ESJF
EUROPEAN JEWISH
CEMETERIES INITIATIVE

Jewish Cemeteries
in the Classroom - **An ESJF Guide**

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Esther Zyskina ■ Alexandra Fishel

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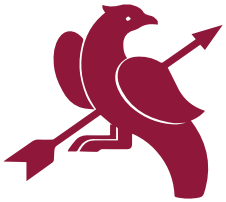

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A Manual for Educators

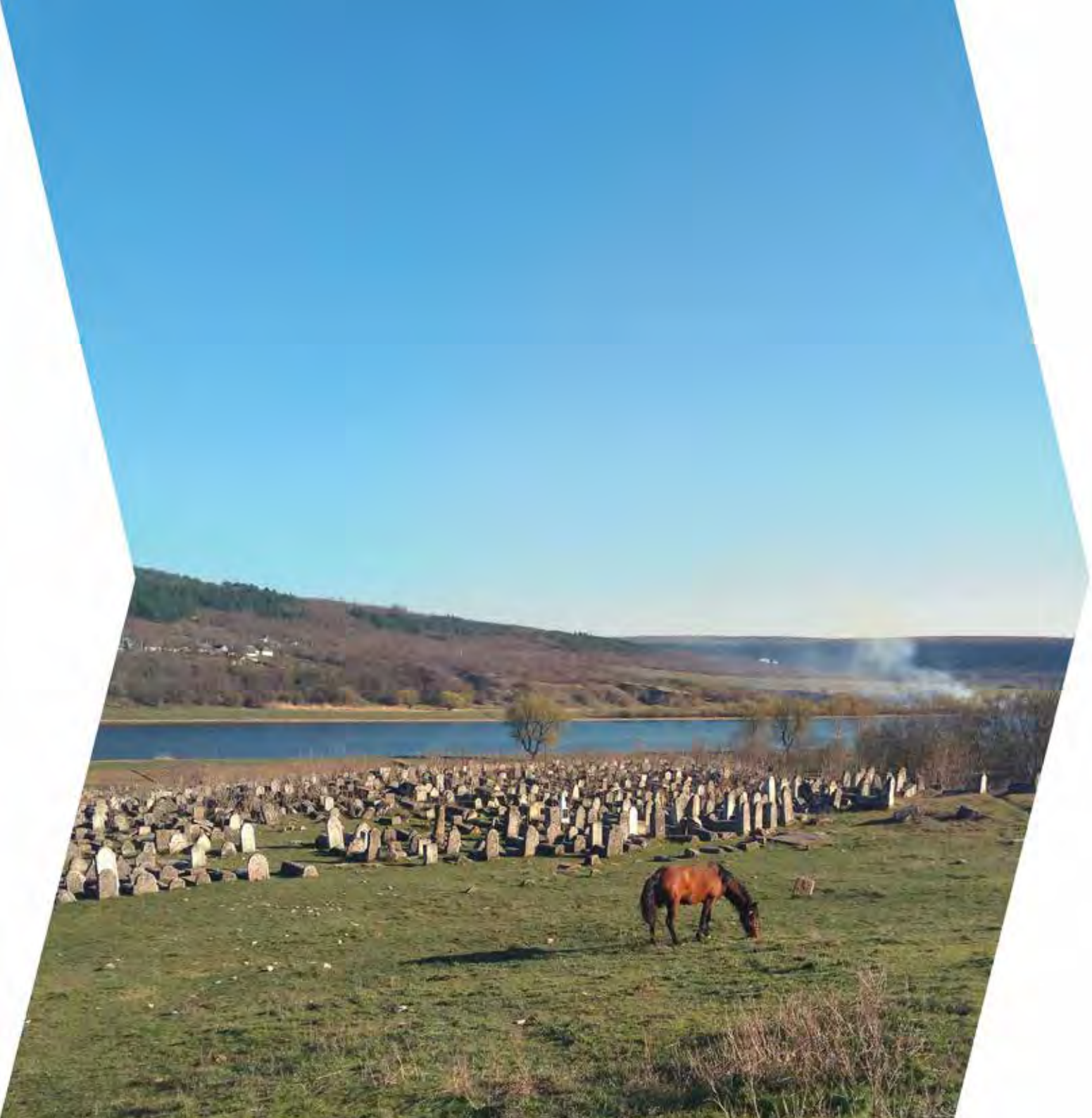
The manual you hold in your hands is a unique guide for middle and high school teachers and their students who wish to explore local Jewish cemeteries. Our hope in producing it is not only to impart the knowledge necessary to research Jewish cemeteries, but to do so in a challenging, engaging way. In a sense, Jewish cemeteries share a lot in common with the great pyramids of Egypt, and can be of just as much historical interest. However, unlike the pyramids, they can be found on your doorstep.

Let this guide be a map to the treasure trove that is Jewish cultural history; something which has often been left out of discussions of European heritage but is just as much a part of it as the Parthenon and the great cathedrals. Although the devastating events of the 20th century, culminating in the Holocaust and the destruction of thousands of Jewish communities, forever altered the fabric of European Jewry, its material history can still be found in many cities and towns. One remarkable fragment of this heritage is the Jewish cemetery – the unambiguous marker of a once thriving Jewish presence, a rich source of texts

and even works of art that can shine a light on communities which might otherwise be entirely forgotten. When approached correctly, Jewish cemeteries can serve also as a valuable learning material in schools, whether in the study of history or art.

This manual's goal is to present the Jewish cemetery as a profound resource in the research of local Jewish history and to provide middle and high school teachers, as well as their students, with the basic tools necessary to conduct this research. We have tried our best to make this material as accessible and pleasant to use as possible, while keeping in mind numerous regional differences. Of course, it is impossible to take into account every region in a manual this size. As such, we invite you to take advantage of our web resources, as well as the additional literature we recommend at the end of each section of this manual.

We sincerely hope this will help you develop a keener interest in the challenge of researching Jewish cemeteries, turning the preservation of Jewish heritage in general into a fascinating activity for students and teachers alike. By engaging with the information and activities in this book, you might even gain a deeper appreciation of the diverse history of your own cultural heritage.



Introduction to the ESJF and pedagogical material

The ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative was set up in 2015 as an international non-profit public foundation registered in the Federal Republic of Germany with the core objective of protecting Jewish cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe. Its mission has been to concentrate particularly on those Jewish burial sites in the thousands of towns and villages whose Jewish communities were wiped out in the Holocaust. With no local Jewish communities to protect them, such cemeteries have been destroyed, vandalised, and neglected over the course of some 80 years. As of 2020, the ESJF has demarcated and fenced over 160 Jewish cemeteries across seven countries.

The mission remains vast. It is estimated that these regions are home to over 8,000 Jewish burial sites. Our task is therefore to continue fencing but also to determine methodologies for protecting the thousands of sites we cannot yet fence. More than anything else, this requires the support of local communities in the towns and villages of Central and Eastern Europe. It further requires developing sustainable and cross-generational models in which local Jewish heritage becomes part of local historical heritage, by which its shared ownership makes the responsibility for its protection a collective, partnered effort.

As part of this project supported by the European Commission in 2019-20, the ESJF physically surveyed some 1,500 Jewish cemeteries in five European countries — Greece, Lithuania, Moldova, Slovakia, and Ukraine — utilising state-of-the-art drone technology and creating an online database reflecting the current – and often perilous – condition of these sites. This acts as a starting off point for protection, mobilising local authorities and communities by providing them with direct physical evidence of the state of key parts of their heritage, sometimes in settlements which contained substantial or even majority Jewish populations prior to World War II.

However, walls do not protect cemeteries. People do. A core principle of the ESJF and a vital part of this project is engagement with young people — either in formal school or informal group settings – to educate them about the Jewish history of their regions. By doing so, we aim to provide a wider view of Jewish contributions to local history and heritage, and to emphasise the values of a multicultural society, based on tolerance and opposed to racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism.

By working directly with students in the local villages and towns of Eastern Europe, our programmes impart these values, providing an opportunity for them to physically visit the sites and engage with their local heritage. The results of these programmes, led by ESJF educators and partner organisations, are a key component in building a sustainable future and ensuring the long-term protection of these cemetery sites.

We are deeply grateful for the continued support of the European Commission in this work and also for the engagement of all our students and partners.

Philip Carmel
Chief Executive Officer
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative

Contents

Jewish heritage and its preservation

Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, schools and other buildings are not only significant to Jewish religious and cultural life, but to the whole community. They continue to represent an integral part of the villages and cities in which they are found, even when the Jewish communities responsible for their construction are no longer present. They bear witness to a shared history and remain living parts of contemporary places.

Slonim Sinagogue, Belorus

Jewish Marriage Contract «ketubah», Slovakia

In other words, they are heritage sites: buildings, monuments, and artworks that testify to the contribution of Jewish communities in the foundation and development of many places across Europe. Through them we can uncover the story of a long-term coexistence, which sometimes manifested as cooperation and empathy between Jews and their neighbours, but often led to conflicts and tragedies as well. There is no denying that these are heritage sites, but they have not always been considered or treated as such.

What is cultural heritage?

Not every building and monument is recognised as a heritage site. Cultural heritage is the legacy that a group of people leaves behind for the generations that follow. This can be tangible or intangible. Tangible heritage can consist of magnificent sites like palaces, fortresses, or religious complexes, but also ordinary dwellings, or artefacts, and books. Intangible heritage recognises and protects customs, knowledge, and languages.

Heritage status provides both types of heritage with recognition, documentation, and protection. In other words, we notice their presence, then work to ensure they are not allowed to disappear or be forgotten.

Who protects heritage sites?

The most famous organisation that recognises heritage sites across the world is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). World Heritage status is granted by UNESCO, and it constitutes the highest

form of prestige a heritage site can gain. Countries can nominate sites in order to gain World Heritage status, meaning global recognition is initially dependent on decisions made at a national level.

Not only the most ambitious, unique, or ancient sites deserve protection: heritage can be important for a nation, a region, or even a town or village. Local governments can protect local monuments and can ensure the local community knows about them; national governments can do the same. Civil society, activist groups, volunteers and students can bring overlooked or threatened heritage sites to the attention of their local governments. Heritage always belongs to the communities that recognise it as their own, and without such ownership, heritage sites often slide into oblivion.

How are Jewish heritage sites protected?

Jewish communities have diminished across Europe: pogroms, emigration, and the Shoah reduced their numbers so drastically in most countries that in many places, Jewish heritage sites are left without any form of local community to oversee their care. In countries which came under Communist rule, the land on which these buildings and cemeteries stood was often nationalised and put to other uses.

Local governments and the public have recognised the importance of intervening before these sites disappear in many places. Synagogues and especially, Jewish cemeteries are often the last vestiges of local Jewish history, adding an important dimension to the history of the communities to which they belong. Descendants of the people who lived in these places often try to find their ancestral homes, and to organise protection measures. These are vital steps in making sure that the most vulnerable sites do not disappear.

Still, local efforts are not always enough. Jewish heritage is part of our shared, European heritage that connects most of the continent and bears witness to a vital history of diversity and coexistence. It speaks of transnational achievements in the arts and sciences, diverse architectural styles, and many ways of life that have since faded. Because Jews were always a minority in these countries, national governments do not always prioritise these sites, especially in smaller settlements. Learning about the cemeteries, understanding them, and putting them back on the map is the most essential step towards protecting them, and reintegrating them into the local history. This is why the ESJF surveys Jewish cemeteries across Europe, and it is why we invite students, educators, and activists to join us and explore them further.

Diána Vonnák
Project Manager ESJF
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative

Jewish Presence in Europe

The Jewish diaspora in Europe was distributed across most of the continent for many centuries. Although Jewish communities subscribed to a different way of life from their non-Jewish neighbours, contact between the populations always existed, with the two groups heavily influencing one another. Therefore, the study of Jewish history is relevant not only to the Jews themselves, but also to the local communities who wish to explore that part of their own heritage.

The 20th century brought with it devastating changes to the face of European Jewry; with two world wars, the brutal genocide of the Holocaust, pre and mid-war migration to the United States and South America, and mass migration to the nascent state of Israel all leaving a vacuum in their former homelands. In the conspicuous absence of these communities, whose only remaining markers in many towns and villages are the pieces of material heritage they left behind, we now face the challenge of piecing together the centuries-long history of Europe's Jews, and re-establishing its cultural importance to Europe as a whole.

Today, few pieces of Jewish heritage survive in many European countries. Many were destroyed during the wars, with others disappearing

over time – victims of natural degradation and theft. The most common remaining items, aside from archival documents and home collections, are the buildings: synagogues, hospitals, private homes, etc. Many of these structures were later appropriated for other purposes, making it difficult to identify them as Jewish.

Jewish cemeteries are among the most important pieces of this heritage. This manual aims to present the Jewish cemetery as an invaluable resource for the research of local Jewish history and to provide the reader with the basic tools necessary to conduct this research. We tried our best to make this material as easy to understand and use as possible, while keeping in mind numerous regional differences. We sincerely hope that it will help you to develop and explore an interest in the research of Jewish cemeteries, as well as the preservation of Jewish heritage in general.

A Jewish Cemetery: Overview

Jewish heritage in Europe is present in many forms, such as the remnants of buildings, old synagogues, and Jewish cemeteries. Researchers have taken an interest in Jewish cemeteries since the 19th century. The events of World War II cast the preservation of Jewish heritage in an urgent new light, with interest growing significantly in its wake. Nowadays, there is a large community of individuals who explore Jewish cemeteries from different angles: academic researchers, who treat cemeteries as a historical and archaeological source; descendants of European Jews, who search for their roots and relatives; volunteers who wish to preserve the Jewish heritage in their particular city or town; and individuals concerned for the sanctity of the dead, an integral part of Jewish religious culture, who fight to defend the cemeteries from complete destruction. Thanks to this immense effort, the data already collected may contribute to the emergence of a new academic field. ESJF hopes that its database will provide a useful source of knowledge for this field.

A cemetery is often the only preserved piece of Jewish heritage in the places where Jewish life ceased to exist. Somewhat paradoxically, it can provide the most "live" evidence of Jewish life in a region when

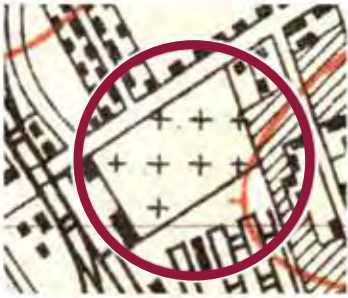
no other sources remain. However, many Jewish cemeteries have also been destroyed, with only old maps testifying to their existence. Locating a Jewish cemetery using a map or another type of evidence is already a significant step in the research process. Some maps have special symbols to indicate a Jewish cemetery, while others do not. In any case, consulting old maps in your research helps not only to locate the sites that disappeared, but also to enhance your orientation skills and increase your familiarity with your hometown.

Here are the examples of how Jewish cemeteries can be marked on the maps[1]:

Greek maps

Polish maps

Christian cemetery



Muslim cemetery

Russian maps

Jewish cemeteries

Orthodox cemeteries

[1] *ESJF works closely with maps from different periods. This information was kindly provided by Dr. Katerina Malakhova, head of ESJF's Historical Research Department.*

Practice*

Try to find all three Jewish cemeteries on this old map of Kovel, Ukraine

*Please find all answers on practice tasks at the end of manual p. 70

A Jewish cemetery, existing or destroyed, is a clear sign that a significant Jewish community once existed in an area, as smaller settlements tended not to have their own cemeteries. On the map above you can see the example of Kovel, a city in north-west Ukraine, where once there were three Jewish cemeteries, and now there are none.
Historically, these cemeteries were first established in what is today the centre of the city and then moved to today's outskirts as the city expanded. As such, the closer the cemetery is located to the current city centre, the older it is likely to be (except in the cases where several active Jewish cemeteries existed in the city simultaneously). The city of Kovel is a perfect example of this: based on the old maps, we are able to estimate the age of the cemetery without seeing the actual dates on the tombstones. Moreover, the emergence of new Jewish cemeteries provides a glimpse of how the city was growing[2].
Usually Jewish cemeteries have clear borders, sometimes in the form of a fence or a wall, in order to distinguish between the cemetery and the surrounding settlement. One reason for this is that cemeteries and everything related to death is considered ritually impure in Judaism. Alternatively, the borders of the cemetery could play an important role in local rituals. In many places, when a community or a specific family was in grave danger, it was the custom to measure the cemetery's perimeter and to donate an equal sum of money or candles to the synagogue[3]. Moreover, cemeteries were often encircled by ditches to mark their borders. If the cemetery no longer exists, the foundation of a fence or ditch can help determine its perimeter.

[2] *See the list of maps at the end of this manual.*

[3] *The Short Jewish Encyclopedia (Kratkaya Evreyskaya Entsiklopediya), Jerusalem, 1988. vol. 4, col. 332-338.*

The concept of ritual purity is important in the Jewish burial ceremony. The members of the Chevra Kadisha[4] — the Jewish burial community — thoroughly wash the body of the deceased before the burial. For that purpose, special "purification houses" (batei tehara) are built next to the cemetery, where the body is prepared for the burial. They were also used to carry out special pre-burial liturgical ceremonies. For example, it was the custom in some communities to walk around the body of the deceased singing psalms. In other cases, speeches were said to venerate the deceased.

If a cemetery had been seriously damaged or destroyed, the remnants of the beit tehara might be the only indication that a Jewish cemetery existed on the site. However, if the cemetery is inactive, the building no longer functions as a beit tehara, so additional efforts have to be made when attempting to locate the cemetery.

According to Jewish ritual, the washing and burial (all performed by the chevra kadisha) is usually carried out on the day of death or as close to it as possible. The tombstone, however, is generally not erected immediately after the death, but in most Ashkenazi communities — those originating in the Rhineland and forming almost the totality of Central and Eastern European Jewry — during the eleventh month of the one year mourning period which follows. The one-year delay before the unveiling allows the earth to settle so the stone will not sink. In the Sephardi[5] community, those Jews originating in the Iberian peninsular, or later, from the Middle East, North Africa and parts of the Balkans, the stone is sometimes erected after the first thirty days (sheloshim). It is the custom of certain Hasidim[6] to erect the stone immediately after the initial seven-day mourning period[7].

[4] **GLOSSARY** Chevra Kadisha (from Aramaic "holy society") is a special burial fraternity — a group of people who prepare the body of the deceased for the funeral and conduct the burial. It is a crucial part of almost every Jewish community, and its members are treated with great respect.

[5] **GLOSSARY** Sephardi — Jewish ethnic division from Spain, or Portugal with their special traditions

[6] **GLOSSARY** Hasidim — Jewish religious group that arose as a spiritual revival movement in the territory of contemporary Western Ukraine during the 18th century. Today, most affiliates reside in Israel and the United States.

Jewish Funeral during the WWI, Galicia

[7] *For more information on Jewish burial rituals, see, for example: Goldberg, Sylvie Anne. Crossing the Jabbok: Illness and Death in Ashkenazi Judaism in Sixteenth- through Nineteenth-century Prague. Berkeley, Calif: U of California Press, 1996.*

Julian Karczewski Jewish funeral in Vilnius in 1824.

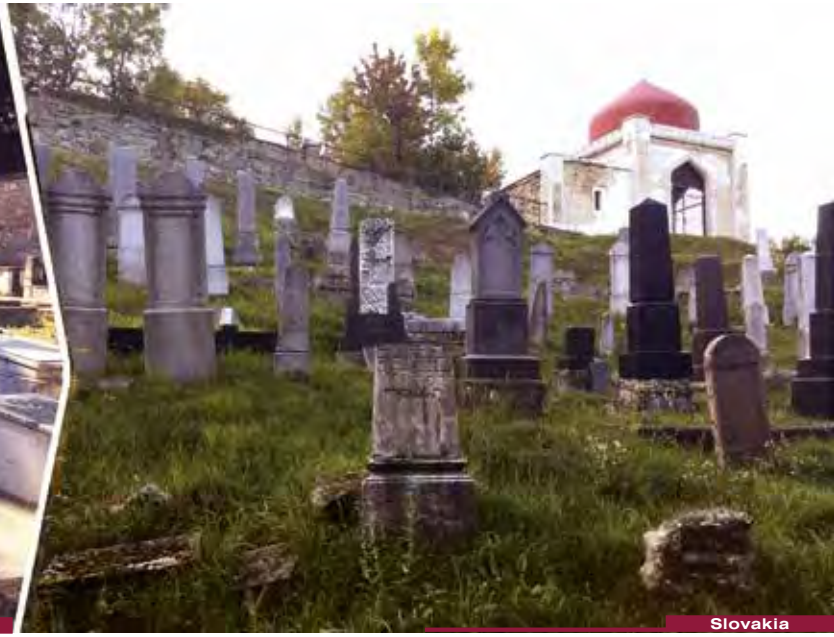
Given that the cemetery sites used to be very small, the graves were located in close proximity to each other. However, according to Jewish religious law, there had to be at least 40 cm between the graves.

The Jewish burial ritual is quite similar to the non-Jewish one. After washing, the body is dressed in simple clothes and interred in a closed coffin. In some communities, where legal requirements allow for this, the coffin is open-bottomed in order that the body is placed directly in the grave and in contact with the earth. Nothing else is usually put in the grave, with the exception of rituals in certain communities[8].

While the Jewish cemetery itself is defined by the graves beneath the ground, the presence of visible tombstones generally denote the main element of any preserved Jewish cemetery. These can be divided into

[8] *Skóra, Kalina. (2016). A Habit of Providing the dead with padlocks against the background of Ashkenazi funeral rites. Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae. 29. 131-145.*


Greece


Slovakia

two broad categories: matzevot (from Hebrew matzeva – "tombstone, gravestone"), which are variously shaped headstones, predominantly vertical in Europe and horizontal in more southern communities (e.g. Greece, North Africa); and ohalim (from Hebrew ohel – "tent"), larger constructions above the grave with four walls and a roof. The latter is mostly found in Europe and has its origins in the custom of praying on the graves of rabbis and Hassidic leaders: the roof sheltered those praying from wind, rain and snow. Usually, ohalim were erected on the graves of rabbis or other prominent members of the community[9].

[9] *The special form of the ohalim can also be explained by the wish to imitate the graves of the ancient kings and forefathers in Ancient Israel.*

Ukraine

Lithuania

Recommended literature

- Jacobs, Joachim. The heritage of Jewish cemeteries in Europe. // Jewish cemeteries and burial culture in Europe. — ICOMOS Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees. International Conference, Berlin-Weißensee, 3.–6. April
- Menachemson,Nolan. A Practical Guide to Jewish Cemeteries Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2007

Reading a Jewish Epitaph: Tips and Guidelines

Now that we have been familiarised with the structure and layout of a Jewish cemetery, we shall move to its core visible element: the tombstone (matzeva). Matzevot and the inscriptions on them (epitaphs) are a remarkable source of information. This section will provide you with a few necessary tools that will help you extract as much verbal information from them as possible.

A Jewish epitaph is a specific genre of text. Like any genre, it abides by a specific set of rules. Every epitaph is unique and individual, but most of them follow a certain type of structure and contain several easily recognisable key elements. Through identifying these elements, one learns at least as much as the buried person's name, gender and date of death, which is usually sufficient for research purposes.

Quite frequently, epitaphs in local languages can be found, especially if the tombstones are relatively new. The focus of this section, however, is on the more widespread and universal Hebrew epitaphs. Therefore, a basic knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet is needed to use this information in practice. The following table shows the correlation between the Hebrew letters, sounds and numbers (gematria[10]). The latter will be useful when calculating the date (see below).

[10] **GLOSSARY** Gematria is a code based on an alphabet, where each letter has its own numerical value. It is widely used in Jewish tradition instead of common numerals, including dates.

Please note that there are 5 letters (marked with circles) that can be written in two ways, either of which you might come across when reading the epitaph. The form on the right always appears at the end of the word.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	ך כ
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20
(a) Alef	B, V Bet	G Gimel	D Dalet	H He	W, V Vav	Z Zayin	H, X Chet	T Tet	J, I, Y Yod	K Kaph
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ל	ם מ	ן נ	ס	ע	ף פ	ץ צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	400
L Lamed	M Mem	N Nun	S Samekh	(o) Ayin	P, F Pe	Ts Tsade	K, Q Qoph	R Resh	S, Sh Shin	T Tav

Starting and ending formulas

The overwhelming majority of Hebrew epitaphs contain fixed sentences or abbreviations that mark the beginning and end of the epitaph. These abbreviations are important for several reasons: first, they indicate that the object is indeed a tombstone; second, they facilitate the right orientation of the stone in case it does not stand upright; finally, they are usually close to the crucial elements of the epitaph and help locate them more quickly.


Moldova


Ukraine


Slovakia

One of the common abbreviations that begins the epitaph is **פנ**[11] ("po nikbar/nitman") – "here lies/here is buried".

Important: Hebrew should be read from right to left.

In different regions, other abbreviations might be found instead of **פנ**, such as **מצק** ("matsevat kvurat" – "a tombstone"), **בדה** ("baruch dayan ha-emet" – "may the righteous judge be blessed"),**בהג** ("baruch ha-gomel" – "may the redeemer be blessed") or **פט** ("po tamun" – "here lies").

[11] *As this is an abbreviation, various symbols can be used on the tombstone to indicate it and thereby distinguish it from other words.*


Slovakia


Ukraine


Greece

Slovakia


Moldova


Greece

The most common abbreviation that marks the end of an epitaph is **תנצבה** ("tehi nafsho/nafsha tsrura bi-tsror ha-hayim" – "May his/her soul be bound in the bond of life").[12]

Alternatively, these abbreviations might be written as full sentences, or specific formulations might be used.


Ukraine


Slovakia

[12] *This formulation is a quote from Samuel I 25:29 and is included in the main Jewish prayer for the dead.*

Practice

Try finding starting and ending abbreviations on the following pictures. What are they?

Greece

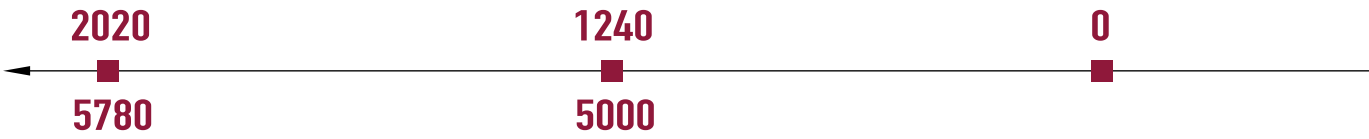
Moldova

Date

[13] *In some regions we can find the date on top of tombstone.*

The final abbreviation, **תנצבה**, is usually located next to a highly important element of the Hebrew epitaph: the date[13] of death. The year of death is given according to the Jewish calendar and is usually written in two — to six Hebrew letters, each of which represents a number (first hundreds, then tens, then single digits), so that the sum of these numbers equals the year. The table above contains the gematria for each Hebrew letter.

Jews count the years from the creation of the world. The numbers are indicated by letters, and the thousands are usually omitted. For example, the year 2020 is 5780 according to the Jewish calendar, which is written as **תשפ** or **תשף** (780). Occasionally, the letter **ה** (5) stands before it, representing 5000. Then **תשף** will look like **התשף**. The date is read from left to right!



How to calculate the Hebrew date:

- Add all gematria of the letters together. For example, **תקפד** is 400 + 100 + 80 + 4 = 584. This is a Jewish year with thousands omitted.
- Add 1240 to the result. This is the year according to the Gregorian calendar. Thus, **תקפד** is 584 + 1240 = 1864.

Be careful not to mistake **תנצבה** for the year, as it starts with the same letter!

Quite frequently, the date is followed by an abbreviation **לפק** ("li-frat katan" — "according to the small calculation"), which means that thousands have been omitted from the date. It can be an additional useful marker for locating the date in the epitaph.

Slovakia

Moldova

Practice

1. Try to find and calculate the date on the pictures provided in this manual. Where the date is marked, calculate it and convert it to Gregorian.
2. Using the knowledge you now have about the correlation between the Hebrew and Gregorian dates, calculate the year of your birth (or any year of your choice) according to the Jewish calendar.

Ukraine

Bonus point: write it down in Hebrew letters.

Lithuania

Name

A crucial part of the epitaph is the name of the deceased, which is significant both for ritual purposes and for research. In most cases, the personal name and the patronym (father's name) are given, and quite often also a surname, especially on later tombstones. There are two types of names: biblical and non-biblical. Biblical are usually easier to locate and read, although they are written only with consonants (for example, רחל – Rachel or יצחק – Yitzhak).

Surnames usually differ by region and can therefore be more difficult to read. In Ashkenazi regions, the surnames were usually written according to Yiddish phonetics, meaning one may come across combinations of letters that are unusual to Hebrew and are translated as a single sound. If you see combinations like זש ([zh]), טש ([ch]) or שטש ([shch]), they, most probably, indicate the surname. Another frequent combination is יי ([ey] or [ay]); the vowels [o] and [a] are written with א, and [e] with ע. In those regions, non-biblical and sometimes even biblical names are written using this principle.

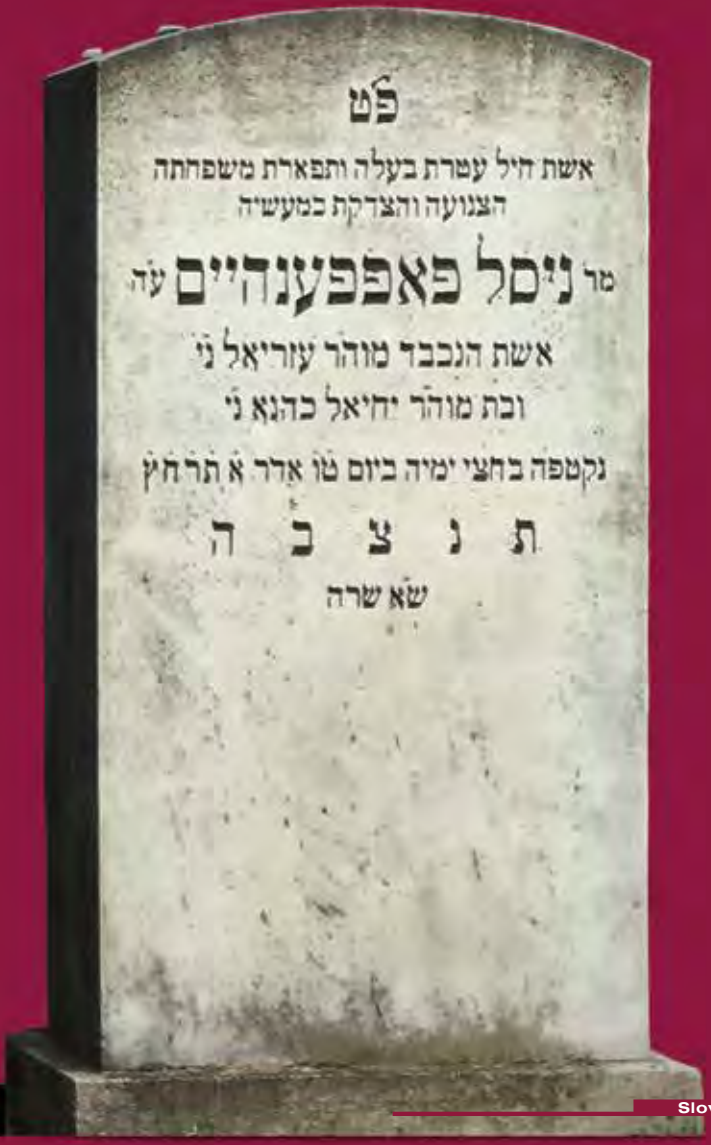
In Hebrew text you can see ASHER and in Polish wersion it become to OSKAR sometimes jewish changed names in documents- and put both on epitaph

Here is an example of acrostic

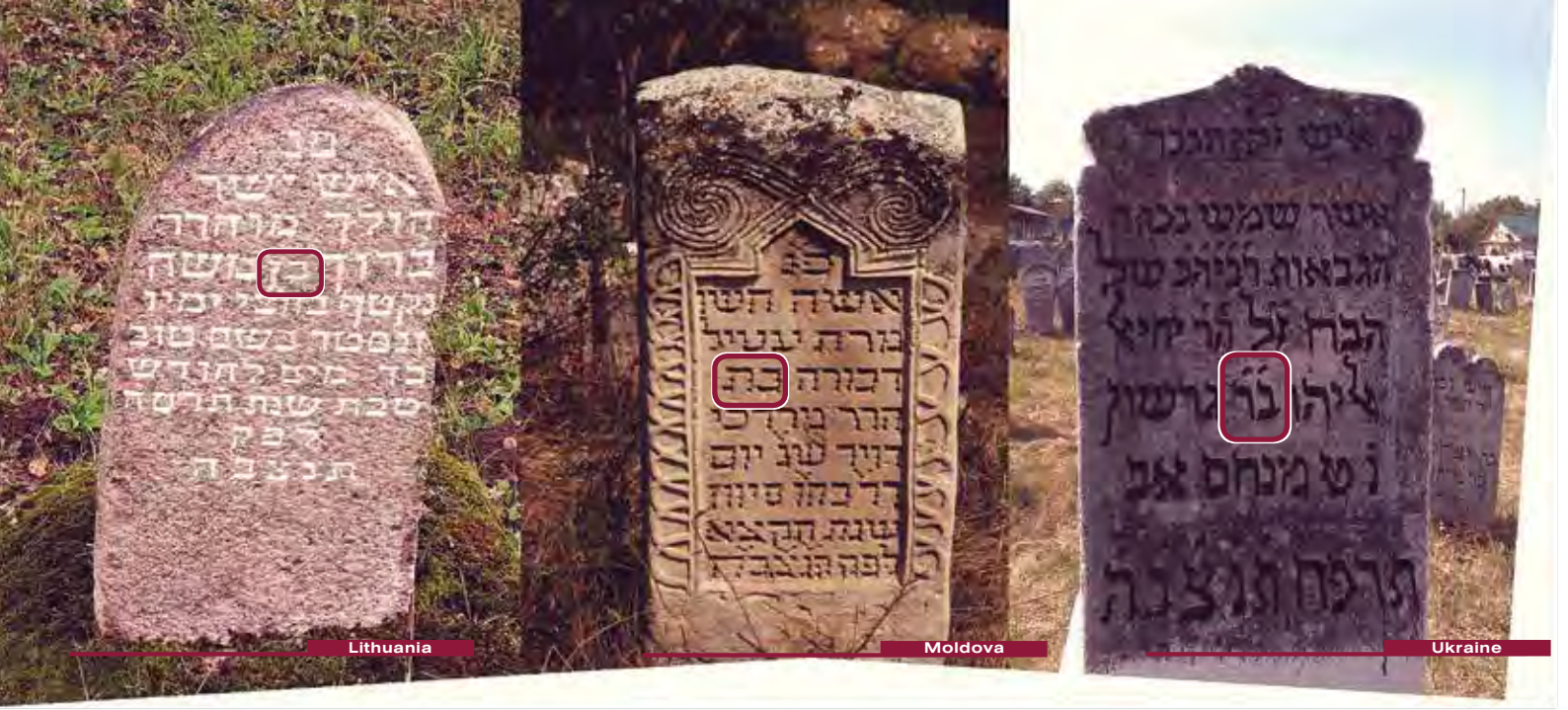
Practice

1. Try to find and read the names on the pictures provided in this manual.
2. Try to write your own name and surname using the Hebrew alphabet and Yiddish letter combinations.

Greece



Slovakia



However, sometimes there is no indication of any kind, and if your knowledge of Hebrew is limited, it might be more difficult to find the name on the stone. Usually it is located close to the opening abbreviation; in addition, the words **בן** ("son"), **בת** ("daughter") or the abbreviation **בר** ("son/daughter of Mr. …") usually appear there and serve as a link between the personal name and the patronym. Once you have identified these, you will be able not only to find the name, but also (in most cases) to determine the deceased person's gender.

These are the main key elements of a Jewish epitaph, which can be applied to most inscriptions and are sufficient for carrying out preliminary research. However, they vary from region to region. More in-depth research necessitates a closer acquaintance with the structure of the epitaph. There are various additional elements that can be included

in the text: lamentations, information on the person's occupation, and relevant biblical quotes. In the date, not only the year is given, but also usually the month and the day of death. If you become interested in these specific details, please see the article by M. Nosonovsky referenced below.

Apart from textual epitaphs, various decorative elements can be found on a tombstone. These elements, aside from their aesthetic significance, can also bear special meanings. The next section will focus on how to decipher and "read" the symbols that accompany the epitaph. (closing picture)

Greece

Recommended literature

- Nosonovsky, Michael. Hebrew Inscriptions from Ukraine and Former Soviet Union, Washington, DC: Lulu. 2006.
- Doctor, Ronald. Reading Hebrew Matzevot Key Words, Abbreviations, & Acronyms. 2008.

Symbols and Ornaments on Jewish Tombstones

Honorific Arch of Titus, 1st-century AD, Italia

In the previous section, we focused on the written information presented on the tombstones. However, these epitaphs are quite often accompanied by a variety of symbolic images, which can often bear as much important information as the text itself. The following section will discuss the most widespread symbols[14] and ornaments found on Jewish tombstones, their meanings and ways to use them as a key element in your research.

Many factors influenced the decoration of the Jewish tombstones: regional Jewish and non-Jewish visual traditions; whether there was a custom to carve images on the tombstones at all; even the type of stone available in the region. Moreover, it is difficult or even impossible to imagine the whole spectrum of decorations, as so many tombstones did not survive. Given the sheer breadth of possible designs, we will discuss only those which are most frequently encountered.

[14] The symbols found on Jewish tombstones are too numerous and too varied to fit in one manual, but we have tried to provide the background and meanings of the most widely-used, enduring symbols.»

Menorah.

One of the most frequent Jewish symbols used on the tombstones is the menorah ("candelabra"). It has seven branches and represents the golden chandelier used in the Jerusalem temple[15]. It is one of the oldest symbols in Judaism, dating back to ancient times. It is widely used not only on tombstones, but also in the decoration of synagogues, and is depicted on the coat of arms of the State of Israel. One of the most famous images of the menorah appeared on the Arch of Titus in Rome.

Greece

[15] *The First Temple was constructed by King Solomon in about 1200 BCE and destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BCE. The Second Temple stood in Jerusalem between 516 BCE and 70 CE. Its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE began the centuries-long exile of the Jews, and the Temple soon became a symbol of hope for their eventual return to the Holy Land.*

The priestly blessing (Cohen's hands).

Another common symbol is an engraving of two hands with their fingers separated in a special way, leaving a space between the middle and ring fingers. The fingers are arranged to resemble the Hebrew letter "shin" (ש).

This is a symbol of the Cohanim, an extended family descending from Aaron, the brother of Moses, the members of which were priests in the Temple of Jerusalem. After the destruction of the Second Temple in the 1st century CE, the Cohanim lost most of their functions, except for the special priestly blessing that is performed on major holidays during prayer in the Ashkenazi tradition and every day in the Sephardi tradition. During this blessing, the Cohanim place their hands as depicted above. Consequently, if there are such hands on a tombstone, it is a clear indication that the deceased was a descendant of Cohanim. The symbol itself emerged relatively recently, in the late Middle Ages.

Slovakia

Pitcher

On some tombstones, a depiction of a pitcher can be found. This pitcher is a symbol of the Levite tribe. The Levites were servants in the Jerusalem temple. They assisted the Cohen priests, including washing their hands before worship. As such, the pitcher is a symbol of this act, and its presence on the tombstone marks that the person buried under the stone is a Levite.

Important: not all vessels depicted on the tombstones are Levite pitchers, despite the similarities. Please pay attention to the form of the pitcher, in order to avoid mistakes and false conclusions.

Ukraine

Shabbat candles.

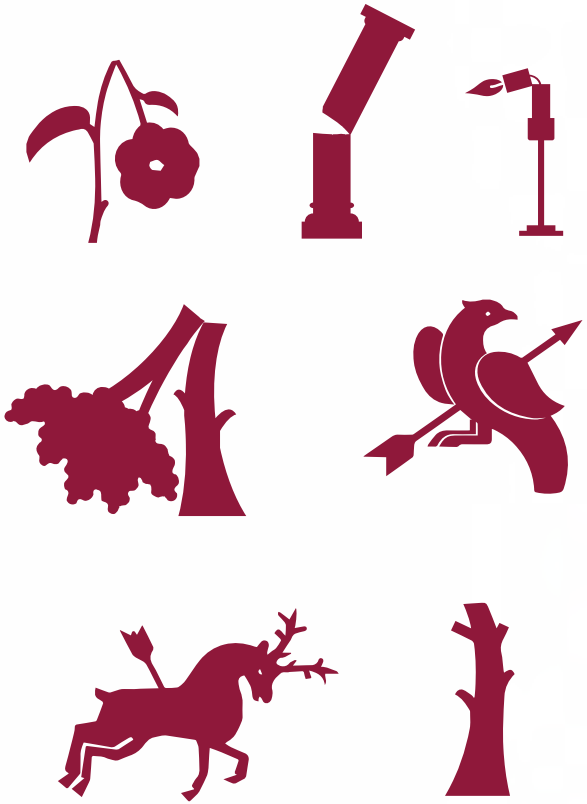
This symbol reflects one of the most important religious laws of Judaism: the observance of Shabbat, the holy day which starts on Friday evening and continues until nightfall on Saturday. To mark the beginning of Shabbat, a Jewish woman lights candles, an act which is considered one of the most important religious responsibilities for Jewish women[16]. Consequently, women's tombstones are often decorated with symbolic Shabbat candles, which indicate not only the gender of the deceased, but also the fact that she was a righteous woman who observed religious laws.

Important: the Shabbat candles are easy to mistake for a menorah. Whenever you see a chandelier on a tombstone, pay attention how many branches it has. A menorah always has seven branches; if there are any more or less, it is most likely a representation of Shabbat candles.

[16] *Traditionally, lighting Shabbat candles and baking bread for Shabbat is done by women.*

Metaphors of death.

Another frequently encountered group of symbols reflect death in a metaphorical way. This category encompasses a wide range of symbols, the most widespread of which are a broken tree or flower, or a dead or wounded animal, etc.



Animals

While certain animals are used as a metaphor for death, there are many which appear on tombstones for other decorative purposes. These depictions of animals can be very varied and bear different meanings. The choice of a particular animal depends on many factors and cannot always be interpreted unambiguously. Sometimes the animal represents the name of the deceased; whereas in other cases it may be a reference to a biblical tale, or even a purely aesthetic addition. The most popular animals of this kind are a lion and a deer[17].

[17] *For more on the symbolic meaning of these animals in Judaism see, for example: Goberman, David Noevich, Pinsky, Robert, and Hundert, Gershon David. Carved Memories: Heritage in Stone from the Russian Jewish Pale. New York: Rizzoli, 2000*

Birds can also be found, particularly on female graves. Occasionally, the carvers were unsure of an animal's exact appearance, and depicted others of which they had a clearer conception; for example, a bear may be included in place of a lion. There are also chimeras — supernatural animals like unicorn or griffin. According to Boris Chaimovich, these chimeras serve as guardians of the deceased's soul[18].

Ukraine

[18] *Khaimovich, Boris. The Jewish Tombstones of the 16th -18th Centuries from the Eastern Province of the Polish Kingdom: Study of the Iconography and Style Genesis (2005).*

Greece

Lithuania

The star of David

Finally, there is the symbol that became the most associated with Judaism: Magen David ("the shield of David"), or the star of David: a six-pointed star. Despite its universal association with Judaism, as a symbol it is much newer than, for example, the menorah. According to the medieval legend, it was King David's sign, depicted on the shields of the soldiers of his army. It became widely used in the late Middle Ages. ILater, Nazi authorities used Yellow Stars of David to mark the Jewish population. Today, it is the most widely-recognised Jewish symbol, and can be found in synagogues, Jewish homes, and on the national flag of Israel.

How to use the symbol as a key element.

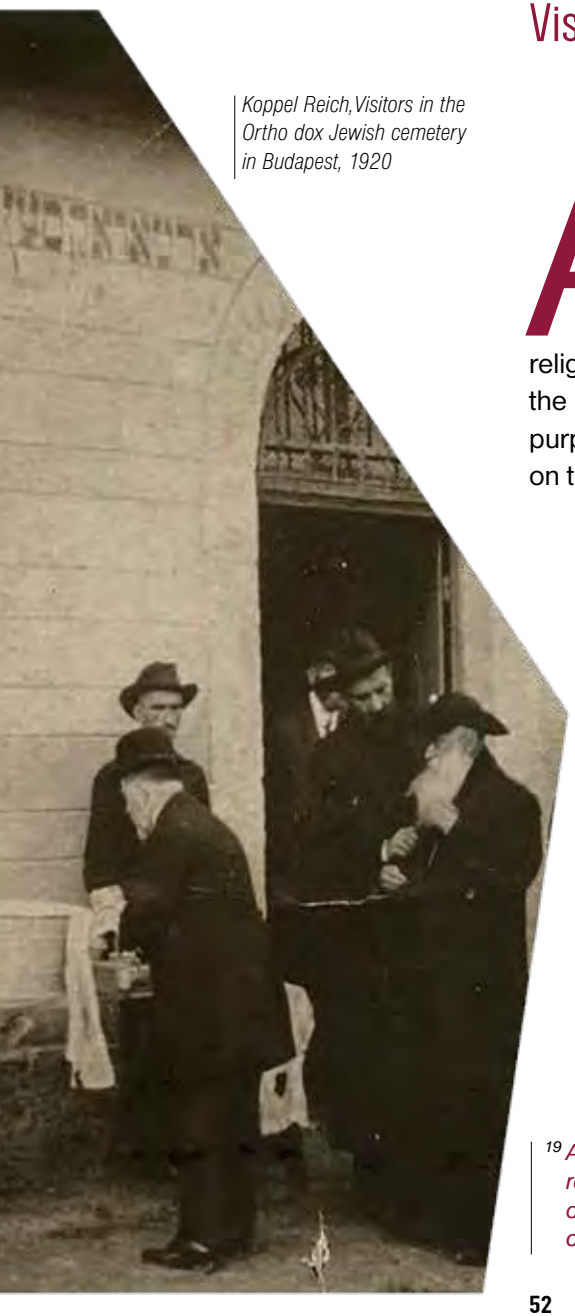
These symbols might come in handy when deciphering the epitaph, especially if your knowledge of Hebrew is restricted. For example, the symbols can provide information about the deceased person's gender, as with the aforementioned Shabbat candles, employed as a symbol solely on female gravestones. By contrast, the Cohen's blessing and the Levite's pitcher are usually found depicted on the tombstones of men. Thus, if you were able to read and calculate the date, then identified a gender-specific symbol accompanying the epitaph, you would already have sufficient information for future research (for example, regarding which name you should look for: a male or a female one). To classify the deceased as a Cohen or a Levite also narrows the field of your research.

Important: not all images on tombstones have their own special meaning. Floral ornaments, stylized columns, and abstract ornaments are usually just decorations. In contrast, some symbols carry very specific meanings with regards to an individual's occupation, cause of death, political views, etc. They may also serve as expressions of mourning.

Recommended literature

- Goberman, David Noevich, Pinsky, Robert, and Hundert, Gershon David. Carved Memories: Heritage in Stone from the Russian Jewish Pale. New York: Rizzoli, 2000.
- Brown, Ryland. If The Stones Could Speak: A Guide to the Shapes and Symbols in Your Local Cemetery. Gateway Seminars, 2014.

Visiting a Jewish Cemetery



Koppel Reich,Visitors in the Ortho dox Jewish cemetery in Budapest, 1920

Any Jewish cemetery, active or inactive, is a place of special religious importance to anyone of the Jewish faith. As such, visitors to the cemetery, whether they came for personal reasons or research purposes, have to abide by a few simple rules. This section will focus on these rules, as well as some rituals related to visiting the cemetery.

- Men should[19] cover their heads. In Judaism, it is obligatory in general that men wear head coverings at all times. At a Jewish cemetery, especially an operational one, men (regardless of their religion) will most likely be asked to wear a kippah out of respect for the deceased. Such coverings are usually provided on site.
- Eating, drinking and smoking while at the cemetery is prohibited. On the one hand, Jews consider it disrespectful of the deceased; on the other, the cemetery is perceived as an extremely ritually impure place.
- Due to the impure state of the cemetery, you might be asked to wash your hands before leaving the cemetery. For that purpose, most cemeteries are equipped with hand-washing facilities.

[19] *At a Jewish cemetery, especially an operational one, men (regardless of their religion) will most likely be asked to wear a kippah. While this is not strictly obligatory, it is a sign of respect to Jewish tradition and the deceased. Such coverings are usually provided on site.*

Mourners partake in a number of rituals and customs at the cemetery, such as: the recitation of mourning prayers, or kaddish, which is not itself a mourning prayer but an expression of praise for God, the lighting of candles next to the tombstones, and the placement of small stones on them. Placing flowers on graves is not a Jewish tradition, but is considered more of a Christian custom, and as such is not as encouraged.

In general, all customs related to cemeteries and funerals are thought to be highly honourable, according to Jewish customs. For example, being a member of a Chevra Kadisha is considered a very respectable occupation; to take part in a funeral or to come across a funeral procession was also perceived as a great honour. According to one of the customs, the individual who encountered a funeral procession is obligated to give money to charity immediately afterwards.

Local Cemeteries

In the following section several Jewish cemeteries are presented, providing an insight into the way theory meets practice. We chose to present five cemeteries from five different countries in order to showcase the diversity of ways to explore Jewish cemeteries, research them and bring them into the classroom.
Each cemetery we have chosen represents a different historical background and a different outcome regarding its preservation and commemoration.

- Rhodes (Greece): a cemetery which represents not only the life of a community which has disappeared, but also a cemetery which has suffered a similar fate, given that it stores the tombstones gathered from the city's older Jewish necropolis, which was destroyed. In addition, the cemetery is one of the principal Jewish tourist sites in Greece.
- Orgeyev (Moldova): a cemetery which has remained active throughout its entire 300 — year existence and has been damaged only by natural factors.
- Ostroh (Ukraine): a rare example of a cemetery belonging to one of Ukraine's most important Jewish communities, which was completely demolished during the Soviet period but has recently been restored by foreign donors and local authorities.
- Malý Horeš (Slovakia): a small cemetery which stands as the only evidence of the Jewish community that once existed there.
- Kretinga (Lithuania): a vivid example of preservation and care provided by local authorities at the instigation of descendants of natives of the town.

These cemeteries are located in the countries that are included in the ESJF Survey project. Visit the ESJF website to learn more about these and other cemeteries in the project countries.

Greece

The total number of Jewish Cemeteries explored by ESJF in Greece: **45**

Jews on Rhodes

The Jews appeared in Rhodes around the 2nd century BC. The city's community was in a state of continuous growth throughout the Middle Ages and became especially prominent during the rule of Ottoman Empire.

The main occupations of the city's Jews were: merchants, manufacturers, craftsmen, etc.

By the beginning of World War I, about 4,500 Jews live in the city of Rhodes. After the Holocaust, only 50 remained, a number which has since fallen to below 20.

The Jewish cemetery of Rhodes.[20]

The Jewish cemetery of Rhodes is neither the oldest in Greece (which is in Ioannina) nor the largest (which is in Thessaloniki). However, it is an excellent example of a well-preserved Jewish cemetery that once belonged to a community which has almost entirely ceased to exist.

Rhodes was once home to two Jewish cemeteries, but only one survives today. It is remarkable for the age of its tombstones (the oldest of which date back to the end of the 16th century) and the rich texts and varied decorations of its beautifully preserved marble gravestones, which include cypresses, geometrical and floral ornaments, as well as stylized lamps and specific Jewish symbols such as the Star of David.

[20] *Gafni, I., & Kerem, Y. (2007). Rhodes. In M. Berenbaum & F. Skolnik (Eds.), Encyclopaedia Judaica (2nd ed., Vol. 17, pp. 277-279). Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA. Retrieved from https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587516704/GVRL?u=huji&sid=GVRL&xid=e10c8912*

Similar decorations can be found in Volos, Xanti, Athens and other surviving Greek Jewish cemeteries.

The Jewish cemeteries of Greece represent unique historical and cultural landmarks for various Jewish groups in the Mediterranean region. Quite often they are the only reminder of the communities that once flourished there, and as such it is vital they be researched and preserved.

Lithuania

The total number of Jewish Cemeteries explored by ESJF in Lithuania: **105**

The Jewish cemetery of Kretinga.

Jews in Kretinga

The Jews began to settle in Kretinga (German, until 1915: Kretingen) in the middle of the 18th century. According to the 1897 census, they constituted more than a third of the town's population: 1,202 out of 3,418. In the first two decades of the 20th century, the Jewish population of Kretinga began to decrease, such that before the Holocaust only 700-800 Jews remained there. During the Holocaust, the community was completely destroyed.

The Jewish cemetery of Kretinga was most likely established in the first third of the 19th century, as its earliest tombstone dates back to 1835. The site contains approximately 300 tombstones, most of which are well-preserved and legible, although generally undecorat-

ed. This cemetery reflects the general situation in Lithuania, where the Jewish cemeteries are restored, catalogued and preserved. In addition, its simple, distinct epitaphs can serve as valuable material to learn more about identifying the content of tombstones.

Moldova

The total number of Jewish Cemeteries explored by ESJF in Moldova: **72**

The Jewish cemetery of Orgeyev.[21]

The Jewish cemetery of Orgeyev is one of the oldest in south-eastern Europe, its earliest tombstones supposedly dating back to the 17th century. However, during the SEFER Center expedition in 2019, the oldest gravestone found dated to 1708. The cemetery itself is divided in two large sectors: the first consists of older tombstones from the 18th and 19th centuries, while the second dates predominantly from the Soviet period and is still in use.

The tombstones in the older sector are mostly made from local sandstone. The quality of the material allowed the carvers to decorate them

Jews in Orgeyev

According to some sources, Jews first appeared in Orgeyev in the 16th century. This community grew significantly after the Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812.

Historically, the Jews of Orgeyev were businessmen and craftsmen, and sometimes participated in the production of wine. Later, in the first two decades of the 20th century, the number of Jewish farmers rose.

Prior to World War II, there were around 6,500 Jews in Orgeyev. Some of them managed to flee east when the war started, but the majority were killed in the Holocaust. Today, a small community of 87 people remain there.

[21] *Feldman, Eliyahu, and Jean Ancel. «Orgeyev.» Encyclopaedia Judaica, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 15, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 468-469. Gale eBooks, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587515186/GVRL?u=huji&sid=GVRL&xid=400339fd. Accessed 5 May 2020.*

richly, using floral ornaments, Jewish traditional symbols (such as the priestly blessing and the Levite's pitcher), as well as depictions of various animals (mostly lions and deer). Unfortunately, the downside of the material is its fragility. By comparing the site to photos taken by famous Jewish artist and photographer David Goberman (1912–2003) in the 1930s and the 1950-60s, it is clear many beautiful tombstones have not survived the intervening years[22].

The Jewish cemetery of Orgeyev is only one of many south-eastern European cemeteries with sandstone tombstones and masterpiece decorations. It represents quite accurately how many Moldovan Jewish cemeteries looked and look, and is one of the few which has functioned for several centuries.

[22] *Besides the Orgeyev cemetery, Goberman documented many cemeteries in Moldova and Ukraine, immortalising them.*

Photos taken by D. Goberman, 1960s





Slovakia

The total number of Jewish Cemeteries explored by ESJF in Slovakia: **237**

Jews in Malý Horeš

Malý Horeš (Hungarian: Kisgéres) is a small Slovakian village close to the Hungarian border. Today, 99% of its population is Hungarian, and its Jewish cemetery is the only remaining trace of the Jewish community that once existed there. Otherwise, nothing is known about the Jews of this settlement.

The Jewish cemetery of Malý Horeš.

The Jewish cemetery of Malý Horeš is relatively new, with its oldest tombstone dating back to 1875. The few surviving stones are well-preserved, with legible epitaphs and a variety of decorative elements.
In addition to the epitaphs, already a trove of valuable information, at least two of the stones give insights into the mason behind them. Stonemasons held an esteemed position in these small communities, where all of a cemetery's tombstones were generally carved by just one mason at any given time. In most cases, the authorship of a tombstone is left anonymous: the name of the deceased is listed, not the individual who carved the epigraph. In Malý Horereš, however, we found several tombstones on which the carver had left his signature, revealing a rarely explored aspect of Jewish community history.

The mason most likely carved his name to promote his business — a wise decision in an era in which tradesmen like him likely needed to be known in as many settlements as possible to ensure a sustainable income. The fact such a professional could be hired also reflects the financial status of the community.

While the material evidence no longer exists to prove these assumptions, Malý Horeš shows that, even when there is no information on a Jewish community beyond the contents of its cemetery, glimpses can still be caught into the way of life which once existed.

Ukraine

The total number of Jewish Cemeteries explored by ESJF in Ukraine: **1003**

The Jewish cemetery of Ostroh.[23]

The oldest tombstones in the Ostroh Jewish cemetery date back to the 16th century. However, these do not survive today, and only exist in photographs.

In 1968, the cemetery was closed by the local authorities, as it was long abandoned and totally destroyed. An amusement park was opened on the site, and some of the tombstones were removed for use as building material. In 1991, when the park was closed, 400 tombstones were rediscovered, some of them dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries[24].

Jews in Ostrog

There is evidence to suggest Jews first appeared in Ostrog around the 15th century. Its Jewish community was one of the most important and active ones in the regions of Podolia, Volyn, and Galicia.

Historically, the Jews of Ostrog actively participated in international trade, particularly in the exchange of cattle, as well as the export of various goods.

In 1939, just before the start of World War II, there were almost 10,500 Jews in Ostrog. The overwhelming majority of the community perished during the Holocaust, and the community was not rebuilt afterwards.

[23] *Shochat, Azriel, et al. „Ostrog.» Encyclopaedia Judaica, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 15, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 510-512. Gale eBooks, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587515256/GVRL?u=huji&sid=GVRL&xid=28e184ab. Accessed 30 Apr. 2020.*

Although the Ostroh Jewish cemetery no longer exists in its original form, it remains a remarkable testament to an old and significant community. It serves as a rare example of a Jewish cemetery that has been reconstructed and catalogued despite there being no active Jewish presence in its town.

Photos of carver from A.- Nskiy expedition, 1920s

[24] *Fishel, A. & Nosonovsky, N. (2017), «Rediscovered Gravestones from a Destroyed Jewish Cemetery in Ostrog: The Case of Two Inscriptions of 1445», Zutot, vol. 14, pp. 73 – 87.*

What's Next? Practical Activities

This manual has supplied you with the basic theoretical information necessary for the research of Jewish cemeteries. It goes without saying that the communities in Europe and beyond were different and remain so, and that the requirements for their Jewish cemeteries varies, as well as the style and appearance of those cemeteries. Therefore, we tried to keep the theory we provided as universal as possible, in order for it to be applied to the widest variety of situations.
Below, we have listed several activities for middle and high-school students. These activities are also quite general and can be altered and adjusted to fit specific purposes.

1. Map comparison.

As mentioned earlier, old maps can be a useful resource in locating a Jewish cemetery. They are especially helpful when the cemetery has been destroyed, and there is nothing left to be researched except its former site.

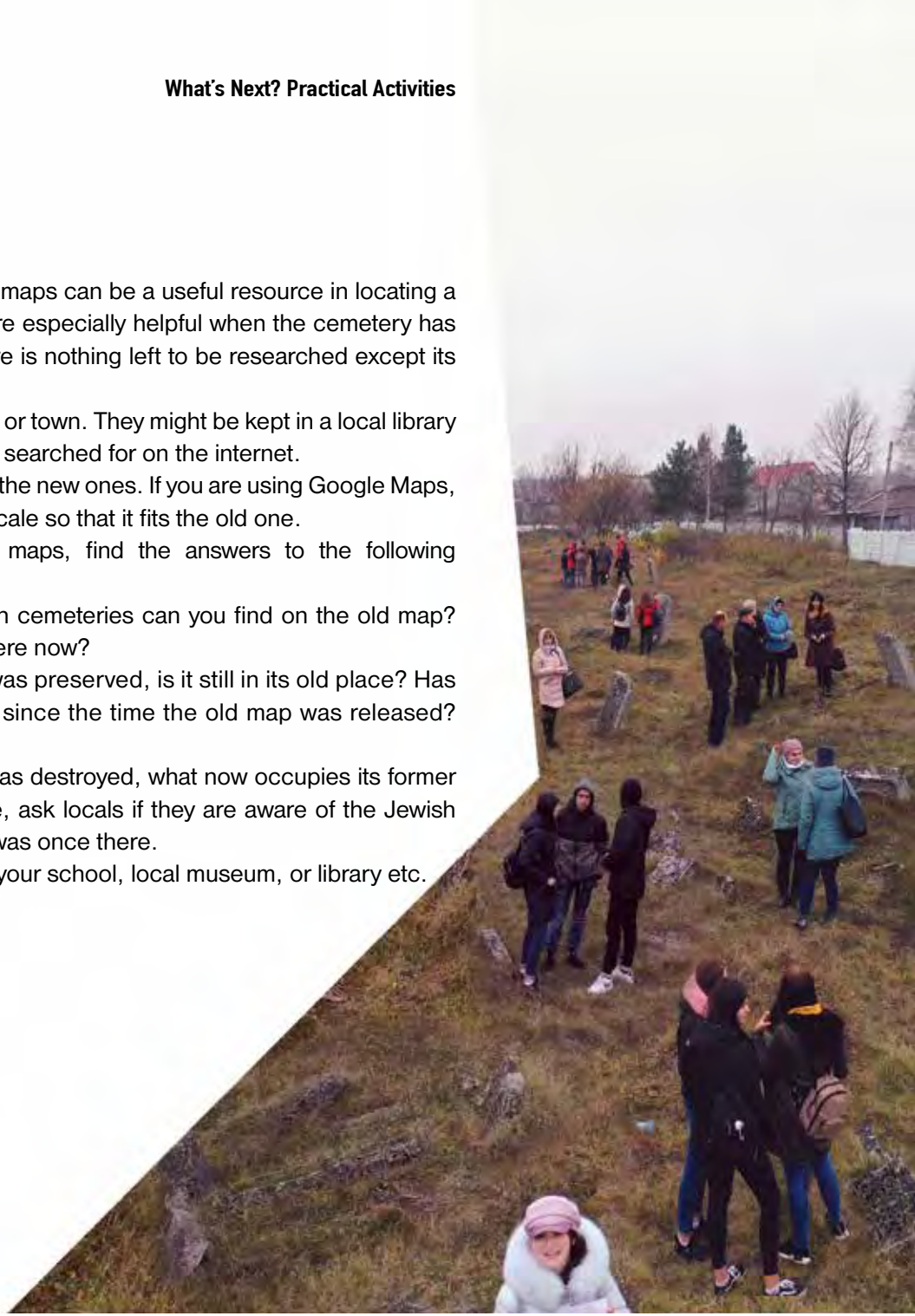
Find old maps of your city or town. They might be kept in a local library or can perhaps be simply searched for on the internet.

Compare the old maps to the new ones. If you are using Google Maps, make sure to adjust the scale so that it fits the old one.

Using the two kinds of maps, find the answers to the following questions.

- How many Jewish cemeteries can you find on the old map? How many are there now?
- If the cemetery was preserved, is it still in its old place? Has its size changed since the time the old map was released? How?
- If the cemetery was destroyed, what now occupies its former site? Visit the site, ask locals if they are aware of the Jewish cemetery which was once there.

Present your research in your school, local museum, or library etc.



2. Photo exhibition.

This creative activity will suit those whose level of Hebrew does not allow them to conduct research based on textual material. It is especially appropriate for regions where the decorations on the tombstones and/or their architectural forms are rich and varied.

Explore your local Jewish cemetery and find recurring types of decoration.

Choose a topic for your exhibition, according to your findings. For example, "Animals and birds on the Jewish tombstones in my city" or "The most popular Jewish symbol".

Take pictures. If it is possible, use a professional quality camera.

Choose the best photos to be shown at your exhibition.
Make an exhibition in your school, local museum, or library etc. You may accompany your visual material with historical information on the Jewish community in your city or region and/or on the Jewish cemetery you are presenting. Use the relevant part of this manual to explain the meanings of the symbols and ornaments. Additionally, you may consult the reading list provided at the end of that section.
If several authors present their photos at the exhibition, you may run a contest or a hold a vote for the most interesting picture.

3. Chronological research.

If you feel more at ease with the Hebrew alphabet and are able to locate, read and calculate the Hebrew date in the text of an epitaph, do so. This is a good way of applying the theoretical material in practice.
Explore the tombstones in your local Jewish cemetery and try to identify as many dates as possible. Use the relevant section of this manual. Calculate the dates and convert them to the Gregorian calendar.
Based on the results you have gathered, find the answers to the following questions.

- How old is the cemetery?
- How old is the oldest tombstone at the cemetery? The newest?
- Which year or decade is most prevalent on the cemetery? What could it mean?

Present your research at your school, local museum, or library etc.

4. Genealogical project.

This activity demands more involvement and resources than the previous ones but might prove even more interesting and challenging. To perform it, you will need to use the majority of the theoretical information provided in this manual and, in addition, conduct some archival or ethnological research. This project can be performed both individually and in groups. Using the results of your successful research, you will produce a genealogical report on a certain person or family whose tombstones can be found at your local Jewish cemetery.

Explore the tombstones on your local Jewish cemetery.

If there are any decorations on the stones, try to identify those that reflect the social position, occupation, and/or gender of the deceased. Consult the relevant sections of this manual.

Choose a tombstone that seems interesting to you. Note the information that you have already extracted from it.

Find and calculate the date. Convert it to the Gregorian calendar.

Find, read, and transcribe the name and surname (whenever present).

Sum up the data that you have collected. This is a "profile" of the person whose history you are trying to trace.

Wherever possible, find more tombstones with the same surname. Repeat this to create a "profile" of those persons.

- Do the dates correlate?
- Can it be inferred that they are the members of one family?

Archival research: if possible, check the names in your local archive.

- Who were these people? What information can be gathered about them?

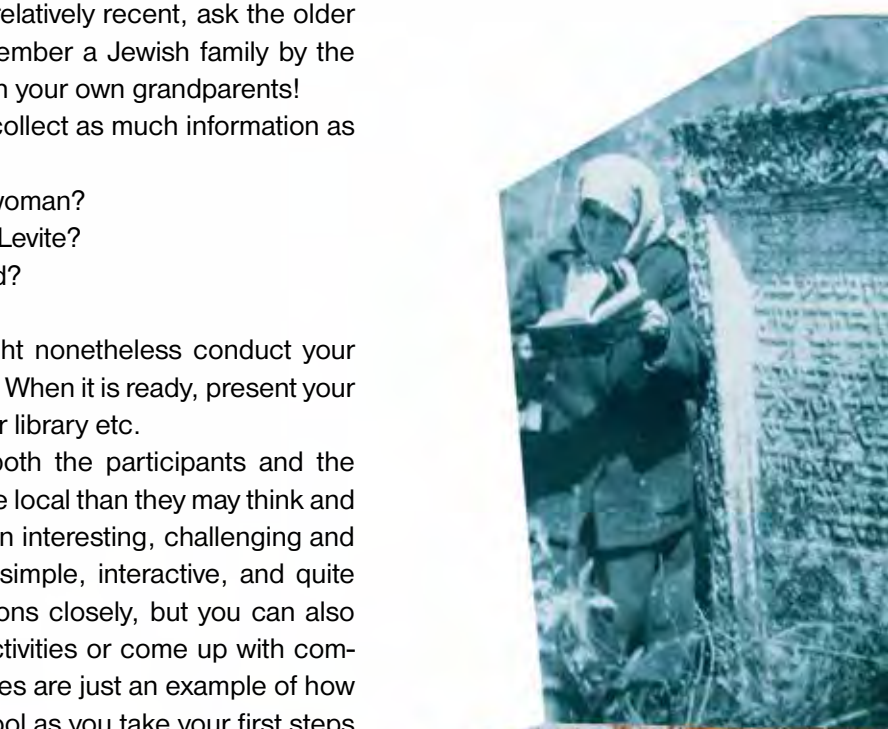
Ethnological research: if the dates are relatively recent, ask the older people in your city or town if they remember a Jewish family by the name you have found. You can start with your own grandparents!

If the name cannot be identified, try to collect as much information as possible.

- Was the deceased a man or a woman?
- (If a man) Was he a Cohen or a Levite?
- Can his occupation be identified?
- When did they die?

With such scarce information, you might nonetheless conduct your research and achieve significant results. When it is ready, present your project at your school, local museum, or library etc.

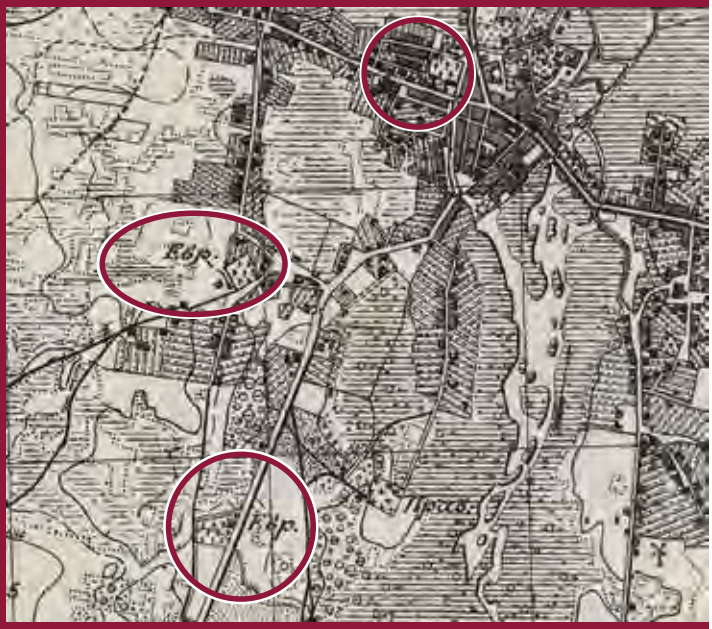
These activities are perfect to show both the participants and the viewers that Jewish culture is much more local than they may think and that researching Jewish cemeteries is an interesting, challenging and rewarding activity. These activities are simple, interactive, and quite adaptable: you may follow the instructions closely, but you can also use them as inspiration for your own activities or come up with completely independent ones. These activities are just an example of how this manual can be used as a support tool as you take your first steps in researching your local culture and history.



Answers

On this map of Kovel (Ukraine) we can see three Jewish cemetery sites. From this, we can determine that the oldest site was located almost in the centre of the town, and that the Jewish population was growing rapidly. Today, all of the cemetery sites in Kovel have been demolished and over-built, with old maps being the sole source of information on them.

Practice*



Practice

For this task, there are two different difficulty levels which can be tried: the easier involves the standard **פנ**, and the harder involves the "mazevat kvurat" formula discussed in the manual. However, the manual did not include a Hebrew version (only the abbreviation **מצק**), so the Hebrew alphabet will need to be used. Now you are a real archaeologist!
Each ends in the same formula: תנצבה

Let's try it!

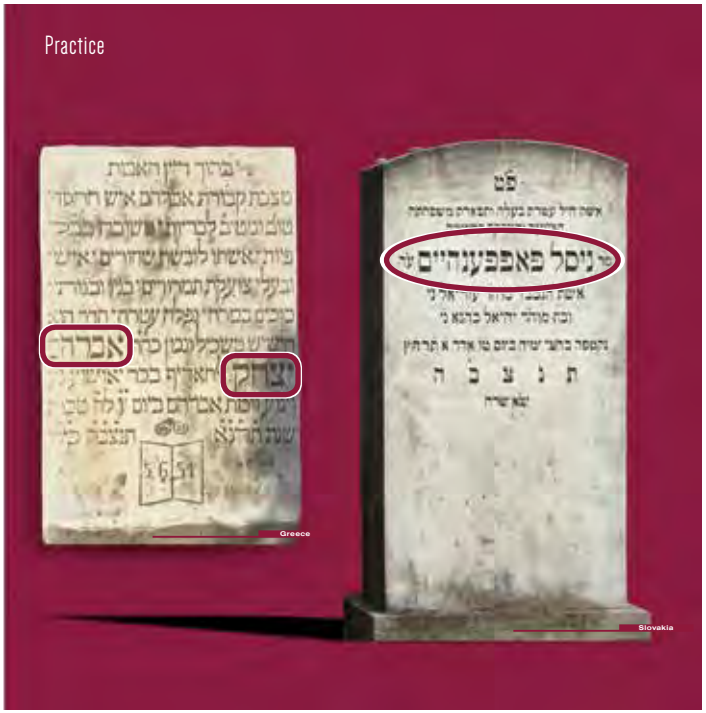
The formula and answer for the first year is:

1908 = 1240 + 668 = **תרסח**

The second is: 1849 = 1240 + 609 = **תרט**

Now, how do we convert a date of birth to the Jewish calendar? Say you were born in 1975, you would find it with the following formula: 1975 - 1240 = 735

Once you add the thousand column you will find you were born in the year 5735 (based on the Jewish calendar's interpretation of the creation of the world). Congratulations! Now we will convert this to Hebrew letters as follows: 400 + 300 + 30 + 5 = **תשלה**



Names too are very interesting. Let me introduce Mrs NISL PAPPENHAYM from Slovakia, and a gentleman from Greece named AVRAHAM YITZHAK.

How do we convert names to Hebrew?

Here is a list of some of the people who worked on this manual. See if you can read them, then try to write your own name the same way:

אסתר זיסקינ, אלעכסאנדרה פישל, דיאנה וואננאק, שאן מאקלעאד

Useful links

Databases on Jewish cemeteries

- ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative The largest database of Jewish cemeteries sites in Eastern Europe (including maps, historical overviews, descriptions, and photographs) https://www.esjf-surveys.org/surveys/
- International Jewish Cemetery Project (by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) http://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe
- Online Worldwide Burial Registry by Jewishgen (JOWBR) https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/tree/CemList.htm
- Maceva. Lithuanian cemeteries http://www.litvak-cemetery.info/

Genealogical research

- Jewishgen. The largest database of Jewish communities (includes locations, names, basic information, and reference texts) https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Search.asp
- Avotaynu. A catalogue of texts on Jewish genealogy https://www.avotaynu.com/allbooks.htm
- Geni.com Family trees/surnames https://www.geni.com/projects/Jewish-Genealogy-Portal-A-Guide-to-Jewish-Projects-and-Resources-on-Geni
- Ancestry. Family trees/surnames https://www.ancestry.com/cs/jewishgen-all

Maps

- Mapster. A Polish research resource, with more than 150 Polish, Austrian, German, and Russian historical maps (it is possible to search by settlement name) http://igrek.amzp.pl/mapindex.php
- Mapire. Detailed historical maps from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with automatic binding to modern satellite maps https://mapire.eu
- Etomesto. Several dozen historical maps, mostly of Ukraine and Russia, automatically linked to modern satellite maps http://www.etomesto.ru

Handout

Symbols of Jewish tombstones

The Star of David (“Magen David”) is a hexagram (six-pointed star). Although it is newer than some of the other symbols, it has become a universal symbol for the Jewish people, Judaism, and Israel. According to medieval legend, the star was a symbol of King David of Judah, and in depictions of his army it often appears on their shields. Today, it appears on the flag of Israel and is the symbol most strongly associated with Judaism.

“The priestly blessing” (Cohen’s hands) is the symbol of the Cohanim tribe, whose members were priests in the Temple of Jerusalem in the era of the ancient Jewish state. After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the first century CE, Cohen priests lost most of their functions, except for the special priestly blessing performed on major feasts during prayer. During this blessing, they position their hands as shown.

The Levites are one of the ancient tribes of Israel. They acted as servants in the Temple of Jerusalem and assisted the Cohen priests in their duties, including washing their hands before worship. The pitcher is used to symbolise these duties.

The menorah (“lamp”) is a golden seven-branched candle, which was traditionally located in the Jerusalem Temple. It is one of the oldest symbols of Judaism, dating back to classical antiquity.

Texts on Jewish tombstones

נ פ — two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, "pey" & "nun", usually found at the beginning of a tombstone inscription (epitaph). This is an abbreviation of the words "buried here" — "po nitman".

ה צ ב נ ת — the five letters of the Hebrew alphabet which most often complete the tombstone inscription. They are an abbreviation of a traditional blessing for the deceased — "let his soul be tied in a knot of life".

How to count a date

Each letter in the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value:

Please note that there are 5 letters (marked with circles) that can be written in two ways, either of which you might come across when reading the epitaph. The form on the right always appears at the end of the word.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	ך כ
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	20
(a) Alef	B, V Bet	G Gimel	D Dalet	H He	W, V Vav	Z Zayin	H, X Chet	T Tet	J, I, Y Yod	K Kaph
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ל	ם מ	ן נ	ס	ע	ף פ	ץ צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	400
L Lamed	M Mem	N Nun	S Samekh	(o) Ayin	P, F Pe	Ts Tsade	K, Q Qoph	R Resh	S, Sh Shin	T Tav

Jews traditionally count years from the creation of the world. According to Jewish chronology, the current year is 5780. Numbers are indicated by letters. For example, the year 5765 would be written as shown below (read from right to left). If you add together the numerical values of all the letters, you will get the number 5765.

In order to translate the Jewish date into the Gregorian calendar, you will need to:

1) add the numerical values of all letters (see table above),

2) ignore the thousands column (often it is not even included),

3) add 1240 to the resulting number. You are doing this because the year 5000 in the Jewish calendar fell on the year 1240 according to our own. 765 + 1240 = 2005.

Thank you for taking the time to read our manual! We hope you enjoyed it and that you walk away from it with a trove of useful information on Jewish cemeteries to inform your future research.
If you have any questions about the manual or Jewish cemeteries in general, please do not hesitate to contact the authors directly via email.

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The images in this manual were predominantly gathered from the ESJF survey database, but some were reproduced from open sources such as Wikipedia and from.

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- Ketuba, Slovakia by Ketubot Collection of the National Library of Israel — The National Library of Israel collection p.15
- Photos of some headstones reproduced from Moldova by "Sefer" Field Research Archive (www.sfira.ru) pp.30-39
- This is not the original relief on the Arch of Titus in Rome but a copy, located in the Museum of the Jewish People — Beit Hatfutsot in Tel Aviv. (https://www.bh.org.il) p.40
- Photos taken by D. Goberman in 1960s by S. Petersburg Judaica Archive (http://judaica.spb.ru) p.59

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Heritage preservation sits at the nexus of many different fields, from the technological to the pedagogical. The work of the ESJF encompasses many of these fields. With these manuals, we hope to support various professionals working in the protection of Jewish cemeteries, and in doing so share the expertise necessary for achieving long-term preservation.

Protection work begins locally, and to ensure communities take an interest in the wellbeing of their Jewish cemeteries, it is essential the next generation learn about the history of these sites.

Written for teachers, this manual provides a unique guide to exploring Jewish cemeteries in the classroom. With sections on Jewish heritage, as well as guides to interpreting tombstones and leading cemetery expeditions, it contains all the tools necessary to help students engage with their local Jewish heritage in a meaningful way.

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