WINDOWS TO A LOST JEWISH PAST

VILNA BOOK STAMPS

DOVID KATZ

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PREFACE

Like most remarkable cities, Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, has its ghosts of previous peoples that are there no more, and of which only scant traces remain on site. As history goes, the annihilation of its erstwhile Jewish people, who comprised around a third of the population before the war, was both recent and brutally near-complete. It happened in the years 1941 to 1943, when nearly all the city's Jews were murdered at Ponár (now Paneriai), by the Nazis and their enthusiastic local henchmen.

There are diverse ways to "touch and feel" the living Jewish civilization that pulsated through the city's streets for centuries. By "civilization" we refer to an array of cultures rather than any single one. The vibrant diversity of Jewish Vilna spans the gamut from the most piously religious prayer and study houses and yeshivas to the movements dedicated to modernist Yiddish culture (often affiliated to socialist and social-democratic movements) and to modern Hebrew culture (usually affiliated to the Zionist movement).

The Lithuanian-language form *Vilnius* is the proper way to refer to the city's present incarnation. But for its classical periods, and right up to the war, the English form *Vilna* is perhaps most appropriate, approximating the name of the city (in alphabetic order!) in Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Russian, and close to the Polish Wilno. In prewar Jewish usage, the notion 'Vilna' was itself spelled in three different ways, reflecting three of the Jewish cultures of the city. First, with the word-final Hebrew letter alef (giving Vílno, or in more casual pronunciation Vílne), an ancient Aramaic noun-ending form. And then, from around the turn of the twentieth century, the two competing modernist Jewish cultures — and the city became a major international center for both — introduced their own variations on the name of the city. The Yiddishists spelled it with phonetic Yiddish ayin at the end (giving Vílne). The Hebraists respelled the city's name with the Biblical-style word-final hey, rendered in speech in the "Sephardic" (eventually Israeli) pronunciation, giving: *Vílna*.

And with that, we return to the question of how to fathom today these lost terrains of culture? There are still survivors (alas, fewer with each passing day) of that prewar life. There are the books and magazines and papers in libraries, there are photographs and paintings, and there are derivative communities in Israel and the West, in addition to the tiny but vibrant community in Vilnius.

This little book introduces prewar Jewish Vilna through book stamps. Some show possession of a book by an individual, or an individual's donation of a book to a library or institution. Others are the formal stamps of libraries of cultural movements. Most are inked stamps, but some are stickers, embossing on leather book covers, inscriptions in ink by a professional scribe, or even the "pauper's stamp" of a handwritten line, repeated near-identically on a number of books, in the spirit of a stamp.

The images of old book stamps tell more individual stories too. The choice of Hebrew vs. Yiddish, and in those with national-language texts, of Russian vs. Polish (or very briefly, Lithuanian), speak to the issues of cultural orientation as well as dating. These book stamps include one from the *kloyz* (Lithuanian Yiddish for "synagogue" or "prayer-and-study house") of the Gaon of Vilna, one from a milk store on Zavalna Street (today's Pylimo gatvė), and one of the first used by the just-organized Yivo around 1925. The next-to-last stamp in this book is of the Vilna Ghetto police on a Hebrew book, symbolizing the imminent and barbaric liquidation of the magnificent Jewish world that was Vilna.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Dovid Katz

Vilnius 2008

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THE BOOK STAMPS

AND THE PAGES
ON WHICH THEY WERE STAMPED

The Vilna Gaon's kloyz

The Lithuanian Yiddish word for synagogue (particularly a cozy prayer house that doubles as a full time study house) is a *kloyz*. The most famous in Vilna was *dem gó(y)ens kloyz* (kloyz of the Gaon of Vilna — he was Eylióhu ben Shlóyme-Zálmen, who lived from around 1720 until 1797).

It was erected some three years after his death, in 1800, by the Vilna Jewish Community, on the site of his home where he studied, wrote and taught a small group of elite pupils. The attic preserved the Gaon's study table and candlesticks.

British scholar Israel Cohen reported on his 1930s visit to the *kloyz*: "Ten pious scholars who have separated themselves from their wives and families in order to achieve perfect concentration, are always engaged here in the study of sacred lore, to the greater glory of the immortal sage. Whenever there is a vacancy in their ranks it is immediately filled" (Cohen 1943: 111).

The stamp reads *sháyekh l'kloyz ha-Góen mi-Vílne* (belongs to the Gaon of Vilna's kloyz), with the final alef apocopated, leaving the ad-hoc (but perfectly readable) "abbreviation" VILN.

The book is a volume of *Eyn-Yánkev* (Ein Yaakov, 'Eye of Jacob' after Deuteronomy 33:28), a classic compilation of legends in the Talmud. This particular edition purports to be "as printed [in small letters, abbreviated] in Slovita [in big letters]" so the undiscerning would think it a prestigious print from Slovita (now Slavuta, Ukraine). According to Dr. Moshe Rosenfeld (Rose Chemicals, London), the book is most likely to have been one of the "emulations of Slovita prints that appeared in Warsaw, Lemberg (Lvov) or Koenigsberg in the late nineteenth century."

In today's Vilnius, the site of the Gaon's *kloyz,* of which nothing remains, is an empty patch of street with a bust of the Gaon, placed there in 1997, which some observers feel looks more like Karl Marx than Eylióhu the Gaon of Vilna…

Menke Katz Collection

כתנות אור

אור כולל ומוסיף על ספר

עין יעקב

חלק ראשון

עם חדושי קהלת שלמה

ספר מאסף לכל אגדות ומדרשים הספוזרים בכל ששה סדרים עם פירש״י ז״ל והתוספות רבותינו
חכמי צרפת וחדושי הרמב״ן והריטב״א והרן והרשב״א זיל.

הן כל אלה פעולות איש צדיק תמים החכם ר׳ יעקב בר שלמה ן חביב תנצב״ה.

ועד נתוסף עליו כל אגדות הירושלמי כאשר נרשמו בספר יפה מראה גם פירוש על חמלות חמרות ססמי
הערוך אשר לא ערכם הראשונים.

ולאחרי יאיר נתיבות האורה המחדש בשתי תורני אגדות על כל שיתא תלמודא הן את שבחשתו הספתני עין יעקב לאר
אין פיקר ותיקן ה״ס הנסון כמוהר״ר שמואל אליעזר ללמ״ה ר״ח ואב״ד דקיק ליססריסל אשר נרוב פרישותו
ושלמותי פירס פלו״ס על כל שיתא תנ״ים.

ומסק על השבהרת לספור על פלדן ואשיך עיטים תולדור לאדן עלפריל״ם באלי ולעורסת ל״ק חרב הסובסב בסאבר״ל ואשיאדו פינבנו הללולת
ל״הי סיקר פינבט ל״ר לאסר ולו לוד ל ק ל קרל ותסרנד תניר ודרוס מקויט.

כל אלה תינרו אל עמק הסמ״ה הוא ים הסל״ין פלנו של עולם על״י הרב הססאר הגהול החכם הכולל ב״י ע״ה כ״ה
כמוהר״ר יצחק מאיר פרענקיל קן מ״ה כמוהר״ר יחא ולמ״ה נעל דקיקן דיחה.

תחה ודפס סתדת בהחבבת מיודע על המניק . כספר בית יהודה אהבז ל״ת נמוהר״ר יהודה סמודיעט ל״ת עלמוטע תהל״כ את
בהסאביו בהל הספהה נספר ארן ומקב כל ותהד נאקהקו סב פירד״ל וההספה והרהל״ת ר״ל ותירום תוקסר תבובה.

ואלה מוסיף על הרסאנים הריר״ף על חלק שני וחלק שלישי וחדושי קהלה שלמה אשר היכי הרבני מוהר״ר זלמן דיין
דק״ק ולבת יע״א ן מוהר״ר יעקב קן מוהר״ר אייכל דיין ספתנה ול״ל.

כ״ס׳נ בסלאוויטא.

ואלה מוסיף עוד מעלות יתרות טובות ומועלות :

א) הספמו באור לתרוח עם פירושים לפר נפאסו ברסמו הב״ל — בפי פלהסום נספר ע״י לנד נבסו ות בכל פלהת אנה.
ב) כל תלתות עם ספרוסם הנותקנום ממקממו נגהיה ואלפי הגרבותם בכד אלתב יכסבונ בנבי אופי
פתיח מא [ ] וכססמת היסכת המוס נית פני אופי ונבו מא ( ).
ג) נאהסמות סכל סירוסי לנקים ספלסרום והתולדל נפנעי הנספו לנלוע לאתם עם פירוש״ה ותהול״א..
ד) סאנו לן לבור ההסאסום בל פי נרד החלוחד ובן גם חספרינו סינוה בל לסד הבל מקסם פולתו
ה) בל תולתל מקוסות לבר צדום ברדו על סקוסם ופלו אין לוסם פארידום ולעוטם אלהניום על נגנו.

A Christian book at the "Light of Torah" synagogue

Historians and pundits have long pondered the role of Vilna as a center of both traditionalist rabbinic culture and of the modernist Jewish intellectual movements. There was much less "fear of contamination" among even the most pious Vilna Jews — and more generally, classic Litvaks — about exposure to aspects of non-Jewish culture that were not perceived as incompatible or offensive.

Still, it might surprise some that an obviously Christian author's work on the Bible would find its way into a wholly traditional prayer house (what would today count, no doubt, as an "ultra-orthodox synagogue"). But when you think about it, why not? It is not a work of Christian theology but a Bible concordance by a prominent Swiss Christian Hebraist, Johann Buxtorf I (1564—1629). The edition, the title page of which is produced opposite, is Stettin 1861. The book originally appeared in Basel in 1632.

The stamp on the book says "belongs to the *kloyz* [prayer house] Or Torah in Vilna." This presumably nineteenth century *kloyz* (its name translates as "Light of Torah") seems not to have survived (at least not under the same name) to twentieth century Vilna. It is not listed among the hundred and sixty prayer houses enumerated in Leyzer Ran's *Jerusalem of Lithuania* (see Ran 1974, I: 104).

The definitions of the Biblical terms are given in Latin, which would not have been of much use to the congregants of Or Torah (*Or Téyre* in Vilna Yiddish, *Or Tóyre* in the standard language). But the references to the book, chapter and verse where each word occurs were provided in Hebrew by the great Christian scholar of Hebrew, making the book almost exclusively useful for the Jewish reader! Moreover, a number of definitions are provided in German, but in Jewish characters, using contemporary Yiddish spelling conventions (for example the letter ayin for *e*), which would also have been a sometime help to Yiddish speakers in Vilna.

And so, the Latin-Hebrew tome, originally published in Basel by a famed Christian Hebraist, seems to have sat very comfortably in the now-long-forgotten Or Torah prayer house in Vilna. And so too its Hebrew book stamp sits in peace alongside the Latin title of the book…

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

Joannis Buxtorfi

CONCORDANTIAE

Bibliorum

Hebraicae et Chaldaicae.

קאָנקאָרדַנציע אֶרר יודתבמידישׁו

In nova editione in his rebus emendatâ:

1. *Ordo* vocum plerisque in locis mutatus est, radicibus summa cum diligentia recens disquisitis.
2. *Sensus* atque *Versio* vocum plurimarum emendata et correcta sunt, collatis tum antiquis tum recentissimis operibus et lexicalicis et grammaticalibus.
3. *Voces* ab auctore promiscue modo plena modo defectiva scriptione confusae secundum Masoreticam lectionem distinctae sunt.

Adjecta sunt

1. Omnes Hebraicae *Particulae*, ab auctore omnino neglectae.
2. Latinae vocum versioni ubique *versio Germanica* litteris Hebraicis excusa;
3. Tabula omnium vocabulorum et *Hebraicorum et Germanicorum*, lectore rejecto ad Bibliorum locos, in quibus inveniuntur.

Editore

Bernhardo Baer.

Fasciculus I continens litteras א et ב.

An early Strashún Library stamp

The name "Strashún" is in the rarified coterie of Vilna Jewish royalty. The most famous Strashúns were Samuel ben Joseph Strashún (originally Zaskevitsher, lived from 1794 to 1872), a scholar and merchant. His son Matisyóhu Strashún (1819—1885) went on to become a prominent scholar, merchant and social figure on Vilna's high society scene (he got a seat on the city council and became a member of the Imperial Bank of Russia's branch in Vilna).

Matisyóhu Strashún was also a prodigious collector of books. Childless, he bequeathed his collection to the community. It formed the basis of a public library from 1892, and in 1901 was moved to a specially constructed annex to the Great Synagogue on the *Shúl-heyf* (the Great Synagogue Courtyard). In 1920, a street in the Old Town was named Strashúna in his memory by the city government (it's now Žemaitijos gatvė). Some have expressed the hope that it will soon be renamed, in its Lithuanian language form — Strašūno.

According to Aviva Astrinsky, chief librarian at Yivo, the stamp on the title page opposite (reproduced on its own, above) "appears on all the original books that actually were in Reb Matisyóhu's collection. I presume the books were thus stamped by his nephew and trustee, Dovid, either soon after his death, or as the books were being catalogued."

This particular book is the Prague 1624 edition of Meir Benveniste's *Os Émes* ('Sign of Truth'), originally published in Salonica in 1565. It is a commentary with corrections to errors in the classic Jewish works of midrashic (homiletic) literature and notes on various prayers. According to the careful reading of Dr. Moshe Rosenfeld, it was published on Tuesday, 26 Elul (= 10 September) 1624.

The Strashún stamp reads: "Stamp of the library of the late gaon, Reb Matisy' Strashún, of blessed saintly memory, of Vilna."

Incidentally, the Strashún Library, housed in its purpose built annex to the Great Synagogue for forty years (1901 to 1941, when it was pillaged and looted by the Nazis), is sometimes confused with another popular Jewish library, the Mefítsey Haskóle on Strashún *Street* (see p. ^64) which became the Ghetto Library in the period from early September 1941 to 23 Sept. 1943 (see p. ^93).

Menke Katz Collection

נתיב

ספר
אות אמת

יפתח דרכו דרך ישר לכמה חכמות ינחם
וסוד פירוש פירושים כתאבדים ונבאר
כהלכות וככתים של כל המדוקים במכלולם
בדקום כ"ח · הבכולתא · סוטא · ספרי ·
וכפרים דבה, וחגרוגא ' ומדרש שמואל ·
תלים· וכסלי· והילקוטים מהתור' ונביאים
ותבונים· ופירות והצו' על פרור הגלהת·
ככל מכדוים וכא חפשו וזקוק כל כ'ית לתמיד
הכבול · ונמכל המצי'לם משלות כ'ת כל כאבר
ירלם תרול'ב בלקרמת כמתב' פבכם כספר
ותמציכו מכובם רותמות בשלומקק כמות
בכלן וחקה נדש פנית 1

על ידי המחהקק אבר'כס כן לא'ה כס'לור
סמתון ו'ל כלו חיט כוויכו

פה קלן פראנ תרות ככמלה ארתונו חקיסר
ודיעברוס י'ז

והרי התהולהו יום ב' רّו אלול
שפ'ר' לפّק

A gift to the Strashún kloyz

The *kloyz* (prayer and study house) named for the Strashúns was a double-faced premises with entrances going out on two parallel Stephan Streets: *Kleyn Stefn gas* ('Little Stephan Street') and *Greys Stefn gas* ('Big Stephan Street'), both of which emerge from Zavalna. At the time of this particular stamp (interwar Polish Wilno), Little Stephan Street was called Kwaszelna, and the stamp duly records both addresses: Kwaszelna 4 and Wielka Stefanska 3. Today the two streets are known by their names in translated Lithuanian: Raugyklos and Šv. Stepono ('St. Stephen's Street'; with no 'Little St. Stephan' to contrast with, so the 'big' has been deleted).

According to one tradition, the founder of the *kloyz* was Dovid Strashún (died in 1843), the father-in-law of Samuel ben Joseph (the Reshásh, as he was known by his acronymic). Dovid Strashun's fortune helped set up his son-in-law, Shmuel, who was so darned grateful that he took his father-in-law's name. Another version has it that it was because he settled with his wife's parents in the village Strashún, near Zézmer (Straszuny, now Strošiūnai, near Žiežmariai). The versions merge in so far as the in-laws took *their* name from their village, too.

The tradition of donating books to educational and religious institutions in memory of a dear departed relative is strong, and one that inspires — a book stamp. On this fine edition of the *Eyn-Yánkev* (Ein Yaakov), published by Romm in Vilna in 1883, the title page bears three inked stamps: of the Strashún Kloyz itself giving both its addresses on the parallel streets (upper right hand corner), reproduced on its own above left. In addition, there are two (top left and bottom left) stamps commemorating the person in whose memory the book is being donated to the *kloyz*.

As a charming flourish, the donor of the book, Yitskhok Rudashevski, commissioned a traditional scribe to adorn the book with an inked version of the dedication on the front endpapers (reproduced above, right), which reads: "This, Reb Yitskhok Rudashevski has bequeathed to the Strashún Kloyz in memory of the soul of his beloved wife, Móras Rivke daughter of Reb Shlóyme-Zálmen who passed away on the 19th day of Teyves in the year [5]693. May her soul be bound with the bond of life." Incidentally, *Móras* is the standard title for a woman, corresponding with male *Reb*.

The date of Rivke Rudashevski's death, commemorated by these stamps — inked and inscribed — corresponds to 17 January 1933 of the Christian calendar.

Menke Katz Collection

ספר

עין יעקב

מאסף

לכל האגדות והמדרשים המפוזרים בשם תלמוד בבלי, ואגדות מתלמוד ירושלמי

עם פירוש רש"י, ותוספות, וחדושי הרמב"ן, הרשב"א, הריטב"א, והר"ן, וחדושי
הכותב (מאת הרב המאסף), כל אלה ילוו על האגדות מש"ס בבלי, ועל אגדות ירושלמי באור הרב הכותב.

את כל אלה אסף וחבר יחד, איש צדיק תמים הגאון הגדול

מרנא יעקב בר שלמה ן' חביב זלה"ה

ועליהם נוספו

א) חדושי אגדות לחרב ותאון האמתי גר ישראל מרנא שמואל אליעזר בר' יהודה חלוי אידלש ז"ל
(מהרש"א). ב) מאור עינים (הרי"און), חדוש הרב המוסמך הגאון מהרר' יאשיהו בר' יוסף פינטו ז"ל.
ג) בית יהודה כולל הוספות אגדות שהשמטון הרב המחבר ז"ל, ואסף הזמנם הרב הכולל מהרר' יהודה אריה בר' מדונא
ז"ל רב כולהדא, וכל כל מאמר מהאבחות, שנוסף נלוה חדוש הרב ז"ל, וזובני איום בשם אמר הבונה. ה) חדושים
מהגאון תהילל כו' מהרר' יונה האומים ז"ל (בערכים קיקין רייונא הו) קהלת שלמה, חדושים מאת הרב המובן
הרב שלמה יקותיאל וולמן ז"ל, ודין הרק נמצא רבתי. ו) באור מלות תמיהות שבאגרות ירושלמי מס' הערוך.

ועוד נוסף בו הספר הפלא

עין יעקב מאת הרב הגאון תהלל המובהק כו' מהרר' יעקב רייושר ז"ל (בערכים חק יעקב ושות' שבת יעקב וכו')

שם כל שאר ההוספות וכל המעלות בקודש שבבל כפרי עין יעקב שרוש לאור עד כה, רבר לא נעדר.

ועל כל אלה הוספנו בו עתה

ארבע עשרה הוספות נכבדות, חדשות ומועילות

רובן לא שמשו עד עין הרשום, הלא הם ד' התחשים

עין יוסף · ענף יוסף · יד יוסף

ויד עשתי עשרה הוספות המפורשת בפלז.

ווילנא

בדפום והוצאות האלמנה והאחים ראם

שנה יוכד לניראת נהולתו את נאון יעקב אשר אמר אלה לפרק

שבת יציאות פרק א

A POOR MAN'S BOOK STAMP

The commissioning of an inked stamp was a luxury that not all could afford; and so it was with paying a scribe to inscribe a formal dedication in a book.

This volume of the Mishna (Tractate Sabbath, first chapter "Things Carried Out"), is modestly dedicated to the Strashún Kloyz on the first text page inside, rather than on the title page or endpapers. The handwriting is an everyday Vilna Jewish handwriting.

The dedication says, in simple Hebrew: "This was given to the Strashún Kloyz, on Stephan Street in Vilna, by Yehude son of Yankev Sharet."

Menke Katz Collection

שבת יציאות פרק א

השבת (א) שתים שהם ארבע בפנים . ושתים שהן ארבע בחוץ[ג].כיצד"
העני עומד בחוץ וב"ה בפנים . פשט העני את ידו לפנים ונתן לתוך

ר"ע מברטנורה

פרק א **יציאות** השבת . הוצאות
שמרשות לרשות
...מורות אכל שבת והכנסות כמי קא קרי
...אות הוציל ומוליח מרשות לרשות (ב)
...כי דתני יציאות ולא הנא הולאות לימא
...רא נקט דכתיב אל יצא איש ממקומו
...חייב דרשינן הולאה אל יצא איש עם
...כל שבידו ללקוט המן : שתים שהן ארבע.
...חיים מן התירה הולאה והכנסה לבעל
...בית הטומד בפנים בריה"ר ועני שתים חוב
...ייב על שנגחתו חטאת ועל זדונו כרת ועל
...הראחחו מקינוב כחו בכל : שאר מלאכות
...שנת : סהן ד' . מדבריהם הוסיפו
...תים לחסור לכתחלה ריכא שהולאכת
...ימא ק.ם"י שנים זה טוקר וזה מנים דפטרים
...שאוהו קטורים שנאחר בעשותה אחת

עיקר תוי"ט

(א) יציאות הסבת . ופרשי במלאכה זו פתיח
נסט אכית מלאכות כמ"נ הקרשיוה לפי
שוחם המלאכה היה נמלאת קדיר נהה וכאלו
בני אדם על הרוך לפי שהיום כרילים כה לכלום
והפם פני ללמדינו פהיוא מלאכה אפ"פ שהנרולם
ממנה שאינה מלאכה הר"ם . (נ) ומה לי לפנוקי
חס לי פולי . נסרוף ר"פ הזהק . ונפסטנות ד"ס
(והמכילגין)אפדרי וטעמא אפרי הפל כל נקירם
חסן ממקוטו הולאם קרי לה . (נ) נחן . והפטמ
התר פיוחח לביו חחלי נרדן לחחני מרחי דפני
ודמטחהיה מהלי עני מה לי אפיר ונכהי במלאחורין
לחסאוועינין מסוס נסולאס מלאחכ גרוטק היק
למה לי חזלית מרהד"ה לרה"י מה לי מולי' פרהה"י
לרה"י ולא היה גחרוכי דנעדזם פעני ולא לפני
מכא"ם ולנכי אלפכורכי ארי קרפלי מד אל ולא
וחרו.יחלא השם פהכיות כר"פ הזורק . (ד) פורחם
במלאחה נקיט דכטי לפרוסי דרוגה לחנל לדמקם
מפטחת לסערם

וכל ופחת ה' הכטוקה את הכטוף ולא הטוסה של שנת חחייבין
חיד שעטשחה מ"נ כפיס סעטחוה פטורים : ושתים סהן ל' כתון . שתים מן
התורה הולאה והכנסה לעני הטומד בחון בריה"ר. סהן ד'.מדבריהם הוסיפו שתים לחסור
במחחל כמוה עוקר וזה חניח : פשט העלי אח ידו . ונחולכה קופה או הסל שחחקבל צר...
כרוח מבע"י (ד) ונלסכי נקט הולאת בל' פני ועטיר דתּגב הומפים קח"ל דמלוה הכאה
בעירה אסורה חטירה חיבין פליה : ינמך לחוך ידו סל צעל הבים.דעצ'יר ליה בקירה מרה"ל
(מועד) א

זה העשרים וארבע נדב ר׳ חיים בר יוסף עם זוגתו שרה בר זלמן
בקלויז חברה תהלים

Elegance of a scribal hand

But one "hand" (as paleographers use the word) is by no means equal to another. If a handwritten cursive dedication of a gift, written into a book, is a "poor man's way of doing things," then the inscription by a scribal hand is a "rather elegant way of doing things," in some views rather classier, in fact, than a printed stamp.

In traditional communities, a very high status is enjoyed by the scribe whose work, after many years of training and general higher Talmudic learning, can include the writing of the sacred verses in the parchment within mezuzas (door post amulets) and tefillin (phylacteries for the hand and head), and, at the highest level, the writing and repairing of scrolls of the Torah. Internationally, scholars have marveled at the overall accuracy of Jewish scribes. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the twentieth century, the textual differences found between say, the modern Hebrew prints of the book of Isaiah, and the Isaiah scroll that turned up at Qumran, in the Judean desert, while of enormous significance to specialists, seemed relatively minor given the span of some two thousand years and the generations of recopying before the age of print.

The inscription on this book, in the skilled hand of a professional scribe, reads: "This copy of The Twenty-Four was bequeathed by Reb Chaim son of Reb Joseph, with his wife Sarah the daughter of Reb Zalmen, to [literally: "in"] the *kloyz* Khévre Tehílim."

The Twenty-Four is one of the names for the (Jewish) Bible in traditional Yiddish speaking communities, a reference to the traditional division of the Old Testament into twenty-four books. *Khévre Tehílim* is the name of a Vilna *kloyz*, meaning "Society for the Psalms," that was dedicated to the reading and reciting of chapters of Psalms. The Yiddishized pronunciation of the word for the Psalms was often *Tílem*.

In traditional Jewish culture, *kapítalakh Tílim* ('chapters from the Book of Psalms') are read as a kind of prayer and devotional activity, for example as a supplication for the recovery of a dangerously ill person.

Menke Katz Collection

כתבי קדש

עשרים וארבעה

נביאים אחרונים

בולל

יחזקאל תרי עשר

עם תרגום יונתן בן עזיאל ופירוש רש"י ז"ל

תם שני פירושים הדועים

מצודת דוד ומצודת ציון

ותם באור לשון אשכנזי כתב עברי וחמבן לכל ישראל יושבי
ארצנו להתום המלות לבאר הכתנים במאור נבון.

ווילנא

בדפוס האלמנה והאחים ראם

שנת תרל"ג לפ"ק
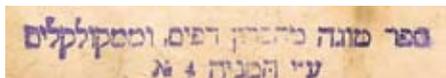
DEFECTIVE, BUT FIXED BY PROOFREADER No. 4

Vilna's most prestigious Jewish publishing house, specializing in the classic texts of Jewish religion, culture and lore, was the family-owned Romm company (known for many years as "The Widow and Brothers Romm"). Founded in Grodna (now Hrodna, Belarus) in 1789, the family set up shop in Vilna in 1799, which soon became its sole headquarters. The Romms published what became known as the classic "Vilna Shas" (The authoritative Vilna edition of the Talmud) and countless other books. Their reign in Vilna, as the world's most prestigious Jewish publisher, lasted until 1940, when they were dismantled by the Soviet regime that had swallowed Lithuania (which had itself just acquired the city from Poland, via the USSR, in the fall of 1939).

In the years before the First World War, Romm began to issue classic Hebrew and Aramaic texts of Jewish civilization with (for the Jewish world) altogether modernistic (and, contextually, rather daring) title pages. This volume, containing a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, was published in Vilna in 1912.

The eagle at the top of this modernistic design (as Talmudic title pages go) is rather engrossed in the first lines of *Pírke Óves* (Pírkey Ovoys, Pirké Avót — the *Sayings of the Fathers,* a popular tractate of the Mishna which anthologizes rabbinic wisdom on life and the purpose of the world. In everyday Yiddish, this beloved little book is known simply as *der Péyrek* ('The Chapter'). The artist has inscribed the first lines of the *Péyrek*: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai, and gave it on to Joshua, Joshua gave it on to…" But in the spirit of modern Jewish art, the lettering is everyday cursive rather than the square Hebrew of the print editions or its scribal version used in Torah scrolls. What is more, the design of the entire title page evokes another line from the *Péyrek* (5: 20[/24]): "Rabbi Judah ben Tema said: Be bold as a leopard, swift as an eagle, fleet as a gazelle, and strong as a lion, to do the will of thy father who is in heaven."

The impact of modernity on the most traditional of publications is evident in the accreditation of the artist, in petit letters in the lower right hand corner: Moyshe son of Yehude-Leyb Maimon (Moses, son of Judah Leib Maimon). But to the outside world of art, he was Moisei Leibovich (or more russified — Levovich) Maimon (1860—±1924), who studied at the Vilna Drawing School in 1880. He won a prize at the St. Petersburg Art Academy for his "Marranos under the Inquisition" and did a series of chromo-lithographs on biblical themes. Some consider him to be in the spirit of the famed Vitebsk school.

In the finest Romm tradition, a book with some defective pages had to have the defect announced honestly to the customer in a stamp on the title page, and to inform that things have now been fixed after all. This book stamp therefore reads: "The book is corrected from the missing pages, and from the spoiled ones, by proofreader no. 4." Let us hope for his sake that No. 4 got it right…

And so the book stamp has more uses that one would think at first.

Menke Katz Collection
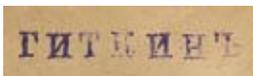
Gitkin's Bible

The title page is of a handsome two-volume Vilna edition of the Jewish Bible (Old Testament). This is the second, comprising the Prophets and Hagiographa (called the *Ksúvim*, literally "Writings"). The title page proudly announces the inclusion of the Bible commentary of "the Malbim," an acronym for Meyer-Leyb ben Yekhiel-Mikhl (1809—1879), whose commentary on the Bible shot him to instant fame across Jewish Eastern Europe.

The owner's book stamp comprises the single word, in Russian: GITKIN.

Bur who was Gitkin?

Menke Katz Collection

כתבי קדש

נביאים וכתובים

עם פירוש

הרב הגאון האמתי המפורסם

מו"ה מאיר ליבוש מלבי"ם ז"ל

ווילנא

1

2

3

4
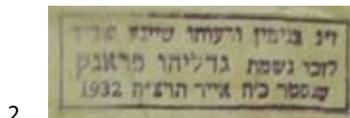
A BOOK OF MANY OWNERS

True, the *Vílner Shas* (Vilna edition of the Talmud), published by the Romms, rapidly became the international standard, and most prestigious to own (and remains so to this day, via reprints). But for *Vílner* (people in Vilna) themselves, it could also be rather satisfying to own a beautifully produced tome of the Talmud from "the west." This particular title page is from the 1863 edition of the tractate *Yevómes* (Yevamoth, 'Levirate Marriages'), published in Berlin in 1863 by Julius Sittenfeld, whose Latin-letter initials appear at the base of the tree trunk of his logo. Such Latin letter initials of the publisher would be quite unthinkable in the less internationalist "eastern tradition" of cities like Vilna. But that did not affect desirability of the volume in Vilna. Perhaps it even enhanced it.

It is risky to guess about the chronology of the four distinct stamps on the title page opposite (some occur twice), but language, typography and orthography suggest a plausible progression from czarist-era owner A. Shabad (no. 1), the lumber merchant (Russian *lesopromyshlennik*), through to his heirs/relatives Benyómin and Shéyne Shabad (no. 2), who donated the volume in memory of Gedálye (Gedalyóhu) Frank who passed away on the 28th of Iyar [5]695, which fell on 30 May 1935; the general-calendar year on the stamp is however 1932, so there seems to be a mistake somewhere.

But to which institution was it donated? One of the two institutional stamps is of the society for study of the Talmud (no. 3) in Shnípeshok (today's Šnipiškės); the other is the newest stamp of Ramáyles Yeshiva (no. 4) which relocated from its old city courtyard premises to Novigóred 9 (today Naugarduko 7) in the new city (see pp. 30-31).

Menke Katz Collection

28

מסכת

יבמות

מן

תלמוד בבלי

עם

פירוש'י, תוספות, פסקן תוספות, רבינו אשר, פסקן הראש', ופי' המשניות להרמב"ם ז"ל

וחדי הספקות הנעברות כאשר נדפס באמיר ובפאריש אחת סהנה לא נעדרה מהוברים קמה

עם

מהרש'ל מהרש'א וכמהר"ם

ונתת תורת אלהים חיים מעושרח בעדי עדים בתנוזות ותקנינם שנים ואלה הסה

הזה התקנים מרבצה והלבוש' בני מלואני אמתי הקפדתם מוה ישעיה פוק וכל נאר שנדפס בדיהודישה ...במלואן אמתי המפדתם רבנו יחזאל סגל לנדוא שלה והתקנים מלואן וחדול מוה בצלאל רעסבורג ניע מא אשר נדפס בפראג די במלואן אמתי המפדתם ובנו אליהו מווילנא שלה והתנויחהר על היראות מבורים בסלח ינבי הוא במלואן אמתי המפדתם רבנו עקיבא איגר עלה

הדרשנו על היראש המעודני יום, ופלפולוא דריספתא, קרבן נתגאל, ות"ש לא וסר דבר ובנוה מהידתא.

נדפס בערלין לפ"ק

One of the well known yeshivas (higher rabbinical-Talmudical academies) in Vilna was Ramáyles (Ramailes) yeshíve. It was founded in 1831 in an Old City courtyard known as "Reb Mayle's heyf," Vilna Yiddish for "Mr. Mayle's Courtyard." Mayle (Maile, Meile, and other spellings) was a known personality in eighteenth century Jewish Vilna (see Cohen 1943: 269; Glenn 1953: 174), and after the yard was named for him, the yeshiva founded in that yard also became known as such, though its actual founder was the humble chimneysweep Shabse ben Shabse and his wife Dveyre (Sabbethai ben Sabbethai and Deborah) who gave everything they had for its establishment. But the name that stuck was "Reb Máyle's Yeshiva," after the yard. In time, good old Yiddish phonetics worked its special magic too. Old Máyle — the personality — was forgotten. As the yeshiva acquired fame, it morphed from Reb Máyle's yeshíve to Ramáyles yeshíve plain and simple, with the possessive sense lost.

The yeshiva's ultimate fame rested on the reputations and lifework of a number of its leaders, including Reb Ábele Posveler and the founder of the Musar ('Ethical Life') movement, Israel Salánter (1810—1883). Before World War I, the yeshiva moved to large new premises at Novigóred Street 9 (Novogrodska, site of the present Soviet-era building housing the Vilnius Simonas Daukantas secondary school at Naugarduko 7).

The poster opposite, dated Elul 5687 (the Jewish month corresponding with the period from 29 August to 26 September 1927), is signed by the yeshiva's dean, Rabbi Hirsh Grodzensky, and bears the stamp of "The Ramayles School for Rabbis" in Hebrew and Polish. It is a pained call for urgent financial support in the face of a crisis. "The old yeshiva turns therefore with a call to our American brethren in general and to *lándslayt* (natives) of Vilna specifically: Help with your annual or short-term contributions, think of the yeshiva for which it is a joy. We ask the honored rabbis and the administrators of the synagogues to inspire to contributions for the yeshiva, by which you will rescue the old historic yeshiva of the old Jewish city, the City and Mother of Israel — Vilna…"

The poster calls for contributions to be sent to the address of the fabled Rabbi Chaim-Oyzer Grodzensky — Zavalna 17 (today Pylimo 15, where the original doors are preserved).

Menke Katz Collection

א אויפרוף
וועגן ווילנער ראמיילעס ישיבה.

די היסטאָרישע ראמיילעס ישיבה, וועלכע איז געגרינדעט געוואָרן דורך

הגאון ר' אבלי פאסוועלער ז"צל רא"בד ווילנא

עקזיסטירט שוין מער ווי הונדערט יאר. די גרעסטע גאונים זיינען דאָרטן
געווען די ראשי ישיבות ווי הגאון ר' ישראל סאלאנטער, ר' מרדכי מעלצער
און ר' מאיר מיכל זכרונם לברכה, און אנדערע באיואוסטע גדולים. די ישיבה
האָט איבערגעלעבט פאָרשיידענע תקופות און שטורמונגען און די איז געבליבן
א פעסטונג פון תורה ביז היינטיקן טאָג, אין די שווערסטע צייטן און אויך אין
די אַקומפאצי'ארן האָט זאָרט ניט אופגעהאָרט צו לייכטן דער נר תמיד. דער
למוד התורה. און דעם נייעם שיינעם בנין, וועלכער עס איז געבויט געוואָרן
פאַר דער מלחמה געפינען זיך בערך 150 תלמידים איינגעטיילט אין 5 שעורים
מיט א משגיח, און די תלמידים ווערן באַזאָרגט מיט עסן אין די ישיבה. קיך און
מיט געלט שטיצע.

צום גרויס באָדויערן געפינט זיך די היסטאָרישע ווילנער ישיבה אין א
שווערן קאטאסטראפאלן מצב. די שטיצע וואָס זי האָט באַקומען פון אמעריקע
דורך און ועד העזרה האָט פאָרלוימיג אופגעהאָרט. די סיבסידיע פון ועד הישיבות
איז זייער קליין, דער אפצאָל פון די חברים איז אונבאַדייטנט און מען זאָל
ניט אָנגעמען געהעריקע מיטלען דראָף מען חלילה פאַרמאַכן די ישיבה.

די אלטע ישיבה ווענדעט זיך דערפיבער מיט אן איין אויפרוף צו אונזערע
אמעריקאַנער ברידער בכלל און צו די ווילנער לאַנדסלייט בפרט העלפט מיט
אייערע יערלכע ציטוויי...יגע נדבות, דערמאָנט זיך ווען די ישיבה ביי
וועלכע עס איז א שמחה. מיר

בעטן די נעערטע דמנים אין די נבאים פון די שולן

מעורר זיין צו נדבות פאר די ישיבה דאָרורך וועט איר רעסן די אלטע היסטא-
רישע ישיבה פון

די אלטע יודישע שטאט עיר ואם בישראל ווילנא

פון אונטערגאַנג

ותתברכו כלכם בברכת אשר יקים את התורה

די נדבות זאלט איר איבערגעבען די גבאים אדער די רבנים פון די שולן וועלכע
זאלן איבערשיקין אין ווילנא אויף דעם אדרעם פון

הרב ר' חיים עוזר גראדזענסקי ווילנא

הכו"ח בתדש אלול תרפ"ו: ווילנא [...]

Rabin Ch. O. Grodzieński Wilno, ul. Zawalna 17.
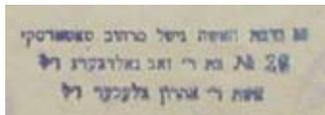
Gitl of Tatar Street

The book stamp became one of those genres in Jewish Vilna where a woman had the same rights as a man, even in the most traditionalist, orthodox circles. This handsome volume of an Order of the Mishna (the order *Zróyim*, or 'Seeds') bears the stamp, in royal blue ink, on the page opposite the title page: "This is the gift of the woman Gitl of Tatarski Street 29, the daughter of Mr. Zev Goldberg of blessed memory, the wife of Mr. Aaron Blecher of blessed memory." So, the lady who donated this book was the widowed Mrs. Gitl (Gittel) Blecher of Tatarski 29. Tatarska, as it was formally known, is today's Totorių gatvė (preserving the meaning "Tatar Street"). Genrich Agranovsky, searching in the city archives for the heroes of this book stamp collection, has found one Gita Blecher at Ludvisarska 12 in 1932; no. 10 was at the corner of Ludvisarska (now Liejyklos) and Tatarska. Gita [gíta] would be the "formal base form" of diminutive "Gitl") and so it could just be her.

Gitl donated the book to the prayerhouse of Ramailes Yeshiva (see the previous item).

In fact, the page with the stamp bears several imprints of both the older and the newer stamp of the prayerhouse associated with Ramailes Yeshiva. Above and to the left of Gitl's stamp are samples of the older stamp that reads *Váad Beys ha-Knéses R' Maylis*, *Vilno* ('Board of Reb Maile's Synagogue, Vilno'). This stamp goes back to a time when the yeshiva (or at least the synagogue) was still spelled as Reb Maile's, though with no apostrophe in the orthography, and with the nineteenth century yud for the final unstressed vowel of the Yiddish name (giving *Maylis = Mayli's*).

The second, and much later stamp, characteristic of the interwar period, which occurs to the right and underneath of Gitl's stamp, says: *Ezras Toyro d'Yeshivas Ramayles b'Vilno* (or, in the "Sephardic" pronunciation of the Zionist movement and then the State of Israel: *Ezrát Torá d'Yeshivát Ramáyles b'Vílna*).

In the older stamp, the words "Reb Mayle's" are in the center of the circular stamp. In the newer, the word for "in Vilna" is centered.

And, in the older, Vilna (Ashkenazic Hebrew Vílno, typically Yiddishized in speech to Vílne) is spelled with classic Aramaic style alef at the end. In the newer, a certain Zionist-Hebraist influence is felt in the spelling (which spread to some elements of more modern Orthodox circles) of Vilna with word-final hey. At the same time, however, modern Yiddish spelling conventions (ayin for *e*) are evident in the spelling of Ramailes, which is condensed to one word, with no reference to a Reb Mayle…

Note that both the older and new Ramailes Yeshiva stamps, for internal use on the books studied, are entirely in Jewish letters, whatever the shifting internal language politics of Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish spelling conventions and all that they evoke in the culture. That is in contrast with the "non book stamp" stamp used on the fundraising appeal; *that* stamp, with Polish in first or equal position, played the role of institutional stamp for the outside world.

The page also contains a scribbled ex libris: "belongs to Ramailes Yeshiva on Novogrodska" with the initial *shin* of the first word, *sháyekh* ('belongs') "calligraphed" out to contain an eye image.

There are also some rather primitive arithmetic computations on the page.

Menke Katz Collection

זאת האשה חי' מרים בעד נשמת ביתה

המנוחה טרת הנרה רפ בתול אימ

נאדרא: כ ה חשו16
שנה הרבם קפמ

Chaya-Miriam in memory of her daughter Hinda-Rochel

Few misfortunes are as heartrending for humankind as a woman's loss of her daughter.

This imposing large volume of a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud on women's laws was published in Vienna in 1845 (cf. p. 28 on the deluxe ambience of imported folio editions of the Talmud).

The rather less aristocratically exacted gold leaf embossing in Vilna, added on the cover, reads: "This is the gift of the woman Chaya-Miriam [Kháyə-Míryem] for the soul of her daughter who passed away: Hinda-Rochel [Híndə-Rókhl] daughter of Reb Aaron Gordon, 28th of Cheshvon, [5]629 according to the shorter calendar style."

That corresponds to Friday, the 13th of November 1868.

זאת האשה חי' מרים בת נחמן נעסת פנחה
הקדשה טרח הנרה רחל בהלי ואשר

נאהראן כ ה חשון
שנה תרצא קפס

נדבת ר' חיים יעקב לעוזיין הלוי
משניפישאק הקטנה
לזכר נשמת אשתו הכבודה
מ' קיילע מלכה ב"ר רפאל הלוי
שנפטרה כג אייר תרצ"ט

A fellow from "Little Shnípeshok"

Shnípeshok, across the Viliya River from central Vilna (corresponding to today's Šnipiškės, across the Neris River from central Vilnius), had (and some would say it still has) two subsections. If you went left after crossing the Green Bridge (Žaliasis tiltas in Lithuanian), you were in *Di línke Shnípeshok* ('the Left Shnípeshok' which was poorer). If you went straight ahead or right, you were in *Di rékhte Shnípeshok* ('the Right Shnípeshok' deemed a better neighborhood). In a parallel terminology, the Left Shnípeshok was also called *Kleyn Shnípeshok* ('Little Shnípeshok'), and Right Shnípeshok was also called *Greys Shnípeshok* ('Big Shnípeshok'; in standard Yiddish pronunciation, 'big' is *groys* rather than *greys*).

But in formal and sacred usage, Hebrew language equivalents for these terms were invoked to provide the gravitas. In the embossed stamp opposite, Kleyn Shnípeshok is rendered Shnípeshok haktáno ('the Little Shnípeshok'), with the classic Hebrew feminine giving an eerily sacred Biblical aura to this poor neighborhood. It is embossed on the cover of a huge prayer book that is being donated to a prayer or study house. The inscription translates (roughly):

"Gift of Reb Chaim-Yánkev Levin the Levite of Little Shnípeshok, in memory of the soul of his esteemed wife Móras Kéyle-Málke daughter of Reb Refóel the Levite. She passed away on the 23rd of Iyar 5699."

The date corresponds to 12 May 1939, and this embossed book would have been donated in her memory not too long thereafter. That was the last spring of Polish-era Wilno.

Only a few months later, Vilna was taken by Soviet forces (in September 1939), and then bequeathed to Lithuania (in October), as part of the Stalinist ruse to swallow all of Lithuania (fully carried out in June 1940). The Holocaust came in June 1941 with the Nazi invasion and the start of massacres by German forces and local collaborators of nearly all the Jewish population. So, in theory the book could have been bequeathed anytime until the Nazi invasion of June 1941, though most likely before the Soviet rule imposed in 1940).

The book may look rather beaten up today, but it was a handsome and relatively new volume, just four years old, when dedicated. It is a *Kol-bey* (standard Ashkenazic *Kol-boy*, Israeli Hebrew *Kol-bo*), meaning "All in It," in other words all that you need is in this comprehensive prayer book. It was published in Vilna by Romm's in 1935.

Menke Katz Collection

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סדור ומחזור

נדבת ר' חיים יעקב לעווין הלוי
משגיפישאק הקטנה
לזכר נשמת אשתו הכבודה
מ' זעלדע מלכה ב"ר רפאל הלוי
שנפטרה כג אייר תרצ"ט

The rabbi's receipt for his son's tuition fee

People of many cultures inscribe important family data into bibles and other sacred tomes.

This particular sacred book belonged to "Khánekh-Hénekh Neviazski, rabbi of Antokol-Vilna." The Polish text in the center of the stamp has "Rabin H. Niewiazski. Antokol-Wilno." Antókol, a suburb of Vilna is today the Antakalnis district of Vilnius. Nowadays the much lengthened street, Antakalnio, that is its core, extends northward quite a bit further than the original.

And underneath his stamp, the rabbi pasted in the receipt he received for paying his son's tuition money at the Yavne religious school at Sadóva 3 (today's Sodų gatvė).

The receipt, written in Hebrew reads:

"Yavne School, Sadóve 3, Vilna, with blessings to God, 6th of Shvat [5]694 [=22 January 1934]. Receipt no. 1321. Received from the brilliant rabbi, Reb Khénekh-Hánekh Neviazsky, on the account for the tuition fee for the study of his son Tsvi-Hirsh, who studies in the Yavne School, for the month of …., the sum of six zehúvim [= contemporary Polish zloty]."

It is signed by the principal whose signature seems to be P. Ts. Teitz. The signature is such that it could equally be Ts. P. Teitz. Genrich Agranovsky surmises it is Tsvi-Pinches Teitz who was at one time director of the Yavne children's school at Novogrodska (Yiddish: Novigóred) 41. The building no longer stands.

Above the stamp and the receipt are three imprints of what was perhaps an earlier owner's stamp: "Avróhom Mórdechai son of Kh. Vaidiklovski, Lodz." There are also the two large handwritten letters tof alef ("T. A.").

Menke Katz Collection

אריק

בית אולפנא וילנה, ב"ה יום ; לחדש ש תרצ"ה

„יבנה"

סאדאווע 3. שובר 1321 №

נתקבל מאת הרב הג' ר' חנך הנק שאוועלסני

על חשבון שכר למוד בעד בנו 3 פ הורם

הלומד בבית האולפנא „יבנה" בעד חדש

סך מאה מפשיי

המנהל Dr. Szumszkiss Wilno Zawalna 15
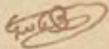
The Book of Job at the dairyman's inn

On reflection, there is no reason why a milk shop should not have its stamp on a copy of the biblical Book of Job. The page opposite happens to be from chapter 9, from midway in verse 24 to midway verse 29. It is from a set of the Hebrew Bible published in Warsaw in 1874, with the standard commentaries, plus a new feature heralded on the title page: the commentary of The Málbim (= acronym of Rabbi Meyer-Leyb ben Yekhíyel-Míkhl, 1809—1879).

The stamp says, in Polish: "Sh. Tobolski, Cheese and Milk Sales, Zavalna 66, apartment 13, Vilna" That is today at Pylimo 60 in Vilnius, toward the top end of the famous street.

Still, it would be on the rare side for a milk shop to have its stamp on its very own Book of Job. But that would be in some sense characteristic for the Jewish civilization of pre-Holocaust Vilna.

Genrich Agranovsky, master of Vilna addresses, has found in the city archives that Simon (Shimen) Tobolski was registered in 1932 as the owner of a guest house (inn) at the same address, and the book might well have been for the pleasure of the establishment's guests (a kind of Jewish version of "placed by the Gideons" in hotel rooms).

Menke Katz Collection

פְנֵי וָאֶבְלִיגָה : כ יָגֹרְתִּי כָל־עַצְּבֹתָי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־לֹא תְנַקֵּנִי :
כ אָנֹכִי אֶרְשַׁע לָמָּה־זֶּה הֶבֶל אִיגָע : לא אִם־הִתְרָחַצְתִּי בְמֵי־שֶׁלֶג
וַהֲזִכּוֹתִי בְּבֹר כַּפָּי : לב אָז בַּשַּׁחַת תִּטְבְּלֵנִי וְתִעֲבוּנִי שַׂלְמוֹתָי :
לג כִּי־לֹא־אִישׁ כָּמֹנִי אֶעֱנֶנּוּ נָבוֹא יַחְדָּו בַּמִּשְׁפָּט : לד לֹא יֵשׁ־
בֵּינֵינוּ מוֹכִיחַ יָשֵׁת יָדוֹ עַל־שְׁנֵינוּ : לה יָסֵר מֵעָלַי שִׁבְטוֹ וְאֵמָתוֹ

רש"י

[פירוש רש"י — טקסט צפוף וקשה לקריאה]

מצודת דוד

[פירוש מצודת דוד — טקסט צפוף וקשה לקריאה]

מצודת ציון

[פירוש מצודת ציון — טקסט צפוף וקשה לקריאה]

באור הענין   **קשת ומגן**

[טקסט צפוף וקשה לקריאה]

Leather merchants' society

Visitors nowadays to the *Khór-shul* (Choral Synagogue), at Pylimo 39 in Vilnius, often notice the large colorful prewar posters on the wall. One of them, on the southern wall, records the order of readings from the Psalms on holidays according to the Gaon of Vilna. Another, on the eastern wall to the left of the ark area, gives the text for a special prayer added on the High Holy Days. Folks who read Hebrew notice that they have small lettering noting their origin as a certain Leather Merchants' Prayer-house (the Yiddishized Hebrew for 'leather merchants' in Vilna pronunciation, being: *sókhrə éyrəs*; standard Yiddish *sókhrə óyrəs;* Israeli *sokhré orót*). Perhaps these charming posters were salvaged and brought there after the war to the one functioning synagogue in Vilnius.

A list of registered Jewish prayerhouses, in the official Polish records for the year 1927, lists 104 addresses. The real number, including the "unregistered" was rather larger. Leyzer Ran (1974; I, 104) lists 160, among them some thirty prayerhouses of specific tradesmen or people in a certain field. One of them is the leather workers' (or leather merchants') *kloyz*.

The leather merchants' stamp reads: "Seal of the *kloyz* of the leather merchants" with its formal name Beys Yankev (Beys Yaakov, Beth Jacob) in the center, and the word Vilna at the bottom. The red ink version, which turns up often, is provided to the right.

The book opposite, with the leather workers' stamp on its title page, is a *mákhzer* (machzor) or holiday prayer book that comes from their prayerhouse. It is volume two of a set for the three major annual festivals (High Holidays, Passover and Shavuoth; *yómim nəróyim*, *péysakh*, *shvúəs*).

The handsome volume is an 1857 print by Romm's in Vilna. Intended for everyday folk rather than a scholarly readership, it is equipped with a prominent Yiddish translation. During the middle of the nineteenth century, most Yiddish books in Eastern Europe were already being printed in square Jewish print-letters with full vowel pointing. But the older style, inherited from earlier Western Yiddish, of using the special sixteenth century *máshkit* typeface was still in vogue in some circles, especially for translations from classical sacred books, where *máshkit* conveyed an aura of otherworldly sanctity, in addition to familiarity for older folk nostalgic for the form of lettering from their youth.

The Yiddish paragraph on the title page, upon which the right end of the stamp overlaps, is based on a centuries-old formula. It urges the worshipper to say the prayers in Yiddish so that they will be understood, pointing out that this is an excellent way to achieve forgiveness for one's sins, an especially potent message for the prayers on Yom Kippur — the Day of Atonement.

There is a second, possibly older, illegible stamp in the lower left hand corner. It may be the stamp of the unknown family that donated this volume in the first place to the Leather Merchants' *kloyz* in Vilna.

Menke Katz Collection

At the hospital

Some hospitals might provide patients with popular novels, humor and other light reading to assist convalescence. In the spirit of Jewish Vilna, however, a Jewish hospital would have its own prayer and study house, and its own library which would also contain some "heavy" Talmudic literature.

This volume is the tractate *Brókhes* (Brokhoys — 'Blessings') of the Babylonian Talmud (the text of which was sealed around 500 AD). It is one of the classic Romm publishing house editions. It is a print from 1835, when Romm's books were published in "Vilna and Grodna" (in the Ashkenazic Hebrew of the title page: *Vílne ve-Horódno* (Horódno — Yiddishized pronunciation: *Haródne*; often spelled Grodno in the Polish fashion, it is today Hrodna in Belarus). The Romms had founded their press in Grodna, in fact, in 1789. They opened the Vilna branch in 1799. After some decades of listing both cities on the title page, they dropped Grodna, and the rest, as they say, is history: their Vilna publishing house grew over the next century to the status of the world's major Jewish press. This edition of the Talmud, in fact, starting in 1835, became the famous *Vílner shas* (Vilna set of the Talmud) which is standard to this day and is constantly reprinted photomechanically.

This book, which originally belonged to one Joseph Chaim (signed at the bottom) went into the library of Mishméres Khóylim (Vilna Yiddish: Mishméres Khéylim) which means 'Watchguard for the Sick' (roughly). The stamp says: 'Seal of the Society Mishméres Khóylim, which was founded here in Vilna in the year [5]650" (= 1889-1890).

In fact, the modest society Mishméres Khóylim, was founded before the hospital, in 1889, by Betsalel Altshuler. It was, to start off with, a typical *khévre* (society for good works), which focused on helping poor people with a doctor's home visit, filling prescriptions, provision of ice and home care for the extremely ill. In 1906, Mrs. A. Kh. Skomorovsky built it up to include ambulatory care and a subsidized pharmacy. In 1910, Mishméres Khóylim was established in its own building and the famous hospital grew from there.

The stamp takes pride in the modest beginnings of the hospital as a simple society for good works back in 1889. That this message is included in a later book stamp is telling. And for Vilna, it was characteristic that a huge tome of the Talmud was kept for patients' use in a Jewish hospital.

During the interwar years, books also got stamped with a newer version containing just the name of the society Mishméres Khóylim in Hebrew and in Polish transcription (above right).

Menke Katz Collection

וחלבים

מסכת

ברכות

מן

תלמוד בבלי

עם כל המפרשים · כאשר נדפס
מקדם · ועם הוספות חדשות ·
כמבואר בשער השני ·

בדפוס השותפים הלק

ווילנא והוראדנא

ברשיון הממשלה יר"ה

שנת תקצה לפ"ק

Mr. and Mrs. Kirzner's Lubavitch prayerhouse

Vilna was the cradle of Misnagdism, the Lithuanian brand of religious traditionalism that rejected the Hasidic movement and its revisions in culture, customs and prayers. Vilna was in fact the scene of the great edicts of excommunication against the Hasidim in the late eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth it was the international center for Misnagdism (literally "Protestantism"). See for example Etkes (2002); Katz (2004: 121-140; 2007: 154-172); Nadler (1997); Schochet (1994).

Nearly all the prayerhouses and yeshivas in the city were Misnagdic. Nevertheless there were several Hasidic institutions in town, all of them offshoots of the so-called "Lithuanian Hasidim," referring to dynasties that arose on the northern territory of Jewish Eastern Europe, in other words, *Líte* (Lita) in the Jewish sense (see Katz 2004). In his list of 160 Jewish houses of worship in prewar Vilna, Leyzer Ran enumerates a handful of Hasidic places, including Lechevitsh, Slonim and of course, the best known of the Lithuanian Hasidim — Chabad-Lubavitch.

One of the curious institutions is the "Synagogue of Gutman and Chaya Kirzner in Vilna." Gutman was still known as a male forename in early twentieth century Lithuania, as documented by Alexander Beider (nowadays it is thought of only as a surname). The Russian *molitvenaya shkola* in the original, literally "prayer school" is often used for 'synagogue' in the city archives. In the book opposite, a Warsaw 1864 edition of the tractate Sabbath from the Babylonian Talmud, the stamp appears twice on the title page. Genrich Agranovsky and Roza Bieliauskienė have discovered various mentions in the city archives of this prayerhouse in the years 1912—1914, at Shpitalna Street 9.

The plot thickens. At various times, city archives list a Lubavitch prayer house at the same address (unknown to most historians of Chabad). Roza Bieliauskienė has found mentions of the Lubavitch presence at that address from 1918. Genrich Agranovsky has uncovered various documents about Chabad Lubavitch occupying this address, and surmises a close cooperation between the Gutman-Kirzner *kloyz* and Chabad-Lubavitch. His findings include references to the Chabad rabbi, Chaim-Shimen Top (born 1871) living there in 1920. Agranovsky surmises that "originally Lubavitch Hasidim prayed in Kirzner's synagogue, and eventually, apparently after Kirzner's death, people started to call the place "Lubavitch." (Incidentally, this synagogue should not be confused with the much more famous branch of the Lubavitch yeshiva Tómkhey Tmímim on Vilna Street 21, home also to the Opatov prayer house.)

In Yiddish the street was called Shpitól gas (the Yiddish equivalent for 'Hospital Street') or in older usage, Hékdesh gesl ('alley of the poor-and-mad house'). Today it is the high-priced Ligoninės gatvė (Lithuanian for 'Hospital Street') in the Old Town, where the former no. 9, home to the Kirzner-Gutman and Lubavitch premises, corresponds to today's Ligoninės 7, where the remodeled building is the upmarket Grotthuss Hotel. The street numbers have since changed. No doubt the owners will be proud to affix a plaque marking the former incarnations of their building…

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

Yiddish literature for a new century, over at Funk's

Right around the turn of the twentieth century, a number of ambitious literary collections appeared in Warsaw, Vilna and other cities that were home to circles of writers, publishers, and enablers of various sorts who were determined to catapult the vernacular — Yiddish — to the medium of a sophisticated and modern European culture. Vilna's role (particularly a few years later) would become pivotal, and disproportionate to the city's modest size compared to larger urban centers both in Europe and America.

The title page opposite is of *Der Folks-fraynd,* published in Vilna in 1901 by Y. Pirozhnikov (1859—1933), a Ukrainian Jew born on a little island on the river Dnieper, who settled in Vilna where he launched his press in 1900. It was edited by Hillel Vikhnin (1879—1942), a Lithuanian Jew, who migrated to America in 1904. After a few years in New York, he settled in Philadelphia where he edited Yiddish publications and translated Tolstoy into Yiddish.

The 1901 Vilna-published *Folks-fraynd* includes some prominent Yiddish writers, including Y. L. Peretz (1852—1915), Abraham Reisin (Avrom Reyzen, 1876—1953) and H.D. Nomberg (1876—1927), and the famous poem *Dray shvéster* ('Three Sisters') by Morris Vinchevsky (1856—1932), about the poverty of three sisters in London's Leicester Square.

Not insignificantly, the distributor "A. Gaselnik, bookdealer, Vilna, Hospitalnaya" (today's Ligoninės gatvė in the Old Town, see previous entry), is listed on the title page before even the publisher. And the contents features "A. Gaselnik's catalogue of useful popular scientific works." Such works played a pivotal role in the movement to make Yiddish "sufficient for acquisition of general modern knowledge."

The stamp, which takes the decorative shape of a book, says, in Yiddish, "*Izraelit* Bookshop, Rudnítsker Street, Shapiro House, Vilna, Yankev [Jacob] Zev Funk." The use of the Yiddish abbreviation for the German word *Strasse* ('street') might indicate that the stamp dates from the World War I period. The street's Yiddish name is Rudnítsker gas (today's trendy Rūdninkų gatvė). For a later, Polish-era stamp of the same establishment, see p. 88).

The additional round stamps higher up on the title page indicate that later, in the interwar period, this book ended up in a Jewish library in Kretinga, in the Lithuanian Republic.

The Jewish booksellers of Vilna were generally catalysts for both the Yiddish and the Hebrew language movements. Verily, it is hard to find a bookseller anywhere who doesn't enjoy selling works from "two sides of an argument." The Yiddish-Hebrew "argument" was gaining steam in the early twentieth century, and its ramifications were felt, not least, in the rise of two excellent school systems (with some overlapping but also many non-overlapping book needs): the *Tseh-Beh-Kah* for Yiddish (see p. 58), and *Tárbus* (or, as it was increasingly called, in the Israeli-Sephardic rendition, *Tarbút*) for the Hebraist-Zionist movement (see p. 70).

Nevertheless, it also happens that folks in a certain circle have "their" bookshop as a kind of social locus, a hangout to meet and chat.

One case remembered by some as Vilna lore, but that still needs to be researched, is that of the family Funk (pronounced "Foonk"). There were the "Yiddish Funks" on Rudnítsker gas (now Rūdninkų), run by Shlóyme Zev Funk (previous stamp), and the "Hebrew Funks" on Dáytshe gas (German Street, now Vokiečių), run by Tévye Funk. The Hebrew Funks made their business stamp in Hebrew (above) and enjoyed stamping it on the title page of Hebraist volumes in which they took pride.

In fact, Vilna lore, as researched by Genrich Agranovsky, shows that there were three Brothers Funk, all in the book business. The brothers' father, I. Funk of Rudnítska, was regarded as the founder of this twentieth century bookstore dynasty in the city.

Tuvia (or Tévye) Funk, of Dáytshe gas ('German Street,' now Vokiečių — Lithuanian for 'German') stamped the title page of this Hebraist book. According to the archival research by Irina Guzenberg of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum of Lithuania, the address on Dáytshe gas was no. 12 (the side of the street destroyed during and after the war; the buildings there now are of postwar Soviet vintage). The stamp reads, in Hebrew, "Bookshop of Tuvia Funk. Vilna, Dáytshe gas [12]."

The book on which T. Funk's stamp appears is one of the typical textbooks that played such a major role in reviving the Hebrew language: Heilprin's *Avodá atsmít* (*Avoydo atsmis* in Ashkenazic), which translates roughly as 'Independent Work.' It is part two of a series "to aid pupils in the expression of ideas in writing." The publisher is Yehudia, listing Warsaw and Vilna as joint cities of publication, with the actual place of appearance, and the printers (Notes and Shveilich), in Vilna.

The author, Falk Heilperin (1876—1945) was one of the leading personalities in Vilna in *both* Yiddish and Hebrew education, teaching, directing schools and preparing textbooks in both languages. He migrated to Palestine in 1938.

Menke Katz Collection

עֲבוֹדָה עַצְמִית.

חלק שני

סֵפֶר עֵזֶר לְתַלְמִידִים בְּהַרְצָאַת הָרַעְיוֹנוֹת בִּכְתָב.

כִּשְׁתֵּי מֵאוֹת חֲמִשִּׁים שׁוּרוֹת
לְחִבּוּרִים, סִפּוּרִים, הַרְצָאוֹת
וְתֵאוּרִים, עִם תָּכְנִיּוֹת וְדֻגְמָאוֹת
מוּבָאוֹת בִּפְנִים הַסֵּפֶר.

הוצאת "יהודיה" ורשה—וילנה.
בדפוס של י. נאמעם וא. שווילינ.

ווילנא—תרע"ד.

"Yєкоро"

The "Yekopo" (acronym for "Jewish Regional Committee for Aid to the Victims of War") was a large organization, organized via democratic elections in many communities in the Vilna region. It was set up at a series of conferences, starting in September 1919. Its central committee was in Vilna, but its work covered a much larger region of then eastern Poland, including the regions of Nowogrudok (Naváredok), Baranovitsh and Slonim.

Yekopo was at its core a Jewish welfare organization for the many whose lives seemed ruined by the devastation of the First World War, but it went on to adapt its role in the interwar years to the new realities, which in many towns and villages entailed a postwar impoverishment that could be regionally very harsh. Its activities included legal aid, money, clothing, food, medicine, tuition for education, and loans for over twenty thousand people rendered homeless by the war and the more "local" fighting at its end which was in many cases more devastating than the period of "orderly war" between the great powers. Yekopo also became a force in the rising diversification of Yiddish writings and publishings. It published a periodical called *Undzer hilf* ('Our Help'), and a large volume (*Pínkes fun Yekopo*) that is rich in information, both statistical and practical, as well as folkloristic and cultural, on many Jewish towns and cities in the areas it covered. Edited by Moyshe Shalit, the massive folio volume appeared in 1931.

In 1939, Yekopo comprised 112 local charity offices in as many towns and villages.

One of the major cultural activities of Yekopo was its *Bíkher láger* (Book Storehouse Project), which rescued masses of Jewish books and recycled them to institutions where they were needed in the postwar years. Many interwar Yiddish library books have the *Bíkher láger Yekopo, Vilna* stamp in addition to the eventual "permanent" library stamp.

The stamp pictured above is typical, applied to a corner of the page with its edges clipped. It comes from the title page of the journal pictured opposite, the Warsaw published bibliographic periodical called *Bíkher velt* ('Book World'). This issue (March 1929) starts with a polemic reply to someone by Y. Khmurner, a well-known pseudonym of the popular historian, translator, journalist, and editor Joseph Leshtshinski (1884—1935), not to be confused with his more famous and more academic brother, Jacob Leshtshinski (1876—1966).

This copy was apparently donated by Yekopo to the *Kínder biblyoték* ('Children's Library') of the *Tseh-beh-kah* , indicated by the blue rectangular stamp in the middle, where this item carried the inventory number 8324.

Menke Katz Collection

ביכער וועלט

י. כמורנער

צום סך-הכל

פון אונזער דיסקוסיע

ער ארטיקל מײנער „וועגן א סעלער, וואָס חורם זיך איבער״ („ביכער־
וועלט״ נומ. 7) האָט ארויסגערופן א פּאָלעמיק. ח׳ זילבערפארב
האָט דערזען אינם ארטיקל א „סערלעכע אילוזיע״, מאלשע בארימעריי
(פֿעדער קאָמפּאָוה), וועלכע קאָן אונז נאָר שאָדן ברענגען. וואָס איז: — איך האָב
געשריבן: „דער אייניציק אקטיווער, דער אייניציק שעפֿערישער כח בײ אונז איז אין
דער ארבעטער־קלאָס״. און נאָך האָב איך געזאָגט: „דער פּראָלעטאַריאַס, און נאָר
ער פאָרקערפּערט אין זיך די סענדענצן פון דער קומענדיקער אנטהיקלונג, און
דעריבער איז ער — דער היסטאָריש־באַרופענער העגעמאָן אין סאָן־נעבסער אויך
אין אונזער קולטור־באַהעגונג״.

איך קוו זאָגן: די קריטיק פון ח׳ זילבערסאַרב אין פאר מיר געקומען
אביסל אומגעריכט. אין נומער 5 „ביכער־וועלט״ האָט ער, ח׳ זילבערסאַרב, דער

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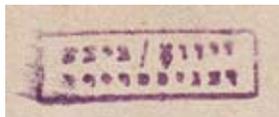
Yivo (1)

By the early 1920s, in the new independent republics of Eastern Europe, the movement to continue building and to solidify institutions for a Yiddish language based on modern European culture was growing apace. School systems, press, theaters and political institutions were flourishing. An academic component to this movement had in fact been launched just before the First World War, and in Vilna. In 1913, a collective academic volume called *Der Pínkes* ('The Record Book') appeared in the city, edited by Sh. Niger (1883—1955). In it, Ber Borokhov (1881—1917), the founder of modern Yiddish linguistics, published his "Aims of Yiddish Philology" in which he "dreamt" the rise of a major new academic institution that would be dedicated to the serious scholarly study of Yiddish language, literature and folklore, and that would conduct its business *in* Yiddish, not only *on* Yiddish, and thereby serve as the academic component of living modern Yiddish culture.

Borokhov's dream was realized in good measure in 1925 (some eight years after his own death) when the *Yídisher vísnshaftlekher instítút,* much more widely known by its acronym Yivo, was established in Vilna under the leadership of Max Weinreich (1894—1969) and other inspiring Yiddish scholars. During World War II, it was reestablished in New York City, where it is the primary international resource center for Yiddish studies to this day (see Katz 2007: 296-300, 359).

One of its first orders of business was the establishment of a library that would be open not only to the "narrower" focus of the modern Yiddish language movement, much of which was secularist, leftist, and focused on modern Yiddish literature; it would become a research library for all aspects of Jewish civilization and life.

The Yivo's "acquisition registered" type stamp, pictured first above, and on the book opposite., says: "Yivo. Bitse [abbreviation for Bíkher-tsentrále]. Registrírt" ('Yivo. Central Book [Department]. Registered'). The reverse title page contains the full Yivo stamp (above right): "Biblyoték fun dem Yídishn Vísnshaftlekhn Instítút" ('Library of the Yiddish Academic Institute'; in its postwar American phase, it was renamed in English as the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research).

The book itself, pictured opposite, is in Hebrew; it is a history of Jewish religious law, or Halacha (Yiddish *halókhe*, Ashkenazic Hebrew *halókho* or *halokhó*, Israeli *halakhá*) by Chaim Tchernowitz, published in New York in 1934.

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

תולדות ההלכה

כולל שלשלת הקבלה
והתפתחות התורה שבעל פה
מתוך שרשיה ומקורותיה
מראשיתה עד חתימת התלמוד

מאת

חיים טשרנוביץ
(רב צעיר)

כרך ראשון, חלק ראשון
מבוא כללי, תקופת התג"ך

Yɪᴠᴏ (2)

The intellectual and scholarly inclusiveness of the Vilna Yivo was particularly evident in the collection policies of its library. Far from being limited to works near the conceptual center of the Yiddishist movement (say works in modern Yiddish whether literary, educational or political), it sought to build a university-level center for all movements and tendencies within Jewish life.

In contrast to the previous book (in Hebrew, religious, published in America, see pp. 54-55), the volume opposite comes from the other end of the 1930s Jewish spectrum: Soviet, communist, in Soviet Yiddish. It is *Literatúr: khrestomátye farn zekstn shul-yor*, a literary anthology for use in the sixth grade published by the Soviet publishing house cited in Yiddish as *Tsentráler Félker-farlág fun F.S.S.R.* ('Central Nationalities Publishing House of the USSR') in Moscow, Kharkov and Minsk in 1930.

The three compilers of this anthology were M. Hoder, E. Koptshitz and Y. D. Kurland.

At the very top of the image there is the same acquisition stamp ("Yivo / Bitse. Registrírt"), and on this occasion, the classic prewar Yivo library stamp lower down on the title page itself (reading "Biblyoték fun dem Yídishn Vísnshaftlekhn Institút").

There had been a certain Vilna Yiddish Yivo folklore that the book stamper, whoever he or she was, "sometimes preferred" to use the red-inked version for books published in the Soviet Union, but only a proper study could determine if there is any basis to that assertion.

Menke Katz Collection

מ. האָדער, ע. קאָפּטשיק, י. ד. קורלאַנד

ל י ט ע ר א ט ו ר

כרעסטאָמאַטיע פאַרן 6־טן שוליאָר
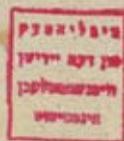
With love from Vilna — to a prison in Jerusalem

For folks in love with the modern Yiddish culture movement in Vilna, one of the most emotive words in the years between the two world wars did not even sound particularly Yiddish. It was *Tseh-beh-kah*, the names of three Polish letters of the alphabet (corresponding to "ts", "b" and "k"), which became the popular shorthand for the *Tsentráler bíldungs-komitét* (literally 'Central Education Committee'), the Vilna based organization that ran a network of Yiddish schools throughout the Vilna region (a large area comprising sections of today's eastern Lithuania and western Belarus, all part of interwar Poland, and all in the heartland of the territory Jews call *Líte* (Lita). The *Tseh-beh-kah* was established in May 1919.

The 1924 *Shúl-pínkes* ('Record Book of the Schools'), proudly subtitled *Finf yor árbet fun Tsentráln bíldungs-komitét* ('Five Years of the Work of the Central Education Committee'), was much more than a catalogue of facts (schools, budgets, projects). It became a testament to the seemingly miraculous "overnight growth" of a radical idea into a viable system of education, from kindergarten through to a teachers' seminary, all conducted in the spoken language, Yiddish, and in the spirit of modern Europe. The preface concludes on a romantic note: "Once there was an idea, an ideal; it became a dream, and people started to realize that dream, and the tower gets built. The legend is woven, the legend of the Yiddish school. Here is the collective volume of facts — the first book of legends of our epos" (*Shúl-pínkes* 1924: 4).

Turning from "the book" to "the particular copy of the book," the stamps on the title page tell a remarkable tale. One marks it as among the books "collected by Chaikel Lunski" (see next entry).

A second stamp marks the book as belonging to the *Tsentráler bildungs-komitét* in Vilna.

A third, with the letters *tsádik*, *beyz, kuf* (the Yiddish equivalents of *ts*, *b*, *k*) written in as the donor, identifies the volume as being marked for donation to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Indeed, Lunski was at the time avidly collecting books for the library of the new Hebrew University, that had been founded in Jerusalem in 1925.

But a fourth marks the place where the book actually ended up in the Holy Land: "Central Prison, Jerusalem" and a more detailed stamp inside includes the date of arrival there: 28 Sept. 1929. The lifespan of a book, like that of a person, is liable to unexpected twists.

Menke Katz Collection

Chaikel Lunski

Chaikel Lunski (±1881 — 1942 or 1943), a fabled librarian, archivist, writer and cultural historian became a legend in his lifetime; he was known as *der shóymer fun Yerusholáyim d'Líte* ('guardian of the Jerusalem of Lithuania'). No other person in the twentieth century so encapsulated knowledge of Jewish Vilna in all its incarnations, religious and secular alike, as Chaikel Lunski, a Holocaust victim whose date or mode of death is still unknown. One account had it that he was tortured to death by the Nazis in the Vilna Ghetto in Sept. 1943; another, that he was deported to Treblinka when the Ghetto was liquidated that month.

Lunski, a native of Slonim (now in Belarus), settled in Vilna in 1892 and soon began a life of intimacy with books and lore, with establishing the position of the librarian-writer-researcher-helper who loves the various Jewish cultures, religious and secular, Yiddishist and Hebraist, academic and popular. For him the divisions were artificial and his knowledge of Vilna's lore evolved into latter day Vilna folklore per se. His works include a 1918 study on the prayerhouses in the Great Synagogue Courtyard, a 1920 book on the old Jewish quarter, a 1925 book on legends about the Gaon of Vilna, and a 1931 work on great rabbinic figures of the recent generations.

As a librarian he was unsurpassed, working for decades, from 1895, as chief librarian of the Strashún Library (see p. 16). In 1918—1919 he helped Sh. An-sky set up the Historical-Ethnographic Society, which was renamed for An-sky after his death in 1920 (Lunski served as the society's secretary). He was a pivotal member of the Yivo's bibliographical commission, and personally helped collect books and archives for all these institutions.

A visit to Chaikel Lunski became part of the agenda of visitors to the city from near and far.

The book stamp above is Lunski's personal stamp, which reads Khaykil Lunski on top; and, in emphasized letters underneath: Vilna, spelled the classic rabbinic way with an alef. It is a rabbinic tome collating all the commandments, positive and negative, from the Torah and from later times. The volume is called *Mitsvoys Ha-Shém* ('Commandments of God'). It appeared in Koenigsberg. The date is given in the frequent style of bringing a relevant passage (in this case "and thou shalt remember all the commandments of God" — Numbers 15:39) with the numbers to be counted in calculating the (Jewish) year printed in larger type. Ever the librarian, Lunski added the easy-to-read Jewish year just underneath: [5]617 (= 1856-1857).

Menke Katz Collection

The An-sky Society for History and Ethnography

The inside cover of this book reveals the linguistic and cultural tension between modern Yiddish and modern Hebrew culture, which coexisted not only with each other, but with the silent (or not so silent) majority of traditional religious culture. The sticker for this book is bilingual, in Hebrew above the space for the inventorization code, and in Yiddish below the code (a "higher-lower" symbol right there). The text in both cases reads "Historical-Ethnographic Society in memory of Sh. An-sky of blessed memory, Vilna" (in the Hebrew: *Vílna*, with hey at the end; in the Yiddish: *Vílne*, with word final áyin). But the book stamp beneath it in Hebrew appears alone on the book's title page (opposite). Above, the stamp and sticker appear side by side.

A Jewish "Lovers of Antiquity" society had been founded in Vilna in 1913 but went under in the wake of the First World War. In early 1919, it was relaunched by a group of intellectuals led by the celebrated ethnographer and author Sh. An-sky, best known to posterity for his mystical drama, *The Dybbuk* (Der Díbek), and the theatrical and film productions based on it. But he was also one of the founding figures of modern Yiddish ethnography, who led the Jewish ethnographic expedition to Volhynia and Podolia (both now in Ukraine) from 1911 to 1914, and it was in the classic Jewish city of learning, Vilna, that he decided to establish his historical-ethnographic society following upon the expedition.

He was born Shloyme-Zanvil Rapoport (1863—1920). The pseudonym An-sky, and the hyphen therein on which he dutifully insisted, were to ensure that the matronymic aspect was not lost. Naming himself for his mother, Anna (Hannah, Yiddish Kháne), he was to be Anna-sky → An-sky.

After his untimely death in 1920, the society in whose creation he had been the driving force was renamed for him. Comprising in time a museum, a library and an archive, it was located in the building of the Jewish community of Vilna. Its best known publication is the *Pínkes far der geshíkhte fun Vílne in di yorn fun milkhóme un okupátsye* ('Record Book for the history of Vilna in the years of war and occupation' [= the First World War and aftermath]), edited by Zalmen Reyzen.

The book opposite, from the An-sky Society's library, is a collection of funeral orations, delivered in memory of notable people who had passed away, by Moyshe-Yankev Rabinowitz, the *Mágid Meyshórim*, or official main preacher for the city's Jewish community (popularly in Yiddish just *shtót mágid* or "city *mágid*"). It is also a source of knowledge for the lore and cultural history of Vilna.

At some point in time, the book (bound in with some other books in its latest history) had belonged to "Shalit" who wrote his name in the upper left hand corner. Moyshe Shalit, a prominent Yiddish educator, communal leader and author apparently donated the book to the An-sky Society, of which he was a board member for two decades. Shalit, born in Vilna in 1885, was murdered at Ponár (Paneriai) in late July 1941, less than a month after the Nazi invasion, after he refused the "invitation" to join the Judenrat or "Jewish Council" under Nazi rule.

Menke Katz Collection
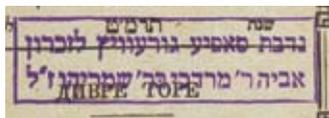
A SOCIALIST EDUCATOR DONATES A RELIGIOUS BOOK

One of the most beloved figures of the modernist, secularist, socialist, Yiddishist branch of Jewish Vilna was Sofia Gurevitch, often known in these Vilna circles by her Russian patronymic (giving Sofia Markovna, after father Mark). Born in 1879 in Minsk (now capital of Belarus), she studied pedagogics and natural sciences in St. Petersburg, and went on to found avant-garde schools for Jewish children, at various times, in Kovel and Poltava (both in Ukraine). She is best known for her two periods in Vilna, however; first, from 1905 to the outbreak of the First World War, and most famously, 1918-1937, when she built up the school (at various times secondary and primary) that came to be known as the *Sofia Gurevitch Gimnázye*. Graduates today include artist Yonia Fain of New York, Professor Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski) of Yale, and librarian Fania Brantsovsky of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute at Vilnius University.

Recent research by Roza Bieliauskienė has turned up three foreign-use passports issued by Polish authorities for Sofia Gurevitch (1927, 1928, 1929), in which her father's name is listed in a "gentilized form of the original Jewish name," *Morduch* (i.e. Mordechai, Yiddish *Mórdkhe*), rather than the wholly russified Mark.

Among the Vilna Jewish book stamps found in the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, thanks to the dedicated and generous help of Dr. Lara Lempertienė, is the stamp above, which reads (in Hebrew): "Gift of Sofia Gurevitch in memory of her father, Reb Mordechai son of Reb Shemárye [/Shmaryóhu], of blessed memory."

The gift in her father's memory was made to the central library of Adas Yisróel that was merged with the Library annex built on to the Great Synagogue in 1902, that is most often called the Strashún Library, after the collection which formed its core, which had been bequeathed by Matisyóhu Strashún (see p. 16).

The book, *Dívrey Tóyro* (Divrei Torah, Lublin, 1889) is a compilation of interpretations of biblical phrases by Hasidic masters, more or less the opposite end of the Jewish spectrum from Sofia's own life's work in modern secular Jewish education. But that didn't stop her finding the best possible home for the book in memory of her dear father (and a stamp often suggests that there were other books too).

And so, we have another book stamp symbolizing the warm juxtaposition of the various and sundry Jewish cultures of Vilna.

Sofia Markovna's meteoric career in Vilna (interwar Polish Wilno) came to a sad end when anti-Semitic elements in the relevant ministry withdrew her right to work in schools. She had to leave her post in 1932. In 1937, she left for the Soviet Union. In the wake of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, she was evacuated to the safety of Gorki, where she died a year later — cold, hungry and lonely.

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

The boys' school of *Mefítsey Haskóle*

Mefítsey Haskóle ('Disseminators of Education' or of 'Enlightenment' or thereabouts) was the name of various related organizations and institutions in Vilna and elsewhere. It became famous for its Vilna library on Strashún Street 6 (now Žemaitijos 4). It became the Ghetto library during the Holocaust (see p. 92).

In December 1915, during the German occupation of Vilna in World War I, when some of the czarist era restrictions on Yiddish were lifted, the Vilna Mefítsey Haskóle komitét set up the innovative boys' school Mefítsey Haskóle (in Middle Eastern "Sephardic," eventually Israeli pronunciation — Mefitsé Haskalá; on the school's early history see Shalit 1916: 137-146). In time, it became part of the network of the *Tseh-Beh-Kah* system (Tsentráler bíldungs-komitét, see p. 58).

Founded on 28 December 1915 at premises on Kona Street (later, Bazilyana 4; today: Bazilijonų 3), the school experienced large increases in enrollment, to some five hundred new pupils in the spring of 1916. This led to the urgent need for new premises. In one of the many legendary instances of "Dr. Shabad to the rescue," Dr. Tsemakh Shabad managed to organize larger premises at Ostrobrom (Ostrobramska) 26 (which became Beliny 4 in the early 1920s, in the "upper" part of the street, now Aušros vartų, that starts at the railway viaduct; Genrich Agranovsky finds that this building no longer stands).

In April 1931, the school put out a proud *Yoyvl heft* ('Jubilee Book') in honor of the school's fifteenth anniversary. The slim, handsome volume, in green covers with a large gold embossed "1915—1930" contains memoirs of the school's many travails, including the need to fight off "extreme right and extreme left" elements within the pro-Yiddish community itself.

The title page of the *Yoyvl heft* features a photograph of little boys rushing to school, caps and short trousers and all, at Bazilyana 4 (see opposite). There is a personal dedication from the school's director, Borekh Lubotski, to the chairman of the school's support committee, Dr. A. Goldburt.

The book stamp is the school's own, proud that what started as a school with just several of the middle grades evolved into a full "eight grade elementary school Mefítsey Haskóle within the Tseh-Beh-Kah in Vilna." The large "No. 8" in the center is the school's designation with the Tseh-Beh-Kah system.

Menke Katz Collection

יובל-העפט

XV

פון דער "יינגל-שול" "מפיצי השכלה"

ב"ם צ.ב.ק. אין ווילנע

ב. מ.

אין שול אריין.

Hammurabi at the Humanistic Yiddish High School

The modern Yiddishist movement developed a sophisticated educational curriculum for classes in modern subjects conducted in the language itself. This requirement necessitated a rapid program of compilation, adaptation and translation of handbooks, textbooks, and diverse scholarly literature. In addition to bringing world culture of the outside into the schools, serious efforts were made to educate Jewish youth in the secular world's study of ancient and more recent Jewish civilization.

The stamp above is from the *Humanístishe gimnázye* (Humanist Secondary School) of the Tsentráler yídisher bíldungs-komitét, or Tseh-beh-kah (see p. 58). For a time, the Humanistic Secondary School, on Portova Street, (today's Pamėnkalnio), was one of the three secondary Yiddish schools associated with the Tseh-beh-kah. The others were the Sofia Gurevitch Gimnázye on Makova (today's Aguonų) and the Reál Gimnázye on Rudnítsker gas (now Rūdninkų).

The book is a Yiddish translation, called *Tanákh Visnshaft* (Science of the Hebrew Bible) which appeared in Warsaw in 1923. It is a rendition into Yiddish of one of the scholarly works of German professor Rudolph Kittel (1853—1929). Incidentally, he was acclaimed for his dispassionate scholarly voice in published work, but harbored anti-Semitic views about modern Jewry.

It was obviously important to secular Yiddish educators to bring to children the findings of non-Jewish scholarship regarding Jewish civilization, starting with the Bible, and to bring in "scientific fact" as an alternative to received religious beliefs. To this end, a usable counterpoint to the belief in revelation at Sinai was the work of Kittel (and others) comparing the Mosaic law to the much older Code of Hammurabi, the famous king of Babylon who reigned in the eighteenth century BC and whose famous Code was found on the stele discovered at Susa in 1901 (now kept at the Louvre).

The frontispiece of the Yiddish edition used at the Vilna Humanistic High School is the famous image of Hammurabi from the top of his stele, facing the sun god Shamash.

The Yiddish caption reads: "The king of Babylon, Hammurabi, and the god of the sun (the Code follows on below)."

The Yiddish translation was by Shmuel Rosenfeld (1869—1943), who also participated in producing a four volume history of the world in Yiddish.

Menke Katz Collection

דער קאפיע פון בבל האמוראבי אין דער געזעץ פון דער זון
(אונטן קומט פארשריבן דאס געזעץ)

טאבל I.
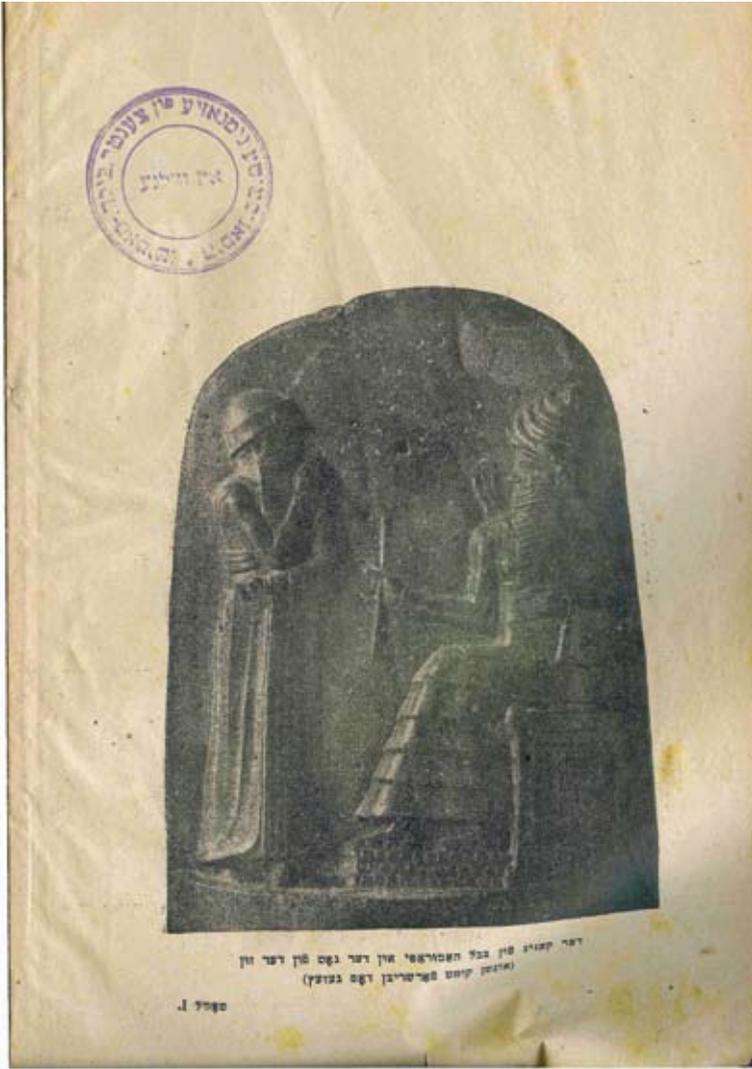
For Hebrew teachers-in-training

The major Hebraist-Zionist educational system in interwar Eastern Europe — particularly sophisticated in the Polish Republic — was *Tarbut*, modern Hebrew for 'culture'. In interwar East European Hebraist circles, it had the added sense of 'modern Hebrew culture of the Zionist movement'. Still, a part of the Hebraist movement stuck to the Ashkenazic pronunciation, *Tárbus*, much more native to East European children and pupils, which had the added nuance of the Yiddish(ized) sense of 'polite and courteous, behaving in a cultural way'. The sympathetic interweaving of forms and meanings was buttressed by the root *kultúr* radiating the dual senses of 'higher forms of culture' and 'politeness' which both fit the bill neatly, with the newer sense of modern Hebraist culture added in. There was a whole continuum of popular forms, from "wholly Yiddish " *Tárbəs* to "proper Palestinian / proto-Israeli" *Tarbút: tárbəs—tárbus—tarbús—tárbut—tarbút*. All five can still be heard from elderly survivors in Vilnius in the late first decade of the twenty-first century.

By the mid 1930s, the Tarbut system in Poland included 183 elementary schools, nine high schools and four teachers' seminaries, in addition to evening and agricultural schools. The Tarbut complex at Zavalna 4 in Vilna, became particularly well known for its standards throughout Eastern Europe, and indeed in Palestine.

The best known Vilna Tarbut Schools stamp, pictured above right, is of the main library of the gimnaziya (secondary school) at Zavalna 4. It has the word *sifriyá* ('library') in the center, encircled by *Gimnáziya Ivrít "Tarbút" b'Vílna* (Tarbut Hebrew Gymnasium in Vilna).

The book opposite, however, is from the library of the Tarbut Hebrew Teachers' Seminary. It has the word *b'Vílna* ('in Vilna') in the center, and is encircled by *Gimnazyón l'morím al-yad "Tarbút"* ('Gimnazium for Teachers affiliated with Tarbút'). It is in an older style, in both font and usage. The page on which it occurs here (opposite) is the German-language title page of an academic Hebrew edition of *Takhkemóni*, a thirteenth century Hebrew-language masterpiece by Judah ben Solomon Al-Harizi (1170—1235). The work (often spelled *Tahkemoni* or *Tachkemoni*) reflects the creatively inspirational impact of contemporary Arabic poetry, particularly the *maqama*.

In both Tarbut stamps, Vilna is spelled with the biblically-derived word final *hey,* encouraging the modern "Sephardicized" Hebrew pronunciation *Vílna*, in contrast to religious institutions which usually stuck with the Aramaic-derived final *álef*, encouraging *Vílno*, often rendered in everyday speech just as in Yiddish: *Vílne.* The Yiddishists introduced final ayin to formalize *Vílne* as the proper norm, rather than just the "perceived lax pronunciation of *Vílno*"…

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

VILNA TECH IN YIDDISH

Perhaps Hammurabi and his ancient law code merited elucidation in Yiddish for the Humanistic High School of the Tseh-beh-kah (see p. 68). But a more practical component of the Yiddishist movement entailed training students for the advanced technology of the day through the medium of Yiddish. In addition to producing new textbooks in Yiddish, the library of the *Yídisher Tékhnikum* (Jewish Technical College) included many works in Russian, Polish and other languages.

The book opposite is L. A. Borovich's 1904 translation into Russian (from German), of A. Ledebur's *Hammering, Pressing, Rolling and Dragging*, with myriad sections on the ductility of various metals and the functions of tools ranging from "outhammering" to "incusing." Appropriately enough, the St. Petersburg publisher was on "Casting Avenue."

The stamp, in Yiddish, reads: "V*ílner Yídisher Tékhnikum ba gez[élshaft]* ORT." The acronym ORT is from the Russian for (in its final form) "Society for Spreading Artisan and Agricultural Work (among Jews)." It was founded in 1880 in czarist Russia (with the czar's blessing, in fact). After the First World War, its central office was reestablished in Berlin and it became a major force for organizing vocational training among Jews throughout Eastern Europe. Recast as the World ORT Union, it was headed between the wars by Leon Bramson (1869—1941) of Kovna (Kaunas), incidentally the uncle of Fira Bramson, currently head of Judaica at Lithuania's Mažvydas National Library in Vilnius.

The Vilna Jewish Technical College — *der Yídisher Tékhnikum* — was one of the ORT's pride-and-joys. Its first incarnation is dated to 1916, when technical education courses were initiated in Yiddish by Dr. Tsemakh Shabad. In the early 1920s, the project was incorporated into ORT, and it occupied premises at the corner of Great Pohulanka and Aleksandrovski Bulvar (which became Pilsudskiego), today the much admired building with rounded balconies on the corner of Basanavičiaus and Algirdo in Vilnius. Later the *Tékhnikum* moved to Gdanska (now Islandijos Street).

One of the instructors at the *Tékhnikum* was Benyómin Yókheles (Benjamin Jocheles), father of Fania Yókheles Brantsovsky, today's librarian at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute at Vilnius University.

For many years between the two world wars, the Vilna *Tékhnikum* was the only Jewish technical school of its kind in the Polish Republic. Its curriculum was divided between mechanical and electrical engineering.

Menke Katz Collection

А. Ледебуръ.

Профессоръ Королевской Горной Академіи въ Фрейбергѣ (Саксонія).

Ковка, Прессованіе, Прокатка

и

Волоченіе.

Ковкость различныхъ ме-
талловъ, нагрѣваніе ме-
талловъ, кузнечные горны,
пламенныя печи, муфель-
ныя печи, орудія, служа-
щія для приданія

формы, молота, пресса,
прокатные станы; вопо-
чильные станы, расплю-
щиваніе, осаживаніе, за-
гибаніе, штампованіе, че-
канка и пр.

Съ 172 рисунками въ текстѣ.
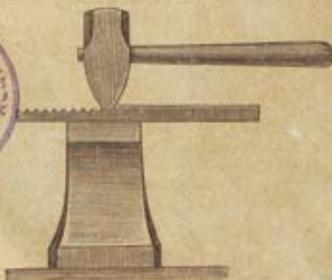
THE FAMILY BRAZ
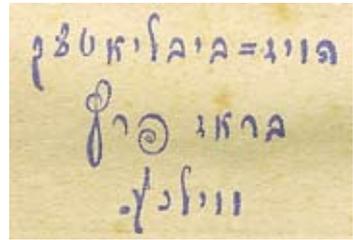
Modern trends bring modern cultural fashions. In the case of modern Jewish culture in Vilna, that often meant switching a certain genre of "high culture" from the classical language (Hebrew) to the spoken language (Yiddish) which was acquiring ever more "high culture" use. Use in a library stamp is naturally somewhat high-culture by its very nature. The new Yiddishist tradition was producing a cultural market for books in Yiddish that had something to do with world culture, and with private ex-libris stamps *in* the modern Yiddish that had "just become" the high-culture language.

The book opposite is a Yiddish translation of *Les Amies,* the eighth volume of Romain Rolland's ten-volume novel, *Jean-Christoph*e. All ten were translated from French into Yiddish by Aaron Mark (1904—1938). The title page of the volume, called *Di Fráyndins* in Yiddish ('The Lady Friends') reveals that the volume was published by the cooperative firm Bíkher ('Books') in Warsaw in 1927, as a *prémye* ('prize') for readers of the Warsaw literary weekly *Literárishe Bléter*. The printed mistake "seventh volume" (of *Jean-Christophe*) is corrected by hand to "eighth." These editions were being churned out rapidly in those years.

Educator and translator Aaron Mark taught at Vilna's *Yídishe Reál Gimnázye* from 1927 or so onward, and was likely known to the owners of this book.

The book stamp, in the classic "royal purple" of book stamps, is crafted in a font stylizing modern handwriting, rather than the usual printed forms of the letters. The stamp reads:

Household library
Braz Peretz
Vilna.

Vilna is proudly spelled the Yiddish way, with the ayin at the end.

Crack historian of Vilna addresses Genrich Agranovsky reports his find that in 1932, Peretz Braz is listed in the city archives as an accountant who lived at Shopén Street 3 (today's Šopeno), near the central railway station. If it is in fact the same person, this was a Vilna accountant with an avant-garde stamp for his personal book collection.

Menke Katz Collection

ראָמען ראָלאַן

זשאַן קריסטאָף

ביים ציל

Herzl in Yiddish, printed in Warsaw, read in Vilna

Theodor Herzl (1860—1904), the founder of political Zionism, was the author of the movement's classic tract, *Der Judenstaat*, first published in German in Vienna in 1896. By now, it has appeared in over a hundred editions in numerous languages.

This edition, in Yiddish translation, appeared in Warsaw in 1936.

The copy ended up in the library of the Yídishe Reál-gimnázye, the Jewish secondary school at Rudnítsker gas in Vilna (now Rūdninkų), where it was given the inventorization number 344. The Reál-gimnázye was a secular Yiddishist school, whose teachers and students had a variety of political and ideological persuasions, with a preponderance being more sympathetic to leftist Yiddishist movements than to Zionism. Nevertheless, the gamut of modern Jewish thought was studied at the school through the medium of Yiddish.

Menke Katz Collection

ד"ר ט. הערצל

יודנשטאאט

1936 תרצ"ו

פארלאג פ. יאקובסאן, ווארשע

MODERN HEBREW POETRY AT THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE

Standard treatments of late nineteenth and early twentieth century revivalist Hebrew poetry generally crown Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873—1934) as the greatest bard of the era. He was born near Zhitomir, in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, there was always a minority, even at the time, especially in Europe but also in the pre-state Land of Israel, that preferred the verse of his comtemporary Saul Tchernichovsky (Tchernichowsky and other spellings, 1875—1943). Tchernichovsky, a native of Mikhailovka, Russia, lived in the vibrant Jewish center of Odessa, before studying medicine in Heidelberg and Lausanne. He lived in St. Petersburg, served as an army doctor for the Russian Army in World War I, and afterwards settled in Odessa again.

Like the major works of Bialik, all of Tchernichovsky's great poems were written in, and need to be read and enjoyed in Ashkenazic Hebrew, the traditional Hebrew of Eastern Europe characterized by a much fuller vowel system than modern Israeli, and the distinctive Ashkenazic penultimate stress pattern boldly applied to Hebrew, over objections of both "antiquarists" and modern political Hebraists. The actual dialect of Ashkenazic Hebrew that became standard for classic modern Hebrew (but pre-State) poetry is remarkably similar to the Vilna pronunciation of classical Hebrew and Aramaic, and this coincidence of sound patterning made these and other Hebrew poets particularly popular in Vilna and the Litvak regions.

It was during his second Odessa period that he completed the book opposite, *Shírim khadóshim* (*Shirím khadashím* in Israeli pronunciation) — "New Poems."

This modern Hebrew work, by a non-religious and often rebellious poet (he experimented with paganism too), comfortably bears the stamp of the pious "Adas Yisróel Library at the Great Synagogue" as the stamp reads. It was one of the incarnations of the fabled Strashún library (see pp. 16, 64).

Yet again, the spirit of openness to other Jewish cultures is evident at even the most pious and sacred Jewish addresses in Vilna.

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

ש. טשרניחובסקי

נעימות

שירים חדשים

ל. רבכד

Daughters of Zion

Few ancient phrases could be as emotive as The Daughters of Zion, known from the Song of Songs (3:11), and from the prophet Isaiah (3:16-17, 4:4). The singular is even more prominent in biblical poetry (e.g. Jeremiah 6:2). And few cities in Europe could lay claim to a role in the revival of spoken Hebrew as pivotal as Vilna's. The various Hebrew-revivalist circles in Vilna were the backbone of the movement to accomplish the not-so-small miracle of turning a liturgical and written language into a quasi-vernacular capable of "needing just the final touches" to turn into a full vernacular upon emigration to the Land of Israel (see Katz 2004: 223-239).

By the late nineteenth century, Vilna Hebrew language circles were increasingly becoming involved with the early East European Zionists who were actually moving to the deserts of Palestine to rebuild *Érets Yisróel* — the Land of Israel. Hebrew language and Zionist ideology were synthesizing to produce ever more dedicated groups, and Vilna was a major center.

In 1889, the Daughters of Zion organization was established in Vilna for girls and women to study Hebrew and Jewish history. It produced a number of pioneering women teachers of Hebrew and Jewish history who went on to play substantial roles in educational establishments in Palestine (see Klausner 1983: II, 318-319).

The ancient biblical phrase would have a number of phonetic incarnations, ranging from the "Deep Vilna" *Bənéys Tsíyeyn* (and its more homey, Yiddishized *Bneys Tsíyən*), through standard Ashkenazic Hebrew *Bənóys Tsíyoyn,* more formal *Bənóys Tsiyóyn*, down to the "Sephardic" (and latterly, Israeli) *Bənót Tsiyón*. The different phonetic renditions themselves tell a tale of intricate cultural complexity (see Katz 1993).

The Daughters of Zion stamp opposite is joined by the Adas Yisróel stamp of the Strashún Library built on to the Great Synagogue where the book may have ended up. This is the first page of the Warsaw 1898 edition of Saul Tchernichovsky's *Khizyóynoys umangínoys* ('Visions and Melodies'). The 1893 poem that starts off the volume (reproduced opposite), has been translated for this page by Prof. Ghil`ad Zuckermann (www.zuckermann.org) of the University of Queensland (Australia):

We shall go and dwell at our ease
when the ice and frost have passed,
while the sun shines in the gardens
in grassy oases of delight and light.

At a time when leaves, wet and fresh,
will scatter aroma of myrrh,
like the discourse of angels and seraphs
the nightingale and sparrow will sing.

At a time when the red-tails cover the lilies
the dove will surely fall in love;
we shall amorously dwell in the gardens
when the ice and frost have passed...

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

SHOLEM ALEICHEM IN HEBREW, IN A YIDDISHIST LIBRARY

Folks who remember the modernist sectors of prewar Vilna Jewish life invariably talk about the intensive rivalry between the devotees of Yiddish (usually socialist, "here-ist" and left-leaning) and those of modern Hebrew (usually Zionist, "there-ist" and more rightward leaning). The educational systems of both movements had built up remarkable school systems, from kindergarten to the higher educational level, where most subjects (sometimes all, except classes in the national language) were taught in the group's "Chosen" among the modern Jewish language options. This was an instance of more general developments throughout non-Soviet East European Jewry, for both Yiddishism and Hebraism. Vilna became famous for the success of *both* its Hebrew and its Yiddish school systems, adding modern layers to the city's older status as "Jerusalem of Lithuania."

Still, today's folks don't quite appreciate how often stalwarts of each of the two language based modern traditions were "intimately acquainted" with the other, and often — and this is important — readers of works from the "other camp" (a far cry from today's Jewish diaspora situation where even those "interested" in Jewish culture can rarely read either Yiddish *or* Hebrew literature in the original).

In fact, the page opposite is testament to a whole network of intra-Jewish cultural interaction. Much of the work of the classic Yiddish writer, humorist Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinowitz, 1859—1916) was translated into Hebrew by his son-in-law Y. D. Berkowitz (1885—1967). The page opposite, with a photo of Sholem Aleichem with his father Nókhem (Nahum) in 1885, is from the frontispiece of a New York 1920 edition of (part two of) Berkowitz's rendition of Sholem Aleichem's literary autobiography. The Yiddish work is called *Fúnem Yaríd* ("From the Fairgrounds"); Berkowitz's Hebrew gets renamed *Kháyey Ódom* (Israeli Heb. *Khayé Adám*), a playful reference that evokes the name of an early nineteenth century rabbinic work of the same name, which means "The Life of a Person." The rabbinic work of that name, a kind of digest for the cultured layman was, incidentally, written by Avrom Danzig (1748—1820) who settled in Vilna where he eventually became a judge on the city's rabbinical court.

But the book stamp is that of the Tseh-beh-kah, the "ultra-Yiddishist" Tsentráler bíldungs-komitét in Vilna (see p. 58). Someone there was obviously enjoying Sholem Aleichem in… Hebrew.

Menke Katz Collection

שלום־עליכם ואביו נחום רבינוביץ בשנת תרמ"ה
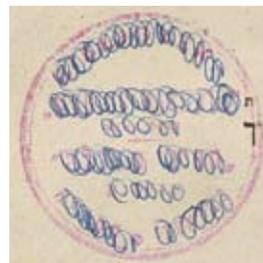
There is a stigma about a book stamp found in a book in an individual's possession when he or she is not the party named in the stamp (well, at least if the stamp is from a functioning library in the same period). The worry is one that transcends human lifespans; someone may think unkindly of him or her long into the future. The first assumption will be that someone has stolen, or "taken" or "forgotten" or "failed" to return or perhaps decided to "keep" the book. These things happen, even among folks who would on their life not hold on to someone else's dime.

But the amateur detective game can become more complicated, even if it is all a retroactive thought experiment about another age and place.

Book thieves who panic and decide to destroy a stamp usually do better than the person who crossed this one out. They cross out the stamp beyond legibility. The book thief worried about damage to his or her reputation that could "happen" many years hence, often takes more radical measures. These include smudging the stamp with water or a chemical to the point where it becomes just a stain (though a revealing one to the forensic detective of books). And, alas, one finds old books with a rectangle of paper containing the stamp cut out (or even the entire page excised).

This stamp, and others on different pages of the same book — a 1931 translation into Hebrew of John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* — are crossed out, but not beyond the point of readability with some moderate effort.

The stamp says "[in Polish:] BIBLJOTEKA "MEFICE HASKALA" WILNO [and in the Jewish alphabet:] "Mefítsey Haskóle [/Mefitsé Haskalá] Biblyoték — Sifriyó [/Sifriyá]." The volume belonged to this famed library on Strashún Street, which became the Vilna Ghetto Library during the Holocaust years (see p. 92).

What, then, have we here? It could just be the case of an individual carefully noting that the book no longer belongs to its erstwhile owner (which might have disposed of it as a duplicate or for some other reason). It might have been thought "prudent" to cross out a Polish era stamp after the incorporation of Vilna into the USSR in the spring of 1940 (or after the war, in the Stalin years; chemical analysis of the ink used for the crossing-out could help with dating: postwar Soviet ink differs from prewar Polish ink).

Menke Katz Collection

דְזשון גאלְסְוָורְתִּי

הַהַגָּדָה שֶׁל בֵּית פוֹרְסַייט

כרך שני
שִׁלְהֵי קַיִץ. בַּקּוֹלָר

חרגם מאנגלית
י. ל. ברוך

עִבְרִיַּת שְׁטִיבָּל
הוצאת ספרים

For everyday folks, there is often something frightening, even unmentionable, about death and burial. For Holocaust victims before their own death, and survivors even today, there is often overt envy at those privileged to see their loved ones die in peace of natural causes, with the honor of a traditional burial according to tradition, and with a gravesite, and inscribed stone, that can be visited at will.

In fact, *Gakhsho* is often the oldest Jewish institution in a city, and Vilna was no exception. Gakhsho is an acronym for *Gemílas khésed shel émes* ('Rendering of the Kindness of Truth'), a way of referring to that kindness for which nothing tangible could come in return, in other words — to the deceased (as opposed to other kinds of kindness for which some favor in return is perhaps expected). It came to be the name for the *Khévre kadíshe*, the "holy society" that took care that all rites and prayers were taken care of for those who died, as per the letter of ancient Jewish law as interpreted by rabbinic authority over the ages.

The great historian of Jewish Vilna, Israel Klausner posited that the Vilna Gakhsho as an institution was older than 1487, the traditional founding date of the Great Jewish Cemetery at Piramont (now the site of an international dispute over building projects arising above it in the Šnipiškės section).

Like certain other big city *khévre kadíshes* the Vilna Gakhsho had a tradition to throw a massive party once a year, to encourage and honor the many volunteers, supporters and members in their difficult work, which involved finding resources to accord proper burials and gravestones for the poor. The Vilna Gakhsho's party was held each year on the 15th day of Kislev, some ten days before Chanukah, and it featured a song, partly in Yiddish and partly in Hebrew, that was composed by Mordechai son of Moyshe, who had been inducted into Gakhsho in 1770.

The lengthy bilingual song sung at the annual Vilna Gakhsho party, was composed as an acrostic, in alphabetical order with each letter retained for six stanzas (three in Hebrew and three in Yiddish). It tried to be merry without losing the serious meaning of the enterprise called life. For example: "The body always pursues food and drink and all your passions. And with your tongue you speak all that your heart wants. Remember that your end will be that the Khévre kadíshe will carry you to the graveyard" (after Klausner 1938: 115).

While the names "Khévre kadíshe" and "Gakhsho" are rather elegant, the Jews of Vilna gave the establishment, which was right opposite the Great Synagogue within the synagogue courtyard (*der shúlheyf*, in Vilna Yiddish), a rather more earthy name: *di kabrónishe kloyz* ('gravediggers' prayerhouse').

Some brief excerpts from Chaikel Lunski's 1918 description:

"It was founded in 1487 and rebuilt in 1750. People study and pray there without stop. There is an old society there for studying Bible, founded in 1786. There is a society of people who fast every ten days. The first [World War I] refugees who came to Vilna before *Shvúes* of 1915 stayed at Gakhsho, about fifteen families" (Lunski 1918: 102).

The book is *Léket Tsví* (Roedelheim 1856), an anthology of prayers, supplications, songs, praises, and studies of Mishna, Gemora, ethics and warnings. What better book for the folks at Gakhsho?

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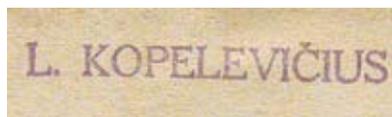
1939

This two volume work in Yiddish, *Kabóle un mekubólim* ('Kabbalah and Kabbalists') appeared in Vilna in 1939, the last year of the "Old Vilna," so to speak, before a series of rapid changes of regime, official language, and complex relationship to the impending disaster in Europe.

The work was published by Tomor, a high-brow Yiddish culture publishing house headed by Yoysef Kamermakher (Joseph Kamermacher), who had split away from Kletskin's much larger and older enterprise.

The book stamp of Funk's bookshop (headed by S. Funk) is in Polish, the official language of Wilno, as it then was officially, until the 19th of September when the city was taken by the invading Soviet army. After around a month, the Soviets gave the city they had taken from a just-disappeared Polish Republic to the Lithuanian Republic, and Lithuanian became the official language of the city that was duly renamed Vilnius. The Soviets also politely insisted on stationing troops on Lithuanian territory; it was all a trick to incorporate all Lithuania into the Soviet Union, and that followed in June 1940.

Of course, a Polish-language book stamp could have been quietly used even after September 1939, but in would not, in real life, have been used for very long for stamping additional books in a bookshop.

The man who apparently purchased the book from Funk's bookshop (probably in 1940) already had his own stamp produced with the Lithuanianized version of his Jewish surname, Kopelevich, which appears as Kopelevičius; unless, of course, it was sold to a Kopelevich from the pre-September 1939 territory of the Republic of Lithuania, in which case it would have been Kopelevičius in official usage all along anytime during the previous two decades or so. The border between the mutually hostile states of Lithuania and Poland was rapidly dismantled by the Soviets in 1939.

Incidentally, the address of Funk's bookshop provided is Rudnicka 10 (Yiddish Rudnítsker); for an older, czarist era stamp of the same bookstore, see above, p. 48. Today's Rūdninkų 10 in modern Vilnius happens to be home to Versus Aureus, publishers of the present volume. But it is not quite the same building. Genrich Agranovsky reports that the numbering changed, and old Rudnicka 10 was a building that no longer stands.

Menke Katz Collection

דיר ש. א. האראדעצקי

קבלה און מקובלים

אין צוויי טייל

1940—1941

Book stamps can be a window into a brief period of history, one that could not have come before or after.

Pre-Holocaust Jewish book stamps from Vilna are in Hebrew or Yiddish, and sometimes in one of the principal non-Jewish languages of the city. Russian was generally used in book stamps during the czarist period, and Polish in the interwar period, when the city and its region were part of the Polish Republic.

The Lithuanian language was among the least used in the Vilna region before the war, and its appearance on a Vilna Jewish book stamp usually means that the stamp can be dated to the period after late 1939, when Lithuanian became the official language in Vilna (the Polish *Wilno* which had become Lithuanian *Vilnius* when the Soviets transferred the city to the Lithuanian Republic, after dismembering then eastern Poland).

The Hebrew language appeared freely on book stamps *until* Vilna, and all of Lithuania, were forcibly made into a Soviet republic following upon Stalin's faked elections of June 1940. Sovietization meant banning of the "clericalist" or "Zionist" Hebrew language.

It therefore follows that a bilingual stamp in Lithuanian *and* Hebrew can be dated with some precision to a period between late 1939 and mid 1940.

The Hebrew text of this stamp reads "The Jewish Community in Vilna" (the need was not felt here to Lithuanianize the name of the city in Hebrew usage). The Lithuanian text reads "Vilnius Jewish Religious Community." Again, this would have reflected the pre-Soviet state when "religious community" was not a problematic formulation, and was in fact a prominent legal entity in the city.

It is also characteristic of that 1939—1940 period of rapid official Lithuanianization that mistakes were made either in haste, or because of insufficient mastery of Lithuanian.

In some versions of our stamp in other books, the word *Vilniaus* (genitive of Vilnius in Lithuanian) is misspelled as *Vilniauo*, indicating a not-very perfect knowledge of Lithuanian grammar. One example is reproduced in the right hand image above. But this was obviously fixed and the word appears correctly in the instance of the stamp on this book.

The book itself, incidentally, is a 1924 Vilna edition of one of the six divisions of the Mishnah. Unlike the pre World War I Romm editions of such sacred works, the interwar paper was often very poor and nowadays crumbles to the touch.

Menke Katz Collection
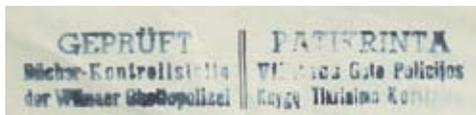
1942—1943

The Jewish population of Vilna grew from sixty thousand to (some say) around eighty thousand in the period between September 1939 (when Poland was carved up between Germany and the USSR) and the Nazi invasion in June 1941. The Jewish newcomers were mostly refugees from Nazi-occupied (western) Poland, and also included some who came from parts of interwar Poland incorporated into the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSR, for whom Vilna — (Polish) Wilno just renamed (Lithuanian) Vilnius — was seen as a temporary haven and potential port of escape from a very volatile Eastern Europe.

In early September 1941, the Nazis forced the city's Jews into two ghettos, a "small ghetto" which was liquidated within weeks, and a "large ghetto" which was liquidated over two years later, on 23 September 1943; that is the one people are often referring to when talking about "the Vilna Ghetto." It was bordered by *Dáytshe gas* (now Vokiečių) and *Zaválne gas* (now Pylimo).

From its start to its finish, groups of Jews were herded from the Vilna Ghetto to the mass killing site Ponár (Paneriai) where they were murdered, in large part by Lithuanian units which enthusiastically collaborated with the Nazis. By the end of September 1943, the Jewish population of the centuries-old Jerusalem of Lithuania was close to statistical zero.

The Vilna Ghetto developed a network of cultural, educational and sports activities. Its library on Strashún Street (now Žemaitijos), formerly the Mefítsey Haskóle library, celebrated the loan of the 100,000th book to Ghetto readers on 13 October 1942. To the very end, the victims of the Nazi racist project tried to cling to a cultural and meaningful life. Books were central to that culture (see Shneidman 1998; 2002; Kostanian 2002).

The title page opposite is of the translation into Hebrew of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vania* (from the original Russian *Diadia Vania*). It was translated by Kh. Sh. Ben-Avram and had been published in Warsaw, by Shtibl, in 1923.

The book stamp, issued by the Vilna Ghetto Police, is in the two languages — German and Lithuanian — which brought terror to the civilian Jewish population trapped in the Vilna Ghetto. The stamp reads: "Checked [/Passed]. Vilna Ghetto Police, Book Censorship Committee" (or: Dept. of the Vilna Ghetto Police for screening books).

The approval for the book would have come from Hebrew-reading members of the Jewish police and civil administration, who worked under Nazi supervision.

And so that was the last "Jewish" book stamp, macabre as it is to call it that, of Vilna Jewry before its final annihilation.

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

After the End

The prewar Jewish population of Vilna, of around sixty thousand people, had grown to around eighty thousand after the arrival from Sept. 1939 onward of war refugees. Nearly all — an unarmed civilian population belonging to a minority — were murdered by the Nazis and their local collaborators. When a count of the city's population was taken in August 1944, a month after the city's liberation from the Nazis by the Soviet army, six hundred Jews registered: a survival rate of around one percent. Some posit an additional five hundred or so who were afraid to register, after all that had happened, and with all that might happen. Over the coming months and years, more Jews returned to the city from their places of evacuation in the USSR or following discharge from the Soviet army. Over time, others came to the capital from smaller towns.

By 1956, there were about sixteen and a half thousand Jews in Vilnius (Shneidman 1998: 156). So, this was a postwar population, from 1944 onward, that was growing modestly, and in a normal country, some continuity of prewar Jewish culture would have been expected and welcome. But it was not meant to be, for the liberators — the Soviets — quickly became oppressors, of Jews and non-Jews alike.

Less than two weeks after Vilna was taken by the Soviets in 1944, two Yiddish poets, both decorated heroes of the Soviet anti-Nazi partisan movement, Shmerke Katsherginski and Avrom Sutzkever, set up a new Museum of Jewish Art and Culture in their apartment at Gedimino 15, and moved it shortly thereafter to Strashun 6 , which had housed the Ghetto library and prewar Mefítsey Haskóle library (see pp. 66, 92). Because of the poor state of the building they were able to make more use of the former ghetto prison in the yard (of what is today Žemaitijos 4). Another colleague of theirs was the famed Jewish partisan commander Abba Kovner.

But it was not meant to be. Soviet authorities were determined that Jewish culture in Vilna would not rise again. They harassed and undermined the entire effort, and arranged for tons of books and other treasures to be disposed of by the city's Department of Trash. Katsherginski and Sutzkever made their way to Poland, then Paris, and rescued as much of the materials as they could, sending packages to Yivo in New York, which had by then taken over as the international headquarters, headed by Max Weinreich, who had left Vilna in 1939, never to return.

The dramatic story of how the Yiddish poets saved materials during the Ghetto years, found some of them upon return to the rubble of Vilna, set up a museum and library, and then smuggled

what they could to Yivo in New York, has been told in various Yiddish memoirs. In English, it is best recounted by David E. Fishman in his *Embers Plucked from the Fire: The Rescue of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Vilna* (Yivo 1996).

The book stamp of the shortlived postwar Vilna Jewish museum is a spartan rectangle with the words *Yídisher muzéy, Vilna, nr.*

This book is a prewar Warsaw edition of a Yiddish translation of Knut Hamsun's *The Editor* (Yiddish: *Der redáktor)*. Earlier stamps from before the war are from Kh. Kopelovitsh's book store on Kvietkova (now Gėlių) and from the children's library of the Tseh-beh-kah (see p. 58).

And between them is the stark postwar stamp of the "Jewish Museum" in Vilna, in Soviet purple. No librarian ever filled in the number on the dotted line provided. This was a culture that was not allowed to go forward in the city that was once called the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

Menke Katz Collection

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