

FROM THE EDITOR

ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN LITHUANIA: THE PROBLEM OF INSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS AND CULTURAL TRANSFERS



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2022 marks the centennial of the University of Lithuania, which in 1930 was renamed Vytautas Magnus University (VMU; Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, VDU, in Lithuanian). It was established in Kaunas, then the provisional capital of Lithuania, and became the first state-sponsored institution functioning in the Lithuanian language and carrying out scholarly research as well as providing a university-level education across the board. Throughout its nearly 20 years of existence in the First Lithuanian Republic VMU demonstrated to its country and to the world that Lithuanians were capable of thriving as an independent and civilizationally well-equipped linguistic and cultural entity as well as being a political nation functioning as an autonomous geopolitical subject. Viewed retrospectively in terms of its institutional genesis and specific cultural mission, this university may be regarded as the foundational cornerstone of the entire system of contemporary Lithuanian academic research and higher education.

Nonetheless even though nowadays it is often believed that the status of the initial cornerstone in Lithuania's system of institutions of research and higher education historically belongs to the University of Vilnius, the facts tell a somewhat different story. Institutionally speaking the present-day University of Vilnius actually began as the year of 1939 turned into 1940 when three faculties of VMU were transferred from Kaunas to Vilnius where the material base of the *de facto* already closed Polish State University of Stephen Bathory was located, a base largely consisting of the cultural inheritance from the old University of Vilnius that existed from 1579 until Czarist Russia closed it in 1832. Thus one can speak of the historical continuity of Vilnius University not in terms of an uninterrupted (and allegedly reconstituted) institutional development but only in terms of attempts to foster a historical cultural identity consisting of university-involving activities in Vilnius. Perhaps that is the reason why the centennial anniversary of the first Lithuanian alma mater in Lithuania was celebrated not as a significant jubilee on a national

scale but only as a fest of three institutions of higher education in Kaunas tied by real or alleged institutional connections to the first Lithuanian alma mater.

The fest was indeed commemorated with a multitude of events which it would be difficult to rank in order of their importance as signifying lasting value and genuine momentousness. This 78th issue of *Deeds and Days* that we finished preparing at the very end of 2022 does not seek to survey the whole jubilee year but only to highlight some of the memorable creators of, and participants in, the history of Vytautas Magnus University by bringing out just a few of their characteristic achievements and ideas.

Headlining this issue is a text prepared by the philosophy and history of ideas buff Mykolas Drunga for presentation at the 2022 VMU World Lithuanian University Symposium that took place on October 27–29. In our view the title given to his text by the author reflects its contents accurately. For it is not the academic institution in and of itself nor the period during which it formally existed that justifies the connotations of its hallowed name – it is the brilliance of the luminaries associated with it that accounts for the uniqueness of what is in fact Lithuania’s international university. Marija Gimbutas, Antanas Salys, Pranas Skardžius, Petras Jonikas, Antanas Klimas, Alfred Senn, Alfred Erich Senn, Algirdas Julius Greimas, and Algirdas Avišienis are just some of the personalities whose lives on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and whose contributions not only to Lithuania’s history, its language, and its culture, but also to globally recognized scholarship even to the point of changing its direction are all hallmarks of VMU’s intellectual leadership. Drunga’s personal acquaintance with many of these personalities gives his recollections color and warmth, making his text special and distinctive.

Another noteworthy text published in this issue has been written by the VMU archivist and historian Kęstutis Raškauskas, who endeavors to present the University of Lithuania’s academic staff and its creative output in a way that is also distinctive and somewhat unusual for historiography as practiced until now. Formally a publication of archival sources, Raškauskas’s presentation of archives currently scattered among eight memorial depositories is extraordinary for its generalizing quality and the attention it pays to personalities; it thereby transcends the usual boundaries of the archival genre. In his work Raškauskas gathers each of the personalities, their files, and their published works into an aggregate that generates a personal bibliography. This collection of bibliographies is the result of three years of painstaking labor; when supplemented with links to digitalized texts and made available to the public, it will gain additional value and undoubtedly give rise to further research.

In the section called *Polemics* we publish another article difficult to classify genre-wise by Mykolas Drunga in which he not only reviews Ignas Staškevičius’s book

Pasaulis jų akimis: pokalbiai iš esmės [*The world through their eyes: interviews on essential matters*] featuring lively conversations with diverse Lithuanian and foreign intellectuals on various topics mainly of their own choosing, but also launches a critical philosophical discussion with the book's author and his interlocutors on issues relating to human existence, time, perception, and characteristics of the universe.

This issue also contains three book reviews of the familiar sort. The historian Halina Beresnevičiūtė-Nosálová, a VMU alumna now teaching in the Czech Republic assesses the newest monograph from the pen of the historian and public administration analyst Saulius Pivoras entitled *Virtus Lituana* about political ideas in the historiography of Simonas Daukantas.

Daukantas may also be regarded as the originator of the concept of a school of higher education functioning in the Lithuanian language. The historian Kastytis Antanaitis reviews *Pirmoji lietuviška alma mater: trumpa klasikinio universiteto Kaune istorija*, the Lithuanian title of a book by Antanas Kulakauskas that appeared this year and which title might be rendered in English as *The first Lithuanian alma mater: a brief history of a classical university in Kaunas*. In his review Antanaitis concentrates on describing the current condition of academic autonomy.

Finally, the sociologist Dainius Genys calls attention to the work of the celebrated and highly productive historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius, whose newest study entitled in Lithuanian as *Spalvos ir juostos: lietuvių akademinės skautijos istorija 1924–2024* surveys the history, soon to reach a full hundred years, of the Academic Scout Movement, an extraordinary Lithuanian phenomenon with aspects highly important to the discipline of sociology.

The *Chronicles* section covers the fifth conference devoted to the famous European intellectual Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016) as well as the prehistory, reaching the first years of the re-established UVM, of the newly founded Digital Resources and Interdisciplinary Research Institute. We also publish an obituary devoted to a recently deceased member of the VMU community, the cybernetics and information science specialist, a principal organizer and leader of VMU's reestablishment and its longtime rector Vytautas Kaminskas (1946–2022), an obituary written by his colleague, the first elected rector Algirdas Avizienis.

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