

INTERACTION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND CULTURE IN LITHUANIA, 1920–1955

Summary

The aim of this book is to analyse and evaluate the characteristics of the development of Lithuanian higher education and research institutions, as well as the cultural expression of their elites, from the establishment of the predecessor of the University of Lithuania, the Kaunas Higher Courses, in 1920 until 1955, when the restructuring of Lithuanian scientific institutions according to the Soviet organisational model was completed and cultural life underwent changes under the conditions of early de-Stalinisation. The study examines archival and published sources on the environment that shaped the socio-cultural educational orientation of the study disciplines at higher education institutions in independent Lithuania. The contribution of scholars to the promotion of the cultural life of the university community has also been analyzed. The book also discusses the trends of educational activity in society, the attitude of intellectuals towards the development of international cultural relations, the foundations of Lithuanian cultural identity in science, and the efforts to preserve it in Lithuania under the challenges posed by Soviet policy after the occupation in 1940.

The research employed the sources stored in the Central State Archives of Lithuania, as well as the manuscript collections of the Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Library of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, the Library of Vilnius University, and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. These sources provide an indispensable basis for studying the socio-cultural aims of the founders of higher education in Lithuania, the context of their activities and their academic and cultural connections, the creation of a framework for their scientific, educational and cultural endeavors.

The studied sources and published texts point to the significant organisational and scientific accomplishments of the scholars of the University

of Lithuania, founded in Kaunas in 1922. These scholars contributed not only to pedagogical work, but also to the development of a qualified, socially active, and democratic academic community. The principles of social solidarity, tolerance and other aspects of social progress, as well as the recognition of the value and rights of each individual, formed the basis of the theoretical ideas and public activities of intellectuals such as Vaclovas Biržiška, Petras Leonas, Albinas Rimka and others.

The cooperation of the academic faculty of Kaunas was encouraged by the initiation of public lectures, journalistic writing and the need for discussion and wider dissemination of ideas in society. Special attention was paid to the discourse on history and cultural development, innovations in these fields and the promotion of scientific knowledge among the public. A significant number of articles on these topics were published in cultural journals such as “Kultūra” and “Naujoji Romuva”. This marked the beginning of an intellectual movement for cultural education in society, driven by the academic intelligentsia. Scholars of the Humanities, chemists, mathematicians, and researchers in other fields also actively participated in this initiative. Public communication was dominated by the tendency to cultivate and strengthen the cultural identity of the Lithuanian nation, with a strong focus on the Lithuanian language, cultural traditions and heritage. These elements served as unifying factors within society in the intellectual expression of independent Lithuania.

The contributions of the academic elite of the University of Lithuania were significant in the organisation and development of international cultural relations. In this respect, the Kaunas faculty influenced not only the intellectual life of the temporary capital, but also that of other educational institutions, the country’s intelligentsia and society at large, thus promoting modernisation. The Lithuanian intelligentsia sought to expand international links by actively participating in the activities of cultural organisations, bringing together not only scientists but also cultural figures, artists and publicists. University scholars maintained close ties with the League of Nations’ International Committee for Intellectual

Cooperation and the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation in Paris, and participated in their events. Lithuanian scholars and cultural figures sought to strengthen relations with neighbouring countries and contributed to the establishment of cultural exchange organisations. Particularly strong links were maintained with Latvian intellectuals, leading to the organisation of joint cultural congresses and other events.

In the early Soviet period, following the occupation of Lithuania in 1940, university studies and scientific research had to be organised under difficult conditions of ideological and political pressure. In the post-war years, the newly established science institutes of the Lithuanian SSR focused primarily on applied and natural sciences. The structure and specialisation of these institutions followed the organisational model of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. However, efforts were made to gear research as much as possible to the needs of the country and to develop the qualifications of young Lithuanian scientists.

In the post-war years, there were increasing signs of ideological influence on scientific institutions and the cultural environment shaped by scholars. Although there were numerous cases of ideological and political collaboration under the conditions of the consolidation of the Soviet regime, researchers at Lithuanian Studies Institutes continued their work, preparing texts for publication, contributing to museum exhibitions and displays, and collecting cultural and historical artefacts that had been dispersed during the war. These efforts were driven primarily by dedicated scholars and cultural patriots of Lithuanian studies who sought to integrate scientific research with cultural memory and promote the wider dissemination of cultural heritage. Memoirs and other sources attest to the significant role of prominent intellectuals such as Juozas Balčikonis, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas, Konstantinas Jablonskis and Pranas Kulikauskas. Their scientific and educational contributions were crucial not only in organising academic work in the post-war period, but also in shaping the values, sense of responsibility and respect for cultural heritage of a new generation of researchers.