

REFERENCES TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN LITHUANIAN MEMOIRS AND PUBLICATIONS DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD: 'AND LITHUANIA MOANED UNDER THE IRON FIST OF THE INVADERS'

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ABSTRACT

Personal testimonies of the Great War, revealed in memoirs, diaries and publications by Lithuanians, have already been used by historians seeking clarification of the reflection of the military experience in Lithuania. This article shows that a significant part of these testimonies appeared in the interwar period due to the intentional collection and publication of material on military history, and their publication was often not random, but also had a political aspect. Moreover, the article complements earlier knowledge of the fact that the Great War was referred to not only when mentioning the German occupation. The many references to the Great War in the writings of Lithuanian intellectuals, and in the writings and speeches of politicians in the interwar period, had much more varied reasons.

KEY WORDS: First World War, German occupation, military history, war experiences, memories, publications.

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ANOTACIJA

Asmeniniai liudijimai apie Didįjį karą, atskleisti Lietuvos gyventojų atsiminimuose, dienoraščiuose, publicistikoje, jau buvo naudojami istorikų, siekusių nagrinėti karo patirties refleksiją Lietuvoje. Tačiau šiame straipsnyje parodoma, kad nemaža tokių liudijimų dalis tarpukariu atsirado dėl kryptingos karo istorijos medžiagos kaupimo ir publikavimo veiklos, o jų publikavimas dažnai buvo ne atsitiktinis, o turėjo politinę potekstę. Kartu straipsnyje papildomas ankstesnis pažinimas, atskleidžiant, kad į Didįjį karą buvo kreipiamas dėmesys ne vien prisimenant Vokietijos okupaciją. Daugkartines nuorodas į Didįjį karą Lietuvos inteligentijos raštuose ir politikų tekstuose bei kalbose tarpukariu lėmė kur kas įvairesnės priežastys.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Pirmasis pasaulinis karas, Vokietijos okupacija, karo istorija, karo patirtys, atsiminimai, publicistika.

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Our war?

In a book published a few years ago, the historians Maciej Górný and Włodzimierz Borodziej attempted to take a fresh look at the impact of the First World War in the societies of East Central Europe. According to them 'this was our war', because the 'Russians, Germans, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Byelorussians and Ukrainians fought in the uniforms of the Imperial Russian army, and Germans and Poles for the Prussian army. Slovenians, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Austrians, Bohemian Germans, Czechs, Moravians, Silesians, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians and Romanians went into battle with Austro-Hungarian troops.'¹

How much was the First World War 'our war' to the Lithuanians? Some Lithuanian historians today answer this question unequivocally. A hundred years after the start of the Great War, Algimantas Kasparavičius stated that the war 'was perceived in the Lithuanian historical memory as a global and bloody conflict between major European states', and as 'alien to Lithuania and Lithuanians'.² Rasa Antanavičiūtė made a similar point in an article published in 2016. According to her, in the interwar period in Lithuania, 'memories of the Great War were totally eclipsed by memories of the Wars of Independence'.³ But is it not possible that these authors did not find the memory of the Great War in Lithuania because they were looking in the wrong place? For example, Andrea Griffante, in several of his articles, has revealed many assessments of the Great War experience by the Lithuanian population, images of the German occupation of Lithuania during the war, and their stereotyping.⁴ Memoirs and diaries, sources that previously eluded the attention of historians in their articles, allowed Griffante to reconstruct the prevailing assessments of the war rather successfully.

¹ BORODZIEJ, Włodzimierz; GÓRNY, Maciej. *Nasza wojna*. T. I: *Imperia 1912–1916*. Warszawa, 2014, s. 9.

² KASPARAVIČIUS, Algimantas. La Grande Guerre dans les mémoires historiques des Lituanais. *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 2014, No 1–2 (113–114), p. 58.

³ ANTANAVIČIŪTĖ, Rasa. The Memory and Representation of World War I in Lithuania. In *The Art of Identity and Memory. Toward a Cultural History of the Two World Wars in Lithuania*. Ed. by Giedrė JANKEVIČIŪTĖ and Rasutė ŽUKIENĖ. Boston, MA, 2016, p. 191.

⁴ GRIFFANTE, Andrea. La Prima guerra mondiale e l'uso pubblico della storia in Lituania: i nuovi Cavalieri teutonici. Storicamente: laboratorio di storia. *Studi e Ricerche*, 2014, Nr. 10, p. 1–25; GRIFFANTE, Andrea. We and Homeland: German Occupation, Lithuanian Discourse, and War Experience in Ober Ost. In *Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial* (History of Warfare, Vol. 100). Ed. by Joachim BÜRGSCHWENTNER, Matthias EGGGER, Gunda BARTH-SCALMANI. Leiden, Boston, MA, 2014, pp. 237–255; GRIFFANTE, Andrea. „Irgendetwas in mir ist verhärtet oder abgestorben. Ich bin nicht mehr die, die ich war.“ Gabrielė Petkevičaitė und ihr Kriegstagebuch. In *Nach dem Zerfall der Imperien: Historische Zäsur und biografische Erfahrung im östlichen Europa = After the Fall of Empires: Historical Turning Points and Biographical Experience in Eastern Europe* (Nordost-Archiv, 2014, 23. Jhg.). Hrsg. von Kartin STEFFEN. Lüneburg, 2015, S. 192–208; GRIFFANTE, Andrea. Gemeinschaft und Mythos. Zwei litauische Narrative über den Ersten Weltkrieg. In *Der Große Krieg beginnt: Sommer und Herbst 1914 = The Great War begins: Summer and Autumn 1914* (Nordost-Archiv, 2015, 24. Jhg.). Hrsg. von Joachim TAUBER. Lüneburg: Nordost-Institut, 2016, S. 97–113.

However, Griffante's research does not indicate that a significant part of the memories of the Great War that were collected and published in the interwar period were the result of targeted activities, and the publication of these memories was often not random. We will attempt to fill this cognitive gap in the first part of this article. Moreover, Griffante's research highlights a rather one-sided assessment of the Great War, since in many cases it is based on memories of the German occupation. In the second part of the article, which analyses multiple references to the Great War in the letters of intellectuals and writings (or speeches) by politicians, the aim is to show that the assessment of the war and its role in the interwar period in Lithuania was much more diverse.

Collecting and publishing memoirs of the Great War

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Memoirs of the First World War were widely published in the interwar period in Lithuania. However, for various reasons, a large part of the memories and testimonies hardly reached the reader, remaining in manuscript form. This is based on several arguments.

First, the organised collection of historical material and various data (memoirs, stories, songs, folklore) about the events of the First World War and its consequences in Lithuania began during the war, but material collected at that time does not appear to have been published. The material was primarily gathered by the Church. From the beginning of the war, some parishes in the Diocese of Samogitia recorded events on a daily basis 'as seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears'.⁵ But ordinary people were also encouraged to collect material and write down stories relating to various events in the war. One of the first such appeals, based on the fact that events should not only be remembered but also 'consigned to history', appeared in the weekly *Lietuvos ūkininkas* on 1 October 1914. At that time, military action was already taking place on the German-Russian border, including the areas populated by Lithuanian speakers in the Suwałki province. Pelikšas Bugailiškis, the author of the article, suggested sending material to the Lithuanian Scientific Society in Vilnius, to create a Great War archive.⁶ Regular recommendations on how to collect war history material (the situation before the war, rumours, conscription, requisitions, relations between civilians and the army, descriptions of battles, spies and intelligence, obligations, losses), and documents to be collected (newspapers, photographs, diaries, letters from soldiers, war songs, poems, etc), later appeared in the newspaper *Lietuvos žinios*, in another article by Bugailiškis.⁷ It is not entirely clear what the impact

⁵ Karo istorijai medžiaga. *Lietuva*. 1921-11-20, nr. 262, p. 3.

⁶ [BUGAILIŠKIS, Pelikšas] GK. Rinkime karo meto medžiagą! *Lietuvos ūkininkas*, 1914-09-18 (10-01), nr. 38, p. 350.

⁷ [BUGAILIŠKIS, Pelikšas] GK. Karo istorijos medžiaga. *Lietuvos žinios*, 1914-11-01 (11-14), nr. 174, p. 1-2.

of these appeals to society was. However, the Manuscript Fund of the Lithuanian Research Society in the Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences has manuscripts of memoirs written in the second half of 1914,⁸ which could have been deposited in the fund at that time.

A similar call to record the events of the war also appeared in the Lithuanian press in 1915. In June, the Christian Democrat magazine *Šaltinis* published an article inviting readers to write about military action on Lithuanian territory. It noted that Lithuanians had always been loyal to the Russian Empire, showed compassion to Russian prisoners of war, were patriotic, and did not collect information for the enemy. Therefore, it was important to collect all data on military operations and incidents, as the Poles did, that 'do credit to Lithuania, because this war will be referred to by our children and our grandchildren for hundreds of years.'⁹ In these invitations, we can still see the declaration of loyalty to the Russian Empire, which gradually died out after the withdrawal of Russian troops. When the German army occupied Lithuania in 1915, collecting material of a similar nature could not even be considered: the occupying government treated any collection of information as espionage, and imposed the death penalty for it.

Nevertheless, information about the German occupation was collected and recorded even before the end of war. We know of this from many sources. Bugailiškis later wrote: 'As for the actions of the German occupiers, whenever I had an opportunity to observe them, I recorded everything in my diary-chronicle [...] The chronicle shows an extremely clear and fair view of the occupying regime and the misery of the people.'¹⁰ Without collecting material, it would not have been possible for Lithuanian intellectuals to draft memoranda to the occupying Ober Ost administration, or for Jonas Basanavičius to make his speech on 1 September 1916 in Vilnius, which was later published separately.¹¹ The 'Memorial of Great Lithuanian Perils' handed over to the German chancellor by the Council of Lithuania on 20 October 1917 was similar in terms of content. It attempted to draw the attention of the German central authorities to the great economic difficulties and losses caused to inhabitants of Lithuania by the occupying administration (forced labour, requisitions, deforestation, robbery, crime by bandits and prisoners of war, fugitives hiding in forests, crimes against civilians, etc).¹²

⁸ Eg: NORKUS, K. [?] Iš Kalvarijos padangės. Pasakojimas apie karo veiksmus tarp Vokietijos ir Rusijos, 1914 m. II pusė. *The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių biblioteka, hereafter LMAVB)*, F 255–221; SONDECKAS, Jackus. Europos karo istorijai medžiagos žiupsnelis, 1914 m. lapkričio 6–10 d. Žemaičių Kalvarijoje (four notebooks). *LMAVB*, F 255–375.

⁹ [ŠMULKŠTYS, Antanas] PAPENTIS. Rašykime karo istoriją! *Šaltinis*, 1915-05-30 (06-12), nr. 21–22, p. 137–138.

¹⁰ BUGAILIŠKIS, Pelikšas. *Gyvenimo vieškeliais: medžiaga istorijai*. Sud. Vigintas Bronius PŠIBILSKIS. Šiauliai, 1994, p. 204–205. Some of the Bugailiškis notes were published as the introduction to the diary of Petras Klimas: KLIMAS, Petras. *Dienoraštis 1915–1919*. Chicago, 1988, p. 13–44.

¹¹ BASANAVIČIUS, J[onas]. *Iš lietuvių gyvenimo 1915–1919 m. po vokiečių jungu*. Vilnius, 1919.

¹² Laikinojo Lietuvių Tautos Tarybos Prezidiumo Didžiųjų Lietuvos vargų memorialas, 1917 10 20. In *Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais 1915–1918. Lietuvos nepriklausomos valstybės genėzė*. Sud. Edmundas GIMŽAUSKAS. Vilnius, 2006, p. 171–190.

However, the collection of information about the German occupation did not stop at the end of the war. On returning to Lithuania from Russia in 1918, Jaroslavas Rimkus decided to convey the German occupation, which he himself had not essentially experienced, in drawings. In order to create them, he apparently also gathered recollections and interviewed people. This is evidenced by the words in the introduction to his book of drawings issued in 1922: 'There was no easier job than collecting material for this work, because every Lithuanian under the German occupation was a living encyclopaedia of German atrocities and all kinds of occurrences.'¹³

The publication of documentary writings about the war years essentially began immediately after the war. This was primarily the publication of diaries and notes made during the war. In 1921–1922, the journal *Mūsų senovė* published extracts from diaries by the Lithuanian intellectuals Liudas Gira and Aleksandras Dambrauskas, and the notes of Petras Klimas. Notes by Pranciškus Žadeikis, a priest in Skuodas on the Lithuanian-Latvian border, were published in a separate book in 1921 in Klaipėda (the second part was published in 1925). The author sought to capture the events of the war so that the material could be used for writing a history of the Great War in Lithuania, and so that, after reading it, citizens of Lithuania could understand 'what terrible times we have experienced and how much trouble we had in winning freedom for Lithuania.'¹⁴ The book describes the turmoil amidst the approaching or receding front, the arrival of the German army in Skuodas in 1915, the functioning of the occupying authorities, daily relations with the occupying administration, and the attempts by civilians to adapt to the wartime conditions. The author of another such work is Mikas Gudaitis from Prussian Lithuania, who served in the German army during the war. In Ober Ost, he worked for the semi-official newspaper for Lithuanians *Dabartis*, and in 1917 he travelled around the country several times and took notes. In the foreword to a description of these trips published in Klaipėda in 1925, Gudaitis explains that the purpose of his writings and their publication was to leave 'a view of events of the First World War for future generations'.¹⁵ In the same year, Pranciškus Žadeikis commented once again in the preamble to the second volume of his book *Užrašai* why he published it: it had seemed that the country would never forget its wartime experience, but 'it turned out that these difficult times are slipping quickly into the shadows of time, mainly because much more difficult times of turmoil and the building of Lithuania came after the war.'¹⁶ Another work in a similar vein was also published in 1925, the first part of a diary by the writer Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė,

¹³ *Vokiečių okupacija Lietuvoje 1915–1919 m. paveikslėliuose ir trumpuose jų aprašymuose*. Surengė ir išleido J. ŠILIETIS. Kaunas, 1922, p. iii.

¹⁴ ŽADEIKIS, Pr[anciškus]. *Didžiojo karo užrašai*. I dalis: 1914–1915–1916 metai. Klaipėda, 1921, p. 4.

¹⁵ GUDAITIS, Mikas. *Lietuva 1917 metais. Kelionės po Lietuvos vokiečių okupacijos metu*. Klaipėda, 1925, p. 4.

¹⁶ ŽADEIKIS, Pr[anciškus]. *Didžiojo karo užrašai*. II dalis: 1917–1918–1919 metai. Klaipėda, 1925, p. 1.

written in Puziniškis during the war (the second part came out in 1931).¹⁷ The diaries of Petkevičaitė-Bitė, a well-known publicist and public figure, are a unique document in the history of Lithuanian literature about the First World War, and have attracted the attention of individual researchers.¹⁸ This is not only because they were written by a talented author, but also because they are a valuable source for understanding the day-to-day realities of the German occupation, changes in the mood of the people, and the formation of the image of the Germans in Lithuania.

The beginning of studies on military history in Lithuania in the 1920s gave a new impetus for the collection and publication of memories of the Great War. In 1918, the General Staff of the army already had a special unit that engaged mostly in book publishing and propaganda, which changed its name several times.¹⁹ Simultaneously, there were attempts to establish a public organisation in which, unlike the General Staff, studies on military history would be specifically developed. The first attempt was the Karo mokslo kūrėjų draugija [Society of Creators of Military Science], established at the beginning of 1921, of which the president was General Leonas Radus-Zenkavičius, and the secretary was Major Vytautas Steponaitis. However, it did not last long. After two years, again at the initiative of General Radus-Zenkavičius, a group of officers founded the Karo mokslo draugija [Military Science Society] in Kaunas, which operated for a decade. It sought to bring together people interested in military history, to collect information on battlefields in Lithuania, memoirs, and descriptions of battles, and to publish research on warfare.²⁰ A history section was established in the society, and its members, who studied military history, had a special role to assign to the events which 'are related to the history of Lithuania and the Great War'.²¹

The study of the Great War experience was perceived not only as an interest in history, but also as part of the education of officers. Most people associated with the activities of the Karo mokslo draugija had participated directly or indirectly in events in the war, so it is understandable that examples from this war were used in military education. In 1925, at the initiative of the Karo mokslo draugija, the publication of the periodical *Kardas* for the Lithuanian military was launched. It contained articles relating to the First

¹⁷ PETKEVIČAITĖ, G[abrielė]. *Karo meto dienoraštis*. [I dalis.] Kaunas, 1925; II dalis: *1915–1916 metų okupacija*. Kaunas, 1931.

¹⁸ BARNIŠKIENĖ, Sigita. „Karo meto dienoraštis“ („Das Tagebuch der Kriegszeit“) von Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė. *Annaberger Annalen*, 2012, Bd. 20, S. 65–75; GRIFFANTE, A. „Irgendetwas in mir ist verhärtet...“

¹⁹ This unit was initially called the Literature Commission, and later the Literature Unit. In 1921, it became the Military Science Division, in 1926 the Military Science Department, and in 1929 was reorganised to become the Press and Education Division. For more about its activities, see: JOKUBAUSKAS, Vytautas. *Karo istorija ir jos svarba Lietuvos kariuomenei tarpukariu*. *Karo archyvas*, 2017, t. XXXII, p. 195–203.

²⁰ For the activities of the society, see: NAVAKAS, [Kazys]. *Karo mokslų draugija. Mūsų žinynas*, 1928, t. XV, nr. 45, p. 621–628; JUZEFOVIČIUS, Romas. *Istorinė švietėjiška Karo mokslų draugijos veikla 1923–1933*. *Karo archyvas*, 2002, t. XXVII, p. 181–191. Cf. also VAIČENONIS, Jonas. *Lietuvos karo istorijos tyrimų organizavimas 1918–2008 metais*. *Istorija*, 2009, t. LXIII, p. 60–61.

²¹ RUSECKAS, P. *Karo mokslo draugija, Karys*, 1923-12-06/12, nr. 49 (237), p. 542.

World War, describing not only various 'strangenesses' from the German occupation in Lithuania,²² but also battles on the Western and Eastern fronts, in the Balkans and in Turkey, information about Lithuanian soldiers who served in the Russian army, or who were prisoners of war, etc. Examples from the history of the Great War were used for similar purposes in the magazine of the Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga [Lithuanian Riflemen's Union] *Trimitas*. They supported the idea of civilian resistance and partisan activity, indicating, for example, how the people of East Prussia had acted when the Russian army invaded that German territory.²³ Examples from the Great War were even used in order to organise the Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga, and to justify the need for its military preparation,²⁴ thereby strengthening the country's military capability.²⁵

However, officers who were engaged in military history did not restrict themselves to an interest in the Great War for practical and educational purposes. Events in the war were not described exclusively in publications for Lithuanian soldiers or riflemen. Attention was also drawn to the collection and publication of memoirs about the First World War. This was done in the journal *Mūsų žinynas*, and in particular in *Karo archyvas*, both published by the Lithuanian army. Both were edited by Vytautas Steponaitis, in 1921–1925 and after 1925 respectively. This is why his activity can be associated with the more consistent collection of material about the First World War. *Karo archyvas* was published in Lithuania from 1925 to 1940, with a six-year break between the fifth and the sixth volume. The first five volumes came out between 1925 and 1929, and seven more came out between 1935 and 1940. The editor's note in the first volume stated that the recovering Lithuanian army also relied on 'the experiences and lessons of the Great War'.²⁶ However, the journal published extremely diverse memories and publications about the Great War. It was a wide-ranging journal, publishing various pieces related to Lithuanian military history: articles, memoirs and documents. Of the 182 items in the 12 volumes of *Karo archyvas*, the (mostly) Lithuanian experience in the First World War was revealed in 53 different items. Thus, 29% of the entire

²² Eg: [AMBRIOZAITIS, Juozas] T-KA, P. Kodėl vokiečiai šunes Lietuvoje naikino. *Karys*, 1930-01-16, nr. 3, p. 49–51.

²³ 'In 1914, when the Russians intruded on the German lands, every German attempted to help their own army. They did not even spare their houses, and burned them down. For example, after instructed by their own side where the Russian army was, the German population would burn their houses or stacks of grain. When the battles began, telephone and telegraph lines in the Russian army did not function, as the German population made sure to cut the wires.' J., M. Karai ir gyventojai. *Trimitas*, 1924-07-10, nr. 195, p. 18–19.

²⁴ 'This little group [the group of founders of the Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga] still had fresh memories of the Great War, and recalled the saying by famous German military leaders that "It is easy to fight with an army but terrible to fight with all the population" and remembered the example of residents of Belgium, all of whom, although with poor weapons, resisted the armed intruders as a neutral country, and blocked the powerful German military machine for two weeks.' ŠAULYS ŠAUKLYS. Penkiametinėms sukaktuvėms. *Trimitas*, 1924-07-17, nr. 196, p. 1.

²⁵ 'Belgium paid very dearly for not providing the right attention to the military capability of their country before the World War, relying excessively on international treaties guaranteeing its neutrality.' K-TIS, Č. Mažoms valstybėms savo nepriklausomybę apginti keliai. *Trimitas*, 1927-05-19, nr. 19, p. 594.

²⁶ Redakcijos žodis. *Karo archyvas*, 1925, t. I, p. 1.

journal was devoted to aspects of this war. It published memoirs about service by Lithuanian soldiers in the Russian army, the experiences of prisoners, military action on Lithuanian territory, civilian life during the war, the self-organisation of Lithuanian soldiers in 1917–1918, and the creation of national units that began in Russia. In addition, the journal also published research. In the case of the First World War, these are mainly the studies by Marija Urbšienė about press releases during the German occupation, the communication system, economic life, etc.²⁷

In the second phase of the publication of *Karo archyvas* (1935–1940), the focus on the Great War coincided with the foundation in 1936 of the Military History Unit, a separate unit in the Press and Education Division of the General Staff, to carry out research into military history. Its establishment is associated with the appointment of General Stasys Raštikis as commander-in-chief in 1935, and the reforms he initiated, which, among other things, led to the renewed publishing of *Karo archyvas*.²⁸ The Military History Unit was primarily concerned with collecting material about the Wars of Independence, but it also appealed to society for memories of the Great War. 'We would also appreciate memories of the German occupation and other occupation periods,' its first appeal went.²⁹ The appeal was soon repeated, clearly expanding the range of memoirs of interest to the Military History Unit: 'The Military History Unit of the General Staff has already addressed participants in the Great War and our Wars of Independence, asking for their memoirs to be sent to the Military History Unit. In addition, letters have been sent to a number of people [...] on this occasion, the Military History Unit once again asks all participants in our struggles to record their memoirs and send them to the Military History Unit of the General Staff.'³⁰

Thus, it is obvious that the activities in the 1920s began mainly with initiatives by individual officers, and in the mid-1930s acquired the organisational reward of the army, and, accordingly, entirely different possibilities. The organised collection and publication of memories of the Great War in this case was considered as 'normal', as in the case of the Wars of Independence. At first, this interest in the Great War was limited mainly to the national movement among Lithuanian troops in Russia in 1917–1919,³¹ but later the range of themes clearly expanded.

²⁷ URBŠIENĖ, Marija. Vokiečių okupacijos ūkis Lietuvoje. *Karo archyvas*, 1936, t. VII, p. 143–219; URBŠIENĖ, Marija. Vokiečių okupacijos ūkis Lietuvoje. *Karo archyvas*, 1938, t. X, p. 7–94; URBŠIENĖ, Marija. Vokiečių karo metų spauda ir Lietuva. *Karo archyvas*, 1937, t. VIII, p. 71–116; URBŠIENĖ, Marija. Susisiekimai, paštas ir pasai Lietuvoje Didžiojo karo metais. *Karo archyvas*, 1939, t. XII, p. 63–84; URBŠIENĖ, Marija. Sveikatos priežiūra vokiečių okupuotoje Lietuvoje Didžiojo karo metu. *Karo archyvas*, 1939, t. XII, p. 85–94.

²⁸ VAIČENONIS, J. Op. cit., p. 61.

²⁹ Karo istorijos reikalai. *Karys*, 1936-04-16, nr. 15–16 (890–891), p. 388.

³⁰ Nurodymai atsiminimus rašantiems. *Kardas*, 1936-07-15, nr. 14 (243), p. 390; *ibid*: *Šaltinis*, 1936-07-25, nr. 30 (1028), p. 364.

³¹ One of the first proclamations on this topic appeared in 1922 in the *Karys* newspaper of the Military Science Division (GINKLO DRAUGAS. Rinkime istorinę medžiagą. *Karys*, 1922-04-27, nr. 17 (153), p. 197). Readers were encouraged to write their reminiscences 'about the days and events that they have

There were other reasons why references to the First World War grew in the Lithuanian press in the 1930s. First, as political tensions intensified in Europe, more focus was put on military topics and military history, and not only in specialised army-related magazines (*Karys* or *Kardas*). Not only did the corps of Lithuanian officers have to be spiritually prepared for a possible conflict with neighbouring countries; different groups in society were prepared for the purpose as well, and, as a result, they were more widely introduced to military specifics, military operations, the influence of the army on national education, and the plans in different countries in the Baltic region, etc. This is why, 17 years after the Great War, in an article on military education, Major Simas Narušis wrote: 'When we begin doing something in military training, many of us remember the Great War.'³²

But there was another reason as well. The organised publication of memoirs of the First World War in the mid-1930s was related to the growing political tension between Lithuania and Germany, and the resulting propaganda struggle. The publication of various memoirs of the German occupation began at that time. They emphasised a persistent, emotional and simplified negative image of the Germans, who were portrayed as an aggressive nation, constantly threatening Lithuania and its people. The negative perception of the occupation, even without any direct personal experience, persisted until the end of Lithuania's independence in 1940. This depiction of the German occupation in the pages of the Lithuanian press essentially expressed not only personal experiences during the Great War, but also the different aspects of the struggle for influence in the autonomous Klaipėda (Memel) region between Germany and Lithuania.

In this context, a special role was played by the memoirs of the German occupation collected by Petras Ruseckas. He participated in the activities of the Karo mokslo draugija mentioned above, and actively collected memories of Lithuanian residents about various periods in national history during the interwar period. Prior to this, he had published collections of testimonies about smuggling of prohibited printed matter in the Latin alphabet into Russia from Prussia in 1864–1904, the times of serfdom in Lithuania, and the Wars of Independence. In 1939, Ruseckas published his latest collection of memoirs, called 'Lithuania in the Great War', in Vilnius. In spite of the broad title, the publication was mainly intended to describe the German occupation, and in the introduction, the compiler emphasised strongly the moralising anti-German position of his book: 'Read the memoirs in this book telling you how the Germans rewarded us for our trust, with superficial and empty politeness, greetings, and immediate, cruel robbery, plunder, the futile destruction of farms, crops, shooting animals,

experienced, i.e. about their stay in Russia and the organisation of Lithuanian soldiers' unions and separate military units there'. This was motivated by the desire 'not to lose memoirs for history', while the editors of *Karys* promised to give the more interesting memoirs to *Mūsų žinynas* to publish.

³² NARUŠIS, S[imas]. Karinis visuomenės rengimas. *Židinys*, 1935, t. XXII, nr. 7, p. 19–20.

requisitions, contempt for people, beatings and even murders. And, like locusts, the Germans came in swarms, bringing more destruction every time. The flourishing, rich, calm land inhabited by hard-working people immediately started to turn into a country of poverty, trouble and hunger.³³ The publication included 30 eyewitness stories and memories recorded in 1929–1939, and one diary written in 1915–1919. From a territorial point of view, it covered a large part of Lithuania, in particular the former Kaunas province. The southern part of Lithuania was represented much less.

Ruseckas' publication was the only collection of memoirs on this scale that was printed in the interwar period in Lithuania. However, the fact that he portrayed stereotype episodes in the German occupation of Lithuania, which were already exploited in the pages of *Karo archyvas*, should not give the false impression that no other memories were relevant. A significant part of the memoirs published in the interwar period were also devoted to the activities of Lithuanian national units in the Russian army. The last storyline at the end of the 1930s gained a new impetus for development relating to the establishment of the Kariuomenės pirmūnų sąjunga [Association of Army Predecessors] in Lithuania (1937). However, the three years up to the occupation of Lithuania in 1940 were too short for this impetus to produce any tangible results.

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Assessments of the Great War in memoirs and publications

As can be seen from the review provided in the first part of the article, images of the German occupation dominated in assessments of the Great War published in the interwar period in Lithuania. The principal provisions of the evaluation of the occupation period reiterated in many publications from before the Second World War were formed at the time when Ober Ost fully controlled the situation in the country. Nevertheless, the negative perception of the war, the depiction of Lithuania and Lithuanians as victims of the war, began before the German army crossed the former Russian-German border in 1915 and occupied Lithuania.

In fact, in the summer of 1914, war was like a long-lost legend pertaining to the past among country people in Lithuania. Who remembered a 'real' war on Lithuanian soil? Despite localised anti-Russian uprisings in the 19th century, which did not occur all over Lithuania, the last big war in Lithuania had taken place in Napoleonic times. According to the priest and writer Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, a Lithuanian who lived in Imperial Russia has not seen war 'with his own eyes and has not experienced its deprivations through the entire nineteenth century'.³⁴ Thus, the announcement of

³³ *Lietuva Didžiąjame kare*. Surinko ir suredagavo Petras RUSECKAS. Vilnius, 1939, p. 3–4.

³⁴ [TUMAS, Juozas] VAIŽGANTAS. Iš lietuvių karo metų psichikos. In [TUMAS, Juozas] VAIŽGANTAS. *Raštai*. T. 11. Vilnius, 1999, p. 446.

war, mobilization, forced migration and the real events of war were a cruel, unexpected and shocking existential challenge to the population of agrarian Lithuania. The newspaper *Viltis*, edited by Antanas Smetona and Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, wrote on 4 August 1914 (new style) at the beginning of the war: 'The disaster that we could not force ourselves to believe in the last hours has happened [...] It is clear without explanation that the largest field of war between Russia and Germany will be in Lithuania, on both sides of the Nemunas [...] Lithuania will suffer painfully.'³⁵ However, Lithuanian intellectuals were not just passive observers of the onset of military action. In August 1914, Russian troops entered East Prussia, and the hope emerged that Lithuanian-populated areas in the east of Germany could be connected to Russia, thus consolidating all the lands inhabited by Lithuanians. The same newspaper wrote in September: 'Russian victories in East Prussia bring salvation to our brothers in Lithuania Minor from national death in the waves of Germanisation, and for us, new strength and recovery.'³⁶ Moreover, in a piece published at a similar time, cautiously formulating a vision of the future, Smetona asked: 'What will happen after the war? What will the map of Europe look like?' In his opinion, 'like other countries, our country also has the right to expect to be compensated for the plight which it suffers like other nations, sacrificing her people and their wealth in favour of Russia.'³⁷ However, with the changing situation at the front, and the war not ending, such hopes became increasingly unattainable, and Lithuanian intellectuals concentrated their efforts on the activities of the Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpiti [Lithuanian War Relief Committee]. The meaning of the war for Lithuanians, as well as for many other people living near the borders of the Russian Empire, had become increasingly uncertain. The opinion that this was an apocalypse, from which you would expect only trouble and suffering, was gaining ground.

This prospect was especially fuelled by the experience of the German occupation. After the German troops took Vilnius on 18 September 1915, there were no major military clashes in Lithuanian-populated territories until the end of 1918. However, as the writer Balys Sruoga later wrote, Lithuanians lived under the German occupation like in a 'hard labour' camp.³⁸ Soldiers seeking food, plundering and terrorising put constant economic pressure on the population, in addition to numerous restrictions and obligations. People were not only prohibited to fish, hunt and travel freely around the country, but were forced to comply with rules and requirements imposed by the German authorities (to celebrate German holidays, the birthday of the Kaiser, attend German meetings, write letters in German, etc). Ultimately, the constant grievances to the occupying government, immoral sexual standards and the prevalence of venereal disease,

³⁵ Rusijos karas su Vokietija. *Viltis*, 1914-07-22 (08-04), nr. 161, p. 1.

³⁶ *Viltis*, 1914-08-31 (09-13), nr. 195 (1143), p. 1.

³⁷ SM[ETONA], A[ntanas]. Karo ženkle gyvenant. *Vairas*, 1914-08-30 (09-12), nr. 14, p. 2.

³⁸ [SRUOGA, Balys] PLIENINIS, Jurgis. *Vokiškasis siaubas. Teisybė apie vokiečius*. Kaunas, 1934, p. 29.

resignation and lowering standards of living damaged morale.³⁹ While the war was still going on, in the autumn of 1918, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas stated: 'The countryside will no longer be what it used to be after the turmoil of the war. Only the prophet can say what it will be [...] The war so deeply corrupted people of all social classes and walks of life that the real face of people can no longer be seen in the sludge.'⁴⁰

Thus, understandably, at the end of the war, not only the number of casualties and the sufferings and difficulties of refugees who were forced to expatriate to the depths of Russia or had left of their own free will, but primarily the brutal occupation by Germany, stimulated people to recall the events of the Great War. The visual footprint of the war was so vivid in the countryside that contemporaries often began their narrations from their reviews: 'It's sad to visit Lithuania at this time, because of its emptiness, and even more so because of the sadness of the people who have not so far been able to recover,' Jonas Basanavičius wrote in August 1916. 'If you walk along the railway from the Kaunas district, in the Suwałki province, you will rarely see an old house, only trees around farms singed with gunfire, and occasionally a chimney.'⁴¹ At the end of 1918, Jonas Navakas, a former officer in the Russian army, returned to Lithuania, and ten years after the events of the war, he recalled his first emotional impressions when he arrived in Lithuania near Daugavpils: 'The countryside is terribly affected: forests have been destroyed, trees cut down by artillery shells, barbed wire everywhere, many fields are fenced. Pits, trenches... I would like to see at least one person in the fields. There is no live spirit to be seen anywhere. The land is dead. The graves can be felt...'⁴² The reckless deforestation, a huge loss in the years of the war, was felt in the interwar period. Mikas Gudaitis, who travelled in Lithuania during the war, not only described the predatory tree felling process in the forests of Suwałki province, but also illustrated it with emotional impressions: 'The forest was humming powerfully; it wept and cried, because strangers ruined its being; the straight trees complained, fluttering with their green tops...'⁴³ Ordinary people, without a doubt, emphasised the personal disasters that the war had brought on them. Ten years after the war, the journalist and writer Petras Cvirka wrote that 'even now, in our village, there is an old man walking in straw shoes and complaining about his misfortune, that his sons were killed during the Great War in Russia. Three sons.'⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the actions of the war and their consequences in some memoirs

³⁹ Attention was later drawn to it from time to time, for example: ALEKSA, Jonas. *Lietuvių tautos likimo klausimu. Lietuvos kaimas ir žemės ūkis*. T. I. Kaunas, 1925, p. 72; PALECKIS, Justas. *Didysis 1914–1918 m. karas*. Kaunas, 1939, p. 91.

⁴⁰ TUMAS, J[uožas]. Ūkis. *Lietuvos aidas*, 1918-09-12, nr. 86 (134), p. 1.

⁴¹ BASANAVIČIUS, J. Op. cit., p. 1.

⁴² NAVAKAS, Jonas. *Lietuvai besikeliant. Iš 1918–1919 metų užrašų ir atsiminimų ir iš Lietuvos vasaros rytų partizanų veikimo*. Kaunas, 1928, p. 12.

⁴³ GUDAITIS, M. Op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁴ [CVIRKA, Petras]. Pranašas su vyžomis. *Diena*, 1929-10-06, nr. 61, p. 3.

were evaluated using biblical images of disaster: the war was described using metaphors of whirlwinds and storms, and its consequences were compared to a bloody scar, a plague, a famine, and a devastated land. Stasė Jablonskienė wrote that the first storm of the war was mobilization, the second was the deportation of people, forced migration from Lithuania with their chattels and animals. Finally, before the end of this disaster, 'a third black cloud came to the native land, the German occupation. And Lithuania moaned under the iron fist of the invaders, and the tears of oppressed people began to flow.'⁴⁵

For contemporary Lithuanian writers, wartime experiences provided creative themes for looking deeper at the meaning of warfare, and promoting a moral evaluation of the war. They raised questions not only about the horrors of war, but also about the altruism and self-sacrifice evoked by the war. The war forced them to reflect on the issue of preserving humanity, and even encouraged anti-militarism. For Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, the years 1914 to 1917 were the most productive and creative, as was noted by the researcher Aleksandras Merkelis: 'The cannon bombardment, the complaints of the wounded, tears and trouble gave him a strong impetus to work. Fr Tumas was the first Lithuanian writer to use themes from the Great War in his creative work. *Karo Slibinas*, *Rimai ir Nerimai*, *Antimilitarininkas* and *Ponas Direktorius* were creative works written in the first years of the war.'⁴⁶ Some of the anti-militaristic, universal Christian morals highlighted in Vaižgantas' works are related to the anti-military rhetoric of authors from other European countries.⁴⁷ The theme of the First World War unfolded in works by other Lithuanian poets and writers as well, both created during the war and later. However, in general, it should be noted that the experience of the war has not been contemplated and presented more deeply in talented literary or publicistic forms.

But references to the war after it ended were provoked not only by reflecting it as a disaster. In many instances, the assessment of the war was influenced by the fact that the attitude was expressed in the completely new political circumstances, in which the independent state of Lithuania already existed. In this situation, the war acquired a symbolic meaning. It was like a zero hour for counting historical time, the starting point of a new period in life, from which the establishment of the state, the restoration of the economy and a peaceful life began: 'After the Great War, the fields and the countryside were in ruins; people were tired, looking around with melancholic pity, as in terrible unfamiliar places, waiting for a blessing from the brightening sky. And the countryside of Lithuania was covered by clear skies, people were

⁴⁵ JABLONSKIENĖ, St. Didžiam karui siaučiant. *Karo archyvas*, 1935, t. VI, p. 289.

⁴⁶ MERKELIS, A[Aleksandras]. *Juozas Tumas Vaižgantas*. Kaunas, 1934, p. 241-242.

⁴⁷ 'Reflections are reflections. But when you talk about defence, you feel that the war has scratched off your shell derived by culture, and turned you into a beast, unable to forgive anything, especially the enemy. And you curse the war, to go to hell.' [TUMAS, Juozas] VAIŽGANTAS. Karai – tautų žvėriškintojai. *Nepriklausomoji Lietuva*, 1919-06-27, nr. 51, p. 1.

preparing a feast in which a quiet life was expected like a beloved and peaceful guest.⁴⁸ In the book 'On the Fate of the Lithuanian Nation. Lithuania's Countryside and Agriculture', published in 1925, the economist and minister of agriculture Jonas Aleksa, who spent the war years in Russia, not only listed the material damage done to Lithuania during the war, but also the determination of the people to create a new economy based on new principles after the war.⁴⁹ Abundant references to the Great War as the beginning of the period are also found in a commemorative publication devoted to the decade of independence, presenting changes in the country's agriculture, industry and financial system, and the formation of public organisations, the press and schools in the decade after the war.⁵⁰

Besides, there were appeals to the Great War, stating that the war and its results had enabled the modern state of Lithuania to be created. This was usually emphasised at various state celebrations and anniversaries, but similar thoughts were not necessarily revealed in commemorative publications. On 15 May 1920, the Lithuanian Constituent Seimas elected by the people had its first meeting. Aleksandras Stulginskis was elected chairman, and noted in his speech that the war was a factor giving hope for independence: 'In the midst of the atrocities of the war, hope for the liberation of our nation, which has been enslaved and suffering since long ago, began to shine.'⁵¹ In the commemorative publication mentioned, the diplomat Petras Klimas stated that the creation of the state of Lithuania began in 1915, when the German occupying authorities had uncontested control over occupied Lithuania.⁵² In 1935, one cultural magazine wrote: 'If there had been no Great War, which crushed the great Russian Empire, we can be sure that today we would still bear the yoke of this slavery, which we suffered until the day of the declaration of independence in 1918.'⁵³

In particular, there were many references of this kind to the Great War in Antanas Smetona's speeches and publications. Due to his extended rule as president (1919–1920 and 1926–1940), and the authoritarian rule introduced after the coup of 1926, the whole period of independent Lithuania is often associated with this politician. It is for this reason that Smetona's references to the Great War deserve special attention.

As a future president, Antanas Smetona worked for the Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti in Vilnius during the war, and participated actively in an informal political circle of intellectuals. From the end of 1915, he was one of the most important politicians in the country. They began organising Lithuanian

⁴⁸ DAUNYS, Pranas. *Vargo kelias. Atsiminimai iš kovų dėl nepriklausomybės ir aklujų gyvenimo*. Kaunas, 1933, p. 5.

⁴⁹ ALEKSA, J. Op. cit., p. 74–78.

⁵⁰ *Pirmasis Nepriklausomos Lietuvos dešimtmetis 1918–1928*. Kaunas, 1930, p. 37, 140, 178, 205, 238, 308, etc.

⁵¹ I Sesijos Pirmasai posėdis, 1920-05-15. *Steigiamojo Seimo darbai*, 1920, sąs. 1, p. 4.

⁵² KLIMAS, Petras. Lietuvos valstybės kūrimas 1915–1918 metais Vilniuje. In *Pirmasis Nepriklausomos Lietuvos dešimtmetis...*, p. 1.

⁵³ NARUŠIS, S. Op. cit., p. 19–20.

evenings (discussion clubs) in Vilnius in the Rūta Hall, bringing together an 'intelligent circle for the discussion of Lithuanian affairs', which at the beginning of April 1916 was reorganised into the smaller 'Lithuanian diplomacy group'.⁵⁴ Smetona prepared memoranda from this group to the German occupying authorities, and was one of the main organisers of its activities. He spent the whole war in Lithuania, participating actively in social and political life, and in September 1917, he was formally elected chairman of the Council of Lithuania, which later declared independence. Probably because of this experience, the Great War was often mentioned in his speeches and articles, becoming a symbol of beginning.

While in opposition, and as president, Smetona emphasised the importance of the First World War in the establishment of the state, the national consciousness and the activation of political life. In a commemorative piece written to mark the 20th anniversary of the meeting of the Great Seimas in Vilnius in 1905, he noted: 'The great global war was a condition for the seed from the Vilnius Seimas to grow. It moved the world in a huge whirlpool, and was deeply embedded in every person's heart, and thus in the consciousness of each nation. In Lithuania, for decades it accelerated the process which began [...] when the idea of political independence was still in the blue mists of the future.'⁵⁵ On 16 February 1933, in the celebrations of the 15th anniversary of independence, the 'Letter to the Nation' by Smetona, who was then president, was published. In his speech, referring to the declaration of 16 February, the president inevitably mentioned the German occupation during the Great War, the political constraints imposed by the occupying authorities, the destruction of the economy, and the ability of Lithuanian politicians to manoeuvre in difficult situations. Of course, in the latter instance, he had himself in mind. The Great Depression was already hurting, farmers in southwest Lithuania were unhappy, relations with Germany had deteriorated because of the tension in the Klaipėda region, and the sufferings of the Great War were presented as examples to the nation to withstand the difficult challenges: 'The present crisis is nothing compared with the sufferings of the period of activity of the [Lithuanian] Council [...] Could whoever has experienced the Great War be upset?'⁵⁶

On the same day and on the same occasion, speaking in the garden of the War Museum in Kaunas, Stasys Šilingas, chairman of the Council of State, also mentioned the Great War in his speech. What he said was a thesis formulated and at least first publicly expressed by Smetona at the beginning of the Great War. He repeated the idea that the Lithuanians became the first victims of two hostile forces during the war: 'Our homeland was drawn into the very first military action, our country's crops

⁵⁴ It included Juozas Bakšys, Jonas Basanavičius, Mykolas Biržiška, Povilas Dogelis, Augustinas Janulaitis, Steponas Kairys, Petras Klimas, Antanas Smetona, Juozas Stankevičius, Aleksandras Stulginskis, Jurgis Šaulys, and Jonas Vileišis. Cf. *Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje...*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ SM[ETONA], A[ntanas]. Vilniaus Seimą atsiminus. *Lietuvis*, 1925-11-27, nr. 47, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Resp. Prezidento raštas Tautai. Kaunas, 1933 m. vasario 16 d. *Vairas*, 1933, t. VII, nr. 3, p. 282.

were trampled under the feet of foreigners, and our homeland burned in the fire of battles. Residents of Lithuania Minor from Klaipėda and Lithuanians from Tilsit were conscripted into the German army. Lithuanians from Lithuania Major were conscripted into the Russian army. Brother was forced to bear arms against brother.⁵⁷ As early as 1914, Smetona wrote in a censored article written while military action was taking place in East Prussia and on the German-Russian border: 'It was our country's fate to be the first to hear the sound of gunfire and whistling bullets.'⁵⁸

In a speech to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Lietuvių draugija nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpti, Smetona put together many of his frequently used statements in a unified structure: 'From the former lands of Russia, Lithuania as a frontier was destined to be the first to get into the fight, the first to feel the strokes of the sword [...] Lithuania became the first victim of the war'; but 'One must not forget that the Great War [...] is the reason why many nations, including Lithuania, acquired freedom, like a reward for their plight.'⁵⁹ In this way, according to Smetona, the war was a misfortune, it brought a lot of suffering and challenges, which the Lithuanians felt the first, but they worked together, were not scared, and won rewards: freedom and independence. In a publication in 1939 which essentially apologetically glorified Smetona's rule, the Great War was mentioned as the starting point and an object for comparing the achievements of the state. According to Smetona, 'Today Lithuania has recovered from the ruins of the war, rebuilt, redeveloped, revived its agriculture and industry; Lithuania is shining and has become more nationally engaged.'⁶⁰

Those who experienced the Great War in Lithuania were more afraid of the political crises that struck Europe in the interwar period. They remembered the period 1914 to 1918 like a series of *annus horribilis*, because they understood well what the anarchy and turmoil caused by war were. In this context, the specificities of the geopolitical survival of small states, the political manoeuvring, and the military preparations of small states were mentioned. However, with the rise of tensions in Europe, and with the German aim of destroying the Versailles system becoming clear, in 1935 Smetona stated clearly that, with freedom regained during the war, it could also be lost if war broke out again.⁶¹ The political situation in Europe was essentially changing in the 1930s. At the end of 1939, the journalist and publicist Valentinas Gustainis, writing about the war that had broken out again in Europe, took the example of the First World War, and predicted that in the new war, the victories and defeats 'will be

⁵⁷ Valstybės tarybos pirm. p. S. Šilingo kalba pasakyta 1933 m. vas. 16 d. Karo Muz. Sodely. *Vairas*, 1933, t. VII, nr. 3, p. 342.

⁵⁸ SM[ETONA], A[ntanas]. Karo ženkle gyvenant. *Vairas*, 1914-08-30 (09-12), nr. 14, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Valstybės Prezidento kalba minint Lietuvių Komiteto dvidešimtį metų sukaktį (1934.XII.8). *Vairas*, 1935, t. XIII, nr. 1, p. 53.

⁶⁰ *Pirmąjį barą išvarius. 1918–1926–1938*. Kaunas, 1939, p. 10.

⁶¹ Tautos Vado kalba tautininkų suvažiavime, 1935.I.5. *Vairas*, 1935, t. XIII, nr. 2, p. 129.

deeper than in the war of 1914–1918', and that the results of the war would not only create a new international order, but also a new civilisation.⁶² On 16 February 1940, speaking on the radio, Smetona regretted that 'The equilibrium created after the First World War in Europe is dwindling', and 'the fear that the war could spread even more and make life worse for everyone' could be felt.⁶³

Although all these references to the Great War expressed the attitude of the Lithuanian political elite towards the experience of war, the indoctrination of the provisions created by the authoritarian regime was strong in society. Not only did public opinion form government policy, but, on the contrary, public opinion was the subject of manipulation by the political elite. Perhaps, therefore, references to the First World War inevitably led the Lithuanian people to remember their experiences, and to anticipate what could be expected in the new war when the enemy troops arrived. However, the catastrophic reality of the Second World War and its consequences surpassed the most pessimistic forecasts.

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Conclusions

The material presented in this article supplements current studies on the importance of the Great War to Lithuania in the interwar period in several important respects. First, it is clear that the recording and collecting of information about military action in Lithuania and the impact of the war on the people of the country was attempted after 1914. Some diaries written during the war, and various notes made at the time, were the first documents on the Great War to be published in Lithuania in the 1920s. The organised collection of historical material, various data (memoirs, stories, songs and other items of folklore) about the events of the war was also carried out in independent Lithuania. The development of research in military history contributed most to this. This depended on enthusiasts such as Vytautas Steponaitis, Petras Ruseckas and others. The journal *Karo archyvas* of the General Staff edited by Vytautas Steponaitis (1925–1940), and Ruseckas' collection 'Lithuania in the Great War' (1939), were the most important platforms for publishing memoirs about the war. The publication of the many memoirs about the war in various newspapers and magazines in the 1930s was partly due to the intensifying political tensions and propaganda war in relations between Lithuania and Germany relating to the Klaipėda region. In this context, attention was paid to one topic, the German occupation, sometimes depicting the Germans

⁶² GUSTAINIS, V[alentinus]. Šio karo prasmė. *Židinys*, 1939, t. XXX, nr. 12, p. 621.

⁶³ Pamatai, ant kurių laikosi mūsų valstybės rūmas. Respublikos Prezidento A. Smetonos vakar Nepriklausomybės šventės proga pasakyta per radiją kalba. *Lietuvos aidas*, 1940-02-17, nr. 79 (5288), p. 1.

in a simplistic and negative way, showing them as an aggressive nation. The experience of occupation suffered in many ways by many people became a central storyline in the prevailing narrative of war as an apocalyptic disaster, which brought much suffering and many difficulties to the people.

Secondly, the assessment of the Great War in the interwar period in Lithuania did not consist merely of experiences of the occupation by Germany. As we have seen, references to the Great War in recollections and in publications appeared for a variety of reasons. The experience of this war was used in practice in training soldiers and riflemen, giving them specific examples of military action, paramilitarism and the organisation of civilian resistance. Interest in the geopolitical survival tactics of small nations, political manoeuvring and the specificity of their military preparation were encouraged, by presenting them as a model for the development of a possible scenario of events in Lithuania if the country were to be involved in a broad international conflict again. This motif of references to the Great War dominated in the specialist military publications *Mūsų senovė*, *Mūsų žinynas*, *Kardas*, *Karys* and *Trimitas*. With the complicated geopolitical situation in Europe in the 1930s, the presentation of events in the Great War and the reflection of international politics then became more relevant in publications. In addition to the 'war as a lesson' motif, other factors also encouraged references to the Great War in memoirs and publications. Many memoirs revealed the military experience of veterans of the Great War, especially in the national units created in 1917 by Lithuanians serving in the Russian army. The war was also mentioned by giving it a symbolic meaning of a zero hour for counting time. Thus, the war was turned into a starting point for a new political and social order, from which the establishment of the state, the restoration of the economy and a peaceful life began. Eventually, the Great War was mentioned often, indicating that it offered an opportunity for creating new political realities, and became a prerequisite for the emergence of the independent Lithuanian state. Understandably, Antanas Smetona had an obvious interest in portraying this meaning of the Great War for Lithuania. Coming back to the question raised at the beginning of the article, whether the Great War was 'our war' for Lithuanians in the interwar period, it seems that in the mid-1930s, at least President Smetona had a clear answer to this question.

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„IR SUDEJAVO LIETUVA PO GELEŽINE OKUPANTŲ RANKA“: NUORODOS Į PIRMAJĮ PASAULINĮ KARĄ ATSIMINIMUOSE IR PUBLICISTIKOJE LIETUVOJE TARPUKARIU

Vygantas Vareikis

Santrauka

Kiek lietuviams Pirmasis pasaulinis karas buvo „mūsų karas“? Straipsnyje šis klausimas svarstomas nagrinėjant Lietuvos gyventojų atsiminimus, dienoraščius, inteligentijos raštus ir politikų tekstus bei kalbas.

Pirmojoje straipsnio dalyje atskleidžiama, kad nemaža dalis atsiminimų apie Didįjį karą, kurie buvo renkami ir publikuojami Lietuvoje tarpukariu, buvo kryptingos veiklos rezultatas, o šių atsiminimų skelbimas neretai nebuvo atsitiktinis. Organizuotai rinkti istorinę medžiagą ir įvairius duomenis (atsiminimus, pasakojimus, karo metų dainas, folklorą) apie Pirmojo pasaulinio karo įvykius ir jo pasekmes Lietuvos teritorijoje buvo pradėta dar karo metais. Tokius duomenis fiksavo Bažnyčia, tai ragino daryti visuomenininkai. Visa rinkimo, kaupimo ir užrašinėjimo veikla tuo metu buvo traktuojama ne vien kaip karo istorijos medžiaga, bet ir kaip šaltinis, atskleidžiantis okupacinės administracijos Lietuvos gyventojams keliamus ekonominius sunkumus ir daromus nuostolius. Dalis tokių

karo metais surašytų egodokumentų (Liudo Giros, Aleksandro Dambrausko, Petro Klimo, Miko Gudaičio, Pranciškaus Žadeikio, Gabrielės Petkevičaitės-Bitės) buvo publikuota jau 3-iajame dešimtmetyje.

Naują impulsą rinkti ir leisti Didžiojo karo atsiminimus davė Lietuvoje 3-iajame dešimtmetyje pradėti organizuoti karo istorijos tyrimai. Didžiojo karo patirtis juose vaidino svarbų vaidmenį dėl siekių praktiškai ugdyti karininkus. Tačiau žurnaluose „Mūsų žinynas“, o ypač „Karo archyvas“, publikuota ir nemažai specialiai surinktų ar parašytų atsiminimų apie lietuvių karių tarnybą Rusijos kariuomenėje, išgyvenimus karo nelaisvėje, karo veiksmus Lietuvos teritorijoje, civilių gyvenimą Lietuvoje karo metais, lietuvių karių saviorganizaciją 1917–1918 m. ir Rusijoje pradėtus kurti tautinius dalinius. „Karo archyve“ 29 proc. visų 1925–1940 m. publikacijų buvo skirta įvairiems su šiuo karu susijusiems aspektams. Antrajame „Karo archyvo“ leidybos etape (1935–1940 m.) dėmesys Didžiajam karui šiame žurnale sutapo su Karo istorijos dalies įkūrimu. Šis Kariuomenės štabo padalinys, turėjęs vykdyti mokslinius karo istorijos tyrimus, vos įsteigtas, pirmiausia susirūpino medžiagos rinkimu, kreipdamasis į visuomenę su raginimu rinkti ir siųsti medžiagą ne tik apie Nepriklausomybės karus, bet ir apie Didįjį karą. Taigi akivaizdu, kad organizuotas atsiminimų apie Didįjį karą rinkimas ir publikavimas, kuris 3-iajame dešimtmetyje prasidėjo daugiausia pavienių karininkų iniciatyva, 4-ojo dešimtmečio viduryje įgijo organizacinį kariuomenės užnugarį ir atitinkamai visai kitokias galimybes.

Tačiau organizuotas Pirmojo pasaulinio karo laikų atsiminimų publikavimas XX a. 4-ojo dešimtmečio viduryje buvo susijęs ir su stiprėjančia politine įtampa Lietuvos bei Vokietijos santykiuose, ir su dėl to užvirusia propagandine kova. Tuo metu buvo pradėta sąmoningai spausdinti įvairius atsiminimus apie Vokietijos okupaciją. Juose regimas pastovus, emocionalus ir supaprastintas negatyvus vokiečių vaizdinys. Šiame kontekste ypatingas vaidmuo teko Petro Rusecko surinktiems Lietuvos gyventojų atsiminimams. 1939 m. publikuota knyga „Lietuva Didžiajame kare“ tarpukariu buvo vienintelis Lietuvoje išleistas tokio masto atsiminimų, surinktų organizuotai, rinkinys. Tačiau tai, kad jis perteikė stereotipizuotus Vokietijos okupacijos Lietuvoje epizodus, kurie jau buvo eksploatuojami „Karo archyvo“ puslapiuose, neturėtų sudaryti klaidingo įspūdžio, kad jokie kiti atsiminimai nebuvo aktualūs.

Nors Lietuvoje tarpukariu viešai skleistuose karo vertinimuose Vokietijos okupacijos vaizdiniai dominavo, antrojoje straipsnio dalyje parodoma, kad karo ir jo reikšmės vertinimas Lietuvoje buvo kur kas įvairesnis. Į šio karo patirtis apeliuota praktikoje ugdat karinius ir šaulius, pateikiant jiems konkrečių pavyzdžių apie karinį veikimą, paramilitarizmą ir pilietinio pasipriešinimo organizavimą. Daugelyje atsiminimų atsiskleidė Didžiojo karo veteranų karinė patirtis, ypač tautiniuose daliniuose, kuriuos 1917 m. pradėjo kurti lietuviai, tarnavę Rusijos kariuomenėje. Lietuvių rašytojams amžininkams karo patirtys suteikė kūrybinių temų ieškoti gilesnės karo prasmės, skatino moralinius karo vertinimus. Jie kėlė klausimus ne tik apie karo baisumus, bet ir apie karo sužadintą altruizmą bei pasiaukojimą. Karas vertė juos apmąstyti žmogiškumo išsaugojimo klausimą ir netgi skatino jų antimilitarizmą.

Ne vienu atveju vertinant karą turėjo įtakos faktas, kad požiūris buvo reiškiamas esant visiškai naujai politinei situacijai, kai jau egzistavo nepriklausoma Lietuvos valstybė. Dabar karas įgijo simbolinę reikšmę. Jis buvo tarytum istorinio laiko skaičiuotės nulinė valanda,

naujo gyvenimo periodo atskaitos taškas, nuo kurio prasidėjo valstybės kūrimas, ūkio atstatymas ir taikus gyvenimas.

Kartu į Didįjį karą nuolat buvo kreipiamas dėmesys teigiant, kad būtent šis karas ir jo rezultatai sudarė sąlygas moderniai Lietuvos valstybei sukurti. Dažniausiai tai būdavo pabrėžiama įvairių valstybės švenčių ir sukaktuvių metu, tačiau panašios mintys atsiskleisdavo ir nebūtinai proginėse publikacijose. Ypač daug tokio pobūdžio nuorodų į Didįjį karą būta Antano Smetonos kalbose ir publicistikoje. Tiek veikdamas opozicijoje, tik užimdamas valstybės Prezidento pareigas, A. Smetona pirmiausia akcentuodavo Pirmojo pasaulinio karo reikšmę kuriant valstybę, augant tautiniam sąmoningumui ir aktyvėjant politiniam gyvenimui. Dar Didžiojo karo pradžioje jis vienas pirmųjų išreiškė vėliau dažnai kartotas tezes, kad Lietuva tapo pirmąja Didžiojo karo auka ir kad vieni lietuviai (Rusijos) šiame kare turėjo kovoti su kitais (Vokietijos). A. Smetonos nuomone, karas buvo nelaimė, jis atnešė daug kančių ir išbandymų, kuriuos lietuviai pajuto pirmieji, tačiau jie veikė kartu, nepabūgo ir gavo atpildą – laisvę ir nepriklausomybę. Tai, kad Didysis karas suteikė galimybę susikurti naujoms politinėms realijoms ir tapo nepriklausomos Lietuvos valstybės atsiradimo prielaida, A. Smetona vaizdavo gana suinteresuotai. Grįžtant prie straipsnio pradžioje iškelto klausimo, ar Didysis karas tarpukariu lietuviams buvo „mūsų karas“, aiškų atsakymą 4-ojo dešimtmečio viduryje, regis, turėjo bent jau Prezidentas A. Smetona.