

The article describes the life of a native of Proskurov (Khmelnitsky) David Rapoport, one of the founders of the organization *Rue Amelot* in occupied France during the Second World War, which was engaged in saving Jews during the Holocaust.

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## DAVID RAPORT FROM PROSKUROV

"Going down to the great river,  
We all leave footprints on the sand..."  
A. Makarevich

The trace of a human being in our world is a various and rather subjective category. Here we mean the nonmaterial heritage, which a person has left after him or her to the next generations; i.e. creative ideas, crucial decisions, emotional experience, acts of bravery or mercy etc. And, certainly, the human trace might be noticed, admired, kept in memory of the next generations, highly appreciated, or simply passed by and forgotten. If that trace has even been noticed we might not properly understand what it means, and haven't tried to look at it with deep attention. But at the very moment of the certain trace's discovery and understanding of its real importance (if and when it happens), strong feeling of singularity of the event suddenly comes, especially if the person passed away long ago and since then was never recollected, as if the memory of the person has waited for finally bringing together at the right place and time.

People say that a man is alive as long as he is remembered. But the reality often, regardless of our desire or non-desire, creates memory lapses and only occasionally returns us familiar faces, names and events from oblivion. Also there might be occurred interesting paradox around it: the memory of a person may totally disappear at his native place, but has remained alive at the places far away, where that individual performed the mature actions, especially if they were connected with the struggle and martyrdom. There, far from his Motherland, his endeavors have been highly appreciated by many decent people, his colleagues and sympathizers. So, the name of David Rapoport, the main character of the article, hasn't been, until recently, remembered in his native town Khmelnitsky (former Proskurov), but he has been well-known in France as a remarkable fighter against Nazis' policy of the Jews' extermination, a brave and effective savior of many Jews and the hero of the French Resistance. Now we can say that the situation with his memory on the native soil, after full and absolute neglect, which lasted ages, has been improved.

In 2012, at the very center of Khmelnitsky (former Proskurov), in the city downtown, an unusual event took place that no one could expect: the precious family Archive was found during the old roof repair. Khmelnitsky's downtown had already survived a total reconstruction of the 1980s. Later, after the collapse of the USSR, the high wave of real estate privatization shifted the ownership of the old buildings, which had still remained from the late 19th and early 20th century, from municipal to the private one. This crucial change stimulated all sorts of their restructuring, redevelopment and repairs. But the old private Archives had miraculously survived the process of all reconstructions, having been, until recently, unnoticed in the attic of the splendid house which had formerly belonged to the well-to-do Jewish family of Rapoports. So, those precious documents, real witnesses of the gone époque, have survived all disturbances and turmoil of the 20th century and confusions of post-Soviet era and brought us the truly bright testament of old times.

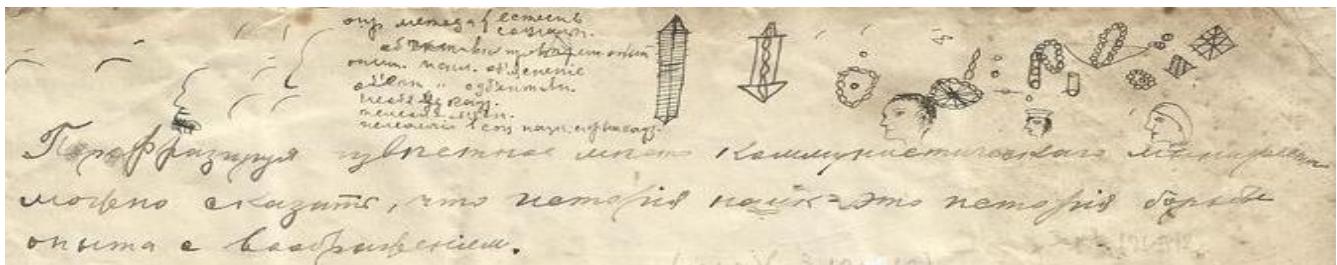
Once, the author of this article occasionally dropped in to the local antique dealer's store. At the same time workers, who repaired the roof nearby, brought him a big portion of found in the attic old papers in hope to sell them with good profit. For the author, personally, it was a great miracle: he was at the right place at the right time! The supposition, which has scared him until now, sounds like this: "If I were not there at that very moment, what might have been the fate of these precious archival items?" Maybe it was His will? So, the author, with own limited money and with merciful donations, made Khmelnitskiy sponsors, could acquire significant part of the original old papers and pictures, namely those related directly on David Rapoport's life events.



*Modern view of the Rapoports' former house in Khmelnytskyi*

Apart from David Rapoport's letters and those addressed to him, this collection consists of Meer Rapoport's (David's father) commercial correspondence and the documents related to his charitable activities including help to the poor Proskurov Jews. Also there were discovered letters addressed to Hendil, Meer's wife and David's mother. As for David's brother Solomon's part of the discovered collection, his private letters and also a big amount of the pre-revolutionary Jewish-Russian periodicals were found in it. In addition, some portion of immigration papers was discovered, as well as a private correspondence of certain Shprincia Shapiro, supposedly the Rapoports' relative, who arrived in Proskurov from Austro-Hungary in 1911. Some papers, which were accumulated in these domestic Archives, were written in Hebrew and Yiddish, the other portion of the documents is in Russian. We have managed to restore the main events of David Rapoport's life using the personal data from the archival letters and the materials received from open sources found in the Internet.

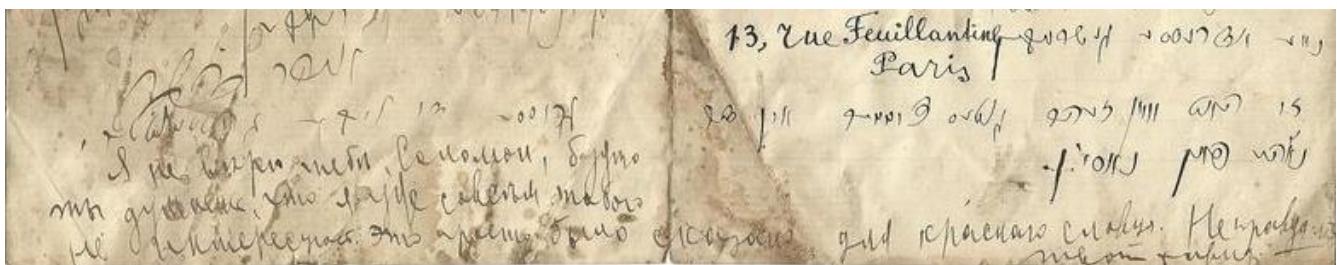
David Rapoport was born in the city of Proskurov (Podolia province of the former Russian empire, nowadays Ukraine) in October 1, 1883. Born into the pious and highly respected by the Proskurov Jews family of Meer and Hendil Rapoports, David showed extraordinary intellectual abilities from his early childhood. He began rabbinical studies while also interested in literature, the visual arts and the social sciences. From being very young, his criticism grows to have militant and political activities. Joining the left wing of the Jewish party Poale Zion gives him the opportunity to learn clandestine work. Already at the age of 17 David is responsible for propaganda in local unit of Poale Zion [1]. The fact of his belonging to the left socialists is indirectly confirmed by the cursive inscription in old Russian grammar on the reverse side of one of his post-cards: "Paraphrasing the well-known part of the Communist International (the world Communist Anthem), we can say that the history of science is the history of struggle of experience with imagination".



*Handwritten note*

Because of revolutionary events in Russia of 1905-1907, David was forced to leave the parents' home about 1906: he and his wife Rebecca, descended from the related Rapoport family branch of Berdichev, moved to France. [2]

But even after leaving home, David does not cease taking part in public and political life. He travels a lot (among his addresses is found Yerevan, Tbilisi, Vladikavkaz and Baku), and looks for opportunities to visit his family. In one of his letters to his brother Solomon, sent by David from Paris to Proskurov, we found his new address: *13, rue Feuillantines, Paris*. This house still exists and has retained its status as "an apartment house". [3] [13, P. 59]



*13, rue Feuillantines, Paris*

Another Parisian address that's associated with David, was listed on letters addressed to him by his wife Rebecca from France in 1907: *Escautpont, rue du Bois (Nord)*. [13, P. 59]



*Escautpont, rue du Bois (Nord), France*

In 1910, David and his wife arrived in England, where their son Daniel was born next year. Then, they returned to France in 1912. In June 1914, David, still having no particular job, decided to visit his parents, which remained in Proskurov. David was planning to stay with them for a few weeks. Because of the outbreak of the First World War he failed to obtain permission for returning to France. Instead, David was drafted to the Russian Army. In the spring, 1916, the Rapoports were expelled from Proskurov in according with the Russian General Staff order on the eviction of all Jews from the front line vicinity to the deeper Russian provinces. [14] They moved to Kremenchug (Poltava province). Only thanks to the February revolution of 1917, the family got reunited, and David with his parents managed to move together to Lodz, Poland. There David became very active in assisting Jewish refugees with emigration process, especially with emigration to America. Their escape grew more and more massive because of the raising wave of anti-Semitism in extremely violent forms in Eastern Europe, including the pogroms carried out by Petliura's supporters in the Western regions of the former Russian empire.

But that job has not stopped his active social work in the homeland. For example, we can see his name among the members of the Proskurov City Council Commission, which was responsible for

compiling lists of those killed during the infamous bloody Proskurov pogrom, burst out on February 15, 1919. [15] After creating a network of authorized *Jewish Community Committee for relief to victims of pogroms*, in April 1921, David's father, Meer, gave four rooms in his own home (50 Sobornaya str.) and a warehouse for the Proskurov region Commissioner's office. [16] While not being an official part of the office workers, David occasionally went on business trips, doing the job the Commissioner of the Jewish Community Committee. [17]

Finally David got an entry visa to France and found his wife and son there. He, with the help of his wife, started a small photo agency in Paris. And also he continued his work, begun in Poland, supporting the emigration of Jews. Meanwhile, he got involved as a volunteer, into the activities of the other Jewish organizations, including the Federation of Jewish Communities of France, which provided educational services, vocational training and the admission of immigrants from Poland, Russia, and the Baltic states. In addition to his charitable activities, David Rapoport tried his hand in journalism. He became the Paris correspondent of New York City's largest Jewish newspaper *Jewish Herald*.



David Rapoport about 1925



Press agency RAP, Staal and David Rapoport, the director. Paris, about 1925

About 1924, when the latter organizations practically stopped functioning, he, together with Mr. Herman, founded the agency of journalistic photos called *Photo Rap*, which operated until the eve of the Second World War. In 1934, he and his friends took part in starting of the Yiddish newspaper *Pariser Haint (Paris Today)*. Its address was 105 *Faubourg du Temple*. Alarming reports about the fate of Polish Jews in Hitler's Germany, which had been printed in that newspaper, prompted the young Jew, *Hersh Grinshpan*, to take revenge by killing the German diplomat Ernst von Rath in Paris on November 7, 1938. [18, p. 54] At the same time, David didn't cease his work with Jewish immigrants from Poland, Russia, and, subsequently, from Germany, especially after Hitler came to power in 1933, with the rise of Nazism as an ideology.



*David Rapoport in prewar time*

In January 1940, David's son Daniel was offered a teaching position in the French city of *La Bourboule*. Two years later, in 1942, Daniel was arrested and interned, as a British subject, in the camp of *Saint-Denis*, not having chance to join his father in the Resistance movement. Maybe it saved his life. He was the only family member who survived WWII.

In Paris, where David Rapoport and his wife Rebecca stayed after the outbreak of WWII, several Resistance groups emerged. One of them was called the *Comité de la Rue Amelot*, or *Rue Amelot*. It was a small Jewish relief organization that started providing services to so-called "foreign" Jews in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi Occupation, serving hot meals for them, providing medical care, and supplying financial assistance for the needy. This organization, known as '*Rue Amelot*' after the street in which it was located, was disguised as a "Mother and Baby" clinic and summer camp for school children, to be able to fulfill its much more dangerous tasks.

Like the other organizations of its kind, it sought to alleviate the suffering of its community members. Their efforts culminated into an ingenious plan that allowed Jewish children, whose parents were interned in camps, to be secretly placed to Christian families, so kids could avoid deportations. They also helped to smuggle children and adult Jews to the South. In 1997, a British couple uncovered a virtually unknown episode of the Second World War after buying a remote thirteenth century chateau near Montpellier. They discovered that the chateau had secretly housed more than 500 Jewish children about 1943; the operation was part of a network of smuggling refugees to the south of France. *Rue Amelot* took part in these activities.

The *Rue Amelot* Committee was established in Paris on June 15, 1940, one day after the German capture of Paris and in the midst of a chaotic situation in which at least three quarters of the Jews had fled the city. Jewish residents who stayed in Paris because they were poor and unable to partake in the exodus, mostly were foreign Jews. A significant part of the Jewish relief organizations simply shut down their doors because the city's Jewish neighborhoods were mainly deserted. In this situation three foreign Jews, active members of the Jewish refugee community, met to discuss a way to get relief operations back on track. The three founders were Léo Glaeser, who left his native Riga in 1907 to study at Heidelberg and La Sorbonne, a Polish-born Bundist Yehuda Jakoubowicz (in the other transliteration - Yakubovich), and Ukrainian (Proskurov-born) David Rapoport. They decided to merge three relief organizations: the *Colonie Scolaire* (Colony School; its purpose was to provide physical and moral protection of children from economically and socially disadvantaged families), the *La Mère et l'Enfant* (Mother and Child) dispensary and *Le Cercle Amical*, (the Friendly Circle, a Jewish laborers' soup kitchen). Their office was located at 36, *Rue Amelot*, from which the Committee got its name. At first, Mr. Yakubovich offered David to help him in his difficult work of the general secretary of the organization. According to the Yakubovich's testimony (the interview with him was taken in Paris, 1988), he believed that David was "a theorist, an intellectual, a tactician, an incomparable man of

action, a wonderful director." Yakubovich and Rapoport were acquainted from 1922, when they both were members of the Secretariat of the *Conférence mondiale juive de secours* (The World Jewish Relief Conference), the president of which was Leo Motzkin and general secretary - Israel Efrojkin. They rarely parted and worked together in different organizations. As it has been mentioned, at the beginning, there were three founders of the *Rue Amelot* organization, but within a year, Rapoport would be the only one remaining. Yakubovich resigned in May 1941. A few weeks later, Glaeser was forced to flee Paris to the Non-Occupied Zone when it became known the Gestapo was looking to arrest him. Witnesses agreed that Rapoport had been a dedicated and generous man who gave everything he had to *Rue Amelot* and to the people whom he helped. To tell the truth, the immigrants Jews were a highly diverse group – a mixture of *Zionists*, *Bundists*, *Communists*, as well as apolitical factions. David concentrated only on welfare and relief operations. Analyzing the statements and interviews provided by participants of *Rue Amelot*, who managed to survive, we can say that David was an exceptional human being, in general, described as the true *Tzaddik*. His participation in saving, with the extraordinary courage, his Jewish brothers and sisters really deserves our gratitude forever.

Despite his poor health and a short height, this man was the true incarnation of moral grandeur. Respect, sincerity, sociability, kindness, courage - those are the words most often heard from the lips of witnesses, even if sometimes he was too authoritarian, as evidenced by Yakubovich. Being the only leader of the *Rue Amelot* under the pseudonym *Le Tzadik* [10], David performed an exemplary job, while holding a children's home *La Varenne-Saint-Hilaire* near Paris [4]; assisting interned Jews with four soup kitchens located in the areas with heavy concentration of foreign Jews; also running his famous clinic *La mere et l'enfant* (Mother and Child); fulfilling rescue operations, manufacturing false documents, etc. After the raids of the German secret police to his office in May 1941, there were enhanced measures of secrecy and security in *Rue Amelot*. David attracted public donations for persecuted. He listened to them and gave them shelter, helped financially to disadvantaged families. He also took opportunity to protect these families from the Nazi police raids and to give them chance to go to hiding-places. Another important activity sponsored by *Rue Amelot* was the assistance to detainees in the detention camp system. As was mentioned above, the first round-ups, mostly affecting foreign Jews, started in May 1941. Most of the detainees from Paris and its surroundings were sent to the camps, which were located about 80 km from Paris. Already by the fall of 1941, thousands of Jews got detained, and Rapoport began getting word from the camps that conditions were "extremely difficult" and that camp authorities, in many cases, did not even bother to feed Jewish detainees. *Rue Amelot* responded immediately with a plan to supply parcels of food, clothing and other goods to family members who wished to visit their imprisoned loved ones. In these early months, camp security was lax and visits were permitted. This changed after the summer of 1942, when the camps became closed to visitors, especially Jewish ones. He also sent social workers to *Poitiers, France*, to help Rabbi Elijah Bloch with saving his family. He managed to pull hundreds of families and children from the clutches of the Gestapo and collaborators.

Since 1941, David Rapoport was a member of the *Committee of the Charities of Paris*. He collaborated with the organization "*Français*" of the Resistance movement in manufacturing false documents and smuggling Jews to Switzerland and Spain. [4] David collaborated with the Red Cross in collecting and distributing material assistance and humanitarian parcels among internee Jewish population. [4] Unfortunately, *Rue Amelot*'s finances were shaky. The situation was becoming critical in September 1940. *Rue Amelot* temporarily lost its main source of funding: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JOINT). That time, JOINT headquarters in Paris were relocated to Marseilles where, in spite of Vichy obstructionism, the organization was allowed to pursue its activities. As soon as JOINT relocated to Marseille and resumed normal activities, *Rue Amelot* received its share of funding again. *Rue Amelot*'s activities were funded perhaps at 50 to 60 percent by JOINT. A voluminous amount of the organization's correspondence – and Rapoport's time – were spent on local fundraising. Until the summer of 1941, such activities amassed about 150,000 francs per month; after that, they collapsed to between 15,000 and 20,000 francs. As the numbers of Jews in Paris dwindled, so did the pool of prospective contributors. In November 1942, when the Nazis and Italians invaded the Southern part of France, JOINT aid to France entered its clandestine phase. Unfortunately, *Rue Amelot* was left with little else but local sources of funding. According to correspondence available in the *Rue Amelot* collection, it appears that almost all JOINT contributions were channeled through the Quakers

(the American Friends Service Committee) who were very active in occupied Western Europe. Payments usually ranged between 50,000 and 100,000 francs. Jacques Alder has provided evidence that the Quakers channeled at least part of the money through Switzerland. Starting in spring-summer 1943, receipts start appearing in the *Rue Amelot* files on which Rapoport stated that "the sum would be used to save the Jewish children of Paris" and that the whole amount would be fully reimbursed to the lender in New York, up to three months after the end of the war and the resumption of normal postal service with the U.S.

He got the multiple threats all the time but ignored them. Finally, David was arrested in 36 *Rue Amelot* on June 1, 1943 and imprisoned at Fort Romainville, where everyone was delighted by him. This was the reason of his transfer to the camp Drancy on October 6, 1943. On the next day he was deported in convoy No. 60 to Auschwitz, where he died from exhaustion on July 2, 1944, according to the version of the source [2].

Information on the fate (the date and place of the death) of David Rapoport in the electronic Archives of Yad Vashem, which was obtained through the witnesses' testimonies, is rather controversial. In accordance with the POT (Page of Testament) No. 740802 submitted by David's brother-in-law, Shmuel Rapoport, the place of David's death is listed as "Monowitz, Biala Malopolska, Krakow". All the other personal data: David's place of birth, his parents' names, his last residence place, wife's name, etc. coincide with what we know about him, except of year of his birth, that was listed as "1884" instead of "1883". [5] Shmuel Rapoport also submitted the POT on his sister Rebecca, David's wife. Actually, the Monowitz concentration camp was a part of the huge Auschwitz Death Camp. Monowitz was established in 1942.

In the POT No. 1208026 compiled and submitted by Sabine Alison, David's friend of his Parisian life and also the fighter of the French Resistance, all the data coincide with the version published on the website of the *Rue Amelot* Museum. [6] [10] Place of David's death was Auschwitz there. The same information was presented in the POT No. 3210954, which was based on information from the "List of deportation from France in "Le Memorial de la deportation des Juifs de France, Beate et Serge Klarsfeld, Paris 1978" (Memorial to the Jewish Deportation from France, Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, Paris 1978). [7]

Date and place of death are variable also in the other sources:

- In 1994, Jacqueline Baldran and Claude Bochurberg published a book "*David Rapoport, "La Mere et l'enfant", 36 rue Amelot*", dedicated to the clandestine activities of David in France during the Second World War. [12] According to the authors' information: p. 209 (b. Oct. 1, 1883 in Proskürow, Ukraine); p. 228 (deported 1943); p. 198 (probably died in Monowitz July 2, 1944);

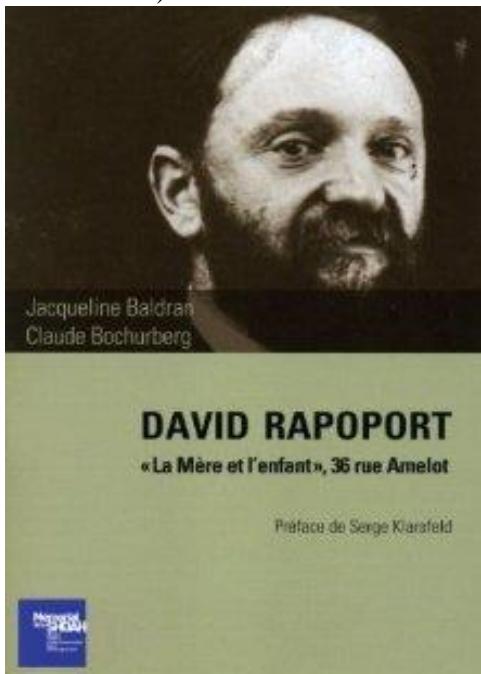
- "*L'un des trente-six, 1946* (One of thirty-six, 1946)", A. Alpérine et al. Publisher: Paris, Kyoum, 1947. P. 1 (David Rapoport, 1883-1944); p. 35 (arrested on 1 June 1943); p. 61 (last heard from in a note received Nov. 1944). The title of the book alludes to the Jewish legend: the world exists only if in every generation, thirty-six Righteous Jews are born and alive. Usually nobody around them and even they themselves don't know about their high destination and task – to keep the whole world in existence. So, David was one of them, on the A. Alpérine's opinion.

- RAMEAU, 15 July 2005 (Rapoport, David (1883-1944); Juif d'origine Russe; sauvetage et protection des réfugiés Juifs en France (oyer de la *Rue Amelot*); Rapoport, David (1883-1944); *The Jew of Russian descent; rescue and protection of Jewish refugees in France* (oyer de la *Rue Amelot*) - source, l'un des 36. [8]

- 1944 as the year of David's death was mentioned in the article dedicated to A. Alperine. [9] A. Alpérine was an internee in the "Russian Camp" located in Compiègne since June 1941. He was arrested immediately after Germany declared war on the USSR. He was released from the camp at the end of 1942 and returned to Paris, working alongside David Rapoport: organizing Jewish welfare, hiding-places and rescue operations for Jewish children.
- On the official website of the Museum *Rue Amelot* Museum: David Rapoport's year of death is 1943; David Rapoport - Le Tsadik (1883-1943). [10]

The names of David and Rebecca also mentioned in the list of persons who George Wellers dedicated his book "*From Drancy to Auschwitz*", which was published in 1946. [11]

Until recently, the only Russian source which contains the short biography of David Rapoport has been “РОССИЙСКОЕ ЗАРУБЕЖЬЕ ВО ФРАНЦИИ (1919 - 2000)”. БИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ СЛОВАРЬ В ТРЕХ ТОМАХ; под общей редакцией Л. Мнухина, М. Авриль, В. Лосской (THE RUSSIAN EMIGRATION TO FRANCE (1919 - 2000). THE BIOGRAPHY DICTIONARY IN THREE VOLUMES).



The cover of the book "*David Rapoport, "La Mere et l'enfant", 36 rue Amelot*", by Jacqueline Baldran and Claude Bochurberg, 1994

So, we have learned about the fate of the wonderful person. David Rapoport was a native of Proskurov (Khmelnitskiy), where he was raised and spent first 23 years of his life in his parents' house. Later, after his emigration, he returned there from time to time, to see his parents. He also served in the Russian army through the years of WWI, 1914 to 1917. The house where his family lived in the end of 19th century and during the first decades of 20th century has miraculously survived and still exists. More than that: until recently, this house, silently and secretly, kept a lot of family memorabilia, which now became available to the members of Khmelnitskiy Jewish community and to all curious guests of the city. From the family archives we recognized that David began as a socialist. But he gradually became a devoted Jewish activist. He was one of the founders and the last remaining director of the Jewish relief organization, *Rue Amelot*, which functioned in occupied France during the Second World War and saved many Jews. He was arrested by Nazis in 1943 and perished as 6 millions Jewish victims of the Holocaust. David Rapoport was the true *lamedvavnik*, one of 36, thanks to whom our World exists.

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## Biography of Author



*Yaroslav Mikhailovskyi was born in Khmelnitsky (former Proskurov) on Aug. 31 1973. From 1991 to 1996, he studied in the History Department of the Kamianets-Podilsky University. After graduation, he worked as a school teacher, a researcher for the Regional Local History Museum, and also Department of Cultural Heritage Protection in Khmelnytskyi region, as well as in the Department of Anthropology of the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. From 1997 and on, he participated in the search and reburial of graves of unknown victims of wars and political repression of the 20th century. In 2007, he received a Masters Degree in History from National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.*

*Mikhailovskyi was born and raised in the town with rich Jewish history, and thank to this circumstance, from his childhood he was fascinated with the traces of Jewish life, both material and non-material; that's why he prepared the article on David Rapoport. Currently he is researching the activities of the Committee for Assistance to the Jewish Victims of Pogroms of 1920-23. He also became a volunteer with the Khmelnitskiy Jewish charitable foundation "[Hesed-Besht](#)".*

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