# NATIONAL TENDENCIES IN LITHUANIAN INTERWAR INTERIOR DESIGN (1918–1940)

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## INTRODUCTION

Various researches and new attitudes on the interwar period have been accelerating in art history and criticism for the recent decades. Every one of them peculiarly completes the history of Europe, opening new ways of understanding the European Unity of our times. Entering the context of both World Wars, it is worth to keep in mind the earlier history of Lithuania, rich with its multicultural population[1] and variety of architectural styles inherited from the preceding periods[2], the latest being Historicism and Secession (the latter in Russian original version: *модерн*[3] – *modern*) architecture, inherited from the previous Tsarist Russia era[4]. Meanwhile,

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[1] According to various statistics, in the first Republic of Lithuania lived 80% of ethnic Lithuanians, in the cities – 50%, or even less. Thus, Lithuanian collective culture was influenced by various nations, especially Jews, Poles, Russians and Germans. *Lietuvių statistikos metraštis* [Lithuanian Chronicle Statistics], Kaunas 1926, p. 22: Lithuanians – 80,14%. *Lietuvių statistikos metraštis* [Lithuanian Chronicle Statistics], Kaunas 1938, p. 15: Lithuanians – 80,6%.

[2] The History of Lithuanian Architecture's volume dedicated to the interwar period has not been published until this moment; meanwhile, separate objects are presented in the *Architecture and Urbanism Research Centre*'s website: www.autc.lt [accessed: 28.10.2019].

[3] https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Модерн [accessed: 28.10.2019].

[4] *Nuo XIX a. II-ojo dešimtmečio iki 1918 m. Lietuvos architektūros istorija*, vol. 3, eds. N. Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė et al., Vilnius 2000.

the German Bauhaus modernistic trend became a source of aspiration for young architects in the late interwar Lithuanian cities.

The p r o b l e m with research into this topic is that Lithuanian national interior design frequently contrasted with exterior architectural aesthetics combined with manifold stylistic variety. The distinct features among the representation of architecture and interior were grasped thanks to Charles Rice's study *The Emergence of the Interior*[5]. It was the scientific approach that inspired new attitudes on Lithuanian interior design as an art history object. The f o c u s of the narrative is public and residential interiors of the interwar Lithuania (1918–1940), created by professional architects, designers and decorators, and even interior spaces arranged by amateurs[6]. The a i m o f t h e a r t i c l e is to appraise the national, ethnical roots of the aesthetical, stylistic variety in Lithuanian interiors, investigating the distinct tendency of the period – the representation of national identity. The regions of Klaipėda and Vilnius were left out of the scope of research deliberately, as for the most part of the interwar period, the Vilnius region had been separated from Lithuania and greatly influenced by Polish politics and culture. Although the Klaipėda region belonged to Lithuania for the bigger part of that period, it was still exposed to German culture; thus, Prussian cultural tradition had been rooted there.

The r e s e a r c h c a r r i e d o u t i n L i t h u a n i a a n d a b r o a d. Lithuanian academic art history and criticism turned the attention to the field of the interior architecture just in the recent decade[7] but most of the carried-out studies demonstrated an obvious problem of the methodology suitable for the interior researches. Because of that, the search for methodological ideas was done in the works of Western European authors. Thanks to that, the main

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[5] Ch. Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior. Architecture Modernity Domesticity*, London – New York 2007.

[6] The full picture of the object is revealed in the monograph by L. Preišegalavičienė, *Lietuvos tarpukario interjerai 1918–1940*, Kaunas 2016.

[7] The first international conference 'Secular Interiors: Idea, Decor, Design' was held in Vilnius Academy of Arts 2013, May 9–10th. Org. D. Klajumienė. The articles collection has followed in 2014 under the same name: *Pasaulietiniai interjerai: Idėja, dekoras, dizainas / Secular Interiors: Idea, Decor, Design*, ed. D. Klajumienė, Vilnius 2014.

methodological approach was chosen – the theory of collective cultural memory[8]. The analysis of Lithuanian interiors uses Maurice Halbwachs' (1877–1945) conception of families, neighbourhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, and other progressively larger communities, such as different nations[9]. Single objects and items, through the processes of locating, recording and retelling them, as well as through communication, become a part of a larger group of people, nation, and the state's collective memory and cultural identity. The interior design research thesis also employed the traditional methods of art criticism: comparative analysis, formal and factual analysis, and case study. The surviving iconography, documents, and contemporaries' memories (recollections) were analysed. Although numerous examples interiors of that time from other European countries have been collected and investigated, the thesis provides minimum of comparative analysis due to the limited space, mostly presenting it in the form of generalizations and insights.

The French philosopher M. Halbwachs wrote about home living environment as a space for accumulation and storage of collective memory. According to M. Halbwachs, home – its installation, furniture and room decor – reminds of family and friends often seen in this space. Every item, properly integrated in the space, reflects the lifestyle, which is common to many people. Any analysis of the causes for selection of the interior items implies a critical examination of thought, which is a mixture of the input from many groups of people[10]. Referring to the latest contemporary researches on memory practiced by Jan Assmann[11], Aleida Assmann[12] and other authors

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[8] L. Preišegalavičienė, *The Interaction of Memory and the Interior in the Interwar Kaunas Living Spaces (1918–1940)*, „Art History and Criticism" 2012, Vol. 8, p. 111–130.

[9] M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective et l'espace* [in:] idem, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1950, p. 83–105.

[10] Ibidem, p. 84.

[11] J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, California 2006.

[12] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, Cambridge – New York 2011.

applying the concept of the collective memory[13], the thesis on Lithuanian interior design investigates individual identity of people, their individual memory, mentality, traditions and symbols. The reconstructions of historical interiors are based on J. Assmann's idea about the communicative memory – 'our memory only develops through our intercourse with other people'[14]. These 'others' are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common picture of their past. The contemporary scientists A. Aleida and J. Assmanns define the collective memory as a result of a change of personal memory, through communication and interaction with other people's memories. Adjusting M. Halbwachs' theory to the field of culture, A. Assmann has recently introduced the concept of the cultural memory. The term 'identity' is used – as the individual identity and as collective identity. In compliance with the theory of collective cultural memory, identity is considered as changing. In the thesis, national identity is regarded as a part of collective identity. Cultural identity is a part of the discourse of collective memory which saw its renewal in worldwide and in Europe in the last two decades of the 20th century. Referring to Heidrun Friese, the thought and temporality are recognized as essential and most immanent properties of identity, thus the thesis relates identity to thought and temporality[15]. H. Friese's definition, that identity is a never-ending, ongoing draft, is suitable for the relevant historical researches on Lithuanian interiors. J. Assmann's studies have clearly proved the influence of religion on cultural identity[16]. This attitude justifies the former very popular incorporation of religion symbols in Lithuanian secular interiors. Referring to Allan Megill, the constructive nature of identity is recognized; a person can be identical, identity within a person is natural and not artificially constructed[17]. Many parallel, yet contradictory, memories are the real and not artificially-created history.

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[13] W. Hirst, A. Mack, *Collective Memory and Collective Identity*, „Social Research" 2008, Vol. 1, No. 75.

[14] J. Assmann, op. cit., p. 1–3.

[15] H. Friese, *Identity. Desire, Name and Difference*, [in:] *Making Sence of History*, eds. H. Friese, A. Assmann, New York 2002, p. 17–27.

[16] J. Assmann, op. cit.

[17] A. Megill, *Historical Representation, Identity, Allegiance*, [in:] *Making Sence of History*, eds. S. Berger, L. Eriksonas, A. Mycock, New York – Oxford 2011, p. 19–34.

At the same time, in the interwar period, understanding of national culture was idealistic, considering it as a necessary solid representation of mentality of society in the broadest possible way, from folk people to intellectuals and wealthy industrialists.

Discussing the concept of representation, its meaning in Lithuanian architectural discourse is usually equated only to dignified looks and solid feel[18]. However, the term 'representational' has various meanings: 1) characteristic, having features of the represented whole, 2) having a solid and dignified appearance. The representation – as the representation of features of entirety – is often encountered in the interior, but in the living environment it does not necessary coincide with the dignified appearance and solidity. Meanwhile, in public interiors, representation is understood as dignified looks and solidity, as the only representative whole. Having acknowledged the claim that architecture and design are the 'language' of spaces, shapes, proportions and colours, Stuart Hall's definition of representation[19] becomes useful for the analysis of the interiors: S. Hall describes representation as an act and way of giving a meaning through language. In the course of representation, we make use of different signs, organized into different languages in order to be able to communicate meaningfully with each other. In the interior, like in a language, the meaning is created only by the practice of use. Here again, one encounters collective experiences resulting from communication between people, which M. Halbwachs wrote about at the end of the thirties.

To define the social class of Lithuanian local aristocracy and nobility, Lithuanian interwar press and contemporaries' memoirs used the term 'nobleman' (in LT – *bajoras*), nobility (in LT – *bajorija*). The term "manor" (in LT – *dvaras*) was used to mean a traditional – typical not only to Lithuania but to the entire former territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – living

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[18]   R. Buivydas, *Lietuviškieji XX a. reprezentacinės architektūros variantai*, „Kultūros Barai" 2005, Vol. 10, p. 71: *Reprezentacinė architektūra privalo būti įtaigi, patraukli, efektinga* [Representative architecture must be suggestive, attractive, effective]. Online: https://etalpykla.lituanistikadb.lt/object/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2005~1367153670362/ [accessed: 28.10.2019].

[19]   S. Hall, *The Work of Representation*, [in:] *Representation: Cultural representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. S. Hall, London – New Delhi 1997, p. 28.

environment of these groups of people in exurban areas. In 1949, Lithuanian historian Zenonas Ivinskis[20] claimed that relation between manor culture and the Baroque style is characteristic to Lithuania[21]. In Z. Ivinskis' studies, the terms *bajoras, dvaro kultūra* (nobleman, manor culture) and *baroque* are used together[22]. This shows the perception of the Baroque style as representing wealth and power. As examined by Marta Leśniakowska, Polish manor's history[23] gives evidence that Polish national identity (similarly to Lithuanian) has been much affected by manors' culture. It's worth remembering the concept of Polish nationality after the First World War as the new requirement, so called 'national traditionalism' (Pol. *narodowy tradycjonalizm*). The reconstruction of architectural traditions of the palaces and manors, which survived in the countryside, was the result of it. According to Witold Krassowski, 'the style of the mansion' (*styl dworkowy*) was designed to replicate in new medium-sized Polish houses, especially built away from other homes[24].

In Lithuanian manors, oriental arts lively showcase the interest for exotic countries' art and various design items, which used to be saved for years. One of the oldest collections of oriental art in Great Duchy of Lithuania, or the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, belonged to the dynasty of noblemen Radvila (Polish: Radziwiłł). In 1601, Mikalojus Kristupas Radvila Našlaitėlis wrote and published book *Travel to Jerusalem* – full of narratives about his and his companions' impressions on Egypt of those times[25]. Authentic art

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[20] Lithuanian philosofer and historian, medievalist, survived the prison in Stutthoff concentration camp, from 1944 Gastproffesor at *Baltisches Forchungsinstitut* in Bonn. Died in 1971 in Bonn, Germany; online: https://alchetron.com/Zenonas-Ivinskis [accessed: 28.10.2019].

[21] Z. Ivinskis, *Lietuvių kultūros tarpsniai*, [in:] *Kultūra ir istorija. Kultūros fenomenas*, ed. V. Berenis, Vilnius 1996, p. 210.

[22] Ibidem, p. 204–210: *Baroque and manor cultures*.

[23] M. Leśniakowska, *Polski dwór: Wzorce architektoniczne, mit, symbol*, Warsaw 1992.

[24] W. Krassowski, *Problemy architektury polskiej między 3 ćwiercią XVIII wieku a drugą XX wieku*, „Architektura" 1978, nr 11–12, p. 82.

[25] A. Snitkuvienė, *Senovės Egiptas Radvilų giminės istorijoje bei Rinkiniuose*, „Menotyra" 1988, No. 16, p. 95–109;

pieces, eastern interior items, wall decoration with carpets, cushions and drapes were characteristic for the noblemen in their manors' residences. So, in contrast to Western European and American *orientalism* mostly supported by colonial imperial ambitions and racism examined by Edward W. Said[26], Lithuanian orientalism's roots were idealistic: at the end of the 16th century, admiration towards East was inspired by Catholic Church's pilgrim trips and missions and in the beginning of the 20th century, various insights (philosophical, cultural, regarding freedom of religion) about Eastern cultures were declared by philosophers, writers and educators, such as Vydūnas (Wilhelm Storost), Adomas Jakštas (Aleksandras Dambrauskas), Pranas Dovydaitis, Levas Karsavinas, Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, Stasys Šalkauskis, etc. Philosopher S. Šalkauskis developed the idea of 'East-West Synthesis'. Many famous Lithuanian politicians, scientists and artists proclaimed 'Ex Oriente Lux' (En. 'Out of the East Light') ideology. Sixty-six most famous and active members of the society signed[27] the Nicholas Roerich Pact[28]. Despite various approaches to the East-West Synthesis idea, the current academical opinion states that 'namely this S. Šalkauskis' idea received the biggest reverberation in society, although not unambiguous, but always very actual for everybody who used to solve questions of Lithuanian culture'[29].

eadem, *Lietuva ir Senovės Egiptas XVI a. pab.–XXI a. prad. Keliautojų, kolekcininkų ir mokslininkų pėdsakais.* Kaunas 2011.

[26]  E.W. Said, *Orientalizmas*, transl. V. Davoliūtė, K. Seibutis, Vilnius 2006.

[27]  Lithuanian N. Roerich Society was established in Kaunas, temporary capital of Lithuania, in 1935. The full list of the members was never declared, only the names of the most active members can be found in: P. Tarabilda. *Rericho paktas ir taikos vėliava*, Kaunas: prof. M. K. Rericho draugijos Lietuvoje leidinys 1936. Famous artists were the members of the N. Roerich society – Paulius Galaunė, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, Petras Kalpokas, Juozas Mikėnas, Petras Rimša, Antanas Rūkštelė, Adomas Smetona, Kazys Šimonis, Petras Tarabilda, Domicėlė Tarabildienė, Liudas Truikys, Stasys Ušinskas, Stasys Vaitkus, Adomas Varnas, Justinas Vienožinskis, Viktoras Vizgirda, Juozas Zikaras, etc.

[28]  Nikolai Konstantinovich Rerikh (Rus. Николай Константи́нович Ре́рих) was a Russian painter, writer, archaeologist, theosophist, philosopher, and public figure of Baltic German descent.

[29]  A. Sverdiolas. *East-West Synthesis* [in:] *Kultūra lietuvių filosofų akiratyje*, Vilnius 2012, p. 200–201.

The analysis of the aspects of national identities in Lithuania is based on the works by the authors investigating the Lithuanian ethnic interior, and on the researches carried by Polish[30] and Russian[31] scholars. An important research on traditional Lithuanian Jewish visual art and symbols, published in Aistė Niunkaitė-Račiūnienė's monograph study *The World of Lithuanian Jewish Traditional Art and Symbols*[32], has helped to link the diverse aspects of the Jewish interior with the contexts of traditions. While exploring the issues of national identity, it was referred to in a range of the texts by contemporary foreign and Lithuanian authors in the field of cultural studies, which often see *identity* as a person's ability to define his or her 'self'.

This narrative examines only the tendency to declare national identity in Lithuanian interior, discussing it not only in the official-state context, but also looking at various non-official conceptions of the national. This overlook focuses on the two main components of the ethnic representation: the first one is the political official National Style, the second – unofficial – of the local ethnic minorities. Thus, the conception of the national in the interwar Lithuania was indeed very complex and proves why it was represented by so different architectural styles. Lithuanian National style absorbed the conceptions of the interior aesthetics and decorating inherent to various peoples living in Lithuania's territory. The seek for multi-ethnicity reveals the influence of ethnic Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jewish, Polish and

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[30] W. Krassowski, op. cit.; I. Huml, *Polska Sztuka stosowana XX wieku*, Warsaw 1978; A. Kostrzyńska-Miłosz, *Polskie meble 1918–1939. Forma – Funkcja – Technika*, Warsaw 2005; R. Reinfuss, *Meblarstwo Ludowe w Polsce*, Warsaw 1977.

[31] G.V. Baranovskij, *Architekturnaja enciklopedija vtoroj poloviny XIX veka*, Vol. 7: *Detali*, Saint Petersburg 1904; E.I. Kirichenko, *Romantism i istorism v Russkoj architekture XIX veka*, [in:] *Archnasledstvo*, Moscow 1988; E.I. Kirichenko, *Russkij stil'. Poiskij vyrazhenija nacional'noj samobytnosti. Narodnost' i nacional'nost'. Tradicji drevnerusskogo i narodnogo iskusstva v russkom iskusstve XVIII–nachala XX veka*, [album], Moscow 1997; A. Vasiliev, *Russkij interier v starinnych fotografijach*, Moscow 2008.

[32] A. Niunkaitė-Račiūnienė, *Lietuvos žydų tradicinio meno ir simbolių pasaulis*, Vilnius 2011.

Russian aesthetic[33] conceptions of living place upon common understanding of National Style and its representation in Lithuania. The features of the official national identity in the interiors were determined by retrospective worldview of the local population, state's policy, traditions, tastes and collective memory of the ethnic and confessional groups. It's worth to remember that in all European countries, professionals used to look back at the rural people's living environment for their creative ideas. Characteristic regional features can be traced in the interior of ethnic trend. However, in Lithuania – like in Poland[34] – the process in the opposite direction was also apparent: the professional items of Neo-Gothic, Neo-Baroque and Neoclassicism were primitively reproduced in ethnic rural environment. They were like naive imitations of living environment of the noblemen – elite[35].

All above-mentioned scholars' perceptions, connected with the archival documents kept in Lithuanian State archives[36], opened the understanding

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[33] Lithuanian Germans showed the most assimilation with local Lithuanians. It may be the reason why the material about Lithuanian Germans interior was found very minimal. Similar conclusions are found also in the researches of historians: I. Jakubavičienė *Vokiečiai Lietuvos ūkyje XX a. 3–4 dešimtmečiais*, „Lituanistica" 2011, Vol. 4, No. 57, p. 407–409. In year 1923 (excluding Klaipėda's region) lived 29 231 Germans, that is 1,44 % of all Lithuanian citizens. German historian Arthur Hermann wrote: 'Germans in the interwar Lithuania were very few in exception of Kaunas Šančiai district and several manors. They used to start talking in Lithuanian language very soon and their social position was similar to local Lithuanians – they were farmers or craftsmen. Most of them had been influenced by Lithuanian culture because of their mixed marriages with Lithuanians. […] Possible that Lithuanian Germans had no unfounded national ambitions'.

[34] R. Reinfuss, op. cit.

[35] L. Preišegalavičienė, *The Interior In the Interwar Lithuania: Factors, Forms, Tendencies (1918–1940)*. Doctoral Dissertation (03H Art Studies). Kaunas 2014, p. 129.

[36] These documents are kept in various Lithuanian State Archives and national museums. They can be divided into seven groups: 1) the architectural projects, which an image of the interior in architectural drawings of floor plan or section view of a building present sometimes, in rare cases the drawings of the interior equipment and detail drawings with annotations are found; 2) historical photographs; 3) perspective views, sketches and paintings of interior spaces; 4) various documents;

of (for many years neglected) National Style, also as all different (non-official) representations of national tendencies in Lithuanian interior design.

## THE *NATIONAL STYLE* – THE OFFICIAL STYLE

After proclaiming independence in 1918 in Lithuania, as well as in the neighbouring countries, it was necessary to reformulate the architectural goals in such a way that they could be understandable by all residents, regardless of their nationality and social status. Therefore, there was a return to the past of Lithuanians living in the country's territory, looking for the uniqueness in local farmers and peasant's culture. Architect-artist and educator Vladimiras Dubeneckis was one of the first creators of the Lithuanian National Style[37]. Similar creative ideas were followed by other architects and artists, such as Mstislavas Dobužinskis, Stasys Kudokas Jonas Prapuolenis, Gerardas Bagdonavičius, Jonas Kovalskis, Virginijus Vizbaras, etc. This uniqueness had to be expressed through a newly created aesthetical understanding, the so-called National Style. However, many other young European countries turned out to also have such aspirations for their National Styles. Despite the criticism upon the *guberniya* (a territorial and administrative subdivision of pre-revolutionary Russia) period architecture, the style representing the state of Lithuania, was developed in a similar way to the "Russian Style", i.e., an emotion of patriotism used to be evoked[38]. The ways to create the style were similar to those in Russia; only some tools were different. In Lithuania, the National Style was produced through 1) the romanticized turn to the medieval period, 2) the integration of rural and folk traditions, arts and crafts, 3) the citations of the Baroque, and 4) the incorporation of elements

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correspondences between clients and customers, the minutes of meetings, ordering and purchase invoices; 5) surviving authentic fragments of finishing and equipment of various interior spaces, furniture, light fittings, and interior details; 6) contemporaries' memoirs and letters; and 7) students' graduation theses and dissertations, written during the interwar period and subsequent times.

[37]  L. Preišegalavičienė, *Tautinės modernybės architektas: Vladimiro Dubeneckio gyvenimas ir kūryba 1888–1932*, Kaunas 2018, p. 194–198.

[38]  E.I. Kirichenko, *Russkij stil*, op. cit.

of the Eastern culture[39]. From the chronological and ideological point of views, it is evident that the National Style appeared as a continuation of Secession and, due to the decorativeness and uniqueness of designs, had much in common with Art Deco.

The romanticized turn to the medieval period reflected itself in paintings, tapestries, stained glass windows and panels depicting the legendary and historic scenes, furniture, lightings and equipment, that looked like quotations from the Middle Ages (fig. 1–3).

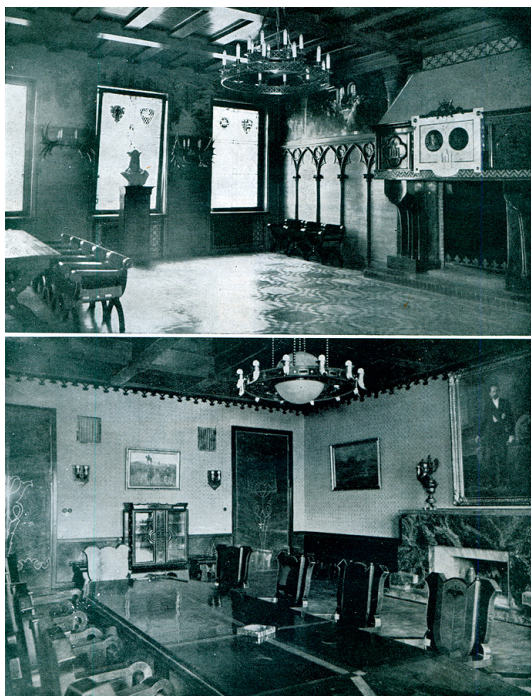The portraits of Vytautas the Great, the maps of Grand Duchy of Lithuania, architectural land-



Fig. 1. The interiors of the representative room in the Lithuanian Military Officers' Club in Kaunas: Vytautas' the Great Sitting room (top), President's Reception hall (bottom)

scapes, images of Lithuanian hill forts, etc. were hung on the walls. The symbols of the medieval period were arranged even in pure modernism spaces as separate elements of the interior – as pieces of artwork. It was popular to showcase various architectural landscapes of Vilnius city – the historical capital of Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (fig. 4–5) in the representative rooms.

The National Style was also produced employing the traditions of rural households, folk art and crafts. For this purpose, the Lithuanian

[39] L. Preišegalavičienė, *Lietuvos tarpukario interjerai 1918–1940*, op. cit., p. 178–185.

Fig. 2. Project of an armchair for the President's reception room by Gerardas Bagdonavičius



Fig. 3. The fireplace in the Lithuanian Military Officer's Club in Kaunas, Vytautas the Great Sitting room (Photo: L. Preišegalavičienė, 2016)



Fig. 4. Library room in Lithuanian Army's Duke Vytenis' 9th infantry's regiment, 1930–1940



Fig. 5. The interiors of Lithuanian Radiofonas studio

nation-specific ornaments, rustic furniture and textile forms were selected (fig. 6).

Following the forms of folk art and crafts, the professional artists tried to replicate the typical primitive nature of folk arts, but freely reproduced and interpreted them. High-quality, single- or limited-edition elements of the National Style interior corresponded



*Fig. 6. Jonas Vailokaitis' living house interiors in Kaunas, arch. Arnas Funkas*

to the requirements of international Art Deco style. The design of these single-piece products, which were adopted from rural households and perfected to the highest quality, were based on the Art Deco ideas. Accurate and professionally perfected paraphrases of forms and ornaments of rustic household items were understood as folk styles in the most countries. It was no coincidence that the quotations of the Baroque style were popular in Lithuania. In interiors decoration, rope's patterns, various floral scroll patterns, oval panels, puffy silhouettes in furniture décor, wallpapers and stencil wall paintings, and ornate textile draperies were particularly beloved. The Baroque corresponded to the aesthetic taste of the population of Lithuania. Even the shapes of folk-art ornaments and rustic furniture – which in many cases were primitive followings of the Baroque style – witnessed the Lithuanian residents' sympathy for the aesthetics of Baroque. The insertion of the Baroque citations into the Lithuanian National Style was meant to symbolise the Catholic Western European culture, richness and solidity. Most of the official governmental representative spaces were designed reaching for Lithuanian manor's residences' style (fig. 7–8).

For the development of the National Style, the Eastern cultures were also important. On one hand, the interwar Lithuanian interior Orientalism emerged from the incentives of cultural discourse (East-West Synthesis) to collect artefacts of the collective memory. On the other hand, however, it stood as a part of the western Art Deco, therefore it was manifested in

Fig. 7. President's Antanas Smetona's Reception hall



Fig. 8. The Conference Room in the Bank of Lithuania



Fig. 9. Interior of Lithuanian Trade Industry and Crafts Chamber

conjunction with this style or combined with the pieces of Lithuanian folk art (fig. 9–10).

Despite the architects' propaganda against Secession aesthetics, which flourished before the First World War, it continued to exist in Lithuania during the 20s and 30s, but in the new forms of the National Style, especially in light fittings, interior textile and stencil wall paintings with various floral motives.

## INTERIOR OF THE ETHIC MINORITIES

This chapter aims to reveal different forms of the conception of the national, which existed during the interwar period in Lithuania. They were determined by the tradition, religion and customs, formed in ethnical communities. This part of the narrative also analyses the function of various ritual objects in living interiors.



*Fig. 10. G. Bagdonavičius home interior. Šiauliai Aušros Museum, F-FN 8318*

The Lithuanian Jews' interiors. Jews were the largest ethnic minority in the interwar Lithuania[40]. This section attempts to reconstruct the Jews' interiors in the interwar Lithuania[41]. Jewish living environment was characterized by traditionalism which was also prevalent in all dimensions of their life. Pieces of Neo-Baroque furniture and Baroque ornamentation in ritual objects and papercuts used to be arranged in modest surroundings. Utilitarian modernist furniture contrasted with Baroque items. In the Jewish interiors, like in the houses of other nationalities,

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[40] Interwar period (also the previous periods') Lithuanian cities residents' statistics is reconstructed in the catalogue: *Synagogues in Lithuania*, Vol. 1: *A–M*, eds. G. Mickūnaitė, V. Levin, Vilnius 2010; Vol. 2: *N–Ž*, eds. G. Mickūnaitė, V. Levin, Vilnius 2012.

[41] Lithuanian Jews' interiors see: L. Preišegalavičienė, *Lietuvos tarpukario interjerai 1918–1940*, op. cit., p. 186–206.

handicrafts were very popular: richly embroidered pillowcases, ornate ritual *Shabbat* textiles. For functional purposes, tapestries and rugs with colourful oriental ornaments, various landscapes, sometimes depicting animals, birds and human figures, were hung on the wall over the beds and sofas in the living rooms (like in Lithuanians' and Lithuanian Russians' houses). Alongside these tapestries and carpets, the walls were decorated with landscapes, reproductions of famous paintings, and rabbis' portraits, which were appreciated not as authentic art treasures or works of art, but as the symbols of the professed values such as memory, wisdom, science, the relationship of man and God, and the relationship between the past and future generations. The illuminated *ketubah* (a traditional Jewish marriage contract), *mizrach* (an artistic wall plaque inscribed with the word *mizrah* – meant *East*, and Scriptural passages), other kinds of traditional Jewish papercuts with excerpts from the book of Psalms were hung on the walls; they embodied a sacred, mystical and protective meaning. Small-size decorative, delicate elements – like papercuts depicting various birds, two-headed eagles or lions in floral background – with no religious texts were also used. In the homes of the elite studying the Talmud and in the interiors of secular intellectuals, there were collections of books and various scripts. However, the abundance of books was not common to all living quarters. In the interiors, objects such as *mezuzah*, *mizrach* and papercuts also performed a function of an amulet – protection from the evil. A hanging *Shabbat lamp* (*judenstern*) and a *Shabbat candlestick* had an exceptional significance in a living interior. At the beginning of working week, the lamp was hanging high on the ceiling, above the dining table, and welcoming *Sabbath* or a holiday, it was gradually lowered down every day. The requirement of beautification of a ritual space and objects is defined by the term *Hiddur Mitzvah* in the *Talmud*. This aspiration for beauty was very important, but its expression depended on inhabitants' financial capacity.

In Lithuania, like in other countries, some Jews were open to newly emerging modernism aesthetics. Rationality, modesty, and collective memory are characteristic to Jewish culture, and aesthetics are important too. Although the Lithuanian Jews and ethnic Lithuanians had different confessional identities, during the interwar period, the features of collective culture of neighbourhood life in the same country came out into the open.

The Lithuanian Poles' interior. The Lithuanian Poles, unlike the Russians and the Jews[42], did not seek to declare their distinct national identity, as they identified themselves naturally as part of the European culture. This conception of ethnic identity was also evident in their architecture and interiors. In order to establish their national identity in architecture (and interiors), the Lithuanian Poles, above all, insisted on avoiding the elements of the Russian Style. At the end of the 19th century, in the search for the Polish National Style the 'Neo-Gothic was an architectural synonym for Polishness, but only in the Russian sector'[43]. In Lithuania, Gothic style recalled the middle ages – the period of Vytautas' the Great – so not by chance it became the source of inspiration when creating new original designs for various secular spaces in the country's independence mood[44]. However, it was not the sole expression of the Polishness. Polish architecture was also influenced by the romanticized sentiments towards the rural people (peasants and farmers) living in the mountainous areas of Poland, seen as unspoiled by civilization, very devotional and hard-working. Peasants' culture and way of life in the Zakopane region best represent this view. Stanisław Witkiewicz named the architectural style affected by Romanticism the Zakopane Style (Polish: *Styl Zakopiański*). It combined Neo-Gothic forms and rich wooden trim in interiors. According to W. Krassowski, due to the conception of the Polish national identity (after the First World War), arose a new requirement, the so-called 'national traditionalism' (Polish: *narodowy tradycjonalizm*), which resulted in a shift towards architectural traditions of palaces and manor houses that survived in rural areas[45].

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[42] The Lithuanian Poles' interior see: L. Preišegalavičienė, *Lietuvos tarpukario interjerai 1918–1940*, op. cit. p. 207–211.

[43] W. Krassowski, op., cit., s. 76.

[44] Neo-Gothic forms were arranged by Jonas Prapuolenis in the representative space of 'Vytauto seklyčia' in 1937 [Vytautas' Sitting room – Interior of the Lithuanian Military Officer's Club in Kaunas]; Various project for furniture and lightings by Gerardas Bagdonavičius [in:] *Bagdonavičius, Gerardas. Tapyba, grafika, dizainas, fotografija*. Catalogue, Furniture projects are placed in CD supplement / Sud.: A. Jovaišaitė, O. Stripinienė, V. Šiukščienė. Šiauliai: Šiauliai Aušros Musem, 2011.

[45] W. Krassowski, op., cit., s. 76.

According to the official history of Lithuanian architecture, 'Manor Style' (Polish: *styl dworkowy*) was sought to be replicated in new medium-sized Polish houses, especially built away from other houses[46]. In the interwar period, the 'Manor Style' was very popular in the houses of Lithuanian residents with gentry background. Even those living in city apartments sought to replicate the interiors typical to Lithuanian manors and fill their homes with collections of artworks, family portraits and furniture from the manor houses[47]. In the interwar period, the Polish conception of national identity was formed from the elements of Polish folk art and Neo-Gothic as a symbol of the Catholic worldview. The ethnic textile items – curtains, coverlets, cushions, wall tapestries, and carpets – and inclusively arranged ethnic furniture represented that conception. One of modern and simple ways to declare Polishness in the interiors was to upholster furniture seats and cushions with tapestry in Polish patterns, as well as to use handmade textiles, embroidered and decorated with appliqués or even, non-decorated linen textile.

The Lithuanian Russians' interior. Officially, the declaration of the Russianness in the exterior of buildings was objectionable because of its relation with the Russian Czarist oppression of ethnic Lithuanians, Jews, Poles and other nations[48]. However, the private living environment was a favourable milieu to freely unfold the ethnic identity, individual romanticism, religion and worldview. On the other hand, naturally, in many unrenovated buildings, the guberniya-period interiors still existed; after their renovation in the independent Lithuania, those interiors' elements inherited from the past, and the logic of their composition still survived. In

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[46] N. Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė. *Modernas ir kitos XX a. pradžios kryptys* [in:] *Lietuvos architektūros istorija. Nuo XIX a. antrojo dešimtmečio iki 1918 m*, Vol. 3, eds. N. Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė et al., Vilnius 2000, p. 448–450.

[47] Various cases were found during the research of interwar Lithuanian interiors, e.g. case of Vladas Daumantas-Dzimidavičius home interior, published in L. Preišegalavičienė's article" *The Interaction of Memory and the Interior in the Interwar Kaunas Living Spaces (1918–1940)*, „Meno istorija ir kritika / Art History and Criticism" 2011, p. 113–121.

[48] The Lithuanian Russians' interior see: L. Preišegalavičienė, *Lietuvos tarpukario interjerai 1918–1940*, op. cit., p. 211–219.

Russian authors' works, the Russian Style is defined as turning to the ancient architecture, the Byzantine period, the architectural forms of medieval churches and to the motives of Russian folk art, textiles, fairy tales and fables. The study of Russian iconography has also found an orientation towards the East, especially towards the culture of Caucasian and Asian countries[49]. Many building constructors and architects, who worked during the guberniya period in Lithuania, tried to follow the guidelines on the use of the Russian Style in architecture and interiors. Russian Style is characterized by an abundance of various details and ornaments. In practice, in the Russians' interiors, the Russian conception of beauty and aesthetics had a slightly different expression than in the works by the theorists of the Russian Style. In the interwar Lithuania, the trend of the Russian Byzantine architecture was displaced by the Classicism architecture ideas. The architects, who had completed their studies in St. Petersburg, developed the academic Neoclassicist trend in Lithuania. In many cases, the Lithuanian Russian Old Believers' houses were typically modest and, in terms of the aesthetic taste, converged with living environment of ethnic Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jews.

Summing up, the comparison of the conceptions of the national interior revealed that in Lithuania, ethnic minorities and ethnic Lithuanians shared some common attitudes. First of all, the Lithuanians, the Lithuanian Jews and Russians preferred the Baroque style. For the Lithuanians, it was associated with church architecture, for the Jews – with *Aron Kodesh* decors (*Aron Ha Kodesh* – The Holy Ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept in synagogues), and the Russians related it with Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and other examples of the tsar's residences. Most of the ethnic groups regarded the Baroque style as representational, having links with European culture. Secondly, most of the population of Lithuania had common leaning to Orientalism and various elements of the Eastern culture and arts. Of all the creative ideas, the most preferred one by different ethnic nationalities

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[49]   For imperialist Russia, valid are the explanations of G. Delanty's, that orientalism was a result of imperialism's expansions, when the stronger part intercepted the occupied countries' culture and arts. Otherness and differences made them desirable and gave great inputs into the identities of the biggest countries. See: G. Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, London 1995, p. 84–99.

was the concept of East-West Synthesis. For the interior architectural representation, this tendency was right, both in the emotional and aesthetic sense, thus it was widely realized on different artistic levels in creating the interiors of Lithuanian National Style.

## CONCLUSIONS

The first ideas for the Lithuanian ethnic interior were sought after in the countryside houses, where traditions of old were maintained. It was a living environment of peasants, farmers and people of small Lithuanian towns and villages. Ethnic trend is unique because it involves primitive reproductions of Neo-Gothic, Neo-Baroque and Neoclassicism, when peasant life naively imitates the living environment of the social elite. This amateur paraphrase of prevailing architectural styles is one of the most original stylistic trends, both in the sense of art and of national identity.

Lithuanian National Style was recognized as an official style of the state. It was designed professionally and characteristic not only to the ethnic Lithuanians but also to all the people living in the territory of the state. Lithuanian National style had similarities with Russian Style in such elements as referring to the medieval period and the use of folk art, textile patterns and woodcarvings. The differences were: a) in the independent Lithuania, Baroque was chosen from all the other styles as its style recalled Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth history, visible in the churches' and manors' architectural heritage that survived from that period; b) due to the idea of East-West Synthesis, the Lithuanian National Style included the most aesthetically attractive oriental elements. The research implies that Orientalism was a new, theoretically and culturally, pre-planned direction of Lithuanian National Style. This attitude is new and has not been discussed by other scholars.

Visual differences in the interior spaces of national (ethnic) minorities living in Lithuania were formed by, different for each nation, confessional factors, textile-printing patterns and approaches to rationality and decorativeness. The elimination of religious and liturgical objects, ethnic textiles and folk ornamentation from the interiors makes the spaces uniform; they converge in common European directions of neo-styles or modernism.

Characteristic features of the Lithuanian Jewish interiors were rationality, thought-out function, polychromy of individual elements, rich and bright

colours, contrast, complex and dynamic ornamentation in needlework, curtains, carpets, rugs, large round pillows, and tablecloths; not only carpets were hung on the walls – so were the traditional papercuts which have direct links to religion, symbolism, Oriental arts and aesthetics. The emotional intelligence, characteristic to the Jewish nation, and the way of life determined by religion had the strongest impact on the formative principles and aesthetics of *Litvaks*' home environment.

The expression of Polish identity implied strong distance from officially-declared elements of Russian Style and avoiding them. The Neo-Gothic, which formerly was synonymous with the Polish identity, became the key element and the main idea. After the First World War, the conception of Polish nationality added a new requirement, the so-called *national traditionalism* (in Polish: *narodowy tradycjonalizm*). As a result, there was a shift towards the architectural tradition of palaces and manors, which were still present in rural areas. During the interwar period, it was considered modern to link Polishness with manor's architecture, equipment and furnishings. National traditionalism was understood as simplified classicism, Biedermeier-style furniture, carpets in Polish ethnic patterns, and modest finishing of interior spaces. During the interwar period, the so-called 'manor style' (in Polish: *styl dworkowy*) was popular among the Lithuanian residents having the gentry's origin.

The Lithuanian Russians' interiors had a visible tendency to replicate the inherent splendour of orthodox churches, abundance of elements, dynamics of decor, and change of forms. Its characteristic feature was an adornment of the Saints' images and icons by hanging a drapery made of an ethnic towel over them and arranging rugs and ornamented textiles in its background. The living spaces reflected the Russian people's tendency towards sincerity, romanticism, splendour and eclecticism. In the diversity of Russian interiors' details and shapes, usually appear ethnic quotations from the location and country of residence. The Russians who lived in the interwar Lithuania, as well as the Lithuanian Jews, were loyal to the state and used Lithuanian statehood symbols in their interiors.

The predominant tendency in the interwar interiors – which was for the nations to differ and separate from one another – did not stand up. The nations living together did not escape cultural fusion. Various concepts of nationalism developed in the common cosmopolitan direction.

The theoretical formulation of Lithuanian National Style was utmost rational, attractive and appropriate for different aesthetic conceptions and represented various social strata nations living in Lithuania at that time. Interwar period was a very short, but very important, stage as it was the origin time of the Lithuanian conception of the collective interior that exists today.

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Fig. 1. „Iliustruotas židinio priedas" 1937, Vol. 5, p. 5
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Fig. 3–4. Author's private collection.
Fig. 5. Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, LNB RS, F12, 818-88.
Fig. 6. *Kauno architektūra. 1930–1940 m.* (Photo-album), Kaunas Regional Library, I-5715.
Fig. 7. *Vytauto Didžiojo mirties 500 metų sukaktuvėms paminėti albumas*, Kaunas 1933, p. 130.
Fig. 8. *Lietuvos Bankas*, Kaunas 1932, p. 43.
Fig. 9. *Prekybos Pramonės ir Amatų rūmų albumas,* Kaunas 1938, p. 10.
Fig. 10. *Gerardas Bagdonavičius* (Catalogue), Šiauliai: ŠAM 2011, fig. 19.

**National Tendencies in Lithuanian Interwar Interior Design (1918–1940)**

After proclaiming independence in 1918, one of the most important tasks was creation of new visual-architectural and design identity which was called 'Lithuanian Style' or 'National Style'. That search for a new image had to be established by an intentional, wilful act which could be able to create a desired object in accordance with the pre-planned model. Because of the multi-national origin of the artists, their distinct education in various countries (Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, etc.), and the multiculturalism of customers, the same idea of countries' identity was realised in very different visual forms. This variety of Lithuanian interior design approaches was strived to be untangled for the first time in the scientific monograph *Lithuanian Interwar Interiors 1918–1940*. Meanwhile, the current article (due to the space limit) presents the idea of national tendencies in the interior design. The latter prompts the understanding that theoretical formulation of Lithuanian National Style was ultrarational, attractive, and suitable for different aesthetic tastes – above all, it truly represented various social strata and nations living in Lithuania at that time.

**Keywords**: interwar Lithuania, interior design, national identity, National Style, multiculturalism