

# *Lituanus* Celebrates 70 Years Anniversary

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This year marks the 70th anniversary of *Lituanus*, the longest-running English-language academic journal dedicated to Lithuania and its culture, created by the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States. While most cultural and scholarly publications by Lithuanian émigrés have long ceased to exist, *Lituanus* continues to make significant contributions to Lithuanian studies. The journal is internationally recognized and is housed in the collections of renowned university libraries worldwide. *Lituanus* currently has approximately 1,000 subscribers and reaches 400 libraries worldwide.

In this article, I will provide a brief overview of the journal's origins, its evolving goals, and its development over the decades, highlighting the key factors that have contributed to its enduring success.

## Origins

Approximately five years after arriving in the United States from displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, many young Lithuanians enrolled in universities. In 1951, they found the Lithuanian Student Association (LSA), which grew to 569 members from twelve different universities across the nation.<sup>1</sup> In 1954, the LSA

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<sup>1</sup> Goštautas, "Lituanus' žurnalui 50," 2.

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established a foreign affairs section and that same year, they agreed to publish the *Lituanus* journal. The initiative to create the journal came from American-Lithuanian activist Jonas Bachunas, who also provided financial support. However, it was Vytautas P. Vygantas, a doctoral candidate in psychology at the University of Illinois, who spearheaded the journal's publication and took over its organizational matters.

Initially, *Lituanus* was called a Lithuanian academic youth bulletin. It was published quarterly, consisting of 12 pages, and had a circulation of 1,000, which steadily grew. Its mission was to inform American society about Lithuania, then under Soviet occupation. As stated in the lead article of the first issue:

This publication hopes to acquaint its readers with Lithuania and the Lithuanians: their problems; historical sketches; cultural background, and environment. <...> These pages will tell you, in print, some of the injustices imposed upon Lithuania; will show you the cruel methods by which the would-be masters tried to achieve their aims; will give you a glimpse of life in a free and independent Lithuania in the 13th through 18th centuries; and tell you what life was like in the present century when the occupation occurred.<sup>2</sup>

The first issue was 8 by 11 inches in size and featured three articles, a lead editorial, and a section titled "Did You Know That" which offered bits of facts such as: "In the days of its greatest imperial power, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea."

After several issues focused on Lithuania's political and historical situation, the editors began incorporating Lithuanian literature in translation, introducing Lithuanian artists and their works, and reviewing books related to Lithuania.

From the outset, the goal was to place the journal in every major library where researchers and students could access accurate scholarly information about Lithuania. Students were encouraged to request *Lituanus* at their university libraries – if at

<sup>2</sup> Dundzila et al., "Towards Better Understanding."

least three students made a request, the library was likely to subscribe. In 1969, according to managing editor Jonas Kučėnas, *Lituanus* was sent to nearly 2,000 libraries worldwide.<sup>3</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that these libraries subscribed; many received complimentary copies from the editors who offered them free of charge, and libraries did not decline the offer.

Although the Lithuanian community in the United States primarily spoke Lithuanian, the journal did not specifically target this audience. However, financial support for *Lituanus* depended heavily on the Lithuanian-American community. Publishing and distributing the journal to libraries was costly, so the LSA frequently organized fundraising campaigns to cover the expenses.

## Changes

In 1963, as LSA members graduated from universities, the non-profit *Lituanus Foundation* was established to oversee the popular quarterly on a long-term basis. Like all publications that seek to remain relevant, *Lituanus* had to evolve. Discussions in various Lithuanian diaspora media reveal that three potential paths for the journal's future were considered: 1) to become a large-circulation popular publication, 2) to find a balance between popular and academic appeal, or 3) to focus solely on academic direction. The latter option was chosen.

While the original goal of the bulletin was to inform American and English-speaking students and organizations about Lithuania, the journal's scope was expanded to take on a more academic character, with a greater emphasis on Lithuanian cultural topics.<sup>4</sup> In 1964, a new editor-in-chief, Dr. Tomas Remeikis, remarked:

Considering that the magazine is not intended for mass information, but more for elite circles, scientific and political institutions, there is a clear need to raise the content of the magazine

<sup>3</sup> "Lituanus akademinis žurnalas," 255.

<sup>4</sup> Dundzila, "'Lituanus' penkeri dešimtmečiai," 10.

to an intellectual level. Only really high-level content will distinguish *Lituanus*.<sup>5</sup>

To realize this vision, the editorial approach was reorganized: instead of relying on a permanent editorial team, different editors, each an expert in their respective field, were invited to curate individual issues. The journal's format was also revised to align with other academic and professional periodicals, and its length expanded to 80–104 pages per issue.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the recognition and support for the journal grew significantly; by 1965, its circulation reached 7,000 copies.<sup>7</sup>

In 1966, another pivotal discussion took place, setting a stable course for the future of *Lituanus*. Intellectuals involved in this discussion argued that merely informing an English-speaking audience or promoting Lithuanian culture was not enough to realize the journal's full potential. Professor Rimvydas Šilbajoris proposed that *Lituanus* should not only present and interpret Lithuanian culture but also contribute to its creation. He suggested that the journal's authors should analyze Lithuanian culture and history, explore its connections to contemporary society and civilization, and address modern cultural and social issues. Šilbajoris encapsulated this new vision by saying, "*Lituanus* must not only be a mirror of past reality, but also a creator of today's Lithuanian reality."<sup>8</sup> In this context, he argued, the journal would appeal not only to foreigners but also to educated Lithuanians – especially as more young Lithuanians in the diaspora were less fluent in their parents' language or lacked access to Lithuanian cultural publications in the Lithuanian language.

## ***Lituanus* After 1990**

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1990, *Lituanus* did not undergo drastic changes in its publishing policies or content,

<sup>5</sup> Cited in: Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Penki 'Lituanus' dešimtmečiai," 254.

<sup>6</sup> Peleckis-Kaktavičius, "Penki 'Lituanus' dešimtmečiai," 252–272.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>8</sup> Šilbajoris, "Tikrovės veidrodis ir jos kūrėjas," 1.

as the decision to remain an objective academic journal had been made decades earlier. The biggest challenge, however, was finding a new editor. When Professor Violeta Kelertas, who had served as editor-in-chief for over a decade, stepped down in 2011, a temporary editor-in-chief took over. Over the following two years, individual issues were primarily prepared by guest editors.

In 2014, Professor Almantas Samalavičius, who lives and works in Vilnius, became the new editor-in-chief, ushering in a new phase for *Lituanus*. At this point, most of the Board members remained in the U.S., while the editor-in-chief worked from Lithuania.

This proved to be an insightful decision, as fewer scholars from the diaspora were submitting papers for publication. Many had either retired or preferred other venues to publish and disseminate their work. By appointing a well-known intellectual based in Lithuania, *Lituanus* was able to attract more authors from within the country, revitalizing its pool of contributors.

## Keeping up With Time

In 1996, *Lituanus* website was created, allowing readers to find articles online. While the newest issues were not immediately available, an archive was accessible. In 2003, an electronic format was introduced. This change was made to keep up with the times while also considering subscribers who do not use computers.

Over the years, *Lituanus* has built an extensive archive of articles and literary works that are freely accessible to scholars online (<https://www.lituanus.org>). These articles are divided into 14 categories, such as art and artists, book reviews, economy, education, historical documents, history, linguistics, literary analysis, literature – original works, miscellaneous, music, philosophy, political science, and sociology.

While it is difficult to determine exactly how many articles, research projects, dissertations, or books have been produced

with *Lituanus* as a resource, the size of its archive highlights its significant contribution to Lithuanian studies. When *Lituanus* celebrated its 50th anniversary, editors cataloged approximately 1,500 article titles. Based on this growth, the journal has published over 2,100 distinct articles to date, not including literary works.

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In summary, one key reason for *Lituanus's* longevity is its ability to evolve while staying true to its original mission. The publication started as a Lithuanian academic youth bulletin and later became a respected academic journal, continuously adapting to the changing needs of its audience. Its shift to a more academically focused journal, guided by expert guest editors and collaborations with academic institutions, helped maintain high intellectual standards, contributing to its long-term success.

Another crucial factor in its endurance is the strong financial and community support from the Lithuanian-American community, including private donors, subscribers, and organizations like the Lithuanian Foundation, Inc. Fundraising efforts and subscriber backing have allowed the journal to overcome financial challenges and remain present in university libraries.

*Lituanus's* adoption of digital formats in 1996 and 2003 made its archives accessible to a global audience, ensuring its continued relevance and sustainability in the modern era.

To conclude, I would like to quote Vytautas Vardys, a Lithuanian public activist who worked with *Lituanus* from its very first issue. He writes: "Convincing someone that *Lituanus* or a similar English-language journal is needed is like saying that the sun should shine once in a while."

I hope readers will forgive this poetic digression, but the occasion warrants it: as we celebrate 70 years of *Lituanus*, it proves that such a periodical is a time-tested necessity. It also attests to the fact that the Lithuanian community in the United States possesses not only intellectual and entrepreneurial resources but also the determination to see their efforts succeed.

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