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16.12.2016

"Mittens of Latvia" opens door to ancient times that gain ever more charm and value in our current hasty age.



The author of the book Maruta Grasmāne does not hide that "Mittens of Latvia" is a work of several decades and was first of all published in Latvian, of course.

In ancient times mittens were knit in Latvia not only to keep the hands warm. Patterned mittens were a popular gift, and without it getting married could not be imagined, for example. When preparing for wedding, the bride knitted 100 to 300 pairs of mittens, and no pair could be identical to another.

Maruta Grasmāne, National folk art master, Head of Handicraft Department of Riga Art College and the founder of the National Costumes Centre "Senā Klēts" (Old Granary), wished to collect and describe this wealth stored in dowry chests of Latvian women who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries. She is very convinced that the magnificent national heritage, ethnographic values should be passed on to the next generations.

Encyclopaedic book, into which other enthusiasts of preserving the ancient skills have invested as well, was published in Latvian in 2012. Soon after the book was published, it drew international attention, and in 2015 "Mittens of Latvia" began its life in English as well.

By the end of 2016, the book "Mittens of Latvia" has also been published in German, Norwegian and Japanese. According to the estimations of the publisher "Senā Klēts", this unique book dedicated to Latvian patterned gloves has already been published in around 20 thousand copies in other languages.

It may seem to be surprising that ethnographic patterns of Latvia may be interesting not only to us, Latvians. When the work on translation of the book was started, social networks were used to learn if the published work could be on demand. Apparently, it can. And not only by the German-speaking public, that could be understood, considering the common past of Latvia and Germany in bygone times.

Norwegians also expressed a serious interest in patterns of Latvian ethnographic mittens. It is said, that almost every other woman in this modern Nordic country knits in their free time. Maybe they do not knit mittens, but something else, yet the knitting needles are not idle.

Interest in translation of "Mittens of Latvia" in Japanese is both unbelievable and more than believable. Groups of Japanese journalists and tourism operators, whose introductory visits to Latvia have become a tradition, are a good evidence that this nation from far away views preservation of ancestral traditions and crafts as very important and exciting.

With every new Japanese tourist group in Latvia, it is already known that attention should be paid to such tourism objects that offer a view into the ancient times of our nation.

Tourists from other countries also are more and more interested in skills that are almost extinct in many places of this modern age. Crafts traditions and ancient skills in Latvia are still very much

alive; furthermore, in all four cultural and historical regions. No matter where you travel in Latvia, whether it be Latgale, Kurzeme, Vidzeme or Zemgale, everywhere you will meet wonderful weavers, knitters, handicraft masters, basket-makers, potters, smiths, master woodworkers, etc.

It should be added that Latvian masters do not keep their candles under a bushel and gladly receive guests, show them their skills and encourage the guests to try their hand at these ancient crafts.

A true hospitality is also shown by the publisher of the book "Mittens of Latvia", National Costumes Centre "Senā Klēts" in Old Riga, where everyone can experience the joy of crafting, whether young or old, a local or a guest from afar.

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