

“ROBBY, SHOW ME YOUR MAP AGAIN,” I asked. We had flagged down a cab in the now Ukrainian, once Jewish-Polish, city of L’viv (formerly Lwów, Lemberg, or Lvov, depending on when and whom you asked), in search of former Jewish glory. “Your Austrian map has Polish street names on it. What are they called now?” I said to Robby, annoyed that our primary means of navigating an excursion through this bustling city of eastern Galicia was a 90-year-old map from his tattered Baedeker guidebook. Clearly, our forty-something Ukrainian driver had no idea how to find what we were looking for, the site of a former Jewish sports club of Austro-Hungarian Lemberg. Not being able to speak Ukrainian very well, I asked him in Russian, the lingua franca of the Soviet Union and the language that ended up as our primary means of communication in contemporary Ukraine.

After driving ten minutes toward the edge of town, we thought we might be near the right place. We got out, paid the driver, and began our search for ghosts, something we would repeat often during our ten-day Jewish literary journey through Ukraine. We were the two scholarly experts filling in the historical, literary, and cultural landscape for 15 American Jewish tourists who had plenty of questions, opinions, and ideas.

In some ways, Robby’s 1913 map of Lemberg and my 2006 map of L’viv were a lot alike. We frequently laid one on top of the other and noted the similar curving arcs of the main streets, along with the town squares that had changed little in structure in the 90 years, two world wars, and three countries that lay between them. But the names on the two maps were different, the scripts were written in different alphabets, and the inhabitants of our respective maps were from two different worlds. In our attempt to collapse time and space in search of Jewish literary culture, we often found ourselves witnessing a battle between the ghosts of Robby’s map and the living inhabitants of mine. In this instance we were searching for a Jewish sports stadium built at the turn of the 20th century as the home of Hasmonea Lwów, one of Central and Eastern Europe’s most well known sports teams. Robby seemed convinced that his map was more correct than the empty reality before our eyes, so we crossed busy Lychakivska Street and began wandering through the trees. As the forest began to thin, not more than 500 meters from the main street, we saw an expanse and looked down into a decaying stadium, what was once one of the crowns of Lemberg Jewry.

“My Jewish ghosts trump your map and your skeptical Ukrainian cab driver,” Robby declared as I photographed him out on the field where Jewish runners used to compete against their Ukrainian and Polish counterparts. The sign saying “No One on the Field” would not stop this reunion between two young scholars of Eastern European Jewish history and their vanished subjects.

As it turned out, my interest in the living helped us locate the club where Jewish men and women trained for their competitions. “Go up to those ladies and ask them if this was the old Jewish club,” Robby insisted. During our ten-day trip, I frequently found myself translating in Russian between Robby’s Yiddish-speaking ghosts and the very much alive Ukrainian-speaking residents whom we had to ask for directions, help, and occasionally stories about the past.

“Izvenite pozhaluista. Do voiny zdes byl li kakoi-to evreiskii sportivnyi klub?”

“Excuse me. Before the war did this used to be some kind of Jewish athletic club?”

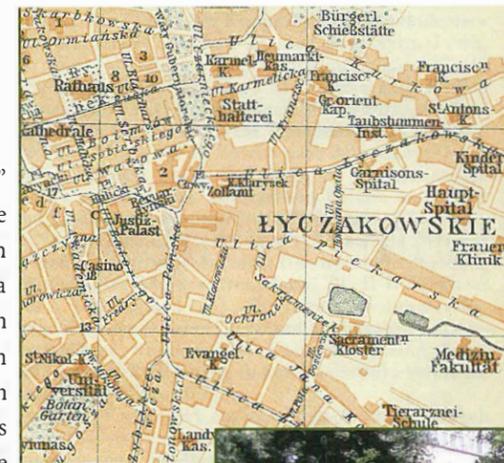
I have lived on and off in Russia and traveled throughout the former Soviet Union since I was a teenager. As a historian of Russian Jewry, I like to commune not just with the ghosts I study but also with the people who inhabit the world of today. Of course, I understood why the past took precedence over the present during a tour like this. This was a form of Jewish heritage travel, even though we were more intent on placing Jewish culture in its real Ukrainian landscape than in making pilgrimages to sites of mass murder. Nonetheless, the narrative running through the heads of most American Jews when they meet Ukrainians is either “You’re old enough to have been here during the war, what did you do to the Jews?” or “I’ve heard the

Ukrainians were the worst anti-Semites.” Wartime Ukrainian collaboration with the Nazis is well documented, real anti-Semitism still exists, and the occasional swastika scrawled on a Jewish grave or building in 2006 only supports the stories. But American antagonism also extinguishes interest in talking to the old women in former sports clubs, to cab drivers, or even to the few people who actually know something about the Jewish past. To most American Jews visiting Ukraine, the inhabitants of contemporary Ukraine were merely mediums for the ghosts of the twentieth century, effectively invisible as citizens of their own complicated world.

The coat-check lady we asked had, typically, “absolutely no idea” where the club had been located. I wasn’t surprised. Nazi and Soviet control of Lwów-Lemberg-Lvov-L’viv radically changed the demographics of the town in a violent process we now call ethnic cleansing. Under the Austro-Hungarian empire, Lwów was Polish, Jewish, and German, with a small Ukrainian minority, with German the state language and most often the language of high culture. In interwar Poland, German faded from the streets to be replaced by the new state language, Polish. When the Soviets (or in the minds of most Lvivians, the Russian imperial conquerors) occupied the city in 1939, Russian replaced Polish, which went from being the language of the state to the language of the “fascist,” “nationalist” Poles, who were the most frequently deported ethnicity under Soviet occupation.

In 1941 the invading German army brought in Ukrainians, who had not fared well under either Polish or Soviet rule. This time the Germans and Ukrainians did not just deport, but killed the centuries-old Jewish presence in the city. They did their job more thoroughly than any previous or future ethnic cleansing and left only remnants – the remnants we were searching for. When the Soviets reoccupied the city in 1944, they turned Lvov into an important center of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, with Ukrainian and Russian the chief languages and ethnic Ukrainians and Russians making up the bulk of the city’s population.

According to our local guide, the population of L’viv in 2006 is 85 percent Ukrainian, ten percent Russian, and five percent miscellaneous Poles, Jews (who primarily moved there after the war), and others. So it should not have been a surprise that neither the coat-check lady nor the cab



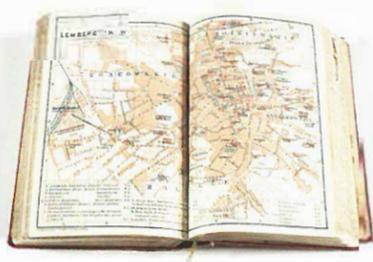
Left: Detail from the 1913 Baedeker showing the Lychakivska Street area. Below: A streetcar used to bring fans directly to the Hasmonea Lwów stadium. Behind the retaining wall was the immense football pitch, now the site of a factory.



driver nor more or less anyone in the city knew anything about the ghosts we were seeking. They all were essentially first-generation L’vivians, new residents who lived in the apartments emptied out by the Poles, Germans, and Jews who, once upon a time, made the city one of the most cosmopolitan in Europe.

Instead, our would-be informant directed us to an older gentleman who used to coach sports at the club and knew some of its history. He showed us the locker rooms, a fencing area where Jewish teams used to spar, and the track on which Jewish runners competed. Robby and I both felt ghosts that day as we stood imaginatively filling the silent stadium with the cheers of crowds as the Jewish team raced (and, we both hoped, won) against the Polish one. We thanked the gentleman, made our way back through the forest to Lychakivska Street, and hailed a cab to the center of town, this time using my Ukrainian map to bring us back to the present. **PT**

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Two Jews, Two Maps

BY DAVID SHNEER