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Situation of Vilnius diocese according to the Visitation of 1522

Introduction

In 1387, Lithuania became the last country in Europe to convert to the Catholic faith, marking the final victory of Western Christianity on the European continent. At the same time, a new cultural phenomenon began to develop in the state – the history of the Catholic Church in the Grand Duchy.¹ The 15th century was particularly important for the new religion brought by baptism. It was the century for the first spread in a pagan state and the century for the consolidation of the position of the faith against the upcoming Reformation, which spread throughout Europe and which, unlike many other cultural phenomena, did not arrive in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania later or with less force than in the rest of Europe. Therefore, in the 15th century, in the period between the Baptism and the Reformation, Lithuania experienced such intense cultural processes that the rest of Europe had centuries to experience. The strong echoes of the Reformation in the Grand Duchy demonstrated the existence of a society, receptive to new cultural and religious winds. This naturally again raises the question, which has been repeatedly explored by academics,² but which has not yet been fully answered: why the Reformation, though not completely victorious, was so strong in Lithuania, a country which had only recently come to know Christianity itself? Was the susceptibility of the Duchy to the Reformation due to the strong establishment of the Catholic Church, and thus, as in Western Europe, the Reformation spread easily as a form of protest? Or, on the contrary, was its establishment due to a sluggish and weak knowledge of the Roman faith, so that Catholic baptism and the Reformation had practically the same starting positions in Lithuanian society at that time?

¹ For a comprehensive history of the Catholic Church and Christianity in Lithuania, see V. Ališauskas et al., *Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija*, Vilnius 2006.

² The classic works on this topic are written by I. Lukšaitė, *Kai tikėjimas keitė pasaulį*, Vilnius 2017, and idem, *Reformacija Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje ir Mažojoje Lietuvoje: XVI a. trečias dešimtmetis - XVII a. pirmas dešimtmetis*, Vilnius 1999.

The 15th century is the main period of the study, and the focus on Vilnius diocese is important because of its unique position as the political and cultural religious centre of Catholicism in the state.³ The visitations were the main tool for learning about and responding to the challenges that existed within the Church institution.⁴ In 1522, the diocese of Vilnius was visited for the first time by its direct head, the Archbishop of Gniezno. In addition to a meticulous inventory, the purpose of the Visitation was to collect and record the foundation deeds of existing churches, altars and donations of property, thus ensuring the legitimacy of these documents and the continuity of the baptism of the relatively new state.

The situation of the Vilnius diocese at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries has attracted the attention of historians,⁵ but this article aims to explore what the Visitation of 1522 reveals about the period under study. The main source of the work (the Visitation) was edited and published by S.C. Rowell.⁶ In terms of historiography, Jan Kurczewski was one of the first to write on the history of the Vilnius diocese, writing, amongst other works, the book “Biskupstwo wileńskie” (Eng. *Bishopric of Vilnius*) in 1912, but the most fundamental work was published in 1972 by Jerzy Ochmanski, whose “Biskupstwo wileńskie w średniowieczu: ustrój i uposażenie” (Eng. *The bishopric of Vilnius in the Middle Ages: system and endowment*), although published 50 years ago, is of immeasurable value for the information it provides on the Vilnius bishopric. The work of R. Petrauskas “Lietuvos diduomenė XIV a. pabaigoje - XV a.” (Eng. *Lithuanian nobility at the end of the 14th century - 15th century*) is important in the analysis of foundations; this work is the basis for the chosen method for dividing and analysing the nobility. The overview of the material situation of the churches is complemented by the publications of J. Jurginis⁷ and P. Pakarklis.⁸ For the analysis of the pastoral part, important works are written by M. Paknys.⁹ Contextual data on the situation of the Vilnius diocese can be found in the works of I. Lukšaitė,¹⁰ and V. Ališauskas.¹¹

³ The most comprehensive and indispensable work for the knowledge of the Vilnius diocese in the Middle Ages is J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo wileńskie w Średniowieczu: Ustrój i uposażenie*, Poznań 1972.

⁴ Edited by L. Jovaiša, *Žemaičių vyskupijos vizitacija (1579)*, Vilnius 1998, p. XII.

⁵ First of all, the already mentioned Ochmanski and his works, as well as the works and articles of M. Jučas, M. Paknys, S. Rowell, L. Jovaiša and others, who have also written academic works of the subject.

⁶ Edited by S. Rowell, *Acta primae Visitationis diocesis Vilnensis anno Domini 1522 peractae: Vilniaus Kapitulos archyvo Liber IIb atkūrimas*, Vilnius 2015. Further: S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*

⁷ J. Jurginis, *Lietuvos valstiečių istorija*, Vilnius 1978 (Eng. *History of Lithuanian Peasants*).

⁸ P. Pakarklis, *Ekonominė ir teisinė katalikų bažnyčios padėtis Lietuvoje (XV-XIX a.)*, Vilnius 1956 (Eng. *The Economic and Legal Situation of the Catholic Church in Lithuania (XV-XIX a.)*).

⁹ M. Paknys, *Šventųjų kultai LDK XV-XVII a. pradžioje*, „Šventieji vyrai, šventosios moterys šventųjų gerbimas LDK XV-XVII a.“, Vilnius 2005, pp. 15-102.

¹⁰ I. Lukšaitė *Kai tikėjimas keitė pasaulį...*, and idem, *Reformacija Lietuvos Didžiojoje...*

Also a joint publication by J. Jurginis and I. Lukšaitė *Lietuvos kultūros istorijos bruožai*, Vilnius 1981.

¹¹ V. Ališauskas et al., *Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija...*

The diocese of Vilnius in the context of the visitation¹²

When the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was baptised in 1387, the first churches, parishes and dioceses began to be created. The most intensive expansion of parishes was achieved under the Polish-Lithuanian ruler Casimir (1440-1492), when the number of churches grew twice as many as under the reigns of Jagiełło, Vytautas and Sigismund Kęstutaitis combined. The reasons for this can be found primarily in the peace that prevailed in the state, which ended with the outbreak of the war against the Muscovite state.¹³ Another striking change is that by 1440 as many as 82% of all churches were founded by the ruler.¹⁴ While, in the period 1440-1500, however, about two thirds of churches were already founded by the nobility, i.e. in the second half of the 15th century a turning point occurred in Vilnius¹⁵ during which the nobility, realising the importance of the Catholic Church for the state, took the initiative to fund new churches themselves. The growth of the church network did not cease as the 16th century began, and the expansion of the church network maintained its momentum.

An important feature of the diocese in the 16th century was the increased political importance of the office of bishop and its attractiveness to the nobility of the Grand Duchy. The threshold of these changes is the appointment of Albrecht Radziwiłł (bishop of Vilnius 1507-1519), the first bishop from a magnates' family.¹⁶ At that time, we can observe the emergence of political power games in the diocese: the power of the family is used to achieve political goals (Bishop Radziwiłł uses the intercession of his powerful brothers in his conflict with Archbishop Laski).¹⁷ In the statute of the Chapter of the Vilnius Cathedral of 1515, Radziwiłł identifies himself first as the "son of the Voivode", and then only as the "bishop".¹⁸ On the one hand, such changes may mark the beginning of the growing politicization of the Church institution, but it can also be seen as an increase in the power, value and authority of the Catholic Church in the eyes of the public (of course, first and foremost, its main members – the nobility). It was only with the powerful and influential authority of the Church (in this case, the diocese of Vilnius) that the first Radziwiłł family (and later the ruler Sigismund the Old, who placed his illegitimate son John of the Dukes of Lithuania on the throne of

¹² As the Visitation concerns territories and localities that exist today in three different modern countries and languages (Lithuania, Poland and Belarus), a certain degree of misspelling may appear. In order to minimise this effect, all the names of the territories are given as they appear in the Visitation document; the names of the noblemen are written in Polish, except for the Lithuanian grand dukes and popes, where the English spelling is preferred.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 64.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 65.

¹⁵ J. Ochmański, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, p. 67.

¹⁶ R. Petrauskas, *Albertas Radvila: Pirmas Didikas Vilniaus Vyskupo Sostė*, „Bažnyčios istorijos studijos“, vol. 9, Vilnius 2018, p. 13.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 14.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

the Bishop of Vilnius¹⁹), would have sought the positions of this institution by nominating their own family members to it. Subsequent episcopal appointments, such as that of Polish Jerzy Chwalczewski (1535-1549), were met with fierce opposition by the Council of Magnates, while the appointment of another Polish clergyman, Bernard Maciejowski, to Vilnius at the end of the 16th century was not approved at all – Maciejowski never came to Vilnius, as a result of the resistance of the magnates of Lithuania.²⁰ These later events have their roots in the early 16th century, which marked not only the transformation of the Vilnius diocese into a political tool, but also the consolidation of the significance and importance of the Catholic Church in the eyes of the nobility of the Grand Duchy in the early 16th century.

Vilnius diocese Curia and Chapter

The Vilnius diocesan Curia was the main ecclesiastical administrative apparatus that ensured the essential functioning of the diocese. The Curia was the focal point for all the most important ecclesiastical matters. To ensure this, the main governmental offices already existed and were established in the diocese of Vilnius in the 15th and 16th centuries. One of the most important, the Chancellor, was in charge of the chancery, managed the administrative affairs of the diocese, and had an excellent grasp of legal matters. The whole of Vilnius diocese was under the jurisdiction of the Chancellor, except for the Vilnius Cathedral chapter, which became independent of him in 1520.²¹ From the very foundation of the diocese, the Vilnius Chapter consisted of ten canons, two dignitaries (a prefect and a dean) and two prelates. Later, Bishop John of the Dukes of Lithuania increased the Chapter by two prelates and two canons. This structure of the Chapter (12 canons and 6 prelates) remained constant.

The Chapter was governed by the privileges granted to it by bishops, rulers and popes, and by these privileges it had its own maintenance and provision in kind. However, this maintenance was the subject of several disputes: in 1503 there was a dispute between bishop Tabor and the Chapter over the distribution of income, and later in 1518, under the episcopate of Radziwiłł, there is evidence of an agreement between the bishop and the canons on the salaries and the supply of honey, but a document of 1521 (under the episcopate of John of Dukes of Lithuania) makes it clear that the previous agreements had not been respected, and that there was a need for a new one. The latter dispute did not end there, and the canons of Vilnius lodged a complaint against bishop John even to Pope Clement VII himself.

¹⁹ V. Ališauskas, T. Jaszczolt, L. Jovaiša, M. Paknys, *Lietuvos katalikų dvasininkai XIV-XVI a.*, Vilnius 2009, p. 135 (Eng. *Lithuanian Catholic clergy 14th-16th c.*).

²⁰ M. Paknys, *Vilniaus vyskupijos istorija: XIV-XVIII a.*, “Bažnytinio paveldo muziejus”, 2015, p. 4.

²¹ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, p. XXVI.

The Vilnius Chapter was an important centre not only for the diocese, but also for the cultural development of the Grand Duchy. The structure of the Catholic Church, which was established and developed there, created the preconditions for the development of churches, Catholicism and Latinisation of the country, thus integrating the Lithuania into the Western cultural space. Thanks to the activities of the 15th century bishops and the Chapter itself, many different intellectuals and humanist in later centuries came from the Vilnius Chapter: lawyers, editors of the Statutes of the Grand Duchy, secretaries to dukes and diplomats.²²

Relations between the archbishop of Gniezno John Laski and the Grand Duchy. The appearance of 1522 Visitation

In order to properly assess the 1522 Visitation and the situation of the Vilnius diocese at that time, it is important to review the context of the Visitation, the role of the archbishop of Gniezno, John Laski, and the role of the bishop of Vilnius, Albrecht Radziwiłł.

John Laski, born in 1456, was a canon of Gniezno, Poznan and Krakow before becoming archbishop of Gniezno. From 1503 to 1510 he was Grand Chancellor of the Polish state. Finally, in 1510, he was appointed as an archbishop of Gniezno and the primate of Poland, a post he held until his death in 1531.²³ Even before he became archbishop, Laski was familiar with the diocese of Vilnius (he personally knew several Vilnius canons and investigated their cases). After the death of Alexander, John Laski was responsible for organising the burial of the king in Vilnius Cathedral. The abundance of circumstances indicates that John Laski had a fairly good understanding of the internal order and specifics of the Vilnius diocese.²⁴

Sources and historiography attest that John Laski was also quite close to the family of Radziwiłł, especially to Mikoloj Radziwiłł, the father of Vilnius bishop Albrecht Radziwiłł. While Laski was Chancellor of Poland, Mikoloj was at the same time Chancellor of the Grand Duchy. It is speculated that both chancellors may even have been the godfathers of the son of Mikoloj's daughter, the Duchess of Masovia, Anna.²⁵ The good relationship is evidenced by the regular loans between Laski and Radziwiłł.²⁶

During the canonisation process of prince Casimir, an official visit to Vilnius by John Laski took place from 27 July to 28 September 1518. The primary purpose of this visit was the issue of

²² M. Jučas, *Krikščionybės kelias į Lietuvą*, Vilnius 2000, p. 99.

²³ *Jan Łaski*, "Prymas Polski", retrieved from <http://prymaspolski.pl/prymasi/jan-laski/> [verified on 3.04.2023].

²⁴ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, p. XXIV.

²⁵ P. Tafiłowski, *Jan Łaski (1456-1531): kanclerz koronny i prymas Polski*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 212-219.

²⁶ V. Ališauskas, T. Jaszczolt, L. Jovaiša, M. Paknys, *Lietuvos katalikų dvasininkai...*, p. 29. R. Petrauskas, *Albertas Radvila...*, pp. 23-26.

Casimir canonisation, as the archbishop himself noted in his diary.²⁷ However, Laski also indicated that he intended to carry out a visitation of the diocese of Vilnius, which, according to Laski himself, “has never been visited by an archbishop”²⁸.

When Laski announced his intention to visit Albrecht Radziwiłł's bishopric, the latter resisted. Laski notes in his diary that “I was prevented from carrying out my visitation because the bishop did not allow me to visit himself and his diocese”. Albrecht Radziwiłł took it upon himself to argue that Laski had no right to visit Vilnius, and Laski's own words about his diocese having “never been visited” only served to justify the lack of need for a visitation. As evidence, Radziwiłł presented a letter from Pope Leo X, in which he (Radziwiłł) is named as a member of the papal family (*familiaris*), which, according to Radziwiłł, shows that Vilnius is only directly accountable to (and therefore can be visited only by) the Pope.²⁹ Another argument put forward by the head of the Church of Lithuania, together with the members of the Council of Magnates, is that it is also not entirely clear to which archbishopric Vilnius belongs, that of Gniezno or Riga. Indeed, there has never been an official assignment of Vilnius to the Metropolis of Gniezno³⁰ and although Laski's remark that Vilnius had long been sending envoys to the synods of Gniezno (thus recognising the hierarchy) was correct,³¹ this practice has only gradually developed.³² Nevertheless, the Visitation of Vilnius was eventually carried out in the few years matter.

The role of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in the establishment and provisioning of the churches of Vilnius diocese

In the Visitation, which consists of 68 different transcripts of documents, 19 acts relate to the grand dukes. The oldest document related to a grand duke dates back to 1449, when Casimir confirmed an older privilege of Vytautas for the church in Dubingi,³³ providing church with an additional supply.³⁴ We can find more documents of a similar nature related to grand duke Vytautas in the Visitation: in 1494 the priest of Grodno Andreas asks Alexander to re-approve the foundation of Vytautas;³⁵ the document of the same manner of Daugy priest John to Alexander³⁶, and in 1517 the abbot's address Sigismund the Old asking to approve the privilege of Vytautas for the monastery

²⁷ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis*..., p. XII.

²⁸ R. Petrauskas, *Albertas Radvila: Pirmas Didikas Vilniaus Vyskupo Soste*, [in:] ”Bažnyčios istorijos studijos”, Vilnius 2018..., p. 23.

²⁹ V. Ališauskas, T. Jaszczolt, L. Jovaiša, M. Paknys, *Lietuvos katalikų dvasininkai*..., p. 30.

³⁰ M. Paknys, *Vilniaus vyskupijos istorija*..., p. 2.

³¹ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis*..., p. XXV.

³² R. Petrauskas, *Albertas Radvila*..., p. 24.

³³ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu*..., p. 63.

³⁴ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis*..., 1449 04 23 Vilnius 8[6], p. 12.

³⁵ Ibidem, 1494 02 28 Gardinas 28[25], p. 37.

³⁶ Ibidem, 1503 08 14 Vilnius 69[63], p. 96.

of Antiqua Troki.³⁷ According to the latter document, the monk appealed to the ruler because, while travelling between Troki and Vilnius, the clergyman had been attacked by Tatars and the old privilege had been destroyed. However, it seems that Heaven was generous to the abbot, who not only escaped (otherwise he would not have stood up to the ruler), but was even rewarded – in addition to confirming Vytautas's old privilege, Sigismund the Old also added lands and tithes. A similar situation can be found earlier in 1511 in Vawkavysk (church founded by Vytautas in 1430³⁸), when its priest Martin appealed to Sigismund the Old to approve the old privileges, as the documents were destroyed by the Tartars.³⁹ Other document related to Vytautas includes 1518 appeal to Sigismund the Old by the priest of Nowohrodek⁴⁰ (church founded by Vytautas in 1398⁴¹). The visitation documents themselves do not give a specific date for the establishment of the churches, but they all mention a direct privilege of Vytautas. The mention of churches founded by this grand duke in later times may suggest that the churches were under-endowed, as in each subsequent case the rulers granted additional properties and supplement to the churches.

The visitation shows that at the time of the foundation of the Vilnius diocese and in the first half of the 15th century, the grand dukes were important church founders. The Visitation describes the churches associated with the grand dukes, mentioning mainly those founded (first privileges granted) during the reign of Vytautas or Casimir. However, the later grand dukes appear only as their collators, having inherited this right from their predecessors. There are few documents from which we can trace a church founded by Alexander or Sigismund the Old. This is evidence of the declining role of the grand dukes in the establishment of new churches in the Vilnius diocese, a conclusion supported by Ochmanski's aforementioned observations about the changing proportions of church founders in the second half of the 15th century.

Visitation data on newly established churches in the diocese

49 transcripts are related to the foundations by the nobility, the creation of parishes and the bequest of their wealth to the churches. Of these 49 documents, 17 relate to the building of new churches.

The documents can be grouped according to the social status of the founder – magnates and nobility (“common” nobles).⁴² And although the definition of the distinction between these concepts

³⁷ Ibidem, 1517 11 23 [1415 02 14 Senieji Trakai] 20[18], p. 28.

³⁸ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, p. 63.

³⁹ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, 1511 08 09 Lietuvos Brestas 42[37], p. 59.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 1498 05 09 Vilnius 59[53], p. 86.

⁴¹ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, p. 63.

⁴² There is an important distinction between these two notions. Though both social classes can be attributed to the general layer of nobility but magnates, in this sense, were the most important nobles among the state and nobles' social

is extremely problematic, starting with the fact that in the 15th century such distinctions did not exist in the minds of the nobility itself, the actual differences in the social power and influence of relatives and individuals make it possible to speak of such distinctions. In order to apply the most accurate method of such an approach, the article is based on the distinction made by R. Petrauskas.⁴³

Five churches can be counted that were founded through the individual efforts of magnates. Olechno Sudymuntowicz - the Vilnius voivode, chancellor of the Grand Duchy, in Petrauskas' words "probably the most influential Lithuanian nobleman at the end of Casimir's reign" - is mentioned in 1462.⁴⁴ He built St. John's Church in Vowpa as it is said, because of the "great distance" between his palace and the other church. However, such a "selfish" sounding motive really reflects the problem of an extremely sparse network of churches – one of the biggest problems of Vilnius diocese, and of the entire Grand Duchy. The average size of a parish in what is now (ethnic) Lithuania at that time was 350 km², in Samogitia – 600 km², in the Ruthenian territories – 950 km², while in the diocese of Krakow the average parish covered 60 km², in Wroclaw 26 km².⁴⁵

Several other magnates are mentioned in the visitation: the Chancellor of Lithuania, the Voivode of Trakai and Vilnius, Mikolaj Radziwiłł the Second, and his foundation in Kalinowka;⁴⁶ Jan Sunigajło, the Elder of Kaunas, the Castellan of Trakai, an influential person who fought in the Battle of Grunwald.⁴⁷ In his name in his home town of Worniany Sunigajło's widow established a church in 1462.⁴⁸ Although the widow founded the church "by the will of Sunigajło", she only added the saint of her own name (St. Marina) to the title of the church, not her husband's (St. John). Another church founded by a magnate is evidenced by a transcript from 1449, when Vseliub's heir, Mikołaj Niemirowicz, the marshal and one of commanders of the army in the war against Moscow,⁴⁹ built a church in his homeland in Iskolka "in order to anticipate the hour of death by charitable acts and to help the souls of his ancestors and forefathers".⁵⁰ Another document written in 1522 testifies about

layer. These distinctions are important to notify in order to properly understand social structures of Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland.

⁴³ R. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos diduomenė XIV a. pabaigoje - XV a.*, Vilnius 2003. Petrauskas defined the difference as "the magnates includes, first of all, those persons who had the greatest influence on the life of the country, i.e., those who were the closest advisors of the ruler, who testified in his documents, who took part in the envoys, and who were officials of the central and local government. This rather narrow circle of people needs to be expanded to include their relatives. This is a logical solution for a society that thinks in terms of the category of descent, and [...] it also allows us to better understand the social assumptions of the nobility's power". Ibidem, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pp. 296-298.

⁴⁵ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁶ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, 1511 04 27 Goniondzas 30[27], pp. 41-42.

⁴⁷ Z. Kiaupa, *Žalgiris ir Kaunas*, „Kauno istorijos metraštis“, vol. 11, Kaunas 2011, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸ "[...] proinde ego Marina relicta domini Songal de voluntate [...]". S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ R. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos diduomenė...*, pp. 277-278.

⁵⁰ "[...] volens ipsam horam mortis operibus misericordie prevenire, mee meorumque predecessorum et successorum animarum saluti consulere [...]". S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, p. 87.

the church built by the governor of Kamien, Mikolaj Zaberezinski.⁵¹ Zaberezinski built the church “understanding the transience of the world’s riches”.

In 1481, Jan and Fedka Dagirdowiczi, founded a church in Vidzy (Jan was the elder of Merez at the time, and therefore a member of the magnates⁵²). In 1515, magnates Jerzy and Piotr Mikolaiewicz together with their wives founded a church in Traupi.⁵³ It is mentioned that the church in Traupi is only being rebuilt, which means that there was a church before. Another, the foundation of the Uszakowo church is rich in founders. Several different noblemen founded this church in 1460,⁵⁴ which was also endowed by the then bishop of Vilnius. The founders of this church do not belong to the magnates.

The visitation agrees with Ochmanski's observations about the circumstances of the churches' creation – almost the vast majority of them were built by magnates. We can see from the individual cases that this establishment of churches also reflected the problems of the newly established baptism – the sparse network of churches. The latter problem seems to be relevant not only for today's historiography, but was also partly felt by the elite of the time, at least as the Wolpa case testifies. The visitation shows that the establishment of churches intensified in the early 16th century.

In many cases, the document states that the nobleman is providing a certain amount for the church “he has built”. This in turn provides an additional criterion when considering and researching the establishment of new churches in Vilnius diocese in the 15th-16th centuries. Although this method is not absolute (a nobleman may not necessarily state in his endowment that the church was built by him), it can be useful – when we read in the transcript about a nobleman's endowment for a “church built by him earlier”, taking into account the then short lifespan of people, we can logically assume that the church was founded up to 20 (in a rare case up to 30) years ago – after all, it could be only an adult person who was matured and possessed of sufficient wealth, and would think of founding a church at all. Following this principle, one can notice 8 churches mentioned by

⁵¹ The latter is not classified as a nobleman by direct application of Petrauskas's monograph (this is impossible to do, as the study only covers the period up to the end of 15th century, and the act of visitation is from 1522. However, Mikalojus Jurgaitis Zaberezinskis fits the criteria set and applied by Petrauskas, as he is the marshal of the court. *Mikalojus Jurgaitis Zaberezinskis*, S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, p. 206.

⁵² R. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos diduomenė...*, pp. 226-227.

⁵³ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, 1515 04 13 Vilnius 7[5], p. 10.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 1460 01 13 Vaistamas (Ušakovas) 16[14], p. 22.

the funder as “previously built by me” – the foundations in Horodzyłowo,⁵⁵ Ostrosszicze,⁵⁶ Hrodziszce,⁵⁷ Wpnyky,⁵⁸ Msczybow,⁵⁹ Merecz,⁶⁰ Iszczolna,⁶¹ and Vavyerka.⁶²

The dates of the aforementioned founders’ granting documents for the church they “founded before” are often older than those that mention the foundation of the church at the specific time of the document (and churches that we learn about in former mentioned cases are naturally earlier than churches that have the same dates of construction and the recording of the property allocation). The absence of the original foundation documents of such older churches may also mean that the spread of the written culture brought by baptism had not yet been properly established in the Vilnius diocese in the early 15th century, as in the rest of the Grand Duchy. Historiography testifies that in pagan times, although Lithuania ruled the eastern Ruthenian lands which had their own written tradition, this tradition did not spread from the Orthodox lands to the western Duchy.⁶³ After the Baptism, the Latin language and written culture did not take root in the state so quickly, and we know that still in the 16th century a writer Michalo Lituanus urged a broader learning⁶⁴ of Latin among Lithuanians.⁶⁵ Therefore, it seems quite natural that in a relatively recently baptised state and a newly established diocese, new churches were still being founded in a “pagan” oral way, while the written foundation acts mentioned above may not have existed at all, and only became established with the passage of time. In this case, often the later acts of the mid-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries already testify to a change in tradition, as church foundations began to be recorded and formalised in official documents, as is customary in the European Catholic tradition. The data of the 1522 Visitation testifies to the process of the arrival and establishment of Western culture in Vilnius diocese, and therefore in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Economic situation of churches according to the visitation data

Half (34) of the 1522 visitation documents consist of various deeds of donation of property to churches. It is worth noting that drawing conclusions about the material situation of the churches from the Visitation data is problematic due to the different economic values of the villages and land

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 1448 04 04 Horodilovas 67[61], p. 93.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 1448 04 04 Vilnius 64[58], p. 90.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, 1460 11 22 Dambrava 50[45a], p. 72.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 1482 10 15 Vilnius 4[2], p. 6.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 1492 06 07 Gardinas 35[30], p. 48.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 1500 06 25 Vilnius 53[47], p. 76.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 1515 04 27 Eišiškės 45[40], p. 65.

⁶² Ibidem, 1479 05 29 Senieji Voverys 46[41], p. 67.

⁶³ J. Jurginis, I. Lukšaitė, *Lietuvos kultūros istorijos...*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ This call sounded in a slightly different context, first of all because Michalo Lituanus considered Lithuanians to be close to Italians and Latin to be the language of Lithuanian ancestors. However, this call still shows that even in the 16th century, Latin was not yet so widely spread, known and used among the state elite.

⁶⁵ M. Lietuvis, *Apie totorių, lietuvių ir maskvėnų papročius*, Vilnius 1966, p. 49.

plots recorded. In many cases, it is not possible to make precise comparisons between them. However, the article retrospectively attempts to refer to Ochmanski's 16th century data and his categorisation, in this way, some material conclusions may be more concrete. According to the number of serf houses under possession, Ochmanski divided the churches of Vilnius into 5 categories,⁶⁶ but for the sake of clarity, the article splits these the churches into two categories - "richer" and "poorer". According to the data available in the Visitation, 16 richer and 13 poorer churches can be distinguished.

A common feature among all the churches is the allocation of peasants to provide for the priest and the parish. Already in the 15th century, when the peasants were started to be distributed by the grand dukes, the church needed such people not only for agricultural duties, but also for the daily functioning of the parish - ringing the bells, maintaining the churchyard, guarding the rectory and even providing an armed escort for the parson.⁶⁷ It is therefore not surprising that in almost every case peasants are included in the allocations for the churches, only the number varies. In terms of the differences between richer and poorer parishes, the richer churches all received at least a dozen peasants, while the poorer ones more often received up to ten, and sometimes only a couple; the rich parishes were given tithes from at least a few villages, manors or even towns, and these tithes often covered a wider range of goods - grain, vegetables, livestock. More often these richer churches tend to be given a provision of goods such as honey, wax, furs.

From the beginning of the 16th century onwards, it is possible to observe a more frequent attribution of the obligation of monetary rents (the monetary obligation from villages or manors to churches is mentioned in the cases of Punia in 1503, Jelna in 1520, Daugy in 1503 and 1515). It can also be mentioned the document of Vavyerka in 1479, which states that the manor's provision can be provided either with honey or with money. This deed is an example of the harbinger of future changes.⁶⁸ Such isolated cases show the beginning of a relatively slow, but noticeable, transition from the in-kind to the monetary method of rent payment, which became more widespread in church lands in the 18th century.⁶⁹

A noticeable difference in explaining the reasons for the wealth of some churches is the donation of taverns. The rich churches were given a total of 19 taverns (thus an average of 1.12

⁶⁶ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, pp. 102-105. Ochmanski categorises churches according to their wealth by counting the number of owned serfs' houses. The Polish historian identifies five categories of parishes in the Vilnius diocese: "rich" (owning more than 100 serfs' houses), "rich" (owning between 50 and 100 serfs' houses), "moderately prosperous" (owning between 20 and 50 serfs' houses), "poor" (owning between 11 and 20 serfs' houses), and "poorest" (owning less than 10 serfs' houses) parishes.

⁶⁷ J. Jurginis, *Lietuvos valstiečių istorija...*, pp. 32-42.

⁶⁸ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, 1479 05 29 Senieji Voverys 46[41], p. 67.

⁶⁹ P. Pakarklis, *Ekonominė ir teisinė katalikų...*, pp. 74-77.

taverns per church), while the poorer churches were given a total of 3⁷⁰ taverns (an average of only 0.23 taverns per church). In his study,⁷¹ P. Pakarklis noted that in the 15th-16th centuries in the Grand Duchy there was a monopoly of taverns, with only the grand duke or nobles close to him being able to establish taverns or grant permission for their construction.⁷² This is also confirmed by a letter of Sigismund the Old in 1527, in which he threatened to sue and punish those who would establish taverns without the privilege granted. The First Statute of the Grand Duchy also refers to the prohibition of building taverns without permission.⁷³ Taverns provided a large income, and it was not advantageous to share their monopoly widely. This meant that only influential persons close to the ruler (magnates), had permission to maintain taverns and so churches sponsored by them had more taverns and were wealthier.⁷⁴ The Visitation shows that the nobility in total bequeathed twice as many taverns to the churches (15) as the grand dukes (7). This marked change in the donation of taverns to churches can be seen from the end of the 15th century onwards, when in the period 1492-1520, the nobility donated more than two thirds of the total number of taverns mentioned in the Visitation. This finding adds to previous observations about the declining influence of grand dukes in the establishment and provision of churches.

In summary, we can see and draw some conclusions that partly explain why in the 16th century some churches tended to become poorer (or to remain as poor) and others to become richer (or to remain as rich) when compared with the 15th century. Out of the 16 richer parishes, all 16 were endowed by the magnates or by grand dukes. By contrast, of the 13 poorer parishes, only 6 were endowed by the magnates and 4 belonged to the sovereign. The remaining 3 were taken care by the poorer nobility. This may be a small number of cases, but among the richer parishes there are none of such.⁷⁵ We can see that, although not absolute, the endowment of a magnate meant that a church was more likely to remain wealthy, while a church endowed by a poorer noble was much less likely to remain wealthy (based on the Visitation data alone, such a church was guaranteed to be “condemned” to poverty). There is a marked dominance of the magnates, and this disproportion is a

⁷⁰ There would be a fourth one in Naugardukas, but in this case it is merely a “permission to build”, not a donation of an existing one.

⁷¹ P. Pakarklis, *Ekonominė ir teisinė katalikų...*

⁷² Because of the ideological requirements for writing of the time, P. Pakarklis refers to the more influential nobles (referred to as “magnates” in today’s historiography) as “large feudal landowners”, but the meaning is identical in this case, as Pakarklis also makes a distinguish between small and large feudal nobles.

⁷³ P. Pakarklis, *Ekonominė ir teisinė katalikų...*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 96.

⁷⁵ All the churches for which we can find data with Ochmanski are also evaluated according to the criteria previously defined for the “magnate”. Of all the churches funded not by the great dukes, 4 churches endowed/funded by magnates do not fit into the framework of Petrauskas’ work (until end of 15th century) – Podorosk (1518), Iszczolna (1515), Merecz (1507) and Jelna (1520). However, the funders of all these churches were magnates and their position can be grounded or traced back by R. Petrauskas’s and/or S. Rowell’s works.

perfect reflection of the trends of the 15th and early 16th centuries, when, in addition to the ruler's attention to the churches, the private initiative of the nobility was already beginning to emerge, but it was still mostly the powerful and wealthy nobles.⁷⁶

It is worth comparing the churches of the Vilnius diocese in terms of the inventory of liturgical instruments carried out during the visitation.⁷⁷ This article focuses on only three essential liturgical instruments: a chasuble – an ecclesiastical outer garment for the daily liturgical rite (the Mass), a chalice – a liturgical vessel for the most important ritual of the Mass – the Last Supper, and a cappa – the ritual garment worn by a priest when burying the dead, leading a procession or visiting the sick, thus also marking the activity of the priest in a parish.

We have something to compare the averages of Vilnius parishes with. Rowell noted that at a similar time in Poland, in the western part of the archdiocese of Gniezno, in the archdeaconate of Wielun, a very similar inventory was also carried out (although instead of the 68 parishes like in Vilnius, only 36 parishes were visited in Wielun). Whereas the average number of chasubles in the Vilnius diocese in the early 16th century was 6.1 (total 413), in the diocese of Wielun the average number was 4.17. As for the number of chalices, the average number of chalices per parish in the Vilnius diocese was 2.8 (190 in total), while in Wielun it was 2.37. The number of cappa in each church in Vilnius was approximately 1.16 (79 in total), while in Wielun it was 0.34.⁷⁸ Comparing the aforementioned richer and poorer parishes, we can also see a marked difference in their inventories:⁷⁹ on average, the richer parishes have 9.6 chasubles, 2 chalices and 3.8 cappas, while the poorer parishes have 5 chasubles, 1.4 chalices and 2 cappas.

Considering the overall composition of the Visitation, one more conclusion can be drawn: the nobility, especially the magnates, tended to gift large amounts of wealth for the churches, every deed mentions a land, almost every time peasants and villages are mentioned (along with the land). In some cases, the same churches are endowed several times. From Ochmanski's studies we know about tens and hundreds of peasants owned by churches, and the data from the Visitation give us a deeper understanding of the exact wealth donated to the Church. The diocese of Vilnius itself, had enjoyed exclusive rights and immunities from the very beginning of Lithuania's baptism.⁸⁰ And as the nobility continued to sign over their holdings to the churches, the diocese turned into an increasingly powerful

⁷⁶ J. Ochmanski, *Biskupstwo Wileńskie w Średniowieczu...*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis...*, pp. 99-109.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. XXXIX.

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that this is not without its problems – although it would seem that the comparison of religious inventories would indeed be the most impartial criterion, the problem of comparison is based on the specificity of the Visitation – not all churches whose foundation contracts were copied, not all of these churches were included in the inventory lists. Of the 16 wealthier parishes mentioned above, only 6 were also inventoried, and of the 13 poorer parishes, only 5 were inventoried.

⁸⁰ J. Ochmanski, *Senoji Lietuva*, Vilnius 1996, pp. 106-130.

landowner. So therefore, it is not surprising that the important, and often decisive, influence that Church had gained in the state, eventually began to cause friction with the rest of the political elite.⁸¹ The clashes of interest between the nobility and the clergy in the 16th century over the prerogatives of the Church, including in the payment of taxes, testify the increasing power of the Church, these conflicts are only an acknowledgement of the extent of the Church power.⁸² Outbreak of the Reformation movement among the nobility in the 16th century was a form of protest against (too) influential position of the Church. The genesis of this growing of power were determined by material wealth and its growth in the 15th century. This genesis is attested in detail in the Visitation of 1522.

Veneration of Saints in the diocese of Vilnius

Among all the different churches mentioned in the visitation, 80 dedications to saints and/or religious phenomena in churches and 34 dedications to saints and/or religious phenomena in altars/chapels can be counted. The most popular dedication is to the Virgin Mary and her Mysteries. Mary is mentioned in a total of 18 different titles: 5 refer to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, 4 to the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, 3 to the Immaculate Conception, 2 to the Annunciation to the Mother of God, 2 to the Virgin Mary in general, with no additional specific phenomena, and 2 to the Candlemas, in this case, title is not only related to the Virgin Mary, but her as well. A similar relationship prevailed in the rest of the diocese. In Vilnius as a whole, Marian titles accounted for about 21.4% of all dedications (in the Visitation this percentage is 22.5% of all titles).⁸³ The most popular saints in the churches are St. Nicholas (7), St. Paul and St. Peter (7), St. George (5) and St. Anne (3).

For comparison, it is worth to consider the popularity of saints' titles in Polish dioceses. Until the first quarter of the 16th century, the most popular saint in the archdiocese of Gniezno was also St Nicholas (9.3%). In the diocese of Krakow the same was true (St Nicholas – 8.3%).⁸⁴ Although the influence of the neighbours shaped the tradition of veneration of saints in Lithuania, according to L. Jovaiša, the Polish venerated saints could not become “their own patron saints of Lithuania, in a land which scrupulously guarded and strengthened its independence”.⁸⁵ In turn, one of the most popular saints in Lithuania was St George, while popular Polish saint St Adalbert of Prague is rarely found in the Grand Duchy at all.⁸⁶ The absence of "Lithuanian" saints in the diocese and in the state (the

⁸¹ I. Lukšaitė, *Reformacija Lietuvos Didžiojoje...*, p. 60.

⁸² I. Lukšaitė, *Kai tikėjimas keitė pasaulį...*, p. 41.

⁸³ M. Paknys, *Šventųjų kultas LDK XV-XVII a....*, pp. 15-103.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 42.

⁸⁵ L. Jovaiša, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės...*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, pp. 14-15.

process of canonization of Casimir was still in progress at the time of the Visitation⁸⁷), and the aforementioned opposition to “Polish” saints, may have contributed to the popularity of the neutral St Mary and her Mysteries, which is testified by the Visitation.

A common motive for the choice of a saint’s title is the dedication to the patron saint of the founder's name. The phenomenon, observed since the 15th century, became quite popular throughout the Duchy of Lithuania – 26.5% of churches in the Samogitian diocese had saints named after the founders, and in the Vilnius diocese the figure was similar – 27.3%. A similar ratio of patron saint inclusions prevailed in the case of altars (24.5%), which is why, according to M. Paknys, “there was no significant difference in the inclusion of one’s patron saints in the titles of churches or altars”.⁸⁸ This phenomenon was also reflected in the visitation rate – 21.7% among churches’ and 27.3% among altars’ titles.

Another important aspect of the faith that we can observe in the transcripts of the Visitation is the obligation to celebrate Mass. As many as 26 different endowment documents mention the requirement for the clergy to pray and celebrate Mass with the intention of the funder. The number of Masses to be celebrated varies, often 2 or 3 Masses, although there are few exceptions, such as in the case of Wolpa, where the then bishop of Lutsk (future bishop of Vilnius), Paweł Holszański, who, according to the Visitation “at the behest of his mother”, assigned the maintenance to 4 priests and ordered them to celebrate 14 Masses per week. Considering all known obligations of the Visitation (26 churches and altars), 69 masses are celebrated every week (an average of 2.65 masses per week per church/altar). The most frequently mentioned intention is in the honour of Mary (24.6%), but this is not far behind the intention for the ancestors of the funders (23.1%), the request to hold Masses for the funders themselves (14.5%), the request to pray for sins in general (8.7%), and the other intentions (for the ruler or for the individual saints) follow. If we count only the intentions that are for the well-being of the funder or his family (for the sins of the funder, the ancestors or the funder himself), the number of weekly Masses celebrated with such intentions would be 32 (46.4%).⁸⁹ Thus, almost half of the obligatory Masses are for the benefit of funders (nobility). The obligation to celebrate Masses for personal benefit shows not only the need to care for and build churches because

⁸⁷ M. Čiurinskas, *1514 m. spalio 20d. Gniezno Arkivyskupo Jono Laskio laiškas: vienas ankstyviausių šv. Kazimiero hagiografinių šaltinių ir kanonizacijos proceso pradžia*, “Bažnyčios istorijos studijos”, vol. 9, Vilnius 2018.

⁸⁸ M. Paknys, *Šventųjų kultas LDK XV-XVII a.*..., p. 46.

⁸⁹ It is worth noting that sometimes the nobility instructs to pray with several intentions during the Mass – for example, in 1498, when donating his property to the Vidzy church, Marshal Jan Dagirdowiczi instructed to celebrate Mass in honour of Holy Virgin Mary. However, he mentions that the priest should also pray for the funder in each Masses. S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis*..., 1498 03 06 Naujadvaris 11[9], p. 15. And sometimes the sacrifice of the Mass is mandated, but the intentions are not specified. For example, in the altar of Dzevyenyschky in 1471, it is commanded to offer 7 masses a week, but the intention is not stated in the deed (it remains unknown). S. Rowell, *Acta primae visitationis*..., 1471 06 16 Geranainys 56[50], p. 78.

of the state's baptism policy,⁹⁰ but also the understanding and sincere belief in Catholic truths among the nobility (the belief in the salvation of souls and in the means of achieving it). The Visitation testifies that in the 15th century Catholicism was sufficiently rooted in the consciousness of the elite of the state, so that the Reformation, which reached the country in the 16th century, could also have been welcomed by the nobility as a reflection of the faith. The faith, which was sufficiently embedded and already familiar.

Recapitulation

The 15th century was one of the most important periods in the history of the Vilnius diocese, with the creation of new churches and the development of its bishopric administration. From the 16th century onwards, the office of bishop (the appointment of Albrecht Radziwiłł can be stressed out) also became an important tool in politics. Such shifts were possible because of the sufficient consolidation of baptism in the consciousness of the public (the nobility), perceiving the Church as an essential part of the structure of the state and thus seeing the sense of striving for, and believing in, the usefulness and importance of this institution.

Looking at the data of the Visitation, it shows a significant contribution of the early grand dukes (Vytautas, Casimir) to the foundation of new churches in Vilnius diocese. The later grand dukes (Alexander, Sigismund the Old) are more often mentioned only as the approvers of the old privileges, and not as the original founders of churches. This indicates the declining role of dukes in the establishment of churches in the Vilnius diocese, the inadequacy of the first dukes' endowments and the need for later rulers to provide additional endowments to sustain parishes.

The visitation is full of data about newly established churches. The number of endowments to the "previously built" churches in transcripts suggest the absence of a written initial act of foundation for these churches, these perhaps existed only in verbal form. Thus, the visitation testifies to the transition from pagan to western culture, and to the process of the establishment of the Catholic written tradition.

A material analysis of the acts of visitation shows the varied situation of the churches in the Vilnius diocese. Comparing the data of the known churches in the 16th century, it is evident that the churches that tend to remain the wealthier share similarities in receiving more peasants, subsistence and tithes from the founders. A particularly notable difference indicating the (un)richness of the churches is the number of taverns given, which could usually only be donated by the wealthier and

⁹⁰ The baptism of Lithuania in 1387 was naturally followed by Jagiełło's instructions on "compulsory" baptism for all, the prohibition of mixed marriages (mostly with the Orthodox), and the granting of exclusive rights to the Catholic nobility. Thus we can see that one of the reasons for being a Catholic nobleman was also pragmatic. V. Ališauskas et al., *Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija...*, p. 50.

more influential noblemen (magnates) who ruled over them, or by the grand duke. Richer parishes had on average several times more taverns than poorer ones. The Visitation shows that the nobles were more inclined to bequeath taverns to the churches (the changes were particularly pronounced from the end of the 15th century to the beginning of the 16th century) than the grand dukes. The analysis of the Visitation data shows that churches endowed by wealthy magnates in the 15th century were more likely to remain wealthy later on, while churches endowed by poorer noblemen were much more likely to become (or remain) poor over time.

The situation in Vilnius diocese is also highlighted by the inventory of the churches' assets carried out by the visitators. An analysis and comparison of the average number of basic clergy inventory (average number of chasubles, chalices and capps) in the churches of the Vilnius diocese shows that the number of these items was higher than in Wielun, which was visited at a similar time. The analysis of the inventory shows the difference between the compared richer and poorer Vilnius.

The visitation shows the pastoral features of the diocese of Vilnius. The most popular dedications are to the Virgin Mary and her mysteries. Dedications to the patron saints of the founders are often seen among the titles of the churches visited, both among the churches and the altars. The Visitation gives details of the obligations to offer Mass and the intentions recorded. Approximately half of the churches mentioned in the Visitation have a written obligation to celebrate Mass regularly, as do almost all the altars mentioned. The most popular intention is in honour of Mary, but overall, about half of all Mass intentions are for the salvation of the soul of the founder and/or his family. According to the visitation, an average of 2.65 Masses were celebrated weekly in each church in Vilnius diocese.

The material analysis of the Visitation churches testifies to the growing economic power of the Church in general. Because of this, already in the 16th century, the friction between nobility and Church appeared over the rights and exclusivity of the clergy. These processes inspired the nobility's susceptibility to the Reformation as a form of protest against the power of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the increasing involvement of the nobility in the process of establishing and providing churches, the requirements for priests to celebrate Masses with the certain (often personal-related) intentions, may testify about the firm Catholic faith's foothold in the minds of Lithuanian nobility. This allowed the society to understand the importance of the Church and the faith, and later to become actively involved in the Reformation processes. The visitation of the Vilnius diocese in 1522 witnesses the preconditions and the course of these profound processes.

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Summary

The article examines the Visitation carried out in 1522 in Vilnius diocese and what this document reveals about the situation of Vilnius diocese at that time and the roots of Catholicism in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The article examines the role of the grand dukes of Lithuania in the time of Visitation, drawing conclusions about the role of the dukes in the establishment of new churches and the inadequate provisioning of the different rulers. The churches are compared according to the wealth of the noble funders. An analysis of the material well-being of the churches is made according to the recorded wealth, and the fundamental differences between poorer and richer churches are defined, the reasons for such differences are presented. The article conducts a study of the veneration of saints and the pastoral care of the churches - based on the visitation, the most popular intentions of the mass are reviewed, and the essential pastoral features of the Vilnius diocese are defined. From the data provided by the Visitation, conclusions are drawn about the development of Catholicism in the Grand Duchy and the development of the prerequisites for the Reformation in the 15th-16th centuries.

Key words: History of Catholic church, Visitation of 1522, prerequisites to reformation