

LITHUANIAN ETHNOLOGIST ANGELĖ VYŠNIAUSKAITĖ 100

The 100th anniversary of a famous Lithuanian ethnologist – professor Angelė Vyšniauskaitė (15.05.1919 – 09.07.2006) was widely celebrated by the Lithuanian academic community. On this occasion, a seminar was organized at the Lithuanian Institute of History on May 15, 2019 – her 100th birthday. During this seminar, the scientific and pedagogical activities of the jubilee were remembered, as well as the history of Lithuanian ethnology.

Vyšniauskaitė worked at the Lithuanian Institute of History for 45 years (1948–1993). The ethnologist was the first head of the Ethnography Department (from 1996 – Ethnology, from 2006 Ethnology and Anthropology Departments) at the Institute of History (from 1990 – Lithuanian Institute of History). The forerunner of the Ethnology Department was the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, which was founded in 1952 and run by archeologist assoc. prof. dr. Pranas Kulikauskas. In 1962 a part of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography was transformed into the Ethnography Department. At the time it was headed by prof. habil. dr. Angelė Vyšniauskaitė.



The professor's scientific legacy consists of a large number of works of various kinds – 11 monographs and more than 700 scientific publications. Her work is characterized by a variety of scientific interests, but perhaps the focus has been on research of family and flax cultivation and their customs. In 1955 in Moscow, she defended her candidate's (now doctoral) dissertation "The Life of a Lithuanian Collective Farmers Family". Much space was devoted to the family in this work. This gave rise to further research of the Lithuanian family. In 1964, Vyšniauskaitė edited and together with her colleagues published the publication "Patterns of Lithuanian Ethnography" (Vyšniauskaitė 1964). She wrote the chapters of this book devoted to the traditions of the family, its household and customs, community and calendar customs (about a third of the total text of the work). The publication was also noticed by foreign scholars, which resulted in a number of positive reviews. This book is associated with the birth of ethnology as science in Lithuania. It is still widely quoted and does not lose its value till our days. In 1965, her study "The Lithuanian Collective Farmers Family" was published in USA in the 4th volume of "Soviet Anthropology and Archeology" (Vyšniauskaitė 1965). The book "Lithuanian Family Traditions" was published in 1967. It was the first book in Lithuania dedicated to the customs of the life cycle (Vyšniauskaitė 1967). The author continued her research of family customs by publishing works in the book series "From the Cultural History of the Lithuanians" and in separate publications dedicated to rural culture in Lithuanian regions.

In 1981 the study "Weddings in the Village of Suvalkija" was published in the book "Modern Village of Suvalkija. The Culture and Household of Lithuanian Socialist Village" (Vyšniauskaitė 1981: 100–155), in 1985 another study "Weddings in Žemaitija" – in the book "Modern Village of Žemaitija. Culture and Household of Lithuanian Socialist Village" (Vyšniauskaitė 1985: 122–189). In 1995, A. Vyšniauskaitė together with two authors (Petras Kalnius and Rasa Paukštytė) published a monograph on family research "The Lithuanian Family and Customs". A large part of this book was written by A. Vyšniauskaitė (Vyšniauskaitė & Kalnius & Paukštytė 1995). 2008 the second edition of this book was published posthumously (Vyšniauskaitė & Kalnius & Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2008). Her last major work also deals with wedding customs. In 2007, also after her death, her last study, "Weddings", was published in the book "Traditions". The book was dedicated to the cultural heritage of Northern Lithuania (Vyšniauskaitė 2007: 81–105).

Another area of scientific interests chosen by the researcher is Lithuanian flax cultivation research. The first study, "Lithuanian Peasant Flax Cultivation, was a scientifically mature work (Vyšniauskaitė 1977: 7–138). The study "Lithuanian Flax Cultivation Traditions" (Vyšniauskaitė 1983: 99–179) is not inferior in value. The international recognition of flax research was determined by the "Historical-Ethnographical Atlas of the Baltic Countries. Agriculture" (Istoriko-etnografinis atlas Pribaltiki. Žemledėliavė, 1985), which was well evaluated by the European ethnological community. A. Vyšniauskaitė was the main author of the section on flax cultivation and a member of the editorial board. On this subject in 1993 the habilitated doctoral dissertation was defended ("Lithuanian Flax Cultivation in the First Half of the 18th–20th Centuries: Inventory and Customs").

The ethnologist wrote quite significant works on other topics as well. After the restoration of independence, the study of calendar customs "Our Years and Celebrations" (Vyšniauskaitė 1993), had a great significance for Lithuanian society. In addition to traditional calendar holidays, it also analyzed public holidays. Undoubtedly, a historiographical work "Lithuanians in the Historical Sources of the 9th–Mid-19th C." will be included into the history of Lithuanian ethnology, too (Vyšniauskaitė 1994). In popularizing Lithuanian ethnic culture, the professor's book "Lithuanian House", published in 1999, boasts its informativeness and persuasiveness. This book covers all daily and festive life, beliefs and customs and rituals taking place in Lithuanian homes.

Thus, the way of life of an ethnologist is not only scientific, but also pedagogical activities. As much as several generations of ethnologists can call her their teacher. Under her supervision, doctoral dissertations were defended by Izidorius Butkevičius (1956), Antanas Daniliauskas (1965), Irena Regina Merkienė (1966), Marija Mastonyte-Miliuvienė (1967), Vitalis Morkūnas (1968), Giedrė Tallat-Kelpšaitė-Niunkienė (1968), Janina Morkūnienė (1972), Rasa Paukštytė (1997), Rasa Račiūnaitė (1997). The professor was also an opponent of many doctoral dissertations and a member of dissertation commissions. Professor A. Vyšniauskaitė dedicated a lot of inexhaustible energy and love to the promotion of ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University. The professor's activity was important both in developing the science of ethnology in Lithuania and in promoting and nurturing ethnic culture. In 1997 Professor Angelė Vyšniauskaitė was awarded the Order of Gediminas of the 4th degree, in 1998 she was awarded the prestigious national Jonas Basanavičius Prize.



Seminar 15.05.2019 at the Lithuanian Institute of History.
Photograph by Žilvytis Šaknys 2019.



Petras Kalnius and Rasa Paukštytė during the seminar 15.05.2019.
Photograph by Žilvytis Šaknys 2019.

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