

# LITHUANIAN RELIGIOUS ART

vol. II: Diocese of Šiauliai

Part 2: Deanery of Šiauliai

Book 2: Kužiai–Pavėkiai

## Summary

Book 3 of Part 2 “Deanery of Šiauliai” of Volume II “Diocese of Šiauliai” of the serial publication “Lithuanian Religious Art” further presents the architectural and artistic heritage of churches and chapels from Šiauliai Deanery. Two earlier books dedicated to this Deanery described the history, architecture and art of the churches of Aukštelkė, Bazilionai, Gruzdziai, Juozapava, Kairiai, Kuršėnai, and Kurtuvėnai, and the chapels of Agailiai, Bridai, Gordai, Kalviškiai, and Kybarčiai, as well as the Hill of Crosses site with a chapel and a Franciscan monastery (in the books, all houses of prayer were arranged in alphabetical order based on their geographical names). Book 3 of the Šiauliai Deanery of Šiauliai Diocese presents the research of the churches of Kužiai, Meškuičiai, Micaičiai and Pakapė as well as small cemetery shrines and chapels in Mimaičiai, Ožkėnai and Pavėkiai. Similarly to the previous books from the “Lithuanian Religious Art” series, in this book heritage research data are presented as texts of various lengths arranged like in a catalogue, i.e. for each church or chapel, its valuable artistic items are arranged based on their type (starting with altars and finishing with bells or outdoor monuments) and the time of their creation. The book strongly focuses on the history and architecture of the churches and chapels being described.

The majority of data have been collected during expeditions to the churches and chapels of Šiauliai Deanery: an ongoing *in situ* inspection, expert assessment and photographing of these art works has been carried out since 2014. The screening of items to be published was mainly based on their artistic and historical value, but some other criteria were also taken into account, such as the rarity of the artefacts, their typological peculiarities, or their significance in the context of vanishing traditions. Simultaneously with the expeditions, the historical research of parishes, churches, chapels, and their valuable items was carried out in Lithuanian archives, museums, libraries, parish archives and private collections. The majority of the heritage items included in all books of these series are being published for the first time and their historical research is often based on textual and iconographic sources that have not been used yet.

Book 3 of the Šiauliai Deanery of Šiauliai Diocese describes four churches from this region that have not attracted the attention of researchers until now. Two of them (Meškuičiai and Pakapė churches) used to be filial churches till mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: the former belonged to Šiauliai parish and the latter to Kurtuvėnai parish; therefore, their history is closely related to the temples with an honourable past and the collections of their heritage reflect this long-standing relationship.

Meškuičiai church was built in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it contained four and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as much as six altars decorated with wood carvings. The current brick building built in late 19<sup>th</sup> century still has multiple surviving baroque and classicist altar carvings created at different times; at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the carvings were ingeniously integrated into two majestic retables of side altars and an impressive high altar of unique artistic style was built in the chancel. The church also contains the only surviving organ built by the masters of Spiegel (Szipigel) dynasty who worked in Prussia and Lithuania, which is the only pneumatic organ still in operation in Lithuania. It also has several paintings from the former Meškuičiai church, the most notable among which are works by painter Pawel (?) Jagmin who worked in Samogitia in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: somewhat provincial but artistic paintings evidently influenced by Classicism. A processional altar, a set of funeral utensils and several textile items can also be attributed to the same style era. The influence of the classicist art is equally obvious in the set of liturgical vessels and utensils, which, in addition to a couple of nice baroque items from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, comprises several really interesting classicist utensils such as ciborium, monstrance and the remains of candlestick sets.

Pakapė church is somewhat younger: its history began in 18<sup>th</sup> century when a wooden chapel was built in a cemetery on the land of Karpiai family. Before the turn of the century it was made a filial church of Kurtuvėnai parish and in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became an independent parish with a current wooden church built in 1879. A monumental building with modest features typical of folk architecture is characterised by a baroque splendour on the inside created by the traditional elements of wooden religious architecture (galleries, doors, shape of windows), old wood carvings from Kurtuvėnai and Pakapė churches preserved in the side altars, solid benches made by local masters, and eye-catching neo-baroque equipment: the high altar and a pulpit. It also contains one of the oldest classicist organs in Šiauliai Diocese. Another item worth noting is the painting of St. Stanislaus apparently transferred from Pašiaušė and placed in a *trompe l'oeil* side altar; the painting is in a very poor condition but is decorated with a subtle casing from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The surviving authentic environment, i.e. a wooden belfry in the churchyard surrounded by a stone fence and old Pakapė cemetery, still in operation, provides the church with additional value.

The case of Kužiai church is interesting from the historical point of view. It was founded in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as a prestigious altarage of the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary of Šiauliai parish and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became a modest filial church. A series of wooden buildings replaced one another but after the church had burnt down during World War I, the efforts of an active priest Adolfas Kleiba and the parish people resulted in a nice stone and reinforced concrete building with two towers and three baroque-style altars built in 1930 based on the design of Mykolas

Songaila and Vladimiras Dubeneckis. Unfortunately, it was destroyed during World War II and the parish was forced to compensate for this huge loss by transferring a local wooden church together with its baroque altar from Gruzdžiai cemetery. Equipment and liturgical utensils were brought to Kužiai from various parishes, including a reliquary once made for Šakyna church by a goldsmith Christianus Josephus Stapeler who worked in Samogitia during the period of 1775–1800 and had a unique signature style.

Micaičiai filial church belonging to Kuršėnai parish was famous because Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, who was also a well-known Lithuanian writer and activist, served as a priest there for a very short period (1901–1902); however, it only became an independent parish in 2000. In 1915, after the old church burnt down, a new wooden church was built in the same spot in the cemetery. After World War II, the Soviet administration expropriated it and turned it into a crop warehouse. Despite the requests and some independent initiatives of the local people to repair this little church, it stood abandoned till 1988. Even so, the building of Micaičiai church—a late example of ethnic architecture—retained its authentic configuration and exterior. It also contains artworks created in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that were brought here from Kuršėnai and some unknown more distant parishes.

The book also describes three small-scale architecture items in the old cemeteries of Mimaičiai, Ožkėnai and Pavėkiai: a masonry monument of peculiar shape and already undecipherable intention built in 1935 on the hill near Mimaičiai road, a small wooden shrine dating back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century erected in the old Pavėkiai cemetery, and a brick chapel in Ožkėnai which was only built in 1993 but has a traditional shape. Their improvised little altars are decorated with sculptures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and various saints, devotional pictures, little crosses and artificial flowers. Each of them uniquely reflects the architecture and traditions of the old cemeteries of Šiauliai region.

The third book dedicated to Šiauliai Deanery uses texts and illustrations to presents 205 art and craft works (altars, paintings, sculptures, liturgical vessels, vestments, and utensils) and their groups (altars with sculptures, series of paintings “Stations of the Cross”, sets of candlesticks, etc.) located in four churches, 192 of which have not been researched or published before. In addition, it is also the first publication of a few more artworks that used to be in these churches but were given to museums during the Soviet era and now were identified during this research. The aspect of novelty, coherence and complexity of the data is relevant to any further research of art history and church history and allows to see the books of the “Lithuanian Religious Art” series as published sources of the Lithuanian cultural heritage. On the other hand, consistent historical research carried out within the framework of this project significantly contributes to the development of the local history, i.e. the history of Šiauliai region and the parishes of Šiauliai Diocese.