VLADIMIR LEVIN

Maps, Synagogues, the City of Vilne, and Zalmen Szyk

Annotation: The absolute majority of maps of East European cities marked only one or two major synagogues, while tens or hundreds of smaller synagogues and Jewish prayer houses were omitted. Using Vilnius as a case study, the article argues that this omission was not only a consequence of viewing the Jews as a 'not indigenous' part of the population, but also reflected the reality. The absolute majority of synagogues and prayer houses had no role in the cityscape of Vilnius and other cities of Eastern Europe, and therefore were not noticeable to non-Jewish people. Either synagogues and prayer houses were situated in courtyards, or they had no external features designating them as Jewish sacred places. Only the Great Synagogues and the Choral Synagogues of 'modernised' Jews attempted to be visible and prominent in the cityscape. The discussion of the issue of visibility of Jewish sacral buildings is based on the Yiddish guidebook to the city of Vilnius published by Zalmen Szyk in 1939. This book is a unique work, which combines the description of Vilnius 'in general' with special attention paid to the Jewish public institutions existing in the city, the majority of them synagogues and prayer houses.

Keywords: Vilnius, synagogues, Jewish history in Eastern Europe, maps, guidebooks, Zalmen Szyk.

According to the 1897 Imperial Russian census, 63,996 Jews constituted 40 per cent of the people living in the city of Vilna. Numerous descriptions testify that those Jews were highly visible in the streets and squares of the city: the majority of them spoke, dressed and behaved differently from their Christian neighbours, be they Roman Catholic or Russian Orthodox. Therefore, one has to ask whether this visibility of Jews among the people of Vilna/Wilno/Vilnia/Vilnius/Vilne was also articulated in the cityscape. In other words, did the identity of Vilna's Jews find its expression in the architecture of public buildings constructed by

the Jews and serving their needs? Were those buildings prominent enough to be noticed by the non-Jews?

Until the early 20th century, Jews possessed only one type of public building, synagogues and prayer houses. According to the Vilne custom, only the Great City Synagogue and several others were called 'synagogues', while smaller houses of prayer were dubbed *kloyzn*. In the first half of the 20th century, there were more than a hundred synagogues and kloyzn in Vilne: some were situated in separate buildings or wings of larger buildings, while others occupied apartments in houses, especially in the old Jewish quarter.[1]

Jewish houses of prayer on East European city maps

Maps of Vilna/Wilno/Vilnius published in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century would be of no help in locating the hundred or so synagogues and kloyzn.[2] Some maps showed no synagogues at all, while others marked only the Great City Synagogue and/or the Choral Toharat Ha-Kodesh Synagogue, constructed in 1902. Other Jewish objects usually marked on the maps were the Jewish hospital on the present Ligoninės Street, and two Jewish cemeteries. In striking contrast to the marking of all Catholic and Orthodox churches and even free-standing chapels, the maps showed only one or two Jewish religious buildings, along with marking the mosque and the Karaite Kenessa. Thus, the maps represented 63,996 Jews (according to religion) in the same manner as 853 Muslims and several dozen Karaites.[3] In other words, they treated the Jews as an insignificant and exotic minority, similar to Muslims and Karaites.

This approach by cartographers in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, marking only one or two synagogues among tens or

---

1   On synagogues in Vilne, see Vladimir Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', in: *Synagogues in Lithuania. A Catalogue*, ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, Sergey Kravtsov, Vladimir Levin, Giedrė Mickūnaitė, Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, Vol. 2, Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2012, p. 281–351.

2   A useful selection of maps can be found on the website 'O Vil'niuse', http://vilnius.penki.lt/map.html [Last accessed 12 April 2020].

3   N.A. Troinitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897 goda: Vilenskaia guberniia*, St Petersburg: Tsentral'nyi Statisticheskii komitet MVD, 1904, p. 3.

hundreds of synagogues and prayer houses, was characteristic not only of Vilna/ Wilno/Vilnius, but of other East European cities as well.[4] Only with the extensive production of Yizkor books, memorial volumes devoted to the annihilated Jewish communities, in the 1950s and 1960s, did maps appear that marked the placement of all synagogues in a town. These maps were usually drawn from memory, by Jewish natives of those towns living in Israel and America, and are the only cartographic evidence of the urban situation of synagogues, especially in smaller towns.[5]

It is possible to single out two major reasons for the approach by East European cartographers towards marking synagogues. The first is the perception of Jews as a 'non-indigenous people', not 'belonging' to Eastern Europe. The discussion of this perception is outside the scope of this article. The second, no less significant, reason is the unpretentious character of Jewish buildings, and their lack of visibility in the cityscape.

Toyznt yor Vilne by Zalmen Szyk

Vilna/Wilno/Vilnia/Vilnius/Vilne is a perfect case for studying the visibility of Jewish buildings. It is an ancient city with a well-documented Jewish presence since the 16th century. By the first half of the 20th century, it was a regional centre, but not an industrial hub, so that the city did not undergo rapid modernisation, and preserved its 19th-century cityscape. The Jewish history of Vilne in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, including synagogues and kloyzn, is

---

4   The best collection of 198 maps is the project 'Urban Maps Digital' at the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe in Lviv, https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/umd/maps/ [Last accessed 13 April 2020]. Rare examples of a map which shows more than one or two synagogues are M.M. Dieterichs' map of Odessa with four synagogues, published in 1894 by A. Schultze, http://historic-cities.huji.ac.il/ukraine/odessa/maps/diterikhs_1894_odessa.html [Last accessed 13 April 2020], and a map of Kraków with nine synagogues, published circa 1930 by Universal Bookstore, https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/umd/map/?ci_mapid=276 [Last accessed 13 April 2020].

5   Probably the first map marking all existing synagogues is the map of the shulhoyf of Vilne drawn by David Maggid in 1909 and published in the Russian-Jewish Encyclopedia. Maggid's map is schematic, and contains numerous inaccuracies. *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, Vol. 5, St Petersburg: Brockhaus and Efron, 1910, p. 581–582.

well reflected in contemporary writings. Besides the 'usual' archival materials produced by the state and community bureaucracies, like building permission, rabbinic elections and various reports, there are three major contemporary sources on Vilne's synagogues. The first is a brief chapter written in 1917 and published in 1918 by Khaykl Lunski, the librarian of the Strashun Library and former *unter-shames* of the Old Kloyz.[6] In this work, Lunski mentioned by name 80 kloyzn, but described only those situated in the shulhoyf and in Jewish Street. The second source is the description of the kloyzn probably prepared in 1942 by Avrom Nisson Yaffe, the secretary of Rabbi Haim Oyzer Grodzenski. It was written in German, and was probably commissioned by the Judenrat for the Einsatzstab Rosenberg.[7] Yaffe described 110 synagogues and kloyzn, and provided their addresses, short histories and basic descriptions.

The third source is *Toyznt yor Vilne* by Zalmen Szyk, published in 1939.[8] Szyk's work is a travel guide to Vilne/Wilno, written in Yiddish and intended for Jewish visitors to the city. It appeared a century after the publication of the first Murray's Handbook for Travellers and Baedeker-Reiseführer, but to the best of my knowledge, it is the first and only travel guide in Yiddish to an East European city or country (in contrast to numerous travelogues and local histories). In his 'Introduction', Szyk states that he initially envisioned a travel guide, but the work expanded 'to allow Yiddish readers and Jewish tourists to get acquainted with Vilne, its history, development, antiquities, institutes and organisations'.[9] The first volume of the book, published in 1939, is a detailed street-by-street description of the city, with thematic chapters like 'Flora of the Vilne District', 'Length of Vilne Streets', 'Names of Vilne Streets', 'Churches',

6   Khaykl Lunski, 'Vilner kloyzn un der shulhoyf', in: *Vilner zamlbukh*, ed. Tsemakh Szabad, Vol. 2, Vilna: N. Rosental, 1918, p. 97–112. It was reprinted as Khaykl Lunski, 'Vilner kloyzn, di yidishe gas un der shul-hoyf', in: *Fun Vilner geto: geshtaltn un bilder*, Wilno: Farlag fun dem fareyn fun di yidishe literatn un zhurnalistn in Vilne, 1920, p. 55–72. This chapter was also published in instalments in the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-tsfirah*: H. Lunski, 'Ha-'kloyzim' be-Vilna, ḥatzar beit-ha-kneset ve-rehov ha-yehudim (lefanim u-vi-shnot 1916–1918)', *Ha-tzfirah*, No 138, 4 July 1921, p. 2–3; No 139, 5 July 1921, p. 2; No 40, 6 July 1921, p. 2; No 141, 7 July 1921, p. 2.

7   Avrom Nisson Yaffe, 'Wilna und Wilnaer Klausen', Lithuanian Central State Archives in Vilnius (LCVA), F. R-1421, Ap. 1, B. 505.

8   Zalmen Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, Wilno: Gezelshaft far landkentnish in Poyln, 1939. I am grateful to Professor Motti Zalkin for sharing his copy of the book with me.

9   Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 2–3.

'Squares', 'Bridges,' etc. The prepared second volume was never published, but its table of contents, included in the first one, shows that it contained chapters on Vilne's Jewish organisations, and famous Jews and some non-Jews in the city.[10] Szyk also planned to publish a third volume, with supplementary material and numerous illustrations.[11] Thus, had the second volume been published, it would have resembled other interwar collections and almanacs describing Jewish Vilnius,[12] rather than a guidebook for tourists.

The book starts with variants of 'A Programme for Visiting Vilne', which reflect the approach of an educated and socially conscious Jewish visitor. For a visit of half a day, Szyk proposed the following dense programme: Ostra Brama (Aušros Vartų) Street, Town Hall Square, Wide (Didžioji) Street, the 'Ghetto,' the shulhoyf and the Strashun Library, the university, the cathedral, Castle Hill, the Old Jewish Cemetery, and the YIVO. If a visitor had a full day at his disposal, the programme should also include the Rossa (Rasų) Catholic Cemetery with the 'Pilsudski Mausoleum', Napoleon (today Simonas Daukantas) Square, and the An-sky Jewish Museum.[13] The programme, therefore, reflects Szyk's statement that he 'tried to provide a general picture of Vilne, paying special attention to Jewish Vilne, but without detracting from other parts of the city.'[14]

The 'general picture of Vilne' presented by Szyk is mainly polonocentric, which is not surprising after almost two decades of the city belonging to the Second Polish Republic. The 'special attention to Jewish Vilne', however, undermines the integrity of the Polish narrative, and makes it easier for Szyk to include generous mentions of other non-dominant national and religious groups. Thus, there is a chapter 'Lithuanians in Vilne', followed by chapters on Belarusians, Karaites and Tartars, and the chapter 'Vilne in Yiddish Literature', followed by chapters on Vilne in Hebrew, Belarusian, Russian, Polish, German and French literature, and on Vilne's Yiddish proverbs. (Lithuanian literature is probably omitted because Szyk did not know the Lithuanian language.)

10 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 519–520, cf. also p. 3.

11 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 3.

12 Tsemakh Szabad, ed., *Vilner zamlbukh*, Vol. 1, Vilna: N. Rosental, 1916; Tsemakh Szabad, ed., *Vilner zamlbukh*, Vol. 2, Vilna: N. Rosental, 1918; Moritz Grossman, *Yidishe Vilne in vort un bild: ilustrirter almanakh*, Wilno: Hirsh Matz, 1925; E.I. Grodzeński, ed., *Vilner almanakh*, Wilno: Farlag 'Ovnt-kurier', 1939.

13 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 6–7.

14 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 2.

The multinational character of the city and the narrative is stressed by the unexpected appearance of title-page information not only in Polish but also in Esperanto: '*Z. Šik. 1000 jaroj de Wilno.*'

The Jewish 'dimension' of Vilne in the first (and only existing) volume of Szyk's book is expressed in three ways. First, there is a chapter entitled 'Historical Dates of Jewish Vilne', which follows the chapter 'Historical Dates of Vilne'. Second, there are detailed descriptions of the streets that are considered part of the 'Ghetto' (Jewish, Gaon, Klaczki [today M. Antokolskio], and Glazier [Stiklių] streets), the shulhoyf, and the kloyzn in the old Jewish quarter. Third, when describing other streets, Szyk always mentions the kloyzn situated there, although without providing details. A distinctive feature of his book is that tourist descriptions are intermingled with Yiddish poetry about the sights described. This feature will be dealt with below.

Since Szyk wrote for a visitor who was actually seeing the site in question, he did not engage in describing space and architecture, concentrating instead on history and contemporary developments. Some descriptions of kloyzn are accompanied by charts with texts of memorial plaques and of the title pages of *pinkasim*, while the Great City Synagogue, the Old and New Kloyzn and the Synagogue of Hevra Kadisha are represented by photographs by Tsinoveits, which were also published in 1938 in the book *History of the Jewish Community in Vilna* by Israel Klausner.[15] Thus, Szyk's book followed the pattern of photographing Jewish houses of prayer in Eastern Europe which developed in the first half of the 20th century: the Great Synagogues and their precious ritual objects were usually well photographed, while the exteriors and interiors of smaller prayer houses were rarely recorded, unless people were photographed in their prayer halls.[16]

The constant mention of synagogues and kloyzn, as well as other Jewish places, creates a unique picture of Wilno, where the Jewish 'dimension' of the city is interwoven with its general history and non-Jewish monuments. Szyk was the last in a succession of local Jewish authors who wrote about the Jewish

---

15 Israel Klausner, *Toldot ha-kehilah ha-ivrit be-Vilnah*, Vilna: Ha-kehilah ha-ivrit be-Vilnah, 1938.

16 On the issue of photographing, see Vladimir Levin, 'The Social Function of Synagogue Ceremonial Objects in Volhynia', in: Sergey Kravtsov, Vladimir Levin, *Synagogues in Ukraine: Volhynia*, Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center and the Center for Jewish Art, 2017, p. 144.

history of Vilne. His predecessors Samuel Joseph Finn and Hillel Noah Maggid-Steinschneider, and his contemporaries Khaykl Lunski and Israel Klausner, wrote about the Jews *per se*, without a connection with the rest of the city.[17] Finn and Maggid-Steinschneider provided a complete picture of Vilne's Jewish elite, without mentioning non-Jews at all; Lunski described the Jewish experience in the early-20th century in Vilne; and Klausner was interested in the 18th-century Vilne Jews. Zalmen Szyk, in contrast, took the exclusively Jewish material, and placed it within a general context. For example, in his book, the memorial plaque to the Russian-Jewish sculptor Mark Antokolsky is presented next to memorial plaques to Vilna Orthodox saints,[18] Adam Mickiewicz and Józef Pilsudski. The description of three Jewish cemeteries is followed by descriptions of all other cemeteries, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim, and military ones, as well as the legendary tumulus of Gediminas.[19]

Szyk created a tapestry in which the general and Jewish geographies of Vilnius are interwoven, an approach that became popular only in the early 21st century. As opposed to recent guidebooks, however, his work was designed exclusively for the Jewish, Yiddish-speaking tourist.

The visibility of Vilne's synagogues and kloyzn

According to Szyk and all other descriptions of Jewish Vilne, the centre of Jewish life until the Holocaust was the Great City Synagogue and its courtyard, the shulhoyf. Erected apparently in 1633, the synagogue was situated in Jewish Street, in the middle of the block, and was screened from the street by adjacent

---

17 Samuel Joseph Finn, *Kiryah neemanah*, Vilna: Romm, 1860; Hillel Noah Maggid-Steinschneider, *Ir Vilna*, Vol. 1, Vilna: Romm, 1900; Hillel Noah Maggid-Steinschneider, *Ir Vilna*, ed. Mordechai Zalkin, Vol. 2, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003; Khaykl Lunski, *Fun Vilner geto: geshtaltn un bilder*, Wilno: Farlag fun dem fareyn fun di yidishe literatn un zhurnalistn in Vilne, 1920; Khaykl Lunski, *Legendes vegn Vilner goen*, Wilno: Farlag 'Di naye ydishe folksshul', 1924; Israel Klausner, *Korot beit-ha-almin ha-yashan be-Vilnah*, Vilna: Ha-ḥevrah le-historiyah ve-etnografiyah al shem Sh. An-sky be-Vilnah and ha-kehilah ha-ivrit be-Vilnah, 1935; Klausner, *Toldot ha-kehilah ha-ivrit be-Vilnah*.

18 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 356–357.

19 Ibid., p. 403–455.

buildings.[20] In the 17th and 18th centuries, it probably towered over the surrounding edifices. In the early 19th century its eastern gable was embellished by two impressive wooden neo–Classical colonnades, which Marija Rupeikienė calls 'the only example of "pure" professional Classical architecture in Lithuanian synagogue architecture'.[21] The upper colonnade had four Corinthian columns, while the lower one was originally comprised of 12 Doric columns; probably during the repairs of 1893, their number was reduced to ten. By the early 20th century, when numerous photographs of the synagogue and the Jewish quarter were made, only the gable with colonnades and the southern façade, facing a narrow courtyard, could be seen. The construction of the colonnades testifies to the awareness of the Jewish community of the Great City Synagogue's visibility and its role in the cityscape. The synagogue colonnades mimic two important neo–Classical buildings of Wilno, both built with prominent colonnades at their entrances: the Catholic cathedral (erected in 1783), and the Town Hall (1799). In contrast, the synagogue colonnades had no practical purpose, and were not accessible to the public. This fact strengthens the assumption of their symbolic role in establishing a kind of architectural dialogue with those Christian buildings. Like the cathedral, the seat of the bishop, the Great Synagogue was the most important religious building to its community. Like the Town Hall, the seat of the city's autonomous administration according to Magdeburg Law, the synagogue housed the administration of the autonomous Jewish community, the *kahal*. During the 19th century, however, the prominence of the synagogue's columned gable faded, and by the early 20th century, it could be photographed only from several spots on Jewish Street, or from the roofs of the old Jewish quarter.

The placement of the City Synagogue in the middle of the block was not a specific feature of Vilne. The majority of known Great Synagogues in other East European towns were situated in courtyards, known as shulhoyfn, synagogue courtyards in Yiddish.[22] Neither was this feature restricted to Jews alone. Other

---

20 On the history of the Great City Synagogue, see Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 284–292.

21 Marija Rupeikienė, *A Disappearing Heritage: The Synagogue Architecture of Lithuania*, Vilnius: E. Karpavičius publishing, 2008, p. 98.

22 On Great Synagogues and shulhoyfn, see, for instance, Vladimir Levin, 'Synagogues in Lithuania: A Historical Overview', in: *Synagogues in Lithuania: A Catalogue*, ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin et al., Vol. 1, Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2010, p. 24–34.

religious minorities acted in a similar way. For example, the Lutheran church in Vilna (established in 1555, rebuilt in 1662) was also situated in a courtyard, and it is currently completely invisible from the street, which is called German (Vokiečių) because of the church. The Armenian cathedral in Lviv/Lwów/ Lvov/Lemberg (established 1363), also stands in the middle of a block.

The shulhoyf of Vilne that emerged around the Great City Synagogue had 12 kloyzn in the early 20th century.[23] Only one of them, the Kloyz of the Vilna Gaon, faced Jewish Street. It was completely rebuilt in 1867–1868, and acquired a remarkable street façade with wide segmental arched windows, a gable and oculi. All other kloyzn in the shulhoyf lacked articulated façades.

The same could be said about 24 kloyzn situated in the narrow lanes of the old Jewish quarter.[24] Some of them were founded when the Jews were restricted to this quarter, but the majority emerged in the 19th century, when Jews lived in all parts of the city. The last kloyz in this area, that of the Hakhnasat Orḥim Association, opened in 1930. Many such kloyzn were established by members of the Vilna Jewish elite in their own houses, as an expression of their social status and personal piety. Others were founded by Jewish professional associations, and served as offices of Jewish guilds. All of them were in courtyards, and none faced a street. For example, the Leyb Leyzer Kloyz in the large building on Jewish Street adjacent to the shulhoyf had a prominent entrance portal with a semi-circular gable, but this portal was situated in the courtyard. Another kloyz with a remarkable façade, known from photographs, is the Ḥevra Torah Kloyz (I am grateful to Juozas Jankus, who reattributed these photographs). It, too, was situated inside the narrow Ramayles Passage, and was hardly visible from the street. Even if one takes into account the fact that the courtyards in the old Jewish quarter functioned as public spaces, and not as private closed territories, the kloyzn were not sufficiently visible to play any role in the cityscape.

We may suppose that the kloyzn in the old Jewish quarter were hidden in courtyards because of the lack of space and the density of the buildings, but the synagogues and kloyzn in other parts of the city were erected in a similar way. Many of them were situated in courtyards, like the preserved Pundik Kloyz at 9

---

23 On the synagogues in the Vilne shulhoyf, see Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 283–304.

24 On the synagogues in the Old Jewish quarter, see Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 304–312.

Žemaitijos Street (1882), the Beit Midrash by the Green Bridge at 13 Žygimantų Street (around 1860), and the Kloyz of the Jewish Almshouse at 11 Pamėnkalnio Street (early 20th century). Even the last private kloyz in Vilne, built by a member of the traditional elite, Mordechai Epstein, in 1915, was situated in a courtyard (3 Gėlių/4 Šv. Stepono Street).[25] It is easily understandable that the placement of a kloyz in a courtyard wing of a private house allowed the owner to use the premises facing the street in a more profitable way as shops and expensive apartments for rent. The courtyard situation of the Almshouse Kloyz, however, suggests that this pattern was dictated not only by economic calculations. The initial placement of the kloyz in the building constructed in 1875–1878 is unknown, but in 1884 the kloyz was situated in the basement, and after 1887 on an upper floor of the building, with windows on Pamėnkalnio Street. Between 1897 and 1909, a separate wing for the kloyz with elaborate façades was erected in the courtyard.[26] This placement was probably in line with the tradition of erecting synagogues in courtyards; it also allowed the kloyz to be more spacious, and embellished the courtyard that doubled as the almshouse garden.

Large communal synagogues, like the New Town Synagogue and Beit Midrash on Naugarduko Street (established circa 1840 and 1866), and the Great Synagogue and the Great Beit Midrash of Šnipiškės (established in the 18th century), were also situated inside courtyards, which in practice were shulhoyfn, structurally similar to the courtyard of the Great City Synagogue.[27] The Virshubskaia Synagogue in Antakalnis (1907) had a very distinctive façade, but it was also hidden in a courtyard.[28]

Some of the synagogues and kloyzn outside the old Jewish quarter faced the street, like the preserved Zavl Kloyz at 6 Gėlių Street,[29] the destroyed Soldiers' Beit Midrash in the New Town (1887), Poplavy Beit Midrash (1903), Lomboblat or Kievsker Kloyz (1908), and the Ḥayei Adam Kloyz of the Carters (1909).[30] Their façades, however, were relatively ordinary, and were distinguishable from

25 On the preserved synagogues in Vilne, see Aliza Cohen-Mushlin et al., eds., *Synagogues in Lithuania. A Catalogue*, Vol. 2, Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2012, p. 243–252, 268–273.

26 Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 246.

27 Ibid., p. 326–328, 331–333.

28 Ibid., p. 334–335.

29 Cohen-Mushlin et al., *Synagogues in Lithuania*, Vol. 2, p. 263–267.

30 Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 324–325, 328–329, 336–337.

the surrounding buildings only by semi-circular arched windows, which were usually absent in houses. Moreover, the entrances to these synagogues were situated in courtyards.

The Poplavy Beit Midrash, Lomboblat Kloyz, Ḥayei Adam Kloyz, and the Chimney Sweeps' Kloyz (1889) were situated on the upper floors of their buildings, while the ground floor was used for shops. Thus, those synagogues were integrated into their built surroundings. The buildings which comprised commercial premises on the ground floor and the prayer hall in the upper one could be considered a distinctive 'large city scheme' of synagogues, which differs significantly from small towns, where there was no need to combine shops and synagogues in one building.

The Chimney Sweeps' Kloyz on Žemaitijos Street is a case where the clearly Jewish architectural identity of the building was changed. The design for the kloyz prepared by the architect Mikhail Prozorov in 1889 demonstrated a remarkable façade in the neo-Moorish style, a style that was fashionable in the European synagogue architecture of that time, and was generally considered to be Jewish.[31] Prozorov's new drawing, submitted to the authorities in 1891,

---

31 On synagogues in the Oriental or neo-Moorish style in Europe, see, e.g., Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964, p. 198–214; Carol H. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1985, p. 81–85; Harold Hammer-Schenk, *Synagogen in Deutschland: Geschichte einer Baugattung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (1780–1933)*, Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1981, p. 251–309; Hannelore Künzl, *Islamische Stilelemente im Synagogenbau des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984; Dominique Jarrassé, *L'âge d'or des synagogues*, Paris: Herscher, 1991, p. 134–149; Dominique Jarrassé, *Une histoire des synagogues françaises: entre Occident et Orient*, Arles: Actes sud, 1997, p. 213–258; Dominique Jarrassé, *Synagogues: Architecture and Jewish Identity*, Paris: Vilo & Adam Biro, 2001, p. 171–201; Ivan Davidson Kalmar, 'Moorish Style: Orientalism, the Jews, and Synagogue Architecture', *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., 7 (2001), p. 68–100; Eleonora Bergman, *Nurt mauretański w architekturze synagog Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX i na początku XX wieku*, Warsaw: Neriton, 2004; Rudolf Klein, 'Oriental-Style Synagogues in Austria-Hungary: Philosophy and Historical Significance', *Ars Judaica* 2 (2006), p. 1–18; Vladimir Levin, 'The St. Petersburg Jewish Community and the Capital of the Russian Empire: An Architectural Dialogue,' in: *Jewish Architecture in Europe*, ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, Harmen H. Thies, Petersburg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2010, p. 192–198; Saskia Coenen Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, s.v. Oriental-inspired architecture.

as well as later photographs, shows that the style of the façade was altered to a mixture of neo-Renaissance and neo-Gothic.[32] Thus, it seems that the congregation changed the style during the construction work, so that, although still remarkable, the building lost its Jewish associations.

The only meaningful exception to this pattern of 'avoiding', if not 'concealing', the Jewish identity of the prayer house is the Choral Toharat Ha-Kodesh Synagogue on Pylimo Street. Built according to a design by Daniel Rosenhaus in 1902–1903 for the 'progressive' community of maskilim and Jewish intelligentsia, this synagogue was 'proudly Jewish'. It faces one of the main streets of the city with a prominent neo-Moorish façade, attracts the attention of passers-by with a huge arch, and has a dome, although not seen from Pylimo Street, but easily observable from other spots in the city.[33] Like other Choral Synagogues in the Russian Empire, the Toharat Ha-Kodesh was meant to be a publicly significant edifice, with a prominent role in the cityscape. Its founders and builders envisaged the representative function of this synagogue as an embodiment of a different style of Jewish worship, in line with social norms of educated Europeans, and therefore made it especially visible not only to Jews but to non-Jews as well.[34]

Conclusions

This short survey of the urban situation and visibility of Jewish houses of prayer in Vilne shows that the architectural representations of traditional Judaism were extremely modest. Most artistic attention was invested in the Great City Synagogue, but it was hidden in the shulhoyf. The majority of kloyzn were unremarkable: either they were hidden in courtyards, or had no exterior features that would distinguish them from surrounding buildings, or were hidden and devoid of exterior signage. The available visual materials originate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but there is no reasonable basis to suppose that in the 18th and 17th centuries the situation was any different.

---

32 Levin, 'Synagogues, Batei Midrash and Kloyzn in Vilnius', p. 314–315.

33 On the synagogue, see Cohen-Mushlin et al., *Synagogues in Lithuania*, Vol. 2, p. 253–261.

34 On the Choral Synagogues and their representational functions, see Vladimir Levin, 'Reform or Consensus? Choral Synagogues in the Russian Empire', *Arts* 9 (2020), p. 1-49.

It is hard to provide a comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon, in whole or in part. It could be because the difference between the public street and the private courtyard in the old Jewish quarter was minimal: courtyards functioned as public spaces, and the two most famous Jewish courtyards in Vilne, Ramayles Hoyf and Durkhhoyf, eventually became public passages. It could be that this was a time-tested way of circumventing the restriction on the number of synagogues imposed by the Catholic Church. It could be that the kloyzn were perceived as a 'vernacular' space vis-à-vis the splendid Great City Synagogue. It could be on account of the general disregard for the outer appearance of Jewish houses, often mentioned in 19th-century descriptions; the lack of modern aesthetic considerations, and the desire to invest greater effort in embellishing interior spaces seen only by the congregation. It could be that East European Jews tended less to appropriate public spaces visually by displaying Judaic symbols: since the annihilation of the Jews, the former Jewish streets and quarters show no visual signs of a Jewish presence.

Whatever the reasons may be, it is clear that non-Jewish people walking through the streets of Vilna/Wilno/Vilnius, as in other centres of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, would hardly notice most of the more than a hundred synagogues and kloyzn. They would certainly be attracted by the shulhoyf, but would be able to observe only the gable of the Great City Synagogue, and would surely notice the Choral Toharat Ha-Kodesh Synagogue. The other synagogues would easily escape their attention. Therefore, the omission of tens and hundreds of synagogues from the maps of East European cities had a very material reason: they were barely visible to the outsider who was not part of local Jewish society.

One of the distinctive features of Zalmen Szyk's guidebook is that he presented his city to the tourist through the lens of literature. He did not know that in the early 21st century, researchers would speak about reading the city as a text, but he extensively brought texts, mainly poetic, which described the city. One of these poems, 'Vilne – Yerusholayim de Lite' by Shmerele Sharafan, is dedicated to the poetic description of Vilne's synagogues.[35] It includes the following lines:

---

35 Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 174–177.

ווי שטערנדלעך זײנען די קלויזן צעשפּרייט

אַװוּ נאָר מען קערט זיך, אַװוּ נאָר מען גייט.

קלויזן אַריבער די הונדערט אַ סך

פֿון יעטװײדער בראַנזשע, פֿון יעטװײדער פֿאַך [...]

זיי ליגן זיך אַלע װי פּערל צעשפּרייט,

אַװוּ ס'זײנען ייִדן אין שטאָט נאָר פֿאַרזייט.³⁶

Like stars are the kloyzn spread out
Wherever you go, wherever you turn
More than a hundred kloyzn
Of every trade, of every guild [...]
They are placed like scattered pearls
Wherever the Jews are planted in the city.

Given the tour we have just taken, it would be more correct to say not 'placed like scattered pearls' but 'concealed like scattered pearls'. And the poet indeed stressed this 'concealing' by saying that each kloyz 'rests hidden and modestly' (*bahaltn un tsniyesdik rut*), 'quietly and humbly, without uproar or noise' (*nor shtil un basheydn, on tuml, on rash*), and that only the Choral Synagogue is different and remarkable by its glow. Thus, besides the Choral Synagogue, only a Jewish eye could capture those 'stars' dispersed through the entire city. Zalmen Szyk combined this 'Jewish view' with the general outlook of the city, but he did it in a Jewish language, only a few months before the beginning of the destruction of Jewish Vilne in 1939.

Accepted 2021 11 16

---

36 Ibid., p. 176.

Žemėlapiai, sinagogos, Vilnius ir Zalmenas Šykas

Santrauka

Absoliučioje daugumoje Rytų Europos miestų žemėlapių būdavo pažymėtos tik viena ar dvi pagrindinės sinagogos, o dešimtys ar šimtai mažesnių sinagogų ir maldos namų likdavo nepažymėti. Remiantis Vilniaus atvejo tyrimu, straipsnyje teigiama, kad taip buvo ne tik dėl to, kad žydai traktuoti kaip miesto gyventojams „nepriklausanti" grupė, bet ir dėl anuometinių istorinių aplinkybių. Vilniuje ir kituose Rytų Europos miestuose dauguma mažų sinagogų ir žydų maldos namų nebuvo svarbūs kraštovaizdžio objektai, todėl nežydai jų nė nepastebėdavo. Šie kulto pastatai paprastai stovėdavo vidiniuose kiemuose ir dažniausiai neturėdavo jokių išorinių bruožų, padedančių juos atpažinti kaip sakralinės paskirties vietas. Vilniaus miestovaizdyje architektūriškai išsiskyrė ir dėl to buvo svarbios tik dvi sinagogos – Didžioji ir Choralinė, „modernioji". Žydų sakralinių pastatų matomumo klausimas aptariamas remiantis 1939 m. išleistu Zalmeno Šyko vadovu po Vilnių jidiš kalba. Ši knyga – unikalus kūrinys: viena vertus, Vilnius jame aprašytas „bendrai", antra vertus, daug dėmesio skiriama mieste veikusioms žydų viešosioms institucijoms, kurių dauguma kaip tik ir buvo sinagogos ir maldos namai.

Raktažodžiai: Vilnius, sinagogos, žydų istorija Rytų Europoje, žemėlapiai, kelionių vadovai, Zalmen Szyk.