



## РЕЦЕНЗИИ

UDC 391.069.5(411.16)

### Book review: Liudmila B. Uritskaya and Semen M. Yakerson. Evreiskie sokrovishcha peterburga. Ashkenazskie kolektsii rossiiskogo etnograficheskogo muzeia [Jewish Treasures of St. Petersburg: The Ashkenazic Collections of the Russian Ethnographic Museum],

St. Petersburg, Arka, 2009, 231 pp.

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The writer reviews the main aspects of the monographic work (art book) by L.B. Uritskaya and S.M. Yakerson, which is a comprehensive manual on the extremely rich Ashkenazim collection of the Museum. The review provides characteristics of the new materials being introduced into academic usage and circulation and gives assessment of the role of the collection in studying the culture of the Ashkenazi Jews; particularly notable is the portion devoted to the formation history of this part of the Museum's collection; a need for having the book translated into English is accented.

*Key Words: Ashkenazi Jews, Russian Museum of Ethnography,  
traditional Jewish lifestyle, Museum's collections, the Jewish cultural heritage.*

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### Рецензия на книгу: Л.Б. Урицкая, С.М. Якерсон. Еврейские сокровища Петербурга. Ашкеназские коллекции Российского этнографического музея

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ДЭВИД ФИШМАН

Профессор Еврейской теологической семинарии Америки, Нью-Йорк,  
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В рецензии проанализированы основные аспекты монографического труда (альбома) Л.Б. Урицкой и С.М. Якерсона, всесторонне раскрывающего богатейшее ашкеназское собрание музея. Также даны характеристика вводимых в научный оборот материалов и оценка коллекций для изучения культуры евреев-ашкеназов, особо отмечен раздел, посвященный истории формирования данной части музейного собрания и подчеркнута необходимость перевода альбома на английский язык.

*Ключевые слова: евреи-ашкеназы, Российский этнографический музей, традиционный еврейский быт, музейные коллекции, еврейское культурное наследие.*

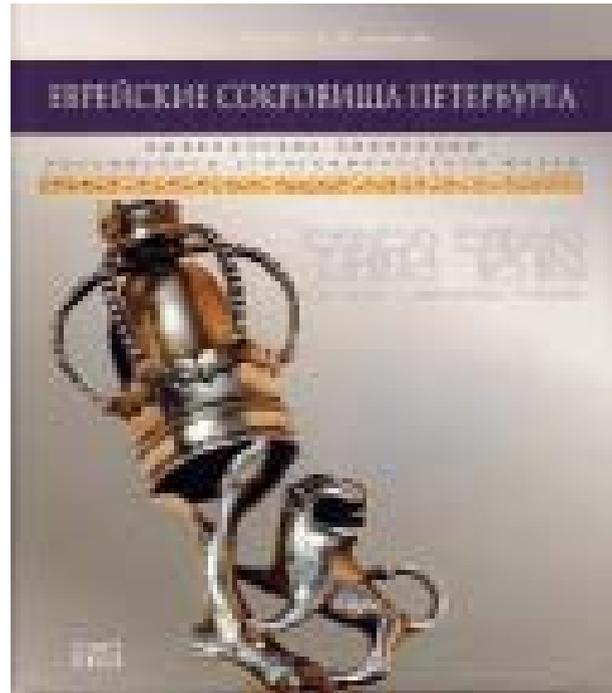


In December 2007, the Russian Ethnographic Museum (REM) in St. Petersburg opened a permanent exhibit “The History and Culture of the Jewish People in Russia”, featuring several hundred objects and photographs. It is to this day the only standing exhibit on Jewish life in a major Russian museum (with the exception of the recently opened Jewish Museum in Moscow). Now parts of the REM exhibition have been published in an exquisite album that will be of interest to both specialists and to the broader public.

The core of the album consists of objects and photographs collected by the famed An-ski ethnographic expedition in the Pale of Settlement in 1912–1913. These items were obtained by the Russian Ethnographic Museum in several stages: An-ski himself donated 295 objects and approximately 100 photographs to the museum in 1918, “for temporary preservation”; in 1929, the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society was liquidated by the Soviet authorities, and a part of its museum-collection was transferred to the REM at that time (another part, which was acquired by a different museum, was transferred to the REM in 1948); and Solomon Yudovin (1892–1954), the An-ski expedition’s staff-photographer and artist, donated photographs, drawings and objects from the expedition to the REM in 1939. These holdings were supplemented by subsequent acquisitions, most notably by material collected by Isay (Yehoshua) Pulner, who was head of the REM’s short-lived Jewish section between 1937 and 1942.

The album is organized both chronologically (around the growth and development of REM’s Jewish collection) and thematically. The main thematic sections are: (a) The synagogue and its objects, featuring Yudovin photographs of synagogue structures, and samples of parokhets, kaporets, Torah mantles and crowns, rimonim, yads, vessels for hand-washing etc.; (b) The shtetl and Jewish community, with Yudovin photographs of shtetl scenes (of families, work, and “types”) and illustrated title-pages of pinkasim; (c) The Jewish home, dress, amulets, and folk art – with mizrachs, paper mâché replicas of Jewish baked goods, patterns for cakes (lekekhh-bretlekh), men’s and women’s clothing, including talit katans, yarmulkas, women’s brusttikhlekh and head-covering, amulets and Jewish Luboks (folk-illustrations to Biblical tales); (d) The Jewish holidays: havdalah sets, challah covers, Kiddush cups, Chanukah menorahs, megilot, gragers, illustrations of Purim plays, and seder plates.

Some striking items are published in the album for the first time (and are indicated as such); others were previously published in A. Kantsedikas and I. Serheyeva, *The Jewish Artistic Heritage*



Album By Semyon An-sky / *Al'bom evreiskoi khudozhestvennoi stariny Semiona An-skogo* (Moscow, Mosty Kultury, 2001), and Eugene Avrutin et. al. (eds.), *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-Sky's Ethnographic Expeditions* (Brandeis University Press, 2009). While these aforementioned volumes provide a more extensive analysis of the An-Sky expedition, and larger samples of illustrations and photographs that An-ski and others collected, the current album has several advantages. First, we for the first time have a visual presentation of the full range of objects collected by An-ski and his colleagues, including the rich assortment of traditional Jewish clothing (pp. 110–137). An-ski’s collection of Jewish material culture was truly universal and exhaustive, cutting across high art and folk art, from amulets to clothing. Second, the album includes copious transcriptions of the Hebrew texts and inscriptions found on parochets, pinkasim, Luboks etc., as well as their translation into Russian, and explanations on Jewish ritual, and traditional Jewish life. This enables the reader to view the objects not only as art, but as products of Jewish culture and history. Third, the quality of the photographic reproductions is breath-taking, and by far surpasses the previous volumes. Photos known from elsewhere now appear in sharper relief.

The album is expertly edited by the late Liudmila Uritskaya, the former chief curator of REM who

was responsible for renewing the museum's interest in Jewish art and objects in the 1990s, and Semion Yakerson, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a world-renowned specialist in Hebrew manuscripts. The collaboration between an ethnographer of Eastern Europe and a Judaica specialist has yielded impressive results. The narrative text is accessible to general readers, and

at the same time of importance to specialists in Russian-Jewish culture and ethnography.

The album includes a glossary of terms, a biographical lexicon of personalities, an index of names, places, and literary works, and a bibliography of works related to An-ski, Jewish art and ethnography. This is a landmark publication of the highest caliber in every respect – scholarly, artistic, typographic, and editorial. An English-language edition would be highly desirable.