

LITHUANIAN ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDIES A Survey of Ethnographical Museums and Societies

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When the Lithuanian State was reconstructed in the years 1918-23, substantial parts of ethnographic Lithuania (Lituania propria), not to speak of historical Lithuania, remained outside the boundaries of the new state. Most of the material that had been gathered in the field of Lithuanian ethnography remained in those territories that passed to Poland and Germany. Since relations with those states were not friendly, Lithuanian ethnographers were deprived of the fruits of past research and had to begin completely afresh. The libraries and collections of archeological relics that Tsarist Russia had not succeeded in expropriating were in Vilnius, and there too remained the Lithuanian Society of Science — founded in 1907 — with its museum and library. So-called Lithuania Minor, with the city of Tilžė (Tilsit, now Sovietsk), went to Germany, and with Tilže went the Litauische Gesellschaft and its museum and library, with their substantial collections of Lithuanian books and relics. Lithuania itself, situated next to the invasion route of the large Central European imperialist countries and preserving sovereignty over only half its ethnographic territories, inherited only the small municipal museum in Kaunas, with some 3,000 exhibits, a few documents having to do with Kaunas, and some 70 research volumes. It also inherited the so-called Baublys, a tiny museum founded by D. Poška in 1812; the stem of an old, burned — out oak tree served as the location of this unique museum. But this museum had been vandalized by the Germans in 1915-18, and only 200 prehistoric and geological relics remained. The city of Kaunas and Lithuania itself did not at this time possess a single scholarly library or collection of Lithuanian material; the public library in Kaunas owned only a few hundred Russian, German and Jewish novels, some textbooks on German and Russian history, and several purely Lithuanian studies that had found their way there by accident. This was the whole of the meager inheritance of the Lithuanian state for its educational and scientific work. And a completely new start had to be made in the field of ethnography, with the founding of societies for ethnographical research and the preservation and study of cultural monuments.

The Preservation of Cultural Monuments

With the transfer of the Lithuanian government from Vilnius to Kaunas in January, 1919, the first efforts toward the preservation of Lithuanian cultural monuments were made. T. Daugirdas, director of the municipal museum in Kaunas, was placed in charge of all prehistoric and ethnographic matters. He and his four assistants were given the task of organizing the preservations of all cultural monuments, libraries and art collections. A State Archeological Commission was set up in 1919 for this purpose, with Daugirdas as its chairman; it was responsible for the preservation not only of cultural monuments but also of documents and private libraries, many of which had been abandoned during the war. During and after the First World War, many manor houses had been left ownerless, and the retreating Russian soldiers, and later German soldiers, pillaged their libraries and art collections. The Germans were especially systematic in their efforts to carry as much as possible of this treasure back to Germany. What treasures remained after this looting by the Russians and Germans, and in some cases by Bolsheviks, could be preserved only by government intervention, and it is owing to the efforts of the State Archeological Commission that anything valuable from the Lithuanian past was preserved. The commission functioned until 1935, when its functions were taken over by the newly reorganized and expanded Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments, which existed until June, 1944. This group registered all the Lithuanian castles, hills, ancient burial grounds, and art monuments and made measurements of castles and other ancient buildings.

Scientific and Educational Institutions

When the University of Lithuania (called the University of Vytautas the Great after 1930) was founded in 1922, ethnographical work was not forgotten. The study of folklore was included in the faculty of Lithuanian language and literature, and the course was made mandatory for everyone who specialized in Lithuanian. The history faculty also gave courses in prehistory. In 1933 a faculty of ethnology was founded; this provided for specialization in Lithuanian folklore, ethnography and prehistory and gave mandatory courses for Lithuanian specialists. When Vilnius was returned to Lithuania in 1939, the faculty of ethnology was transferred there and was split up into two faculties, one of prehistory and one of ethnography, which functioned until March, 1943, when the German authorities closed all Lithuanian institutions of higher education.

Besides the university's teaching work, there were special groups primarily interested in research. In 1922 the faculty of medicine founded an anatomical museum; this gradually became a museum of anthropology, and studies were made there of the skulls and skeletons of Lithuania's prehistoric inhabitants, as well as anthropological measurements of Lithuanians. The results of this research were published in "Medicina" ("Medicine") and in the works of the faculty of medicine of the University of Vytautas the Great. The work was headed by Prof. Dr. J. Žilinskas, who died in Waterbury, Conn., in 1957. Some of the most important works in the field of Lithuanian anthropology are: **Akmens periodo žmogus Žemaitijoje ir Suvalkijoje (Stone Age Man in Žemaitija and Suvalkija)**, by J. Žilinskas, published in 1931; **Lietuvių rasine sudėtis pagal kraujo biologines savybes (Lithuanian Racial Composition According to the Biological Properties of Blood)**, also by Žilinskas, published in 1930; **Senajo geležies periodo Lietuvos gyventojų kaukolių studija (A Study of Skulls of Inhabitants of Lithuania in the Old Iron Age)**, by J. Žilinskas and R. Masalskis, published in 1937; **Crania lituanica**, by J. Žilinskas and A. Jurgutis, published in 1939; and **Kraujo grupės ir jų paskirstymas Lietuvos gyventojų tarpe (Blood Groups and Their Distribution Among the Inhabitants of Lithuania)**, by M. Nat-kevičaitė, published in 1929.

At first the faculty of Lithuanian language and literature was responsible for the collection and publication of Lithuanian folklore. In the years 1923-31 it published "Tauta ir žodis" ("The Nation and the Word"), and later "Athenaeum" and "Darbai ir Dienos" ("Works and Days"). In 1930 the Commission on Lithuanian Folklore was established, and it became responsible for the collection and study of folklore. It was headed by Prof. Dr. V. Kreve-Mickevičius, who taught at Kaunas and Vilnius and at the University of Pennsylvania and who died in 1954. In the years 1930 to 1935, this commission published volumes I to X of "Mūsų Tautosaka" ("Our Folklore"); it also published **Dainos (Songs)**, by J. Dovydaitis, in 1930, and Vol. I of **Patarlės ir Priežodžiai (Proverbs and Maxims)**, by V. Kreve-Mickevičius, in 1934. In the latter year a special Commission for the Collection of Folksongs, headed by Prof. St. Šimutis, was founded. In 1935 the two commissions were merged and the Lithuanian Folklore Archives was established. This group was headed by Dr. K. Balys, who has taught at the University of Vytautas the Great, the Baltic University in Hamburg and the University of Indiana, and he occupied the post up to the Communist occupation of 1944. The Lithuanian Folklore Archives published "Tautosakos Darbai" ("Works in Folklore"), Vols. I-VII, in 1935-40. It also published an extensive study by Dr. J. Balys on the ancient god Thunder. The archives began the scientific and systematic publication of Lithuanian folklore. In 1939 it was incorporated into the Lithuanian Institute and in 1941 into the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. Up to January, 1940, the archives had collected 150,154 songs, 15,378 melodies and 33,844 folk tales and had made phonograph records of 8,324 items. In all, the Lithuanian Folklore Archives had 442,084 items in its possession. In 1941 the collection of the Lithuanian Society of Science (1907-36 and 1938-40) was joined to that of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives. The Vilnius society had in its collection some 50,000 folklore items plus a substantial number of ethnographic descriptions; this represented what the Polish government had not succeeded in destroying during the two years the society was banned.

The collection of prehistoric, ethnographic and other archeological relics was entrusted in 1919 to the municipal museum in Kaunas. This museum had become the central Lithuanian museum, and it carried out archeological diggings and other work. In 1934 the Cultural Museum of Vytautas the Great was established, with sections on prehistory, ethnography, history and art. When this museum, which was housed in the buildings, was founded, the prehistoric, ethnographic and art collections of the municipal museum were turned over to it, the municipal museum retaining only items having to do with the city of Kaunas. The cultural Museum of Vytautas the Great became the principal museum in Lithuania, and it coordinated the work of the whole network of Lithuanian museums. When the Cultural Museum's prehistory section was organized, prehistory exhibits from museums throughout the country were lent to it in order to present as complete a picture as possible of Lithuania's prehistory. The borrowed exhibits were to be returned to their owners once the museum's gaps were filled with new findings. The museum had the task not only of advising other museums but also of aiding them with exhibits. The historical section of the museum remained unorganized up to 1940, and later, with the beginning of the occupations, some of the material in its possession was carefully hidden to preserve it from destruction. A warning had been provided by the experience of the War Museum of Vytautas the Great, which was vandalized by Soviet soldiers, who carried some of its exhibits off to Moscow. In 1942-44 the same museum was looted by German soldiers. The ethnographic section of the Cultural Museum had not yet been opened, since it was planned to make this section an outdoor museum, somewhat like the Swedish Skansen. The organization of this open-air museum had been begun in 1939, and it had been given the name Homeland Museum. However, beginning in 1937 the ethnographic section made annual summer expeditions collecting various relics. The art section was based on the former Čiurlionis Gallery (founded in 1921). This gallery had collected 255 paintings and drawings by M. K. Čiurlionis, as well as works by other Lithuanian artists and artists from other European countries. Including a folk art section, it owned some 12,000 items. When the Soviet

Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, the name of the Cultural Museum of Vytautas the Great was changed, under orders from Moscow, to the State Art Museum of Kaunas. The use of the old name was resumed in 1941-44, while with the second Soviet occupation it was renamed the State M. Čiurlionis Memorial Art Museum. In 1942 the Cultural Museum published an annual that had been scheduled to appear in 1940 but that had been delayed by the war. The Čiurlionis Gallery also published works in its field separately.

In 1939 the Lithuanian Institute was founded with the purpose of furthering Lithuanian studies; it had sections for Lithuanian ethnography, history, language and literature. In 1941 it was absorbed into the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. The historical section of the institute succeeded in publishing Vol. I of **Lietuvos Praeitis (The Lithuanian Past)**, and the folklore section published Vol. I of **Lietuvių Liaudies Sakmes (Lithuanian Folk Tales)**.

Ethnographical Societies and Their Museums

Ecclides the work carried on from "above," through government institutions, many private ethnographical societies flourished. These efforts from "below" were characterized by the great number of these societies and by their dedication. Societies of this type existed even before 1918, the year of the declaration of independence. The Lithuanian Society of Science, centered in Vilnius, maintained secret chapters in Kaunas, Riga, Marijampolė and Ssinaï. Also, many individuals maintained close ties with the Litauische Literarische Gesellschaft. Eut these ties were disrupted in 1919, and the interested individuals immediately began to seek other organizational ties. In 1920 they gathered around the Lithuanian Society of Art and Artists, whose members were especially active in collecting folk art. Through their efforts, 12,613 exhibits and some 5,000 photograph negatives were collected up to 1925, in which year these treasures of folk art were incorporated in the Čiurlionis Gallery that in 1935 became part of the Cultural Museum.

As early as 1920 the high schools of Kaunas and Panevėžys had ethnographical clubs whose members collected Lithuanian folklore and relics; later there were such clubs in almost all the country's high schools and institutions of higher education. In 1922 a club of this sort was active at the School of Agriculture in Dotnuva, which later became the Dotnuva Agricultural Academy. In 1923 a similar club was founded at the University of Lithuania. A Society for the Study of the Native Land was established in Panevėžys in 1924, and in the following year the Lithuanian Ethnographical Society was founded in Kaunas. This latter group evolved from the Kaunas chapter of the Lithuanian Society of Science. Since all direct contact with Vilnius had been cut off, correspondence could be maintained only through Latvia, and whatever meetings could be arranged had to be secret and held in that country. The aim of the Kaunas society was to coordinate activities throughout the whole country. Later — in 1929 — this function was assumed by the society of Sauliai, which was founded 2d in 1927. In 1934-44 the society of šauliai published "Gimtasai Kraštas" ("The Native Land"), a periodical for Lithuanian ethnography and related fields. It was also host to national gatherings in 1930, 1933 and 1935. Besides the societies named above, many municipalities maintained societies of their own. Notable among these were the ones at Alytus, founded in 1928 for the study of the Dzūkija area; at šakiai, founded in 1934 and spscializing in the Zanavykai area; at Dusetos, founded in 1935; at Kėdainiai, founded in 1926; at Kretinga, founded in 1934; and at Marijampolė, founded in 1933. There were also the "Alka" society, founded in 1931 in Telšiai for the study of Žemaitija (Samogithia).

All these societies flourished up until June, 1940, when with the Soviet occupation their activities were ended. In spite of the fact that they were all newly registered in July, 1940, by September of that year they had all passed out of existence. After the Lithuanian revolt of June 23, 1941, and the occupation of Lithuania by Germany and its incorporation into the "Ostland," only the society of šauliai resumed its activities — after a fashion — by continuing the publication of "Gimtasai Kraštas." None of the other societies were revived, despite efforts that were made to legalize them.

Besides the inherited municipal museum in Kaunas and the Cultural Museum, many of the local ethnographical societies in independent Lithuania maintained their own museums, with the help of the municipal governments. Lithuanian ethnography was the principal interest of most of these museums, although they included prehistoric, numismatic, historic and art items and in some cases natural history material. Unfortunately, statistics as to the size of their collections are in many cases unavailable.

In 1928 the Museum of Dzūkija was founded in Alytus, a town of some 10,000 population. It suffered greatly from the war and German looting in 1941, but by 1944 it had rebuilt its collection to about 5,000 items in various categories. Several exhibitions of the Lithuanian past were held in neighboring towns under the museum's auspices. A museum was also established in Biržai in 1928; it was particularly noted for its large historical collection from the Castle of Biržai. In 1938 the town of Dusetos gathered several separate collections together into a single museum. This museum was looted by Bolshevik and German soldiers in June, 1941, and its Mesolithic bone artifacts and ancient gold and silver coins were stolen. But by 1944 it had built up its collection once again to seme 3,000 items. In 1936 the town of Kaišiadorys gathered local municipal collections into the Museum of Trakai (Trakai itself was occupied by Poland at this time). In 1946 the museum was moved to Trakai and there merged with a museum maintained by the Karaimes, a Jewish sect that had settled in Lithuania in the 15th century. A museum was founded at Kėdainiai in 1926 and one at Kelme in 1936; the latter was completely destroyed during the war. In 1935 a museum was established in Kernavė, the legendary first capital of the medieval Lithuanian state. This museum was noted for its extensive collection of relics dealing with Kernavė itself and for its many folk sculptures — "dievukai," which are statuettes of Christ, Mary and the saints carved in wood. The port of Klaipėda (Memel) maintained several museums. Besides the municipal museum, there was a separate museum of

ethnography and culture of the Lithuanians of the Klaipeda area founded in 1922 by the "Aukuras" society. In 1935 attempts were made to establish an open-air seaside museum, but the authorities of this autonomous region within Lithuania refused to grant permission. The museum owned more than 8,000 items, of which 6,000 had to do with the prehistoric period. When the Germans occupied Klaipeda in 1939, the museum was placed under German authorities who carried off the collection to an unknown destination. A museum founded in Kretinga in 1935 had some 1,000 pieces of amber jewelry among its 5,000 or so items. Museums were founded at Mažeikiai in 1930 and at Marijampole in 1932. A museum established in 1933 in the fishing village of Nida kept prehistoric and amber collections and also had a section devoted to fishermen's ethnography. The museum founded in Panevėžys in 1925 had an extensive prehistoric, historic and ethnographic section. Many of the museum's history exhibits were removed by Russian and German authorities during the several occupations, and their whereabouts are not known. Museums were also established in Plunge in 1934, Rokiškis in 1935 and šakiai in 1928.

One of the largest local museums was that in Šiauliai. Established in 1923, it carried out prehistoric excavations and sponsored annual ethnographic exhibits on its own. It was called "Aušra," and it had some 30,000 ethnographic items. In 1930-33 it published, in conjunction with the city's ethnographic society, the "Šiaulių Metraštis" ("Šiauliai Annual") and in 1934-44 the quarterly "Gimtasai Kraštas." In 1941 the museum was turned over to the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, but in the following year it was returned to the local society. When the military front approached the city in 1944, a great many of the museum's exhibits, along with its library and laboratories, were hidden to save them from destruction. That same year the museum's buildings and remaining exhibits were destroyed by Russian and German bombardment and artillery fire. In 1953 the Soviet press reported that some 44,000 items had survived the war, but up to 1956 no buildings were available for the museum and many items in its collection were ruined for lack of proper storage facilities. In 1957 the museum was finally given a new building, and work on restoring its exhibits was begun; however, items unfavorable to the Soviet Union were removed and anti-German items were featured.

There were also museums in the following municipalities: Tauragė (founded in 1937); Telšiai (1932); Ukmergė (1933); Utena (1935); and Zarasai (1932). The last two were heavily damaged in 1941 and 1944. Their buildings were damaged by artillery fire and their collections suffered heavy looting, especially the numismatic collection at Zarasai.

Besides the societies and museums that have been mentioned, a Jewish ethnographic society, with substantial collections of its own, functioned in Kaunas from 1922 and had chapters throughout Lithuania. In 1941 some of its material was transferred to the Cultural Museum; the rest was destroyed by the Germans or carried away to Frankfurt am Main. In 1943 the material in the Cultural Museum suffered the same fate.

When Vilnius was returned to Lithuania in 1939, the museums in that city and the surrounding area were merged into the Lithuanian network. In Vilnius were located the prehistoric and ethnographic museum of the University of Vilnius and the museums of the Lithuanian Society of Science and the Polish Friends of Science Society. The area also contained a Jewish museum with a large library, a Byelorussian museum and a Karai-mian museum. During the first Soviet occupation there was a reorganization of all museums, and the three former museums were placed under the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences while the three national museums remained independent. In August, 1941, the Jewish museum and its library were totally destroyed by German authorities.

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