

The Kremenets Regional Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy
named after Taras Shevchenko, Associate Professor of the Department of Art

Architectural Peculiarities of the Jewish

Town Block in Kremenets

Abstract: *The article analyzes typological peculiarities and significance of the lost buildings of the Jewish town block in formation of the historical town image. Numerous meandering streets of the town were thickly covered with buildings, unique wooden dwelling houses. Kremenets was old fashioned town which preserved its image of the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth century. The article deals with the description of the traditional form of settling and the organization of life in the Jewish communities. The peculiarity of the origin and development of wooden architecture in the central part of the town connected with cultural processes in the Volyn region at the end of the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century is also observed. The article shows the influence of surroundings and sort of activity upon the architecture, main features of structural elements of the shtetl (Jewish town block) which was completely ruined during the German military occupation in July 1942.*

Keywords: *shtetl, decoration, wooden architecture, structural elements.*

Setting up the problem. At the beginning of the XIX-th century the activity of the Volyn Gymnasium favoured largely the formation of Kremenets as a cultural centre and its good reputation in art circles. In time not only young people but also experienced artists, musicians, cultural figures step by step began "to open" Volyn for themselves. The Kremenets of the XIXth century was a unique architectural town with interlaced traditions of the Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish people. Located there wonderful models of the Jewish wooden architecture of the XVIIIth and the XIXth centuries, combined with the complex of the baroque buildings of the Jesuit Collegium, harmonically went with the mountainous landscape of the area. Analysis of the latest investigations and publications. The peculiarities and characteristic features of the architectural process in the context of the living area of the Second Rich Pospolyta were investigated mostly by the Polish scientists such as: Y. Vislotska, A. Olshevskiy, K. Pavlovskiy, A. Faryna-Pashkevych and others. Among the Ukrainian scientists a considerable contribution to the investigation of the Jewish architectural heritage of Podillia and Galicia was made by N. Levkovich and Y. Kotliar. Nevertheless, the problem of formation of the Jewish architecture in the Volyn towns wasn't the object of individual investigation. Solitary articles by the Kremenets museum workers: Z. Opolskiy, F. Monchak, S. Skheibal devoted to the area can be found in the Polish weekly "Zycie Krzemienieckie". Among the latest publications the article by M. Jakobchuk is distinguished. It reveals the peculiarity of the architecture of the Jewish hotels in Kremenets (inns) [1, p. 3-8].

The Objective of this research is the investigation of the destroyed architecture of Kremenets – one of the Volyn areas of the Jewish culture in the XIXth, at the beginning of the XXth century. The actuality of the article is connected with the unique architectural heritage of the town in art circles.

The Exposition of the basic material. The Jews appeared in the town still in the XVth century and in the end of the XVIIIth – at the beginning of the XIXth century Kremenets becomes an important centre of Hasidism. A traditional form of settlement and life organization of the Jewish community in the Eastern Europe in that time was "a shtetl" (a town in Yiddish) with its indispensable synagogue, market, cemetery and a peculiar form of local building [2]. There was a special atmosphere in the town. One or two-storey houses formed a solid labyrinth of streets with the Jewish shops. One of the traditional occupations of the Jewish population in Volyn was craftsmanship.

The Jewish towns were overcrowded with Jews-craftsmen: tailors, shoemakers, barbers, jewellers. Rich Jews usually had brick houses along the central streets. It's a well-known fact that a lot of travellers and artists were attracted not only by bourgeois houses and some palaces of the XVIIIth – XIXth centuries but also by the local colouring wooden Jewish architecture of the town which was completely destroyed in the XXth century. We can form an opinion about its exclusivity only from some saved documentary and artistic photos, the collection of pictures from Kremenets plain-airs scattered in different museums of Ukraine, Poland and in private collections.

The architectural decision of building in the Jewish community depended, first of all, on a property state of its owners, influences of the town community and peculiarities of the regional architecture. That's why the architecture in rich «shtetls» of big cities was formed under the influence of architectural styles of that time while in the towns like Kremenets dominated, as a rule, wooden, less qualitative building. Historically formed line planning system of Kremenets is subordinated to the landscape dominant – Bona hill with the ruins of the castle of the XIVth century on its top, a little bit corrected thanks to a market square in the centre of the town with its main composition axis – Shyroka street [3, p. 171]. Kremenets was characterized by its old-fashioned building saved since the end of the XVIIIth century – the beginning of the XIXth century. Like in any other Jewish town there was, side by side with a residential area, a market square (in front of the majestic complex of the Jesuit Collegium). On the other side of the block there was a central brick synagogue (the Palace of Culture is situated now on this place). A brick synagogue was a core of the “shtetl”. The block itself was being formed not far from the synagogue as a special component part.

According to the statistical data of that time the central part of Kremenets (especially Zariadna, Medova, Serednia, Torhova and largely Shyroka streets) was populated with the Jewish community [1, p. 26]. Wooden architecture determined a character of the building in this part of the town forming the line of facades with one or two-storey wooden houses with the original balconies, terraces, porches and broken roofs. The most typical Jewish houses were one, one and a half or two-storey houses on a high stone socle. A house itself was usually whitewashed and crowned with four of two slope tiled roof with frontons. On the outside a house was decorated with a wooden porch and a gallery on the second storey with carved columns-balusters or wooden paneling. Front staircase ran to open galleries. There were not any fences or garden-walls between the yards, they attached to each other. Sometimes passages between the houses were only about 2 metres wide. Sometimes one house belonged to several owners, as many people wanted to have, at least, one or two rooms in the centre of the town [2]. The planning of the Jewish areas impressed with its pictorial disorder. To gain economy, the interiors of residences were separated with narrow cold corridors of about one metre wide. The Kremenets porches were famous for their decorative elements. It's known that still in between war period of the XXth century a lot of wooden decorations were in breakdown susceptibility or completely ruined. Z. Opolskyi, the Polish geologist and one of the founders of the Kremenets museum named after Villibald Besser, counted 27 varieties only in decoration of balconies and verandahs of Kremenets and Vyshnivets [4, p. 75].

The planning of streets in Kremenets was characterized by absolute asymmetry. Usually the owners extended housing space with additional storey or verandah. A mountainous place gave the area a particular, exclusively Kremenets charm. It created an illusion of cascade with numerous tiled roofs of different colours (“holenderky”). Open galleries, verandahs and loggias, narrow passages between the houses often united with a common roof also contributed to it. This feeling was stressed with colourful inns with their exits to both streets and which served for visitors' staying on fair days. An inn as an integral part of the Jewish town building of the XVIIIth – XIXth centuries was a prototype of a modern motel. The Kremenets inn of the end of the XVIIIth - the beginning of the XIXth centuries joined in itself the functions of a shop, a hotel, a dwelling and a covered place for carriages and horses [1, p. 26].

The last of the expressive patterns of the inns in Shevchenko street was protected by the local authorities but in 1980th ruined [5, p. 4]. Developed infrastructure of the town foresaw a considerable number of restaurants and hotels.

There were five restaurants, three hotels and some inns only along the central street of the town. All the Jewish houses, richer and poorer, were built like hotels – inns. Visual enlargement of the size of a house was caused by a jut of roofs which sometimes reached two meters. Roofs were supported by wooden columns creating an outside gallery [2]. The main distinction of Jewish houses in comparison with those of other ethnic groups is that they demonstrate the peculiarities of an urban way of life. For a district town till the middle of the XIXth century an urban character of these houses wasn't a self-evident fact, because there were a lot of a rural houses in it as well [7, p. 54]. It should be noticed that poor Jews lived from generation to generation on the same territory till the Second World War. More than 650 buildings, 340 outbuildings and the central synagogue of Kremenets were devastated by a fire in 1942. It is practically the whole central part of the pre-war town. Nowadays, when a town park is situated on the place of Jewish block only solid gaps which periodically take place remind about former wooden architectural structures. It indicates to a huge network of underground passages which run through the whole town and form underground streets. Some tunnels belong to different historical periods of the community's existence. The lack of material realities for analysis suggests the idea that the patterns of typical Jewish houses in Kremets is the continuation of a certain tradition and that's why they don't differ greatly from the similar objects of the XVIIIth, XVIIth or even XVIth centuries [1, p. 27]. We come to this conclusion having analyzed the fact that houses in different periods of time were built for the same needs, made of the same material (wood), in the same way and under the same conditions.

Conclusions and prospects of the investigation. So, we can state that the traditional building of the Kremenets "shtetl" was so highly developed from the architectural and compositional point of view that it became a visiting card of the town which alongside with sacral buildings attracted travellers and artists. After the war and Holocaust "Jewish towns" remained only in the works of the writers: Sholom Aleikhem, Isak Bashevits Zinher, Shmuel Josef Agnon and in the canvases of the Jewish painters – emigrants from the Jewish communities of Podillia and Volyn [8, p. 4]. Lost patterns of the Kremenets building had the most characteristic peculiarities of historical analogues emphasizing expressiveness of silhouette, prevailing roof planes and subordinating of all spatial forms to a central axis of a house. The investigation gives an opportunity not only to understand the unique lost architecture but also to restore some separate elements of "shtetl" in future.

References:

1. Якобчук М. Готелі-заїзди Кременця як формотворчий образ міста. Збірник «Студентський вісник Національного університету водного господарства та природокористування». Рівне, 2014. – № 2 (2). – С. 26-29.
2. Старков М. Штетл – єврейське містечко [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу до джерела: http://www.sholomaleichem.kiev.ua/publ/articles_about_the_jewish_traditions/shtetl_evrejske_mistec hko/2-1-0-22.
3. Михайлишин О. Л. Житловий квартал для службовців 1920-х років у Кременці: архітектурно-планувальні та стилістичні особливості. Архітектурна спадщина Волині: Зб наук. праць. Вип. 2. – Рівне, 2010. – С. 171-177.
4. Opolski Z. Ganki Krzemieńca i Wiśniowca. «Życie Krzemienieckie», 1933. – № 2. – S. 73-78.
5. Бачинська Л. Пояснювальна записка до історико-архітектурного опорного плану м. Кременець «Укрзахідпроектреставрація». Львів, 2003. – С. 3-8.

6. Зуц Н. Описание города Староконстантинова от начала основания и до наших дней. Староконстантинов, 1884. – 90 с.
7. Метельницький Р. Деякі сторінки єврейської забудови Луцька. Київ, 2001. –С. 54.
8. Сапожніков Л. Єврейські художники – вихідці з общин Поділля і Волині. Форум націй. – 2009. – № 3/82. – С. 4.