

Repressions of the OGPU-NKVD-NKGB against Gypsies 1932–1941: On newly discovered materials from Ukrainian archives

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This article deals with a little-explored part of the history of the Gypsies: the repressions against them by the Soviet state security organs in the 1930s and 1940s. The persecution and arrest of Gypsies, led by “King” Yegor Mihai and members of the Kwiek royal house, took place both during the terror period of the 1930s and in the early stages of the Second World War. The article is based on previously unknown documents of the Soviet special organs, which are kept in the Ukrainian archives. The analysis of these sources led to the conclusion that the OGPU-NKVD-NKGB repressions against the so-called foreign Roma were aimed at the complete “cleansing” of the cities in the USSR of the presence of this ethnic group.

Keywords: Gypsies (Roma), USSR, Poland, repressions, Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), People’s Commissariat for State Security (NKGB), Gypsy King Yegor Mihai, Kwiek royal dynasty

This article aims to fill the research gap on the coverage of the OGPU-NKVD-NKGB repressions against the “foreign” Gypsies (including the Gypsy Kings), especially during the Terror in the 1930s and at the beginning of the Second World War.¹ We will present previously unknown, newly discovered archival documents from the Rivne Archives that shed light on the fate of one of the Roma groups living on the territory of the Soviet Union, the *Kelderara*. The fate of the other Roma groups on the territory of the Soviet Union, who were not counted among the “foreigners,” is not the subject of this article.

1. OGPU – Joint State Political Directorate; NKVD – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs; NKGB – People’s Commissariat for State Security.

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Soviet power and the “foreign” Gypsies: Conceptual framework

From the moment of the coup d'état of October 1917, the Soviet Republic began a bitter and bloody struggle for its further existence. In this struggle, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was proclaimed by the Leninists who came to power. The indicated term was to remain only a declared euphemism covering nothing but the dictatorship of the ruling Bolshevik party. It could exist only with the help of a law enforcement agency endowed with punitive functions. The main instrument designed to ensure the construction of a “new socialist society” and protect it from the encroachments of internal and external enemies was the political police – the special services, successively called VChK–OGPU–NKVD–NKGB.

The first in this series was the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (VChK), founded on 20 December 1917. After the creation of USSR in 1922, the VChK was transformed into the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) under the Council of People's Commissars (SNK). In 1934, mass repressive measures were carried out in the USSR. These measures were aimed at “cleansing” the country of real and imaginary “enemies of the people” under the conditions of “the intensification of the class struggle and the development of socialism.” OGPU was incorporated into the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) as an independent unit and renamed the Main Directorate for State Security (GUGB). On 3 February 1941, in the early stages of the Second World War (USSR was directly involved in its outbreak), the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) was separated from the NKVD structure and became an independent department at the same level.

The oppression by the Soviet special services in the 1920s and 1930s had both class and national causes. The struggle against the class enemy within the Soviet space was accompanied by the struggle against the hidden external enemy discovered among the members of those national groups who not only lived in the only country of socialism (USSR) but were also located in the capitalist countries. Consequently, they fitted perfectly into the alleged role of the “external enemy.”

Of all the Roma who inhabited the territory of the new Soviet state, the *Kelderara* (coppersmiths) were the most suitable to be included in this category. This Roma group migrated en masse from the territories of the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (Fraser 1992: 131–43; Marushiakova and Popov 2004: 145–91), and from the second half of the nineteenth century their movement took the form of “the Gypsy Copper-smiths' invasion” (Winstedt 1913: 244–302). As a result, within a few years large masses of Gypsies changed their traditional places of residence and

settled almost everywhere in the world. They also reached the territory of the Russian Empire (Зіневич 2001: 47). This changed the structure of the local Roma community in the Russian Empire and added a new ‘nomadic’ element. The latter group was labelled “foreign Gypsies” (Russian иностранные цыгане and иноцыгане) by the Soviet special services and was subject to widespread persecution and systematic repression.

Archives of the OGPU-NKVD as a source on the history of the Gypsies

In modern historiography there are a number of studies dealing with the repressions against the Roma community in the USSR (Бессонов 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Бугай 2012; 2015; Марушиакова and Попов 2021). To this day, there is practically no reference in the historical literature to the persecution of Roma and the repressions against them by the NKVD-NKGB in the early stages of the Second World War. At that time, a large part of the Roma fled from German-occupied Poland to western Ukraine and western Belarus. The latter were included in the USSR in the early autumn of 1939. Information on these repressions is also missing from thematic collections on the tragedy of the Roma during the Second World War (Kenrick and Puxon 1995; Тяглий 2013; Бессонов 2020).

Researchers Jerzy Ficowski (Ficowski 1985) and Alicja Gontarek (Gontarek 2022) based their reconstructions of the life of Polish Roma in the interwar period exclusively on periodicals. Alicja Gontarek concluded that the press is the most important and only source on the subject, as it cannot be compared with archival documents, since the last ones perished during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944: “The history of the Gypsy elite has languished in the darkness of history and in obscurity ... we have to resign ourselves to the fact that there are no other sources” (Gontarek 2022: 328). From the perspective of a Ukrainian scholar with access to preserved sources on the ground, we can add that among the periodicals used as sources on the history of the Gypsy Kings, there were not only “sensational” articles in Polish periodicals (*Express Poranny*, *Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny*) (Gontarek 2022: 328); there is also serious information in political newspapers. For example, the organ of the leading Ukrainian political party in Galicia, the Ukrainian National Democratic Association (UNDO), the newspaper *Діло*. It referred very often to the Gypsy issue. In its pages there are publications about the election (*Діло* 1934a: 6; *Діло* 1935b: 7), the expulsion (*Діло* 1934b: 3), the overthrow (*Діло* 1935a: 7), the coronation (*Діло* 1937: 6) of Gypsy kings, and about the Gypsy congress in Warsaw (*Діло* 1938: 8), etc.

We must bear in mind that the history of the Roma community, especially the institution of the “Gypsy kings,” has been very rich, diverse, and dynamic

over several centuries. It could not but leave documentary traces in various countries and states, which are preserved but still too little researched. Despite the mass illiteracy of the ethnic group under study, information about them has been ceaselessly collected. The documents of state, political, public, religious, cultural, police, and many other institutions were preserved in the countries where the Roma lived. Their documentary traces can be found today in various archives, both private and public.

In our case, the “archival revolution” in Ukraine, which took place after 2015, played the decisive role in writing this article. At that time, the country’s parliament passed a law on free and unhindered access to documents of the Soviet special services (in particular, the OGPU-NKVD-NKGB bodies). In the State Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, in Ukraine – ГДА СБУ) in the city of Rivne, we found a number of documents created by employees of the OGPU-NKVD-NKGB of the USSR. These finds concern both the history of the Gypsies in general and the Gypsy kings issues *sensu stricto*.

Supervisory files (контрольно-наблюдательное дело, KND) No. 11828 (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828) and no. 17664 (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664) on persons arrested in 1941 who belonged to the Kwiek royal family contain not only investigative documents on these persons, but also materials from the 1930s relating to the suppression of Soviet Roma: excerpts from indictments, copies of interrogation protocols, a survey of materials on “foreign Gypsies,” a draft plan of measures to combat crime among “foreign Gypsies,” etc. Apparently, the last documents were received from Moscow in 1941 by the directorate of the NKGB (UNKGB) in the Rivne region to be used as supporting documents for the investigation of the Kwiek case.

Persecution of the “иноцыган” [foreign Gypsies] in the USSR 1932–1938

In USSR, the persecution of the “foreign Gypsies” by the OGPU began in 1932–1933. The reasons justifying the repressions were formulated in the criminal indictment against the liquidated “Gypsy group” led by Yegor Mihai (“Chula” / “Чула”), the “king” of the Gypsies in USSR. In the investigation documents he was accused of calling for a struggle against sedentarization, ignoring the measures of the Soviet government, banning Roma from serving in the Red Army, spreading anti-Soviet ideology, preventing the elimination of illiteracy among Roma in order to prevent Soviet influences among them, and conducting intelligence (espionage) activities in favour of Poland. According to the investigations, “Chula” maintained close contacts with his cousin, the king of the Polish Gypsies, Wasyl Kwiek, who had been received personally by Jozef Piłsudski on several occasions. Likewise, Wasyl Kwiek

came to Moscow in 1929 allegedly to facilitate the clandestine export of gold to Poland (75,000 roubles of the czar coinage) and to collect espionage reports (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 48–8 зб).

To this end, the Gypsies are said to have infiltrated important state institutions and military units under the guise of blacksmiths and tinkers, on the instructions of Yegor Mihai (“Chula”), who himself “worked for a long time at the headquarters of the OGPU division, in the cavalry unit of the VChK–OGPU and worked as a coppersmith in the Khamovniki and Chernyshevsky barracks” (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 48–58). “Chula” organized artels (teams) of tinsmiths, registered them with the Metal Association and employed his brother Toma Babako as head of the national minority sector there. From 1929 onwards, Yegor Mihai gathered up to 4,000 mostly Romanian Gypsies to Moscow, who he grouped into 34 tinkers’ artels. All the artels were structured according to the tribal principle, headed by the heads of the clans, who enjoyed unlimited power over the other members (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 26).

The investigators summarized the threat that the Gypsies posed to the Soviet government as follows:

Since they move freely on the territory of USSR, hide behind the national minorities, penetrate the strategic centres of defence and the military, live largely with forged documents, have strong mutual responsibility, and complex family and domestic relations that prevent class stratification, the Gypsies undoubtedly constitute very valuable material for the foreign intelligence services, mainly from Romania and Poland. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 55 зб.)

According to the testimony of Yankovich, a witness in the case of the “Gypsy group,” Yegor Mihai declared:

The Red Army exists for reprisals against us and for war. The Bolsheviks are preparing to fight primarily with Romania and Poland. Romania is our motherland and our Kwiek live and rule in Poland. The Polish Gypsies have been granted independence. We cannot fight with our own people, why should we go to the Red Army, service in the Red Army is a betrayal of the Gypsies, and for traitors there is only one punishment, death. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 58)

In the case of the “counter-revolutionary Gypsy group,” the Special Department of the Plenipotentiary Representation of the OGPU in the Moscow Region prosecuted a total of 61 persons under Article 58, paragraphs 6, 8, 10, 11 and Article 59, paragraph 12 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR): five members of the Kwiek royal family, the head of the security service and three of his assistants, ten tribal chiefs and eight of their deputies, 12 persons of the king’s personal guard, five

ordinary members of the Supreme Court, three “terrorists” and 14 “Polish secret service agents” (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 25).

The OGPU collegium sentenced the defendants on 2 September 1933 (there is also another date: 6 September 1933) to various prison terms from five to ten years in labour camps (рос.: исправительно-трудовой лагерь – ИТЛ). Some of them were imprisoned in the NKVD’s notorious Solovki prison until the autumn of 1937. In accordance with Order No. 59190 of 16 August 1937 issued by Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD, a special troika of the NKVD directorate (UNKVD) in the Leningrad region, chaired by Leonid Zakovsky, Commissioner 1st rank of State Security, sentenced 1,825 prisoners of Solovki Prison to death, including 12 Gypsies. Among them were prisoners from 1933 and 1935.

Execution protocol no. 198 of 25 November 1937 covers the Gypsies sentenced in Moscow on 2 September 1933:

- Mihai Toma Nikolaevich (Gogo Le-Balashesko),² born in 1893, a native of Romania, tinsmith;
- Mihai Vasily Petrovich (Toma Le Matasko),³ born 1889, native of Bucharest in Romania, tinsmith of the Metropromsoyuz factory in Moscow, illiterate;
- Mihai Rista Derdi (Toma De Mardyulako),⁴ born 1876, native of Bacau (Bacău) in Romania, coppersmith, illiterate;
- Mihai Drilla Dmitrovich, born in 1894, native of the town of Fokshany (Focșani) in Romania, a coppersmith, master, and supplier in the artel Red Zabaikalets,⁵ illiterate;
- Mihai Derdi Yankovich (Drilla Yutanesku), born 1897, native of Bucharest in Romania, tinsmith, almost illiterate;
- Mihai Vishan Dmitrievich, born in 1903, native of Romania, coppersmith, literate;
- Mihai Ivan Georgievich (Balo-Balisho Bulasko), born 1910, native of Bucharest in Romania, worker, literate;
- Stanesko Yergul Georgievich, native of Romania, worker, illiterate;
- Stanesko Nikolay Lotsevich (Yergulo Le Piadako), born 1876, nomad, unspecified occupation.

The list also includes three names of persons sentenced on 4 June 1935 by the

2. Probably Baliśésko, the misprint patronymic from Baliśó, lit. “pig.”

3. Probably Matísko, the misprint patronymic from Máti “Matthew.”

4. Misprint: Le.

5. “Red Transbaikalian” – an artel (copper-tinning production) – address: Moscow 18, Maryina Roshcha, 6th passage, 21.

Special Council of the NKVD to five years ITL “for counter-revolutionary agitation”:

- Mihai Ivan Dmitrievich (Lazhunga Lesko),⁶ born 1899, native of the town of Fokshany in Romania, coppersmith, illiterate;
- Mihai Toma Yankovich, born in 1891, native of the town of Fokshany in Romania, coppersmith in an artel;
- Mihai Toma Ristovich (La Zinkako), born in 1909, native of the town of Fokshany in Romania, coppersmith in the Yugoslavets⁷ artel in Moscow, illiterate.

(Кулаковський and Шаповал 1999: 47–9)

On 7 December Leonid Zakovsky, the Commissar 1st Class of State Security, ordered the execution of the death sentence. The executions took place the next day, 8 December 1937, in the Lodeynoye Pole camp of the Svirsk ITL (Svirlag) near Leningrad, which was located in the buildings of the Alexander of Svir Monastery. Alexander Polikarpov, the commander of the UNKVD in the Leningrad region, a first lieutenant of state security, and his assistant Pavel Shalygin, a second lieutenant of state security, were in charge of carrying out the executions.

The elected head of the Gypsy camp near Moscow Stanesko Gogo Parfentievich (Trifolo le Mardiulako), born in 1886, a native of Romania, sentenced on 2 September 1933 under Articles 58, paragraph 6, 8, 10, 11 and 59, paragraph 12 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR to ten years in a labour camp, was killed before the eyes of his own tribesmen. While serving his sentence in Solovetsky Prison, he was sentenced to the death penalty (высшая мера наказания, – VMN – by shooting) by the Special Troika of the UNKVD in Leningrad region on 14 October 1937 (Кулаковський and Смірнов & Шаповал 1997: 30, 272). He was shot together with other convicts on 1 November 1937 in the Sandarmokh forest massif near Medvezhyegorsk in Karelia. The sentence was carried out by the captain of state security Mikhail Matveyev, senior lieutenant of state security Georgy Alafer, the employees of the 3rd Department of the White Sea-Baltic Combine Ivan Bondarenko, and Alexander Shondysh (Пазумов: 3–10, 30).

As can be seen, the form of relations with the Bolshevik authorities declared by King Yegor Mihai made a cruel reaction by the Soviet secret service inevitable. This reaction was also motivated by the fact that the vast majority of Gypsies who roamed the territory of the former Russian Empire

6. A confused patronymic, probably Le Žungalesko, from the home male name Žungalo, lit. “bad, angry.”

7. Lit. “Yugoslavian.”

were not prepared to change to a settled way of life under the conditions of the USSR. Nomadic Gypsies were arrested in entire camps in parking lots, and also caught at railway stations during their transit through Moscow. The population of Siberia and the Far North of the USSR was replenished by raids on the Gypsies of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine (Беліков 2016: 24–5).

Official documents cited counter-revolutionary speeches, theft of socialist property, banditry, robbery, premeditated murder, counterfeiting of banknotes, theft, smuggling, possession of firearms, espionage in favour of foreign states, dissatisfaction with Bolshevik party policy, and the Soviets as reasons for the forced evictions (Бурай 2012: 31).

In preparing and carrying out national operations during the Great Terror, the NKVD paid special attention to “foreign Gypsies.” In particular, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations of the Main Directorate of the “Workers’ and Peasants’ Militia” (RKM) prepared a detailed overview of the material on “foreign Gypsies” in the summer of 1937. Their number in USSR was estimated at 10,000–15,000 people of Polish, German, Austro-Hungarian, Serbian, Lithuanian, and Finnish origin. The study examined in detail the history of European Gypsies, characterized Gypsy leaders abroad (in Poland, Romania, Germany, France) and their contacts on the territory of USSR, gave the location and characteristics of Gypsy camps in Moscow, and provided information on the espionage activities of the so-called “foreign Gypsies,” etc. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 23–43).

Gypsy kings phenomenon in the Republic of Poland

It should be noted that in Poland in the seventeenth century the institution of the “Gypsy kings” emerged. After 1624, Polish kings placed Gypsies under the administration and court of special persons called “Gypsy kings” or “Foremen,” who received a royal charter upon their appointment. In order to exercise his authority, the Gypsy king (not necessarily an ethnic Gypsy) had to constantly move from place to place to judge and punish the guilty. The last Gypsy kings at the end of the eighteenth century were Ignacy and Jan Marcinkiewicz. Researchers believe that the title of the foremen for the Gypsies, who were called “kings” (królowie) in the official documents of the Rzeczpospolita, “contained a certain amount of humour” (Зіневич 2001: 42–43).

In 1911, a group of Gypsies appeared in Budapest under the leadership of Wojciech Kwiek, who belonged to the “Gypsy kings.” After the First World War, they founded their royal dynasty in Poland. Born in Galicia, Wojciech Kwiek united nine wealthy Gypsy families in Warsaw, as head of which he visited Paris, Belgium, Germany, and other countries (Ficowski 1985: 84).

Later, in the 1920s to 1930s, members of the Kwiek dynasty were elected kings of the Polish Gypsies: Michał I, Grzegorz I, Dymitr, Michał II, Wasyl (Bazyli), Janusz. This long tradition was used by the Polish authorities to control the Roma community in the country. Pompous ceremonies were held to “elect” kings in order to legalize the rule of the chiefs over their fellow tribesmen. This ritual became a theatrical epigonism that helped the more cunning Gypsies to gain money and authority.

As Alicja Gontarek suggested, the entire history of the Gypsy Kings is the history of a Kelderar Gypsy group (Gontarek 2022: 329), and its members regularly clashed in the struggle for power. For example, in early 1930 competition escalated between Wasyl, who had influence over the Gypsies in the eastern areas of Poland (the territory of Ukraine and Belarus), and Michał II, who controlled the western areas. First Michał II won the congress and the election of the king in the town of Piastów near Warsaw. His election was honoured by Józef Piłsudski with his own presence (Ficowski 1985: 90). Later Wasyl Kwiek won the congress in Lodz with the support of Matiasz Kwiek, who had come to Poland from Spain as an arbitrator in a dispute over the crown and had a personal acquaintance with General Francisco Franco (Gontarek 2022: 330–3).

It was Matiasz who initiated reforms in the life of the Roma community in Poland. He raised the issue of the Gypsies’ transition to settled life. The Polish authorities reportedly agreed to allocate land around the village of Bielcza near Kraków, villages around the town of Stanisław[ów] (now Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine) and near Lodz to the Gypsies for resettlement. In 1933, the Roma Association was founded, which in 1937 was transformed into the Association of Polish Gypsies, which was subordinate to the President of the Republic of Poland. At the Gypsy Congress in 1934, Matiasz Kwiek proposed that the title “King of the Gypsies” be abandoned, as he considered it false and imitative (Gontarek 2022: 333–7). At the same time, he began to call himself “Wódz Narodu Cygańskiego / Leader of the Gypsy Nation” (Ficowski 1985: 97–8), thus concentrating in his hands practically all the levers of control over the Gypsies in Poland.

At this point, we should refer to the assessment of the phenomenon of Gypsy kings in Poland by researchers Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, who highlight its difference from other forms of Roma self-organization. They suggest that the institution of Gypsy kings should be seen as a form of “the “civic emancipation movement of Roma in the countries of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in the interwar period” (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 646).

In 1935, Matiasz Kwiek attended the funeral ceremonies for Marshal Jozef Piłsudski when he declared a six-week period of mourning in all Gypsy camps,

with a ban on concerts, games, weddings, and so on. But soon, in March 1937, Matiasz Kwiek died as the result of an accident (Gontarek 2022: 341). Later, in the same year, the most momentous elections in interwar Poland for a new king took place. The winner was Janusz Kwiek – “the most mysterious of all Gypsy kings” (Gontarek 2022: 343). The election and coronation of the new king took place on 4 July 1937 in the Polish Army “Legia” stadium in Warsaw (Діло 1937: 6). The ceremony took place on such a scale that it was even broadcast by American radio stations. Reporters from Polish and Ukrainian newspapers described the event as follows. In the centre of the square stood a throne borrowed from the Warsaw Opera House. All the stands and also the press area were filled to capacity. The candidates for the throne (there were five of them: Anton Cickerski, Yerzy, Rudolf, Sergiusz, and Janusz Kwiek) sat separately on specially reserved chairs. The king was elected by the senators, who took turns throwing their cards into the ballot box. The count showed that of the 30 eligible voters, 17 voted for Janusz Kwiek. The coronation took place immediately after the election. The crown was placed on the new king’s head by the Orthodox archpriest Terenty Teodorovich, accompanied by four priests. Archpriest Teodorovich, who had graduated from the Moscow Theological Academy, joined the Polish Orthodox Church in the 1920s and was rector of the Metropolitan Church of Mary Magdalene in Warsaw. He died on 25 September 1939 during the German bombardment of the Polish capital and was buried in the Orthodox cemetery in the Wola district.

After the coronation ceremony, Janusz Kwiek gave a speech in Romani which some of those present did not understand. The new Gypsy king announced that he planned to organize the Gypsies and, with the help of the League of Nations, obtain part of Abisinia (Ethiopia) from the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini for Gypsy colonization. The main attraction of the unofficial part of the coronation, according to the correspondents, was “a beautiful Gypsy orchestra that played when it was necessary and where it was necessary, and when it was necessary, ran across the football field.” The author of the publication in the *Діло* newspaper summed up the significance of the coronation with a peculiar conclusion: “The greatest proletarians and internationalists and democrats by birth have clearly and unequivocally voted for the monarchy” (Діло 1937: 6).

During an interrogation in March 1941, the brother of the crowned Janusz Kwiek, Michał, told his version of the 1937 coronation and how it took place:

Kwiek Sergiusz and Kwiek Rudolf arrived at Wilanów railway station, where we were staying at the time, and said that they wanted to make a Gypsy film and broadcast a radio concert, but had no suitable artists. They offered us to help produce the film and undertook to provide us with costumes, and for this work we could earn 50–60 zloty. We accepted their offer, and that’s how the coronation took place. All the

costumes were borrowed from the theatre wardrobe. Sergiusz Kwiek was the leader and administrator of the whole coronation process, and we participated as actors. The priest who read the prayers was hired for 60 zloty. Who he is and whether he was really a priest or an actor, I do not know. My brother had no documents to prove that he was a Gypsy king. So the whole procedure of my brother's coronation was a kind of theatrical performance. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 37 зв.)

The authors of the notes to the published document on the coronation of Janusz Kwiek, Adam Bartosz and Natalia Gancarz, stated: "His fate during the Second World War remains unknown" (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 626). Jerzy Ficowski, in his work on Polish Gypsies, summing up the rule of the "pupilki sanacyjnej polityki" (puppets of the *Sanacja* regime), including Janusz Kwiek, pointed out that "w czasie okupacji ginie po nim ślad i relacje o jego dalszych losach nie są zgodne" [during the occupation all traces of him were lost and the accounts of his further fate are contradictory] (Ficowski 1985: 103). We also find the assumption that Janusz Kwiek "disappeared during the Nazi occupation of Poland, probably dying in one of the Roma camps" (Берник 2020). The real story, however, was different. The Gypsy king Janusz Kwiek disappeared in 1941 when he moved with his numerous relatives to the territory of the USSR and died in one of the Soviet camps.

There is no doubt that the NKVD authorities had access to the information disseminated by the press about the coronation ceremony of Janusz Kwiek. Despite the overtly theatrical nature of the event, the NKVD authorities neither understood nor accepted such dramatization. On the contrary, this tradition was interpreted as a serious security threat to the USSR. Thus, in the summer of 1938, the Main Directorate RKM NKVD of the USSR prepared a "Project of measures to combat crime among foreign Gypsies."

It was prescribed to all republican, regional, and district militia departments to form operational groups under the personal responsibility of their chiefs for carrying out the operation against "foreign Gypsies"; to designate an operational agent from among the most experienced personnel, with whom all work and reporting on the Gypsies was to be concentrated; immediately ascertain the location of the camps of the "foreign Gypsies," carry out searches in these camps to identify weapons, seals, stamps, forged documents, counterfeit money, currency, and espionage material; fingerprint and photograph all male "foreign Gypsies"; arrest ("remove") all tribal leaders, carry out a thorough investigation of their contacts; draw up a ten-day report on the work done, etc. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 21–2). The draft of this plan was at the disposal of the NKVD-NKGB even before they planned the operation to "cleanse" the territory of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus from "foreign Gypsies" from the end of 1939.

The Soviet secret services paid special attention to the members of the Kwiek royal family.

Gypsy kings: the object of repression of the NKVD-NKGB 1939–1941

The German invasion of Poland forced Janusz Kwiek's camp, where his brothers Volodya/Vladimir, Jósef (Masho), Michał, Jurgil, Ilia, and a number of other Gypsies lived, to move east, because "there were rumours that the Germans would kill Gypsies and Jews" (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 18). Fleeing from the advancing German troops, the camp reached the town of Brest, which was located in the territory occupied by the Soviet troops. From there the Gypsies went to the town of Kivertsi in Volhynia, where they spent the winter. At the end of the winter they moved to Kovel, where Michał Kwiek celebrated the wedding of his son Zhora. In Kovel the camp of the Kwieks divided and two parts went in different directions (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 18–18 зб.). The reason for this was obviously the conflicting ideas of their fate: some wanted to stay in the Soviet-occupied part of Poland, others wanted to get into the German part of Poland. An ongoing power rivalry between the Kwiek family members cannot be ruled out as a reason for this split either.

Part of the Gypsies left for Galicia, in the town of Yavoriv, where they stayed until the next winter of 1940–1941. They wintered in the village of Makhlynets, Zhydachiv district, Drohobych region. The families stayed there until 5 March 1941, and the men got work as tinkers in various organisations and establishments in Sambir, Drohobych and Khyriv. In early March the camp left Makhlynets for Yavoriv, but was stopped on the way by militiamen (RKM). (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 35–35 зб.)

The second group of Gypsies (30–40 carts) from Kovel went to Vladimir-Volynsky, where there was a German commission to select persons of German origin to be let to the Reich. After setting up a camp near the town, Janusz, Mihał, Vladimir Kwiek, Joshka, and Ivan Homon collected documents for the Gypsies and applied to the commission for permission to move to Germany. At first they were asked to wait, and after about two weeks they were refused entry on the grounds that "Jews and Gypsies are not allowed to enter Germany." Afterwards the camp was dismantled and sent to Lviv (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 68–68 зб.).

It is clear that after a year and a half of staying in the border zone, the Roma camps could not go unnoticed by the NKVD-NKGB. The Main Militia Department of the NKVD of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) issued Instruction No. 38/381263 "On the development of nomadic Gypsies

and the identification of bandits, thieves and other criminal groups among them” on 28 October 1940. According to these instructions, the militia were obliged to register all nomadic Gypsy camps on the territory of the USSR, to obtain valuable agents among the Gypsies, to identify the Gypsies belonging to criminal groups and to suppress them immediately (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 92).

Through the use of intelligence and operational measures, it was established that groups of nomadic Gypsies from the former Poland came to the western regions of Ukraine during the period of military activity, including the Gypsy king Janusz Kwiek. On 8 April 1941, Ivan Gorbenko, the head of the NKVD militia department of the Ukrainian SSR, reported to Vasily Sergienko, the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR, that in order to determine the whereabouts of the Gypsy king Janusz Kwiek, the criminal investigation department under his command had recruited the Gypsy Ivan Gomon, who agreed to betray the king and spoke about the harassment of Gypsies by the “royal family.” The recruited Ivan Gomon was sent on a raid together with NKVD officers, as a result of which two brothers of Janusz Kwiek, Michał and Josef, the former king Wasyl, nephew Roman (Rishik),⁸ and brother-in-law Sandol were arrested in various places (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 93).

The militia department of the Kalush district (ROM) in the Stanislav region recruited the agent “Dukach”⁹ (a Gypsy from the Kwiek clan), who lured Janusz Kwiek’s camp to his whereabouts in the village of Pidhirtsi in the Kalush district, where the special operations group of the UNKVD militia in the Stanislav region arrested Janusz Kwiek himself, his brothers Karol and Vladimir, and a number of other Gypsies: Kwiek Vladimir Romanovich, born in 1902 in Przemyśl; Kwiek Vladimir Stepanovich, born in 1902 in Przemyśl; Borsuliak Nikolai Mikhailovich, born in 1891 in Warsaw; and Kwiek Dezorzh¹⁰ Marianovich, born in 1903, a native of Makgovtsy. When they were arrested, a 4 kg silver chain was confiscated, which served as an attribute of the chief Gypsy judge (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 93–4).

On 15 March 1941 Kwiek Vladimir Nikolaevich and Kwiek Karol Nikolaevich were arrested by the Kalush criminal police ROM UNKVD in the Stanislav region. The next day, 16 March 1941, Kwiek Mikhail Nikolaevich and Kwiek Iosif Nikolaevich were arrested by the Criminal Police of the Office of the RKM (URKM) in the Rivne region. On 27 March 1941, Kwiek

8. A diminutive from the male name Khristo, Rista mixed with the Kelderar Romani riś “bear.”

9. Lit.: “women’s jewellery in the form of a coin.”

10. May be a misprint of *Джорж/Dzhorzh “George.”

Sergei Bodovich¹¹ was arrested by the criminal police of the URKM NKVD in the Stanislav region. They were all charged with criminal acts.

On 13 May 1941, in agreement with the newly created NKGB of the USSR and with the main militia department of the NKVD of the USSR, the investigation files of the URKM NKVD in the Rivne region were handed over to the Counterintelligence Department (контрразведывательный отдел, KRO) of the UNKGB in the Rivne region for further investigation (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 13–13 зб.). The charges against the arrested persons were reclassified to Art. 54–6 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR (espionage in favour of foreign states).

The investigation file of the former king Wasyl Kwiek was separated from the (joint) main file No. 12649. He was transferred, together with belongings and valuables, accompanied by the detective of the KRO of the UNKGB of Rivne region Yefim Waisblekh, to Moscow on 18 May 1941, where he was held in the internal prison of the NKGB of the USSR (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 47–8).

During the investigation of the Kwiek case, it became necessary to consult the specialists of the NKVD and NKGB headquarters, as neither the NKVD URKM nor the KRO of the UNKGB in the Rivne area had specialists on the “Gypsy line.” The relevant materials to guide the operational officers and investigators were received and deposited in the Supervisory Files (KND) No. 11828 and No. 17664. This includes an extract from the indictment in the case of the liquidated Gypsy group in 1933; inspection of materials on “foreign Roma” compiled on the basis of materials from the Criminal Department of the Main Directorate of the RKM in 1937; minutes of the interrogation of the accused Mihai Toma Georgievich Yepo le Chukurosko¹² of 17 May 1938; and draft measures of the Main Directorate RKM NKVD of the USSR to combat crime among “foreign Gypsies” in 1938, signed by the senior militia major Tarichan Dyakov.

The aim of the investigation was to prove “crimes of espionage and sabotage” allegedly prepared by members of the Kwiek family for the benefit of the Polish state, which at that time no longer existed, and Germany. At the same time, “criminal acts” were to be uncovered and “criminal contacts” of the arrested persons in the western and eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR and other Soviet republics were to be established (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 95). The investigation of the case was placed under special control of the Secretariat of the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR, and the

11. Here and below the surname Kwiek stands before the first name and patronymic in -ich, following the order in the Soviet official sources quoted.

12. The typewritten “Епо” (Yepo) likely is a confused copy of the Kelderar male name Ёно (Yono). Thus, his inner name was Yóno, the son of Chúkuro.

deadline for its fulfilment was set for 25 April 1941 (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 92).

Among other things, investigators vigorously tackled the search and confiscation of the arrested persons' jewellery. According to the report of 14 May 1941 in Rivne, three silver cups weighing 427 g, a ladies' silver belt weighing 137 g, a silver stand weighing 283 g, eight silver coins weighing 119 g, a horse silver harness weighing 1.97 kg, a gold necklace weighing 30.7 g, a gold wedding ring weighing 4 g and a ten crown gold coin weighing 3 g were seized. A total of 17 items were seized, including three gold items weighing 37.7 g and 14 silver items weighing 2.942 kg (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 28–28 зб.).

In fact, the NKVD-NKGB officers hoped to get many more treasures from the prisoners. Thus, already on the second day of the arrest, 17 March 1941, Karol Kwiek was interrogated about the fate of the legendary Gypsy golden horseshoe (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 51–52).

The fate of the Gypsy kings in the Soviet camps

Due to the German attack on USSR at the end of June 1941, the accused in the Kwiek case, who were imprisoned in UNKVD Prison No. 1 in Rivne, were evacuated to the town of Kamyshin on the Volga to complete the investigation. Later, some of them were transferred to the ITL Karaganda (Karlak). The investigation file on Kwiek was taken to Sverdlovsk as part of the archive of the NKVD of the USSR, from where it was sent to the UNKVD in Karaganda region on 8 December 1942 to complete the investigation (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 1). The further fate of those arrested was different, but equally tragic.

- Mikhail (Michał) Kwiek was born in Przemyśl in 1883, according to his Soviet passport. On 11 November 1940 Michał received a passport issued by the Zhuravne district department of the RKM in the Drohobych region (his stated nationality is Gypsy). On 27 December 1940 he was registered for temporary residence in the rural soviet of the village Makhlynets, Zhydachiv district, Drohobych region, until 20 January 1941, he was temporarily registered in the town of Drogobych, on Gogol Street, 44, and from 14 February to 15 March 1941, in the town of Sambir on Slesarskaya Street, 11 (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 19). Charged under Article 54–6 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR, he was evacuated from the front line to Karlak, where he died on 4 April 1943 (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 88–88 зб.).
- The brother and assistant of King Janusz, Vladimir Kwiek, born in 1881 in

- Przemyśl (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 94), died on 15 June 1943 in Karlag (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 6 зв.).
- Iosif Kwiek, born in 1896, arrested in Drohobych, imprisoned in Rivne, died on 17 August 1943 in the Ust-Vymsk forced labour camp (Ustvymlag) (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, аркуш ревізії).
 - Sergiusz Kwiek, adjutant of King Janusz, born in 1893 in Bielcza of the Krakow Voivodeship, received a Soviet passport on 2 April 1940, issued by the 2nd border checkpoint of the NKVD district department Slonim (ROM) in the Baranovichi region. In this passport he is registered as a Hungarian artist. On 28 March 1941 the passport holder was registered by the department of the RKM of Velikii Glubochok (today: Velykyi Glybochok) district in the village of Bielaia (now Bila). From 4 September 1942 to 24 April 1944 he was imprisoned in Karlag and on 25 April 1944 his case was submitted for consideration to the Special Session (Russian: Особое совещание, Ukrainian: Особлива нарада) of the NKVD of the USSR. (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 2–4). No information was found about the further fate of Sergiusz Kwiek.

There is no information about the fate of Karol Kwiek, brother and assistant to King Janusz (ГДА СБУ, Київ, ф. 16, оп. 1, спр. 0515, арк. 94), who was born in Przemyśl in 1903.

The relatives of King Janusz Kwiek – his brother-in-law Sandol Doordohovich,¹³ born in 1900, a native of the town of Przemyśl, and his nephew Rishik Romanovich, born in 1907, a native of the town of Przemyśl – were arrested by order of the URKM in the Rivne Region on 18 March 1941 on the charge of Article 173 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR (robbery). However, on 10 May 1941 both were released from prison No. 4 in Rivne because “they were not actively involved in the crimes committed by Kwiek Janusz and others” (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 17664, арк. 1–4, 8, 11–12, 17).

The former king Vasyl Kwiek, born in 1876, whose archive file was kept in Saratov, had been sentenced to the death penalty (VMN), and the sentence against him was carried out as indicated in the supervisory file (KND) no. 11828 (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, аркуш ревізії).

The fate of King Janusz Kwiek himself is only fragmentarily reflected in the documents of the Soviet special services. Supervisor file (KND) No. 11828 contains the minutes of the confrontation of 4 April 1941 in Stanisław between King Janusz Kwiek and his adjutant Sergiusz (Serge) Kwiek, during

13. Probably the misprint instead of the written by hand *Дьордохович, documented perception of the Kelderar phoneme [ř] as [x], the patronymic from the diminutive form Дьордърро/D'órdōro, which is from Дьорди/D'órdi (Hungarian György 'George').

which Janusz Kwiek testified: “In 1938 [sic] I was elected Gypsy King in Warsaw in the stadium, and there I was crowned by Bishop Teodorovich, and after the coronation the Polish authorities investigated Bishop Teodorovich. After these elections, a Gypsy concert took place in the same stadium ... Kwiek Serge was appointed my adjutant, so to speak. He was appointed by a representative of the Polish authorities, a certain Zdynok.” The statement made at the confrontation was “fully confirmed” by Janusz Kwiek, but he did not sign it because of his illiteracy (ГДА СБУ, Рівне, ф. 4(Р), спр. 11828, арк. 87–87 зв.).

The registration card of the convict Kwiek Yanush Timofeevich-Nikolaevich, born in 1897, a native of the city of Przemyśl and a nomadic Gypsy, who was arrested on 15 March 1941 by the UNKVD in the Stanislav region on charges of espionage, was fortunately found in the Information and Analytical Support Department of the Main Directorate of the National Police in the Rivne region. On the back of the card it is noted that on 26 October 1941 Janusz Kwiek was sentenced to the death penalty (VMN, shooting) by the military court of the NKVD troops in Saratov region in accordance with Article 58–6 Part 1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian SFSR. The sentence was carried out on 14 December 1941. The data for filling out the card were taken from the archival investigative file No. 12649 and entered on 7 December 1964.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this information. The investigation of King Janusz appears to have been conducted jointly with the investigation of other members of the Kwiek royal family, as their main case number 12649 is the same. After his arrest, Janusz was held in Stanislav prison and from there, like his brother Wasyl, he was transferred to Moscow, where he was at the disposal of the NKGB of USSR. They were probably transferred to the city of Saratov at the beginning of the German-Soviet war. The Kwiek case was thus split: The investigation concerning Janusz and Wasyl was continued in Saratov, where they were murdered soon afterwards; the investigation concerning the other relatives was continued in Karlag, where they arrived from Rivne in transit via Kamyshin. The investigation files and the supervisory files (KND) of Janusz and Wasyl Kwiek were kept in Saratov in the local department of the Committee for State Security (where they are in all likelihood kept to this day), as there was no reason to search for these persons. The supervisory files (KND) on Vladimir, Jósef, Karol, Michał, and Sergiusz Kwieks were returned to the officials of the State Security Committee in Rivne in order to determine the fate and possible whereabouts of the defendants in the new proceedings they had initiated.

When we consider the fate of the Kwieks in the territory of the Soviet Union, we cannot overlook what happened in German-occupied Poland. On

5 May 1941, when the KRO of the UNKGB was searching the Rivne region for traces of “espionage and sabotage crimes” committed by the arrested members of the Kwiek family in Western Ukraine, Rudolf Kwiek, one of the contenders for the royal throne in the 1937 elections, addressed a letter to the leadership of the general government in Krakow. In it he offered the Nazis his services in registering all the Roma living in the country, identifying their place of residence and the location of the Gypsy camps (Ficowski 1985: 104–6). With his direct help, the Nazi authorities carried out the genocide of the Roma in the western and central parts of the former Poland. On the other side of the then German-Soviet border, the Soviet secret services simultaneously suppressed part of the Roma (targeting mainly representatives of the elite of the Kwiek clan) who were on the territory of eastern Poland, which came under the control of the USSR in accordance with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

Conclusion

Thanks to the use of newly discovered Soviet intelligence documents from the 1930s and 1940s, this article has been able to fill the research gap on Soviet repressions against the “foreign Gypsies” (including the Gypsy kings), especially during the Terror in the 1930s and at the beginning of the Second World War. This persecution began in 1932–1933 and intensified during the Great Terror. The Soviet secret services estimated the number of “foreign Gypsies” (who came to USSR from various states such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, Germany, etc.) at 10,000–15,000 people. The mistrust intensified with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, which forced a number of Polish Roma (starting with the Gypsy king Janusz Kwiek) to move east to the Soviet-occupied territories of Poland. Despite the overtly theatrical nature of Janusz Kwiek’s coronation ceremony in 1937, the NKVD authorities neither understood nor accepted such dramatization. On the contrary, they saw it as a serious security threat to the USSR. In spring 1941, members of the Kwiek family were arrested and accused of spying for foreign states. Contrary to earlier assumptions by other scholars, the Gypsy king Janusz Kwiek did not die in a Nazi camp, but in a Soviet one. He was arrested in March 1941, sentenced to death by an NKVD military court in October 1941, and executed on 14 December 1941.

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