

Knights and ladies parade through town of six hills

Spirit of past evoked at Mstislavl, steeped in legends and fairy-tales



Participants of *Knights' Fest* in Mstislavl meet audiences' expectations

By Olga Kudsenikova

Ladies, lifting the hems of their wonderful dresses, promenaded the streets, accompanied by noble knights. A settlement with a fortress, tents and a tilt-yard appeared on Zamkovaya Hill, where the town originated in the 10th-11th century. Anyone unaware of the *Knights' Fest-2011* being held in one of Belarus' most beautiful and ancient towns would be greatly astonished; even those coming to Mstislavl to deliberately view the festivities were surprised.

The event brought together knights of the Temple and Tevton orders, alongside archers; over 400 knights from Belarus and Russia gathered, alongside

members of historical re-enactment clubs and historical researchers of ancient Mstislavl. They began the day with a prayer service at the Carmelite Roman Catholic Church and Alexander Nevsky's Cathedral, remembering Mstislavl warriors who died for their Fatherland on July 15th, 1410, at the Battle of Grunewald. The local history and archaeology museum displays their helmets, as found in Vikhra River by local boys in the last century.

Doctor of History Igor Marzalyuk, who heads the Mogilev University's Chair for Archaeology and Special Historical Disciplines, tells us, "I admire Mstislavl, which is built on six hills, as it retains so many an-

cient sites in their original state, unlike any other region in the east of Belarus. The Mstislavl District boasts many prominent names. Local residents are proud that their central square is graced with a monument to book printer Piotr Mstislavets, rather than to a popular political leader from times past."

The parade saw costumed actors playing Piotr Mstislavets, Duke Rostislav Mstislavich (who founded the town), Duchess Anastasia Slutskaya and Stepan Polubes (both born in the Mstislavl area, with the latter making a breakthrough in making ovens in the 17th century, tiling their facades). They were followed by knights and ladies adorned in long dresses,

bright frock coats, armour and linen smock shirts and trousers.

Andrey Nelyubin — one of the enduring organisers of the event and head of the Mogilevskaya Druzhina Club — was easily distinguishable in this colourful crowd, being dressed in dark blue robes trimmed in gold and a fur hat, carrying a scroll in his hands. Like his fellow club members, he was keen to reconstruct the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, re-creating costumes (and armour) from historical documents. The youngest member of his club — Zvenislava (or Anechka) — is just six.

Rechitsa's Terra Club — Belarus' oldest historical and military club — promenaded in luxurious outfits, helmets and sparkling armour, joined by young boys and girls from Vitebsk's Naglfar Club. However, when knights from the Smolensk District appeared, spectators completely forgot their kvass and shashlyk. The strong grey haired men in splendid armour, with swords and shields and fur boots looked so authentic — as if they'd stepped straight out of the past. However, more surprises were in store, including one of the knights being called out to fight by a lady. Several years ago, Galina joined the Varta Sports Association, headed by knights Vladimir and Gennady from the Dorogobuzh District's Ozerishche (Smolensk Region). She helps sew costumes and studies the traditions and techniques of knightly tournaments, so she knows how to wield a sword, a



Ladies wearing wonderful dresses bewitch and beguile

spear, an axe and battle flail. Of course, a sword can weigh up to 2kg, while a shield weighs a significant 5kg; an entire armoured outfit weighs around 20kg. However, these were minor problems for our guests from Smolensk, who say that their interest in antiquity helps them 'escape' the routines of everyday life.

The Handicrafts' Town ensured that guests left with souvenirs of the wonderful day. Many left hoping to return one day to the ancient streets, perhaps viewing the sun rise over Zamkovaya Hill. Of course, ancient Mstislavl — called 'small Vilnius' or 'Belarusian Suzdal' — is beautiful at any time, not just on holidays.

Ilya Repin's descendants come to Vitebsk

Visitors arrive in Belarus to see places once connected with their prominent ancestor

By Semen Gerusev

In 1892, Ilya Repin bought Zdravnevo Estate near Vitebsk for use as a family summer retreat. Over the coming decade, he created *Autumn Bouquet*, *Belarusian* and *Sunrise on the Zapadnaya Dvina River*. After the October Revolution, his younger daughter settled there. His granddaughter, Tatiana, later married the son of a local priest, going on to have four children, born in Zdravnevo. The Diakonoffs worked as teachers at a local primary school, yet the stamp of 'former' people hung over them like the Sword of Damocles. In August 1930, they moved to Repin's Penaty Estate (now, a suburb of St. Pe-

tersburg and, until 1940, part of Finland). After the artist's death, they moved to France and never returned... until recently, wishing to view places in Belarus formerly connected with their outstanding ancestor.

Four twice-great-grandsons of the painter returned to Vitebsk with their families: a book-keeper, a carpenter-cabinetmaker, a physical education teacher, a trade worker and a financial consultant among the part of 18 — but not a single painter. The oldest — 59 year old Yvan Diakonoff — works as an engineer with the famous France Télécom Corporation and lives in Lyon. The youngest — 20 year old thrice-great-granddaughter Celia

Autechaud — is a student of classical literature. Many of their names are familiar to Slavs: Marina, Nadine, Veronique, Alexis, Sophie, Adrian and Serge.

Eight decades of living in Western Europe have definitely influenced the family, with only Svetlana Terekhova-Mayorgas knowing Russian. She was born in Pskov and now teaches at a French school, while also working with the Union des Russophones in France. It is she that has been organising the visit for the last two years.

"It was only a few days ago, while visiting Kiev, Chuguev (Repin's homeland) and Moscow, that we discovered Ilya Repin's true popular-



Ilya Repin's descendants visit Zdravnevo Museum-Estate

ity within the former Soviet states," admits Yvan Diakonoff. "In France, he is known only among artists and those studying Russian art."

"Of course, in visiting Belarus, we'd like to learn more about our prominent ancestor," explained Yvan's brother,

engineer and mathematician Michel Diakonoff. "Zdravnevo was where our father Kirill was born (unfortunately, no longer living). Looking at your woods and fields through the train windows, we imagined our father as a small boy, running through this beauty. It

was very exciting." The artist's descendants visited Repin's Zdravnevo Museum-Estate and a cemetery in Verkhovye, where their ancestors are buried. They also familiarised themselves with how people live and relax in the Dvina River area.