

# Brest Bible should return to Brest

Around forty copies of the Brest or Radziwill Bible have preserved worldwide. Eight of these are kept in Moscow, five — in St. Petersburg and two more are located on the Belarusian territory. Alongside private collections, the folio is also present at the Russian National Library (named after M. Saltykov-Shchedrin) in St. Petersburg, the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Polish library at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, alongside the Central Scientific Library (named after Yanka Kupala) at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and at the National Library of Belarus.



**M**eanwhile, only one book is kept in Brest — recreated in 2003 by joint effort of Professor of the Jagiellonian University and Director of the Collegium Columbinum, Waclaw Walecki, and patron of arts Piotr Krolikovsky. Scientists from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland have gathered together in Brest during the international Brest Bible — a Unique Monument of the 16th Century Culture round table discussion. I'm confident that the words 'unique' and 'sensation' haven't been ever announced in the conference hall of the Brest Hero-Fortress Memorial so often.

The jubilee book definitely deserves to be remembered after 450 years since its appearance. One of the

reasons is that the release of its copy happened on September 4th, 1563 — earlier than the founder of the printing in Russia, Ivan Fiodorov, published his first book in the Old Church Slavonic language — Apostle.

The Brest Bible contains translations made from original languages — Greek and Hebrew — into Polish. At that time, Polish was a language of eastern European Calvinists. The edition comprises of 738 pages and 14 engravings, with headpieces, vignettes and capital letters being masterfully created. There're also comments for the texts on the margins. Engravings — The Flood, Tribes of Israel and Fountain — are considered to be masterpieces of the 16th century graphical art.

The biggest (in volume) printed edition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was first (in the history of Belarusian



book printing) accompanied by the subject index and had full leather binding with metal brackets.

Today, we admire this edition, so the money paid to best artists and translators in Europe by headman and Berestie Duke, Mikolaj Radziwill Czarny, have been well spent.

The Bible is a symbol of Brest, alongside the Union of Brest, the Brest Peace and the Brest Fortress. The territory of the later once housed a printing shop which printed the Old and New Testaments.

But why did book appear here? There's an opinion that it just couldn't be released in Catholic Poland; it could be printed only in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where various confessions existed peacefully.

The international round table discussion was organised by the Brest Regional Library on the eve of the edition's jubilee. The team, guided by Director Tamara Danilyuk, masterfully returns the lost heritage. For several years already, they've been conducting the Berestie Book Collections conference, involving scientists from different countries. Books return in electronic form, as no one wants to give back folios (yet). However, the library plans to purchase a copy of the Brest Bible which is estimated approximately at \$30,000.

We may speak only after the edition appears at antiquarian book auctions whether the librarian collection will be expanded with a 16th century original edition and when this will happen. So, it's important to trace the situation and not to miss the moment. It's likely that sponsors and Brest residents will help raise funds, since the Brest Bible should definitely return home.

I've heard many times that the Brest Bible hasn't been researched so thoroughly since the moment of its release. High level discussions investigate it as a book, as a historical monument and as a sacred edition while also studying its illustrations, printing types and its influence on other Bible editions.



*Mikolaj Radziwill Czarny, Berestie Duke, is a sponsor of the Brest Bible edition. Scientists consider him to be not only a patron but also a spiritual encourager of the edition. He wanted to make the city a centre of Protestantism*

Deputy Director of the Brest Regional Library, Alla Myasnyankina, promises that a collection of reports will be released, which should become a true scientific sensation. I eagerly believe the opinion of librarians.

Meanwhile, the conference focused not only on the Bible. The audience hall was 'exploded' by the report of the Chair Head at the Brest Technical University, Anatoly Gladyshchuk. The physicist has been keen on historical investigations for a long time. He brought the branches of birch bark (according to the legend, Berestie comes from the word 'birch bark') and defensibly announced that the first documental mention of the city dates back to 1017 rather than 1019...

Brest is a God-salvable city. In this way the settlements are called where the Bible once was released. I first heard such definition from Doctor of Historical Sciences from Ukraine, Leonid Timoshenko.

This is really true. Maybe, for the sake of historical truth, it's a compro-

mise to celebrate the city's jubilee during two years... A Brest craftsman jumped ahead of the official opinion and offered all those wishing during the scientific forum in the fortress to mint commemorative solids and medals, dedicated to the city's 1,000th anniversary, with their own hands. I also tried and enjoyed greatly.

These magnetic coins may be fixed on refrigerators while bronze medals, marking the jubilee of the book folio, should be preserved as a numismatic rarity. There're only fifty of these created by artist Nikolay Kuzmich, who has re-created the Cross of Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya. The author personally handed medals to the participants of the round table discussion: the first — to the Brest Regional Library and the second — to the National Library of Belarus.

The reverse side of the medal contains the name of the founder: Mikolaj Radziwill Czarny. Scientists added that the Duke wasn't merely a sponsor; he was a spiritual encourager of the edition and wanted to make the city a centre of Protestantism. Berestie headman died on May 29th, 1565. It accidentally happened so that this date came to light during the round table discussion, held on May 29th. When the forum was planned, no one oriented towards this date, yet such coincidences do occur sometimes.

Unfortunately, Brest doesn't have the street named after Radziwill but his figure is installed on the monument dedicated to the city's millennium birthday. However, the memory of the Brest first printer Bernard Vayavudka hasn't been commemorated but I'm sure his time will also come.

The Head of the Rare Book Department at the Russian National Library, Nikolay Nikolaev, mysteriously called his report 'On the Diameter of the Jubilee Cake'. We've heard a philosophical answer from the scientist and an old friend of Brest: the more the cake's diameter is, the more explored and... non-explored is the history of the Brest Bible.

By Valentina **Kozlovich**