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Lithuanian Handwritten Books in the Period of the Ban on the Lithuanian Press (1864–1904)

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When we talk of the hand-written book (or the manuscript book), we first of all refer to the time before the appearance of the printed books, and the Middle Ages in particular. In the early modern period, we mostly see the handwritten book as a book prepared for publication but which remained unpublished in a manuscript form due to some political, social or individual reasons. In the Modern and Postmodern period, the appearance of the hand-written book is most frequently determined by the personal motives of the creator of such a book, someone's individual needs, or the striving for the appearance of a new and different type of a book. The change in the book as a phenomenon is closely related to political and social conditions of an actual local culture. The aggravation of these conditions (war, occupation, the application of a repressive apparatus, censorship, various bans and the like) often lead to the emergence of new and extraordinary cultural phenomena. This paper discusses one phenomenon of this type that so far has not been looked into, and that is the Lithuanian handwritten book intended for personal use during the period of the ban on the Lithuanian press from 1864 to 1904.

As one of the repressive measures introduced after the Lithuanian and Polish uprising of 1863 against tsarist oppression, printing in traditional Lithuanian (or Latin) script was banned in Lithuania in the period of tsarist occupation. The ban on the Lithuanian press started on 5 June 1864, when Mikhail Muravyov, the Governor-General of Vilnius issued a letter to the Censorship committee of Vilnius, which contained the decree prohibiting printing printers in Lithuanian script. The following year, on 6 September 1865, the Governor-General of Vilnius, Konstantin von Kaufman, issued a secret circular prohibiting the printing, import and dissemination of all Lithuanian publications in Latin script. This ban was approved of by circular No 141 of 23 September 1865 by Pyotr Valuyev, Russian Home Affairs Minister. Finally, on 30 January 1866, Nikolay Miliutin, the secretary of the state council for the affairs of the kingdom of Poland communicated a message from Alexander II to the Minister of Education, that in effect consolidated the Lithuanian press ban. From now on, all publications in Lithuania had to be printed in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, the so-called "grazhdanka". That was how the ban on the Lithuanian press was consolidated (cf. Merkys 1994, 43–64; Vladimirovas 1985, 13; Merkys 2004, 7).
The ban lasted until 1904. During that period Lithuanian books were published, but illegally. From 1865 to 1904, about 4000 Lithuanian titles in Latin and Gothic script were published, not including the periodical press. Of these 4000, about 2700 were published in Lithuania Minor (East Prussia, which did not belong to Russia), and the rest in the USA and other countries. About 2000 of these 2700 titles were intended for Lithuania Major, and half of these consisted of religious literature. In addition, 66 were authorized by the authorities and published during the same period in Lithuanian Cyrillic script (cf. Žukas 1985, 22, 24–5, 29; Merkys 1994, 185; Merkys 2004, 10–11; Černiauskienė 2004, 7; Stoniënė 2006, 20, 24–5).

Books intended for Lithuania were printed using a strategy of counterfeit: deliberately misleading publication data concealed the real identity of authors, translators, and editors, as well as the place of publication and the name of the publisher. The most frequently appearing name was that of Juozapas Zavadzkis, a printer from Vilnius, and the most popular year of publication was 1864, that is, one year before the press ban. Counterfactual books were mostly printed in Lithuania Minor. The number of such publications exceeds 833. The so-called book-carriers, or “book-smugglers,” transported these books across the Prussian-Russian border and distributed them in Lithuania (Žukas 1985, 30; Aleksandravičius and Kalukas, 1996, 287; Kulškevičius and Misius 2004); Merkys 2004, 11; Černiauskienė 2004, 7–8; Stoniënė 2006, 25).

The demand for Lithuanian books, especially those intended for religious practice, was extremely high at the time. This is demonstrated by large print runs—reprints—of books printed in Lithuania Minor. Print runs of some prayer books [Aukso alatūra [The Golden Altar]], for instance, could be as large as ten to fifteen thousand, and they would be reprinted up to 32 times. Prayer books accounted for 29 percent of all publications intended for Lithuania (Vėtra 1979, 79). Total book production for the period was about six million printed copies. Religious books were in great demand for several reasons: (1) they were necessary for religious practice; (2) they were used in illegal underground schools, established in villages and townships, as teaching aids (Žukas 1985, 29, 32); (3) they were very fragile, while their users were inclined to have their own personal copies, especially of prayer books and hymnals.

The ban on Lithuanian press in the Latin script depended on a great extent on the attitude of the Catholic Church to this matter. The attitude was negative, because the Church saw it as a disciplinary punishment directed against the Catholic faith, to encourage conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church. Initially, it was a matter of faith. Only later did other national and state interests begin to play a part too. For this reason, more priests and Catholic activists were engaged as writers, editors, and supporters of the illegal press than other people in the first two decades of the press ban, until the appearance of the underground periodical press in 1883 brought a change to this.

While the printing and distribution of counterfeit publications satisfied a need for religious literature, not everybody could acquire those publications. The ability to obtain books was determined by the financial spending power of readers, supply levels of printed titles and access to the distribution networks. Given these difficulties involved, especially for readers outside of Lithuania, a new mode of “publishing” was introduced: copying by hand.

The hand-written book (or manuscript) is a book copied from a published book and sometimes of a manuscript, mostly intended for personal purposes and use. All currently known hand-written books were copied by people who had not received any higher education, mostly peasants and public servants. The corpus of Lithuanian hand-written books is not numerous, and its thematic circle is not diverse either. It consists mostly of religious books that can be broken down into several groups: (1) books intended for religious practice—prayer books (including prayers, litanies, hymns, rosaries, hours, recollections, meditations), hymnals, catechisms; (2) various religious readers—lives of saints, descriptions of miraculous visitations; (3) religious and inspirational manuals—guides to good dying, guides to pious and god-fearing life; and (4) textbooks of all kinds.

Lithuanian hand-written books are mostly copybooks or loose leaves bound between hard covers. The writers often left marks or made inscriptions in their books: this includes information about ownership (the name of the writer), place of residence, the date of copying, the reason why a book was copied, or other types of minor comment. A frequent feature is an appeal to the reader to pray for the author. The books sometimes also contain information about the writer provided by others: about his life, the reasons for copying, and again there are appeals to pray for the soul of the writer.

One cannot claim that all the handwritten books have been examined and all information on their authors thoroughly studied. However, it is possible to assume that their number was small, and that the three writers covered below offer a fairly good picture. The names of these writers are very important in the history of Lithuanian writing.

The largest collection of handwritten books was compiled and copied by Jurgis Japertas, very likely a farmer from Samogitia who was born some
time before 1851 and who died after 1882. The library of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore in Vilnius has 55 items consisting of his manuscript texts in bound and unbound books, notebooks and separate sheets, as well as in eight published books.

Figs. 1, 2. Title pages of *Evangelija Nikodemo* (1888) and of *Jurgis Japertas's Evangelija Nikodemo* (1873) (LTLIB, 1195 f. 1, b. 2013)

Between 1851 and 1882, Jurgis Japertas copied six printed books: *Kalvarija, arba Kėliaus kryžių sotųjų Jėzus Kristus* [The Calvary, or the Painful Road of the Cross of Jesus Christ] (1871?); *Evangelija Nikodemo* [The Gospel of Nicodemus] (1873); *Memuo Senučiais Marijos Paso* [The Month of the Holy Virgin Mary] (after 1878); *Apsakymas stebuklingo musuldinimo su Liudoviko Lateau* [A Story of the Miraculous Occurrence with Liudoviko Lateau] (after 1880); *Auksu knygelė, arba Mokslos nusižemėmintis* [The Little Golden Book, or the Teaching of Humility] (1882); *Kėliaus kryžiaus sotųjų mūsų Jėzus Kristus, arba Kalvarija* [The Road of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the Calvary]. He also copied manuscript texts (*Rokolekijos deiviskis* [Spiritual Recollections], 1852, 1869; *parts of books, mostly prayer books* [Meditacija [Meditation], 1851; *Gadžinkas apie mūsų Jėzus Pono* [Hours on the Suffering of Lord Jesus]; *Nobūsiųjų laiko priėmimo sakramento pačiūsėmės* [Worship of the Time of Receiving the Sacrament of the Eucharist]), and he compiled selections from various books ([Knygelė vedimo genų ir krikščioniško gyvenimo [A Small Book of Leading a good and Christian Life], 1852; *Knygelė didžiai sugadina prie nubalsčio* [A Book Very Useful at a

* Deceased, 1852*. He also copied texts for other people (for example the *Meditacija* he copied for Elena Simutaitė from the parish of Laukzeme).

Jurgis Japertas worked with great precision. He wrote out title pages, wrote some letters in a calligraphic style, embellished them, and used inks of different colours.

Figs. 3, 4. Title pages of *Memuo Senučiais Marijos Paso* (after 1878) and of *Jurgis Japertas's Memuos Senučiais Marijos Paso* (after 1878) (LTLIB, 1199 f. 1, b. 2614)

Some texts Japertas copied are bound into the back of published books — again usually prayer books: *Gadžinkas apie mūsų Jėzus Pono* [Hours on the Suffering of Lord Jesus] in Motiejus Valančius’ *Daržukų knyga* [A Book of Pious Women] (1867?); *Karožiai saldžiausio vardo Jėzaus* [The Wreath of the Sweetest Name of Jesus] in Motiejus Valančius’ *Garbinimas Senučiaus Sūriūs Didieio mūsų Jėzus Kristaus* [Worship of The Sacred Heart of Our God Jesus Christ] (1874). Interestingly, if Japertas had a book that had some pages missing, he would copy those pages and then bind the complete book. We find this for example in *Naupas altorius, arba Suriokamas persengėjimų ir matų prie spastines, komunijos įventas del ligonių ir mirčiantų* [A New Altar, or a *Collection of Warnings and Prayers for the Holy Communion for the Sick and Dying*] (1864). He also copied individual prayers, hymns and other texts containing religious exercises.
Japertas' inscriptions in these manuscripts are a significant source for documenting his work. For instance, in *Evangelija Nikodemo* he left the following inscription: "O! Dabar Antra karta apraszi Jurgis Japerts' metus 1873" ["O! Now Jurgis Japertas wrote for the second time. Year 1873"] [Japertas 1873, 1], or in *Aukso knygelė*: "Jurgis Japerts tą parraszi iš Drukalotų vadinama Aukso Knyginele metus 1882" ["Jurgis Japertas copied this from the published one, called Aukso knygelė, in 1882"] [Japertas 1879, 208]. Another inscription in *Evangelija Nikodemo* describes the purpose behind his work and writes an appeal characteristic of these handwritten books:

Ant didesnį gan bries ir šlovais Po-nou Diewou, ta | Proce muna, O | tims Skajotojems | kurjei este Kiniu-|giedu Paskaitos, | Donau Diewe | Loska | rekalinda ant | Santiago | ganima dušišes | atrasti ir Pažįška | Dvasios | apturtis | in | O už muna du-|sies bėr poviņia | Svejka Marija... | ir poviņa amži-|nai atibi sukailbė-|kiet Skajotam. | Prasgtu Jurgis | Japerts Metuos... | 1873. Miestas Ko-|wa 20. diejo | [This work of mine is dedicated to God's greater honour and glory. And Lord, give mercy needed for the saving of the soul and for the spiritual

benefit to those readers who will use these books. As for my soul, say at least one 'Hail Mary' and one 'Eternal Rest' while reading. I appeal. — Jurgis Japertas, 20 March 1873 [Japertas 1873, 372–4].

Our second copyist of handwritten books, Jonas Matulionis (1830–after 1914), was from the Lithuanian Highlands. Between 1870 and 1877 he copied *Žyvatos Pono ir Dievo mūsų Jėzus Kristus* [Life of Our Lord and God Jesus Christ] [Matulionis 1870–1877] by Saint Bonaventure, from an anonymous translation published in 1759. He did not finish this work. A note by his brother Povilas Matulionis indicates why Jonas Matulionis undertook copying of the book, what he intended it for, and how the work proceeded. Here I will cite this text, which bears the title "Izangos vieštojas" ["Instead of an Introduction"]: 

Izangos vieštojas. | Lietuviai, šaltą savųjų | knygų, jau 1870 metai | pradeda būti lietuvių | istorijos | Jonas | Stasio | sumos | Matulionis | Kupiškio, šiono | krygos, paskolina | jo motinos | milžinių knygų ir išmesti ją visų | savo ranka atsprendži, kad kiti lietuvių, | jų | nesunki naudos | pusė | skatinti galutį | semti iesą, kaip ją | semiai visi | suveriniai iš skaičius | Dievo saules, Svėtadžiama, populiariai, | naktį-mis pre balanos | įviesos Jonas | 20 metų jaunikis rašo | spaudo knygą, kolai ne buvo pašauktas kariuomene ir įvežtas Kaukazas. Iš ten

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Figs. 5, 6. Title pages of *Kalvarija, arba Koliai kryžiais karaliaus sopulių Jėzus Kristus* (1848) and Jurgis Japertas' *Kalvarija, arba Koliai kryžiais sopulių Jėzus Kristus* (1871) [LLIT, B 915, f. 1, b. 2605]

Fig. 7. Missing pages copied and bounded by Jurgis Japertas in *Ningaus altoriai* (1864) [LLITB, B 872]
One of the most interesting examples of the handwritten books from the period of the Lithuanian press ban is that of our third writer, Aleksandras Luotoys (?—before 1899). He copied two works in one book (Luotys 1875): Motiejuis Valančius’ Trumpas katekizmas [A Short Catechism] published in Lithuanian Cyrillic, and Mykolas Olševskis’ Brama atverta į viešnastį [The Gate Open to Eternity] (the 1846 edition; first edition 1753), one of the most popular Lithuanian works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, devoted to the theme of death and consisting of a spiritual reader with sermons, edifying examples, spiritual meditations and other texts of a similar kind.

Figs. 8, 9. Title pages of Žyvasas Pono ir Dievo mūsų Jezus Christus (1759) and Jonas Matulionis’ Žyvasas Pono ir Dievo mūsų Jezus Christus (1870—1877) (1998 facsimile, f. 1, b. 3513)

Figs. 10, 11. Title pages of Mykolas Olševskis’ Brama atverta į viešnastį (1846) and Aleksandras Luotoys’ Brama atverita į viešnastį (1875) (L.LTIB, B 801, f. 1, b. 3468)

Little is known about the writer of this handwritten book: only that he was related to Skuodas in Samogitia, that in 1874—1875 he lived in St. Petersburg and worked as a printer in the lithography department of the Senior Artillery Board, where, according to his own words, he “wrote” Mikas Vaizgantas’ Lithuanian Handwritten Books (1864—1904)
Trumpas katekizmas and Bruna atverta in viešnäsiį while he was on duty. He died before 1899, because in this year Juozas Tumas ([Tumas] 1899, [17]) recorded his book in his catalogue, and also because the book contains an inscription by one of its previous owners:

Mikas skaitojaiv praszasz | az, Jonas Gadeikis kiekvieja | skaitojaiv
kad asdykiskitum | uz duže Aleksandras Lowies nes | įav ira poseda
P. Dirva. ]

[Dear reader, I, Juozas Gadeikis, ask each reader to pray with hope for the soul of Aleksandras Luotys, because he already faced the judgement of God Almighty ([Lowists] 1875, Br, [277]).]

Figs. 12, 13. Title pages of Motiejuš Valančius' and Jonas Krečinskis' Трумпас катехизас (1865) and Aleksandras Luotys' Trumpas Katekizmas (1874) (LLTB, 21056, f. 1, b. 346b)

Trumpas katekizmas is a catechism written in Lithuanian by bishop Motiejuš Valančius (1801–1875) and transcribed in Cyrillic as Трумпас катехизас by Jonas Krečinskis (c. 1820 – after 1884) (Valančius and Krečinskis 1865). It is the first and, it seems, the only instance of this kind in the history of Lithuanian writing, when a text previously printed in Cyrillic was copied, converted or brought “back” into Lithuanian (Vaicekauskas 2003, 16; Subačius 2006, 283, 304; Vaicekauskas 2007, 76). Aleksandras Luotys did not abridge the text of Trumpas katekizmas, and did not add anything to it. Occasionally, however, one sees a desire to edit the lexicon, to replace some words by others. In copying the text he returned to old traditional Catholic church terminology that Motiejuš Valančius had attempted to replace with original, not borrowed words (Subačius 2006, 291–2). Aleksandras Luotys, however, changed aspects incompatible with the Catholic faith. The rule was that before printing a publication of religious content in Cyrillic, it was subject to spiritual censorship, and required approval from the Vilnius Censorship committee (Mediauskinė 1998, 42). The Catholic way of doing the Sign of the Cross from left to right was changed by the censor into the Orthodox formula, from right to left:

Жемякъ кріўцзу ІІІ. дарау: дела́къ веншу́ръ роли́нъ вірму
пры | рукась, паскішь анть куста́ння, дара́ | паскішь анть дешние
це ёй кайры́ пете | сакідама́сь: [...].

[I am doing the Sign of the Cross: with the right hand first touching the forehead, then the chest, and after, the right and the left shoulders, and uttering: [...] ] ([Valančius and Krečinskis] 1865, 12; Italics mine – M. E.)

In his rescript of the catechism, Aleksandras Luotys restored the Catholic formula (Merkys 1994, 54–5; Subačius 2006, 290):

Zenkla križas. S. darau: diegamas dešinėje rankoje | pirmo pri kaktas,
paskias ant kruodės, dar paskias | ant kairo ir dešinių pėsų sakisdamas: [...].

I am doing the Sign of the Cross: with the right hand first touching the forehead, then the chest, and after, the left and the right shoulders, and uttering: [...] ([Lowists] 1875, TK, 7). Italics mine – M. E.

Unlike Trumpas katekizmas, the text of Bruna atverta in viešnäsiį ([OBevski] 1846) is shortened, and Latin quotations are omitted. That these texts were copied not for printing but for personal use, and with the intention of possessing personal copies probably because it was impossible to acquire them in St. Petersburg is indicated by the inconsistencies in spelling, and the writer’s failure to adapt to the norms of the Lithuanian written language of the time (Subačius 2006, 292, 302).

Manuscript books that were intended for other than personal use are also known. They were rewritten in the period of the ban on the Lithuanian press. In the late nineteenth century, Jonas Ketelė (1831–1908), the priest of the Panemunės parish, organised a wide network of secret Lithuanian schools. Jonas Ketelė supplied these secret Lithuanian
Finally, it is worth noting that the handwritten books of Aleksandras Luotys and Jurgis Lapertas were exhibited at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris. The banned books were included in a section on Lithuanian printing, which was part of the country’s exhibition on ethnography of the European nations in the Trocadero Palace. The banned Lithuanian press was displayed in the exposition of Lithuanian press at the exhibition of Lithuanian ethnography ([Zieliński] 1902, [16]; [Tumas] 1924, 186; [Tumas-Vaizgantas] 2007, 99; Lauškaitė 2000, 501–3; Merks 2004, 19; [Mišiūnas] 2006, 68). Unlike the rest of the display, however, the handwritten books did not attract the attention of visitors. Juozas Tumas, an editor and publisher of forbidden Lithuanian publications, one of the assistants in setting up the Lithuanian exposition who had provided the handwritten books for the exhibition, wrote the following:


([The exhibition of handwritten books] was meant to demonstrate to the world the hardships and troubles that the Russian authorities had dragged us into. It seems that our idea to prove the barbarian nature of the press ban was not properly exploited or was misunderstood, because it was not advertised. [...] Neither the exhibition organizers nor the public appreciated the writer’s [Lapertas] library; maybe they did not even notice it. To us who were fighting for the freedom of the press, any “piece of writing” that was not destined to be printed would draw tears from our eyes.]

The material and research here presented shows that in Lithuania the repressive structures (occupation, Russification, the press ban and censorship) led to the invention of a new type of a book—a handwritten book for personal use. Although not widespread, it was not an incidental phenomenon during this period in Lithuanian history. Even under the most unfavourable conditions of political and cultural oppression, the need for books in society was strong. When smugglers and book-carriers could not ensure sufficient supplies of books, especially of religious literature, people resorted to new, private initiatives, and began compensating for the

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shortage of books by copying printed books by hand. Thus an alternative mode of “publishing” came into existence.

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