

MILITARY ACTION IN SECURING AND RESTORING ORDER DURING THE POGROMS IN BESSARABIA IN 1903 AND 1905

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The Russian Empire, an autocratic state with strong remnants of feudal caste law, was based on a legal system that aimed to intimidate the citizenry in order to defend and preserve the existing anachronistic social order. Various specialized state institutions were responsible for the security of the regime and internal order, among which the armed forces. The tsarist authorities widely used military units in the fight against mass demonstrations and the preservation of public order. In this paper, based on the vast new documentary material from the national archives of the Republic of Moldova, we will demonstrate the actions of the military units in order to save the Jewish population of Bessarabia during the pogroms of 1905 and 1907.

Keywords: Bessarabia; pogrom; regiment; infantry; self-defence;

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian Empire had a vast Jewish diaspora, deprived of political and civic rights following the adoption of a whole series of anti-Jewish laws, required to reside in pre-established exclusive areas of residence. According to the first general census of the Russian Empire, held at the end of the 19th century, 5,215,825 Jews lived in the empire, which constituted 4.15% of the entire population, of which in Bessarabia – 229,000, that is 11.7 % of the population of the region (Nistor, 1991, p. 213). The massive concentration of the Jewish population in the urban centres of Bessarabia led to numerous anti-Semitic tensions, which sometimes ended with the outbreak of violence in the form of pogroms, the most famous of which is the pogrom in Chișinău, from 1903.

THE POGROM IN THE SPRING OF 1903 IN CHIȘINĂU AND THE ATTEMPTS OF THE ARMED FORCES TO REPRESS THE MASSACRES

Since March 1903, the Gubernial Directorate of the Independent Corps of Gendarmes in Bessarabia, through its head, Colonel V. Charnoluskij, and his subaltern, the rittmaster, Baron von Levendal, head of the guard section of Bessarabia Department for the Defence of Public Security and Order (Ohranka), warned the authorities of St. Petersburg about the tense situation created in Chișinău and the imminent outbreak of a massacre on the Jewish population in the city (Новицкий, 1991, p. 177). Due to them, the gubernial authorities, in the person of the governor, Lieutenant General Rudolf von Raaben, sensing that, on Easter eve, the spirits were getting hot in the city, strengthened the city guard, detaching armed patrols from the military garrison of Chișinău to the police. At that time, the Chișinău garrison was an imposing military force, composed of two infantry regiments (53rd Volania Infantry Regiment and 54th Minsk Infantry Regiment), a reserve infantry battalion (207th Chișinău Reserve Infantry Battalion), an artillery brigade (14th Artillery Brigade) and a cavalry regiment (24th Lubensk Dragon Regiment). However, what followed also surpassed the bleakest predictions about the existing situation. For three days, between 6 and 8 April 1903, the city was engulfed in the explosion of a deadly hatred towards the Jewish population, degenerated into the massacre.

51 people were killed, 456 were injured, 1,350 homes of the 4,149 existing in the city were vandalized (Джадж, 1998, p. 86), the amount of damage amounting to about two million rubles (Ib.). In such cases, the main question is how could such a thing happen, who was the culprit, and where were the armed forces?

We must examine this question in the context of previous investigations, paying special attention to the analysis of overlooked moments in the past that can shed new light on the course of events. Most researchers observed that the events were unexpected by local authorities, who were not expecting a crisis. As in previous years, the patrols deployed to the police bodies from the military units were not numerous, the reserve being composed of several groups gathered from all the infantry units of the garrison, without internal cohesion and single command, the number not exceeding 1.5 infantry companies (Кишиневский погром, 2000, p. 224). The military authorities allowed soldiers to freely exit the city, on 5 April, to participate in the midnight Easter service. Despite the increasingly tense situation in the city, the permissions were not cancelled for 6 April. However, the commanders told the military to return to the unit in the event of an exceptional occurrence. The commanders' decision made it hard to gather the units on alarm and use them efficiently when necessary. In the case of the 54th Minsk Infantry Regiment, which was gathered in its full composition on 6 April, well after 16:00, some of the soldiers returned from leave were intoxicated (ASPORM, collection 90, inventory 3, file 5, p. 2). Not all the soldiers on leave arrived at the units, some of them, unidentified, were observed among pogromists, such as the soldier Ion Burduja, who was on leave, as well as former servicemen, demobilized from the army, Ion Vacari, Pavel Veto, Vasile Sarban, Anton Dulghier, Fyodor Gornostaev, Macarie Malasenco (Кишиневский погром, p. 278). The occasional participation of the military (former and active duty) in the events, with their combat experience, explains why the pogromists were acting methodically, based on "a plan" (Джадж, p. 64), but spontaneously, which excludes the hypothesis that the massacre was organized and directed by obscure forces, not yet elucidated.

The first day of the massacre, 6 April, demonstrated that police bodies, reinforced with military patrols, were barely coping with the events in their early stages. The police justifications for the lack of staff (213 policemen for a city with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants) are out of criticism and would be correct under conditions of lack of an army aid. Joint patrols, which consisted of soldiers and policemen without any orders to fire, were under the general command of police workers, but were utilized inefficiently due to the lack of communication and coordination of actions between them. The chief of police, A. Hanjenkov, though former career military and senior officer in the cavalry, instead of taking over the general

command over the operation of repressing the pogrom, during the period between 13.00 and 16.00, was traveling on the streets of Chișinău, inspecting the main markets where people gathered agitated, urging them to scatter, action that was at hand of a sector policeman and the police chief. The scattering of the aggressive crowd on the Ciuflea market, which took place after 16.00, was not followed by the operation of mass arrests of aggressive people. Even those arrested were released from the hands of the police by their comrades, indicating the impossibility of the police and the army to respond to the crowd (Кишиневский погром, p. 218). The dispersed crowd, yet not arrested, spread through the streets adjacent to all the districts of the city, clustered around informal, aggressive leaders, some with military experience, forming small bands in the number of 10-20 people, having children in the vanguard, strengthened by adults in the second echelon. Soon, simultaneous unrest began in several parts of the city. Joint patrols of the military and police were forced to act separately from each other, on several directions, in the absence of coordination and the linkage system established in advance, dispersing the common effort of the law enforcement forces, few in number and without a consistent reserve. It was not due to the existence of a plan drawn up in advance by anonymous leaders of the massacre, but to the logic of the events and mistakes admitted by the authorities, of which the pogromists took full advantage. Among the errors committed by the authorities was that the cavalry was not involved in scattering the crowd divided into small groups, the cavalry being the only military force capable of acting at high speed in the city streets. Only in the evening, after he realized that he could not keep the situation under control, the police chief, A. Hanjenkov addressed the governor of Bessarabia, Lieutenant General R. von Raaben, who in turn redirected him to the head of the Chișinău garrison, Lieutenant General V. Bekman, where A. Hanjenkov arrived only after 20:00 (Ib., p. 224), when the situation in the city had already calmed down. Following the consultations, it was decided that, on 7 April, 9 infantry companies and 6 cavalry squadrons would be deployed to police bodies, without the right to open fire (Ib., p. 225). It caused further violence, starting on the morning of 7 April. And that time too, the military and the police did not act in coordination, passing responsibility from one to the other. Considerable military forces were concentrated in the central park, waiting for an alleged political demonstration that did not take place. However, because of that expectation, they were stationed until noon, instead of participating in the suppression of disorder. Considerable military forces were deployed to guard the homes of the infantry brigade commander, Major General Glebov, and the commanders of regiments and battalions, as well, being excluded from actions of restoring the rule of law (ASPORM, collection 90, inventory

3, file 5, p. 3). The passivity of the mixed military-police teams, who understood their task in guarding the communication arteries and dispersing the crowd, not wanting to sanction the arrests (Кишиневскийпогром, p. 333), unleashed the crowd, the Jews being simultaneously assaulted in all the districts and suburbs of the city. More determined in the scattering of the aggressive crowd were the dragons, but also in their case the criminal ingenuity of the killers found its way out in a tactical combat process – sneaking, one by one, among the cavalymen's horses (Ib., p. 260). The authorities failed to control the situation in Chișinău.

At 15:30, taking into account the gravity of the situation, the governor of Bessarabia, R. von Raaben, delegated, in writing, to the head of the military garrison in Chișinău, Lieutenant-General V. Bekman, all powers in the suppression of massacres, with the right to open fire. At 16:00, General V. Bekman issued an order on the garrison to assume full power, dividing the city into several sectors, distributed to units with the right to use the weapons. Starting at 17.00, after the order was brought to the attention of the staff, measures started to repress the pogrom, making mass arrests, which were carried out quite quietly, and, it was not necessary to open the fire, using only the bayonets and the weapon grips in the inventory. The authorities were able to control the situation by midnight, except for the suburbs where the massacres continued until 8 April in the evening. In the massacres and killings in the suburbs were involved the Moldovan population, thus excluding the influence of the written press, even the newspaper of P. Crucean, because that population, in its majority, was illiterate.

In conclusion, we can say that the pogrom in April 1903 in Chișinău was based on the frustrations and grudges of a part of the pauperized population of the city, accumulated over several years against the Jewish community, spurred by verbal rumours, the role of the press, including reactionary, being marginal in a predominantly illiterate region. The magnitude of the tragedy was due to the confusion of the leadership of the governorate, who, at the moment, failed to exercise its power. The actions of the authorities were characterized by the lack of a single leadership, coordination of crowd repression actions, fear of opening fire on demonstrators and conducting mass arrests among the rebels. It was only after the authorities returned from the shock, losing a day and a half, that they began to act concentrated and efficiently, using military force to extinguish the outbreaks of massacres existing in the city.

MILITARY ACTIONS IN THE SUPPRESSION OF JEWISH MASSACRES IN 1905

More serious consequences and amplitude had the pogroms in Bessarabia in October 1905, which is less known, being practically ignored in historiography. On 17 October 1905, after the news about the issuance of the Proclamation by Nicolai II on improving the state order, the revolutionary forces participated in a political rally, where about 10,000 people gathered. In opposition to that rally, the pro-government forces planned a patriotic demonstration in support of the monarchy and the rule of law on 18 October. On the morning of that day, about 5,000 people gathered in the Ciuflea square, from where they started, at 11:00, to the Cathedral, holding the Russian national flags and portraits of Nicolai II. At the intersection of Armenian streets with Aleksandrovskaya (Bld. Stephen the Great), on the demonstrators, a fire salvo was fired by some unknown people, which caused the aggressive reaction of the crowd. The vicinity of the New Square (now Central Square) determined the crowd to begin looting, temporarily stopped by the rittmaster of the independent body of the Vasiliev gendarmes, delegated by the authorities to accompany the demonstration. The situation repeated itself at the next intersection with str. Kupeceskaia (current str. Vasily Alecsandri). Again, the situation was saved by the Vasiliev commissioner (NARM, collection 297, inventory 1, file 40, p. 1 verso). Arriving in the cathedral square, the demonstrators took part in the prayer, when, unexpectedly, the bellboy on the cathedral bell tower began to shout that the Jews were robbing the shops of Gottlieb Gheer and Raymond Ghikish, where, among other things, firearms were sold. It is unclear how the boy, from a height of 40 meters, observed the nationality of looters operating on two neighbouring directions, even if at short distances from each other. The hectic crowd triggered the pogrom, which spread to all the districts of the city. Taking into account the experience of the 1903 pogrom, Bessarabian governor Alexei Haruzin convened an emergency operative meeting to which the commanders of the military units from the garrison were invited. At that meeting, it was decided to establish special police detachments for tracking pogromists, military units were given the right to open fire, including artillery, against the rebel resistance centres. In order to isolate the city from the suburbs and agrarian areas, detachments of free peasants were set up to stop other peasants on the way to Chișinău. Towards the end of the day, under threat of firearms, the massacres were stopped, but they resumed on 20 October, when rebel groups opened fire on the soldiers, killing and pillaging Jewish houses and shops. The use of armed forces, including several cannon salvos, ended the massacre. Between 18-20 October, 55 people were killed and 107 injured

(Ib., p. 2), 89 houses and shops were vandalized and looted, among them being those that did not belong to the Jews, such as that of Princess Evfrosinia Viazemskaiasau of Tudor Grițan, the amount of damage constituting about 24,690 rubles (Ib., pp. 2-11).

Unlike in 1903, the pogroms of 1905 spread throughout Bessarabia. The beginning was on 22 October, when the pogrom against the Jewish population in the locality broke out in Strășeni. Due to its proximity to the gubernia capital, the massacre was repressed on the same day (Ib., p. 17). Much worse was the situation at Akkerman (White Citadel), where, on 18 October, a political demonstration was held, turning into a general strike. Russian nationalist circles in the city obtained permission from the city hall to hold the rally in support of the government and the monarchy on 22 October. The head of the police, contrary to the rally, refused to provide police assistance in supervising the event, leaving the demonstrators to fend for themselves. After the divine service at the Cathedral, the demonstrators, with national flags, portraits of Nicolai II, intoning the national anthem, marched through the streets of the city and set off for the fairs Popusoi (Peremozhnevo) and Turlaca (Vypasne), the suburbs of Akkerman. There, they were joined by a group of locals, armed with bats, crowbars, axes and revolvers, who, along with the rest of the crowd, began to burn and rob Jewish houses and shops (Ib., p. 50). Upon returning to the city, the agitated crowd was stopped by a company of soldiers, but, bypassing it on the side streets, they entered the locality, thus starting the pogrom. Despite the fact that the army began to shoot at the aggressors, between 18:00 and 04:00, all Jewish shops were burned and destroyed, the city being engulfed in flames. Only after an additional company of soldiers was sent to Akkerman (White Citadel) in Bender (Tighina), the situation in the city was taken under control.

On 23 October, the bloodthirsty inhabitants of Popusoi (Peremozhnevo) and Turlaca (Vypasne) tried to enter the city again, but they were stopped by the fire of the army. As the Vasiliev rittmaster, chief aid to the Governorate of the Independent Corps of Gendarmes, mentioned in his report, the Russians in Popusoi (Peremozhnevo) and Turlaca (Vypasne) turned into real bandits, gathered in groups of 6-10 people armed with revolvers, who did not recognize any authority, terrorizing the wealthy sections of the population, including Russians, extorting from them money and material goods (Ib., p. 5). The Russian population at the Shabo (Shabo) fair, urged by the exploits of its fellow countrymen in Popusoi (Peremozhnevo) and Turlaca (Vypasne), attempted to plunder the local Jews, but they were stopped by armed patrols of French and German settlers, who, opening

fire, killed 2 and wounded 3 attackers. On 25-26 October, incidents occurred in the localities Divizia, Chebabcea (Shyroke), Monași (Monashi), Bairamcea (Mykolaivka), resulting in looting the Jewish population in these localities. It was hard and with the help of the army to restore order in the land of Akkerman (White Citadel). 70 people, Russian and Jewish, were killed and wounded (Ib., p. 50 verso).

A serious situation was also in Ismail, where, on 22 October, between 19:00 and 21:00, a political rally was organized in the city centre by revolutionary circles, at which were discussed the political consequences of the Proclamation of 17 October 1905. After the rally, some of the participants, representing the unskilled workers in the port, some of them under the influence of alcohol, moved to the shopping district, where they began to destroy the Jewish little shops (Ib., p. 34 verso). The situation in the city worsened dramatically on 23 October, when, starting at 12:00, the crowd, numbering about 200 people, composed of teenagers and workers, started to burn and destroy the Jewish shops. The city authorities, in a state of confusion, repeated the mistakes made by those in Chișinău, in 1903, being unable to resist the massacres, in conditions where they had local police reinforced with two platoons of the Independent Border Corps. It is also worth mentioning the behaviour of the collaborators of the gendarmerie corps who, in the tragic events of Ismail, made efforts to appease the spirits. Thus, sergeant Moisei Seledin and vahtmaster Semion Savel put out the fire that engulfed a shop, and sergeant Anton Carlashevski defended on the streets of the city a large Jewish family from the rage of the crowd, saving them from death. In contrast, it was the behaviour of the local clergy, who involuntarily, instead of settling, stirred the spirits. Arriving in the evening of 23 October at the "New" Square, which was covered with flames, the clergy, wearing festive garment, with crosses and flags, was greeted by the crowd with cheers and shouts "Hooray"! Stopping from the robbery during the clergy's urges to stop the massacre, the crowd immediately continued its criminal activity after the religious procession moved to the next burning object. Under the conditions when all the commercial part of Ismail was caught in flames, several hundred Jews, with the permission of the head of the customs, took refuge on a barge from the port of Ismail, in the customs department of Ismail, from which the walkway was removed to prohibit access at night (Ib., p. 35 verso).

To put an end to the pogrom that continued through the night, Colonel N. Rogovschi, the commander of the Ismail Border Brigade, strengthened the local troops with guard troops, moving to action, starting at 01:00, with the rest of the troops in the city, opening fire on the attackers. Towards 05:00, on 24 October, following the energetic actions of the soldiers, who, at night, by the opening

of the fire, killed 10 people and wounded 11, all unskilled workers, order in the city was restored (Ib., p. 37). However, the city was still panicked and many Jewish families and state officials crossed the Danube and took refuge in the Romanian villages of Satul Nou and Tulcea. With the introduction, on the streets of the city, of pedestrian and horseback patrols, the situation was taken under control, the city, starting on 25 October, returning to normal life. After the south, the centre of Bessarabia exploded. It all started in Călărași, on 23 October, the day of the fair, when many people from neighbouring villages gathered to do shopping. Around 10:00, a gunshot was heard that sparked the rage of the crowd, mostly composed of Moldovans, who began the devastation of shops and homes of the Jews. The town centre was set on fire, burning up to 150 Jewish houses. The Jewish population, about 2,000 souls, took refuge in the building of the state's former wine warehouse. Upon receiving the news about the outbreak of the pogrom in Călărași, there, by rail, was sent deputy governor S. Tatishchev, accompanied by a company of soldiers. When S. Tatishchev arrived at the scene, he blocked the village entrance for peasants in nearby villages and re-established order by opening fire against the robbers. In general, 40 people were killed following the pogrom in Călărași, most of them Jews, 5 of whom were burned alive (Ib., p. 26).

On 23-25 October, pogroms took place in the towns of northern Bessarabia – Mîndra, Dereneu, Rădeni, Hirova, Hoginești, Onișcani, Pitușca, Hîrtopul Mare, Paustova, Bîrnova, Bahmut, in which at least 14 Jewish households and dwellings were destroyed and 4 people were beaten, including peasant Peter Mezdra, cruelly beaten by the attackers, because he defended the Jewish families (Ib., pp. 47-48 verso).

CONCLUSION

Jewish pogroms in the autumn of 1905 had a much larger character than those in 1903, in Chișinău, 105 victims (killed) were certainly attested, and 70 people killed and wounded, without exact distinction, a total of 175 people (Ib.). The area of massacres encompassed the entire region, both urban and agrarian settlements. The practically simultaneous actions of the revolted in different geographical parts of Bessarabia suggest the existence of an alleged coordinating centre planning the deployment of pogroms. However, the documents in the archive do not confirm the existence of such a centre, which does not allow us to draw that conclusion. The 1905 pogrom, unlike the 1903 pogrom, had no media influence on the outbreak of massacres, which confirms the minor role of the press in the events of 1903.

At that time, the authorities reacted promptly to the challenges that arose, making extensive use of the armed forces, which acted in an organized, prompt and energetic manner, unhesitatingly opening fire on the robbers and murderers, hence the large number of victims. The lesson given by the authorities to the anti-Semitic elements was assimilated in the region as, until 1917, there were no anti-Jewish pogroms documented.

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