

LINA KAMINSKAITĖ-JANČORIENĖ

Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre

JUOZAPAS PAŠKAUSKAS

Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre

Images

vol. XXXII/no. 41

Poznań 2022

ISSN 1731-450X

Local and Global Framework of Early Cinema in Lithuania: Vilnius Cinemas, Programme Formats and Audience^[1]

ABSTRACT. Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė Lina, Paškauskas Juozapas, *Local and Global Framework of Early Cinema in Lithuania: Vilnius Cinemas, Programme Formats and Audience*. "Images" vol. XXXII, no. 41. Poznań 2022. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 27–44. ISSN 1731-450X. DOI 10.14746/i.2022.41.02.

The paper focuses on film culture in Lithuania by analysing the film programme advertisements in periodicals from the early cinema scene – 1907–1913. In the article, we present the specificities of the programmes of the key cinemas operating in Vilnius at that time, with reference to the programme composition by film type, genre, and the nature of film communication. A thorough analysis has allowed us to gain a clearer picture of film culture in the city, film circulation, and the communication strategies used by movie theatres to attract the audience. The analysis of this period enables a comparison of local early cinema processes in Lithuania with the global ones.

KEYWORDS: Vilnius, movie theatres, film programme advertisements, audience, periodicals

From the late 18th century until 1918, the territory of Lithuania belonged to the Russian Empire, i.e., constituted the north-western imperial boundary (Rus. Северо-Западный край), known as Vilnius, Kaunas, Suvalkai and Gardinas Gubernias. The research in this area can provide a better picture of cinema processes developing on the imperial and colonial borders, or in the periphery.

In the research on the cinema of Eastern Europe, the relations between the periphery and the centre are given relevance from the postcolonial perspective as well as from the tradition of cinema history writing, claiming that the formation of the existing historiography is also influenced by the power relation of centre and periphery. As the compilers of the book *Cinema at the Periphery* have observed, the research on such peripheral film cultures is important not only for supplementing the reviewed marginalised contexts but also for “effectively bracketing the centre out.”^[2] The research on Lithuanian (early)

[1] This article is part of the research project “Early cinema in Lithuania: National, Imperial and Global Connections” (Nr. S-LIP-19-72) funded by Research Council of Lithuania and carried out by Lithuanian academy of Music and Theatre.

[2] *Cinema at the Periphery*, eds. D. Iordanova, D. Martin-Jones, B. Vidal, Detroit 2010, pp. 1–8.

cinema does fall within the cinema periphery both from geographical, historical and historiographical perspectives.

Early cinema has been little researched in the cinema historiography of Lithuania. This was mainly due to scant professional research on the history of cinema, renewed interest in which has only been observed in this past decade. Even when attention was paid, the colonial heritage was long regarded as non-national film heritage.[3] As international historiography has revealed, such a condition is typical of most colonised countries lacking modern statehood, whose research on colonial cinema often seems disoriented, i.e., alien both to the former colonisers and the countries that inherited the colonial cultural heritage.[4] As a result, little knowledge on Lithuanian early cinema is available, not only in the local but also in the Russian historiography. To illustrate this, one may point to the book by Semion Ginsburg, the pioneer of research on cinema history in the Russian Empire, which concentrated on the establishment of film production,[5] or one of the most well-known studies in the Western historiography on the literary imagination, the response of the elite to early films by Yuri Tsivian.[6] In this context, the filmography of especially great value compiled by Venyamin Vishnevsky, the founding researcher of the early cinema in Russia, should be highlighted.[7] The filmography also contains the names of the films produced in Lithuania. Important, albeit fragmented, information can also be discovered in Polish cinema historiography. For example, in the book by Małgorzata Hendrykowska, we can find references to the first films made in Vilnius, as well as the dates of cinemas operating at that time,[8] whereas the book on the contribution of the Jewish community to the development of film production by Natan Gross contains references to feature films made in Vilnius.[9] The most extensive research on film culture in Vilnius can be found in the book by Andrzej Romanowski.[10]

Taking into consideration the lack of the research on early cinema in Lithuania as well as taking into account the changed concept of nationalism in film studies, we believe that this article might be of great interest not only for local cinema history but also for regional, transnational and international film studies. In addition to supplementing Russian and Polish historiography, these research findings also

[3] Ž. Pipinytė, *Lietuvių kino integracija į tautinę kultūrą*, [in:] *Ekrane ir už ekrano*, ed. S. Macaitis, Vilnius 1993, p. 7; M. Malcienė, *Lietuvos kino istorijos apybraiža*, Vilnius 1974, p. 7.

[4] N. de Klerk, “*The Transport of Audiences*”: *Making Cinema “National”*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. R. Abel, G. Bertellini, R. King, Indiana 2016, pp. 106–107.

[5] С. Гинзбург, *Кинематография дореволюционной России*, Москва 2007.

[6] Y. Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, Chicago 1998.

[7] Документальные фильмы дореволюционной России, 1907–1916, сост. Вениамин Вишневский, Москва 1996; Художественные фильмы дореволюционной России, сост. Вениамин Вишневский, Москва 1945.

[8] M. Hendrykowska, *Śladami tamtych cieni: film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895–1914*, Poznań 1993.

[9] N. Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce*, Kraków 2002.

[10] A. Romanowski, *Młoda polska wileńska*, Kraków 1999, pp. 336–343.

provide highly valuable information on the distribution, circulation, and exhibition of films. The research on early cinema lets us deal with both local and global, international contexts, because, as far as we know, early cinema at the beginning of the 20th century was a global phenomenon, which interacted with local audiences.[11] Summing up, by analysing cinema advertisements of film programmes we seek to answer the following questions: Were films screened with great delay in the periphery?; What sort of films were screened?; How they were communicated to the local audience?; What communication strategies were employed by different movie theatres?; What film types and genres were predominant? In this article, we are going to limit ourselves to the city of Vilnius in the period 1907–1913.

It is well known that the history of early cinema depends on periodicals, which often contained detailed film programmes with film titles next to cinema advertisements. Paraphrasing Richard Abel, “local newspaper is relatively unexamined treasure trove for writing film history.”[12] Today, the research on early cinema in the international historiography has been given new relevance due to the “digital shift” in film studies: film digitalisation and restoration, digitalisation of periodicals, a broader access to such films and periodicals. These aspects enable us to identify more films, and to compare film programmes from different countries in the global context, thus identifying the diversity of genres. This also allows us to approach the expectations of the audience of early cinema and the strategies of the formation of such an audience.

According to Joseph Garnarcz, who researched the popularity of films in Germany, in the case of early cinema, one should examine entire programmes, not only individual films, because that was the standard pattern of film exhibition. Secondly, permanent cinema owners put together programmes themselves rather than rented them ready made. Therefore, in a representative sample of film programmes from a certain country, a film’s popularity is reflected by the number of its screenings.[13]

Niko de Klerk’s approach based on communication theory and the research on early cinema programmes is especially valuable in the light of the analysis of early film programmes. He suggests that “the programme is of a container format: i.e., it consists of a number of discrete attractions sequenced by an organising agent with designed to regulate audience involvement, usually for the duration of a single visit, and programme formats refer to the ways these presentations are put together. In terms of its constituent elements, a programme can be a line-up of

Programmes, periodicals and Early cinema

[11] T. Gunning, *Early Cinema as Global Cinema: the Encyclopedic Ambition*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, op.cit., pp. 11–12.

[12] *Mapping Movie Magazines. Digitization, Periodicals and Cinema History*, eds. D. Biltreyst, L. Van de Vijver, London 2020, p. 1.

[13] J. Garnarcz, *The Emergence of Nationally Specific Film Cultures in Europe 1911–1914*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, op.cit., p. 187.

either homogenous or heterogeneous items. In terms of coherence, the format introduces functional and content relations; the former concerns the matters of arrangement: rhythm, variation, contrast, and balance; the latter concerns the ways in which a programme's composition can be overlaid with meaning (artistic, thematic, symbolic, narrative)."[14]

As a result, the analysis of film programmes is highly interesting and important not only for the identification of films (genres, compositional rhythm) but also to understand the way how early cinema was presented depending on differing contexts, i.e., what cinema it was shown in, the expectations of the location where the cinema was situated, the period, and the audience. So, Niko de Klerk's suggested aspect of coherence, what films by type (fiction, non-fiction) and genre were programmed, and how they were put together, is important for us in our article. Moreover, we have paid close attention to how films were presented and communicated to the audience in periodicals.

The analysis of periodicals constitutes the basis of this article. Data from two different periodicals, i.e., the "Vilenskij Vestnik" (Rus. Виленскій вѣстникъ) and the "Kurier Litewski" published in 1907–1914, were selected. These two dailies published in two different languages – Russian and Polish – had a long, intertwining history.

The "Kurier Litewski" is regarded as the first Lithuanian information newspaper, the first issue of which was published in the Polish language back in 1760.[15] Following the November Uprising in 1831, the "Kurier Litewski" became bilingual, i.e., the Russian text was printed in the first column, whereas the news in Polish was in the next one. A decade later, the name of the newspaper was changed: the Polish issue was renamed the "Kurier Wilenski," while the Russian equivalent became the "Vilenskij Vestnik." Over time, the Polish part of the newspaper shrank and, eventually, following the ban on the use of the Polish language in public in 1864, the newspaper became an official monolingual publication named the "Vilenskij Vestnik. Gazeta oficjalnaja, politiceskaja i literaturnaja." The "Vilenskij Vestnik" was published up to 1915. Although this was not the only publication in the Russian language, it was definitely the main periodical source mirroring the official discourse of the authorities, the promotion of Russianness, and the struggle against the Polish and Catholic heritage in the then north-western part.[16]

When liberal reforms started in the empire, the rich landowners of Vilnius region financed the revival of the "Kurier Litewski: dziennik polityczny, społeczny i literacki" in 1905. The daily was published until 1915.[17] Even though the newspaper demonstrated its loyalty to the tsarist authority and Catholic Church, the new version brought

[14] *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, ed. R. Abel, London 2005, pp. 533–535.

[15] R. Jakubėnas, *Początki i sytuacja prasy w Europie i w Rzeczypospolitej obojga narodów*, [in:] "Senoji Lietuvos literatūra" 2005, no. 20, pp. 176–177.

[16] M. Kvietkauskas, *Vilniaus literatūrų kontrapunktai: ankstyvasis modernizmas. 1904–1915*, Vilnius 2007, p. 59.

[17] It is true, though, that there was a year break (from 1910 October to 1912 January), when the "Kurier Wilenski" was being published.

together the co-authors of *krajowcy* views. As a result, the newspaper published, for example, Lithuanian press reviews, and also cooperated with certain Lithuanians, for instance, Jonas Basanavičius, the father of the Lithuanian National Revival, and Petras Vileišis, the benefactor of the Revival.[18]

During the period under consideration, both publications constituted the main dailies of Lithuania published in the Russian and Polish languages; however, their audience went beyond the boundaries of just Russian or Polish communities, for these languages were employed as a *lingua franca* by Byelorussians, Jews, Lithuanians, Tatars, Karaites, Germans and other nationalities of the city of Vilnius and Vilnius Gubernia.

The precise circulation of these publications is not known (such data were usually announced neither in public nor in private press regulation institutions), yet both contemporary and modern-day researchers consider them to be the key dailies covering the life in the country from all possible perspectives. Both publications included traditional columns dedicated to theatre, literature, scientific innovation; both contained reviews of cultural events (not only local ones but also those that took place, for example, in Moscow or Warsaw). Various theatre or circus companies, as well as individual performers visiting Vilnius, advertised in these newspapers due to the accessibility and dissemination of the “Vilenskij Vestnik” and the “Kurier Litewski.” The Vilnius City Theatre and a number of private entertainment institutions published their repertoires in these publications, too. The newspapers also printed the adverts of the first movie theatres in Vilnius. It is true, though, that the newspapers in question were attributed to quality papers, where a great deal of attention was paid to internal and foreign policies and procedures; in no way did their readers belong to the newly literate “lower middle class.” The publications dedicated to this particular audience of Vilnius appeared only in around 1909–1910.

It should be noted that in this article we have analysed the cinema programmes on the basis of these main Vilnius daily newspapers. So, apart from advantages (e.g., the “Vilenskij Vestnik” was the only periodical that ran continuously from the emergence of cinema until the First World War, which ensured a consistent reconstruction of cinema reception), such a choice also has its disadvantages. For example, those cinemas that had different audience-building strategies and did not advertise in these pages remain out of the frame or appear only in a very fragmented form; thus, it is difficult to verify the information on them in other sources. Although we know that the Komfort (the Mirage from 1912) was opened in Sv. Georgievskiy Ave 11, in 1911, and the Repos opened its doors in Trakų Street 2, in 1912, we do not know their daily programmes or other specificities, or even for how long they remained in business.

[18] T. Venclova, *Vilniaus vardai*, Vilnius 2006, p. 234.

Vilnius and its Cinemas

In the late 19th–early 20th centuries, Vilnius was becoming an increasingly modern city in all aspects. Thanks to capitalist industry, urban development was becoming more modern and started to acquire the features of a regular street network plan characteristic of Western metropolises; new modern engineering structures appeared in the city. Vilnius (at that time officially referred to as Vilna) was the historical capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, i.e., it was a prominent city not only for Lithuanians of that time but also Poles and Byelorussians from the region; it stimulated the patriotic feelings of the intelligentsia.

In the late 19th century, Vilnius was a city of newcomers: in 1897, the local population of Vilnius constituted only 52.4%, whereas the majority of the population consisted of peasants (around 41,000) and people from other towns of Vilnius Gubernia (36,000).[19] In 1911, the population in Vilnius was nearly 240,000, including the army. Another important economic aspect of Vilnius is the following: although the city was not as large an industrial centre as Riga or Tallinn, it stood out as the most prominent railway hub in the entire north-western area of European Russia in the late 19th century.[20] Therefore, taking into consideration the aspect of film circulation is extremely important.

Within a few decades before the First World War, Vilnius became a single centre of political and cultural life of Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, Byelorussians, and Russians.[21] In the context of the Russian Empire, at the turn of the 20th century Vilnius became a significant centre, and not only in national terms; the activities and ideas of political, especially left-wing groups, e.g., the Bund, also played a significant role.[22] In the early 20th century, the new, modern lifestyle and entertainment in Vilnius (in luxurious restaurants, hotels, cafés, cabarets) still mingled with the old calendar religious festivals dating back to the Middle Ages, especially with Catholic indulgence feasts, processions, and fairs.[23]

The aforementioned circumstances also laid the foundations for film culture in the city. The first film screenings by an unidentified film projector system advertised as Edison Animatograph in Vilnius took place at approximately the same time as in Warsaw (i.e., on 14 July 1896[24]) on 28 July at the Botanical Gardens' Musical Hall.[25] The first film screenings by the Lumière brothers took place in Vilnius on

[19] T. Balkelis, *Moderniosios Lietuvos kūrimas*, Vilnius 2012, p. 97.

[20] V.K. Jacunskis, *Pabaltijo miestų ekonominiai ryšiai su Rusija kapitalizmo epochoje*, Vilnius 1955, p. 71.

[21] *Vilniaus kultūrinis gyvenimas: tautų polilogas. 1900–1945*, ed. A. Lapinskienė, Vilnius 2012; R. Antanavičiūtė, *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse*, Vilnius 2019; M. Kvietkauskas, *Vilniaus literatūrų kontrapunktai: ankstyvasis modernizmas. 1904–1915*, Vilnius 2007; L. Laučkaitė, *Vilniaus dailė XX amžiaus pradžioje*, Vilnius 2002; D. Staliūnas, *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883–1940*,

Marburg 2015; *Lietuvos erdvinės sampratos ilgajame XIX šimtmetyje*, ed. D. Staliūnas, Vilnius 2015.

[22] M. Mishkinsky, *Regional Factors in the Formation of the Jewish Labour Movement in Czarist Russia*, [in:] *Essential Paper on Jews and the Left*, ed. E. Mendelsohn, New York 1997, p. 78; *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Z. Gitelman, Pittsburgh 2003, p. 4.

[23] L. Laučkaitė, op.cit., pp. 166–176.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] *Виленскій вѣстникъ*, July 27, 1896.

3 July 1896 in the same place at Botanical Gardens'.^[26] The fact that the Cinématographe by the Lumière brothers was shown fourteen months later than in Saint Petersburg and nine months later than in Krakow is not surprising, for Vilnius was a peripheral city at the time and the screenings by the Lumière brothers occurred at about the same time as in other provincial towns (e.g., Tarnow, Rzeszow).^[27]

The first permanent movie theatre *Iliuzja* (Eng. *Ilusion*, Rus. Иллюзия) opened its doors to the Vilnius public (Didžioji Str. 60, currently 10A, Pol. *ulica Wielka*, Rus. Немецкая улица) in late 1906. Shortly after, in 1907, film programme advertisements started to appear on a regular basis. Therefore, it is from this year that our research starts, since this was the year when film exhibition places stabilised, and audiences could start cultivating the regular, daily experience of movie-going.^[28] We chose not to include other non-theatrical exhibition places, for even though such venues are equally important, their film programmes were either fragmented or were elaborated in no longer existent posters rather than in periodicals. As a result, it is extremely complicated to obtain both an overall picture and to compare it with the repertoires of permanent movie theatres. Thus, in the period of 1907–1913, there were the following long-term movie theatres in Vilnius (see Table).

Cinemas operating in Vilnius in 1907–1913.

Illuzja	1906	Didžioji Str. 60
Czary	1907 (operated only that year)	Šv. Jurgio prosp. ^[29]
Paradyz	1907	Šv. Jurgio prosp.*
The Biophon Theatre	1907 (operated only that year)	Botanikos Str. No. 1, corner Didžioji Str.
Eden	1908	Didžioji Str. 45
Fantazja / Miniatura	1908 / 1913	Šv. Jurgio prosp. 7
P. Sztremer's Cinema	1909	Didžioji Str. 74
Oaza	1910 (operated only that year)	Trakų Str. 9
Oaza 1	1910 (operated only that year)	Šv. Jurgio prosp.*
Mechta	1911	Kalvarijų Str. 1
Bronisława Cinema	1911	Šv. Jurgio prosp. 8
Odeon	1911	Location not identified
Komfort (from 1912 Mirage)	1911	Šv. Jurgio prosp. 11
Repos	1912	Trakų Str. 2

[26] Виленскій вѣстникъ, July 3, 1897.

[27] M. Hendrykowska, op.cit., pp. 37–40.

[28] Виленскій вѣстникъ, January 28, 1907.

[29] Exact location not identified.

Movie theatre advertisements published in newspapers enable both the reconstruction of the movie theatres operating in Vilnius at that time and the determination of the most important ones. Judging from the frequency of printed adverts as well as from the space taken up by them it can be assumed that the main cinemas in Vilnius in 1907 were the *Illuzja* and the *Czary* (Eng. *Charm*, Rus. Чары). Together with the *Eden*, which opened in 1908, the movie theatre *Illuzja* remained at the forefront in 1908 and in 1909. In 1910, the newly established *R. Sztremer's* movie theatre joined the leading ranks alongside the *Eden*. Finally, the *Bronisława Cinema* became an obvious leader in film exhibition from 1911 to 1913. Based on identical nature and communication of advertisements, it is also possible to notice that movie theatres situated in different locations of the city belonged to the same owner. For example, the *Illuzja* and the *Czary* in 1907, or the *Oaza* and the *Oaza I* in 1909. The distribution of these movie theatres largely reflects the concentration tendencies of all movie theatres in the city, i.e., in the old part (*Didžioji Street*) and in the new part of the city (Lith. Šv. Jurgio prosp. Curr. Gedimino prosp., Rus. Свято-Георгиевский пр. Sv. Georgievskiy Avenue).

A broader discussion on the differing urban concentrations of movie theatres seems significant, for it reveals possibly different audiences as well as various strategies how to attract them to movie theatres. In the late 19th century, major, rapid and radical changes took place in Vilnius based on the principles typical of most metropolitan areas in Western, Central Europe and the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, i.e., regular street networks, the perimeter block development principle, wide boulevards, avenues and squares with ideological accents.^[30] Sv. Georgievskiy Avenue constitutes one of such dominant elements of the new part of the city, framed by Lukiškių Square on one side, and St. Georgievskaya Square (current *Vincas Kudirka* Square) and Cathedral Square on the other. This artery symbolised the new city centre, where new commercial and public institutions (banks, courthouses, gymnasiums and schools, the Grand Theatre), hotels, restaurants, cafés, and residential houses of the new elite (the wealthy bourgeoisie) were concentrated.

In the early 20th century, another significant concentration of movie theatres can be observed on the opposite side of the heart of the city, in the current Pilies (Pol. *ulica Zamkowa*, Rus. Замковая улица) and Didžioji Streets. Those have been among the most impressive streets since the Middle Ages with historical palaces of noble families, the chapter building and other real estate owned by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. It goes without saying that important imperial institutions (the Board of Excise, various charity organisations, the city theatre and concert hall), extravagant (and more modest) hotels, shops were also set up around this historically significant artery of the Old Town in the 19th century. It is here that merchants, high-ranking

[30] R. Antanavičiūtė, op.cit., p. 51.

officials, and successful representatives of liberal professions chose to acquire real estate that had often belonged to the nobility. It was highly important for common yet economically superior inhabitants of Vilnius to settle in the sections of the city where the elite and the nobility resided, in one of the commercial and administrative centres of the city. Nevertheless, in contrast to Sv. Georgievskiy Avenue, this old part of the city stood out for the fact that its neighbourhood was highly stratified in economic, social, and cultural terms: the nearby streets of the Old Town were gradually losing their former economic and prestigious status (the old and the new elite of the city moved to live in more modern houses constructed in the suburbs, as well as in the new centre of the city, i.e., in the already mentioned Sv. Georgievskiy Avenue, rents started falling). Moreover, the quarters inhabited by the more deprived inhabitants of Vilnius were concentrated behind the façades of the central streets. Particularly stark poverty could be observed in the Jewish quarter, due to historical circumstances. Only the Town Hall Square and the façades of the central streets separated this most neglected and densely populated quarter from the movie theatres in Didžioji Street.^[31]

Essentially, this urban and social development reflects the already mentioned dominant features of movie theatres, i.e., if initially larger and more important movie cinemas were concentrated in Didžioji Street (*Illuzja*), gradually, Sv. Georgievskiy Avenue became a more significant artery (the Bronisława and P. Sztremer's Cinemas).

An obvious breakthrough, as well as two periods, i.e., 1907–1910 and 1911–1913, can be observed in the composition of cinema programmes. During the former period (1907–1910), new film programmes changed once a week, whereas from 1911 onwards, film programmes were changed twice a week. At the beginning, there was a six-month delay before films appeared in the repertoires of the movie theatres of Vilnius. However, this lag was gradually reduced to approximately three months' time. More rapid film circulation was also caused by the emerging institutions of film distributors.

Until 1911, films were rented from Riga film distributors and after the emergence of the first distribution companies in Vilnius, according to central distribution system; Vilnius was attributed to Moscow area and films came from there. In 1912, the first news of the Vilnius-based distribution agency *Saturn* appeared.

A major breakthrough in the structure of cinema programmes also occurs in 1911. In 1907–1910, the model of film programmes based on movie type and genre is highly diverse and dynamic (see Chart No. 1).

During this period, the composition of programmes according to type or order (whether a non-fiction or fiction film came first) kept changing on a regular basis. Moreover, it is evident that non-fiction

Composition of Film Programmes

[31] A. Ambrulevičiūtė, T. Voronič, D. Žiemelis, *Modernėjantis Vilnius, Kaunas, Gardinas, Miestų*

plėtra ir sanitarinės infrastruktūros pokyčiai 1870–1914 metais, Vilnius 2019, p. 41.

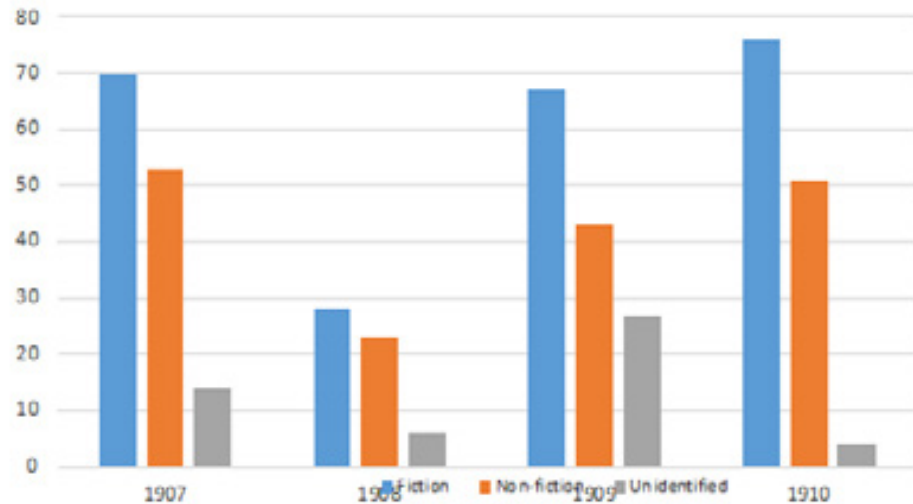


Chart No. 1. Advertised films by type (fiction – non-fiction).

films constituted quite a large part in programme advertisements. Film diversity and novelty were highlighted in advertisements in order to promote films. Films were usually presented by indicating their titles or briefly describing their content or plot, e.g., a journey to..., competition, etc. It was also often stressed that those were colour films. Gradually, film communication started changing: if at first the unique features of a film were highlighted, in 1909–1910, the length of films (*Bolshaya kartina* – big picture) or their genre (drama, *bibleskiyi* – biblical, *istoricheskkiye sobytiya* – historical, *komicheskaya stsena* – comedy scene, *fantaziya* – fantasy) was increasingly singled out.

This gradual shift is obvious in the model of advertised films according to their genre (see Chart No. 2). As can be seen, the diversity of genres^[32] in 1910 was much poorer compared to 1907. In 1907, there were multiple films with magical plots along with dramas and comedies, e.g., trick films, fairy and fantasy movies, while in 1910, trick films were no longer popular; a new genre – historical films – emerged, whereas dramas and comedies remained among the most frequently shown films. This could confirm that the transition from the cinema of attraction to that of narrative integration, as Yuriy Tsivian, Andrea Gaudreault and Tom Gunning suggested, was linked to the reorientation of the entire textual strategy of the medium from “showing” [demonstration] to “telling” [narration].^[33]

[32] We identified films and genres of films with the help of *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, *Velikij Kinemo*, online *Pathé Catalogue*, V. Vishnevsky catalogues and other sources. Cf. *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. R. Abel, London 2005; Великий Кино. Каталог сохранившихся игровых фильмов России (1908–1919 гг), сост. В. Иванова, В. Мильникова, С. Сковородникова, Москва 2002; Документальные фильмы дореволюционной России, 1907–1916, сост. В. Вишнеvский, Москва

1996; Художественные фильмы дореволюционной России, сост. В. Вишнеvский, Москва 1945; *Pathé Catalogue*, <<https://gparchives.com/>>, accessed: 14.02.2022.

[33] T. Gunning, *The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, its Spectator and the Avant Garde*, “Wide Angle” 1986, no. VIII: 3 & 4, pp. 63–70; A. Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. T. Barnard, Urbana 2011.

Regarding non-fiction films, the diversity of genres remained more or less the same all those years. However, a gradual change can also be detected here (see Chart No. 3). Progressively, multiple productions on world and local events appeared next to travelogues, animal (hunting) depictions and sports. The following three different film types on local news could be singled out: official imperial films, the films related to neighbouring regions and cities, and the films produced by local movie theatres.

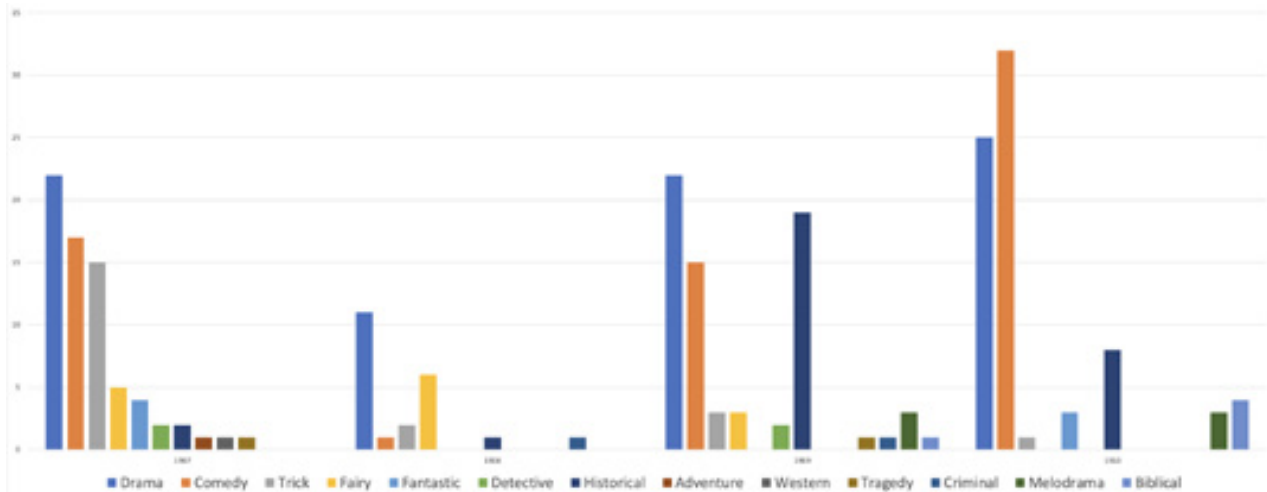


Chart No. 2. Fiction films by genre.

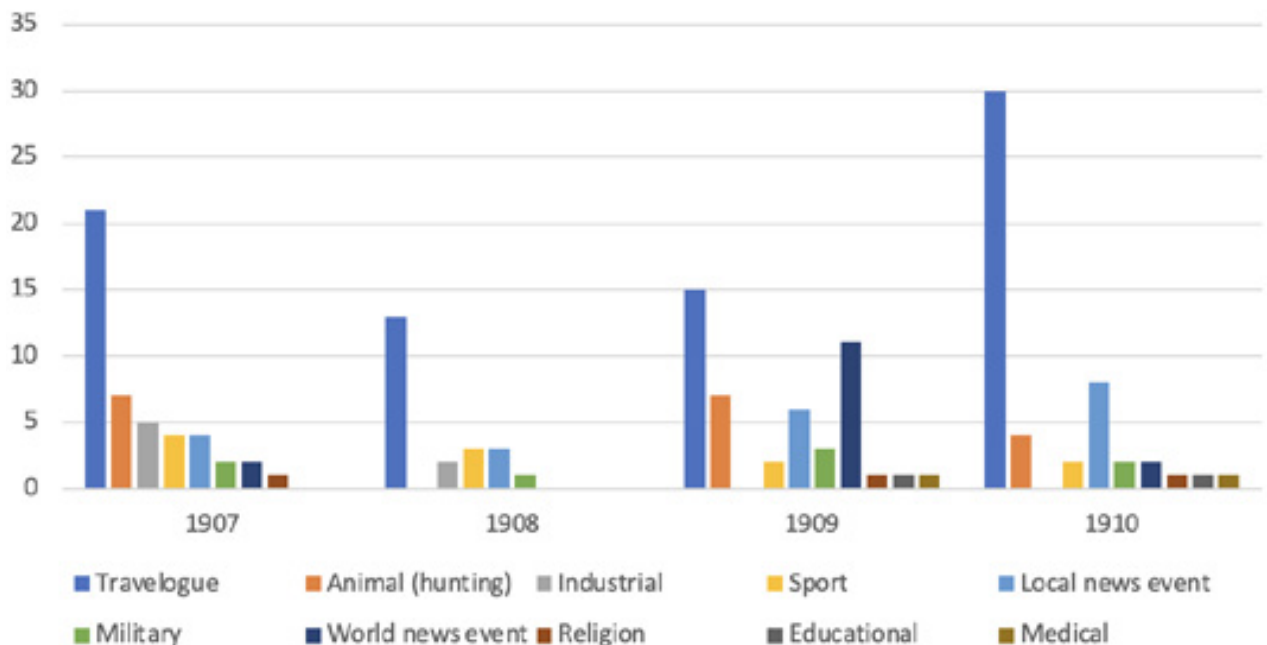


Chart No. 3. Non-fiction films by genre.

The first group, i.e., official imperial documentaries, constituted the majority of films of this subgroup. Non-fiction films made in the Russian Empire differed from those in other countries mainly due to

the fact that from the very beginning, documentaries in the Russian Empire were used to demonstrate and strengthen the power of the tsar's family. The start of this combination of cinema and ideology is marked with the images filmed by the Lumière operators in the Russian Empire in 1896 that captured the coronation of Emperor Nicholas II. Such political documentation of the emperor and his environment is known in Russia as "tsarist chronicles." According to Oksana Chefranova, "the term refers to a body of actuality films about the monarchy, a multi-film record of official and private moments from the life of the emperor systematically produced by various cameramen and film ateliers until 1917. At the turn of 1907–1908, the tsarist chronicles became widely used in the commercial cinema circuit to promote the monarchical idea."^[34] At this stage, a specific term defining documentaries, i.e., chronicles, started to take shape. On the one hand, it was used as a synonym of documentaries; on the other hand, as Chefranova has noted, imperial chronicles constituted a specific sub-genre of actuality films.^[35]

Semion Ginzburg, who researched early cinema in Russia, singles out the following main imperial chronicles: 1) tsarist chronicles focusing on the emperor of Russia and his family in various official events. Such films were normally shown at the start of the programme and were separated from all the other films of that day by a minute's silence. They were extremely popular with Russian viewers; 2) military unit chronicles. Ginzburg also mentions the element of propaganda of such chronicles, e.g., following the defeat in the Russo-Japanese war, the right to film military units and objects was often granted to foreign operators in order to restore the image of military power; 3) chronicles of religious objects and celebrations - such film reels were also easy to export; 4) chronicles of picturesque locations, travelogues (Видовые съемки).^[36]

This genre structure could be found in Vilnius cinema repertoires as well. It is important to note that alongside the films reflecting the official politics of the empire, more films focusing on regional and local realities, as well as on the realities of Vilnius and other issues of great importance to the local community, started to emerge; for example, in 1910, film programme advertisements in periodicals concentrated greatly on the films which showed the anniversary of a highly significant event for the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – the Battle of Grunwald - to be marked in Krakow.

Therefore, the second half of this period sheds some light on the dynamics of the next stage, i.e., declining diversity of genres, increasing number of productions covering local events. In 1911–1913, the composition of Vilnius cinema repertoires as well as the order of films according

[34] O. Chefranova, *The Tsar and the Kinematograph: Film as History and the Chronicle of the Russian Monarchy*, [in:] *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema*, eds. M. Braun, Ch. Keil, R. King, Indiana 2012, p. 63.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 66.

[36] С. Гинзбургъ, *op.cit.*, pp. 62–67.

to their type and genre became much more stable. The programme that was normally changed every 3 days contained 3–5 films and featured a rather strict structure: at the beginning newsreels/chronicles (usually by Pathé, Goumont or not listed) were shown, dramas were included in the middle, and one or two short comedies or a travelogue closed the programme. This stable structure resulted in almost unchanging ratio between documentaries and feature films (30/70), and feature film genres with prevalent dramas and comedies (45/55). A kind of traditional film composition arc was established: first, spectators were given some factual information, then various moving, emotional, and serious films were shown, and at the end, the audience was given an opportunity to relax and leave the movie theatre feeling uplifted.

Such a clear programme structure and genre “purity” enabled movie theatres to highlight more significant films or information that could attract the audience. For example, during this period, more detailed descriptions of what would be shown disappeared from advertisements of non-fiction films, apart from films about local events which were specified in great detail, showing special preference for events in Vilnius or neighbouring cities, e.g., Riga or Minsk, for instance, the fire in an oil refinery in Riga (Пожаръ нефтянопогонкаго заводе въ Риге, нат). Another similar example could be the traditional charity campaign “White Flowers Day,” also held outside Vilnius (День “Белаго цветка” въ Вилне 11 мая); the consecration of one of the Orthodox churches in Vilnius; a popular horse racing event; the visit of the Government minister to the city (Пребывание въ Вилне товарищи министра внутренихъ дель Джунковскаго (сънатуры); and various picturesque views of cities and their surroundings: the banks of the Vilnelė River, Druskininkai Resort, the Trakai Castle.

This could be interpreted as a fact that movie theatre owners tried to maintain the audience’s interest in cinema, in addition to attracting new viewers by demonstrating that not only distant or unknown lands but also the streets and events of Vilnius could appear on the big screen. On the other hand, as Paul Moore and the co-authors of the book *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema* pointed out, “non-fiction films were routinely programmed by commercial exhibitors partly to assuage the industry’s many critics by lending a degree of cultural capital and local content to commercial shows.”^[37]

The diversity of genres of non-fiction films also disappeared in advertisement communication along with those changes. However, it is possible that Pathé and Gaumont newsreels “packages,” which typically represented all kinds of global events, might have taken such genre diversity over and anonymised it. In the given context, travelogue-type documentaries that never lost popularity persisted throughout the whole period (1907–1913). Travel films are an important kind of early

[37] As in footnote 30.

cinema and constituted a regular part of the movie-going experience. These short films offered a glimpse at foreign lands, their people, regional industries, and showed the most iconic tourist destinations to viewers that were not yet accustomed to global travelling.

Even though comedies were dominant at the state cinema level, attention should be paid to the fact that comedies were usually shorter than dramas and often several films of this type were shown during one cinema session. As a result, their number was greater but this did not imply a longer screening time. As regards dramas, with reference to the advertisements and slogans that were selected to define such films, it can be stated that most dramas were indeed sensational melodramas because, typically, sensation scenes “of high action, suspense, violence, and hazard, usually set in extraordinary, visually arresting locales” were emphasised. The audience was especially drawn to films that mirrored reality and their time. Therefore, film reviews often highlighted “modernity,” “reality” of films, film productions based on “true events” or “real lives of today.” Moreover, it should be noted that various sub-genres - historical, criminal, patriotic, biographical, biblical dramas, etc. - might have been hiding behind the identification of drama, and they may have been indicated alongside drama or autonomously in the advertisements of the earlier period. That mainly explains the gradual levelling of genres and reveals the common popularity tendency of sensational dramas, as well as the shift from comedies (predominantly produced in film studios up to 1905) to dramas.

The years 1911–1913 in Vilnius can be singled out not only because of a more stable film programme format or more specific knowledge of genres, celebrities or film studios. The very fact that from 1911 on Vilnius audiences knew exactly what genre films they preferred illustrates relatively rapid maturity of the cultural taste of cinema viewers. The maturity in tastes can further be revealed through other film advertising details (e.g., emphasis on actors and film companies). This means that the viewers in Vilnius knew what Nordisk or Vitascope could offer and also had their favourite actors and actresses, in particular, Asta Nielsen, Max Linder, Valdemar Psilander (also known as Garrison in Russia), Charles Prince (also known as just Prince or under the name of one his characters, Rigadin, in Russia), or André Deed (also known as the Fool (Rus. *Glupyshkin*) in the Russian Empire).[38]

The year 1911 is particularly important, since this is the year when the first instances of screening just one film during a cinema session were recorded: the first Russian historical military feature film *The Defence of Sevastopol* (Оборона Севастополя, dir. V. Goncharov, A. Chanzhankov, 1911) depicting the Crimean War was shown. Having been granted exclusive film screening rights, the Bronislava Cinema

[38] L. Piispa, *Garrison. Star of the Russian Screen*, [in:] <<https://www.kosmorama.org/en/kosmorama/artikler/garrison-star-russian-screen>>, accessed: 14.02.2022; T. Gunning, *Comedy*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia*

of Early Cinema, ed. R. Abel, London 2005, p. 203; D.J. Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror. Moviemaking in Russia, 1908–1918*, Madison 1999, p. 13.

showed this film. Judging from advertisements, that was a truly exceptional event that drew considerable attention of the audience because the film was on for twice as long as other movies (for ten days), and was accompanied by a symphony orchestra and a military choir. Feature films received special attention from both movie theatres and viewers, for example, the film *1812* (*1812 год*, dir. V. Goncharov) shown at the same movie theatre. This historical military film was made to commemorate the anniversary of the Russian-French war of 1812, and was also accompanied by a military orchestra. *1812* attracted the attention not only of the general public but also of the local military and political elite – Vilnius Military District Commander F.V. Martson and Vilnius Governor P. Veriovin watched it.

While in 1911–1912, the screening of feature films was more of an exception, the genre diversity of such films became slightly greater in 1913. Foreign film productions appeared alongside patriotic Russian feature films. According to advertisements, in 1913, a grandiose nine-reel film *Quo vadis* (by Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) was shown. The “Vilenskij vestnik” wrote that the film was “based on the novel of the same title by Sienkiewicz, the film studio *Cines* in Rome. Over a million lire was spent. No such film has ever been or will be made. Never has such excessive luxury been shown. All competitors revolted against this film employing all possible legal and illegal measures and yet only the Bronislava Cinema has the exclusive screening rights. The only one. However, it paid a considerable amount for this movie consisting of six parts and lasting for two hours. The cinema directorate has made every effort to have both expensive and cheap tickets available.”^[39] In the same year, the signs of the first critical essays on films appeared along with such advertising material highlighting the uniqueness and attractiveness of the films.

While comparing the film programme advertisements of different cinemas, it becomes obvious that various communication, programming and audience formation strategies appeared quite early in 1909. For example, that same year, the biggest Richard Sztremer’s cinema, which belonged to the network of Sztremer’s cinemas, was established in the north-western part of the Russian Empire. Sztremer had movie theatres in Kiev, Minsk, Riga and other cities; the cinema chain attempted to establish itself as the cinema for families, with special attention paid to school and children’s audiences. As can be seen from the composition of the programmes, Sztremer attempted to attract wider audiences, whereas the neighbouring cinema Eden offered a more sophisticated programme featuring not only the most frequently shown dramas or comedies but also artistic movies (*khudozhestvennyye* as it was put in Russian, or *artystyczny* in Polish) usually indicated in their original identification *Le film d’art*. Meanwhile, the Bronislava Cinema increased its audience by means of strengthening its reputation through

[39] Виленскій вѣстникъ, March 30, 1913.

various social and charitable initiatives (money raising campaigns for the poor), free screenings for children, and additional musical or theatrical performances offered before films.

Conclusions

The findings of this research enable us to compare local cinema processes with global tendencies, and to elevate the culture of peripheral cinema in the context of international film studies. The most recent analysis of film programmes allows researchers to draw conclusions about early cinema formation tendencies in Europe as a whole: stable film programmes are associated with the opening of permanent film exhibition places in 1906–1912; in this period, short film programmes were dominant. The latter fact is linked with the increase in film production. In 1906–1912, both standards for film genres and viable replication of film programmes begin to take shape: film programmes could include from seven to twenty names of short films, whereas the entire programme lasted from one to two hours.^[40] As Andrea Haller and Martin Loiperdinger have observed, on the one hand, viewers could come to the cinema not necessarily knowing what they would see; on the other hand, this continuous flow of films had its own logic of compilation and organisation.^[41] The structure of programmes consisting of short films began to change in 1911 with the emergence of feature films. As can be seen, identical processes, with some delay, were taking place in Vilnius.

Based on the film programme analysis, it could be stated that Vilnius had a rich film culture. The main movie theatres were emerging in two urban areas - in the old and the new parts of the city, thus forming the two most important arteries of urban cinema culture. The appearance of the first film programmes in periodicals could be associated with the establishment of the first permanent film screening locations and cinemas. An obvious breakthrough, as well as two periods, i.e., 1907–1910 and 1911–1913, can be observed in the composition of cinema programmes. The first period was characterised by the diversity of genres, the continuous flow of films, and those early cinema genres that took the audience by surprise with the help of magic tricks, special effects, and visual impression. During the second period, the composition of programmes acquired a stable structure, thus forming a traditional film composition arc: first spectators were given some factual information, then various emotional and serious films were shown, and in the end, the audience was given an opportunity to relax and leave a movie theatre in high spirits. The screening of the first feature film in Vilnius in 1911 marked a gradual shift in the composition of programmes that had previously been based on short films.

[40] See A. Haller, M. Loiperdinger, *Stimulating the Audience: Early Cinema's Short Film Programme Format 1906 to 1912*, [in:] *Early Cinema Today: The Art of*

Programming and Live Performance. KINtop. *Studies in Early Cinema I*, New Barnet 2011, pp. 1–21.

[41] *Ibidem*, p. 10.

- Abel R. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, London 2005
- Ambrulevičiūtė A., Voronič T., Žiemelis D., *Modernejantis Vilnius, Kaunas, Gardinas, Miestų plėtra ir sanitarinės infrastruktūros pokyčiai 1870–1914 metais*, Vilnius 2019
- Antanavičiūtė R., *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse*, Vilnius 2019
- Balkelis T., *Moderniosios Lietuvos kūrimas*, Vilnius 2012
- Biltrey D., Vijver Van de L. (eds.), *Mapping Movie Magazines. Digitization, Periodicals and Cinema History*, London 2020
- Chefranova O., *The Tsar and the Kinematograph: Film as History and the Chronicle of the Russian Monarchy*, [in:] *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema*, eds. M. Braun, Ch. Keil, R. King, Indiana 2012
- Garncarz J., *The Emergence of Nationally Specific Film Cultures in Europe 1911–1914*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. R. Abel, G. Bertellini, R. King, Indiana 2016
- Gaudreault A., *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. T. Barnard, Urbana 2011
- Gitelman Z., *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, Pittsburgh 2003
- Gross N., *Film żydowski w Polsce*, Kraków 2002
- Gunning T., *Comedy*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, ed. R. Abel, London 2005
- Gunning T., *Early Cinema as Global Cinema: the Encyclopedic Ambition*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. R. Abel, G. Bertellini, R. King, Indiana 2016
- Gunning T., *The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, its Spectator and the Avant Garde*, “Wide Angle” 1986, no. VIII: 3 & 4
- Haller A., Loiperdinger M., *Stimulating the Audience: Early Cinema’s Short Film Programme Format 1906 to 1912*, [in:] *Early Cinema Today: The Art of Programming and Live Performance. KINTop. Studies in Early Cinema I*, New Barnet 2011
- Hendrykowska M., *Śladami tamtych cieni: Film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895–1914*, Poznań 1993
- Iordanova D., Martin-Jones D., Vidal B. (eds.), *Cinema at the Periphery*, Detroit 2010
- Jacunskis V.K., *Pabaltijo miestų ekonominiai ryšiai su Rusija kapitalizmo epochoje*, Vilnius 1955
- Jakubėnas R., *Początki i sytuacja prasy w Europie i w Rzeczypospolitej obojga narodów*, “Senoji Lietuvos literatūra” 2005, no. 20
- Klerk de N., *“The Transport of Audiences”: Making Cinema “National”*, [in:] *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. R. Abel, G. Bertellini, R. King, Indiana 2016
- Kvietkauskas M., *Vilniaus literatūrų kontrapunktai: ankstyvasis modernizmas. 1904–1915*, Vilnius 2007
- Lapinskienė A. (ed.), *Vilniaus kultūrinis gyvenimas: tautų polilogas. 1900–1945*, Vilnius 2012
- Laučkaitė L., *Vilniaus dailė XX amžiaus pradžioje*, Vilnius 2002
- Malcienė M., *Lietuvos kino istorijos apybraiža*, Vilnius 1974
- Mishkinsky M., *Regional Factors in the Formation of the Jewish Labour Movement in Czarist Russia*, [in:] *Essential Paper on Jews and the Left*, ed. E. Mendelsohn, New York 1997
- Pathé Catalogue*, <<https://gparchives.com/>>, accessed: 14.02.2022
- Piispa L., *Garrison. Star of the Russian Screen, Kosmorama*, <<https://www.kosmorama.org/en/kosmorama/artikler/garrison-star-russian-screen>>, accessed: 14.02.2022
- Pipinytė Ž., *Lietuvių kino integracija į tautinę kultūrą*, [in:] *Ekrane ir už ekrano*, ed. S. Macaitis, Vilnius 1993
- Romanowski A., *Młoda polska wileńska*, Kraków 1999

- Staliūnas D. (ed.), *Lietuvos erdvinės sampratos ilgajame XIX šimtmetyje*, Vilnius 2015
- Staliūnas D., *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883–1940*, Marburg 2015
- Tsivian Y., *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, Chicago 1998
- Venclova T., *Vilniaus vardai*, Vilnius 2006
- Youngblood J.D., *The Magic Mirror. Moviemaking in Russia, 1908–1918*, Madison 1999
- Вишневский В. (сост.), *Документальные фильмы дореволюционной России, 1907–1916*, Москва 1996
- Вишневский В. (сост.), *Художественные фильмы дореволюционной России*, Москва 1945
- Гинзбург С., *Кинематография дореволюционной России*, Москва 2007
- Иванова В. (сост.), Мыльникова В. (сост.), Сковородникова С. (сост.), *Великий Кино. Каталог сохранившихся игровых фильмов России (1908–1919 гг.)*, Москва 2002