

AGE MEYER BENEDICTSEN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

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Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė unfolds the story of Age Meyer Benedicstsén, Danish linguist, writer, and traveller, who, at the end of the 19th century, was the first Scandinavian to study Lithuania's culture and language, advocating early for Lithuanian independence. This chapter also tells how leading cultural personalities from Lithuania and Denmark were performing cultural diplomacy, opening new doors into the political world.

This is a great privilege to be part of the project initiated by the Royal Danish Embassy in Vilnius to mark the centenary of the beginning of political contacts between Denmark and Lithuania. These longstanding ties have played a crucial role in the establishment of Lithuania's independent and democratic statehood, and they have also shaped the lives and careers of many teachers and students at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies at Vilnius University, which I represent.

All the Nordic countries, in different ways, but especially by working together, have been instrumental for Lithuania becoming what it is now, and it would be futile to attempt to weigh the contributions of one country against another. Lithuanians swear eternal gratitude to Iceland for being the first to recognise their restored statehood in February 1991; however, Iceland's President Gudni Th. Johannesson, a professional historian who has researched his country's role in the recognition of the Baltic countries, acknowledges the importance of



Portrait of Age Meyer Benedictsen.
(Photo: Private)

other Nordic countries, and especially then Danish foreign minister Uffe Elleman Jensens contribution into these processes. He also implies that they should be seen in the light of earlier Baltic-Nordic relations, including the years of Soviet occupation.¹

Denmark, by firmly standing by its recognition in 1921, remained an ally of independent Lithuania even in the times when the latter's name was erased from the political map of the world. This paper, however, will go much further back into the past and will pay tribute to the Dane Age Meyer Benedictsen (1866-1927), who at the end of the 19th century became the first and vocal Scandinavian advocate of Lithuania's right to be recognised as a nation. It will also serve as an occasion to remember some other contacts between the two countries in the course of the more than 100 years that followed, and to reflect on what could be done in order to preserve their memory for the future.

PURSUING OPPRESSED NATIONS' HAPPINESS

The inscription on Age Meyer Benedictsen's gravestone reads: "The interpreter of oppressed nations/A radiating spirit for the Danish people" and on the back side: "Friends, his noble/Work won for him/

Erected the stone/Over the good worrier”.* Although not cut in runes, it refers to the Viking custom of inscribing a persons memory in stone for future generations. Today, however, not many Danes will know his name, although it was quite often mentioned in the contemporary press. Upon his death, foreign diplomats came to pay him last respects, and the then Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Laust Moltesen read an eulogy at his funeral.²

A search in the catalogue of the Danish Royal Library will produce an extensive list of Meyer Benedictsen’s publications. Most of them are booklets for folk university education with speaking titles: “Jews and Jew-hatred” (Joderne og Jodehadet, 1906), “India and Europe” (Indien og Europa, 1909), “The Struggle of the Irish people” (Irlands Folkekamp, 1910), “The Black Race in Africa and America” (Den sorte Race i Afrika og Amerika, 1927) and others. There are also bigger volumes: aside from the book dedicated to Lithuania, which will be discussed here, there are others dealing with Armenia, Finland and Iceland.³ Meyer Benedictsens name also appears in Danish translations of literature from many countries: novels by Božena Nemcova, Ivan Vazof, Juhani Aho, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Nikolai Gogol, and poems by Juliusz Slowacki and Adam Mickiewicz. He has also left a mark in linguistics, especially in the research of Iranian dialects.⁴

Meyer Benedictsen was born into a multicultural family: his mother, Anna Marfa Benedictsen was an Icelandic-Danish actress and author, and a friend of H.C. Andersen, and his father, Johan Philip Ferdinand Meyer, was a successful businessman of Jewish descent. During his life, he came into contact with numerous other nationalities: he travelled widely not only in Europe, but also went to Caucasus, Persia, Kurdistan, India, Singapore, the West Indies and other places. Possessing an extraordinary talent for languages, immense erudition and a compassionate soul, he could easily establish contacts with any people and learn what pained them most. He became one of the first Danish defenders of ethnic minority and human rights, making it his life’s task to spread knowledge about subdued or persecuted

De undertrykte Nationers Tolke/En lysende Aand for det danske Folk; Venner, hans aedle/Virke vandt ham/satte Sten/ over Stridsmand god.

communities and call for change. At the time without radio, TV and internet, his lectures, based on his globetrotting experience and read in the spirit of Grundvig's tradition of popular education, must have been the most immediate channel for the Danish people into the outside world. His phenomenal ability to attract and captivate crowds of listeners is well documented.

In one of his letters, Meyer Benedictsen wrote: "I never travel for fun [...], but always go beyond the surface. Under the colour and form, I search for the essence [...], for the human being, his way of thinking and his sense of happiness".⁵ His persistent "quest" for others' happiness also included the Lithuanians, whom he rediscovered for the world and described in the book *Et Folk, der vaagner. Kulturbilleder fra Litaven*, 1895.

WRITING LITHUANIA

Meyer Benedictsen first came to Lithuania in 1893, when the country as such did not exist. What had once been known as Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was, as the result of the third partition of the Lithuanian- Polish Commonwealth (1795), reduced to a province of the Russian Empire, while Lithuania Minor was a region of East Prussia. The indigenous Lithuanian people were unknown to the world, except for a few linguists (the Dane Rasmus Rask among them) who studied Lithuanian as one of the most archaic Indo-European languages, and those interested in folklore: some Lithuanian songs had been included in Johann Gottfried von Herder's collections of folk songs and had been mentioned in Danish by Georg Brandes in his *Impressions from Poland (Indtryk fra Polen, 1888)*. However, none of the foreign learned people before Meyer Benedictsen (perhaps, with the exception of the German humanist George Sauerwein, whom Meyer Benedictsen met and mentions in his book), spoke about Lithuanians as a nation to be, and already the opening paragraphs of his book show that the author is going to speak of their rights:

On the spot where the voracious eagles in the arms of the two mightiest military powers of Europe salute each other, the

boundary marks of both countries are planted in the soil of an alien people; the land is neither German nor Russian; neither the German nor the Russian language has right of citizenship there - this land is Lithuania.⁶

Up to the present day, Benedictsen's book, supplied with plentiful visual illustrations, remains one of the most exhaustive accounts about Lithuanians as an ethnic group. He meticulously, but also with sympathy and in vivid narrative and scenic images, describes all the elements that according to him define the individuality of a people: the landscapes and history, customs, language, mythology, people and culture. He also, apparently helped by his first wife Jeanette Schonheyder van Deurs⁷, includes the translations of about fifty Lithuanian *dainos* (folk songs) or their fragments. Much like the Romantic philosopher Herder, he sees in these songs - "often simple and monotonous [...] but never without truth, rarely without beauty"⁸ - the essence of the nation's soul and a possible source of national pride, especially when quality literature in



Et Folk, der vaagner. Kulturbilleder fra Litaven, 1895. (Photo: Private)

the national language was lacking. Meyer Benedictsen also explores in great detail the condition of the Lithuanians under Prussian and Russian rule, their relations to other peoples with whom they share the territory - Germans, Poles and Jews - and registers with joy the first signs of national rebirth.

After his studies in Moscow, Warsaw, Copenhagen and Leipzig, Meyer Benedictsen had very good command of Russian, Polish and German, and also of Lithuanian, which he had studied with professor Karl Verner.⁹ Thus, he could base his research both on his immediate experience of the country and on multiple written sources. Through the Russian linguist Filipp Fortunatov, he came into a contact with the Lithuanian intellectual Petras Kriaučiūnas (1850-1916) and his wife Sofija (1849-1912), whose home in Plokščiai, where he came to stay, was frequented by European linguists and “litvomans”. Kriaučiūnas was involved in the National Revival Movement, and through him, Meyer Benedictsen came into contact with its other members, including Vincas Kudirka (the future author of the Lithuanian national anthem) and had access to the movement’s press (*Ausra*). He also made use of older written sources by the historian Simonas Daukantas, the folklorist and poet Ludwig Rhesa, the poet Kristijonas Donelaitis, the ethnographer Ludwik Adam Jucewicz and others.

Much of what he tells the Danish reader therefore reflects the traditional national-romantic narrative that would later lay the ideological foundation for the newly created Lithuanian state: the emphasis on Lithuania’s grand past, the uniqueness of its language and the great injustices inflicted by foreign powers. The memory of the Holocaust and manifestations of xenophobia today oblige us to be alert with regard to nationalist ideals; however, Meyer Benedictsen, much ahead of his time, was already fully aware of the complexity of nationalism. He dedicates his work to the distinguished Danish scholar and ardent proponent of the freedom of thought Georg Brandes, whom he calls:

An advocate of what is elevating in the national feelings and an opponent when they drive over into banality and ugliness, an ardent defender when they give dignity to a people and are spacious and strong enough to accommodate the thoughts of

the big world, but an unhesitant protester against that type of national feelings that build a wall of prejudice around their own imperfections and narrow-mindedness*.¹⁰

What Meyer Benedictsen was observing during his visits to Lithuania was exactly the loss of that dignity: cultural and technological stagnation, growing alcoholism, denouncement of the native language and even shame at being a Lithuanian. He associated this decline with the people's impeded cultural development, as the result of ethnic discrimination policies.¹¹ He realised that Lithuanian ethnicity was very much a social issue. Lithuanian-speaking people in both the Prussian and Russian part (and language was the key factor of ethnicity for the author) of the territory were exclusively poor peasants inhabiting the rural areas, and in the Russian part, he saw a further overlapping of class and ethnic divisions. The bureaucracy and the punitive power were concentrated in the hands of Russian emissaries and the gentry and clergy were Poles or (self)polonised Lithuanians, while manufacturing, finance and trade were concentrated in the hands of the Jewish people**.¹² Of all these groups, Lithuanian peasants, according to Benedictsen, suffered most. In the German territory, it was possible for a Lithuanian to cross the class boundary by adopting the coloniser's culture through education, but this led to the loss of Lithuanian ethnicity.¹³ The author saw that the cultural and social implications of Russian rule as being even more devastating. There was panoptic control of public, religious and private life, coupled with severe punitive measures, which intensified after the crushing of the 1863 Polish-Lithuanian insurrection against the Russian czar. One of the most dramatic episodes in the book is the description of Kražiai massacre (1893), in which the author exclaims with Shakespeare at the

Where something is missing in the published English translation of the book, my own translation from the Danish original is provided.

The author, who signs the book with his paternal Jewish surname Meyer, does not identify the entire Jewish population with this class. He sympathises with the difficult lot of the most disadvantaged part of this community and informs readers about the injustices Jews endured in the course of history. However, the book does contain some problematic descriptions of the local Jewry, and Orveille (1997) explains that by claiming that Jewishness was not a racial, but a cultural, category for A.M. Benedictsen.

world's indifference: "This World!... Fie on t ah, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden..."¹⁴The violence committed against the nation's spirit appeared to him as no less tragic. He, who was so active in Danish folk education, writes about the impossibility of getting schooling in the mother tongue, the absence of agricultural courses, the ban on public gatherings of any sort, and also the ban on Lithuanian writing - "an act of tyranny against the awakening spiritual life in Lithuania".¹⁵ He understood that russification of Lithuanians was a result of the short-sighted Russian anti-Polish policy¹⁶ and regretted that the Poles, who had also suffered much from Russian suppression and whose cause he would also voice¹⁷, looked down on the Lithuanians and were antagonistic towards their national aspirations.¹⁸ Meyer Benedictsen himself welcomed the formation of a new social group - the children of wealthier farmers who had gotten their university education in Moscow or St. Petersburg and returned home with a strong feeling of Lithuanian national identity and quite 'radicalised'. Meyer Benedictsen deemed it important to stress that unlike earlier European national movements, the Lithuanian revival movement did not spring from romantic idealisation of the past, nor from foreign influences, but "had its foundation in nothing but love of the people and deep compassion for the hard conditions under which they had to live"¹⁹, and that the way it chose to go was that of enlightenment. He found a living proof of that in Kriaučiūnas and the people around him who organised secret Lithuanian schools, published Lithuanian papers in Lithuania Minor and had them transported to the mainland.²⁰ Meyer Benedictsen can be even said to have joined their efforts: just as they appealed to the Polish speaking Lithuanians to "rediscover their roots," so did he, when he, according to Jurgis Savickis²⁰, recognised a Lithuanian family name among people (a future "bank director and a famous doctor and maybe more") he met in Moscow.

The Poles perceived these aspirations as being openly anti-Polish. The complexity of Polish-Lithuanian relations and differences in the interpretation of the same processes are well reflected in Landsbergis 2011/ 2013.

Book smuggling and illegal schooling became a defining Lithuanian cultural phenomenon up to 1904, when the ban was lifted (Plakans 2011, 237), and this 40-year period would witness an unprecedented growth of Lithuanian literacy (Venclova 2019, 108).

Meyer Benedictsens trust in the decisive role of culture and enlightened intelligentsia for nation formation was confirmed in theory and proven by history²¹, and his book about Lithuanian awakening was later considered prophetic by many. However, back in 1895 his conclusion was quite pessimistic: “it will be a very long and difficult way to go” before “the ill-treated people have secured the right of development and ennoblement [...], because the world is still so short-sighted and hard-fisted”.²²

THE AFTERLIFE OF THE BOOK

The book received quite a few positive reviews in the Danish press and was even said to have attracted attention “of wide circles”.²³ It was called “one of the best and most warmly written books of the year”.²⁴ It raised Danish readers’ sympathy for “the litde and modest peasant community, who had never been a cultural people” and whose “fight against two great cultural countries for the right to preserve their language and inherited customs was a sad thing to read”.²⁵ The book is also said to be an “eyeopener to the glaring injustice committed by great powers against their small neighbours and showing, which weapons work better than canons and bayonets in the battle for national feelings and independence”.²⁶ It is clear that the book appealed to the national sentiment of the Danes, who recognised their own trauma in the Lithuanian situation - the loss of South Judand to Prussia in 1864. (Meyer Benedictsens book contained references to it too, but he also reminded the Danes that unlike the Lithuanians, they had a place where their nationality could be freely cherished).

Jurgis Savickis (1890-1952), who in 1919 became the first Lithuanian envoy to Denmark, later met older Danes who would cheerfully exclaim that they knew Lithuania, because they had read Benedictsens book”.²⁷ But even if there were people in Denmark who after 1918 still remembered what Lithuania was, the Lithuania that Savickis represented wanted to profile itself in a different way - not as a miserable and uncultivated victim, but as a vital, culturally and economically aspiring European state. It was Savickis, a diplomat, writer and artist, who took upon himself to continue Meyer Benedictsens

work and promote young Lithuania in Denmark. He did it through diplomatic channels and by arranging cultural events like exhibitions and concerts²⁸, by personally approaching the intellectual guru Georg Brandes²⁹ and by contributing to the Danish press. He came to Denmark in 1915, as a delegate of the Lithuanian Society for the Relief of War Sufferers, which functioned under the Danish Red Cross. There, he arranged publication of postcards with Lithuanian themes, and people could support this cause by purchasing them. In 1917, he published the longer article “Lithuania’s Present and Future”³⁰, in which he spoke of the country’s determination to pursue independence and seek cooperation with its neighbours. The same year he started working on a book in Danish that would come out in 1919 with the title *Gleam* (Lysskaer). Comprised of articles by several authors on Lithuania’s political, economic and cultural realities, it aimed at testifying to the democratic direction of the new state and, as is clear from Savickis’s opening plea, at making it an attractive partner for Denmark, not only in terms of trade:

Having been reborn, we stretch our hands towards you [...]. Copenhagen - this city with eternally rattling cranes in the shipyards, the city of beautiful towers, and the city of joys, - this city that also resonates with care for the misfortune of others [...] it will also have an ear for Lithuania. Lithuania does not yet exist on the maps, it is swallowed as a piece of a larger whole! However, it is not only for the sake of the future commodity market, but also in the name of cultural knowledge and for a closer and friendlier mutual relationship of spirit, that this awareness is undeniably necessary.³¹

Meyer Benedictsen translated the biggest part of the texts in the book and an introduction to his biography, written by Savickis, precedes Meyer Benedictsen’s own article “The Reborn Lithuania” (Det genfodte Litauen). There, he takes great care to describe not only the political circumstances that made the emergence of the new state possible, but also the first signs of the country’s modernisation, despite the devastations of war, and, especially, its resolute cultural drive. He introduces the Danes to the names of Lithuanian artists (Čiurlionis,

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Letter from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Meyer Benedictsen, 19 May 1924. (Photo: Private)

People attending gala dinner in Kaunas (Photo: Private)

Petrauskas, Rimša, Maironis, Landsbergis (Žemkalnis), Krėvė, Gira, Vydūnas), and “measures” the nations “will of expression and vital power” in numbers of published books. The emphasis on culture is further strengthened in this book by the inclusion of a political essay by the writer and bishop Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, and, especially, of Savickis’s own autobiographical sketch “Blue rockets. An undated diary” (Blaa Rakter. En dagbog uden data), which now exists in the Lithuanian language only in translation from Danish.³² The same year Savickis published another book, *A Journey Through Lithuania* (En Rejse gennem Litauen), which offers glimpses into Lithuania’s (and also Latvia’s) life immediately after WWI and has a foreword by Georg Brandes.

It was also on Savickis’s initiative that the English translation of Meyer Benedictsens’s Lithuanian book, with some small textual omissions, but supplied with a special author’s preface, new illustrations and a contemporary map of the country, was published in Copenhagen as *Lithuania: The Awakening of a Nation —A Study of the Past and Present of the Lithuanian People*. Savickis’s letters show that

Meyer Benedictsen had been involved in this project, and probably even made the translation, and also that the book was being prepared for publication in 1917.³³ It was probably delayed due to problems with funding, but having been eventually funded by the Lithuanian government and published in 1924, it was distributed through diplomatic channels and used for official representation (Letter from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Meyer Benedictsen, 19 May 1924). According to Savickis³⁴, it was well received, especially in the Nordic countries. It was also welcomed with joy in the Lithuanian press³⁵ and a year earlier Meyer Benedictsen and his second wife Katri Benedictsen were received in Lithuania with great fanfare. They travelled the country, visiting Pažaislis, Kaunas and Biržai, and in Kaunas a gala dinner, hosted by President Smetona was arranged in their honour at Three Dukes' Hall in the celebrated restaurant Metropolis, with many representatives of the Lithuanian political and cultural elite present.³⁶

It took many more years, before the Lithuanian translation of the book appeared. Some excerpts of the book were later translated by Savickis and published in *Skaitymai* (1920). It was, however, first translated in its entirety from English by a graduate of Vilnius University, Skirmantė Ramanauskaitė, on the initiative of her supervisor Lioginas Pažūsis, and published in 1997. Very soon, the book attracted attention of politicians, scholars and cultural enthusiasts. At least three academic conferences and seminars (in 1996, 2006 and 2012) were dedicated to the book and its author, and quite a few organisations were involved: the Vytatai Club and the Lithuanian-Danish Society, the Royal Danish Embassy and Danish Cultural Institute, Vilnius University, Association Norden Lietuva and Baltoscandia Academy, Club Norden: Benedictsen's Friends, Plokščiai school and probably others. The proceedings of the first conference came out as a separate publication³⁷, and in connection with the second conference, the Danish Royal Embassy organised an essay competition, in which students were invited to reflect on Meyer Benedictsens importance for Lithuania and its culture.³⁸ In Plokščiai, where some of these events also took place, one can find a display in Meyer Benedictsens honour at the local school museum, which also takes care of some personal items donated by members of the writer's family.

THE BOOK'S SIGNIFICANCE

The Lithuanian historian Vaidotas Mažeika³⁹ in his brilliant study of Lithuanian-Danish relations in the inter-war period, sadly remarks that Meyer Benedictsens book of 1895 had hardly achieved more than evoking sympathy with its Danish reader: several decades later, little was known in Denmark about Lithuania. This is probably true with regard to its direct political influence in Denmark. However, the fact that it was chosen from several books for the promotion of Lithuania's name in the world⁴⁰ shows that Savickis believed in its power to move people's minds and hearts. The significance of the book, although difficult to pinpoint exactly, may be scattered through different fields and times - as complex as the book is.

It remains a trusted source of information, an eye-witness recount of the most diverse aspects related to the area where the Lithuanians (and other peoples) traditionally lived. References to the book are quite ample in contemporary humanities research, for example: Roepstorff & Simoniukstytė 2005, 168-185; Briedis 2016, 30; Pocevičius 2016, 479-450; Kalnius 2010, 20; Kasparavičius 2006, 302 and Rabinowitz 2018, 14. It is also valuable as a depository, the only one of its kind, of Danish translations and presentations of Lithuanian folk songs - a tradition that has been inscribed into UNESCO's list of intangible world heritage and that has played a key role in Lithuania's second national awakening - the Singing Revolution of the late 1980.

The book could have also served for young Lithuania (those who steered the country's course knew of it, and some had even met its writer in person) as a barometer of where a change was needed to be accepted as a modern state. For example, that it was important that women should have access to education and other civil rights - there is a telling episode in the book about an enlightened young man's sister who looks "as if she stepped right out of an old daina (song)" and who can "neither read nor write, but can go to church".⁴¹ It was crucial to dispel Lithuania's image as a technically and culturally backward country. Who knows, but maybe the Danish farmers who settled in Lithuania in the '20s⁴² also found encouragement in the words about the rich Lithuanian soil which cried out for progressive ways of farming.⁴³

According to Bjornlund⁴⁴, the book has (re)constructed the Lithuanian nation. Indeed, it collects in one place the country's major ingredients: history, territory, (folk)culture, traditions, language, etc. It has been used in Lithuanian public discourse, especially immediately after the publication of its translation, to encourage national confidence, which had been repressed under the Soviet rule. Now, when many Lithuanians have freed themselves from the complex of the nation as eternal 'innocent sufferers'⁴⁵ and see the future of the country as an open civil society, Benedictsens's book has gained new relevance. It is a reminder of the necessity to self-check with regard to the situation of the state's own ethnic and other minorities and of the danger for a nation to "build walls of prejudice around its own pettiness" (to quote again the dedication to Brandes). For Meyer Benedictsens, being a nationalist or internationalist had hardly ever been a matter of choice, and his persistent will to know and understand other nations did not reduce his love for and interest in his own country. In everything he did, he was a humanist first of all, who defended the dignity of life, both with regard to individuals and their communities. According to Moltesen⁴⁶, Meyer Benedictsens proved that individuality and universality, nationalism and internationalism go well together.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

For the author of this contribution, there is one more, personal, aspect to the significance of Benedictsens and his book. It serves as a connection to the work of my parents, already gone, and especially to my mother, Svetlana Steponavičienė (1936-2019) who was a big enthusiast of everything Danish and also a professional Scandinavianist. She wrote her PhD on the Icelandic author Halldor Laxness at Leningrad's (St. Petersburg) university, where she also learnt Danish. She later perfected it in Denmark, where she taught Russian at Aarhus University in the 80s, when according to the Soviet rotation scheme, the time had come for Vilnius University to send its lecturer to Denmark. She was the only candidate who could comply with the Danish language requirement, and this episode of her biography, much fictionalised, has found its way into the novel *Sat Astafri* (2010) by Hans Otto Jorgensen. During

the years of Soviet occupation, she was also the first to teach some optional Scandinavian subjects at Vilnius University, which attracted both students, scholars and cultural workers. Some of them would later become professional translators from Scandinavian languages. One was Leonas Petravičius (1940-2014), who, among other things, translated novels by Herman Bang and William Heinesen.

In 1989, Steponavičienė became one of the founders of the once very active Lithuanian Danish Society and later of the Association Norden Lietuva. She would also act as one of the many 'ambassadors' for Vilnius European Capital of Culture (2009), helping with contacts in the Nordic countries, and especially Denmark. For many years she was passionately involved, on voluntary basis, which is still not very usual in Lithuania, in building bridges between Danes and Lithuanians from most diverse walks of life. She was often called by her numerous Danish friends by the same epithet as Meyer Benedictsen: "en ildsjael" (soul of fire) and she also did a lot to make his name known. She was part of all the earlier mentioned events and it was also through her that a contact was established with three descendants of Katri and Age Meyer Benedictsen's foster children: Tove Lis Schmid Hansen, Irene Benedictsen and Kurt Daell. It is also primarily on the basis of the material that Steponavičienė had collected that the present article is written. She herself intended one day to hand this collection over to an official archive. There are all editions of Meyer Benedictsen's book in all three of the languages in which it was published and some of his other publications, as well as papers from the 2006 conference that were left unpublished due to the lack of funds and some letters written in connection with it. There are even some of Meyer Benedictsen's original letters and postcards entrusted to her by his family (some with corners clipped off - probably someone had deemed the postal mark to be of higher value than the card itself). One can also find there the full text by Finn Orville (1935-2004): "Age Meyer Benedictsen 1866-1927. Sprog, kultur og nationalitetsfølelse" (Language, culture and national sentiment), a paper read at an international seminar dedicated to Lithuanian studies, which took place in Plokščiai in 1996 and whose Lithuanian translation was included into the 1997 edition of the book, but which seems to have never come out in its original form. There is a paper on Meyer Benedictsen in German, handwritten and read by

Leonas Petravičius at the first conference organised by the Lithuanian Danish Society “Lithuania-Denmark: Governmental, Professional and Personal Contacts in the Past and Present” (1992). There are also copies of letters from and to Meyer Benedictsen, including two by Jurgis Savickis (in 1923 and 1924) that Steponavičienė had found in the Danish National Archive and that had not been published before. In that archive, yet unsorted, there are materials relating to other contacts between Lithuania and Denmark that Steponavičienė knew of and tried to communicate further.

With the natural circulation and co-operation of all sorts between the two countries constantly expanding, with ever-new generations of students of Danish graduating from Vilnius University and research being done by Lithuanian scholars in various fields of Scandinavian Studies, a list of such contacts becomes endless. However, having in mind the fragility of memory and the limited span of an individual life, we should probably put our heads together (as they say in Danish) and start looking for ways to collect from different sources and arrange into a more systematic catalogue or archive the earliest facts and testimonies of intersections between Denmark and Lithuania, so that the generations of tomorrow will be able to explore the co-operation, which originated more than 100 years ago in the remarkable Danish man Age Meyer Benedictsen. Age Meyer Benedictsens work and his friendship with Jurgis Savickis prove the importance of combining culture, personal engagement and diplomacy, and can serve as an inspiration in further stimulating and cherishing the relations between Lithuania and Denmark.

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