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LIETUVOS
Didžioji Kunigaikštystė
Vyrai ir moterys

LIETUVOS ISTORIJOS INSTITUTAS

XVIII
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Didžioji Kunigaikštystė
Vyrų ir moterų

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RAMUNĖ ŠMIGELSKYTĖ-STUKIENĖ

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THE HISTORY OF WOMEN BETWEEN (EUROPEAN) EAST AND WEST, OR AT A CROSSROADS AGAIN

The boom in women's history, the so-called *herstory* that began in Western universities in the 1960s and 1970s, did not bypass Lithuania, and scholarly publications devoted to this topic appeared at that time. In 1977, Irena Valikonytė was probably the first to write an article on double compensation for a woman in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the sixteenth century. The historian argued that as a norm of the Statute of Lithuania, double compensation originated in custom law and was applied to large groups of women, but eventually lost its force.¹ As in the West, research on the history of Lithuanian women sought to fill the gaps in the historiography ('white spots') and to reconstruct the roles of 'silent groups of society' and their expression in society. Here the main narrative is not 'men and women' in history as two isolated narratives, but history written from a woman's perspective. It is obvious that *herstory*, told from a woman's and/or the feminist point of view, has been important if we want to reveal a multifaceted historical picture and reconstruct a more objective historical development of societies. That is, without the questions raised by the history of women and the family, social history remains fragmented and hardly capable of reconstructing a convincing historical picture.

Although women's history has not been established as a separate field in history after the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the historians who saw the importance of the research continued it. The older generation of scholars further explored the roles of women in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the legal protection of women against violence in the statutes of Lithuania, the possibilities of women's divorce in nineteenth-century Lithuanian society, and, for the first time in Lithuanian historiography, analysed separation petitions of peasants and the nobility.² At the same time, the

1 Irena Valikonytė, 'Dviguba išpirka už moterį Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje XVI a. pirmojoje pusėje', in: *Lietuvos TSR aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai. Istorija*, 1977, vol. XVII (2).

2 Eadem, 'Ar Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje XVI a. moteris buvo pilietė?', in: *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 1994, vol. 2, 62–73; Eadem, 'Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės bajorių teisė laisvai ištekti: realybė ar fikcija?', in: *Lietuvos valstybė XII–XVIII a.*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 1997, 147–157; Vytautas Andriulis, 'Atsakomybės už smurtą prieš moterį Lietuvoje XV–XVI a. problema', in: *Teisės problemos*, 1997, No. 3; Irena Valikonytė, Lietuvos Metrikos 4-oji Teismų bylų knyga – šaltinis moters statusui tirti, in: *Lietuvos Metrikos studijos*. Mokymo priemonė, sudarė Irena Valikonytė, Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 1998, 124–149; Dalia Marcinkevičienė (Leinartė), *Vedusiųjų visuomenė. Santuoka ir skyrybos Lietuvoje XIX amžiuje – XX amžiaus pradžioje*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1999; also see the expanded edition in English: Dalia Leinarte, *The Lithuanian Family in Its European Context, 1800–1914: Marriage, Divorce and Flexible Communities*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; Ramunė Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, 'Lychių

forgotten and rediscovered archival sources of *herstory* were prepared for the publication.³

From the 1990s, a growing number of Lithuanian historians started writing and publishing their research on women's history. Raimonda Ragauskienė explored the life of Barbora Radvilaitė and refuted the historiographical stereotype of this historic woman as an exceptionally sexual being. Her monograph reveals the struggle of King Sigismund August against the court in legalising his marriage and crowning Barbora and simultaneously reconstructs the role of a noble woman in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the sixteenth century.⁴ Historians Jolita Sarcevičienė and Jolanta Karpavičienė published works on the roles of Lithuanian aristocrats and townswomen in sixteenth-century society.⁵ In her monograph, Karpavičienė focuses on the economic and legal status of urban women, their inheritance rights, the possibilities of self-efficacy and financial independence of a sixteenth-century urban woman, the status of widows, and the property relations between a married woman and her new family. Historians Virginija Jurėnienė, Olga Mastianica, and Jurga Miknytė also chose women's history as the subject of their dissertations and published exhaustive monographs.⁶ In her book, Jurėnienė discusses women's political activity in the parliaments of the independent Republic of Lithuania. According to the historian, the image of an active Lithuanian woman as a public figure began to take shape in 1920, when six women were elected to the Constituent Assembly. The author places considerable emphasis on the Lithuanian women's movement in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century and points out that Lithuanians preceded their Latvian, Estonian, and Polish

vaidmenys viešojoje ir privačioje veikloje Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje. Darbo pasidalijimo tradicijos, stereotipai, priežastys', in: *Moterys, darbas, šeima. Lyčių vaidmenys užimtumo sferoje: sociokultūrinis aspektas*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2008, 165–197. For more, see: Dalia Leinartė, 'Women's and Gender History in Lithuania. An Overview from Time and Distance', *Aspasia*, 2013, vol. 7, 183–192.

- 3 Marcinkevičienė Dalia (Leinartė), *Ižymios Lietuvos moterys, XIX a. – XX a. pradžia*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 1997.
- 4 Raimonda Ragauskienė, *Barbora Radvilaitė*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1999.
- 5 Jolita Sarcevičienė, 'Vieno stereotipo istorija – LDK moters įvaizdis istoriografijoje', in: *Feminizmas, visuomenė, kultūra*, 1999, No. 1, 30–39; Jolita Sarcevičienė, 'Vyro ir žmonos santykių modelis XVI a. II p. – XVII a. I p. proginėje literatūroje LDK – patriarchatas ar partnerystė?', in: *Kultūrų sankirtos*, parengė Zigmantas Kiaupa ir kvol., Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2000, 189–215; Eadem, XVI a. II p.–XVII a. I p. proginė literatūra kaip šaltinis idealios moters modeliui LDK', in: *Feminizmas, visuomenė, kultūra*, 2000, No. 2, 46–59; Jolanta Karpavičienė, *Moterys Vilniuje ir Kaune XVI a. pirmojoje pusėje: gyvenimo sumiestinimo Lietuvoje atodangos*, Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2005.
- 6 Virginija Jurėnienė, *Lietuvos moterų judėjimas XIX amžiaus pabaigoje–XX amžiaus pirmojoje pusėje*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2006; Olga Mastianica, *Praverus namų duris: moterų švietimas Lietuvoje XVIII a. pabaigoje – XX a. pradžioje*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas leidykla, 2012; Jurga Miknytė, *Moters socialinio vaidmens konstravimas viešajame diskurse XIX a. vidurio – XX a. pradžios Lietuvoje*. Doctoral dissertation, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2009.

counterparts in organising the first women's congress in Kaunas in 1907 where they envisaged the strategy and tactics of the women's movement. The historian also analyses the split in the women's movement into two currents, the Catholic and the progressive. Olga Mastianica's monograph provides detailed statistics on girls' primary and secondary education, showing that in Lithuania, up until the early twentieth century, the number of girls in schools was five or more times lower than that of boys. At the same time, the category of gender was established in Lithuanian historiography. Ramunė Šmigelskytė-Stukienė constructively applied the gender perspective in distinguishing between women's expression in private and public spheres.⁷

In the last decades of the twentieth century, in neighbouring Poland, *herstory* was also driven by the academic desire to reconstruct the silent voices of women in historiography. Probably the greatest contribution was made by the *Kobieta i ...* (Woman and ...) series of scholarly studies initiated by the pioneers of Polish women's history, Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, who since 1990 have published as many as eight comprehensive monographs in this series.⁸ The history of women in Poland has been substantially complemented by the subsequent studies by other scholars.⁹

It is obvious that women's history and the methods applied offer the possibility of answering questions that are unlikely to arise without introducing the category of gender. Examples and discoveries have been numerous. The interviews

7 Ramunė Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, 'Lyčių vaidmenys viešojoje ir privačioje veikloje Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje', 165–197.

8 *Kobieta i społeczeństwo na ziemiach polskich w XIX w.*, vol. 1, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 1990; *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, vol. 2, parts 1–2, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 1992; *Kobieta i świat polityki. Polska natle por'Ównawczym w XIX i w początkach XX wieku*, vol. 3, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 1994; *Kobieta i kultura: kobiety wśród twórców kultury intelektualnej i artystycznej w dobie rozbiorów i w niepodległym państwie polskim: zbiór studiów*, vol. 4, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 1995; *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego: wiek XIX i XX: zbiór studiów*, vol. 5, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 1997; *Kobieta i praca: wiek XIX i XX: zbiór studiów*, vol. 6, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000; *Kobieta i kultura czasu wolnego: zbiór studiów*, vol. 7, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 2001; *Kobieta i małżeństwo*, vol. 8, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, Warszawa: Instytut Historyczny UW, Wydawnictwo DiG, 2004.

9 Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki*, e-book, 2000; Natalia Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru. Robotnice w Polsce w latach 1945–1960*, Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2015; Magdalena Grabowska, *Zerwana genealogia Działalność społeczna i polityczna kobiet po 1945 roku a współczesny polski ruch kobiecy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2018; Małgorzata Fidelis, Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, Piotr Perkowski, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, *Kobiety w Polsce, 1945–1989: Nowoczesność – równouprawnienie – komunizm*, e-book, 2020.

with women who had lived most of their lives during the Soviet era, which I conducted in the late 1990s, revealed that the overwhelming majority of respondents were unable to recall and recount the details of their own family life, although the women willingly agreed to be interviewed and to share the stories of their private lives. This was surprising, because women were responsible for the family and children in Soviet society. The pauses in and the fragmentary nature of the women's narratives could not be explained by their lack of memory, reluctance to talk, or traumatic experiences. On the contrary, the respondents gave detailed and coherent accounts of the often tragic and extremely painful post-war years, the partisan resistance, and the deportation of the Lithuanian people to Siberia. They also spoke vividly of their experiences and ordeal during the national revival under Mikhail Gorbachev's rule.

However, these women could hardly remember the details of their own family life. So why, then, were the memories of the married life of the women, who had lived through the Soviet mundanity, so fragile? Most aspects of family life in Soviet Lithuania were regulated and organised by the state, leaving little room for personal initiatives by the family members. The full working day for both men and women, state-organised leisure time for parents and children, the extensive after-school activities for schoolchildren, regulated and centrally coordinated summer holidays, which often did not coincide with those of husbands and wives, and limited forms of leisure reduced the amount of time available exclusively for the family and for interaction between family members. They spent more and more time away from the family, and the poor economy of the Soviet country and the constantly necessitous daily routine also reduced the amount of time spent together. The unique experiences of the women provided an opportunity to recount the historical narrative from the perspective of *herstory* and encouraged the correction of the widespread stereotype of the family as a safe haven for the Soviet regime: did the family really occupy the central place in the lives of men and women during the Soviet era and was it an essential support for the regime?¹⁰ Today, solid research on women's history in Lithuania covers the period from the Late Middle Ages to the very end of the Soviet period and is attracting increasing attention from scholars, students, and readers. However, women's history should be linked not only to research and publications, but also to the institutionalisation of this academic field. It is no coincidence that in the 1960s, many of the pioneers of women's history in the West were working at and directing the emerging uni-

¹⁰ Dalia Marcinkevičienė (Leinartė), *Prijaukintos kasdienybės. Biografiniai Lietuvos moterų interviu, 1945–1970 m.*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2008; *The Soviet Past in the Post-Soviet Present*, introduction and eds Melanie Ilic, Dalia Leinarte, New York: Routledge, 2015; Dalia Leinarte, *Family and the State in Soviet Lithuania: Gender, Law and Society*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

versity centres of women/gender studies where research in and programmes of women's history found formal 'shelter'. The institutionalisation of women's history in the West has legitimised this field as a separate independent discipline. In the 1960s, the American historian Joan Scott irreversibly introduced the category of gender and the notion that it was impossible to explain history as a whole without *herstory* in the field of historical research. Legitimation of women's and family history as independent academic disciplines led to the establishment of solid international journals in these fields, which are counting decades of their existence today. In American and Western European universities, research in women's history is conducted at the centres of women and gender studies, history departments, and specialised research centres, with dedicated public funding. It was obvious to Western scholars that women's history had to be an independent and equal discipline, not a marginal and subsidiary one.

The feminist movement and the struggle for women's rights in the 1960s gave women's history a chance to be institutionalised in Western universities. *Herstory* and women's voices resurrected from historical oblivion became an integral part of the feminist movement and was seen as the realisation of women's rights in academic life. It is worth reminding that discrimination in academia used to be blatant, and one of the leading universities such as Yale opened its door to women only in 1969. It was obvious to Western feminist intellectuals that the denial of women as subjects of history in historiography (in other words, non-recognition of women's history) and the actual discrimination of women in society were two integral issues of gender (in)equality. The academic world of the West has also recognised that women's history contributes to the understanding of the causes of structural gender inequalities and transforms the patriarchal roles of men and women in contemporary society at the same time.

Despite the growing number of scholars and students interested in women's history and studies, this field of research and studies has remained formally unrecognised in Lithuania. There is no specialised academic journal or a university department and/or research centre with specialised undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in Lithuania, despite the fact that the history of women and gender is a popular topic in university theses. Unlike in the West, women's history in Lithuania has never been formally integrated into historical research and studies, nor has it become a professional and equivalent discipline funded by the state budget. In other words, women's history in Lithuania has not become an integral part of the discipline of history and remained a marginal field of historical research and fragmentary studies.

With the collapse of the communist regimes, it was commonly expected that, along with their explicitly stated ambition to transform themselves into liberal Western democracies, the well-educated Eastern European societies would

adopt Western principles of gender equality and inevitably draw on the history of women and gender. However, shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Lithuania, like other Eastern European societies, mainly discredited the principles of gender equality preferring the neo-patriarchal roles of men and women. Decades after the end of the communist regime, albeit with gratifying exceptions, most of research in women's history is conducted by women, and mostly for a female audience. As in other Eastern European societies, women's history in Lithuania does not have a sufficient institutional basis to play a weighty and meaningful role in the strengthening of democracy and implementation of Western principles. Thus, women's history in Lithuania, which began its journey together with the colleagues in the West, is stuck halfway between the unfulfilled ambition to become an institutionalised independent field of research and studies and an exotic field of issues of marginal history.

What, then, are the prospects for women's history today?

In Lithuania, just like in neighbouring Poland, women's history is increasingly becoming part of the political discourse. As a result, women's history is often infantilised and rendered primitive by conservative social policies.¹¹ In Poland, populists falsify women's history to justify the patriarchal roles of men and women in the family by assigning women an exclusively reproductive role. Women's history in Poland is being used to curtail women's reproductive rights and ban legal abortion altogether.¹² In Lithuania, radical and ultra-nationalist groups are also exploiting the falsified history of women to legitimise the 'traditional family', to speak out against liberal democracy and Western values, and aggressively deny the principles of liberal gender equality and feminism. On the other side of political discourse, in Lithuania, as in other Eastern European countries, women's history becomes part of the LGBTQ+ narrative. This shift opens up new academic areas that have not been explored before. Focus on the gender-neutral history has an innovative academic perspective and offers a methodologically new approach. However, the unequivocal interweaving women's history with queer studies fundamentally changes the subject of research – the woman. At this point, intersectionality narrows the framework of research in women's history as established in the 1960s.

Scholars working in women's history in Lithuania and other European countries are at a crossroads and inevitably have to choose which methodological path to follow in reconstructing the past. One perspective or another is not exclusively

11 The 2020 documentary *Podwójnie wolne. Prawa polityczne kobiet, 1918* (Twice Free. Women's Political Rights, 1918) about women's participation in liberation struggle can serve as an example.

12 The lecture 'Women's History in Feminist Discussions in Poland' given by the Polish historian Dobrochna Kalwa on 19 May 2022 at Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science. Online access: <https://www.facebook.com/TSPMI/videos/372230334948408/>.

theoretical and academic. The choice of the narrative determines which gender roles in family and public life are proposed by scholars as historically objective and valuable, and, on the contrary, as a patriarchal, harmful tradition that must be transformed. Women's history is thus open to miscellaneous contexts. That is why today women's history is not only the resuscitator of the silent voices of history, but probably the most important shaping force of contemporary society.

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