



THE YEAR OF THE VILNA GAON
& OF THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA

2020 | 5780

9th Litvak Days in London

28 May 2020, 2:00 p.m. (BST)



The Old Synagogue in Vilnius, 1929
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ZOOM WEBINAR:

EMBRACING ITS JEWISH LEGACY: HAS LITHUANIA REACHED A MILESTONE?

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of Vilna Gaon Elijah ben Ben Solomon Zalman – the 18th century sage who contributed immensely to the formation of Litvak Judaism and brought the city of Vilnius fame as the Jerusalem of the North. Lithuania has dedicated 2020 to the commemoration of this anniversary, as an opportunity to discover and to promote the long and vibrant history of Lithuanian Jews. The 300th anniversary also provides us all with renewed inspiration and impetus to reflect on the importance and complexity of the Jewish legacy in Lithuanian history, culture and identity.

Over the past few years, a growing interest in the lost world of Jewish Lithuania and a determination to grasp the significance of this loss could be felt across the country. Confronting this painful issue is driving Lithuanian society to deeply reconsider the past and how it relates to core issues of the present.

Today, Jewish culture exists in fragments of spiritual and material heritage, as seen in literature, architecture, music and the sciences. Despite the appalling destruction of Jewish life and heritage, what remains provides a crucial foundation for the ongoing process of rediscovery.

This major online panel event will open with a keynote address. Entitled “Restoring the Collage of Jewish Vilna”, it will be delivered by Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, Minister of Culture of Lithuania, who is also a literary scholar and translator of numerous Yiddish texts into Lithuanian. In the panel discussion following his address, five distinguished speakers will engage in a collective inquiry into issues such as how the culture of embracing Jewish heritage has evolved over the past three decades of independent Lithuania, along with the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

The five panellists are: Lara Lempertienė, a specialist in Jewish cultural history and the head of the Judaica Research Center at the National Library of Lithuania; Kamilė Rupeikaitė, the director of the Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History and a specialist in Jewish musical heritage; Violeta Davoliūtė, professor at Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science; Michael Berkowitz, professor of modern Jewish history at University College London, and, Jon Seligman, an archaeologist and the Director of the Excavations of the Great Synagogue of Vilna, one of the most prominent landmarks of Vilnius.

Chair: Rosie Goldsmith, former BBC journalist, director of the European Literature Network and Chair of the Judges of the EBRD Literature Prize.

REGISTER HERE: <http://tiny.cc/be32oz>

This event is part of the 9th Litvak Days in London, organised by the Embassy of Lithuania in the United Kingdom.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS



Dr. Michael Berkowitz is a native of Rochester, New York, with family roots in Šaukotas, Pašušvys, and Josvainiai, Lithuania. He is a professor of modern Jewish history at University College London and an author with his most recent publication titled *Jews and Photography in Britain* (2015). He is also an editor of a peer-reviewed academic journal *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*.



Dr. Violeta Davoliūtė is a professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. A graduate of Vilnius University, she studied Yiddish and Hebrew at Oxford University and completed her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. A specialist in the study of historical trauma, the politics of memory and collective identity, she has published several books and articles on these topics with a focus on the Baltic States and East Central Europe. In recent years she has been a visiting scholar at Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena, Yale University, EHESS and Uppsala University.



Rosie Goldsmith is an award-winning journalist specializing in arts and foreign affairs. In twenty years at the BBC, she travelled the world and presented several flagship programmes. Rosie is a linguist and has lived in Europe, Africa and the USA. Today she combines journalism with chairing and curating literary events and festivals for leading cultural organisations. She is Founder and Director of the European Literature Network www.eurolitnetwork.com and since 2018 has been Chair of the Judges of the EBRD Literature Prize, a major new prize honouring both author and translator of international literary works in English translation.



Dr. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas is a literary scholar, writer and translator from Yiddish and Polish. Since 2019 he is serving as Lithuania's Minister of Culture. Kvietkauskas studied Yiddish language and literature at the University of Oxford. His main areas of research are multinational literary modernism and urban culture in Lithuania and East Central Europe. He is an author of two academic monographs, a collection of poetry and a book of literary essays *Uosto Fuga* (The Port Fugue). His recent publications include translations and introductory articles to Vilnius ghetto diary by a Lithuanian Jewish poet Matilda Olkinaitė, a reprinted photo album "The Ghetto Lane in Wilna" by Moshé Raviv-Vorobeichic (Moi Ver) & "Hommage à Moi Ver", „Abraham Sutzkever's book *Tsen lider / Dešimt eilėraščių / Ten Poems*.



Dr. Lara Lempertienė is the head of the Judaica Center at the Department of the Documentary Heritage Studies of the National Library of Lithuania and the YIVO archivist in Vilnius. Her field is the cultural history of the European Jewry, specifically Jewish classical texts and their integration in Jewish education in various settings as well as Jewish book and press and day-to-day life of Lithuanian Jewry. She is also an author and an editor with her most recent publication in *Tsen lider / Dešimt eilėraščių / Ten Poems* by Avrom Sutzkever. Vilnius: Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 2020.



Dr. Kamilė Rupeikaitė is the director of Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History (VGMJH) and a researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. Since 2008, she has been a member of the Lithuanian Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In 2017, she was the Chair of the Memorials and Museums Working Group. Her scientific research includes symbolism of musical instruments, multicultural contexts of musical phenomena, and musical heritage of the Lithuanian Jews.



Dr. Jon Seligman is presently the Director of the Archaeological Licensing and International Relations of the Israel Antiquities Authority in Jerusalem. Dr. Seligman receiving his doctorate (summa-cum-laude) from Haifa University on the subject of the 'Rural Hinterland of Jerusalem during the Byzantine period'. Jon has directed some thirty excavations in Israel and has published widely, including three books (on the Temple Mount, the Holy Sepulchre and the Roman farm at Nahal Haggit). For the past five years he has directed, together with Zenonas Baubonis, the excavation of the Great Synagogue and Shulhojf of Vilna. Jon is a Litvak, part of his family originating from the area of Vilnius.



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27-29 May, 2020