

Rēzekne Jewish Cemetery as a Representative Substructure of the “Other” in the Culture of Latgale

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to analyze the verbal and non-verbal signs of the Rēzekne Jewish cemetery with the cultural semiotic approach and to find out the hybridization features of the Jewish semiosphere in Latgale. The article describes the Rēzekne Jewish cemetery as a representative substructure of the “other” in the culture of Latgale with special traditions of language and ritual graphics, valuable genealogical material and historical evidence about the fate of local Jews and with a special tomb cult, determined by the ethnically diverse environment.

Jews in Latgale have always nurtured and preserved their cultural otherness; this is also characteristic of their traditions of arranging cemeteries. Depending on the cultural and social trends of the relevant era, it is possible to trace changes in the formation of grave inscriptions, graphics and forms. Interrelations with the traditions of the local majority, the Latgalians, show the hybridization of the culture of Jewish cemeteries. In the 20th century, Yiddish is gradually disappearing from grave inscriptions, that is caused by decreasing of the number of its speakers. During the Soviet occupation, the role of the sacred language – Hebrew in grave inscriptions decreased, while the proportion of Russian in the narrative of the inscriptions increased. During the last decade of the 20th century, grave inscriptions are predominant in Russian, which confirms the decline in the number of Hebrew speakers. The symbolic meaning of tomb cult graphics in the second half of the 20th century levels off, and local Jews take over Latgalian traditions of the design of tombstones. The graphic shows the transmission of information to the receivers of the “other” culture, for example, the yellow Star of David is represented instead of the menorah, since the yellow six-pointed star is more recognizable to the local population as a testimony of the Holocaust. A menorah may not cause an association with a Jew, because candles and candlesticks are usual graphic elements of Latgalian tombs. Such a trend in the choice of symbols indicates a unique cultural dialogue and its implementation tools, which are oriented towards the self-presentation of a separate ethnic group, using recognizable stereotypical signs instead of specific cult symbols, the language of local residents instead of their sacred language. They want to be understood and understandable for themselves because the number of people who know the authentic meaning of Hebrew and sacred cult signs in Latgale and Rēzekne is quite small. In any case, communica-

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tion or cultural dialogue still exists, at least the tomb culture is still capable of transmitting its basic values in the form of stereotypical, well-known signs. In this way, the “other” tends to be noticed and understood.

Keywords: “other” in Latgalian culture, semiosphere, Jewish cemetery, non-verbal communication, ritual graphics.

Rēzeknēs žydu kapinēs kaip „kito“ reprezentacinis paminklas Latgalos kultūroje

Anotacija. Šio tyrimo tikslas – kultūrinio semiotikos požiūriu išanalizuoti Rēzeknēs žydu kapinių verbalius ir neverbalinius ženklus bei išsiaiškinti Latgalos žydu semiosferos hibridizacijos ypatumus. Straipsnyje Rēzeknēs žydu kapinės apibūdinamos kaip reprezentatyvus „kito“ paminklas Latgalos kultūroje, pasižymintis ypatingomis kalbos ir ritualinės grafikos tradicijomis, vertinga genealogine medžiaga ir istoriniais įrodymais apie vietos žydu likimus bei turintis ypatingą kapų kultūrą, nulemtą etniškai įvairios aplinkos.

Žydai Latgaloje visada puoselėjo ir išsaugojo savo kultūrinį kitiškumą; tai būdinga ir jų kapinių tvarkymo tradicijoms. Atsižvelgiant į atitinkamos epochos kultūrinės ir socialinės tendencijas, galima atsekti kapų užrašų, grafikos ir formų formavimosi pokyčius. Ryšiai su vietinės daugumos – latgaliečių – tradicijomis rodo žydu kapinių kultūros hibridizaciją. XX amžiuje jidiš kalba pamažu nyksta iš kapų užrašų, tai lemia mažėjantis jos kalbėtojų skaičius. Sovietų okupacijos metais šventosios kalbos – hebrajų kalbos – vaidmuo kapų užrašuose sumažėjo, o rusų kalbos dalis užrašuose išaugo. Paskutiniame XX amžiaus dešimtmetyje vyrauja kapų užrašai rusų kalba, o tai patvirtina hebrajiškai kalbančiųjų mažėjimą. Simbolinė XX amžiaus antros pusės kapų kulto grafikos reikšmė niveliuojasi, vietiniai žydai perima latgalietiškas antkapių kūrimo tradicijas. Ritualinėje grafikoje matyti informacijos perdavimas „kitos“ kultūros gavėjams, pavyzdžiui, vietoj menoros pavaizduota geltona Dovydo žvaigždė, nes vietiniams gyventojams geltona šešiakampė žvaigždė labiau atpažįstama kaip liudijimas apie holokaustą. Menora negali sukelti asociacijos su žydu, nes žvakės ir žvakidės yra įprasti latgaliečių kapų grafiniai elementai. Tokia simbolių pasirinkimo tendencija rodo savitą kultūrinį dialogą ir jo įgyvendinimo priemones, orientuotas į atskiros etninės grupės savęs pristatymą, naudojant atpažįstamus stereotipinius ženklus vietoj konkrečių kulto simbolių, vietos gyventojų kalbą vietoj jų šventosios kalbos. Jie nori būti suprasti ir suprasti save patys, nes Latgaloje ir Rēzeknėje žmonių, žinančių autentišką hebrajų kalbos reikšmę ir sakralinius kulto ženklus, yra gana mažai. Bet kuriuo atveju komunikacija ar kultūrinis dialogas vis dar egzistuoja, bent jau kapų kultūra vis dar sugeba perteikti savo pagrindines vertybes stereotipinių, gerai žinomų ženklų pavidalu. Tokiu būdu „kitas“ linkęs būti pastebėtas ir suprastas.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: „kita“ latgaliečių kultūroje, semiosfera, žydu kapinės, neverbalinė komunikacija, ritualinė grafika.

Communication mechanism of two different semiospheres

Culture from the semiotics point of view is the totality of society’s collective mind and memory, common mechanism of memory retention, transfer (or informative memory) and creation (or creative memory, such as art). Conservation and further transfer ensure the consistent existence of texts or uniform codes, or determine the existence of regularity in change of codes (Lotman, 1992b, pp. 129–132). Each culture defines its own laws of remembering or forgetting, which may change with time, and that which has been forgotten can recover the status of important information in a documentary or artistic form. Texts of creative memory will never fulfil the function of information “storage”, they always are generators; here, meanings are grown rather than kept. They help to not only decipher, but also to generate new texts/codes. When a text, which is very different from the other texts of the given culture comes into memory, we lack traditions for its deciphering. In such cases, after a short pause, a creative explosion follows that suggests the enrichment of

cultural memory. Cultures, whose memory gets periodically and massively supplemented with the texts of other traditions, develop much more dynamically (Ibid.). Memory actively participates in the creation of cultural texts. Semiotics has a special name for collection of cultural texts as a system – semiosphere (Lotman, 1992c, p. 13).

Jewish culture in Latgale has always functioned as an autonomous cultural space, semiotic individuality or semiosphere with clear borders, clearly understanding and nurturing cultural otherness. Borders of such cultural space have a bilingual mechanism, when for the transmission/translation of information of other dominant cultures internal language is used, and vice versa. Borders of semiosphere check, filter, adapt the external and convert it into internal material of texts of the specific semiosphere. As already mentioned in connection with memory, relations of different semiotic systems are orientated towards creation of new texts and systems.

Latvia is lacking studies on what Jewish culture has adopted from Latvians of Latgale and vice versa; mainly due to the consequences of the Holocaust, there is almost no evidence about the dynamics of ours and the unknown in the text system or semiosphere of the Jewish culture of Latgale; it can certainly be seen in the wooden architecture, crafts, traditions of individual holidays. Each culture has its own internal organisation; it also establishes its own outside environment, disrupted environment and type of this disruption. In the Latvian cultural space of Latgale, in terms of comparison structures, the otherness of the Jewish cultural semiosphere is respected, on the backdrop of which the dominant cultural space looks relatively weak or even unorganised. In periodicals of Latgale (newspaper *Auseklis*) of the 20th century, journalistically didactic articles are found that highlighted vices of residents of Latgale on the background of Jewish virtues: "Pagans and irreligious Jews put Latvians to shame. I asked: "When has someone seen a Jew, who would buy or sell something on his Sabbath?"" (Vorguls, 1907, p. 2).¹

Intercultural dialogue always creates new information in semiospheres of culture with which they have come into contact; unfortunately, at the moment it can only be identified in cultural semiotic systems of Latgale (in folklore, literature, journalism of the early 20th century), almost until the Holocaust, because after that the number of Jews becomes very small and still continues to diminish, therefore systems of the Jewish culture's semiosphere reached the periphery of culture of Latgale, supposedly forever. In addition, these systems, as a product of the interrelation of two different cultures are outdated, and mostly store as well as inherit information containing stereotypes, which is not possible to reconstruct with authentic material, due to the lack of texts of both informative (life of Jews of Latgale until the Holocaust) and creative memory (no new fiction or publications on this topic are created). According to Yuri Lotman, reconstruction always means the creation of a new system / language (Lotman, 1992c, p. 13). Elements or substructure of semiospheres transform, while maintaining a constant core (invariant). Thus, we inherit persistent stereotypes of Latgale, for example, relating to the special treatment of the Jewish

¹ Original Latgalian text: "Pogons un naticīgs žids tys aizkaunej latvīti. Vaicoju, kod un kas ir redzējis žīdu, ka viņš šabatā, sovā svatdinā kū pērktu vaj pōrdutu?"

religion, family, business; there is always something to do with the objective subdivisions of informative memory in the Jewish cultural semiosphere.

Most strikingly the cultural interrelation keeps and develops creative memories, in particular – texts of folklore and fiction of Latgale. They reproduce the image of Jews with the features that characterise the different (values, traditions, anthropologically different appearance, strange behaviour and characteristics), because representatives of this nationality have been acquainted over a longer period of time of living side by side as different but accepted. The Jewish faith seems strange in relation to this as in Latgale today there are stories circulating about ritual murders, the spilling of Christian blood, etc. Stereotypical qualities of Jews are exaggerated in folklore: stinginess, parsimony, slyness, tenacity, timidity, naivety, garrulity, shape of the nose, beard, etc.

In Latgale there is a common ethnonym *žyds* (*žeids*, *žid*) [yid]; in proverbs and sayings of Latgale it is often included in a comparison as a character (to what compare): “Creaks like an unoled Yid’s wagon” (Opincāne, 2000, p. 14), attributing Jewish properties to a representative of other ethnicity: “Runs like a Yid from a cross” (Digital Archives of Latvian Folklore, Inv. No. # LFK-1168-801), “eats with a hat on like a Yid” (Ibid., Inv. No. # LFK-640-398), “stays together as yids” (Latkovskis, 1967, p. 28), etc. These constructions are indicative of the similar not different, and the presence of positive humour.

In Latgalian folk songs and literature the features of Jewish appearance and behaviour (accent on the different) are generally emphasised; revealed stereotypes are clearly connected with this ethnicity, such as the reluctance of Jews to work in the countryside, their specific behaviour or manner of speech. The frequent use of ethnonyms and Jewish person names in a diminutive form (*Abrameņš*, *Jankeleits*, *Odumiņš*) signals a positive stylistic expression. According to the belief of Latgale, a Jew met on the way is always a harbinger of success or happiness.

During World War I and after it, the number of texts including such stereotypes visibly decreased. Jews are mainly attributed with a strange manner of speech and stinginess, apparently inspiring folklore, or in texts of the early 20th century (Apšeniece, 1993, pp. 138–139).

For two different semiospheres to communicate, we need the third, which is the connecting element of both semiospheres. In the cultural dialogue of Jews of Latgale and Latvians, such element or substructure may become territorial coexistence – not depending on whether the openness of the semiosphere’s borders is based on interest in the familiar or in the strange. Information is transmitted more actively by that culture, which is at a higher level in its development (Lotman, 1996, pp. 193–206). The diaspora maintained continuous activity in strengthening moral, cultural and social positions for centuries, which allows the Jewish minority to achieve a high level of development, cultivating its diversity outside, dominating in translations, at least in a certain stage of history.

The transformation of transmitted texts/meanings in the semiosphere of Latgalians is largely reinforced in the often misleading stereotypes, reflecting the lower level of the receiver’s culture. But, on the other hand, mutual exchange of information between such different cultures provides bilateral creativity and development. In communication, semio-

spheres of two different cultures acquire unique hybrid form in relation to isomorphic or kindred cultures. So one could argue that the multiethnic region of Latgale should thank local Jews for its cultural peculiarity.

The culture of Jews of Latgale after the Holocaust has become a culture without a language; its representatives constitute the Russian speaking mass of the region. Such cultures without language are characterised by the tendency to save information about the order/cycle rather than about its disassembly; about rules rather than about their violation. The primary and most important text in such cultures is the calendar, as well as customs and rituals recorded in it – for storage in the collective memory. It is a culture that is orientated not towards the creation of new texts, but rather towards the reproduction of old texts. Spelling is not necessary here, but the scrupulous respect of tradition is important. Such cultures sanctify memory and diligently cultivate their sacred sites. Lotman (1922–1993) admits that such cultures are orientated to the future (observing of the annual cycle) and nothing indicates that they could not exist (Lotman, 1992a, p. 218).

The cemetery as a substructure of the Jewish semiosphere of Latgale

The culture of the Jews of Latgale is still autonomous, it is maintained by communities, and the number of its representatives is small. In the centre of the semiosphere there are traditions, rituals and symbols and the most important text is the calendar; the existing texts will no longer qualify for crossing borders of the semiosphere toward the cultural semiosphere of the majority. Such cultural dialogue no longer exists. Reconstruction of Jewish cultural elements advanced in the periphery of the cultural space of Latgale, the innovation processes, minus the history of the Holocaust and sacred architecture in the discourse of texts of informative memory, are stagnant. Preservation and exploration of the Jewish cultural semiosphere is testimony to our cultural uniqueness. Jewish cemeteries are one such example of the remains of the semiosphere and essential subdivisions of the territorial identity in Latgale.

The aim of this study is to analyze the verbal and non-verbal signs of the Rēzekne Jewish cemetery with the cultural semiotic approach (Eco, Lotman) and in this way to find out the hybridization features of the Jewish semiosphere in Latgale.

The collection and description of Jewish cemeteries in Latgale was carried out by regional researcher Meijers Melers (2006). One of the oldest cemeteries in Latgale is in Ludza (established in 1722). Apart from the Jewish cemetery in Daugavpils, the rest are located in urban or rural areas isolated from other non-Jewish cemeteries, or are near them (Balvi, Dagda, Demene, Grīva, Kārsava, Krāslava, Ludza, Piedruja, Preiļi, Rēzekne, Viļāni, and Zilupe). The largest Jewish cemeteries are located in Daugavpils and Rēzekne (from 500 to 5000 headstones). The best preserved are Ludza and Zilupe cemeteries; in other cemeteries headstones are significantly damaged. In Rēzekne cemetery there was a pre-burial space, but it is no longer preserved. In Daugavpils and Krāslava Jewish cemeteries there are still Ohels (little houses on the grave), under which significant people and rabbis were usually buried. Rēzekne and Preiļi Jewish cemeteries are protected as

cultural monuments, perhaps because before World War II these towns had a significant Jewish population and developed thanks to the eminent Jewish families (Ibid., p. 131). Daugavpils, Ludza, Krāslava, and Rēzekne cemeteries are still used, but in most of them no one was buried after the Holocaust.

The shape of headstones or monuments in the Jewish cemeteries has been traditional in all of Latgale since the Soviet occupation; the irregular angular shape of the headstone is very characteristic. Before that it was characteristic to have rectangular columns or vertical, flat plates, the most common form of the arch with ornaments, reminiscent of Art Nouveau (ornament was most often associated with plants), less frequently – a sarcophagus. One headstone can be devoted to an entire family. Having portraits, images, and photos of the deceased is a typical Soviet tradition that is also popular today. In many cases the author of obelisks in Rēzekne Jewish cemetery is the Old-Believer T. Kirsanov (1873–1967).² He is buried in the Old-Believer cemetery in Rēzekne. This craftsman's works have been known since 1910, he has engraved his name on all of his Jewish obelisks (usually on the side of the base). This fact confirms the collaboration of local ethnic groups in the field of ritual services; religious differences were not an obstacle.

In Rēzekne Jewish cemetery there are headstones of two relatives next to each other, a Jew is buried under one of them, and under the other – an Orthodox woman, judging from the symbolism of the cross. Only the father's name of this man is mentioned. It is a typical multiethnic environmental phenomenon of Latgale cemetery (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Kinship of representatives of different faiths (Rēzekne Jewish Cemetery)

² His full name could not be found.

The headstones in cemeteries of Latgale are most often built of granite. The manufacturing technique of Jewish cemeteries of Latgale differs by the simplicity of the decor, the main focus here is on the inscription, which praises the dead in Hebrew, tells about any affiliation to a certain family, employment, good jobs or devoutness. In almost all Latvian Jewish cemeteries (also in Daugavpils, Ludza, and Rēzekne) you can find a grave monument in the shape of a tree with trimmed branches and an open book or the Torah scroll at the trunk. Gedalja Morein, engraver and researcher of ornamental graphic traditions in Jewish cemeteries in Latvia, said in the 1980s that headstones of the 1930s showed the result of the interaction of unique local traditions; in the terminology of Lotman – the interaction hybrid of cultural semiospheres.

Jewish cemeteries as a subsidiary body in Latgale are characterised by the particular language and ritual traditions, but also are a valuable genealogical material and historical evidence of local Jewish lives and, perhaps, modification of the cemetery cult determined by the multiethnic cultural environment.

Drawing on ideas of semiotician Umberto Eco (1932–2016), the culture of Jewish cemeteries of Latgale will be revealed further in a semiotic aspect, with an example of Rēzekne Jewish cemetery. It is one of the largest, oldest Jewish cemeteries in Latgale (built in 1786, at present day 91 Andreja Upīša Street). Jews from other regions – Malta, etc., were also buried there. The cemetery is relatively well-preserved and is still in use. The focus is mainly on non-verbal signs on headstones, given the incompetence of the receiver of the cultural phenomenon and little knowledge of Hebrew.

The information is retrieved, stored and transmitted with different signs. An important factor in world perception/interpretation is naming of object or replacing them with signs, implementing the transfer of meaning (Eco, 2006, p. 199).

Eco insists that a sign does not reflect the object’s properties, but rather the conditions of its perception (representation in consciousness). In perceiving the sign, we use our experience, knowledge and we select concepts of understanding the sign, but these notions are based on the recognition of perception/interpretation of the conditions for the selection, creating and selecting the sign; in this case, selecting decorative graphics for the design of a headstone. In principle, this act of imagination means emphasising the essential properties of the object for better remembrance and future communicative networking, mainly for remembrance culture.

Such act, under normal conditions – natural, inherent property – is independent from the culture or ideology, as it is the process of perception of the sign. But in the commemoration context it is possible to identify, when the cultural determination of choosing a sign is revealed (sign selection is determined by the culture). The task of an expert of signs is to identify, what corresponds to human nature in the selection and formation of signs, and what corresponds to the culture or mindset tools, used by a certain collective. Hypothetically it can be assumed that in the decorative and ritual graphics of local Jewish cemeteries the choice of signs is determined by culture, aiming to preserve, and represent the collective characteristics.

If one compares the visual representation of the different cultures, you may find that depending on whether one and the same object seems exotic or familiar, you can highlight entirely different characteristics; namely the concepts of recognition may vary. In decorative graphics of modern Jewish headstones of Latgale we can often see the menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum, and the Hanukkah holiday nine-branched candelabrum. In Orthodox Judaism they have a different and specific meaning, but in the commemoration culture of Jews of Latgalian culture, this difference levels out. The candelabra, as the Star of David, in the Jewish cemetery of Latgale is a general symbol of the local representative of Judaism, rather than a symbol of specific holidays or rituals. The yellow 5-pointed star, inscribed in many headstones, can commemorate the Holocaust, even if the person has died from natural causes, but mostly it is a descriptor and confessor of ethnic group's culture. The number of candles, flowers or tree leaves in the graphic can be symbolic, but it may also indicate the following of trends in the dominant cultural semiosphere. For example, two flowers, as with two candles or three acorns, do not always symbolise the number of the deceased's children; it may be a tradition borrowed from the Soviet period. Likewise, only on some headstones of people who died young there is a broken flower engraved, and only on a few headstones of women there is a burning candle engraved; more important and ever present is the common sacred symbolism.

The use of verbal or language signs in different time periods

An interesting situation develops with the use of language signs in different centuries, which is one of the most important multi-ethnic characteristics of cemeteries of Latgale. The language after the Holocaust has become a graphic sign, because it is unknown not only to other ethnic groups, but also to Jews. Jewish culture in Latgale has had no language for a long time; the language has essentially become a decorative ritual sign without real usage, a real object, but mostly with the same symbolic representation.

Language signs can be classified by their diversity of usage in certain centuries:

- (1) The language signs only in Hebrew until the 1920s, only in Russian from the end of the 20th century;
- (2) Bilingual signs concurrently in Hebrew and Yiddish until the 1920s, in Hebrew and abbreviated messages in Russian, German or Latvian from the 1920s to 1960s: from the 1960s, a message in Russian becomes more common than a message in Hebrew;
- (3) Trilingual signs in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian from the 1920s to 1960s, a message in Russian is usually abbreviated.

Usage of linguistic signs, of course, shows the trends in language usage, respecting/not respecting the national language policy characteristic to the relevant century (the Russian Empire, the Republic of Latvia, the USSR, the National Awakening, and years of restored independence). Language/languages of the message, as well as the amount of messages in different languages, mostly depends on the setup time and destination of

a commemorative plate. For example, during the period of the Republic of Latvia, along with the text in Hebrew and Yiddish, there are reduced entries (only personal names and dates of birth and/or death) in German, Russian (the 1920s) and Latvian (the 1930s).

The bilingual and trilingual trend with the Latvian language strengthens during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, during radical implementation of the national language. But trilingual and bilingual signs, which include messages in Russian, German or Latvian, show characteristics of cultural dialogue and openness of local Jews to this contact with different semiospheres. Monolingual signs most often warn one about the usage habits of certain language in ethnic groups and seclusion, entering the periphery of the dominant semiosphere: Hebrew as a sacred language and Yiddish as an everyday language were known and used by the majority of local Jews until the 1920s, but here we also face a “but”. If along with Hebrew, translations of messages are placed in Yiddish, this means that a particular part of recipients in a specific period cannot or do not use Hebrew. After the Holocaust, Yiddish gradually disappeared from headstones, which indicated the decrease in the number of people who knew this language and brought forward the sacred language for maintaining commemorative culture, thus making Hebrew one of the symbols of Judaism. In the 1970s, the priority was already being allocated to a message in Russian that was at the top of a headstone, and was more extensive than text in Hebrew and was engraved with bigger letters. In turn headstones installed at the beginning of the 21st century already show the absolute preponderance of Russian in the mutual communication of Jews of Rēzekne and in interaction with representatives of the dominant culture, who used Latvian and Latgalian on a daily basis. Perhaps it is an action, proposed by a collective defensive response that causes enclosing and forces us not to use the national language at least in the isolated cemetery culture. This hypothesis remains to be tested in future studies.

Some of the patterns should be mentioned in relation to the volume, content and structure of informative messages. Messages are often traditional in the cemetery culture of Latgale: name of the deceased, the name is introduced by an abbreviation in Hebrew with a meaning – here lies, also a sign expressing affection and love, such as “dear”, “unforgettable”. The abbreviation most commonly also remains in messages in foreign languages. After that a family description (father, mother, etc.) follows, the text of the epitaph (age of the deceased or birth/death dates according to the Jewish calendar, an integral part still today – father’s name; encomium or abbreviated listing of good works, even citations from the Torah or the Talmud, it all gradually diminishes and disappears from the headstones at the end of the 20th century). The message is concluded by the final formula (the abbreviation from the First book of the Prophet Samuel (25:29) or behest to the deceased), transcript of the dedicator, indicating kinship (children, grandchildren, etc.) and, much less frequently – mentioning of the deceased person’s place of residence. Obviously, this is sometimes important, because Jews from surrounding regions are also buried in Rēzekne cemetery (Melers, 2006, p. 80). Minor deviations from elements of the mentioned messages only apply to the 1990s (for example, the message starts with an addressee and recipient). In modern monuments, epitaphs and closing formulas are

traditional to the local culture (you shall live in our hearts, rest in peace, etc.). In headstone messages of the 1980s, which were written in Latvian and where the father's name is missing, the Star of David can be replaced not just with an oak, but also with maple branches with four or six leaves. On small headstones there are abbreviations, but if for some reason the message is created as compact as possible, only the date of death of the deceased is mentioned.

If the message is identical in Hebrew and Yiddish then the message in Russian, Latvian or in German most often is reduced to a minimum: in an optimal version the name of the deceased, his/her father's name and life dates are mentioned, but most often only life dates or just the year of death is mentioned. The date of death in Jewish culture is more important than the birth date. In bilingual signs in the Soviet period, information in Hebrew and in Russian is mostly balanced. This trend confirms the progressive growth of the role of the Russian language, which also explains cases in which the message in Russian becomes more extensive than the message in Hebrew (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Bilingual sign of the Soviet period (Rēzekne Jewish Cemetery)

A special group of messages is associated with the subject of victims of pogroms, robberies or homicides. They are more extensive, because they clearly but expressively describe the circumstances of victims' deaths, highlighting the sufferings of those violently killed. For example, such a message can be found on the headstone of the Edelstein family, where on one of the two plates it is written that the children of Mihel Edelstein, Kira (22 years) and David (16 years), and on the second plate – Mihel and Leah (daughter of

Iser Klackin), were violently killed on the night of 7 March 1922. Interestingly, on the headstones devoted to Holocaust victims, the expression is hidden in the subtext, the pain can be sensed in the brief list of victims, in records of their place and time of death. But virtually all headstones, the messages of which contain victims, contain signs which carry the family or generation code (most often genealogy), because in these cases a natural interruption in the replacement of generations occurs; a gap is carved in the continuity of family and nation.

Modification of visual semiotics: sacred and secular graphics

Non-verbal signs with an imaginative transfer of meaning or icons of Jewish headstones in Rēzekne are not spontaneous, natural, nor a result of new creation, they include the cultural coding of a specific ethnic group; that is, almost exclusively, the choice of traditional graphic signs is associated with the self-actualisation of culture, which has become peripheral but keep using signs, even behind the sign there is no longer a real object, only its image. Eco (1976, p. 7) speaks directly about symptoms of the crisis of cultural signs in the modern culture. Crisis of a sign, firstly, is the crisis of a message because a rapporteur is not an actual object, but the model of an object that belongs to a particular model group, in this case – sacred or secular graphics. Therefore, objects are not real, they are temporarily constructed and kept in the mind. If the sign is connected to a rapporteur, it is not a real object, but a cultural product (Eko, 2006, p. 47). Observations of Eco are entirely attributable to the phenomenon of the peripheral culture of Jews of Latgale – the subsidiary body with its visual characteristics. Further we will track the traditions of the ritual graphics in Rēzekne Jewish cemetery, to justify this claim.

The most common ornamental graphic signs used in the design composition of headstones is symbolic, without an imaginative, creative transfer of meaning:

- (1) Six-pointed star (Magen David, or the Shield of David, a hexagram) often has a circle frame, with a two-letter or four-letter abbreviation inside or outside its border – on the left or right of the headstone; if the occupation symbolism is highlighted (open book with or without additional attributes (education, or science), music key (music), a cup with a snake wrapped around (medicine), especially in the 1970s), then there is a star on the left side. The star may be engraved on the menorah's stem, combining two signs in one; an equivalent of the star – an oak branch with seven leaves;
- (2) Cult object, the menorah with seven branches, less frequently Hanukkah candelabra with nine branches, relatively often engraved on the base of the headstone or on the other side; an equivalent – two or more burning candles on the other side of the headstone, which is a symbol of comfort (Melers, 2006, p. 137).

The secular signs can also meet the parameters of an iconic sign (though cliché, because they are common) and are traditional to the culture of cemeteries of Latgale, particularly during the Soviet period (roses or carnations, oak, maple, birch branch), often separating them from signs of spiritual identity (on the back of the monument or on the opposite side

of the star). Secular symbolism can carry an additional emotional function (broken flower reminds one of premature death, roses under the portrait or next to the Star of David draw attention to the name of the deceased “Rose”, etc.).

Occupational signs were especially topical in headstones of the 1970s; most often it is an engraving of a book. The iconic sign of the book most often represents knowledge. But the book can also be a sacred symbol of Judaism – the word of God, a divine message, keeper of the truth, sign of the world, universe, and life. More often it is associated with the symbolism of the tree; the book along with the tree can represent the universe (the monument, shaped as an oak with an open book or scroll, common to Jewish cemeteries in Latvia, was already mentioned). In the Jewish cemetery of Rēzekne in the 1970s there was a headstone, on which the occupation of the deceased is figuratively rendered: an open book, on the right page a spruce in the background, on the left – an ear of grain in the foreground. Supposedly, the deceased was an agricultural scientist or teacher. Formally this graphic resembles the sacred combination of a tree and a book, but does it also have a hidden symbolic subtext? In such cases, imagination collides with the real story (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Combination of symbols of an ear of grain, a spruce and an open book on a headstone (Rēzekne Jewish cemetery)

According to Eco, the used sign can in some way be optically, hypothetically, conventionally (can be modelled and accepted) similar or isomorphic to its object. Recognition of isomorphism depends on the cultural prescriptions, restrictions of interpretation (Eco, 2006, pp. 188–193). Accepted signs are sacred Judaism symbols, but iconic signs – secular, closely associated with traditions of the local population, particularly during the Soviet period; sacred meaning can only be assigned to the number “seven” (branches, leaves, flowers), as in the local Latgalian and Russian tradition, for example, there are usually two or four oak leaves. Perhaps it is a current defensive response to the ideological restrictions of religious cult and its signs.

Apart from information mentioned by the semiotician Lotman we can also highlight other important functions of mutual communication, including cultural communication:

- (1) The maintenance of collective cultural memory (inclusive abstractions – in the form of archetypal characters, concepts, symbol, etc.);
- (2) Inclusion in the context of a specific culture (encoding, or character selection, respecting traditions, stereotypical notions, clichés, due to identification) (Lotman, 2002, p. 88).

The ritual graphics in Rēzekne Jewish cemetery can be divided into sacral symbolism which exercises the first message function, and the secular one which exercises the second function of supporting communication. But in reality, everything is not so simple and transparent. In the subsidiary body of the semiosphere in Jewish cemeteries, both of these functions are present in sacred symbolic signs, because the medium of culture, the collective, selects the Jewish ritual graphics by the principle of visibility, where the recipient is the local representative of the dominant semiosphere, a Latgalian. So, communication or dialogue of cultures still exists; at least the culture of cemeteries is still capable of broadcasting their own core values in the form of stereotypical, common signs. In this way, the “other” tends to be noticed and understood.

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