

LITHUANIAN RELIGIOUS ART

Vol. II: DIOCESE OF ŠIAULIAI

Part 1: DEANERY OF JONIŠKIS

Book 2: Juodeikiai – Rudiškiai

Summary

Book II “Juodeikiai-Rudiškiai” of Part I “Deanery of Joniškis” of Volume II “Diocese of Šiauliai” of serial publication “Lithuanian Religious Art” further presents the architectural and artistic heritage of churches and chapels of Joniškis deanery. The first book on this deanery included churches of Joniškis and Gasčiūnai and chapels of Balkaičiai, Ivoškiai, Jakiškiai and Jauneikiai. This second book presents the history, architecture, altars and other equipment, paintings and sculptures, liturgical vessels and vestments, processional items, bells and church utensils of Juodeikiai, Kriukai and Rudiškiai churches and Jurdaičiai, Kalnelis, Kurmaičiai, Mergiūnai, Milvydžiai and Pošupės chapels as well as tombstones located in these parishes.

Like all other books from “Lithuanian Religious Art” series, this volume reserves many pages for the history of parishes, churches and chapels and coherently discusses their architecture. These significant sections of the publication supplement knowledge on the history of Lithuanian Catholic Church and sacral architecture and provide a manifold context for the main subject of the book, namely, the works and articles of sacral art. Art objects of each location are listed by their type and the chronological order of their creation while the information about them is arranged as in catalogue and is published as texts of various lengths. The publication includes all objects of art or artistic craftsmanship found in churches and chapels during expeditions which have artistic, historical, typological or other value. Memorial monuments in cemeteries or villages are an exception; the criteria of their selection were their significance to history, art and typology as well as their ability to provide knowledge about their creators. Some of the articles include the biograms of the authors of art works or related persons. The history of churches is supplemented by lists of priests who used to administer that particular sanctuary. The book is composed of 186 articles and 505 illustrations (photographs of art works or their fragments, schemes and designs of churches). The publication is concluded with a list of archival sources and references, an English summary and indexes of names and places.

The 19th c. Rudiškiai Church of St. Philip and St. James is distinguished among others by the unity of its artistic heritage. It was rebuilt from an 18th c. chapel which had been standing in that place and retained some features from the old architecture. The interior equipment, furniture, art works and liturgical and processional items of this distinctive church with three towers represent the heritage of craftsmen, artists and local artisans of the 19th century Lithuania and Latvia. The ensemble of five neo-baroque altars of uniform style was formed in 1838-1871. It is harmoniously complemented with choir balcony, pews, pulpit, confessionals and processional altars of the same period as well as with vessels manufactured by the 19th c. Vilnius goldsmiths and paintings and sculptures created by both professional and folk artists.

Juodeikiai Church of St. John the Baptist was founded almost one hundred years later, thus its architecture and artistic heritage represents the processes of sacral art of the 1st half of the 20th century. Mykolas Dobrovolskis (Father Stanislovas OFM Cap) worked here in 1957-1960 after returning from exile and left warm reminiscences about him in the parish. The church contains several older works, the most valuable of which is a Crucifixion sculpture of a specific iconographic variety.

The book reveals the sad destiny of artistic heritage of Kriukai Church of St. Lawrence. The wooden church established in the 18th c. and rebuilt in the 19th c. and the 20th c. contained a large number of art works but the old building was destroyed by the storm of 1993, the new building has not been built and part of the valuables were scattered or have gone missing. The statues of St. Peter and St. Paul as well as unique sculptural groups of the Stations of the Cross discussed in the publication are no longer there. However, in the current temporarily equipped church, a baroque painting of the Holy Family representing the old devotional traditions of the parish, the sculpture of Jesus at the Pillar created by a 19th c. folk artist and several other valuables are stored.

The chapels of Joniškis Diocese presented in the book had been closed during the Soviet period; their buildings seriously deteriorated and artistic stock was scattered. All chapels are now refurbished and operating and part of their property has been retrieved from museums.

Kalnelis cemetery chapel which has already been mentioned in the sources of the 17th century used to have a special status; therefore, its building constructed at the end of the 18th c. creates an impression of a small church. The most distinctive art works of Kalnelis Chapel are utensils from the 18th–19th c., a bell founded in Vilnius in 1729 and a small image of St. John the Nepomuk intended for private devotion. Two other chapels built in the 18th c. (Pošupės Chapel reconstructed in the 20th c. and recently reconstructed Kurmaičiai Chapel) represent the traditional wooden religious architecture of the region. They have retained their old wooden altars and other elements, some utensils and paintings (Pošupės Chapel). Stone chapel of Milvydžiai is distinguished among other chapels of Joniškis parish by its plain but professional red brick neo-gothic façade. The chapel contains authentic neo-baroque altar, a pulpit-confessional and balustrades. Mergiūnai Chapel of St. Isidore which was built in 1923 at the initiative and funds of a local farmer is an interesting example of late folk architecture of religious buildings in both historical and stylistic aspects.

A third book on the Diocese of Joniškis is also planned which will discuss the history, architecture and art of the churches of Senoji Žagarė and Naujoji Žagarė, Raktuvė chapel and Skaistgiris and Žukančiai churches.