

Summary

Monuments Commemorating Lithuania's Statehood: Cross Crafting in the Interwar Period

Having appeared with Christianisation, wooden cross-crafting monuments, a familiar part of the Lithuanian landscape, gradually spread from churches to waysides and farmhouses, village and town squares. The number of wooden memorial monuments particularly increased in the period after the abolishment of serfdom in the second half of the 19th century, and in the late 19th – early 20th century, these monuments became quite elaborate and acquired a large variety of shapes. Despite unfavourable historical circumstances (wars, tsarist Russian, Nazi and Soviet occupations), the tradition of erecting crosses has survived to our days. The Lithuanian cross-crafting tradition is included in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity, but its historical development has hardly been analysed and presented to society. One of the very important but practically unexplored aspects of this phenomenon is cross-crafting of the interwar period. It is this period starting from 1928 that became the focus of this book.

The monograph discusses the preconditions for the construction of monuments dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Republic of Lithuania – the previous experience of actualisation of traditional crosses and the situation of state-curated memorial heritage in Lithuania. The authors direct their attention to the government-initiated campaign of building cross-crafting monuments and the projects of wooden memorial monuments created by professional artists. An important stage of cross-crafting, when wooden crosses became monuments commemorating Lithuania's statehood, is discussed for the first time in the book. The aim of the research is to show how the anniversaries of independence were commemorated using the

already vanishing cross-crafting tradition in the interwar period. For this campaign the artist Adomas Varnas created projects of various cross-crafting monuments. The book reveals to what extent these projects drew on the cross-crafting tradition, which objects were used as prototypes, how many and what monuments were built according to these projects. Their iconography is discussed, and their original and typical features as well as features characteristic of ethnic regions are pointed out. The effect of the 1928 campaign on the development of cross-crafting in the interwar period and later in Lithuanian exile, in the Soviet period and in contemporary Lithuania is discussed. The results of the campaign – monuments carved and built according to the projects – are catalogued in the list at the end of the book. This list is an important source for the history of cross-crafting that provides iconographical and empirical data for further art critical, historical and ethnological research.

The research is concentrated on – but not limited to – the period from 1928 (the 10th anniversary of the Republic of Lithuania) to the Soviet occupation. Looking for an answer why the shape of a wooden cross was chosen to commemorate the anniversary of independence, the authors turned to the period of national revival (late 19th – early 20th century) and the first years of the independent state. The chronology of the research on the projects from 1928 and the dissemination of cross-crafting monuments built according to these projects also includes World War II and the second half of the 20th century – the situation of cross-crafting in Lithuania in the Soviet period and in exile, as well as the contemporary situation.

The objects of cross-crafting – crosses, column shrines, roofed pillar-type crosses and shrines, being symbols of faith, acquired additional symbolic meanings in the second half of the 19th century. Densely scattered in the landscape, Catholic crosses emphasised Catholicism prevailing in Lithuania and visually distinguished it among other territories under Russian rule, thus from the middle of the 19th century the tsarist authorities put a ban on building crosses without permission and punished those who disobeyed. Yet people were not intimidated by prohibitions, and due to the repressive actions of the Russian authorities, the cross acquired the meaning of political resistance. When the uprising of 1863–1864 was suppressed, prohibitions to build crosses became particularly strict, as the tsarist authorities regarded these religious monuments as a political and national manifestation of local inhabitants. Yet it was not easy to eradicate this tradition: even after the uprising, people defied the prohibitions and continued to build crosses in usual locations – at farmhouses, waysides and in fields. In the post-uprising period, the political aspect became distinct – people came to realise crosses as an expression of not only Catholicism as opposed to the official Eastern Orthodox religion, but also as a sign of national identity and a form of resistance.

In the period of national revival of the late 19th and early 20th century, Lithuanian intellectuals were intent on looking for signs and symbols that would become an emblem of their national identity. Many cultural figures of that time considered folklore the basis of national art. It was seen as a source of national identity and cultural uniqueness. Cross-crafting was distinguished among the types of folk art with an emphasis on its ornamentation, and in the first half of the 20th century, it became an identifying representative symbol of national identity and a metaphorical image of hardships that Lithuanians and Lithuania had to endure.

In the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century, monuments of national content and significance were built in many places of Europe and elsewhere, but in Lithuania such monuments could not appear due to Russia's occupational policy. In 1918, the restored young Republic of Lithuania had to overcome the deprivations caused by World War I and to protect its independence, and in these conditions self-representation through memorial monuments was not a top priority. The authors of the book show the rather poor panorama of memo-

rial monuments in the country before 1928, alongside noting the growing need to commemorate the idea of statehood by building monuments to the persons who embodied it (dukes, famous writers, public figures), those who perished for Lithuania's freedom or were dedicated to freedom and independence. The Catholic youth organisation "Pavasaris", the Riflemen's Union and the Society for the Improvement of Lithuania were the first to start building monuments in public places. The latter society organised the first wide-scale tree-planting festival in 1923, during which the Trees of Freedom were planted as monuments to the 5th anniversary of Lithuania's independence.

From 1923, society more actively discussed the necessity to build a landmark monument of the Nation, and different visions were proposed. It was decided to build the votive Church of the Resurrection as the main monument of the country's rebirth and freedom. This project outcompeted the idea of a monument to an unknown book smuggler (its proponents asserted that in its nature it would be unique in the world) among others. The construction of the church began, but there was no time to finish it as World War II broke out.

The campaign to create memorial sites by building monuments commemorating statehood intensified along with the preparation for the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the state: it was almost universally planned to build memorial signs in cities, towns and villages. The situation of public commemorative monuments testified that a large number of concrete or stone monuments of low artistic value were about to be built. For example, at that time obelisks or pyramids built from natural fieldstones, modelled after the monument to those who perished for Lithuania's freedom erected in the garden of the Kaunas War Museum in 1921, were quite popular. On the Government's initiative, the Chief Committee for the Preparation of the Festivities of the 10th Anniversary of the Regaining of Independence (hereinafter referred to as the Chief Committee) was founded in 1928. The director of the Kaunas War Museum, General Vladas Nagevičius, who distinguished himself as one of the most prominent fosterers of memory culture, was appointed its chair. He had already established the most important memory site in Lithuania that was constantly actualised by various rituals – the monument to those who perished for Lithuania's freedom in the garden of the War Museum.

He began to build ornate wooden crosses next to this monument and in this way materialised a symbolic image of Lithuania as a *Land of Crosses*. In the publication, the activity of the Chief Committee is discussed. The most important festive events of 1928 were focused on the days of the proclamation of Independence (February 16) and the beginning of activity of the Constituent Parliament (May 15). The Chief Committee recommended that the festivities of consecrating the Independence Monument should become an important highlight of May 15 (also called the Nation's Day), and alongside, promised its support for the construction committees by offering monument projects, which were aimed to improve the artistic form of the monuments. The Chief Committee and the majority of citizens thought that traditional cross-crafting monuments, which were considered signs of national identity already before that time, were perfectly suited to contemplate statehood – they reflected the Catholic spirit, the nation's artistic self-expression, and the material resources of villages and small towns. It was to the village residents that the entire activity of the Chief Committee was oriented, as it encouraged the revival of the already vanishing cross-crafting tradition. Thus even if commemorative monuments of various materials and forms were built, cross-crafting objects were proposed as one of the most suitable ways to memorialise the anniversary of independence.

The Chief Committee created a model of ceremonial public holidays with an important element and material sign – a memorial monument reflecting the Lithuanian tradition. The Committee initiated the campaign of constructing wooden crosses and sacral monuments of other shapes. Projects created by artists during this campaign finished the formation of the model of a *Lithuanian* monument. The artist Adomas Varnas was entrusted with the task of creating projects of cross-crafting objects. Having involved his students from the Kaunas Art School, in early 1928 he presented to the Committee projects of 35 traditional cross-crafting monuments (20 crosses, 8 column shrines, 6 roofed pillar-type crosses, and one suspended shrine) and a drawing of a fence, which were handed to the War Museum. There they were multiplied and the copies were disseminated in Lithuania. These projects were offered for the regions as examples reflecting the cross-crafting traditions of a certain area. It was suggested to call these monuments Crosses of Freedom

or Ten-Year Crosses, but the name of Independence Crosses finally took root.

Having taken interest in cross-crafting monuments and having photographed them for many years, Adomas Varnas distinguished their regional features and thus sought to give the shape and décor typical of a certain region to the projects of traditional monuments. The idea was to make drawings of memorial monuments having a construction and ornamentation characteristic of a certain locality, according to which local masters would produce a typical monument of that region, rather than to create something totally new. Each monument represented in the drawings had a concrete iconographic prototype or even several of them. Yet, while seeking to consolidate the image of a *Lithuanian*, i.e. lavishly decorated monument, ornaments in the drawings were often much richer, with a particular emphasis on plant motifs. The tulip motif, which became widespread in the interwar period as an attribute of the “national” style, was predominant. Usually the shafts of traditional crosses are very moderately decorated, but in the projects they look very ornate, which makes them quite distinctive.

The projects are very meticulously prepared and contain notes explaining to which region of Lithuania the monument is intended and who made the drawing. The scale is indicated and several projections of a monument are given. In some projects, iron tops, a plan of a canopy or separate décor details are drawn separately. Sometimes certain measurements are given or themes of the sculptures are indicated.

20 projects (11 crosses, 4 roofed pillar-type crosses and 5 column shrines) are devoted to the largest region of Lithuania, Aukštaitija (Northeastern Lithuania). The monuments proposed for the region reflected the specific features of local cross-crafting, were ornate and tall, and harmonised with the landscape. Their appearance was in line with the essence of the Lithuanian cross as a sign of national identity, thus the monuments took root not only in Aukštaitija. They were also built in other regions, above all Suvalkija (Southwestern Lithuania), which did not have enough of its own ornate crosses. However, the majority of monuments were erected in Aukštaitija, mainly according to the projects of three-tiered roofed pillar-type crosses typical of that region (No. 6 and 18) and a cross with an altar-shaped shrine characteristic of the eastern part of the region (No. 11).

For the Dzūkija (Southeastern Lithuania) region Adomas Varnas chose crosses of two shapes with the most customary form and décor of the region, supplementing it with new features (No. 23 and 26). Traditional crosses of the Suvalkija region were not noted for lavishness – very simple or moderately decorated monuments were built there. For the purpose of adorning this region for the 10th anniversary of the state, Varnas created four projects of crosses (No. 5, 8, 9 and 36). The residents of Suvalkija willingly built the monuments that were also proposed for Aukštaitija, Dzūkija and Žemaitija. The campaign of building crosses for the 10th anniversary of independence was highly successful in the Suvalkija region – more than 20 crosses and roofed pillar-type crosses were built there, and project No. 9 became particularly popular.

Eight projects were meant for the Žemaitija (Western Lithuania) region: 4 crosses (No. 12, 17, 20 and 32), 3 column shrines (No. 15, 24 and 34) and a roofed pillar-type cross (No. 22). The tradition of column shrines and shrines placed on the ground was very strong in Žemaitija, probably that is why the proposed projects of column shrines did not catch the interest of its residents (a single column shrine was built in Vieکشniai according to project No. 15), but a large number of crosses went up. The residents of Žemaitija might have found crosses more suitable as memorial monuments than column shrines, as the latter were usually much lower and not so lavishly decorated, while an ornate and tall cross (in the projects, some of them were 8 metres high) was both a visual landmark and a significant symbol for the anniversary of the state. Several projects of crosses meant for Žemaitija were implemented in other regions.

Research on the spread of monuments built according to the projects showed that the builders not always took account of the locality indicated in the projects, which resulted in a more rapid mixing of the regional features of cross-crafting monuments. Village communities, various organisations and even individuals built monuments according to these projects to commemorate not only the anniversaries of independence (in 1928, 1933 and 1938), but also other important dates, anniversaries and events in the life of the Church (missions, the Holy Years of 1933–1935, the anniversary of the christianisation of Lithuania in 1937). In the years of World War II, such monuments were built to pay homage to war and occu-

pation victims. Several monuments created according to these projects were dedicated to the memory of prominent figures; some tombstone monuments were built as well.

The most intense period of building wooden monuments according to the projects was the year 1928, when the 10th anniversary of independence was celebrated. According to the data collected by the authors of the book, approximately 50 crosses were built in Lithuania at that time, and in general, 112 wooden memorial monuments were built according to the projects of 1928 in the interwar and Second World War period with various intentions. The lack of information – photographs and factual data on wooden crosses built in that period (and destroyed in the Soviet times) – may account for an error of several dozen items.

Thus, the widely promoted idea of an ornate Lithuanian cross was successful – lavishly decorated cross-crafting monuments, not necessarily related to the projects, became widespread in the interwar period. The idea of an ornate wooden cross as a memorial object of the national tradition was also fostered by Lithuanians who had fled from Soviet occupation at the end of World War II. This vision of the cross persisted through the Soviet period and reached our times.

In exile, the idea of an ornate cross as a national symbol was implemented in monuments intended both for the exterior and the interior. Some of them are reminiscent of Adomas Varnas's projects, in particular, roofed pillar-type crosses and crosses depicted in projects No. 10, 11, 18, 26 and 28. Besides, Lithuanian artists in exile used stylised images of crosses and roofed pillar-type crosses from the projects as a sign of national identity in their paintings, prints, book illustrations, postcards, souvenirs, and decoration of tombstone monuments. A frequent motif is different variations of roofed pillar-type cross No. 22, while motifs of crosses No. 12, 17, 26 and 32 are also occasionally found.

Unlike in exile, in Lithuania the cross-crafting tradition in the Soviet period faced great difficulties. Not only was it prohibited to build new crosses, but also they began to be pulled down already in the years of the first occupation (1940). Yet, even though strongly suppressed, the cross-crafting tradition did not end in the Soviet period. The majority of Independence monuments that stood in public places and had already become the landmarks of villages and towns were dismantled. Only those that were built or transferred to churchyards or

cemeteries were preserved. However, new monuments created according to Varnas's projects did appear. A particularly large number of crosses were created according to project No. 9 by the cross-crafter Petras Tamašauskas. They were built in the churchyards of churches of the Vilkaviškis diocese in the Suvalkija region.

New monuments created according to Varnas's projects also appeared after the restoration of independence in 1990: roofed pillar-type crosses in Jonava (project No. 6) and Tauragnai (project No. 18), crosses in Sujainiai (project No. 12), Vilnius (project No. 12) and Raseiniai (project No. 32).

The campaign of 1928 and the spread of the idea of an ornate *Lithuanian* monument made an impact on the further development of traditional cross-crafting. It mostly manifested itself through décor, sometimes through imitation of forms or shapes. This phenomenon can be seen

in cross-crafting monuments built in exile, in the Soviet period, and even in our times. Varnas's projects made probably the greatest influence on the decoration of shafts of such monuments: it was due to the campaign of Independence Crosses that it began to flourish. In the 1930s, shaft decoration was still not very popular, but it became customary in the 1940s, in the Soviet period and today.

From 1928 onwards, crosses and monuments of other types made according to Varnas's projects are almost always built to commemorate ceremonial occasions and important events: anniversaries of churches or towns, the Holy Year, christianisation of Lithuania, as well as to pay tribute to those who fought for Lithuania's freedom – post-war partisans and the victims of January 13. It shows that the concept of an ornate Lithuanian cross as a sign of national identity and even statehood is deeply embedded in memory culture.