

A TREATISE ON THE UNIVERSITY'S "GOLDEN AGE"

Daniel Beauvois,, Lumières et Société en Europe de l'Est: L'Université de Vilna et les écoles polonaises de l'Empire Russe (1803-1832), Paris, Librairie Honoré Champion, 1977.

D. Beauvois' book consists of a dissertation defended at the First University of Paris on February 5, 1977. The author dedicates it to the 400th anniversary of the founding of the University of Vilnius. It is thus that French scholarship pays a fitting tribute to this occasion. In turn, the huge, 912 page dissertation will surely be hailed as one of the key works ever written on Vilnius University. To be sure, it covers only one of its periods — the "Golden Age" — but does so in an exceptionally learned, thorough, comprehensive, and innovative way.

Of all periods in the university's history that from 1803 to 1832 has been studied the most. At the same time, in both Polish and Lithuanian historiography, it has come to be imbued with a somewhat legendary character. The age of Mickiewicz and Daukantas, of the Philomaths, rebels, and national heroes, has always lent itself to the making of myths. Works dealing with that period usually offer, in addition to the facts, a large dose of journalistic elaboration. But D. Beauvois attempts to gain an, as it were, ideologically unencumbered side-view of the "vast complex of culture at empire's edge that is Vilnius" (pg. 2). Indeed, he is concerned not so much with the ideas emanating from the university nor with the development of the arts and sciences in Vilnius as with the sociology (even microsociology) of the university, with what might be regarded as a cross section of the university community. It is in this heretofore less intensively researched area that he discovers things both remarkable and surprising. Out of an array of numerous documents and painstakingly prepared statistical tables and graphs there emerge the socio-economic structures of an entire period and with them a picture of the psychology of Lithuanian society, of the spirit that imbued the civilization of Vilnius at that time.

The author made use of Russian, Polish, Austrian, French, and Lithuanian library collections (in the case of Lithuania, the libraries of the university itself and of the Academy of Sciences), thereby bringing to light a wealth of little known or even entirely unknown material. He familiarized himself with, among many others, the works of Lithuanian historians (A. Kaupas, I. Lukšaitė, J. Lebionka, F. Sliesoriūnas, A. Šidlauskas, and particularly M. Lukšienė), even though studies written in pre-World-War-II Lithuania or by Lithuanian scholars living in exile remained outside his field of vision. Incidentally, it appears that the libraries and archives of the Soviet Union and Vilnius felt no obligation to make his task any easier; for example, he was not allowed to see the original French manuscript (kept in Vilnius) of J. Frank's memoirs (p. 79).

Having briefly surveyed the characteristic peculiarities of the Vilnius region as well as the history of the university, the author discusses at length Alexander I's „reform fever," the role of individual curators and rectors, and the influence of Russian ministers on the fate of the university. Especially comprehensive and revelatory is the chapter on the teaching body, disclosing detailed information on the professors' geographical and social origins, age, family status, employment stability, and material rewards. Next the discussion moves on to the faculty's internal structure, the oppositions (locals/foreigners, clergy/laity), disagreements, and contradictions within it, the manifestations of group solidarity, including those associated with Masonic activity. Nor does the author neglect to mention a certain number of negative phenomena, such as moments of narrowness, isolation, and servility. An equally exhaustive treatment, with plenty of graphic material, is given to the student body. Rather dry, this material does a better job than the usual myths, revealing the human, intellectual, and even moral physiognomy of the two strata. At times the book grows into what might be termed a history of the Lithuanian educated class at a certain period. It would be highly desirable if an analogous study were done with respect to other historical periods. We do not as yet have a history of the Lithuanian intelligentsia, something without which the self-awareness of contemporary Lithuanian intellectuals cannot become complete.

Of value are the pages that touch upon the university's intellectual role in a number of lesser known spheres: the publication and distribution of books; the fostering of the periodical press; and censorship (where this role was not always positive). One way or another the university contributed to the formation of the country's spiritual atmosphere not only by virtue of its scholarly and pedagogic endeavors but also by indirect means, a fact that is often overlooked. Needless to say,

the author covers the more familiar topics as well, discussing each of the faculties, profiling the individual professors, and examining the court case of the Philomaths/Philarets together with the closing of the university, which he expressively characterizes as "one of the most serious cases of cultural genocide in history" (p. 911). The second volume of the work is devoted entirely to the Vilnius district schools that were under the university's supervision. Here too there is a wealth of highly valuable material for students of both Polish and Lithuanian civilization.

Unusual or just plain interesting facts crop up on nearly every page of the book. A person, not necessarily a scholar, who is attracted by the period in question will find ample food for thought here. The reviewer, for example, was intrigued to learn of the rather unexpected connections revealed by D. Beauvois to have existed between, on the one hand, the University of Vilnius, and, on the other, Joseph de Maistre (p. 27) and Jan Potocki, author of the famous novel *The Manuscript from Saragossa* (p. 198).

Even though the work belongs primarily to the area of Polish studies (not surprisingly so — the "Golden Age" is, after all, mainly a phenomenon of Polish culture), the author takes pains to avoid on-sidedness. He remarks that the Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and White Russian cultures are sufficiently vigorous so that the claims that Poles occasionally still voice to that area have become a matter of passé dreams (p. 2). Sometimes, though not often, he deals with problems of Lithuanian culture directly. Here, unfortunately, and in spite of the author's best intentions, one is struck by the rather frequent inaccuracies. Thus A. Strazdas' *Secular and Religious Songs* is described as a book of religious hymns (p. 200) even though the very title contradicts this. S. Stanevičius appears both as Stanievicius and as Stankiewicz (p. 288). Kajetonas and Kiprijonas Nezabitauskis seem to have been fused into a single person (p. 288). It is maintained that M. Daukša translated Wujek's Bible (p. 865), and so on. Of course, these inaccuracies do not detract from the value of this book as a whole but they do suggest that in writing about the University of Vilnius it helps to become more knowledgeable about both the Lithuanian language and Lithuanian historiography. The work could also have benefited from an index.

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