

PROFILES IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY




CURATED BY JULIJA MATULYTE

ISAAK SERBOV
 (1871 - 1943)
ETHNOGRAPHER;
FIRST BELORUSSIAN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

Isaak Serbov (1871 - 1943) - ethnographer, first Belorussian visual anthropologist. In 1911-1913, funded by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, Serbov has set out to the Polesia region to seek and document remains of the ancient tribal union of Dregovichs, who, according to rumours in Minsk, maintained their archaic life-style until the beginning of the 20 C.

Serbov was calling his field research photo excursions or photo expeditions, as the main purpose of his trips was to photograph the population and environment of Polesia - villagers, their costume, biological features, mundane activities, arts and crafts, utensils, buildings, and transportation.

During his fieldwork, Serbov experienced a collapse of the stereotypes about the polesians; though some of the archaic customs still remained. The modern life was affecting Polesia and its inhabitants (ploughs, threshers and bridles were already in use, jackets and scarfs were worn by the youth). According to his accounts, he was depicting life in Polesia as it was, nonetheless; as his Kodak camera was an unseen object in the region, people were always attracted to it. Reactions varied from curiosity to surprise and fear; thus, even the situations that were not simulated (Serbov used method of reconstruction to depict decaying costumes and customs) appear to be enacted.

Despite being a slight idealisation of rural life of the region, the archive of Isaak Serbov, 435 items of which are stored in the Manuscript Department at Vilnius University Library, is an invaluable document on life in Eastern Europe of the beginning of the 20 century. 

Based on Labacheuskaya V. (2012). 'Photography Collection of Belorussian Ethnographer Isaak Serbov at the Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library: On Question of History of Creation, Attribution and Dating', Vilnius University Library Yearbook, 2012: 90-121.

Д. Дпансир, Готфруденароу.



Мавриус и гомбасир (Термандури)

С. Вуѣвир, Мисенароу.



Смивар келба на румин.

Д. Паўлюкiнцэ, Бэрнцэвенкалоу.



Васуцiнна сцуну.

Л. Шрынна, Бобруцкэкалоу.



Шына.

All photos courtesy of the Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library