovich, Aranka Blind, Herman Tunis, Simcha Weintraub (Fisfeld, 1890–date of death unknown), Max Brinn, Helena Gurevich) presented the operetta “Why Do Girls Run Away?” by Y. Rumshynsky and “Mosse, How Are You?”. On February 19, 1928, a Jewish theater troupe (managed by Zacharias Franzo) opened its run at the Uzhhorod City Theater with a performance of “The Beggar-Musician” by K. Weill and E. Hauptmann. The local Hungarian newspaper “Ruszenszkói Magyar Hírlap” noted that the actors Leopold Jungvirt (pseudonym Leonid Peretz, 1891–date of death unknown), Zacharias Franzos, Herman Tunis, and Max Hartzendorf contributed to creating a distinctive atmosphere within the performance (The Beggar Musician, 1928).

In February 1929, “Habimah” returned to Uzhhorod with new performances and concerts featuring Vera Kanevska (d. 1945) with her husband Paul Breitman (1890–1975) and Max Brinn. In February 1930, the “Habimah” troupe invited Uzhhorod audiences to its performances, which featured renowned artists such as Leopold Jungwirth, actor and set designer Dolly Nahbar (1903–date of death unknown), Ernestina Jungvirt (Ferner, 1891–date of death unknown), theater and film actress Laura Glucksmann (Larke Glucksmann or Perla Leah Glucksmann, 1885–1938, died in a concentration camp), Fanya Brantsovskaya and Herman Tunis. From February 25 to March 14, 1931, the Uzhhorod City Council made the municipal theater available to the Jewish theater troupe “Havima” (managed by Zacharias Franzos). The press reported that Jewish theatre performances had been staged at the municipal

theatre since the establishment of the Jewish theatre tradition in the city. Productions on Jewish themes, including the operetta “Yudales Bar Mitzvah” by S. Vorobkevich were characterised by a high artistic level. Particular attention was devoted to the talents within the troupe, including Sevilla Pastor (1905–1981), although audience interest was described as moderate (Theatre, 1931). But with every performance, the auditorium grows increasingly empty. The Uzhhorod public showed little interest in attending theatre performances.

In July 1932, the “Baratoff Troupe” arrived in the region. Director, actor, and impresario Paul Brenner (Baratov, 1873–1951) performed under the pseudonym Ben-Zvi Baratoff (Fig. 6). A reviewer for the Uzhhorod newspaper “Zsidó Néplap” reported that the internationally known Baratov Jewish theatre troupe scheduled performances across several cities of the region in 1932, including Mukachevo, Berehove, Khust, Yaseny, and Uzhhorod. Particular attention was devoted to Dr. Paul Baratoff, whose acting was characterised as original and highly artistic, and whose appearance was regarded as a significant event for admirers of Jewish theatre. At the same time, criticism was directed toward the management of the troupe under Zacharias Franzos, whose previous theatrical activities were described negatively in relation to other Jewish theatre companies (Theatre Baratoff, 1932). After the troupe’s first performance in Uzhhorod, the press wrote that Baratov’s acting was not acting, but reality, an event, a slice of turbulent life. Particularly unforgettable were roles in the dramas “The Father” by A. Strindberg, “Hinkemann” by E. Toller, and “The God of Vengeance” by S. Ashi. But no less successful was actor’s performance in the American comedy “The Underworld”, where was also demonstrated unsurpassed mastery. Baratov’s worthy partners included: Henrietta Schlitt, Ola Slivkovitz (1910–date of death unknown), Clara Meisels (Friedhofer, 1896–1960), Yakov Shigorin, Boris Sigal (1885–date of death unknown), Herman Tunis, and actor and playwright Moshe Shnatman (Mikhail Shnaidov), who formed a wonderful ensemble. At the general request of the audience, the “Baratoff Troupe” continued its tour during 1932 in Uzhhorod: on Saturday, 1932 “Der Mezamet” by Berkovich; in the evening: “The Five Children of Nachez” by Gorin (Theatre, 1932).



Figure 6. Pol Baratoff, 1930s

Source: based on I. Bercovici (1982)

In January 1933, “Habimah” submitted a request to perform at the municipal theater in Uzhhorod but Uzhhorod audiences were in no hurry to buy tickets to the shows. It was reported that after the second week the troupe had begun performing to nearly empty halls, while financial difficulties became so severe that the actors lacked sufficient funds to leave the city. On this basis, the absence of significant demand for Jewish theatre among the Jewish population of Uzhhorod was noted (A Habimah Jewish Theatre..., 1933). In the summer of 1933, “Habimah” returned to Uzhhorod with its productions, in which the leading role was played by the theatre and film actress Lydia Patotska. In August 1933, the second branch of the Vilnius Jewish Theater Troupe (“Vilner Trupe”), led by Józef Kamen (Stein, 1900–1942), arrived in Uzhhorod. In the 1930s, the “Vilner Trupe” (Fig. 7) split into several groups that toured various countries. Actors affiliated with the “Vilner Trupe” toured almost continuously from the establishment of the troupe in 1915 until its dissolution in 1935. Initially, performances were staged in small towns and cities throughout Poland, while later гастрольна діяльність expanded to Austria, Romania, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, England, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. These theatrical activities were carried out within the framework of complex multidirectional migration routes between countries and continents (Caplan, 2014). The troupe’s director, Y. Kamen, led one such company, which performed in cities across Romania and travelled to Transcarpathia with the plays “Richi, China!” by S. Tretyakov, “The Mutiny in the Penitentiary” by P. Lampel, and “The Deaf Man”, based on the work by D. Bergelson. The local newspaper reported that the troupe, featuring Y. Kamen and his wife Dina König (1907–1964), presented the finest Jewish dramatic works over four days. As for the touring sets for the productions of “Vilner Trupe”, they were always created in accordance with the established requirements: stage sets, costumes, lighting equipment, and props were required to remain highly portable regardless of the artistic preferences of directors or designers. Scenic elements were designed to be easily dismantled for transportation in railway carriages, while props and costumes were intentionally made lightweight and compact. Lighting arrangements also had to be adaptable and readily reproducible in a wide variety of performance spaces, ranging from large proscenium theatres in European capitals to converted barns and temporary tents in rural areas (Caplan, 2014).

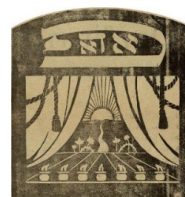


Figure 7. Logo of the “Vilner Trupe”, 1916

Source: based on D. Caplan (2014)

In January 1937, following performances in Mukachevo and Uzhhorod, the theater troupe led by Salo Pryzament and Giza Haydn opened its tour in the grand hall of the “Korona” hotel. The Uzhhorod newspaper “Uj Közlöny” reported that the theatre management had borrowed the necessary stage equipment from the city authorities. Particular attention was devoted to Giza Haydn, whose performances were distinguished by vocal mastery and a successful repertoire, contributing to her widespread recognition. Salo Prizamant was likewise identified as one of the leading figures of the troupe due to his notable acting abilities, strong vocal performance, and central role in the artistic activity of the company (Theatre “Haor”, 1937). The troupe’s repertoire consisted of the plays “The Little Thief” by S. Talman, “The Bride of Marmaros”, “The Girl Who Fell from the Fire”, “The Jewish Violinist”, “Passionate Love”, “Two Kuni-Lemls”, and “Auf der Kayt in Pulisch”. The Uzhhorod newspaper “Zsidó Néplap” reported that troupe’s principal strengths were associated with the performances of Giza Haydn, Salo Prizamant, Kalmen Gutman (1901–1945, killed in action), Rosa Gutman, Jacob Relis (Leizer, 1878–1941), Salcia Waldberg (née Sara Licht, 1878–1940), and Herman Waldberg (1863–1942). Particular attention was devoted to Prizamant, who functioned not only as the leading performer, but also as the author and composer of the staged works, whose musical compositions were characterised by artistic maturity and memorability (Theatre, 1937a).

In 1937, Siegler-Pastor theater troupe, led by Moise Siegler (Moritz or Moses Beiser, 1878–1965), arrived. From 1908 to 1915, Moritz Siegler served as director of the “Jewish Stage” in Vienna. In 1920, together with his wife Rosa, their three children, and Muni Pastor (Fig. 8), he founded the travelling theater troupe “Siegler-Pastor”. I. Bercovici (1982) noted that the members of the “Siegler-Pastor” troupe were Rosa Siegler (née Aron, 1888–date of death unknown), Muns Pastor (stage name Abraham Moses Pasternak, 1898–1941/1944, died in a concentration camp in Poland), Erna Siegler (1911–date of death unknown), actor and director Samuel Leresco (Shmuel Lerer, 1876–date of death unknown) and his wife Adela Leresco (Kerner, 1886–date of death unknown), Burach (Borch) Rintzler, Shmuel Iris (1889–1960), the orchestra was conducted by the young violinist Marcel Kreisler and Seville Pastor. After the Anschluss of Austria to Nazi Germany, the troupe toured the Carpathian Ruthenia until the group disbanded (Dalinger, 2003).

Sevilla Pastor (née Sevilla Ziegler, 1905–1981), together with the company’s stars (Erna Ziegler, Dolly Nahbar, Muns Pastor, Rosa Ziegler, Isaac Havish (Isi, Yitzhak Havish, 1910–1991), and conductor Zon Polyakov (d. 1941), staged several performances (“Samuel’s Mission” by A. Zweig) at the recently renovated Uzhhorod City Theater. The Hungarian newspaper “Zsidó Néplap” reported in its pages that “performances by the Jewish troupe will take place: June 15–17 in Khust; June 19–24 in Mukachevo; June 26–30 in Uzhhorod” (Theatre, 1937b). Each visit by the Yiddish theater troupe allowed residents of the region to

enjoy the actors’ performances, discovered new plays, and experience theatrical culture, demonstrating a close national connection in the shared cultural development of national art (Sandrow, 1996). In January 1938, the Warsaw Jewish theater troupe “Habimah” (directed by Moise Lipman) began a tour in Uzhhorod. Moise Yakub Lipman was one of the founders of the State Jewish Theater in Odesa. In the 1920s, Lipman toured Galicia and performed in theaters in Warsaw. In 1926, he became the director of the Skala Theater (Łódź, Poland), in 1928, the artist collaborated with the Warsaw Theater under the direction of Abraham Isaac Kaminsky (1867–1918). Starting in 1929, director began working actively in film (Fig. 9). Among the plays presented in Uzhhorod “Motke the Villain”, “God of Vengeance” (“Got Fun Nekome”) by S. Ashi, “Yoshe Kalb” by J. Singer, “The Street Child” by V. Sigel, and “The Dybbuk” by S. Ansky were particularly successful. In which the troupe’s actors performed – Nukhem Turkov (Jonas Turkov, 1898–1988), Moise Lipman (1893–1947), Natalia Lipman (1890–date of death unknown). In October 1938, when Hitler’s army invaded Czechoslovakia, the troupe disbanded (Museum of Family History, n.d.).



Figure 8. Sevilla and Muns Pastor, 1930s

Source: based on I. Bercovici (1982)



Figure 9. Moshe Lipman

in the film “In the Polish Wilderness”, 1929

Note: director: Jonas Turkov

Source: Shtetl Routes (n.d.)

On March 18, 1939, Transcarpathia was occupied by Hungarian troops. A large-scale anti-Jewish campaign began, culminating in a wave of deportations to

ghettos and camps. Itinerant Jewish theater troupes stopped coming to the region to perform their plays. Actors from many Jewish theaters emigrated to Argentina (Solomon and Clara Stramer, Elsa Rabinovich, Morris Pelz, Esther Rappell, Samuel Silberberg, Sara Kanner, Leon Berger, Iris Shmuel); the United States (Paul Baratov); Australia (Sara Silvia); South Africa (Vera Kanevska, Paul Breitman), and Israel (Moshe Shnatman). Those who did not manage to emigrate were deported to concentration camps or death camps (Auschwitz, Oswiecim, Belzec, Treblinka). The Yiddish theater of the 1920s–1930s was an international phenomenon in the theatrical culture of Transcarpathia, created by various travelling Jewish troupes that brought the best theatrical traditions from different countries to the region. The findings of this study were consistent with a number of articles and works that have examined Jewish culture and Yiddish theatre from various perspectives. For example, T. Stepanchykova (2005) examined the social and cultural life of Galicia and the emergence and development of professional Jewish theatre. I. Meleshkina (2020) researched the history and activities of Jewish theatres in Ukraine during the 19th and 20th centuries. The authors provided a detailed and well-founded account of theatrical elements in traditional Jewish culture, from the emergence of amateur troupes through the brief flourishing of Jewish cultural life to its dramatic decline under the pressure of anti-Semitic policies. B. Pinchevska (2013) sought to shift the perspective of Ukrainian academic art history regarding the subject of Jewish art as an independent cultural and artistic phenomenon that developed separately within a specific multi-ethnic region. M. Abramowicz (2022) presented a detailed history of Polish Jewish theatre, beginning with the earliest theatrical performances, through the performances of travelling theatre troupes, to productions following the World War II. The study was based on a large number of Polish and German sources (archives, libraries, including the memoirs of actors such as Jonas Turkov, who performed regularly in Uzhhorod in the 1930s). S. Simakova (2023) conducted historical research into the preservation of the memory of the Kyiv Jewish Theatre. The researcher worked with first-hand accounts from people, who were involved in the theatre's activities during the 1980s and early 1990s. D. Caplan & R. Moss (2023) examined the finest production of the Yiddish play the “Dybbuk”, which had served as an answer to the question of Jewish identity. For many audience members, the play marks their first encounter with Jewish culture. The scholars analysed various productions of this play and reveal the secrets behind its enduring presence on the theatrical stage. This research had highlighted the conclusion that

Jewish theatre, with its deep historical roots, was regarded as an evolutionary aspect of national culture. The history of Jewish theatre was a history of journeys, the movement of productions and theatre companies, and the migration of artists and audiences.

CONCLUSIONS

A study of itinerant Jewish theater troupes in the theatrical landscape of Transcarpathia reviewed the activities of Yiddish-language Jewish theaters in Transcarpathia during their heyday between 1920 and 1930. The art of Jewish theater was examined in relation to national and regional cultural traditions. Throughout its history, the Jewish Yiddish theater had worked to preserve folk traditions and promote Jewish drama. After the outbreak of World War II and the Holocaust, records of Jewish theater activities and the subsequent fate of the artists came to an abrupt end. Most representatives of Jewish theater perished in the ghettos or emigrated to other countries. Yiddish theatre lived on in the cultural heritage and in the memories of audiences, remaining forever an important part of the country's cultural history. It had been established that the origins of the itinerant Jewish Yiddish theater influenced the subsequent development of theatrical culture in Transcarpathia during the 20th century. For example, the theatre companies “Haor”, “Habimah”, “Vilner Trupe”, “Zigler-Postor”, and the troupes led by Leon Berger, Paul Baratov, Solo Prizament and Moise Lipman became a significant milestone in the development of Jewish cultural life in the region. Reports on the theatres' touring performances made the front pages of the local press, but all publications noted the high standard of professional performance. The touring activities of Jewish Yiddish theatres proved decisive for the creative development of the Transcarpathian Ukrainian Music and Drama Theatre and the Mukachevo Drama Theatre during the period 1946–1980. A prospect for further research is the examination of stage design and theatrical costume as a continuation of the theme of Jewish (Yiddish) theatre within the context of the multicultural theatrical environment of 20th-century Transcarpathia.

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Олег Зайцев

Доктор філософії з культурології, заслужений працівник культури України
м. Ужгород, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8571-2186>

Мандрівні єврейські їдиш трупі в театральному просторі Закарпаття (1920–1930 роки): культурологічний аспект

Анотація. Актуальність цього дослідження зумовлена необхідністю наукового розуміння розвитку еволюції єврейського їдиш театру в театральному просторі Закарпаття 1920–1930-х років. До квітня 2026 року мандрівний єврейський театр на Закарпатті не вивчався, тому ця наукова тема залишилася маловивченою. Мета дослідження – дослідити та систематизувати мандрівні єврейські їдиш театри, розглянути витoki та динаміку театральних виступів в театральній культурі Закарпаття 1920–1930-х років. Єврейський театр залишився важливою частиною української культурної спадщини, еволюціонуючи від театральних студій та державних театрів. Їдиш театр завжди був осередком мистецького середовища, транслуючи єврейську культуру через театральне мистецтво. Методологія дослідження ґрунтувалася на використанні діалектичного, аналітичного, культурологічного, історичного, біографічного та узагальнюючого методів. У дослідженні було проаналізовано вплив мандрівних єврейських їдиш колективів на розвиток театральної культури регіону та було встановлено, що гастрольні маршрути театрів проходили через великі міста регіону (Ужгород, Мукачево, Хуст, Берегово). Репертуар театрів відзначався жанрово-змістовою різноманітністю, охоплюючи всі вікові категорії глядачів, водночас, враховуючи вподобання публіки, на сцені театрів надавалась перевага музичним виставам. Окрім розважальних вистав, виконувалися п'єси, які базувалися на національній єврейській драматургії, які актуалізували питання єврейської приналежності. Творчий склад театрів формувався з талановитих акторів, режисерів, музикантів з Румунії, Польщі, Австрії, Литви, України. Їх доля співпала з культурним розквітом театру, а завершена – репресіями, еміграцією, депортацією до концентраційних таборів та центрів смерті. Практичне значення дослідження полягало в можливості використання його результатів для вивчення історії театру та їх застосуванні у сфері театрознавства та культурології у збереженні національної ідентичності в дослідженні театального мистецтва регіонів

Ключові слова: єврейська спадщина; регіональна культура; сценічне мистецтво; вистава; актор; еміграція; Голокост
