

Summary

This new book is an addition to the series of books from Latgale published by Center “SEFER”¹. This book is based on the data on Jewish ethnography, history and epigraphy collected during expedition trips of 2012-2015 that took place both in Latgale (Daugavpils, Kraslava, Rezekne, Ludza etc), and in Israel, where we have interviewed people from this region.

During the past years in addition to “Sefer” field schools on Jewish ethnography and epigraphy, expedition trips organized by the Museum “Jews in Latvia” also took place in Eastern Latvia². The memories

¹ The first issued book of the series is called “Neighborhood Lost: Jews in the Cultural Memory of Contemporary Latgale. Data collected during the expedition trips in 2011-2012”. Moscow, 2013. 382 pages.

² The first field school/expedition trip organized by Center “SEFER” (in collaboration with Hebrew University’s Chase Center for Jewish Studies and supported by The AVI CHAI Foundation, Genesis Philanthropy Group, UJA Federation of New York and “Nativ”) in Latgale took place in 2012.

The second expedition trip to Ludza took place in 2014. The trip was the first one to combine collecting the Jewish ethnographic data with research on Jewish epigraphies (during the trip the whole Jewish cemetery of Ludza was documented, see the present book). This expedition trip was organized in collaboration with the Council of the Jew-

of the Jews and memories about Jews have also been documented as part of the projects dedicated to a wider set of topics and organized by the Center for Oral History research of the University of Daugavpils,

ish Communities of Latvia, Museum “Jews in Latvia”, supported by Genesis Philanthropy Group, UJA Federation of NY, Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund and State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF), Ludza Regional Studies Museum, Ludza City Library and Ludza Municipality.

Two research trips took place in Riga in November 2014 and June 2015 (in collaboration with the Council of the Jewish Communities of Latvia, Museum “Jews in Latvia”, State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF) and Claims Conference) during the trips the participants have recorded interviews with the Jews that are originally from Latgale.

One more expedition trip to research Jewish ethnography in Rezekne, Varaklani, Vilani, Ludza and Riga was organized by Center “Sefer” (in collaboration with the Council of the Jewish Communities of Latvia, Museum “Jews in Latvia”, supported by Genesis Philanthropy Group, UJA Federation of NY, State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF) and Claims Conference) in June 2015.

An ethnographic expedition trip to Israel took place in October 2015, among informants interviewed by the participants of the expedition were former residents of towns in Latgale. The data collected during all expedition trips is available on www.sfra.ru.

Latvia [see: Saleniece 2003, 2005] and local historians [see: Meler 2010; Rochko 2010; Syrtsov 2010]. It's also worth noting that former Jewish residents of Latgale have published several memoir works [see: Kamayskaya 2013 and others]. All these materials are valuable sources describing everyday life of the Jewish population of Latgale during the interwar period, political situation before the World War II, the Holocaust etc.

When discussing the history of the Jews of Latgale it's important to first outline its main events. The Jews first settled in Latgale approximately in the second half of the 16th century. During that time Latgale was a part of the Polish Commonwealth. By the 1772 there were 661 Jews in Ludza and Ludza parish [Feigmanis 2004]. After the First Partition of Poland in 1772 Latgale became a part of the Russian Empire; the parishes of Ludza, Rezekne and Daugavpils became a part of a newly-formed Polotsk Vicegerency. According to the 1897 census data Jews constituted 4,9% of the population in Ludza parish, 7,4% in Rezekne parish and 20% in Daugavpils parish. In 1802 the Latgalian parishes of Rezekne, Ludza and Daugavpils became a part of the Vitebsk Governorate [Gessen 1910]. According to the 1847 census data Jews constituted 46,6% of the population in Daugavpils, 54,5% in Ludza and 60,2% in Rezekne. The Jewish Encyclopedia lists the biggest Jewish towns in the Vitebsk Governorate (the towns that are located in Latgale are listed in bold, modern names are given in brackets) [Shabad 1910]:

| | Total population. | Jewish population | | Total population. | Jewish population |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Beshankovichy | 4423 | 3182 | Kreslavka (Kraslava) | 7834 | 4051 |
| Varaklani | 1810 | 1365 | Lievenhof (Livani) | 2658 | 1406 |
| Glazmanka (Gostini) | 2328 | 1976 | Osveya | 2830 | 1660 |
| Dagda | 1516 | 1026 | Preili | 2104 | 1375 |
| Ilyino | 1415 | 1105 | Sirofino | 1998 | 1766 |
| Kolishki | 1568 | 1127 | Ulla | 2485 | 1539 |
| Kreuzburg (Krustpils) | 4150 | 3164 | Ushach' | 1460 | 1129 |
| | | | Chashniki | 4590 | 3480 |
| | | | Yanovichy | 2359 | 1702 |

In 1918 Latvia became an independent state. In his written works Israeli historian Ezra Mendelsohn mentions three different groups that constituted the Latvian Jewish community: the Jews of Kurland, the Jews of Latgale and the Livonian Jewish community (comprising the Jewish population of Riga). The Jewish population of Latgale has considered itself to be a part of a Polish-Belorussian group, their main spoken language was Yiddish, and the intellectuals spoke Russian. This group was different from the Jews of Kurland. Kurland was a more urbanized region, heavily influenced by the German culture; the use of German and Yiddish languages was widespread amongst the Kurland Jewish population [Mendelsohn 1987, 242–243]. During the interwar period in Latvia there were several Jewish political parties, social movements and youth organizations [see further: Zvinklis 2010, 28–63; Runce 2013; Mendelsohn 1987, 247–250].

During the interwar period Latgalian Jews comprised one third of the total Jewish population of Latvia. In Daugavpils Jews constituted 40,8% of the total population, in Rezekne – 41,5% and in Ludza – 40,6% [Mendelsohn 1987, 244]. The population of Latgale as a whole mainly belonged to the following ethno-confessional groups: Russian Old Believers, Latgalians and Jews. Besides them there lived Belarusians, Poles, Gypsies and a small group of Lutheran Germans.

Typical eastern European shtetls were still present in Latgale during that period; however they weren't common in Kurland [Mendelsohn 1987, 242–243]. Before the outbreak of the WWII about 40 to 90% of the population of Latgalian cities and shtetls were Jewish. The rural population living in isolated farmsteads and villages were predominantly Russian Old Believers and Latgalian Catholics. This was a typical situation for most parts of Eastern Europe: small towns had a predominantly Jewish population that was living in the central parts of town, especially in the areas adjacent to the marketplace and the non-Jewish rural population usually visited these towns to purchase the necessary goods. This means that shtetl and – to be more precise – the marketplace was the main place for the Jews and non-Jews to meet. The marketplace usually was the center for all economic activity; it was a place for social interaction between the Jews living in the shtetl and the rural population [Kassow 2007, 123–124]. This spatial and socioeco-

conomic structure is concise with the descriptions of the various towns of Latgale in the interviews we collected in the region, both from the Jews and from the non-Jews. The non-Jews who mostly lived in the countryside often describe their trips to the city as a very important event, always mentioning that their parents had “their own Jew”, who let them leave their horse in his yard so they could walk to the shops and to the market, who would lend them money, and treat them with matzos for Passover. In these childhood memories the shtetl is always described as a special place: it’s a place of abundance, where you can find magical, unusual and very attractive things – special sweets, toys, clothes – the items that were important for children (for example our interviewees often remember candy and gingerbread that were brought for them from the trips to the market). When describing the characteristic features of the Eastern European shtetls, Samuel Kassow points out that in these towns Jews formed the majority of the population and consequently played a major role in the political and economic life of the town itself and the neighboring rural community, which means that thinking of the Jews as a minority in this situation would be a mistake [Kassow 2007a, 8].

The main language spoken by the Latgalian Jewish community of the interwar period was Yiddish with many of our interviewees mentioning that they have always spoken Yiddish. Some of the interviewees have learned Hebrew in school, and Russian language only during the period of evacuation during the WWII or in exile in Ural, Siberia and central regions of Russia. Ezra Mendelsohn notes that widespread use of Yiddish in everyday life is one of the things setting Latgalian Jews apart from all other Jewish communities of Latvia [Mendelsohn 1987, 242]. S. Kassow mentions that one didn’t have to speak any other languages except Yiddish while living in a shtetl where the majority of the population was Jewish [Kassow 2007a, 2]. However usually the Jews spoke Latvian and Russian since knowing these languages was beneficial for their business activities. This is supported by the information provided by our non-Jewish interviewees. As it was mentioned earlier the non-Jewish population of Latgale comprised Poles, Latgalians and Russian Old Believers, therefore some of the town inhabitants (mostly people of older generations) knew Yiddish well and used it to communicate with their Jewish neighbors in everyday life.

On June 17th 1940 the Soviet forces have crossed Latvian borders and Latvia became a part of the Soviet Union [for further information about these events see: Stranga 2010, 112–123]. On the night of June 14th 1941, 15 424 people were deported from Latvia, with Jews constituting 10% of the total amount [Stranga 2010, 128]. Men were sent to forced labor camps, most often to Vyatlag, women and children were sent to settle in Siberia [about these events see memoirs of a girl whose family was deported from Ludza: Kamayskaya 2013]. Paradoxical as it may sound, many Jewish families were saved from the Holocaust by this deportation, however most of the deported men perished in the GULAG camps.

The war between the Soviet Union and Germany started on 22nd of June 1941 and by the end of June/ beginning of July the Nazi forces have occupied Latvia. Some people got evacuated, some even managed to save their families, but more than 90% of the Jewish population of Latgale perished during July and August of 1941 [see: Meler 2010; Rochko 2010; Ezer-gailis 1999]. When the war ended some of the families that managed to escape returned to their home towns, however many of them later moved to Riga and later to Israel and other countries. Currently there are 180 Jews in Daugavpils (0,08% of the total population), 56 in Rezekne and 21 in Ludza. The once significant Jewish towns of Kraslava and Varaklani are now home to one Jewish inhabitant each.

For the last couple of years Center “SEFER” is actively working in the regions close to Belorussian-Latvian-Russian border, including areas of the former Vitebsk Governorate. Our projects have taken place not only in the cities and towns of Latgale, but also on the territory of modern Belarus and Russia – Nevel, Lepel, Ushach, Chashniki, and Glubokoye. This book is a part of a large scale project researching the memories about Jews, Jewish history, culture, ethnography and epigraphy as well as the stereotypical notions and beliefs of different ethnic groups about the Jews of the Vitebsk Governorate and adjacent territories. Several books based on the data collected during our work in this region have already been published with some still being prepared [Neighborhood Lost 2013; Lepel 2015; Glubokoye 2016]. We plan to continue our work in the neighboring region – the Smolensk Oblast. This book represents a small step taken in the process of researching this vast historical region and its rich culture.

This book consists of four parts. The first part includes articles dedicated to Jewish folklore – here you will find the works discussing the linguistic, religious and cultural features and distinct aspects of everyday life characteristic of the Jewish population of Latgale as perceived by the Jews themselves. *Svetlana Pogodina* writes about the Jewish naming traditions in the context of multilingual environment and socio-political changes. *Svetlana Amosova* explores Latgalian Jews' perception of the calendar holidays, highlighting the local-specific features and the transformation of the Jewish tradition, which gradually takes place under the influence of different historical and cultural circumstances. *Marina Geht* uses materials gathered in Riga and Latgale to examine narratives about the work ban on holidays, and how one could bypass such restrictions, noting that such practices were considered legitimate among the Jews. As part of a larger project dedicated to mapping the features of the Jewish cuisine within the Pale of settlement, *Darya Vedenyapina* pinpoints some of the characteristic features of the Jewish cuisine of Latgale. In addition, this section includes the publication of materials of folklore scholar Hirsh Etkin from Latvian Folklore archive, prepared by *Marina Geht*. This collection contains various paremiai (curses, good wishes, proverbs, proverbial signs, etc), collected in Rezekne in the postwar period.

The second part of the book is dedicated to discussing the perception of the Jews by their non-Jewish neighbors. *Angelika Yushko-Shtekele* analyzes how the Jews are portrayed in classic Latgalian folklore (from mid. XIX century to mid. XX century) in order to identify the main features of the stereotypical Jew from the folk texts. *Marina Geht* shows the important role the Jews played in the toponymic traditions in Latgale. *Maria Vyatchina and Vladislav Ivanov* analyze the etymology and the geographic range of the term “white Jews” based on the Latgalian expedition data. *Victoria Kuhtina* examines the narratives about the major life-cycle rituals in Jewish tradition (birth, weddings, and funerals) collected from Jews and non-Jews. *Svetlana Amosova* researches the perception of the Jewish holidays by the non-Jewish inhabitants of Latgale and analyzes various defamatory narratives,

in particular the most famous one – the blood libel; her work also compares various defamatory narratives from Latgale with the narratives from other regions. *Svetlana Pogodina* examines various aspects of the food practices of the Jews. In addition, she studies the examples of interference in “foreign” ritual of worship – various kinds of jokes about Jews during prayers in the synagogue or religious holidays. The article written by *Elina Joffe* focuses on the tales of the inhabitants of Latgale about the items of Jewish material culture. These narratives give an extraordinary example of attempts at understanding and interpretation of the neighbors' traditions.

The third part of the book offers a historical perspective. It opens with the work of *Inese Runce* dedicated to research of the development of the Latgalian regional identity. *Konstantin Karpekin* researches the migration processes of the Jewish population from Vitebsk Governorate to Latvia and from Latvia to Vitebsk Governorate in the first half of the 1920s based on the data from the archive. *Kaspars Strods* analyzes documents and oral testimony about the great fire in Ludza (1938) which destroyed a large part of the city, including Jewish shops and property.

The last part of the book is dedicated to the Jewish cemetery of Ludza. During the work the researchers have recorded all of the parameters of the cemetery: territory, the number of tombstones, the catalog of graves and Matzevot, texts of the epitaphs, etc. This part features an article by *Mikhail Nosovsky* examining the epitaphs found on the Ludza Jewish cemetery in the context of the general trends in the development of the genre of Jewish epitaphs in Eastern Europe. Also included is an extensive database that contains summarized information about Ludza Jewish cemetery, prepared by *Mikhail Vasilyev*. The database is represented in the form of a table, which contains data about more than 1100 Matzevot from the Ludza cemetery.

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S. Amosova, I. Kopchenova