

Jewish Contribution to Architecture in Kishinev

M.Sc Thesis

Architect: Anastasia Moskaliuc

*Technion–Israel Institute of Technology, IIT,
Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Technion, Haifa 32000, Israel
moskaliuk.a@gmail.com*

Abstract.

Little is known about the contribution of Jews to Kishinev architecture and urban design. The primary aim of the following research is to establish the Jewish contribution to Kishinev architecture. The research covers the period of Jewish heyday in Bessarabia from 1830s to 1940. The present qualitative research about Jewish contribution to the Kishinev architectural development is an unprecedented theme study with potential for further research.

The contribution is presented and analyzed as Jewish broad presence and activity in all the fields of city life, preeminently in construction, that determined Kishinev as a true “Jewish” city until the outbreak of World War II. During the first half of the 20th century Kishinev Jewish population amounted to more than 50% of all residents. This demographic and anthropological phenomenon was felt in every walk of the city's life and had an incredible impact on urban planning. The research discovers the city's diverse "Jewish places", which have become an integral part of one indivisible urban space.

Kishinev was a multiethnic city, architectural image and urban dynamics of which were forged, to a large extent, by the influx of many ethnic groups prior to 1940. Irrespective of their national identity, all the city's residents were able to settle in every part of the city and lead an active professional and social lives. Therefore, those places in Kishinev characterized as "Jewish architecture" were established throughout the urban enclave rather than within the boundaries of a ghetto, as traditionally occurred in many European cities.

The topic of Kishinev Jewish architecture has never been researched before and almost no information is available about the Jewish contribution to Kishinev architecture. The main sources of information were the State archives of Republic of Moldova and Russian Federation as well as private archives around the world and interviews with professionals involved in preservation of Moldavian Jewish cultural heritage and History of Bessarabian Jewry. My research was started from a scratch about Jewish life in Kishinev. The main point

was the data about the existence of Rabbi Tsirelson's¹ list, where 77 city synagogues and prayer halls were mentioned. The research provides an outline for a descriptive history of the share of Jewish contribution to architecture in Kishinev, where Jews participated as investors, engineers and architects, and, of course, owners within a specific socio-cultural and economic-political context. More than a hundred of residential buildings and public institutions of the Jewish community, including medical, educational, commercial and industrial enterprises, have been preserved. However, from among 77 pre-war synagogues and Jewish prayer halls that existed, only seven buildings remain intact today. The main findings of the research are: 115 preserved buildings owned by Jews or consumed by Jewish everyday life, three lists of Kishinev synagogues, unknown design documentation of synagogues and prayer houses. Archive files about construction and opening of Kishinev synagogues hold a special place in overall design documentation. All the city synagogues were divided by professional belonging of their congregation. The manipulation of data files led to deep comprehension of the process of synagogues' erection in local social conditions and technical demands. The design documentation testifies a high level of construction works, the results of building examination (durability and safety of the construction) are attached to each file. Synagogues technical documentation is published for the first time. The last chapter describes Serghey Ghingher (1870-1937), an outstanding Kishinev architect of that period. Among his main works there are large projects in the city, such as Jewish hospital, Psychiatric hospital, mansions in the center of Kishinev and Synagogue of glaziers, the only one acting today. The Ghingher's name has fallen into oblivion because of his tragic death, shot on charge of NKVD in 1937.

The main research results include technical and historical description of Jewish architectural heritage preserved in Kishinev, determination of buildings' architectural value and their public significance in the urban space of modern Kishinev, each building type case study and tables with a short description of each building.

The visual studies contain 115 buildings of former Jewish property; most of them are noted in the State Register of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Kishinev as monuments of national or local significance. Jewish dwellings and mansions compose the core of historical urban area, still remain residential buildings. Postwar reconstruction restored and preserved that unique image of prewar city. Therefore the modern Kishinev is developed on the base of architectural heritage of Bessarabian Jews.

¹ Yehuda Leib Tsirelson (1859 – 1941), the Chief Rabbi of Bessarabia in 1918-1941.

The research covers the architectural and urban environment of Kishinev in the light of once blooming and then neglected Jewish places in Eastern Europe, as a key component that defines the identity of the present urban space. The interpretation of Jewish participation in city life through the study of more than one hundred buildings of former Jewish property composes a very important part of knowledge about Bessarabian Jews, an important branch of Eastern European Jewry. As Bessarabian Jews history is less researched versus to Romanian or Ukrainian Jews, present research contributes to broadening foreign outlook to the peculiar Jewish character of Kishinev urban design on a multiethnic city background.