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The Iconography of Jewish Vilna during the First World War

Annotation: The aim of the article is to show the picture of Jewish Vilnius/ Vilna created by German artists during the First World War. The research is based on an analysis of works of art published in the press of the time, or stored in institutions in Lithuania, Germany and Belgium, and also on an analysis of writings in German periodicals of that time. The media in Ober Ost during the war took an anti-semitic stance, promoted by the top military leadership, but the author of the article argues that there also existed a different attitude towards the Jews of Vilnius and their heritage. The views and origins of journalists, writers and artists taken on by the editorial boards of German newspapers published in Vilnius and Kaunas influenced the emergence of the Ostjuden discourse. This discourse was rather contradictory, and included both fascination with the traditional religious Jewish community, and its cultural heritage and spiritual values, and at the same time horror at the suffering and poverty of the community. This discourse also remained viable in postwar Germany, and influenced the identity of Jewish art in Vilnius in the interwar period.

Keywords: First World War, German art, Ostjuden, Vilnius, Jewish iconography.

How did the title 'Iconography of Jewish Vilna during the First World War' come to me? As an art historian, I was researching art in Vilnius at the beginning of the 20th century; my interest focused on the issues of multiculturalism and the appearance of new tendencies in Lithuanian art, and also included themes on artistic production, artistic life and art institutions. Having written the book *Art in Vilnius 1900-1915*,[1] I came to an unresearched period of the First World

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1 Laima Laučkaitė, *Vilniaus dailė XX amžiaus pradžio*je, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002; English version: Laima Laučkaitė, *Art in Vilnius 1900-1915*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, Kultūros, filoso-fijos ir meno institutas, 2008.

War, and in 2018 published the study 'Art in Vilnius during the Great War',[2] continuing my research on Vilnius art in the 1920s. It focused mainly on a new part of the Vilnius art scene, German artists who came to Lithuania with the Kaisers' army, and created many works of art based on local iconography.

The First World War brought a real flood of artistic and photographic production to books, newspapers and postcards, created by professionals and amateurs, and depicting places and life in Ober Ost. In many cases, Germans were the first to capture views of small towns and villages in provincial Lithuania. In the case of Vilnius, of course, theirs were not the first images, but the flow of imagery was particularly great. In the eyes of the German invaders, Vilnius was a multicultural city, inhabited by Poles, Jews, Lithuanians and Byelorussians, a city with fascinating Catholic Baroque churches, Orthodox churches, and Jewish quarters, so the occupiers tried to learn about this entire patchy urban world. The Jewish theme appeared to be very important to German artists during the First World War. Even today, a close look at modern publications, books and web pages[3] shows that the bulk of visual material on Jewish quarters in Vilna, the everyday life and traditional heritage in the late 19th and early 20th century, comes namely from the German photographic legacy from the period of the First World War.

It should be noted that relations between the Germans and Lithuanian Jews during the First World War have already been touched on in some studies: German policy toward the Jews in Ober Ost has been analysed,[4] as have encounters between German Jews and East European Jews, and the problem of the identity of German Jews.[5] Changes in Jewish cultural life in Eastern Europe

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2   Laima Laučkaitė, *Vilniaus dailė Didžiojo karo metais*, Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2018.

3   http://blog.akg-images.com/2014/11/07/a-personal-view-of-the-first-world-war-photo-albums/; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od4RzCxZkjU; https://www.maggs.com/album-documenting-jewish-life-in-vilnius_212286.htm

4   Jürgen Matthäus, 'German Judenpolitik in Lithuania During the First World War', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 1998, Vol. 43, No 1; Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 119–120; Christopher Alan Barthel, *Contesting Russian Borders. The German Military Administration of Occupied Lithuania, 1915–1918*, Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, 2011, p. 55–68.

5   Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Conciousness 1800–1923*, Madison, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.

during the First World War have also been examined.[6] But research into the visual discourse and the iconography of Jewish Vilna in German art has only started.[7] This paper deals with German artistic production and German artists residing in Vilnius.[8] How did they depict Jewish Vilna? What motifs did they choose? What were the iconic places of Vilna? How did they treat the subject, and why did they do it in that way?

The German army occupied Vilnius in September 1915, and discovered an unknown world, a hotchpotch of ethnic communities, confessions with different cultural heritages and traditions. In order to colonise, to control and rule, the unknown world had to be surveyed and studied, and this task was assigned to military institutions and media. German journalists, writers and artists worked for newspapers and books edited in Ober Ost and Germany, introducing the occupied land and its people. There was also much interest in the local culture and heritage. Vilnius was the main transit centre on the Eastern Front, a lot of soldiers passed through, and many of them learned about it. Soldiers' curiosity about the occupied countries and their heritage was related to the phenomenon of 'war tourism'. On the other hand, the German military authorities carried out a cultural programme of their own in the occupied lands. The historian Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius described the goals of the programme in this way: 'Native culture was to be bracketed by German institutions which would define native identity and direct their development. Finally, cultural policies also aimed to provide German soldiers with a sense of their mission.'[9] So the Germans

6   Avie Roshwald, 'Jewish cultural identity in Eastern and Central Europe during the Great War', in: *European Culture in the Great War: the Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914– 1918*, Avie Roshwald, Richard Stites, eds., Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 89–126.

7   Laima Laučkaitė, 'Jewish Vilnius in the Works of German Artists', in: *The Art of Identity and Memory: Toward a Cultural History of the Two World Wars in Lithuania*, Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Rasutė Žukienė, eds., Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015, p. 25–54.

8   Both Lithuanian and German museums possess very few wartime works, so the research is mainly based on art published in books and illustrated supplements of newspapers issued in Vilnius during the First World War. Nevertheless, some institutions and museums have important collections on the subject, mainly the Vilna Gaon Jewish museum, the Berlin Jewish Museum, the City Museum of Aschersleben (Germany), and the Collection of the German Speaking Community of Belgium in Eupen. These collections were important sources for the research.

9   Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 114.

undertook the mission of tutorials in the local cultural heritage: they researched it, and spread their discoveries among the public.

Who were the artists residing in Vilnius? Most were professional artists who had enlisted in the Kaiser's army, who came to Vilnius as soldiers and worked for German-published newspapers and their illustrated supplements. Some of them were war artists. These artists were agents of propaganda and the ideology of war. There were also artists who were not related to propaganda activities and free of censorship: they worked in military hospitals, press distribution, logistics and other services, and created their works in their free time. Writers, journalists and artists can be grouped around three intellectual centres: in Vilnius, they worked for the newspapers *Zeitung der 10. Armee* and *Wilnaer Zeitung*, and in Kaunas (Kowno) they were members of the Club of the Intelligentsia. Different missions and aims, and the different ideological, political, cultural and artistic backgrounds of these centres, influenced the work of these artists.

Jewish Vilna in the newspaper *Zeitung der 10. Armee*

Zeitung der 10. Armee was an army newspaper representing the views of the Supreme Army Command (Oberste Heeresleitung) which, as is known, had anti-semitic views (e. g. the 'Jewish census' in the army, etc). The newspaper's articles and images presented Vilnius to soldiers and the German public. Newcomers to Vilnius have always gone to the Old Town, where the traditional Jewish community lived. The illustrated supplement *Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee* began the acquaintance with the Jewish quarter in the September 1916 issue. The article written by Otto Jahnke called 'Das Wilnaer Judenviertel' was illustrated by drawings by Julius Cohn-Turner[10] (Ill. 1).

An impressive portrait of a Talmud reader by Cohn-Turner is printed in the centre of the page: a serious, solidly built man with a book. At the top of the page, there is a genre scene: two poor Jews chatting animatedly in the street.

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10 Julius Cohn-Turner (real name Julius Cohn) was Jewish, and he was apparently murdered in the Holocaust. Different reference sites indicate different dates of his death. Some put the year 1948; according to other sites which are very credible, the artist died before 1945, and the circumstances of his death are stated as 'Deported from Belgium' (where the artist had fled from Germany).

1. The article 'Das Wilnaer Judenviertel', with illustrations by Julius Cohn-Turner, in: *Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 16 September 1916.

In the top right, there is a narrow street in the Old Town, with an arch and a busy crowd. It should be noted that the view of a picturesque Medieval street with an arch (in Glazier Street) or two arches (in Yatkowa Street) became an icon of Jewish Vilna in German art. It was portrayed in various techniques in various seasons by Alfred Holler, Walter Buhe, Paul Paeschke, Paul Schneider, Bruno Steigueber, Hermann Struck, and others (Ill. 2). Subsequently, the motif of the street with two arches became the logo of the group of Jewish artists Yung Vilne in the interwar years.

Otto Jahnke's article alongside Cohn-Turner's drawings has rather negative connotations: 'This Jewish quarter is an extraordinary place, nurturing their heritage and poverty. There reigns the law and uniformity of ugliness, which has been so conspicuous in every step already on the main streets of Vilna. Here

2. Alfred Holler, *The Jewish Quarter*, 1917, in: *Alfred Holler. Wilna. 12 farbige Bilder*, Wilna: Zeitung der 10. Armee, 1917.

we can find the lowest class of people, who have consciously chosen this form of life, living densely in a crammed and narrow space. I enter Glazier Street. The pavements are uneven and bumpy. Sewers are high and badly integrated with the street pavement. Sewage from Jewish Street flows to Glazier Street, but occasionally the flow halts and becomes stagnant.'[11] Later, Jahnke describes dirt, the stench and the unsanitary living conditions, emphasises the repulsive, ugly side of the Old Town, and tells the story of a conflict between a Jewish drunkard and his family. Oskar Klosinski, another writer for *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, offers the same opinion: to him, Jewish streets seem to be full of poverty, a 'flea market', where old items and worn clothes are sold: 'Here I am again in the heart of the Old Town. I seem to understand why Vilna is called the Jerusalem of the East. It appears to be the home of all things discarded or

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11   Otto Jahnke, 'Das Wilnaer Judenviertel', Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee, 1916 September 16.

redundant. I wonder who could still be interested in buying these old lamps, rickety furniture, dirty glasses and worn-out clothes, as I hopelessly try to make sense of using all these things. With every step, sewage spurts out from under the wooden boards that have replaced the pavement, and flows away gurgling. At a door, something vague and formless is being offered. A young man is shouting out his wares, and straightaway offers something edible to taste [...]. Next to him stand a great many beggars of various ages, with all possible kinds of affliction, without any distinctions of age, gender or faith.'[12] Artists depicted crowds of people, beggars and street traders alongside the synagogue (Ill. 3). Oskar Klosinski noted that these scenes reminded him of Jesus Christ expelling the traders from the temple. *Zeitung der 10. Armee* presented the ghetto spaces as repulsive, ugly places, and this interpretation was influenced by anti-semitic views. These views were spread by the German Supreme Army Command, which treated the Jewish community in Ober Ost as backward and uncivilised, and called the Jewish people cheats, deceivers, disloyal, etc.
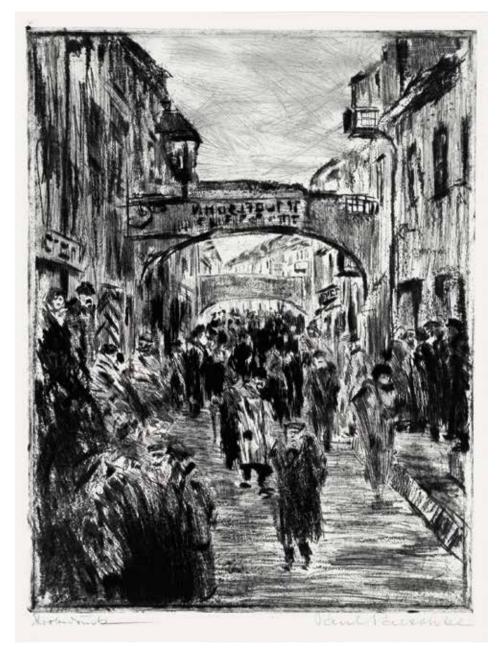
On the other hand, there was also another approach. The case of the war artist (*Kriegsmaler*) Alfred Holler[13] is typical. As a war artist, he had to portray battles scenes and victories, but almost all of his work from the war years covered the Old Town of Vilnius. *Zeitung der 10. Armee* organised an exhibition in Vilnius, and published a portfolio of his work.[14] An article published in *Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee* praised Holler's paintings depicting Jewish Vilna: 'It is the Jewish quarters that have attracted his brush. He has become fascinated with the dark courtyards and passageways, the crooked streets and the medley of people, and he knows how to convey it all. He never ceases to find hidden picturesque corners, and always knows how to render newly discovered beauty: a creaking staircase and a dilapidated courtyard covered in snow, as well as unexpectedly revealed majestic architecture, whose power and grandeur are doubled by the contrast with shabby structures in the foreground.'[15] Holler's

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12 Oskar Klosinski, 'Die Entschleierte: Wilnaer Stimmung', Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee, 26 April 1917.
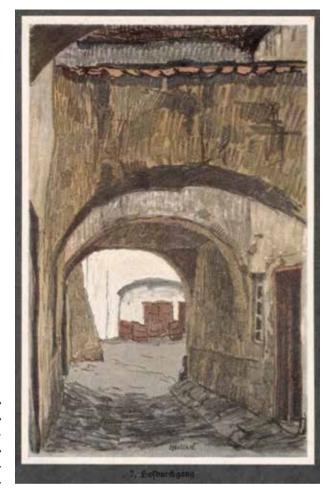
13 Laima Laučkaitė, 'Our Alien Legacy: German Art during World War I in Vilnius', *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi/Studies in Art and Architecture*, 2018, Vol. 27/1–3, p. 156–158.

14 Alfred Holler. Wilna. 12 farbige Bilder. Wilna: Zeitung der 10. Armee, 1917.

15 F.H. [Fred Hendriok], 'Ein deutscher Kriegsmaler in Litauen', Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee, 26 April 1917.

3. Paul Paeschke, *The Jewish Ghetto in Vilna*, 1918, drypoint. Tartle collection, Vilnius.

4. Alfred Holler,
A Courtyard Passageway,
1917, in: *Alfred Holler.
Wilna. 12 farbige Bilder*,
Wilna: Zeitung der 10.
Armee, 1917.

courtyards and narrow streets are picturesque; his tonal hues and sensitive lines are characteristic of Art Nouveau (Ill. 4). He used coloured paper and mixed media of oil pastels and gouache, thus achieving the painterly effects of his drawings. Holler was a poet of the Old Town: he romanticised the spaces of the ghetto, admiring their ancient beauty touched by entropy.

In general, it should be noted that the publications by *Zeitung der 10. Armee* devoted to the old Jewish quarter were rather rare and controversial: journalists and writers emphasised the repulsive, ugly urban side, and their writings have anti-semitic overtones. Meanwhile, the visual images have another focus: artists treated the Old Town in a lyrical and romanticising manner.

The 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' in *Wilnaer Zeitung*

The newspaper *Wilnaer Zeitung* was somewhat different from *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, and presented a different interpretation of Jewish Vilna. It was addressed to civilians, and was subordinate to the military commanders of the city, not to the commanders of the army. The newspaper did not demonstrate fierce militaristic content, as *Zeitung der 10. Armee* did, although it also spread the ideology of the German 'cultural mission'.

Prior to the aforementioned articles in *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, in May 1916, the illustrated supplement *Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung* published a long article about the Jewish district of Vilna. The word 'ghetto' was used in the title of the article,[16] although local people never used the term for the Jewish quarter of Vilnius. The article begins: 'The Jerusalem of Lithuania: this honourable title was granted to Vilna by religious East European Jews. For many centuries, the nation of Israelites has constituted a large part of the population of our city. Prominent sages made the Vilna school of the Talmud known all over the world. Being part of the city's Jewish community has obliged its members to keep loyally to their inherited place. Oppression, poverty and pain may have led to bodily deterioration, but could not uproot the tenacious and unyielding trunk. Walking around the streets today, we can see how important the Jewish element was in the picture of the city in earlier times. The old ghetto has lost its confines, but today the streets where the forefathers lived have become home to their grandchildren.'[17] The article describes the activities of the inhabitants of the Jewish Old Town and the poverty on the streets, but the focus is on the religious space, the Great Synagogue. 'The highly unfavourable view of the streets vanishes as soon as the curious visitor goes to see East European Jews in their most sacred place, their sanctuary. This world opens up just a couple of steps off the throng of German Street [...]. Hebrew inscriptions on the walls and shops accompanying you all along the street curve up to the Old Synagogue.'[18] The Great Synagogue became an iconic place of Jewish Vilna in works by German artists during the First World War.

Since the whole building of the Old Synagogue could not be seen from the outside, as it stood against neighbouring buildings, artists depicted it from

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16 'Im Judenviertel von Wilna', Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung, 29 May 1916.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

various angles, from yards or streets, from the gates of the shulhoyf, from Ramailes Lane, from the courtyard of the shulhoyf (Ill. 5–7). The article invites us to go into the synagogue '[...] crammed with people; particularly during Shabbat hours on Saturday mornings, there are a great many believers dressed in white prayer shawls praying in singing tones, guided by the loud voice of the person leading the service. There are only men; women are allowed by the Law only to stand in the gallery. Four massive pillars in the centre of the synagogue surround the Bimah crowned by a cupola, the place from which the prayers

5. Walter Buhe, *The Courtyard of the Old School*, 1915, watercolour. Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.
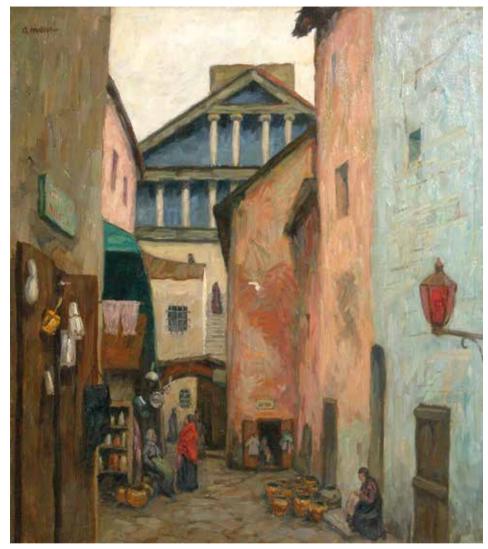

6. Walter Buhe, *The Great Synagogue*, 1916, oil on cardboard. Private collection.

are read'[19] (Ill. 8). The impressive interior of the Great Synagogue, and also neighbouring houses of prayer and study, were depicted by Walter Buhe. 'These houses are open to believers, young and old, who spend all day long there, absorbed in studies of the Talmud, poring over the Holy Books, or clustered around the table for disputes. The stove, which warms poor believers in winter, gives a Slavic aspect to this unique view of a cult building.'[20] Buhe fixed various
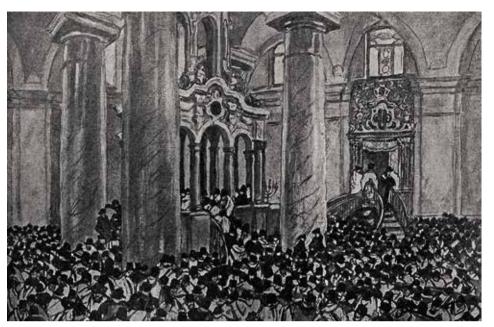
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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

7. Alfred Holler, *The Courtyard of the Old Synagogue*, 1917, oil on canvas. Collection of the German-Speaking Community of Belgium in Eupen.

moments in the houses of prayer: especially interesting is a scene with the poor warming up by the stove in the synagogue, which provided not only spiritual but also physical shelter during the cold seasons, when Vilnius was very short of firewood for heating (Ill. 9).

8. Walter Buhe, *A Service in the Old Synagogue*, 1916, lithograph. City Museum of Aschersleben.

9. Walter Buhe, *By a Warm Stove*, 1916, in: *Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung*, 1916, No 9.
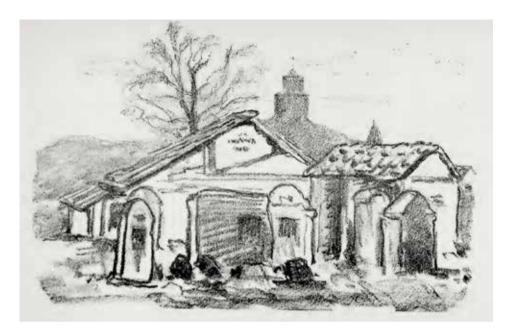
10. Alfred Holler, *The Old Jewish Cemetery*, 1916, in: *Alfred Holler. Wilna. 12 farbige Bilder*, Wilna: Zeitung der 10. Armee, 1917.

The third iconic Jewish location next to the Old Town and the Great Synagogue was the old cemetery in Šnipiškės. *Wilnaer Zeitung* wrote: 'Those who wish to know the traditions of the Vilnius Jews have to cross the river by boat to reach a burial site which served the community until 1831 [...]. The place looks abandoned and neglected, but there is a kind of melancholy hovering above the white tombstones, above the places of eternal rest of famous sages and ordinary believers [...]. Real little houses with wooden roofs [rise] above the graves.'[21] Šnipiškės cemetery was painted not only by Buhe, but also by Alfred Holler and Felix Krause, conveying exotic monuments and the melancholic mood of the famous cemetery (Ill. 10). Hermann Struck depicted the monument to the Vilna Gaon together with the tower of Gediminas' Castle in the background; while Cornelia Gurlitt depicted the Jewish cemetery with the figure of a German soldier (probably the art critic Paul Fechter) (Ill. 11, 12).

Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung began its acquaintance with Jewish Vilna with an article which raised the community's religiousness and loyalty to the traditions of the ancestors. The article presents Jews as an oppressed, impoverished

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21 Ibid.

11. Hermann Struck, *The Gaon's Grave in the Old Jewish Cemetery*, 1917, in: *Skizzen aus Litauen, Weissrussland und Kurland*, Berlin: Verlag von Georg Stilke, 1916.

12. Cornelia Gurlitt, *Untitled*, 1917, lithograph. Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.

and downtrodden community, which nevertheless preserved its spiritual strength and the faith of the ancestors. Later, *Wilnaer Zeitung* paid attention to the Jewish traditional heritage, and published more illustrated articles than *Zeitung der 10. Armee*.[22] *Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung* even put photographs, pictures of Jewish Vilna, on the covers of the magazine, while *Zeitung der 10 Armee* put a single image with Jewish Street on the cover of the magazine only in the summer of 1918, when the war was ending and German censorship and ideological control of the press had diminished. How can the differences between the editorial policies of these two occupation newspapers be explained?

The editor-in-chief of *Wilnaer Zeitung* was the journalist Ernst Walenberg. He came from an old rabbinical family from Gdansk, worked for the German publishers Ullstein, and was the editor of *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Berliner Zeitung* and *Vossische Zeitung*. The Jewish publisher Hermann Stilke, the owner of the publishers Hermann Stilke, also worked for *Wilnaer Zeitung*. There was also the enlisted art critic and gallerist Hildebrandt Gurlitt, the son of the famous art historian Cornelius Gurlitt and brother of the artist Cornelia Gurlitt.[23] He was later replaced on the editorial board of *Wilnaer Zeitung* by the journalist Franz Leppmann (who also had Jewish origins, but was baptised a Protestant). Before the First World War, he had worked as a feuilletonist at Ullstein, and was theatre critic for *Vossische Zeitung*. In 1916, he wrote the first biography of Thomas Mann. *Wilnaer Zeitung* took on the art critics Paul Fechter, the author of the first book on Expressionism published in Germany,[24] and Monty Jacobs, the son of an English trader of Jewish origin, and a writer on theatre for *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung*. The author of the article in *Wilnaer Zeitung* on the Jewish quarters of Vilna mentioned above is not indicated; but it was written by Jacobs and Fechter. Soon, the article was published in the book *Wanderstunden in Wilna*, under the pen-name Paul Monty.[25] The book was made up

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22 Images from *Wilnaer Zeitung* made by the photographer Ludwig Boedecker are usually reprinted in publications on old Jewish Vilnius nowadays.

23 In the Nazi period, Hildebrandt Gurlitt became the trader of 'degenerate art'. See Catherine Hickley, *The Munich Art Hoard. Hitler's Dealer and his Secret Legacy*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2015.

24 Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus*, München: Piper & Co, 1914.

25 Paul Monty, *Wanderstunden in Wilna*, Wilna: Verlag der Wilnaer Zeitung, 1916. Authorship was indicated by Friedrich Bertkau. See: Friedrich Bertkau, *Das amtliche Zeitungswesen im Verwaltungsgebiet Ober-Ost. Beitrag zur Geschichte der Presse im Weltkrieg*, Leipzig: Verlag E. Reinicke, 1928, p. 112.

of newspaper articles, and presented an essayistic image of the multicultural urban spaces of Vilnius. So the editorial team at *Wilnaer Zeitung* was quite specific: the members were journalists from the biggest liberal daily newspapers in Berlin, and cultivated people with a different standpoint to that of the editorial board of *Zeitung der 10. Armee*.[26] Besides, many of them had Jewish origins, which determined their sympathy for their subjects.

The only artist employed by the newspaper *Wilnaer Zeitung* was Walter Buhe.[27] He created many scenes of everyday life in Vilnius: in each issue of the newspaper, he published one drawing from scenes of the town, including Jewish Vilna. He drew Jews reciting their traditional prayers at the adorned tree of Ger Zedek in Šnipiškės cemetery. Legend has it that Ger Zedek, Count Valentin Potocki, converted to Judaism in the middle of the 18th century, and was burned by Catholics. A large tree grew in the place where his ashes were scattered, and became an important site of worship. One of Buhe's drawings shows a courtyard in the Old Town with Jews milling grain for *matzos*, and housewives buying the flour for their Pesach treats (Ill. 13). During Sukkot, the Feast of Booths, Jews would leave their homes and live in a *sukkot*, a makeshift booth. Buhe's drawing shows *sukkots* covered with fir branches on the balconies of houses on Glazier Street (Ill. 14). Such scenes are absent in the iconography of Vilnius, so today the images created by Buhe are fascinating and unique documents of traditional urban Jewish customs.

The German-Jewish Club of the Intelligentsia in Kowno

The Club of the Intelligentsia in Kowno (Kaunas) was the third important centre of writers, journalists and artists on the Eastern Front. German intellectuals of Jewish origin discovered an unknown Jewish world in Ober Ost, and were

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26 The editor-in-chief of *Zeitung der 10. Armee* was the industrialist Hans Urbach, the supplements to the newspaper focused on scientific and technical matters.

27 Hans Richter, *Walter Buhe als Graphiker*, Leipzig: Verlag der Deutscher Buchgewerbevereins, 1932; Laima Laučkaitė-Surgailienė, 'The Image of an Occupied City: Walter Buhe's Vilnius of the First World War', in: *Dailės istorijos studijos / Art History Studies*, Vol. 5: *Art and Artistic Life during the Two World Wars*, Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Laima Laučkaitė, eds., Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2012, p. 121–140.

13. Walter Buhe, *Pesach in Vilnius. Matzo Grinders in the Jewish Quarter*, 1917, in: *Wilnaer Zeitung*, 16 April 1917.

14. Walter Buhe, *The Sukkot Holiday on the Balconies*, 1917, in: *Wilnaer Zeitung*, 10 July 1917.

stunned. 'The plight of East European Jewry acquired greater political urgency during World War I as German-Jewish soldiers on the Eastern Front discovered the immense suffering and squalor in the ghettos. Though most German Jews supported the fatherland in the war, physical contact with the *Ostjuden* challenged established national loyalties and personalized what for many had been an abstract matter [...]. Jewish journalists and writers stationed in the East described the devastating effects of the war on East European Jewish life while those in Germany wrote about the grim situation on the home front [...]. Solidarity with the *Ostjuden* often betrayed antipathy toward the bourgeois values of liberal German society. Whereas the previous generation of German Jews expressed shame over their eastern counterparts, their own children were embarrassed by the materialism of their parents and looked eastward for a source of renewed pride. This "cult of the *Ostjuden*" criticized both assimilated Jews and Western Zionists who flirted with East European Jewish culture as an abstraction but remained estranged from the reality of their own people.'[28]

Ostjuden made a strong impression on Germans of Jewish origin: they discovered a community that had already disappeared in Germany, and found

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28 Rachel Seelig, 'Germany Goes to the Ghetto: German-Jewish Soldiers on the Eastern Front. East European Jews in the German-Jewish Imagination. Exhibition from the Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica', in: https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/exeej/germany-goes-ghetto-german-jewish-soldiers-eastern-front/.

their own roots and past there. At the same time, they were stunned by the poverty, misery, hunger and suffering of the community, brought on by the war. This discourse was perhaps most expressed in the milieu of the third group, German-Jewish intellectuals living in Kaunas. In 1916, the supreme headquarters of Ober Ost set up the Press Office (Presseabteilung Ober Ost) in Kaunas, which had to censor all publications in the occupied eastern territories. Friedrich Bertkau, an editor with Ullstein publishers, headed the Press Office. His adjutant was the writer Hans Frentz. It was Frentz who gathered a group of German artists in the Press Section: he invited his acquaintants and friends, journalists, artists, writers and publishers, to Kaunas.[29] Among them were the writers Arnold Zweig, Herbert Eulenberg, Richard Dehmel, Alfred Brust, Sammy Gronemann and Victor Klemperer, the journalist Oscar Kuehl, the painters Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Magnus Zeller. Kaunas unexpectedly became a cultural island in the war zone; an informal group called the Club of the Intelligentsia emerged. The headquarters of Ober Ost distrusted the club greatly; nevertheless, members gathered on Monday evenings at the Levinson Hotel, and, ignoring military rank, debated, discussed politics and art, and gave lectures. The founders of the club were Zionist activists from Berlin: the writer Sammy Gronemann, the artist Hermann Struck, and the journalist Hans Goslar. Struck was not only a famous Berlin artist, but also a political figure, a Jewish activist.[30] Stationed in Kowno, he worked as a translator from Yiddish. In 1917, the headquarters of Ober Ost appointed him head of the Ober Ost Jewish Affairs Division (Dezernat für jüdische Angelegenheiten in Ober Ost). In addition to his duties, he created a lot of Jewish lithographic portraits. These portraits were published in the books *Skizzen aus Litauen, Weissrusland und Kurland* (1916), *Skizzen aus Russland. Ostjuden* (1916), and *Das Ostjüdische Anlitz* (1921). Struck lived in Kowno, but spent much time in Vilna, where he portrayed the

29 Paul Fechter, *Menschen und Zeiten. Begegnungen aus fünf Jahrzenten*, Berlin und Hamburg: Deutsch Buch Gemeinschaft, 1949, p. 161.

30 Jane Rusel, *Hermann Struck (1876–1994). Das Leben und das graphische Werk eines jüdischen Künstlers*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien: Lang, 1997; Gilya Gerda Schmidt, 'Hermann Struck. The Artist of the Point and the Artist Soul of Israel', in: *The Art and Artists of the Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901– Heralds of a New Age*, Syracuse University Press, 2003, p. 84–120; Lara Lempertienė, 'Iliustruota 'Lietuvos Jeruzalės' mitų knyga: apie Zalmano Šneuro ir Hermano Štruko knygą Vilna (Berlin, 1923)', *Atrasti Vilnių: skiriama Vladui Drėmai*, ed. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Vilnius: VDA leidykla, 2010, p. 152–161.

15. Hermann Struck, *Head of an Old Jew*, 1916, in: *Skizzen aus Litauen, Weissrussland und Kurland*, Berlin: Verlag von Georg Stilke, 1916.

famous cantor Herszmann at the Old Synagogue, and the actors in the Yiddish theatre *Vilna Troupe*. However, he depicted mostly Jewish types, poor men and women, showing them as hardworking, decent, religious people, who preserved their identity despite the difficult life (Ill. 15). His portraits are realistic and

psychological: people stand proud, they are composed, confident and full of dignity. Struck idealised and mythologised them, for, being a Zionist, he was convinced that the future state of Israel should be based on people like Ostjuden.

Nevertheless, his works do not represent the true situation of Vilna Jews during the First World War. The Supreme Army Command treated the Ober Ost region as a supplier of goods for the army: everything that could be used by the military machine was expropriated. The city was stricken with poverty and famine. The winter of 1917 was particularly cold, and fuel was confiscated. People died on the streets, the death rate soared, and disease spread. In 1917, an epidemic of typhus afflicted citizens for half a year. After the machinery was taken away from factories, industry ground to a halt; the shops of craftsmen closed down; joblessness escalated, and the streets were full of beggars. The situation in the Jewish quarters, overcome by misery and deprivation, was especially difficult. Starving children and adults scavenged in piles of rubbish to find something to eat.

The images of Vilna Jews created by German artists who did not have to deal with ideology and propaganda contained more truth about real life in Ober Ost. The art created by young German artists unrelated to the media and censorship belongs to Expressionism, a movement which showed the atrocities of war, pain and suffering. The motif of Vilna beggars is expressed strongly in the graphic work of Cornelia Gurlitt (she worked as a nurse in the Antakalnis Hospital in Vilnius),[31] Jacob Steinhardt (a famous Jewish artist from Berlin, who worked for *Graberkomando* in Darbėnai),[32] and Magnus Zeller (who worked as an errand boy at the Press Office in Kowno)[33] (Ill. 16-18). On the other hand, the content of the images also depended on the time of their publication: the pictures published in the media in 1918 were bitter in comparison with the images published in 1916 and 1917, because censorship was weaker.

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31 *Cornelia Gurlitt: širdies kelionė. Vilnius vokiečių ekspresionistės akimis / Cornelia Gurlitt: The Journey of the Heart. Vilnius of 1915–1917 in the Eyes of a German Expressionist / Cornelia Gurlitt: Reise des Herzens. Vilnius mit den Augen einer deutschen Expressionistin: 1915–1917. Ausstellungskatalog*, hrsg. Hubert Portz, Staatlichen Jüdischen Gaon-von-Vilnius-Museum, 2015.

32 *Jakob Steinhardt: Der Prophet. Ausstellungs-und Bestandskatalog*, Berlin: Jüdisches Museum, 1995.

33 Magnus Zeller. *Entrückung und Aufruh. Ausstellung 29.11.2002–9.2.2003*, Stadtmuseum Berlin, Museum Ephraim–Palais, hrsg. Dominik Bartmann, Berlin: G–und–H Verlag, 2002.

16. Cornelia Gurlitt, *Rachmonis*, circa 1916, Indian ink. Private collection.

17. Jacob Steinhardt, *Beggars of Vilna*, 1920, drypoint. Jewish Museum, Berlin.

18. Magnus Zeller, *Street Scene*, 1917, *Bilderschau der Wilnaer Zeitung*, 1917, No 40.

Conclusions

In summary, the First World War induced a flood of Vilnius Jewish iconography. This legacy by German artists is important today in several respects. It is valuable for the views of the urban landscape of Vilnius, which in many cases have disappeared or changed. German artists were fascinated by the Old Town, and depicted iconic places of Jewish Vilna in their pictures: arches in the streets of the Old Town, the Old Synagogue, the Šnipiškės cemetery. Representations of Jewish Vilna reflect the contradictory spectrum of the ideological positions of the artists, from anti-semitism to Zionism. The discourse of Ostjuden was relevant in Germany after the First World War until the Nazis came to power. Views of Jewish Vilna were published in German memoirs, books and articles written by witnesses. It should be noted that Jewish artists from Vilna, who settled in Berlin, Dresden and other German cities after the war, also worked in the discourse of Ostjuden: they depicted local types, traditional life, and scenes of poverty and deprivation. Lasar Segall and Abraham Palukst are the first to be mentioned among these artists.

The impact that German artistic production had on local Jewish art of the interwar period is important in the art history of Lithuania. It should be said that until the First World War, depictions of Jewish Vilna, its religious and cultural heritage, and views of synagogues, the Old Town and cemetery, were quite rare and accidental, because it was considered that these objects did not deserve the attention of artists. The interest of German artists in this heritage influenced local art. During the First World War, German artists could very often be seen working in the streets of the Jewish Ghetto. Moï Ver, the future photographer, the author of the book *The Ghetto Lane in Wilna* (1929), who grew up in Vilnius, recorded how 'he would often come across strange German officers and soldiers in the Jewish quarter of the Old Town, drawing or painting synagogues and courtyards, and watched in astonishment, along with the other Jewish children who surrounded them, as works of art were born. It was only years later that he learned that the prominent German artists Hermann Struck, Walter Buhe, Magnus Zeller and others were among those soldiers.'[34]

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34 Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, 'The Young Moï Ver in Vilnius', in: *The Ghetto Lane in Vilna*, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2019, p. 82.

The local public and artists saw the work by German artists published in the media, and also in several exhibitions held in Vilnius in 1916 and 1917.[35] These exhibitions introduced the local public to German art, while critics especially appreciated and praised works depicting Jewish types and places in Vilna.[36] During the interwar period, motifs of iconic places in Jewish Vilna, the Great Synagogue and streets in the Old Town with arches, appeared in works by the local Jewish artists Mojzesz Lejbowski, Jakob Szer and Ber Zalkind, and also in works by the local Polish artists Adam Międzybłocki, Bronisław Jamontt, Tadeusz Malecki, Leszek Pindelski, and others. It should be stated that German art drew the attention of local artists to the Jewish heritage in the town, and influenced the emergence of iconic images of Vilna in the interwar period.

Žydiškojo Vilniaus ikonografija Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais

Santrauka

Straipsnis skirtas istoriografijoje mažai tirtam objektui – Pirmojo pasaulinio karo laikotarpio Vilniaus dailei, kai miesto meninėje scenoje atsirado naujas žaidėjas – vokiečių dailininkai. Jie atvyko į Rytų frontą kaip kareiviai, dažniausiai dirbo masinėse medijose ir Oberoste sukūrė daug kūrinių vietiniais motyvais, tarp kurių svarbią vietą užima žydiška tematika. Autorė parodo, kaip Vilniuje leisti vokiečių laikraščiai ir iliustruoti jų priedai vaizdavo žydiškąjį Vilnių, kaip formavo žymiausias ikonines jo vietas. Nagrinėjama, kuo skyrėsi tekstinės ir vizualinės interpretacijos, analizuojamas Vilniuje leistų laikraščių *Zeitung der 10. Armee* ir *Wilnaer Zeitung* turinys ir publika

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35 'Bild und Druck', *Wilnaer Zeitung*, 16 October 1916; 'Sonderausstellung in der Wilnaer Arbeitstuben', *Wilnaer Zeitung*, 7 December 1916; 'Maler in Ob. Ost', Wilnaer Zeitung, 9 September 1917.

36 'Wystawa obrazów', *Dziennik Wileński*, 14 August 1917.

cijų skirtumai. Straipsnis pirmą sykį istoriografijoje atskleidžia, kaip laikraščiuose dirbusių intelektualų – žurnalistų, rašytojų, dailininkų – liberalios pažiūros ir žydiška kilmė veikė *Ostjuden* diskurso atsiradimą, kokią reikšmę jam turėjo neformalus „Inteligentų klubas", veikęs Kaune Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais ir propagavęs sionistines pažiūras, taip pat iškeliamas tuo pačiu metu susiformavusio žydiškojo diskurso poveikis tarpukario Vokietijos ir Vilniaus meninei aplinkai.

Raktažodžiai: Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, vokiečių dailė, *Ostjuden*, Vilnius, žydiška ikonografija.