

ZALMEN SZYK

*Toyznt yor Vilne***Itinerary for visiting Vilna<sup>1</sup>**

Five days are needed to become truly acquainted with the city, its surroundings and all its historic attractions. Four of these days ought to be devoted to the city proper (Jewish, Polish, Belarusian, Lithuanian, Karaite and Tatar) and one to visit *Troki* and *Werki* [...]. But because a tourist's time is usually limited, we therefore offer an itinerary that fits the allotted time.

## I. Itinerary for a half-day visit

*Ostrobramska* Street and *Ostra Brama* Gate, (2) *Ratush-plats*,<sup>2</sup> (3) *Breyte gas*<sup>3</sup> (see, among other sites, the memorial plaque to Mickiewicz<sup>4</sup>), (4) the Ghetto (*Yidishe gas*, *Yatkever*, *Glezer* and *Klaczko* streets),<sup>5</sup> the shulhoyf,<sup>6</sup> the Strashun Library, (5) University,<sup>7</sup> (6) the Cathedral, (7) Castle Hill, (8) the old Jewish cemetery,<sup>8</sup> (9) the Yivo Institute.<sup>9</sup>

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1 Zalmen Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 6–8.

2 Pol. *Plac Ratuszowy*, now Town Hall Square.

3 Pol. *Ulica Wielka*, now *Didžioji* Street.

4 Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), a Polish poet, dramatist, essayist, publicist, translator and political activist

5 *Yidishe gas*, or Jews' Street, was called *ul. Żydowska* in Polish; *Yatkever*, or Butcher's Street was *ul. Żydowska Kramna* (lit. 'Street-of-many-stores'), and *Glezer*, or Glassmaker's Street, was called *ul. Szklanna*.

6 Synagogue Courtyard.

7 In 1919–1939 the university functioned under the Polish name *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego* (Stefan Batory University).

8 Szyk refers to the old Jewish cemetery in Pyromont (Shnipishki).

9 YIVO Institute was opened in Vilnius in 1925. In 1933 it moved to its new building located at 18 A. *Wiwulski* Street (now A. *Vivulskis* Street). YIVO was closed in 1940 and the building was destroyed by bombing in 1944.

## II. [Itinerary] For a full-day visit

(1) *Ostrobramska* Street and *Ostra Brama* Gate, (2) the Catholic cemetery at *Rossa* with the Piłsudski Mausoleum,<sup>10</sup> (3) Town Hall Square, (4) *Breyte* gas (with the memorial plaques to Antokolski<sup>11</sup> and Mickiewicz), (5) the Ghetto, the Synagogue Courtyard, the Strashun Library, (6) the University, (7) Napoleon Square,<sup>12</sup> (8) Castle Hill, (9) the Cathedral, (10) the old Jewish cemetery, (11) the Yivo Institute, (12) the An-ski Museum.<sup>13</sup>

## III. [An itinerary for a] Day-and-a half visit

The same as itinerary II, followed by: (13) Mickiewicz Street, Lukishkes,<sup>14</sup> the Tatar Mosque and Cemetery,<sup>15</sup> (14) Zwierzyniec with the Karaite House of Prayer, (15) the Bernadine Garden, (16) St. Anne Street, with St. Anne's Church, the Church of St. Bernard and the Church of St. Michael, the Mickiewicz House, (17) *Zarzeczie*<sup>16</sup> and the new Jewish Cemetery (the graves of: A. Vayter,<sup>17</sup> S. L. Zitron,<sup>18</sup> Don,<sup>19</sup> Dr Tsemakh Szabad,<sup>20</sup> Dvora Esther,<sup>21</sup> the communal grave of 1905,<sup>22</sup> the founders of the Bund,<sup>23</sup> and more).

## IV. [An itinerary for a] Two-day visit

Day One as in Itinerary II; the morning of Day Two as in Itinerary III, followed in the afternoon by: (18) the former Basilian church ('Konrad's prison

10 Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), the first head of state of the newly independent Poland. After his death, his heart was buried in the Cemetery of *Rossa* (now *Rasos* cemetery).

11 Mark Antokolski (1840–1902), a renowned Jewish-Russian sculptor.

12 Pol. *Plac Napoleona*, now *S. Daukantás* Square.

13 The first Jewish Museum was established in Vilnius in 1913 by the Society of Lovers of Jewish Antiquity. In 1919, Sh. An-sky (Shloyme Zaynvl Rapoport, 1863–1920) revived and re-established the Jewish Museum which was named posthumously after him. The An-ski Museum was located at 7 *E. Orzeszkowa* Street.

14 Pol. *Lukiski*.

15 The Tatar Mosque and Cemetery were located near *Lukiski*.

16 Now *Užupis*.

17 A. Vayter, the pseudonym of Ayzik Meyer Devenishski (ca. 1878–1919), a Yiddish playwright, political activist, and cultural figure, who was assassinated by Polish Legionnaires.

18 Samuel Leib Zitron (1860–1930), a Hebrew and Yiddish writer, historian, and literary critic.

19 Don Kaplanovich (1880–1932), a Yiddish journalist, humorist, and translator.

20 Zemach Szabad (1864–1935), a Jewish doctor and social and political activist in Vilnius.

21 Dvora Esther Gelfer (1817–1907), a philanthropist and founder of the Jewish Free Loan Association in Vilnius.

22 The communal grave of the victims of the Revolution of 1905.

23 The Bund, or the Jewish Labour Bund, was a secular Jewish socialist party founded in Vilnius in 1897 and active in Poland and the Baltic States until 1939.

Cell'), (19) Belarusian Museum,<sup>24</sup> (20) Medieval underground crypts on *Bakszta* Street, (21) *Subocz* Street, Missionary Church, (22) the Society of 'Help through Work', (23) along the banks of the Wilia (a walk in the evening).

V. [An itinerary for a] Three-day visit

Days One and Two follow itineraries II, III and IV. On the morning of the third day: (24) *Dominikańska* Street, the Dominican Church and the underground crypts, (25) *Daytshe gas*,<sup>25</sup> the Moniuszko<sup>26</sup> House, (26) *Wilno* Street, the *Moniuszko* monument, (27) *Zawalna* Street, Calvinist Church, Library and former cemetery, (28) Jewish Technical School (3 *Gdańska* Street), (29) Museum of the Polish society<sup>27</sup> of Friends of Science.<sup>28</sup>

VI. [An itinerary for a] Four-day visit

The first three days are the same as Itineraries II, III, IV, and V above. On the fourth day:

(30) *Antokol*, Museum of the Lithuanian Scientific Society,<sup>29</sup> (31) the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, (32) the former Sapiieha<sup>30</sup> Palace, (33) the *Wróblewski* Library with the Museum of the City of Wilno, (34) *Zamkowa* Street with the Church of Street John and the Słowacki<sup>31</sup> House Museum, (35) the *Literacki* Lane with the Mickiewicz House Museum, (36) *Skopówka* Street, (37) the Papal College,<sup>32</sup> (38) the Hill of the Three Crosses, (39) *Daytshe gas* with the Evangelical Church, (40) *Trocka* Street with the Franciscan Church, the monument to Montwiłł,<sup>33</sup> (41) the Tatar Museum, (42) the plywood factory

24 Belarusian Museum (Bel. *Віленскі беларускі гісторыка-этнаграфічны музей імя Івана Луцкевіча*) was established in Vilnius in 1921 and functioned until 1945.

25 Pol. *Niemecka* St., now *Vokiečių* Str.

26 Stanisław Moniuszko (1819–1872), a Polish composer.

27 Pol. *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Wilnie* was a Polish scientific society which functioned in Vilnius from 1906 to 1939.

28 There is no breakdown for the afternoon – *D. G. R.*

29 Lit. *Lietuvių mokslo draugija* was a scientific, cultural, and educational organization that was active between 1907 and 1940 in Vilnius.

30 Lew Sapiieha (1557–1633) was a nobleman and statesman of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

31 Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) was a Polish poet.

32 Pol. *Alumnat* was founded in 1582 with the financial support of Pope Gregory XIII. It was intended to provide a shelter for students of the Uniate Church seminary.

33 Józef Montwiłł (1850–1911) was a bank owner and philanthropist, notable for many social initiatives.

or the ‘Elektrit’. In the evening, hear the VILBIG<sup>34</sup> Choir perform (should it be rehearsing that evening).

### **Trocka Street**<sup>35</sup>

A major commercial highway once led through *Trocka* Street and the *Trocka* Gate from *Plock* to *Troki*, *Grodno*, *Białystok* and *Warsaw*. Thus, the name ‘*Trocka*’ derives from the fact that this street led directly to *Troki*. No remnant remains of the *Trocka* Gate because it was demolished in 1803.

In 1790, the courtyard on the corner of *Trocka* and *Niemecka* Streets (No. 1) belonged to Wittenholtz, and later belonged to the Lithuanian Treasurer Antoni Tyzenhaus.<sup>36</sup> The house was built by the architect Knakfuss<sup>37</sup> in a neoclassical style; over the first floor there are beautiful friezes with exquisite metopes and triglyphs. Entering from *Trocka* Street there is a building that houses the Grand Hotel.

At No. 11 *Trocka* Street (opposite the Franciscan Church), in a two-room apartment, Józef Piłsudski sat under house arrest prior to his being banished to Siberia.

The house No. 20 (on the first floor) was the first residence of the Piłsudski family (1874–1877), which relocated to Vilna following the fire in *Żułow*.

There is also a square on *Trocka* Street which marks the place where in the historic past the Franciscan cemetery was located (*see*: Christian Cemeteries). In 1932 a monument was erected in the square in memory of the civic leader and philanthropist Montwiłł.

To the left of the entrance to the square there is a chapel (in the Baroque style) that was built in 1708 by Michał Suzin in memory of the victims of the infamous Cossack massacre of 1655.

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34 VILBIG, or *Vilner bildungs-gezelschaft* (‘Vilna Education Society’) was founded in Vilna in 1924 and promoted Yiddish language and culture as the foundation of a new secular Jewish identity.

35 Zalmen Szyk, *Toznt yor Vilne*, p. 139–41.

36 This is incorrect. It first belonged to A. Tyzenhaus and only after he went bankrupt, in 1785, was it sold to the widow of General Fitinhof, who hired M. Knakfuss to redecorate it.

37 Marcin Knakfuss (1740–1821), a famous architect.

Deep inside the square is the tower of the Franciscan Church. The tower is adorned with red bricks (red or black bricks were then used in construction).

According to legend, the church was built at the initiative of Gasztołd.<sup>38</sup> After the first Franciscan monks of Vilnius were massacred, Gasztołd brought down new Franciscans and granted them land on the *Piaski* (the former name of this neighborhood), where, in the fourteenth century, they started building both the church and monastery.

The church was originally built of wood, which was later rebuilt in brick, following a fire, in Gothic style. The door, windows and ceiling have remained in Gothic style, while the remaining parts were later rebuilt in Renaissance and Rococo style. In 1812, the French turned the church into warehouses for provisions. In 1864, Muravyov<sup>39</sup> confiscated the church and in 1862-72 installed an archive, which was recently relocated to Słowacki Street (*see*: State Libraries). Those suspected of participating in the Uprising of 1863 were held in the monastery.

In the past few years, after litigating with the municipality, the Franciscans succeeded in recovering the church, had it renovated and even reacquired the square from the city.

All that remains in the buildings of the former monastery are: the municipal pawn shop, a part of the municipal archive, various educational establishments and since 1905, a chapel that was recently closed. [...]

At No. 22 stands the *Tyszkiewicz* Palace, its entrance supported by two *bulóanes* (that is what the statues of male torsos are called by local inhabitants).

## The Vilna shulhoyf<sup>40</sup>

The Vilna shulhoyf<sup>41</sup> is a shtetl in and of itself. Its inhabitants – the *shamosim*, *gaboim* and the congregants – are inextricably bound up with one another.<sup>42</sup>

38 Lit. Goštautas.

39 Count Mikhail Nikolayevich Muravyov (1796–1866), a Russian imperial statesman of the 19th century, the governor general of Vilnius from 1863 to 1865. He was nicknamed ‘the Hangman’ due to his cruelty while quashing the Polish-Lithuanian uprising.

40 Zalmen Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 171-173.

41 Synagogue Courtyard.

42 *Shamosim* is the plural of *shames*, a beadle or synagogue sexton. *Gaboim* is the plural of *gabe*, the one who manages the synagogue rites and rituals. They are either (poorly) paid

In the middle of the shulhoyf, as in the middle of the street in any small town, there are always groups of shulhoyf Jews standing around. They are busy talking, discussing, contemplating and evaluating every bit of news about the shtetl and surrounding the shtetl. Every new face in town is immediately noticed, and is worked over by moist, melancholy eyes. On the spot, almost in sign language, they arrive at an understanding of the precise place this newcomer will occupy in the shulhoyf: a madman, to the Gravedigger's Kloyz, right next to the broad, warm tile stove;<sup>43</sup> a maggid in a worn-out gabardine, to the Painters' Kloyz, there to deliver his sermon; a taciturn Jew with a pack on his back, to the edge of a bench in the Gaon's Kloyz, where one of the *prushim* teaches [Torah] to the simple folk;<sup>44</sup> a cantor who comes from the Polish heartland, to lead Sabbath prayers in the Old-New synagogue. The newcomers come and go. Each one presents a new face and provides – some more, some less – the stuff of conversation for the permanent residents of the shtetl.

The shulhoyf leads into *Yidishe gas*<sup>45</sup> and *Daytshe gas* (there are as many as three gates opening onto *Daytshe gas*). Here are located the Great Synagogue (*see: Shtotshul*), a large number of study-houses and *kloyzn* (that are described separately), and also the Jewish bathhouse. In times past, the Kahal building<sup>46</sup> and the Religious Court were also located in the shulhoyf, and on the site where the Strashun Library now stands (*see: Libraries*) there once were Jewish slaughterhouses (built by the Yesod<sup>47</sup>) and grain stores.

In 1938, the Vilna Kehilla<sup>48</sup> brought some order to the shulhoyf and carried out some renovations. Firstly, it removed the lanterns over the iron gates of the shulhoyf, on *Yidishe gas*. These lanterns once burned on gas, but were later replaced by electric bulbs, and most recently, these broken lanterns served merely

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functionaries or appointees, who serve without pay. Szyk describes Jewish public prayer as the province of men only. As a male, he would have had no first-hand knowledge of women's spirituality.

43 For the significance of the kloyz, or small prayer house, see Vladimir Levin's article in this issue.

44 *Prushim* is the plural of *poresh*, a recluse who devotes all his time to the study of Jewish sacred texts.

45 Pol. *Ulica Żydowska*.

46 The Kahal, or Jewish community council, was the decision-making body of the Jewish community, or Kehilla.

47 Yesod, or Judah ben Eliezer (?–1762) was a Talmudist, communal worker, and philanthropist.

48 Jewish Community Council.

as objects for artists to paint. So the Kehilla decided to remove the lanterns and to replace them with Stars of David made of perforated pipes. On festive occasions, after filling these Stars of David with gas, the bulbs will light up.

The well that once stood in the shulhojf is a separate story.<sup>49</sup> For there to be water – for drinking, fire protection and sanitation – the Vilna Kahal entered into an agreement with the Dominican friars (who owned the *Vingriai* springs) in 1759 about bringing water to the shulhojf. Henceforth, all the Jews of Vilna were permitted to come to the shulhojf to draw water, which flowed nonstop from the pipe.

Immured in the wall of the new kloyz is a marble plaque with an inscription stating that the Maggid Mishneh (Esteemed Preacher), Meyer-Noah Levin, renovated the well (that was located nearby). Oversight of the well was the province of the Bedek Habayis Association,<sup>50</sup> which oversaw the pipes, the bathhouse, the sewer system, and the like.

In 1791, the Bedek Habayis signed an agreement with the Dominican friars for a special pipe to supply water for the bathhouse and paid a yearly fee of four ducats. The filth that drained off from the Jewish bath and the communal outhouse flowed through underground pipes that (since 1772) were joined to the sewage of the Jesuit Church on Bishops' Street.

In the shulhojf there was both a crude and well-kept bathhouse. In the crude bath, you had to ascend to the anteroom on steps, and only then descend some thirty steps to the ground floor in order to bathe. These steps were slippery, and people were often injured. In the cooler bathhouse where people came to bathe, there was a wooden pump, and two Christian workers stood over it pumping water up and down. The walls were as black as coal. Cockroaches crawled about in the bins in the anteroom. Due to the dampness, from all corners of the bathhouse you could hear the croaking of frogs and from their hiding places the crickets were always chirping away.

On the eve of major holidays the Jewish bathhouse was open all night long.

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49 This well is the site of Ayzik-Meyer Dik's *Seven Servant Girls at the Pump with Seven Jugs to Draw Water for Tea*, which is discussed in the article by David G. Roskies. After the Holocaust, the Vilna-born poet and prose writer Chaim Grade (1910–1982) wrote a short novel about the rebuilding of this well. See *Der shulhojf*, New York, 1958, p. 9–233; *The Well*, trans. Ruth Wisse, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967.

50 Upkeep of the Temple.

When the bathhouse was closed down, the American Jewish Distribution Committee donated funds for a proper Jewish bathhouse in Vilna. A king's ransom was invested in this bathhouse, more than 20,000 US dollars. When the bathhouse was finished, the Kehilla subleased it to a Jew who refused to spend any of his own money and kept running to the Kehilla for subsidies, arguing that the bathhouse was running a deficit. In the end, the Kehilla barely got rid of him, and was happy to place the bathhouse under lock and key. Now the plan is for the Kehilla to reopen the bathhouse.

In front of the communal bath there once stood huge vats, where almost all the city's Jews would come to kasher their utensils before Passover.<sup>51</sup> Paupers would buy the remains of people's breadstuffs and burn them in the communal bonfire, thus earning a little something 'for the seders'.<sup>52</sup>

### *Zarzeczcie*<sup>53</sup>

From *Milosierna* (formerly *Spaska* Street) one passes to the suburb of *Zarzeczcie*, which was known by this name as far back as the sixteenth century. Three bridges lead across the *Wilenka* to *Zarzeczcie*.

At the entrance to *Zarzeczcie*, on the corner of *Poplawska* Street, there is a chapel with a sculpture of Jesus that was erected in the seventeenth century on the site where there once stood the Orthodox Church of Peter and Paul that was completely destroyed in a fire.

The following objects of historical interest are located in *Zarzeczcie*: the Memorial to Independence, the former Honestich Palace (house No. 5); the Church of St. Bartholomew from 1644. Originally built out of wood, it was rebuilt in stone in the seventeenth century, then again, following various fires. Finally, in 1824 it was rebuilt in the Late Classical style.

The house at No. 21 *Zarzeczcie* once belonged to the historian Aleksander Zdanowicz, professor at the Noble Institute of Wilno. In 1863 his son Ignaz,

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51 To kasher means to render kosher; in this case, by immersing the utensils in boiling water.

52 On the morning before the first seder, one is obligated to burn the ritual remains of the breadstuffs from one's home.

53 Zalmen Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 243–44.

a member of the *Rzad Narodowy* (People's Government), was arrested here. That same year the young Zdanowicz perished on the gallows.

At the end of *Zarzeczcie*, on Polock Street, the orphanage named after Gertrude Marx is located. The *Zarzeczcie* market is also located here and past the market there is a road leading to the [new] Jewish cemetery. This is the source of the folk saying, *Men zol dikh firn af Zaretshe* ('You should be led to Zarzeczcie', i.e., drop dead!). And there is also a folk saying, *Ale veln mir forn durkh Zaretshe* (i.e., 'All of us will end up going through Zarzeczcie to the Eternal Resting Place') (see: Zarzeczcie Cemetery). [...]

The second half of the street, near the Zarzeczcie bridge, is called *Metropolitalna* Street. There a monument was erected to the memory of the Christian Dordzik who, during a flood in 1931, rescued a Jewish boy and himself perished in the waves of the Wilenka (see: Monuments).<sup>54</sup>

The continuation of this area is called *Safyanikes*. The name is derived from the tanners – 'safjaniki' – who settled there in the sixteenth century.

On this little street there are many houses of ill repute, which explains why so much rowdiness and fist fights occur there.<sup>55</sup>

## The Yiddish names of Vilna streets<sup>56</sup>

There are streets in Vilna whose Jewish names predate their present Polish names. They were given these Jewish names when they first became streets, some thirty to forty years ago. Take for example the *Rossele* Quarter with its alleys (called *zavulkes* in local argot). *Ruzele* is the name given to the street that stretches from the *Szwajcarsky* Lane (near the 'cheap houses'<sup>57</sup>) until the bridge (at the end of *Subocz* Street). A few decades ago, when most streets did not yet have a

54 See Moyshe Levin's 'A Memorial by the River' translated in this issue.

55 The Vilna-born novelist Abraham Karpinowicz immortalized this street and its raunchy clientele in his collection of stories *Baym vilner durkhhoif*, Tel-Aviv, 1967; partially translated in *Vilna my Vilna: Stories*, translated from the Yiddish by Helen Mintz; foreword by Justin Cammy, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016.

56 Zalmen Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, p. 303.

57 Cheap Houses, a Jewish subsidized housing complex built in Vilnius at the end of the nineteenth century.

name, Jews were frequent visitors here (this is where Jewish workers would hold mass meetings), and they were therefore called by the name of local inhabitants. Thus *Karlsbadzka* Street came to be known as *Ayziks zavulek*, and *Jerozolimski* Lane was known as *Henekhs zavulek*. Probably the same thing occurred with the streets in the *Nowe Miasto* district: *Skandres zavulek* (*Cechowy* Alley), *Motye Shmids zavulek* (*II Nowomejsky* Lane), *Katses zavulek* (*Komendancki* Lane). This may also explain why *Krupnyczy* Alley is called *Shloyme Kisins gesl* (see: *Krupnica* Street) and *Szawelska* Street – *Yudemanski gesl*.

It is interesting to note that some of these names are well known throughout town, perhaps even better known than their Polish names (*Skandres zavulek*, *Henekhs zavulek*, *Gitke Toybes zavulek*; see: *Ulica Św. Mikołaja*).

In Vilna there are a number of streets that are named after Jewish personages: Gaon Street, Fünns Street (see: *Shnipeshek*), Strashun Street, Juliusz Klaczko Street.

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