Content of Volume 2

Communities and Synagogues

Mlynyv 449
Novohrad-Volynskyi 461
Olevsk 479
Ostroh 491
Polonne 541
Raddyylv 565
Rivne 581
Shepetivka 637
Slavuta 653
Starokostiantyniv 665
Turiik 685
Volodymyr-Volynskyi 693
Vysniwets 721
Zhytomyr 739

Glossary 787
Abbreviations 793
Bibliography 794
Index 815
Communities and Synagogues
Shepetivka

Ukrainian name: Shepetivka [Шепетивка]
Russian name: Shepetovka [Шепетовка]
Polish name: Szepetówka
Jewish names: Shepetovka [шепетовка], Shepetivke [шепетивке]

Shepetivka is a town on the River Huska, 102 km north of regional center Khmelnytskyi, 35 km west of Polonne, and 21 southeast of Slavuta. Out of six synagogues existing there in the first half of the twentieth century, only the building of the Great Synagogue is preserved.

A village Shepetivka was mentioned in 1594 and was granted rights of a town in 1619. It was heavily damaged during the Khmelnytsky uprising of 1648 and only three houses were registered there in 1650. Shepetivka belonged to Princes Zaslavski in the seventeenth century, to Princes Lubomirski and Sanguszko in the eighteenth century and to Counts Potocki in 1859–1917.

History of the Jewish Community

Jews in Shepetivka were not mentioned until 1765, but most likely settled there much earlier, soon after the establishment of the town. A prominent Hasidic leader, Rabbi Pinhas of Korets, died in Shepetivka on his way to the Land of Israel.
in 1791, His eldest son, Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapiro (1760–1829), held his court in Shepetivka after 1791. His descendants and the descendants of his brother Rabbi Moshe of Slavuta lived in the town until 1935, but this dynasty was not influential.12

In 1849 the Russian authorities knew about the existence of one beit midrash with 28 regular worshippers.13 In 1867 the authorities registered a synagogue (officially permitted in 1854) and two prayer houses, existing without permission.14

Correspondence from Shepetivka in 1887 reveals that when the town’s notables gathered in the synagogue for prayer on the anniversary of the coronation of Alexander III, they decided to establish a Jewish hospital and on the same day bought a house for that purpose.15 In 1894 there still were three houses of prayer, “too small to accommodate all who come to pray.”16

In the early twentieth century the number of houses of prayer in Shepetivka grew to six, namely the Great Synagogue (“magnificent masonry building”), the Beit Midrash, the synagogue of tailors and shoemakers, the kloyzn of the Trisk and Makarov Hasidim, and the synagogue of Rabbinovics – a family that came from Slavuta.17 The brick buildings of two of them, situated to the south of the Great Synagogue, are seen in Yudovin’s photograph of 1912–13 (Fig. 4), and an additional half-timber building on a masonry basement – in another photograph from the same year (Fig. 5).

During the Civil War Shepetivka avoided major pogroms, owing partly to the existence of an armed Jewish self-defense unit.18

With the establishment of the Soviet rule in 1920 the six synagogues continued to function until the 1930s, when all of them were closed by the authorities.19

With the occupation of the town by the German army, murder of Jews began on July 28, 1941. Later the ghetto was established and it existed until June 25, 1942, when its inhabitants were murdered in a forest near the town.20

After the war, a Jewish religious community was registered in January 1947 and got the upper floor of the former Great Synagogue, while the lower floor was used for sauerkraut production. According to the Soviet authorities’ estimate, ca. 200–250 religious Jews lived in the town. The synagogue functioned until 1960, when it was closed by the authorities.21

Shimon Yantovskii, visiting the town in 1982, found that the building of the former synagogue was used as a sport club, while two illegal minyanim in private houses existed in the town.22

In 1992 the Great Synagogue was restored to the local Jewish community.23

The Preserved Synagogue

The Great Synagogue

The Great Synagogue of Shepetivka is located at 2 Ltnyka Street. It was built apparently in the first half of the nineteenth century and currently is the only remaining structure of the shul hoyf.

The synagogue is situated in the terrain sloping to the south, toward the lake and the Huska River (Figs. 1, 2). As can be seen in the pre-Holocaust photographs (Figs. 3, 4, 6–9), the synagogue’s plot was adjusted to the townscape by means of retaining walls, fencing, terraces, and exterior stairs. None of these elements has survived. The building is surrounded with alleys and green slopes on all its sides.

The synagogue comprises a lofty brick integral mass based on a rectangular footprint and covered by a saddle roof; a lower extension – with a lean-to

1. Town plan of Shepetivka, the shul hoyf vicinity. Drawing by Zoya Arshavsky.

2. View of Shepetivka. The Great Synagogue is seen from southwest. Postcard, 1903. After Vladimir Likhodedov, Synagogues (Minsk 2007), fig. 292.
3. The Great Synagogue, view from northwest. Photo by Solomon Yudovin, 1912–13. CPJ.

The Great Synagogue, view towards southeast. The Great Synagogue is on the left, and two prayer houses – on the right. Photo by Solomon Yudovin, 1912–13. REM.

4. Shabtay, view towards southeast. The Great Synagogue is on the left, and two prayer houses – on the right. Photo by Solomon Yudovin, 1912–13. REM.

5. Shepetivka (?), a prayer house, view from southwest. Photo by Solomon Yudovin, 1912–13. CPJ.

6. The Great Synagogue, view from northwest. Photo early 1920s. IS PAN, 3372 F.

roof and apparently with a women’s section on its ground floor – is attached to its southern side. The surrounding terrain slopes southward and the extension comprises an additional, lower floor. While the structure of the two masses survived in general, the pre-Holocaust photographs depict a more elaborate composition than the extant one.

The western front of the synagogue comprised the façade of the main mass, and that of the southern extension. It faced a courtyard, which was fenced by wrought iron bars mounted on masonry piers (Figs. 3, 4, 6–9). An additional, interior fence with sinuous wrought metal arch over the western entrance, separated a smaller court at the men’s entrance to the building. Wedding ceremonies probably took place in the smaller court, like in front courtyards of other synagogues in the region.

The façade of the main mass had two tiers, and was topped by a shaped gable. The façade was divided by lesenes into three even bays, while its tiers were separated, in the two side bays, by a stringcourse; the upper tier was crowned by a moulded dentilled cornice, which encircled the whole mass. The lower tier of the façade was pierced by the central rectangular doorway and by two lateral windows. Both windows were set in rectangular niches, the southern window being comparatively smaller, probably as a result of reconstruction. The doorway was framed by a flat band, and a decorative relief was set above it. The relief (Fig. 10) included a U-shaped laurel wreath with two birds sitting symmetrically on its ends, each holding in its beak an end of an arched upper wreath. Two bas-relief rampant lions, holding a central cartouche, were sculptured inside the wreath. The cartouche was supported by two volutes and topped by a crown; it was inscribed כנף וירח (the Crown of the Torah). A bent inscription was placed above the crown and beneath the upper wreath: עֲבֹדָה מָצוּקָה הַזָּה אֶל-כַּנֶּפֶן וְיֵרָח (This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous will enter through it [Ps. 118: 20] / year 1907); this date refers to the synagogue’s renovation.

The southern portion of the western façade belonged to the southern extension. It was single-story and crowned by a sinuous half of a gable, shielding the extension’s lean-to roof (Fig. 4). Its crowning curve echoed that of the main gable, probably indicating simultaneous construction of the main mass and the extension. The only bay of the southern portion of the façade was pierced by a rectangular window. Its southern corner pilaster was topped by a turret.

The southern front of the synagogue comprised two echelons, the bottom one being the two-story façade of the southern extension, and the top one being the southern façade of the main mass (Fig. 8). The lower tier of the extension was pierced by rectangular doorways and its upper tier had rectangular windows. The upper façade was pierced by three round-headed windows in its middle part. Two other, the westernmost and easternmost blind windows, featuring the same round-headed shape and rhythm as the three glazed windows, were probably designed for overall symmetry.
The northern side of the synagogue was designed as a representative façade, as it faced the town center (Figs. 3, 6, 9). It was flanked by corner lesneses, and a stringcourse divided it into two tiers. It was articulated by a central projection, which was unrelated to any of the interior divisions, and was achieved only by thickened brickwork (Fig. 23). The projection was adorned with four pilasters of gigantic Composite order, dividing each tier into three bays—the two lateral bays being narrower than the central one. While the lower tier of the projection, like the whole lower tier of the façade, was marked by rectangular niches, its upper register was pierced by a central round-headed window, and the narrow lateral bays were marked each by a round-headed tusk. The façade on both sides of the projection was pierced by round-headed windows, placed close to the projection, and by a pair of blind windows further away—similarly to the arrangement of the southern façade (see above). The central projection was crowned by a round-headed gable, flanked by turrets. The gable’s central field included bas-relief sculptured symmetric rampant lions supporting a central shouldered cartouche; its inscription is illegible in photographs. A brick terrace with a wooden fence and exterior stairs was attached—probably as a later addition—to the western part of the northern façade. A door leading from the terrace into the building was cut through the stringcourse dividing the tiers and it was not as elaborate as the main entrance. The terrace and the door likely served as an access to a small prayer room situated on the upper floor, above the vestibule.

Men, entering the central door on the western side, likely crossed a small vestibule and proceeded directly to the prayer hall, two side rooms, located to the south and north of the vestibule, were also at their disposal (Fig. 21). The prayer hall (Fig. 11) was elongated in west-east direction, and devoid of interior supports. There is no evidence of how the hall was spanned; judging from the moderate wall thickness, it could be spanned by a wooden ceiling, rather than masonry vault.

The Torah ark was located at the middle of the eastern wall (Fig. 11). It was of masonry construction and...
probably plastered, its lower part engaged in the wall. The ark had a tiered composition and was preceded by a flight of steps. The lower tier comprised the Torah shrine, embedded into a wall niche and flanked by oddly slim Doric columns supporting an entablature. Unrelated to any classical order, the entablature included an architrave, rather resembling a frieze decorated with sculptured and colored floral scrolls, and a dentilled cornice immediately above it. The upper tier of the ark comprised two aediculae towering above each other. Paired bulky pilasters, inadequately decorated with Corinthianesque volutes, flanked the central reveal of the lower aedicula and supported a rounded pediment. The lower part of the aedicule was filled by the wall mass and decorated with a relief rosette. The upper aedicule was flanked by two yet simpler pilasters, which bore a rounded pediment with horizontal shoulders, all these topped by three balls. The aediculae were backlit by the central semicircular “Palladian” window. The simplified architectural order of the aediculae echoed the architectural order of the northern façade’s projection, and hence could be a product of a mason, rather than an ark carver. The ark was void of any inscriptions.

The amud stood to the south of the Torah ark. Its vertical plaque was decorated with two relief rampant lions and with a crowned inscription, illegible in the photograph (Fig. 11).

The bimah was apparently located in the center of the prayer hall, but no depictions are known. The seats of the most respected community members at the eastern wall were inscribed with the owners’ names; the discernible inscription reads שֵׁם נַחַב תַּנָּא (Nahum son of Pinhas) (Fig. 11). In 1912–13 the hall was still lit by candles (Fig. 11). The Torah ark had side and upper bronze chandeliers, attached to the wall and to the entablature above the shrine. More light was given by a tiered bronze openwork chandelier attached to the amud, and a bronze chandelier suspended from the ceiling between the Torah ark and the bimah.

The synagogue was damaged during the First World War and the following Civil War. The fallen plaster and broken windows are clearly discernible.

15. The Great Synagogue, interior view towards southeast. Photo by I. Fuhol, 1998. CJA.


17. The Great Synagogue, view from southwest. Photo by S. Krvatov, 2011. CJA.
in the photographs of the early 1920s (Figs. 6, 7). A state of repair was captured by the photograph of 1925, when the southern portion of the western front belonging to the southern extension acquired a raking cornice instead of a sinuous one (Cf. Fig. 4 and Fig. 8). Ongoing care of the synagogue, including its exterior plaster and paint is evident from the photographs of 1928 (Figs. 9, 10).

The building was damaged again during World War II. In the afterwar period it was re-established as a synagogue, and reconstructed (Figs. 12–26). Its exterior shape was simplified: the gables became triangular, cornice moldings were covered by plain plaster (Fig. 20), all vestiges of architectural orders eliminated, and large semicircular windows bricked up or substituted with round-headed windows. New rectangular windows were cut through the lower tiers of the eastern and northern façades (Figs. 12, 18, 19, 24). The southern extension received a new western entrance and a boiler; a tall chimney was added to the southern façade of the main mass (Figs. 14, 17, 18, 25). The roof tiles were replaced with asbestos sheets. The original elements of urban design serving the synagogue – fences, gates, steps, and terraces – were razed. The interior space was split into two stories, of which the lower one was used for sausage production (see above), and subdivided into a number of rooms for technological needs (Fig. 21). The western portion of the prayer hall was converted into a new staircase. The eastern part of the upper floor is used as a prayer hall since 1982 (Figs. 15, 22).

Nowadays the building is comparatively well maintained. Its upper floor serves as a synagogue, though no exterior signage explicates this function.

The Great Synagogue of Shepetivka is an example of synagogue architecture combining the Neo-Classicist and local baroque idioms, which survived well into the mid-nineteenth century. The Neo-Classicist idiom featured integrity and symmetry of masses – not necessarily stipulated by functional requirements –
and such formal elements as semicircular “Palladian” windows. The baroque idiom manifested itself mainly in sinuous shapes of the gables, articulated by turrets. Both idioms looked conservative in the mid-nineteenth century.