

Book Review

RESEARCH IN THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIAN ART

Paul Reklaitis. EINFUEHRUNG IN DIE XUNSTGESCHICHTSFORSCHUNG DES GROSSFUERSTENTUMS LITAUEN, "Wissenschaftliche Beitrage zur Ge-schichte und Landeskunde OsL Mittel-europas," Nr. 59. Marburg — Lahn, Herder Institut, 1962. 217 pp.

At the end of 1962, the Herder Institute in Marburg published the *Introduction to Research on Art in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania* by Dr. Paul Reklaitis. The author is a known Lithuanian art historian who has made significant contributions to Lithuanian and international studies and periodicals. The more extensive studies by Dr. Reklaitis were published in *Commentationes Balticae* (1955), in *Zeitschrift fuer Ostforschungen* (1959), and in the Lithuanian Encyclopedia (Boston, 1950-1963). The present book is part of a comprehensive historical study on Lithuanian art — *Monuments of Art in the Territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*, actually the last part of the projected work. In addition to the just published bibliography and survey of research in Lithuanian art history, the author has compiled about half of the projected volume, which has been in the making since 1954.

The *Einfuehrung in die Kunst-geschichtsforschung des Gross-fuerstentums Litauen* is limited to the survey of research and bibliography on the architectural and artistic monuments created up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The appearance of the book is very modest: it has been printed on a duplicating machine, as a paperback, and has no illustrations; 43 pages of the manuscript are devoted to a condensed history of research and the remaining 173 pages contain an extensive bibliography and a systematic index of items, localities, and names.

Dr. P. Reklaitis' work is written with the erudition and perspicacity that is characteristic of him. This is not merely a dry compilation of facts and literature, but rather a view of his field, considered in its proper political and social context. Where necessary, researchers are identified by bibliographical sketches. After a hundred and fifty years of work by almost one hundred specialists and art lovers, the collected body of research, widely scattered in literature, reveals the great artistic wealth of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The names and origins of the architects and artists, the dates of the artistic works themselves, and the history of their disappearance and restorations have been preserved.

The author divided his historical introduction into five articles: a.) the beginnings of research in the nineteenth century; b.) the period from 1831 till 1915; c.) the works of the Germans in Lithuania during the first World War; d.) the works of the Poles in Vilnius from 1920 to 1939; e.) works in independent Lithuania and a brief discussion of works during the Soviet occupation.

As is the case with every other field of learning, so it is with art: the most important thing is to study the art objects themselves or their remains in their original surroundings, to discover and examine the archival materials of that period which could enlighten the scholar about the artist himself, his experiences, environment, and other relevant items. The art historian must be a well-trained specialist, familiar with the period in question not only in Lithuania, but also in other countries, so that he may make use of broader sources for comparison. A number of the artists were foreigners who came from other lands and brought the traditions of one style or another which they adopted to the Lithuanian environment. In examining works of architecture, it is important to make an inventory, i.e. measure, sketch, and photograph that which has remained. Besides that, it is necessary to find the original blueprints of the architect and to add that which has been rebuilt, torn down, or added in the course of time. As an illustration, we can cite the studies of P. Galauné, V. Žemkalnis, and Ed. Budreika done on the architecture of L. Suoka-Gucevicius. In his earlier studies as well as in this book, the *Einfuehrung*, Dr. Reklaitis has methodically collected and synthesized the previously widely scattered facts obtained by different researchers and proceeds to show how, step by step, brick upon brick, the origins, the past, and the fate of Lithuanian castles, churches, mansions, and works of the ancient art have been reconstructed.

The survey begins with the Englishman John Saunders, who arrived in Vilnius in 1810, traveling from London via St. Petersburg. In addition to studying and restoring the older works of art, he was the first to lecture at the University of

Vilnius on the history of art. It is difficult to believe that the heritage of art which had accumulated in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for five centuries was not studied and documented until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Perhaps Dr. P. Reklaitis and his colleagues in the field of art history will be successful in obtaining even older sources which should be found in European archives. Further, considering only the more important art historians, one cannot ignore people such as M. Balinskis, Ig. Krasevičius, Dr. M. Homolickis, and the Tiškevičius brothers. In 1855, after founding an Archeological Commission and Museum, Count E. Tiškevičius branched out in his research beyond the boundaries of Vilnius, seeking to encompass the castle of Birzai. In 1870, Konst. Tiškevičius published a book about the river Neris and the works of art upon its banks. After the revolt of 1863, when cultural endeavors in Lithuania were especially suppressed, A. H. Kirkoras, a Tartar archeologist, gained the confidence of the Russian government and was able to continue his work. His book, which had five printings in Vilnius (1856-1889) did not lose its importance even later. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there appeared certain publications which tended to emphasize the importance of the Russian churches and their influence in Lithuania, minimizing the influence of Western thought and Roman culture on art in Lithuania (e.g. in the books of E. Batius-fcov). After the revolution of 1905, independent research was revived and became organized. The Lithuanian Scientific Society in Vilnius propagated Lithuanian national culture, folk art, village art, and language. The Poles of Vilnius formed their own Society of Friends of Science whose primary interests were the art of the cities and of country estates. A group of scholars, who had lived in exile in St. Petersburg, and published two magazines, *Kwartalnik Litewski* and *Litwa i Rus*, joined the Polish group in Vilnius.

P. Reklaitis' comments about the Germans in Lithuania during World War I are of special interest. Being unfamiliar with the local language and ignorant of the works of local scholars, the Germans felt they had discovered previously unrecorded works of Lithuanian art. For that reason, the ten articles by Germans which the author mentions in his book lack importance, for they were founded primarily on impressions and not facts. Perhaps an exception can be made in the case of B. Schmid who wrote a fairly good study on the castle of Trakai and its gothic style; he himself collected the data and measurements at the site.

Another worthwhile study, that of the buildings of Triciunas village, district of Vydziai, was done in 1917 by an engineer, H. Soeder, who incidentally is omitted in P. Reklaitis' book. This well-illustrated dissertation was published in Darmstadt. Although the study of building structure is not included in the scope of Dr. Reklaitis' works, some of the more important studies are included in the bibliography. As the Russians had tried to do previously, the Germans now tried to show the great influence of their culture in Lithuania (e.g., P. Karge). Later both the Lithuanians and the Poles were to make use of these German assertions. The Poles rejected the German hypotheses, while the Lithuanians and Belorussians cited the German claims in an attempt to negate Polish tendencies. This battle continues to this day, unfortunately not always with the goal of discovering the truth. Even in independent Lithuania, for a while, certain Lithuanian buildings of the Middle Ages were being ignored because of their alleged Germanic origins.

The major part of Dr. P. Reklaitis' work is devoted to studies of art history made during the period of Lithuanian independence. With the Polish occupation of Vilnius, which contains many of the ancient works of art, Polish experts began detailed studies of the city's art and architecture, under the auspices of the Polish government. These studies were published in *Ateneum Wilenskie*, 1923-1939, which Dr. P. Reklaitis considers to be the most important document concerning the art of the Grand Duchy. Here, and in other places, were printed the works of men such as Rev. J. Fijalek, architect J. Klos, prof. M. Merelowski (his studies alone comprise 20 items in the bibliography), S. Lorentz, E. Lopacinski, the Rev. P. Sledziewski, J. Jod-kowski. As previously, architecture received the most attention, while art took a secondary position. Dr. P. Reklaitis' comments about the research of these and other scholars are basic; he points out their theories, tendencies, and shortcomings.

While the newly independent Lithuanian state was being created, a new society was also forming — one oriented towards the nationalism of the rural areas and away from the polonized gentry. The author makes an accurate observation that under those conditions the art historians turned their interests towards the folk art of the villages, identifying nationalism with village life, and folk art with prehistoric and early Lithuanian culture. Later this prejudiced outlook changed with the works of scholars such as Dr. H. Kairiūkštytė-Jacynienė, prof. M. Vorobjov, and the well-known artist M. Dobužinskis; they were more oriented towards Western culture.

The author very appropriately credits prof. P. Galaunė with being the foremost contributor to the reconstruction of the history of Lithuanian art. He not only established museums and lectured at the University, but also found time for original research and for writing numerous books and articles. In his bibliography P. Reklaitis lists 28 works of Galaunė from the period 1920-1941, but one must note that he does not include numerous later works.

When considering the researchers who studied Lithuanian wayside crosses and chapels, A. Jarosevičius, A. Varnas, and prof. Ig. Končius, our author comments that "For a long time it has been accepted that the ornamental crosses are unquestionably a treasure of nationalistic art forms." It would be interesting to discover what opinion Dr. P. Reklaitis holds about the origin and stylistic characteristics of the ornamental crosses.

Having examined the works of the Archeological Commission Estab. 1919, of A. Tamošaitis, prof. J. Baltrusaitis, Rev. K. Jasėnas, Dr. J. Grinius, of the Vytautas the Great Museum of Culture and of the Museum of Church Art, the author devotes two pages to the works of art historians in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. The author reminds his readers that because of the

communist occupation, study of Lithuanian art was stifled until 1953, but that at present there are many new, young scholars in this field in Lithuania. At present research in the field of history of art and architecture is centered in the Lithuanian SSR Academy Sciences, the art museums in Kaunas and Vilnius, and the College of Architecture at the Polytechnical Institute of Kaunas.

Dr. P. Reklaitis finishes his highly valuable study by complimenting Lithuanian scholars in the Western World who have published many valuable articles and studies. This compliment can be reflected upon Dr. Reklaitis himself, for outside Lithuania, he is the most notable contributor in this field.

Commenting about his bibliography, the author states that it is not a complete listing of the studies done in the field, but merely a selection of those he felt were most important. Because of the demands of the publisher, the original bibliography of 1500 items had to be reduced to 944 entries. German translations are given for all titles. The list includes not only works in the history of art, but also in related fields, such as archeology, castles, ethnography, heraldry, and numismatics. A few items of little scholarly value, such as tourist brochures, are also inserted. In place of the brochures, it may have been wiser to include several other viewpoints which did not find room in the bibliography. Several errors in documentation and occasional typographical errors do not detract from the basic value of this pioneering work.

The soviet contention that nothing was done in independent Lithuania in the study of history of art and related subjects is erroneous; so is the contention that nothing is done- by Lithuanian art historians in the Western world. This is evident from the author's material in the survey and the bibliography. Finally, soviet and some Western researchers' opinion that the emigre scientists cannot be objective toward the work done under the soviet regime is negated by the author's survey of the more important work done in Lithuania after World War II.

The *Einfuehrung* will prove interesting not only to art historians, but to everyone who reads German and has an interest in the history of Lithuanian culture. In evaluating the works of art researchers, P. Reklaitis makes a notable distinction between those of greater and lesser value: he compliments those who justify their conclusions and lightly dismisses the propagandists, falsifiers, and compilers. Dr. P. Reklaitis has an unprejudiced and just approach in evaluating each scholar; although he has constructive criticism to offer about each work, he also is able to find elements of veracity and value.

DR. JURGIS GIMBUTAS