

## INTERVIEW WITH LONG-TERM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *KNYGOTYRA*, PROFESSOR DOMAS KAUNAS (FULL MEMBER OF THE LITHUANIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES)

*Knygotyra* (“Book Science”) is one of the longest existing scholarly journals among the periodicals published by Vilnius University. It has been in print since 1961. Until 1969, it was published under the title *Bibliotekininkystės ir bibliografijos klausimai* (“Issues of Librarianship and Bibliography”). During 1981–1991, as part of the series “Research Work of the Higher Education Institutions of the Lithuanian SSR,” it appeared in two volumes: one devoted to the problems of book history, publishing and distribution, and the other – to issues of libraries, bibliography, and information science. In 1990, the first volumes were turned into *Knygotyra*, a serial published by Vilnius University, while the second volumes were published independently under the title *Informacijos mokslai* (“Information Sciences”). Since 2003, *Knygotyra* has been regularly published twice a year as a scholarly journal. For decades, it has been referred to in Lithuanian and international databases as an open access, peer-reviewed journal and, since 2018, it is included into the Elsevier Scopus database. Domas Kaunas is the most experienced member of the Editorial Board and has been an Editor-in-Chief till 2019. Docent Genovaitė Raguotienė had been in this position for three years (1970–1973), Professor Levas Vladimirovas – for fifteen years (1974–1989), when Domas Kaunas subsequently joined the editorial board in 1979 and served as the Editor-in-Chief for three decades.

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*How did you join the board of Knygotyra? What were your motives for participating in the editorial work of this publication?*

It was accidental. I had been involved with the team of *Knygotyra* involuntarily: one day, Vytautas Gudaitis, who was working at the now almost forgotten Research Laboratory of Information Problems, had duly informed me that a decision was made to assign me the job of the responsible secretary for *Knygotyra*. There were two reasons given: first, Levas Vladimirovas, Head of the Laboratory and Editor-in-Chief of the journal, needed an assistant; second, I was suitable for the job, as I had just defended a dissertation on press history and acquired the degree of a research candidate (the equivalent of a PhD). I did not know who had made the decision, but I guess that it was the Editor himself and the members of the editorial board close to him. I did not have any experience and was not ready for the job, so I had to listen and learn. I had some understanding of the work, since while working on my dissertation, I had written some papers and communicated with the Editor-in-Chief, the reviewers, and the copy editor. L. Vladimirovas was tolerant of my ignorance and treated me, as a young scholar, in a friendly and democratic manner.

*Could you identify certain stages in the life of the journal? What is the difference between the Knygotyra of L. Vladimirovas's times and that after 1990, when the interdisciplinary communication sciences were institutionalized, and the Faculty was established at Vilnius University?*

We know well enough that book science in Lithuania did not begin with *Knygotyra*. Its beginnings can be found in the old Vilnius University, its continuation in the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, and it has even progressed in Vilnius University during the Soviet times, which are so sceptically viewed today. The achievements and innovations of book research used to reach us from the large research centers of the republics of the now-defunct USSR as well as from those of foreign countries, though much less. The first qualitatively new stage was marked by the establishment of *Knygotyra* in 1970 on the basis of several academic serials. It became a conceptual annual volume of research studies. Its birth coincided with the efforts of Doc. Genovaitė Raguotienė, a library researcher and then Vice-Dean of the Faculty of History, to strengthen a new direction of research, improve its level, and consolidate the research efforts of a growing collective of university researchers. An important stimulus was the return of L. Vladimirovas from the post of the Director of the UN Dag

Hammarskjöld Library. He had revealed new shifts in research. Scientific information disciplines related to librarianship, bibliography, and book science were taught at Vilnius University. I am sure that his authority and international experience was the foundation for the further development of the journal. Not everyone had the power to bring this during the Soviet times, as we did not have any live contact with the West. Of course, the most favorable conditions for the journal were created through the restored statehood of Lithuania. This was the main reason for the increased internationalization, without which research journals (or other publications) could not gain the recognition of the academic community.

*What are the characteristics of the journal Knygotyra in comparison with other book science publications in Lithuania and in the world? What were and are the examples of high-quality scholarly journals for you? Why do you appreciate them?*

This question requires a more detailed answer. We were growing slowly, but our steps became wider and quicker. In Soviet times, we were scanning the horizons as much as we could, comparing ourselves to the available publications, talking to colleagues we met here or while travelling abroad. It is self-evident that the most accessible example of the book science periodical of the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the collection of papers from Moscow titled *Книга: исследования и материалы* (“Book: Research and Materials”). It was edited by famous Russian scholars and many others from the former USSR and other similar countries. They had all collaborated in producing it. We also had easy access to the journal *Studia o książce* (“Studies about the Book”), published by the Polish Academy of Science. It was well-funded by the Polish Ministry of Education, and experienced authors were involved in its production, only the format was not very attractive. The journal’s layout was of low quality, and the illustrations were quite modest. Polish scholars often noticed significant publications by Lithuanian researchers and used to review them. We got in touch with some of these scholars, especially from the Krakow and Wroclaw Universities, after 1990, and we have maintained these relations still. Some of them became personal friends.

Once, when participating in a book science conference organized by Latvian State Vilis Lacis Library, I met Aleksej Apinis, Inara Klekere, Andris Vilks, and other lecturers of the University of Latvia and employees of the rare publications department of their library. They have presented to me the published issues of the annual volume of *Bibliotēku zinātnes aspekti* (“Aspects of Library

Science”), and since then I continued to collect each new issue myself. Most of the articles were discussing the issues of library and bibliography science, but there were some on the topics of book science. They were written in Latvian and Russian with obligatory abstracts in other languages. The scholars in Riga sometimes published articles relevant to Lithuanian book scientists, so we invited them to publish in *Knygotyra*. Andris Vilks, who knows Lithuanian, was especially active. As Latvian articles were better illustrated than those of our *Knygotyra*, we attempted to catch up with them in this respect. At present, this publication of the National Library of Latvia is a prestigious standard to follow. The latest volume of 2019 is especially solid and relevant and deals in depth with the topic books and reading in Latvia before 1945. It is well-designed, complete with many illustrations, and is printed on high-quality paper.

My acquaintance with the German book science periodicals started back in the times of the German Democratic Republic, thanks to Prof. Friedhilde Krause. She favored Lithuanians greatly. I later learned that her maiden name was Lithuanian – Jonat, and that her grandparents lived in the East Prussian region called Lithuania Minor, not far from Gumbinnen (Lith. Gumbinė), and possibly did not speak German. Professor Krause helped me publish my first article in the German library science journal. But at that time I was not yet introduced to the grand fundamental yearbook of German book science titled *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*. I handled one of its volumes in 1992 as an author of one of the articles published there. When I travelled to work in the Gutenberg Museum Library in Mainz, I got the previous ten volumes as a present. They were exceptionally heavy, and I barely managed to drag them to Vilnius. The recognition of this publication rests on the authority of internationally known scholarly authors, exemplary research, and its professional publisher – the German Gutenberg Society, which fosters the traditions of the German *black art*. The international *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* was established as a scholarly source of old book printing and book science studies in 1926 and is still alive.

European bibliophile periodicals also influenced *Knygotyra*. The bibliophile study area is an auxiliary discipline of book science. Its periodicals are characterized by a high academic level of their editorial boards, acknowledged authors, such as scholars, cultural workers or writers, and the publishing of studies, reviews, overviews, and numerous illustrations representing rare and valuable print or manuscript heritage. We also have such an example in our XXVII *knygos mėgėjų metraštis* (“XXVII Book Lovers Yearbook”), with two volumes published in 1933 and 1937. The book *Philobiblon or the Love of Books* by Richard de Bury (translated to Lithuanian in 2001) has provided an incentive

to investigate the contents of bibliophile journals anew. The author was a monk and the bishop of Durham and had written the book using a goose feather in 1345. Irena Jackevičienė translated it from Latin, and Elona Marija Ložytė produced its highly aesthetic design. The book has been a real ornament of the Vilnius Book Fair of that year. Since I was involved in its publishing project, I had to get acquainted *de visu* with the most important bibliophile publications of Europe and other countries. In the times of dynamic communication, there was no problem to acquire them, and my shelves were soon full of publications on book art and graphics, collecting, personal libraries, especially bibliophile ones, rare book scholarly journals, such as the German *Marginalien* (Wiesbaden) and *Philobiblon* (Stuttgart), the English *The Book Collector* (London), the French *Bulletin de Bibliophile* (Paris), the Swiss *Librarivm* (Zurich), the Dutch *Quaerendo* (Leiden), and others. After the demise of the Soviet Union, Russian bibliophile publishing has been revived, and the hunters after the rarities of Silver Age began to run wild. They were really repressed during the Soviet times. The bibliophile journals freely published the ideas of scholars who disregarded the ranking and citation measures. This new environment fostered new acquaintances and topics, different quality requirements, and an organizational working style. We have organized an international book science conference in 2001 dedicated to the bibliophile study area and, on the basis of the presented papers, published one of the volumes of *Knygotyra* (2002, Vol. 38). The topic was timely, and apart from Lithuanians, there were participants from Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Russian, and the Lithuanian community from the USA. They gave reports at the conference and published articles. The objects of the investigation also included collecting as well as book culture and the history and fate of personal book collections. Thus, Lithuanian book science has taken over personal library research from the field of librarianship.

*What were the circumstances, in your opinion, that had such a positive influence and helped develop a serial publication to the present level – a periodical journal significant in the Baltic region, issued twice a year and reaching the size of 30–40 press sheets annually?*

To begin with, we needed incitement and speeding up. Such an incitement has been provided by the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Lithuanian book celebrated in 1997. The Executive Council of UNESCO has decided to include the anniversary of the first Lithuanian book into the 1996–1997 calendar of outstanding cultural events of the world. The Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania announced 1997 to be the Year of the Lithuanian Book. We used

the opportunities of this anniversary well. Lithuania has never before experienced any book festival of this scope. It was headed by the Governmental Commission, which became active one year before the celebration and finished a year after it. The humanities scholars, creators, cultural and educational workers, representatives of churches were all included in the Commission. Many far-sighted decisions were influenced by politicians, who were unusually supportive. Two prime ministers and the Seimas chairman Vytautas Landsbergis acted as the chairmen of the Commission (at that time the turnover of the highest politicians was quite high). The state of the activities of the anniversary was monitored by the President of the Republic of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas, who resided in the Seimas Palace at that time. He occasionally wished to discuss these issues in his office. The results I would like to say without exaggeration were joyful and encouraged us to accelerate the rate of our work. In three years, 50 books in book science, philology, cultural history, and other areas were published, national and international conferences were organized. The works included in the governmental program were financed generously and in time, the books were sent to libraries and schools as well as to the supporters of Lithuania abroad.

It is self-evident that the program included the organization of an international book science conference (1997). Other conferences were organized as well: the Baltic Researchers' Conference, the Conference on the Renaissance and Reformation Age Issues, and the International Mažvydas Readings. We invited Lithuanian and foreign scholars to this book science conference. All participants had enough time to convert their conference papers to scholarly articles and even to write new ones. They were published in a thematic issue of *Knygotyra* (1998, Vol. 25(32)). The introductory piece "In the Service of the Word" was written by a member of the Commission, the academic Justinas Marcinkevičius. The authors have come not only from Lithuania, but from Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, and Israel. The main focus was, of course, Martynas Mažvydas and the first Lithuanian book, but also the pioneers of publishing in other national languages, the creators of book culture and its traditions, and comparative book history. Inspired by the enthusiasm, we have also prepared and published the first encyclopaedic dictionary in Lithuanian language called *Book Science*. Together with the specialists from the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics led by academic Adolfas Laimutis Telksnys, we have produced the first digital book in Lithuania – a multimedia compact disc "The Year of the Lithuanian Book." Today, I am surprised that we have managed to do all this.

The volume of *Knygotyra* devoted to the anniversary of the first Lithuanian book was almost 500 pages in size. This is still an unsurpassed achievement that has emboldened us. Since 2002, we started publishing two volumes of *Knygotyra* annually. The volumes 38 and 39 were published that year and so are likewise continued to present day. We receive funding for 40 press sheets, but saving on the publishing, we managed to issue volumes up to 45 sheets. The authors were never lacking.

*What about the international editorial board – how much did its members help in shaping the identity of Knygotyra? What is their greatest achievement?*

The editorial board was augmented and quite dynamically changed since the already mentioned anniversary volume in 1998. We were watching and selecting new members from the most active and perspective journal authors and book science conference participants. We also have used our network as our mobility in foreign countries increased. The influence of foreign editorial board members was felt in the quality of our content, the relevance and innovativeness of the publications, and a more coherent application of classical and modern research methods. I have browsed through the volumes and noticed that throughout several years, some recognized names were listed among the editors and authors, among them professors Liivi Aarma, Klaus Garber, Konrad Umlauf, Engelber Plassmann, Krzysztof Migo, and Tom Wilson. We can see the prevalence of German scholars because of my close relations with the scholars in the united Germany. It was important to see among the authors not only those listed above, but also such well-known European book researchers as Paul Raabe. Krzysztof Migon, Professor at Wroclaw University, has aided the journal a lot. Many of his colleagues have become our collaborators. Some of them were related to Lithuania through their families. During the latest decade, we see among the members of the editorial board and authors Viestur Zanders (Latvia), Tiiu Reimo (Estonia), Ilkka Mäkinen (Finland); during the last five years we have attracted scholars from different fields of humanities, such as Leslie Howsam and Josée Vincent (Canada), Guido Michellini (Italy), Miha Kovač (Slovenia), Christiane Schiller (Germany), Adriaan van der Weel (the Netherlands). Of course, not every one of them stayed with us for long, but all left their footprints. It is a pity that due to the strained international politics we have lost connections with Russian book researchers. This loss is, to some extent, compensated by our colleague from Belarus, Larisa Dovnar. While we were preparing the latest volumes, Ukrainian colleagues have joined the net-



work. As we are working closely with the book researchers from the Western and Eastern countries, we can see the essential differences in the research problem areas and differences of qualifications. Thus, we have an opportunity to identify the cases worth following. It is clear that the dynamic changes in the editorial board have benefited the quality of the journal, the relevance of the publications and the scope of research topics. What was gained by our partners from other countries is better known to them. I have not enumerated our own scholars, but it will not be an exaggeration to say that they are the spine of the journal, ensuring its research direction. We are conducting and publishing research on the publishing industry and book culture of Lithuania as well. Our common efforts and creativity have allowed to reach the level of quality that has brought *Knygotyra* into the well-known Elsevier Scopus database, which has been registering our publications since 2018.

*Knygotyra has survived for decades. What episodes in its publishing history are the most memorable for you?*

There were achievements, but also many tensions and unpleasant situations. During the Soviet times, one tried to avoid incrimination of ideological faults – every issue was checked by a preventive censorship institution masked under the name of the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press. I remember well what happened to the material from the all Union conference “Pranciškus Skorina and Some Issues of Book Development in the Soviet Union” in the *Knygotyra* volume of 1975. It ended up not only in the hands of the “protectors of the State secrets,” but also in the infamous Institute of the History of the Communist Party. They had felt the threat of awakening nationalism. We were waiting and waiting and there was no decision or condemnation. At last, the Editor-in-Chief had played an inventive game. Levas Vladimirovas had received a copy of an article in a Canadian emigration magazine. There, it was written that the organizers of the Conference are persecuted and even punished. The Editor-in-Chief had put it on the table of the director of the Party Institute and asked him to deny the “rumors of the bourgeois nationalists.” It worked, and the permission to print the material was given. It was published in *Knygotyra* four years after the conference, in Volume 7 (14) of 1979 and in the Russian language. I cannot say how much the content was changed or abridged, as I have not seen the original articles and only learned about this incident from my cautious conversations with L. Vladimirovas. He had the courage to defend the authors of *Knygotyra*, especially those who investigated the press of the national movement. He was born in Lithuania (Telšiai),



in a mixed family, which moved to Russia at the start of the war. He fought in the war, was a member of the Communist Party, and had held a high post in the United Nations in New York. It is a pity that L. Vladimirovas has not left any written memoirs about his experiences regarding the publishing of *Knygotyra*.

*What influences the significance and recognition of  
a humanities scholarly journal in the modern world?*

Without *Knygotyra*, Lithuanian book science and its school would not have the same value. You have most probably understood that the recognition did not arrive by itself. An effort and sometimes a struggle were required for the journal to earn its place under the sun. A fight will be inevitable in the future too, especially with the bureaucratic machine of Lithuanian science policy. It will take constant, purposeful, and thoughtful change, an observation of the general trends of book science development in the world, and an understanding of the perspectives of innovation. It is important to work permanently with foreign partners. If they trust us, they will sincerely share their theories, new research problems, and methods, as well as their experience of national research schools. We cannot close ourselves in the everyday life of our own country and its research circles. At present, the state emphasizes applied research. We are in a favorable position here: many topics, especially in the areas of preservation of cultural heritage or publishing, can be adapted for applied research. On the other hand, we represent research on Lithuanian matters, the importance of which cannot be denied by any government. It would also be a far-sighted move to increase the collaboration with scholars working in relevant areas of study in other universities and state research institutes, especially in the Lithuanian Culture Institute, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, the Institute of Lithuanian Language, and the Lithuanian Institute of History. These partners could help us occupy any underexploited niches. I can also add that in comparing *Knygotyra* with other journals, I see the original design and layout as a valuable feature of the journal. It is necessary to preserve it. As usual, we illustrate the published material very little. In terms of content, one should remember that one professionally selected and qualitatively presented illustration says much more than a couple of densely printed text pages.

*What would you wish to interdisciplinary book science and the scholarly journal Knygotyra that represents it?*

I would wish that book science be a progressive and forward-looking field and that the journal is considered attractive and modern, mobilizing the camp of researchers, supported by professionals and students who represent the new generation of scholars and who will continue our work. Scholarship requires commitment. The ones who will choose it must rely on the past capital and modern experience, keenly observe the changes and innovation, and boldly undertake tasks requiring huge efforts – once implemented, this will bring recognition and self-confidence. I wish that the fourth Editor-in-Chief of *Knygotyra* possesses foresight, mobility, persistence, strength, and attracts good team members.

*Thank you for the conversation.*

Interviewed by *Aušra Navickienė*