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The Old Jewish Cemetery in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

VYTAUTAS JOGĖLA

Nineteenth-Century Cemeteries

In the nineteenth century Vilnius became a center (one of several in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania) of Jewish, or Litvak, life. Nearly half of the city's inhabitants were Jews who earned their livelihood by engaging in commerce of one or another sort. Every ethnic group kept up its traditions according to the customs of their faith: they built houses of worship and founded organizations and schools. Each ethnic or religious group maintained its cemetery. Catholics, Protestants, and Tartars usually had cemeteries near their churches or mosques. The Orthodox in the nineteenth century did not; while Jewish cemeteries throughout the Grand Duchy most often were further away from the city center.

The city of Vilnius fits this pattern. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian Imperial government issued a decree forbidding graveyards in the city or city center. This decree was motivated not by politics but by health considerations: due to the spread of disease and epidemics it was feared that having burial

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grounds in the city might facilitate deadly outbreaks. As a result, almost all the graveyards near churches and other houses of worship in Vilnius were closed. Another reason for closing them was no less practical: due to the limited size of these burial grounds there inevitably came a time when no more space for burials was left over. This happened to the historical cemetery of the Jews.

In 1824, the leaders of Chewra Kadisza Cdoko Gdolilo, the Jewish Burial Society, asked the Vilnius governor Piotr Gorn to assign them another city-owned plot in addition to the overburdened Jewish cemetery in Šnipiškės on the other side of the Neris River.¹ But according to the Vilnius municipal prospective plan approved by the Czar in 1817, the new Jewish cemetery was supposed to be located in Antakalnis near St. Peter and Paul's Church behind the gunpowder magazines.² This land belonged to the Canons Regular, and the Vilnius governor-general gave an order to adhere to the plan and to place the cemetery in Antakalnis.³

Nevertheless the leaders of the Jewish Burial Society persisted and won a small victory. They were successful, after five years had gone by, in convincing the Vilnius governor-general that the new cemetery needed a better location. The plot belonging to the monks was near a road heavily used by Vilnius pedestrians during the summer. Thus a new plot was assigned not in the location indicated by the plan of 1817 but near a lot belonging to the former Orthodox Holy Spirit monastery called Popowsczyzna⁴. Its size was 2 tithings and 125 square fathoms (2.5 ha).

¹ Governor's writing to the Vilnius military governor Rimski Korsakov, December 13, 1824. Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (henceforward LVIA), F.378, Ap. BS 1824, B.848, L.1.

² 1824 m. Šnipiškių suburb plan. LVIA, F.378, Ap. BS 1824, B.848, L.3-4.

³ Writing to the Vilnius governor, January 1825. Ibid, L.5-6.

⁴ Writing of the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit to the land surveyor, November 24, 1830. LVIA, F.610, Ap. 2, B. 16, L.13.

While the new cemetery was not yet in place according to Jewish burial customs, the Vilnius burial society continued to bury the dead in the old graveyard. In 1830 the Vilnius police chief, carrying out the governor-general's order, forbade burials in the cemetery on the other side of the Neris River and accused the Vilnius Jewish Burial Society of burying people on top of others' graves. The society denied doing this and explained that since Jewish religious customs prohibited walking on the graves it was merely seeking to protect them by covering them with mounds of earth so that no one would walk over them.⁵ It is hard to say now which side was speaking the truth, though it is likely that burials were indeed taking place even after their prohibition since the other place for the cemetery was not yet ready then.

The Russian Imperial military fortifications that began to appear in 1831 changed, or began to annihilate, the Jewish cemetery. In that year there already stood, next to the cemetery, a one-story dilapidated brick building, pantry, and wooden stable. The cemetery was surrounded by ramshackle brick ramparts and a fence.

Throughout almost the entire period of the cemetery's existence, the Vilnius Jewish Community was able to secure permission from the authorities to have a so-called guard house either in the cemetery itself or next to it. After the fortifications were erected, the military command allowed the construction of a temporary wooden house behind the fence (at the end of the cemetery). Soon thereafter the authorities complained that the house served not only as the security guard's living quarters but as a tavern as well. It seems that later, after the Imperial Russian fortifications in Vilnius were removed, the Jewish community built for the guard's benefit a house and a utility barn near Derewnicka (now Rinktinės) Street. Fearing that the

⁵ Writing of the Vilnius Burial Society to the governor-general, October 15, 1830. LVIA, F.378, Ap. BS 1824, B.848, L.8.

ramshackle structure might collapse and thereby injure people, the city magistrate ordered it to be torn down.⁶ The community protested and argued in vain that it shouldn't be demolished, but the authorities paid no attention to their arguments and made the watchman move out of the dangerously decrepit building.

The Plot and the Fence

In 1831 the cemetery was kept up and managed by the Vilnius Jewish Community. That at least was stated in official documents sent to the imperial capital, although other archival documents show these functions to have been assigned to the Vilnius Jewish Burial Society. The difference in the terminology used here apparently is of little consequence, as the authorities did not always have a good understanding of a closed community's internal affairs and traditions. Thus on the basis of the data on the lists we can assert that the cemetery territory was not owned by the Vilnius Jewish Burial Society or the Vilnius Jewish Community. This claim is implicit in all documents and we have found no indications that it is inaccurate. It is worth remarking that the city's authorities found no evidence that the Vilnius Jewish Community paid any land taxes on cemetery property. In the column or columns of documents for indicating the plot's ownership or trusteeship it is stated that the cemetery is on land belonging to the city, the Radziwill princes, and the Carmelite Fathers.⁷

A newly found register of Jewish cemetery burial documents (*Žydų kapinių dokumentų rejestras*⁸), confirms that on

⁶ Writing of the municipal architect, January 18, 1937. LCVA, F.64, Ap.9, B.4965, L.53.

⁷ Certificate of July 30, 1831. LVIA, F. 378, Ap. BS 1831, B.2556 b, L. 75; Certificate of January 27, 1832, LVIA, F. 1286, Ap.5, B.700, L.98.

⁸ *Žydų kapinių dokumentų rejestras, Vyriausias senųjų aktų archyvas, Radvilų archyvas (Varšuva)*, (henceforward AGAD AR), section XVIII, b.17364, l.15.

April 21, 1626, Lithuanian Field Hetman Prince Kristupas Radvila awarded Jews a plot of land for their cemetery, while in 1759 another prince, Lithuanian Grand Standard-bearer Jeronimas Radvila, awarded the Vilnius synagogue a plot of land for a cemetery. A third, undated document is a petition addressed to Jeronimas Radvila by the Vilnius kahal asking for permission to bury the dead in that cemetery. But the historian Elmantas Meilus, following Izrael Klauzner, mentions the Lithuanian Cupbearer Jeronimas Florijonas Radvila who, though not owning land near the cemetery, forcibly demanded payments for protection services he allegedly offered.⁹ Thus we have two conflicting accounts of land possession and fee payments. Oddly enough, original documents about what really happened have not survived.

According to the initial version, the property appraisal commission valued the land (containing the house and the cemetery) at 4.5 thousand roubles but later, responding to the Imperial government's outrage, reduced it to 3.5 thousand roubles.¹⁰

The cemetery was rimmed by a fence 1299 arshins in length. From this one may surmise that the cemetery area was in excess of four hectares. In 1832 workers hired by the Vilnius Duma demolished the brick fence because military regulations forbade the existence of structures that could interfere with military actions. The Vilnius Jewish Burial Society asked Vilnius governor-general Nikolai Dolgorukov for permission to erect a wooden fence on the foundation of the former brick fence.¹¹

⁹ Elmantas Meilus, "Senujų Vilniaus žydų kapinių šnipiškėse istorija," pages not numbered.

¹⁰ Report of the Vilnius police chief, 1832. LVIA, F. 378, Ap. BS 1831, B.2556 b. L.228.

¹¹ Request of August 17, 1836. LVIA, F. 378, Ap. BS 1831, B.2556 a, L.785.

This was the society's second request. Archival material makes clear that the Russians removed the fence twice: in 1831, and again in 1836, when they aimed to widen the esplanade.¹² After consulting with the military command, the governor-general rejected the request because in 1832 Captain Semionov had already approved the erection of a wooden fence around the cemetery. At that time the Jewish society had agreed that if ordered by the military command it would tear down that fence in two days. But the erection of the fence caused a conflict between the burial society and the monks. While constructing it, the burial society widened it on the monastery's side – in order, as they themselves claimed, to create a pathway along the cemetery.

No documents could be found relating to how much of the cemetery's area was taken up by the military fortifications. It is known that on the right bank the military command had built a ravelin and five redoubts, and six additional redoubts were set up in the direction of the Green Bridge. However, the contemporary historian Michał Baliński claimed that beyond the Neris River in front of the arsenal three brick structures were built to store gunpowder.¹³ The Russian officials called all the fortifications on the right side of the river *mostovoe prikritie*. It seems that the dug-out ditches and ramparts built around the fortifications came right up to the cemetery. This territorial situation of the cemetery in relation to the Vilnius military fortress remained the same until the advent of Soviet times.

Apparently the cemetery's wooden fence was not kept in good condition. When the Poles occupied Vilnius in 1919, a quarrel broke out between the local Jewish community and the military units stationed near the cemetery. When soldiers began to tend their horses in the cemetery and to dam-

¹² Report of the chief of the Vilnius Engineering Team, August 25, 1836. LVIA, F. 378, Ap. BS 1831, B.2556 a, L.781-782.

¹³ Michał Baliński. *Opisanie statystyczne miasta Wilna*, 22.

age the wooden grave markers, the cemetery keeper Mejeris Zelmanovičius complained about the broken monuments of Rabbi Izrael Krejnes and of Simonas Strašūnas's mother; the wooden roof of the Gaon's monument had also been removed.¹⁴ In 1920 the Vilnius police inspector reported to his chief that the city's Jews complained of overturned markers because some people were destroying graves and the fence as well as dislodging the markers.¹⁵ The Vilnius police ordered the cemetery leadership to surround the territory with barbed wire and positioned a patrol officer in its vicinity.

But a new cement fence was built only in 1939. Four years earlier the Polish government had declared the cemetery a museum site and taken responsibility for it. During the war it was substantially damaged: the entrance to it was torn down and the southern fence was destroyed completely. In 1947 a commission, basing itself on the former lines of the fence and fortifications, determined its area to have been 2.7 hectares.¹⁶ Thus we might say that before the war the cemetery occupied a larger area: 3.25 ha.

The Soviet Period

The Soviets took away from the Vilnius Jewish Community or, more accurately, nationalized all the property it possessed and handed it over to various Soviet offices. On September 16, 1940 the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and the Interior Minister formed a special commission consisting of Chairman Petras Kežinaitis, Director of the Press and Association Section; Vincas Petronis, delegated

¹⁴ 1920 Jewish press review. Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (henceforward – LCVA), F.13, Ap.1, B.422, L.26.

¹⁵ Report to the Vilnius police chief, May 5, 1920. Ibid., L.8.

¹⁶ Cemetery Inspection Report, December 15, 1947. Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (henceforward – LYA), F.1771, Ap.11, B.274, L.13.

by the Education Ministry; and Šmerelis Maiminas, delegated by the Lithuanian Communist Party.¹⁷ Kežinaitis decided to liquidate the Vilnius Jewish Community because its continued "activity is incompatible with the aspirations of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic."¹⁸ At that time, the Jewish Community had control of about 30 pieces of real estate. In 1937 it had taken over this property from the Great Jewish Synagogue and the Cemetery Board (more precisely, the Jewish Burial Society), the Jewish members of the Vilnius Municipal Council, and other societies. In 1940, all these holdings were distributed among three Soviet agencies: the private homes and the slaughter-house went to the People's Commissariat of the Communal Economy; the museum and libraries, to the People's Commissariat of Education; and the three Jewish cemeteries, to the Vilnius Municipal Government. The actual nationalization was entrusted by the chairman to the Vilnius City and District leader. On October 22, 1940, the ancient Jewish Cemetery was turned over to the Vilnius Municipal Government: "...a lot of about 3 ha and 2552 sq m with historical monuments and remains."¹⁹

We know that after the return of the Vilnius territory to Lithuania, there were disagreements between the Jewish Community, on the one hand, and the Great Vilnius Synagogue and the Burial Society, on the other. Thus less than a month following nationalization, the leaders of the synagogue and the burial society, including Matas Strašūnas, Izaokas Margovickis, Notelis Gurvičius, Mauša Voločinskis, Icikas Pietuchovskis, and Joselis Svirskis appealed to the mayor of Vilnius and asked him to let them govern three religious ob-

¹⁷ 1940 Order of the internal affairs minister. LYA, F.L-43, Ap.6, B.608, L.1.

¹⁸ Decision of September 16, 1940. VAA, Ap. 4, B.880, L.163.

¹⁹ Property Transfer and Reception Act, October 22, 1940. Vilniaus apskrities archyvas (henceforward – VAA), F.761, Ap.4, B.880, L.90.

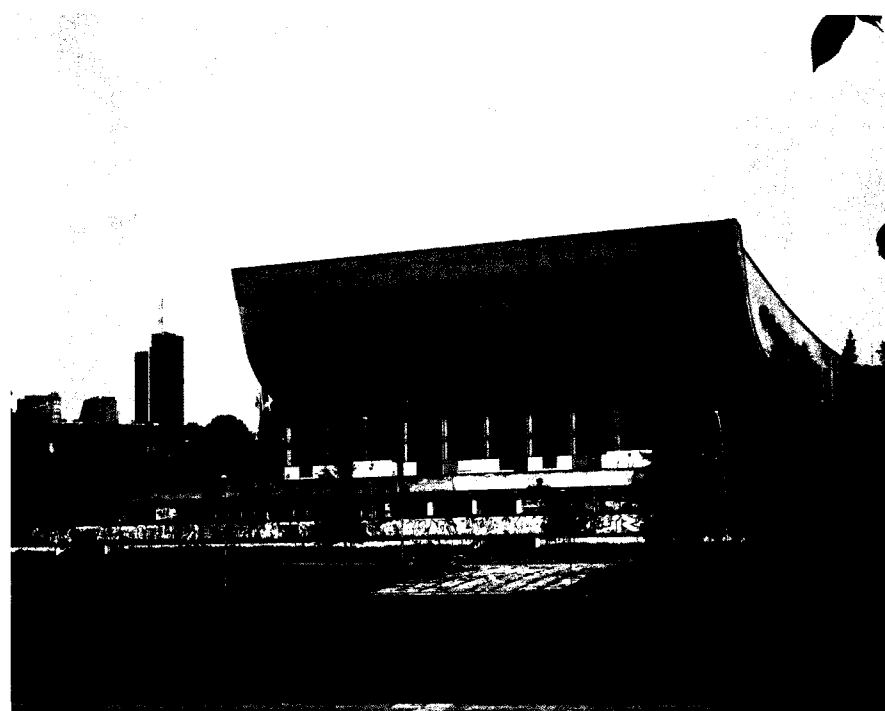
jects: the Great Vilnius Synagogue, the ritual bathhouse, and three Jewish cemeteries²⁰ (that on Kirkuto Street 5; the Old Cemetery on Rinktinės Street.; and the Ažuolyno or Dėbowka cemetery). This request came rather early because the Vilnius municipal authorities had not yet been put officially in charge of the cemeteries. The mayor was at a loss what to do but was apparently benevolently inclined because already the next day he asked the LSSR Communal Economy Commissar for advice. He thought the maintenance and administration of the cemetery would be an additional burden on the city government, whereas it would be much more convenient for the city and the Jewish Community itself if the cemetery were run by people directly appointed for this task by the municipal government. Three months later this was done: all three cemeteries were put under the charge of persons from the Vilnius Jewish Community. Legally speaking this “putting in charge” was a mere formality since all cemeteries had already been nationalized.

When after the start of World War II Lithuania was occupied by the Germans, it is not clear who looked after the Old Jewish Cemetery. On the orders of Alfred Rosenberg and under the direction of V. Šaferis, a certain Goldbergas drew up a list of the most prominent Jews buried in this cemetery.²¹ The criteria by which Goldbergas selected the most prominent graves are not clear; still, the list is valuable, not least of all because it provides sometimes extensive biographical data about the people involved: they include the most famous Vilnius rabbis, Talmud exegetes, scholars, and community activists together with their relatives. But the list is probably incomplete because only 51 graves are listed.

When after the Holocaust the Soviets returned, there were only 20,000 faithful left in the Vilnius Jewish Community. As

²⁰ Request of October 21, 1940. VAA, Ap. 4, B.880, L.41.

²¹ Senosios kapinės, 1943. LCVA, F. R.-1421, Ap.1, B.504, L.30-56.



Sports Palace. Photo by Almantas Samalavičius.

Chairman Geršonas Kabas complained to the Soviet authorities, “it is difficult to maintain even the Synagogue.”²²

The Destruction of the Cemetery

On the approach of the tenth anniversary of Soviet rule in Lithuania, the Lithuanian SSR’s Council of Ministers on May 15, 1950 passed a resolution “on the building of jubilee-related objects” which directed the Vilnius Municipal Executive Committee to build a fence along Eidukevičiaus Street

²² Report of the representative for religious affairs, 1949. LCVA, F. R-181, Ap.3, B.22, L.15.



Žalgiris Stadium.

(now Rinktinės Street) to be paid for with city funds.²³ This fence enclosed the Old Jewish Cemetery. At this same time the Žalgiris Stadium and the territory surrounding it were being reconstructed. In this stadium the Soviet government intended to hold mass celebrations.

Somewhat earlier, on July 27, 1946, when the authorities weren't yet thinking of any anniversaries, the Jewish Museum Board together with its director J. Gutkovičius requested that the Old Jewish Cemetery be put on the "protection of endangered objects" list with an appropriate plaque.²⁴ During the war no one had looked after it. The Germans had cut down all the trees and bushes as well as destroyed most of the grave

²³ Writing of the LSSR Finance Ministry, December 8, 1950. LCVA, F. R.-754, Ap. 4, B. 1946, L.79.

²⁴ Writing to the Museum and Ancient Monuments Section, Committee on Culture and Education Offices, LSSR Council of Ministers (Copy to LSSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman, Comrade Paleckis), 1946. Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministerijos archyvas (henceforward – KMA), F.16, Ap.1, B.40, L.90; Vanda Kašauskienė, "Kai stigo dėmesio"; J. Rozina, "K voprosu," 248.

markers. After the war, the picture was more desolate still: cows were pasturing in the cemetery, and pedestrians walked through it using the markers as stepping stones.²⁵ Neglected and abandoned, the cemetery less and less resembled anything like a traditional resting place for the dead. If not for the military ramparts dug out in the nineteenth century, it would have disintegrated even earlier.

In 1947 there were but a few individual monuments left in the 10-acre field, but even these remaining grave markers were not the old ones, but such as had been constructed with bricks over the previous twenty years, or, in other words, restored because inside the monuments there were placed stone boards.²⁶ For example, a dilapidated underground structure with a reinforced concrete roof and a name in black paint, stood where the Gaon had been buried.

The Soviet ruling class (*nomenklatura*), though by no means well-educated, understood that this picture wasn't pretty. Although the museum's board had written to Justas Paleckis, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR, no positive response was received. Only Bortkevičius, the chairman of the committee of cultural and educational offices, sent a copy to the chairman of the Vilnius executive committee with a request to put the cemetery in order.²⁷ But there is nothing in the archives that suggests that this request was acted upon.

It seems that the immediate postwar period was not the best time to worry about the upkeep of cemeteries. Even the graves of fallen Soviet soldiers became an object of some concern only when the afore-mentioned jubilee drew near. There

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cemetery inspection report, December 15, 1947. LYA, F.1771, Ap.11, B.274, L.13.

²⁷ Writing to the Vilnius executive committee chairman, August 23, 1946. KMA, F.16, Ap.1, B.40, L.94.

was also the matter of the generally unfavorable policies and attitudes that Stalin evinced toward the Jews at that time. The only half-way feasible way of preserving the Jewish cemetery could just be the efforts – not only in words, but in physical actions – of the Jewish community itself (which in Vilnius at that time consisted of about 20 thousand people) in tending to the ruined graves.

The news about the intended future closure of the cemetery spread not only through Vilnius itself. In 1947 the World Jewish Congress in New York appealed to the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee of the USSR for help “in preserving a monument important to all the world’s Jews.”²⁸ The Secretary of the Soviet Lithuanian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, Antanas Sniečkus, having received this request asked P. Kareckas, the chairman of the Vilnius City Executive Committee, to submit his conclusions. Kareckas did not even know in which cemetery the Gaon (referred to as Guam because of an error in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee’s letter) was buried and directed the chief municipal architect Vladislovas Mikučianis to set everything straight.²⁹ To this end a commission was formed consisting of Mikučianis; Vladas Sakas-Sakavičius (Head of the Protection of Architectural Monuments Section); Rindziunskis, senior fellow of the Vilnius Jews Museum; Eduardas Budreika, Chief inspector of the Protection of Architectural Monuments; Section-engineer architect Isakas Brancovskis; and the Jewish Community Chairman, Geršonas Kabas. The commission inspected the cemetery and came to the following conclusion: “This monument (cemetery) as well as all the recently built monuments have no historical or artistic value. Several eighteenth century (stone) boards are bricked into the northern

²⁸ Writing of the committee to comrade Sniečkus, November 6, 1947. LYA, F.1771, Ap.11, B. 274, L.1.

²⁹ Writing of A. Sniečkus, November 20, 1947. LYA, F.1771, Ap.11, B. 274, L.6.

wall (fence). The grave of Ger Cedekas (Count Valentinas Potockis, who converted to Judaism) with its “legendary” tree have been destroyed. Since its demolition, the old Jewish cemetery has been neglected and not looked after by anyone. The commission believes it would be appropriate to preserve in the cemetery’s southeastern portion a small area (20 by 20 meters) where the most valuable stone boards would be placed, since according to the general plan’s provision for a park, the rest of the cemetery territory would be used for a park.”³⁰

According to the general Vilnius plan, the stadium was to be expanded to 25 thousand seats, which meant having to expand the construction territory. The sole convenient space for such an expansion was, in the plan’s creator’s eyes, the territory consisting of the cemetery and its surroundings. There an entire sports complex was to be constructed, the idea for which had already originated in pre-war Poland, when the Polish government or Vilnius city magistrate had started preparing projects for a sports-oriented territory up to the Neris River. The chairman of the Vilnius Executive committee, Kareckas, therefore agreed with the commission’s view that “the valuable memorial boards may be placed together at a certain location in the park and concealed by plants, or else transferred to another cemetery.”³¹

In the summer of 1948 the Vilnius Municipal Executive Committee formed a working group charged with evaluating the condition of the city’s cemeteries and proposing recommendations. At that time, the Soviet government was actively shutting down churches and houses of worship in the course of combating what it called “religious fanaticism.” One of the components in this struggle was the abolishment of cemeteries. After several months, the commission presented a list of

³⁰ Cemetery Inspection Report, December 15, 1947. LYA, F.1771, Ap.11, B.274, L.13.

³¹ Writing to the Communist Party Central Committee Secretary Comrade Sniečkus, January 6, 1948. LYA, F.1771, Ap.11, B.274, L.10–11.

cemeteries supposedly unfit for further burials. On October 15, 1948, a session of the people's deputies of the Vilnius City Executive Committee decided to shut down three cemeteries and liquidate two: The Jewish one on Rinktinės Street and a Catholic one on N. Melninkaitės Street."³²

The initial proposal had been only to close the latter two cemeteries, but the deputies changed their mind after agreeing with the city's economic chief Semionov. The Vilnius plan provided that the whole territory from the Neris River along the Rinktinės and Sporto Streets be set aside for the construction of athletic facilities. On April 19, 1949, the Vilnius City Executive Committee transferred to the Committee for Physical Culture and Sports, a 3.7 hectare lot between Eidukevičiaus, M. Melninkaitės, Sporto Streets, and the Neris River"³³

In the summer of 1949 the Vilnius City Executive Committee committed itself to perform additional tasks on this territory: to create new city squares (plazas) next to the power plant and the stadium, and to erect speakers' platforms in the state stadium."³⁴ The celebration of a Soviet jubilee hastened the liquidation of the cemeteries. In the consciousness of post-war Soviet man these cemeteries were no longer existent on this territory, and the solitary monuments standing in a forlorn place no longer evoked special feelings.

In 1950 an enclosed swimming pool began to be built at the request of the Lithuanian SSR Sports and Physical Culture Committee. Its official address then was Edukevičiaus Street 1. The lot was bounded by the as yet vacant stadium territory on the North, the Neris River on the South, Eidukevičiaus Street on the

³² Decision No.604, October 15, 1948. LCVA, F.761, Ap. 9, B.110, L.291.

³³ Decision No. 223, April 19, 1949. VAA, F. 983, Ap.1, B.15, L.38.

³⁴ Writing to LSSR Council of Ministers' Chairman Comrade Gedvilas, June 29, 1949. VAA, F.1015, Ap.1, B.96, L.46.



A Blend of Soviet and post-soviet architecture, Šnipiškės.

Photo by Almantas Samalavičius.

West, and the military unit's wooden fence on the East.³⁵ The lot's size was 45 by 28 meters, and its area was 2553 sq. m. Thus the

³⁵ Conclusions of the Vilnius municipal health department's sanitary inspection team, July 11, 1952. VAA, F.1036, Ap.11, B. 157, L.51.

pool took up but a small portion of the assigned lot. The project for it was prepared by the architect Kolosovas, who complained that the lot is full of soil and rubbish that in places is 4 meters high.³⁶ Almost the whole territory from the Žalgiris Stadium to the river was covered by a layer (the closer the river, the thicker it got) of garbage and construction remnants. Yet, in fact, no geological inquiry that was undertaken, determined that layer's varying chemical composition. The best summary of these investigations was provided by a visual inspection undertaken in 1946 by members of the Vilnius Jewish community when they claimed that "the cemetery has become a site for rubbish."³⁷

We have found no traces in the archives of what happened to the monuments, but it's certain they haven't survived. Another puzzle concerns re-burials, about which no one mentioned anything prior to 1950. J. Rozina, who studied the history of the Antakalnio (Kirkuto) Cemetery, mentions the re-burial of 35 people's remains when the Jewish cemetery there was liquidated in 1963. But that list contained only 38 Jews.³⁸ But there are no archaically confirmed data about the re-burial of remains from the Old Jewish Cemetery. Even though the Šeškinės Cemetery contains references to the graves of the Gaon and other famous Jews, G. Agranovskij and I. Guzenberg, in their description of noteworthy historical Jewish places, state that "the Šnipiškių Cemetery is the Gaon's second burial site. Also buried there are the Gaon's wife, son, and Count Valentinas-Potockis Ger Cedek."³⁹ Unfortunately, the authors say nothing about the time of the re-burial.

³⁶ Note of explanation, 1953. VAA, F.1036, Ap.11, B. 92, L.5.

³⁷ Writing to the Museum and Ancient Monuments Section, Committee on Culture and Education Offices, LSSR Council of Ministers (Copy to LSSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman, Comrade Paleckis), 1946. KMA, F.16, Ap.1, B.40, L.90; Vanda Kašauskienė, "Kai stigo dėmesio".

³⁸ J. Rozina, "K voprosu," 249–250.

³⁹ G. Agranovskij, I. Guzenberg, *Litovskij Ierusalim*.

But even if such reburials actually took place, in some cases they probably were no more than symbolic, for determining the identity of remains in a devastated cemetery in which people were buried on top of each other is no easy task. The Municipal Executive Committee assigned the job of liquidating the cemetery to the Economic Section and the Burial Office. It's likely that the human remains and monument remnants dug out during the liquidation process, were ditched into various hollows closer to the Neris, because in 2002 more than 700 human bones were found in the reconstructed Rinktinės and Olimpiečių Streets accessing the King Mindaugas Bridge, then being built. We do not know who buried them there and when. Human bones were discovered by archaeologists as well when they studied the cemetery territory while heat pipes were being laid during construction. Knowing the history of Šnipiškės, we may surmise that human remains from three cemeteries may have ended up there: from the old Jewish cemetery, the Carmelite cemetery next to the Jewish, and the liquidated catholic cemetery on Žvejų Street.

At the location where the cemeteries used to be, the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports went up in the early 1970s and the whole territory was "appropriated."

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**The Old Jewish Cemetery in the Nineteenth and
Twentieth Centuries**
VYTAUTAS JOGĖLA

Nearly half of Vilnius' population in the nineteenth century were Jews. Like any other ethnic groups, Jews maintained their cemetery. Jewish cemeteries before modern times were most often far away from the city center. The old Jewish cemetery underwent significant transformations during imperial Russia's regime and was finally demolished after World War II when Soviet municipal authorities set out to modernize the former suburb of Šnipiškės on the bank of the River Neris.