

Summary

This book is the third part in the series “A Jewish Shtetl in Contemporary Cultural Memory”, dedicated to the history and culture of Jews in Belarus. The aim of this large-scale project is to uncover archival material and to introduce new findings about the history, traditions and folklore of the Jewish settlements, as well as to showcase the surviving fragments of Jewish cultural heritage and to draw attention to the problems of its conservation. The books in the series are based on materials collected both during annual field schools that are organized by the Center “Sefer” and the Center for Slavic-Jewish Studies of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as through archival research.

The expedition to the town of Hlybokaye (Vitebsk Region of Belarus) was an important milestone in the study of the narratives, historical documents, and preserved cemeteries. It is an attempt to reconstruct the “Jewish history” of former Belarusian shtetls, based on historical, epigraphic and ethnographic data. The field school, which brought together ethnographers and epigraphers from Belarus, Russia, USA, and Ukraine, as well as local historians and volunteers, took place July 22-30, 2015. This expedition

became possible thanks to support from the Genesis Philanthropy Group, the UJA Federation of NY, the Russian Science Foundation and the Rothschild Foundation Europe. Our school received comprehensive assistance from Hlybokaye Regional Executive Committee. The inspiration for this research of Jewish history of Hlybokaye came from *Margarita Kozhenevskaya*, a long time participant of the Center “Sefer” programs, a Hlybokaye native and a doctoral student of the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno, who came up with the idea to conduct a field school in the region. This book includes an article and archival documents published by her.

The participants of the field school have created an index of 596 Jewish tombstones. Ethnographers have collected 75 narratives, totaling 120 hours; epigraphers have created a full catalog of the Jewish cemetery in Hlybokaye.

But why is the town of Hlybokaye of particular interest to researchers? Because Hlybokaye is an excellent example of a town that historically had been a place where people of different ethnicities and religions coexisted. In the years from 1921 to 1939, Hlybokaye was a part of Poland and up until the begin-

ning of World War II, the town's Jewish life was vibrant and multi-faceted.

Moreover, until the unification in 1832, the town of Hlybokaye was divided into two sectors with identical names: one privately owned and the other controlled by clergy. The two sectors belonged to two different administrative-territorial entities and this division played a role in the way the Jews settled in Hlybokaye because they were allowed to settle only in the privately owned area.

Hlybokaye was always a place on the crossroads of different cultural traditions. The town was inhabited by people of various ethnic backgrounds (Jews, Belarusians, Poles, Tatars, Roma) who practiced multiple religions (Judaism, Catholicism, Eastern Rite Roman Catholicism and, after 1839, Orthodox Christianity and Islam).

The history of the Jewish community in Hlybokaye goes back to the 17th century. The epigraphers who took part in the expedition discovered one of the oldest Jewish tombstones in Belarus, dating back to 1708. The Jewish population of the town had steadily increased over the three centuries, both in absolute numbers and in relation to the Christian population. According to the 1897 census, there were 3,917 Jews living in Hlybokaye (70.4% of the total population).

The history of Hlybokaye is intertwined with the history of its Jewish community. During the expedition, our ethnographers were fortunate to record valuable narratives and memories about Jewish life in Hlybokaye, including family stories and common perceptions of the Jews by their non-Jewish neighbors, consistent with historical and ethnographic sources.

The presence of Jews in the area is also reflected in local toponyms: one of the lakes in the town, formerly called Hlybokaye lake, is now called Kahalnaye (because of its proximity to buildings owned by the Jewish community, and, this is still unconfirmed by documents, because the Jewish community began to rent or possibly even purchased the lake at the end of the 19th century).

Hlybokaye was an important trade hub, and beginning in the mid-17th century hosted a weekly market, as well as three to six annual fairs. Jews played a key role in the town's economy as merchants, craftsmen, fishermen and lessors.

Jews were the majority of the town's population, and until the mid-1930s, the number of Jewish rep-

resentatives in the town's administration was greater than usual in the post-reform Russian Empire (despite the restrictive laws for the Jews).

The Jewish community of Hlybokaye made a noticeable impact on the town's social and political life. For example, during the 1930s there were three newspapers in Yiddish and the town's Jewish population was in close contact with Hlybokaye Jews living in the United States.

The tragic history of the Jewish ghetto in Hlybokaye during the German occupation and until August 19, 1943 (when it was finally liquidated) shows that even under dire circumstances, the Jewish community was able to create various jobs for the ghetto inmates, to open a hospital, and to provide meals for the needy. Those who managed to escape from the ghetto formed a Jewish unit that participated in armed resistance, both independently and in cooperation with the local guerrilla fighters.

After the war, Jewish life in Hlybokaye, as in other Jewish towns, has come to a halt. However the memory of Jewish life in Hlybokaye has survived in the many stories that the town inhabitants so generously shared with participants of the expedition for which we are very grateful.

The structure of the book reflects our comprehensive approach to researching Jewish shtetls. The book consists of analysis of the collected oral history, folklore and ethnographic data, research of the cemeteries and epigraphic sources, and compilation of archival data.

The first part of the book comprises articles on the specific characteristics of the region and history of Hlybokaye and its Jewish community. The first article by *Victoria Mochalova* examines the history of Hlybokaye from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth until the 19th century, and the role that the Jewish community played in the town's development. *Inna Sorkina* explores Hlybokaye's history from the 18th century until the first third of the 20th century, focusing primarily on the social and economic standing of the Jewish population. *Margarita Kozhenevskaya* introduces new archival materials and reviews the daily life of a Jewish town at the turn of 19th-20th centuries. The article by prominent American Scholar *Samuel D. Kassow* tells of interwar Hlybokaye based largely on local source material, but also presents a broader view of the characteristic features that

defined shtetl life during that time. The article by *Kirill Gavrilenko* helps us understand the structure and function of the Jewish burial fraternities in western Belarus during the interwar period. This section concludes with an article by *Mikhail Krutikov* dedicated to the reinterpretation of landscapes and the distinctive cultural and geographical region of “Raysn” (Belarus) by Yiddish modernist poets.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the study of the system of stereotypes, explanatory models, motifs and themes dominant in the local cultural tradition that influence how the local community perceives the town of Hlybokaye. *Natalia Savina* highlights the dominant narrative motifs that define the image of the town and the “urban text” that describes it; the Jews play an important role in the urban narratives about a “trade hub” and the “ghetto”. The article by *Olga Belova* focuses on the everyday life of Hlybokaye as portrayed in the stories of local residents; the memories of older residents have preserved the Jewish past of Hlybokaye, the stories of coexistence in a multi-faith environment, and the memories of Jewish traditions, rituals and folklore. *Oksana Chyoha* explores the local folk legends based on the stories from the Bible in which the Jew plays a prominent role. The research conducted by *Julia Bernstein* focuses on the memories of Jewish teens about the Hlybokaye ghetto. These testimonies were recorded for the USC Shoah Foundation, the Institute for Visual History and Education in the second half of the 1990s. While the article was being prepared for publication, some new memories and photographs from the personal archives of the still-living survivors of the ghetto were found and were added to the research. The authors of this book would like to express their sincere gratitude to *Yakov Sukhovolsky* for his help.

The third part of the book contains selected interviews with residents of Hlybokaye, including commentary from the collectors. One individual shares with *Oksana Chyoha* his memories about the war years, *Andrey Moroz* publishes a story of a house that reflects the history of Hlybokaye as related by its owner. The Jewish holidays, as perceived by the neighbors of other ethnicities, are described by *Anastasia Golovina* in interview fragments discussing the topic of a folk calendar. *Anna Skorina* compares the stories of her two dialogue partners, one of whom was of Jewish descent, but chose to practice Orthodox

Christianity, and the other, an ethnic Belarusian, who is interested in Judaism and practices Kashrut.

The next section of the book is dedicated to the Jewish cemetery in Hlybokaye. The researchers recorded all the parameters of the cemetery: territory, number of tombstones, catalog of *matzevot*, epitaphs, etc. This part includes an article by *Mikhail Nosonovsky* examining the epitaphs found in the Hlybokaye Jewish cemetery as a source of historical information and as a cultural phenomenon. Also included is an extensive database that summarizes information about Hlybokaye’s Jewish cemetery, prepared by *Aleksandra Fishel* and *Mikhail Vasilyev*. The database is presented in a table listing more than 600 *matzevot* and fragments. You can find the map of the cemetery with a list of the numbered tombstones on the back cover.

The last section of the book contains archival materials on the history of Hlybokaye; many of these materials have been translated from Polish and German and are introduced here for the first time. We would like to thank the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC) for kindly providing photos of the Jewish ghetto, the unique visual materials needed to conduct research on the Holocaust in Hlybokaye.

The authors of the book “The Shtetl of Hlybokaye in Contemporary Cultural Memory” hope that their contribution to the research on the Jewish history and culture of Eastern Europe will help to preserve the Jewish cultural heritage.

We believe that this book, dedicated to Jewish life in Hlybokaye and the history of intercultural communication that is imprinted in people’s memory and reflected in the artefacts, will prove useful to scholars (historians, ethnographers, folklorists) and to a wide range of readers who are interested in Jewish history, culture and traditions.

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