

IN MEMORIAM



Vilius Ivanauskas (26.08.1979 – 08.11.2018)

In November 2018, the historians' community bade farewell to their colleague Vilius Ivanauskas (26.08.1979 – 08.11.2018). Before even having reached the age of forty, during his career as a historian, that was abruptly cut short, Vilius made a truly significant contribution to East Central European and Soviet history, both in terms of publishing important monographs and many scholarly articles on the history of the second half of the 20th century, and in terms of his unparalleled energy in organizing colleagues for joint collaborations, sharing ideas and outlining future research perspectives.

Vilius began his doctoral studies at the Lithuanian Institute of History (doctoral studies were conducted in cooperation with Klaipėda University) in 2003. He had not only completed a Master's degree in history and anthropology at Vilnius University (2003) and a Bachelor's degree in politics and international relations (2002), but had also acquired a wealth of experience abroad. He had spent five months at the Centre for Anthropological, Political and Social Theory at the University of Copenhagen in 2002 under the Erasmus-Socrates program. His excellent grasp of theory, broad knowledge of the available literature and clear vision of what he wanted to research became important factors that determined his success in the then barely-studied field of Soviet history. It was important to find an approach to this difficult topic, and to not succumb to the temptation of focusing solely on repressions and terror, instead trying to discern the deeper, latent political and social shifts that our society experienced in the late Soviet period. In this regard, Vilius' excellent awareness of the context and literature, his understanding and application of paradigms that had been tried elsewhere served this field very well. Incidentally, his somewhat lesser knowledge of archival material was an obstacle in the beginning, as his primary specialisation in anthropology meant he chose to rely mostly on interviews and field research methods. However, this lack of experience was only a short-term hurdle, as his skills in adopting new research opportunities allowed Vilius to



quickly learn the secrets of working in the archives. He also acquired the sixth sense of finding “hidden” documents on the archive shelves that is so necessary to a professional historian. It wasn’t long before he was working in archives both in Lithuania and in foreign countries. I recall how we ventured to the archives in Moscow and Estonia on numerous occasions. He also investigated the archives of Georgia and even of distant Kyrgyzstan. While undertaking his Fulbright scholarship in the United States, in November 2012–June 2013, he also had the chance to work at the Hoover Institution Archives.

His excellent skills in theoretical approaches and ability to combine archival materials and the unique interviews he had conducted resulted in brilliant scholarly studies. His dissertation, which he defended in 2008, titled “Lithuanian nomenklatura in the bureaucratic system: between stagnation and dynamics (1970–1988),” was nominated for the best dissertations competition in 2009 and was awarded a prize at the Presidential Palace of the Republic of Lithuania. Only one negative comment was made during the defense of his dissertation – it was too large, too broad, and thus more than one monograph could be written on the basis of the text. But Vilius did not know how to write too little, or just “as much as was required”. He always thought of ways of expanding on one or another section in a future book or article, or supplementing the material in another chapter. He would not notice how this writing literally enveloped him, consuming all the hours in his day, and often making him work late into the night on his texts. His young age and seemingly never-ending energy tricked Vilius, while he himself accepted his fatigue as an understandable sacrifice made in the name of science. Such was the work ethic that led to his excellent academic results: Vilius’ scholarly articles were printed in prestigious international journals, including *Europe-Asia Studies* and *Histoire@Politique*, but also in other foreign and Lithuanian journals. Only recently, in February 2019, just after Vilius’ passing, a collective monograph was released in English, under the title *The Literary Field under Communist Rule* (Academic Studies Press), where his contribution is also present. He authored the book’s chapter about the strategies followed by Lithuanian writers during the Soviet period. Vilius’ intellectual legacy is also preserved in the Manuscripts Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History, in his personal collection (col. 66), where recordings of his interviews are kept.

Of course, the most important contributions Vilius made to academia are his monographs. Both the book published on the basis of his dissertation *Lietuviškoji nomenklatura biurokratinėje sistemoje: tarp stagnacijos ir dinamikos (1968–1988 m.)* (Lithuanian nomenklatura in the bureaucratic system: between stagnation and dynamics (1968–1988, Vilnius, LII leidykla, 2011) and especially

his second monograph, *Lietuvos rašytojai „Tautų draugystės“ imperijoje* (Lithuanian Writers in the 'Friendship of Nations Empire', Vilnius, LII leidykla, 2015) are large-scale works, significant for the research of the Soviet period. I read them with great interest in manuscript form, having been asked



to read them by their author, and also once they had come out from the publishers. I still refer to them today in my own research. The special feature of large-scale monographs is that, after a certain amount of time has passed, they can be read afresh to reveal new and interesting points that had gone by unnoticed in earlier readings. So too today, returning to Vilius' first monograph, while reading it again, I am surprised at the sheer number of accurate conclusions, original insights and unique discoveries it contains. The monograph can be read as several separate independent histories. For example, when reading about the establishment of the Mažeikiai Oil Refinery or the Ignalina Atomic Power Plant, we can take an anthropological approach to the bureaucratic practices that plagued the Soviet period, but which are still alive and well today. We can also learn about the history of local regions, for example, about the city of Alytus. Yet, most importantly, all these accounts that appear in his book are integral parts of one deep and systematic analysis, revealing the functioning of the Soviet nomenklatura and bureaucracy.

Likewise, in his second monograph about the Lithuanian writers in the Soviet period, the author did not limit himself just to discussing how cultural figures would grow closer to or distance themselves from the orders handed down from Moscow. Following the activities of the writers and their works, Vilius delved into the expressions and shapes of nationalism during the Soviet years. He revealed the complicated hierarchy of involvement, control and coexistence in the Soviet empire and the different strategies that were adopted, presenting cases from other republics (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, etc.) and comparing the situation of Lithuanians to the trajectory of cultural figures of other nationalities (e.g., Jewish writers) who also happened to be writing in Lithuania. Critics might say that the texts of his monographs, especially the second one, are not



easy to read. I had brought up this topic with Vilius and he was quite adamant: a scholarly work is not meant to be a booklet for popular consumption. Having gone to such lengths and put so much work into his research and writing, the author has the right to ask for a degree of attention and effort from his readers, who are in turn highly rewarded with their newly acquired knowledge. I have no doubt that younger generations of historians will discover Vilius' books and articles anew, as they are indispensable for researching the history of Lithuania during the second half of the 20th century.

One could even say that Vilius discovered America for his fellow historians in Lithuania. He was one of the first to make use of his academic connections in order to benefit from a longer scholarship in the United States. Whilst a post-doctoral scholar at the Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science in 2009–2011, he took part in several research fellowship programs at major American research centres, including Berkeley in California, Indiana University and Stanford University. Upon his return, he convinced us, his colleagues, of how important it was not to become isolated within the boundaries of research on Lithuanian history exclusively, to search for opportunities for closer cooperation with scholars from other countries, and to present our research to as wide an audience as possible. Back then, driven by Vilius' inspiration, we strived to organize our first panels to attend the convention of the largest body researching our East Central European region – the Association of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES). At the convention held in Washington in November 2011, Vilius, Aurimas Švedas and I, together with our colleague from the University of Latvia, Martins Kaprans, and David Beecher from the University of California Berkeley, organized a panel about the personalization of institutions during the late Soviet period and their work schedules. At this panel Vilius presented a paper about the activities of the Lithuanian Writers' Union. This first successful attempt was followed by other international conferences, scholarships and research fellowship programs, of which the Fulbright scholarship at the University of California Berkeley in 2012–2013 was especially notable. During his time at Berkeley, Vilius was inspired by the attitude and approach of Professors Yuri Slezkine and John Connelly towards the research of the Communist era, by their ability to get to the essence of a scholarly presentation, by their relationship with the existing academic contributions to Sovietology, and even by their ways of conducting discussions. Vilius saw the six months of his Fulbright scholarship as his academic golden age, due to the inspiring discussions with colleagues, the chance to have access to the rich collections of the UC Berkeley Library and to the largest body of Soviet archival materials outside the borders of the former USSR, kept in the

Hoover Institution Archives. He also had the chance to meet with Lithuanian families living in California, to participate in and speak at Lithuanian community events held to mark Lithuanian national holidays. The feeling of harmony and fulfilment also came from having his family with him during this longer stay – his wife, Gvida, and his then still very young sons, four-year-old Juras and two-year-old Ainis. As I was simultaneously on my Fulbright scholarship at the neighboring Stanford University, I would often visit Vilius. We travelled around together with his family, and I saw him being happy.

It was Vilius' ideas that gave rise to the Vilnius Symposium on Late and Post-Soviet Issues. The ninth annual symposium was held at the Lithuanian Institute of History last year. Unfortunately, Vilius was no longer present – a candle was lit near his photograph. His colleagues from Lithuania and abroad remembered and honored him, and two days later it was time to sadly say farewell.

Saulius GRYBKASKAS

