

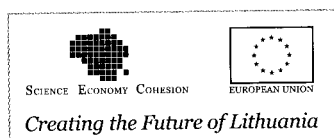
DARIUS BARONAS, S. C. ROWELL

The Conversion of Lithuania
From Pagan Barbarians
to Late Medieval Christians



THE INSTITUTE OF LITHUANIAN LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE
VILNIUS

UDK 27-9(474.5)(091)
Ba453



Research was carried out and this monograph published on funds provided by the European Social Fund: Operational Programme for Human Resources Development for 2007–2013, Priority 3 ‘Strengthening of Capacities of Researchers and other Scientists’, Measure ‘Support to Research Activities of Scientists and Other Researchers (Global Grant)’, Project No. VP1-3.1-ŠMM-07-K-03-008.

Peer-reviewed by Paweł Kras and Jonathan Shepard

Cover illustration: Petras Repšys *The Baptism of Žemaitija* (2006–2008), silvered bronze antependium of the altar in the former cathedral church of Ss Peter and Paul, Varniai.

Published by
Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore
Antakalnio St. 6, LT-10308 Vilnius, Lithuania
direk@liti.lt, www.liti.lt

Printed by
UAB ‘Petro Ofsetas’
Naujoji Riovonių St. 25C, LT-03135 Vilnius, Lithuania
priemimas@petroofsetas.lt, www.petroofsetas.lt

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ISBN 978-609-425-152-8

Contents

PREFACE	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Tepid Beginnings and the First Martyrs: Adalbert-Wojciech and Bruno of Querfurt	21
2. High Hopes on Difficult Terrain: Mindaugas – the First and Last King of Old Lithuania	55
3. How to Play with Western Christians: a Battle of Wits between the Literate and the Illiterate	119
4. Going East, Facing West: Pagan Lithuania and Christian Neighbours	149
5. Orthodox and Franciscan Martyrs: Spiritual and Bodily Arms Talk	175
6. Grassroots Christianity in Pagan Lithuania and the Final Turn: the Road from Vilnius to Cracow	221
7. The Demonstration of Christian Power in Vilnius in 1387 and Its Aftermath	261
8. How to be Big in Europe: Convert the Pagans, Reduce the Schismatics	327
9. Bulwark of Latin and Greek Christendom?	379
10. Supplications and Indulgences	403
11. Lithuanian Catholics go to Court	437
12. Diocesan Structures and Reform	459
EPILOGUE: From Pagan Europe to Christian Europe	519
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	557
<i>Manuscript sources</i>	559
<i>Bibliography</i>	561
<i>List of maps and illustrations</i>	613
<i>Index</i>	615

Preface

..Vos etenim, patres eximii ... pisces magnos de mari oceano trahentes
ad litus salutis attrahitis, nos nempe e diverso in mari magno et
spacioso terrarum nostrarum versus orientem reptilia, gentem scilicet
Samagiticam ... de profundo aquarum extrahentes ad hauriendum
aquas in gaudio conducimus salvatoris.

*Missive of King Jogaila and Grand Duke Vytautas to the Fathers
of the Council of Constance (25 August 1417)*

This book is intended to be a guide through the murky waters of pagan and early Christian Lithuania. Notwithstanding the fact that the last twenty or so years have seen a remarkable increase in studies devoted to the territories that once formed the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the knowledge of medieval Lithuania in anglophone academia is still fragmentary and liable to fluctuations caused by oriental battles over the past. By 'oriental battles' we mean ideology masquerading as scholarship. Nowadays it would be quite impossible to imagine discussions between serious-looking French and German scholars as to how far the empire of Charlemagne was French or German. The legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is large enough for every 'successor-state' to take pride in it. However, moderation in pride was not the strongest side of East European nations, be it early-twentieth-century Poles and Lithuanians or early-twenty-first-century Belarusians. Exclusivist claims to the heritage caused much rancour and actual fighting in the past, the wounds of which have not been healed fully to this day. The same pattern may repeat itself once again. The best proof of 'blood lands' coming back is Russian aggression against the Ukraine. What had been started as the negation of the Ukrainian nation as such, morphed, in just a few years, into 'hybrid warfare' accompanied by unparalleled world-wide campaign of deception. As a means of this aggression the pan-Russian recourse has been made to claims to the

legacy of Kievan Rus'. The legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania may be manipulated similarly. Even in the scholarly world this no longer extant country is far from always being looked at in a value free mode of thought, as a thing in itself, interesting for its own colourful history. That is why we have tried to do justice to every piece of evidence subjecting it to critical, source-based assessment.

The topic of our present research is the Christianization of Lithuania, with emphasis being placed on the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries. By and large, the conversion of the last pagan state in Europe may be viewed as the mainstream of its 'civilizing process' (N. Elias), hence the 'development' from pagan barbarians to late medieval Christians. The image of 'pagan barbarians' is used in a conscious attempt to evoke the image of the early Middle Ages. It is to be noted that in the thirteenth century Lithuanian society bore structural resemblances to what Western Europe was like in the post-Migration period. As shall be presented, this *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (R. Koselleck) was not always to the detriment of Lithuanian society when it came to face the late-medieval expansion of Latin Europe in the form of the 'northern crusades'. This new engagement with neighbouring countries served as a stimulus to accelerated changes that took a decisive turn with the country's official conversion in 1387. By the early sixteenth century Lithuanian society was essentially the same as the rest of Latin Europe. Some differences remained, some peculiarities were retained, as was the case in every country of Europe, but the gap was filled in an extraordinarily short period of time – during the 'long-fifteenth century'.

It would be trivial to say that Lithuania is a country lying between East and West. However, we would like to draw attention to this fact for purely pragmatic reasons related closely to our research topic. The Christianization of European countries may be viewed as a separate field of historical scholarship. The case of Lithuania is still relatively weakly represented here, largely because of medieval Lithuania's balancing act between the Latin Catholic and Greek Orthodox worlds. This state of affairs proved unpropitious for modern scholarship to tackle this topic that requires some

specialist knowledge on both parts of medieval Christendom(s). Being aware of our own limits, we have nevertheless decided to brave the space between the Baltic and the Black Seas, because it is our belief that thinking large may be helpful in bringing back the experiences of medieval people who ranged far and wide.

The Authors wish to express their gratitude for the kind assistance afforded them by the directors and staff of the Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Gnieźnie (Fr M. Sołomieniuk), Archiwum Diecezjalne w Płocku (Revd Dr D. Majewski) and especially the Archiwum Diecezjalne w Siedlcach (Revd Dr B. Błoński and Sr H. Redzik). The Revd Father Archivist of the Sacred Penitentiary and his staff in the Vatican City have been particularly helpful. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the nearby library of Friedrich-Meinecke-Institute proved the best places in Berlin for conducting our research. Special thanks are due to H. E. Dr Irena Vaišvilaitė for her hospitality and lively discussion of the late-medieval Church in Lithuania. Our thanks also go to Arūnas Baltėnas, Fr Andrzej Bruździński (Cracow), Remigijus Černius, Jonas Drungilas, Artūras Dubonis, Fr Hieronim Fokciński SJ (Rome), Giedrė Mickūnaitė, Sergey Polekhov, Edmundas Rimša, Keith Robbins, Sergejus Temčinas, Tadeusz M. Trajdos and Oksana Valionienė.

The introduction, chapters 9 to 12, and the epilogue were written by S. C. Rowell, chapters 1 to 8 by Darius Baronas. The project was carried out at the Lithuanian Institute of History from 2013 to 2015.

- Švitrigaila, GD of
Lithuania 308, 363,
376, 383, 389, 424
- Svyriškis 501
- Svyriškis (Świrski), D 414
- Svyriškis, Andriejus 457,
461
- Swanson, R. N. 418
- Sweden, Swedish 31, 55,
58, 70
- Syncretism 314, 491, 521
- Tabris (in Persia) 198
- Tacitus 22, 23, 26
- Tagino, Abp of Magde-
burg 39
- Taliatas, Jonas 481
- Taliatas, Jurgis 463
- Tamerlane (Temür) 158
- Tana 212
- Tannenbergs 327, 339,
341, 367, 368, 374, 383,
- Tarnowski of Chehm 424
- Tartary 198, 199, 480
- Tartu (Dopart) 80, 106
- Tatar, Tatars 3, 63, 64,
78, 87, 88, 95, 103,
104–106, 108, 111,
113, 117, 140, 143, 46,
151–158, 169, 174, 198,
199, 203, 212, 238–242,
262, 284, 290, 386, 373,
377, 379–385, 387, 397,
398, 401, 402, 413, 417,
418, 420, 462, 487
- Tatars see also Golden
Horde
- Tauragė 433
- Tauragnai 459
- Taurvilas 78, 79, 81, 106,
107, 335
- Temchin, Sergey (Sergejus
Temčinas) 265
- Temple(s) (pagan) 84,
263, 267, 268–277, 309,
310, 313, 355, 524
- Theoderic, K of the Ostro-
goths 26
- Theodorich Ticha, Pr of
Oboltsy 306
- Theodosius II, Pt of Trnovo
165
- Theognostos, M of Kiev
160, 165
- Theophilos, M of Lithuania
164, 165, 168, 173
- Thietmar of Merseburg
41, 44, 47
- Thomas 451
- Thomas Aquinas, St 427
- Timofey of Pskov =
Daumantas
- Timur Kotluk, Khan of the
Golden Horde 381
- Tokhta, Khan of the Gold-
en Horde 198
- Tokhtamysh, Khan of the
Golden Horde 242,
253, 380, 381, 401
- Tolochko, Ihor 110
- Tolstikowicz, Mychno 478
- Topiczewo James (Jakub)
450
- Toporov, Vladimir 264
- Toropets 154, 157
- Toruń 194, 215, 216, 339,
342, 428
- Toruń, peace of 339
- Toulouse 192
- Traby 474, 505
- Trade (in slaves) 29, 30,
282, 373, 501
- Traidenis, GD of Lithuania
103, 116–118, 150, 222
- Trajan, E 22
- Trakai 229, 241, 245–247,
275, 292, 293, 344,
346, 362, 392, 402, 407,
408, 411, 414, 433, 440,
467, 473, 475, 488, 498,
500, 505, 508
- Trakeliai 412
- Trebizond 198, 200
- Treniota, GD of Lithuania
106, 107, 114
- Trzciana 468
- Tsybulska, Dorota 481
- Turkish 203, 385
- Turov 149, 150, 151, 164,
166, 488
- Tver', Tverite 154, 156,
160, 165, 169, 170, 172,
218, 253, 381, 390
- Tykocin 16, 388, 454, 475
- Tynec 293
- Ugrovsk 115
- Ukmergė 500, 516
- Ukraine, Ukrainians 71,
157, 158, 159
- Ul'ianovskii, V. I. 390
- Ulrich of Adlenchovitze,
Mrt 204, 205, 206, 208
- Ulrich Richental 348
- Ulrich von Jungingen,
GM 368
- Upninkai 412
- Urban IV, P 107, 108, 425
- Urban VI, P 273, 274, 279,
282, 337, 460, 461
- Ushakovo 467
- Usielub, 474, 505
- Uzbek, Khan of the Golden
Horde 154, 198
- Užupis 397
- Vaclav of Hradec Kralove
(Bohemia) 285
- Vaidotas, D 233
- Vaidutis, Prince 236
- Vaiškavičius, Stanislovas
476
- Vaišvilkas (Vaišelga,
Voishelk), GD of Lithu-
ania 64, 108–117, 174
- Valachia 212, 213, 240,
307, 377
- Valmantaitis, Jonas-Jau-
nius 408, 412, 413
- Vandžiogala 268, 269
- Varangians 49
- Varniai 327, 358, 359,
461, 502
- Varniany 440, 472
- Vasilko Romanovich, D of
Volyn' 115, 117
- Veliuona 137, 356, 359,
364, 465
- Verkholantsev, Julia 20
- Verkia 440, 459
- Vicina 203
- Vjdukłé 359
- Viking, Scandinavian 30,
49, 50, 51, 55, 70, 154,
246
- Vikul, Tatiana 110
- Viligaila, D 73
- Vilnia (Vilnelė) 222, 223,
277, 397, 513
- Vilnius 3, 6, 7, 8, 10–16,
18, 19, 83, 84, 122, 124,
125, 131, 133–136, 148,
160, 175, 177, 180, 184,
202, 204, 206, 208–210,
213–227, 231, 232, 235,
244, 245, 256, 257,
261–263, 267, 272–274,
276–289, 292–295, 299–
303, 305, 311, 320, 321,
337, 345, 353, 354, 363,
365, 372, 382–385, 388,
389, 391–402, 407–409,
411–424, 426–449, 452,
453, 455, 457, 459–467,
470, 472–482, 484–490,
493–498, 500–503, 509,
511–514, 516, 517, 520,
522, 523
- Visitation, Vilnius (1522)
8, 18, 429, 474, 481,
488, 494–500, 522, 523
- Visitation, Žemaitija
(1579) 19, 408
- Vistula 21, 22, 26, 28, 35
- Vitebsk 153, 160, 244,
291, 321, 473, 488
- Vladimir Andreevich, D of
Serpukhov 253–255
- Vladimir, D of Kiev 43,
45–48
- Vladimir, ruler of Bulgaria
112
- Vladimir-in-Volyn' 488
- Vladimir-on- Kliaz'ma
154, 162, 376
- Voislav, Mrt 195, 196
- Volga 32, 49, 63, 154, 157
- Volkhov 32
- Volkovysk 111, 440, 473,
488
- Volyn', Volynian 72, 110,
112, 113, 115, 116, 117,
139, 151, 152, 156, 237,
238, 325, 460
- Vorskla 338, 382, 402,
417
- Vygantas (Alexander), D of
Kernave 296
- Vykintas, D 78
- Vytautas (Alexander), GD
of Lithuania 7, 66, 157,
233–236, 241, 243,
245–248, 268, 282,
284, 285, 287, 288, 292,
293, 296–298, 301–303,
308–311, 313, 315, 317–
319, 322, 323, 326, 328,
335, 337–339, 344, 346,
347, 349, 353–356, 358,
360–364, 366, 368–373,
375–377, 379–384, 386,
388, 394, 401, 402, 406,
408, 417, 420, 423, 460,
462, 501, 520
- Vytenis, GD of Lithuania
118, 136, 153, 164, 184,
195, 205, 223, 228, 275
- Waldemar II, K of Den-
mark 62
- Warband(s) 61, 64,
68–72, 75
- Wawrzyniec of Wegrow
409, 410
- Wenden (Cēsis) 106
- Werner von Orseln, GM
132
- Wibert 42
- Wieluń 318
- Wigand of Marburg 184
- William de Prato, Abp of
Beijing 212
- William IV, Count of Hol-
land 138
- William of Rubruk OFM 87
- William, Austrian Prince
256
- Wilsnack 322
- Winrich von Kniprode, GM
148, 243
- Wit, Bp of Lithuania 92,
93
- Władysław (Ladislas), St
278, 279,
- Władysław I (Łokietek),
King of Poland 151
- Władysław II = Jogaila
- Władysław III, K of Poland
384, 388
- Władysław, K of Hungary
387
- Wojciech Kostka Skib-
niewski, Drohiczyn
under-judge 477
- Wolborz, Nicholas 444
- Wolfram von Nellenburg,
Deutsche Meister of OT
142
- Wrocław (Breslau) 93,
142, 194, 199, 214,
425, 470
- Wulfstan, Anglo-Saxon
merchant 27, 28, 30
- Yaroslav the Wise, D of
Rus' 50
- Yatvingians 21, 50, 51,
63, 78, 92, 95, 96, 225,
331
- Yuliana of Tver', wife of GD
Algirdas 11, 160, 165,
218, 241, 251, 253
- Yurii Danilovich, GD of
Moscow 154
- Yury Surozhich, 509
- Zabiela, Gintautas 225
- Zabrzezinsky, Jan Janowic,
marshal 15
- Zaccharia Ferreri = Ferreri
- Zarasai 471
- Žasliai 19
- Zawisza, Drohiczyn judge
476
- Žeimena 292
- Žeimiai 473
- Zelva 476, 513
- Žemaitija, Žemaitijans
(Samogitians) 1, 2, 19,
62, 64, 66, 70, 73, 74,
75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 83,
96, 98, 105, 106, 131,
132, 133, 135, 136, 232,
245, 247, 260, 262, 263,
269, 270, 298, 311, 325,
327–366, 370, 377, 408,
416, 417, 428, 432, 436,
459, 465, 466, 470,
477–479, 489, 490, 496,
498, 502, 510
- Zhaludok 476
- Zhibort Khotko of Skrabo-
vo 508, 509
- Zhygmuntisishki 416, 436,
474, 505
- Žiežmariai 472, 473, 481
- Živindubas 73
- Zofia Korczewska 401
- Zofija, wife of Jan
Zabrzeziński 469
- Zuckerman, Constantin
165
- Žukas, Steponas' son-in-
law 508
- Žygimantas 388
- Žygimantas Kęstutaitis, GD
of Lithuania 304, 324,
383, 424