

Jewish Contribution to Architecture in Kishinev

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Jewish architecture has no clear definitions, but it holds a special place in a wide spectrum of national architectures. There are several reasons for it. Unlike most other national architectures, Jewish architecture has been formed without any specific dereferencing and is characterized by so-called “mobility”. Frequent migrations due to difficult social and political conditions affected not only sacral architecture of the Jewish people, but also many other construction fields. Forced migration and perpetual change of environment undoubtedly enriched technical and expressive means of Jewish architecture. It is evident that Jewish architecture merged constructive experience of the whole world. The diversity in architectural styles, as well as the necessities to meet engineering, geological and seismic requirements of a particular region lead to a very peculiar direction in the construction industry.

The absence of a single definition of Jewish architecture greatly expands the typology of buildings that fall under this wording. Thus, not only sacral but also residential, public and industrial buildings can also be components of Jewish architecture. As, during the period of the end of 19th – beginning of 20th centuries, the Jewish population dominated in Kishinev inhabiting the city without any restrictions, the buildings of Jewish property were erected everywhere.

Traditionally by referring to Jewish architecture people usually mean synagogues and houses of worship, but it is not only religious architecture that the features of national architecture can be found in. Any building is closely connected with both its creator and those who inhabit it. The character of the city always reflects the philosophical essence of its’ citizens life. The history of Kishinev is broadly determined by the history of Jewish presence in it. Therefore, not only the synagogues which only few survived to this day but also numerous residential, public, civil and industrial buildings bear the marks of a long-term residence of the Jews in Kishinev. To date more than a hundred architectural objects of various kinds

related to the Jewish history have survived in the city. Most of these buildings used to be Jewish property until 1940.

The history of the Jews in Kishinev totals to more than three centuries. During this time, the city has experienced a lot of wars, destruction and natural disasters. Along with the change of epochs, architectural styles representing the social order were also changing. As a reflection of the spiritual culture of the citizens, the architecture developed under the influence of people's world outlook and a way of their life. The characters and types of buildings not only performed vital and social functions for a society, but were also cultural and even political symbols of a certain age. Along with the development of the world architectural styles (Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism, Art Nouveau, etc.) national architecture was also developing continuously creating its own distinctive architectural forms. Therefore Jewish architecture of Kishinev took on certain features of traditional Moldavian stone architecture.

The lack of a compact area of Jews residence, the so-called Jewish "ghetto", was an important distinction between Kishinev and other cities with a significant proportion of Jewish population. There was no special area for Jewish site development. City residents, regardless of their nationality, could settle in any part of the city and implement professional and social activities there. Therefore, Jewish architecture in Kishinev was never limited by "ghetto" boundaries, as traditionally occurred in many European cities.

The planning solutions adopted in the 19th century had been meeting the needs of the city for more than 100 years. In 1834 after the approval of the master plan, urban zoning emerged naturally. The city was divided into two regions: upper and lower.

The Lower City consisted of an irregular number of narrow streets with one-story buildings, where modest dolly shops, small craft shops and manufacturers, small and large industrial enterprises were located. Jewish craftsmen, which made up 67% of the total craftspeople population of Kishinev, resided and worked in the lower city. Curvy and narrow streets followed the lay of the land dissected by ravines and

gulches. Next to Old Market Square, hidden in the nest of narrow streets, an eponymously named Jewish Street was located, which is a narrow lane non-existent today. This symbolic place has not survived¹. Today the territory of the former Old Market stretches between Grigore Vieru Boulevard and Pushkin Street, to the south of Jerusalem Street¹ (during World War II that was the border of Jewish ghetto, established by Nazis in Kishinev). It runs from the south point of the Old Market to the street intersection of former Pavlovsky, Antonovsky and Inzovsky lanes. In 1998 the street was renamed as Jerusalem Street in honor of the 3000th anniversary of Jerusalem, which is notorious in the pogrom of 1903 Asia Street lays thereby. Today it is referred to Romana Street. Quite a few streets of the working class suburb survived up to this day.

However, not only the Jews occupied the Lower City. According to the historical data there were ethnic street names in this district, such as Moldavian, Greek and Serbian lanes, Armenian, Turkish and Jewish streets. Karaim Lane appeared after the Imperial Edict of 1829 came out, that forced the Jewish people to move from Sevastopol and Nikolaev “to Bessarabia on preferential terms”. To the south of the presumptive Jewish Street, the Armenian Church of the Holy Mother of God was located which had survived hitherto. At the same time, there were many synagogues and houses of prayer on the very territory of the Old Market² (Tsirelson’s list, 1940). Such close proximity of various places of worship displays a high level of culture and ethnic tolerance among the city residents.

Considering the chaotic nature of Jewish settlement, the property that belonged to Jews was to be found in every part of city. Among them single-family were detached homes (built to the standard design), mansions; lodgings with retail space on the ground floor; numerous educational institutions; orphanages; hospitals and clinics; hotels; public offices; banks and chambers of trade; large and small industrial

¹ According to another version, Jewish Street was later renamed as Kagulsky Street, and before Stavrievsky Street. This street, located in the same district, was much longer.

² It is confirmed by German map of prewar Kishinev from 1940.

enterprises, including mills. Jewish religious architecture had a very special place, adding up to 77 synagogues and houses of prayer in pre-war Kishinev in 1940. The quantity of synagogues conveys that they were to be found on almost every street. A Choral Synagogue by an unknown architect was erected in the city center in 1912. Only rich Jewish communities could afford visiting Choral Synagogues. The Burial Synagogue was also located at the Jewish Cemetery, the foundation date of which was not certain. However, it had already existed in 1812 and was located between the villages of Buiucani, Visterniceni and the Durlesti Road.

Traditionally, the lower and underprivileged area of the city was densely populated. All the residential quarters were formed according to area zoning by the degree of reliability, durability and professions of the inhabitants. The fundamental principle of urban planning and the use of the closed building method spread to both parts of Kishinev. Numerous mansions were built in the Upper City for Kishinev Jewish elite, customers of individual projecting.

The mansion of Kligman at the corner of Meshchanskaya and Aleksandrovskaia streets (today Stefan cel Mare Street) was built in 1896-1898 and now it is the greatest among the existing edifices. A brick house of “standardized” design was located here from the middle of 19th century. The house was bought out and demolished by Moisey Kligman. He was a merchant of the top guild, a rich man of low birth well known in Kishinev. On the empty plot a mansion was erected in Neoclassical style with a low-rise socle. The building adorns Kishinev centre up to the present day.

Another key object in Kishinev residential development is a mansion of Gamburd located on 63 Bucuresti street. It was built in the late 19th century in the neo-classical style and eclecticism. In the early 20th century, it was purchased by Isak Gamburd, the father of a famous Bessarabian painter Moses Gamburd. A monogram with the initials “И” and “Г” in the Cyrillic alphabet has survived on the pediment of the portico crowning the main entrance.

According to Kishinev Annuary of 1940, the city amounted to 14 major hospitals, exclusive small clinics and private medical services. A lot of Jews were involved in different fields of medicine. The doctor's list mentioned in the Annuary proves this fact. Almost all clinics were located in the northern part of the city, relatively close to each other. In many cases different medical institutions are still located in the same places, as well.

The Jewish Hospital Centre initially was placed at town outskirts, within its northern borders, on Kaushanskaya street (today Columna Str.); at the end of the 19th century the hospital was found to be close to the city center. The Jewish community converted the hospital to one of the most beautiful buildings in the city. By the end of the 19th century, it was the largest and the only Jewish hospital in Kishinev. The complex involved multifaceted medical centre for Jews. Since 1944 the hospital has been renamed as the City Clinical Hospital № 4. All the departments, except the infectious disease ward, are located on the same premises. Qualified health professionals, most of whom have started their career under the guidance of old Jewish doctors, serve there.

Jewish industrialists actively arrived in Bessarabia from other provinces of the Empire. Possessing considerable financial resources, they became the main building investors in the region. This fact fostered a rapid development of various manufactures. About a hundred of industrial facilities had operated in Kishinev in the early 20th century. They included lime, brick and tile factories, metallurgical works (including iron foundry); soapery, candle works and tobacco factory, tannery, as well as many craftsman schools. There were windmills and steam powered mills, in addition to a highly developed food industry, including pasta and bread-baking plants, two fruit and viniculture factories, five cognac houses and three breweries.

The first attempt to built a brewery in Kishinev belongs to the Third Guild merchant Froim Engler is dated to 1832-1833. In 1856 the mother of architect Bernardazzi acquired a plot on Meshchanskaya Street and divided it among her children. On the obtained plot, Naum Tsigler built a brewery, which was opened in 1890. However, in

1983 the ownership of the brewery passed to the City Bank because of debt. In 1897 bourgeois Idel Shpirt redeemed it. After the construction and technological remodeling was completed in order to bring it up to date, the enterprise was named the First Bessarabian honey brewery “BOHEMIYA, the factory of fizzy and fruity drinks”. The abundance of production space and improved technology allowed the “BOHEMIYA” to attain high level. The factory distributed products not only all over the whole Bessarabia, but also Odessa, Iassy, Galati and other cities.

The only survived steam mill in Kishinev is a unique industrial architectural monument of the late 19th - early 20th century. Known as “Red Mill”, one of the first Bessarabian steam mills was built in the second half of the 19th century. An unremarkable one-storey building during 1850-1860, the mill changed several owners in a quarter of a century. Kishinev was growing, and so did people’s requirement for flour and bread, entrepreneurship was also developing. According to archival documents, already in 1884 the mill became roller-crushing and ran on steam.

As it appears from archive sources, according to the statement of the Mayor of Kishinev of May 8, 1892, the city had 1492 houses belonging to Jews, 42 houses of prayer and one synagogue. In 1904, the provincial government holds the following information: 1693 houses in the city were accommodated by Jews; there were 51 houses of prayer. The document further mentions that 4 more houses of prayer could be opened based on the recommendation on 30 residential houses for 1 house of prayer.

As Jews made the majority of Kishinev population in the first half of the 20th century, synagogues and houses of prayer formed an integral part of the cultural space of the city for decades. There is information about the existence of the list of rabbi Tsirelson³ that was made in 1911 and listed 59 synagogues, including houses of prayer. By 1913, the city had 65 functional synagogues and houses of prayer. By the

³ Yehuda Leib Tsirelson (1859 – 1941) was the Chief Rabbi of Bessarabia, a member of the Romanian parliament and a prominent Jewish leader.

end of the 1930, Tsirelson updated his list and the number of synagogues allegedly reaches 77. But in 1939, the Romanian administration made an inventory of Jewish property, including synagogues and houses of prayer, where 65 names were mentioned again, with a specification of the address and, in some cases, the area was occupied by the synagogues.

The existence of synagogues in the city, likewise the quantity of synagogues, is an illustration of Jewish presence in it. Religious life of the community is impossible without synagogues. Only seven synagogue buildings survived from supposed 77 buildings existing in pre-war Kishinev.

They are:

- The synagogue building on Il'inskaya St. preserved its original look, including interior. Now the building belongs to another confession. It is located at the back of the yard, the access inside is prohibited.
- Synagogue "Beith – Amidrash" (Yeshiva "Sinai") on 5 Leovskaya St. (Schusev St.) hosted yeshiva "Agudat Israel" in 1990s. Today the building is closed.
- Synagogue on 65 Nicolaevskaya street (61 Columna St.) The building is preserved without any exterior changes. Today it is a dwelling.
- Synagogue "Lemnariya" on 5 Pavlovscaya street (Diordita St.) Only vault basement is conserved. The new building of "KEDEM" Jewish centre is raised above.
- Yeshiva "Tsirelson" with asylum for the elderly, on 8 Popovskaya St. (8 Rabbi Tsirilson St.) , only exterior walls are preserved.
- Funeral synagogue "Beth Tahara", on the old Jewish cemetery, only exterior walls are preserved.
- Synagogue "Gleizer sheel" at Yakimovskiy lane, the only acting synagogue today.
- On the place of previous Choral synagogue Russian Drama Theatre was erected (Parcalab St). There is a hypothesis that some of the synagogue premises are used as theatre deposits, but this has no documentary proof.

The sacral architecture was specific mainly due to two factors: multiethnic Bessarabian society around the Jewish community and the steady adherence to tradition, the canonization of the traditional, archaic forms. Together with the traditions, the architecture was influenced by structural and stylistic features of Kishinev urban environment.

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11/11/2014