Land with the bison in background

Lithuanian kitchen

Gothic and Byzantinism in the Great Lithuanian Prizedom of 16th century

Artificial division of Eastern Borderlands

Polish organization in Kaliningrad Oblast
Dear Readers,

Cultural, national or religious diversity has been recently rediscovered. The accession of Poland and Lithuania to the European Union has reopened the discussion about the mutual history and borderlands of the two nations. In our magazine, which first issue you are reading, one can find historical scientific articles concerning our common past as much as readings related to national minorities in Poland, Lithuania and Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. A journey to the lands of Kresy will bring us close to nature and regional cuisine. And at the same time it will show us how the political sphere of the lands of the former Great Lithuanian Duchy has changed.

Have a nice and informative read!

Piotr Sobolewski
Chairman of Amicus Association

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Gothic and Byzantinism in the Great Lithuanian Princedom of 16th century

The Great Lithuanian Princedom – is a state within which borders till 1569 was the greater part of a territory of our interest. Only a small part of the land was within the borders of Monastic State of the Teutonic Order (since 1525 known as Duchy of Prussia).

The majority of population was the Rus whereas the Lithuanians were the minority living in the regions of Aukštaitija (around Vilnius) and Žemaitija/Samogitia (to the north of Vilnius). The division clearly showed the religious dualism of the times. The coexistence of the two Christian traditions and ceremonial has been the vital element of culture of these lands since 14th century.

The special attention deserve well-preserved 16th century monuments of sacral architecture as churches and Orthodox churches of Vilnius, Kaunas, Novogrudok, Supraśl, Synkavichy, Mažeikiai, Zapyškis and Kodeņ that combined the elements of Gothic and Byzantine style. St. Anne’s Church in Vilnius and Perkunas House in Kaunas are the most delightful examples of this style of architecture. Then the question arises as to what was the mutual relationship between the two architectural styles and what were their historical considerations. Then, here arises the need to discuss the religious history of this territory.

Christianisation for the Polish Throne

On 14th August 1385, the Lithuanian Prince the Great Jogaila concluded a contract with the Polish delegation. The Polish offered Jogaila the throne and proposed him to marry the Polish Queen Jadwiga. Jogaila agreed to adopt the Catholicism himself and baptize Lithuania in Catholicism. He also agreed to adjoin the Lithuanian Princedom to the Polish Kingdom. In 1386, Jogaila set out for Poland and the Polish delegation set out for Lithuania. They met in Volkovysk to confirm the Union of Krewo (Kreva Act).

Jogaila together with his close kinsmen was baptized in Krakow on 15th February 1386. Ladislaus Jogaila married Jadwiga at the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow on 18th February 1386. Jogaila was crowned King of Poland. In January 1387, Queen Jadwiga went to Red Ruthenia. On Ash Wednesday 1387, Jogaila called the Lithuanians to come to Vilnius where they were encouraged to be baptized.

Later, the places of pagan cult were destroyed, the eternal Perkunas fire was extinguished, the sacred groves were cut down and snakes and adders were killed. The noble and their relatives were baptized individually, whereas the folk in groups. From the very beginning of Lithuanian’s conversion to Christianity, the Polish were engaged in the Christianization of the population.

The rulers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania faced the problem of unifying the church which was a prerequisite to maintain the unity of the state. In order to do so, they could either introduce missions among the Orthodox or conclude the Uniate Church. As a result Gregory Camblak, the Patriarch of Moscow between 1415 and 1420, proposed the union. The Pope rejected the proposal, Vytautas and Jogaila, however, were encouraged to promote the idea of the Uniate Church. Still, the problem was not solved.

The Second Baptisation blasphemes the First One

Hence arose the problem of re-baptization of the Rus. When Jogaila was baptised together with some of his kinsmen, a few of his brothers did not agree to repeat the sacrament. These brothers were baptized according to the Greek Rite.

Jogaila also condemned the re-batization. Vytautas the Great adopted the same attitude. On 25th August 1417, Jogaila and Vytautas addressed a letter to the Council of Constantinople that cited the opinion of
theologians, which confirmed the validity of baptism according to the Greek Rite and considered the repeated baptism as an insult to the Greek sacrament. The re-baptism was condemned by Papal bulls, however, the Polish Episcopate continued the process. Even though, Jogaila did not approve of the repeated sacrament, the last of his wives, Sophia of Halshany was re-baptised.

On 17th February 1387, Jogaila equipped the Catholic diocese in Vilnius. On 12th March 1388, Pogochose Dobrogost, the Bishop of Poznan, as a papal legate and ordered him to found the diocese and appoint Andrew as its first bishop. The new diocese included the Grand Duchy of Lithuania except for the lands within the Vladimir Diocese, Kamieniec Diocese and later Kyiv Diocese. The Vilnius Diocese from the very beginning was considered as an exempt diocese dependent on The Holy See of Rome, however, not engaged in the conflict between the rival metropolitans of Gniezno and Riga.

The independence of the Vilnius Diocese and strong separatist feelings of Vytautas the Great led to founding the metropolis of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Vilnius. On 23rd October 1417, Vytautas the Great equipped the Diocese of Samogitia with its cathedral in Miedniki. On 24th October 1417, papal legates founded the diocese under the rule of The Holy See of Rome. Still, the Vilnius Diocese was not established then.

**The King of Two Nations, the King of Two Religions**

Lublin, situated on the border of united Lithuanian and Polish Princesdoms under the rule of Jogaila, was a centre of great importance. Since 1386 the Polish and Lithuanian nobilities were convoking assemblies in Lublin. In 1412, the King erected the church of the Assumption of Mary "de triumphis", a votive cathedral, founded in memory of the victory gained over the Teutonic Order at Grunwald. On 10th August 1418, the interior decorations of The Church of Holy Trinity were finished (the date is inscribed on the lancet arch of the cathedral, though already in 1407 some paint jobs were done in the church and below the portrayal of Jogaila there is the emblem of Piotr Knita, the Castelan of Lublin since 1409). The works started in 1415. In the meantime, Vytautas the Great laboured for ecclesiastical union between Catholics and Greek Orthodox and declared the Lithuanian Orthodox Church, independent of the Patriarch of Moscow on 15th November 1415. In 1418 he sent Gregory Camblak, Metropolitan of Kiev, to the Council of Constance to conclude the Uniate Church.

The Church of Holy Trinity in Lublin as a unique historical monument due to its status and architectural design. It is a two-storey church. The first storey was built by 1326. Before 1409, Piotr Knita supported building the second storey. The first storey was further designed by Catholic, whereas the second storey was decorated according to the Byzantine architectural style. The church is the relic of the Uniate Church. The Church frescoes are the examples of Byzantine icon-painting popular in the architectural tradition in the Orthodox Church. In addition, the portrayal of Jogaila was drawn on the lancet arch and in the interior tower sheltering the empora where the King would pray during the mass.

The Founder’s Prayer is inscribed on the cross-barrel surface. In the middle, there is Jesus Christ with Mother Mary who is sitting in the throne. Jogaila is kneeling in front of Christ and Mary with his hands in prayer. The king is protected by Saint Nicholas and Saint Constantine the Great, the two most cultivated saints by Eastern Christians of Byzantine tradition. The King is also surrounded by two other companions without halos that represent the two nations – the Polish and the Rus-Lithuanians.

Jan Długosz believed that Jogaila preferred the eastern art to the western one, as he ordered to decorate...
his bedroom at Wawel and a few Catholic churches in Poland (e.g. Gniezno and Wawel Cathedrals, collegiate churches in Sandomierz and Wislica, and the benediction sanctuary in Święty Krzyż).

**Conflict over Bernardines Sisters and Helena Ivanovna**

Alexander Jagiellon continued the process of uniting the Catholic and Orthodox church, which was introduced and further implemented by Jogaila, Vytautas the Great and Casimir IV Jagiellon. On 15th February 1495, Alexander Jagiellon married Helena, the Tsar’s daughter, the marriage was of profound symbolic importance. The monarchs united in marriage unified two rites, thus the King showed his support the Uniate Church and gave his consent to uniting two religions.

On 30th May 1498, Joseph Bolgarinovich, bishop of Smolensk, became the Metropolitan of All Rus. Metropolitan Joseph wanted to invoke the Union of the Council of Florence. Moscow Chronicle said that the post of a Metropolitan was promised to Joseph as an incentive for converting Helena to Catholicism and that he collaborated with Wojciech Tabor, Bishop of Vilnius, and the Bernardines in order to convince Helena to be baptized.

The Bernardines Sisters of Vilnius supported the Uniate Church. The indulgence granted to their chapel of St Michael caused Metropolitan Misail to send protest letters against its foundation the letters were sent between 1475 and 1476. Later, also the Rus clergy and nobility sent the letter of protest of to Pope Systus IV. Having the knowledge, Alexander Jagiellon decided not to continue with the foundation of the convent himself; it was continued by daughters of Lithuanian nobilities: Anna Radziwiłłowiczówna, sister to a Lithuanian Chamberlain, and Dorota Olechnowiczówna who settled in two houses upon the Vilnia River in Užupis (pol. Zarzecze), Vilnius. The houses were opposite to Bernardine Church.

Helena Ivanovna, the wife to Alexander Jagiellon, was the most desired person in the Catholic Church. It is considered to be the reason for Moscow to launch the war. Helena must have trusted the Bernardines as she deposited her jewels and valuables in the church. John from Komorov, the provincial superior, passed the jewels and valuables to Sigismund I the Old.

On 3rd May 1500, Muscovite-Lithuanian war broke out. Ivan III purported the war as the religious one. On 14th July, Lithuanians were defeated in the Battle of Vedrosha. Only after the defeat did Alexander receive the declaration of war.

**The Obedience to the Pope**

On 20th July 1500, however, Metropolitan Joseph Bolgarinovich signed the Act of Obedience to the Pope that stated the obedience of the Orthodox of the Great Lithuanian Princedom to the Pope together with the sacramental confession as according the Council of Florence.

Also, Bishop of Vilnius, Wojciech Tabor, and Alexander Jagiellon addressed letters to the Pope. Erazm Ciolek as the envoy to the Pope was ordered to support the obedience on behalf of Alexander Jagiellon. Johannes Sacranus, the rector of Cracow Academy, encouraged by Bishop Tabor published Fulcidarius errorum ritual Ruthenici in which he explained the flaws of the Orthodox Church. On behalf of Bishop of Vilnius, Ciolek presented Johannes Sacranus’ work to the Pope. Ciolek held the obedience speech to Pope Alexander VI on 31st March 1501, in Rome.

The defeat over the Lithuanians in the Battle of Vedrosha undermined the plan to confirm the Uniate Church. On 23rd August 1501, Al-
Alexander VI expressed his content about the Rus and other Orthodox inhabitants of the Great Lithuanian Princedom living within the dioceses of Vilnius, Kyiv, Lutsk and Medininkai having converted to the Catholic Rite and thus ordered them to renounce their Orthodox misconceptions as according to the Council of Florence. The Pope, however, acknowledged the baptism of the Orthodox and Armenian Catholics, thus refraining from the re-baptisation of the Rus. The Pope ordered Bishop of Vilnius to accept the Rus baptized according to the Orthodox or Armenian Rite and allowed making copies of the bull by the notary that were to be sealed either by the Pope himself or by other bishop or prelate.

More Tolerance – Greater Influence of Rome

The Bull Altitudo divini consili by Pope Alexander VI dated 23rd August 1501, and the Breve by Bishop Tabor, as much as the letter written by Alexander Jagiellon, as I believe, were of great importance to the revolutionary changes in the religious divisions in the Great Lithuanian Princedom. Roman Catholicism widely spread all over the Great Lithuanian Princedom proves it right. Landlords, church patrons founded Catholic churches for all the inhabitants both of Catholic or Orthodox Rite.

Different directions of religious geography seem to be clear. The administrative division of Eastern Church, in particular, seems to have influenced the new religious geography. The metropolitan diocese, to the north of the Great Lithuanian Princedom, was the Catholic centre, whereas the Vladimir diocese must have been under different religious influences. The process
of Catholisation was implemented together with the Polonisation. The
lands where the Poles are settled in large numbers these days must have
been within the dioceses under supervision of Pope Alexander’s VI.
The thesis raised here seems to be of great importance to the history
of the Great Lithuanian Princedom needs further examination.

New Parishes for both Rites

The clergymen started to develop the parish structure common for
both rites. Historic documents of the church in Ikažn’ in the Bracław
Voivodeship dated 28th April 1501 reveal that Pope Alexander VI re-
newed his permission to build the parish. The permission to build the
Church of Saint Spirit in the Diocese of Vilnius was first given on the
request of Ivan Sapieha, Alexander Jagiellon’s secretary. The Pope
allowed to celebrate masses of the Orthodox Rite by the Rus priests,
Catholics under the supremacy of Rome. Sapieha did not manage to
build the parish of both rites in Ikažn’ till 1501, therefore, the Pope
permitted to celebrate masses in the consecrated church conducted
by both Latin and Rus priests and attended by both Roman Catholic
and Rus believers. Still, the masses

and services were to be celebrated according to the Roman Catholic
Rite. Moreover, having consecrated the parish the Pope granted 10-
year indulgence to all believers who would have attended the church
and thus helped to mend, preserve and decorate it.

On 10th May 1501, Pope Alexander VI issued the Breve diletto fratri
Gregorio de Loszko Kyovieni dio-
ceesis, to the converted the light of true understanding and unity of
the Roman Catholic Church. The
Priest of the Rus Metropolis had
not been confirmed, but ordained
by Vassian, Bishop of Vladimir Di-
ocese (1492-1512). The ordination
was performed litterae dimissoridi
during the period of The Vacancy of
the Holy See (1497-1498), the Pope
allowed for the excuse from the cen-
sure and gave the priest dispensa-
tion to take holy orders performed by one of Catholic bishops.

The erection of St Anne’s Church
in Vilnius situated near the Bernar-
dines’ Monastery and Church and
on the edge of the Rus capital of the
Great Lithuanian Princedom
was clearly related to the Union of
the churches. On 22nd May 1501,
Pope Alexander VI issued the in-
dulgence bull esti cuncte ecclesiae
et loca. The Pope stated that believ-
ers would pray for Alexander Jagi-
ellon in this particular church.

The Gothic architecture of the
church with the intertwined Gothic
arch together with trapezoidal arch
(typical for Byzantine architecture)
was the symbol of the religious syn-
cretism that was to attract the Rus
to the church. The syncretism had a
strong influence upon the aesthetic
nature of St Anne’s Church.

The architecture of the other
building might have been under the
influence of the religious syn-
cretism as well, though there exists
no historical evidence whatsoever.
However, the church in Kaunas,
from the second half of the 16th
century was a Jesuit Mission (later
known as Perkūnas House), might be
the example of the syncretic archi-

The continuation of the article will be printed in the next issue.