

200 Years of Lithuanian Anthropology

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In October 27 – 30, the international conference »200 years of Lithuanian anthropology: modern trends, history, relation to medical practice and humanities« dedicated to 425th anniversary of Vilnius University took place in Vilnius. This is a good occasion to look at the history of anthropology in this country in general.



Fig. 1. Jędrzej Sniadecki (1768–1838)

Lithuanian physical anthropology developed quite changably, having its ups and downs, connected with the history of the country: wars, the periods of occupation and independence. The history of Lithuanian anthropology can be divided into following periods: initial (the 1st half

of the 19th c.), until independence of Republic of Lithuania (the 2nd half of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c.), the time between two world wars, and the post-war, or the present period.

We can trace the beginning of anthropology in the cradle of all Lithuanian science – old Vilnius University, and it is connected with the name of a famous physician Jędrzej Sniadecki. He was born in Zhnin, Poland, studied medicine, chemistry and anatomy in Krakow, Pavia, Bologna, Edinburgh, London and Vienna. Being in Edinburgh, the idea to write his famous work »The theory of organic beings« arose. In 1797, Jędrzej Sniadecki was invited to Vilnius University, that was called at that time the Main School of Lithuania (Figure 1). The 1st part of his book »The theory of organic beings«¹ was published in 1804, and this year considers to be a source of anthropology in this country (Figure 2). Though in this book and in later publication »Remarks on physical education of children«² Jędrzej Sniadecki does not use the term »anthropology«, nevertheless, he analyzed the questions that were the subject of physical anthropology. He dealt with man's place among animals, and with racial questions, described age differences in the physical structure of human body, and set

forth a periodization of human life that has not lost its scientific value to the present. J. Sniadecki suggested some original ideas on the constitution and influence of natural and social environment upon the human body. Similar questions were tackled in the lectures of B. Jundzill and M. Homolicky, also the professors of Vilnius University. In the handbook »Anthropology« by J. Jasinski³ published in Vilnius in 1818, one can find a typical contemporary view as the whole complex of knowledge about man. By the way, the book presents some interesting data on the variants of new-born body length and the chronology of maturation. It is interesting to point out, that dissertations on anthropological questions were being de-

was closed by Russians, following the uprising of 1831 Lithuania lacked a scientific center that could organize anthropological investigations. In addition, the ban of Lithuanian publications in the Latin alphabet and other repressions that followed the uprising of 1863, impeded the development of science in general. Anthropological investigations were carried out either by foreigners or by single local enthusiasts. The 1st investigation specifically concerned with anthropology of the Lithuanians was the dissertation by I. Brennsohn »Zur Anthropologie der Litauer«⁴, defended in Tartu (then Dorpat) University (Figure 3). He examined 60 males and 40 females in Zarasai district. Some contributions to Lithuanian anthropology were made by the Polish Anthropological commission, that investigated Poland proper and the territories which were formerly (until 1795) part of

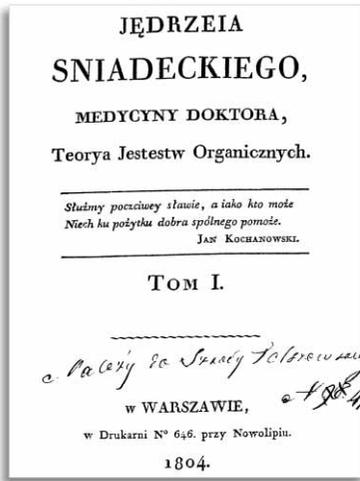


Fig. 2. »Theory of organic beings« by J. Sniadecki

fended at that time in Vilnius University.

The 2nd period coincided with the formation of modern anthropology, based on anthropometry. The time was not propitious for the development of science in Lithuania, for after Vilnius University



Fig. 3. »Anthropology of Lithuanians« by I. Brennsohn

Lithuanian- Polish state. The commission delegated J. Talko-Hryniewicz, a Polish anthropologist of Lithuanian origin, to investigate the inhabitants of Lithuania and Western Russia. He made several publications, the most interesting of them are following: »The townsmen of Vilnius at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th c.«⁵, »The Lithuanian noblemen«⁶, »The cemetery of Lankiskiai«⁷ etc. The last work is quite interesting, for 4 trepanned skulls were described. The anthropology of Prussians, the extinct western branch of the Balts, was investigated mostly by German writers on the basis of craniological findings (Wittich, Lissauer, Kupffer and Bessel-Hagen, Virchow).

A new rise of our anthropology began at the end of the 19th c. and was connected with the name of Jonas Basanavičius, a physician, a prominent social and political figure, a member of Vienna and German anthropological societies (Figure 4). Upon emigration to Bulgaria, he published »The materials on Bulgarian Sanitary ethnology«⁸ in 1891, and he is considered to be the founder of Bulgarian anthropology. He interpreted anthropology as a part of ethnology, so important for national rebirth, and encouraged



Fig. 4. Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927)

educated young generation to investigate physical peculiarities of our people. Povilas Visinskis, a well known cultural worker, being a student of Petersburg University, wrote an essay »Anthropological characteristics of Samogitians« in 1898⁹, J. Baronas measured 100 peasants¹⁰, D. Bukantas examined 1000 persons in the Zarasai district¹¹, Petras Avizonis, in his dissertation on blindness¹², presented head measurements of more than 5 thousands persons. Thus during this period, morphological information on the population was collected and premises concerning ethnogenesis of our people were established. Objective figures collected before of intensive migration are of particular value. They help us to understand how much our population was influenced by the secular trend of growth.

After the 1st World War, when Vilnius was annexed, the cultural and scientific center was Kaunas, a temporary capital of Lithuania. When the university was founded in 1922, after a long period, the country had again a scientific institution that favored the development of human morphology. Anthropological investigations were mostly carried out in the Anatomical institute of the Medical Faculty under the guidance of Jurgis Žilinskas, an anatomist and surgeon, who studied anthropology in Munich under Rudolf Martin (Figure 5). The majority of works carried out by the Anatomical institute dealt with craniology. The data of about one thousand skulls were presented in the most prominent publications »Characteristics of the Iron Age man in Lithuania«¹³ and in »Crania Lithuanica«¹⁴, the first ethnogenetical generalizations were made in the book »The ancestors of the Lithuanians«¹⁵ By the way, these craniologists revealed the phenomenon of brachycranization. Some publications on serology and somatology appeared at this time. Over 5 thousands of soldiers as well as over 1 thousand persons in Lithuania

Minor (Klaipeda region and East Prussia, now Kaliningrad region of Russia) were measured. The 1st auxological investigations were carried out by E. Slonimskis and R. Sliupas at this time. Therefore the Kaunas period was the 3rd peak of our anthropology after J. Sniadecki and J. Basanavicius.



Fig. 5. Jurgis Žilinskas (1885–1957)

After 2nd World war ethnogenetical investigations, that flourished in Kaunas, were unpopular and unwelcome. That is why Salezijus Pavilionis, a pupil by J. Žilinskas, directed his attention to auxology, which was connected with medical practice in general and pediatrics particularly (Figure 6). Prof. Salezijus Pavilionis founded the Lithuanian school of auxology, and the Department of Anatomy, Histology and Embryology (now of anthropology) became a coordination center of investigations in this field. The peculiarities of growth and development of children from newborns till puberty were characterized, the national standards of growth and sexual maturation were established^{16,17}. At the same time, all literature on physical appearance and peculiarities were registered in the »Bibliography of Lithuanian anthropolog«¹⁸. However, those investigations had not only applied



Fig. 6. Salezijus Pavilionis (1919–1998)

character: some theoretical problems, such as secular trend, its causes and perspectives, inhabited and environmental factors of growth and maturation, were being solved. Nowadays, auxological examinations are being carried out under the guidance of Janina Tutkuvienė, a pupil of professor S. Pavilionis. She concentrated her efforts to check up the peculiarities of maturation of modern generation, especially of girls. Her recommendations are accepted as a state norm by the Ministry of Health of our state¹⁹.

The historical anthropology (so called ethnic anthropology) came to itself at the 7th decade of the last century, when over 10 thousands of crania and about 1 thousand of entire skeletons from Lithuania and adjacent territories were examined. Due to those examinations, all periods of Lithuanian ethnogenesis, namely, the coming of the 1st inhabitants, the invasion of Indo-Europeans and the forming of the Balts, as well as differentiation of the Baltic tribe unions and forming of physical peculiarities of the Lithuanian nation, were elucidated (Figure 7). At the same time Irena Balciuniene accomplished a large odontological investigation

of historical and modern populations. She examined all regions of local inhabitants as well as fossil materials and came to a conclusion, that Middle European odontological type of modern Lithuanians has its deep roots. For ethnogenetical and odontological investigations, the authors have won a state prize in sciences²⁰. On the fossil materials, Rimantas Jankauskas is examining palaeopathology and palaeoecology of Lithuania's inhabitants.

Jonas Vytautas Nainys, a professor of Kaunas Medical University, founded the school of forensic anthropology. His work »The identification of a person according proximal limb bones«²¹ presented equations for restoring of stature of inhabitants in this country. This work was followed by Antanas Garmus, who investigated other parts of skeleton from the point of view of forensic medicine²².

A special need of applied anthropology arose during the last decade, when the graves of KGB victims were discovered in Tuskulenai, Vilnius. 724 individuals were excavated and 45 of them identified. The main work did professor Rimantas Jankauskas. In the other suburb of Vilnius, the Siaures miestelis, a massive grave of the Napoleon's warriors was found out. The remnants of over 3000 personas were examined here.

At the same time, specialists of human genetics under the guidance of Vaidutis Kucinskis carried out serological investigations on the large scale. All regions of this country were examined and

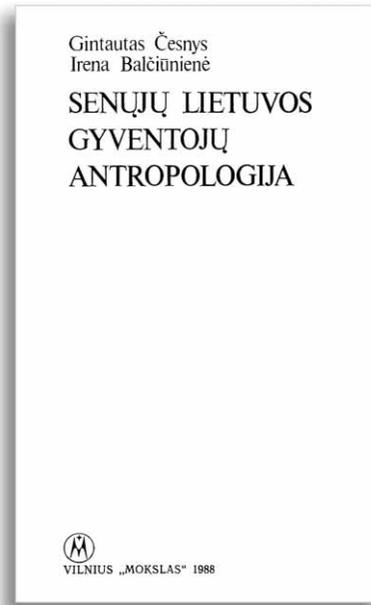


Fig. 7. »Anthropology of ancient inhabitants in Lithuania«, which was awarded National Prize for science

the data were treated against the European background²³.

It is necessary to point out that Vytautas Urbanavicius, a well known Lithuanian archaeologist, made over 30 plastical reconstructions according the skull by method of Michail Gerasimov. The last his work is a portrait of Barbora Radvilaite, the Great Duchess of Lithuania and the Queen of Poland.

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