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Between Ethnocentrism and Multiculturalism: The Cultural Landscape in Polish Guidebooks to Vilnius (1856–1939) and Zalmen Szyk's *Toyznt yor Vilne*

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Annotation: This article explores changes over time in the manner in which multiculturalism in Vilnius was shown and evaluated in tourist guidebooks written between 1856 and 1939. It provides an overview of narratives which serves as a background reflecting the uniqueness of Zalmen Szyk's Yiddish-language publication *Toyznt yor Vilne* (1939). From the mid-19th century on, one can detect an increasingly strident nationalist patriotism in Polish-language books of this genre, underscored by ethnocentrism and nationalistic megalomania. The city is depicted in most of these guidebooks as a bastion of Polish spirit and martyrdom, the quintessential example being a guidebook published by Juliusz Kłos in 1923. Zalmen Szyk, on the other hand, evinces a much greater readiness to incorporate various models of historical memory and interpretations of urban space: Vilnius in his work is unashamedly multicultural, without a trace of ethnocentrism. Szyk is extremely meticulous and unprejudiced in his treatment of all the ethnic groups living in the city and the heritage they left behind. He writes about each group in turn: Lithuanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Tartars, Germans and Jews, and the adherents of Catholicism, Judaism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Islam are all accounted for. In comparison with the Polish-language guides, Szyk's Yiddish guide to multicultural Vilnius contains by far the most comprehensive description of the Polish cultural presence; notably, he does not shy away from incorporating elements of the romantic model of Polish martyrdom.

Keywords: Vilnius city guides, Zalmen Szyk, Adam Honory Kirkor, Juliusz Kłos, multiculturalism, ethnocentrism.

1. Parallel histories

When I began researching the history of the Yung Vilne group in 2000, I travelled to Vilnius for the first time with a group of Polish journalists. We were taken on a tour of the city that highlighted the splendours of Polish culture: on the few occasions that the guide pointed out vestiges of the heritage of other nations, they were presented as either having been destructive to the Polish character of the city, or simply primitive. When I visited Vilnius some six months later to attend the Yiddish Summer Programme, we were taken on field trips throughout the city in its ‘Yerushalayim de Lite’ version, which focused solely on the history and material traces of its Jewish past. The Greek Orthodox churches in Vilnius were not included in either the Polish or the Jewish sightseeing tours, so I had to discover them on my own. I was also left on my own to unearth the Lithuanian culture of old Vilnius, completely absent from both tours exploring the modern-day capital of Lithuania. It struck me then how much richer a tour of Vilnius could be if it were presented as a multicultural and multi-faith city that embraced its Lithuanian, German, Polish, Russian and Jewish cultures along with the material heritage of Judaism, Catholicism, Karaism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism.

I now perceive the two completely distinct narratives about Jewish and Polish Vilnius embedded in city sightseeing tours as emanations of two separately shaped collective memories, inseparable from the politics of memory, for which all the inherently selective and partial tourist guidebooks, tourist routes and historic sites are important tools that shape the canon of national heritage and identity.

Vilnius is a very important point on the map of historical and national heritage for both Poles and Jews; moreover, for both these groups, it is a unique and extremely important centre of culture, religion and martyrdom. The danger lies in the fact that the special role of Vilnius, and the emotionalism associated with that role, work to mythicise its history, hindering the possibility of a common vision of the past that is recorded in the urban space. The narratives of Polish, Jewish and Lithuanian Vilnius developed in parallel over the 20th century, each one virtually ignoring the other.

Thus, my discovery of Zalmen Szyk’s Yiddish guide *Toyznt yor Vilne* (‘A Thousand Years of History in Vilnius’), published in 1939, was all the more both an unexpected and a somewhat surprising find. For more than 500 pages, the guide consistently avoids blatant ethnocentrism: it presents Vilnius

as a multicultural city, and succeeds in neither privileging nor marginalising any culture or religion. What is more, the author applied an interdisciplinary approach to the description of space, incorporating historical, literary, folklore and other sources. To fully appreciate Szyk's perspective on the Vilnius cultural landscape, and the image of Polish culture presented in his work, we must perforce place his book within the context of other Vilnius guidebooks that appeared before 1939.¹

2. Adam Kirkor's guide to multicultural Vilnius

The publication of city guides was directly related to the development of tourism which occurred in the 19th century, as a result of improvements in infrastructure and transport (primarily railways), but also as the result of the emergence of the intelligentsia as a social group, and the emergence of leisure as a distinct category. The first guide to Vilnius, entitled *Przechadzki po Wilnie i jego okolicach* ('Walks around Vilnius and its Surroundings'), was penned by the Polish archaeologist, journalist and publisher (e.g. *Kurier Wileński*) Adam Honory Kirkor, writing under the pseudonym Jan of Śliwin (1818–1886). It appeared in 1856 in Polish, 15 years after the first tourist office in the world opened in 1841. Readers could choose from 18 walking tours in Vilnius mapped out by Kirkor in his 291-page guide. The routes do not culturally hierarchise space: the author takes an almost academic approach (the main text has numerous footnotes) to his detailed descriptions of objects and places, representing various cultures and religions. Kirkor references historical sources, chronicles, documents and even folk tales. He refrains from comments that demean the tangible and intangible emblems of heritages other than that of Poland and Catholicism. He views the Jewish quarter without judgment, describing its crowded conditions and poverty there with compassion rather than censure, as for example when he paints the fate of some poor families in diminutive terms: 'So as to find themselves a place in

1 For more on Vilnius guidebooks, see also Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, 'Podróże do Wilna i początki wileńskiej turystyki w drugiej połowie XIX wieku i w początkach XX stulecia (do 1914 roku) w świetle bedeków i relacji', *Turystyka historyczna*, Vol. 1, eds. Z. Hojka, K. Nowak, Katowice 2017, p. 550–579 and Marcos Silber, 'Tiyulim be-Vilna be-shalosh safot bi-shnot ha-shloshim ha-me'uharot', *Zemanim*, 2014, No 125, p. 58–67.

the cheapest little corner, several inhabitants build additional levels in a single chamber, where they reside in the most unbearable stench of stale air. Some of the tenement houses were so old that they fell apart and crumbled into rubble, a few even crushing their poor inhabitants.² Kirkor wrote about the activities of numerous Jewish brotherhoods that supported the poor, and about the funeral society. He describes the residential buildings of the Jewish quarter: ‘The streets and alleys are lined with old stone tenements with various courtyards, horrible to look at, narrow stairways steep as ladders set upright without as much as a handrail, with porches wobbling under their own rot, passages connecting one street with another, little secret shops, underground corridors.’³ He also focuses on the cemetery, synagogue and hospital, and on Leib Leyzer’s ‘haunted’ basement, describing with ethnographic precision the exorcism rituals that took place there. This is not the only instance when Kirkor embellished his narrative with local legends. I must quote this one passage because similar descriptions were simply not to be found in Polish guidebooks about Vilnius published in the 20th century.

In the house of the Israelite Leyb Leyzer on Jewish Street there is an enchanted shop, an underground dungeon, where the Jews themselves tell this story: the Jew who owned the shop died childless in the last century, and left no will when he suddenly passed away, so it was sold in public by auction. But the new owner had barely settled in when all manner of ghosts began to haunt him so ruthlessly that, terrified and unable to get rid of them, the poor man turned for help to the renowned scholar Rabbi Elias of Vilnius.⁴ He in turn summoned the power of the evil spirits along with the pitiable Jew, whom he instructed to drape a canvas across the room at a designated hour, and the trial began. Separated by the canvas, each side in turn put forth their rights to the house. Sitting over his Talmud amid the loud shrieks and arguments of the parties, to which he listened in all earnestness, the Rabbi cut them off with a single *shtil!*, and after a thorough presentation of the claims of both sides, wherein the spirits also proved their rights to inheritance after the deceased, the judge bowed silently over the Talmud, with his eyes closed in a state of the highest concentration. At long last, he opened his eyes and then his

2 Jan ze Śliwina, *Przechadzki po Wilnie i jego okolicach*, Vilnius 1857, p. 70.

3 Ibid.

4 This is most likely a reference to the Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720–1797).

mouth, and proceeded to state that both sides were right, which brought forth more shrieks and screams, for the spirits rejoiced, while the Jew and his family protested loudly. The Rabbi ordered silence once more, and issued a firm verdict ordering that one room in the house be handed over to the ghosts, as the unlawful children of the deceased owner, but strictly forbade them from entering any other part of the house. This room was walled up, and from that time on there was peace and quiet.⁵

It is worth noting that Kirkor recounts this story with all due respect for the Vilna Gaon, without in any way diminishing the latter's dignity. The story was also intended not as a criticism of the backwardness of the Jewish residents, but rather both to introduce an ethnographic element taken from Jewish sources, and to endow the space with a certain aura of mystery (this is a method still very much in use today to enhance stories about historic sites).

The author was not blind to diversity, and indeed saw it everywhere. For example, he expressed his delight at the sound of the muezzin's chanting: 'When the weather is fine on a Friday, especially on fresh May mornings, as you stroll along the river bank you can hear an agreeable, melodic and gentle singing. It is the muezzin's call to prayer.'⁶

Kirkor also paid special attention to the Protestant heritage of the capital of Lithuania, which was directly related to the status of the aristocratic Radziwiłł family in this area, and with Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł (1515–1565), a leading proponent of Calvinism in Lithuania.

An important feature of Kirkor's guide that distinguishes it fundamentally from later works is the fact that he considered Vilnius a Lithuanian city in the broadest sense of the word: for him, Lithuanians were simply all the residents of historical Lithuania, including Poles living in the area. For this author, the concept 'Lithuanian' appeared to be a category that encompassed a linguistic and cultural mosaic. In the introduction to the guide, he wrote: 'At every step in Vilnius, you will find something interesting and edifying that evokes the heroic deeds of Lithuanians, an open book of lives full of virtue and merit, vice and weakness.'⁷

We should bear in mind that Kirkor's guide was created after the partitions of Poland, and had to be submitted to the tsarist censor. This limited the author's

5 Jan ze Śliwina, *Przechadzki*, op. cit., p. 72–73.

6 Ibid., p. 111.

7 Ibid., p. 9.

ability to write about various events that were critical for Vilnius, such as the Polish national liberation uprisings. It is also clear that he avoided mentioning the name of Adam Mickiewicz, although he slipped in information about the Polish bard's works, by citing the title of one of his works without actually invoking his name directly. Kirkor was accused of taking a submissive attitude towards the tsarist authorities, and in an afterword to the second edition of the guide (1857), he mentioned that he had also been attacked for his emotionally balanced descriptions, as well as his lack of piety and 'Catholic spirit'.⁸

Criticism notwithstanding, the guide was very successful, and the second edition was published only a year after the first printing. In addition, just six years later, in 1862, the author published another guide, entitled *Wilno i koleje żelazne z Wilna do Petersburga i Rygi* ('Vilnius and the Railway from Vilnius to Petersburg and Riga'), which was a direct result of the introduction of a railway connection to Vilnius (the first train pulled into Vilnius in 1860, and the station was built in the same year that the guide was published). The guide was intended as a manual for travellers (e.g. it provided information about ticket offices), but also as an incentive for sightseeing trips (the author described places along the railway route, but the greater part of the book is devoted to Vilnius).

In the 1862 publication, the author emphasised Vilnius' multiculturalism even more strongly than in the first edition of 1856, and firmly established its religious tolerance as its fundamental asset and the source of its growth and past glory:

One of the greatest virtues of August⁹ [...] was his lenience towards people of all faiths and religions [...]. The population grew, trade and crafts flourished, the city in its splendour assumed the appearance of a great European capital. The city was a strange amalgam of various elements melded together, and yet at the same time in a unified form: all the religions had their temples, convents, monasteries, the Evangelical congregations, Jewish synagogues, and Tartar mosques, which all gave the city an unusual appearance, while various nationalities brushed past each other

8 Compare *Ibid.*, *Dodatki i sprostowania*, p. 275.

9 Zygmunt II August (1520–1572), Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1529, King of Poland from 1530. It was on his initiative that the Crown Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were merged into one Commonwealth on the basis of the Union of Lublin in 1569.

on the streets: Lithuanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Armenians, Greeks, Germans, Jews, Turks, Tartars, etc, and it was Zygmunt August who endowed it all with life and gave it its soul.¹⁰

The guide is richly detailed, with descriptions of tollgates, thoroughfares, outlying districts, canals, springs, bridges, mills, gardens, city lighting, tax collection, the workings of the judicial and administrative authorities, food consumption, industry and trade. As in his earlier work, Kirkor did not omit to write about religious buildings, cemeteries, charities, scientific societies, schools or archaeological monuments. He included extremely precise statistical data: we learn, for example, that at the time he was writing his guidebook, there were four schools in Vilnius for Israelite girls (the author generally used the word *Izraelita*, rather than the word *Żyd* (Jew), as the latter was considered to be a pejorative stereotype) that had 285 students, along with three yeshivas with 39 students, as well as 348 students and 31 staff members at the rabbinical seminary. The details he provides are at times surprising: he informs his reader, for instance, that there were 1,977 patients in the Jewish hospital in 1862, 164 of whom had died (he also provides numbers regarding other hospitals in Vilnius). From the statistics that he included regarding the structure of the population of Vilnius, Kirkor also conveyed its ethnic and religious complexity: he wrote, for example, that 640 Jewish boys and 480 Jewish girls were born in 1861. The structure and content of the guide indicate that it was addressed not only to tourists, but also to people travelling to Vilnius on business, including potential investors. One can surmise that at the time Kirkor was writing, the concept of the guidebook as such was still very fluid.

3. The return to martyrology

Kirkor's guides were a genuine sensation compared to Polish guides that appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, and especially when compared with the outpouring of guidebooks during the interwar period. It is impossible

10 A. H. Kirkor, *Przewodnik: Wilno i koleje żelazne z Wilna do Petersburga i Rygi oraz do granic na Kowno i Warszawę*, Vilnius 1862, p. 20–21.

to discuss all these publications here, and while I have found nine of them (not including guides to the Vilnius region), I most certainly may have overlooked several others.

As early as 1904, Władysław Zahorski (1858–1927), a Polish doctor, researcher of Vilnius' history and collector of Vilnius legends, published his *Pamiętki narodowe w Wilnie. Uzupełnienie przewodnika po Wilnie Kirkora* ('National Souvenirs in Vilnius. A Supplement to the Kirkor Guide to Vilnius'). As the title suggests, the purpose of the publication was to complete the information provided in Kirkor's books that the tsarist censorship had not allowed: specifically, a survey of places associated with the Polish national struggle for liberation, steeped in the spirit of martyrology. This type of supplement could only have been issued in Krakow, i.e. not in the Russian Partition, but in the Austrian Partition, which allowed much greater freedom of the press (even so, the author took care not to disclose his name in the publication). In his introduction, Zahorski expressed his reasons for completing the Kirkor guide in these dramatic terms:

Over a hundred years of governance from Moscow, during which rape, atrocities and the repression of the Polish population have played a major role, have left behind numerous memories imprinted on the city's streets, places of worship, and other buildings. There is no home or street that did not hear the Polish lament, that did not witness the despair and tears of women and children knuckling under the weight of Moscow's fist, struggling in vain to free themselves from oppression [...]. A souvenir of the martyrdom of the first apostles of Christ's faith in Lithuania is the three crosses destroyed by a sacrilegious hand, that should be placed on the coat of arms of the city of Vilnius, as an emblem of the martyrdom of successive generations.¹¹

As can be inferred from the passage above, the Polish population of Vilnius was excluded from the general community (although other ethnic groups also suffered under the tsarist regime), and the main purpose of the 1904 guide was to commemorate places of martyrdom. Thus, the martyrdom of Poles was inscribed in the larger context of the entire history of martyrdom in the Catholic

11 Władysław Zahorski, *Pamiętki narodowe w Wilnie. Uzupełnienie przewodnika po Wilnie Kirkora*, Kraków 1904, p. 3.

faith. The author referred to the three crosses on the Hill of Three Crosses in Vilnius, and to the legend that it was on this site in the 14th century, during the reign of Grand Duke Algirdas (a son of Gediminas), that seven Franciscans were tortured, in remembrance of which three wooden crosses were erected in the 17th century. The crosses deteriorated, and collapsed in 1869, and the tsarist authorities refused to grant permission for their reconstruction.¹² Tsarist repression is thus represented as a continuation of the fight by Catholicism against paganism. From this perspective, the Lithuanians are equated with the partitioning powers, setting up an obvious antagonism between Poles and Lithuanians. From that point on, this type of discourse shaped the Polish narrative in tourist guidebooks to Vilnius.

I will mention only two of the many Baedeker-style guides that came out during this period. Two guides appeared in print in 1910: Władysław Zahorski's *Przewodnik po Wilnie opracowany na podstawie najnowszych źródeł* ('A Guide to Vilnius based on the Newest Sources'), and *Wilno – przewodnik ilustrowany po mieście i okolicach z planem miasta i dodatkami* ('Vilnius – An Illustrated Guide to the City and Surroundings with a City Map and Appendix') by Wacław Gizbert-Studnicki (1874–1962), a Polish historian and archivist, director of the Vilnius State Archives in the interwar period, and one of the founders of the Vilnius Society. Compared to the Kirkor guide, there is a very clear change in the manner in which the city is described: apart from its practical dimension, the guide has a different function, to portray Vilnius as a Polish city tormented by the martyrdom of its Polish population. In Zahorski's guide, Jews appear as a hostile element, above all in the context of the events of the 1905 revolution. The author accuses them of supporting the Bolsheviks: 'Revolutionaries, almost exclusively Jews, tried to terrorise the city by killing policemen and throwing bombs.'¹³ We are witnessing here the beginnings of the stereotype of the Jew-communist that was to taint Polish-Jewish relations for years to come.

At the same time, the 1910 guide entirely fails to mention the Jewish district, noting only the presence of the synagogues (the main one and the Taharat-Hakodesh) and a cemetery. This guide had a second edition in 1921,

12 The crosses were reconstructed in 1916, removed under Stalinism in 1950, and then re-erected in 1989.

13 Władysław Zahorski, *Przewodnik po Wilnie opracowany na podstawie najnowszych źródeł*, Vilnius, 1910, p. 25.

and the changes made to that edition are very characteristic, reflecting further internal divisions within the Vilnius population as a result of the First World War. After Poland regained independence in 1918, the guide targeted not only Jews as enemies, but also, and perhaps above all, (ethnic) Lithuanians. The events of the struggle for the city in 1918 are described as follows:

On January 5, the Bolsheviks seized the city, and the terrible Jewish-Bolshevik rule over the Christian population began, lasting three months. The Jews decided who was to be imprisoned, convicted in mock trials, and shot; hostages were taken and deported from Vilnius [...]. In a word, there was no rape or atrocity that the Bolsheviks were not willing to commit against the tormented and despairing people of Vilnius [...]. Finally, the Bolsheviks fell back, surrendering the city to the Lithuanians, who treated the Polish population as the Bolsheviks had, if not worse.

4. The Juliusz Kłos guidebook as the apotheosis of Polishness

Vilnius, which passed from hand to hand, and to which both Poland and Lithuania claimed rights (Poland having broken diplomatic relations with Lithuania), began to be portrayed as a bastion of Polishness, a city of martyrdom. The most glaring example of this rhetoric was *Wilno*, a very popular guide published in the interwar period in 1923 (reprinted in 1929, 1937 and 1980, and finally in 1989 in large quantities of 50,000 copies). This travel guide was by Juliusz Kłos, a Polish architect, architectural historian, professor at Stephen Bathory University, and dean of the Faculty of Fine Art. Considering his professional credentials, one would assume that Kłos' guide would be a model of balanced academic discourse, but nothing could be further from the truth. Kłos' bathetic and exalted narrative about the history of Vilnius was permeated with nationalist patriotism, combined with a big dose of ethnocentrism and national megalomania. It comes as no surprise that he introduced his second edition as a guide to human souls. The new main category for evaluating objects and places was the degree to which they embodied the Polish spirit and the martyrdom of the Polish nation. The author expressed this in his introduction, in the form of a metaphor for the city as a song that harkened to 'every sensitive noble visitor'.

The following excerpts from the guide encapsulate the spatial tropes used to describe Vilnius in Polish guides of the interwar period. The song's prevalent leitmotif is the enthusiasm of the Polish spirit:

Vilnius has its own unique character and tone, it is a song of great enthusiasm, incandescent in its eternal 'Ode to Youth',¹⁴ its ecstasy reaching to the ends of the universe in the 'Improvisation' in the third act of *Dziady*¹⁵ [...]. This basic element of the Polish spirit, the source of the immortal deeds of Grunwald,¹⁶ and the relief of Vienna,¹⁷ the Constitution of May,¹⁸ and the 'miracle on the Vistula',¹⁹ found its fullest incarnation in Vilnius; as if evoked by its picturesque location, the spirit settled over the ramparts of Vilnius from the Ostrobramska chapel through the soaring towers of the church of St Anne, through the majestic arcades of the Academy, the volcanic explosion of creative frenzy in the Church of St Peter and Paul, to the sanctuary of the Church of St John, incomparable in its frolicsome and subtle fantasy, and that of the Dominicans, and up to the columns of the Cathedral portico, so powerful in their monumentality! The land of Vilnius also gave Poland its greatest enthusiasts of action, from Kościuszko²⁰ and Traugutt²¹ to Piłsudski and

14 *Oda do młodości*, written by Adam Mickiewicz in 1820.

15 *Dziady*, a Romantic drama cycle written by Adam Mickiewicz and published in 1823–1860. *Improvizacja* was a monologue by Konrad, the hero of the work, in part III of *Dziady*, that took place in a cell in the Dominican friary in Vilnius, which at the time was used by the tsarist government as a prison.

16 This is a reference to the Battle of Grünwald (15 July 1410) fought by joint Polish and Lithuanian forces against the Teutonic Knights.

17 The relief of Vienna (12 September 1683) was a victory outside Vienna by the Polish-tsarist army under Jan III Sobieski over the forces of the Turkish Empire.

18 The Constitution of 3 May, adopted on 3 May 1791, regulated the legal system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It is recognised as being the first modern constitution to be written in Europe.

19 The Miracle on the Vistula is the name given to the Battle of Warsaw, fought on 13–15 August 1920, during the Polish-Bolshevik war. It had a decisive influence on Poland's independence, and stopped the spread of communism in Western Europe. Józef Piłsudski was the commander-in-chief of the Polish armed forces.

20 Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817) was the supreme commander of the national armed forces during the Kościuszko Uprising in 1794, directed against Russia and Prussia after the Second Partition of Poland.

21 Romuald Traugutt (1826–1864) was a Polish general who was the last commander of the January Uprising (1863–1864).

so many, many others; it was she who issued the radiant host of the Philarets,²² and the prophets of the Nation, with Mickiewicz and Słowacki²³ at the fore.²⁴

This prevailing tone of enthusiasm, as Kłos wrote, was underscored by:

The moaning of the victims murdered in the Moscow invasions, tortured by the degenerate thug Muravyov,²⁵ tormented in prisons by the German, Bolshevik and Lithuanian invasions. The second melody is the martyr's song of Vilnius, which suffered infinitely more than all the other cities of the Commonwealth, but which finally blends with the immortal enthusiasm of the triumphal chords: 'We have not yet perished!'²⁶ and with the flash of the Polish soldier's sword that twice released Vilnius from the chains of captivity.²⁷

The search for the Polish spirit becomes a filter through which Kłos assessed even the aesthetic value of architectural objects. He considers the buildings put there by the Russian administration aesthetically foreign manifestations of barbarism, and, as such, devoid of artistic value. He regards the Orthodox churches as eyesores:

And this melody, painful and tragic, but relentless, echoes until today in the disfigured palaces and churches, violently remoulded into Orthodox churches with farcical onion-shaped domes, in the new glaringly colourful Orthodox constructions triumphantly spread out over the highest points of the city, in all the barbarically modern buildings built in Vilnius after 1864, to its unprecedented neglect and disgrace.²⁸

22 The Philarets were a secret Polish patriotic association of young activists in Vilnius in the years 1820 to 1823.

23 Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) was a Polish poet and playwright from the Romantic period, who lived and was educated in Vilnius from 1811 to 1828.

24 Juliusz Kłos, *Wilno. Przewodnik krajoznawczy*, Vilnius, 1923, p. 8–9.

25 Mikhail Muravyov (1796–1866) was the Russian governor-general of Vilnius from 1863 to 1865, during the suppression of the January Uprising.

26 'Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła' ('Poland has not yet Perished') is a Polish patriotic song from 1797, which in 1927 became the country's official national anthem.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

28 *Ibid.*

A little further, he compares Orthodox churches to ulcers, cancers, foreign matter growing in the city's tissue:

Until the outbreak of the European war, Muravyov and his successors added to the city's panorama ever more insidious and bulbous churches, glaring in their foreignness like ulcers on the architectural face of the unfortunate Vilnius. A whole series of these cancers, not even worth mentioning here, do not even display the artistic culture possessed by the old Orthodox churches of Russia.²⁹

In a church given over to the Lithuanians, in which services were held in Lithuanian, the author of the guide also noticed many unsightly elements, and describes it in a way that basically discouraged visitors: 'primitive architecture', 'ugly vestibule', 'huge, bizarrely shaped windows', 'uninteresting form, incompetently copied from Classicism', 'shamefully glaring red colour', 'the interior has no valuable altars or monuments.'³⁰ At the German cemetery, Kłos was disturbed by the 'German' organisation of space: 'erected at great cost and labour, with a certain artistic taste, but suppressed by an overly pedantic regularity, so typical of German organisations'.³¹ The author is a determined tracker of the influence of Polish art, which he spied, for instance, in the Orthodox Church of St Nicholas. He also sought evidence of the influence of the Polish style over art, e.g. the pure style of the Polish Renaissance (without ever specifying what that might actually be). He entered headlong into a polemic with the Polish architectural critic Zygmunt Hendel, who saw German and Flemish influences in the Church of St Nicholas, whereas Kłos regarded this building as the embodiment of the Polish Renaissance.³² For ethnocentric Polish researchers, the central problem was the issue of the Lithuanian origins of the founding of Vilnius. This became more pronounced after 1918, when the Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius erupted. Without hesitation, Kłos asserted that the Vilnius region 'was populated from the beginning by Slavic tribes, not ethnic Lithuanians' (in subsequent guides published in the interwar period, the notion gained traction that the city of Vilnius was founded by Poles abducted

29 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

as prisoners by Lithuanians).³³ Kłos imagined the beginnings of Lithuanian statehood as the partition of Slavic lands, admitting that the Vilnius region belonged to Lithuania in the 13th century, but immediately qualifying this by adding: ‘This, however, did not determine its nationalisation, because Slavic [agricultural] culture stood at a much higher level than Lithuanian [hunters], and therefore the Slavic population of the conquered countries had a significant numerical advantage over the conquered peoples.’³⁴ The conviction that Poles were culturally superior to Lithuanians was also evident in the author’s thesis regarding ‘Poland’s civilising mission in the Lithuanian territories’.³⁵

It comes as no surprise that Kłos formulated a similar theory in relation to the Jewish community. He described the entire Jewish quarter in two pages, which is comparable to Zahorski’s guide, but Kłos’ terms of description were significantly more depressing. He pointed out that although ‘the houses in the Jewish quarter do not have any architectural merits, nor do they exhibit any particular style’, taken as a whole, they represent something original.³⁶ He added in conclusion: ‘Unfortunately, this impression is very much undermined by the typical eastern sloppiness of the inhabitants of this anti-hygienic district and its unbearable stench, making it impossible, especially on hot summer days, for a cultural European to visit these backstreets.’³⁷ Kłos thus abruptly excludes Jews from the category of ‘cultural Europeans’, and although Jews were residents of Vilnius for nearly as long as Poles, they remained an alien eastern element. While Kirkor detected the Jewish quarter’s social problems, rooted in poverty and human misfortune, he dismissed the slovenliness and lack of hygiene that he observed as endemic ethnic features. His dire depiction would certainly have deterred tourists from venturing into the Jewish quarter.

In the third edition of his guide, Kłos added one noteworthy address to his description of the Jewish quarter, the birthplace of Julian Klaczko (1825–1906). Why would Klaczko be the only person worthy of attention out of all the members of the Jewish community of Vilnius? The answer is simple: Klaczko was a Jew who was entirely assimilated with Polish culture. He earned a reputation

33 Ibid., p. 16.

34 Ibid., p. 17.

35 Ibid., p. 28.

36 Ibid., p. 218.

37 Ibid.

as a Polish literary critic and art historian, and, most importantly for Kłos, he was also a friend of Juliusz Słowacki. The choice of Klaczko as the only Jew mentioned by name and surname (by his Polish name, of course; Klaczko's real name was Yehuda Leyb) was influenced by the same Polish filter, which for Kłos was the basic tool for the selection and evaluation of all his content.

5. Other Vilnius guidebooks in the interwar period

Kłos' guide was very popular, but at least one other publication, by Helena Romer (1878–1947), a Polish prose writer, publicist, playwright, social activist and secretary of the editorial board of *Kurier Wileński*, entitled *Vilnius* (Warsaw–Poznan, 1920), is also worth mentioning.³⁸ Her depiction of the Jewish quarter goes beyond the typical formula of a guidebook. The author's naturalistic narrative has some literary merit. On the whole, it is a very ambivalent depiction. On one hand, the author paints a disparaging picture of the Jewish quarter, emphasising the stereotypical attributes attributed to Jews, focusing on dirt, trade, and *gesheftly* (small deals). On the other hand, however, the author placed Poland in the role of a caring, family home for the Jewish population, thereby recognising the Jewish community as an integral part of the population of Polish lands, and thus the Jewish quarter as an integral part of Vilnius, bursting with life and energy:

38 This is not the only Vilnius guide written by a woman. In 1912, the Polish journalist and writer Ludwika Życka (1859– after 1 September 1939) published *Wilno* in the 'Library for School Youths' series. Unlike Romer, Życka penned a positive description of the Jewish quarter. She failed to note the stench that all the others pointedly mentioned, and was clearly delighted by the synagogue: 'an ancient synagogue worth seeing', 'a beautiful wooden gallery outside', 'a beautiful vault', 'stylish decoration' (Ludwika Życka, *Wilno*, Kraków, 1912, p. 42). She also mentions a private Jewish library of 20,000 volumes (a reference to the Strashun collection). She mentions the fact that there were gates in the Jewish quarter in the past that were supposed to protect the Jewish population against the attacks on them that were so widespread in Europe in the Middle Ages, but softened this statement a bit by adding that in Poland such attacks were severely punished (see Ludwika Życka, *Wilno*, op. cit., p. 42). References to pogroms against Jews were not common in Polish guidebooks to Vilnius.

With the dirtiness and density of its inhabitants, this network of winding, black streets, alleys and courtyards, overgrown with swamp, could compete with London's Whitechapel. Some shops, sunk deep below the street, breathe mould and rot; others spew all sorts of goods out on to the street, from lubricants and ropes to 'satin silks without seals of authenticity', which were much touted. In the midst of all this, a raucous Israelite crowd is teeming along the rotten boards of the pavements, the bumpy cobbled roads, the narrow corridor of streets, from dawn to dusk. Disputes, bargaining, deals, conducted with passionately raised voices over the scream of young ruffians who literally live being knocked about in the gutter, the lament of beggars lying against the walls and the shuffling of a thousand feet.³⁹ Thousands of odours, one would think deadly to the human body, saturate the air. And yet everything there is intensely alive, with a strong sense of having being there for hundreds of years. The 'black city', the Jewish quarter in Vilnius, is not merely a part of the city: it is the great ancestral home of the Jewish community, a secure and dense beehive, from which the swarm, consolidated here thanks to its money and trade, flies out into other streets.⁴⁰

Separate guides to the Vilnius and Novgorod regions were also published in the interwar period. The book *Przewodnik narciarski po terenach Wileńszczyzny* ('Skiing Guide to the Vilnius Region') by Jan Grabowski and Konstanty Pietkiewicz, published in 1937, was one of the more unusual items in this category. The Lithuanian guide to Vilnius *Vadovas po Vilnių* ('Guide to Vilnius'), written by Jonas Vytautas Narbutas and Mykolas Biržiška, was published in Kaunas in 1938, at about the same time as the guide by Szyk. Like Kłos' guidebook, this publication can also be seen in the context of political activities pertaining to historical memory and the cultural heritage. As Justyna B. Walkowiak noted:

The longest and undoubtedly the most important part of the guide was made up of lists of street names: Lithuanian-Polish and Polish-Lithuanian. Since Vilnius belonged to Poland at the time, Lithuanian street names did not actually exist (and they had never existed in official records before), so the book would be of little use

39 Whitechapel is a district of London dating from the 17th century inhabited mainly by poor people, characterised by overcrowded conditions and plagued by crime.

40 Helena Romer, *Wilno*, Warszawa-Poznań, 1920, p. 30.

to a Lithuanian tourist who wanted to tour Vilnius after diplomatic relations were established between Poland and Lithuania in 1938.⁴¹

Although Mykolas Biržiška was perceived as a supporter of Polish-Lithuanian reconciliation, the guide itself bolstered the activities of the Vilnius Liberation Union (founded in 1925), which actively sought out evidence of the city's historical Lithuanian identity.

A new Polish guide by Jan Jaskólski, *Wilno, jego zabytki i piękno* ('Vilnius, its Monuments and Beauty'), was published in Vilnius in 1939. Its purpose, the introduction explained, was similar to that of Kłos: 'At the same time, I would like the visitor-tourist to be able to convince himself of the greatness of Polish culture, erected brick by brick over centuries to create a stately edifice of the Ark, a treasury of historical achievement.'⁴² He calls Vilnius 'a Polish bastion in the east'.⁴³ Jaskólski's narrative is characterised by a pathos and a patriotism echoing that of Kłos. It should be noted, however, that his description of the Jewish quarter, although very succinct, is decidedly more favourable than that left by Kłos (he writes about the synagogue as a very interesting building), without overt ethnic prejudices (he is also very positive about the large Tartar community living in Vilnius).⁴⁴ Although it devotes only a single page to the Jewish quarter, it does not simply repeat word for word previous descriptions, but introduces a new detail: 'It is interesting to enter the synagogue through a large, old-fashioned, massive door, which has a unique construction of moveable stairs that serves to lock the door from inside.'⁴⁵ The author completed the guide in July 1939. In view of the events that were to take place just a month later, Jaskólski's words about 'Polish world-power status' sound rather grotesque today.⁴⁶ Some of the profits derived from the sale of this guide were to be allocated to the National Defence Fund; the publishers wished, in the words of the author, 'to add a brick to the strengthening of state power'.⁴⁷

41 Justyna B. Walkowicz, 'Urbanimia wyobrażona: przewodnik po Wilnie nieistniejącym', *Język Polski*, 2018, No 4.

42 Jan Jaskólski, *Wilno, jego zabytki i piękno*, Vilnius 1939, p. 3.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 43.

45 Ibid., p. 46.

46 Ibid., p. 68.

47 Ibid., p. 4.

6. Zalmen Szyk's guidebook and the move away from ethnocentrism

How, then, does Szyk's work compare with other 19th- and 20th-century guides to Vilnius? First of all, especially in the context of interwar guides, Szyk's vision of the Vilnius landscape is unusually multicultural, and free of ethnocentrism. Szyk meticulously and without prejudice accounted for all the ethnic groups living in the city and the legacy they left behind. He wrote about each group in turn: Lithuanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Tartars, Germans and Jews, adherents of Catholicism, Judaism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Islam. Besides Yiddish, which is the language of the narrative, he cites Hebrew, Latin, Russian, Polish, German and Lithuanian. This broad cultural panorama is defined by the author in his introduction as the main theme of the book:

Vilnius is one of the most beautiful and oldest cities in Poland, and for all nations that inhabited this region, it is not just any city, but the source of all the sources from which its national and spiritual vitality flows. For the Lithuanians, it is the city of their glorious past; for Poles, it is the city of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Lelelew and Piłsudski; for Jews, it is Yerushalayim deLite, the city of the Vilna Gaon, rabbis, Torah scholars, *maskilim*, and a cradle of modern Jewish culture; Belarusians are also connected with Vilnius in numerous ways; and even the Tartars and Karaites of Vilnius have a long history here.

No major work in any language has appeared to this day that writes precisely about this: about old and new Vilnius, its nations, its long history and landscapes. The list of books on 'Vilnius in literature', whether in Polish, Jewish, Russian [...] includes hundreds of titles of works about Vilnius, but I feel I am not exaggerating when I say that Vilnius has not been described comprehensively in any of these works. Each author has focused on a particular part of Vilnius, placing an emphasis on what he considered important, omitting with a clear conscience everything that did not interest him, even if the actual material from another part might have been of value. I have tried to give a full picture of Vilnius, paying special attention to Jewish Vilnius, of course, but without diminishing any other part of it.⁴⁸

48 Zalmen Szyk, *Toznt yor Vilne*, Vilnius, 1939, p. 1–2.

As can be seen from this quote, Szyk was fully aware of the shortcomings of the works on Vilnius and guidebooks published in the 20th century. He understood how the national-centric perspective impoverished the city's image, and wrote with a clear desire not to make the same mistakes as his predecessors.

Of course, Szyk's guide provides the most complete picture of the Jewish quarter and the Jewish heritage in Vilnius compared to the publications discussed earlier, but the author treats them proportionally to the contribution of other cultures to the city's panorama, adhering to the principle of cultural pluralism. The extent to which he wants to avoid any hint of ethnocentrism is clear from the fact that his route through Vilnius begins at Ostra Brama (the Gates of Dawn, a Gothic gate in the city wall) and Ostrobramska Street, a central point in the city for Catholics, who believed the image of Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy located in the chapel adjacent to the gate could work miracles, and treated it as a special place of worship and pilgrimage, as a revered symbol of Catholicism in Poland and Lithuania. Of course, starting a tour of Vilnius from the site of a part of the preserved fortifications, and the only existing Gothic gate leading to the city, has its rational and historical justification. One could without difficulty, however, imagine that a Jewish guide might have chosen a different starting point, especially since in the past Jews generally avoided passing through the Ostra Brama gate, because of restrictive regulations obliging them to keep silent and remove their headcovering on entering the city through this particular gate. In this historical context (including the ban on Jews regarding trade and public gatherings at Ostra Brama and on Ostrobramska Street), Szyk's decision to begin his journey around Vilnius from this particular site was a clear manifestation of his faith in tolerance and his rejection of prejudice.

7. Guidebooks as depositories of Polish national memory

Szyk's willingness to include various models of historical memory and interpretations of the urban space is evident in his description of 'Polish' Vilnius. First of all, the amount of space in his guidebook devoted to various aspects of Polish culture is appreciably greater than that devoted to Jewish ones. His account is based primarily on Polish sources (he cites the chronicler Maciej Strykowski, the Polish historians Józef Kraszewski, Teodor Narbutt, Michał Baliński and

Leon Wasilewski, and also the Polish historians of literature Stanisław Pigoń and Henryk Mościcki). Paradoxically, Szyk's Yiddish publication contains the most details and places connected with Polish culture, the longest list of distinguished Poles in various fields, and the most quotes from Polish literature, of all the guides published in the Polish language before 1939. Furthermore, Szyk adopted the model of national martyrdom based on Polish romanticism. He scrupulously notes all the sites associated with the repression of Polish patriots, in no way distancing himself from the Polish struggle against the occupying forces, or from the raising of the uprisings for Polish national liberation to cult status. He clearly sympathises with Polish resistance against russification. The author pays particular attention to the activities and the persecution of the literary circle of 'Philomats' and 'Philarets'.⁴⁹ The term 'Polish patriot' has a positive connotation in his guide. Szyk's treatment of the memorials to martyrdom is interesting, because his description of the Jewish community clearly departs from this type of terminology. He mentions instances of restrictions, pogroms, and anti-semitism, but these themes are treated marginally and are not the main focus of the Jewish cultural landscape.

Szyk's description of Polish spaces in Vilnius also promotes the cult of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, which after 1926 was the official ideology of the state, and which intensified after his death in 1935.⁵⁰ Piłsudski was also popular in the Jewish community as a proponent of equal rights for Jews, and anti-Jewish legislation was not passed during his rule. He was remembered as a guardian of Jewish rights, and anti-semitism clearly escalated in Poland after his death in 1935. Piłsudski is one of the most frequently recurring names in the guide. The author, with due respect, noted all the sites related to Piłsudski, e.g. 'the mother of Marshal Piłsudski lived at the corner of Makowa 1 and Nowogródzka 10 streets. It was from here that the marshal, a suspect in an assassination attempt on the tsar,⁵¹ was exiled to Siberia⁵² [...]'. At Trocka Street 11 (opposite the

49 The Philomats were a secret Polish society of students and alumni of the University of Vilnius active from 1817 to 1821.

50 Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) was a politician, social activist for independence, head of the Polish Socialist Party, Polish head of state (1918–1922), commander-in-chief of the Polish army (1918), first marshal of Poland (1920), and prime minister of Poland (1926–1928, 1930).

51 Józef Piłsudski was accused of taking part in an assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander III Romanov. The organisers of the attack were members of the Terrorist Faction of the Narodnaya Vola, in which Piłsudski was implicated. He was exiled to Siberia on 1 May 1887.

52 Zalmen Szyk, *Toyzt yor Vilne*, op. cit., p. 133.

Franciscan monastery), Józef Piłsudski was detained in a two-room apartment before he was sent to Siberia⁵³ [...]. Józef Piłsudski lived at Dominikańska Street 11 when he passed his matriculation examination in 1885⁵⁴ [...]. Józef Piłsudski's family lived off the courtyard [of the house on Militarna Street]. His mother died here in 1884.⁵⁵ Once Aleksandrowska or Bulwar Aleksandrowski, later first Raduńska, and after the liberation of Poland, Piłsudski Street, because there is a house (between numbers 9 and 11) which was associated with J. Piłsudski's underground and revolutionary activities. It was here in a small wooden room that a secret printing press was located and operated by the illegal PPS organ *Robotnik* ('The Worker'), edited by Piłsudski from 1894 to 1899.⁵⁶ The Kłós guide does not mention any of these places.

No other guidebook includes so many quotes from Polish literature related to Vilnius. Szyk cites Polish works in the original, without providing a Yiddish translation. He refers to canonical authors, especially Adam Mickiewicz, but also goes beyond the strict canon, quoting, for example, the poem 'Viliya' by Faustyn Łopatynski (ca. 1835–1886), a poet, violinist, pedagogue, translator and photographer, who has been completely forgotten. He also refers to younger artists whose reputations had not yet been established. For example, he cites a witty poem about Castle Hill by Teodor Bujnicki (1907–1944), a poet and satirist, and one of the founders of the Żagary group. Not all the authors cited in the guide, however, contributed to the greater glory of Polish literature. Szyk also included anti-semitic poems by Bazyle Bonifacy Jachimowicz, who, in one of his poems, for example, accused the Jews of starting the fires that plagued the city in the 18th century, and in another work accused the Jews of degrading the Rudnicki tract.

Szyk was the only guidebook writer to quote poems written by women, such as, for instance the *Pieśń o Wilnie* ('Song of Vilnius') by Zofia Bohdawiczowa (1898–1965), a Polish poetess, prose writer, and author of books for children and young people. Born in Warsaw, she gained a degree in Polish philology from Stephen Bathory University in Vilnius, and was so captivated by the region that it became the leitmotif of many of her works. He also quotes Wanda Doboczevska

53 Ibid., p. 140.

54 Ibid., p. 145.

55 Ibid., p. 257.

56 Ibid., p. 265–266.

(1892–1980), a Polish poetess, prose writer, publicist and playwright, who in the interwar period served as vice-president of the Union of Writers in Vilnius. He also recalls the theatre play *Wilia u Państwa Mickiewiczów* ('Viliya with the Mickiewicz Family') by Helena Romer, the guidebook author mentioned earlier.

Conclusions

Szyk broke the mould for guidebooks on many levels, notably in his presentation of the city. Only he mentions the Zaretshe neighbourhood in Vilnius, and its street lined with brothels, where quarrels and fights continually broke out.⁵⁷ To his credit, he did not idealise the city, and was not afraid to guide his readers along many of its less illustrious routes. He even guided his readers to Fania Levando's (1889–1941) famous restaurant at 14 Niemiecka Street, the only place they could have a vegetarian dinner in Vilnius. Her vegetarian cookbook in Yiddish was published in Vilnius in 1938, a year before Szyk's guide.

Unlike many other guides, Szyk's Vilnius is not only a city of churches, places of worship, historic buildings and cemeteries: it is an extremely wide-ranging and richly detailed panorama of the city, in which every fragment of its multinational heritage is treated with respect and attention. Szyk produced something far beyond a typical guidebook. He gave us a true compendium of interdisciplinary knowledge about Vilnius: his story literally brings the city and its diverse communities to life. *Toyznt yor Vilne* takes us on a virtual journey from street to street, from home to home; we can read every memorial plaque, and stop to enjoy every attractive view. The richly embroidered tapestry of the city is interwoven with the history of rulers, clergy, rabbis, scholars, artists and writers, and enriched with the sound of folk songs, poems and proverbs about Vilnius. Szyk's account is all the more moving for contemporary readers, who are aware that the author immortalised Vilnius on the eve of a great catastrophe that changed the face of the city for ever. We are painfully aware that Vilnius and its Jewish quarter, with all its backyards, *mikvoahs*, Vilnius *kloyzn* and *yeshivas*, were soon to disappear like Atlantis. The author was also to succumb to the

57 Ibid., p. 244.

catastrophe: Zalmen Szyk died on 8 May 1942.⁵⁸ The material he prepared for the second volume of his guide was also lost. But our appreciation of his detailed descriptions in *Toyznt yor Vilne* is all the greater for it, and his book acquires an extremely important documentary value from this perspective. The outbreak of the war also affected the fate of the book itself: published in 1939, it did not manage to really penetrate the market, and only a few copies have survived. The futility of the enormous effort put into its creation is of tragic proportions.

Having researched numerous Polish guidebooks to Vilnius, I can say with certainty that Zalmen Szyk's publication has the greatest documentary value, as it presents Vilnius as a multicultural city most extensively, but at the same time it includes the local Polish cultural presence most completely. I strongly believe that *Toyznt yor Vilne* deserves to be reprinted and translated in at least two languages: Polish and Lithuanian. It will undoubtedly be of great interest to historians, regionalists, literary scholars, architects, specialists in the field of cultural heritage studies, contemporary residents of Vilnius, as well as tourists visiting the capital of Lithuania.

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Tarp etnocentrizmo ir daugiakultūriškumo: kultūrinis kraštovaizdis vadovuose po Vilnių lenkų kalba (1856–1939) ir Zalmeno Šyko *Toyznt yor Vilne*

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnio tikslas – parodyti, kaip išskirtinai Zalmenas Šykas kelionių gide *Toyznt yor Vilne* („Tūkstantis Vilniaus metų“) vaizduoja daugiakultūrį miesto paveldą, ir šį leidinį palyginti su kitais Vilniui skirtais vadovais.

58 The second volume was to be devoted to Jewish cultural and political organisations. See Z. Szyk, *Toyznt yor Vilne*, op. cit., p. 519.

Apžvalga pradedama nuo seniausių – 1856 ir 1860 m. – lenkų archeologo ir leidėjo Adamo H. Kirkoro išleistų vadovų po Vilnių. Kirkoras pristatė tuomet naujovišką požiūrį ir atsisakė miesto kultūrinės erdvės hierarchizacijos principų. Jis kruopščiai aprašė objektus ir vietas, reprezentuojančias įvairias (lenkų, lietuvių, armėnų, vokiečių, žydų) kultūras ir denominacijas (katalikybę, protestantizmą, stačiatikybę, judaizmą, islamą). Kirkoro pasakojimo būdas pasirodė bešas išskirtinis, nes vėliau, XX a. pradžioje, gausiai publikuotuose kelionių vadovuose Vilnius pirmiausia tebebūdavo aprašomas kaip lenkų kankinystės vieta, o lenkų kultūros apraiškos – kaip tikresnės ir būdingesnės miestui.

Puikus iš kankinystės perspektyvos parašyto kelionių vadovo pavyzdys – populiarusis *Wilno: przewodnik krajoznawczy* („Vilniaus žymybių gidas“), kurį 1923 m. išleido lenkų architektas, architektūros istorikas, Stepono Batoro universiteto profesorius Juliuszas Kłosas. Pakilus jo pasakojimas kupinas perdėto nacionalistinio patriotizmo, jame juntama ryški etnocentrizmo ir tautinės megalomanijos gaida. Kłoso leidinyje pagrindinius objektų ir vietų atrankos kriterijus lėmė tai, kiek tie objektai ir vietos skleidė lenkiškumo dvasios ir pabrėžė lenkų tautos kentėjimus. Vadovu siekta paliudyti, kad Vilniaus regionas yra slaviškas – taip norėta patvirtinti Vilniaus priklausomybę Lenkijai. Žydų kvartalą Kłosas aprašė iš kultūrinio pranašumo pozicijų, miesto kraštovaizdyje pavaizduodamas jį kaip svetimkūnį. Straipsnyje taip pat glaustai aptariamai Władysława Zahorskiego, Helenos Romer, Jono Vytauto Narbuto, Mykolo Biržiškos ir Jano Jaskólskio parašyti vadovai po miestą.

Iš daugumos XX a. vadovų po Vilnių Šyko darbas išsiskiria daugiakultūre, nuo etnocentrizmo atsietą perspektyva. Didžioji knygos dalis skirta lenkų kultūros apraiškoms, remiamasi Lenkijos tautinės atminties modeliu, taip pat iškeliamas maršalo Józefo Piłsudskio kultas. Pažymėtina, kad Šyko vadove gausu su Vilniumi susijusios lenkų literatūros citatų. Pagrindinių temų analizė atskleidžia, kaip esmingai autorius atitolo nuo tuomet gyvavusio kanono. Šyko vadovo po Vilnių dokumentinė vertė ypatinga ir tuo, kad jo autorius gebėjo pristatyti Vilnių kaip daugiakultūrį miestą, o drauge – išsamiai aprašyti to meto vietos lenkų kultūrą.

Raktažodžiai: vadovai po Vilnių, Zalmen Szyk, Adam H. Kirkor, Juliusz Kłos, daugiakultūriškumas, etnocentrizmas.
