

# The most outstanding iron-wrought tops of cult and memorial monuments from the collection of Šiauliai "Aušros" Museum

Teklė  
Tomkutė  
Lithuania

The catalogue  
*Iron-wrought tops of  
Cult and Memorial  
Monuments from the  
Collection of Šiauliai  
"Aušros" Museum*,  
ed. Skaistė Mockutė,  
2003.



In March 2011, the Šiauliai "Aušros" Museum introduced a virtual exhibition entitled *The most outstanding wrought-iron tops: from the Šiauliai "Aušros" Museum collection of the iron tops of cult and memorial monuments*. The exhibits are part of the virtual catalogue *Lithuanian Folk Art* available through the virtual exhibition system of the Lithuanian Art Museum. The content of the above-mentioned virtual catalogue has

already been provided to ATHENA and is available in the Europeana digital library.

In 2003, the Šiauliai "Aušros" Museum published the catalogue *Wrought-iron tops of Cult and Memorial Monuments from the Collection of Šiauliai "Aušros" Museum* (ed. Skaistė Mockutė, 2003).

Regarding the ever-increasing value of those particular exhibits, the museum provides



At the present moment, all the iron tops from the collection are already digitised. This year, the exhibits will be published on the Lithuanian Integral Museum Information System (LIMIS) and, thus, made available to every Internet user.

Internet users with an opportunity to see something that may be considered a rather tiny part of Lithuanian culture but nevertheless carries symbolic meaning and information that is, on the one hand, of great importance to Lithuanians, and on the other, arouses interest among foreigners. In this way we invite Internet users all across the globe to enter the unique and authentic world of Lithuanian cultural heritage or, more precisely, the traditional smithery of the iron tops of cult and memorial monuments.

Iron tops are an inherent part of churches, chapels, belfries, churchyards and cemetery gates as well as wayside shrines, roofed poles, crosswise crosses, and grave markers resting in the fields, at the roadsides or homesteads. Lithuanian museums have a fair amount of such wrought-iron tops. The Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum boasts a collection of 186 iron tops of cult and memorial monuments dating as early as 18<sup>th</sup> c. and as late as 20<sup>th</sup> c. Most of the

iron tops were found in Samogitia while others come from Upper Lithuania.

The greater part of the items from the iron tops collection was gathered during expeditions throughout Samogitia in 1929–1941. Nearly half of the items do not have metrics data (i.e. it is not indicated who is an author of a cross or what monument it is taken from), but the measurements that vary from 26 x 18 cm to 159 x 80 cm suggest that these are the tops of chapels, roofed poles, belfries, or gates of churchyards. In 1993, 10 iron tops from the Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum collection were displayed at the Old Lithuanian Folk Art exhibition in Schwarzenau, Austria. Information about the exhibited iron tops is presented in the catalogue *Iron-wrought tops of Cult and Memorial Monuments from the Collection of Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum*.

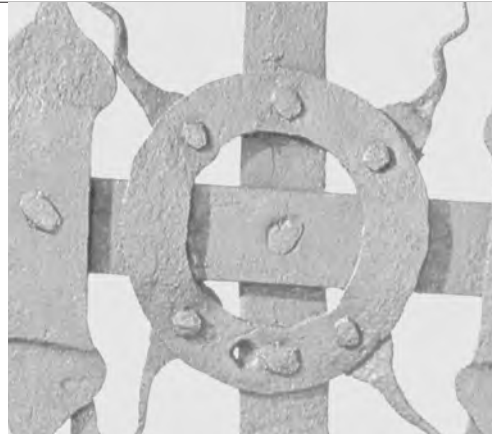
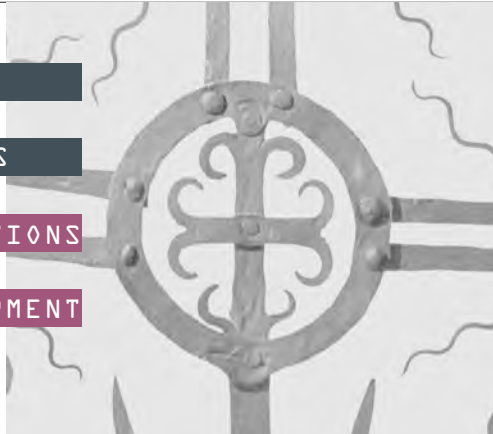
Virtual exhibitions (available on the portals of the Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum, Lithuanian Art



Wrought-iron top,  
unknown folk artist,  
Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 21,  
first half  
of the 19th cent.,  
acquired in 1941.



Wrought-iron top,  
unknown folk artist,  
Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 8,  
19th cent.,  
acquired in 1931.



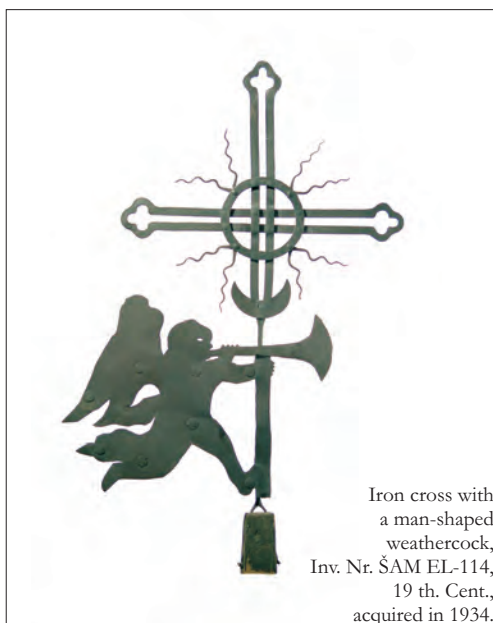
Museum as well as on Europeana through ATHENA) present the digital images of the most outstanding iron tops, the ornaments of which survived well the destructive power of time. At the present moment, all the iron tops from the collection are already digitised. This year, the exhibits will be published on the Lithuanian Integral Museum Information System (LIMIS) and, thus, made available to every Internet user.

The iron cross with a man-shaped weathercock (the illustration on the lower left) stands out in clear relief among other exhibits. It has cored axes with cross-shaped openings at its ends. The gaps between the axes are decorated with two wavy sunrays that fork off the hollow circle in the middle. The circle symbolises a sun disc with crossing axes forming geometrical figures inside it. At the lower part of the vertical axis there is a crescent moon. Beneath it there is attached a unique weathercock with a medium-sized figure of St. Michael the

Archangel with a trumpet that symbolises the Last Judgement.

This atypical and original top (the illustration on the lower right) was forged a single sheet of tin and has perforated holes in it. The cross consists of a vertical axis and a smaller, subordinate horizontal one. The ends of the axes are shaped in the form of a pointy leaf. There is a perforated inscription “LMH” on the horizontal axis. Symbols shaped as a heart and a crescent moon are attached to the lower part of the pole; beneath them there is a weathercock of a cloven flag shape with the date “1880” inscribed in it.

Wrought-iron tops are mostly decorated with motives of heavenly bodies, e.g. a sun disc (whether full or hollow openwork), a crescent moon, or stars - together with vegetable motives and iconographic inscriptions. Another important element of decoration is sunrays that take various shapes - straight, wavy (reminiscent of a grass snake), spiral, and in the

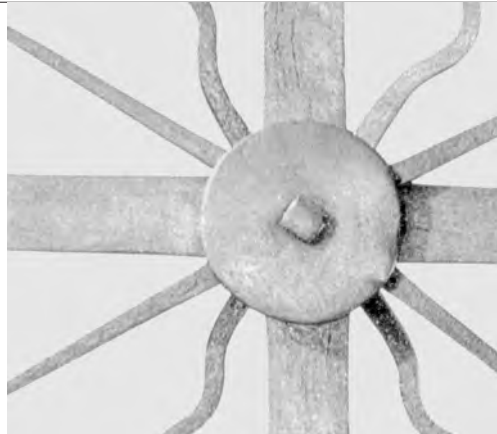


Iron cross with a man-shaped weathercock, Inv. Nr. ŠAM EL-114, 19 th. Cent., acquired in 1934.



Free-form wrought-iron top, Inv. Nr. ŠAM EL-70, the last decade of the 19 th. Cent., acquired in 1932





semblance of a flame with starlets or crosses at their ends. The motif of a sun dominates the crosses; their decoration is characterised by the syncretism of pagan and Christian symbols.

Iron tops together with Lithuanian crosses are invaluable, ageless cultural assets. It may be confidently stated that the wrought-iron tops of cult and memorial monuments preserved at the Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum has a significant contribution to the Lithuanian ethnic heritage. In 2001 cross-crafting and its symbolism in Lithuania was included in the UNESCO list of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Virtual exhibitions aim at revealing the subtle beauty of Lithuanian folk smithery, with its rich diversity of ornamental patterns, as well as the mastery of blacksmiths, with their ability to exploit the plasticity of iron.

We hope that virtually presenting Lithuanian folk culture and its heritage to a wider audience will generate a growing interest in its richness



and relevance for today's world. We expect that making such information available will maintain the continuity of traditions and further development as well as facilitate data search and stimulate intercultural communication.

The text is based on the catalogue *Iron-wrought tops of Cult and Memorial Monuments from the Collection of Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum*

Translated into English by Agnė Pulokaitė

## Illustrations:

1. The catalogue *Iron-wrought tops of Cult and Memorial Monuments from the Collection of Šiauliai “Aušros” Museum*, ed. Skaistė Mockutė, 2003.
2. Wrought-iron top, unknown folk artist, Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 21, first half of the 19th cent., acquired in 1941.
3. Wrought-iron top, unknown folk artist, Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 8, 19th cent., acquired in 1931.
4. Iron cross with a man-shaped weathercock, Inv. Nr. ŠAM EL-114, 19 th. Cent., acquired in 1934.
5. Free-form wrought-iron top, Inv. Nr. ŠAMEL-70, the last decade of the 19 th. Cent., acquired in 1932
6. Wrought-iron top, unknown folk artist, Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 23, 19th cent.
7. Wrought-iron top, unknown folk artist, Inv. Nr. ŠAM E-L 48, 19th cent., acquired in 1932.

