

Jewish Motol: Genealogical and Family History Bibliography

Itzhak Epstein
May 13, 2003

For my grandmother
Hayah Fruma Epstein
Born 1874 in Motele
Died October 1942 at Dobrovolie near Pinsk

This bibliography's primary purpose is to identify the written resources available to genealogists and family historians researching the Jews who lived in Motol, or Motele as it was called by our ancestors, between its annexation by Russia from Poland in 1795 and the annihilation of its Jews on August 2nd and 3rd 1941. It is not intended to provide general information about genealogy and Jewish history. Nor, with the exception of one cluster of families, is it intended to deal with specific Motele family histories. While I have read some of the bibliography's entries fully, I only browsed through others.

Comments, corrections and suggested additions are welcome.

Itzhak Epstein
P.O. Box 20128
New York, NY 10025
USA
Itzhak.epstein@earthlink.net

I -- THE JEWS OF RUSSIA AND POLAND

Only a few books, all in English, are listed. There are obviously many additional worthwhile sources

1. Baron, Salo W. The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets: A comprehensive history from the earliest settlements to the present time. New York: Macmillan, 1964. 415 pages.

Until page 200 the book deals with Tsarist Russia. Still the basic text on the subject.

2. Zborowski, Mark and Herzog, Elizabeth. Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetle. New York: Schocken Books (paperback), 1962. 452 pages.

The 1952 classic from the anthropological point of view.

3. Wischnitzer, Mark. To Dwell in Safety; the story of Jewish migration since 1800. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948. 368 pages.

Why and how they got from there to elsewhere.

4. Marcus, Joseph. Social and political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919 - 1939. Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983. 569 pages.

The best English language comprehensive book on Polish Jewry in the inter-war years that I saw.

II -- POLESIE

Polesie has been defined in several ways. It is often synonymous with the Prypiet Marshes. The broadest definition is that of a trapezoid whose larger base is formed by the Kiev-Mogilev line and its parallel smaller base consists of about 110 km (or 70 Miles) along the Bug around Brest. Motole researchers are mostly interested in the northwestern part of greater Polesie. Even the few listed sources do not provide an adequate understanding of how the Jews of Motol related to the communities around them. As one progresses with her/his genealogical research he/she discovers how our ancestral families ranged all over the western Prypiet marshes and somewhat even as far north as Slonim and Volkovysk.

Motol, 52° 19' N 25° 36' E, was in the Kobryn Uezd (district) of Grodno Gubernia (province) until the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917. Between WWI and WWII it was in the Drohiczyn district of the Polish the Gubernia of Polesie. It is near the center of Polish Polesie which constituted an irregular rectangle of roughly 110 miles from east to west and 50 miles from north to south. While Motol's Jewish community gained its independence from Pinsk's in the 1760s it continued to relate to Pinsk as its central city. The Jews of the villages and estates near Motol often related to Motol as their central community. However, such yishuvukim might have also related to a neighboring shtetle; such as Yaneve (Ivanovo) to the south, Homsk to the west, Lohishin to the east or Telhan to the north.

6. Hoffman, B. (editor). Toiznt Yohr Pinsk [The Thousand Years of Pinsk]. New York: Pinsk Branch 210 of the Workmen's Circle, 1941. 497 pages.

Yiddish. Especially useful are pages 287 - 297 which deal with an overview of Polesie.

7. Levin, Yosef. Antopol: Mitoldoteha shel kehilla ahav bepolesiyah [Antopol: From the history of a Jewish community in Polesie]. Tel Aviv: self published, 1967. 164 pages.

Hebrew. Contains an essay on Polesie (pages 20 - 35) that uses much of the TYP article above. Sometimes opinionated but readable by those who know Hebrew but not Yiddish.

8. Spector, Shmuel. Pinkas Hakehilot: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities: Poland, Vol. V: Volhynia and Polesie. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990. 341 pages.

Hebrew. pages 209 - 218 deal with the Jews of Polesie.

9. Rabinowitsch, Wolf Zev. Lithuanian Hasidism. Translated from Hebrew by M.B. Dagut. London: Valentine Mitchell, 1970. 263 pages.

The best available source about the Weingartens and Hasidism in Polesie.

III -- MOTOL MEMOIRS

These writings provide a glimpse of how our ancestors lived. Some of these memoirs dealt mostly with daily life in Motele. Genealogy, if at all, was a minor concern of the writers. While they described families and individuals, they were often vague about how the actual relationships were formed. Some of these writings provide rich information about specific families. Most of the literature relates to the Chemerinsky/Chemerinsky/Fialkov/Weingarten/Weizmann/Shapiro group of families. Though memoirs by members of Motol's leading families are available, we know little about life from the perspective of its poorer Jews.

10. Chemerinsky, Hayim (Reb Mordechele). Ayarati Motele [Motele My Shtetle]. Edited by Alter Druyanov with advice from Hayim Fialkov. Glossary by Yom Tov Levinsky. Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1951. (First appeared in Reshumot Vol II, 1927 pages 5-124.) 209 pages.

Hebrew. This 1917 deathbed classic provides an excellent description of Jewish Motol of about 1865 - 1880. It also provides some background about earlier decades and impressions of how Motol changed by the early 20th century. The author describes his own family's immediate genealogy in some detail. He also describes several dozen individuals. Unfortunately, many names were altered by the editor. I have been told that a new edition was published recently.

A new Hebrew edition of Ayarati Motele was published in 2002 by the Hebrew University Magnes Press with a forward by Dr. David Assaf.

A reasonable attempt to translate the book into English can be found at the YIVO Library in New York. It seems to be a photocopy of a word-processed document. I am trying to obtain an electronic version.

11. Weizmann-Lichtenstein, Hayah. Betzel Korateinu: Pirkei zichronot mibeit abba [Under Our Roof: Memoirs from my father's house]. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1948. 258 pages.

Hebrew. More autobiographical than Ayarati Motele by Reb Mordechele's first cousin once removed. Her version of some accounts sometimes differs with Chemerinsky's. The first 75 pages take place in Motol. 1880 -1895.

12. Weizmann, Chaim. Trial and Error. Harper & Brothers: New York, 1949. 498 pages.

The autobiography of a very public person and the foremost Jewish leader of the first half of the 20th Century -- Lichtenstein's brother who left for school in Pinsk in the mid 1880s and by page 16 of the book. Not everything he writes about his childhood should be taken literally.

13. Weizmann, Rahel Leah (as told to Jean Jaffe). "Mamme Veitzman" [Weizmann's Mother]. Der Tog. (Serialized.) April-May 1938.

Yiddish. Chaim and Hayah's mother's version of what her children would recount in their autobiographies around a decade later. Jaffe seems to have recycled some of the contents in Hebrew and English elsewhere (see below).

14. Yarden, Shmuel. Sipurah shel Motele [Motele's Story]. Bnei Brak: Self published, 1978? 200 pages.

Hebrew. Memoirs from the late 1920s - early 1930s when the author was less than 10 years old. Might have been aided by his family. The book provides a useful update of Ayarati Motele's communal description. It deals in some detail with the author's immediate family. However, it contains very little genealogical information.

IV -- THE SHOAH

15. Klavan, Avraham. "Motol". In Pinkas Hakehilot (see above under Polesie).

pages 267 - 268 provide a very short outline of Jewish Motol's history and end.

16. Hurban Motele/The Destruction of Motele:

Telling the tale of the writing, translation, production and distribution of this account of Jewish Motele's tragic end requires Reb. Mordechele's sensibilities. Alas, what can be made out of this account was left to me to outline.

16.1. The book was written in Yiddish by Aharon Leib Polik of Motele and Los Angeles, or Aaron Paul as he was known in America. According to Steve Kerlin he died in the 1990s. The Yiddish original, so it seems, was never published.

16.2. In 1956 an English translation was published in mimeograph form. Its title page says:

A.L. Polik (in English and Hebrew)

HURBAN MOTELE (in Hebrew)

THE DESTRUCTION OF MOTELE

Translated from Yiddish to Hebrew and adapted by

SZYMON JOZUK

Edited by

DR. DOV ROZEN

Published by the Committee of Mottele Survivors in Israel

Jerusalem, 5716 (1956)

16.3. An 87 page Hebrew translation whose front page gave the same information as the English one above seems to have been similarly issued in 5717(1952/3). I have seen it quoted but never saw any part of it.

16.4. For some time Motelites have been passing around photocopies of an 84 page 8.5 x 11 printed book of the English translation. I actually saw a hard (blue) covered printed book. It has no notations except a title page that says:

Hurban Motele (in Hebrew letters)

The Destruction of Motele

by Aaron Paul

16.5. In 1999 JewishGen's Yizkor Book Project, under the direction of Motele descendent Martin Kessel, issued its own English version. Its title page says:

The Destruction of Motele
Motol, Belarus
52":19' / 25":36'
Complete Translation of Hurban Motele
by A. L. Polick
Translated [from the Hebrew] and Contributed by:
Edward Ehrlich

16.6. In 5755 (1994/1995) Eliezer Chemerinsky of Netanya, Israel self published his Motele Sheli [My Motele]. The book's first part (32 pages) includes materials about Motele – Mr. Chemerinsky's life story, recent photographs of the town and a few related documents about the Shoah. The rest of the first part is devoted to his wife's family and to his messianic commitment to the Lubavicher Rebbe. Pages 33 -128 are a reissue of the 1957 Hebrew version.

V -- MORE WEIZMANNIA

Chaim Weizmann, by far the most distinguished son of Motele and these families, can be the sole subject of a substantial bibliography. The New York Public Library research library, for instance, includes 41 titles under his name in its CATNYP catalogue. However, hardly any of these works provide useful and reliable information about his family and Motele. The better ones deal well with the career of a great historical figure. The few that were included here were selected mostly because of their value to family historians and students of Motol.

17. Weisgal, Meyer W. and Litvinoff, Barnet (Editors). The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann: English Edition, 23 Volumes. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1968 - 1980.

A must resource for serious Chaim Weizmann researchers. The Biographical Indexes in each volume provide excellent information about the various people in his life. Two additional volumes deal with President Weizmann's papers.

18. Reinharz, Jehuda. Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Zionist Leader. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 566 pages.

The only useful outsider's biography about his childhood and genealogy. The footnotes and bibliography are especially helpful. The Motol part ends on page 14.

19. Reinharz, Jehuda. Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 536 pages.

The second volume of the authoritative bibliography. It does not have any significant genealogical information.

20. Weizmann, Vera (as told to David Tutarev). The Impossible Takes Longer: the memoirs of Vera Weizmann, wife of Israel's first president. London: H. Hamilton, 1967. 308 pages.

Mrs. Weizmann's memoirs are included to provide the perspective of the person who knew him best as an adult.

21. Weizman, Ezer. On Eagles' Wings. New York: MacMillan, 1977. 302 pages.

This autobiographical sequel in the family saga was co-written with Dov Goldstein. Neither Mr. Goldstein nor the unnamed translator is acknowledged in the English version. The author is, again, a very public person. Unlike his uncle who finished T&E four years before he died, E.W. published this book five years after he switched from military service to politics. This book is written from a refreshing sabra perspective; by a contemporary (or almost so) of most of this bibliography's current users. The contrast between Chaim Weizmann's wife and his nephew is sharp and the younger Weizman would not want it any other way.

22. Weizman, Ezer. The Battle for Peace. New York: Bantam, 1981. 395 pages.

The sequel to the sequel has much more politics and a little family history. There is also a Hebrew version.

23. Weizmann-Lichtenstein, Hayah. El HaGvul Hanichsaf (To the yearned for border). Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1953. 174 pages.

A continuation of the family saga in Palestine and Israel. Of particular interest is the visit to the old country in 1935 (pp 120-134.)

24. Jaffe, Jean. "From Motele to Haifa". The Pioneer Woman . December 1952.

An abbreviated retelling her Der Tog series -- dealing mostly with Rahel Leah Weizmann.

25. Jaffe, Jean. "Zikhronot al Yalduto shel Chaim Weizmann" [Reminiscence of Chaim Weizmann's childhood]. Davar, June 3, 1938, page 8.

Hebrew. An abbreviated retelling of her Der Tog series -- dealing only with Chaim Weizmann.

VI -- SIGHT UNSEEN SOURCES

I have not seen any of the items below and am not sure of their value. They should be investigated

According to the bibliography in Norman Rose's Chaim Weizmann, Jean Jaffe also wrote the following:

- "Recollections of Chaim Weizmann's Childhood" (copy in Weizmann Archives).
- "The House of Weizmann" Israel Life and Letters (November 1952).

The bibliographic reference below (in Polish lettering) from p. 328 of Vol. A(A) of the Pinsk yizkor book refers to Helena Skirmunt's memoirs. Though she was allegedly from the family's Kolodna estate (east of Pinsk) rather than from Poreche or Pesticeve (both near Motol), this is the only 19th century Skirmunt memoir of which I know. Since many Chemerinskies were employed by the Skirmunts, this book may provide useful information.

- Zaleski, Bronislaw: Z zycia Litwinski [Heleni Skirmuntowe], 1827 - 1874. Z listow I notatek zlosyl... Poznan 1876.

Steve Kerlin mentions the following two items:

- "Congregation Anshe Motele, 93rd Annual Banquet booklet. June 23, 1996."
- "'Motteler Diary". A ledger of members of Congregation Anshe Motele and their relatives in the Motele region. I have a copy of 2 pages in English. – document is in Yiddish at Spertus Museum."

A photocopy of the item below is at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati: Box 936. It is supposed to be about, among other subjects, the Chemerinsky Family. Zvulun Ravid says that Ms. Seletsky is a Motelite.

- Seletsky, Mollie. A Life to Live is not Like Crossing a Field. Typescript. 1973-1976. 250 pages.

VII -- POLESIIEN YIZKOR BOOKS AND WHY MOTOL DOES NOT HAVE ONE

Motele does not have a conventional yizkor book. However, the various published writings about it combine to accomplish what many yizkor books do. To understand why a conventional yizkor book was less likely to be issued for Motol, I compiled a list below which shows all the Polish Polesien communities which, according to Pinkas Hakehilot, had more than 250 Jews in 1921. While this demographic data should not be used to project earlier or later population sizes, it is a rough indicator of how many survivors and pre-WWII emigrants would see to it that a yizkor book would be issued around 30 to 60 years after 1921. With one exception, every Polish Polesien community of more than 1400 Jews in 1921 had a yizkor book or was part of a consortium. Of the 16 communities with 250 - 1400 Jews in 1921 5 had their own yizkor book, 4 were in consortiums and 7 had no yizkor book at all. I suspect that the commitment of very few individuals played a disproportionate role in producing yizkor books for the smaller communities. Nevertheless, many smaller communities were included in their larger neighbors' yizkor books.

**JEWISH POPULATION AND SUBSEQUENT ISSUANCE OF YIZKOR BOOKS
IN POLISH POLESIE'S COMMUNITIES**

<u>LOCALITY (In Polish)</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>YIZKOR BOOK?</u>
Pinsk	21,063	17,513	Yes
Brezsc Nad Bugiem	30,608	15,630	Yes
Kobryn	6,738	5,431	Yes
Pruzana	5,080	4,152	*
Stolin	2,489	2,966	Yes
Dawidgodoek	3,087	2,832	Yes
Rozana	3,599	2,400	Yes
Antopol	3,193	2,206	Yes
Bereza Kartuska	2,643	2,163	Yes *
Luniniec	2,83	2,045	*
Wysokie Litewskie	2,876	1,994	No
Janow Poleski	1,875	1,988	Yes
Kamieniec Litewski	2,722	1,902	Yes
Drohiczyn	784	1,521	Yes
Kosow Poleski	2,028	1,473	Yes
Szereszow	2,553	1,341	*
Domaczewo	1,057	1,337	No
Lenin	753	1,173	Yes
Motol	1,354	1,140	No
Lachwa	1,057	1,126	Yes
Chomsk	1,273	1,048	No
Dywin	1,094	786	No
Kozangrodek	1,597	783	*
Maloryta	227	753	*
Horodno	563	583	No
Pohost Zhahorodzi	593	530	Yes
Malecz	1,201	479	*
Telechany	1,508	463	Yes
Rubiel	500	349	No
Horodec	648	269	Yes
Sielec	866	250	No

* Participants in multi shtetle consortiums.

Source: Pinkas Hakehilot: Poland Vol. V. (Mostly)