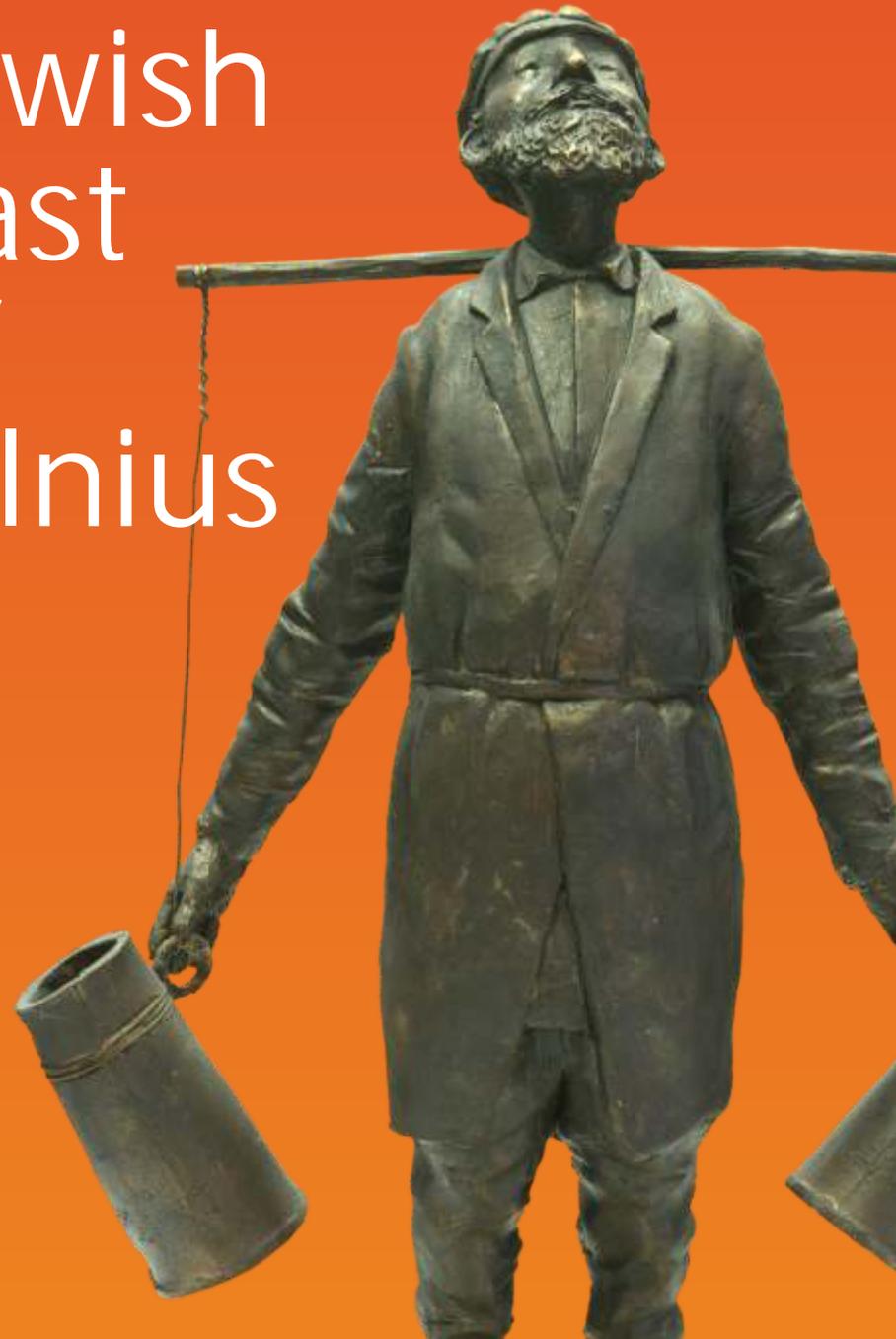


contribute to

a monument to the Jewish past of Vilnius



Jewish Vilnius

Many people will confirm that one of the best destinations to visit in the North East of Europe is the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, a city situated in a landscape of hills and meandering rivers. Tourists come to Vilnius to explore its rich cultural and historical background along with its natural beauty. It is famous for its many churches of various denominations and the historical buildings. What many tourists don't know, is the fact that Vilnius (in Yiddish: Vilne) used to be a very important Jewish center in Europe. From the 14th century onwards Jews settled in the city, and by the 18th century Vilne had become the world center of traditional Talmudic learning, eventually becoming known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, or more generally, the Jerusalem of the North.

The Lithuanian Jew (or Litvak) was known for his love of education. In the 18th century, The Great Gaon of Vilnius, Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman, attained guru status, esteemed as one of the world's greatest thinkers and authorities on Torah and Talmud. Jews were very much part of Lithuanian society and contributed strongly to the Lithuanian independence movement and, in the 1920s and 1930s, the building of an independent Lithuania. For them Lithuanian independence meant a renaissance, the chance to live as equal citizens in the newly founded country, an end to the stigmatization and anti-Semitism of the tsarist period. Without question, Vilnius was the axis of the Lithuanian Jewish world. Renowned scientists, teachers, writers, sculptors, and musicians made their homes here. Jewish secular and religious institutions flourished, including Der Yiddisher Visenshaftlicher Institut (YIVO). Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud were honorary members of its board.

The Second World War resulted in the almost total liquidation of the Jewish community and destroyed much of the city. Around 95% of Lithuanian Jews were murdered, including 80,000 Jews who lived in the city prior to the Nazi invasion. When the few Jewish survivors returned to Vilnius, they found a city in ruins, a population struggling for survival and a Soviet government that immediately re-imposed totalitarian rule. After a few years the few memorials to the Holocaust were removed or changed to monuments for "Soviet citizens". All remaining expressions of Jewish cultural life were banned.



Visitors to Vilnius now find very little of the Jewish past. Although there are several museums and several plaques that indicate where the Vilnius ghetto was, one really has to know the city to understand what Jewish Vilnius looked like. Also the younger generations of Lithuanians lack this understanding; they live in a city whose past remains hidden. As a result, they unknowingly miss part of their roots, and the chance is missed to pass the city's history on to future generations. And there is so much to be remembered: the cultural, academic and spiritual heritage, and also the painful events that continue to influence Lithuania even today.

Jewish Vilnius

יְהוּדֵי וִילְנְיָה



The water carrier monument

One of the well-known Vilnius residents of Jewish origin was the poet Moshe Kulbak, whose best poems were written in Vilnius. Maybe the nicest of them is a poem about Vilnius itself, describing it as a spiritual city, where neither poverty, nor suffering cannot conquer the power of idealism. One of the most prominent symbols of Vilnius in the poem of M.Kulbak is „the water carrier“:

*You are a dark amulet set in Lithuania.
Old grey writing – mossy, peeling.
Each stone a book; parchment every wall.
Pages turn, secretly open in the night,
As, on the old synagogue, a frozen water carrier,
Small beard tilted, stands counting the stars.*

As one of the steps to bring back the Jewish past of Vilnius, the plan has been developed to place a sculpture of the water carrier in the former Vilnius ghetto quarter in Rudininku square. On the pedestal of the sculpture there will be engraved 7 excerpts of the phrase mentioned above in Lithuanian, Polish, Yiddish, English, German, Russian and Hebrew languages.

Vilnius municipality has reserved a location for the monument, close to where the main gate of the Vilnius ghetto of 1941-1943 was located, but due to the financial crisis is unable to cover the costs of the production of the sculpture and its pedestal. Alternative ways of raising the necessary funds have to be sought.



Romas Kvintas

The author of the monument of the water carrier is Romas Kvintas, a well-known Lithuanian sculptor who authored several monuments in Vilnius, such as a statue for the author Romain Gary and for the Jewish doctor Dr. Zemach Shabad. Kvintas was born in Zagare, Lithuania, on June 16, 1953 and studied at the Vilnius Art Academy in 1975-1981. Since 1983 he is a member of the Lithuanian Artist Association. In 1982-1990 he worked as an instructor at the Vilnius Art Academy, since 1990 he is an independent artist.



Raising funds

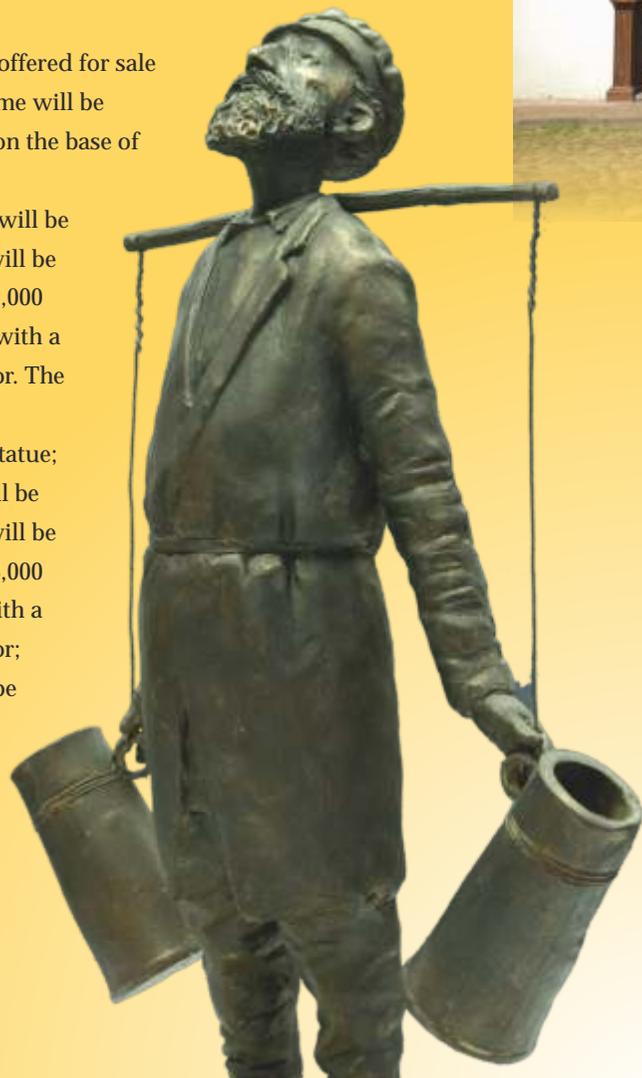
In order to establish the water carrier monument in Vilnius the Vilnius Jewish Culture and Information Center has decided to attract private and corporate donors. In order to do so, copies of the statue will be made and sold through the gallery of the Jewish Culture and Information Center in Vilnius, through networking and via the internet. We invite you to consider contributing to this project by purchasing one of the following models:

■ One life-size copy will be offered for sale to a major sponsor, whose name will be most prominently displayed on the base of the statue;

■ Twenty numbered copies will be made of 30 cm height. They will be sold for a minimum price of 5,000 litai (approximately € 1,450), with a certificate signed by the author. The name of the buyers will be displayed on the base of the statue;

■ Fifty numbered copies will be made of 20 cm height. They will be sold for a minimum price of 3,000 litai (approximately € 870), with a certificate signed by the author;

■ One hundred copies will be made of 10 cm height. They will be sold for a minimum price of 400 litai (approximately € 115).



The Vilnius Jewish Culture and Information Center

The Vilnius Jewish Culture and Information Center is a not-for-profit organization established by Vilnius municipality, the Lithuanian Jewish Community and the Vilnius Jewish Community. It is located in a newly rebuilt Jewish house in the old town of Vilnius and offers information about the Jewish past of Vilnius.

Almost half of the Vilnius population used to be Jewish. As a result, there are many sites that relate to that glorious past. The Vilnius Jewish Culture and Information Center provides information on sites related to this Jewish heritage of the city, on Jewish and other museums, religious sites, sites related to the Holocaust, as well as information on more general issues such as accommodation, dining options, etc. Upon request, the Center organizes personalized tours for visitors to see places outside Vilnius.

The Vilnius Jewish Culture and Information Center has its own art gallery, bookstore and meeting space, where it shows at regular intervals and upon request an audio-visual presentation of Vilnius.

It is open Tuesday from 11.00 to 15.00, Wednesday and Thursday from 11.00 to 17.00, Friday and Saturday from 11.00 to 18.00, Sunday from 11.00 to 15.00.

Jewish Vilnius
16 M 211 111102