



A. Sabaliauskas, *Noted Scholars of the Lithuanian Language*. Biographical Sketches. Translated by William R. Schmalstieg and Ruth Armentrout. Published jointly by Akademinės Skautijos Leidykla and Dept. of Slavic Languages, Pennsylvania State University, Chicago, 1973.

*Noted Scholars of the Lithuanian Language* is a translation by William R. Schmalstieg and Ruth Armentrout, both of Pennsylvania State University, of Algirdas Sabaliauskas' Lithuanian original *Žodžiai atgyja*. In the words of the translators it "is an anecdotal account of the lives of many linguists of the last century and the early part of this century who helped shape the course of development of the field and who were instrumental in bringing it to its present position." The table of contents lists thirty-three scholars, but the text frequently refers to others, who, in a larger volume, would undoubtedly have warranted an article in their own right. And yet this slim work (one hundred and sixty eight pages in the translation) is much more than an inventory of the great achievements of the great names.

Books on Baltic linguistics are often extremely forbidding in their appearance, full of symbols, asterisks, reconstructions, dialectal variants, archaisms, Sanskrit, Greek and Old Slavic comparisons, and the full range of esoteric terminology elaborated by generations of Indo-Europeanists. They are of course intended for the specialist, and are largely incomprehensible to anyone else.

Sabaliauskas' work is not scientific in this sense; there are very few references to technical matters. It can be read with ease by any layman, and few will escape the fascination of the portraits it paints. We come to form impressions of scholars from their published works, and it is hardly surprising that the image of most historical linguists is depressing austere. From their thick tomes, replete with the breadth and depth of their scholarship, we all too easily come to think of them as humorless old men, seated in dingy studies, surrounded by dusty volumes and occasional cobwebs. Insofar as we invest them with any human characteristics at all, we might think of them as falling into the absent-minded professor category, forgetting to eat or to turn the heating on.

Sabaliauskas brings us another dimension. His book begins with August Schleicher gate-crashing a ministerial banquet, learning Czech in the bars of Prague, and Lithuanian at village festivities, and getting up in the middle of the night to tend his garden. We learn of Bruckner's alleged habit of tearing out the pages of books as he read them, of Bezzenberger's "impeccable" catechism, of Nieminen's lost suitcase, of Zubaty's talent for musical composition, of Portunatov's Thursdays and Baudouin de Courtenay's Saturdays, of Kurschat's first train ride, of Jaunius' absences from mass and his experiments with boot polish on his tongue, of Būga weighing his lexical entries, of Jablonskis' forged report card.

Thus we are led to an understanding of how it is that the great achievements of Lithuanian linguistics were due not to a race of eccentrics in ivory towers, but to a stream of dedicated men, seeking inspiration in the field from country folk, and often battling against many difficulties and hardships in the pursuit of their studies, teaching and researches. To see their achievements in this light is to appreciate them more fully, and to emphasize the passionate determination of scholars who would otherwise, perhaps, remain for most of us little more than faceless names in inaccessible books.

A book such as this one serves not only to re-humanize for us great names from the past and to remind us of the importance of the human element in scholarly research, but also, through the popularization of both the men and their work, to offer encouragement to those who might be thinking of helping to continue the tradition; certainly it will be of value in breaking down the barriers of remoteness and anonymity which so often separate predecessor from follower. Not that there is any lack of enthusiasm among present-day scholars — indeed twenty-three very significant names are simply listed at the end of the work as being currently active — but it is nevertheless the case that linguistics in the traditional sense, perhaps better known as comparative philology, is, along with Classics, suffering something of a depression at the present time. If Sabaliauskas, Schmalstieg and Armentrout between them succeed in capturing the imagination of even a few potential students, their contribution will have been significant, and their success well deserved.

The translators end their foreword: "We have done our best to convey the charm of Sabaliauskas' little book. Only the reader will be able to say whether we have succeeded." In the opinion of this reader at least, they have succeeded admirably; *Noted Scholars of the Lithuanian Language* should be required reading for all Lithuanians, and for all would-be

philologists. He is a rare person indeed who will not derive both information and pleasure from it; perhaps someone will find in it an inspiration as well.

Trevor G. Fennell,  
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