

Yivo (1)

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

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

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

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

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

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania

יורד / ביב
1888

תולדות ההלכה

כולל שלשלת הקבלה
התפתחות התורה שבעל פה
מתוך שרשיה וסקירותיה
מראשיתה עד התיבת התלמוד

מאת

חיים משרנוביץ
(רב צעיר)

כרך ראשון, חלק ראשון
מבוא כללי, תסופת התנ"ך

ניוירק, תרצ"ה



YIVO (2)

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection

מ. האדער, ע. קאפטשיץ, י. ד. קורלאנד

ליטעראטור

כרעסטאָמאַטיע פֿאַרן 6טן שוליאָר



צענטראַלער פֿעלקער־פֿאַרלאַג פֿון 5. ס. ר.
מאָסקווע — כאַרקאָוו — מינסק — 1930



WITH LOVE FROM VILNA — TO A PRISON IN JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection





CHAIKEL LUNSKI

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection

ספר

מצות השם

כולל

הרי"ג מצות כסדר התורה, ע"פ דעה הרמב"ם וז',
וע"פ דעה רמב"ן, וע"פ דעה סמ"ג, וע"פ דעה סמ"ק,
וספר הרד"ם, ושבע מצות דרבנן, וקצת לאוין דרבנן,
וקצת הקנות דרבנן, ושבע מצות בני נח, וי"ח כללים.
ולכל מצוה ולכל ענין המראה מקומות לשם ופוסקים.

גם

חקוני חשבוה על העבירות ככלל ובפרט, מלוקט מספר הירד
לרמב"ם, ושאר ספרים קדושים, וגם הרי"ג מצוה לבעל
הלכות גדולות העומק סאן ככתבו וכלשיעו בלי היססות ונרעין

תוספת אליו

סדר עבודת תמידין ומוספין וזמר עבודת יצבור שהיו נבית
הוקדש הוב"ג, ע"פ דעה הרמב"ם ז"ל. לאמרוס כל אחד בזמנו
אשום ושלמה פרים שפתי.

ונתקף עוד

הנחוח יקרוה, ענינים מאירוח, והיססות הקונים הריבוי, סאת
הריב ס"ה יוסף סגנאן ס"ה בונם גינס זלחה.

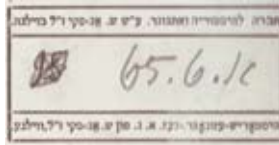


קעניגסבערג

ברס"א. ראָסבאָך.

בש"ה חכרחהם אה כל מצוה זו ל"ק.

(תרי"ג)



THE AN-SKY SOCIETY FOR HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection





A SOCIALIST EDUCATOR DONATES A RELIGIOUS BOOK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania



THE BOYS' SCHOOL OF *MEFITSEY HASKÓLE*



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

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection

644 ill. *Yach-heft XV* fun der Yiddish Land
'Mefitzer-Hashkole' beyen Ts. P. K. in Vilna
(1912-1913)*

יובל-העפסט XV

פון דער "נגל-שול" חפ"צ' השכלה"
ב"מ צ.ב.ק. אין ווילנע ב.ד.

*דער פאליטישער פון אפיקורסים איז דער יתרון-אל
אפרישער פ'ד א גאנצער א אגוד אגוד דער
15 יעריקן יאר פון דער אל*

פאליטישער 2 יוביל



12-101



אין שול אריין.

ארגאניזאציע פון יובל-חפ"צ

Vilna 1921



HAMMURABI AT THE HUMANISTIC YIDDISH HIGH SCHOOL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Menke Katz Collection

