

UDC 94(477.81-25)“1918/1939”
DOI: 10.24919/2519-058x.16.210902

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**INTERETHNIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL POLYPHONY
OF THE INTERWAR RIVNE**

(review of: (Gon M. RÓWNE: The Outlines of the Missing Town. 2nd ed. Rivne: Volynski oberehy, 2019. 160 p.)

**МІЖЕТНІЧНА ТА СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНА ПОЛІФОНІЯ
МІЖВОЄННОГО МІСТА РІВНЕ**

(рецензія на монографію: Гон М. RÓWNE: обриси зниклого міста. 2-е вид. Рівне: Волинські обереги, 2019. 160 с.)

*“The Nazi and the Soviet regimes turned people into numbers”.
So we have to “turn numbers back into people”
Timothy Snyder “Bloodlands”*

“RÓWNE: The Outlines of the Missing Town” is an essay book, historical saga, which was published due to the laborious work of our contemporary, a Ukrainian historian and political scientist, Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor Maksym Gon. The 160-page book is divided into three main sections.

The book describes the life of one of the dominant national communities, which dwelled in Rivne – the Jews. In the decades between the two World Wars, this community played a significant role in the social, cultural, and economic development of the town. The disappearance of this community, which began during the Soviet era and got horrific forms during the Nazi occupation and organized by the Nazis' ruthless genocide of the town's Jewish population, led to the loss of the so-called shtetl (a small town with a predominantly Jewish population) – a special spirit of the town. The spirit that had been formed over the centuries due to the functioning of Judaism, the Jewish language, Jewish culture, and most importantly, its bearers, who lived peacefully their lives and developed the town with representatives of other nationalities: the Ukrainians, the Poles, the Germans, the Czechs, the Romani, the Russians. The book is recommended for use by historians, local lore researchers, ethnologists and ethno-politicians, all those who are interested in Rivne town past history, the history of the native land and Ukraine in general.

Taking into consideration the main plot line reflected in the title of the book, it seems metaphorical, because the author, in accordance with the situational historical facts and events of the past, managed to reveal sufficiently and with great emotional load certain stories from the life of Rivne and its dwellers, who both played a significant role in the life of the Jewish community and simply earned a living. Starting from the first page, the author brings the reader back to the forgotten pages of the history of the Jewish community. In the decades between the two World Wars, this community was one of the biggest in number and made great socio-political, cultural, and economic contribution to the development of Rivne, made up the majority of the social and cultural "landscape". At the same time, the book reveals the socio-cultural and national polyphony of the city of Rivne during the interwar period, which was reflected in the peaceful coexistence of different languages, cultures, nationalities, and sacred buildings of different religions. Tens of thousands of people who lived and built their future in this town, enjoyed life, loved, dreamed, raised children and cared for their parents, their language and culture, suddenly fell under the repressive machine of Nazi Germany and its genocide, lost everything – their life and the future of their loved ones. Not only people and their national culture disappeared, the whole "worlds" illuminated by their spiritual warmth disappeared, a town itself disappeared, a town that will never be the same, it disappeared, and it is gone... Thus, the title of the book from the very beginning provokes deep sadness, because those events happened and nothing can be fixed, time will never come back!

In addition to the positive assessment and note of the originality of the main story line, quite successfully revealed by the author in the reviewed book, it is important, in our opinion, that characterizing the socio-political, cultural, and religious life of the town, including public organizations and interethnic relations, the author diverges from the historical literature of the Soviet and partly post-Soviet era and ideological approach concerning the historical events disclosure. This allowed the author quite thoroughly, using the available source base (the archival materials and cases, the articles in periodicals, the photographs, the legal documents, Rivne residents' memoirs, the Second Commonwealth police and authorities reports, the period of the Soviet and the Nazi occupation, some foreign publications of the postwar period) to reveal the Jewish perspective of social, political, cultural, economic, and religious life in the town. Thus, the author managed to characterize these processes from the standpoint of biographical, phenomenological, paradigmatic, and personal-value approaches, which expanded greatly the possibilities of revealing the social and political life specifics in

Rivne, including the daily life of its inhabitants in the interwar period and during the years of the Nazi occupation.

We should note another important specificity of the reviewed book: its content, in addition to revealing a purely historical, local lore, cultural, and religious context, is, in the first place, the author's conversation with the audience. The book encourages the reader to get away from the everyday life and begin to think about life in general, in which knowledge of the past has a direct impact not only on the history of one's hometown, but also on the formation of modern realities of its multiculturalism, ethno-confessional diversity, and public tolerance.

The reviewed book is concise and at the same time informational, has emotional "coloring" of the titles of sections, interesting style of presentation, unique illustrations, photographs, statistics and their analysis and conclusions made by the author. Moreover, most importantly, the content of this book reflects the author's deep interest in revealing such an important problem of Rivne city history and its past in the context of the national and cultural-educational paradigm. It is possible that the publication of this book will encourage new historical and local lore research concerning the life and destiny of those Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, and the representatives of other nationalities, who lived in the town during those years. This may facilitate the creation of a wide information field, which will be a reflection of the multi-national and multi-religious "face" of the pre-war and even post-war Rivne.

In this context, analyzing the content of the first chapter of the reviewed book "Rivne between the two World Wars: the Jewish perspective of the social and political processes", there is every reason to say that the author is clearly focused on the role of the Jewish community in Rivne in the joint, peaceful and tolerant with the representatives of other nationalities, development of town's social, cultural, interethnic, and multi-confessional space. The specificity and originality of this space, as Maksym Gon notes, was precisely that "a significant component of this cultural polyphony was formed by those who addressed the Almighty in Hebrew in synagogues, who outside the walls of these sacred buildings spoke Yiddish" (p. 13); "...communication between neighbors, who lived on the "interethnic border", for example, in houses owned by people of different religions... confirmed the ethno-confessional diversity of the town, which was evident" (p. 14). In this way, in the pages of the book, the author managed to recreate the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional spirit of the town, the leading attribute of which was a friendly community, which "symbolized the interaction in Rivne between the representatives of the different nationalities and religions" (p. 16).

In a very interesting way, the author presents the social and cultural space of Rivne during the socio-economic crisis after World War I, the Russian Empire collapse, and later – the Ukrainian national revolution. In particular, during the last days of 1917, the town was controlled by the Ukrainian People's Republic troops, from the spring of 1918 – by the Bolsheviks, who were replaced by Austro-German military units and at the end of the year, the Directorate took over the control.

Appropriately applying a biographical and personal value approach, the author of the book described a number of personalities – the Jewish community representatives, who took an active part in these socio-political transformations of the social and cultural environment of Rivne. It is necessary to note the professional level of the author of the book in revealing the figure of M. Zilberfarb (alias Moses Bazin), who was born in Rivne and received the degree of Doctor of Law in Bern (Switzerland). In 1917, with the proclamation of the Second Universal of the Central Rada, he became the Vice-Secretary for National Minorities. As Maksym Gon notes, "that was the first time since the Jews had lost their state when they were

represented in the government... A year later, the Law on National and Personal Autonomy prepared by M. Zilberfarb gave him the opportunity to take the post of the Minister of Jewish Affairs of the Ukrainian People's Republic" (p. 20).

Maksym Gon's application of the phenomenological approach deserves a special positive note. It involved the rejection of idealization, dogmatism, and bias in the analysis and characterization of social, cultural, and political views, and the real results of personal activity. This approach also allowed the author to characterize the main stages of the formation of the worldview of Moses Bazin and to reveal the influence of his worldview on the result of creative activity, as well as to prove the fact that he was a distinctive representative of his era or even was ahead of it. The author of the book deserves a positive assessment for the creation of an inextricable link between generations, an example of which is the recognition by our contemporaries of the importance of social, cultural, political, and interethnic activities of Moses Bazin, after whom one of the streets of Rivne is now named.

In turn, the paradigmatic approach application allowed the author to determine the logic of the emergence and transformation of personal ideas and provisions developed by a personality within specific social, cultural, political, and interethnic realities characteristic of a particular level of community development in a given historical period. That is why, we consider a positive aspect of the reviewed book is the author's desire, which can be clearly seen in its pages, to restore historical justice and return from oblivion or reveal events that had a significant impact on social and cultural development of Rivne and Ukraine as a whole.

The analysis of the first chapter of the reviewed book confirms the postulate that history is known to be cyclical, and that people try to learn more about the past to avoid previous mistakes, which gets quite resonant in book's pages. The author develops this postulate characterizing the social and cultural space of the town via the description of the lives of its ordinary citizens. These lives were significantly influenced by frequent changes of central governments and local authorities, which failed to establish proper governance, desired order and comfort. In an atmosphere of such rapid change and turbulent emotions, as Maksym Gon notes, predominantly the Jews continued to be robbed and abused, although the other nationalities, including the Ukrainians, also suffered. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the author in the unbiased way describes not only the numerous episodes of the ethnic violence, but also the courage, devotion, and bravery of those members of the Jewish community, who chose the path of struggle for their dignity. An example of such a civic position is Petro Fedorchuk's activity, who twice in 1918 prevented the pogroms in Rivne (pp. 22–25).

It is necessary to emphasize the clarity of the author's adherence to the historical retrospective in the disclosure of book's story lines, which reflect the social, political, and economic transformations in the life of town's ethnic communities, in the first place Jewish, presented in the second and third chapters – "Town economy" and "Civil organizations and the Jewish community". In this context, the description of the next stage of social and political life in the town, were represented by a retrospective analysis of the years of gradual formation and rule of Poland in the western part of Volyn, is logical and quite thorough. The statistics presented in this section and their analysis and conclusion made by Maksym Gon deserve a positive assessment. First of all, this concerns the population of the town, which in 1931 reached 55.5 thousand people, 82.8% of whom were the Jews. Positive in this context is the author's professional analysis of the demographic situation in Rivne Povit (County), as well as in the towns of Berezne, Malyi Ustyluh, Dubno, Lutsk (the then administrative center of Volyn Voivodeship) and the others.

In addition, the book precisely describes extremely complex processes of Western Volyn incorporation into the Second Polish Commonwealth, including the establishment and functioning of state bodies, the implementation of mechanisms for Volyn Voivodeship governing, the police and courts activities, the state institutions unprofessionalism and incompetence, which replaced the tsarist-Russian officials in those years. The book clearly reveals the problem under study, carries out the analysis of the processes in the dynamics, and provides characteristics of the role and significance of the Jewish community. This allowed the author to identify a number of trends and factors of social, political, and economic life of the region, and of the demographic situation, which were characteristic for Volyn in general and the town of Rivne in particular (pp. 26–27).

As a positive feature, we should particularly note a thorough analysis of the social and political structuring of the Jews in Rivne, the disclosure of the main directions, content, and results of various institutions created at the beginning of 1920-ies – 1930-ies: the Jews-Victims of World War I Committee Aid (leaders: S. Kulikovicher and W. Goldenburg), the American Jewish Distribution Committee in Rivne (M. Zakon – Chairman), the Jewish National Council, the Department of the Emigration Society “HIAS”, an illegal organization in Poland (active members N. Rapoport, M. Rubinstein, etc.), the Zionist Party (led by B. Asenberg), the other parties: the “Poale Zion” (Workers of Zion), the “Hitahdut”. the “Mizrahi”, the “Mercaz” (Spiritual Center), the public organizations: the “Gehalutz-pioneer” (the initiative of Y. Shvidki and B. Kagan), the “Palestinian Emigration Society”, the funds: the “Jewish National Fund”, the “Building Palestine” and the others. Considering the activities of these institutions, the book focuses on the attempts of most of these parties to combine the Zionist ideals with Judaism, the values of the Social Democracy and the Zionism, to protect the civil and national rights of the Jews in Poland, to revive the national state in ancestral lands. It is this idea that practically became the leading activity of most of these parties and organizations. The research, carried out by Maksym Gon, found out and characterized the unique historical materials concerning the preparation of the Jewish youth for emigration, for which various structures were created that contributed to their acquisition of the professional skills in crafts, agriculture, industry, etc. (pp. 36–39). Thus, the author thoroughly reveals and describes the extremely important role of the Jewish community in the town of Rivne in the creation of the national state of the Jews in Palestine years later.

No less positive assessment in this context deserves the author’s systematization, a thorough historical and genetic analysis and disclosure of the essence and significance of Rivne Jewish community members in the development of the social and political activity in the 1920 – 30-ies. They organized and held numerous events: the Hebrew University of Jerusalem opening celebration, the mass demonstrations against London’s prohibition of the Jewish emigration to Palestine, the support for those who traveled to the Promised Land, the celebration of national holidays, and more. Thus, we can state that the author proved the role of the Jewish community in Rivne as a center of the Zionism in Volyn, and as one of the leading communities for the revival of the Jewish state in the Middle East.

Another important contribution of the author is the disclosure of the role of the Jewish community in the development of town’s economy, which, unfortunately, during the 1920-ies and until 1939 did not acquire the features of industrial, but remained partly underdeveloped agricultural. Rivne itself remained not a big town. The “great future” was postponed to the future (pp. 62–67).

It should be noted again the effectiveness of Maksym Gon’s biographical and personal value approaches in revealing the contribution of some prominent figures among the

entrepreneurs, the philanthropists, the owners of factories, the breweries, the artisans, doctors of Rivne, such as: M. Pisiuk, O. Shtryk, D. Stok, N. Steiman, L. Deichmeister and the others. Important in understanding the social, political, and economic situation in the town is the author's disclosure of a whole historically verified layer of the Jewish community activity in the trade unions, which were a significant lever in town's economic development.

We should mention the authenticity and logical unity of the presentation of the historical events written by the author in the epilogue "The Missing Shtetl" as the quintessence of the content of the reviewed book. As Maksym Gon notes, everything changed after September 17, 1939, because "the formation of a totalitarian regime of the Communist model in Western Ukraine was accompanied by the liquidation of the multiparty system... and this, in turn, led to the mass liquidation of the civil society, which was accompanied by the leaders arrests of primarily the Ukrainian, the Polish, and the Jewish party institutions and civil organizations ... and even simple citizens: Y. Golberg, H. Katz and thousands of others..." (p. 134).

It is necessary to note the historical-genetic analysis made by the author and a rather meaningful retrospective reflection in the book of historical events of those years, the lives of individuals, the heads of public institutions, the representatives of culture, education, religious denominations structured in accordance with the ethnic variety of Rivne residents. The author of this unique book defines the essence of those events based on the results of an extensive analysis of the evidence in the horrific acts of the NKVD in 1939 – 1941. A characteristic of the repressive activities of the Bolsheviks is the Jewish saying of the time provided by the author "We were sentenced to death, but by the grace of God it was substituted by life imprisonment" (p. 137).

History has always been relevant, and history told first hand is even more relevant. There are many facts in this book that modern Rivne residents should know about that time. Unfortunately, the history of the city consists not only of bright pages; this city has seen a lot of tragic events as well. The great tragedies that influenced hundreds of thousands of people cannot be silenced or forgotten, and time distance does not play a role in such cases. We must remember the terrible events so that humanity will never repeat such mistakes again. The "double occupation" created a kind of social space, in which mixing of images left by the Soviets and the political aspirations of the local population in 1939 – 1941, and later the Nazi ideology and the local specificity resulted in the mass extermination of the Jews.

Author's special professionalism manifested itself in the unbiased and at the same time truly historical description of the Holocaust in Rivne region. In the Soviet times, this topic, although present in the social and cultural paradigm, was rarely mentioned, if not practically hidden. The stereotype of a country, which won World War II, did not allow mentioning millions of victims, especially when it came to a particular nationality. Therefore, behind the name the "Soviet people" hid the tragedy of millions, which even in the first years after the war was talked about by almost all countries of the world: Poland, Italy, then the Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, and the others.

In our opinion, the greatest achievement of Maksym Gon, the author of the book "RÓWNE: The Outlines of the Missing Town", is the disclosure of numerous examples of the Nazi repressive machine against the Jews in the town of Rivne. This is not just a statement by the author of the statistics, which he found, not just a description of certain events and their consequences, the fate of the Jews of Rivne, and all the horror of the Nazi; it is, above all, his personal empathy with the events he describes. The main thing is that they touch the soul and make readers think.

There are not many eyewitnesses of those horrors left today, and when they can talk openly about those events, does it make sense to them to deceive someone or to hide something? Developing this plot line in the book, the author presents the stories of eyewitnesses of those events, who by God's grace survived. It should be noted that based on the stories of those people, with all the emotional expressiveness, openness, historical authenticity and responsibility, Maksym Gon managed to reveal the numerous atrocities of the Nazi in Rivne region during the period of 1941 – 1944. The book describes the mass killing of 17.5 thousand make sense the Jews shot in Sosonki, including thousands of children. K. Novakovska's story about this place causes sadness and pain. The author of the book cites her words: "some small children were thrown alive into the pit, the others were thrown up and shot on the fly. It was accompanied by the moans and cries of the dying and the laughter of the executioners" (p. 140).

Special mention should be made of Maksym Gon's retrospective analysis of a large number of documents, materials, letters, orders and other information of Rivne Judenrat at the time, which allowed the author to accurately reveal the fate of thousands of Jews in the town, who escaped the horror of Sosonki, but did not avoid the horror and humiliation of Rivne ghetto. The author managed to reveal the broken destinies thanks to numerous memories not only of the Jews who survived, but also of the Ukrainians, the Poles, and the Russians, who helped them to escape and survive. The author managed to recreate the faces of those Rivne residents of different nationalities and religions, who lived next to each other a few years earlier, and the horror of the ghetto, which destroyed those who before World War II were the largest community in Rivne.

The road to eternity of the last Rivne victims of the Holocaust began with the ghetto horror. As the author of the book notes, "5,000 nameless victims are buried there, near Kostopil. There are no documents, no names. Only our memory and shocking lines of the documents to commemorate them. The Jews, who lived in Rivne – disappeared" (pp. 151–153).

In our opinion, the indisputable value of the reviewed book for modern Ukraine, which has faced numerous socio-political, economic, religious and even military challenges and threats, lies not only in the historical and local lore context, but also in the examples of the civic tolerance described by Maksym Gon in his work. The Civic tolerance is especially relevant not only in the multicultural environment of modern Rivne, but also in the state as a whole as an example to follow in building life on the principles of the mutual understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect in the European independent state – Ukraine.

*The article was received on February 11, 2020.
Article recommended for publishing 26/08/2020.*