

## LITHUANIAN RELIGIOUS ART

vol. II: Diocese of Šiauliai

Part 2: Deanery of Šiauliai

Book 2: Kairiai–Kurtuvėnai

### Summary

This book is a part of serial publication “Lithuanian Religious Art” (the books comprising Volume 1 of this series published in 1996 to 2007 have presented the art of churches and chapels from six deaneries of Vilkaviškis diocese) and further presents the architectural and artistic heritage of Lithuanian Catholic churches. The religious artistic heritage of Šiauliai Diocese has been researched since 2008. Volume 2 of the “Lithuanian Religious Art” represents the results of this study. This volume is divided into five parts by deanery (Joniškis, Šiauliai, Kelmė, Pakruojis and Radviliškis Deaneries), each consisting of several books. The data related to the churches and chapels of Joniškis Deanery have been published from 2011 to 2015 in three books comprising Part 1 of Volume 2 of the “Lithuanian Religious Art” series.

The second book of Part 2 dedicated to Šiauliai Deanery presents, in the alphabetical order, the history, architecture, art and other heritage of Kairiai, Kuršėnai and Kurtuvėnai churches, Kybarčiai and Kurtuvėnai cemetery chapels, and the unique Hill of Crosses site. It also tells the history of Kalviškiai manor chapel that has not survived. The selection of items to be published was mostly based on their artistic and historical value but the rarity of function and iconographic value were also taken into account, as well as their being typical or unique examples. The texts on the history and architecture of the churches and chapels are very important because they help to understand the value and historical context of the religious art items. For some of the above-mentioned buildings, it is the first time when their history has been thoroughly researched. The study is based on multiple documents, many of them used for the first time, as well as on other textual and iconographic sources.

The major part of the book consists of articles dedicated to Kurtuvėnai church. Kurtuvėnai church and parish founded in late 15<sup>th</sup> century is the second oldest in Šiauliai Deanery and the oldest among the ones described in the book. The current Church of St. James the Apostle is the monument of architecture designed by Vilnius architect Marcin Knafus in the 18<sup>th</sup> century combining the features of late Baroque and early Classicism. The church commissioned by a local landowner Jakub Nagurski surpassed other typical churches of Samogitian towns and villages both by its size and other characteristics. Nagurski wanted it to be comparable to city churches of the time or impressive parish and monastery churches built

near the residences of the wealthiest houses of the GDL, which often also served as the mausoleums of their founders. The architectural grandeur of the building was echoed by the organ built in late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was one of the largest in the region (its prospect and parts of the dismantled instrument survived) and was manufactured by an “architect of Samogitia” Mateusz Raczkowski, who was a colleague of Nicolaus Jantzson, an organ builder from Vilnius late Baroque school. The ensemble of Kurtuvėnai church altars and pulpit was created later and it took a long time to complete them: from 1820 to 1893. They tell us about the changes in the artistic styles, ideas of the funders and the resources available to the parish throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three classicist altars and a pulpit built by an unknown artist from Vilnius coordinate well with two altars built under the supervision of Franzisk Lehmann in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are decorated with certain order elements and plaster mouldings typical of secular architecture.

The paintings, sculptures, liturgical vessels, and vestments of Kurtuvėnai church were created during a much longer period. The oldest items in the church are wooden baroque sculptures created in late 16<sup>th</sup> century to early 18<sup>th</sup> century that depict the Passion of Christ (“The Crucified”, “The Crucified with a Vine” and “Christ in Prison”). Other items worth noting are the carvings of the old baroque altars and sculptures of saints from the old wooden church as well as classicist statues of Evangelists now standing on the high altar. The church contains a rather large number of sculptures created from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from which the most worth noting are pretty examples mass-produced in European artistic workshops, i.e. the statues of Our Lady of Graces and the Infant Jesus of Prague, which are typical of their era and have been exceptionally popular among the faithful. A valuable discovery is the bas-relief portrait of Bishop Gasparas Cirtautas by a famous architect and sculptor Antoni Wiwulski.

The oldest painting in Kurtuvėnai church is the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Redeemer of Captives, created in late 18<sup>th</sup> century and hypothetically attributed to Michaël Josaphat Eggenfelder. Until now, no surviving works of this artist from Vilnius had been known. The paintings of St. Isidore, St. Barbara and St. George located in side altars were painted in 1820 by an unknown artist who had a characteristic painting manner. The ecclesiastical art of late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, brought from Italy, paintings depicting St. James and baptism of Jesus created by Piotr Podolski in Vilnius and double-sided paintings on processional items created by Antoni Przesłański from Šiauliai.

The liturgical vessels and vestments of Kurtuvėnai church include some examples of goldsmithery and artistic textiles that are distinguished by their artistic and historical value. Among the most valuable heritage items of this church is the set of liturgical vessels made in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century by a goldsmith Johann Christoph Banck

from Vilnius. Other items worth noting are a pair of silk dalmatics with stoles from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and chasubles donated by patrons, the Plater-Zyberk family, that have a historical value. Kurtuvėnai has preserved Easter soldiers, previously used as a decoration during the Holy Week, which are rarely found in churches today and an impressive wooden chandelier, as well as various memorial items such as the epitaphs and tombstone plaques of persons who were the patrons of the church or have been honoured for some other merits.

Kuršėnai parish is also one of the oldest in the deanery established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (and later owned by the Reformed Church for a while) but the book contains much less articles on the local church and its artistic heritage in comparison to Kurtuvėnai. The reason is the history of the church and its losses. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, several wooden churches have been built in Kuršėnai one after another. In 1842 the fourth wooden building was constructed and in 1886 a brick bell tower of Gothic Revival style designed by an architect Floryan von Wyganowski from Riga was added to its main façade. The churchyard was surrounded with a new brick and stone fence of the same style, into which a chapel was integrated. By the beginning of World War I the wooden part of the church burned down and the ruins of brick buildings were restored after the World War II. Now they are a part of the church ensemble and even dominate over it stylistically. Near the surviving tower, a brick and plaster church of basilica-type structure designed by Grigorijus Gumeniukas was built in 1927–1933. The church suffered some damage during the war and was later restored but the tower was only rebuilt in late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exterior of the church is dominated by Gothic Revival elements but their modified shapes and surrounding details reveal the influence of Modernism and Art Deco. In the interior, neoclassicist elements prevail. The ensemble of 12 altars (a rare example of grandeur from the Soviet era) created in the 1950s combines the features of both Gothic Revival and Neoclassicism. Due to its long and complicated history, the church has very few old religious heritage items because most of them were lost during World Wars as mentioned above. The majority of its artworks and equipment can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A few items distinguished by their artistic qualities and age are: a baroque chalice (its bottom part marked with a signature mark of Nathaniel Schlaubitz, goldsmith from Gdansk who has lived in late 17<sup>th</sup> century), reliquary made by a goldsmith Christian Joseph Stapeler who used to create vessels for Samogitian churches, and a classicist monstrance attributed to Vilnius goldsmiths.

A much later Kairiai church is a typical prayer house of the old Samogitian Diocese that has grown in status over the years. After the plague in early 18<sup>th</sup> century, a wooden cemetery chapel was built here, which was replaced with a new stone chapel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1911 it became a filial church of Šiauliai parish but in 1924 an independent Kairiai parish was established. During the war, in 1944,

the church was heavily damaged but was later rebuilt and expanded. After all these reconstructions, the church significantly deviated from its initial appearance and reflects its unpredictable history. The only authentic and architecturally valuable elements are side walls of the aisles characterised by an expressive combination of plastered and unplastered surfaces and a rather original grouping of openings. In addition to a few artworks of rather low artistic value created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kairiai church has a sculpture of the Crucified dated to late 18<sup>th</sup> century that has retained some baroque characteristics.

The book describes two small manor chapels: an unsurviving one in Kalviškiai and a partially rebuilt one in Kybarčiai (Kybartai). They are valuable examples of sepulchral architecture and their history and heritage significantly add to the knowledge about the culture of local nobility. A wooden chapel of Kalviškiai Manor built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was already in poor condition by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a new stone and brick mausoleum of Ławcewicz family and its tower was designed by an engineer Piotr Dorofejewski but this chapel was also destroyed during one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wars. In 1879, a local landowner Stanisław Rustejko was given a permit to build an chapel-shaped mausoleum with Classical Antiquity features designed by an engineer Szymon Górski in Kybarčiai Cemetery that has been opened in 1810s. However, the actually built chapel was quite different: a functional structure was constructed using a combination of stones and bricks. It stood abandoned during the Soviet era but was reconstructed and newly equipped in 1990s by the descendants of the original funder. The history of both above-described private chapels reveals the circumstances of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: during the period of restrictions imposed on the Catholic Church, the Tsarist administration only allowed building mausoleums on manor`s property but, being built in the shape of chapels, they also served as public prayer houses (in Kybarčiai chapel, Mass used to be held till early 1960s until the Soviet government banned Mass in Catholic chapels in the whole Lithuania).

This book also presents the Hill of Crosses site: a unique ensemble of cultural landscape and religious buildings. This is the first time when, using a large number of textual sources, publications and iconographic materials, the development of the Hill of Crosses itself (the erection, demolition and re-building of crosses and a wooden chapel and gate that have not survived) has been researched so consistently and at such a comprehensive level revealing how Jurgaičiai Mound became a sacral Christian place and the symbol of faith and national pride. New structures that have been added to this pilgrim site have been described separately, i.e. an open chapel for Mass specifically constructed on the occasion of Pope John Paul II`s visit to Lithuania in 1993 and a Franciscan convent with the Chapel of the Stigmatisation of St. Francis built in 2000. The brick and stone convent designed by Italian architects Angelo Polesello and Nunzio Rimmaudo features a harmonious

combination of the old traditional Italian monasteries and modern construction principles and integrates well into the local landscape and the entire ensemble. The series of stained glass windows by Algirdas Dovydenas and equipment created by Rimantas Sakalauskas for the convent chapel are one of the most artistic and original examples of Lithuanian religious art of the last few decades. The chapel and the convent are decorated with artworks created by other contemporary artists from Lithuania, Italy and Israel and liturgical vestments used here have been created by a textiles artist Aušra Grigaitienė.

*The editors*