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## **The Recent Publishing Initiatives of the Sefer Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization**

*Translation by Liv Bliss*

**Irina Kopchenova (Ed.). (2013). *Zheludók: The Memory of a Jewish Shtetl (Zheludók: pamiat' o evreiskom mestechke)*. Moscow (in Russian). — 328 pages; Svetlana Amosova (Ed.). (2013). *Neighbors No More: Jews in the Cultural Memory of the Inhabitants of Latgale; Expedition Materials, 2011–13 (Utrachennoe sosiedstvo: evrei v kul'turnoi pamiati zhitelei Latgalii; Materialy ekspeditsii 2011 — 2013 godov)*. Moscow (in Russian). — 382 pages; Mikhail Chlenov (Ed.). (2014). *Pages From the History and Culture of Georgia's Jews (In the Footsteps of the 2013 Expedition). (Stranitsy istorii i kul'tury evreev Gruzii [po sledam ekspeditsii 2013 goda])*. Moscow (in Russian). — 136 pages; Irina Kopchenova (Ed.). (2015). *Jews on the Map of Lithuania: Biržai; Problems of Preserving the Jewish Heritage and Historical Memory. (Evrei na karte Litvy: Birzhai; Problemy sokhraneniia evreiskogo nasledii i istoricheskoi pamiati)*. Moscow (in Russian). — 366 pages.**

These collections comprise first-time publications of primary materials and analytical articles collected and written by members of research expeditions sponsored by the Sefer Center for University Teaching of Jewish

Civilization. The Center, in collaboration with various partners, has been organizing field schools on Jewish ethnography and paleography for undergraduate and postgraduate students and young researchers since 2003.

Expedition participants have conducted studies in Belarus, Latvia, Moldova, Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Lithuania, both where Jewish communities continue to exist to this day, in whatever form, and in areas where nothing attests to the Jews who once lived there except deserted synagogues, cemeteries, and the memories of their former neighbors.

*Zheludók: The Memory of a Jewish Shtetl* covers various aspects of the life of a Jewish community in a western Belarusian shtetl. It should be noted that it not only launched this series of field-school publications but also represents a groundbreaking effort by Russian-speaking scholars to address the topic of the Jewish shtetl as a unique cultural phenomenon based on the example of one small hamlet, by collecting and analyzing diverse sources (ethnographic sources, archival materials, memoirs, and manuscripts). As a specifically Jewish space, Zheludók, like most others of its kind, has been wiped from the map of Eastern Europe; its Jewish population — 70 percent of its residents before the war — was obliterated in May 1942. Sergei Pivovarchik and Irina Sorokina's introductory article, a fairly detailed and comprehensive historical essay on Zheludók, offers an abundance of interesting historical and statistical infor-

mation. Maria Sidorova-Shpilker's "Jews of the Zheludók Shtetl" ("Evrei mestechka Zheludók") is based on archival materials related to, and residents' recollections of, the tragic events of May 1942. Sidorova-Shpilker makes several interesting observations of the way that today's settlement residents perceive the "inconvenient" Jewish theme and makes a number of suggestions that might help them make sense of what happened in 1942.

In the article "Neither Insiders Nor Outsiders: Jews in the Social Space of Belarusian Peasants in the 19th and 20th Centuries" ("Ne svoi i ne chuzhie: evrei v sotsial'nom prostranstve belorusskikh krest'ian XIX — XX vekov"), Olga Shatalova analyzes the reason for changes in Belarusian peasants' attitude toward Jews, tending to explain its deterioration mostly in terms of economics, in that competition gradually supplanted what had been a relationship of mutually advantageous cooperation. The Polish oppression that both sides experienced had rendered the Jews more acceptable "outsiders" in Belarusian eyes. Shatalova concludes with comments on the "softening" of the Belarusian perception of Jews after the Holocaust, although this, in my view, contradicts her earlier examples of those former neighbors' efforts to provide a rational ex-

planation for the annihilation of the Jews — efforts that may be summarized in five short words: “They brought it on themselves.” Olga Belova’s “A Portrait of an Ethnic Neighbor: Jews through Slavic Eyes” (“Portret etnicheskogo sosedá: evrei glazami slavian”) and Olga Shchur’s “Jews in the Minds of the Villagers of Farnyi Konets” (“Evrei v predstavlenii zhitelei derevni Farnyi konets”) expand in part on the topic that was broached in Shatalova’s article. Using a wealth of field materials, they showcase the shaping and persistence of traditional stereotypes regarding Jews in that area. This book also contains a catalog of Zheludók’s Jewish cemetery and the memoirs of Miron Mordukhovich, who was born and raised in the shtetl.

The collection *Neighbors No More*, also published in 2013, is a study of the ways in which notions of the past are shaped within a society — in this particular case, memories of Jews in contemporary Latgale. The book opens with Mikhail Alekseevskiy’s “‘Jewish National Character’ in the Ethnocultural Stereotypes of the Residents of Latgale” (“‘Evreiskii kharakter’ v etnokul’turnykh stereotipakh zhitelei Latgalii”). Alekseevskiy notes that the respondents’ comments on Jews were on the whole more positive than negative, and proposes that the disappearance of Jews

from the area is connected with the formation of that positive image. One result of that disappearance was the respondents’ idealization of their former neighbors, which manifested in the positive coloration of the current range of ethnic stereotypes. But, somewhat puzzlingly, Alekseevskiy overlooks the attendant circumstances, which are, of course, mentioned but are never factored into his hypotheses for the causes of the idealization of Jews in that area. Yet it is a known fact that Latgale’s Jews were annihilated mainly by the Latvian police with active support from the locals. May it not therefore be supposed that a collective sense of guilt was at least one of the reasons for the substitution of certain stereotypes with others?

To briefly recap other materials here that are connected in some way to religion, there is Daria Tereshina’s “‘Lots of Jews, and Traders, Every One’: Memories of Jewish Trading Stalls and Itinerant Peddlers in Pre-War Latgale” (“‘Mnogie evrei ... oni vse zanimalis’ torgovlei’: vospominaniia o evreiskikh lavkakh i brodiachikh torgovtsakh dovoennoi Latgalii”), which further pursues the topic of stereotypes, this time with reference to a basic sphere of commercial activity among the Jewish population. Also noteworthy are the following: Svetlana Amosova, Yulia Andreeva, and

Vladislavs Ivanovs, “The Jewish Religion, Religious Practices, and Synagogues in the Accounts of Long-Term Latgalian Residents” (“Evreiskaia religiia, religioznye praktiki i sinagogi v rasskazakh starozhilov Latgalii”); Mikhail Alekseevskiy, “Understandings of Jewish Burial and Memorial Traditions in the Accounts of Latgalian Residents” (“Predstavleniia o evreiskikh pokhoronno-pominal’nykh traditsiakh v rasskazakh zhitelei Latgalii”); Viktors Andruškevičs and Marina Gekht, “Tales of Jewish Festivals” (“Rassказы o evreiskikh prazdnikakh”); Svetlana Amosova, “They Will Capture, They Will Kill, They Will Drain the Blood and Mix it into that Matzo of Theirs’: Accounts of Blood Libel in Latgale” (“Poimaiut, ub’iut, krov’ vytiagnut i pribavliaiut v etu matsu’: rassказы o krovavom navete v Latgalii”) (which revises the somewhat idealized picture presented in Alekseevskiy’s first article); and Yulia Andreeva and Maria Viatchina, “‘The Kosher Table’ and ‘Khazer’: Jewish Dietary Practices in the Minds of Non-Jewish Latgalians” (“‘Koshernyi stol’ i ‘khazer’: pishchevye praktiki evreev v predstavlenii neevreiskikh zhitelei Latgalii”). These original studies cover various aspects of the religious and everyday life of Jews as understood by their alloethnic neighbors. They contain a wealth of field findings that re-

quire further analysis with reference to comparative material from elsewhere.

The second section of this volume offers articles based on a variety of sources (oral, archival, and literary) on the 20th-century history of Latvia’s Jews. Inesa Runce’s “The Attitude of the State toward Jewish Communities in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s” (“Otnoshenie gosudarstva k iudeiskim obshchinam v Latvii v 20–30-kh gg. XX v.”) deals with changes in independent Latvia’s official policy regarding Jewish communities. Runce’s conclusion is that, like other “non-traditional historical” religious minorities in Latvia (Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Old Believers) during the period under study, Jews experienced no particular oppression.

Karīna Barkane’s “The Observance of Jewish Traditions in Soviet Latgale (Mid-1940s to Early 1960s): Between Archive and Memory” (“Sobliudenie evreiskikh traditsii v Latgalii v sovetskoe vremia [vtoraia polovina 1940-kh — nachalo 1960-kh gg.]: mezhdru arkhivnymi dokumentami i vospominaniami”) is of great interest. Here, Barkane studies certain elements of everyday and religious Jewish culture that survived into the postwar period, even after the Holocaust had dramatically altered the ethnic balance in Latgale. She also looks

into the Soviet government's anti-religious policies.

Among the most successful of these articles is surely that by Didzis Bērziņš, which covers salient features of the memory of the Holocaust in Soviet literature. Bērziņš prefaces his piece with a brief review of the present state of memory studies with respect to the Holocaust, noting that Western and Eastern Europe diverge somewhat in this area. He suggests that contemplation of the Holocaust was not chronologically continuous and identifies three phases in postwar Latvia during which Soviet fiction tackled the subject of the catastrophe.

It remains only to regret that the reader of this altogether highly commendable collection has not been given the opportunity to assess how the memory of the Holocaust is presented in contemporary oral narratives or how this may have influenced the shaping of Jewish stereotypes and the perception of the Jewish tradition among the local population.

The next edited volume under review, published in 2014, deals with Georgian Jewry. That ethno-confessional group is among the least studied Jewish ethnic groups and is more integrated than others into Georgian society, but its history is even now hard to distinguish from mythology. The members of the expedi-

tion on whose findings this collection is based worked in two directions, ethnographic and philological, as they strove to encompass the unencompassable by bringing history into the present day. Konstantin Lerner, the author of the first article in the collection, "Georgia's Jews: Acculturation without Assimilation (2nd Century BCE — 20th Century CE) ("Evrei Gruzii: akkul'turatsiia bez assimiliatsii [II v. do n.e. — XX v.]"), copes especially well with this task. He notes that the study of Georgian Jewry is of great value not only to the field of Jewish Studies but also to general sociological theory, as "the history of the Jewish community in Georgia vividly exemplifies a successful strategy for the ethno-religious and economic survival of a small group within a dominant society" (p. 14).

The next noteworthy article, written by the famous Russian ethnographer Mark Kupovetskii, concerns the Jews of Kakheti in the 14th to 17th centuries. Kupovetskii remarks on the paucity of the available primary sources on the history of Georgia's Jews and indicates a need to supplement the Georgian sources with Russian, Western European, and Persian sources of the same periods. This approach enables this article to break new ground by reconstructing the conditions of

life in Kakheti's Jewish communities and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance.

Field materials from the expedition are represented here in Svetlana Amosova, Maria Viatchina, and Elena Sabantseva's "The Jews ... Either Doctors or Shopkeepers They Were" ("Evrei ... ili vrachi byli, ili prodavtsy"), which is based on short interviews on the life of Georgian Jews. But what is lacking here, in my view, is an analytical commentary to point up the universality or uniqueness, etc., of the Georgian ethnic stereotypes. That void is to some extent filled by Anastasia Chizhova's "The Relations Between Georgia's Jewish and Judaic Communities" ("Vzaimootnosheniia evreiskoi i iudeiskoi obshchin Gruzii"), which, descriptive as it is, still allows the reader to contextualize the above-mentioned interviews somewhat.

This collection also contains two intriguing articles by Maciej Bone, "The Jews of Georgia and Their Polish Books" ("Evrei Gruzii i ikh pol'skie knigi") and "The Image of the Jews in Polish Descriptions of the Caucasus" ("Obraz evreev v pol'skikh opisaniakh Kavkaza"); Natalia Kashovskaia's "A Philological Excursion to the Mountain Village of Lailashi" ("Epigraficheskaiia ekskursiia v gornoe selenie Lailashi"); Lela Tsutsashvili's "Georgia's Jewish Cultural Legacy" ("Evreiskoe

kul'turnoe nasledie Gruzii"); Guram Lortkipanidze's "New Archival Materials on Georgia's Jewish Diaspora" ("Novye arkhivnye materialy po evreiskoi diaspore Gruzii"); and Shota Bostanashvili's "The Synagogues of Georgia" ("Sinagogi Gruzii").

Finally, the last of these collections to be published to date reverts to issues of historical memory, drawing this time on Lithuanian materials. These scholars have focused on the small town of Biržai, where a rabbinical community once peacefully coexisted with a Karaite community. Several locally initiated projects are presently under way here to study and revitalize the local Jewish cultural heritage.

The book opens with articles by Ruta Anulyte and Krzysztof Bielawski that discuss the problems of preserving the Jewish legacy in Lithuania and Poland. Both countries have lost virtually all of that legacy, and in both, the tragedy would not have attained the scale it did had the local population not been actively involved in carrying out the Holocaust. These articles consider how the attitude toward the Jewish legacy (primarily material but not only that) changed in this regard and how, given that no Jewish communities remained afterward, the custodianship of the legacy fell to the state and the local population.

Vladimir Petrukhin's "Rabbinical and Karaite Communities in Medieval Lithuania: The Problem of Historical Origins" ("Rabbanitskie i karaimskie obshchiny v srednevekovoi Litve: problemy nachal'noi istorii") and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė's "Essay on the History of Biržai's Jewish Community" ("Ocherki istorii evreiskoi obshchiny Birzhaia") explore how the rabbinical and Karaite communities emerged and coexisted in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The following part of the book covers the image of Jews in the memories of their Lithuanian neighbors. Rimantas Sliužinskas's "Lithuanians' Historical Recollections of Jews in the Environs of Biržai (1920–40): The Contemporary View" ("Istoricheskie vospominaniia litovtsev o evreiaikh v okrestnostiakh Birzhaia [1920–1940 gg.]: sovremennyi vzgliad") seeks to systematize Lithuanian memories of Jews, including the specifics of their day-to-day and religious culture. Eye-witness accounts of the Holocaust have also been gathered. This section additionally contains Ilia Magin's thought-provoking "Old Believers as Jews: Idiosyncratic Dietary Prohibitions among the Old Ritualists of Northern Lithuania" ("Starovery kak evrei: osobennosti pishchevykh zapretov u staroobriadtsy severnoi Litvy"). Although field material intended

"to provide examples of the little-known vernacular of Biržai's Old Believers" lies behind this article's tantalizing title, it is not all about linguistics. It also contains an abundance of other interesting information, including on Old Believers' attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust.

A whole section of the Biržai book is devoted to the memory of the Holocaust, with articles by Maria Viatchina and Boris Rashkovskiy, and primary materials collected and processed by Svetlana Amosova. All three note that the collective memory of the Holocaust has probably been conditioned by the particular sensitivities of the respondents, who knew the victims personally, and also by the locals' widely known involvement in the violence taken against the Jews. A good number of works have been written over the past decade on the mechanisms whereby individual and collective recollections of globally traumatic events are framed. Suffice it to recall Aleida Assman's *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, which was recently translated into Russian as *The Long Shadow of the Past: Memorial Culture and Historical Policy (Dlinnaia ten' proshlogo: Memorial'naia kul'tura i istoricheskaiia politika)* (Moscow, 2014). The primary materials published in this collection sup-

ply additional grist to the mills of those wishing to verify existing theories and others intending to develop additional theories in this sphere.

In concluding this brief overview, I would like to make a few points on the series as a whole. On the one hand, the value of these materials is indisputable. Most are unique contributions that have ushered new primary sources into the scholarly mainstream. But on the other hand, the analytical component of these publications is insufficient, and, as a result — in accounts of blood libel, say, or narratives on ethnic stereotypes in Latvia, Lithuania, and Georgia — the reader has to

perform his or her own comparative analysis to pinpoint what is universal and what is unique in them. Also, articles in a given collection sometimes cover the same ground, which, although inevitable in that the authors are working with a single field archive, could have been minimized by some judicious editing. Presumably these features may be expected to change for the better over time. On the whole, though, all four collections will certainly be of great interest to historians and students of religion and will have much of value to offer to the ongoing development of academic Jewish Studies.

**Zhanna Kormina, Alexander Panchenko and Sergei Shtyrkov. (Eds.). (2015). *The Invention of Religion: Desecularization in the Post-Soviet Context (Izobretenie religii: Desekuliarizatsiia v postsovetskom kontekste)*. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta (in Russian). — 280 pages.**

This book is the result of the work of a brilliant and significant school of anthropologists that has formed around several important scholarly institutions in St. Petersburg: the Kunstkammer (the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences), the Pushkin House (the Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences), and the

European University at St. Petersburg. While the contributors to the volume are not exclusively Petersburgers (there is a broad geographical representation here, from America to Armenia), the school itself is Petersburg-based. The book under review here is the second collection of articles this school has produced, and it is as interesting as the first one (Kormina, Panchenko, Shtyrk-