

Memory forever lingers on ‘fair-haired consul’

How did Belarusian Iosif Gashkevich compile the first Russian-Japanese dictionary, and teach citizens of Japan how to use a camera and to sew European clothes?

By Lyudmila Minakova

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Iosif Gashkevich is being celebrated worldwide, having been included on the Calendar of Commemorative Dates for 2014-2015 by the UNESCO General Conference.

The amazing traveller was a diplomat, being among the first to explore East Africa and rural China. He was an entomologist, an orientalist and linguist, and collected his own amazing collection of flora and fauna from Indochina, Japan, the Philippines and Korea. He became the first Russian consul to Japan after rising from reasonably modest beginnings in the Minsk Province.

Exile to Beijing

Gashkevich was from a family of priests and was destined to follow in their footsteps, finishing his studies at the Minsk Theological Seminary in Slutsk. As the best graduate, he was sent to St. Petersburg’s Theological Academy, where he showed ability in learning foreign languages and became enthusiastic about translating the Old Testament of the Bible from Hebrew into Russian. The Holy Synod viewed such an initiative as ‘criminal’; Iosif’s similarly-minded friend was punished, while he was sent into exile for ten years — to a Russian theological mission in Beijing.

Gashkevich began to study Chinese culture and its natural landscapes, writing articles about rice and potato growing, and silk-worm breeding. He even wrote

a book on *Chinese Application of Mascara, Ceruse [skin whitener] and Rouge*. His interests were wide-ranging, covering astronomy and meteorology, as well as various cultural aspects.

Japanese travel

Gashkevich’s ties with the East continued when he was sent to ac-

isolation. Now, it opened its harbours to Russian ships.

Gashkevich made friends with Japanese priest Tachibana Kōsai, who was later to help him publish the first Russian-Japanese dictionary, initiated during his time in the Asian Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Russia — and continued while he taught at St. Pe-

and the sailors cared not for Iosif’s protestations of being a civilian. He was sent to Hong Kong and only returned to his homeland after the signing of a peace treaty between Great Britain and Russia. Gashkevich returned to Russia only briefly, being recommended by Putyatin for appointment as the first consul to Japan — where he served from



Japan. An Orthodox church in Hakodate. Iosif Gashkevich mission was located nearby.

company Russian admiral and diplomat Yevfimiy Putyatin to Japan, acting as his translator and adviser, in 1855. As an expert in Eastern traditions, he helped negotiate the signing of the first Russian-Japanese contract. Japan, had forbidden foreigners to approach its coast for centuries, living in self-imposed

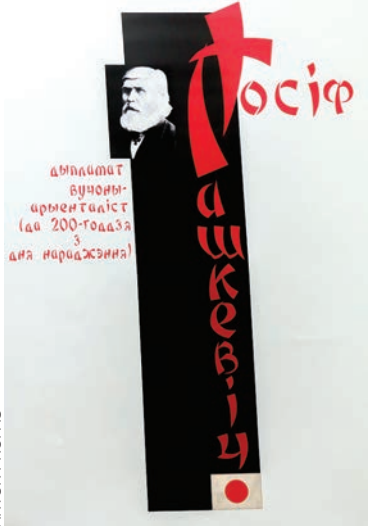
tersburg’s University. As an imperial citizen, Tachibana could have been cruelly punished for speaking to a foreigner.

Iosif hid away on a Russian ship headed back to Russia and had the misfortune to be taken captive on coming across a British vessel. It was the time of the Crimean War

1858 until 1865.

With love to the East

At that time, the Japanese were wary of foreigners so even consuls were forbidden to travel upcountry. However, they liked Gashkevich and called him tenderly the ‘fair-haired consul’. His popularity was, in some part, likely to have originated in his



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having organising the opening of a Russian school for Japanese children in Hakodate and free medical aid for local people. He also organised lessons in navigation and shipbuilding for the Japanese and sent six Samurai to study in Russia.

Those Japanese who studied seamanship received a lighthouse lantern, barometre and other equipment in long time used in Europe. Under his direction, Hakodate tailor Kidzu Kakiti mastered photography and opened the first photographer’s studio in Japan — later, also, a workshop for tailoring European clothes.

After returning from Japan, Gashkevich served in the Asian Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Russia for several years. In 1867, he finally decided to return to his native home however, in Belarus, buying a small house in Mali, in the Ostrovets District. There, he began studying eastern philology and wrote a book on *The Roots of Japanese Language* — published after his death.

Gashkevich is buried in the Ostrovets District and a commemorative plaque is placed in Mali; in Ostrovets, near the office of the regional newspaper, a bust stands in his honour. A Minsk street is named after Gashkevich and his memory is respected abroad. A gulf in Korea and some kinds of rare insects (discovered by Iosif) are named after him. His bust is also found in Hakodate. Even after death, the ‘fair-haired consul’ is remembered by those for whom he cared. No doubt, he would have been delighted to see how the Japanese people have made their mark in the civilised world.

Travelling for treasures in one ancient fortress

By Sergey Smirnov

Grodno offers treasure hunt in Old Castle

Grodno historical-archaeological museum is now offering visitors the chance to take part in a treasure hunt. Aimed at middle and senior school pupils, as well as college students, the game allows for teams of 5-20 people. Of course, the aim is to encourage youngsters to explore the museum and learn as they go. The game takes them stage-by-stage in search of the treasures of Stephen Báthory which, according to legend, are hidden in the Old Castle.

The museum provides each team with necessary equipment and gives a ‘briefing’ before the game begins; several teams can then set off simultaneously. Staff are now creating a similar



Gates of the Old Castle in Grodno open for tourists

game for other age categories.

Grodno historical-archaeological museum is one of the oldest and largest in Belarus, housing items from Grodno royal castles of the 16-18th century. The Old Castle has 19 muse-

um halls showing materials from the history of Grodno and the region — including the nearby Nieman. In the courtyard of the Old Castle is Bottom Church: typical of the Grodno architectural school of the 12th century.

What use is fun?

By Yulia Leonova

International Fun Theory competition aims to improve urban living — including in Minsk

The essence of the competition is simple: people are invited to think up ideas which are not only useful, but amusing. The ‘fun theory’ originates with the Swedes, who launched the contest in 2009, resulting in the Swedish capital’s metro gaining musical steps and its parks and squares unique recycling bins which light up, giving virtual points, on being used. The ‘cheerful’ containers have raised the quantity of collected bottles 50-fold.

This year, in advance of the Ice Hockey World Championship,



MinskFun invites teams of two or more people to think up an interesting idea, for implementation with minimum help. The winner will receive a grant of \$1,500, explains organiser Sergey Sakharov. He notes, “We all love something fun — especially when it is used for good. This simple experiment is helping many countries achieve impressive results.”

The jury of the competition is headed by the Chairman of the Committee for Architecture and Town Planning, of the Minsk City Executive Committee, Nikolay Vlasukha. The top five innovations will be placed for public voting and the winner announced on 18th April, with two weeks given for project implementation.