

## *ex libris*. What is that?

Books are as old as the human wish to express one's thoughts by not only speaking to listeners, but also by putting them down on walls, clay tablets, papyrus, parchment or paper. Books were soon followed by book labelling. They were labelled with inscriptions, stamps and eventually – ex libris.

*Ex libris [Latin, "from the books of..."] is also known as a small label, pasted inside the cover or onto the endpaper of a book, indicating the book's owner. At first bookplates used to feature coats-of-arms, monograms, names or institution names, while now – an artistic design, indicating the type of the library or something about the owner's personality. Bookplates are usually etched on wood, brass, linoleum or other materials and then simply printed on the wanted surface. Some of the modern ex librises have already lost their primary function and became small pieces of graphic art, produced only for exhibitions. (Knygotyra. Enciklopedinis žodynas. Vilnius, 1997).*

Books are an important part of our lives. As soon as we're born, our names are included into certain books and later some of us write books and others – enjoy their time reading them. We learn from books, flip through their pages looking for answers and choose them according to individual needs – be it work-related or free-time. Later we acquire an aesthetic taste, looking for not only good content, but also attractive details and artistically "tailored" books that are only "ours" and offer wisdom, advice and console in times of difficulty or when we simply want to spend some time alone with our faithful advisor and friend that will never betray us. We choose books or they choose us. They are those kind of books that we want to keep and prevent from "running away" to our friends or other homes. Many

households own books, marked with a signature, stamp or some other marking. Yet, how many of us label them with a small piece of art, an inscription "ex libris" and our names or initials?

*"People's wish to mark their books is very old. The oldest known bookplate is a faience plate (62x38), found together with a roll of papyrus. The inscription on the plate indicates that the owner of that roll was the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep III (Amenophis, died circa 1353 BCE) and his wife Tiye. The plate is kept at the British Museum in London." (V. Kisarauskas. Lietuvių ekslibrisas. Vilnius, 1991).*

Ex libris and the history of the Lithuanian bookplates are featured in numerous articles and books, written by artists, collectors and art critics, living in different times, such as the first publications of the art critic Paulius Galaunė – "Ex-libris Lietuvoje: XVI–XX šimtmečiai" (published in *Tauta ir žodis*, 1926, BK. 4) and a separate book of the same title later (Kaunas, 1926), etc., also "Naujasis lietuviškas knygos ženklas" by the collector and lawyer Viktoras Cimkauskas (*XXVII knygos mėgėjų metraštis*, Kaunas, 1926, Bk. 2). After the World War II the artist Vincas Kisarauskas inspired a whole new generation of ex libris lovers and published a monograph *Lietuvos knygos ženklai 1518–1918* (Vilnius, 1984). The monograph *Lietuvių ekslibrisas* (Vilnius, 1991) was published already after the author's death. Vitolis E. Vengrys, a biomedic and ex libris collector, living in America, prepared and published Lithuanian bookplates *Lietuvių ekslibrisai* (Chicago, 1980). There were also other very significant publications, with *Lietuvos mažoji grafika. Meninės komunikacijos paštu formos (1960–1990)* (Vilnius, 2005), a dissertation of the art critic Ieva

Pleikienė among the most recent. All publications and studies discuss ex libris from the perspective of artists, art and art collectors.

The search of Lithuanian literature on ex libris as an object intended for a specific audience of a certain profession and from its position as the owner was in vain (none could be found). According to written sources, aside from rulers and noblemen, the first ex libris intended for a specific profession, were created for lawyers and medical practitioners. There is no wonder, since these people were the most tightly-related with books, had the need to have their own libraries and could afford such expensive items as books in the first place. The first ex libris for a doctor was created in the early 16th c. It was the *Exlibris des Dr. Dietrich Block* (1509) by the artist Luc Cranach.

Lithuanians became more interested in the culture of books and at the same time – in book labelling – after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. One of the major roles in the field was played by the XXVII knygos bičiulių draugija (XXVII Society of the Friends of Books), founded in 1930, which also included such famous ex libris collectors as the lawyer Viktoras Cimkauskas, art critic Paulius Galaunė, bibliographer colonel Vytautas Steponaitis and actor Stasys Pilka. Later, after the World War II, ex libris caught the attention of the lawyers Savinijus Katauskas, Jonas Nekrašius, law historian Vytautas Andriulis, ethnographer Vacys Milius, ex libris artists Vincas Kisarauskas, Valerijonas Vytautas Jucys and Alfonsas Čepauskas, who inspired a new ex libris movement in Lithuania, and many others. However, information on medicine-related ex libris collectors also working in the field of medicine, was impossible to find.

The intention of this publication is not only to introduce the medical community to ex libris as one of the most charming pieces of the small graphics, but also to encourage to notice the bookplates as a cultural phenomenon. At the same time we would like to inspire you to look through the books, accumulated at your libraries: perhaps you will find your own bookplate, hastily stashed away between yellowish pages and then forgotten. Perhaps you will remember how you used to label your first books.

*"In the modern day an ex libris (or a bookplate) as a label indicating the book's owner has taken an interesting place between the interests of bibliophiles and visual arts. Its past forms, ranging from heraldic compositions to enchantments, had a specific utilitarian purpose: to inform about the owner of the book, protecting it from thieves, etc., i.e. to preserve the book for its owner", Ieva Pleikienė wrote in her article "Šiuolaikinis ekslibrisas – lietuvių dailės langas į pasaulį" (XXVII knygos mėgėjų metraštis, Vol. 3, 2004, Kaunas).*

We hope that this publication will encourage Lithuanian doctors and the entire medical community to notice ex libris as a label of a book owner, a beautiful collectible object of the small graphic arts, as well as an excellent means of communication between two artists: the artist that created the piece and the doctor. Medicine is both science and art. The art of listening, understanding, sympathy and finding the best solution. We hope to spread the news about the collection of Lithuanian medical ex libris, which could be interesting to researchers of art and medical history, as well as collectors and art lovers.

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