

# Returning the symbol

Brest's City History Museum displays an original copy of the Brest (or Radziwill) Bible for the first time — a unique and priceless monument of the Renaissance, masterpiece of world printing art and one of the symbols of Brest



CULTURE



The Chairman of the Brest City Executive Committee — Aleksandr Rogachuk: 'This is a unique artefact'

By Valentina Kozlovich

It's now the only such complete edition of the Brest Bible in Belarus. It was purchased from a collector by Brest businessmen. Last September, Aleksandr Lukashenko presented the original of the Brest Bible to the city at an official event on the 1000th anniversary of the city.

Over more than two decades, Brest's City History Museum has welcomed many guests: representatives of the re-

gional and city authorities, diplomatic missions, creative and scientific intelligentsia and the wider public. All came to see the beautifully decorated folio with subject index, illustrations and engraved title pages.

The uniqueness of the Brest copy of the Bible is that it has preserved two engraved title pages for the Old and New Testaments. The Brest Bible was published on September 4th, 1563 in the Brest printing house by order of the

Berestie Head and the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Prince Mikolaj Radziwill the Black — who also covered all the costs. This is the largest printed edition from the 16th-18th century, with the first circulation of about 1,000-1,200 copies. For four centuries, the Radziwill Bible was read and used in divine services but, by the mid-20th century, not a single copy remained in the city. Belarus joined the study of this legacy in the 21st century. Brest

worked on the return of the folio step by step and, in 2003, thanks to the efforts of the Deputy Director of the Brest Regional Library — Alla Myasnyankina, a facsimile copy restored in Poland joined the library's collections. In 2014, the library purchased fragments of the folio for a budget price: more than 200 authentic pages. In 2017, a monument to the Brest Bible was erected and, in 2019, a 15kg facsimile edition, made by the National Library and Belneftstrakh, was presented.

Anticipating the display of the most beautiful, expensive and rare book of the 16th century and the printed symbol of Brest, the Chairman of the City Executive Committee — Aleksandr Rogachuk — said, "The idea seemed almost fantastic but, about four years ago, we began working on it. Thanks to hardworking people, patriots of the city, I realised that there was a possibility of implementing the idea. The issue of the authenticity of the Bible was fundamental. We've succeeded. We've been presented the gift by the Head of State. This is a unique artefact which our city lacked."

The rarity is now available to the public. The folio was placed in a special display case with climate control, developed by Belarusian specialists. There are no similar showcases in the country's museums. The period of exposure of the original is three months a year, since the rarity requires not only careful handling, but also special storage rules. Then the Bible will be placed in a special container and next displayed in 2021.

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