

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 27, No.3 - Fall 1981

Editor of this issue: Saulius Sužiedėlis

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1981 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



OLD LITHUANIAN SYNAGOGUES

While the literature of Icchokas Meras reflects the most recent, and tragic, experience of Lithuania's Jews, the following photos represent some of the country's oldest Jewish architectural monuments. The larger synagogues of the cities naturally have served as the centers of Jewish culture and have architecturally blended into the urban environment. On the other hand, the old synagogues of Lithuania's smaller towns, often with elaborately carved eaves reminiscent of traditional peasant homes, contain unmistakable elements of Lithuanian folk architecture. Thus, the old wooden synagogues represent both unique elements of Lithuania's cultural experience and part of the history of Lithuanian folk art and architecture. Unfortunately, most of this cultural heritage was destroyed during the Second World War. A particularly tragic case was the example of Jurbarkas, where the local Jewish community was forced to dismember the historic synagogue of the town during the summer of 1941, just before its own brutal annihilation.

These forgotten and rare glimpses of Lithuanian Jewish culture are provided through the courtesy of Bronius Kviklys who has devoted many long years in collecting an extensive archive of photographs dealing with virtually all aspects of Lithuania's cultural landscape.



The eighteenth-century archway to the Kelmė manor which once served as a library (Courtesy of Bronius Kviklys).



The new synagogue in Kelmé. A 1938 photo by J. Lingis (Courtesy of Bronius Kviklys).



The old Jewish synagogue in Vilnius before the war.



A contemporary view: the Jewish cemetery in Vilnius today.



The synagogue of Jurbarkas, a town on the Nemunas River in western Lithuania, probably built and rebuilt during the 17th and 18th centuries.



The old wooden synagogue in Kelmė, the site of one of Lithuania's oldest Jewish communities.



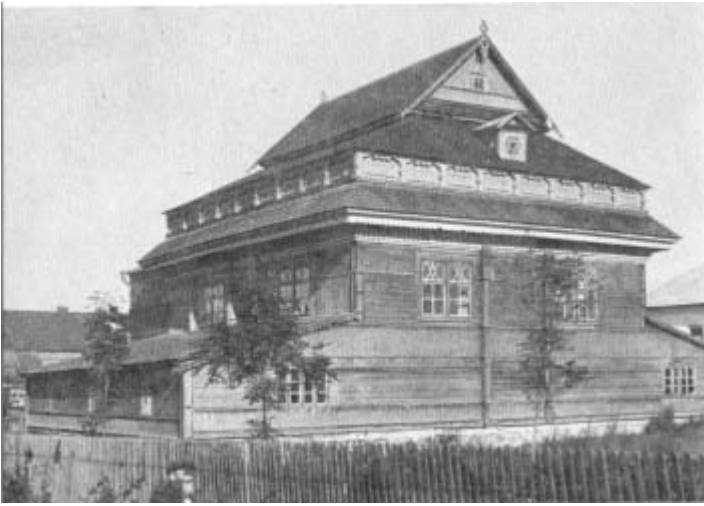
The synagogue of Šaukėnai in western Lithuania, probably built in the 17th century.



Šaukėnai — detail of a wood carving.



Šiaulėnai — the bimah of the synagogue (the rostrum for the reading of the Torah).



The old wooden synagogue in Vilkaviškis. It is thought that the first synagogue on this site dated from the 17th century.



An old sketch of the synagogue in Šiaulėnai, a small town in north central Lithuania.



The synagogue in Švėkšna, a town along the Baltic coast southeast of the port of Klaipėda.