

# Tourists sure to be intrigued by time machine to country's past

12th century castle to be restored in Minsk's historical centre by 2013

By Viktor Korbut

The historical and archaeological reserve and tourist centre are to be unrivalled in Europe, stresses Sergey Baglasov, who is leading the project to restore Minsk's historical centre and reconstruct Minsk's citadel. Like all European cities, Minsk has its 'starting point' which is located between contemporary Pobediteley Avenue, Nemiga Street and the River Svisloch. In the first years after WWII, the area was surrounded by high embankments, which once housed the wooden walls of Minsk's castle. Now, the site is abandoned.

In the 1950-1960s, the ancient constructions were demolished to enable reconstruction, with archaeologists discovering the remains of ancient houses and a 12th century stone church. Later, when the tunnels for Nemiga metro station were being dug, the remains of the original gates to the city of Menesk (Minsk) were unearthed. In fact, Menesk is said to have been named after a legendary bogatyr (a heroic warrior boasting incredible power), thought to have founded the city. He would sail along the River Svisloch, grinding flour for people while gathering together

the bravest young men to become his bodyguard.

Later, Minsk was ruled by Duke Gleb, who made it the capital of the independent state in the 12th century. Sadly, Minsk Principality didn't exist long on the European map. However, the finds date from those times and are to be pro-

tected for future generations by a pavilion dome, allowing public viewing. Nearby, buildings are to be reconstructed to full scale size by scientists from the National

Academy of Sciences.

Parking in Pobediteley Avenue, visitors will be able to step back in time, into ancient Menesk from modern Minsk, strolling re-

constructed 12th century streets whose appearance has been hidden for centuries. The National Historical and Archaeological Centre is to appear on the site, exhibiting weaponry, household items and other treasures found by researchers.

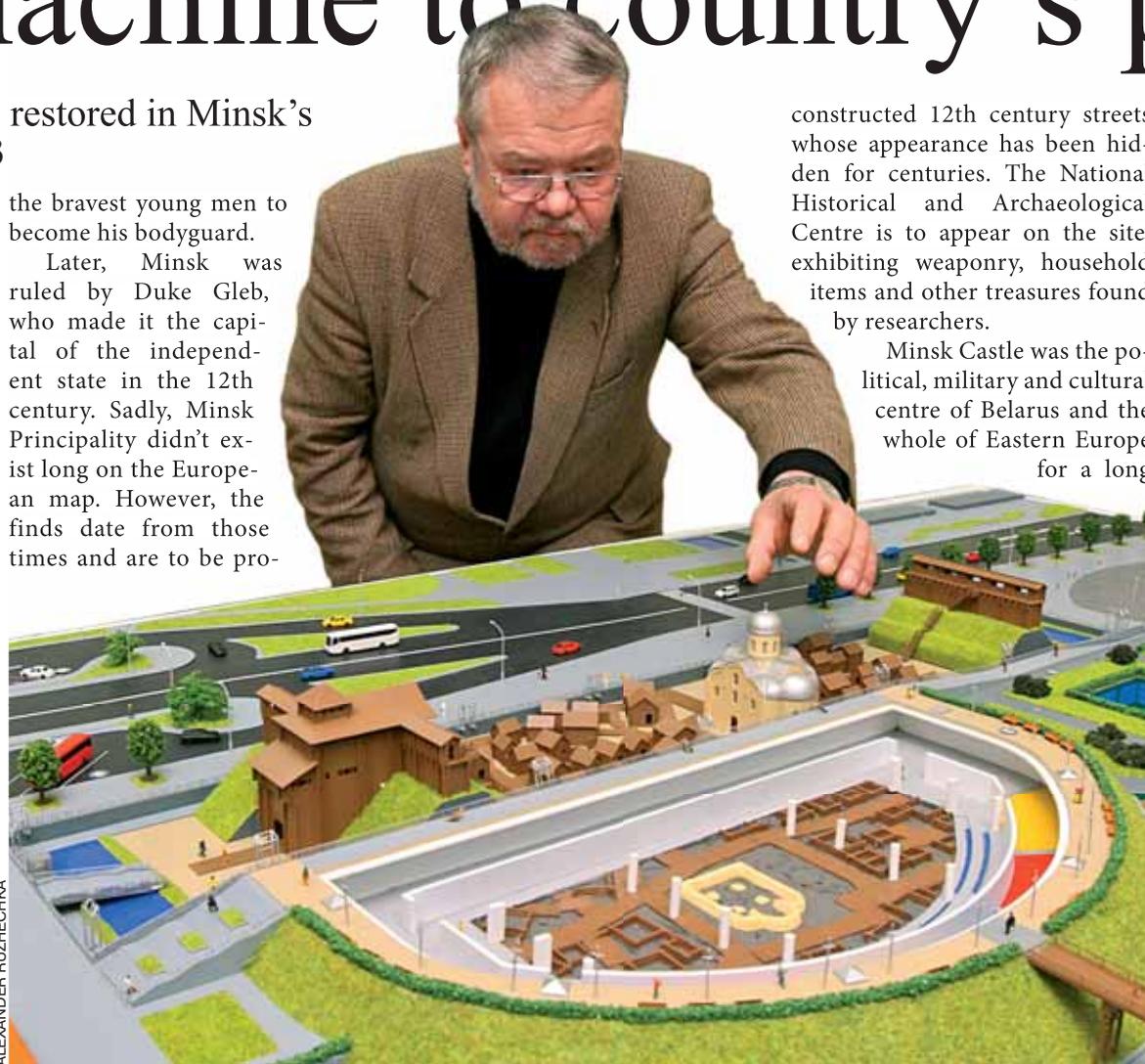
Minsk Castle was the political, military and cultural centre of Belarus and the whole of Eastern Europe for a long

time. In the 14th-16th century, it was owned by the Great Duke of Lithuania, the Polish King. It was of strategic military importance, surviving a siege by Khan Muk-

ammed-Girei of Crimea in 1505. Unfortunately, the fire of 1547 damaged the fortress and it began to lose its previous importance. Nevertheless, people continued to live there until the 1950s. Today, there is a monument to the old citadel on the bank of the River Svisloch, close to where a 12th century church once stood, alongside Nemiga metro station and the street of the same name. In 1067, a battle took place nearby, when the Duke of Belarusian Polotsk fought the Duke of Ukrainian Kiev for ownership of Menesk: it was the first event to be documented mentioning the city's name.

Reconstruction of the citadel is to begin in late 2011, to be completed by 2013. The church is being restored, alongside craftsmen's workshops and the huge entrance gates leading to the castle: situated opposite Nemiga metro station. The site will occupy almost five hectares, with the Lower Market also revived nearby: the city's first market square. Open air trading stalls will operate, beside a tented pavilion for street theatre.

Meanwhile, a sculptural composition to honour Menesk — the legendary founder of Minsk — is to be unveiled near the River Svisloch. A bridge will be constructed near the monument, uniting the castle with Troitsky Suburbs.



Belarusian capital's historical centre soon to return to original appearance

## Books in never-ending motion

Librarians are saddened by the fact that young people tend only to borrow reference books rather than reading fiction for pleasure. Perhaps it's unfashionable to read these days. However, a new trend is emerging, with literary lovers leaving their books in public places, to be picked up and 'borrowed' by others. It's a wonderful way of widening the readership of a single edition, with cafés and clubs being used as exchange points

By Denis Brovorov

The Belarusian National Technical University was the first to support the idea in our country. Several years ago, the Director of its scientific library, Alexey Skalaban, passed an internship in Sweden. At the airport, he saw a huge glass case of books, which he learnt were available for anyone to read. After reading, the idea was to leave the book in another safe place, so it could continue its journey. It was a great idea. The question was only where such books might be kept in Minsk.

"Initially, we created a shelf in the reading hall of the University's scientific library. Later, we installed a case in the main building. It's available to everyone," explains Mr. Skalaban. "You might ask why we need such a facility. Simply, we want to encourage young people to read. Book-crossing is an easy way to do this."

Alexey is looking at a website devoted to book-

crossing. "Look, we've set free almost 700 books," he admits with pride. "Our editions have been swept away from the shelves." On the day I visited, I saw only



Book-crossing gains momentum

two books in the case, each inscribed: 'This book is not forgotten' or 'The edition you hold in your hands is no longer a book in its usual

sense; it's part of a global library'. The inside cover has a plate stating that it is part of the book-crossing programme, alongside a registration number showing

who donated the book and when.

The case is being replenished by library staff, students and even residents

of neighbouring apartment houses. Additionally, publishing houses have donated some editions. Every year, more such 'safe' places are found. Not long ago, a Minsk night club installed a shelf of books. While some people dance, others gather by the shelves of books, magazines and discs. "We've subscribed to several magazines, while books are brought in by our guests, staff and musicians. This is how our collection grows," says Yan Busel, who co-owns the club. "We don't play pop music, so you won't see books written by popular authors either. We don't register our editions on the special websites devoted to book-crossing either, as our visitors usually just read at the club. They seldom take an edition home, although it's not prohibited."

Book-crossing is gaining momentum, with safe shelves found in many libraries, as well as public catering and educational establishments. No doubt, it's a great way to attract visitors.

## Marc Chagall's pupil returns to homeland



Artist's works donated to Vitebsk museum

Russian collectors Isaac and Lyudmila Kushnir, from St. Petersburg, donate 62 works by Belarus-born Anatoly Kaplan to Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk: paintings, drawings and his illustrations of Sholem Aleichem's works

Isaac Kushnir admits that, despite never knowing Kaplan personally, he is carrying out the artist's wish to send his pictures to his homeland. Natalia Kozyreva, a candidate of art history, who heads the Russian State Museum's 18th-20th Century Drawings and Watercolours Department (in St. Petersburg) stresses that most of Kaplan's works remain in private collections abroad, with the Kushnirs owning a significant portion. Now, the best works by the

painter are also to be held in Vitebsk.

The Director of the Marc Chagall Museum, Lyudmila Khmel'nitskaya, plans to exhibit the collection separately, allowing it to tour the Republic. The exhibition will spend an especially long time in Rogachev, where Kaplan was born. In fact, Isaak Kushnir and his wife also plan to donate a considerable part of their collection to Rogachev.

In 1918, the artist moved to Vitebsk, studying under Chagall, who headed the Commissariat on Art in the Vitebsk Province at that time. Chagall recommended that Kaplan go to Petrograd to learn to paint. Anatoly Kaplan is an acknowledged Soviet master, who allowed local culture to influence mainstream contemporary art.