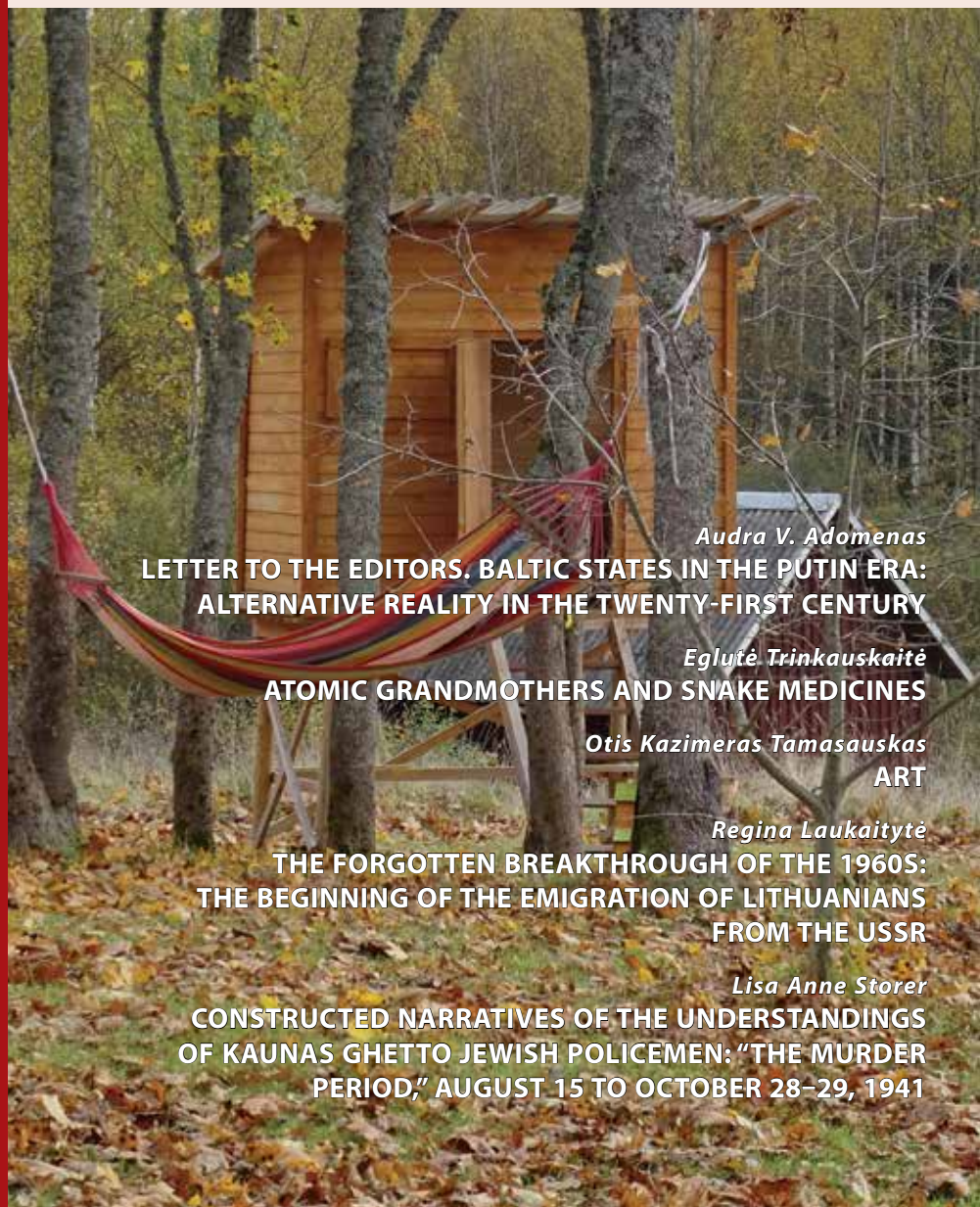


# LITUANUS

THE LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY

VOLUME 69:3 (2023)



*Audra V. Adomenas*  
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# LITUANUS

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# Letter to the Editors. Baltic States in the Putin Era: Alternative Reality in the Twenty-First Century

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AUDRA V. ADOMENAS

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the Russian Federation under President Boris Yeltsin signed a historic document that recognized the annexation of Lithuania in 1940 by the USSR as a violation of Lithuanian sovereignty. Carefully crafted words in the preamble of the July 29, 1991 treaty between Russia and Lithuania “[...] declared that once the USSR had eliminated the consequences of the 1940 annexation which violated Lithuanian sovereignty, Russia-Lithuania relations would further improve [...]”.<sup>1</sup>

The 1991 treaty set the stage for Russia-Lithuania relations to improve in the form of a complete withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Lithuania on August 31, 1993.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 1991 treaty between Russia and Lithuania of July 29, 1991 – preamble. Also see: Mereckis, Darius and Morkvėnas “The 1991 Treaty as a Basis for Lithuanian – Russian Relations”, PDF.

<sup>2</sup> Jakavonis, Gediminas. “25 Metai Nuo Rusijos Kariuomenės Išvedimo” (25 Years Since Russian Army Withdrawal) Vilnius: *Vakaro Žinios* (Evening Newspaper) August 31, 2018, p. 1–3. The article recounts the dynamics of the Russian Armed Forces withdrawal as recalled by Audrius Butkevicius, First Minister of Defense of Independent Lithuania in the post-Soviet era and General Česlovas Jezerskas, first Commander of the Lithuanian Army in re-emerged Lithuania.

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AUDRA V. ADOMENAS is a Certified Archivist and President and Founder of the Lithuanian Archives Project (LAP), a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that archives, digitizes, and makes publicly available historically significant audiovisual and textual materials related to Lithuanian diaspora history worldwide. LAP provides a free database containing thousands of digital objects related to global Lithuanian diaspora history: <https://tinyURL.com/LDDA-Archives>.

## Putin Era and Denial of Annexation

On May 5, 2005, BBC News/Europe announced “Russia denies Baltic occupation. Russia [...] denied it illegally annexed the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in 1940 [...]”.<sup>3</sup> Writing in the *Moscow Times*, reporter Agnia Grigas, grappled with this Putin era interpretation in her article “How Russia Sees Baltic Sovereignty” by noting that this 2005 decision by the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office reviewed the legality of the 1991 Russian government granting of independence to the Baltic States. Grigas observed: “A recent decision by the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office to review the legality of the 1991 decision granting the Baltic States independence from the Soviet Union has irritated the governments of the Baltic States and raised concern among the allies.”<sup>4</sup> The astute journalist continued to observe that: “At the same time, Russian officials confirmed that the ‘matter has no legal prospects’ and no direct implications for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.”<sup>5</sup>

Agnia Grigas goes on to say:

This paradox move can be better understood in the context of other Russian government Initiatives of the past two years [in the Putin Era] that have indirectly challenged the sovereignty of the Baltic States. It also reflects a much deeper-rooted view held in Moscow on Baltic statehood and on the Soviet Era that is much at odds with the view of the Baltic governments.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> News.bbc.co.uk – Russia denies Baltic “occupation” May 5, 2005. Russia has denied it illegally annexed the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in 1940 [...] hereafter cited as BBC – May 5, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> www.TheMoscowTimes.com>how-russ The *Moscow Times* – Independent News from Russia. “How Russia Sees Baltic Sovereignty” by Agnia Grigas, July 14, 2015. Agnia Grigas, PhD Truman National Security Project Fellow. Author of “The Politics of Energy Memory Between the Baltic States and Russia” hereafter cited as – *Moscow Times* – Grigas. Currently, Dr. Agnia Grigas is an energy and political risk expert based in Washington D.C.

<sup>5</sup> *Moscow Times* – Grigas.

<sup>6</sup> *Moscow Times* – Grigas.

The “much deeper rooted view held in Moscow” that journalist Grigas observes warrants an inquiry into Putin-era Russian historical amnesia. This attempt to rewrite history from “a Russian standpoint” may be tied to a term called “myth of 1939–40” by Professor of International Affairs David Mendeloff.<sup>7</sup> Mendeloff, who holds a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in his work notes that the present assertion that – since 2005<sup>8</sup> that the Soviet Union neither “occupied” the Baltic States in 1939<sup>9</sup> nor “annexed” them the following year is widely held and embedded in Putin-era historical amnesia.

The roots of Russian historiography are stated by the Chief of European Affairs at the Kremlin, Sergei Yastrzhemsky, who boldly posits that “[...] there was no occupation. There were agreements at the time with the legitimately elected [July 1940] authorities in the Baltic countries.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, there appear to be

<sup>7</sup> Mendeloff, David A. “Truth Telling and Mythology Making in Post-Soviet Russia: Pernicious Historical Ideas, Mass Education, and International Conflict.” Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Doctoral dissertation February, 2001. Committee: Stephen Van Evera (Chair), David Blackner, Timothy Colton (Harvard) Fields: International Relations and Foreign Policy, Russian Politics, Security Studies also see by Mendeloff, David A. In *Historical Injustice and Democratic Transition in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe: Ghosts at the Table of Democracy*, (eds.) Kenneth Christie and Robert Cribb, p. 778–80 Oxford University Press, 2011 hereafter cited as Mendeloff. It may be noted that Mendeloff’s research is on the theory and practice of international and trans-national justice with special emphasis on impact and accountability mechanics – truth commissions. Mendeloff specializes in international affairs at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NP-SIA) at Carleton University. Also see Mendeloff “Explaining the Persistence of Nationalist Myth Making in Post-Soviet Russian History Education” in *The Teaching of History In Contemporary Russia* by Vera Kaplan (ed.), PDF by Vera Kaplan. Mendeloff, David, *International Studies Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, September 2004. “Truth-seeking, Truth-telling, and Post Conflict Peace-building: Curb the Enthusiasm,” Oxford University Press. David A. Mendeloff, Director, Centre of Security and Defense Studies, The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Mendeloff.

<sup>9</sup> Mendeloff.

<sup>10</sup> Grigas – *Moscow Times*.



two diametrically opposed positions. Reaching into the basics of international law in understandable terms, there are two “legal” arguments at loggerheads. One called *Ex injuria jus non oritur* is a principal in international law. This implies that illegal acts do not create law. The opposing legal principle is *exfactis jus oritur* in which the existence of facts creates the law.<sup>11</sup>

## The “Devil’s Brew”

Within the context of *ex injuria jus non oritur* the Russian Prosecutor’s Office review of the 1991 Russian government treaty is a valid review since it is a fact that the Red Army entered Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1940 at a time in which there was no state of war. Also, there were elections and election results in

<sup>11</sup> Sir Hersch Lauterpacht (1897–1960), hero of human rights, was a British international lawyer and judge at the International Court of Justice. The principles of *ex injuria jus non oritur* – legal term that hold that illegal acts do not create law and *ex factis jus oritur* – existence of facts creates law are both concepts that originate with Lauterpacht, prime mover among international lawyers in the twentieth century. He served as a judge at the International Court of Justice with a lifelong dedication to the advancement of human rights. The seed of the Welles Declaration in which Welles as policy advisor to Franklin D. Roosevelt issued on July 23, 1940, in his position of acting U.S. Secretary of State, condemning the June 1940 occupation by the USSR of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia was grounded in the legal theory of Lauterpacht. The Sumner Welles papers are at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library. The Sumner Welles Papers arrived at the Roosevelt Library in July 1995 and were processed by the archives staff and were opened in the spring of 1996. The Welles Declaration was crafted by Loy W. Henderson (1892–1986) in concert with Welles and Roosevelt. Henderson was a leading figure in the U.S. Foreign Service. While it is outside of the scope of this article, it may be noted that in 1930, Loy W. Henderson was serving as third secretary to the legation in Riga, Latvia where he met and married Elise Marie Henrichson, an outspokenly anti-Soviet Latvian. His personal papers reveal that his wife was very influential in helping to draft the Welles Declaration. Loy W. Henderson’s papers were donated in 1981 to the Library of Congress, and they were prepared by Richard B. Bickel and expanded by Michael Spangler.

June 1940 that led to a request from each of the Baltic states to enter the Soviet Union in July 1940. Following this line of reasoning – there was no occupation and no annexation by the USSR of the three Baltic republics.

However, within the context of *ex injuria jus non oritur* – which holds that illegal acts do not create law the Russian Prosecutor’s review of the “facts” may be classified as nonsense upon stilts. It is within this context that William J.H. Hough II wrote *The Annexation of the Baltic States and Its Effect on the Development of Laws Prohibiting Forcible Seizure of Territory* in the *New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law* in the winter of 1985.<sup>12</sup>

Professor Kazys Pakštas observes the dynamics of the election on which the review of the facts of the 1940 election in Lithuania which was the first step to “legalize” the USSR. Pakštas explains:

[...] Because of widespread boycott of the “polls” [on July 14] the “election” was extended for another day, July 15. However, the Soviet Embassy in London was not informed of this extension

<sup>12</sup> Besides William J.H. Hough II (1926–2014), see: Ineta Ziemele (PhD. Professor. International Law. Litigation at the European Court of Human Rights) book entitled *State Continuity and Nationality: The Baltic States and Russia*. Martinus Nishoff Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands, 2005. Ineta Ziemele is President of the Constitutional Court of Latvia. Also see: Dainius Zalimas, (Former Judge of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania) *Legal and Political Issues on the Continuity of the Republic of Lithuania* (retrieved January 24, 2008. Archived April 11, 2008, in the Wayback Machine). [www.rgsl.edu.lv/news/baltic-yearb](http://www.rgsl.edu.lv/news/baltic-yearb) “Baltic Yearbook of International Law.” The Baltic Yearbook of International Law is the annual legal journal published by the Riga Graduate School of Law (RGSL). The editor-in-chief of the yearbook is Ineta Ziemele and Professor of RGSL, Lauri Mälksoo, (Professor of International Law at the University of Tartu, Estonia, who currently is working on a grant sponsored by the European Research Council and dealing with the practice and theory of international law and human rights in contemporary Russia) and Dainius Zalimas (Professor of Law, Chair of Vytautas Magnus University Law School, Lithuania). Rwi. Lu.Se>HumanRights-Research>Pub. The yearbook is an important annual publication since 2001 on international law issues of import to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

and fully 24 hours before the closing of the “polls,” announced that 95.51% of all eligible voters cast their ballots [...].<sup>13</sup>

While the tactics and transgressions of totalitarian regime election practices are widely known and recorded – an official government announcement – as in this instance – may be seen as a singular act in the history of election practices. Bearing this in mind, the advocacy of the 2005 Chief of European Affairs at the Kremlin, Sergei Yastrzhembsky and his stance that “there was no occupation. There were agreements at the time [1940] with the ‘legitimately elected authorities’ in the Baltic states.”<sup>14</sup> The announcement of “election results” 24 hours before the close of polls in Lithuania by the USSR Embassy in London is at sharp variance with truth. In the course of researching “truth” and “untruth,” the name “Satan” surfaced. The name “Satan” in English is derived from the Hebrew verb *Satan*,<sup>15</sup> to “oppose, and

<sup>13</sup> Pakštas, Kazys. *Lithuania and World War II*. Lithuanian Cultural Institute: Chicago, 1947, p. 31. Kazys Pakštas, formerly Professor of Geography at the University of Lithuania in Kaunas, also formerly of the University of Latvia in Riga, Pakštas fled to the University of California at Los Angeles in 1939 prior to the 1940 occupation of Lithuania. Also see: Sabaliūnas, Leonas (1934–2016) (former Department Head of Political Science, Eastern Michigan University) *Lithuania in Crisis: Nationalism to Communism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972. Especially see: p. 206, 284–5. Also see: Vitas, Robert A. “U.S. Non-Recognition of the Soviet Occupation of Lithuania.” Loyola University Chicago doctoral dissertation. Download available – Political Science Commons. Especially see p. 29 “[...] Soviet military maps printed in 1939 already indicated Lithuania and the other Baltic States as components of the USSR.” Also see: Milkova, Vaida, Lithuanian language newspaper article in *Kauno Diena*: “Siekia priminti apie suklaidotus rinkimus” (Seeking to remind about fake elections) p. 1–2, July 14, 2020. The reporter Milkova includes the details of terror tactics between July 14 and August 25, 1940.

<sup>14</sup> *Moscow Times* – Grigas.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Vann and P.K. Meagher *The Temptations of Christ* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 33–35. Page 33: “adversary” describes the Chief of the fallen angels [...] leader of the host of spirits [...] “Moving from the Old Testament era to our era, the president of the United States, Joe Biden, stated in the world-wide press that president Vladimir Putin “has no soul.” Thus, a hallmark of the chief adversary (Satan).

carries the meaning of ‘one who opposes truth’.” It is within this dynamic that Putin and Putin-era Russian officials traffic in untruth. Speaking plainly, such officials engage in Satanic acts since – by definition – “one who opposes truth” – is the origin of the word Satan. Such is the mind frame of acts by Vladimir Putin and his Russian officials in the Putin era.

The Putin era attraction to *ex injuria jus non oritur* is an adversary view to *ex factis jus oritur* and the existence of facts that expose illegal acts. Interestingly, the name “Satan” in English is derived from the Hebrew verb *Satan*<sup>16</sup>, to oppose, and carries the meaning of “one who opposes.” In other words, one’s adversary “creates untruth.” This article includes the Putin era view of facts / truth which are the opposite of truth. In a word, one who opposes truth is Putin. Thus, the definition of Satan as “one who opposes truth” fits the mind frame and acts of Vladimir Putin and the present Russian Prosecutor’s Office.

\* \* \*

Interested parties on the “nuts and bolts” of Putin-era of untruth and counter reality may benefit from taking a closer look at the work of our contemporaries Dr. Agnia Grigas, Professors David Mendeloff and Vera Kaplan. Since the above noted deal in both theory and practice of counter mind-frame dynamics. Since the past and the present are umbilically tied, the work of Sir Hersch Lauderpacht, William J.H. Hough II, Professor Kazys Pakštas, U.S. State Department Official Loy Henderson and others within the body and end notes of this article form a tapestry to unravel untruth in our time. Joining the conversation on truth and

<sup>16</sup> In the *Chicago Tribune*, March 27, 2022, p. 1, “Biden: Putin Cannon Remain in Power,” p. 1 “for God’s sake, this man cannot remain in power,” p. 2: described the Russian leader as a “war criminal” [...] p. 2: Biden called Putin a “butcher.” Also, in a June 15, 2021 *Newsweek* article by Benjamin Fearnow entitled “Joe Biden Told Putin He Had No ‘Soul’ During Odd Kremlin Visit in 2011,” Joe Biden said “he looked into the Russian leader’s eyes and told him, “I don’t think you have a soul.”

untruth, John Stuart Mill – in his classic work *On Liberty* points to the ultimate fate of the bearers of untruth.

[...] The real advantage truth has consists in this, that when an opinion is true, it may be extinguished once, twice or many times, but in the course of ages, there will generally be found persons to rediscover it, until some one of its reappearances falls on a time when from favorable circumstances it escapes persecution until it has made such head as to withstand all subsequent attempts to suppress it.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty* (Dover Publications, Garden City, NY, 2002), p. 24. Originally published in London by J.W. Parker, 1859.

# Atomic Grandmothers and Snake Medicines

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EGLUTĖ TRINKAUSKAITĖ

## Methods

Pre-Christian Baltic sensibilities continue to thrive in everyday Lithuania. History of Religions hermeneutical methods helps interpret how Baltic sensibilities continue into the twenty-first century.

My first-person voice represents my native Lithuanian position.<sup>1</sup> Research combines ethnographic fieldwork with indigenous healers and folklorists and textual and archival analysis. My participation goes beyond the academic: I grew up in Lithuania under Soviet religious repression, where indigenous belief systems were trivialized as “folklore” rather than religion.<sup>2</sup> My participation in this project is both personal and professional.

Professor Charles H. Long’s History of Religions method of crawling back through history and his urge to continue articulating “that Lithuanian stuff” sheds a new light on the Lithuanian material in the broader context of Indigenous Religions

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<sup>1</sup> Gallager and Greenblat, *Practicing New Historicism*, 37–38.

<sup>2</sup> Trinkauskaitė, “Rūpintojėlis,” 47.

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studies.<sup>3</sup> Methods include primary and secondary texts, ethnographic field research, voice methodology that has to do with my own native Lithuanian position. The use of anecdotal narrative intends to draw in the reader, awaken their curiosity, and educate. The structure of this article mirrors my own experience with this material – starting from the first familial layer of personal experience and crawling through historical layers of research. At the American Academy of Religion annual meetings, Professor Charles H. Long continued to support my distinctive articulation of Lithuanian indigeneity. He saw its value for the study of Indigenous Religious traditions. David Carrasco discusses the importance of Charles H. Long's crawling back through history method with Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast hosts, Philip P. Arnold and Sandra Bigtree.<sup>4</sup>

## Snake Power as Medicine: A Personal Story

When my brother greeted me with hugs that summer, he said, “You smell like a snake.”

I had snake medicine on my face. The snake essence smelled intense – like a snake steeped in alcohol for over thirty years. I remember putting it enthusiastically on my skin. I have been disillusioned with conventional dermatology since I was a teenager suffering from atopic dermatitis due to untreated environmental allergies. I finally turned to *užkalbėtojai*, Lithuanian charm-

<sup>3</sup> Long, Charles H. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986. At the American Academy of Religion annual meetings Long continued to support my distinctive articulation of Lithuanian indigeneity. He saw its value for the study of Indigenous Religious traditions.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold, Philip P. and Sandra Bigtree, interview with David Carrasco, “Episode 03 – The Doctrine of Discovery in the Mesoamerican Context,” *Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery* (Podcast), 2022. <https://podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org/season1/episode-03>

ers, whom my mother would find through neighbors, relatives, and friends in different areas of the country. The first such charmer was a male farmer and there was no snake medicine involved. He put his hands on both sides of my head, then he talked over sugar cubes and my jar of cream. I have a vivid memory of his hands: they felt and smelled like he worked the land. I had worked on the land with my family so I recognized the signs of agricultural labor on his hands. The visit to my first *užkalbėtojas* intrigued me.<sup>5</sup>

The snake medicine was given to me in 2009 on my first visit back to Lithuania as a researcher and as an adult. It came from a folk healer whom I met when my colleagues invited me to participate in an ethnographic expedition.<sup>6</sup> We visited the home of Janina Novikienė, one of the village's *užkalbėtoja* who practices verbal healing charms. Janina was a vibrant, talkative woman of seventy-six years and Lithuanian ethnographers had nicknamed her "Atomic Grandmother" (*atominė bobutė*).

We talked for a while in her living room, then she left on her bicycle to milk her cow. While she was away, we admired her traditional hand-woven bedspreads. To return her gift of hospitality, we later bought some of the coverlets. When Janina came back from milking her cow, she made us beet soup. The subject turned to home-made tinctures and Janina brought some snake medicine in from her barn. It was a sight to behold – an embalmed snake floating in a bottle of brown liquid.

Janina told us a story about the snake medicine. Her husband made this snake medicine about thirty-five years ago. He was

<sup>5</sup> Charmers are closer to religious workers rather than healers. In fifteenth-seventeenth centuries in Western Lithuania and East Prussia seers (Waidler), meditators (Maldininks), and blessers (Segnoten) continued to practice after the introduction of Christianity to the region. Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, 93.

<sup>6</sup> Many thanks to Daiva Vaitkevičienė for bringing me together with Lina Būgienė and Laima Sruoginis in 2009 and for letting me join her ethnographic expedition in 2022.





*Jonė next to Kasotis herb. Photo by Dalia Blažulionytė, 2022.*

sitting on a rock, taking a break from his fieldwork. His son pointed out a poisonous snake coiled up on the same rock. Janina's husband calmly cut a hazel stick so that one end was forked. He pinned the snake's neck right at the head and continued working. Janina said she saw him walking home that evening with a snake hanging over his shoulder.

At home, he took an empty bottle, released the snake's head from the stick, and put the snake's head next to the bottle. She said the snake crawled into the bottle on its own. Then he corked the bottle, leaving a gap so that the snake could breathe, and poured pure alcohol over the snake. When Janina's husband tapped on the bottle, the snake struck the bottle from the inside, releasing its white venom.

Janina says this snake medicine has the power to heal people and animals. She gave some of it once to a very frail woman; after drinking a couple of drops with water, the woman became healthy. Janina says that the snake in the bottle was alive for a long time, at least half a year or so. "Nothing happens to it, it looks like it has been shoved into the bottle today, it's like Lenin in a mausoleum," says Janina. According to her and another *užkalbėtoja* that we visited later that day, many people still make snake medicine. She has even seen three snakes in one bottle. People believe, moreover, that the medicine is especially powerful when the snake is caught in the month of May.

## Snakes and Global Culture

Ambivalence towards snakes is universally shared across cultures where humans encounter snakes on a regular basis. Historically, snakes have been feared for their deadly bites, and killed because of that danger. Their venom, however, is often regarded as potent. The medicinal use of snakes has been recorded around the world to cure many ailments: cancer, fatigue and muscular pains. Snake medicine can also be protection against evil. The medicinal and

religious properties of snakes often blur with the dangers of snakebite, due primarily to beliefs associated with venom.<sup>7</sup> In Mexico, for instance, where venomous snakes are common, “the fear and misperception on the toxicity of snakes might represent a potential threat for their conservation.”<sup>8</sup>

A number of uses of snakes for medicine and religious purposes have been documented among different groups of Nahuas in Mexico. One popular belief in Mexico is that snakes keep disease-carrying mice away from the crops. In central Mexico snakes “are used to cure cancer, fatigue, muscular pains and as protectors against evil” and “all kinds of sickness.”<sup>9</sup> Medicinal powers of snakes are also associated with soil and rainwater. For example, in Brazil, Peru and Argentina, *boa imperator* is used to cure domestic animals and cattle. On the other side of the world, in Australia, the cobra (*naja siamensis*) and the python (*Python regius*) are used as medicine.<sup>10</sup>

There are also striking similarities between Lithuanian narratives about the worship of snakes and ethnographic material from India. Contemporary stories tell of *nagas* (snakes) being fed milk and allowed in living spaces in India, especially by women who desire to have children. It is worth noting that in India, men are more likely to kill a snake while women are more likely to revere it as a manifestation of a productive life force. The abundance of snake stones in India indicates the popularity of snake worship by those seeking the blessings of fertility.<sup>11</sup> Vedic charms against snakes address the snakes directly:

*Let not the serpent slay us, O Gods, with our children and our Folk.  
Let it not close the opened mouth nor open that which is now closed.  
Be worship paid unto the black worship to that with stripes across! To  
the brown viper reverence, reverence to the demon brood! I close to-*

<sup>7</sup> García-López et al. “Traditional Use and Perception,” 6, online.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>11</sup> Allocco, “Fear,” 230–48, online.

*gether fangs with fang. I close together jaws with jaw. I close together tongue with tongue. I close together mouth with mouth.*<sup>12</sup>

As in Mexico, ambivalence towards snakes is well documented in India where snakes are also feared, revered and deified.<sup>13</sup> In Lithuania, ambivalence towards snakes is based on fear of snakes but also rooted in the deep past, possibly an ancient cult of snakes. The spiritual and religious aspects of snake medicine continue in Lithuania. Snakes remain both revered and feared. Though there is only one venomous snake species in Lithuania – the common adder (*Vipera berus*) – the fear of snakes is widespread, especially for those whose livelihoods continue to depend on foraging for mushrooms and berries.<sup>14</sup> Even non-venomous snakes are misperceived to be toxic and dangerous because many people can't identify snake species and fear them all.

## Snakes and the East-West Trade in Medieval Europe

The knowledge of snake medicine spread throughout the medieval world. The snake most commonly used for such purposes was a venomous Syrian serpent referred to as *Tyrus* because it was used in the theriac, a concoction named by the ancient Greeks. Sales of the snake were tightly controlled. The Muslim Soldan (or sultan) of Egypt, for instance, forbade sales of “the most venomous but most noble the Tyr” to Christian merchants. Felix Fabri, an Italian pilgrim to Syria and the Holy Land, documented in the 1480s that despite prohibitions, poor men often illegally sold *tyrus* serpents to Christian merchants in “large

<sup>12</sup> HYMN LVI, *Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1895], <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/av/av06056.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Allocco, “Fear,” 230–48, online.

<sup>14</sup> “In Europe, one person dies due to envenomation every 3 years. There is only one venomous snake species in Lithuania – the common adder (*Vipera berus*) – which belongs to the Viperidae family.” Adukauskienė et al., “Venomous snakebites,” 461–467.



*Jonė's garden.* Photo by Eglutė Trinkauskaitė, 2022.

neighboring commercial centers.”<sup>15</sup> A document by Hans Tucher the Elder (dated 1479–80), describing the Holy Land, notes that the export of the snake should be conducted in secret as the tyrus’s poison had greater value than gold and precious stones.

Uses of tyrus serpent medicine traveled East to West from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The venom of tyrus, how-

<sup>15</sup> Rubin, “The use of ‘jerico tyrus’,” 244, online.

ever, was increasingly hard to come by. Venetian doctors looked for substitutes.

Apothecaries, because of the ignorance of the doctors thus instructing them, think that the *thirus* is a particular animal from which theriac is produced, and takes its name, and they think that this animal is not found in Italy but only in the East, that is, in Syria, and in the south, that is, in Egypt. Because of their ignorance, all of Europe has been for a long time and is still deprived of the benefits of theriac.<sup>16</sup>

The short supply of *tyrus* serpents led Italian physicians Leonicens and Caballus in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to investigate alternatives in authoritative texts. They concluded that local European snakes could replace Syrian *tyrus* for medicinal purposes. According to them, *tyrus* and the most common venomous European viper, the European adder, were the same species. For that reason, the coveted snake venom no longer had to be brought from Egypt or Syria “as if it were a snake unknown in our region.”<sup>17</sup> Caballus’ conclusion was even more radical, arguing that it was an Arabic error to name the snake after the theriac remedy – as the word, Greek in origin, signifies ‘wild animal.’ He argued that the Syrian snake should have been referred to as *vipera*. This line of study sheds light on the fluid exchange of medical knowledge between East and West through participation of merchants, producers, and translators.<sup>18</sup>

## The Crossroads of Lithuania

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), which stands geographically between East and West, was, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, at the center of the exchange of knowledge,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 248.

if not also for the trade of coveted snake medicine. For example, in the sixteenth century, the Moldovian-Polish road that ran through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was used by Ottoman merchants to trade everything from birds of prey, textiles and linens to spices and jewelry.<sup>19</sup> Before the establishment of the Moldovian-Polish trading route, merchants traveled along the “Tartar Way” from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Trade between East and West allowed merchants to exchange goods. It also facilitated the fluid flow of knowledge and religious ideas. For example, the cult of St. Anne reached the GDL via German merchants and craftsmen who settled in Lithuanian towns before the official acceptance of Christianity in Lithuania in 1374.<sup>21</sup>

## Snakes in Lithuanian Folklore

Snakes have always played a part in Lithuanian culture. The connection between shiny snakes and metal, for instance, is present in the naming of certain snakes: metal snakes, copper snakes, etc. These names also associate snakes with mythic ideas of underground riches.<sup>22</sup>

Contemporary ethnomedical research finds that *Vipera berus* continues to be a commonly used animal in folk medicine in Lithuania. There is evidence that *Vipera* medicine surviving into the twenty-first century typically uses an alcohol-based base, not unlike the recipe used by Janina’s husband. Such concoctions are

<sup>19</sup> Veinstein, “Marchands ottomans en Pologne-Lituanie,” 713–738, online; Vorotyntsev, “The ‘Tatar’ Trade Route,” 77–89, online.

<sup>20</sup> Vorotyntsev, “The ‘Tatar’ Trade Route,” 77–89, online.

<sup>21</sup> Birškytė-Klimienė, “Ankstyvosios Šv. Onos kulto apraiškos,” 1–19.

<sup>22</sup> Metal chandeliers with serpent arms were wide-spread from the Netherlands to Lithuania during the sixteenth–seventeenth century. However, art historian Valaitė-Gagač Alantė limits the symbolic meaning of snakes to the Christian context: Valaitė-Gagač, “Origin,” 5–20, online.

used to treat various gastric and oncological diseases.<sup>23</sup> A variety of snakes plentiful in the peatland areas of Lithuania have been used by medical doctors, especially for stomach cancer and digestive issues. Snakes boiled with potatoes were given to animals to increase their appetite.<sup>24</sup> Shiny snakes were fed to the horses so that their coats would be shiny.<sup>25</sup>

The high toxicity of snake venom is attractive to the developing field of anticancer medicine. Research finds that elements of snake venom combined with nanoparticles can be specifically directed to kill the proliferation of cancer cells, to treat “arthritis, multiple sclerosis, pain, neuromuscular disorders, blood and cardiovascular disorders, infections and inflammatory diseases.”<sup>26</sup> In scientific terms, the power of snake venom translates as a concoction of “enzymes, peptides, carbohydrates, minerals and proteins of low molecular mass with specific chemical and biological activities.”<sup>27</sup> In vernacular terms, the stinky snake medicine that Janina gave me works.

Much of the conflicted perception of snakes is due to the Christian hegemonic worldview that represents snakes as venomous, sly, immoral creatures – symbols of the devil. In contrast, the Lithuanian story *Eglė Žalčią Karalienė* presents a serpent, a grass-snake, as an agent of a deeply transformative, non-human world. A serpent-prince takes Eglė away from her human family and to his home deep in the sea. In this worldview, the boundaries between human and non-human worlds are fluid, a common characteristic of other indigenous cultures.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Pranskunienė et al., “Ethnopharmaceutical Knowledge,” 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>25</sup> Jasiūnaitė and Smetona, “Eufemistiniai gyvatės pavadinimai,” online.

<sup>26</sup> Shanbhag, “Applications of Snake Venoms,” 275–276.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, Calvin Luther. *The Way of the Human Being*. Yale University Press, 2000 and Abram, David. *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.



## Baltic Traditions and Catholic Lithuania

Snakes coexist with Catholic saints. Folk healing practices and snake medicines enjoy the same confidence as Catholic saints in Janina's traditional *troba* (village house). The modern dominance of Christianity is evident, however, in that images of Catholic saints are displayed in the prestigious corner of the living room while snake medicine is hidden in the barn.

In popular understanding, dangerous snakes have their own space – a non-human realm – but their spaces and human territory frequently overlap. Foraging humans who enter places where they might encounter “bridges of snakes”<sup>29</sup> know that it takes a protocol to protect themselves from snake bites. Indigenous religions' methodology emphasizes three 'Ps': place, power, and protocol, which are helpful to understand human ways of relating to areas inhabited by snakes. Snakes are the symbolic embodiments of the earth's regenerative powers. A saying, “A small snake kills a large bull” reflects a snake's destructive power.<sup>30</sup>

## Verbal Charms and Curses

In folk traditions in Lithuania, the universe is seen as receptive and empathic, but also reciprocal; blessings and harm can flow both ways. An expulsion charm orders a disease, a lump, or a pain to leave and most Lithuanian healing charms belong to this narrative type in which “the goal is to free the patient of the illness”.<sup>31</sup> Verbal healers can expel diseases to various places in the natural world: into the ground, the water, the swamp, the meadow. Sometimes, animals like pigs or chickens may be the recipients of an illness. A disease can be sent as well to an uninhabitable place beyond the human realm, such as the realm of the dead.

<sup>29</sup> Stasė Trinkauskienė, personal communication.

<sup>30</sup> <https://zodis.eu/reiksme/gyvate>.

<sup>31</sup> Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, 80.

Vaitkevičienė points out that “Verbal charms are intended to calm the *gumbas* that live in one’s stomach.” A *gumbas* is a lump. It is a term used to describe stomach pain. In Lithuanian ethnomedicine, it is described as a toad with fingernails. When *gumbas* is unhappy with something, it moves around and kneads the stomach with its nails, causing pain. Gumbas can live in the stomach and also in a womb. Vaitkevičienė continues, saying, “It is also a term that can be used to describe cancer. It is also used to describe an outgrowth on a tree.”<sup>32</sup> An expulsion charm might be, “Get out, Evil Gumbas, Get Out Through the Bones, Through the Brain, Through the Veins, out of that person (their name), don’t come back, evil gumbas!”<sup>33</sup> Another might say, “Go To The Earth, Why Are You Clinging to Man! Why are *gumbas* (lumps) being sent to earth?”

In the oral tradition of curses, dangerous snakes, grass snakes, and toads belong to the same category as diseases like cholera.<sup>34</sup> In Lithuania, calling something or someone a snake, *gyvatė*, is a common curse, *keiksmazodis*. Usually, calling something *gyvatė* has a negative meaning. For example, “Snake’s child!” means the wrong person. The most common curse is to simply call someone a snake. Since snakes carry ambiguous meaning, calling someone “a beautiful snake” adds an emotional charge.

Curse words in the broader cultural context send one to the earth, the chthonic realm.<sup>35</sup> For example, a healing charm for a minor snake bite addresses the earth. The human breath is the mediator between the human and non-human realms:

“Mother Earth! You’re not Afraid of Me, be Afraid of my Breath!”

“Mother Earth!” (12 times on a single breath). Then, without

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 732.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Grigas, “Keiksmi ir prakeiksmi,” online.

<sup>35</sup> Grotesque language of curses degrade one to the level of the earth. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1984. Bakhtin, who was trained in medicine, created grotesque descriptions of the human body to emphasize regenerative powers of life.

releasing your breath, sign over water or bread and say: “You are not afraid of me, be afraid of my breath!”<sup>36</sup>

The verbal snake charm that Janina shared with me reflects the fusion of *prigimtinė kultūra* (Baltic, pre-Christian culture) and Catholicism, serving as a micro-model of how Baltic culture indigenized Catholicism in Lithuania.<sup>37</sup> I expressed an interest in learning these charms after she revealed that the charms could be passed down to only first-born or last-born people in the family. When I told Janina that I was first-born, she generously shared the texts that were scribbled down half in Polish and half in Lithuanian by a woman in her family. The following charm is meant to protect one from a snake (translation by the author):

*Čilbute saldute medute ir lišk krūman  
nedaryk praškados kaip ir mes nedarom  
kai buvo sveikas taip ir bus.  
Tris kartus Sveika Marija.*

Čilbute [birdie] sweetie honey go to the bush  
Do not do any harm as we do not do any harm  
As he was healthy so he will be  
(Three times Hail Mary).<sup>38</sup>

Janina pointed out that one should address snakes indirectly with a diminutive noun or adjective: *paukštyte, paukštute*, “birdies.” This coded, euphemistic address is supposed to divert the dangers of the snake.<sup>39</sup> Diminutive, pleasing terms in general appease dangerous animals. Pleasing titles of power like queen, and words that describe snakes’ looks (shiny, metallic, copper, red, black, etc.) are similarly used.

<sup>36</sup> Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, 819.

<sup>37</sup> Vaitkevičienė, “Apie mūsų prigimtinę kultūrą.”

<sup>38</sup> Janina Novikienė-Stankevičiūtė, 07/16/09 ethnographic expedition with Laima Sruoginis and Lina Būgienė. A version of this charm is also in Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Jasiūnaitė and Smetona, “Eufemistiniai gyvatės pavadinimai,” online.

Lithuanian verbal charms are a rhetorical strategy to mitigate the dangers of snakes. When addressing non-human persons, humans assume that the non-human world is receptive to humans,<sup>40</sup> and non-humans ought to be especially receptive to human pleas when addressed in suitable diminutive forms. Calling Mary as the mother of God three times seals this intimate plea to a snake with a protective religious authority of Mary. Janina says that God hears the words, and that helps.

Janina told us that once village women got jealous of her popularity and her healing work, and they accused Janina of practicing divination and witchcraft. They reported Janina to the local priest who asked her to explain what it is that she does. When Janina revealed the structure of healing charms, and the priest heard *Hail Marys*, he understood this as a well-intentioned prayer that helps people. The priest subsequently determined that practicing verbal healing charms is not sinful. As long as the motive is to help and not to harm people, all methods of healing are acceptable – from snake medicine to *Hail Marys*.

### **Atomic Grandmother Jonė, 2022: Poisonous Snake from Berry Island**

Eighty-six-year-old Jonė Cerebiejienė of Marcinkonys village shared her snake bite story. My colleagues did not explicitly refer to Jonė as “Atomic Grandmother” but they agreed when I suggested that she fits the category as they gave me the impression that Jonė’s energy is inexhaustible. Jonė is a knowledgeable presenter of herbal ethnomedicine, but she does not consider herself to be a healer. She told us, “Garlic – is medicine – summer garlic and winter garlic – it’s strong. Onion is

<sup>40</sup> For comparative context, see: Shermerhorn “How to Speak to Rattle Snakes.” A striking similarity to O’Dham’s way of addressing rattlesnakes through reasoning and negotiating human-non-human boundaries.



Photo by Dalia Blažulionytė

cough medicine. Every herb helps, but one needs to know from what. [The] *Kasočius* herb (its blossoms are white) pour vodka over it for shaky hands.”<sup>41</sup>

Ethnographers consider her to be an excellent presenter and she enthusiastically shares her experiences. Jonė told us about her encounter with a dangerous, rare snake. She did not have the name for this kind of snake, but she described it as “poisonous, with coarse fur.” She said, “Have not seen a snake like this in my life, don’t go to your garden – you will die – it crawls out from under the earth only once. The earth does not accept it back after it bites someone.”

The earth’s rejection is a punishment for the snake that bites a human. This theme emerges in one of the verbal charms:

<sup>41</sup> *Vincetoxicum hirudinaria*, commonly known as White swallow-wort. Thanks to Dalia Blažulionytė of Dzūkija National Park for explaining Jonė’s reference to the *Kasočius* herb: “Kregždūnė šlakinė (*Vincetoxicum hirudinaria* Medik.) ir kregždūnė vaistinė - *kasočius*, *kasočiai*.” Dalia Blažulionytė, personal communication 1/25/2023.

“Ah, you snake, snake, don’t bite a person – God won’t accept you, the sun won’t accept you, the moon won’t accept you, the stars won’t accept you, you won’t lean on moss, or under moss, or on a bush, or under a bush.”<sup>42</sup>

Jonė’s description of the snake is rooted in her traumatic experience of being bitten by a snake while gathering cranberries near Berry Island. She said, “It took two hours to walk to Berry Island, always accompanied by fear. My dad realized that something was wrong when we came back from the forest early. We gathered berries barefoot. Foraging barefoot, allowed people to feel mushrooms under the moss. Most village people did not have shoes. Shoes were only for special occasions, like church or school. Jonė describes jumping from one mossy mound to another while holding onto trees. “Cranberries were large, I felt *zapt* in my hand – finger – like a pinch of a needle – black snake venom. Behind a mound there was a spotted fat snake.”

Daiva Vaitkevičienė: “What did you do?”

Jonė: “Tied a thread around it, pressed it. It needs to be charmed, not treated by a medical doctor. A doctor untied the thread, injected medicine. The finger/arm swelled after the thread was untied, a seamstress tied it again. I got a bite in the morning, went to [the town] Druskininkai in the evening. Luckily, it was the right arm, not the left – further from the heart. The doctor bought some *degtinė* [vodka; Lithuanian *degtinė* shares a root with *degti*, to burn] and took me to the hospital bed. They told me to drink 100 g., then more, and a third time. I was feeling sleepy, and they told me to drink more *degtinė*.”

I drank two half-liters of government *šnapso* [vodka].<sup>43</sup> They also brought some homemade moonshine – it did not taste good. The government one tasted good. After one week – the itch in the arm, a stab in the finger, a rash. The rash gets the poison out. It was two weeks of medicine and *degtinė* (vodka).”

<sup>42</sup> Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Šnapsas – another vernacular word for vodka – from German *schnaps*.

## Alcohol as Medicine

My Lithuanian colleagues were curious about how much *degtinė* or vodka she had to drink.

Jonė: “Three shot glasses per day for two weeks – I am lucky that I did not become an alcoholic. A verbal healing charmer brought me bread but I could not swallow it; it was dry.

DV: “How many balls of bread were there?”

Jonė: “Five to seven, they did not go down my throat. The bread was talked over by a verbal healing charmer.” It’s a sacred thing, can’t throw it away.”

DV: “Miškinienė? [DV is asking the name of the charmer] When was this?”

Jonė: “1962 – my son was born.”

## A Grass Snake in Jonė’s garden

After we finished listening to Jonė inside her living room, she walked into her garden for her to show us some healing herbs. It was a sunny day and we all noticed a beautiful grass snake, coiled between the fence and plants, basking in the sun. When Jonė heard about the grass snake, she tried to touch it with her walking stick but the grass snake quickly slithered under the flowers. Not all snakes are equal – some bring death and suffering, others bring a good harvest. Snakes framed the entire visit with Jonė; they were active agents of her story and of her everyday life.

## Grass Snakes: A Case Study

The power of snakes remains very much alive in Lithuania. Verbal healing charmers in rural Lithuania continue to address snakes and use snake medicine while adhering to Catholic doc-

trine. Village women establish their spiritual authority by practicing verbal healing charms passed down by their ancestors. Contemporary charmers continue to believe in snakes' healing and protective powers, and if they have a snake, they keep it secretly tucked away in a barn, embalmed in a bottle of alcohol. Images of Mary and Catholic saints, however, occupy the most honored corner in the living room.

In pre-Christian Lithuania, a grass snake (*tropidonotus natrix*) was considered sacred.<sup>44</sup> Because of its ability to shed skin and grow a new one, humans considered a grass snake a material manifestation of the earth's vital transformative and regenerative powers. Grass snakes were deified, fed, and worshiped. Many Lithuanians, other Baltic peoples and citizens of the GDL kept grass snakes in their homes as protection.<sup>45</sup> Grass snakes used to protect homes from thunder, illnesses, and other misfortunes – they were the guardians of the home. This guardianship was additionally associated with wealth and the increase in harvest.

The Polish historian Jan Dlugosz (1415–1480) wrote how Lithuanians kept grass snakes and snakes as sacred protectors of the home. Each home had a grass snake, and people used to offer sacrifice to grass snakes as if they were deities.<sup>46</sup> People made the snakes beds of hay, fed them milk, and sacrificed roosters for them.<sup>47</sup> According to Jonas Balys, who wrote about the worship of grass snakes, these creatures were quickly befriended and suitable as pets because they were not poisonous and drank milk and coffee with milk. The many names Lithuanians used in naming snakes shows the attention paid to them.

In 1517 Maciej Miechova wrote that Lithuanians revere grass snakes as home-protecting deities.<sup>48</sup> Erasmus Stella (ca 1460–1521) wrote that Prussians fed their grass snakes and sacrificed

<sup>44</sup> Kromer (c. 1512–1589). Vèlius, compiler. *Sources of Baltic Religion*, vol. II, 421.

<sup>45</sup> Vèlius, compiler. *Sources of Baltic Religion*, vol. II, 311.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>47</sup> Jan Dlugosz (1415–1480), *Ibid.*, vol. I, 543, 572.

<sup>48</sup> Vèlius vol. II, 353.



to them as if they were spiritual protectors of home. Simon Grunau (c. 1530) reports that Prussians worshiped the god *Patrimpas*, and his sign was a snake.<sup>49</sup> Johannes Bretkius, in his *Prussian Land Chronicle* (1588), wrote of keeping snakes, particularly grass-snakes, at home, worshipping them as the servants and messengers of gods. *Vaidilutės*, the ritual keepers of eternal fire, fed snakes milk from a large bowl. Marcin Kromer (c. 1512–1589) wrote that Lithuanians gave milk and chickens to their home-protecting serpents and snakes. It was an unfortunate or even a fatal omen if someone killed, or even insulted, a grass snake.

Lithuanians believed that the souls of the dead reincarnated as grass snakes and grass snakes were associated with ancestral spirits. They were invited to feast with people as ancestral creatures that bring health, harvest, fertility, and good luck. Maletius (c. 1550) wrote that during certain times of the year people invited grass snakes to the sacrificial or feasting table. The snakes would crawl up to the table through linen tablecloths and taste various dishes. After eating, the snakes would return to their resting places. If snakes ate, people rejoiced, hoping that it would be a successful year. If, for some reason, the snakes did not go to the table and refused the food, people worried that it would be a year of hardship or misfortune.<sup>50</sup> Snakes were also venerated as material manifestations of ancestral spirits and as powerful manifestations of the earths' vital and regenerative powers. Austrian diplomat Sigismund Herberstein (1557) described how Lithuanians used to pray to the snakes while kneeling on benches.<sup>51</sup> Grass snakes were thought to be very intelligent, and their intelligence was associated with ancestral energies that they represented. The folk saying "smart as a grass snake" is most likely supported by this ancestral connection.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>50</sup> Balys, "Žalčių gerbimas," online.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

## Grass Snakes and Children

In Lithuania, grass snakes were especially allied to children; they ate and played together, and they slept in the same bed. A grass snake's relationship with children ran deep – a grass snake protected children and it was friendly with children, even if a child knocked the grass snake on the forehead.<sup>52</sup> Around 1920, when my grandfather served in the army of hussars that was stationed in Samogitia (*Žemaitija*), he observed this scene in a peasant *tro-ba* (village hut) with a dirt floor:

When parents went to work the fields and to look after the animals, they left their children to look after each other. They left a bowl of milk with crumbs of bread for a child on the floor. There were many grass-snakes; grass-snakes like milk too. A grass-snake crawled up to a bowl and started licking milk. The child grabbed a spoon and hit the grass-snake on its head, so it crawled away. Then, later, the grass-snake forgot the hitting and crawled back to the bowl, and then got a hit on the head with a spoon again.<sup>53</sup>

The region of Samogitia remained stubbornly “pagan” after Lithuania accepted Christianity in the fourteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Without doubt, my grandfather's story resonates with the narratives from the textual sources. When I heard the story, I wondered if the bowl of milk might have been served to the snake, not the

<sup>52</sup> Dundulienė, *Žalčiai lietuvių pasaulejautoje*, 93–94.

<sup>53</sup> Stasė Trinkauskienė, personal communication 12/29/06. See Trinkauskė, “Seeing the Swarming Dead,” 46.

<sup>54</sup> Makauskas and Černius. *History of Lithuania*, 83–84. Lithuanian historian Alfredas Bumblauskas examines how Samogitia's christianization was fragmented with “pagan enclaves” in fifteenth–sixteenth centuries. Bumblauskas, Alfredas. “Žemaičių christianizacijos plentas: geografinės ir istoriografinės pastabos.” In *Bažnyčios istorijos studijos*, 2014, 33–40. Historian Darius Baronas uses the term “unbaptised.” Most peasants lived far away from churches and were left to their own devices. Baronas, “Christians in late Pagan,” 51–81.

child. It is very possible that parents had left a bowl of milk with bread on the dirt floor for a crawling child. The cultural relationship between the child and the snake is so amicable, the bowl was probably meant to feed both of them. A child and a snake both represent the ancestral realm.

## Snakes and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century and Beyond

My grandfather's story suggests that peasants still kept grass-snakes to protect their homes as late as the 1920s. These days, the people feed milk to the agricultural deities or *Puškaitis* who live in their homes and help them with the harvest. The crawling of a grass snake into a yard is considered a lucky omen, and people gave it milk, honey, and eggs. In modern Lithuania, grass snakes are associated with good luck and fertility.

For a modern person, the idea of a child being in the same livable environment as a grass snake seems inconceivable and even terrifying. Once one gets past one's modern predispositions about the strangeness of the image, this phenomenon appears like an ordinary interaction between a child and their pet. When commenting upon the amicable relationship between the grass-snake and children, scholars point to the connection with ancestors as the foundation of this friendship because children are seen as recently reborn or renewed ancestors.<sup>55</sup> This friendship between a child and a grass-snake is spiritual and material, a tangible remnant of the fertility cult.<sup>56</sup> January 25th, the Midwinter (*Viduržiemis*) is also the Day of the Serpents (*Kirmėlinė*), a symbolic snake awakening when serpents are believed to come out of the forests and return to their homes on this day.

<sup>55</sup> Pranė Dundulienė. *Žalčiai Lietuvių Pasaulėjautoje ir Daileje* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996) – *Grass snakes in Lithuanian Worldview and Art*, 93–94.

<sup>56</sup> Marija Gimbutas. *The Language of the Goddess* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 121–137

## Eclipsing of the Sacred Power of Snakes

After the fourteenth century, Christianity became the dominant influence on Lithuanian culture. A new iconography eclipsed what was formerly the sacred power of snakes. Demonization of snakes emerged in mythological legends and oral verbal charms. Fear of snakes became evident in the widespread taboos that forbade people from going to a forest and foraging forest goods on holy days. This church-generated fear of the natural environment was one attempt to distance the local population from native Baltic sensibilities.

Old ways of thinking, however, survive. A belief recorded in the twentieth century said that if one went to the woods on a sacred day, a grass snake would wrap around one's neck, refusing to let go. Only when the afflicted person visited a bathhouse would the snake unwrap itself and climb onto the roof because it is afraid of heat. When the person leaves the bathhouse, however, the snake would wrap itself around their neck again. The continuation of such fears and taboos, however, mark boundaries between Catholic dogma and the Baltic way of life that revered grass-snakes as sacred beings related to ancestors.

Stasė Trinkauskienė, my mother, explained her protective charm against snake bites several times: "Before saying a prayer, you need to cross yourself, and after saying it, throw pieces of bread to the right and left sides and cross yourself again. *Oh, angry snake promises to bite me, the Mother of God knows the medicine, she will heal me.* Since I was very afraid of snakes, I repeated the prayer at least three times, and I prayed, and I threw bread, and of course I did not see snakes in the forest."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Stasė Trinkauskienė 1/19/2023 personal communication. "Oi žada kirst mane gyvatė pikta, Motina Dievo liekvarstą žino: išgydys mane. Prieš sukalbant maldele reikia persižiegnoti, o sukalbėjus mesti duonos gabaliukus į dešinę ir į kairę puses ir vėl persižiegnoti. Kadangi aš gyvačių labai bijojau, tai maldele kartojau bent 3 kartus, ir žegnojau, ir mėčiau duoną, ir, žinoma, gyvačių miške nemačiau:))"



Photo by Dalia Blažulionytė

To this day, Catholic women in the Lithuanian countryside continue to practice or seek out indigenous verbal healing charms to protect from snake bites, to heal snake bites, and various conditions. The encounters with snakes continue to be powerful life experiences, though full of ambiguity as the past connects to the present.

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## Art

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### OTIS KAZIMERAS TAMASAUSKAS

**O**tis Kazimeras Tamasauskas was born in 1947 in a Tirschenreuth, Germany Displaced Persons Camp, as his Lithuanian born parents fled the Russian occupation of their home-land.

His Artist Statement reads,

At the present, I am fascinated with the print press and the overlaying of colour. I experiment with simple materials such as paper and ink.

My choice of materials are dictated not only by their physical properties, but also by their symbolic associations.

I do enjoy the idea that certain materials are more profound than words, even while perceiving that words can reinforce visual and conceptual associations.

In the end, I guess I feel one thing is certain... my wanting to make printed images.

He immigrated with his family to Canada in 1952 and was educated at the Central Technical School, Toronto and the University of Windsor, Windsor.

His medium of choice is printmaking, with an emphasis on stone lithography and intaglio, (etching). He feels, printmaking is not about making pictures, it is a way of thinking! He enjoys focusing on experimental printmaking; he feels that printmaking provides creative and technical challenges, provides excitement, thus preventing boredom. He has taught at the University of Toronto and McMaster University, Hamilton. Otis is presently retired from Queen's University, Kingston, where he actively taught for 33 years.

He states: "I would like to think being born Lithuanian, has influences my art practice". He has been to Lithuania a number

of times as a guest lecturer at the Vilnius Academy of Art and avers that Lithuania has many exceptional artists, be it poets, writers, musicians, film makers and visual artists, that possibly also influence him.

He currently remains active and has exhibited his work throughout Canada as well as Lithuania, Thailand, Puerto Rico, and China. His work can be found in public collections in Lithuania and Canada, notably the Lithuanian Museum of Art, Vilnius Lithuania, and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Balance Medium*  
Hand printed lithograph, 24" × 26"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Baroque Fragment Reflections*  
Print construction, with wood, lantern slide, and found objects  
2016, 44" × 34"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Blue Rider Series, Gentle Bend*  
Chine colle, hand printed lithograph, 2012,  
Edition V/E 4, 30" × 42"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Crossing, Navigation Series*  
Print construction, 48" × 48"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Flora and Birds, Balance 3*  
Hand printed lithograph with collage, 30" × 40"





Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Exotic Voyage with Sea Shells*  
Lithograph and woodcut, collage, 54" × 41"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Fisherman's Callendar*  
Lithograph, 2019, 37" × 23"





Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Fisherman's Diary Measurement*  
Mixed media, 2020, 24" × 24"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Fragmented Selections Series, Glass Pink Slipper*  
Hand printed lithograph with chine colle, 2012, Edition unique, 34" × 35"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Hearing What the Deep Sea Says Water Sorcery, Geo*  
Hand printed lithograph, 30" × 43"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Polar Bear and Flora*  
Hand printed lithograph, 2022, 22" × 30"



Otis K. TAMASAUSKAS. *Two Trout with Flower*  
Hand printed lithograph and wood cut, 2011, Edition 6, 30" × 40"

# **The Forgotten Breakthrough of the 1960s: The Beginning of the Emigration of Lithuanians from the USSR**

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REGINA LAUKAITYTĖ

One of the most persistent images of the Soviet Union is that of a country cut off from the world by the Iron Curtain. Everyone who lived there felt that way because they could not travel, and it was possible to hear more about the West through foreign radio stations broadcasting in familiar languages than anything reliable through the Soviet media. Still, the USSR was never a hermetically sealed country. Probably the largest number of migrants to the world's first socialist country came after the civil war, when thousands of supporters wanted to take part in the "great construction projects of communism". After the Second World War, there were also periods when the Soviet Union was open to migrants and re-emigrants fascinated by the image of Stalinism (e.g., Lee Harvey Oswald, who was later charged for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, lived in Minsk from 1959 to 1962, where he worked in one of its factories). However, all migration processes were strictly controlled by the totalitarian state. Leaving the USSR was extremely complicated, especially for those who were treated by the regime as its citizens. Over the decades, Soviet propaganda instilled an attitude that efforts to leave the USSR were tantamount to the "betrayal of the socialist homeland"; the migration authorities had at their disposal a large number of legal obstacles to stop potential emigrants, including delays in the processing of their departure cases.

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REGINA LAUKAITYTĖ is a senior researcher at the Department of Twentieth-Century History at the Lithuanian Institute of History (Vilnius).

Migration historiography reveals a great deal about the exodus of Poles, Germans, and Jews from the USSR (and the Lithuanian SSR) in the period 1945–1990. Considering its international and economic interests, the regime occasionally approved their emigration. This study aims to find out what opportunities Lithuanians had to emigrate by legally leaving the USSR for good, namely, (1) how this right was fought for and (2) who was allowed to leave. So far, such questions have not been formulated in the historiography, although having embarked on this research with the compilation of at least an approximate list of emigrants,<sup>1</sup> which includes almost 200 names of Lithuanian families who emigrated to the USA and Canada (including many minors and mothers with their children; this is by no means an exhaustive list as it does not include the Lithuanians who emigrated with the residents of the Klaipėda region;<sup>2</sup> besides, the destinations of emigration included the countries of Western Europe, South America, and Australia). Among the Lithuanians who legally emigrated to the USA and Canada, there were many (about 20%) repressed persons, i.e., those who possessed “sensitive” information. Numerous direct sources of recent history of Lithuania were published in the émigré press: photographs of deportees, letters, partisan songs, and the first books about life behind the Iron Curtain appeared in the early 1960s. They were widely acclaimed, published in foreign languages, and distributed in huge numbers.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the reminiscences of the emigrants, this study resorts to foreign periodicals and documents from Lithuanian archives.

<sup>1</sup> The Lithuanian émigré press and published memoirs were used for this purpose. I am grateful to everyone who helped to expand this list, in particular to Dalia Cidzikaitė, Indrė Čuplinskas, and Vitolis Vengris.

<sup>2</sup> Many Lithuanians left for West Germany with the Germans of Klaipėda region (almost 7800 of them between 1958 and 1960 alone); they were allowed to repatriate under the 1958 agreement between the leaders of the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany. Arbušauskaitė, *Gyventojų manai*, 189.

<sup>3</sup> For more on emigrants’ books, see subsection “Emigration of Repression Victims”.

## **The Desire to Emigrate: Hopes and Opportunities in the USSR**

The change of borders during the Second World War forced millions of people in Central Eastern Europe to flee their home countries. The core principle of this migration – cross-border agreements on the resettlement and repatriation of foreigners – bypassed Lithuanians and other residents of the occupied Baltic countries. Their citizenship status was regulated by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of September 7, 1940, by which the citizens of the republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia automatically acquired Soviet citizenship.<sup>4</sup> A person could not legally, if desired, leave the USSR unless they had a foreign passport.

When the Soviet occupation began, hundreds of Lithuanians hoped to flee the USSR. First of all among them were the Lithuanians born in emigration, who had returned to their or their parents' homeland after the restoration of its independence, started families, and acquired property there. When the Soviets occupied the country in 1940 and 1944, anticipating the repressions, many of them dispossessed of all their property and the intelligentsia having lost their jobs, they visited the embassies of their countries in Moscow or sent letters to them explaining the political situation and the issues of their citizenship. It is hard to tell how many letters from Lithuanians reached embassies in Moscow, because the security service not only monitored the correspondence of the population<sup>5</sup> but also recorded the people

<sup>4</sup> "O poriadke priobretenii grahdanstva SSSR grahdanami Litovskoi, Latviskoi i Estonskoi Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik", <<http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/131030-o-poryadke-priobreteniya-grazhdanstva-sssr-grazhdanami-litovskoy-latviyskoy-i-estonskoy-sovetskih-sotsialisticheskikh-respublik-ukaz-ot-7-sentyabrya-1940-g>>, accessed January 8, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> It is obvious from the documents preserved in the Lithuanian Special Archive (LYA) that the mail of embassies operating in Moscow first fell into the hands of the Soviet security. The content of the correspondence would be processed and systematized using standardized "forms". These "forms"



visiting embassies: for example, according to the MVD information, 292 Lithuanians were among those who visited the US embassy between 1945 and 1949.<sup>6</sup>

Some foreign nationals managed to leave the USSR (and the Lithuanian SSR) between 1945 and 1947, before the cooperation of the former allies in the Second World War was overshadowed by the Cold War confrontation. However, for the family members who remained in occupied Lithuania and aspired to emigrate as citizens of the Soviet Union, such dreams would start to dissipate as soon as they met the inspectors of the Office of Visas and Registration,<sup>7</sup> who processed their emigration documents. The functions of these officials were formal: for the applicants who had been born abroad and were entitled to citizenship of a foreign country, they confirmed in writing the fact of their “conversion” to Soviet citizenship (in accordance with the above-mentioned decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of September 7, 1940) and explained how such a citizen would be able to go abroad on a “general basis”. The inspectors’ duties did not end there: it was they who initiated the surveillance of those seeking to emigrate. They passed information about each applicant to the Counterintelligence Department of the MGB of the Lithuanian SSR, which forwarded the data to the MGB divisions according to the person’s place of residence with the instruction to organize agency surveillance

were forwarded to the security subdivisions of the republics and other administrative units of the USSR with instructions to identify the persons mentioned in the letters and to organize agent surveillance of them (the “form” of Dž. Naudžius’s letter to the US embassy of April 26, 1948, LYA, col. K-43, inv. 1, f. 22, l. 6).

<sup>6</sup> Top secret letter of March 21, 1953, from Piotr Kondakov, minister of the interior of the Lithuanian SSR, to Bogdan Kobulov, deputy minister of the interior of the USSR, LYA, col. K-41, inv. 1, f. 439, l. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Documents of departure from the USSR and arrival of foreigners were handled by the Visas and Registration Division of the Ministry of the Interior. Due to the blocking of Jewish emigration, the acronym OVIR (*Otdel viz i registratsii*) became ingrained in the historiography in a similar way to *sputnik* or *perestroika*.

and to find out how and what kind of contacts were being maintained with foreign countries.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, even when it was possible to establish contacts with relatives and embassies, emigration in the post-war period was prevented by the suspicion of the Soviet authorities and the principled treatment of foreign countries as “enemy territory” (especially after the Cold War gained momentum). The Iron Curtain divided hundreds of thousands of families; the numbers were especially large in the countries that underwent the Nazi and Soviet occupations of 1939–1945. To them, opening the borders could have had unpredictable consequences and lead to a desperate flight from the regime. During the period of the harshest repression and deportations, from 1945 to 1952, a citizen of the USSR could not even dream of moving to a capitalist country.

The situation changed with the death of Stalin in 1953 and the political “thaw” in the Soviet Union. The obvious changes encouraged people to look for contacts: through the Red Cross, the diplomatic missions in Moscow, the ministries of foreign affairs, acquaintances and relatives, people gained courage to look for their relatives and to exchange letters and information. The situation was changing extremely fast: in 1955–1956, correspondence and support by means of parcels became widespread, and foreign tourism to the USSR, including visits to Vilnius, began. The OVIR

<sup>8</sup> In the local MGB/KGB department, a so-called file/form would be opened for the person in which reports from agents and informants were collected. When enough “evidence” accumulated, the person could be arrested. Standard charges in such cases were formulated as belonging to the intelligence services of the USA, England, or other countries. They were based on the fact that during visits to foreign embassies, the individuals allegedly passed on intelligence or “slandorous” information on the political and economic situation of the Lithuanian SSR; in the case of the visits of Jews, on the situation of their community and the like (top secret papers of 9 July and August 15, 1947, from the chief of OVIR of MVD of the Lithuanian SSR to Filimonov, chief of the Second Department of MGB, LYA, col. K-43, inv. 1, f. 24, l. 194–195, 239, 246; top secret papers of Filimonov, chief of the Second Department of MGB: of July 27, 1947, to the departmental chief of MGB of Marijampolė district; of August 20, 1947, to the departmental chief of MGB of Varėna district, *ibid.*, l. 196, 244).

office on Stalin Avenue in Vilnius, which until 1955 had hardly any work (the staff was confined to one room and worked only three days a week), was no longer able to cope with the rise in the number of applicants by the end of the year, and a request was made for more spacious premises and more staff positions.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Fight for Family Immigration: Hopes and Opportunities in the West**

As families, encouraged by the “thaw”, made contacts, a large group of potential emigrants soon emerged: the children, spouses, and parents of those who had fled to Germany and other European countries in the summer of 1944, with the Red Army approaching. After years of miserable life in displaced persons’ camps, they dispersed all over the world, with around 30,000 settling in the USA and 15,000 in Canada. Often, they and their families left behind in occupied Lithuania were unaware of each other’s fates for years. As contacts were established, family members who were settled in emigration began to support their families with parcels, and quite a few of them were looking for opportunities for reunification.

Interestingly, it was Lithuanians who were the first – or among the first – in the USA to “stir” the issue of reuniting with their families who had stayed behind in the USSR (at the same time widening the opportunities for emigration from the USSR to other countries). They sought legal help, never stopped sending letters to the US State Department, to influential politicians and diplomats, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and

<sup>9</sup> Around 1000 foreigners arrived in the Lithuanian SSR during eleven months of 1955. The ministries of foreign affairs of the USSR and the Lithuanian SSR received up to 55 inquiries per month regarding search of relatives in Lithuania and forwarded those inquiries to the OVIR (top secret document of December 19, 1955, from Kiselevičius, chief of OVIR MVD of the Lithuanian SSR to Gotsev, deputy minister of the interior, (Document Department of the Interior Ministry at the Lithuanian Special Archives, LYA VRM DS), col. L-3, inv. 3, f. 611, l. 46).

to top Soviet officials in the Kremlin.<sup>10</sup> The mass media joined their struggle by publicizing information about the fates of the families and their requests to the Soviet authorities.<sup>11</sup> The struggle for exit permits lasted for several years: the situation then began to change between 1955 and 1960, when, in order to normalize relations with the West, Nikita Khrushchev revised the migration policy opening the doors of the USSR to foreign tourists. The first Lithuanians – family members of foreign nationals – were allowed to emigrate in 1957.<sup>12</sup>

When the first families fled the USSR at the turn of the 1960s, their names, the emotional photographs, and stories of those who embraced each other again after more than a decade made the front pages of the newspapers. What was the precursor of these events and what role did Lithuanians play in fostering the emigration process?

The US authorities and the public immediately recognized the merits of Marshall Macduffie, a lawyer from New York. It

<sup>10</sup> “Po vienuolikos metų susilaukė žmonos ir vaikų iš Sibiro,” *Darbininkas* (New York), November 12, 1957, 3; Jonas Vengris, *Mano kelias. Memuarai*, Osterville, 1990, 240–241, 250–253, and others.

<sup>11</sup> See information on the efforts of Danutė Armonaitė: “Trygve Lie Has ‘Mission’ in Russia,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 17, 1950, 2; “Ohio Girl Calls Bluff of Red Boss,” *The Cincinnati Post*, June 5, 1957, 1; “Armonams susitikti daug pagelbėjo Cleveland Press,” *Dirva*, March 9, 1960, 1.

<sup>12</sup> In March 1957, A. Pavilanienė from Kaunas emigrated to join her daughter, who had been living in the USA since 1938; Monika Gaučienė and her children flew to her husband in Chicago in November of that year. Gaučienė, 44, arrived almost directly from Siberia, where she had spent nine years in exile deported with her children and her mother-in-law as a *kulak*, i.e., an affluent farmer. Felicita Klečkauskaitė, who had returned from the gulag, was allowed to emigrate to Austria, and Hilda Tautvaišienė-Ahlandsberg, also a deportee, was allowed to leave for Sweden. In 1957, the first Jewish families managed to escape as well (“Gyvenimas Lietuvoje: pasakoja ką tik atvykusi lietuvė” [Pavilanienė], *Keleivis* (Boston), April 10, 1957, 1; Juozas Prunskis, “Pasakoja atskridusi iš Sibiro tremtinė lietuvė” [Gaučienė], *Draugas* (Chicago), November 13, 1957, 1; “Sibiro pragare. Pasikalbėjimas su išsivadavusia iš Sibiro lietuvaitė” [Klečkauskaitė], *Draugas*, June 2, 1960, 3; A. M., “In the Cemetery of Nations,” *Lietuvių dienos* (Los Angeles), February 15, 1969, 19; Rachlin Rachelė ir Izraelis, *Šešioliką metų Sibire*, Vilnius: Lietuvos žydų bendruomenė, 2012).

was he who took the opportunity to personally remind Khrushchev, again and again, of the dramatic stories of families torn apart by war and of people's attempts to reunite. Macduffie had known Khrushchev personally since 1946, when he headed the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) mission to Ukraine. He resigned before completing his term in Kyiv because he respected the "political impartiality" of the UNRRA. When the Cold War started, this position began to run counter to official US policy with support for the Soviet Union being heavily criticized and eventually withdrawn.<sup>13</sup> When Nikita Khrushchev became leader of the USSR, Macduffie immediately wrote him a letter reminding him of their long-standing acquaintance and in autumn 1953 received an invitation to visit the Soviet Union. With a "Khrushchev visa", accompanied by an Intourist guide, he had the opportunity to see the Soviet Union from Leningrad to Vladivostok and Central Asia in 65 days. Before returning to America, he met Khrushchev for a few hours talk in the Kremlin. He described his impressions of visiting cities and places that for many years had been closed to foreign tourists in a book published in 1955.<sup>14</sup>

Published at the height of the Cold War, the book was widely acclaimed and earned the author the reputation of "Khrushchev's friend". Therefore, when word spread that he was planning a visit to the USSR with a group of businessmen (January 1956), he was approached by several Americans asking him to mediate in obtaining emigration permits for the members of their families. The first was William Gavcus (Gaučius), who for many years had been trying to bring his wife and children back;<sup>15</sup> the

<sup>13</sup> For more on the activities of the UNRRA in the USSR, see: Harder, "The Politics of Impartiality," 347–369.

<sup>14</sup> Macduffie, *The Red Carpet*, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> Gavcus, who in 1951 found out the address of his family in Siberia through the US Consulate, wrote letters to President Harry Truman, the secretaries-general of the United Nations, and appealed to Georgy Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev. In 1957, his wife was allowed to emigrate to the USA with their 13-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter.

other two individuals were from Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> Macduffie, who had no children of his own, was sensitive to the requests, and his wife Rose urged him not to shy away from a conversation that would be uncomfortable for the master of the Kremlin. When he met Khrushchev, he conveyed the Americans' pleas, adding that he would be risking his marriage if he did not help them. Such an informal appeal was unlikely to leave much room for maneuver for Nikita Khrushchev, who, needless to say, valued the acquaintance of an influential US Democrat figure as an opportunity to open up political contacts and investment. After the meeting in the Kremlin, Macduffie made public Khrushchev's unprecedented promise to allow the family members of the Americans to leave the USSR if they wished.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this, the emigration documents and visa applications of these first families were stuck in the viscous Soviet bureaucracy. Macduffie tried to speed up their departure by telegrams to Khrushchev and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, and in October 1956, when he returned to the USSR with a large delegation of US and Canadian industrialists, he paid a demonstrative visit to Jacob Olin's wife in Kyiv. She confirmed that she was sitting by her suitcases waiting for permission to leave. Upon his return to the USA, Macduffie was a regular visitor to the Soviet Embassy<sup>18</sup> and kept sending telegrams to Khrushchev, Gromyko, and other officials. He had to seek the support of even more influential Americans: when he learned that Eleanor Roosevelt was going to the USSR, he met with her

<sup>16</sup> The wife of one of them, Jacob Olin, remained in Kyiv after he had left for the USA in 1937. The other, Nowozheniuk and his wife, sought to bring back their daughter who had been left with her grandparents in Lithuania at the age of eleven months when they were deported to Germany for forced labor; she survived deportation to Siberia, arriving in the USA in the fall of 1960. *Reunion of families*, 20974.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> He knew Mikhail Menshikov, the Soviet ambassador to Washington from 1953 onwards, from the time of his work at the UNRRA mission in Kyiv.

to ask her to “press” on Khrushchev and Gromyko. She managed to “tip the scales” in favor of the Gaučius’s family emigration: a month after her visit to Moscow, the family finally emigrated to the USA.<sup>19</sup>

This success made Macduffie famous, and he began working on the cases of potential immigrants. In addition to pressuring Soviet officials and criticizing their delay policy in the press, he successfully exploited the opportunities offered by his political contacts with the US authorities. Under his encouragement, the issue of reunification of families separated by war was raised by governors and businessmen during official visits, and in 1959 by Vice-President Richard Nixon, who opened the first exhibition of USA achievements in Moscow. As there was not enough time to discuss the issue in formal and informal meetings, the vice-president outlined it to Nikita Khrushchev in a letter of 1 August. In it, he expressed his hope that the principle of non-separation of families, as recognized by both countries, would serve to improve relations between them. Along with the letter, the vice-president handed over a list of the addresses of the families of US citizens seeking reunification, stating that America would grant them immigration visas and that the US government, for its part, would not obstruct the departure of those who wished to settle in the USSR.<sup>20</sup> Around 200 names were included in this list. Probably there were not many Lithuanian names among them, but several families emigrated to the USA in 1960 thanks to the mediation of Richard Nixon.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Reunion of families, 20974. Later, after Macduffie sent a stern telegram to the USSR Ministry of the Interior, in which he recalled unfulfilled Khrushchev’s permission for Olin’s wife to emigrate, she finally left.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Nixon’s letter to Nikita Khrushchev of 1 August 1959, USA Department of State, Office of the Historian, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d104>>, accessed 8 January 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Judging from the émigré press and memoirs, Nixon’s list included Danutė Marija Sirusaitė, 16, and Laimutė Kriščiūnaitė, 18 (their parents had left them in the care of their relatives when they fled Lithuania in 1944), Regina Gai-galienė and her daughter Gražina as well as Marija Grušienė and her daugh-

Intense pressure on Nikita Khrushchev over the obstacles created by the Soviet regime to the reunification of families separated by the war was organized in September 1959, when he arrived in the USA for a much-anticipated visit. During his visit, even the blocking of American radio stations was stopped in the Soviet Union. During a visit to corn farmer Roswell Garst in Iowa, his guests (including Adlai Stevenson, who had twice run for president of the United States, as well as Macduffie; incidentally, Garst had also visited the USSR on several occasions and had been on friendly terms with Khrushchev) used the full force of their eloquence to argue that reunification of the families that had been torn apart by war would be a good impression on the general public, and that it would bring closer the nations that had been divided by the Cold War.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, during the Soviet leader's tour of the United States, the US administration had apparently arranged for requests for the release of the close relatives of the Americans to be personally handed to him. For example, in one of the hotels in Des Moines, Iowa, where Nikita Khrushchev was staying, there was the most sensitive scene ever photographed and filmed by a large number of reporters. When he appeared in the lobby in the morning, Elena Leonienė took advantage of this unique opportunity to address the leader of the USSR and, crying bitterly, she handed a request for the release of her children personally

ter Milda, who emigrated through the effort of their spouses ("Susitiko po šešiolikos metų. Jurgis ir Elena Sirusai susilaukė dukreles iš Lietuvos," *Darbininkas*, July 7, 1960, 4, 8; "Laimutė Kriščiūnaitė atvyko iš pavergtos Lietuvos," *Draugas*, January 7, 1960, 1; "Atvyko iš Lietuvos Regina Gaigalienė," *Draugas*, October 31, 1960, 1; Archbishop Metropolitan of Vilnius Gintaras Grušas, <<https://www.vilnensis.lt/vyskupai/arkivyskupas/>>, accessed February 28, 2023). The list also included the names of individuals of other nationalities living in Lithuania, e.g., Chaimas Finkelšteinas and his wife, both former political prisoners, who emigrated to their children from Kaunas ("Iš Lietuvos į Sibirą ir Chicagą," *Draugas*, June 2, 1960, 8), as well as Latvian and Estonian names ("Kaks eestlannat Eestist USA-sse," *Meie Kodu, Australian-Estonian Weekly*, December 10, 1959, no. 50, 1).

<sup>22</sup> Reunion of families, 20975.



to him.<sup>23</sup> A similar scene was seen at the University of Pittsburgh when, during an official lunch, a young girl (Donna Armonas – Danutė Armonaitė) in tears sought to kiss Khrushchev’s hand asking permission for the emigration of her mother and brother. This was not a spontaneous “sally”: David L. Lawrence, the governor of Pennsylvania who was close by, explained to the guest why the security guards had allowed the girl accompanied by a group of journalists to approach them. Khrushchev, who was enjoying the attention of the Americans, did not delay the awkward moment and promised the girl that she would see her mother soon. “Her plea won freedom for Mrs. Armoniene”,<sup>24</sup> wrote *Life*, one of the most popular illustrated magazines of the time, which also published the historic photograph. The American media devoted a great deal of space to these scenes, capturing the promise of a broadly smiling Khrushchev to allow family reunification.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to say whether immigrants from other nations behaved in a similar way. According to priest Juozas Prunskis, five Lithuanians “reached” Khrushchev personally.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> When the Leonas fled to Germany from the approaching Eastern Front in 1944, they left their four-year-old daughter and two-year-old son to the grandparents (Paulius Leonas, “Mano gyvenimo pabiros,” 28 October 1998, (Manuscript Department of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, LNB RS), col. F-28, f. 235, l. 2–3).

<sup>24</sup> “Woman in Siberia”, *Life*, may 5, 1961, 119. Jonas Armonas, a US citizen, left the occupied Lithuania in 1940 with his infant daughter hoping for a quick reunion with his wife and newborn son.

<sup>25</sup> Leslie Steven Rothenberg, “Two Encounters with Nikita Khrushchev,” *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 295, December 19–26, 1987, 1621; “A Poignant Victory in the Cold War,” *Life*, February 15, 1960, 45; Barbora Armonienė, *Palik ašaras Maskvoje*, 233. Interestingly, in a book about Nikita Khrushchev’s visit to America published by a group of journalists in Moscow in 1959, there was no mention of similar “incidents” (*Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi*, Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> According to memoirs and press reports, Khrushchev’s personal promise facilitated emigration to the USA of the priest’s mother, Ona Prunskienė (journalists from *The Chicago Tribune* helped him to meet Khrushchev), also Vidmantas Brazys, 16, Erdvilis Janulaitis, 15, Barbora Armonienė and her son Jonas, and Regina and Tomas Leonas (“Sulaukė motinos iš Lietuvos,”

Khrushchev himself undertook his tour of America as a “family man”, arriving with his wife and children. This probably also contributed to a positive attitude, and emigration got the green light. More precise statistics on emigration are not known. According to official figures, 1325 immigrants from the USSR came to the USA between May 1958 and autumn 1965.<sup>27</sup> The majority of them were elderly people going to their family members. Most of them were Jews, as this ethnic minority had many relatives in America.<sup>28</sup> American persistence opened up opportunities for emigration to other countries as well: for example, in assessing Macduffie’s merits, the estimate was that some 1,000 families were allowed to leave the USSR in the first half of 1960 alone (compared with only 55 between 1953 and 1959, according to the data of Jewish organizations in the USA).<sup>29</sup>

According to isolated press reports, at least 40 Lithuanian families were reunited in the USA and eight in Canada in 1960 alone. Interestingly enough, the sudden cooling of relations between the USSR and the USA in the spring of 1960 after the flight of Francis Gary Powers, which ended in an aviation and political disaster, did not abruptly stop emigration. However, the momentum gained was lost, and the Caribbean crisis in the autumn of 1962 brought it to a complete halt. Due to these circumstances, the emigration of Lithuanians to the USA, successful at the start, stopped for a while and the borders of other countries also closed to them. It seems that in 1961, only eight families managed to leave for the USA, while not a single family received emigration permission in 1962. There were sporad-

*Tėviškės žiburiai* (Toronto), April 21, 1960, 1; “Atvyko iš Lietuvos,” *Darbininkas*, August 4, 1960, 1; Kerri Kelleher, “Soviet Reunion,” *Cape Cod Times*, August 6, 2015, <<https://eu.capecodtimes.com/story/news/local/2015/08/06/soviet-reunion/33733188007/>>, accessed January 21, 2023; Barbora Armonienė, Algirdas L. Nasvytis, *Palik ašaras Maskvoje*, 233–242; Paulius Leonas, “Mano gyvenimo pabiros,” October 28, 1998, LNB RS, col. F-28, f. 235, l. 2–3).

<sup>27</sup> “International migration news and notes,” 200.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Reunion of families, 20975.

ic cases of emigration after the crisis, but it never reached the scale of 1960. Between three and twenty families or individuals emigrated to the USA each year.

## The Sensation of Arrival

The arrival of the first Lithuanians from occupied Lithuania attracted a great deal of attention in the West. The event would be covered by both the local émigré and national media. The arrival of the first emigrants was a sensation in the true sense of the word. Along the way (at airports in Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Amsterdam), family members and journalists, also politicians and diplomats would greet them, and upon arrival, a large number of acquaintances and other curious people met them. These occasions were filmed and photographed, and interviews were taken and recorded. For example, in 1957, when Monika Gaučienė and her children arrived at Chicago Midway Airport, at least a hundred people welcomed them, and a red carpet was laid out. Newspapers and radio stations reported the story of the happy family, and they were showered with gifts when they were recognized in shops.<sup>30</sup> When Regina and Tomas Leonas arrived in Chicago in 1960, the local radio kept announcing it every half-hour, and television aired several broadcasts. Police escorted the family from the airport, and a crowd of 150 people awaited them at their home. *Life* magazine published the photographs of the happy family reunited after sixteen years apart,<sup>31</sup> TV shows invited them, and railway companies offered them free trips. The family received great holiday offers from California and Florida (they chose Florida).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> McCandlish Phillips, "Refugees Arrive from Red Lands," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1957, 1; Juozas Prunskis, "Kaip gyvena lietuviai tremtiniai Sibire. Pasakoja iš ten atvykusi Monika Gaučienė," *Draugas*, November 12, 1957, 1.

<sup>31</sup> "A Poignant Victory in the Cold War," *Life*, February 15, 1960, 45.

<sup>32</sup> "Leonų vaikai pasakoja apie Lietuvą," *Draugas*, January 30, 1960, 6; "Ka pasakoja jaunuoliai iš anapus," *Lietuvių dienos*, February 15, 1960, 12, and others.

The reason for this attention was not only the interest of the American public in the dramatic stories of the families and the outcome of their struggle for reunification, but also Khrushchev's name, which was not disappearing from the media, and which attracted the American public like a magnet. His tour of America that was met with immense interest, his immediate communication and his impromptu emotional speeches culminated in an ovation for the USSR leader at his departure. The follow-up to the story of this visit – his promise to allow family reunification – was the focus of global attention. In the case of the Lithuanians, the media hype could not be avoided either. Perhaps the most striking example of this was the fact that in the crowd that gathered at Chicago airport on January 28, 1960, to greet the Leonas children, no one was even aware of the arrival, on the same plane, of 15-year-old Edmundas and 17-year-old Nijolė Trečiokas, whose emigration was not made famous by Khrushchev's name and who were greeted only by their father.<sup>33</sup>

Later in 1960, interest in the new arrivals abated: after a few dozen emigrants had been welcomed, the sensation was over. The press wrote in the summer of that year: "Arrival from Lithuania is no longer news. Got used to it."<sup>34</sup> Yet even not having enough time to track all of the emigrants, the arrival of compatriots mobilized the Lithuanian diaspora. People seeking reunification with their families tried to find out the behind-the-scenes of a successful emigration and searched for the addresses of influential lawyers and politicians who had helped the lucky ones. The media, politicians, and public organizations were interested in the stories of the newcomers and the life in Soviet Lithuania. Meetings and lectures were organized, and memoirs were published and disseminated. Although the emigrants arrived empty-handed (they were allowed to take only up to 20 kg of luggage with them), some of them had invaluable experience.

<sup>33</sup> "Iš Lietuvos atskrido dvi poros jaunuolių," *Dirva* (Cleveland), February 3, 1960, 1.

<sup>34</sup> "Kai atvyksta iš Lietuvos," *Vienybė* (New York), August 5, 1960, 4.

## Emigration of Repression Victims

Among the first Lithuanian emigrants from the USSR to the USA and Canada, the majority were young people 13–21 years old who had been abandoned by their parents when they fled to Germany in 1944, and elderly women whose children and spouses persisted in taking care of their immigration. The emigration press noted immediately that the Soviets only let old women and children out.<sup>35</sup> And indeed, young people and women dominate the 1957-to-1970 list of emigrants. Not just elderly women were among them, though: the youngest was 34 years old. Several of the earliest reunited families in the emigration had children, one of them being Gintaras Grušas, Archbishop of Vilnius, whose family used to joke that he was “Khrushchev’s gift to the world”.<sup>36</sup> Probably the oldest among the emigrants was the grandmother of Rūta Kilmonytė-Lee, a young Hollywood star. A deportation survivor of about 85 years of age, she received personal permission from Nikita Khrushchev to leave the USSR when after eight years of unsuccessful attempts to emigrate, in 1964, the actress succeeded in talking to him by phone.<sup>37</sup> Men were also allowed to leave, some of them even held important posts in independent Lithuania.

As mentioned above, there were quite a number of former political prisoners and deportees among the emigrants. Some of them flew to the West almost directly from Siberia (such as M. Gaučienė, who returned to Lithuania for only three days). Also, among the emigrants there were several women who had escaped from places of exile and therefore were wanted as criminals for a long time after a search for them was announced across

<sup>35</sup> “Kodėl daugiausia atvyksta tik jaunuoliai,” *Dirva*, August 5, 1960, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Interview of April 19, 2013: “Arkivyskupas G. Grušas: kai kam buvau Chruščiovo dovana pasauliui”, <<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/tavo-lrt/15/15777/arkivyskupas-g-grusas-kai-kam-buvau-chrusciovo-dovana-pasauliui>>, accessed March 1, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> “Rūta Lee Kilmonytė pas senele,” *Darbininkas*, March 24, 1964, 1; “Hollywood Actor Rūta Lee Explores Her Family History in Lithuania,” <<https://lithuaniantribune.com/hollywood-actor-ruta-lee-explores-her-family-history-in-lithuania/>>, accessed February 12, 2023.

the whole territory of the Soviet Union (Ona Prunskienė, Marija Avižienienė, Albina Balkutė, Marija Garbačiauskienė; Teklė Benotienė and her three children were found in Lithuania and deported back to Siberia).

As soon as they crossed the Soviet border, many emigrants would start talking about life behind the Iron Curtain. For example, immediately upon his arrival, Alfonsas Milukas, a former political prisoner, gave evidence before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, which was collecting data on the situation in the occupied Baltic republics.<sup>38</sup> In addition to media interviews discrediting the regime, the first memoirs by émigrés appeared in as early as the 1960s, also in foreign languages. These books and first-hand testimonies entered the vanguard of the political struggle of the diaspora. As Hilda Tautvaišienė, a 1941 deportee, wrote in the introduction to her book,

Having arrived in the free world and liberated myself from the never-ending sense of fear, I consider it my duty to testify and tell the story of the people, most of them women and children, who innocently suffered the most brutal violence, the misfortune, and the terrible fate that befell them.<sup>39</sup>

Similar mottos accompanied other books of memoirs,<sup>40</sup> and the power of authentic testimonies cannot be overestimated.

<sup>38</sup> "Mūsų buityje," *Aidai*, 1965, no. 6, 278.

<sup>39</sup> Hilda Tautvaišienė, *Tautų kapinynas Sibiro tundroje*, New York: Amerikos lietuvių socialdemokratų sąjungos literatūros fondas, 1962, 6; Hilda Tautvaiša, *The Cemetery of Nations in the Siberian Tundra*, London: Nida, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> Deported with her son in 1948 and later imprisoned in gulag, Barbora Armonienė wrote the memoirs with a co-author over a period of three months (excerpts of the memoirs were first published in magazines in English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese, and the book was reprinted several times): Barbora Armonienė, Algirdas L. Nasvytis, *Palik ašaras Maskvoje*, Cleveland: Viltis, 1961; Barbara Armonas, Algirdas L. Nasvytis, *Leave Your Tears in Moscow*, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincot, 1961; eadem, *Lass die Tränen in Moskau: 1936–1960: meine zwanzig Jahre in Russland*, München: Ehrenwirth, 1966. Also see.: Stefanija Rūkienė, *Vergijos kryžkeliuose. Sibiro tremties užrašai*, Cleveland: Viltis, 1968; eadem, *Grįžimas į laisvę*, Cleveland: Viltis, 1970. More memoirs were published in the 1970s and 1980s.

Why did the regime not prevent the emigration of repression victims? How did the selection of emigrants work? The selection was the exclusive responsibility of the MGB/KGB. The emigration of minors, the elderly, and the poorly educated villagers was approached leniently. Apparently, security officials did not expect that *kolkhoz* women, seamstresses, and teachers would become involved in the activities of anti-Soviet émigré organizations and publish their shocking life stories. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of multiethnic prisoners of war, Germans, and Polish victims of repression left the USSR after the war. Some of them reached Western countries and already spoke of their horrific experiences.

The very fact of repression was ignored in the cases of Lithuanian emigration. The criminal and deportation files of those who wanted to emigrate would be reviewed and “review references” would be drawn up, but this procedure was probably still formal because those were the people who had been caught up in the whirlwind of mass repression. The leaders of the reafirming Soviet regime were rapidly dismantling the Gulag and the system of special deportee settlements as a legacy of Stalinism. After amnesties, between 1953 and 1958, the victims of repression returned home. For several years at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union seemed to be changing dramatically not only by distancing itself from the crimes of the Stalinist regime but also by making them public. During the “thaw”, books appeared in the Soviet Union, the content of which essentially coincided with the testimonies of the Lithuanians who had emigrated to the free world (e.g., *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, about the daily routine of a prisoner in the gulag. It was published in a print run of millions of copies, for the first time in 1962, and in Vilnius in Lithuanian in 1963). The discrediting of Stalinism did not outweigh the benefits for the newly created image of the Soviet regime.

However, the seemingly liberal attitude of the Soviet regime towards family reunification at the turn of the 1960s had clear boundaries: (1) permission to emigrate was granted on a case-

by-case basis, i.e., the regime did not bind itself by any principled commitment (not to restrict emigration or at least to release all members of a foreigner's family who wished to emigrate, to reinstate the stripped citizenship and the like); (2) formerly well-known personalities and fighters of the national underground were denied legal means of leaving to foreign countries. Their persecution and discrimination lasted for a very long time. Occasionally they would be given permissions to emigrate, but this may have been motivated by the operational interests of the security organs.<sup>41</sup> The emigration of personalities who could have made a stronger impact in the West was blocked. For example, despite all the efforts of his family and French diplomats, the diplomat Petras Klimas, who had returned from Siberia and settled in Kaunas, was not allowed to reunite with his family, although his daughter succeeded in meeting Khrushchev in 1957 and the name of Petras Klimas was on the list of persons of whose emigration was a matter of President Charles de Gaulle's personal concern in 1960. The negative decision was based on the arguments of the KGB of the Lithuanian SSR that the well-known high-ranking diplomat would get involved in anti-Soviet activities of the Lithuanian diaspora in the West.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusions

The first Lithuanians to legally flee the occupied Lithuania after the end of the Second World War were foreign nationals returning to their home countries (1945–1947) and those who achieved

<sup>41</sup> The MGB/KGB of the Lithuanian SSR sent a number of agents to the West for permanent residence. Permits for family reunification were also manipulated, with conditions and recruitment attempts. For example, a Lithuanian army colonel who emigrated to his family in 1965 is mentioned in security documents as an undercover agent "Gružė" (Top secret 1948 06 11 "The America line plan of the Counterintelligence Department of the Marijampolė district MGB", LYA, col. K-43, inv. 1, f. 24, l. 154).

<sup>42</sup> Bukaitė, *Nepriklausomybės akto signataras*, 554–558.



reunification with their family members (when such an opportunity presented itself in 1957). Their emigration to Western countries was hardly noticeable in the Lithuanian SSR (as evidenced by the lack of its traces in the historiography). It did not assume a large scale, but news of the arrival of the first Lithuanians to the West had a snowball effect in the diaspora: families shared their experiences, the addresses of influential lawyers and politicians, and looked for their own ways for the emigration of their family members.

Lithuanian families had to fight for their right to reunite. It was the “human factor” that opened the path to their reunification: direct involvement of influential Western diplomats, politicians, and journalists at the right moment when, having started reforms, Soviet leaders agreed to tolerate limited flows of tourist arrivals and emigration. The Soviets benefited from such an image of “liberalization”: it boosted the regime’s reputation that was essential for the successful development of economic contracts. Only the most persistent families, which had overcome bureaucratic hurdles and had not given up even after several setbacks, reunited. The very phenomenon of the arrival of compatriots mobilized the diaspora for the dissemination of up-to-date information about the repression of the Soviet regime and life in the occupied homeland. It remains one of the important signs of the “thaw” that galvanized the diaspora.

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*Translated by Diana BARNARD*

# Constructed Narratives of the Understandings of Kaunas Ghetto Jewish Policemen: “The Murder Period,” August 15 to October 28–29, 1941

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LISA ANNE STORER

## Introduction

In the Kaunas ghetto, during 1942 and 1943, several anonymous members, *the authors*, in the Jewish ghetto police force secretly wrote a 253-page manuscript of events entitled, *Geschichte fuhn der viliampoler yiddisher geto-politsei* (History of Viliampole Jewish Ghetto Police: referred to in this article as the Secret History).<sup>1</sup> Believed to be initiated by members in the police leadership, the *Secret History* describes actions of German occupying forces and their accomplices and of those in the Jewish police force and those whom they policed. Through analysis of *the authors'* interpretations and those of ghetto inhabitants, this article explores police actions which occurred in “the murder period” from August 15 to October 28–29, 1941, with the focus on the brutality of Jewish ghetto policemen during forced labor roundups and their influence on the selection process of the Great Action.

This is an understudied area in the literature, as the roles of Jewish ghetto policemen are most commonly presented from the

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<sup>1</sup> Schalkowsky, *Clandestine*, ix, xii–xiii.

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LISA ANNE STORER is currently living in Kaunas, as she peruses research connected to Kaunas ghetto Jewish policemen. Through her studies at the University of Haifa, she was introduced to the unique nature of a narrative that several Jewish policemen wrote to explain events in the ghetto. Her research involves understanding their personal histories in relationship to their writings as policemen in the Kaunas ghetto.

perspectives of ghetto inhabitants and not from constructed narratives by Jewish policemen. In the midst of the forced and unnatural circumstances of Nazi Jewish policy, the perceptions of Jewish ghetto policemen are valuable for fostering an understanding of what they believed which, in turn, prompted their actions in relationship to events in the ghetto. Specifically, this article will analyze *the authors'* interpretations of the beliefs and subsequent acts of Jewish policemen during forced labor round-ups and the selection of the Great Action in "the murder period."<sup>2</sup> To do so, the following question will be addressed: What did *the authors'* want their readers to understand about the beliefs and actions of Jewish ghetto policemen during "the murder period" as revealed in the *Secret History*?

## Literature Review

Much of the historiography of Jewish ghetto policemen focuses on organizational and structural aspects of their work. The vital scholarship of Isaiah Trunk presents an examination of Jewish ghetto police forces to reveal their unique creation, duties, and actions in specific ghettos.<sup>3</sup> He explains the corruption and brutality of policemen while also including actions that supported the welfare of ghetto inmates, as corroborated by the perspectives of ghetto inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> Yisrael Gutman's essential research on the Warsaw ghetto identifies the escalated animosity of the ghetto population towards Jewish policemen, also through the perspectives of ghetto inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> Like Gutman's work, Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak provide an exhaustive study of Jewish ghetto police in the Warsaw ghetto with great attention to structure and organization.<sup>6</sup> With a focus on the Kaunas ghetto, the

<sup>2</sup> Levin, "Jewish Police," 62.

<sup>3</sup> Trunk, *Judenrat*, 477–478, 488–489.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>5</sup> Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Engelking and Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 190–218.

comprehensive study by Arūnas Bubnys also presents the formal aspects of a Jewish ghetto police force.<sup>7</sup> The above robust scholarship is oriented primarily toward organizational and structural inquiries of ghetto police forces.

The work of Aharon Weiss provides an essential point that the creation of a Jewish ghetto police force was unprecedented, as no such organization had existed in Jewish culture prior to Nazi ghettoization.<sup>8</sup> This is important to understand as it presents the concept of a Jewish police force as a result of German authority with its purpose to *use* Jews to facilitate Nazi Jewish policy. While acknowledging the force as an alien concept in Jewish culture, Weiss concludes that a Jewish police force, “was the weakest link”.<sup>9</sup> By this, he refers to the negative actions of Jewish ghetto police in relationship to the welfare of ghetto inmates. Katarzyna Person, in her illustrative study of the Warsaw ghetto police, too, makes a general assertion “...the study of the [Jewish ghetto] police is largely a study of adaptation.”<sup>10</sup> The important scholarship of Weiss and Person contributes much to the historiography; however, their conclusions call for a more nuanced inquiry.

The work of Dalia Ofer provides a pivotal examination of Kaunas ghetto policemen, as she acknowledges *the authors* of the *Secret History* as having created an effective historiography.<sup>11</sup> She states that by writing a history of events, the policemen had the agency to present the complexity of the events in the ghetto which includes their perceptions of their own institution and the inner workings and relationships with other influencing factors.<sup>12</sup> Ofer’s insightful scholarship invites further analysis of the perspectives of Jewish ghetto policemen.

<sup>7</sup> Bubnys, *Kaunas Ghetto 1941–1944*, 100–107.

<sup>8</sup> Weiss, “The Relationship Between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police,” 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Person, *Warsaw Ghetto Police*, 157.

<sup>11</sup> Ofer, “Swearing-in Ceremony,” 233.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

The scholarship of Alain Blum, Thomas Chopard, and Emilia Koustova identifies the research value of documentation of NKVD post-war trials of Jewish ghetto policemen.<sup>13</sup> Their work details how this resource differs from others, such as diaries and oral testimonies, as the subjects had not determined to “tell their stories.” They were forced to tell them in relationship to charges of treason and collaboration. Although the authors caution researchers as to the control and manipulation of post war trials by Soviet authorities, they reveal that much can be discerned concerning the lives of the accused. Their study includes letters written to the courts by wives of the arrested Jewish policemen as well as the names of other ghetto inmates revealed in their interrogations. Although, their work maintains a more pointed focus on the charges against the defendants’ and their outcomes as Jewish ghetto policemen, it provides an entry to a rich and unique resource of detailed information.

The work of Dov Levin addresses the question as to why the *Secret History* was written. While some Jewish policemen believed that they were working in the best interests of the ghetto population, they also knew that they were reviled and feared by a majority of those whom they policed.<sup>14</sup> Levin describes the writing of the *Secret History* as “an attempt by the Jewish police at self-examination and substantive commentary as the events unfolded.”<sup>15</sup> Levin identifies the authors’ purpose of analysis with a focus on their perspectives and calls for a more exhaustive study of sources related to the Kaunas ghetto in relationship to the *Secret History*.<sup>16</sup>

The scholarship of the above historians reflects critical contributions to the literature, while exposing an understudied area in the research to examine the beliefs which led to actions by Jewish ghetto policemen. Analysis of the constructed narratives

<sup>13</sup> Blum, et al., “Survivors, Collaborators and Partisans?” 246–247.

<sup>14</sup> Levin, “Jewish Police,” 67.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 183. Levin’s quote is from a preface that is not included in David Cesarani’s edited work: *Holocaust: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*.

<sup>16</sup> Levin, “Jewish Police,” 68.

of *the authors'* of the *Secret History* provides an entry to identify what they believed as truths regarding Jewish police brutality and their influence on the selection process during the Great Action – that is, points of departure to *the authors'* interpretation of what Jewish ghetto policemen understood about their beliefs and actions in the Kaunas ghetto.

## Methodology

This article will analyze *the authors'* narrative interpretations based on the scholarship of James Young that calls “to shift critical emphasis away from diaries’ and memoirs’ claim to documentary evidence, to their more tenable function as historical exegesis.”<sup>17</sup> While the *Secret History* is a unique Holocaust text, as it was written and edited by several authors, Young explains that the significance of each work undertaken to document experiences in the Holocaust does not lie only in its factual veracity, but also in the meaning, the *truths*, that the writers created for themselves from their experiences. While interpretations of events might not appear true to fact, they were *truths beyond facts* to the authors, and as such, their value lies in analysis as historical exegesis. Young explains the importance of this approach to documented Holocaust experience, as providing a pathway to understanding what was believed to be true.<sup>18</sup> This is an important distinction, as what becomes valuable to understand is the meaning that the authors made of the reality in which they lived.

This article will also include constructed narratives by ghetto inhabitants that describe the actions of Jewish policemen during forced labor roundups and the selection process of the Great Action. Diaries, memoirs, and oral histories of ghetto inmates, when viewed as historical exegesis, are also freed from the demand to provide fact-based evidence. In whichever genre ghetto inhabitants chose to tell their stories, their interpretations

<sup>17</sup> Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony,” 407.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 406, 420.

reveal the *truths beyond facts* that they constructed and believed. Their interpretations are important to include to more fully understand the beliefs and resulting actions of Jewish ghetto policemen as interpreted by *the authors*. The purpose of this inclusion is to increase the scope of understanding of *the authors'* constructed narratives.

## **"The Murder Period" in the Kaunas Ghetto**

Dov Levin, a survivor of the Kaunas ghetto, separates the ghetto's existence into three periods of which this article will focus on the first, "the murder period."<sup>19</sup> It lasted for over eight weeks – from August 15, 1941, the day the Kaunas ghetto was sealed, to October 29, 1941 – the second day of the Great Action. According to the second Jäger Report of December 1, 1941, over 14,400 Jews were murdered in Kaunas as of October 29, 1941; the report lists 15,000 Kauen (Kaunas) Jews alive as of December 1, 1941.<sup>20</sup> Alfonsas Eidintas explains that the German need for war products was the only reason that Jews remained alive in Lithuania after December 1, 1941.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Arūnas Bubnys clarifies that Hitler's fixated goal in the East, in contrast to his goals in the West, to "mercilessly" destroy those designated as enemies of the Third Reich, caused the enormous number of deaths of Jewish Lithuanians within a matter of months.<sup>22</sup> As many as 220,000 Jews were living in Lithuania prior to the German invasion. By the end of 1941, 40,000 Jews remained alive.<sup>23</sup>

During "the murder period" in the Kaunas ghetto, the Germans orchestrated the murders of thousands of Jews in major actions that took place on August 18, September 26–27, October

<sup>19</sup> Levin, "Jewish Police," 62. See full article for further information on the three periods in the Kovno ghetto.

<sup>20</sup> Dieckmann and Sužiedėlis, *The Persecution and Mass Murder*, 211–218.

<sup>21</sup> Eidintas, *Jews, Lithuanians and the Holocaust*, 308.

<sup>22</sup> Bubnys, "The Holocaust in Lithuania," 206.

<sup>23</sup> Vashem, "Murder of the Jews of the Baltic States," online.



4, and October 28–29.<sup>24</sup> Many Jews were also killed by arbitrary acts of violence and for violations of petty German directives that included buying food, walking on the sidewalk, or failing to remove a hat to recognize authority figures.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, this period was distinguished by additional terror and barbarity as starting on August 19, 1941, Germans and ethnic Lithuanians systematically, as well as randomly, looted Jewish property and wealth inside the ghetto.<sup>26</sup> The Germans had convinced the Jewish leadership that entering the ghetto was the safest option for Jews to avoid bloodshed. Instead, inside the ghetto Jews faced violence, robbery, and murder, as the German's purpose was "to isolate and to control" Jews.<sup>27</sup>

## Forced Labor Roundups by Jewish Ghetto Policemen

*The authors* state that it was during "the murder period" that an irreversible hatred and fear of Jewish ghetto policemen grew within the ghetto.<sup>28</sup> They attribute this to the brutal beatings that Jewish policemen inflicted upon ghetto inmates during forced labor roundups. They explain that at first a Jewish policeman felt ashamed when he used force upon another Jew, but over time, policemen became more brutal with a decreasing sense of shame, as their violence became on par with that of the Germans.<sup>29</sup> They conclude that the brutality of Jewish policemen

<sup>24</sup> Levin and Brown, *The Story of an Underground*, 6–8; Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust*, 37; Levin, "Jewish Police," 62.

<sup>25</sup> Levin, "Jewish Police," 62.

<sup>26</sup> Schalkowsky, *Clandestine*, 85–90.

<sup>27</sup> For inclusive descriptions of the violence, theft, and murder facing Jews prior to moving into the ghetto see: Vytautas Petrikėnas and Martynas Kosas, *VII Fortas: Lietuviška Tragedija: The History of the First Concentration Camp in Lithuania*, (Arx Reklama: Kaunas, 2011), 102–106; Danutė Petrauskaitė, "Music in the Kaunas Ghetto against the Background of Vilijampole (Slabodka)," *Lithuanian Quarterly* 63, No. 1 (2017): 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

became forever etched into the minds of ghetto inmates during “the murder period” in the fall of 1941.<sup>30</sup>

*The authors* explain that the policemen’s brutality was motivated by the belief that the ghetto’s existence was dependent on satisfying Germans quotas for forced labor.<sup>31</sup> Based on this belief, they justified their actions while interpreting ghetto inmates motivation to hide during roundups as indolence, “[...] we understand that those who were hiding were not doing so out of idealistic motives of passive resistance, but were simply the same ones who were always, under all circumstances, the lazy ones.”<sup>32</sup> *The authors’* interpretation reflects a polarization of their beliefs. On one hand, the police believed that to save the ghetto they must beat those who resisted forced labor, while on the other they characterized ghetto inmates’ refusal as nothing more than laziness. *The authors* assign a moral righteousness to the Jewish policemen’s brutal acts.

In his memoir, Harry Gordon describes his reaction to the brutality of Kaunas ghetto policemen, “We suffered from the blows and kicks of the [Jewish] police and being dragged out of our homes into one working brigade or another, not knowing if we would return.”<sup>33</sup> Gordon’s entry reflects both the extreme violence of the policemen and his fear. He understands their behavior not as working for the greater good of the ghetto, but to force him to join a slave labor brigade which in and of itself endangers his life. To Gordon, the policemen’s actions are deliberately cruel and caulous.

However, *the authors* convey their understanding of the beliefs of both Gordon and Jewish policemen by recognizing the hatred and fear of ghetto inmates. Their constructed narrative, while interpreting the brutality as necessary, explains that it was the reason that ghetto inmates hated and feared Jewish policemen. They state that it was the policemen’s actions that caused the

<sup>30</sup> Schalkowsky, *Clandestine*, 206.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, *The Shadow of Death*, 74.

irreparable break with many in the ghetto. They do not simply blame ghetto inmates to explain the brutality nor do they remain focused on the policemen's beliefs which led to the acts. *The authors'* interpretation reveals that they want their readers to understand that ghetto policemen understood their actions as both necessary and as irreparably destructive.

## The Great Action

*The authors* explain that Jewish policemen assigned to control the crowd during the Great Action soon realized that the Germans making the selection had no regard for whatever Jew was before him awaiting judgement. They realized that the Germans were concerned only with the number of Jews to be selected and not with any individual's work documents, health, or age.<sup>34</sup> Once they understood this, they believed that they could outwit the Germans by shifting ghetto inmates from the "bad side" back to the "good side." The policemen believed that it was safest for ghetto inmates to be sent to the "good side" where they were allowed to remain in the large ghetto, whereas those on the "bad side" were escorted by armed Lithuanian partisans to the small ghetto.

*The authors* state that during the selection process "there were dozens of instances" of Jewish policemen approaching German authorities to request the release of their Jewish acquaintances designated for the small ghetto.<sup>35</sup> This point is important as *the authors* interpreted the policemen's actions as saving "as many people as possible" whom they knew.<sup>36</sup> However, *the authors* also reveal that they understood the negative repercussions of the policemen's actions in relationship to other ghetto inmates, "If a policeman took it upon himself to ask the German to send this or that Jew to the good side [during the Great Action], and the

<sup>34</sup> Schalkowsky, *Clandestine*, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

German granted the request, it was at the expense of another Jew".<sup>37</sup> Although *the authors* understood that saving lives entailed the loss of others, their interpretation of the policemen's understanding at the time was that they were saving lives with no understanding that they were also condemning lives.<sup>38</sup>

*The authors* clarify this point by explaining that during the selection, Jewish policemen did not know what would happen to those selected for the "bad side," for at the time, they did not know that they were destined for death.<sup>39</sup> As previously noted, what they did know was that those on the "bad side" were escorted to the small ghetto by armed Lithuanian guards. However, the *authors* knew, at the time of their writing the *Secret History*, the fate of those sent to the "bad side." They explain that those who spent the night in the small ghetto were marched in the morning to the Ninth Fort and then murdered.<sup>40</sup> The Great Action, the largest and the last during "the murder period," condemned 9,200 Jews to their deaths.<sup>41</sup>

Avraham Tory, a ghetto survivor, describes Jewish policemen's acts during the Great Action as saving as many people as possible, as they "displayed initiative, daring, and resourcefulness".<sup>42</sup> He explains how they directed individuals to safety by appearing to support German selections, "the Jewish policemen would set upon him screaming and push him brutally to the good side, pretending that they were forcing him back to the correct place."<sup>43</sup> Tory's entry reveals his belief that the Jewish ghetto policemen's actions reflected an outsmarting of the Germans that resulted in saving lives. It does not include an understanding that the German

<sup>37</sup> Schalkowsky, *Clandestine*, 140.

<sup>38</sup> Bubnys, "Kauno ir Vilniaus getų žydų policija (1941–1944 m.)," 82. Bubnys makes the distinction that although many Jewish ghetto policemen were corrupt and immoral, a number of Kaunas ghetto Jewish policemen worked with the underground.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 140, 146.

<sup>41</sup> Levin, *Litvaks*, 224.

<sup>42</sup> Tory, *Surviving*, 54–55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

quota for death remained the same, that it required other ghetto inmates to replace those who had been saved.

Moise Rosenblum explains in a memoir entry, that during the selection, his family was motioned to the “bad side.” Because his parents had been close friends with the chief of the Jewish police force, Moisei Kopelman, his father asked him for help, “Kopelman managed to obtain permission to move us, together with my mother’s parents and a few of our close friends to the ‘good’ side.”<sup>44</sup> Rieta Volpert-Lesokhin’s memoir entry also explains how Kopelman, who was a former classmate of her mother’s, helped her family survive. However, she states, “When he saw us, he led our family to the left side [“good side”] in exchange for another family, which he moved to the right [“bad side”].”<sup>45</sup> Judith Meisel’s oral testimony, too, describes the actions of policemen as saving Jews at the expense of others, “they [Jewish policemen] didn’t give up their families. They gave strangers [...] they gave people they didn’t know.”<sup>46</sup>

Zwi Katz, the brother-in-law of Yehuda Zupovitz, a deputy police chief in the force, explains that he saw Zupovitz move Zwi’s grandparents, Zemach and Basia Katz, to the “good side.”<sup>47</sup> Zupovitz is believed to have been intimately involved with the documenting of life in the ghetto, as his wife, Dita Sperling-Zupovich, stated that he confided in her that police officers kept a secret diary, to explain the “events in the ghetto to the world.”<sup>48</sup> The potential that Zupovitz was one of *the authors* places him in the unique position of having acted as a policeman on the belief that he was saving lives in the midst of the selection of the Great

<sup>44</sup> *Smuggled in Potato Sacks*, 273.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Judith Meisel, Interview Code 5916, Segment 129, (1995), USC Shoah Foundation Visual History.

<sup>47</sup> Katz. *Von den Memel ins Ungewisse*, 86.

<sup>48</sup> Litvakes, Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania, “Dita Shperling,” online; Levin, “Jewish Police,” 93n22. Levin cites the testimony of Azriel Levi as explaining that he and two other members of Irgun Brit Zion retrieved boxes of the police documents which included the *Secret History* and buried them.

Action, while later, as one of *the authors*, explaining that for every Jew saved, another Jew was lost.

Tory's diary entry reflects *the authors'* interpretation that Jewish policemen, in the midst of the Great Action, believed that they were outsmarting the Germans and saving lives. Although *the authors'* reflect Volpert-Lesokhin's and Meisel's understanding that the policemen were in fact saving lives at the expense of others, they focus on what they believe was true for the policemen in the midst of the action. Zupovitz, as a Jewish policeman during the selection, saved the lives of his wife's grandfather and grandmother, for which two others had to take their places. *The authors* want their readers to understand that the policemen believed that they were saving lives at the time without understanding that they were condemning others to death.

## Conclusion

*The authors* of the *Secret History* want their readers to understand two points about the beliefs and actions of Jewish ghetto policemen during "the murder period." First, that the policemen were aware that their brutality during forced labor roundups gravely damaged relationships with ghetto inmates. They knew that they caused fear and hatred for them. Next, *the authors* want readers to understand that policemen who exchanged ghetto inmates during the selection of the Great Action were not aware at the time that they were condemning Jews to death. They want readers to understand that they believed that they were saving lives.

During forced labor roundups, *the authors* interpret the policemen's understanding of their brutal beating of ghetto inmates as necessary, as policemen based their actions on their belief that the survival of the ghetto depended on Jewish forced labor. However, they also explain that the policemen understood that the damage done by beating ghetto inmates was irreparable. Their narrative construction of the events reveal that *the authors* perceived that the policemen understood their brutality as nec-

essary while they also understood that their actions were irrevocably destructive.

During the selection of the Great Action, *the authors* interpret that the policemen at the time did not understand the fact that when they swapped strangers for acquaintances, they saved lives at the expense of others. Ghetto survivors' interpretations of policemen's beliefs and actions appear in diaries, memoirs, and oral histories. In some, the policemen's shifting of ghetto inmates to the "good side" are interpreted and understood as only saving lives, while in others they reflect the exchanging of a life for a life – policemen were condemning others to death.

These differing understandings of the same event point to the interpretive nature of constructed narratives in the *Secret History* as well as in diaries, memoirs, and oral histories. It is in the analysis of these interpretations, constructed by authors, that their understanding is revealed. It is through them that they reveal what was true for them in the events that they witnessed. Analysis of *the authors'* and ghetto inmates' constructed narratives as historical exegesis shifts the focus to what the authors of each genre understood to be true without any judgement of worth as based on concepts of factual truth. Analysis of *the authors'* constructed narratives as interpreted is essential to understand that Jewish ghetto policemen constructed meaning from the events that they experienced to reveal what was true for them at the time.

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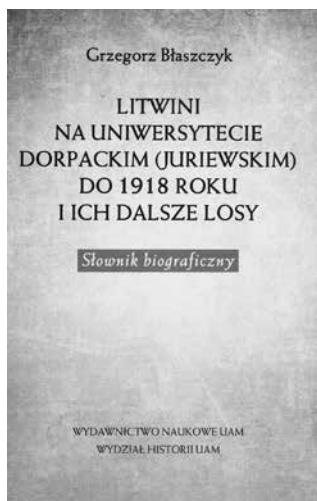
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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Grzegorz Błaszczyk  
*Litwini na uniwersytecie  
Dorpackim (Juriewskim)  
do 1918 roku i ich dalsze losy*  
Słownik biograficzny, Poznań,  
2022, 315 pp.

### **A Book About Lithuanian Students at the University of Dorpat by Polish Historian**

A comprehensive biographical dictionary of Lithuanian students of any university has been unheard of until now. This dictionary of Lithuanian students of the University of Dorpat (Jurjevo-now Tartu) prepared by Grzegorz Błaszczyk, professor of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, a famous historian who studies Lithuania, is the first work of its kind. Based on the collected data, the collective biography presented is also one of the first such studies of the Lithuanian intelligentsia. When I refer to the innovativeness of the work, I mean what the author noted in the very first sentence of the preface, i.e., the fact that the main problem of this work is to separate the end of the nineteenth century and twentieth century Poles from Lithuanians, because the concept of “Lithuanian” was ambig-

uous in that period. Historical Lithuanian and ethnic Lithuanian are different. The compiler of the biographical dictionary chose a narrower ethnic concept of Poles and Lithuanians.

The biographical dictionary consists of two parts: the first section includes biographies of 154 students and a collective portrait of students presented at the end, the second is devoted to biographies and a collective portrait of 72 students of pharmacy courses. A geographic glossary is added.

From the data of the collective biography, it becomes clear that almost the absolute majority of students came from peasants, from the historical Žemaitija (Samogitia) or its Panevėžys or Upytė suburbs. Most of them graduated from Mintauja and Liepoja gymnasiums. Most studied medicine and law. In the Republic of Lithuania, 11 former Dorpat students became professors, 2 served as prime ministers, 9 ministers, 11 diplomats, one signed the February 16th Act of Independence.

Any large work of the biographical genre (especially dictionaries) has inaccuracies. I noticed a few as well. For example, Jonas Basanavičius, the pioneer of the Lithuanian national revival, was not of noble origin (p. 8), but of peasant origin, as shown by the genealogical research conducted by historian Antanas Tyla.

The signatory of the Act of Independence of Lithuania, Jokūbas Šernas, who started studying law at the University of Dorpat (but had already graduated from St. Petersburg), actually did not participate in the Lithuanian conferences of 1917 in Vilnius; this was done by his brother Adams – also a former student of Dorpat University (p. 155). Perhaps it could be noted in the biographies that both of them received one of the six scholarships awarded by the authorities of the Russian Empire for evangelical reformers. On the other hand, the compiler of the dictionary corrected the same Antanas Tyla, who claimed that in 1911 Leonardas Šernas belonged to Dorpat's Lithuanian students' society.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Jokūbas Šernas (155) was a member of it.

<sup>1</sup> Tyla, Antanas. "Jono Basanavičiaus kilmė." In *Dr. Jonas Basanavičius 1851–1927*. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2009, 8.

In summary, I will note that the compiler of the biographical dictionary did a great job collecting a huge amount of data about the students of Lithuanian origin of the University of Dorpat (Yurievo) of the Russian Empire, who soon became part of the intelligentsia of the emerging Lithuanian state – the creators of that state. A wide base of sources, abundant archival documents from the Central State Archives of Lithuania, the Estonian National Archives in Tartu, the Vrublevskii Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, biographical literature and memoirs in both Polish and Lithuanian languages were used.

The biographical dictionary will be extremely useful both for those interested in the history of modern Lithuanian medicine and pharmacy, as well as in the process of formation of the intelligentsia.

VALDAS SELENIS

## ABSTRACTS

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AUDRA V. ADOMENAS

**Letter to the Editors. Baltic States in the Putin Era:  
Alternative Reality in the Twenty-First Century**

This article reflects on the theory and practice of counter mind-frames currently at play between Putin-era Russia and Western concepts of international law. Two legal principles: *ex injuria jus non oritur* (illegal acts do not create law) and *ex factis jur oritur* (existence of facts creates law) are introduced to shed light on the current Russian prosecutor general's office review of the legality of the 1991 Yeltsin-era Russian government granting of independence to the Baltic States. Note to the Reader: The end notes are designed as an integral part of the running narrative to amplify the subject matter within the text.

EGLUTĖ TRINKAUSKAITĖ

**Atomic Grandmothers and Snake Medicines**

The contemporary practice of verbal healing charmers in rural Lithuania continues to address snakes and use snake medicine. Village women establish their spiritual authority by practicing verbal healing charms passed down by their ancestors. To this day, Catholic women in the Lithuanian countryside continue to practice or seek out indigenous verbal healing charms to protect from snake bites, to heal snake bites, and various conditions. The encounters with snakes remain powerful life experiences, though full of ambiguity as the past connects to the present. The verbal charms reflect the fusion of Baltic, pre-Christian culture and Catholicism, serving as a micro-model of how Baltic culture indigenized Catholicism in Lithuania.

REGINA LAUKAITYTĖ

### **The Forgotten Breakthrough of the 1960s: The Beginning of the Emigration of Lithuanians from the USSR**

The article deals with the hitherto unexplored issues of the emigration of Lithuanians from the USSR to Western countries. The main focus is on the factors that triggered the emigration process (the start of which coincided with de-Stalinization and the thaw in US-USSR relations) and the scale of emigration. It seeks answers to the questions of what means were used by Lithuanian families separated by the war to fight for the right to reunite and what resonance was caused by the appearance of the first compatriots, who escaped from the Soviet Union, in the free world at the turn of the 1960s. Only the most persistent families, who overcame bureaucratic hurdles and did not give up even after several setbacks, were reunited. The arrival of Lithuanians, including political prisoners and deportees returning from Siberia, galvanized and mobilized the Lithuanian diaspora: people shared the latest news about life in the occupied homeland and the addresses of influential attorneys and politicians; they searched for the ways for their next of kin to emigrate. The political thaw did not last long, but the limited migration and family reunification that began during that period continued throughout the Soviet era, right until 1990.

LISA ANNE STORER

### **Constructed Narratives of the Understandings of Kaunas Ghetto Jewish Policemen: "The Murder Period," August 15 to October 28–29, 1941**

Anonymous Jewish ghetto policemen (referred to in this article as *the authors*) wrote a manuscript clandestinely in the Kaunas ghetto from 1942 to 1943. *The authors* explain that their purpose was to describe the reality in the ghetto *through their eyes* such



that historians would find their work credible. Drawing on James Young's concept of "historical exegesis," this article will investigate *the authors'* narrative not as factual evidence, but as their constructed narratives to reveal what was true for them in their understandings of the beliefs and actions of Jewish ghetto policemen. This is an understudied area in the historiography, as Jewish ghetto policemen are most commonly viewed in monolithic terms as corrupt, privileged functionaries in the organization and structure of Jewish ghetto police forces. The purpose of this article is to identify *the authors'* constructed narratives of Jewish policemen's beliefs and actions as reflected in their acts of brutality during forced labor roundups and their influence on the selection of ghetto inmates during the Great Action. What did *the authors* want readers to understand about the beliefs and actions of Jewish ghetto policemen during "the murder period" as revealed in their manuscript?

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Monument to economist, Prof. Vladas Jurgutis. Bronze, 2015  
Sculptor: Gediminas Piekuras

### MOVING?

We need your old as well as your new address, to correct our records.

FRONT COVER: Autumn in the Vicinity of Alanta  
Photo by Almantas Samalavičius