

LITHUANIAN RELIGIOUS ART

Vol. II: DIOCESE OF ŠIAULIAI

Part 2: DEANERY OF ŠIAULIAI

Book 1: Agailiai – Juozapava

Summary

This book is a part of the series “Lithuanian Religious Art” continuing the publication of the research on artistic heritage found in Lithuanian churches. Seven books comprising Volume I of this series published from 1996 to 2007 presented the architecture and art of the churches and chapels of all six deaneries of Vilkaiviškis Diocese one after another. Since 2008, the series has focused on the research of artistic heritage in the Diocese of Šiauliai. The entire Volume II of “Lithuanian Religious Art” is dedicated to it. The scope of research presented in Volume II is broader than that of the books comprising Volume I. The original structure of presenting the data on the basis of deaneries and the arrangement of churches and their items within each deanery in alphabetical order based on their geographical names has been retained but Volume II has a different layout that allows larger and more conveniently arranged illustrations. When it became evident that only one book is not enough to discuss the whole artistic heritage of any of the five deaneries of Šiauliai Diocese, Volume II was divided into five Parts, one for each deanery, consisting of several books (as many as needed for the comprehensive description of the said deanery).

Joniškis Deanery, the oldest deanery in the diocese, was the first to be thoroughly researched. From 2011 to 2015, the material related to its churches and chapels was published in the following three books of Part 1 “Deanery of Joniškis” of Volume II of the “Lithuanian Religious Art”: Book 1: „Balkaičiai–Joniškis“, Book 2: „Juodeikiai–Rudiškiai“, and Book 3: „Skaistgirys–Žukančiai“. Volume II, Part 2 “Deanery of Šiauliai” focuses on the architectural and artistic heritage of Šiauliai Deanery.

Book 1 of this Part presents the architecture, religious art and history of the churches of Aukštelkė, Bazilionai, Gruzdžiai and Juozapava, the chapels of Agailiai and Bridai, small shrines of Apšrujai (Gilaičiai) and Butkaičiai, and chapel-columns of Dimšiai and Gruzdžiai. It also discusses the history of non-surviving chapel of Gordai (Vijurkai) and describes Jogminai small shrine in the chapter on Bazilionai church while presenting the sculpture of St. John of Nepomuk now kept in the church that used to stand in the said shrine.

The publication retains a catalogue-like structure already used for the earlier books of “Lithuanian Religious Art” which ensures a consistent and convenient introduction to the history and cultural and artistic heritage of each church and chapel. The research begins with the history and architecture of each prayer house. Together

with the architecture of buildings, it also describes their equipment and décor elements that do not have separate articles dedicated to them. The artworks in churches and their surroundings are arranged based on the type of works and, within each type, according to their time of creation. Large pieces of equipment, such as altars, pulpit, baptismal font, and organ, are the first to be discussed, followed by furniture, paintings, sculptures, liturgical vessels, vestments and various utensils, and, finally, by bells and exterior items. Artworks and items that comprise a kit or an ensemble, are made by the same author or are related in some other way are described in the same article. The authors of artworks, persons depicted in them or other related persons are introduced at the end of respective articles in short biograms.

The texts on the history and architecture of the sacral buildings are very important for the understanding of the value and historical context of all religious items because they consistently describe the development of buildings as well as the piety traditions at a certain church or chapel and parish history. These articles complement this book on art research with a local history aspect. The book provides the first comprehensive historical research on the majority of the discussed churches, chapels and parishes that includes the re-assessment of and significant additions to any previous studies. At the end of articles on churches, the list of priests that used to administer the respective prayer house are given. Historical and artistic studies use a large variety of documents, many of them used for the first time, also textual and iconographic sources, various source literature and data accessed through internet. References and sources are referred to in footnotes and their list, together with the indexes of names and places, are published at the end of the book.

The books starts with the overview of the Deanery of Šiauliai followed by 133 articles of different length, 4 of which are dedicated to the monuments of small architecture, 9 texts discuss sacral buildings and their history and 120 articles analyse the heritage found in the said buildings. The number of actually presented items is much greater because almost forty of these articles describe complex works, paired items and ensembles consisting of several pieces of equipment or of many different images. The texts are accompanied by as many as 512 illustrations. The photographs present all described artworks or other heritage items including their fragments, inscriptions and signatures. In addition to photos taken during expeditions in 2014–2017, archival photographs are also used. They reveal the changes in church surroundings or interiors and present the previous view of some of the artworks. Particularly important photographs show us the views of once deteriorated former Aukštelkė Church, the old Agailiai Chapel demolished during the Soviet rule, completely destroyed cemetery chapels of Gordai and Gruzdžiai, former small shrine of Apšrūjai (Gilaičiai), and the authentic chapel-column of Gruzdžiai. The drawings and designs of buildings found in the archives are also included. Starting with Volume II, the authors also publish church seals that may be useful for sigillographical studies.

Most of book is dedicated to the description of the ensemble of Gruzdžiai Church of the Holy Trinity and its art and the history of parish established in the 1st half of the 17th century. The current church and surrounding buildings comprise a neo-Gothic architectural ensemble of highly professional level harmonised with a Romantic style stone building of former asylum for the poor which now serves as a rectory. The heritage of Gruzdžiai Church is abundant and is described in 56 articles. A significant part of it (altars, pulpit, confessionals, furniture, some of the paintings and sculptures, vessels and other items) are the examples of church art from the 20th century that were manufactured and created soon after the current church was built or even later. The following items are worth noting: the set of altars with unique features, a stylish painting “The Holy Trinity” painted by Aleksandras Boravskis in 1910 and an organ made in the same year by a Latvian organ master Emil Martin. The following relics from the Baroque Era surviving from the old church are valuable in terms of iconography, creators` style or parish history: three old (although over-painted) paintings of various iconography with casings depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Roch, the sculpture of Christ in Distress (*Rūpintojėlis*) of unknown origin, a monstrance from the 18th century attributed to a goldsmith from Vilnius and several old chalices.

The history of Bazilionai (Padubysis) Church of St. Basil the Great that has began in mid-18th century is really unique. This church belonged to the only Greek Catholic Basilian monastery in Žemaičiai Diocese that was famous for its school; in pastoral sense, it had actually worked as the filial church of Kurtuvėnai parish. In the 19th century, when the monastery was closed, it was turned into an Orthodox church but after World War I it became a Roman Catholic church. The current wooden church that used to have some Classicistic features has been rebuilt and some elements often seen in archaic single-towered churches typical of this region have been added, as well as some folk woodwork elements. Inside, the only item remaining from the Basilian stock is a modest altar cross, while the remaining art heritage consists of artworks and items created in the 20th century and earlier that have been transferred here from other churches. The most valuable items are: two bells made in 1732 (one was cast in Vilnius and one in Pašiaušė; a hypothetical maker of the latter has been identified), a double-sided painting of rare structure and iconography in the high altar, an expressive sculpture of St. John of Nepomuk, a stylish chasuble I, and paten II that has spent a while in Siberian exile.

A small stonework Church of St. Apostles Simon and Jude Thaddeus in Juozapava characterised as a rather early example of Lithuanian Romanticism architecture also has an interesting history. The article reveals its connection with the manor of Nagurskis, a family once influential in Samogitia, and the church itself is considered a memorial place to Dirvėnai branch of Nagurskis family. The book focuses on surviving old trompe l'oeil altars painted in the 19th century, organ and

a bell made in 1920 that has accidentally ended up in Juozapava but has a great historical value.

Aukštelkė Church of St. Anthony of Padua that has been built in the place of a wooden chapel (18th century) and, later, brick chapel (late 19th century), has been affected by both world wars. In 1915, a German attack destroyed this particularly large chapel leaving only some remains of its brick walls but it was later rebuilt by a canon Vincentas Jarulaitis who was born in Aukštelkė parish. The authors have found that its restoration was designed by one of the most famous inter-war architects Feliksas Vizbaras. A harmoniously eclectic building of Historicism style combines rendered and non-rendered surfaces and contrasting colours to distinguish between old and new brickwork, thus reflecting the dramatic history of the church in its architecture. This church contains only a few valuable artworks: several metalwork items, a stole and a bell.

The structure of this book that cannot be attributed to a certain publication type and consists of many chapters of various length including both scientific articles and purely catalogue-type descriptions was determined by the main goal of the series: to carry out a comprehensive research and present the works of Lithuanian religious art as well as possible. A systematic study of Lithuanian cultural heritage is among the main scientific priorities of the project group which is why the authors avoid a strict selection of items based on their value and significance which is a typical method in most art research publications and, instead, aim for a consistent introduction of the entirety of religious heritage and publication of complete data about the selected work of art (photograph, main data, known/possible maker, historical knowledge, completeness of research, iconography, artistic context, and value). This book is very important to the Lithuanian art research because the majority of artworks and iconographic sources are published for the first time. We believe that the selected systematisation and presentation method ensures the convenience for the future users of the book: scientists from various fields, museum experts, heritage experts, and the guardians and preservers of cultural values. It allows a comprehensive analysis of individual artistic items, at the same time providing the historical, religious and cultural context necessary to understand their value.

The editors