

Никита Петров (Москва)  
Эли Пономарева (Санкт-Петербург)  
Наталья Савина (Москва)  
Тамара Соломатина (Санкт-Петербург)  
Екатерина Толеренок (Полоцк)  
Валерий Тухто (Лепель)  
Татьяна Халево (Гронинген)  
Анна Шаевич (Москва)

## Summary

This book presents the second issue of the series initiated by Department for Slavic-Jewish Study, Institute for Slavic Studies, RAS and Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization “Sefer” (Moscow) and dedicated to Jewish history and culture in Belarus.

The series of publications aims for introducing new archival and expeditionary data on history, traditions and folklore of former Jewish shtetls to scientific circles, representing fragments of Jewish cultural heritage preserved till today and attracting attention to the problems of its preservation.

The first issue of the series was published in 2013 and described the town of Zheludok of Schuchin district of Grodno region in Republic Belarus. This book is based on the materials collected during and following the expedition of 2014 to Lepel in Vitebsk region of Belarus. As in previous years, the primary focus of the participants of the educational expedition was on reconstruction of “Jewish history” of Lepel (which was and is now a district center) and its surroundings as well as neighboring towns of Ushachi and Chashniki using oral testimonies and historical documents. Another important purpose of the expedition included discovery, research and fixation of artifacts of Jewish cultural heritage in the region (primarily cataloguing Jewish cemeteries).

The contexture of the book reflects an integrated nature of that educational expedition due to united efforts of epigraphic and ethnographic groups. The first part of the book contains articles related to the rich history of the Jewish community of Lepel, the unofficial toponymy of Lepel and its suburbs, the history of synagogues in the town of Chashniki, the “urban text” itself describing the most vivid features of the Jewish past in Lepel, the relationship between neighbors

(there were Jews, Belarusians and Russians among our informants), Jewish customs, rituals and folklore as they were preserved in the memory of old-timers.

The book commences with the article of Konstantin Karpekin “They lived in this city: Essays on history of Lepel Jews in 1840s-1930s”, dedicated to the centenary of the new history of the town and its surroundings. These years were marked by the industrial prosperity of Lepel (two brickyards, a tannery and a brewery were founded and managed by Jews), the trade was on its upsurge, and the town was developing Jewish education.

Equally interesting is the history of ten wooden synagogues in Chashniki reported in the second article of K. Karpekin. Using the example of only one decade (1920-1930s) and bringing archival documents the author demonstrates the change in attitude towards traditional religious values in Jewish ambience influenced by social and political circumstances, the change in shtetl’s layout and the transformation of Jewish religious consciousness.

The articles of Andrey Moroz “Jewish Lepel in the eyes of countrymen” and the article of Victoria Kukhtina and Nataliya Savinova “Unofficial toponymy of the town of Lepel” present to a reader the image of “Jewish town” as we see it today: events related to Jews fixated by the collective memory of townsmen and nearby villagers, town loci and objects considered to be “Jewish”, a reason why the town, which practically lost its Jewish population, is regarded as Jewish.

The stereotypes about ethnical neighbors shaped by a tradition appear to still present in the narratives of both townsmen and countrymen. Therewith the traditional stereotypes obviously show tendency to dynamics and transformation given that the personal communication experience cannot but affect the development of an image of “the other” in the context of proximity and contacts. In this case, as A. Moroz notes in his article, such experience projects from individuals to the whole category of “the other/the stranger”, while its perception is formed according to and under influence of particular events and feelings, and the arguments describing this category are based on the examples of former contacts. This very projection of the “Jewish past” of Lepel is presented in the interviews published by Nikita Petrov and Margarita Kozhenevskaya, and these interviews are virtually the monologues of two Lepel citizens: Belarusian woman born in 1935 and Jewish woman born in 1946. Through the lens of pri-

vate and individual experience, through family history and the events of their own lives, the narrators establish the worldview with the Jewish element playing an important part in the story of national tradition's bearer as well as in the eyes of the outsider.

The topic of ethnocultural stereotypes incorporated into autobiographical narrative passes on in Anna Bazarevich's article "Ethno-confessional stereotypes about Jews in the popular tradition of the town of Ushachi and its surroundings". The popular narratives from Ushachi introduced in the publication reflect the Slavic neighbors' perceptions of Jewish professional activity, everyday life, religion and customs.

Valeriy Tukhto in his essay "Jewish cemeteries of Lepel district" presents the records of the places of Jewish burials in the town and in the region: today it is definitely known about Jewish cemeteries in Lepel and the villages of Kamen' and Pyshno.

Olga Belova's article "The Jewish cemetery in narratives of residents of Lepel and surroundings" intends to demonstrate that the town Jewish cemetery in particular is considered by the old-timers to be the memorable place associated with Jewish history in Lepel. Upon that, however paradoxical it may seem, the cemetery ("the city of dead") – its history, arrangement, the status of sacral place – turns out to be one of the brightest pages of "live" Jewish history of the town.

The second part of the book contains a catalogue of

tombstones at the Jewish cemetery of Lepel with photographs, detailed information on the tombstones and transcripts of the epitaphs. The earliest monuments found at the cemetery are dated back to 1810–1812. The total number of the tombstones is 430, and the epitaphs have been preserved on most of them. From their content we know that there were many religious figures of the community, people of the wealthy and scholarly families of Jewish Lepel buried at this cemetery.

In the appendix there are published documents from the archives (lists of Jews of Lepel, lists of Jews in Chashniki, files of the *Lepel society for helping needy Jewish people*) and highlights of the memoirs of Jews who were born in Lepel and surroundings.

We hope that the series of issues, which are regional in their content but complex in the methods of the research presentation, will carry on introducing new materials on Jewish history and culture into scientific circles in the future and clearly representing a contemporary state of Jewish tradition in the areas where it once had been dominating in many respects.

We want to believe that this book, dedicated to Jewish Lepel, the history of interethnic contacts, which were lodged in popular memory and in cultural artifacts, will become essential to researchers (historians, ethnographers, specialists in folklore) as well as to wide readership attracted to the history of Jewish people and their cultural traditions.

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