

Jewish Chisinau

The official date of birth of Chisinau is considered to be July 17, 1436, the official date of birth of the Jewish community of our city - the year 1774 when a Charter of the Chisinau Jewish funeral brotherhood "Chevra Kadisha" was signed by 144 adult Jewish men on the one hand, and the Chief Rabbi of Iasi on the other. In addition, there is another document that belongs to the 18th century - the litigation between the monastery Galata and some merchant David the owner of the commercial shops who refused to pay tax on the sale of goods. Chisinau emerged at the crossroads of trade routes and over the centuries, trade remained the main activity of its inhabitants. According to legend after the Great fire of 1788 when the city was burned to the ground Jews were the first to build up the city in its historical area which is still known as "Old Bridge." In the late 18th century the total number of Chisinau inhabitants did not exceed a thousand people, according to different estimates the Jewish population ranged from 500 to 800 people.

But the real heyday of the city took place in the 19th century. Together with the city grew and its population, and due to various geopolitical reasons, this population acquired a multinational character. All mixed up in our place: Europe and Asia, colorful East and cultured West. In this diversity of peoples and nations, among the plurality of languages and traditions the Jews were the third largest ethnic group after the Moldovans, and Ukrainians and Russian together. At the end of the 19th century, in Chisinau there were about 50 thousand Jews out of 110 thousand inhabitants.

To appreciate the contribution of the Jewish community into the development of Chisinau one should just walk along the streets of its historic center. Although the rapid violent 20th century dealt a crushing blow to the Jewish community of the region as a whole, and in particular of Chisinau, you can still find traces of its former economic activities. In different parts of the old city there are preserved steam mills, brewery, furniture factories, apartment houses, soap factories. Of the 77 synagogues and prayer houses only seven have survived, and just two of them are still functioning like synagogues. There are several addresses of different Jewish schools but neither Hebrew nor Yiddish sounds there nobody studies Torah and Talmud in them any longer. But there are two modern high schools, yeshivas, kindergarten revived in the 1990s they form the modern community of Chisinau Jews. There are many preserved mansions, urban estates owned by Jews

of different classes and different income. Some of them are in ruins or waiting for major repairs, others belong to the state, in some of them Jews still live keeping hearth and home of their ancestors.

Once live and selfless charity of the Jewish community still maintains its presence in buildings that used to house cheap soup kitchens, almshouses, orphanages, dispensaries. A large complex of the former Jewish hospital - one of the oldest welfare centers occupies a special place in our city. Established by the Community at the dawn of the 19th century it played the role of savior and guardian of the Jews in the days of Chisinau pogroms 1903 and 1905, gave shelter to thousands of refugees from Ukraine in the 1920s. After the war and to this day this complex takes patients despite the fact that it is very "ill" old and in need of our help and protection.

The cultural life of the Jews in Chisinau had always been primarily associated with Yiddish, and although Chisinau was not a real cultural capital up to a short inter-war period, in our city there always were Jewish libraries, a theater, performed touring Jewish troupes and sang famous Jewish cantors and singers. Chisinau "Cultural League" held evening meetings with famous Jewish writers published newspapers and magazines in Yiddish. After World War II the Jews made an invaluable contribution to the development of national culture in Moldova: Chico Aronov, David Gershfeld Joseph Balzan, Liviu Deleanu, Alexander Cozmesku, Ichil Shraibman, David Palatnik, Semion Shoikhet ... This list of global names is endless. Today Jewish Library "I. Manger", Chisinau Joint House for Moldovan Jewry (KEDEM), Theatre on the Street of Roses under the direction of Iury Harmelin, continue cultural traditions of the Jewish community in Chisinau city. Plays by Jewish authors are performed on the scene of Russian and Moldovan drama theaters. Jewish newspaper in Russian is published.

A special place in the history of our Jewish community belongs to the story of Chisinau ghetto. Holocaust deadly napalm destroyed almost all the city's Jews who for various reasons couldn't leave Chisinau at the beginning of the war. In 1945 returning from the evacuation or from the front people found neither their homes nor their relatives. In fact many families still do not know the fate of their close relatives. It gives the Monument to the Victims of the Holocaust erected on one of the streets of the former ghetto the status of the mass grave. The figure of a mourning Jew on the background of a split Star of David by the sculptor Naum Epelbaum draws attention both of the locals and guests of our city.

Ancient and young Chisinau keeps the memory of its Jews in the street names, memorial plaques and monuments, graves in the old Jewish cemetery. One just need walk through the streets looking intently into the face of the city and it will open its secrets and mysteries.