

What Makes the Era of St. Josaphat Unique? A Few Historiographical Notes

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Summary. The article raises the question as to whether it was a coincidence that three saints of phenomenal significance to Lithuanian historical memory emerged specifically during the first half of the 17th century: St. Casimir was canonized in 1602, while two other martyrs of the era, St. Josaphat and St. Andrew Bobola, would be canonized later. The following question is posed: Are not these saints related to the ‘golden age’ of old Lithuania – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – which existed neither before nor after it? The paper considers to what extent the first half of the 17th century, also known as the Vasa epoch, could justifiably be regarded as the age of civilizational progress in Lithuania, and whether it is not related to the aforementioned phenomena of historical memory.

Keywords: Grand Duchy of Lithuania; ‘golden age’; epoch of the Statutes of Lithuania; Vasa era; era of St. Josaphat.

1. Introduction

After a lecture on St. Josaphat at Kėdainiai Šviesioji Gymnasium – which traces its origins back to the *Gimnasium Illustre*, founded by Janusz Radziwiłł in 1647 – I was asked the following questions: “What is, after all, the historical significance of St. Josaphat?” And, “Why are the traditions of Eastern Christianity, which have been largely forgotten in Lithuania, relevant to the present, especially to secular history?” It immediately occurred to me that if we are to remember St. Josaphat, it should be somewhere else, but not in Kėdainiai. After all, in Kėdainiai, it would be more appropriate to first remember the ideas of John Calvin. It was precisely the Calvinist branch of the Radziwiłł family which, by promoting John Calvin’s ideas, seemed to erase the older forms of Christianity. Then I tried to argue the relevance of Eastern Christianity forms for present-day Lithuania, describing the current events in Ukraine and Lithuania in the face of Russia’s war, but I felt that this was not enough. It became clear that the main gap in understanding the old

eras – including the Baroque era of St. Josaphat which we were discussing – is the conceptual assessment of those times, especially in relation to the present.

This is how the text was born, and in which I try to answer the following question: Is it a coincidence that, in the historical memory of Lithuania, as many as three saints are associated with the first half of the 17th century? St. Casimir was canonized in 1602, while two other martyrs of the era, St. Josaphat (martyred in 1623, beatified in 1642, canonized in 1867) and St. Andrew Bobola (martyred in 1657, beatified in 1853, canonized in 1938), would be canonized later. I have formulated a bold hypothesis: could the sanctity of these figures be related to the ‘golden age’ of the old Lithuania – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as *GDL*) – a period which existed neither before nor after that time? Of course, we primarily bear in mind the forms of memory found in today’s Lithuania, but the phenomena of the first half of the 17th century were much broader than the current frameworks of Lithuanian memory. They were diverse both in their origin and in their impact.

2. In which Era should we Search for the ‘Golden Age’ of Lithuania?

The concept of the ‘golden age’ is widely used in historiography. True, it is often used as a metaphor, and even more frequently it is associated with the epochs of imperial powers: the Ottoman Empire (1453–1566, especially during the era of Suleiman the Magnificent), Spain (1492–1659), Britain (the epoch of Elizabeth I), and the Netherlands (1588–1672). Historians of the ‘revival’ of non-imperial nations, who have later been called the ‘fathers of the nation’, as in the case of Lithuania’s Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864) and Maironis (1862–1932), also engaged in the search for the ‘golden age’. The historian of ideas, Monika Baár, who in her monograph, *Historians and Nationalism. East-Central European Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, titled one of the chapters “The Golden Age”, views Daukantas as being among widely esteemed historians and as a ‘statesman’ who is similar to the Polish Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861), the Czech František Palacký (1798–1876), the Hungarian Mihály Horváth (1809–1878), and the Romanian Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891).¹ Concepts of the ‘golden age’ vary widely and encompass different chronological periods: for the Lithuanian Daukantas, it was the time of pagan-

1 M. Baár, 2010, p. 224–255.

ism; for the Czech Palacký, it was the Hussite period; whereas, for the Hungarian Horváth, it was the age of Hungarian reforms (1823–1848).

In 2023, an exhibition titled *Obraz złotego wieku* (*The Image of the Golden Age*) was opened at the Wawel Royal Castle in Kraków, showcasing artefacts which reflect what the Poles refer to as the ‘golden age’. Typically, the Polish ‘golden age’ is considered to be the era of the Jagiellonian dynasty, especially the 16th century, with the beginning of its peak associated with the publication of Nicolaus Copernicus’ work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*) in 1543. This ‘golden age’ epoch includes not only Polish Renaissance architecture, especially the Sigismund’s Chapel in Wawel and the entire city of Zamość, but also Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski with his work *De republica emendanda* (*On the Improvement of the State*), published in 1554, which is compared to Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (*The Prince*) of 1513 (published in 1523) and Erasmus Roterodamus’s *Institutio principis Christiani* (*The Education of a Christian Prince*). The end of this peak is typically considered to be the year of the death of the most famous Polish poet, Jan Kochanowski, in 1580.

Compared to the trajectory of Polish history, we Lithuanians might also consider the 16th century in Lithuania as the ‘golden age’. Its essence would be characterized by the ‘age of the Statutes’. At least that is what the first author of Lithuanian cultural history, Józef Jaroszewicz (1844), believed.² Let us recall his concept. Lithuania, having established a state, has always followed the path of civilization and progress: in the pre-Christian era, it learned more from the Ruthenians, while, after the introduction of Christianity, more was learned from the Poles. However, the 16th century presents the self-generated phenomenon of Lithuanian civilization – the Statutes of Lithuania. These were the highest manifestation of the peak of Lithuanian civilization. According to Jaroszewicz, it was the enactment of laws which convinced Europe that Lithuania had renounced barbarism and had reached a level of civilization comparable to that of Poland. If, until then, historiography in Lithuania had only seen Polish civilization, Jaroszewicz perceived a multi-ethnic and multilingual Lithuanian culture. It is this kind of culture which constitutes the content of Lithuania’s ‘golden age’ of civilization, that is, the 16th century. Moreover, Jaroszewicz was the first to emphasize the Reformation and the Lithuanian-language cultural program: the first Lithuanian book (Martynas Mažvydas’ *Katekizmas* (*Catechism*), 1547), and its contexts in relationships with the

² J. Jaroszewicz, 1844.

professors of the University of Königsberg; and Abraomas Kulvietis and Stanislovas Rapolionis, who, according to Edvardas Gudavičius, demonstrated the potential for creating a university in Vilnius. For Jaroszewicz, as a proponent of Enlightenment ideas, the appearance and influence of the Jesuits did not inspire optimism. For him, it was an era of ‘darkness’ and ‘decline’, brought about by the Jesuits, which produced only two prominent Lithuanian figures: Albertas Kojalavičius-Vijūkas and Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski.

Jaroszewicz’s concept did not become a reference point for the ‘fathers’ of the Lithuanian national revival – not for Daukantas, and nor for Jonas Basanavičius or Maironis, either. However, this was due to the Polonized Lithuanian culture rather than the rejection of the Jesuits. Nevertheless, this concept unexpectedly reappeared in the thoughts of the notable Lithuanian émigré and cultural historian Vytautas Kavolis (1930–1996). For the latter, Vilnius was the centre of European tolerance: “In the second half of the 16th century, when Lithuania briefly became the centre of liberalism in Christian Europe, both politically and religiously, it was possible to be proud of having surpassed Western Europe in political culture.”³

In a way, Jaroszewicz’s concept also reappeared in the historian Edvardas Gudavičius’s idea of a ‘civilizational leap’, which thereby sought to characterize the era following the Christianization of Lithuania: 15th–16th century. Even though the concept suggested by Gudavičius has already been written about specifically,⁴ let us repeat a few of its key ideas. The late Christianization of Lithuania (its official date is 1387) meant that Lithuania encountered not a monastic Europe but rather a Europe of universities. For Lithuania to remain a state with its own culture but not fall out of Central Europe (having just entered it), it was necessary to make a cultural leap – at the very least, to establish a writing industry. By the early 16th century, Lithuania had already achieved this, and, in doing so, Lithuania had accomplished something that no other European nation had had to do. Lithuania not only learned to write but also managed to create an impressive civilizational phenomenon, the Statutes of Lithuania, which, with their systematic approach and Renaissance ‘form’, surpassed the level of legal codification of its neighbours. The Statutes of Lithuania were like a diploma thesis on Europeanization. Moreover, they demonstrated that Lithuania, for the first time, was not only receiving but also giving something back – a reference to the impact of the Statutes of Lithuania

3 V. Kavolis, 1991, p. 22.

4 A. Bumblauskas, 1996.

on the laws of Livonia, Moscow, and Poland. In the 16th century, the GDL became European, and integrated into Western civilization: in property relations, the law of *leno* was established; in the social-economic structure, knights' estates (*feuds*) and serfdom appeared; in the political-social structure, the nobility's estate and an elective monarchy developed; in the urban economy, guilds appeared; and, in education, a European-style education system, with cathedral schools and their trivium, colleges, and universities, was established. The Christian mentality took root, at least among the elite (the idea of *antemurale christianitatis* was directed against Orthodox Moscow); thus was formed not only a nation of noblemen with a historical self-awareness but also a national chronicle. Books began to be written (1499) and printed (1522) in Lithuania, with the first Lithuanian books appearing outside the GDL in 1547 and within the GDL itself in 1595. Thus, the civilization of the GDL absorbed the necessary minimum of European values.

We will come back to Gudavičius, but, for now, let us pause and focus on the author who was the first to use the concept of the 'golden age' in reference to the times of the GDL. This concept was used in 1604 by the Ruthenian evangelical reformer and publicist Teodor Jewłaszewski in his written memoirs.⁵ Describing the atmosphere of Vilnius during the reign of Stephen Báthory (ruled 1575–1586) and anxiously reflecting on his own present, he marvelled at that past time, writing: "Religious differences were not an obstacle to friendship, and precisely because of that, that era seems golden to me when compared to the present, where hypocrisy and the friendship of people of the same faith stand in the way". Although he was an Evangelical Reformer, he was invited to sit at the table of the Vilnius priest and canon Bartłomiej Niedzwiedzki, who was hosting members of the entourage of the Italian Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini (the future Pope Clement VIII, 1592–1605) – and the entourage was very surprised by this.

However, in later Lithuanian historiography, another reference point became established – the Union of Lublin (1569); this was experienced dramatically and sometimes remembered tragically. From a national Lithuanian perspective, this Union between Poland and Lithuania was seen as the cause of, later, a Polonization of Lithuania. It was precisely this Polonization which became the main target of criticism for the Lithuanian national movement at the end of the 19th century, and it was within the milieu of this movement that the aforementioned national stance

5 Teodoras Jevlašauskis, *Atsiminimai*, par. Darius Vilimas, Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 1998.

of Lithuanian historiography emerged. However, even this national historiography acknowledged that, during the era of King Stephen Báthory, after the Union of Lublin, two significant accomplishments were achieved: the founding of Vilnius University in 1579, and the successful conclusion of the Livonian War in 1583 after the defeat of Moscow. This, in turn, raises the question as to whether the first 'golden age' of the GDL began with the reception of Sigismund III Vasa in Vilnius in 1589.

Let us list the most prominent as well as culturally and politically most significant events which had a cultural impact on Lithuania following the reign of Stephen Báthory, that is, from the late 16th century to the first quarter of the 17th century. Let us mention only those events closely related to St. Josaphat:

- The canonization of St. Casimir (1602) and the beginning of the construction of the Church of St. Casimir in Vilnius (1604);
- The opening of the Jesuit college in Orsha (1611) and the subsequent expansion of the Jesuit college network to Kražiai (1616) and Smolensk (1620);
- The Jesuit missionary Andrius Rudamina, who carried the trace of Lithuania to its farthest point, left for Rome (1618), followed by journeys to Lisbon, Goa in India, and Macau in China;
- The publication of *Logica* (1619) by Martinus Smiglecius, a Jesuit professor at Vilnius University; the work was later reprinted three times in Protestant England;
- Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski began his work in Vilnius (1620) and was crowned with the laurel wreath of poets in Rome in 1625;
- The construction of a baroque architectural masterpiece began – the Chapel of St. Casimir at Vilnius Cathedral (1623);
- 1623, the Martyrdom of Josaphat.

Let us add that there is another quarter-century in historiography which is also described as having very positive connotations. First of all, this is a time of progress for Vilnius University, which is referred to as a time of prosperity by Ludwik Piechnik. This period also includes a few other great figures: first and foremost, Konstantinas Sirvydas and Albertas Kojalavičius-Vijūkas, who are well-known in Lithuanian studies; and, towards the end of the era, Kazimieras Semenavičius, the author of *Artis Magnae Artilleriae (The Great Art of Artillery)* (published in Amsterdam in 1650), who is remembered for his significant contributions to the art of artillery. The poetically named 'beginning of the kingdom's calamities' (*initium calamitatis regni*) will only start with John II Casimir Vasa and the *Deluge*. A part of this era of calamities, and also its symbolic beginning, was the martyrdom of the future saint Andrew Bobola in 1657.

The prominence of these facts is an undeniable empirical historiographical phenomenon. Why is the era itself not considered prominent?

3. Four Thresholds of Historical Thought which Move us toward an Understanding of the Era of St. Josaphat

The threshold of the ‘fathers of the nation’ Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864) and Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927). The essence of this position is that baptism is the beginning of evils. The paradigmatic text concerning this is from 1912 – this is a study by Basanavičius on the relationship between Christianity and paganism.⁶ The position can be summarized in the words of Daukantas: “Thus the Lithuanians, Samogitians, living as pagans in the forests, [were] brave in war, free at home, more virtuous than their Christian neighbours”.⁷ Thus, it is not only Polish and German Western Christianity which is on the threshold of Lithuanian self-consciousness, but also Eastern Christianity.⁸ Opposition to the Union of Kreva regarding the dynastic union between the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL (1385), and the baptism of Lithuania’s ruler Jogaila in Kraków, Poland (1386), became a fundamental marker of Lithuanian identity.⁹

The Maironis (1862–1932) threshold. Maironis (Jonas Mačiulis) is another ‘father of the nation’, though he did not have as much enthusiasm for paganism. He formulated a vision not of a pagan Lithuania, but rather of the early Lithuanian

6 Jonas Basanavičius, “Iš krikščionijos santykių su senovės lietuvių tikyba ir kultūra”, [1912], in: Jonas Basanavičius, *Rinktiniai raštai*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1970, p. 156–225. Indeed, the idea that paganism should be considered the most essential and valuable feature of the Lithuanian culture can already be discerned in the works of Daukantas, especially since, for a long time, his only printed work was *Būdas* (*The Character of the Ancient Lithuanians, Highlanders, and Samogitians*, 1845), in which, unlike in his other works, he presents not a ‘diachronic’ history of Lithuania, but a ‘synchronic’ study of pagan culture. [Simonas Daukantas], *Budą Senovės-Lietuviu Kalnienu ir Žamajtiu, iszraszę pagal senowęs rasztu Jokyb’s Łaukys, Petropillie*, 1845.

7 Simonas Daukantas, “Darbai senųjų lietuvių ir žemaičių”, [written in 1822, published in 1929], in: Simonas Daukantas, *Raštai*, t. 1. Vilnius: Vaga, 1976, p. 64–81, 127–128.

8 Another article is dedicated to a separate discussion of this issue: A. Bumblauskas, 2017.

9 European countries typically began their history of Christianization with the baptism of their ruler. Lithuanian historiography puts the date of 1387 rather than that of 1386, when the baptism of the inhabitants began. The baptism of Jogaila in the Wawel in 1386 did not suit the grand Lithuanian national narrative for a number of reasons, both because the event took place in Poland, and also because of the dislike held for Jogaila himself (he is treated as an oppressor of Vytautas, etc.).

state being an era of warriors, and culminating in Vytautas the Great (c. 1350–1430) as the embodiment of Lithuania's power. Thus, Maironis interpreted the concept of the nation's 'vigil-sleep-awakening' in his own way. For him, the 'dying' of Lithuania had not begun, as it had for his predecessors Daukantas and Basanavičius, with its baptism and the death of Vytautas, after which, followed 500 years of 'night without dawn',¹⁰ but, instead, with the death of Sigismund II Augustus.¹¹ From this threshold stems the Lithuanians' dislike for the Union of Lublin (1569), a dislike which managed to influence later political realities, or at least their understanding. The founders of the Republic of Lithuania based their ideas on the notion that it was the Union of Lublin which was the foundation of all evils.¹²

The Adolfas Šapoka (1906–1961) threshold. The historian Adolfas Šapoka was the compiler and editor of the *canonical History of Lithuania* (1936). For him, the beginning of Lithuania's historical misfortunes was the death of Sigismund II Augustus (1572). Šapoka is also considered to be the author of the idea 'let us look for Lithuanians in Lithuania's history'.¹³ Unfortunately, the latter has become an insurmountable barrier when it comes to the Vilnius *Civitas ruthenica* and Lithuanian Eastern Christianity. In his 1936 *Lietuvos istorija (History of Lithuania)*, *Civitas ruthenica* does not exist, which means that half of the history of the metropolis of Vilnius is also absent.¹⁴ Even in his later work, *Senasis Vilnius (Old Vilnius, 1963)*, the corresponding narrative has hardly been developed: only a few sentences are found which summarize the fact that, alongside German and Ruthenian towns, there was the "Great City, where the majority of the population consisted of indigenous Lithuanians".¹⁵ The Jesuits who came to this kind of Vilnius, according to Šapoka, founded Vilnius University – the focal point of Polishness. True, some

10 To quote the poem *Jaunoji Lietuva (Young Lithuania)* by Maironis: "It is time, time to rise from sleep; Five centuries have passed – a night without dawn!" (1907). J. Maironis (M-lis), *Jaunoji Lietuva*, [Sankt Peterburgas], 1907.

11 Maironis (Š. M-lis), *Lietuvos istorija: su kunigaikščių paveikslais ir žemlapiu*, Petropilis, 1906, p. 208–209.

12 P. Łossowski, 1995, s. 54–55; P. Dąbrowski, 2012, s. 194–195; P. Dąbrowski, 2015, s. 40–41.

13 Adolfas Šapoka, 'Raskim lietuvius Lietuvos istorijoje', in: *Naujoji Romuva*, 1932, No. 21 (73), p. 481–482.

14 *Lietuvos istorija*, red. Adolfas Šapoka, Kaunas: Švietimo ministerijos Knygų leidimo komisijos leidinys, 1936, p. 76–78.

15 Adolfas Šapoka, *Senasis Vilnius: Vilniaus miesto istorijos bruožai iki XVII a. pabaigos*, Brooklyn (N.Y.): Tėvai Pranciškonai, 1963. Quoted according to Adolfas Šapoka, *Raštai*, t. 1: *Vilniaus Istorija*, Vilnius: Edukologija, 2013, p. 318. For more on Šapoka's research into the history of Vilnius, see A. Ragauskas, 1997, p. 125–140.

minorities (for example, Jews) are occasionally noted in Šapoka's work; these observations, however, do not touch upon the areas of historical consciousness which are fraught with tension, i.e., the issue of the Lithuanian, Polish, and Ruthenian identity of Vilnius.

Šapoka's programme continued to influence the Lithuanian humanities even during the Soviet era. And, first of all, we see this in the search for the Lithuanian language in the writings of the GDL. During this time, fundamental works were created by Jurgis Lebedys and Ingė Lukšaitė.¹⁶ However, Mykolas Biržiška (1882–1962) rhetorically questions whether this shook the previous image of the voice in the wilderness.¹⁷ It is implied that, aside from the first Lithuanian books published elsewhere in Prussia, there were very few phenomena which could be identified as Lithuanian within the GDL itself: Mikalojus Daukša's catechism of 1595 and postil of 1599, and Konstantinas Sirvydas' dictionaries (published as of 1629) as well as other publications are phenomena which took place in Vilnius, along with a few other cases occurring in Kėdainiai.

Konstantinas Avižonis (1909–1969) threshold. For this Lithuanian historian, the beginning of the evils was the Vasa era. He condemned the entire noble society of the Vasa era, and, as early as in 1940, stated the following: "If, after the death of Stephen Báthory, the Vasa dynasty took over a still fairly strong and fully revived Lithuania, within a few decades it left the country externally completely weakened and internally fragmented. By that time, all of Lithuania's life had fallen into stagnation and no longer progressed, but instead lagged behind significantly, especially compared to other Western European states".¹⁸ Later, this idea was further developed: "Although the formation of the one-estate state and the rise of the nobility began with the reforms of the middle of the 16th century, it was not until the Vasa period, i.e., in the first half of the 17th century, however, that the nobility actually became firmly established in all areas of life and became fully dominant. During that period, the golden freedom and anarchy of the nobility flourished,

16 Jurgis Lebedys, *Lietuvių kalba XVII–XVIII a. viešajame gyvenime*, Vilnius: Mokslas, 1976; Ingė Lukšaitė, *Lietuvių kalba reformaciniame judėjime XVII a.*, Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR mokslų akademijos istorijos institutas, 1970.

17 A historian of Lithuanian literature from an earlier generation, Mykolas Biržiška (1882–1962), highlighted a scribe from Lithuania Minor (Prussia) called Jonas Bretkūnas, as well as Mikalojus Daukša and Konstantinas Sirvydas. Vladas Zajančauskas called the preface to Daukša's *Postilė* "a voice in the wilderness". Vladas Zajančauskas, *Lietuvių literatūros vadovėlis*, Vilnius, 1924, p. 45 (pataisytas leidimas: Vilnius, 1928, p. 37).

18 Konstantinas Avižonis, *Bajorai valstybiniame Lietuvos gyvenime Vazų laikais*, Kaunas: Lituaniistikos instituto Lietuvos istorijos skyriaus leidinys, 1940, p. 38.

which, like a cancer, consumed the old Lithuanian state. That is why the period is interesting. It marks the beginning of the slow but steady decline of the state, which was the result of the nobility's dominance and the crystallization of the noble state system during the Vasa era. The subsequent political, social, and cultural history of Lithuania was merely a logical consequence of that era¹⁹

The discussed horizons of Lithuanian historical thought testify to the fact that it is not worth searching for Lithuania's 'golden age' after the Union of Lublin and Stephen Báthory.

4. Other Historiographical Perspectives on the Late Grand Duchy of Lithuania

In addition to the *Lietuvos istorija (History of Lithuania)* by Maironis (1906), which laid the foundations for the model of Lithuania's identity, and the *Lietuvos istorija (History of Lithuania)* edited by Šapoka (1936), which created a canonical image of the history of Lithuania, there also existed another perspective. Its essence can be described as follows: it is not the trajectory of the history of the Lithuanian state, but rather *the progress of Christianity*. This is the concept developed by the historian Zenonas Ivinskis (1908–1971). For Ivinskis, even after Stephen Báthory, Lithuania continued to move forward, and on the horizon of that continuing progress, even the times of the Samogitian Bishop Motiejus Valančius in the 19th century might be included. This concept is associated with the Christian historiography of Lithuania and Poland. It includes the works by Jan Fijałek (1864–1936), Paulius Rabikauskas (1920–1998), and Ludwik Piechnik (1920–2006). There may also be place for Josaphat Kuntsevych.

Perception of the Ruthenian element of the GDL. In his conception of Lithuanian writings, alongside the grand narrative, Mykolas Biržiška (1882–1962) was already working with the phenomena of the Statutes of Lithuania, the Chronicles, and the *Metrika*. During the Soviet period, this narrative was supplemented with the idea of 'internationalism'. A similar process occurred with the old Lithuanian printers, including Francysk Skaryna at the dawn of Lithuania. Gradually, this space was created for the recognition of the Ruthenian city of Vilnius. The origins of this historiography can be found in the works of the Polish historian and Vilnian

19 Konstantinas Avižonis, "Lietuvos istorija. XVII amžius", in: Konstantinas Avižonis, *Rinktiniai raštai*, t. 3, Roma: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija, 1982, p. 9–10.

Maria Łowmiańska.²⁰ Recently, Ukrainian and Polish historians Ihor Skochylas and Andrzej Gil have formulated the idea of the Eastern Church and the Metropolis of Kyiv as together being a third member of the Republic of the Two Nations (hereinafter referred to as the *RTN*).²¹ This, in turn, allowed Vilnius to be seen not only as a city of Kyivan tradition but also as a crossroads of cultures in general.²² A final point would be Francysk Skaryna becoming a site of memory for Lithuania: in 2017, the Bank of Lithuania issued a coin dedicated to Francysk Skaryna's *Biblia Ruska* (1517), and the *Seimas* [Parliament] of the Republic of Lithuania declared that the year 2022 would be the Year of Francysk Skaryna.

Thanks to Edvardas Gudavičius (1929–2020), a **fundamental alternative to the grand Lithuanian narrative** emerged. The formula proposed by this historian for the late GDL is as follows: Lithuania becomes a 'second Poland', with analogies drawn from the spread of Spanish culture in Latin America. In 1563, after the ruler Sigismund II Augustus issued the privilege of confessional equality, the evangelical reformed magnate Mikołaj Radziwiłł 'Czarny' published the Bible in Polish, the so-called Brest or *Radziwiłł Bible*. It seems that both of these actions were an attempt to seek the foundations of the GDL's integrity in the face of Moscow. These foundations would become the Church Union and the Polish language. This situation would be dramatized by Mikalojus Daukša, but, at the same time, one Radziwiłłowie would write (1615) to another that although they were Lithuanians, they needed to use the Polish language. A few decades later, the most prominent Lithuanian cultural figures, even those of Lithuanian ethnic origin, would write their surnames in Polish forms – Kojalowicz and Siemienowicz, for example. All this allowed Gudavičius to view the late history of the GDL without having a phobia concerning Polishness: the use of the Polish language does not make the phenomena of Lithuanian history inherently Polish; on the contrary, it should be seen within the palette of Lithuania's cultures and confessions. In Gudavičius' programme, there was also place for the Constitution of 3 May 1791, which has been inherited as a commemorative date by the *Seimas* of the modern-day Republic of Lithuania.

Henryk Samsonowicz and his five European Polish-Lithuanian phenomena.

When once asked what the old Lithuania gave to Europe,²³ I pointed out that this question had also been put to the renowned Polish historian Henryk Samsonowicz

20 Maria Łowmiańska, *Wilno przed najazdem moskiewskim 1655 roku*, Wilno: Wydawnictwo Magistratu m. Wilna, 1929.

21 A. Gil et al., 2014.

22 V. Adadurovas et al., 2017; Л. Тимошенко, 2020.

23 A. Bumblauskas, 2001.

(1930–2021).²⁴ I have reduced his ideas to five phenomena: a democracy of nobles, religious tolerance, bread, the baroque, and the Constitution. The first thing that came to mind is that Samsonowicz was referring to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as Lithuania's contribution is clear in all these phenomena. The GDL was no different from Poland in this regard:

- The same democracy of nobles;
- The same religious tolerance (a bouquet of confessions even larger than in Poland);²⁵
- A distinctive Baroque (Johann Christoph Glaubitz school);
- A distinctive legal tradition (the Lithuanian Statutes, which contributed to the creation of the Constitution of 3 May);
- Finally, Gdańsk was not just a Polish port, but also a port for the entire Polish-Lithuanian state (today the Maritime Museum in Gdańsk is decorated with the inscription “Lithuania and Poland – the granary of Europe” (“Litwa i Polska – spichlerzem Europy”)).²⁶

Let us summarize. Contemporary historiography sees no reason to underestimate the Baroque era of the 17th–18th century. On the contrary, phenomena of European significance are being discovered, where the idea of religious tolerance or coexistence between religions resonates very strongly in our context. Clearly, Lithuanian historiography will need to cross a threshold, and see Polish-speaking Lithuanian society and culture not as part of Poland, but as an aspect of Lithuania's identity. Then, the historiographies of the whole region will have to agree that the true beginning of disasters was not the *Deluge* or the Northern War, but rather the destruction of the Polish-Lithuanian state in 1795. But let us return to the Vasa era.

5. Another, Different Perspective – A New View of the Vasa Era

In the new synthesis of the history of the GDL, almost the entire era – the ‘long 17th century of Lithuanian history’ (1588–1733) – is interpreted as a cohesive whole.²⁷ This perspective has many advantages: there are many similarities between the Vasa

24 H. Samsonowicz, 1994.

25 See, for example, T. Kempa, 2016.

26 Polish history textbooks state that Gdańsk, the largest provider to Amsterdam, the capital of Europe at that time, reached its peak in 1618.

27 G. Sliesoriūnas, 2016.

and Saxon eras. However, emphasizing the cohesion of the era while abandoning a single idea is unconvincing. Moreover, it is not conducive to the search for the phenomena of the Josaphat era.

In 1983, the cultural historian Ingė Lukšaitė argued that the country's economy was so devastated by the mid-17th century war that it could be considered a significant chronological boundary separating the cultural life of the first half of the 17th century, which was on an upward trajectory, from the period of decline in the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, which began with the *Deluge*. Thus, it is suggested that the culture of the late feudalism period should be divided into two distinct phases: the notable rise in the first half of the 17th century, which extended the development of the 16th century (the humanist era), and the stagnation and decline in the second half of the 17th century.²⁸ This idea suggested by Lukšaitė correlates with the concept of the Polish historian Ludwik Piechnik regarding the rises and declines of Vilnius University;²⁹ and this concept, in turn, became the basis for the latest syntheses of the history of the University of Vilnius.³⁰ These works establish the concept of the first half of the 17th century as being the first 'golden age' of Vilnius University.

It is not only cultural phenomena that are important. The victories achieved in the first half of the 17th century against three empires – the victories which were never repeated – are also significant. Here, we are referring to the victories of Jan Karol Chodkiewicz: first, at Kirchholm against the Swedes (1605); second, together with Polish and Ukrainian forces, repelling the Turks at Khotyn (1621); and third, the march all the way to Moscow to relieve a besieged garrison of the Polish-Lithuanian state. The last mission was unsuccessful; however, Lithuania had come this close to the Kremlin in Moscow only once before, during the second half of the 14th century under the ruler Algirdas. Chodkiewicz concluded the era of the Vasas' triumph in Moscow when, in 1610, Władysław IV Vasa ascended the Moscow throne, and in 1611, his father Sigismund III Vasa, triumphed in Vilnius, as Smolensk had been recaptured.

Sigismund III Vasa's triumphal processions through Vilnius would stop at various temples, directly reflecting the city's confessional diversity. During the Vasa period, the diversity of confessions continued to thrive in Vilnius, and perhaps

28 J. Jurginis et al., 1983, p. 193.

29 L. Piechnik.

30 V. B. Pšibilskis et al., 2012; A. Bumblauskas et al., 2024.

even developed a phenomenon noted by Vytautas Kavolis: “In the second half of the sixteenth century, when Lithuania briefly became the centre of liberalism in Christian Europe, both politically and religiously, it was possible to take pride in a political culture that surpassed that of Western Europe”.³¹

Nonetheless, Vilnius remained a Northern Jerusalem, with its three religious triads:

- First triad – Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Orthodox believers (later also Old Believers and Armenians);
- Second triad – Protestants: Lutherans, Reformed Evangelicals, and Anti-Trinitarians or Arians;
- Third triad – non-Christians: Jews, Karaites, and Muslims.

All these confessions had not only their own martyrs and saints but also their sages, missionaries, and travellers.

The three most prominent travellers were as follows:

- The Catholic magnate Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł ‘Sierotka’, with his journey to the Holy Land (1582–1584);
- The Jesuit Andrius Rudamina, with his missions to Goa in India and Macau in China (1625, 1626–1632);
- The Radziwiłłs’ physician, Alexander Carolus Curtius, with his journey to New Amsterdam, the future New York (1659–1661).

Prominent poets, scholars, and sages were as follows:

- Rectors of the Jesuit College and the University of Vilnius Jakub Wujek and Piotr Skarga (1579–1582);
- Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł ‘Sierotka’ and Tomasz Makowski with their map of Lithuania (1613) – the most notable cartographic work of the GDL;
- Martinus Smiglecius with his work *Logica* (1619), which reached Protestant England;
- The king of poets Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, and his laurel-wreath crowning in Rome (1625);
- Kazimierz Siemienowicz with his work *Artis Magnae Artilleriae* (1650).

And finally, the three saints of Vilnius of that time:

- Casimir – canonization in 1602;
- Josaphat – martyrdom in 1623, beatification in 1643, and canonization in 1867;

31 V. Kavolis, 1991, p. 22.

- Andrew Bobola – martyrdom in 1657, beatification in 1853, and canonization in 1938.

Let us conclude with *WorldCat* data about **the memory of personalities from the Vasa era (1587–1668)**. The global catalogue of U.S. libraries may not be all-encompassing and it is, in any case, Americentric. However, it can hardly be accused of favouritism toward any particular era of Lithuanian history.

Personality	The personality's works and works about them according to <i>WorldCat</i> data
Piotr Skarga	2,151
Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski	879
Jakub Wujek	822
Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł	602
St. Andrzej Bobola	539
Marcin Smiglecki	310
St. Josaphat Kuntsevych	148

In his works, the historian Gudavičius defined differently the period in which he saw the GDL becoming a society with a European structure. Nevertheless, let us content ourselves here with defining the chronological framework of the era by using **the First and Third Statutes (1529–1588) and take a look at the personalities of that period.**

Personality	The personality's works and works about them according to <i>WorldCat</i> data
Bona Sforza	6,246
Szymon Budny	265
Lew Sapieha	262
Maciej Strykowski	216
Franciszek Skaryna	144
Isaac of Troki	142

The result is quite unexpected. If not for Bona Sforza, the creator of the Statutes, Lew Sapieha, would not have saved the image of the 'golden age'. It seems that the era of Josaphat, and that of another saint, Andrew Bobola, as well as that

of the king of poets Sarbiewski, clearly calls for equal evaluation. Or perhaps even more – maybe this is indeed the ‘golden age’ of old Lithuania?³²

From the later era – **a century after the Deluge and the Saxon era** – even without detailed counting, we can confidently say that only Johann Christoph Glau-bitz is worth remembering. So, it does not take much calculation to see that only **the late GDL (1773–1832) – the era of the Constitution of 3 May** (Hugo Kołłątaj, Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha, and Tadeusz Kosciuszko) **and the Polish prophets from Vilnius** (Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Joachim Lelewel, and Ignacy Domeyko) – with its famous scholars of Vilnius University, like Georg Forster, Johann Peter Frank, the brothers Śniadecki, and Jean-Emmanuel Gilibert, begins to surpass the ‘era of saints’.

Personality	The personality’s works and works about them according to <i>WorldCat</i> data
Frédéric Chopin	116,238
Adam Mickiewicz	57,486
Georg Forster	13,252
Juliusz Słowacki	9,577
Johann Peter Frank	8,949
Tadeusz Kosciuszko	5,403
Joachim Lelewel	3,038
Hugo Kołłątaj	950
Jan Śniadecki, Jędrzej Śniadecki	720
Ignacy Domeyko	598
Jean Emmanuel Gilibert	516
Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha	337

6. In Lieu of a Conclusion

In 1613, the author of the Radziwiłłowie map, Tomasz Makowski, argued with earlier descriptions of Lithuania: “The Grand Duchy of Lithuania is a very vast and very famous country. [...] This country has good, clear, and easily navigable roads on all sides (contrary to the opinion of some writers that one can only ac-

32 However, in the synthesis of Lithuanian history, we were guided by precisely this concept. See A. Eidintas et al., 2016, p. 76–116.

cess it in winter), and a traveller coming from Poland can arrive here (as it is said) without getting his feet wet. All kinds of grains thrive well here; they always ripen and yield a good harvest. The abundance of this harvest can be attested to by the famous ports of Königsberg and Riga, which transport the grains brought by ships from Lithuania to overseas countries. Because of this, Lithuanians now engage in extensive trade with other nations, as, in addition to all kinds of grains – rye, wheat, barley, etc. – they export flax, hemp, ox hides, lard, wax, ashes, tar, as well as small animals, especially martens, beavers, foxes, furs, and many other things. Although they do not have gold, silver, and copper mines, there has always been and still is enough of these things, and they are not exchanged for goods (as others write). This community spends money on purchasing various spices, delicacies, beverages, and silk fabrics embroidered with gold. [/] Now this country is rich in cities, castles, and manors, the most notable of which is Vilnius, the capital of the entire state, a famous and very large city along with its suburbs, occupying two German miles, located at the confluence of the Vilija and Vilnia rivers.”³³ No one had portrayed Lithuania more beautifully before. It will rarely happen again. The epoch of Saint Josaphat was self-confident.

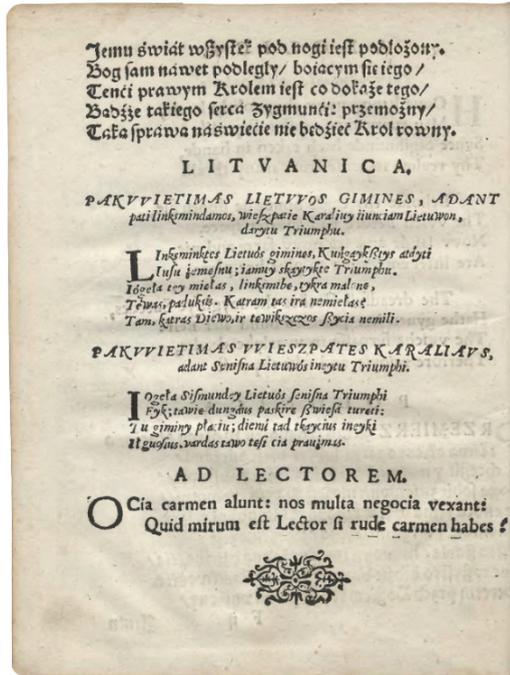
Post Scriptum

Let us offer reassurance to the sensitive Lithuanian ear which continues to show exceptional love for Martynas Mažvydas, who spoke Lithuanian. This era is marked not only by the Lithuanian works of Mikalojus Daukša and Konstantinas Sirvydas, but also by the early highlight of the period of Lithuanistics – the year 1589. Sigismund III Vasa’s visit to Vilnius was honoured with greetings in various languages. Alongside Latin, there were greetings in Italian, Spanish, French, German, English, Polish, and also in Lithuanian. The Lithuanian texts “Pakvietimas Lietuvos giminės” (“Invitation of the Lithuanian Family”) and “Pakvietimas Viešpaties Karaliaus” (“Invitation of the Lord King”) (a total of 9 lines) are considered the first Lithuanian hexameters. However, it is significant not only because of its meter but also because of the ideas it contains – it mentions the Lithuanian nation or ‘Lithuanian family’ (Figure 1).

33 “Lietuvos aprašymas Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės 1613 m. žemėlapyje”, in: *Lietuva žemėlapyje*, sud. Aldona Bieliūnienė, Birutė Kulnytė, Rūta Subatniekienė, Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2011, p. 388.

Figure 1. Greetings in Lithuanian dedicated to Sigismund III Vasa on the occasion of his visit to Vilnius in 1589.

In: *Gratulationes Serenissimo Ac Potentissimo Principi Sigismundo III [...] In [...] Vilnam ad-ventu factae Ab Academia Vilne[n]si Societatis Iesu*, Vilnae: Typis Nicolai Christsophori Radiuilli, 1589, p. [50]. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich (National Ossolinski Institute), XVI.Qu.2521.



Conclusion

If we treat the concept of the ‘golden age’ not as a metaphor or a theoretical generalization which does not require logical precision, a pilot study of *WorldCat* data has shown that, in the history of old Lithuania (from the 13th century until the mid-19th century), the first memorable ‘golden age’ should not be considered the era of the Statutes (as was thought until now by Józef Jaroszewicz, Vytautas Kavolis, Edvardas Gudavičius), but rather the Vasa era – from 1587 until the *Deluge* of 1655. This forces us to rethink our evaluations of this period.

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