

## Identity without trope. Pre-war Lithuania in the photo archive of the expeditions of Stasys Vaitkus

### *Summary*

In 1918 m. Lithuania has for the first time in history gained an opportunity to accomplish the most important project of the statehood – to convert the Lithuanian ethnos into a nation. It was important to include both, the spiritual ethnocultural, and the corporeal heritage into the development of a modern country, so to be able to not only to preserve the continuity of the national memory, but also to multiply the capital of the validation of the existence of Lithuanian nation. The ethnographers, of course, did take part in that campaign of propagating national ideas, yet, the results of their work were integrated into it with careful selection, choosing only the most influential models of the Lithuanian identity.

In the Interwar period, documentation of the vanishing cultural heritage and the accumulation of knowledge on specificity of the Lithuanian nation was executed not only in order to form an empirically reasoned model of the collective identity; it was also an attempt to form an idolized image of Lithuania. During the Soviet time, results of these activities were integrated into the strategy of the representation of the State. This ethnographic platform with an emphasis on mythological-symbolical

expression encompassed different political interests of three epochs. As time passed, it has become an assemblage of unquestionable assets of the state-consciousness. Unfortunately, the actualization of the state archetypes has marginalized the pre-exposed social reality, which, in fact, is not the lesser part of the content of the ethnographic archives.

Stasys Vaitkus (1907–1989) was one of the most active Lithuanian ethnographers and photographers, however, up to this moment, his activity and archives have not been taken to research. Documents of his ethnographic expeditions provide he documented without a great selection – Vaitkus did not disassemble the authentic structure, neither he emphasize ethnic symbolism of the natural lifestyle. On the contrary, he covered the widest social spectrum in attempt to grasp and reveal the very identity of the natives. The purpose of this article is to analyse the photographic documents of Vaitkus's ethnographic expeditions in order to actualize the significant document of the social life of the beginning of the twentieth century and to include it into the discourse of contemporary visual culture.

**Keywords:** identity, image, social reality, ethnographic expeditions, photograph, Stasys Vaitkus.

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