

## SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

### Studies of the Biographies of Inter-war Researchers in Modern Lithuanian Academic Literature

A significant twentieth-century prerequisite for the organization of academic activities of scientists of independent Lithuania was the pedagogical and, to some degree, research infrastructure at the University of Lithuania (since 1930 the Vytautas Magnus University), which in 1922 was established in Kaunas, the temporary capital of Lithuania, as well as other specialized higher education institutions established in later periods. The following institutions were established during the period of Lithuania's independence before the start of the Second World War: the Agricultural Academy (in 1924), the Conservatoire (in 1933), the Trade Institute of Klaipeda (in 1934), the Klaipeda Pedagogical Institute (in 1935), and the Veterinary Academy (in 1936).

Academic communities started to evolve in these state-supported institutions. Higher education institutions generated leaders in studies and scientific research, also intellectuals who consistently advocated the processes of promoting and supporting public education and culture. They developed the scientific and cultural communication. Lithuanian academic intellectuals sought to develop international relations through participation in the activities of public organizations to build international cultural relations and brought together not only academic but also some cultural figures, publicists and creators.

In the last decades, the scientific press of independent Lithuania has started to publish more historical data about outstanding scientists of the first independent Republic of Lithuania (1918–1940) whose professional activities, scientific and socio-cultural legacy was rarely publicized and often kept secret during the Soviet period. This has offered more opportunities not only to promote knowledge about the development of different sciences in the inter-war period, but has also helped to figure out the historical aspects of the interaction between scientists and the society.

The review study pursues to identify the essential features of researchers' academic contributions and public activity with respect to the methods of analysis and data synthesis used in the study of biographies of scientists. The publication

is prepared on the basis of the presentation delivered at the conference of Lithuanian science historians and philosophers held on March 29, 2018.

## Biographical data found in general knowledge publications and research works completed by science historians

There is still a very limited number of publications containing comprehensive and systematic information on the biographies of scientists in Lithuania. However, the available publications have been professionally prepared, their authors have a great understanding of scientific research, and they are the voice of research in the field of science history. The professional activities and achievements of the twentieth-century scientists are increasingly correlated with the educational activities and development of the society, and its capacity building.

For example, the book *Famous Scientists of the 20th Century Lithuania* by Ona Voverienė (2009) provides short biographies of scientists who received international and national academic recognition and who were actively involved in scientific research and building society education and awareness. The book contains information on the most important research achievements of Lithuanian scientists and relates to the context of Lithuanian society and cultural life in the country. The author of the book does not restrict herself to the description of the professional activities of the elite of natural or technical sciences alone, as is often the case in the studies of historians of science.

The book *Outline of Lithuania's Experience in Science and Human Development* by Libertas Klimka and Juozas Algimantas Krikštopaitis (2015) is also attributable to the genre of personality reference book. The chapter in the book called 'The Setup of Society Builders' contains the most important facts about the people who had the greatest influence on the development of politics, culture and science in Lithuania (Klimka & Krikštopaitis, 2015, pp. 340–411). With regard to the scientific, cultural and societal interaction the book speaks of the outstanding people of the academic elite of the First Independent Republic of Lithuania. Today this issue is gaining more and more attention not only in respect to science research, but also in cultural historiography.

For example, Professor Eduardas Volteris, who is well-known in the Baltic States, is mentioned in the book as one of the most important founders of higher education in independent Lithuania. It is reasonably considered that his standing

helped to lay the foundations of archaeological research, museum establishment and protection of cultural monuments in the period of the development of the country's statehood.

In the context of cultural and scientific research activities, the book specifically looks into the role of Professor Ignas Končius, who was a physicist and an ethnologist and who focused on the development of folk traditions and heritage conservation. Attention is paid to the importance of communicating knowledge and values to the public. While combining the activities as a physicist with educational and social activities, Končius wrote over 300 popular science content articles.

The above-mentioned book by Klimka and Krikštopaitis also contains information on the Lithuanianistic expression voiced by professors of the Lithuanian diaspora abroad, its importance for the preservation of Lithuanian culture, and the significance of comprehending the written and other heritage of that diaspora in the present-day Lithuanian society.

Although the factual information in this book is not very coherent and has chronological or thematic issues, the episodes presented cover the most important scientific, educational and cultural facts. Significant areas of expression by historical personalities are distinguished, and the value of their intellectual legacy is pointed out.

## Monographs, essays and other biographical publications

In recent years, science historians have started to publish more comprehensive biographical publications devoted to individual intellectuals of independent Lithuania in the inter-war period. Their scientific research, ideas on public issues, memoirs and diaries have been introduced to the public. The work done helps to unlock and reveal the contribution of the academic elite in organizing research and higher education studies.

The book published by Algirdas Gaigalas and Algimantas Grigelis can be viewed as a study of professional science and applied activity. The authors have compiled a book about Professor Mykolas Kaveckis, who was a geologist and a geochemist (Gaigalas & Grigelis, 2012). With reference to Professor Kaveckis' publications and manuscripts, the authors name the merits of his research, his extensive

contribution to geological research, the studies in mineral raw materials and groundwater as well as the organization and development of university geology studies since 1922. Professor Kaveckis is consistently presented to readers as a broad-minded scholar and a patriot of his country.

The biographical literature published by science historians displays the data of life and activities of scientists as well as their legacy texts that attest to their professional and socio-cultural contribution to the processes of self-awareness and cultural modernization of the society in the country. It is noteworthy that in the Soviet-period Lithuanian historiography of culture and science there was no information about the scientists and teachers who actively participated in the social or political movement and organizations for the independence of Lithuania. There was also no information about scientists who emigrated from Lithuania in the post-war period and continued their academic and social activities in the diaspora. Only recently, the authors of biography studies have started to publish works on the academic elite and their input to the development of Lithuania's statehood.

One of such intellectuals, public figures, and promoters of Lithuanian cultural heritage was Jurgis Elisonas. He was a teacher at the University of Lithuania and at the Lithuanian Agricultural Academy; he was also a gymnasium principal in Panevėžys and in post-war years he lectured at the Harvard University, USA. In his book *Jurgis Elisonas*, the science historian Algimantas Jakimavičius claims that Elisonas was one of the most prominent zoologists of pre-war Lithuania who worked hard to build and support zoology studies at higher education institutions, who was actively involved in social and cultural life and fostered the development of regional research work. In 1923, Elisonas established the Society for the Study of the Homeland, in 1925 he helped to initiate the Panevėžys Museum, and in the years 1935–1938 he was the chairman of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives Council (Jakimavičius, 1997, p. 87).

Significant attention was paid to popular science articles in the publications of historians of science. Society education was a significant activity of some famous inter-war Lithuanian scientists. The science historian Eglė Makariūnienė (1999) has published an informative study on a famous physicist, Professor Antanas Žvironas, and his works and legacy. The author of the study indicates that Žvironas collaborated with the journal *Kultura* ('Culture'), participated in the establishment of the Lithuanian Society of Naturalists and published articles in the journal *Gamta* ('Nature') and *Lithuanian Encyclopedia* (Makariūnienė, 1999). The biographical information presented in the book demonstrates the

social personality of the scientist. Žvironas was actively involved in disseminating scientific knowledge and also emphasized the purpose of science in the society.

The work and legacy of a physicist, chemist and public figure of the inter-war period, Professor Vincas Čepinskis, has been comprehensively unfolded in the book by Zenonas Mačionis and Jonas Čepinskis (1992). The publication highlights the professor's participation and role in the establishment of the Lithuanian University, the design of study reforms, as well as his interdisciplinary relations and cooperation with public figures in Kaunas (Mačionis & Čepinskis, 1992, p. 23). The book includes biographical facts about the professor and the texts of his publications. The provided information demonstrates the approaches and attitudes of an outstanding scientist who focused on issues of promoting education, the dissemination of science knowledge in the society, and the importance of relations between a man and a society. He published most of his articles, which reveal his critical approach towards the society, in the journal *Kultura*.

The book *Professor Antanas Purėnas* by Romualdas Baltrušis looks into the scientific research and pedagogical work of Professor Antanas Purėnas, who was a specialist of organic chemistry and worked at the university (Baltrušis, 2008). The book publishes recollections of his contemporaries, unveils his educational activities in Kaunas and in the country as a whole. With reference to the available sources the authors of the book indicate that in 1925 Professor Purėnas designed adult learning programmes for courses at the People's University, delivered lectures to the public, and cooperated with teachers. In 1929, he was elected to the Culture Union Council of the 5th Culture Congress. His role in the publishing activities was of great importance to the development of the society. Purėnas was a member of the editorial board of *Lithuanian Encyclopedia*. The first volumes of the encyclopedia were published in 1933. Other members of the editorial board were professors of the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The number of volumes published was nine and Purėnas' input amounted to 200 articles in total (Baltrušis, 2008, p. 81). The memoirs of Tadas Ivanauskas, Jonas Dagis and others, which are reported in the biographical study, highlight Purėnas' great scientific achievements, skills of public expression, and tolerance towards people with different views.

The publications dedicated to the legacy of Professor Pranas Jodelė are distinguished in the field of technical sciences and technology history. In 1971, the publication commemorating the centenary of the birth of Pranas Jodelė was issued. The book *Professor Pranas Jodelė* was prepared by a group of authors.

Later the publication was supplemented and in 1996 a revised edition of the book was published (Jodelė, 1996). The book presents a comprehensive study of the professor's scientific research and pedagogical activities at the university in the field of production and use of construction materials, as well as writings on different professional topics. Professor Jodelė reviewed the first issues of the journal *Technika* ('Technology'), participated in the publication of periodicals *Technika ir ūkis* ('Technology and Economy'), *Energetikos Komiteto darbai* ('Proceedings of the Energy Committee'), and wrote articles to many publications on construction design and other construction issues. The authors of the study reasonably and honestly emphasize that Professor Jodelė paid great attention to the development of Lithuanian technological terminology, promoting the use of Lithuanian language, educational progress and youth education. The book also includes the recollections of the professor's colleagues and students who provide evidence of different episodes from the professor's life, describe his personality traits and successful work among the academic elite.

At the end of the 1990s, two books were published in Lithuania which testify the ambition to commemorate the biographical history of the prominent Lithuanian geographer, public figure and professor Kazys Pakštas. The second edition of the book *Kazys Pakštas: the Voice of National Odyssey* was prepared by a well-known inter-war period literature specialist Juozas Eretas (2002). The first edition of this book had previously been published abroad. In this biographical study Kazys Pakštas appears as a representative of the Catholic intelligentsia. The author of the study employs the evidence that reveals Pakštas' versatile personality and his reasoning process.

Vygintas Bronius Pšibilskis, the author of another book on Pakštas, aimed to use all the sources available in Lithuania and abroad to expand the knowledge on the biography of the prominent geographer and his efforts to implement different projects (Pšibilskis, 2003). The book presents Kazys Pakštas as the leader in the establishment and development of professional geography in Lithuania. It provides data on his research into Lithuanian lakes, the Baltic Sea physical geography, Lithuanian cartography, etc. Pakštas' ideas on the importance of strengthening higher education and its academic community for the Lithuanian culture, promoting the country, the relations between the Baltic States and the development of multinational links are highly topical even today (Pšibilskis, 2003, p. 102).

Modern Lithuanian biographical literature uncovers the valuable contribution of scientists of the inter-war period in the fields of humanities and social sciences for

the development of Lithuanian higher education, society and culture. Although this aspect of historiography has not been sufficiently explored, the monographs written in modern times have already started to research and assess the role of prominent people in the interdisciplinary communication of Lithuanian society.

With respect to the historical experience in the development of science and society culture, the study completed by Vladas Žukas is highly informative and of great value. The book is devoted to Vaclovas Biržiška, who is considered to be one of the most active Lithuanian public figures in the inter-war period (Žukas, 2012). The book delves into the issues of scientific and popular content publication that are relevant in terms of historiography. The focus of Biržiška's concern was managing the issues of academic publishing. The mentioned monograph provides a comprehensive analysis of the publication process of *Lithuanian Encyclopedia* and uncovers the existence of different ideas and attitudes—for example, Catholic and liberal representation, the unification of scientists for the implementation of a joint project, and Biržiška's personal contribution to the publishing activity that was of great importance for the cultural education of the Lithuanian society. It should be noted that the monograph discusses the difficulties of the publishing process and how Lithuanian scientists communicated among themselves. The study also provides an assessment of the achievements and failures that the scientists encountered.

It is worth mentioning that the twentieth-century publications present biographical data on famous Lithuanian scientists, their scientific career, academic and cultural relations, and the cohesion of science and society. The preparation and publication of these works was the concern of science historians, as well as professionals who worked in museums, science libraries or were involved in preservation of historical memory. A fine example of this fact is the biography of the inter-war Professor Ignas Končius that was prepared on the basis of memoirs and other documents stored in the funds of the Lithuanian National Museum (Končius, 2016).

The data published in recent biography studies and memoirs indicate a surge in the 1930s' Vytautas Magnus University which was conditioned by the fact that a new generation of teachers and scientists who grew up in Lithuania had the opportunity to improve their skills and competences abroad. These scientists promoted the publishing of scientific and popular content, and strengthened formal and informal activities in cultural life.

## Conclusions

Contemporary scientific research studies of independent Lithuania have started to focus on biographical data research related to prominent scientists, who in the period of the First Republic of Lithuania fostered the establishment and worked for the promotion of higher education. In the Soviet period, their legacy and input to the development of the society remained hidden or was even destined for oblivion.

The scientists of the University of Vilnius, the Kaunas University of Technology and the Vytautas Magnus University who associate the development of these higher education institutions with the academic community in Kaunas in the inter-war period, have prepared a number of biographical studies and essays which depict the professional and socio-cultural relations of that community. The key research areas that Lithuanian Societies on the History and Philosophy of Science are involved in are the studies in the activities and legacy of the most famous Lithuanian scientists of the 20th century. This can be also witnessed in the topics of annual conferences, new publications and exhibitions.

The biographical publications aim to reveal the scientific and pedagogical merits of prominent Lithuanian intellectuals, with an emphasis on their contribution to the cultural and social life, their ambitions to develop the society with aspirations of independence in mind. The studies demonstrate the novelty of contemporary factual content research in historiography, its significance for the development of cultural historiography and the actualization of a researcher's social experience.

On the other hand, there are very few reference manuals and other publications that include information on professional scientific research and public activities of prominent people in Lithuania. The manuscripts and other documents are in the process of analysis and they need to be completed for the funds. Thus, the biography studies about the scientists who lived in Lithuania in the first half of the 20th century have become of great relevance in the contemporary historical research of Lithuanian culture.

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