



Kaplanski Chaim. Western Lithuania, late-19th mid-20th centuries. Vilnius: Samogitian Museum "Alka" and Vilnius Academy of Art, 2007

In 2012-2013, the Samogitian Museum "Alka" (Telšiai, Lithuania) finished the digitisation of a unique museum collection of glass negatives by the photographers Kaplanskis, who lived and worked in Telšiai in the first half of the 20th century. Made in the 1920s and 1930s, around 500 items were discovered in 1999 during the reconstruction of the museum. Packed in paper envelopes, for more than fifty years the glass negatives rested in a hideout in museum cellars. Set during World War II, it remained unknown for many years as museum director Pranas Genys passed away after the war.

In 2007, the Samogitian Museum "Alka" and Vilnius Academy of Art published an album *Chaim Kaplanski. Western Lithuania, late-19th mid-20th centuries dedicated to the art of Chaim Kaplanski* (ca. 1860-1935) and his family. Introducing society to their creative legacy, it completed the research and management of glass negatives that had continued for several years.

The publication of such an album is of great importance, as there were no studies presenting Chaim Kaplanski and his oeuvre. Information about the family was patiently collected in small pieces from various different

sources, which made it similar to the creation of a mosaic. We gathered much data on our expedition to Telšiai. Moreover, the museum's appeal published in the regional press and in *Lietuvos Jeruzalė (Lithuanian Jerusalem)*, a Jewish community newspaper published in several languages and distributed in foreign countries, provoked a response. A great joy for us was Chaim Kaplanski's grandchild Meyer Averbuch, who came to visit the museum from Scotland where he now lives. He provided us with valuable information which strengthened our hypothesis that the first woman photographer in Telšiai was Chaim Kaplanski's daughter Feitska Kaplanskaitė. The Kaplanskis' artistic heritage was presented not only in this publication but also through the exhibitions in 2004 held at the Samogitian Museum "Alka", and in 2005 – at the Tolerance Centre of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum that attracted the attention of specialists and lovers of photography from Lithuania as well as foreign countries.

As photography was the Kaplanskis' only source of income, the whole family worked in their photo studio. Chaim's wife Taubė Kaplanskienė was a canny, exuberant, and authoritative woman who was in charge of business and economic matters, whereas Chaim was concerned primarily with photographic art. The children were his helping hands, as from an early age they were learning the craft of photography.

Chaimas and Taubė Kaplanskis had eight children, four of which died very young leaving no offspring. A six-year old son drowned in a lake, and another one was taken by terminal illness around 1910. In 1918, a teenager daughter Bracha also died from disease, whereas the life of their youngest son Shlomo was swept away by the wave of the Holocaust. He pursued his musical career abroad but, as indicated in a newspaper *Zemaičių prietelis* (*Samogitian Buddy*), had also performed for the Telšiai community: "On 4 February, 1934 the Parish Hall housed a concert of the Cathedral Choir [...] with Mr. Kaplanski playing the violin."

Chaim's daughter Hava (b. 1897) married Moshe Averbuch from Telšiai. He was an alumnus of Telshe yeshiva (Telšiai yeshiva) but, according to his son Meyer, rather free-thinking. Supposedly, Hava and Moshe Averbuchs graduated from the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in Kaunas. Later they taught at the Girls' Jewish Primary School in Telšiai. Around 1920-1921 they left for Palestine.

Three of Kaplanski's children pursued a photographic career: Moshe, Feivel and Feitska. Moshe was the eldest son, who studied photography in Berlin. During World War I, Feivel worked for the Russian army as a photographer. Around 1920 both brothers left for Palestine. While living abroad they started families, and became professional photographers. From 1920 to 1980 they worked in Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Taubė and Chaim Kaplanskis' daughter Feitska was born around 1898. She stayed in Telšiai with her parents. People remember her as a joyful, social person. Having learnt the art and craft of photography from her father, she started to take pictures early in her youth. Photography became her family's main source of subsistence. When around 1925 she

married, her father was already of venerable age, thus together with her husband Iechak Taic she took over her father's business. This notwithstanding, Feitska remained in her father's shadow, as he had huge authority in Telšiai those days. It may have been predetermined by the community's provincial attitude towards a woman, or else Feitska may have proved to be too little ambitious. Her father having left the business, the photo studio that now belonged to Feitska and her husband continued to use a stamp with only the surname "KAPLANSKI" on it.

The family of Feitska and Iechak Taics, along with thousands of other Jewish families from Samogitian towns, became the victims of the Nazi genocide. The family was moved to the Telšiai ghetto where they were killed. With the help of the Kaplanski maid Domicelė Pagojutė, only their eldest daughter Rachel (1926-2001) survived. Risking her life, Domicelė sheltered a scared and lost teenager with frostbitten legs and took care of her as a real mother. In 1945, she helped Rachel to join her relatives to Palestine.

Illustrations in the album are presented in the following order: 1. Kaplanski family (1-25); 2. Photographs (26-83); 3. Negatives (84-220). In the descriptions, we tried to avoid any allusions to the nationalities of the photographer or people in the photos. The aim of the publication was to present photography as a universally significant cultural object. Photographs depict people who left a mark in various fields of life. Most of them were identified and indicated in the album. In order to maintain coherence, descriptions of the photographs are rather short. Names of the portrayed people, with numbers of their photographs in brackets, are provided in the index at the end of the album.

Marina Petrauskienė, Preserver and researcher of photographic collection at Samogitian Museum "Alka", catalogue editor

