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Darius BARONAS

**THE THREE MARTYRS OF VILNIUS:
A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY MARTYRDOM
AND ITS DOCUMENTARY SOURCES***

Introduction

Lithuania is situated on the periphery of East European plain and from the dawn of its history the Grand Duchy of Lithuania has been a neighbour of both Poland and Rus'. The juxtaposition of these two countries makes it clear that the territory in question was exposed to influences coming from both Western and Eastern Christianity. The issue of having a Catholic or Orthodox identity long remained unsettled and that is why Lithuania survived as the last pagan state in Europe for a considerable time. Lithuania attracted wider attention in the middle of the thirteenth when its first ruler Mindaugas (c. 1240-1263) was baptized in 1251 and two years later received the royal crown with the blessing of Pope Innocent IV (1243-1253). The Catholic kingdom of Lithuania for all intents and purposes was, however, short-lived. The murder of its first and last crowned king plunged the country into turmoil and it seemed that it might even become an Orthodox realm instead of Catholic or pagan one when the grand-ducal throne was occupied by Mindaugas' Orthodox son, prince-monk Vojšėk (1264-1267) and his Rus'ian son-in-law Shvarno (c. 1267-c. 1269). However, the Orthodox grip on Lithuania was too weak to take root and was removed by the energetic pagan Traidenis (c. 1269-c. 1282). From this time on Lithuania was ruled by pagan rulers until Grand Duke Jogaila (1377-1381, 1382-1392, titular supreme duke until 1434) accepted baptism as King Ladislas II of Poland (1386-1434) and brought most of his Lithuanian subjects into the Catholic fold in 1387, a process which was completed in 1413-1417, when the westernmost province of Lithuania, Žemaitija (Samogitia) was converted.

Medieval Lithuania was always a polyethnic, multicultural country. Although its kernel was Lithuania proper with a largely pagan Lithuanian Baltic population, it increasingly came to include ever larger numbers of

* List of abbreviations: cf. *infra*, p. 133-134.

While preparing a study about these martyrs I became indebted to many persons and especially to Vytautas Ališauskas, Sergei Temchin and Stephen C. Rowell whose assistance was invaluable.

Slav Orthodox believers, since from the early fourteenth century the country experienced rapid expansion and came to include most of Western Rus'. Lithuanian expansion made big strides under Grand Duke Gediminas (c. 1316-1341) and especially under his son Algirdas (1345-1377). This policy of annexing Rus'ian territory was continued by Grand Duke Vytautas (1392-1430), under whom the Grand Duchy of Lithuania reached its zenith of power in general and in Rus' in particular. By the end of the fourteenth century the eastern border of Lithuania ran about 200 kilometres west of Moscow¹.

Such developments brought a diverse population into one political framework. Interaction between pagans and Orthodox was far from being outright hostility, at least after the removal of local Rus'ian princes meant that there was no danger to Lithuanian rule. Most frequently Lithuanian dukes who came to rule in Rus' adopted the Orthodox faith and in this way became naturalised in their new environment. In general, a picture of pragmatic relations between pagan Lithuanians and Orthodox Rus'ians is accepted in historiography, although we should avoid speaking about peaceful expansion or friendly coexistence² because the reality must have been somewhat more complicated. In this article an attempt will be made to deal with one controversial issue, the martyrdom of the three martyrs of Vilnius.

The three martyrs of Vilnius (or the Lithuanian martyrs) is a compound designation for the Orthodox martyrs, St. Anthony († 14 January), St. John († April 24) and St. Eustathius († 13 December). They are considered to have been put to death by order of Grand Duke Algirdas of Lithuania in c. 1347. In general terms the argument of the *Passio* presents the brothers, Anthony and John, as servants of the Lithuanian fire-worshipping duke. They converted from paganism to Orthodoxy, adopted a new way of life and after that were brought to trial by being forced to eat meat during fast days. Their refusal to fulfil this command brought them finally to the gallows, first Anthony and then John. The story of another

¹ For the Lithuanian background see: ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, where an ample bibliography is included. For the Lithuanian expansion into Rus' see: H. PASZKIEWICZ, *Początki Rusi*, ed. from ms. by K. STOPKA, Cracow, 1996 (originally published in English as *The Origin of Russia*, London, 1954), p. 224-255. The Christianization of Lithuania (until 1387) is dealt with in *La Cristianizzazione della Lituania (= Pontificio comitato di scienze storiche. Atti e documenti, 2)*, Vatican City, 1989, and D. BARONAS, *Lithuania's Entry into Christendom (1009-1387)*, in *Christianity in Lithuania*, ed. D. BARONAS – L. JOVAIŠA – M. PAKNYŠ – E. RAILA – A. STREIKUS, Vilnius, 2002, p. 11-49.

² ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 93-94.

Christian servant, named Eusthatus, is much the same, although he is depicted as having suffered horrible tortures before he was finally hanged. The incident of this martyrdom has proved to be highly controversial in modern historiography and it seems likely that we may never know exactly why they were killed. In this article I am going to discuss the sources, mostly hagiographic in nature, to analyse the various interpretations of the martyrdom advanced so far, and to suggest some new insights. Subsequently the earliest evidence of their veneration within the Orthodox Church will be presented. Finally I will provide an outline of their cult up to the present day. Their veneration is still alive and not only among the Orthodox believers in Lithuania. Its different twists and turns taken throughout the centuries graphically illustrate how the veneration of these saints, despite its being politically misused for some time, has survived from the fourteenth century to the present.

1. The Early Sources of the Martyrdom

Hagiographic Sources

The earliest source relating to the martyrdom of the three martyrs of Vilnius is the *encomium* composed by Michael Balsamon at the end of the fourteenth century³. It is known that Michael Balsamon was active in Constantinople at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He was protonotarius from 1390 to 1397, taught at the patriarchal school from c. 1397 to c. 1400 and was grand chartophylax from 1400 to 1402. J. Meyendorff dated this *encomium* prior to 1394 on the grounds that Balsamon only then became protonotarius. F. J. Thomson has recently noticed that Balsamon was protonotarius already in 1390, so we may suggest that this eulogy was composed in about 1390-1397⁴.

³ This eulogy was published several times in the 20th century: SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 35-47; M. GEDEON, *Νέα βιβλιοθήκη ἐκκλησιαστικῶν συγγραφέων*, vol. 1, Constantinople, 1903, p. 85-102; ID., *Ἀρχαῖον ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ιστορίας*, vol. 1, Constantinople, 1911, p. 152-174. Despite the fact that these editions have been produced from the same manuscript, they are rather different. Collating the latest edition of Gedeon and that of Speransky, T. Alekniéné prepared a new critical edition in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 200-242. The manuscript containing M. Balsamon's eulogy is described in S. EUSTRATIADIS, *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts in the Library of the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mt. Athos* (= *Harvard Theological Studies*, 11), Cambridge, 1924, p. 110, no. 541. See also BHG 2035.

⁴ F. J. Thomson's review of BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, in *AB*, 119 (2001), p. 183-184, with reference to E. TRAPP, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, pt. II (= *Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Byzantinistik*, 1/2), Vienna, 1977, no. 2123, p. 12.

The earliest texts devoted to the memory of the three martyrs of Vilnius are found in liturgical books and the collections of the lives of saints which came down to us mainly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They all are in Church Slavonic. These texts are not identical. Some of them are liturgical offices which contain the description of the martyrdom, some are *Passiones* in their own right. The *Passiones* of the earliest known manuscripts can be broken down into two redactions, as follows:

• The South Slavic Redaction:

- The Belgrade Synaxarium (15th c.): kept until 1941 in the National Library in Belgrade, no. 356, f. 161-164 (*Passio*, 16 December); now lost⁵.
- The Vienna Synaxarium (16-17th c.): Bibliotheca Palatina Vindobonensis, no. 53, cod. Slav., f. 235^v-237 (*Passio*, 16 December)⁶.
- The Slutsk menaeum (mid-16th c.): Vilnius, the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (hereinafter LLAS), F19-147, f. 224-228 (office for the Sunday before the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers; Second Sunday in Advent)⁷.
- The Unev monastery menaeum (mid-16th c.): the Lviv Stefanyk Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Department of Manuscripts, ND-69, f. 45-52 (office for the Second Sunday in Advent)⁸.
- The Posada-Rybotycka menaeum (1555): Warsaw, Biblioteka Narodowa (hereinafter BN), akc. 2804, f. 101-107^v (office for the Second Sunday in Advent).
- The festal menaeum (late 16th-early 17th c.): Warsaw, BN, akc. 2560, f. 153-159 (office for the Second Sunday in Advent)
- The menaeum (early 17th c.): Warsaw, BN, akc. 2817, f. 200^v-206^v (office for the Second Sunday in Advent)⁹.

⁵ This synaxarium was destroyed during the bombing of Belgrad on 6 April 1941 (I owe this information to A. Turilov, S. Temchin and F. J. Thomson). M. Speransky published this text in 1909, so this publication of the *Passio* has a unique value (SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 26-31).

⁶ The Vienna manuscript is not accessible to me. According to Speransky, the martyrs of Vilnius are commemorated on 16 December and this text is almost identical to that of the Belgrade synaxarium (*ibid.*, p. 5, 24, the variants of this *Passio* are annotated under the text of the Belgrade synaxarium).

⁷ The *officium* is published in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 244-266.

⁸ The manuscript is described in I. S. SVENTSITSKY, *Церковно- и Русско-Славянские рукописи публичной библиотеки Народного Дома во Львове*, St. Petersburg, 1904, p. 38-39.

⁹ The last three menaea derive from South Western Rus'; they have a common proto-graph. Their description is prepared on the basis of the catalogue arranged by A. Naumow at the Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw.

• The East Slavic Redaction:

- A
- The collection of the Lives of saints (late 15th-early 16th c.): LLAS, F19-102, f. 55-57 (*Passio*, 20 September)¹⁰.
 - The collection of the Lives of saints (late 15th-early 16th c.): LLAS F19-76, f. 5^v-7^v (*Passio*, 20 September)¹¹.
 - The Suprasl' synaxarium (1512): LLAS, F19-95, f. 491-493 (*Passio*, 14 January)¹².
- B
- The synaxarium (1496): LLAS, F19-100, f. 125-128 (*Passio*, 14 April)¹³.
 - The Suprasl' synaxarium (first quarter of 16th c.): LLAS, F19-98, f. 192^v-195 (*Passio*, 14 April)¹⁴.
 - The manuscript from the Undolsky collection (16th c.): Moscow, the Russian National Library, собр. В. М. Ундольского (ф. 310), no. 1254, f. 65-69 (*Passio*, 14 April?)¹⁵.

Historiographical Sources

The earliest mention of the three martyrs of Vilnius is found in the entry for the year 1347 in the fifteenth-century Russian first Sophia Chronicle¹⁶. This chronicle reflects a compilation of Metropolitan Photius of Rus' (1408-1431) which was composed most probably in Moscow in c. 1418¹⁷. In my opinion the very wording of the entry about the three

¹⁰ This *Passio* is published in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 268-276.

¹¹ The date of 20 September is not explicitly stated. The *Passio* of the Lithuanian martyrs in these two manuscripts is found: in first case between the *Passio* of Duke Mikhail of Chernigov and his boyar Fëdor (20.09) and the memory of St. Barlaam (06.11); in the second – between the *Passio* of the same Mikhail and Fëdor (20.09) and the *Vita* of Sergii of Radonezh (25.09). The relationship between 20 September and the *Passio* of the Lithuanian martyrs may be explained by reference to St. Eustachius (Placidus), commemorated on this day, whose name resembles that of St. Eustathius. These two manuscripts are nearly contemporary, the first being slightly earlier as its watermarks indicate (I owe the information on watermarks to N. Morozova; the dating of the manuscripts is also hers).

¹² This *Passio* is published in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 278-284.

¹³ This *Passio* was discovered by the writer of these lines in June 2000. The manuscript was dated by N. Morozova.

¹⁴ This *Passio* is published in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 286-292. The manuscript was dated by N. Morozova.

¹⁵ This *Passio* is published in SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 32-34. The manuscript is not accessible to me.

¹⁶ *Софийская первая летопись старшего извода* (= ПСРЛ, 6/1), Moscow, 2000, p. 428.

¹⁷ There is still discussion in Russian scholarship about the origin of the I Sophia and IV Novgorod Chronicles, which reflect the so-called Compilation of Metropolitan Photius (cf. G. M. ПРОКХОРОВ, *Летописные подборки рукописи ГПБ, F.IV.603 и проблема сводного общерусского летописания*, in ТОДРЛ, 32 [1977], p. 165-198; Ya. S. LUR'E, *Еще раз о*

martyrs of Vilnius suggests that it must have derived from the metropolitan chancery¹⁸. It is perhaps no accident that the three martyrs of Vilnius entered the Russian chronicles at just about the time when their images were embroidered on the major *sakkos* of Photius (discussed below). The inscription of the first Sophia Chronicle is reflected in later Russian chronicles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries¹⁹. A shortened version of this inscription is found in the Yermolin Chronicle of the second half of the fifteenth century and in the later Russian chronicles which took it from there²⁰. Quite a different record about the Lithuanian martyrs is found in a later source, the early seventeenth-century South Ruthenian chronicle of the Gustynya Monastery. This chronicle mentions the three martyrs twice²¹. The differences in structure and wording indicate that there is no textual relation between the South Ruthenian and the Muscovite chronicles and that the former reflect information obtained from quite a different source.

Iconographic Sources

The most important source of this kind is the major *sakkos* (chasuble) of Metropolitan Photius of Rus'. There can be no doubt that this prominent work of Byzantine art was made in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The images of the three Lithuanian martyrs are found between those

*своде 1448 г. и Новгородской Карамзинской летописи, ibid., p. 199-218; A. G. BOBROV, Из истории летописания первой половины XV в., in ТОДРЛ, 46 [1993], p. 3-20; Ya. S. LUR'Е, Феодалная война в Москве и летописание первой половины XV в., in ТОДРЛ, 47 [1993], p. 82-94; A. G. BOBROV, Редакции Новгородской четвертой летописи, in ТОДРЛ, 51 [1999], p. 107-136). I support the opinion expressed by A. Bobrov in his earlier article that the "1448 svod" was compiled in c. 1418 (BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 31-37).*

¹⁸ It is worth noting that the earliest manuscript of the first Sophia Chronicle ends with a phrase reminiscent of liturgical texts ([...] и прияста венца небесная от руки господня, их ради пострадаста и Христа ради: "and they received the heavenly palms from the Lord's hand and suffered for them and for Christ"). Later versions are somewhat shorter as they omit "suffered for them and for Christ". This may be characteristic of the tendency of later scribes to rework the works of their ecclesiastical predecessors in a more secular manner (cf. A. N. NASONOV, *История русского летописания XI - начала XVIII века: очерки и исследования*, Moscow, 1969, p. 294-295, 300; Ya. S. LUR'Е, *Общерусские летописи XIV-XV вв.*, Leningrad, 1976, p. 160).

¹⁹ *Московский летописный свод конца XV века* (= ПСРЛ, 25), Moscow - Leningrad, 1949, p. 177; *Летопись по Воскресенскому списку* (= ПСРЛ, 7), St. Petersburg, 1856, p. 214-215; *Книга степенная царского родословия* (= ПСРЛ, 21), St. Petersburg, 1913, pt. 2, p. 390.

²⁰ *Ермолинская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 23), St. Petersburg, 1910, p. 109; *Летописный свод 1518 г. (Уваровская летопись)* (= ПСРЛ, 28), Moscow - Leningrad, 1963, p. 232; *Львовская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 20), St. Petersburg, 1910, pt. 1, p. 185.

²¹ *Густинская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 2), St. Petersburg, 1843, p. 349-350.

of the future Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaeologus (1425-1448) with his wife Anna and of Grand Duke Basil I of Moscow (1389-1425) and his wife Sofia, daughter of Vytautas. It is supposed that the latter couple commissioned the *sakkos*²². Taking into account the fact that Anna, daughter of Basil I and Sofia, was married to John VIII in 1414 and died of the plague in 1417 it seems most likely that the *sakkos* was produced between these years²³.

The depiction on the *sakkos* of Photius is the earliest known image of the three martyrs of Vilnius and their representation remained much the same in later iconography²⁴.

Epigraphic Sources

Sources of this kind cannot be as eloquent as narratives, but among them there is the earliest known object directly related to the veneration of the three martyrs of Vilnius: the cross of Patriarch Philotheus Coccinus of Constantinople (1353-1354, 1364-1376). This cross has long been dated to the fifteenth century and it has been thought that only some obscure tradition has associated the earlier name (филофеевский крест, "the cross of Philotheus") with the later object²⁵. Quite recently the Russian historian V. Kuchkin has devoted special attention to this cross and his analysis of the inscriptions has proved that this is the very thing it purports to be. It

²² E. PILTZ, *Trois sakkoi byzantins. Analyse iconographique* (= *Acta Universitatis Upsalensis*, n. s. Figura, 17), Uppsala, 1976, p. 31.

²³ MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 39.

²⁴ It is worth noting that even a questionable attribution of the martyrs' names to their images was reflected in the later sources. The *sakkos* depicts the three martyrs one by one naming them John, Eustathius, and Anthony. The first martyr is depicted beardless, while the other two are bearded. The point is that according to their *Passio* Eustathius must have been the youngest and he should have been depicted without a beard. It seems that for quite a long time this was no problem for Orthodox believers and only in the seventeenth century the Bollandist G. Henskens, while commenting on a Muscovite calendar, noticed this and suggested that either the names or the depictions should be rearranged in their proper order (cf. *AASS*, Aprilis t. 2, 1675, p. 265). This suggestion has not been universally accepted and it is still possible to find a bearded Eustathius and a beardless John (*Подлинник иконописный*, ed. S. T. BOL'SHAKOVA, red. A. I. USPENSKY, 2nd ed., Moscow, 1998, p. 88). One more complication is that the attribution of the pagan names of the martyrs differs in various literary sources and historiographical works. These problems need not occupy us here but these remarks show that their solution requires in-depth study in literary and iconographic sources.

²⁵ Cf. T. V. NIKOLAeva, *Произведения мелкой пластики XIII-XVII веков в собрании Загорского музея. Каталог*, Zagorsk, 1960, p. 275-276, n° 126a, 126b; Id., *Произведения русского прикладного искусства с надписями XV – первой четверти XVI в.*, Moscow, 1971, p. 32-33, n° 2; p. 102, plate 2.

was made in c. 1376 and contained the relics of the "Lithuanian" martyrs among those of other saints²⁶.

There are other two reliquaries containing the relics of the "Lithuanian martyrs". One of them was produced in 1414 by Ivan Danilovich, a scion of the princes of Suzdal²⁷. The other can be dated to late fifteenth – early sixteenth century²⁸.

We have presented a more or less complete corpus of early sources known to date that have to do with the martyrdom and the cult of the three martyrs of Vilnius²⁹. These sources are not rich, but it is to be remembered that we are dealing with a martyrdom which took place in fourteenth-century Lithuania, a country which despite its huge size is the object of relatively little source material. Nevertheless, the sources listed above provide a basis for an investigation into the reasons of the martyrdom and bear witness to the early stages in veneration of the three martyrs of Vilnius. Although by the early twentieth century the bulk of these sources had been published or mentioned, they have been used in varying degrees both in terms of quantity and quality. Now we are going to discuss the relationship between the earliest redactions of the *Passio* and in dealing with the South Slavic redaction we will attempt to reveal those features which establish the historicity of the earliest *Passio* and its proximity to the events it describes. The disappearance of some of these features will reveal the tendencies of further modifications as they are reflected in the East Slavic redaction. This latter redaction is made up of two groups of texts, which for the sake of convenience are called groups A and B, and we will trace their reflections in the later versions of the story well into the eighteenth century.

2. The South and East Slavic Redactions of the *Passio*

The time and place of the emergence of the South Slavic version of the story is a complicated issue. In general the texts of the South Slavic redaction correspond to each other, although the texts of the *menaea* belong to the Bulgarian recension of Church Slavonic, while those of the

²⁶ KUCHKIN, *Сергий Радонежский*, p. 19.

²⁷ T. V. NIKOLAËVA, *Произведения русского прикладного искусства...* (cf. *supra*, n. 25), p. 33-34, n° 4; p. 104, plate 4.

²⁸ EAD., *Произведения мелкой пластики...* (cf. *supra*, n. 25), p. 266-267, n° 121b.

²⁹ Later redactions which will be discussed in a section devoted to them.

synaxaria belong to the Serbian recension of Church Slavonic. The main lines of the story are also revealed in Michael Balsamon's eulogy and this prompts us to wonder about the possible relation between the Greek and Church Slavonic texts. Apart from Michael Balsamon there is also some other evidence suggesting that the South Slavic redaction may have had some Greek antecedent. The office of the three martyrs is instructive in this respect. In tackling this problem the Russian scholar D. Ogitsky turned his attention to the acrostics preserved in the Slavonic text: **ТРОИЦА ЧЪТЕТ СЯ НОВОЯВЛЕНТЫХ МЪЧЕНИКЪ. ВЪ БОГОРОДИЧНЫАХ ЖЕ ДИМИТРИА** ("The three newly-manifested martyrs are glorified. In theotokia [the acrostic] of Demetrius")³⁰. He translated the first words of Slavonic tropes back into Greek, which gives: **Τριὰς τιμάται νεοφανῶν μαρτύρων**; the same procedure with the theotokia resulted in **Δεμετρίου**. This latter acrostic identifies the author of the office and according to A. Turilov he may have been Demetrius Chrysolorus³¹. Ogitsky was the first scholar who most convincingly formulated the idea that the office of the three martyrs of Vilnius was originally Greek which some time later was translated into Church Slavonic and in such a form came down to us. He thought that the office must have been composed about 1374 under the auspices of the Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople. This opinion is based on two facts. Firstly, Michael Balsamon states that Patriarch Philotheus "was first in venerating them as martyrs and honouring them with icons, prostrations and yearly liturgical celebrations"³². The South Slavic redaction informs us that in 1374 Patriarch Philotheus received parts of the relics of the Lithuanian martyrs in Hagia Sophia³³. This *translatio* of the relics means that the official canonization was in 1374 and the very canonization implies the existence of liturgical texts. Secondly, Ogitsky considered that the *Passio* similarly must have been originally Greek as it formed part of the Greek office. Michael Balsamon also lends some support to such a view because he makes a direct reference to a story in which the martyrs are called Lithuanians and fire-worshippers (**οὓς λιτβοὺς ὡς δὲ καὶ πυροσολάτραις ὁ λόγος καλεῖ**)³⁴. Already M. Speransky treated this informa-

³⁰ The Slutsk menaeum: LLAS, F19-147, f. 224 (BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 246).

³¹ Makary (Bulgakov), *История Русской церкви*, Moscow, 1995, book 3, комментарии (A. A. Turilov), p. 528.

³² SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 47.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

tion as evidence of an originally Greek version of the *Passio* of the three martyrs of Vilnius, even though he did not know the text of the South Slavic office with its acrostics³⁵. So the notion about the originally Greek office (and *Passio*) seems reasonable³⁶. Quite recently F. J. Thomson has confronted it by drawing attention that the existence of a lost Greek *Vita* remains unproven³⁷. We must agree that the idea of the Greek original must be considered unproven as long as the Greek texts are not found. Nevertheless, the very idea of a Greek original seems quite plausible taking into account the fact that there are some very similar passages, as Thomson himself noted³⁸ and the accounts in Greek or Church Slavonic are also similar.

Be that as it may, the evidence already mentioned above allows us to suppose that the South Slavic redaction contains information based on a written source by the late fourteenth century, at least by the time Michael Balsamon was writing his eulogy. Such a time span is not particularly long and this implies that the contemporaries or near-contemporaries of the martyrdom could still have been living when the earliest extant information about the events was recorded (the *Passio* relates that the tortures of St. Eustathius were described by those who had been there [in Lithuania])³⁹. Now we may turn to discussing the historicity of the text.

The correspondence between a hagiographic text and "historical reality" is always a delicate one. I will confine myself here to pointing out only those details that can be attested by (near-)contemporary and independent sources.

First of all there are some parallels between the *Passio* and the letter of Metropolitan Cyprian of Kiev (1375-1406) to Sergius of Radonezh († 1392) dated June 23, 1378. The *Passio* mentions a multitude of Christian prisoners of war who asked the Lithuanian duke to permit them to build a church⁴⁰. Already Speransky surmised that these must have been Russian captives who were taken prisoner during the campaigns of Al-

³⁵ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 20-21.

³⁶ It has already been supported by Turilov and Rowell: Makary (Bulgakov), *История Русской церкви...* (cf. *supra*, n. 31), book 3, commentary (by A. A. Turilov), p. 528; ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 33.

³⁷ THOMSON [Review], p. 184.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 15, 19. Cf. OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 239.

⁴⁰ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 29; BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 256.

girdas against Moscow⁴¹. This conjecture is corroborated by the evidence supplied by Cyprian as he stated that during his stay in Lithuania he made endeavours to have the Christian prisoners of war released⁴². According to the Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, the Lithuanians always grudged releasing prisoners of war⁴³, that is why a release on a massive scale would not have been an ordinary event. Algirdas agreed to the request and the church was soon built. Maybe Cyprian's general reference to the churches built in Lithuania applies also to this particular church in Vilnius⁴⁴.

The *Passio* does not specify that the martyrdom took place in or that the church was built in Vilnius. This cannot be satisfactorily explained by simply referring to scanty geographic knowledge on the part of the author of the *Passio*. On the contrary, the *Passio* reveals a fairly good knowledge of topography. The duke advised that the church be built not in the valley, as the captives had previously asked, but on the hill, for that site was, in his opinion, more suitable for the church. The site of the church of the Holy Trinity in Vilnius, which later tradition holds to have been built on the place of the martyrdom, is also described as a hill⁴⁵. Every modern visitor to Vilnius Old Town can see that for himself. Of course, the hill is not enough to demonstrate that this is exactly that same place. However, taking into account the fact that seventeenth-century writers recorded that the martyrs had suffered where Holy Trinity Church was later erected, we can state that in all Lithuania there is no other place that could be claimed to possess at least similar credentials, both written and topographical⁴⁶.

The historicity of the *Passio* may also be reinforced a little by a curious habit of Lithuanians to shave their beards and cut their hair short. The *Passio* indicates that the future martyrs were noticed when they discontinued shaving their beards and grew their hair long in contrast to others. The existence of this habit is, rather unexpectedly, confirmed by

⁴¹ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 15.

⁴² РИБ, 1908, p. 182. The extract from Cyprian's letter of 23.06.1378: "[...] Аще быль есмь въ Литве, много христиан горькаго пленения освободилъ есмь, мнозе отъ неведящихъ Бога познали нами истинаго Бога и къ православной вере святымъ крещениемъ пришли. Церкви святаы ставиль есмь, христианство утвердилъ есмь, места церковная, запустошена давными леты, оправиль есмь приложити къ митрополии всяя Руси".

⁴³ Jan Długosz, *Annales*, liber X, p. 168.

⁴⁴ РИБ, 1908, p. 182.

⁴⁵ J. FIJALEK, *Opisy Wilna aż do połowy wieku XVII-go*, in *Ateneum Wileńskie*, 5-6 (1924), p. 142.

⁴⁶ KREUZA, *Obrona jedności cerkiewney*, p. 59; KOSSOW, *Paterikon*, p. 176; DUBOWICZ, *Hierarchia*, p. 177-178.

Jan Długosz who in describing the pagans also noted that in the pagan times the Lithuanians observed the habit of wearing short clothes and used to shave their hair and beards⁴⁷.

It seems that as an integral part of the *officium*, the *Passio* must have been composed by near contemporaries of the events, which to all probability took place in c. 1347. The *Passio* relates that the tortures of St. Eustathius were described by those who had been there (in Lithuania)⁴⁸. Of course, not all the elements of the story can be accepted at face value, as is always the case with hagiographic (or any other) texts. However, I consider that such basic facts, that the martyrs were under the authority of the pagan duke and were killed for refusing to fulfil his order to eat meat during the fast⁴⁹, that the church was built in the place of the martyrdom, that their relics were transferred to Hagia Sophia etc., are substantially true.

The collation of the South and East Slavic redactions reveals the character of later modifications. The East Slavic redaction presents a more simplified and harmonised version of the description. The South Slavic redaction indicates that the priest Nestor and some believers took part in the burial of SS. Anthony and John. As for St. Eustathius it is said that the Orthodox sons of the tormentor (Algirdas) brought his body from the place of martyrdom, which was three days' journey away, and buried it together with SS. Anthony and John. In both cases the East Slavic redaction knows only of "some believers" taking part in the burials. The very description of building the church is shortened. If we had only the East Slavic redaction we would have been unable to know that the Christians who were eager to build the church had previously been prisoners of war.

⁴⁷ Jan Długosz, *Annales*, liber X, p. 168. Such a change of appearance must be linked to conversion, which entailed a redefinition of identity. A conversion to Orthodoxy in the case of the three martyrs of Vilnius has one more parallel. The same Jan Długosz informs us that Jogaila's brother Vygantas, upon his conversion, so eagerly adopted the holy Polish customs that he seems to have become a really new man: *Qui post regenerationis lavacrum in Cracoviensis ecclesia susceptum adeo singulos barbaros et patrios gestus et mores in habitu, loquela, tonsura et omni conversacione a se relegaverat totumque se Polonorum moribus sanctis et religiosis addixerat, ut non neophytus aut tiro, sed veteranus fidei et religionis catholicae miles crederetur...* (*ibid.*, p. 195). These cases from Lithuania may supply additional substance to similar phenomena found elsewhere: cf. e. g. N. BEREND, *At the Gate of Christendom. Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in medieval Hungary, c. 1000-c. 1300*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 258-260.

⁴⁸ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 30; BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 260.

⁴⁹ A refusal to eat meat leading to execution is by no means unique. Early in the 9th c. pagan Bulgars killed fourteen Christians who refused to eat meat and suffered martyrdom like the seven Maccabees (II Mcc 7, 1-40). For this martyrdom see: B. JOVANOVIĆ-STIPČEVIĆ, *Спис о убијеним Бугарима Теодора Студита (Препис из српског рукописа XIII века)*, in *Археолошки прилози*, 1 (1979), p. 81-101.

In this case it would have been impossible to trace a relation between the *Passio* and the letter of Metropolitan Cyprian (23.06.1378). Only the South Slavic redaction describes the site of the church as a hill which had previously been used for public executions. The East Slavic redaction does not indicate the time, the year 1374, when the holy relics were brought to St. Sophia. The very name of Patriarch Philotheus is also omitted in the East Slavic redaction. The main compositional difference between the South and East Slavic versions is to be seen in the light of such simplifications of the story. All the texts first narrate the sufferings of SS. Anthony and John and then those of St. Eustathius. However, the place of a posthumous miracle is different in the South and East Slavic redactions. The miracle was the fact that after the martyrdom no one else was hanged at the place of public executions where the church was eventually built. In the South Slavic redaction this miracle is placed after the description of the sufferings of SS. Anthony and John, while in the East Slavic redaction it is found after the descriptions of the deaths of all three martyrs. At first sight we may suspect that the South Slavic redaction is inconsequential, for the statement that after their death no one else was killed is followed by the description of sufferings of St. Eustathius. Thus, in the first case the miracle originally referred only to SS. Anthony and John, and in the second to all three saints. This latter description was conducive to the most widespread opinion that all these martyrs had been killed in one place, where later the church of the Holy Trinity was built. By contrast, the South Slavic story allows us to suppose that SS. Anthony and John were killed in one place and St. Eustathius in some other unspecified one. The different circumstances, already noted, corroborate this view. Therefore, the posthumous miracle of SS. Anthony and John was that no one else was later killed in the place which became sacred due to their martyrdom. The posthumous miracle of St. Eustathius was that wild beasts did not devour his body. This means that the South Slavic redaction is made up of two different stories which end with the relevant posthumous miracles. In the East Slavic redaction the two stories are rather mechanically conflated by the transposition of the first posthumous miracle, which thus became the property of all three martyrs.

The collation of the South and East Slavic redactions is informative in another respect too. In its composition the South Slavic redaction is close to the testimony of the Russian chronicles of the fifteenth century. Their testimony informs us in essence about the martyrdom of St. Eustathius and only as a circumstance of his burial refers to the other two martyrs. It is evident that they are describing two different events and this

difference is preserved in the South Slavic redaction. The South Slavic redaction informs us that St. Eustathius was buried where SS. Anthony and John had previously been buried. The same evidence is supplied by Russian chronicles, which, moreover, specify that they all were buried in the Orthodox church of St. Nicholas at Vilnius. Seventeenth-century writers of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (S. Kossow, L. Kreuza, J. Dubowicz) depict the sufferings of all three martyrs as a simultaneous event which is followed by the construction of the church⁵⁰. The pattern is the same as in the East Slavic redaction.

The more simplified structure and contents of the East Slavic redaction reveals, on the other hand, its author's tendency to stress the spiritual values of the *Passio* at the expense of historical details. The spiritualization of the text is obvious in the interpolation commenting upon the Lithuanians' habit of cutting their hair short. While in the South Slavic redaction it looks like a curious ethnic peculiarity, in the East Slavic redaction it becomes devilish and its rejection is presented as a prerequisite for spiritual renewal: "These fire-worshippers observe the habit which their father, the good-hating and wily demon, handed down to them as law to cut their hair short and to shave their beards with razors. He [St. Eustathius] renounced all their infidelity and madness and preserved them intact"⁵¹.

The manuscripts of the East Slavic version fall into two different groups which for the sake of convenience have been called groups A and B. The most visible difference between these groups is the beginning of the *Passio*. Group A gives the pagan names of the martyrs: Kruglets, Kumets, Nezhilo (and this is one of the most important additions to the primary text by the East Slavic redaction). In the place of pagan names the group B text has preserved two verses of a trope inherited directly from the South Slavic redaction: "The deceased three friends of Lithuanian origin / Now annihilate the spiritual enemies".

The relation of the groups A and B to the South Slavic redaction is rather complicated. They have similar features which are the same with regard to the South Slavic redaction, but at the same time group A has phrases which are closer to the South Slavic redaction than those of the group B and *vice versa*. So it is not possible to derive them from each other or to suppose that their authors adapted the original text indepen-

⁵⁰ KOSSOW, *Paterikon*, p. 176; KREUZA, *Obrona jedności cerkiewney*, p. 59; DUBOWICZ, *Hierarchia*, p. 177-178.

⁵¹ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 282.

dently. On these grounds it seems reasonable to assume that both these groups reflect the hypothetical original East Slavic redaction which in all probability was not originally separated into two groups. The East Slavic redaction (and its groups A and B) must have been composed by the end of the fifteenth century most probably in the Ruthenian lands of Poland or the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; its basis, the South Slavic redaction, is known so far only from the manuscripts which originate from Serbia, Poland or Lithuania and it seems that the South Slavic redaction was unknown in Muscovy.

The two groups of the East Slavic redaction were later reflected in different literary works.

3. The Later Versions of the Story (16-18th Centuries)

The Latin version of the *Passio* is presented on the pages of the *Acta Sanctorum* under April 14⁵². How it found its way into them is partly explained by the Bollandist Godfried Henskens (1601-1681). He informs us that the renowned Jesuit poet Maciej Sarbiewski sent the acts of these saints to the Bollandists. Through the good offices of the Bollandists M. Sarbiewski published his *Books of Lyrics* in Antwerp and in return he sent information about the saints, including the Vilnius martyrs, venerated in his country. According to the Bollandists the Latin text was translated from Livonian (= Lithuanian)⁵³ and Ruthenian manuscripts. The comparison of the Latin *Passio* with the Church Slavonic *Passiones* allows us to state that the former is based on a translation of the East Slavic redaction. To be more precise, it was based on a manuscript whose text represented group A of the East Slavic redaction.

The Latin *Passio* has preserved some individual features of group A. The most conspicuous are two phrases. The South Slavic redaction informs that the appearance of St. Eustathius attracted the duke's attention while hunting (въ ловохъ хожденїа)⁵⁴. The same is found in group B of the East Slavic redaction (въ ловитвахъ)⁵⁵, but the protograph of group A

⁵² AASS, Aprilis t. 2, 1675, p. 266. The manuscript copies of the *Passio* are kept in Bibliothèque Royale (Brussels): Ms. 8004-17, f. 197'-199 and Ms. 8306-17, f. 10-10'. See J. VAN DEN GHEYN, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique*, t. 5, Brussels, 1905, no. 3452 (46) and 3464 (5). For this information I am grateful to Father R. Godding.

⁵³ Cf. THOMSON [Review], p. 187. I must agree with the reviewer that the "Livonian manuscript" in the gloss *Ex Mss. Livonicis et Rutenicis* refer to Lithuania.

⁵⁴ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 30; BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 258.

⁵⁵ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 290.

lost two letters and instead of **Ѡ ЛОВИТВАХ** (in hunting) we read **Ѡ ЛИТВАХ** (in Lithuanias).⁵⁶ The translator can well have been confused a little by a garbled grammatical form: in Lithuanias (!), but not with its meaning. So he rendered it in correct Latin: *Quodam autem tempore dum sequeretur principem in Lituania tunc degentem...* (One time when he followed the duke who was then present in Lithuania...)⁵⁷. This reading is alien to both the South Slavic redaction and group B of the East Slavic redaction, but it is identical to that of group A. The same may be said in an other instance too. The Belgrade synaxarium informs us that St. Eustathius was flogged with rods (**жъзликѣ**)⁵⁸. The same is said in the text of group B (**жезлы**)⁵⁹, but group A already knows that St. Eustathius was lashed with iron bars (**рожны желѣзными**)⁶⁰. The same meaning is reflected in the Latin *Passio*: verubus ferreis⁶¹.

The translation into Latin displays some features of its own. There are modifications which are characteristic of the Catholic translator. For example, while translating the Church Slavonic text the word meaning piety (**благочѣстїе**) was consequently rendered as *Veritas Catholica*. There are also other phrases which are conveyed in Catholic wording. For instance, **Таже божьственымъ таннамъ причастиша сѧ ѡба** and *participes facti sunt Sacrosanctae Eucharistiae*⁶². At the same time it is worth observing that while translating the "divine mysteries", characteristic of the Eastern Church, by the "Holy Eucharist", the original form — **причастиша сѧ** = *participes facti sunt* — was preserved. Minor modifications can be seen in the fact that the Lithuanian ruler is always styled as the duke (*dux*) though group A uses as a synonym also the title of king, which must simply have meant a powerful ruler⁶³. The seventeenth-century translator made the titles uniform for he could hardly have failed to know that the Lithuanian duke was no king.

⁵⁶ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 272, 282.

⁵⁷ AASS, Aprilis t. 2, p. 266.

⁵⁸ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житіе*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 290.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274, 282.

⁶¹ AASS, Aprilis t. 2, p. 266.

⁶² Cf. BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 280 and AASS, Aprilis t. 2, p. 266.

⁶³ T. LEHR-SPLAWIŃSKI, *Pochodzenie i rozpowszechnienie wyrazu Król w polszczyźnie i w innych językach słowiańskich* (odbitka z "Prac polonistycznych", ofiarowanych prof. Janowi Losiowi), Warsaw, 1926, p. 53.

These modifications allow us to suppose that the text included in the *Acta Sanctorum* is the Catholic redaction of the *Passio* of the three martyrs of Vilnius. In the eighteenth century this redaction was adopted by the Uniates who translated it into Polish with the addition of some details of their own making. The Uniates suggested that the martyrs had been converted through the labours of Basilian monks, one of whom was the priest Nestor himself⁶⁴.

By contrast to the *Acta Sanctorum*, the relation of the *Passio* in Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow's (1542-1563) menologium to the earlier texts is more complicated⁶⁵. It seems likely that the compilers under Macarius' direction were familiar with both groups, A and B, of the East Slavic redaction since they included both the pagan names of the martyrs and the two verses of a trope. The text of the Macarian menologium used the text of group B as a basis for its own version of the story. This text has preserved individual traits of this group such as the above mentioned *ω ловитвах* (in hunting) and *жезлы* (canes), but it was not simply rewritten.

The allusion to the merits of the Greek Church in spreading the faith was omitted. The East Slavic redaction inherited from the South Slavic one offers the detail that SS. Anthony and John "came in their hearts to love Christianity and our (i. e. Greek) piety"⁶⁶. The Macarian text has: "From all their heart they came to love piety for Christ"⁶⁷. The text of the menologium contains interpolations which are aimed at making the text easier to understand or which were caused by reconsidering the situation. In this way new spiritual facets of the story were revealed. Such is the speech of St. Eustathius addressed to weeping Christians: "Brothers, do not cry for me, although my earthly body will vanish, Christ in heaven will endow me with an eternal one"⁶⁸.

At the same time Macarius' text becomes sensitive to historical details. For the first time we come to know that the martyrs originated not from some part of Lithuania but from the city of Vilnius. The earlier *Passiones* do not mention the duke by name, but Macarius' text speaks of the

⁶⁴ I. KULCZYNSKI, *Menologium Bazyliańskie, to jest żywoty świętych pąskich obojey płci z zakonu S. Bazylego na miesiące rozłożone, zebrane i napisane*, pt. 1, Vilnius, 1771, p. 338.

⁶⁵ *Великие Минеи-четыи собранные всероссийским митрополитом Макарием*, Апрель, Moscow, 1916, p. 438-443.

⁶⁶ BARONAS, *Тры Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 252, 268, 286.

⁶⁷ *Великие Минеи-четыи...* (cf. *supra*, n. 65), p. 439.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

Lithuanian duke Algirdas *expressis verbis*⁶⁹. Nonetheless, these particular details do not outnumber those in the brief notice of the Russian chronicles. The above mentioned historical details of the South Slavic redaction that had been omitted in the composition of the East Slavic redaction, do not reappear any more. For these reasons the Macarian text of the *Passio* of the three martyrs of Vilnius may be considered to be yet another redaction.

It is probable that the *Passio* in the Macarian menologium was used by Metropolitan St. Demetrius Tuptalo of Rostov (1651-1709) when he composed his own menologium⁷⁰. A characteristic feature of the new reworking is the more elaborate language. Such an approach made it easier to draw the parallels between the sufferings of the Vilnius martyrs and those of Christ more explicitly by noting that the saintly martyr Anthony was sentenced to an ignominious death like a robber: he was sentenced to be hanged on a tree⁷¹. M. Speransky has noted that St. Demetrius Tuptalo of Rostov indicated the date of the death of St. Anthony as being 14 January, unlike Macarius, who gave 14 April. Speransky supposed that such a correction was based on some other sources, not the Macarian menologium⁷². These sources can more readily be identified by observing that Dimitry of Rostov dates the death of St. John to 24 April. These dates correspond to those of group A of the East Slavic redaction. St. Demetrius Tuptalo's knowledge of group A is attested also by the fact that he relates that St. Eustathius was beaten with iron bars. However, I cannot ascertain the exact way by which St. Demetrius Tuptalo became familiar with the information characteristic of group A texts. It seems probable that he may have come to know it via Church Slavonic manuscripts or the *Acta Sanctorum*⁷³.

There are thus six tangible redactions of the *Passio* of the three martyrs of Vilnius known to date. It seems likely that the South Slavic re-

⁶⁹ *Великие Минеи-четы...*, p. 439.

⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the original edition of this menologium is not available to me. The *Passio* of the three martyrs of Vilnius first appeared in the third volume of St. Dimitry Tuptalo's menologium published at Kiev in 1700 (cf. THOMSON, [Review], p. 187). I refer to the texts published in *Жития святых на русском языке изложенные по руководству четьех-миней св. Димитрия Ростовского, с дополнениями, объяснительными примечаниями и изображениями святых*, book 8, ed. Московской синодальной типографии, Moscow, 1906 (reprint, Moscow, 1992), месяц апрель, [April 14] Страдание святых мучеников литовских Антония, Иоанна и Евстафия, p. 211-218.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁷² SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 11.

⁷³ It is well known that he used the *AASS*.

daction was translated from Greek some time after 1374 and before the second half of the fifteenth century. The earliest manuscripts of the East Slavic redaction have come down to us from the very end of the fifteenth century. By this time this redaction was already represented by two different groups. Therefore we may deduce that the East Slavic redaction existed at least some decades before the end of the fifteenth century. It looks more likely that the East Slavic redaction was composed somewhere in the Ruthenian lands of Poland or the Grand Duchy of Lithuania rather than in Muscovite Russia. The East Slavic redaction had as its basis the South Slavic redaction, the manuscripts of which point to a provenance in the lands of the South Slavs or in Poland or Lithuania. The East Slavic redaction served as a basis for later redactions of the *Passio*, namely the Catholic one in the *Acta Sanctorum*, and those of Metropolitan Macarius and St. Demetrius Tuptalo⁷⁴. The *Passio* from the latter menologium was the main source for popular editions of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries.

4. The Theories about the Martyrdom

The memory of the Lithuanian martyr saints Anthony, John and Eustathius has been preserved through centuries by the Orthodox Church and historical tradition. The story about their martyrdom was known, as we have seen, in Poland and Lithuania, in Russia and in other countries. It must have been quite widespread as even a dramatic play about the martyrs of Vilnius was composed in 1732, most probably by the Jesuit Jan Józef Obrąpalski⁷⁵. These martyrs also found their place in popular calendars composed by another Jesuit, Jan Poszakowski, which served as a channel of Enlightenment ideas for Polish-Lithuanian society in the eighteenth century⁷⁶, so it is no exaggeration to state that the story of the three

⁷⁴ These issues discussed above have been addressed in more detail in D. BARONAS, *По поводу литературной истории Мучения трех виленских мучеников*, in *Krakowsko-Wileńskie studia slawistyczne*, 3 (2001), p. 73-98.

⁷⁵ [J. J. OBRĄPALSKI], *Sacra fames inter profanas dapes a divīs martyribus Joanne, Antonio & Eustachio usque ad consummationem vitae tolerata*, Vilnius, 1732. The only known copy of this drama play is preserved at Vilnius University Library (IV 32040); repr. in BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 322-336. The authorship is attributed to Obrąpalski on the grounds that he was a professor in rethorics at Vilnius University in 1731-1732 (cf. *Dramat staropolski od początków do powstania sceny narodowej: bibliografia*, t. 2: *Programy drukiem wydane do r. 1765*, pt. 1: *Programy teatru jezuckiego*, red. W. KOROTAJ et al., Wrocław, 1976, p. 535-536, no. 628).

⁷⁶ J. POSZAKOWSKI, *Kalendarz polityczny i historyczny na rok panski 1738*, Vilnius, [1737], f. 16^v. On significance of such calendars see L. PIECHNIK, *Odrodzenie Akademii Wileńskiej 1730-1773*, Rome, 1990, p. 17.

martyrs of Vilnius was quite well known, and not only among the Orthodox believers in Eastern Europe.

When nineteenth-century historians started academic research into Lithuanian history they did not doubt the reality of the Vilnius martyrs. They used simply to retell the story in its main lines without analysing its sources and basing their narrative not necessarily on the primary ones⁷⁷. Something more was bound to happen as methods of investigation became more academic and less antiquarian. K. Stadnicki was one of the first historians to declare that the martyrs were not killed for their Christian faith but because they plotted against Grand Duke Algirdas, whose religious tolerance, as it were, was scandalous both to pagans and Orthodox; only later did their co-religionists make the martyrs out of such criminals⁷⁸. Another Polish historian S. Smolka advanced a different opinion. He surmised that the dissemination of Orthodox Christianity and Russian influence was a source of anxiety among the pagans and in order to placate them Algirdas put to death three Russianized Lithuanians⁷⁹. Such opinions, as Chodyncki remarked in 1927, were not critical enough⁸⁰, and indeed the first really critical studies devoted to the Vilnius martyrs were published in 1927. They were produced by the Polish historians W. Zahorski and K. Chodyncki who were active in Vilnius before the Second World War⁸¹. These studies, and especially the latter one, marked a turning point in the investigation of the martyrdom. Chodyncki draw a radical conclusion that the entire story about the Vilnius martyrs was nothing else than an ideological fiction constructed in the end of the fifteenth century by Muscovite propaganda as part of its attempts to denigrate the Catholic countries Poland and Lithuania⁸². This thesis has long remained so convincing that a large number of Polish and Lithuanian historians have taken

⁷⁷ N. M. KARAMZIN, *История государства Российского*, vol. 5, St. Petersburg, 1819, p. 52-53; I. DANIŁOWICZ, *Latopisiec Litwy i kronika ruska*, Vilnius, 1827, p. 169-170; T. NARBUTT, *Dzieje narodu litewskiego*, t. 5, supp. 10, Vilnius, 1839, p. 41-46; J. I. KRASZEWSKI, *Wilno od początków jego do roku 1750*, t. 1, Vilnius, 1840, p. 35-36, 370-371; t. 3, 1841, p. 43.

⁷⁸ K. STADNICKI, *Olgierd i Kiejstut, synowie Gedymina w. księcia Litwy*, Lwów, 1870, p. 9-10 and 120-121.

⁷⁹ S. SMOLKA, *Unia Litwy z Koroną*, Cracow, 1903, p. 105-106.

⁸⁰ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 418-419.

⁸¹ W. ZAHORSKI, *Legenda o trzech męczennikach wileńskich*, in *Źródła mocy*, 2 (1927), p. 68-72; CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 416-451 (K. Chodyncki considered his own study to be a continuation of W. Zahorski's work: cf. *ibid.*, p. 417).

⁸² CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 442-443.

it for granted⁸³. It goes without saying that tenacity of such an assertion is an interesting historiographical issue in itself. The thesis of Chodynicky seems to have persisted in some quarters despite the fact that it was undermined by Meyendorff already in 1981 and seriously criticised by Ogitsky in 1984⁸⁴. These scholars have turned attention to the earliest known sources of the martyrdom, which were unknown to the authors of the first critical studies and their followers. These newly-found sources prove beyond doubt that the martyrdom of the Vilnius martyrs is a real historical fact. I am not going to repeat the arguments advanced by Ogitsky⁸⁵. Suffice it here to pay some attention to the most striking facts. Chodynicky based his weighty conclusion on inadequate source material. Of the early sources of the martyrdom enumerated above, he knew only about the existence of the historiographical sources. His analysis of the Russian chronicles was far from satisfactory even in the context of the contemporary state of knowledge⁸⁶ and he did not hesitate to speculate that two Orthodox nobles killed for refusing to be rebaptized in 1386 when Jogaila became a Catholic were transferred from the times of Jogaila to those of Algirdas and made martyrs without bothering to explain why this should have happened so⁸⁷. He supposed that the earliest evidence about the existence of the *Vita* is a reference in the Gustynya chronicle and he credited

⁸³ E. g. H. PASZKIEWICZ, *Początki Rusi...* (cf. *supra*, n. 1), p. 241; J. OCHMAŃSKI, *Dawna Litwa. Studia historyczne*, Olsztyn, 1986, p. 28-29; J. BARDACH, *La rencontre des Églises catholique et orthodoxe sur les territoires orientaux du Royaume de Pologne et de Lithuanie aux XIV^e - XV^e siècles*, in *The Common Christian Roots of the European Nations*. An International Colloquium in the Vatican, vol. 2, Florence, 1982, p. 820; H. FROS, *Hagiographie lithuanienne. Les «martyrs» de Vilnius*, in *AB*, 101 (1983), p. 35-36; *Id.*, *Hagiographie brodée*, in *AB*, 103 (1985), p. 107; J. JURGINIS, *Pagonybės ir krikščionybės santykiai Lietuvoje*, Vilnius, 1976, p. 35-39; Z. IVINSKIS, *Rinkiniai raštai*, t. 4: *Krikščionybė Lietuvoje*, Rome, 1987, p. 22; M. KOSMAN, *Litwa pierwotna: mity, legendy, fakty*, Warsaw, 1989, p. 146-168; L. KORCZAK, *Litwa: przechowana tożsamość*, Cracow, 1998, p. 84-85.

⁸⁴ J. MEYENDORFF, *The Three Lithuanian Martyrs. Byzantium and Lithuania in the XIVth century*, in *Eikon und Logos. Beiträge zur Erforschung byzantinischer Kulturtraditionen*, ed. H. GOLTZ, Halle, 1981, p. 179-197; MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 29-44; OGITSKY, *K ucmapuu*, p. 226-246; *Id.*, *Blutzeugnisse für Christus in Litauen des 14. Jahrhunderts. Legende und Wirklichkeit der drei Märtyrer von Vilna*, in *Stimme der Orthodoxie*, 1984, fasc. 6, p. 45-48, fasc. 7, p. 38-40 and fasc. 8, p. 39-48.

⁸⁵ OGITSKY, *K ucmapuu*, p. 226-232 and BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 9-25, 51-54.

⁸⁶ It suffice here to draw attention to one passage to demonstrate that his analysis was rather superficial. Chodynicky (*Geneza i rozwój*, p. 421, n. 1), seems to believe that the IV Novgorod Chronicle contains the earliest notice of the martyrs which went over into the I Sophia Chronicle. The only difficulty with this statement is that the IV Novgorod Chronicle has no mention of the three martyrs of Vilnius at all!

⁸⁷ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 426.

the Bollandists with developing the full-fledged legend⁸⁸. Descriptions of the martyrdom prior to that of the *Acta Sanctorum* were unknown to him. It is true that the manuscripts, now kept at the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, were not available at Vilnius between the two World Wars since they had been evacuated to Russia and were returned only in 1946. However, their description had been published by F. Dobriansky already in 1882, whose book was published not somewhere overseas but in Vilnius⁸⁹. I do not think that it was beyond bounds of the possible to find this book, a number of issues of which are still available in the libraries of Vilnius. There is some evidence that Chodynicky was not assiduous enough in searching for all the relevant information. For example, a footnote in his article shows that he read a page in E. Golubinsky's work where there is information about the depiction of the three martyrs on the great *sakkos* of Metropolitan Photius⁹⁰. Nevertheless Chodynicky preferred to pass it over in silence as he was overconfident in stating that there was no any evidence about the martyrs that could be dated earlier than the late fifteenth century⁹¹. Sometimes it is more convenient indeed to ignore the (inconvenient) facts than to adjust a theory of one's own to them. But why did he do so? I do not know exactly, but we must bear in mind that the relations between the Poles and the Russians were not very cordial at the time. It is tempting to think that some kind of nationalistic prejudice was conducive to the construction of a myth about the non-existence of the martyrs of Vilnius. A hypercritical approach characteristic of Chodynicky was instrumental in keeping him convinced of its truth⁹². It is regrettable that its originator was such a serious scholar as Chodynicky. It is a deep irony that the scholar who set out to dispel the legend produced the myth.

Myths tend to survive as long as their foundations are not exposed. So it is not surprising that the studies by Meyendorff and Ogitsky were

⁸⁸ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 429, 431, 434.

⁸⁹ F. DOBRYANSKY, *Описание рукописей виленской публичной библиотеки, церковно-славянских и русских*, Vilnius, 1882, p. 99, 194, 197, 203 and 283.

⁹⁰ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 428, n. 2, with reference to GOLUBINSKY, *История канонизации*, p. 542.

⁹¹ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 423-424 and 442-443.

⁹² We must bear in mind that much in the same way K. Chodynicky criticized the legend about the fourteen Franciscan martyrs in Vilnius, who suffered during the reign of Algirdas. Similarly this theory has long survived and has a rather long list of supporters. Only quite recently did S. C. Rowell pay adequate attention to the earlier sources (unknown to Chodynicky and most of those who followed in his steps) and proved that there was a real point about the Franciscan martyrs who must have suffered in Vilnius in c. 1369.

pathbreaking and compelled the scholars to treat once again of the matter which had long seemed to be definitely resolved. As a consequence there are a number of interpretations.

Some scholars came to suggest that the murder of three Orthodox believers could have been one of the consequences of the *coup d'état* led by brothers Algirdas and Kęstutis against their brother Jaunutis (Grand Duke of Lithuania 1341-1345)⁹³. The dethroned duke managed to escape, arrived in Moscow and eventually was baptized with his retinue⁹⁴. These scholars suppose that if Jaunutis fled to Moscow, he must have been sympathetic to Orthodoxy already in Vilnius. Consequently the future Orthodox martyrs are supposed to have been his secret allies uncovered and executed for political reasons. It seems quite evident that such an opinion is based on a false premise. There is no evidence which could prove that Grand Duke Jaunutis was a champion of Orthodoxy at the time when he was sitting on the grand-ducal throne. On the contrary, it was Algirdas who must have been more familiar with Orthodoxy because he came from Vitebsk to rule in Vilnius. The fact that Jaunutis fled to Moscow to appeal for help to his sister Aigusta's husband, Semen the Proud of Moscow (1342-1353), is rather an indication that he had no support even in those Ruthenian lands which were under Lithuanian control. The only known significant supporter of Jaunutis, his brother Narimantas, also abandoned Lithuania and sought Tatar help. In both cases help was unforthcoming. Jaunutis and Narimantas finally came to good terms with their brothers Algirdas and Kęstutis and returned to Lithuania some time in 1346-1347⁹⁵. It is hard to imagine that after brotherly friendship had been restored somebody (allegedly the future martyrs) would have acted so boldly in favour of the complete loser of the power struggle as to have themselves executed. It is also significant that the *Passio* mentions no other duke except the one who was lord and executioner of the martyrs. Thus the available sources do not provide any link between Jaunutis and the three martyrs of Vilnius.

We must remember that upon assuming supreme power in Lithuania Algirdas was strong enough to pursue an active foreign policy. The beginning of his rule did not lack spectacular episodes of violence. During his incursion into Livonia in 1345 Algirdas ordered the native Livonian chieftain to be beheaded on the spot⁹⁶. During the same campaign the Li-

⁹³ OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 241; A. NIKŽENTAITIS, *Gediminas*, Vilnius, 1989, p. 67.

⁹⁴ *Симеоновская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 18), St. Petersburg, 1913, p. 95.

⁹⁵ H. PASZKIEWICZ, *Jagiellonowie a Moskwa*, t. 1, Warsaw, 1933, p. 375-376.

⁹⁶ *Hermann de Wartberge Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. STREHLKE, p. 72.

thuanians captured a young German merchant who was unaware of military activities; he was submitted to refined tortures and finally sacrificed to pagan gods⁹⁷. These two men killed in 1345 had nothing to do with the *coup d'état* of 1345. By contrast, we may surmise that the future martyrs as servants of Algirdas may have taken part in the seizure of power on the side of their lord. But some time later they were doomed. The men in Livonia and the three courtiers of Algirdas may have been executed for different reasons, but the very executions seem to have served as a demonstration of the power of the new Grand Duke, who came to the throne in defiance of the succession arranged by his father Gediminas.

Closer investigation into the reasons of the martyrdom compels scholars to ask: Who was guilty of the murder? Analysing the part played by Algirdas the scholars face a puzzle. Why did Algirdas sentence to death these Orthodox courtiers as he himself was married twice to Russian princesses and some of his children were Orthodox too? Thus some scholars are inclined to diminish the personal guilt of Algirdas (with no good reason)⁹⁸. According to Meyendorff, it was not so much a general persecution of Christians, but rather the reluctance of the three young men to comply with external requirements at Algirdas' still pagan court that occasioned their martyrdom⁹⁹. Ogitsky stated that after Jaunutis, allegedly the champion of Orthodoxy, had been dethroned, Algirdas was compelled to acquiesce in the demands of the pagans to kill the three Orthodox believers¹⁰⁰. P. Rabikauskas considered that such a pagan reaction might have arisen naturally in the wake of the death of Maria, first wife of Algirdas (1346)¹⁰¹. Algirdas is supposed to have had to yield to the pagans living in that part of ethnic Lithuania which was ruled by a headstrong

⁹⁷ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, ed. HIRSCH, p. 505.

⁹⁸ D. Ogitsky, J. Meyendorff, R. Mažeika attached great importance to one fact from the *Passio* which they claimed to be proof of Algirdas's tolerance. While Algirdas and John were alone in the bath the latter confessed to being a Christian, but Algirdas, though full of wrath, did nothing (i. e. was tolerant). Even if this episode were true we can hardly expect the Grand Duke in these circumstances to do something more than he did then. Algirdas seems simply not to have acted as his own henchmen, and the given episode is irrelevant to prove or disprove the (in)tolerance of the Grand Duke. Cf. OGITSKY, *K ucmopuu*, p. 241; MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 31; MAŽEIKA, *Role of Pagan Lithuania*, p. 67-69.

⁹⁹ MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ OGITSKY, *K ucmopuu*, p. 241.

¹⁰¹ P. RABIKAUSKAS, *Lietuvių tauta ir ankstyvieji bandymai krikščionybė Lietuvoje*, ed. V. S. VARDYS, Chicago, 1997, p. 28.

pagan Kęstutis¹⁰². When the putative pagan reactionaries become the main culprits the scholars begin to contradict themselves, for at the same time they claim that a general persecution in fourteenth-century Lithuania was hardly possible¹⁰³. If we agree that a pagan reaction compelled the duke to satisfy their vicious demands, the actual number of the victims would not matter much and there would be no reason to deny that it was a persecution of Christians. No less interesting is the fact that the ghost of the pagan reaction was so influential that it caused a misreading of a post-humous miracle. J. Meyendorff saw its description as a proof that the sufferings of SS. Anthony, John and Eustathius marked the end of persecution of Christians in Lithuania¹⁰⁴. R. Mažeika has similarly remarked that after their sufferings no one else was martyred in Lithuania¹⁰⁵. However, the description of the miracle is more prosaic. It simply states that no one else was killed at the place of the martyrdom, which had originally served as a site for public executions¹⁰⁶.

Not so long ago R. Mažeika proposed yet another interpretation. She noted quite reasonably that the refusal of the martyrs to fulfil the orders of the duke might have been related to some kind of public defiance, but in addition she attempts to redate the martyrdom. In her opinion it occurred not in c. 1347 but in c. 1370¹⁰⁷. This redating seems to have gained some currency as it was accepted by Rowell¹⁰⁸. However, it is difficult to subscribe to this view, because the arguments supporting this redating are not convincing enough. By misreading the dating of the *Gustynya* chronicle Mažeika feels justified in doubting in the validity of the dating of Sophia I and other Russian chronicles. Moreover, a few works have sufficed to exert a strong impression on Mažeika that the chronology of the Russian chronicles is unreliable in general and such an abstract opinion is regarded as providing grounds for considering the date of 1347 as unreliable as well.

¹⁰² P. RABIKAIUSKAS, *Lietuvos krikšto aplinkybės*, in *LKMA Suvažiavimo Darbai*, 13 (1991), p. 94-95. The first wife of Algirdas is virtually unknown, her name (presumably Maria or Anne) is indicated only in the late sources of the sixteenth century. The date of her death is also uncertain, but in any case she must have died by the end of 1349. On these problems see TĘGOWSKI, *Pierwsze pokolenia*, p. 48-52.

¹⁰³ OGITSKY, *K ucmopuu*, p. 241; P. RABIKAIUSKAS, *Lietuvių tauta...* (cf. *supra*, n. 101), p. 28.

¹⁰⁴ MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 32 and 37-38.

¹⁰⁵ R. MAŽEIKA, *The Relations of Grand Prince Algirdas with Eastern and Western Christians*, in *La Cristianizzazione della Lituania...* (cf. *supra*, n. 1), p. 82, note 83.

¹⁰⁶ SPERANSKY, *Сербское оумие*, p. 29; BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 256.

¹⁰⁷ MAŽEIKA, *Role of Pagan Lithuania*, p. 71 and 73-78.

¹⁰⁸ ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 275.

The misreading of the dating of the martyrdom is a sad example of the pertinacity of errors in scholarly literature. From the nineteenth century onwards a great number of scholars (too long to enumerate them all) have thought that some Russian chronicles and the seventeenth-century writers date the martyrdom to the year 1328 and the canonization to 1354 or 1364 respectively¹⁰⁹. In both cases the relevant passages date the accession to the throne of the Rus'ian metropolitans Theognostus (1328) and Alexius (1354 or, mistakenly, 1364) and relate the martyrdom and canonization of the three martyrs not to the year but to the tenures of these two metropolitans. So the Gustynya chronicle or writers such as L. Kreuza, S. Kossow or J. Dubowicz do not indicate the exact date of the martyrdom or canonization at all, but they refer to some period of time within which, according to them, these events had taken place¹¹⁰. Although such late sources cannot be considered as reliable as contemporary sources, they nevertheless support rather than discredit the traditional date of 1347¹¹¹.

The above-mentioned bid for redating is an interesting case which shows how a twentieth-century scholar may tend to disregard the sources in favour of his/her intuition. It is not surprising then that the most convenient date *c.* 1370 was picked upon, because it was the time when Lithuania waged war against Moscow and the Teutonic Order and Algirdas pursued an active policy towards Byzantium in order to secure a separate metropolitanate for his realm. It was, as it were, a critical phase when conformity was regarded as conducive to political loyalty¹¹². I am ready to acknowledge that the date 1370 is more convenient than 1347, but the latter should not be simply dismissed for the sake of the convenience, which is not after all a reliable navigator through the labyrinth of history.

There is, of course, some ingenuity in these interpretations, but they suffer from too many inventions. The contrast between Algirdas and pagans is a pure invention. It distorts the account of the *Passio* that depicts

¹⁰⁹ It seems that D. Ogitsky was the first to notice such misreading in the case of J. Dubowicz's work (cf. OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 242).

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Густинская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 2), St. Petersburg, 1843, p. 349-350; KREUZA, *Obrona jedności cerkiewnej*, p. 59; KOSSOW, *Paterikon*, p. 176; DUBOWICZ, *Hierarchia*, p. 177-178.

¹¹¹ *Густинская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 2), St. Petersburg, 1843, p. 349. It is worth noting that already M. Priselkov noted that in comparison to the chronicle compilation of 1408 the very next compilation (that of Photius) supplies additional Lithuanian news from 1345, 1347, 1349, 1381, 1386 (M. D. PRISELKOV, *История русского летописания XI-XV вв.*, Leningrad, 1940, p. 146). The dating of all this information is correct, so why should an exception be made in the case of the martyrdom of 1347?

¹¹² ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 275.

the duke as the main protagonist of violence. The scholars who have entertained the idea about a persecution of Christians have traced it in an episode of the posthumous miracle (see n. 104 and 105) which cannot support their view; they have also noted the striking fact that the priest Nestor, who baptised the courtiers, acted undisturbed. Contradictory ideas only serve to thicken the mist that envelops the martyrdom. At the same time the interpretations under discussion depart from the *Passio* too quickly in favour of a general interpretation of large-scale policy. The attempts to relate the martyrdom to political events of the day seem to be artificial, because what is considered to be the causal relationship may be useful only as a backdrop. Some scholars believe that the martyrdom and the *coup d'état* of 1345 were intimately bound up and they are not disturbed that in all probability the martyrdom took place some two years later. Others propose that a still more intimate relation between the martyrdom and the political situation existed in c. 1370. The backdrop has been changed but the explanation of the martyrdom has not gained much. All these attempts, however, must be viewed as positive. In viewing the accounts from K. Chodynicki's time to the present we may say that a rule of thumb gave way to more sophisticated interpretations. Scholars tend no longer to dismiss the three martyrs as fictioned and they treat the *Passio* not merely as a literary work, but also as a historical source.

The *Passio* does not present the duke eager to punish his political opponents. It does not hint at the cries of the pagan mob demanding the execution of the deserters of the native religion. By contrast, we see the pagans who disdain John, because he failed to remain faithful both to his native and his new religion (true, for some time in the latter case)¹¹³. We do not even see the pagan priests who were depicted in the eighteenth-century Jesuit dramatic play¹¹⁴ and who were seen also by romantic historians in the nineteenth century¹¹⁵. What we see is the grand ducal court. We can catch a glimpse of the duke feasting, hunting or bathing. Certainly the most visible are those troublemakers who go bearded and long-haired and seem strangers to neatly-shaven pagans. Who, in short, observe a different rite. This aspect of court life has recently drawn S. C. Rowell's attention. Not dismissing the ill-founded date of c. 1370, he acutely re-

¹¹³ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 254.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 324 etc.

¹¹⁵ E. G. Ya. КИРЯНОВИЧ, *Исторический очерк Православия, Католичества и Унии в Белориссии и Литве с древнейшего до настоящего времени*, 2nd ed., Vilnius, 1899, p. 16-17.

marked that the martyrs were killed for violation of what was held to be law (customary, of course). Their crime was very serious, because "for a Lithuanian to reject Lithuanian religion is a felony more serious than simply disobeying the grand duke; it is a rejection of the tribe"¹¹⁶. Is such a conclusion well-based?

This grim conclusion may prompt one to imagine that in fourteenth-century pagan Lithuania to meet a Christian Lithuanian may be as difficult as to find pagans in contemporary Poland or England. Lithuanian paganism at the time even happens to be described as robust and well-organised as that of the Wends in the twelfth century¹¹⁷. This seems, however, not to have been the case. Firstly, we have to remember that a considerable number of the closest relatives of Lithuanian pagan rulers were Christians, mostly Orthodox believers. It is hard to believe that they were regarded as having rejected the tribe. Maybe such a privileged exemption was applied only to the members of the ruling dynasty, while the more humble rest was bound to persevere in their pagan religion? Secondly, we may note that dukes were as a rule followed by the members of their retinues in accepting the Orthodox faith. Most of them left Lithuania for Russian lands but their links were probably not always wholly severed with Lithuania proper. A good example is provided by prince Yury Vytautaitis whose wife and children returned to Lithuania when he had fallen in battle against the Livonian knights¹¹⁸. Probably there were no difficulties for them to retain their Orthodox faith in Lithuania just as the Orthodox sister of Gediminas had no trouble in running the Orthodox convent in Vilnius in c. 1341¹¹⁹. The princely entourage was not the only milieu receptive to Christianity¹²⁰. Already the thirteenth-century *Das Rigische Schuldbuch* mentions some Lithuanian merchants by Christian names and they were probably Christians¹²¹. In 1374 the future Russian metropolitan Cyprian

¹¹⁶ S. C. ROWELL, *Custom, Rites and Power in Medieval and Early Modern Lithuanian Society*, in *Kultūrų sankirtos*. Skiriama doc. dr. Ingės Lukšaitės 60-mečiui, Vilnius, 2000, p. 52.

¹¹⁷ R. FLETCHER, *The Barbarian Conversion from Paganism to Christianity*, New York, 1998, p. 503-504.

¹¹⁸ *Псковские и Софийские летописи* (= ПСРЛ, 5), St. Petersburg, 1851, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, p. 536.

¹²⁰ One of the most illustrious examples is provided by the son of King Mindaugas of Lithuania, Vojšėlk (or Vaišvilkas), who ruled Lithuania in 1264-1267; see D. M. GOLDFRANK, *The Lithuanian Prince-Monk Vojšėlk: A Study of Competing Legends*, in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 11 (1987), p. 44-76.

¹²¹ *Das Rigische Schuldbuch (1286-1352)*, ed. H. HILDEBRAND, St. Petersburg, 1872, p. 19, no. 251 (*Johannes Maseghe*); p. 36, no. 483, p. 49, no. 707, p. 108, no. 1715 (*Johannes Bythovte, Johanes Bitovte*); p. 82, no. 1255 (*Petrus Letowinus*).

converted many pagans to the Orthodox faith and there is no sign that they were affronted by their compatriots for violating what was held to be law¹²². At least some members of the House of Alšėniškiai adopted the Orthodox faith before the final introduction of the Catholic faith in Lithuania in 1387. Despite their Orthodoxy they even managed to retain their prominent position among the ruling elite¹²³. The very circumstances of the Lithuanian conversion in 1387 reveal a religious situation which was far more complicated than it could be supposed from an abstract image of a pagan country. By this time not all the Lithuanians were pagans and some followed a different rite in such large numbers as to require precautionary measures against the dissemination of Orthodoxy among the Lithuanians in 1387¹²⁴. All in all these remarks show that the decay of pagan religion was well-advanced before the final conversion to Christianity.

So it seems safe to assume that as much as the historian can perceive in reliable sources a great variation and decentralization were permanent features of Lithuanian paganism. As Rowell put it aptly: Lithuanian religion "was particularly suited to an agricultural and martial culture"¹²⁵. As a phenomenon of an illiterate society paganism was permeable to various influences. As a phenomenon of martial culture it could, of course, reveal cruel features as occasional human sacrifice or martyrdom. It is necessary to deal with this grim aspect of paganism.

Despite various contacts between Lithuania and her Christian neighbours the country long remained a dangerous mission field. Although the extant written sources do not allow us unequivocally to speak of any general persecution of individuals for their Christian faith, violent deaths did occasionally meet even those individual Christians who did not take part in military actions¹²⁶. The Orthodox martyrs of Vilnius were not alone in this respect, because the Franciscans had their martyrs in fourteenth-

¹²² РИБ, 1908, p. 182.

¹²³ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, ed. HIRSCH, p. 604; S. C. ROWELL, *Gediminaičių dinastinė politika Žemaitijoje 1350-1430*, in *Žemaičių praeitis*, 3 (1994), p. 131-133.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Akta unii Polski z Litwą*, ed. S. KUTRZEBA – W. SEMKOWICZ, Cracow, 1932, p. 2; *Codex diplomaticus ecclesiae cathedralis necnon dioceseos Vilnensis*, ed. J. FJALEK – W. SEMKOWICZ, vol. 1, Cracow, 1932-1948, p. 13; *Софийская первая летопись старшего извода* (= ПСРЛ, 6/1), Moscow, 2000, p. 489-490.

¹²⁵ ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 146.

¹²⁶ E. g. Peter of Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, ed. M. TÖPPEN, in *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum. Die Geschichtsquellen der Preussischen Vorzeit bis zum Untergange der Ordensherrschaft*, ed. T. HIRSCH – M. TÖPPEN – E. STREHLKE, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1861, p. 205: [...] *Conradus sacerdos de Alemania transit ad terram Lethowie ad convertendum gentes ibidem. Qui cum moram fecisset per duos annos ibi, Lethowini ipsum interfecerunt.*

century Lithuania too. The most renowned martyrdoms of Franciscans occurred c. 1341 and c. 1369¹²⁷. The Franciscan martyrdoms followed a well-established pattern. Missionaries too zealous in denouncing pagan practices invoked the fury of the pagans which resulted in the massacre of the votaries of the new faith¹²⁸. Scholars in discussing the fourteenth-century martyrdoms in Lithuania are inclined to compare the case of the Franciscan martyrs to that of the three martyrs of Vilnius. It seems that the very fact of Christian suffering entitles us to do so. According to M. Giedroyć, Gediminas had two Franciscan missionaries executed because they disregarded the Lithuanian principle of toleration (sic!) and the three Lithuanian converts to Orthodoxy suffered death for not dissimilar reasons¹²⁹. S. C. Rowell, in drawing parallels between the Catholic and Orthodox martyrs, notes that they violated the *status quo*, according to which all peoples should remain faithful to their own religion¹³⁰. But it is not too difficult to note that the activities pursued by the Franciscan missionaries and the Orthodox courtiers were not identical and we may be allowed to suspect that the reasons of these martyrdoms were not the same. In 1341 the Franciscan missionaries Martin of Ahd and Ulrich of Odlochovice had overtly insulted the pagans by denouncing their rites¹³¹. There is no hint at fervour of this kind in the case of the Orthodox martyrs. Not the impetuous behaviour, but the changed way of life and different appearance gradually aroused suspicion that they were Christians. In a word, there are no traces of proselytising in the case of the Orthodox martyrs. It seems quite natural to expect something different from the local men than from foreign missionaries. That is why the individual features of the martyrdom of the Orthodox martyrs cannot be ignored. The earliest version of their *Passio* must be discussed in its relation to contemporary and related events of Lithuanian history.

¹²⁷ V. GIDŽIŪNAS, *De fratribus minoribus in Lituania usque ad definitivam introductionem Observantiae (1245-1517)*, pt. 1, Rome, 1950, p. 30-33. A. NIKŽENTAITIS, Легенда XIV в. О мученичестве 14 францисканцев в Вильнюсе и историческая истина, in *Вспомогательные исторические дисциплины*, 21 (1990), p. 257-269. Some time ago, Rowell greatly contributed to the study of Franciscan martyrs in Lithuania, see S. C. ROWELL, *Lithuania and the West, 1337-1341 – A Question of Sources*, in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 20 (1989), p. 309-313.

¹²⁸ *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, p. 535-536.

¹²⁹ M. GIEDROYĆ, *The Arrival of Christianity in Lithuania: Baptism and Survival (1341-1387)*, in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, n. s., 22 (1989), p. 51.

¹³⁰ ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 148 and 275.

¹³¹ *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, p. 535-536.

The very drama of the martyrdom, especially in the case of SS. Anthony and John, takes place at the sovereign's court. This fact is so obvious that many historians have not considered it worthy of more attention and have too quickly fixed their eyes on the political events of the day. But the attempts to deal with the actual circumstances of the martyrdom inevitably involve the close and even intimate proximity of the Grand Duke, to something which in German might be called *Königsnähe*. The future martyrs attend court and are entitled to take part in the banquet. The future saint John assists the duke in the bath, while another would-be saint Eustathius accompanies the ruler in hunting¹³². All three serve the fire-worshipping duke of the Lithuanians. According to their social status they were servants, but not ordinary ones. Not every man serving at the court was allowed to feast in company with the duke or to serve him in the bath. Michael Balsamon in his *encomium* assumes that they were nobles (γενναῖοι)¹³³. The same writer maintains frankly that Eustathius was "one of the ruler's retinue" (τῆς ἐκείνου δορυφορίας [δορυφορία: bodyguard, escort])¹³⁴. Such servants as these made up the retinue of the Grand Duke, a formation which in Russian sources is called "the small retinue". One of the most important obligations of such retainers was their loyalty to their lord. They were supposed to be the most reliable force. When in 1336 duke Margiris faced mortal danger from the crusaders he was sheltered by the shields of his *clientes*¹³⁵. In 1341 Gediminas sent his *satellites* to arrest the Franciscan Martin of Ahd and it is most probable that they, as the agents of the duke, executed him¹³⁶. When Jogaila took Keštutis prisoner the latter was taken to Jogaila's patrimony in Krėva castle. Here was a safe place to keep the deadly enemy in custody of his own men in the proper sense of the word¹³⁷. The significance of retainers is well attested in the Vytautas's complaint against Jogaila and his brother Skirgaila. The servant of Skirgaila was entrusted to report confidential threats to Vytautas: "beware of me and I of you"¹³⁸. Despite the fragmentary evidence

¹³² BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 254 and 258.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹³⁵ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, ed. HIRSCH, p. 489.

¹³⁶ *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, p. 535-536.

¹³⁷ Jan Długosz, *Annales*, liber X, p. 99.

¹³⁸ *Vytauto skundas*, ed. K. ALMINAUSKIS, in *Archivum philologicum*, 8 (1939), p. 213-214. Cf. the earlier edition of *Dis ist Witoldes sache wedir Jagaln und Skargaln in Scriptorum rerum Prussicarum. Die Geschichtsquellen der Preussischen Vorzeit bis zum Untergange der Ordensherrschaft*, ed. T. HIRSCH - M. TÖPPEN - E. STREHLKE, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1863, p. 712-714.

it is quite clear that such individuals were rather important at the duke's court. The duke could not treat their loyalty with indifference because they could be dangerous to him as well.

Upon their conversion SS. Anthony and John adopted the Christian way of life and the change in their souls became manifest in their appearance too. They began to grow long hair and beards. The suspicion that they may be Christians was confirmed by their own confession. Then the duke feels the necessity to test their loyalty and orders them to eat meat. These prefer to disobey, because it is the time of fasting. So it became evident that they were more obedient to somebody else's commandments. The same test was later applied to St. Eustathius and the same refusal was the result. No doubt such a narrative of the *Passio* bears hagiographic overtones but the very clash of differing attitudes towards what one ought to do is quite natural and in a sense it could be viewed as some kind of public defiance¹³⁹. Consequently it became clear that their loyalty to the duke was tempered with their allegiance to the new faith.

Such a confrontation of loyalties may seem rather odd to the modern mind, but for barbarians this may have been something quite natural. In 1311 the Lithuanian troops laid waste the lands of the diocese of Varmia (Ermland, in Prussia) and camped on the enemy's soil. Grand Duke Vytenis of Lithuania (c. 1295-c. 1315) performed there blasphemies in front of Christian prisoners of war. He urged them to refuse Christ and accept paganism and fight against the Christians. As proof of his power Vytenis was keen on showing the impotency of Christian God and then he trampled on the Host. In exchange for their loyalty Vytenis promised to support them in everything they needed¹⁴⁰. Such support is reminiscent of the duty of a warlord to support his men. The gifts of a lord were to strengthen the loyalty of his subjects, to stress his domination over them¹⁴¹, for the real lord was he who was generous¹⁴². Perhaps Vytenis would have succeeded in increasing the number of his subjects in this way had not the German knights rushed in to attack his army. Algirdas' and Keštutis' efforts to procure new subjects in a similar way were more successful in

¹³⁹ MAŽEIKA, *Role of Pagan Lithuania*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, ed. HIRSCH, p. 456.

¹⁴¹ Cf. A. Ya. GUREVICH, *Категории средневековой культуры*, 2nd ed., Moscow, 1984, p. 229, 241-242; G. DUBY, *Le temps des cathédrales: l'art et la société 980-1420*, Paris, 1980 (repr.), p. 23-24.

¹⁴² M. BLOCH, *La société féodale*, Paris, 1978 (repr.), p. 233.

1365 when a number of inhabitants from the Skalvian land (also in Prussia) "surrendered to the power and religion of idolaters"¹⁴³.

The three martyrs of Vilnius by refusing to fulfil the order of their lord violated the time-honoured relations between unequal persons who were nevertheless expected to maintain solidarity. In my opinion this is the main reason why they were put to death. At the same time, however, we should observe that they did not refuse the secular authority as such. After their baptism they continued to serve at the grand-ducal court. Probably they imagined that their new religion and service were somehow compatible as long as the duke's orders did not contradict the commandments of the Christian faith. They remained faithful to the principle: "render into Caesar the things which are Caesar's and into God the things which are God's".

If we speak (as does Mažeika) of public defiance to the duke we must bear in mind that it might have appeared so from the point of Algirdas and his pagan entourage. However, this defiance does not necessarily imply the shift of political loyalty, from the Lithuanian to the Orthodox or Pro-Muscovite camp, as Mažeika, expanding some insights of Meyendorff, suggests by inventing the date of the martyrdom c. 1370. The three martyrs of Vilnius did indeed differ from their peers by having adopted the different faith and expressing it by renouncing practices which contradicted Christian ones. Some of the former were inherent in the mutual relationship between the lord and his subjects and so their refusal provoked a violent reaction. Further we may speculate that the martyrs, by continuing to serve at the pagan court even after their baptism, seem to have thought that their new faith and usual service might somehow be reconciled. But the pagans treated their behaviour as a challenge to their tradition, as a violation of the law, as Rowell observed, and the latter is essentially right to point out that we should not accept either Meyendorff's emphasis on compliance with "external requirements at court" or Mažeika's stress on the "suppression of any disobedience to his [Algirdas's] will alone"¹⁴⁴. But his conclusions overplay the role of pagan religion in implying that to renounce paganism is the same thing as to reject the tribe. The continual presence of Christian Lithuanians makes it difficult to equate the adoption of the new faith with a felony so serious as rejection of a tribe. The impious test seems to have been applied to the future martyrs as a means of proving their loyalty only because they were men close to the duke.

¹⁴³ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, ed. HIRSCH, p. 550.

¹⁴⁴ S. C. ROWELL, *Custom, Rites and Power...* (cf. *supra*, n. 116), p. 52.

Now we may advance as a conclusion the statement that the martyrdom came about as a result of the conflict between the pagan ruler and his Christian courtiers, between two parties, each of which acted according to its own motivation. There is no ground for supposing that Algirdas acted as a zealous pagan eager to suppress the Christian influence at his court. His motivation seems to have been purely secular, his punitive action was measured against disobedient servants who from his point of view violated a time-honoured tradition. It was these Christian servants whose motivation in not complying with certain demands of the ruler was religious, because they preferred the commandments of the Lord to those of the ruler. Their new Christian way of life was not neatly compatible with the pagan way of life and that caused a spark which ignited all the drama.

5. The Possible and Real Repercussions of the Martyrdom

The case of the three martyrs of Vilnius is an example of the actual influence of Orthodox Christianity at the grand-ducal court. This influence had to cause additional uneasiness to pagan rulers. It is noteworthy that according to the *Passio* the Orthodox sons of Algirdas secretly took part in the burial of St. Eustathius. Thus they expressed their solidarity not with their father but with their brother in the faith¹⁴⁵. In this respect Jan Długosz may again be right. The Polish chronicler relates that Algirdas bestowed his affection only upon his beloved son Jogaila at the expense of all others as if they had not existed at all¹⁴⁶. A similar note sounds in Russian chronicles too¹⁴⁷.

The range of Christian influence on foreign and domestic policy was bound to grow as vast areas with an Orthodox population came within the boundaries of Lithuania. It is hard to ascertain what repercussions among the pagans were produced by the Franciscan and Orthodox martyrs. Some signs of this may be seen in the miracles that followed. Although miracles are usually viewed as hagiographic *topoi* having nothing real outside literary convention, the case may not always be so simple¹⁴⁸. There are some

¹⁴⁵ It may be pointless to speculate about their personalities, suffice it here to say that at that time Algirdas already had at least two adult sons whose Christian names were Theodore and Andrew (on them see TĘGOWSKI, *Pierwsze pokolenia*, p. 57-58 and 67-68).

¹⁴⁶ Jan Długosz, *Annales*, liber X, p. 93.

¹⁴⁷ *Симеоновская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 18), St. Petersburg, 1913, p. 118.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. e. g. A. ANGENENDT, *Heilige und Reliquien: die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., Munich, 1997, p. 143.

typical examples and they come from quite different literary traditions. The body of St. Eustathius was miraculously preserved from wild beasts¹⁴⁹. Similarly the body of the Franciscan Martin of Ahd was left intact by wild dogs after the corpse was thrown out¹⁵⁰. Ulrich of Odlochovice and St. Eustathius were similarly mutilated, they both had their nose and ears cut off. One may doubt whether this really happened, but it would be futile to negate such events on the grounds that pagans used to look after or show respect to their dead victims. Despite the fact that the description of the miracles is typical of its kind they may also be seen as having a more prosaic side to them. The Franciscan *Passio* relates that in the wake of a miracle a great number of pagans were converted¹⁵¹. The miracle of the Orthodox martyrs is reported to have been such that after the execution of SS. Anthony and John no one else was killed in the place destined for public executions. The Christian possession of the sacred site was finally confirmed by the church built on it. This case may be seen as some kind of personal defeat for Algirdas.

In about the year 1374 the martyrs of Vilnius came to play their posthumous part in international politics. This time was marked by the war between Lithuania and Moscow, which along with the turmoil in the Tatar world may be treated as one of the most crucial events in Eastern Europe in the seventh and eighth decades of the fourteenth century. The army of Algirdas and his Rus'ian allies attacked Moscow three times (1368, 1370, 1372)¹⁵². This war coincided with recurrent attempts of Algirdas to secure a separate Orthodox metropolitanate for his realm. In 1370-1371 Algirdas wrote to Patriarch Philotheus complaining about the metropolitan Alexius: "not even our fathers knew such metropolitans as this metropolitan! He blesses the Muscovites to commit bloodshed. He never visits us. He never goes to Kiev. [...] The metropolitan should have blessed the Muscovites to help us, since we fight the Germans on their behalf. [...] Give us another metropolitan for Kiev, Smolensk, Tver', Little Russia, Novosil' and Nizhni-Novgorod!"¹⁵³

During the initial stage of the war the Patriarch of Constantinople staunchly supported Moscow. This changed rather suddenly in June 1370.

¹⁴⁹ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 260.

¹⁵⁰ *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, p. 536.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² L. V. CHEREPNIN, *Образование русского централизованного государства*, Moscow, 1960, p. 564-572.

¹⁵³ Quoted from MEYENDORFF, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 288-289.

By this time the patriarch was going to abolish the Lithuanian metropolitanate, which had formally been vacant since Metropolitan Romanus' death in 1362, but, as Meyendorff has suggested, at the last moment he refused to sign the act when he seems to have received a certain information from Algirdas and the Grand Duke Michael of Tver¹⁵⁴. The Patriarch rebuked Alexius for his neglect and as his warning went unheeded he dispatched his priest Cyprian as his envoy to investigate the situation on the spot¹⁵⁵. Having arrived in Lithuania in the winter of 1373-1374 Cyprian managed to obtain the good graces of Algirdas¹⁵⁶. Such an asset was not to the liking of Grand Duke Demetrius of Moscow or Metropolitan Alexius. A further patriarchal warning to Alexius was to no avail and then Algirdas threatened the patriarch that unless his demands were met he would obtain a metropolitan from the Latin Church or would convert to Catholicism¹⁵⁷. Faced by this prospect, Patriarch Philotheus finally consecrated Cyprian as Metropolitan of Kiev and Lithuania on 2 December 1375¹⁵⁸. His consecration is regarded as having been conducted in opposition to the canonical requirements since Metropolitan Alexius was still alive¹⁵⁹. What prompted the Patriarch Philotheus to act in this way?

The ordination of Cyprian as metropolitan of Lithuania usually is viewed as a concession on the part of the Byzantine Church to categorical demands made by Algirdas¹⁶⁰. However, considering the demands and their implementation one cannot fail to notice some discrepancy. The splitting of the metropolitanate of Kiev and All Rus' was not to become permanent because Patriarch Philotheus intended Cyprian to be the heir to Alexius¹⁶¹. Cyprian's ordination was surely a compromise on the part of Patriarch Philotheus but he did not sacrifice the future for the present. He as well as Metropolitan Cyprian seems to have preferred the interests of the Orthodox Church to those of Lithuanian or Muscovite rulers¹⁶². Some-

¹⁵⁴ MEYENDORFF, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 190.

¹⁵⁵ THOMSON, *Gregory Tsamblak*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁶ K. CHODYNICKI, *Kościół Prawosławny a Rzeczypospolita Polska. Zarys historyczny 1370-1632*, Warsaw, 1934, p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ *РИБ*, 1908, Appendix: p. 169-171, cf. p. 201.

¹⁵⁸ P. SOKOLOV, *Русский архиерей из Византии и право его назначения до начала XV века*, Kiev, 1913, p. 451-452.

¹⁵⁹ THOMSON, *Gregory Tsamblak*, p. 58 with references to the sources.

¹⁶⁰ SPERANSKY, *Сербское житие*, p. 23-24; KUCHKIN, *Сергий Радонежский*, p. 18.

¹⁶¹ Cf. V. A. USPENSKY, *Царь и патриарх. Харизма власти в России (Византийская модель и её русское переосмысление)*, Moscow, 1998, p. 385-386.

¹⁶² MEYENDORFF, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 253-254.

times Algirdas' threat is viewed as being like that of Casimir of Poland (1333-1370)¹⁶³. However, the similarity need not conceal the difference. The Polish king stated that he would rebaptise his Rus'ians unless the Patriarch provided them with an Orthodox metropolitan. The threat of Algirdas, on the contrary, was more modest. It must be viewed as nothing more than a diplomatic tool, because he never treated the Catholic option seriously¹⁶⁴. A conversion to the Roman Catholic faith would have irreparably damaged the ambition of Algirdas to dominate all Rus'¹⁶⁵.

These remarks are intended only to provide some nuances to the picture which depicts Algirdas in too strong a light and Philotheus in too weak a one. We may recall an idea of the Polish historian S. Smolka who in discussing the ordination of Cyprian suspected that the Orthodox Church entertained some hopes with regard to Algirdas¹⁶⁶. I am sure that in this respect the *Passio* of the three martyrs was useful.

In all probability it is no accident that the image of the Lithuanian duke is not the same throughout all the *Passio*. The very description of the murder presents him as a real tormentor, whose actions fit in ill with his behaviour at the end of the story¹⁶⁷. As we already know, Algirdas must have shown his benevolence in releasing Russian captives from prison in c. 1374. At the same time he is depicted as approving the wish of these Orthodox believers to build the church. He even pinpointed a site for it where the martyrs had previously been hanged. According to Michael Balsamon this church was built in commemoration of the martyrs who had been killed by the same ruler: "the established church and the holy liturgy for their virtue is in their honour and in condemnation of the ruler"¹⁶⁸. That is why the author could not but wonder at such activities of Algirdas: "is that not an all-surpassing exploit that this infidel did not grudge their remains to us, did not trouble to venerate them in common ceremonies and allowed the church to be built in the place of their martyrdom"¹⁶⁹. If in c. 1347, immediately after the martyrdom, the priest Nestor or the Orthodox sons of Algirdas could only secretly take part in

¹⁶³ ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending*, p. 167.

¹⁶⁴ D. BARONAS, *Lithuania's Entry...* (cf. *supra*, n. 1), p. 31-44.

¹⁶⁵ *Hermann de Wartberge Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. STREHLKE, p. 80.

¹⁶⁶ S. SMOLKA, *Kiejstut i Jagiello*, in *Pamiętnik Akademii umiejętności w Krakowie*, Wydział: filologiczny i historyczno-filozoficzny, Cracow, 1889, p. 115.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁸ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 240.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

the burial of the martyrs, so after a few decades the picture had altered beyond recognition. This impression becomes even stronger when we take into account that in 1374 it was possible to bring some parts of the holy relics of the martyrs to Constantinople, where they were placed in Hagia Sophia. How are we to explain the part played by Algirdas, his volte-face in the last years of his life? It seems plausible that the cult of the three martyrs could serve to promote the Orthodox faith among pagan Lithuanians as was really the case during Cyprian's stay in Lithuania in c. 1373-1374. Such a promotion could be one of the considerations for Patriarch Philotheus' canonization of the three martyrs in 1374¹⁷⁰. One passage in the office seems worth quoting here: "Most Gracious [Lord], Thy honourable blood which spilled forth to enlighten the whole of Creation has made a multitude of martyrs and by Thy will [even] barbarians die for Thee, clearly confessing Thee to be God!"¹⁷¹ Further indication of the hopes on the part of the Orthodox Church for the conversion of the pagan Lithuanians may also be seen in the fact that a number of Lithuanian towns were inserted into the list of nearly and remote Russian cities, which, according to the recent redating by V. Yanin, was composed in c. 1375-1381¹⁷². The martyrdom under discussion could provide more grounds for expecting a conversion and thus contribute to the establishment of the Lithuanian metropolitanate. Then it becomes reasonable to suggest that Grand Duke Algirdas preferred not to worry too much about his earlier misdeeds at a time when far greater affairs were at stake. Such behaviour only testifies to Algirdas's flexibility and prudence, of which the Russian chroniclers were not unaware¹⁷³. Similar prudence can be seen on the part of the Orthodox Church as well. Perhaps it is not by chance that the early *Passiones* do not mention the tormentor by name. They were compiled at a time when people were still waiting for Algirdas's conversion, which never came.

Not all the relics which went to Constantinople remained there, some of them continued their travels to North-East Rus', where Grand Duke Demetrius caused problems by taking a dislike to Cyprian¹⁷⁴. So at the

¹⁷⁰ OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 242.

¹⁷¹ BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai*, p. 250: "Истекшая прелъгагыи кровь твоа честнаа вса освати теарь, множество мученикъ съдѣлаавши и варвары егоямелене Бога та възвещаваше тебе ради оумирають".

¹⁷² V. L. YANIN, *Новгород и Литва: пограничные ситуации XIII-XIV веков*, Moscow, 1998, p. 67.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Симеоновская летопись* (= ПСРЛ, 18), St. Petersburg, 1913, p. 118.

¹⁷⁴ MEYENDORFF, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, p. 203 and 209-211.

very beginning of 1377 the embassy of Patriarch Philotheus arrived in North-East Rus'. This issue has recently been dealt with by V. Kuchkin. According to him the mission of this embassy was to explain to Demetrius and Alexius why the Patriarch had acted as he had with regard to Cyprian. The Byzantine diplomats Ioannes Dokianos and Georgios Perdikes first addressed abbot Sergius of Radonezh, hoping for his benevolent influence on Metropolitan Alexius and Grand Duke Demetrius. They presented him with patriarchal gifts that included a golden cross which among other relics also contained those of the new Lithuanian martyrs. Kuchkin suggested that this cross was to serve as a means to prompt Sergius to think of the situation of the Lithuanian Orthodox Church which could only in the person of Cyprian enjoy proper spiritual care¹⁷⁵. The talks with the patriarchal envoys were so important that Sergius at once went to Moscow to Metropolitan Alexius. Although he did not fulfil all the expectations the Byzantine envoys placed in him, he nevertheless supported Cyprian, not Demetrius' *protégé* Mitiay, in his attempts to mount the metropolitan throne in Moscow after Alexius had died¹⁷⁶. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with further developments, suffice it here to note that during the Lithuano-Muscovite confrontation the Patriarchate of Constantinople pursued a circumspect and effective policy which was far from sacrificing the interests of the Church. The three martyrs of Vilnius came to be used as a means to support the traditional policy of keeping the Russian metropolitanate united. The same message is represented in the iconographic program of the major *sakkos* of Photius where the images of the martyrs were embroidered at a time when the unity of the Russian Church was under threat due to the Grand Duke Vytautas' attempts to install Gregory Tsamblak as metropolitan in his realm¹⁷⁷. As for Algirdas, it may be suggested that he had to comply with this policy and be satisfied with the compromise proposed by Patriarch Philotheus.

¹⁷⁵ KUCHKIN, *Сергий Радонежский*, p. 18-19.

¹⁷⁶ G. M. PROKHOROV, *Повесть о Митяе. Русь и Византия в эпоху Куликовской битвы*, Leningrad, 1978, p. 52-60.

¹⁷⁷ MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 41-42; A. PAPADAKIS – J. MEYENDORFF, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church, 1071-1453 A.D.* (= *The Church in History*, 4), Crestwood (NY), 1994, p. 347. Gregory Tsamblak's consecration has recently been critically discussed by THOMSON, *Gregory Tsamblak*, p. 64-71.

6. The Cult of the Martyrs

This section is not intended to be exhaustive because up to this day many aspects of the cult of the three martyrs remain obscure or shrouded in mystery. It attempts to indicate rather than solve the problems.

The beginning of the local veneration of the three martyrs of Vilnius must be seen in the very event of the martyrdom, which must be dated to c. 1347. As has already been suggested, there are no grounds for disbelieving the information of the Russian chronicles, and we may suppose that at the outset the centre of their veneration was St. Nicholas' Orthodox church in Vilnius, where these martyrs had originally been buried. This wooden church has not survived to this day, but archaeological investigations conducted in 1981 on this site revealed that this place was one of the earliest on which Orthodox believers established themselves in Vilnius¹⁷⁸. The very fact that this martyrdom did not go unnoticed in pagan Lithuania must partly be attributed to the local Orthodox community. The events of 1374 when part of the relics was transported to Constantinople and was received at Hagia Sophia by Patriarch Philotheus must be viewed as an official canonization. This was the beginning of the spread of their cult throughout the Orthodox *oikumene*. On account of the arrival of the cross of Philotheus in Russia in 1377 we may conclude that Metropolitan Alexius came to know of the Lithuanian martyrs by then at the latest. The later seventeenth-century writers credited Metropolitan Alexius with the introduction of their veneration on April 14 in Russian Orthodox Church. Many historians have doubted this information¹⁷⁹, but the later research does provide at least some grounds for regarding it as not wholly devoid of substance. The existence of the South Slavic redaction shows that the three martyrs came to be known at least in Serbia in the fifteenth century. The fact that the eulogy of Michael Balsamon was translated into Church Slavonic and is preserved in a manuscript compiled in 1438 by the Moldavian bookman Gabriel Uric attests to their being known in that country too¹⁸⁰. The manuscripts of the late fifteenth — mid-sixteenth century com-

¹⁷⁸ G. ZABIELA, *Laidosena pagoniškoje Lietuvoje*, in *Lietuvos archeologija*, 15 (1998), p. 358.

¹⁷⁹ What difficulties were faced by scholars in establishing the date of the canonization may be seen in GOLUBINSKY, *История канонизации*, p. 542; A. E. PRESNYAKOV, *Образование Великоорусского государства. Очерки по истории XIII–XIV столетий*, Petrograd, 1918, p. 295–296.

¹⁸⁰ P. P. PANAITESCU, *Manuscrisele Slave din Bibliotheca Academiei RPR*, vol. 1, Bucharest, 1959, p. 246, Nr. 164: 10, f. 170^v–203^v: "Рѣчьта свѣтъишжа Божіа великыа

ing from Lithuania and Poland provide proof beyond doubt of their continued veneration among the Orthodox of these two countries.

Almost all the evidence relating to their cult shows that the three martyrs have always been venerated together¹⁸¹. Nevertheless, the feast day of their commemoration remained unsettled for some time. The office of the martyrs in the South Slavic redaction commemorates them on the Sunday before the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, i. e. December 4-10, and this date, as D. Ogitsky has suggested, seems to have been established by the synod at Constantinople¹⁸². This date, however, was not universally accepted since different manuscripts show that the three martyrs were commemorated on January 14, April 14 or 24, September 20. The January and April dates seem to have been orientated to the day of St. Anthony's and St. John's death: January 14 and April 24 respectively. The December and September dates are most probably related to St. Eustathius. By the seventeenth century, however, the date of April 14 had prevailed and this remains so to this day (new style: April 27)¹⁸³.

It goes without saying that the martyrs of Vilnius did not enjoy popularity as intense as that of the most renown Orthodox saints. Nevertheless

цркви Мухана Балсама, на святые и славетныя новонавренныя Христовы мученикы Антонія, Іванна, Еустафія [inc.] Аще же и божественныя кромѣвпо-мошнине”.

¹⁸¹ There is some evidence that St. Eustathius might have been especially venerated, more than the other two. Not so long ago the Russian scholar A. Turilov discovered a Eulogy to Eustathius of Vilnius which is read on December 17. The text is not original as it represents Clement of Ochrid's homily for an apostle or martyr which could be read in honour of any saint not having his/her own eulogy, but it does show that there was a special reverence for St. Eustathius. The manuscript is kept in the archives at Yaroslavl' and is dated to the first third of the sixteenth century (Yaroslavl', Государственный архив Ярославской области, коллекция рукописей, № 418: Торжественник; the eulogy is on f. 355-358"). The manuscript was described in 1957, but with no mention of this eulogy (B. B. LUK'YANOV, *Описание коллекции рукописей Государственного архива Ярославской области XIV-XV веков*, Yaroslavl, 1957, p. 78). I am grateful to A. Turilov for all this information. N. Barsukov gives reference to still another copy of the homily "O Krugleci" (Eusthatius' pagan name) see: N. P. BARSUKOV, *Источники русской агиографии*, St. Petersburg, 1882, p. 46.

¹⁸² OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 243.

¹⁸³ This may be concluded from the fact that by this time the date of April had gained currency in Orthodox, Uniate, Catholic, and Old Believers' martyrology with regard to the latter it may be noticed that the three martyrs of Vilnius are mentioned under April 14 in the horologium (Часослов) published at Moscow in between 04.12.1651 and 17.03.1652, which at the request of Old Believers was later republished several times in Poland and Lithuania, at Vilnius in 1772, at Suprasl in 1786 and 1791, at Pochajev in 1788 (Z. JAROSZEWICZ-PIERESLAWCEW, *Druki starowierców wobec tradycji książki rękopiśmiennej i wczesnej drukowanej*, in *Najstarsze druki cerkiewnosłowiańskie i ich stosunek do tradycji rękopiśmiennej*, Materiały z sesji (Krakow 7-10 XI 1991), ed. J. RUSEK – W. WITKOWSKI – A. NAUMOW, Cracow, 1993, p. 266).

it is worth noting that they were also venerated in the milieu of some Russian dukes. Prior to the First World War a reliquary, containing the relics of the “newly-manifested Lithuanian martyrs”, was found in Mliov village in the province of Tver’. The inscription shows the reliquary was made in 1414 by Ivan Danilovich, a scion of the princes of Suzdal’. Ivan Danilovich was a grandson of Boris Konstantinovich († 1394), the duke of Suzdal’ who in 1354 married the daughter of Algirdas, Agripina¹⁸⁴. It seems that the same family of Suzdal’ princes owned the icon-reliquary dated to late fifteenth — early sixteenth century which also contained the relics of the Lithuanian martyrs¹⁸⁵. Therefore, Ogitsky has good reasons to suggest that these relics came into the possession of Suzdal’ princes because of their relations with Lithuanian dukes¹⁸⁶. The more exact time and circumstances of this acquisition remain unknown¹⁸⁷.

Some idea of the significance of the three martyrs within the Russian Orthodox Church may be gathered from the fact that they were canonised by the Moscow synod of 1549¹⁸⁸. Their *Passio* was included in the Macarian menologium and later in such a popular collection of saints’ Lives as Demetrius of Rostov’s menologium.

All this evidence clearly shows how far Chodynicky went astray when he maintained that the cult of the three martyrs was initiated in Moscow as a piece of anti-Catholic propaganda and that there had long been no trace of its introduction into Poland-Lithuania¹⁸⁹. Such a view only betrays Chodynicky’s perception of the exclusively and permanently anti-Catholic nature of their cult, which does not do justice to all the evidence coming from before the nineteenth century. The veneration of the three martyrs of Vilnius was born locally and continued ever since the fourteenth-century. The provenance of the manuscripts containing their *Passio* indicates that they were quite widely known by the early sixteenth century. It must be emphasised that in the seventeenth century the three martyrs of Vilnius came to be venerated by the Uniate Church and they were no strangers to

¹⁸⁴ TĘGOWSKI, *Pierwsze pokolenia*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ See f. no. 28.

¹⁸⁶ OGITSKY, *К истории*, p. 234.

¹⁸⁷ J. Meyendorff surmised that this reliquary might have been connected with the activities of Metropolitan Photius (MEYENDORFF, *Three Lithuanian Martyrs*, p. 43), but he does not provide conclusive evidence for this.

¹⁸⁸ GOLUBINSKY, *История канонизации*, p. 68-71, 100 and 103-104. It must be noted that the Russian ecclesiastical synods of late 1540s are still insufficiently explored (B. M. KLOSS, *Избранные труды*, vol. 2, Moscow, 2001, p. 367-369).

¹⁸⁹ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 429 and 443.

Catholics either. A prominent Jesuit Wojciech Kojalowicz even listed them among the Greek-rite patron saints of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The latter also included such Muscovite saints *par excellence* as Metropolitans Peter († 1326) and Alexius († 1378), let alone such early Russian saints as Vladimir or Boris and Gleb¹⁹⁰. So we must recognise the simple truth that despite mutual tensions the believers of different confessions venerated their common saints¹⁹¹.

The nineteenth century heralded quite a new stage in the cult of the Vilnius martyrs. Uncorrupted bodies were found in the Orthodox Church of the Holy Ghost in Vilnius in 1814 and they came to be identified with the martyrs under consideration. I am not going to prove or disprove that these relics are authentic or not because I am not inclined to adopt a partisan standpoint, as was the case in the early twentieth century when some Polish historians (Zahorski, Chodyncki) were overactive in denying not only the historicity of the martyrdom, but also the authenticity of the relics, and when Russians maintained quite the opposite¹⁹². I intend to provide material which will enable everybody to form his/her own opinion.

Let us begin at the end. The reliable evidence of the Russian chronicles informs us that the martyrs were originally buried in the St. Nicholas Orthodox church in Vilnius. There is no other mention of their burial site before the seventeenth century. It seems that S. Kossow happens to be the earliest bookman who noted that the martyrs were buried in the Holy Trinity church at Vilnius¹⁹³. W. Kojalowicz maintained the same, but it seems that by this time the exact burial site had already been forgotten¹⁹⁴. Not-

¹⁹⁰ W. KOJALOWICZ, *Miscellanea rerum ad statum ecclesiasticum in Magno Lituaniae Ducatu pertinentium*, Vilnius, 1650, p. 4-9.

¹⁹¹ Cf. THOMSON [Review], p. 185.

¹⁹² It is rather strange that a scholar who negates the martyrdom as a real historical event at the same time feels obliged to argue that the bodies of the martyrs could not survive (W. ZAHORSKI, *Legenda...* [cf. *supra*, n. 81], p. 71-72). As for Russian historians it must be said that none of those cited in this article has ever wondered about the very survival, let alone the authenticity, of the relics found in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁹³ KOSSOW, *Paterikon*, p. 176: "[...] zostało iednak trzech dworzan wielkiego xiązęcia męczennikami, bo ich za wiarę chrześciańską na dębie powieszano, na tym mieyscu gdzie dzisiaj w Wilnie cerkiew Ś. Troycy. Ktorych tamże pochowawszy z nabożeństwem chrześciance cerkiew pomienioną zbudowali byli drewnianą".

¹⁹⁴ W. KOJALOWICZ, *Miscellanea...* (cf. *supra*, n. 190), p. 9: *Sepulti Vilnae in templo Sanctissimae Trinitatis ritus Graeco-Russi uniti*. The comparison of these two accounts shows that Kossow only in passing noted their burial site relying seemingly on a premise that where there had been torture there must be a grave. Kojalowicz seems only to have elaborated such a conjecture. Although he states that their grave is in the Holy Trinity church, in describing the noteworthy objects of this church he mentions only the image of the Mother of God (*ibid.*, p. 25).

withstanding such uncertainty, the Uniates in the next century seem to have tried to find the bodies of the martyrs, but with no result¹⁹⁵. Only in the nineteenth century did the Orthodox monks of the Holy Ghost monastery succeed in finding the bodies.

This happened in 1814¹⁹⁶. At first the news of the discovery did not go beyond the walls of the monastery. Four years later the archimandrite of the Holy Ghost monastery Joel Kotovich asked the Lithuanian military governor Alexander Rimsky-Korsakov to permit the event to be announced publicly. Such a request received only a lukewarm reception by the governor, who postponed the matter until additional miracles proved the relics to be holy¹⁹⁷. In 1825, while the governor was waiting for miracles, the rumour spread from the monastery into town and the population became agitated. On April 14 Christians of various creeds flocked to the relics. Such unforeseen enthusiasm caused the Vilnius police chief Shlykov to intervene and he demanded that archimandrite Joel explain what was going on¹⁹⁸. The archimandrite informed him that the relics of the saintly martyrs were indeed in the monastery and that he was unable to oppose the good will of believers as they came to venerate them. He was also sure that the newly found bodies were those of the three martyrs of Vilnius¹⁹⁹. At the same time the archimandrite informed the Orthodox archbishop of

¹⁹⁵ I. KULCZYNSKI, *Specimen Ecclesiae Ruthenicae ab origine susceptae fidei ad nostra usque tempora in suis capitibus seu primatibus Russiae cum S. sede apostolica semper unitae*, Rome, 1733, p. 14: *et addo hoc tantum, corpora eorundem hactenus reperiri non posse, quamvis credantur delitescere sub terra in horto nostri monasterii Vilnensis SS. Triadis.*

¹⁹⁶ Lithuanian Historical State Archive (Vilnius), F. 378 – 1825 – 274, archimandrite Joel's response to the chief of Vilnius Police, Shlykov, f. 2^r (22.04.1825).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 2^r-3.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 1-1^r (the report of Vilnius police chief Shlykov to A. Rimsky-Korsakov, 22.04.1825): "...На сих днях вознесся по городу слух, который происходит из Виленского свято-Духова монастыря, что в нем обретены мощи трех мучеников: Антония, Иоанна и Евстафия, пострадавших за веру христианскую в 1342 году; и потому к тем мощам ныне обращается народ для поклонения и отправляются в монастыре молебнию. Не имея достаточного сведения о столь важном событии для донесения о том начальству, я требовал от господина архимандрита сего монастыря подробного сведения..."

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, the response of archimandrite Joel to Shlykov, f. 2-2^r: "... Нетленные мощи угодников Божиих Антония, Иоанна и Евстафия, пострадавших за веру христианскую 1342 года и к лику святых 14 апреля церквою причисленных, действительно в свято-Духовом монастыре обретаются. Подтверждается сие как преданием старожиллов (he seems to have in mind their burial place) и описанием жития святых, так и самую очевидностью, ибо по закону природы никакому телу не может быть свойственные нетление и как бы противоестественность, как только телам благоугодивших Господу, в коих он яко Всесильный удивляет вся своя хотения..."

Minsk and Lithuania, Anatolius, about the discovery of the relics²⁰⁰. The military governor did the same by drawing the archbishop's attention to the fact that the public announcement of the discovery (огласка) had taken place without informing the archimandrite's superior and without the permission of the Holy Synod²⁰¹. Upon receiving the news the archbishop acted very cautiously. He took measures to ensure that false rumours were not spread among the population and asked the archimandrite to submit all the necessary information for identification of the bodies. At the same time he permitted the liturgical service since the Orthodox Church did indeed acknowledge these martyrs as saints²⁰². Soon the news about the goings-on in Vilnius reached St. Petersburg²⁰³ and on 4 June 1825 the Ministry of the Interior asked Rimsky-Korsakov to send a most detailed account (подробнейшаго известия) so that the Cabinet of Ministers could be duly informed²⁰⁴. We do not know what exactly Rimsky-Korsakov told the Ministry as we are only acquainted with a draft of Rimsky-Korsakov's response. It contains no more special information about the discovery in 1814 than there is in archimandrite Joel's response and in Archbishop Anatolius' letter²⁰⁵.

Finally, the news reached the Holy Synod and according to K. Chodynicki this was the only central institution which favourably treated the matter from the very first²⁰⁶. In 1826 the Holy Synod asked the archbishop Anatolius for his opinion in this matter. By this time the archbishop had no doubt that the relics were genuine. In his reply he advised the Synod to announce the discovery of the relics since this would strengthen the Orthodox faith. The time for celebrations approached. Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) was also informed. Taking into account that Vilnius was far from homogeneous either from the religious or national point of view the Tsar ordered Grand Duke Constantine to enquire whether the participation of secular authorities in authenticating the relics could give rise to unfavourable comments from within the Catholic Church. The

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 3.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, the letter of A. Rimsky-Korsakov to Archbishop Anatolius, f. 5 (26.04.1825).

²⁰² *Ibid.*, the letter of Archbishop Anatolius to A. Rimsky-Korsakov, f. 6-6^v, (03.05.1825).

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, f. 4 and f. 11. A. Rimsky-Korsakov informed the Ministry of Education and Spiritual Affairs by letter of 28 April 1825. The office of Vilnius civil governor informed the Ministry of Interior by letter of 21 May 1825.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 11-11^v.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 12-13 (June 21, 1825).

²⁰⁶ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 438.

obligation to provide the answer devolved on N. Novosil'cev, head of Vilnius educational district, who admitted that secular participation would be regarded unfavourably not only by Catholics but also by other non-Orthodox believers, so it was decided that only the representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities should take the central part in the solemnities. In 1826 Archbishop Anatolius of Minsk and Bishop Laurence of Chernigov officially authenticated the relics and access to them became public²⁰⁷.

Already in the nineteenth century not only Russian professional historians, but also amateurs faced a difficulty in explaining how these relics came to the Holy Ghost church. How one could reconcile contradicting evidence suggesting that the martyrs had been buried in St. Nicholas and Holy Trinity churches but their bodies were finally discovered in the church of the Holy Ghost? Two theories based not on fact but on conjecture were advanced. The more popular one posited that the relics were transferred from the Holy Trinity church to that of the Holy Ghost in the mid-seventeenth century when Vilnius was occupied by Russian and Cossack armies. In the course of time all trace of the location of their new burial site, however, disappeared and only in 1814 did hieromonk Herman, passing through Vilnius on his way from Austria to St. Petersburg, indicate the exact place²⁰⁸. It was alleged that Herman had visited Constantinople and was lucky enough to find a mid-seventeenth century letter from an archimandrite of the Holy Ghost monastery which contained the information about the tomb²⁰⁹. Even more fantastic is the notion that the said hieromonk came to know of their burial site from the correspondence of Patriarch Philotheus and Metropolitan Alexius!²¹⁰ Already Chodynicky justly remarked that the letter allegedly seen by Herman is mentioned only in the early twentieth century in a brochure published by the Orthodox

²⁰⁷ Here I rely on Chodynicky's account in *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 438-440. The matter certainly requires special investigation as it is still not quite clear why and how the initial scepticism on the part of Rimsky-Korsakov and even of Archbishop Anatolius in 1825 gave way to wholehearted support for authenticating the relics in 1826. Some more information about these proceedings may be found in *Записки Иосифа митрополита литовского*, ed. Императорскою академією наук по завещанию автора, St. Petersburg, 1883, vol. 2, p. 764. N. N. VATYUSHKOV, *Памятники русской старины в западных губерниях империи*, fasc. 5, St. Petersburg, 1872, p. 103, although these works are rather more commemorative than analytic.

²⁰⁸ Н. Н. VATYUSHKOV, *Памятники русской старины...*, p. 14, 103.

²⁰⁹ *Страдания св. Виленских мучеников и чудотворцев Антония, Иоанна и Евстафия*, ed. Виленского св.-Духовского братства, Vilnius, 1911, p. 15.

²¹⁰ А. VINOGRADOV, *Православная Вильна. Описание виленских храмов*, Vilnius, 1904, p. 10.

Fraternity of the Holy Ghost²¹¹ and indeed other data at our disposal allow us safely to relegate this theory to the dustbin of quasi-historical myths. Thus the Uniates of Vilnius complained to the authorities in 1661 that the monks of the Holy Ghost monastery had robbed their church during the Russian occupation (1655-1661). They listed the missing items, among which one can find the relics of Patriarch Ignatius of Moscow († c. 1640) and the Uniate Metropolitan Joseph Rutsky of Kiev († 1637), but there is no mention whatsoever about the three martyrs of Vilnius²¹². Hieromonk Herman was indeed present in Vilnius in 1814 and took part in the discovery of the relics but all the conjectures about his archival research at Constantinople are total fiction. Slightly more likelihood, but nothing more, can be attributed to the theory advanced in 1843 by N. Yelagin. He supposed that the bodies of the martyrs could have been transferred to the newly erected Orthodox Church of the Holy Ghost in 1609 when the Church of the Holy Trinity fell into the hands of the Uniates²¹³. This theory may seem more likely only because there is no documentary evidence which might disprove it and *if* we believe that archimandrite Joel or Archbishop Anatolius of Minsk identified the relics correctly.

Be that as it may, the focal point in the veneration of the three martyrs of Vilnius became the three uncorrupted bodies found in the crypt of the Holy Ghost church. The Russian authorities were interested in exploiting the cult of the three martyrs for propagating the Orthodox faith even among Catholics²¹⁴. An ardent promoter of their veneration was the Uniate bishop, later the Orthodox Metropolitan, Joseph Semashko, who played a crucial role in reducing the Uniates of the Russian Empire to Orthodoxy. On his initiative the funds were raised and the narrow crypt was remodelled and converted into an underground church, which on

²¹¹ CHODYNICKI, *Geneza i rozwój*, p. 436.

²¹² *Акты издаваемые виленскою археографическою комиссиею*, vol. 9, Vilnius, 1878, p. 186-188.

²¹³ N. ELAGIN, *Первые христианские мученики в Литве*, in *Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения*, 38 (1843), p. 128. The same was repeated by Арсений (архимандрит), *Летопись церковных событий и гражданских, поясняющих церковные от Рождества Христова до 1879 года*, St. Petersburg, 1880, p. 777.

²¹⁴ *Męczeństwo trzech Litwinów: SS. Antoniego, Jana i Eustachego, umęczonych w mieście Wilnie roku pańskiego 1342*, tłumaczenie ze sławiańskiego, Vilnius, 1840, p. 20: "Uciekamyż się i my do przyczyny SS. ziomków naszych Antoniego, Jana i Eustachego, im przekładamy nasze utrapienia i niedolę! ich błagamy by się za nami Boga wstawiali! [...] Nakoniec, sprawcie to waszą przyczyną, aby ta wiara S. za którąście wy zostali umęczeni, od wszystkich mieszkańców ziemi naszej, była należycie zrozumiana, przyjęta i jednostaynie myślą, słowy i uczynkiem wykonywana. Amen".

April 14, 1851, was dedicated to SS. Anthony, John and Eustathius. After exactly one year the relics were laid in the new brass coffin-reliquary. On this occasion Metropolitan Semashko made a speech in which he declared that the Lord had preserved the relics of the martyrs on the borders of Holy Rus' with special intention and further prayed for them to be a shield against the enemies of Orthodoxy in the country, and called for their help in separating sheep from goats and in returning apostates from the Orthodox Church into its fold. Feeling that death was near, Metropolitan arranged his tomb *apud sanctos*. The memorial plaque has on it: "Lord, remember your servant, the priest Joseph. Holy martyrs of Vilnius, Anthony, John, Eustathius, pray to the Lord for me, a sinner"²¹⁵.

As long as Lithuania remained in the clutches of Russia the Russians regarded the martyrs of Vilnius not simply as saints who died for the faith, but also as supporters of politically vital issues²¹⁶. Russian imperial propaganda had long been served by Russian historiography which tried to insinuate that Russia had 'historical' rights to the territory that was annexed in the wake of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795), an attempt that has aptly been characterised as "aggression into the past"²¹⁷. It is no surprise, then, that the martyrs of Vilnius were used as one more example to show that Lithuania had been Orthodox before it had become Catholic. There is no doubt that Russian imperial policy was hostile to Polish, and later Lithuanian, national aspirations, and it was quite natural that the three martyrs should become embroiled in bitter ideological strife in which, unfortunately, even academic scholars became partly involved as they came to deny the very existence of the three martyrs of Vilnius.

²¹⁵ *Записки Иосифа митрополита...* (cf. *supra*, n. 207), vol. 2, p. 484.

²¹⁶ E. g. N. ELAGIN, Первые христианские мученики... (cf. *supra*, n. 213), p. 113: "Промыслом Всевышнего, судившим Литовскому народу, после многих превратностей счастья, успокоиться под Скипетром Русских Венценосцев, сбылось в истории Литвы необыкновенное событие ...". *Страдания св. Виленских мучеников*, p. 20: „и в наши дни, в это тяжкое время борьбы с иноверием, будьте бодры и смелы православные люди. У нас есть великие молитвенники и защитники, которые, присутствуя среди нас своими нетленными телами, предстоят на небесах пред престолом Божиим, молясь за наш край, и за народ православный. Будем верить, что они помогут нам стать такими же твердыми в своей вере, какими были они сами, помогут также вразумить и привести к православной вере и тех заблудших братьев наших, которые обольщением отторгнуты от. Св. Православной Церкви”.

²¹⁷ E. ALEKSANDRAVIČIUS – A. KULAKAUSKAS, *Carų valdžioje. XIX amžiaus Lietuva*, Vilnius, 1996, p. 26.

The three martyrs have not been stationary since the time when Metropolitan Semashko arranged a new coffin for them. When the front line of the First World War was approaching Vilnius, the Russians in 1915 took care to evacuate their shrines to a safer part of their empire. Then the relics of the martyrs were transported to Moscow and harboured in the Monastery of Our Lady of the Don. The pilgrims began to visit them but after the Bolshevik revolution the relics were in 1918 moved to the Museum of Public Services of the Russian Soviet Federation. At one time the relics were displayed in the Central Museum of Sanitation and Hygiene²¹⁸. There were attempts on the part of Metropolitan Eleutherius of Vilnius and Lithuania (1917-1940) to have the relics returned and even the government of Lithuania showed some interest in having the relics returned to the interim capital of Kaunas (as Vilnius was occupied by Poland in 1920-1939), but as long as Lithuania remained independent (1918-1940) this did not take place²¹⁹.

The Soviet totalitarian regime was inherently hostile to religion, but it used the Russian Orthodox Church whenever political or international expediency demanded, so towards the end of the Second World War the Soviets began to support the Orthodox Church in reoccupied Lithuania in order to outweigh the influence of the Catholic Church in Lithuania and thus to consolidate their grip on the country²²⁰. It is in the light of this policy that the return of the relics of the three martyrs must be viewed. As the Soviet deputy chairman of the Council of the Russian Orthodox Affairs in Lithuania, A. Liniov, remarked, this would be of help "in propaganda against Catholicism"²²¹. So the Russian Soviet authorities reacted favourably to the requests of Archbishop Cornelius of Riga, who administered the Orthodox Church in Lithuania in 1945-1948, to return the holy relics. The archbishop's efforts now proved successful. On 26 July 1946 the martyrs' relics arrived in Vilnius and were received with great pomp at the monastery and returned to their place in the church of the Holy Ghost²²².

²¹⁸ R. LAUKAITYĖ, *Stačiatikių Bažnyčia Lietuvoje*, Vilnius, 2003, p. 126.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126-127. See also R. LAUKAITYĖ, *Stačiatikių Bažnyčia Lietuvoje 1944-1990 m.: persekiojimas ar protegavimas*, in *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis*, 19 (2001), p. 39.

²²⁰ A. STREIKUS, *Sovietų valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje (1944-1990)*, Vilnius, 2002, p. 68-76.

²²¹ R. LAUKAITYĖ, *Stačiatikių Bažnyčia...* (cf. *supra*, n. 218), p. 128.

²²² *Ibid.*

The re-established shrine became a focus of pilgrimage for Orthodox believers from all over the USSR. The growing popularity of this sacred place and of the monastery irritated the local Soviet authorities and they endeavoured to put an end to the situation either by removing the relics or by closing down the monastery. Despite this the monastery survived and the relics remained intact²²³. In 1997 the relics were placed in the central aisle of the Holy Ghost Church and have remained there ever since Patriarch Alexius II of Moscow paid visit to them.

Lithuanian Institute of History

Darius BARONAS

Kražių g. 5
LT-01108 Vilnius

Résumé. La présente étude considère le martyre des trois saints orthodoxes (S. Antoine [† 14 janvier], S. Jean [† 24 avril] et S. Eustathe [† 13 décembre]) qui furent exécutés, aux environs de l'année 1347, sur l'ordre du Grand Duc lithuanien Algirdas, encore païen. Les différentes sources hagiographiques relatives à ce martyre, issues d'horizons très divers, écrites en grec, vieux slavon ecclésiastique, latin, polonais et russe, sont passées en revue. Dans une perspective historiographique, l'A., après avoir analysé les théories formulées à propos de ce martyre, tente de dégager, aussi précisément que possible, les raisons de l'exécution des trois saints. Il envisage également les répercussions, réelles et supposées, de ce martyre et du culte qui s'ensuivit, depuis le XIV^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours.

²²³ R. LAUKAITYTĖ, *Stačiatikių Bažnyčia...* (cf. *supra*, n. 218), p. 128.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai* = D. BARONAS, *Trys Vilniaus kankiniai. Gyvenimas ir istorija (Istorinė studija ir šaltiniai)* (= *Fontes ecclesiastici historiae Lithuaniae*, 2), [Vilnius], 2000.
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- Chronica XXIV Generalium* = *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis minorum* (= *Analecta Franciscana*, 3), Quaracchi, 1897.
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