

PERSONAL SONGBOOKS: IMPRINTS OF IDENTITY IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITHUANIAN WRITTEN CULTURE

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Abstract: With the growth of literacy in society, the tradition of personal collections of texts took root among common people in Lithuania in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the more popular forms of vernacular literacy turned out to be songbooks which included copied texts of poems and songs. The article focuses on historical and sociocultural contexts which shaped the user of songbooks and formed the distinctive repertory of these collections. The main factors which motivated the distribution of songbooks were the growth of literacy and the increase of secular press. The dynamic of these social and cultural areas of life was also intricately connected with Lithuanian national movement. In the current investigation, songbooks are viewed as a form of self-expression of people and as a manifestation of their cultural and national identity. It has also been observed that personal collections of texts reveal the inclination of their compilers towards the content created and existing within the written tradition. Growing competences in literacy encouraged people to pursue and acquire values associated with the written culture as they were identified with modernity, progress, and authoritativeness. Essentially, songbooks created in the written medium and maintained by it reveal the selective approach of their compilers towards the oral folklore tradition and attest to the priority given to the folk literature of a new style.

Keywords: identity, oral folklore, personal songbook, vernacular literacy practices, written culture

INTRODUCTION

Songbooks as manuscript collections of poetic texts intended for personal use were widely used in Lithuania already in the nineteenth century. Initially, they were an attribute of everyday culture among the representatives of the nobility and intellectuals but in the second half of the century they became

popular among the literate members of lower social classes. The comparison of songbooks from different European countries of the same period points, firstly, to their external similarity as defined by analogous, corresponding physical parameters (writing-books, sketchbooks, homemade or mass-produced notebooks, and writing instruments used for making notes), the way of organising the notes, the coincidences in the arrangement and presentation of texts and pictures. The songbooks derive their distinctive national character from the textual content, the circumstances of their compilation and the contexts of their functioning which were influenced by specific cultural, social, and historical factors. A distinctive book culture (here understood as the functioning of the elements of book culture in the informational and social space) and the press situation had a great influence on the nineteenth-century Lithuanian songbook tradition. Personal notebooks reflected society's level of literacy, compilers'/ owners' perception of their identity, their search for cultural, aesthetic, national self-expression, and conscious choices.

In the second half of the nineteenth century songbooks became widespread among common people who were traditionally considered to be the true representatives of folkloric culture. This circumstance partially conditioned the attitude that a songbook belonging to a person of peasant origin was a reflection of folkloric culture, while various literacy activities of such people were attributed to folklore and to the field of interests of folklore studies. The preservation of manuscript collections of Lithuanian poetry and songs in the archives of Lithuanian folklore started only at the beginning of the twentieth century, and in the sixth decade of the twentieth century they were made part of the Lithuanian Folklore Archives – the main institution for the preservation of Lithuanian folklore data.¹

The profile of this archive influenced the attitude of the researchers towards the material selected for preservation. During the inventory of songbooks, their descriptions were made mainly based on the principles of systematisation of oral folklore, thus they were equated to folklore collections compiled for scholarly purposes. Songbooks were viewed as collections of folklore units and this hindered their perception as independent phenomena of written culture having a distinct purpose and a coherent structure. Both literacy in general and personal collections of folklore were considered incompatible with the existence of authentic, archaic folklore, therefore the history of Lithuanian folklore studies contains hints that songbooks were ignored and their value was not acknowledged (Ūsaiytė 2015: 201–202; 2018: 120). The efforts of the folklorists of the first half of the twentieth century to collect and investigate, above all, archaic folklore formed the criteria regarding the value of oral heritage based on such characteristics as old vs. new, oral vs. written, authentic vs. unreliable/

unoriginal, which influenced the priorities of folklore research almost until the end of the past century (Stundžienė 2003: 15–17).

As songbooks were equated to folklore collections, the circumstances of their compilation and use, their purpose, i.e., essentially different attitude of compilers towards manuscripts, was not taken into consideration. The repertory of the earliest Lithuanian songbooks, dated nineteenth century, differs rather significantly from the content of folklore collections of the time. Therefore, if their different nature and genesis are dismissed, a risk of gaining a distorted impression of folklore tradition arises. In other words, today songbooks create an impression that the influence of written, individual literature on oral folklore was especially significant, albeit fragmented.

Songbooks as a coherent, separate object of written culture and vernacular literacy² have sparked interest in Lithuanian folklore studies relatively recently – two decades ago, when different aspects of change in folklore tradition were explored (Ivanauskaitė 2003; Sadauskienė 2006) or songbooks were investigated as a cultural phenomenon, with an emphasis on their genre specifics, origin, dynamic, and use in everyday practice (Ūsaitytė 2015, 2018). Even though the value of songbooks is acknowledged in the studies focusing on changes in song repertory and on mass culture, these personal notebooks acquire a more independent value when viewed through the methodological lens of new literacy studies (Street 1993; Barton & Hamilton 1998) with a purpose to evaluate under what circumstances this literacy practice functioned. In this article, the historical and sociocultural contexts of Lithuanian songbooks of the second half of the nineteenth century are explored. In agreement with the attitude that “[l]iteracy is not just about texts but also about actions around texts” (Ivanič 1998: 62), the article discusses the factors which motivated the compilation of these collections and formed their content. Based on the view that songbooks constitute a form of self-expression of people, the paper aims at summarising the profiles of their compilers and at delineating the characteristics pertaining to the identity of different representatives of society of the time as reflected in songbooks.

LITHUANIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE OUTLINE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Cultural and social processes in Lithuania in the nineteenth century resemble the situation of other European nations who had no or had lost their statehood. Lithuania did not exist on the political map of the time: after the third partition

of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, executed by Russia, Austria, and Prussia, a major part of territories inhabited by ethnic Lithuanians were incorporated into the Russian Empire. Before these events, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania together with Poland had existed as a federal state. In this federation, despite Lithuania's efforts to maintain administrative independence, Lithuanian nobility got absorbed within Polish nobility due to both close political connections and a more advanced high culture. The minor nobility and peasants who preserved the ethnic identity were encouraged to be loyal to the Polish foundation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through the administrative and educational system and the Church. In Lithuania, Polish had become the language of public life, letters, science, and literature of the higher level, and its use was associated with education and culture. The Lithuanian language "served" exclusively the private domain; it was the language of ethnic culture, while its written form developed mostly in the field of religious literature (Jovaišas 2003; Kuzmickas 1989: 20–51).

In the Age of Enlightenment, in Lithuania, similarly to other European countries, attention to national history, language, folklore, and mythology increased. Following the European interest in the oral heritage of common, illiterate people, it was seen as a source of poetic inspiration, new literary aesthetics, whereas the idea of the "national spirit" was employed to substantiate the concept of an ethnic nation and the tradition of Lithuanian statehood (Aleksandravičius 1994: 11–18; Speičytė 2016). The Lithuanian cultural movement that began in the early 1820s became the first stage of the Lithuanian national awakening. Participants of the movement, which at the time united mostly the intellectuals of noble origin, supported the idea of Polish-Lithuanian union state, yet sought Lithuanian cultural revival, encouraged the interest in ethnic culture, and asserted the suitability of the Lithuanian language for scientific and literary purposes. The process of national emancipation – separation from the Polish cultural field – partially coincided with two uprisings of the nations of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland against the rule of the Russian Empire (1831–1831 and 1863–1864). The repressions of the government that followed had dire effects on Lithuanian culture, slowed down the development of science, education, written language, press, and aimed at changing the linguistic and religious identity of the residents of the country (Aleksandravičius & Kulakauskas 1996; Staliūnas 2009). The programme of "Restoration of Russian Origins", distinctive for its far-reaching effect, was enforced after the second uprising and aimed at decreasing Polish political and cultural influence on Lithuanians in the hopes that the latter would move toward the Russian civilisation. Ethnic Lithuanians encountered the second wave of linguistic assimilation which was implemented through the education

system. Already since the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, Russian replaced Polish in schools and became the teaching language as part of the policy of “elimination of Polish origins”. Lithuanian was used only in elementary parish and state schools for the children of peasants; however, it was banned in all types of schools after the second uprising.³ Printed books which were supposed to serve as an important means for Lithuanians to study in their native language and foster their cultural identity were also eliminated from the official culture – since 1864 all Lithuanian publications could be printed only in Russian characters (Cyrillic). After this government decree, the period of press ban followed. It lasted for forty years and gave rise to an exceptional phenomenon in Lithuanian history – book smuggling. Lithuanian publications in Latin and Gothic characters were printed outside the territory of the Russian Empire (mostly in Prussian Lithuania⁴ and the USA), then illegally carried over the border and secretly distributed. Regardless of unfavourable conditions, Lithuanian publications increased in number and variety: while religious books were dominant, there was a rise in secular publications – informational, educational materials, fiction. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the intellectuals supporting Lithuanian national awakening, being mostly oriented towards a mass audience, especially that of literate peasants, sought to form and establish its need for reading, to shape its cultural horizon and moral attitudes, and to expand knowledge. Due to their efforts, the ninth decade of the nineteenth century saw the release of the first Lithuanian papers and works of popular fiction which were significant for the growth of Lithuanian national awareness. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the press, especially periodicals, was one of the more important means of communication between the nation and Lithuanian secular intellectuals who, due to the implemented policy of Russification, were forced to seek the source of living in other regions of the Russian Empire or abroad. The opportunity to acquire a higher education in Lithuania was lost as well: Vilnius University was closed in 1832 as a reprisal for participation of professors and students in the first uprising of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The formation of the self-awareness of Lithuanian society in the nineteenth century was influenced by a late, in comparison with other European countries, abolition of serfdom. The majority of Lithuanian peasants were granted personal freedom in 1861, yet they did not immediately experience a considerable change. Meanwhile peasants of state estates and those from the Sudovia region, subordinate to the Kingdom of Poland, were released from serfdom earlier. This circumstance, having promoted the improvement of their economic situation, created more favourable conditions for the rise of national and cultural awareness. It was not a coincidence that many important figures of the national

movement and founders of independent Lithuania originated from the peasants who underwent the serfdom reform earlier.

Despite unfavourable conditions, Lithuanians of various social groups became actively involved in the process of written culture already beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. The written history also incorporated the ego-documents compiled by common people, i.e., written sources witnessing the personal attitude and relationship with the sociocultural context.

THE REPERTORY OF SONGBOOKS AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SHAPED IT

The majority of Lithuanian songbooks of the nineteenth century could be more precisely described as commonplace books containing song and poem texts. Such characteristics as the dominance of texts of literary origin and rather stereotypical repertory allow viewing these manuscript collections as a distinctive cultural phenomenon. The material discussed in the article is seen as a link which joins the commonplace book culture in its various forms as recorded in Lithuania since the seventeenth century and the songbook tradition which flourished in the twentieth century (Ūsaitytė 2015; 2018: 110–119). While being adapted according to the changing needs of society, commonplace books underwent an internal genre transformation; for instance, eventually they became “purified” collections of texts unified by a specific theme or literary form. Among the forms of text collections were songbooks⁵ which became widespread among common Lithuanians approximately since the middle of the nineteenth century. Taking into account the situation of the region at the time, the dominance of the Lithuanian language in manuscripts is significant not only because of consciously emphasised language priority⁶ but in other important aspects as well. In this case, Lithuanianism is related to the general situation of the country, especially the culture of national revival, which served as a background for significant changes in the social and cultural identity of peasants, and the creation of the written Lithuanian language oriented towards the strengthening of national and individual awareness of common people. In addition, the early songbooks compiled in Lithuanian remain relevant for the purpose of determining and noting the cases of interaction between folklore and written literature.

Available manuscript material does not allow for particularly accurate conclusions to be made about either the scale of distribution of songbooks or the specifics of their use. The main reason for this is the lack of metadata and contextual information. A major part of the nineteenth-century songbooks survive

in a poor physical condition – without covers, title pages, provenance marks, and damaged in different ways. Sometimes they are dated based on secondary criteria, such as orthography or characteristic repertory of texts. Regardless of these drawbacks, there is no doubt that this literacy practice was already quite common at the end of the nineteenth century. From the viewpoint of social position, the compilers of songbooks were the representatives of secular or confessional intellectuals and common people who earned their living from farming or crafts. Only approximately half of the fifty songbooks included in the scope of this research had a surviving name of a compiler/owner. However, if a person has not left a noticeable imprint on the local historical and cultural memory, the details of their biography and the factors that encouraged them to take to literacy practices are problematic or nearly impossible to find out. Still, the identified personalities as well as the characteristics of a person's identity implied by the physical parameters of "anonymous" manuscripts allow creating a generalised portrait of a songbook compiler. It was a man⁷ of a young age who had studied in an illegal or a state school, secondary school, seminary (specific peculiarities and the manner of handwriting as well as the appearance of a manuscript disclose different levels of education and writing skills), and his literacy was determined not only by his ability to read and write, but also by his openness to the written culture of the time and the changing aesthetics of folklore. The establishment of various forms of personal writing in society is related to the rising status of the written text and the prestige of persons capable of using text (cf. Allan 2010: 4–5; Maskuliūnienė 2005). The press and the written word were gradually acquiring a higher value in the community whose culture was still based on oral communication. Lithuanian songbooks developed in the written medium and manifested the priority of the written culture through their content.

The specificity of songbooks from the discussed period is reflected in the corpus of texts included in them. It was heavily influenced by the cultural and literary context, the peculiarity of which was defined by such factors as the distribution of individual works in the form of manuscripts, a rather late and complicated introduction of Lithuanian secular press, and, finally, the increased orientation of the written culture to the oral tradition. The main sources that nourished the early songbooks were various manuscripts circulating during this period as well as printed secular publications. The supply and especially availability of the latter was highly restricted: the release of secular publications in Lithuania intended for the mass reader increased only in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, even during the period of the press-ban, a considerable amount of original Lithuanian literature and translated fiction was published as individual books and in periodicals. Notably, the last two

decades of the nineteenth century saw the rise of secular publications. This fact undoubtedly correlates with the active cultural and educational activities of the participants of Lithuanian national awakening in the second half of the century, when the press and writing were employed as some of the most important tools to animate the public consciousness of peasants and other layers of society.

The development of Lithuanian press became one of the main premises for the increase in songbooks.⁸ On the other hand, the availability of publications for various social groups was frequently limited due not only to the price but also the supply and demand defined by political and cultural circumstances. These reasons might have encouraged people to copy various texts which were functioning in the field of scribal culture. The comparison of the records in songbooks with the poetry published in the nineteenth century leaves an impression that certain persons strived to record almost any rhyming text they encountered.

For the compilers of songbooks, various written texts were of equal value regardless of their origin. Such an attitude towards the poetic text was determined by the nature of Lithuanian written works. In Lithuanian press⁹ tradition of the second half of the nineteenth century, a cultural attitude prevailed that folk songs should be published interspersed with individual poetry because both poetic traditions were considered to come from the same origins. Various reasons influenced this attitude. One of them was related to the definition of fiction genres: in the nineteenth century, not only pieces of singing folklore, but also individual lyrical texts were called songs (Bikinaitė 1996: 209; Ivanauskaitė & Sadauskienė 2000; Andriukonis 2013: 36). Another reason derived from the intentional wish of the publishers to make no distinction between folk songs and individual poetry. Despite the fact that the intellectuals distinguished between these two types of poetry, they followed the concept of a unified national creative work wherein folklore was seen as a preliterate Lithuanian literature – it was a way to validate the old traditions and continuity of Lithuanian culture, as well as the nation's self-worth (cf. Sadauskienė 2021: 92–93). All Lithuanian writings that met the ethic criteria were viewed as capable of fostering the nation's spirit and culture. In popular printed songbooks and newspapers folk songs comprised a minor part. On the one hand, this happened because Lithuanian publications were flooded with individual poetry which, despite its questionable artistic value, was tolerated inasmuch as it expressed national ideals and historical themes (Maciūnas 2003: 4–5; Skurdenienė 2001: 413). This vast amount was not counterbalanced by the scarce records of folklore¹⁰ which reached the publishers; therefore the individual poetry exceeded folk songs by hundreds of times. Similar proportions of folk and literary song texts are observed in many songbooks. Apparently, Lithuanian intellectuals who followed educatory, ethic, and didactic interests viewed the intensifying pervasion

of the folkloric communication field in written culture in a rather favourable light. The copies of various texts gained importance not only as replacements of printed publications, but they were also considered to be the repositories of collective, folkloric memory. Some Lithuanian intellectuals viewed songbooks as necessary and capable of securing the continuity of the singing tradition regardless of the text origin (Ūsaitytė 2019: 117).

Individual poetry included in personal notebooks resists a brief description as it is remarkably heterogeneous in terms of genre (poems, ballads, narrative poems, romances, idylls), theme (historical patriotic, folkloric, mythological, religious, mundane, social, nature-related), and tone (lyrical, didactic, humorous, satirical) – in other words, it reflects almost the whole range of the nineteenth-century poetry. Among the most popular sources of texts incorporated in songbooks are the didactic novella *Palangos Juzė* (Juzė from Palanga) (1869) by the writer Bishop Motiejus Valančius, which contains several folk and literary songs; a collection of poems *Pasakos, pritikimai, veselios ir giesmės* (Tales, Adventures, Humorous Poems and Songs) (1861) by Kajetonas Aleknavičius; various religious and moralistic publications; the first Lithuanian calendar *Metų skaitlius ūkiškias* (Farmers' Calendar) (1846–1864), popular among peasants, edited by the educator Laurynas Ivinskis; also the first newspapers intended for Lithuania Proper: *Aušra* (The Dawn) (1883–1886), *Žemaičių ir Lietuvos apžvalga* (Review of Samogitia and Lithuania) (1890–1896), *Tėvynės sargas* (The Guardian of the Homeland) (1896–1904), and *Varpas* (The Bell) (1889–1905). The content of calendars and newspapers of the time which had literary sections was frequently copied in popular collections of songs and poems published at the end of the nineteenth century, such as *Graži dainų knygelė* (The Nice Songbook) (1893), and *Lietuviškos dainos, iš visur surinktos* (Lithuanian Songs, Collected from Everywhere) (1893). The variety of both the texts included in songbooks and their sources poses challenges in the assessment of the popularity of individual songs. Still, one of the recurrent songs in personal collections seems to be the romantic ballad “Birutė” by the poet Silvestras Valiūnas who wrote in Lithuanian and in Polish, which appeared in print for the first time in 1823, soon grew into a folk song and became one of the most popular texts to be published (Fig. 1). Among other texts regularly observed in songbooks, the poetry of well-known nineteenth-century Lithuanian poets Antanas Strazdas, Antanas Vienažindys, Ksaveras Sakalauskas-Vanagėlis, Antanas Baranauskas, and Ludwik Kondratowicz (Władysław Syrokomla) should be mentioned (Fig. 2). In addition, poems by numerous other recognised and anonymous poets of the nineteenth century were recorded in abundance.

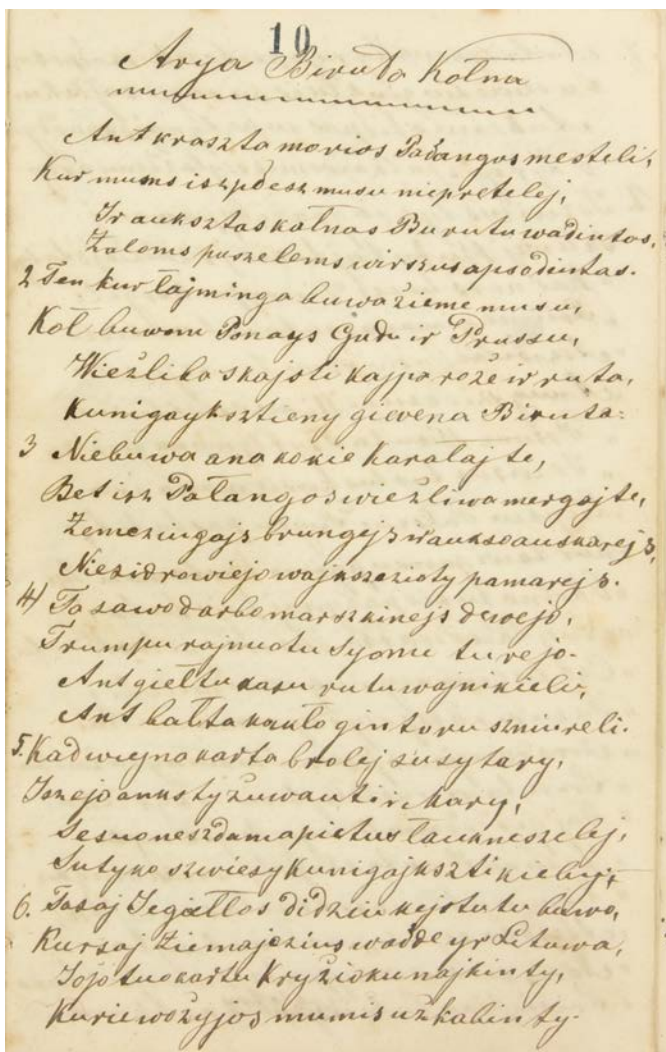


Figure 1. A copy of the ballad “Birutė” by Silvestras Valiūnas (1789–1831). The romantic ballad is based on a historical legend about the meeting of the duke Kęstutis and a low-born girl Birutė, their marriage, and the birth of their son, the Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas. LMD I 767(10), text fragment.

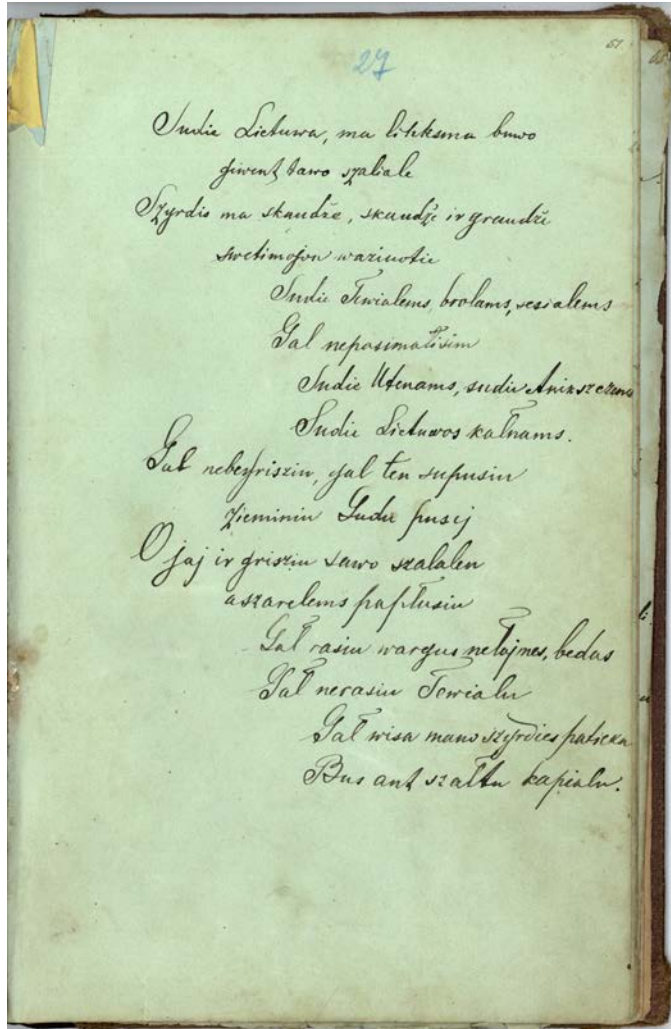


Figure 2. The lyrics of the song “Sudiev, Lietuva, man linksma buvo savo gyvent šalėlėj” (Farewell, Lithuania, I had fun living in my own country) originate from the poem “Keliōnė Peterburkan” (A Journey to Petersburg) by a famous nineteenth-century Lithuanian poet, Bishop Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902). The poem that portrayed a painful parting with one’s homeland grew into a song and was included in the repertory of emigrants and deportees. LTR 3124(27).

Even though for the whole nineteenth century the old songs were an important part of everyday life, both domestic and ritual, in the agrarian Lithuanian society, songbooks reveal the choice of their compilers to, above all, record the written, individual poetry. Next to such “literary” collections, there is a certain number of manuscripts comprising songs of a new style, created by imitating the written literature. Among the latter, didactic songs imbued with Christian ideology and educational intentions, which in an edifying or humorous manner portray mostly mundane scenes from the peasant life and social environment (drinking, slovenliness, relationships of young people, chastity, family harmony, etc.) prevail (Fig. 3).

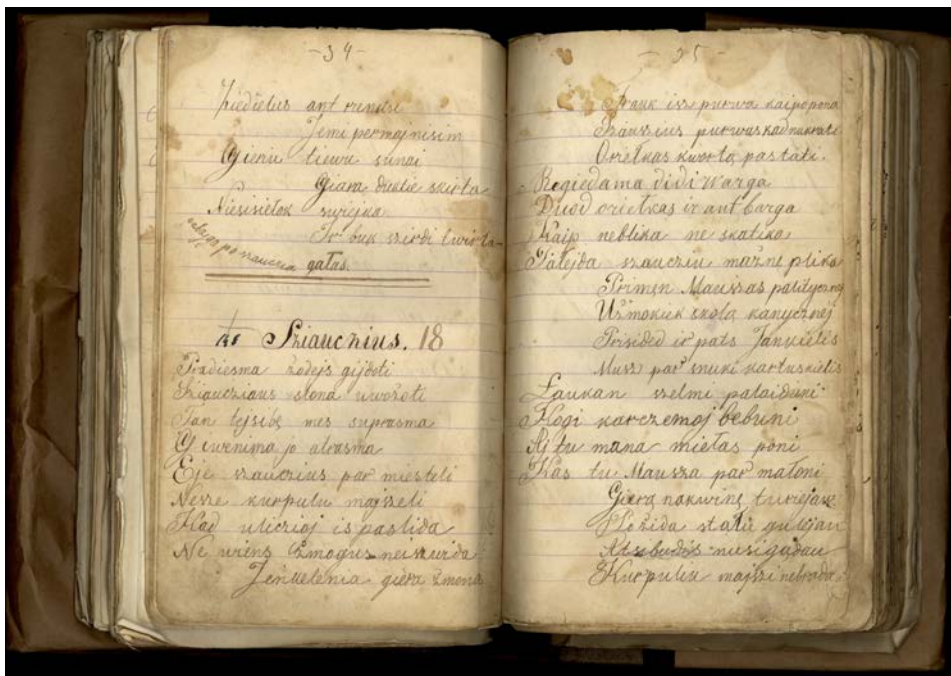


Figure 3. A widespread didactic humorous song by an unknown author about a shoemaker who lost his tools of trade due to drinking and frequenting the tavern. The song ends with an imperative invitation to mend one's ways to escape the punishment of hell after death. LTR 5577(148), text fragment.

In the context of traditional folklore, they were deemed appealing due to their relevant content and a different poetic language (Sadauskienė 2006: 126–157). Seemingly, the repertory of songbooks compiled by people who were not socially active and whose everyday life was less influenced by written culture could

be called *folklorised*, oriented more towards the folkloric communication. It is likely that such songs of didactic or romantic style, which intensely replaced the classic repertory, entered the personal collections directly from the living tradition. However, even in this case manuscripts functioned as a separate, “more authoritative” cultural space (Andriukonis 2013: 46).

Nevertheless, the majority of old folk songs usually entered the personal collections not from the oral tradition but from the written sources. Such collections were not homogeneous. Some of them were created by copying an entire printed songbook (LMD I 1) or by selecting separate texts from it (LMD I 374, LMD I 575, LTR 3295). The first printed Lithuanian songbooks – *Dainos, oder Littauische Volkslieder* (Dainos, or Lithuanian Songs) (1825) by Ludwig Rhesa, *Dainos žemaičių* (Songs of Samogitia) (1829) by Simonas Stanevičius, and *Dainės žemaičių* (Songs of Samogitia) (1846) by Simonas Daukantas – which served as the sources of such copies were available only for a small part of educated society. Their replication could be motivated by a professional, scholarly, cultural interest, which arose among Lithuanian educators already in the first stage of the national movement, as well as by the special historical, national, and emotional value which was imparted on the oral tradition at the time. Personal collections in which old folk songs are sporadic, included as if by accident, are much more frequent. They were usually copied from periodicals, the publishers of which did not shy away from copying texts from the first Lithuanian books of songs. On the other hand, the repertory of classical folk songs was expanded in the press of the end of the nineteenth century: following folklore collection campaigns organised by the intellectuals of the national awakening, folk songs representing the singing tradition of various Lithuanian ethnographic regions were introduced into the field of scribal culture.

Nonetheless, today it is difficult to say whether the authority of the written source was the decisive factor in the formation of such repertory of texts or whether it was the efforts of individual persons to distance themselves from classical folklore at least in the written discourse as it might have been associated with the heritage of preliterate, nonmodern culture represented by the older generation. Both the manuscript form of songbooks and the incorporated texts (their content) could have meant an intentional ambition towards contemporary cultural values and an effort to separate from the mundane, traditional, old (cf. Anttonen 2005: 33). Could that not be the reason why the rare old songs in songbooks seem like peculiar inclusions, the quotes from the archaic oral tradition which lend an exotic undertone to the collection?

Copying different rhymed works as a coherent narrative was encouraged by the poetic form of texts: it seemed recognisable due to its closeness to the folk singing tradition considered to be one of the oldest means of cultural self-

expression. The suitability of a text for singing, or its song-like qualities, was not the main reason for its incorporation in a songbook. The popularity of poetic genres in society was maintained by the high social status of songs. In folkloric communication, the sociocultural value of folk songs was determined by their ability to render the main norms of the peasant culture which frequently relied on ceremonial contexts. Meanwhile the representatives of written culture held folk songs up as the examples of literary aesthetics and a distinct morality by emphasising their relationship with nationality and historicity.

In fact, a group of manuscript collections stands out in the array of investigated material, the compilers of which sought to present a more versatile, authentic picture of the folk singing tradition. It was a distinctive type of songbook: they had a communal purpose and were created in order to satisfy the real or implicit needs of its collective addressee. Besides the copies from written sources, they also contain folk songs collected from people. Still, it should be noted that despite the authentic recordings of texts, these song collections are not identical to “genuine” folklore collections¹¹ which were compiled in response to organised folklore collection campaigns. In the second half of the nineteenth century both these literacy practices already existed separately, clearly differentiated by the compilers themselves. The case of viewing a folklore collection and a songbook as texts of different purpose is illustrated by the written heritage of Matas Slančiauskas.¹² Besides several dozens of folklore collections transferred to folklore archives and the publishers of folklore, he compiled manuscript collections of poetry, folk songs, and religious hymns intended for the common people of his milieu. Folkloric texts were included in them as part of a cultural education programme of a secret society founded by him in 1889, which aimed at collecting folklore, distributing banned publications, awakening national awareness, and raising the culture of common people.

In the nineteenth century, songbooks were compiled not only for singing. They functioned as substitutes for the Lithuanian press which was difficult to access. At the same time, writing and various vernacular literacy practices provided an opportunity for people to perceive and express their individuality (Ivanauskaitė 2003: 17–18). What manifestations of an individual’s identity and awareness were “recorded” in songbooks and how do they reflect the social and cultural environment of a specific historical period – the second half of the nineteenth century?

THE SIGNS OF THE CHOICE OF A CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Collections of texts which served as memory repositories were the object of cultural exchange in society. These notebooks functioned not only in the private space, but also circulated rather widely in various societies: they were shared in the circle of writers, educators, as well as in the gatherings of village people and secret societies; they took root in the subcultures of youths, school and university students (Vanagas 1994: 40–42; Maskuliūnienė 2005; Ūsaiytė 2015: 209–212; Bleizgienė 2019). Even though the content of songbooks and the corpus of texts were essentially determined by the literary (written and oral) discourse, they were also influenced by the social identity of compilers themselves, which was based on the belonging to a group and defined by the performed cultural or social role. Heterogeneous sociocultural environment formed different attitudes, aspirations and aims of people and correspondingly determined the diversity of songbooks.¹³

The collections of poetic texts were compiled based not only on a personal preference and a high regard for the works employing certain themes or poetic expression, but also on account of the target addressee – their social status, education, unspoken needs and expectations. Songbooks helped to develop literacy competences and to expand literary knowledge. Yet the educational purpose did not overshadow the entertainment aspect of songbooks. Functionality and appeal were important conditions for songbooks to exist independently from the number of persons engaged in this practice associated with leisure – a family, a village or a parish community, the members of a specific society, a class of secondary school students, etc. On the other hand, historical context enables us to assign them additional connotations in regard to their influence on the formation of cultural, social, and national awareness. Seemingly, these intentions guided the creation of songbooks which comprised texts about the damage of alcohol consumption and were obviously intended for didactic purposes in the height of the temperance movement (e.g., LTR 3293). A considerable part of collections from the period of the press-ban stand out for their particular effort to accumulate as much verse as possible from available printed sources. Among the objectives of such practice could have been the intention to disseminate Lithuanian national written works which could shape the self-awareness of people from close environments. Characteristic examples of this case include the collection *Knyga dainuškų, išrašyta metuose 1887, per visus metus* (A Book of Songs Recorded in 1887, Throughout the Entire Year) by Antanas Samuolis (LTR 5577/46–112/),¹⁴ collections comprising a hundred of records each – *Dainų*

knyga žemaitiška, 1886 m. (Samogitian Songbook, 1886) by Leonas Liutikas (LTR 3295), and the text collection ascribed to Pranas Virakas (LMD I 372). The sociocultural purpose is revealed by the fact that songbooks functioned in the personal libraries of intellectuals and peasants.¹⁵ As a result of the cultural and national assimilation of the country implemented by the Tzarist administration, there was a lack of Lithuanian publications and they could not satisfy all the needs of society, hence commonplace books helped to compensate this deficiency. In other words, the need for the written copies of texts “was based not on tradition but on the unpleasant necessity” (Andriukonis 2013: 45; see also Lohina 1998: 99; Volkova 2001: 71–72).

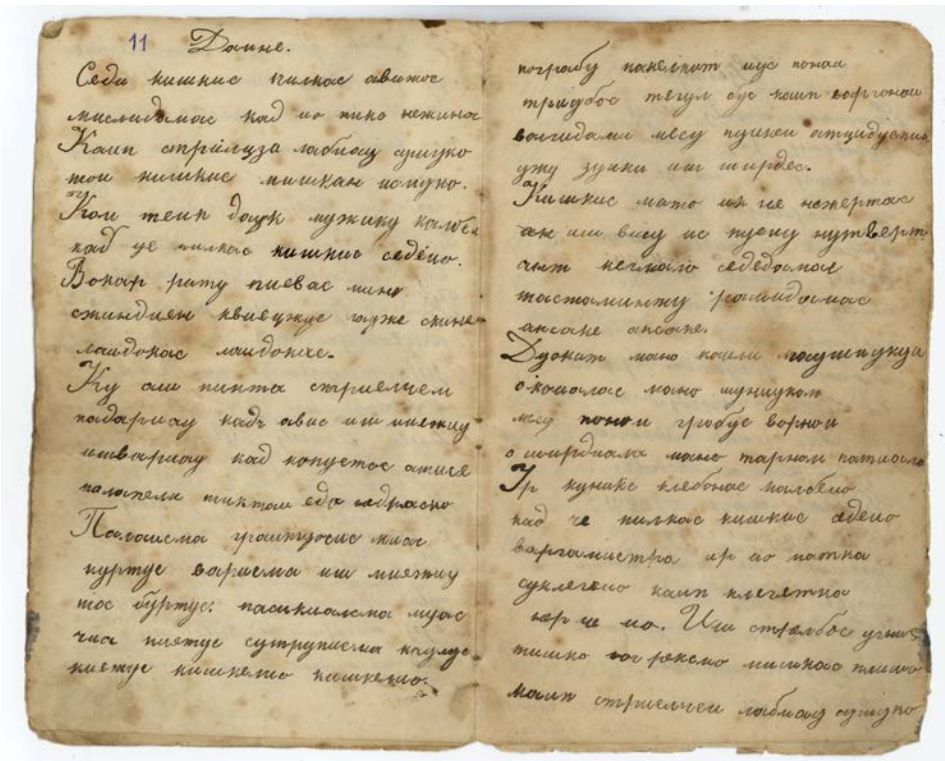


Figure 4. A variant of the poem “Kiškis” (The Hare) by priest Antanas Strazdas (1760–1833), transcribed in Cyrillic characters. The original poem (first printed in 1814), which portrays a hunt for a hare in a humorous way, was popular and circulated among people in folklorised variants. LTR 3294(11), text fragment.

The increase of the number of songbooks intended not for personal use but for the collective addressee occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. They were compiled by the active participants of Lithuanian national movement and public figures.¹⁶ The collections compiled for educational purposes were usually titled with the target addressee in mind (*A Songbook for Youths...*, LMD I 376), emphasised Lithuanian songs and verse as a source of national solidarity (*The Verses for Lithuania by the Servant of His Motherland...*, LMD I 1061, 4 notebooks; *Various Songs and Folk-Rhymes as Sung by Rich Men, Priests, and Peasants*, VUBR F119-44/2), or highlighted the balance between entertainment and usefulness (*Songs, Well-Liked and Suitable*, LMD I 763; *A Songbook for Merry-Hearted People...*, LTR 3307). Having reached their addressee, such collections expanded their folkloric repertory and cultural horizon and at the same time increasingly included the oral tradition into public written discourse. The roles of songbooks in the private life and community activities – entertainment, communication, (self)education – correlate with the areas of everyday life identified by David Barton and Mary Hamilton, i.e., *private leisure*, *sense making*, and *social participation*, where people apply their literacy skills (Barton 2001: 22–27; see also Ólafsson 2012: 71–83).

Taking into account the historical circumstances, the practice of songbooks was hindered by the prohibitions imposed on the Lithuanian language. Not only did they severely limit the availability of printed publications but they also impeded the development of literacy. The teaching language in Lithuanian state schools was Russian, whereas in order to Russify Lithuanians during the transitional stage of this process, the Lithuanian language had to adopt the Slavic alphabet – Cyrillic (Fig. 4). Children learned to read and less frequently to write at home and at secret (illegal) schools supported by peasants themselves. State schools, where the teaching language was Russian, were boycotted by peasants not only in protest at the open assimilation but also because they sought a more convenient and less expensive way to provide their children with primary education. It should be noted that at the end of the nineteenth century approximately half of the residents of Lithuania could read despite the fact that only 7% of them attended state schools. In this respect they were surpassed by Latvians and Estonians who enjoyed significantly better conditions of education (Aleksandravičius & Kulakauskas 1996: 273–282). Songbooks as examples of vernacular literacy of the time retained signs of this difficult period.

The indications of the historically established influence of the Polish language and culture, and the scale on which Russian, the language implemented on the state and institutional levels, was used, can be observed in various records in songbooks. Besides the official Russian language, which was mandatory in state institutions, local residents mainly used Lithuanian and Polish in their

private and public lives; these were also the languages which fulfilled their cultural needs. Bilingualism or multilingualism was rooted in the everyday life of society, above all – the literate society. Most educated Lithuanians spoke and wrote in Lithuanian and in Polish. It can be assumed that in songbooks, the records in other languages reflected the situation where a part of people faced the choice of national, civil, and social identity. Although in the investigated songbooks Lithuanian texts prevail, several records in other languages can be found; usually they are single literary texts in Polish and Russian. One song collection of a sketchbook type (LTR 5577/131–277), most probably compiled by university or school students, stands out: judging by handwritings, 147 Lithuanian and 41 Polish texts in verse were written in by several persons. The linguistic diversity of the songbooks' content could have been determined by the national self-awareness of the compilers and encouraged by the Polish and Lithuanian literary discourse, perceived as a whole, the authority of the official culture, simple curiosity, and openness to various literacy practices. As songbooks were compiled in an environment unfavourable for the Lithuanian language and writing, the priority to the national culture founded on language and ethnicity could attest to the efforts of the compilers to express their national identity. Still, some linguistically heterogeneous collections merely reflected the preference of a specific part of society for the diversity of written culture created in various languages. In this context, linguistically “pure” collections could be viewed as an expression of Lithuanian cultural emancipation which at the time was perceived as a separation from the custody or pressure of foreigners (Mačiulis 2020: 54).

Another category of records in other languages (Russian and Polish) is comprised of structural components of manuscripts, such as the titles, authorial records and commentaries, the personal names of compilers, titles of individual poetic texts, notes on the circumstances of recording. The signature of the compiler/owner of a songbook was one of the main components testifying to the person's identity, an external symbol of identity. A signature usually specified the ownership of a collection, but it also served as a structural element of a manuscript – it signified the end of a particular record or a section of a book. In these cases, the authorship of an autograph as confirmed by a signature was related to a specific action, i.e., making a copy. The investigated songbooks of the second half of the nineteenth century reveal that their compilers frequently wrote their name in a Polish/Russian manner or in Russian letters (e.g., K. Staszewski, S. Szlupowicz, Антон Убейка, Иван Тумялис, Казимирь Кайрукштись, etc.) not only in official documents but also in private notebooks where the Lithuanian language was dominant. The tradition of using a Polish or a Russian form of a name took root both due to the efforts of official insti-

tutions and the unrelenting social and cultural pressure.¹⁷ It seems that the learned official name form became an integral part of one's identity (Kotilainen 2013: 72). Curiously enough, a glimpse at the tradition of personal names in songbooks reveals a certain dynamic of the linguistic expression of signatures. With the knowledge that the Tzarist administration spared no effort to eliminate the Polish language (together with the cultural and political influence) from Lithuanian life, a specific tendency manifests in the change of signatures: from the eighth decade of the nineteenth century, personal names in Cyrillic in songbooks are more frequent than the previously dominant Polish form, although the number of poetic Russian texts (or recorded in Russian letters) did not increase. On the one hand, the Lithuanian language, prevalent in songbooks, reflected individuals' stance against the forced Russification and the rejection of the Russian alphabet, press, and state schools. On the other hand, manuscripts of this period more frequently include Russian entries specifying the owner's identity or the name forms written in Cyrillic. This could partly be explained by the growing participation of persons of peasant origin, who were educated in state schools with Russian as the teaching language, in vernacular literacy practices. The dominant, institutional culture strived to establish functional literacy skills, therefore, when participating in public life, people used Russian.

Taking into account the administrative measures imposed as part of acculturational and integrational policy, the personal initiative to compile and use the copies of song texts could be equated to illegal, underground activities, and cultural resistance associated with growing citizenship. In the years of the press ban, during searches in the houses of people suspected of press distribution and storage, besides publications, various manuscripts in other alphabet than Cyrillic were confiscated (the main criterion for confiscation and destruction of writings was their language and not the content). Surviving search records reveal that such manuscripts included copies of songs and verse (Merkys 1994: 41, 44, 153, 220, etc.); their possession could also incur administrative liability. We are inclined to assume that in this period, people's choice to compile songbooks was based not only on the urge to be a part of the literate society or their cultural aspirations. The desire to express national identity and the increasing self-awareness of national citizenship must have been of an equal importance. The latter motive encouraged resistance against the order imposed by authorities and taking the possible risk of punishment for the possession of illegal Lithuanian writings. In such circumstances, the compilation of a songbook, even if intended only for personal use, required personal efforts as well as the understanding and trust of the community. Some sectors of society, especially the peasantry, did not see secular literature as reliable or capable of bringing tangible benefits, and the scale of persecutions by government caused a certain

antagonism among people. The songbooks of a large scope suggest that for the compilers it was a purposeful and continuous activity requiring patience and devotion. They may have been challenged not only by the attitude of the official authorities, society, or family, but also by material issues, such as the lack of writing instruments and the sources of texts.

Participation in literacy practices was a means for the self-expression of an individual in society. Higher literacy competences allowed people to distinguish themselves in the social environment and served as a means for the expression of their cultural and national self-awareness. Despite the fact that through this activity persons were involved in the discourse of a certain group, this activity potentially testifies to the worldview of the compiler (author) of a specific collection. Each separate songbook appeared as a result of a choice (whether to record, compile, create, or participate) and selection (what one wishes, is capable to record). The combination of these factors caused the diversity of songbooks, which provides a glimpse into the process of the formation of identity “from inside”, or, in other words, allows an attempt to reveal the attitude of people whose experiences were not directly witnessed in historical sources.

CONCLUSIONS

The tradition of songbooks took root in the nineteenth century, which in Lithuania was identified with an intensive expansion of literacy, the strengthening awareness of society, and processes of cultural, historical, and national identity formation. Taking these circumstances into consideration, I have analysed songbooks as a means of self-expression of an individual embracing a new sociocultural experience. In terms of content, songbooks gravitated between the written and oral traditions, yielding to the attraction and the appeal of the former. Oral folklore, especially its old forms, did not become established in personal songbooks, save for a few specific cases. Seemingly, the interest in folklore heritage, which arose during the period of national awakening and encouraged its collection, manifested itself more remarkably among the civically active intellectuals, whereas persons not committed to a community were oriented to a contemporary Lithuanian cultural discourse, especially existing in a written form. Their literacy practices may be viewed as a distinctive written statement about their cultural and linguistic rights and their nationality perceived on a linguistic basis. Nonetheless, while songbooks intended for personal use reflected the characteristics of their compilers' identity, the collections intended for the collective addressee were distinctive for their personality-forming effect. Conversely, all songbooks constitute a part of a common cultural process.

As part of the circulation of social ideas, cultural texts, and their meanings, these diverse, lately thoroughly investigated “writings from below” reveal the choices of common people, individuals (cf. Edlund 2012; Edlund & Haugen 2013; Edlund & Ashplant & Kuismin 2016; Kuismin & Driscoll 2016). Even though their experiences are formed not in isolation but under the influence of communities, personal notebooks, according to Martyn Lyons, lend a “human dimension” to the social and cultural processes of life (Lyons 2016:18). The gradually developing vernacular literacy practices not only influenced the oral culture paradigm but also provided an opportunity to move from the passive state of fostering cultural, social, and national identity to its conscious establishment through writing.

Due to their nature, private writings encouraged various manifestations of individuality. They meant the efforts of a person to acquire certain competences which could constitute the application of functional literacy skills, social and cultural adaptation in society, as well as a wish to approach a culturally valuable object which coincided with the increasing authority of the printed, written word, and the openness to literary diversity. These stimuli were related to a more or less conscious desire to express or establish the contours of one’s identity which revealed the social, cultural, ethical, and national orientation.

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NOTES

- ¹ This research is based on approximately fifty manuscript songbooks, dated nineteenth century, preserved in the Lithuanian Folklore Archives at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore and the Manuscripts Division at Vilnius University Library.
- ² In literacy studies, a distinction is made between *institutional (dominant)* and *vernacular* literacy, stating that the latter is not regulated by the formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions; the rules rather emerge from everyday needs (Barton & Hamilton 1998: 247–252).
- ³ Lithuanian remained a school subject only in the elementary schools of the Suwalki Governorate which was incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland, yet in effect it was under the rule of the Russian Empire.

- ⁴ Prussian Lithuania (or Lithuania Minor) was a historical ethnographical region which extended over the north-eastern parts of the Prussian province.
- ⁵ The consistency of the poetic form of texts in songbooks is rather a tendency and not a rule.
- ⁶ It seems that Lithuanian became the language of personal notes defined by self-reflective characteristics only in the nineteenth century. Until then, no personal Lithuanian manuscripts of considerable scope existed, even though records (usually – marginalia) in Lithuanian have been identified from the end of the eighteenth century (Pacevičius 2001: 672; Ališauskas 2001: 618).
- ⁷ Women’s personal names were found recorded in two songbooks. A collection compiled in 1885, based on the external qualities of the manuscript, belonged to a woman of a higher social status (see LMD III 241). The other collection was compiled by several members of one family (possibly farmers) in approximately 1889 (see LTR 3292).
- ⁸ The connection between the increase of personal text collections and the press is noted by the researchers investigating the written tradition of various historical periods (cf. Holznagel 2016: 118–119; Burlinson 2016; Cowan 2018, etc.).
- ⁹ In this context, the Lithuanian press represents the dominant literacy form.
- ¹⁰ The collection of folklore at the end of the nineteenth century was very segmented and organised on the initiative of individual personalities. Institutionally coordinated efforts to collect folklore have occurred only since 1906, when the Lithuanian Scientific Society was founded.
- ¹¹ On the subject of folklore recording as a vernacular literacy practice see Kikas 2018.
- ¹² Matas Jonas Slančiauskas (1850–1924) – a tailor, book smuggler, collector of folklore, an active figure in Lithuanian national awakening, poet, publicist.
- ¹³ The researchers of commonplace book culture emphasise the diversity and lability distinctive of this type of personal writings (Allan 2010: 34; Smyth 2010: 94). These characteristics were determined by the fact that commonplace books functioned in everyday and leisure context and were not heavily influenced by dominant social institutions.
- ¹⁴ The collection that contains 67 texts – LTR 5577(46–112) – was transferred to the Lithuanian Folklore Archives, bound in a folio together with six manuscripts by other people.
- ¹⁵ The need for personal libraries persisted not only due to the lack of printed publications but also because of the absence of public libraries intended for all groups of people in nineteenth-century Lithuania.
- ¹⁶ The Lithuanian Folklore Archives and the Manuscripts Division at Vilnius University Library store manuscript collections by four active participants of Lithuanian national awakening movement of the end of the nineteenth century – the beginning of the twentieth century – Augustinas Baranauskas, Matas Slančiauskas, Jonas Trumpulis, Juozas Otonas Širvydas – intended for the collective addressee: LMD I 376, LMD I 567, LMD I 763, LMD I 855, LMD I 904, LMD I 1061, VUBR F 119-44/2, F 119-111, F 1169-523.
- ¹⁷ Cf. the writing of Finnish personal names by using their Swedish equivalents in nineteenth-century Finland in Kotilainen 2013.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

- LMD – Folklore Collections of the Lithuanian Scientific Society at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
LTR – Lithuanian Folklore Archives at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
VUBR F – Manuscripts Division at Vilnius University Library

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