CHAPTER FOUR

THE BATHHOUSE AND *MIQVA'OT* (RITUAL BATHS) OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE OF VILNA, LITHUANIA

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Prologue

During discussions on the publication of the excavation of the Great Synagogue of Vilna, Richard Freund voiced a deep interest in the subject of ritual purity, as expressed through the excavation of the bathhouse and *miqve* building exposed during our work[1]. In the final planned publication, Richard had undertaken to conduct a comparative analysis of such structures in eastern Europe, with the bathhouse and *miqve* building from Vilna[2] providing his primary example. Unfortunately, with Richard's untimely passing, this was not to be, and I hope this short chapter introduces future discussion on this topic.

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[1] The researchers involved in the Vilna Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* Research Project are Dr. Jon Seligman - Israel Antiquities Authority; Zenonas Baubonis, Justinas Račas & Mantas Daubaras - Kultūros paveldo išsaugojimo pajėgos; the late Prof. Richard Freund z" l - University of Hartford & Christopher Newport University; Prof. Harry Jol - University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; Prof. Phillip Reeder - Duquesne University. See: www.seligman.org.il/vilna_synagogue_home.html. The excavation was funded with generous donations from the Good Will Foundation and from private donors.

[2] Terminology of place and its associated national attributions is an emotive issue in Eastern Europe, no less so in Lithuania, where, prior to World War II, a multicultural society of Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Russians, Belarusians and others lived side by side. Thus Vilna (Vilne in Yiddish) is also known as Vilnius to Lithuanians and Wilno to Poles. As Vilna was the cultural nomenclature preferred by the Jews relating to their city, it is preferred here, while Vilnius is used when referring to the modern city.

Introduction

The archaeological and halakhic study of ancient *miqva'ot* (ritual baths) in Eretz Israel was pioneered by Ronny Reich (1990, 2013), developing over recent years into an extensive field of study[3], that strongly contrasts the limited discussion of these installations in the diaspora from late Antiquity, through the Middle Ages till modern times. While a small number of *miqva'ot* from Spain, Italy, France and other European countries[4] have been investigated, a significant corpus of such sites dated from the Middle Ages and later have been investigated in Ashkenaz (Germany). The most notable early examples are those in Speyer, Worms, Cologne, Friedberg (Figure 4-1) and elsewhere (Heuberger 1992; Künzl 1992; Altaras 1994; Harck 2014; Keßler 2015; Bodner and Lehmann 2019). Most, though not all, are found in synagogue courtyards or in close proximity to synagogues. In strong contrast to the ancient *miqva'ot* of Palestine, which were mostly filled from above with rainwater that flowed directly into the installation, the examples in Ashkenaz utilise groundwater that trickled into the basin of the *miqve* through the walls or floor, often excavated deep in the level of the subterranean water table at the end of long, often spiralling, staircases. Significant change to the structure of these medieval *miqva'ot* followed the intervention by secular health authorities in their hygienic standards from the early 19th century, who noted the awful conditions of many *miqva'ot*, especially for women, just after childbirth or menstruation. The lack of proper heating of the both the water and the room, especially in winter, poor ventilation, together with the low water quality of the shaft-type medieval *miqva'ot* drew the ire of district physicians, forcing Jewish communities to renovate or construct facilities that met the stringent regulations of the health authorities[5].

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[3] See especially Amit and Adler 2010; Adler 2011.

[4] For a bibliography for these and other European early medieval *miqva'ot* see: Adler and Zeldes 2021: 58, note 17; 59, notes 18-21; Salmona 2021: 58-62, 95-97 and Shenberger 1974: 28-38.

[5] For early discussion on the impact of health regulations on Jewish society see: Schneider 1825.



Figure 4-1 – A shaft type *Miqve* with steps cut down to the level of the aquifer – Friedberg, Germany (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain) https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Judenbad_Friedberg_Innenansicht_f._Wikipedia_Foto_K.Augustin.jpg.

The demand for better and hygienic conditions created an inherent conflict between the secular demands of the state, and the requirements of Halakha[6]. The search for creative halakhic solutions encouraged the renewed use of rainwater and the construction of a basin of ritually pure water known as an *'ôṣār* connected by a pipe to the *miqve* basins so water could pass between them, rendering the *miqve* suitable for ritual purification. This allowed the use of clean tap water to top-up the *miqve*, thus also adhering to new regulations of hygiene and sanitation.

If the study of physical remains of *miqva'ot* in Germany is well served, we hit a blank as we move east. While the presence of *miqva'ot* is obvious,

[6] The complex Halakhic discussion to provide modern solutions to this ancient problem are detailed by Shenberger 1974 and Sternberg 2021.

no study of the remains of *miqva'ot* in eastern Europe, including Lithuania, exists and photographic materials usually provide external images of the *miqve* building and little of the interior installations. However, from the responsa, it is clear that the rabbinical authorities operating in eastern Europe, including Poland and Lithuania, were well aware of the polemics of the issue in Germany and were fully engaged in the discussions that brought about major changes in the structure of *miqva'ot* from the 19th century. One of the first places where this issue received practical expression was the bathhouse and *miqve* of the *Shulhoyf* in Vilna where discussion centered on the use of water piped in to the *miqve* from the nearby spring.

In 1848, during one of the many refurbishments of the bathhouse building in Vilna, Rabbi Ya'acov Meir Padwa of Brisk was asked to provide a halakhic solution for women who were not taking ritual ablution in the *miqve* seriously enough because of the physical difficulties posed by bathing in the deep, cold and unhygienic *miqve* (Padwa 1854: Siman 10; Sternberg 2021: 195-198)[7]. Indeed, Padwa notes the need to climb down forty steps to the *miqve* existing in Vilna up until the mid-19th century, a *miqve* for which we, as-of-yet, have no physical evidence, while noting that most bath in water drawn from the Vingrių spring. He goes on to propose that a pipe be placed in a channel cut in the ground from the spring to a newly constructed women's bathhouse in the *Shulhoyf* from the spring itself.

The Bathhouse and *Miqve* of the Great Synagogue of Vilna

The Great Synagogue of Vilna (Figure 4-2) was at the centre of its community and probably the most important edifice of Lithuanian Jewry until its ransacking by the German-Nazis and Lithuanian collaborators during the liquidation of the Small Ghetto in late October 1941 and later demolition under Soviet control in 1956–57. On the site of the Great Synagogue, a school was erected of poor utilitarian modernist design, its minimalist shape designed to conceal the previous importance of the place.

Paradoxically, in their rush to destroy the Great Synagogue, the Soviet authorities preserved in the foundations of the new school, extensive sections of the lower parts of the walls of the synagogue, portions of which had been built below street level. The excavation has concentrated on exposing sections of the synagogue, with emphasis on the *bimah* and Torah ark (*Aron*

[7] The issue would be taken up again in 1878 by Rabbi Shlomo HaCohen, head of the rabbinical court of Vilna from around 1865 till his death in 1905. He notes 70 steps to reach the water level and confirms the halakhic use of piped water to the community miqve in the *Shulhoyf* (HaCohen 1903: 91-95, Siman 40).

Kodesh), and of the combined *miqve* and bathhouse building in the *Shulhoyf*, the synagogue compound.

According to Jewish tradition, the first wooden Great Synagogue of Vilna was erected in 1573 (Levin 2012: 240), some twenty years before the Jews of the city received privilege from Sigismund III Vasa, the united monarch of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, allowing the community to establish a synagogue, cemetery and bathhouse in Vilna (Bershadski 1887 7.3: 82; Klausner 1935: 5-9; Cohen 1943: 20-37; Frick 2005: 13 and note 15). This privilege would be confirmed by charter in 1629 (Meilus 2007: 65-66) and reconfirmed in 1633 by Władysław IV Vasa to permit the building of a masonry (brick and stucco) synagogue and restricting the use of the bathhouse specifically to the Jewish community (Meilus 2007: 65-66, note 9).



Figure 4-2 – The Great Synagogue of Vilna at the beginning of the 20th century in a painting by Jozas Kamarauskas (Photograph: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vilnius_Synagoga,_J.Kamarauska-2-.jpg

Around the Great Synagogue developed the *Shulhoyf* (Figure 4-3), a communal complex that by the end of the 19th century included twelve prayer halls (*kloyzn* - קלויזן) established by various religious and professional associations, as well as by private individuals, community offices, public latrine, the community well, the drinking and washing fountain and the bathhouse with its *miqva'ot*.

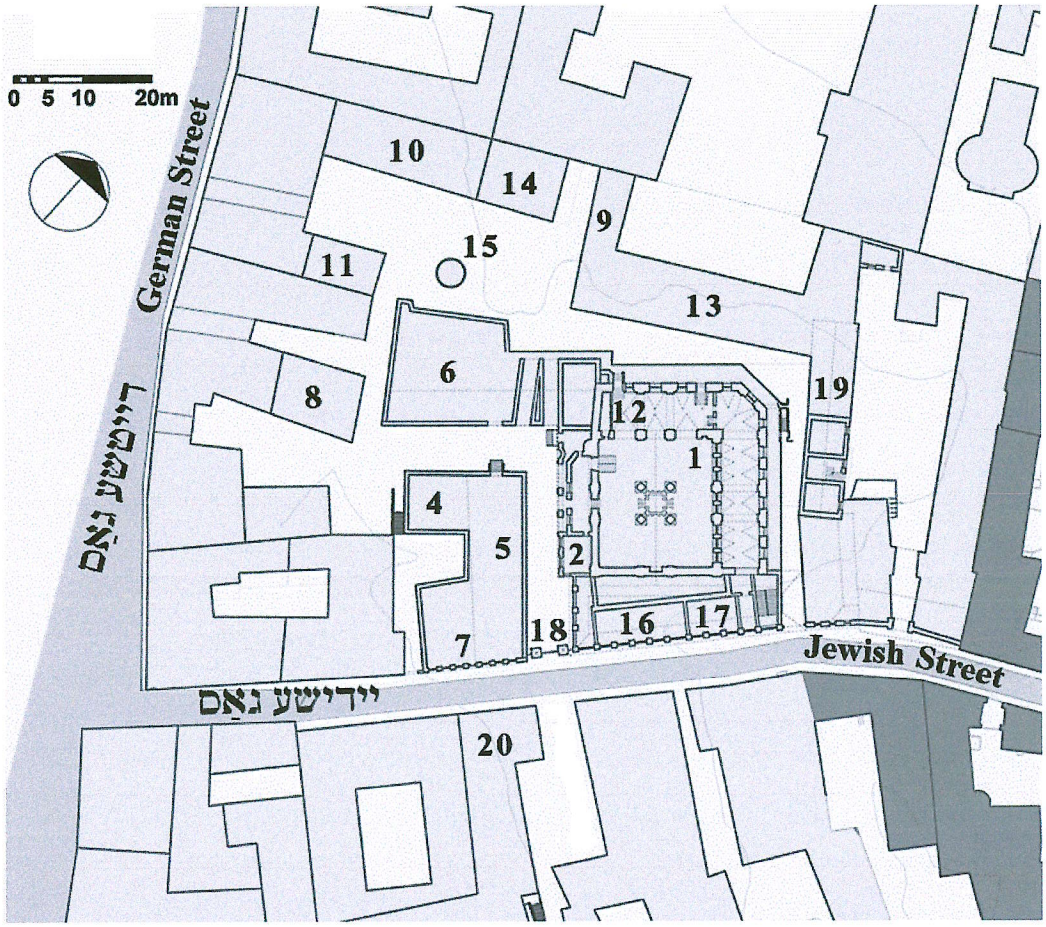


Figure 4-3 – Plan of the Great Synagogue and Shulhoyf of Vilna (based on a plan by Tsila Zak): Legend - 1 – The Great Synagogue, 2 – Community Board (kahal-shtub), 3 – Old Kloyz, 4 – Chevrat Kadisha (Burial Society's) Kloyz, 5 – Shiv'ah Kru'im Kloyz, 6 – New Kloyz of Yesod, 7 – Kloyz of the Vilna Gaon, 8 – Gmilut Hesed Kloyz, 9 – Malarske (Painter's) Kloyz, 10 – Chevra Po'alim (Artisan's) Kloyz, 11 – Koidanover Hasidim Shtibl, 12 – Lubavich Shtibl, 13 – Bathhouse and Miqva'ot, 14 – Latrine (Kahalsher Beis Cise),15 – Communal Well (Kahalsher Brunem), 16 – Meat Stalls, 17 – Strashun Library, 18 – Shulhoyf Entrance, 19 – Beth Midrash, and 20 – Ramayles Yeshiva.

As almost all the accounts of Great Synagogue of Vilna deal with the synagogue itself, we know surprisingly little about the *miqve* and bathhouse in the *Shulhoyf*. For historical information we need to rely on the research of Klausner (1935: 56-58, 100-104), the touristy description of Szyk (1939: 173), the limited incidental descriptions quoted from the responsa of Padwa (1854: Siman 10) and HaCohen (1903: 91-95, Siman 40) and on the renovation plans of the bathhouse submitted to the municipal authorities in 1875 and in 1904. Based on Padwa's and HaCohen's responsa, it is clear that prior to 1848, a deep shaft *miqve* with numerous stairs, probably similar to

those found in Germany, was excavated deep below the *Shulhoyf* to reach the ground water. We have yet to discover remains of this *miqve*, though it is possible that the deep shaft was later converted into the community well, located to the side of the bathhouse building.

For the most detailed historical description we can rely on Israel Klausner's book published in Hebrew in Vilna, titled the "History of the Hebrew Community" (1935)[8]. Klausner notes that importance was given by the community for hygiene through provision of clean water supply through underground pipes for drinking, washing, fire-fighting and for refuse and sewage removal. The Vilna Municipality (Magistracy) had arranged water supply and sewage removal for the entire city, and the Jewish streets should have been able, as guaranteed as part of the charter of privileges and decrees issued in 1633 by Władysław IV Vasa, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, to utilise these utilities as part of the municipal taxes (Klausner 1935: 57; Frick 2005: 14 and note 18). However, the municipality did not fulfil its commitments and the Jews were forced to organise their own water supply and sewage removal.

Water for communal activities was available, at a price, from the nearby Vingrių springs that had been allotted by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Dominican friars. In a contract of 1759 with the Dominicans, the Jews were only allowed to channel water the 540 metres from the spring eastward to the *Shulhoyf* itself. Water could only be taken for public use there and no additional pipes to the homes and courtyards were permitted. The community was charged a high annual price of 200 gold pieces (złoty) for channelling the water through wooden pipes to the *Shulhoyf* and for the digging of a wellhead to collect the water from the spring.

In the mid-18th century, the community passed the management of the bathhouse to the Gabai (sexton) of the *Bedek Bayit* society, with responsibility to supervise the infrastructure and maintenance of the water supply. To cover the cost of the contract to take water from the Vingrių spring, the *Bedek Bayit* society demanded payment from the neighbouring houses and buildings of the Great Synagogue, if they had no private well or if they used public waters taken from the community well.

As the bathhouse was one of the major sources of income of the community, it forbad anybody else to operate a bathhouse or *miqve* elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, women were forbidden to bath in the river, forcing them to bath at the bathhouse and to purify themselves at the *miqve* in the *Shulhoyf*. Over time, the building became dilapidated and by the end of the 18th century the foundations were crumbling and the building was in danger

[8] See especially Klausner 1935: 8-9, 56-58, 100-104 and the sources noted there.

of collapse. The leader of the Kahal allowed the Gabai of the *Bedek Bayit* society to fix the bathhouse, for which all the income of the Bedek Bayit society was allotted. In fact, the condition of the bathhouse was never good, a fact that resulted in numerous recorded closures and repairs. In June of 1823 the bathhouse was designated by the Chief of Police as, "completely dilapidated, even very dangerous."[9] A year later the Governor-General of Lithuania, Alexander Mikhailovich Rimsky-Korsakov, approved a plan submitted by the *Bedek Bayit* society to restructure the building and clear ramshackle wooden outhouses from the plot. From the archived building file, we see that special attention was given to the woman's section, noting that, "... this was needed for daily use according to Jewish law...", clearly indicating that it was referring to the *miqve.* This work, the full details of which remain unclear, was only completed in 1828.

The responsa of Padwa (1854) and HaCohen (1903) deal halakhically with what would prove to be a complete remodelling of the *miqva'ot* in the *Shulhoyf* in 1848. This clearly involved the filling-in or removal of the original shaft-type *miqve* and its replacement with *miqve* basins inside the bathhouse.

While we have little detail or information, it is quite possible that the original construction of the *miqva'ot* we uncovered in the excavation (below) were those built in 1848. From various sources we are aware of further major repairs to the building at the after 1875 and in 1904, the latter the result of a closure order to prevent cholera issued by Dr. Mikhaelov, the municipal physician, following complaints from gentile neighbours of bad odours[10]. Later, after the First World War, with the bathhouse and *miqve* again inoperable and closed, the American Joint Distribution Committee donated $20,000 for renovations, though various logistic and legal difficulties meant the bathhouse and *miqve* remained shut as late as 1939 (Szyk 1939: 173; Kaniel 2015: 65) and bathers were directed by the rabbinical authorities to alternative facilities which had developed in the city as the community had outgrown the small *miqva'ot* of the *Shulhoyf* (Ran 1974: 157) or had moved away from the Jewish quarter. In 1940, the Soviet authorities closed the institutions of the Jewish community and the bathhouse was forever sealed.

The awful condition of the bathhouse is obvious from Szyk's description of the baths in the 1930s:

> "In the *Shulhoyf* was a simple bath and a good bath. To the simple bath one would first climb the steps to the changing room (?) and then go down thirty

[9] LVIA, F. 378, Ap. 1828, B. 140 (microfilm in CAHJP, HM2/9773.3).

[10] See plan submitted to the Vilna Governate in 1904 (LVIA F.282, Ap.2, B.1939).

steps to the lower floor to bath. The steps were slippery and frequently people slipped and were injured. The cool bathhouse, where people bathed, had a pump at its centre, and two gentiles always stood above and pumped up and down water. The walls were as black as coal. The cubicles of the changing room were infested with cockroaches. From the corners of the bathhouse could be heard the croaks of frogs. From their hiding placed could be heard the chirrups of grasshoppers" (Syzk 1939: 173).

Plans for the Repair of the Bathhouse

By the 19th century the Tzarist government had instituted a modern system of building regulation, standardizing the application for building and renovation through the offices of the Governates, with oversight regulated by police authorities and the local municipality (Zolotareva 2019: 3-7). The subsequent archived plans submitted to authorities prove an invaluable source for studying both the relationship between the Jewish community and governmental authorities and also of the planned structures themselves.

A reconstruction plan of the bathhouse, submitted to the Governate in 1875, shows the bathhouse was an irregular L-shaped building, consisted of two main floor levels and multiple rooms, constructed to fit the space between the Great Synagogue to its south and the back of building plot 248 of the *Shulhoyf* (Figure 4-4). The irregularly shaped building lined 56 meters of the northern flank of the plot and 36 meters of its eastern side, each floor consisting of 750 square meters of covered spaces. The bathhouse and the back of the Great Synagogue were separated by a gated narrow pathway. Wood used to heat the bathhouse was often piled in this space. Beyond the gate, to the east was a courtyard, the *durchhoyf*, between the latrine of the bathhouse, the Kloyz *Chevra Po'alim* and the back of the New Kloyz of the *Yesod*. At the center was the community well, possibly the site of the original stepped *miqve* until 1848 (see above). On the eastern side of the bathhouse building, were five small rooms (14-19), with a single *miqve* basin in the center (16). From a film[11] of Vilna dated to the 1930s, we see that this part of the bathhouse is painted in Yiddish and Polish with the sign "Entrance to the men's bath", clearly showing this section of the bathhouse to have been used by the men. From this point the building turns westward, forming a line of six larger rooms (6-9, 11, 13) separated a staircase to the upper story (12). The painted sign in the same film shows this was the women's section of the bathhouse and *miqve*, with an arrow pointing to

[11] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Film titled 'Wilno Great Synagogue area'. Accession Number: 2014.534, RG Number: RG-60.1830, Film ID: 4169. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn553836.

where the ticket booth was located. Further along, facing the *durchhoyf,* was a large public latrine with multiple cubicles on two stories (1 and 25), probably divided by gender (Figure 4-5). The upper story and attic rooms of the bathhouse included a number of rooms 21-33), the use of most remaining unclear. However, we do know that room along the eastern side of the *durchhoyf* were occupied by the *Malarske* (Painters') Kloyz (23-25). In all the rooms standing masonry stoves (cocklestoves) (Rosemarie 1969) kept the space warm during the cold winter, and multiple stove tiles were recovered during the excavation. While the plans seemingly provide a very good guide to the architecture of the bathhouse, a single photograph (Ran 1974: 157) (Figure 4-6) shows a supporting arch that stretched from the bathhouse to the back of the synagogue with the Hebrew date 5641 (1881) indicating the end of a repair and reopening at that time.

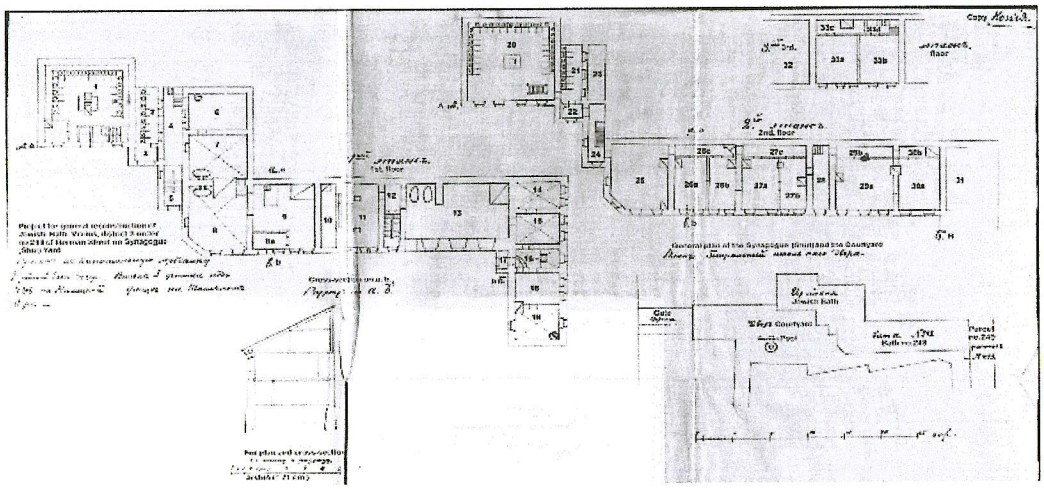


Figure 4-4 – The renovation plan of the bathhouse and *miqva'ot* submitted to the Governor of the Vilna Governate in 1875 (Credit: Vilnius Cultural Heritage Centre Library, with the aid of Marius Baikauskas).

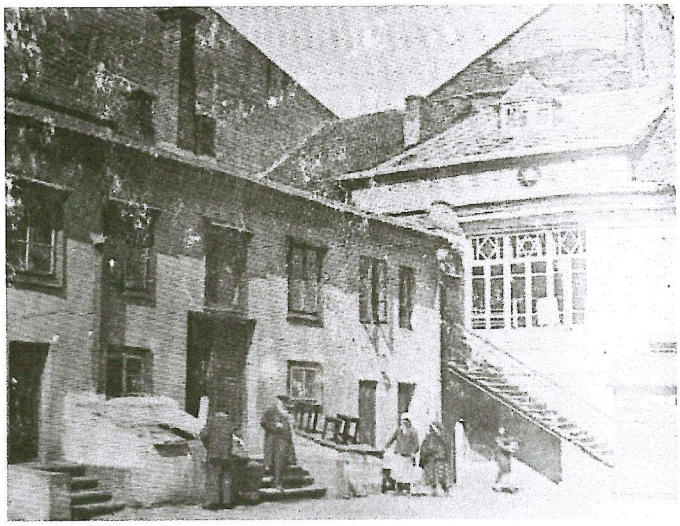


Figure 4-5 - The public latrine building on the left and the large window of the *Malarske* (Painters') Kloyz on the upper story of the bathhouse building (Source: probably from the 1930s, after Ran 1974: 105).



Figure 4-6 – A photograph of the bathhouse and the back of the Great Synagogue with the pathway between them. On the arch connecting the two structures on photograph synagogue is a plaster cartouche with the Hebrew date 5641 (1881) (Source: probably from the 1930s, after Ran 1974: 157).

The later and much more detailed plan of 1904 was comprised by architect R.J. Dombrovsky for the Vilna Religious Board following the official closure of the baths, again following complaints concerning the unhygienic state of the bathhouse (Figure 4-7). This plan indicates the function of each room of the bathhouse and the proposed changes.

Both sets of plans clearly indicate that beyond ritual purification in the *miqve*, the facilities of the bathhouse provided changed rooms, toilets, heated bathtubs (wanny - וואנעס), firstly of copper and later of concrete, and steam baths in the Russian *bania* (баня) tradition (Dachnik 2015: 108-134). The rooms were heated by standing masonry stoves (cocklestoves), usually located on the dividing walls to provide heat simultaneously to two rooms.

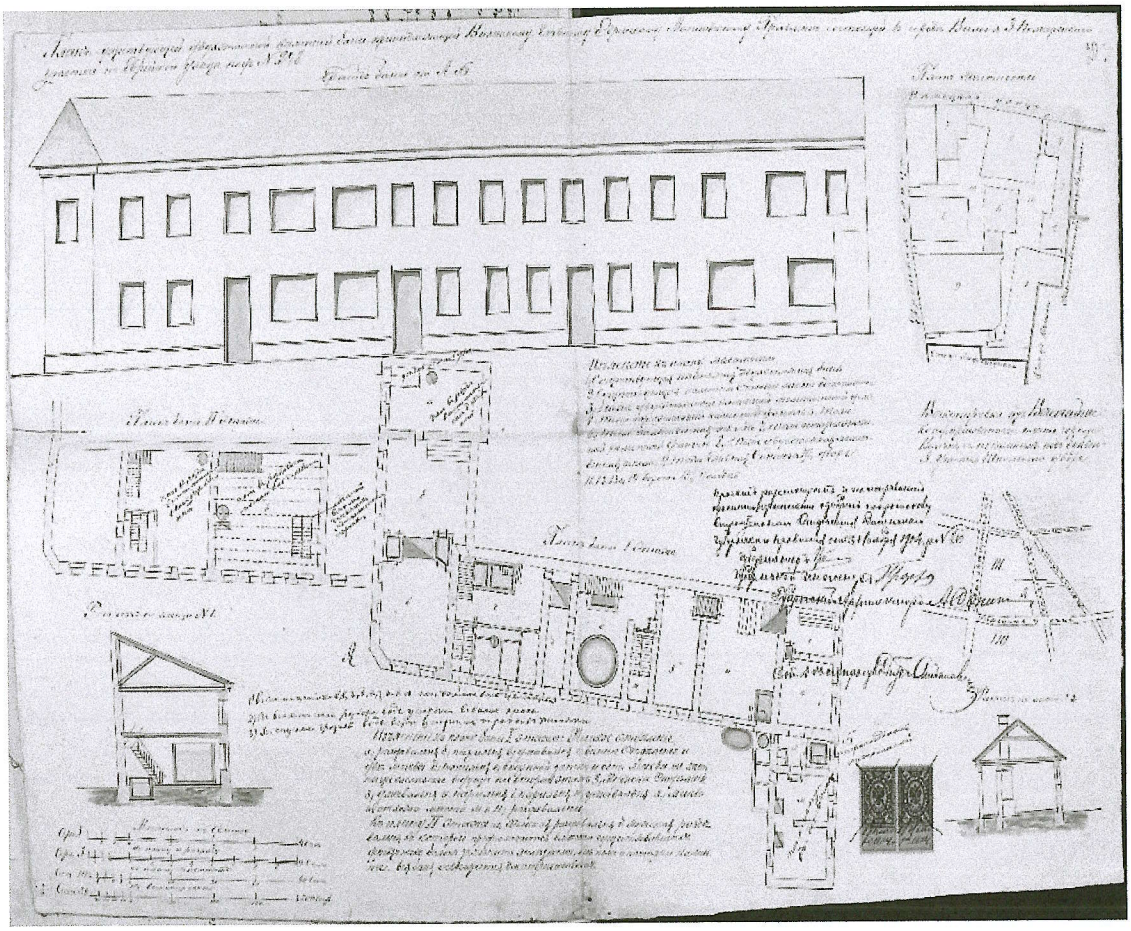


Figure 4-7 – The renovation plan of the bathhouse and *miqva'ot* submitted to the Governor of the Vilna Governate in 1904 (Credit: The Lithuanian State Historical Archives, with the aid of Gerson Taicas. - LVIA F.282, Ap.2, B.1939).

The Excavation of the Bathhouse and *Miqva'ot* in the *Shulhoyf*

Over the past few years, our consortium of Israeli, Lithuanian and North American researchers have conducted archaeological research on the site of the Great Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* (synagogue courtyard) of Vilna (present-day Vilnius in Lithuania). Though bombed and burnt during the liberation of Vilnius in July 1944 from the German-Nazis, the shell of the bathhouse stood until the demolition of the Great Synagogue and the *Shulhoyf* as part of the re-planning of the area of Vokiečių gatvė (German Street) and Žydų gatvė (Jewish Street) on instruction by the Vilnius city architect, Vladislovas Mikučianis[12], part of the egregious and concerted campaign of Soviet-Lithuania to erase Jewish physical and historical memory from the city (Weeks 2010: 143-147). The space where the bathhouse once stood was not rebuilt, and its footprint became the playground of the school built over the Great Synagogue. Given that the area was bulldozed in 1956-7, and with the knowledge that the *miqve* baths would have been at, or just below floor level, we decided that there was a good possibility that remains of the bathhouse still existed. Consequently, we concentrate our excavation in the areas that indicated the existence of *miqva'ot*.

Following a detailed geophysical survey of the site, which indicated the existence of extant remains, the area of the bathhouse was excavated over a number of short seasons between 2016 to 2018. Building remains were discovered just centimeters from the surface but proved to be heavily damaged. The building was constructed of buff and reddish-brown handmade bricks and the division into rooms was clearly discernable. In some cases, underground vaulted basements cut into the sandy soil were also discovered, a typical feature of buildings in the old town of Vilnius (Figure 4-8).

[12] Mikučianis rationalizes his decision to destroy the restorable remains of the Great Synagogue and the *Shulhoyf* in his biography (Mikučianis 2001: 90-94).

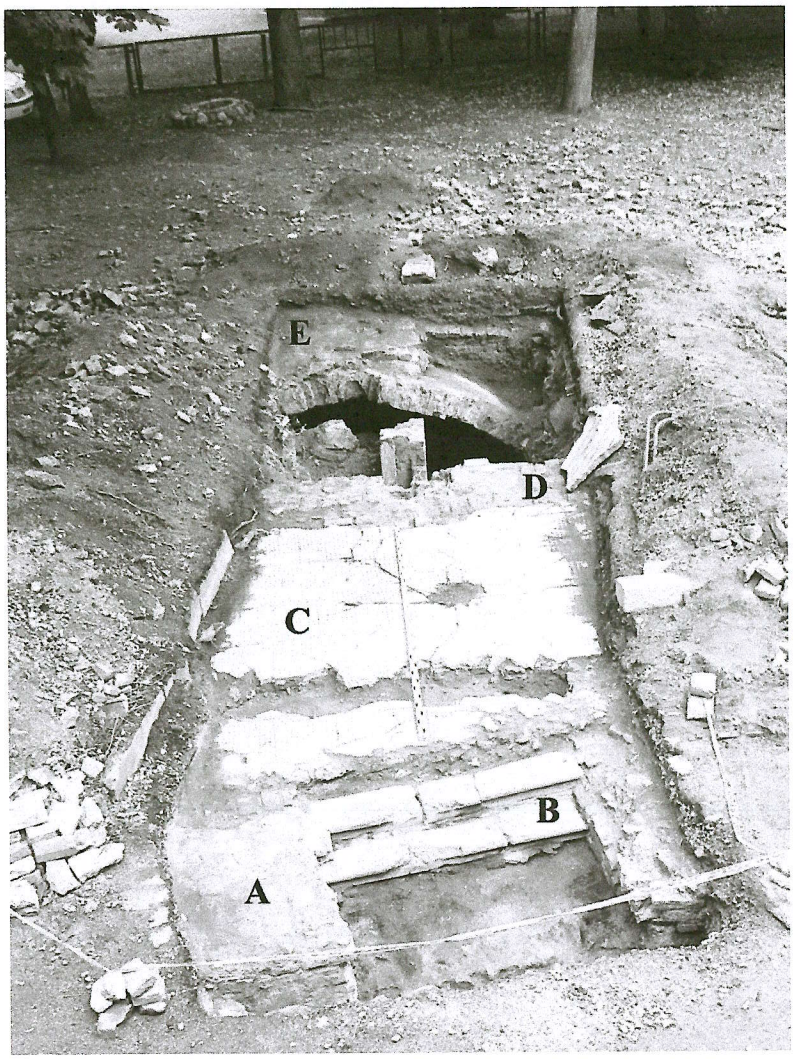


Figure 4-8 – The excavation of the Bathhouse (A - back wall of the Great Synagogue; B – steps from the floor of the Great Synagogue and back entrance; C – 20th century concrete paving of the pathway between the Great Synagogue and the bathhouse; D – the façade wall of the bathhouse; E – the floor of the bathhouse and the undercroft (Photograph: Justinas Račas, Vilna Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* Research Project).

Though heavily damaged we were luckily able to identify at least two *miqva'ot* amongst the debris. The surrounds of the installations were constructed in brick, indicating that these *miqva'ot* originally date to the 19th century, possibly from the time of the fitting of the first *miqva'ot* in the bathhouse in 1848 after the filling or removal of the shaft-type *miqve*. The installations showed clear evidence of the last renovation with concrete and modern tiling set inside the original brick surround.

The first *miqve* (Figure 4- 9), on the western side of the bathhouse, which was surprisingly small, measured 2.6 x 1.5 meters, but large enough to contain the minimum halakhically required volume of 40 *seah* (Talmud Eruvin 4b, Yoma 31a), equivalent to around 200 liters. In the SW corner of the installation were the remains of 25 cm. high steps, two of which are complete. Originally there would have been four steps from the entrance of the pool, making the original depth of the immersion area of the *miqve* around 1 meter, of which 60 centimeters. survive. The walls and the steps were covered in white quartz tiles, stamped on their back as originating from factories in Grodno and Minsk. The floor was covered in beige-yellow tiles set square to the walls, with small decorative black tiles set diagonally at the corners of each tile. To the side of the second step from the bottom was a round metal drain hole, probably fixed to drainage pipes in the undercroft. Between the wall of the room and the *miqve* were the faint remains of the concrete base of the reservoir (*'ôṣār*), lined with pink-yellow lime bricks and lime mortar of the 19th century. From the evidence of a film shot in the 1930s (above), this *miqve*, in the west of the bathhouse, was used by women.



Figure 4-9 – The women's *miqve* (Photograph: Jon Seligman, Vilna Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* Research Project).

A second *miqve* (Figure 4-10), used by men, was exposed in the eastern part of the building. It was on similar size to the previous installation (2.45

x 1.75 meters), but shows two phases of use. In the first, the pool walls were covered with the same white quartz tiles, decorated with a black ceramic band. At a later date, a concrete pool was added inside the space of the *miqve* that possibly served as the reservoir of the *miqve*. Below the *miqve* was an undercroft, inside of which a modern cast iron drainage pipe below the drain of the *miqve* was clearly visible.



Figure 4-10 – The men's *miqve* (Photograph: Jon Seligman, Vilna Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* Research Project).

Standing masonry stoves were used to heat the rooms of the bathhouse and large quantities of colorful glazed stove tiles decorated with geometric, heraldic and vegetal motifs in molded relief, dating from the end of the 18th century up until the early 20th century was discovered in the debris. Such tiles are frequent feature of excavations from the 16th century throughout central and eastern Europe and have received detailed attention in the excavations of the Place of the Grand Dukes in Vilnius (Rackevičius 2012). Further study is required, though the majority of the tiles were of a green glaze of the 19th century, with a limited quantity of blue and white tiles dated to the 18th century. Unfortunately, no evidence of piping or the flow of water into the *miqva'ot* was found. Given the detailed rabbinical discussion by Rabbis Padwa and HaCohen, on this specific issue, relating to these specific *miqva'ot*, but we can safely assume that they were filled in accordance with

the instructions of these rabbis, through wooden pipes laid and maintained from the Vingrių spring to the *Shulhoyf*. This historical understanding was further demonstrated in 2021 during excavations at the Vingrių spring[13]. The remains of wooden pipes formed from hollowed logs, joined with iron couplings, running from the spring directly in the direction of the Jewish quarter were uncovered. More important was the exposure of a boxed pool at the base of the spring lined with wooden logs (Figure 4-11). This was the 'well box' (בורנעם קאַסטן) noted in the rabbinical writings of Kargau (1845: Responsa 5), from whence water flowed directly into the wooden pipes to create a constant flow to the *miqve*.



Figure 4-11 – The wooden well-box at the Vingrių used springs to collect water for the Shulhoyf (Photograph with thanks to Andrius Šležas of the Kultūros vertybių paieška).

[13] The excavations were conducted at the Vingrių spring and Pylimo gatvė, near the medieval walls of Vilnius, in 2021 by Andrius Šležas on behalf of 'Kultūros vertybių paieška'. I thank Andrius for letting me note his findings and for use of the photographs.

Conclusion

While the archaeological study of the *miqve* in the Diaspora in Ashkenaz from the medieval period is well advanced, similar studies in eastern Europe have yet to be undertaken. The excavation of the bathhouse and *miqve* of the Great Synagogue and *Shulhoyf* in Vilna presented us with a unique opportunity to approach this new area of research. Sternberg (2021) has shown that the 19th century was a period of innovation in orthodox rabbinic thinking, mainly because the demands placed on women to bath for purification in dirty, cold and even dangerous conditions in medieval deep shaft *miqva'ot* cut down to the level of the groundwater were no longer tolerable. Though the rabbis considered the reluctance of women to bath in the unpleasant conditions of many *miqva'ot* and specifically the *miqve* in Vilna as 'frivolity', the demand became unfeasible, both because of the 'interference' of secular health authorities and because women, especially those from the more bourgeois elites, were no longer prepared to suffer previously imposed religious dictates. Indeed, both in Germany and later in Vilna, as municipal hygiene became an issue, city physicians would simply close *miqva'ot* deemed unsanitary. In parallel, in Germany, but clearly later spreading to Eastern Europe, the rabbinical authorities found halakhic solutions to enable both controlled use of clean water from the municipal supply and for heating.

Though it may be premature, the combination of a *miqve* within the communal bathhouse, may well be a characteristic tradition that distinguishes the *miqva'ot* of eastern Europe from those in the central part of the continent.[14] While this is clearly the case in Vilna and in other settlements in Lithuania[15], this proposal requires further investigation.

The excavations exposed the latest phase of repair of the Vilna bathhouse, set into the earlier construction of the building. By this time modern materials, such as concrete, quartz tiling and iron fittings were utilized, and the *miqve* basins were connected up to the municipal water supply, though evidence of this can only be inferred from plans and the adopted practices of rabbi's resident or trained in Lithuania in the 19th and 20th centuries as expressed in their responsa. Questions still remain concerning the practices and the physical design of the stepped shaft-type *miqve* prior to 1848 and until such time as its remains are exposed, we will have to rely on the written

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[14] I thank Vladimir Levin for this suggestion.

[15] Other examples of *miqva'ot* integrated with communal bathhouses in Lithuania are known at Eišiškės, Jonava (Cohen-Mushlin et.al. 2010: 143, 150), Plungė, Prienai, Širvintos, Ukmergė, Utena (Cohen-Mushlin et.al. 2012: 38, 56, 150, 202, 218).

description of Padwa and HaCohen. Furthermore, a much more detailed study of the *miqve* in Eastern Europe is required to better understand the development of this central institution found in the thousands of Jewish communities settled throughout eastern Europe.

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At the Great Synagogue of Vilnius. Left to right – Philip Reeder, Richard Freund, Jon Seligman, and Justinas Račas (photo by Kyle Conti).



Figure 1-1 – The location of the research sites that are discussed in Chapter 1.

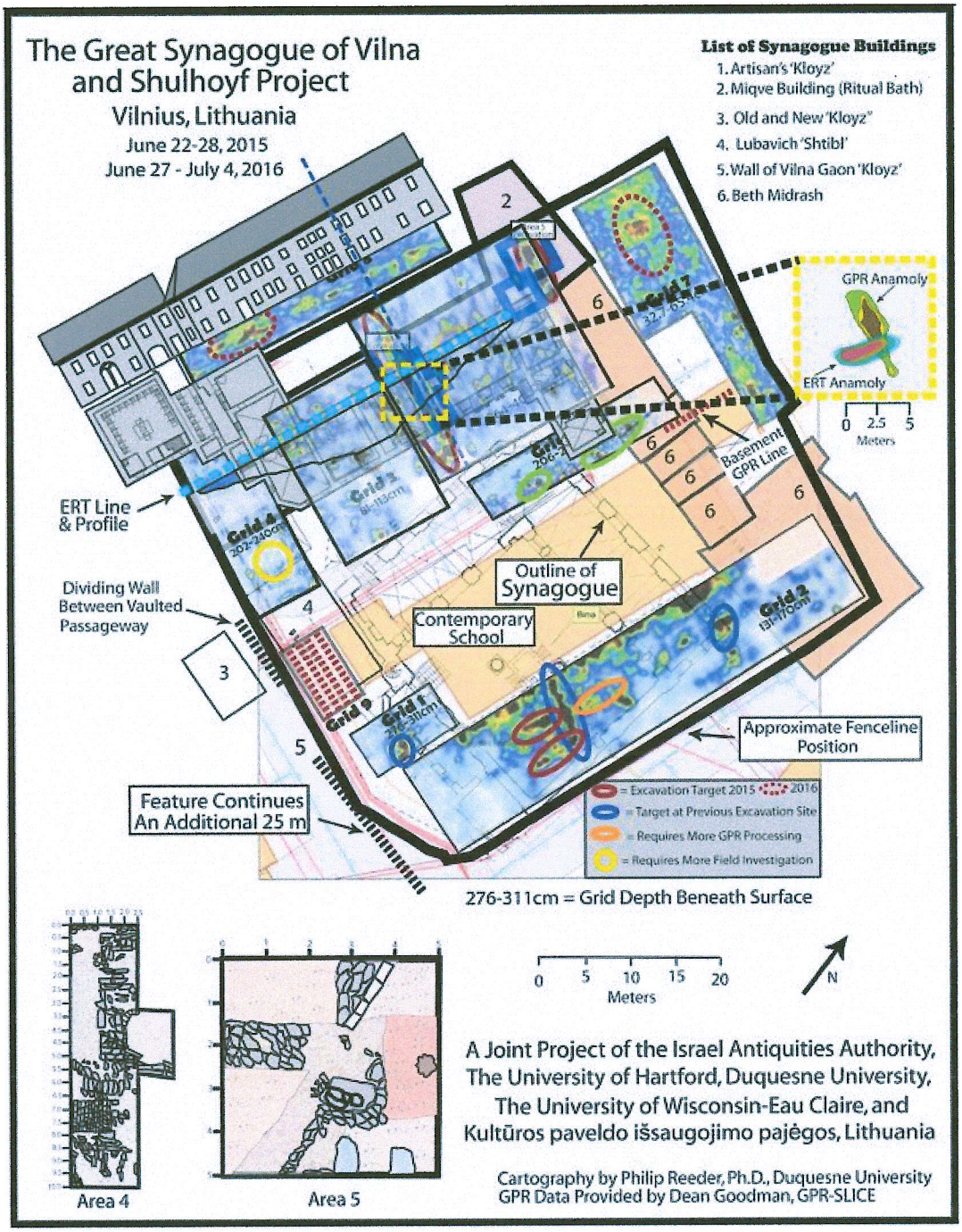


Figure 1-3 – A map of the Great Synagogue and Shulhoyf based on our research. The data for all of the different features depicted on the map is layered one on to the other. It contains the various GPR plots that were collected over the years, as well and the first ERT line collected at the site. Also depicted is a plan (from above) view of the plans for the bathhouse, as well as a rendering of the side veiw of the bathhouse based on the construction plans. Also presented are the locations of other buildings related to the synagogue, the outline of the synagogue itself, and the school that now overlies its ruins. Lastly, possible exvacation targets are provided based on the interpretation of the GPR data.

RICHARD FREUND'S LEGACY OF IDEAS, RESEARCH AND TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST



EDITED BY

PHILIP REEDER

Richard Freund's Legacy of Ideas, Research and Teaching about the Holocaust

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Philip Reeder

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Richard Freund's Legacy of Ideas, Research and Teaching about the Holocaust

Edited by Philip Reeder

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3019-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3019-5

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