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TRACES OF CHRISTIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN PAGAN VILNIUS: THE CEMETERY ON BOKŠTO STREET

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Lithuania was the country to remain pagan longest in Europe, but it was not isolated from the rest of Europe. Although the locals in the late 13th – late 14th centuries were still mostly pagans, Lithuania's grand dukes appreciated the benefits of Christian immigrants. These Christians brought not only their religion, but also a knowledge of crafts, their culture, and their own traditions. Although Christians, both Catholic and Orthodox, mainly wished to settle in Lithuania for economic reasons rather than from a desire to Christianise it, their presence in pagan Vilnius left traces, one of which, visible archaeologically, is the inhumation cemetery on Bokšto Street, where Orthodox Christians began to bury their dead in the last decades of the 13th century. By supplementing the historical context with this cemetery's material, it is possible to talk about how the Orthodox community influenced the city's urban landscape, burial traditions, and crafts.

Keywords: Medieval Vilnius, Christianity, cemetery, cultural influence.

Lietuva ilgiausiai Europoje išliko pagoniška šalimi, tačiau ji nebuvo užsidariusi nuo likusios Europos dalies. Nors vietiniai gyventojai XIII a. pab. – XIV a. pab. daugiausiai dar buvo pagonys, bet Lietuvos didieji kunigaikščiai įvertino atvykėlių krikščionių naudą. Krikščionys atsinešė su savimi ne tik religiją, bet ir amato žinias, kultūrą, savo tradicijas. Krikščionys – ir katalikai, ir stačiatikiai – Lietuvoje buvo pageidaujami ne dėl šalies christianizacijos, o visų pirma dėl ekonominių priežasčių, tačiau jų buvimas dar pagoniškame mieste paliko pėdsakų. Vienu iš tokių palikimų, atsekamų archeologiškai, galime laikyti griautinį kapinyną Bokšto gatvėje, kuriame jau nuo XIII a. paskutinių dešimtmečių savo mirusiųosius laidojo stačiatikiai. Istorinį kontekstą papildydami šio kapinyno medžiaga, galime kalbėti apie stačiatikių bendruomenės įtaką miesto kraštovaizdžiui, laidosenos tradicijoms, amatams.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: viduramžių Vilnius, krikščionybė, kapinynas, kultūrinė įtaka.

INTRODUCTION

Lithuania was the country to remain pagan longest in Europe, until 1387, but it was not isolated from the rest of Europe. Processes and innovations occurring elsewhere did reach the country. Vilnius, which was founded in the second half of the 13th century, existed as a multicultural entity from its very beginning. A distinctive feature in the development of Vilnius is its multi-confessional environment and its competing pagan, Orthodox, and Catholic communities. The invitation to

immigrants to Vilnius served the rulers as one way to achieve their goals. At the same time, it spurred a blending of the different cultures and the society's development. Although the locals in the late 13th – late 14th centuries were still mostly pagans, Lithuania's grand dukes appreciated the benefits Christian immigrants offered and created the conditions necessary for their settlement in the city. As we will see later, peaceful migration was in the best interest of Lithuania's dukes. These

Christians not only brought their religion, but also a knowledge of crafts and their own traditions, which were inseparable from religion in the Middle Ages. Their presence in pagan Vilnius left traces, one of which, visible archaeologically, is the inhumation cemetery on Bokšto Street, where Orthodox Christians began to bury their dead in the last decades of the 13th century.

One, of course, should not overestimate the influence Christians had in Vilnius as their numbers, especially for Catholics, were not very large in the 13th–14th centuries and the locals, like Lithuania's grand dukes, were pagans. Because some Ruthenian lands had become part of the duchy, the grand dukes had Orthodox subjects, whose faith could have often been seen as a lower-class religion. But it must be acknowledged that by living as neighbours in the same city, the members of these different religions inevitably came into contact with one another and had to maintain at least minimal ties, possibly resulting on occasion in closer ties, even marriages or perhaps conversions to Christianity.

The grand dukes had no desire to Christianise the country, rather the opposite. In addition, any Christian influence on the local religion is poorly reflected in the sparse written sources and is difficult to grasp, making it hard to talk about the significance of Christians in the city's management prior to 1387, a greater contribution being noticeable only after Lithuania's baptism when Christians actively participated in the city's management and contributed to the founding of various guilds.

From the very beginning the Christian communities could not help but leave traces in various areas of the city's everyday life. For example, it is known that both Catholic and Orthodox Christians had their own neighbourhoods and houses of worship, which have affected such things as the street layout, as well as spatial changes in urban planning, which still reflects the past presence of Christian communities. The immigrants not only

enriched everyday life and the material culture but also brought new technologies and a knowledge of crafts that contributed to the development of local craftsmanship and the appearance of new fashions and goods in the city.

Unfortunately, the available historical sources cover the political history in far greater detail than the daily life, a gap that the interpretation of archaeological material can help to fill. One such exceptional research object is the medieval cemetery on Bokšto Street in Vilnius, which has yielded information about the earliest stage of the city's development. The cemetery has been dated back to the last third of the 13th – early 15th centuries and is the earliest burial site currently known in Vilnius. A total of 533 graves have been excavated there. Based on the material and historical context, it is ascribable to the Orthodox community. The excavation material from this cemetery, its affiliation to the Orthodox community in Vilnius, and the various burial features there are thoroughly presented in a book by the present authors (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020). The analysis of the medieval cemetery on Bokšto Street has allowed various traces left by the Orthodox community to be seen in different areas of the city's life. By supplementing the historical context with this cemetery's material, it is possible to talk about how the Orthodox community influenced the city's urban landscape, burial traditions, crafts, and fashions (jewellery).

This article aims to discuss a topic that received insufficient attention in the book, namely the attitude towards this burial ground as an object able to reflect not only burial rites and the community's everyday life, but also show possible Orthodox cultural influences on other Vilnius communities as well as the city itself. One must agree that an analysis of Orthodox influences would provide better results if one can compare the cemetery's material with contemporary pagan burial sites in Vilnius. But, unfortunately, no such site has yet been found.

During this period, cremation still prevailed among the pagans but, unfortunately, no traces of any such cremation cemetery have been found in the city.

STATE OF THE RESEARCH AND SOURCES

In talking about the beginning of Vilnius and the period prior to the 1387 conversion, attention has long focused on paganism, Christianity receiving far less attention. In fact, very few written sources actually exist from this period, only a small fraction of which discuss the Christian immigrant communities. Historiography usually emphasizes political history, the creation and development of the Catholic and Orthodox institutions, the attempts at baptism, and the circumstances of the decision. Historians Darius Baronas (e.g., Baronas 2000, 2010, 2014) and Stephen C. Rowell (Rowell 2001) have done a great deal of work in this area in recent decades¹. This situation was also determined by the nature of the available written sources, which mainly reflect events connected with the ruling elite and clergy. Meanwhile, any reflections of Christianity and its influence on everyday life are often left out of research.

In talking about the influence of Christianity, the written sources can be divided into several groups. First are those that discuss the attempts to baptise the grand dukes of Lithuania, e.g., the 3 November 1324 papal envoy report on the mission to Grand Duke Gediminas (Gedimino laišakai 2003, 182–190). Next are Gediminas' letters inviting residents of Western European cities to settle in the '*royal city of Vilnius*', promising them various privileges and freedom of religion (Gedimino laišakai 2003). However, although Catholics were guaranteed the freedom to express their faith, its

spread among other residents of Vilnius was not desired. This is clearly shown by two martyrdoms of Franciscan monks in 1341 and 1369 (Baronas 2010).

As has been aptly observed, in these letters the grand duke set out a programme for 'modernising' Lithuania (Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija 2006, 35). Some slightly later sources, especially after the 1387 baptism, reflect various privileges, donations to the Catholic clergy, diocesan history, church activities, etc. (Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija 2006, 59–61). As can be seen, nearly all these sources talk about the relationship between Lithuania and Catholicism, but only the political aspect.

Given the nature of the written sources and their sparsity, in recent decades attention has turned to other disciplines, such as archaeology, that are able to provide information about 13th–14th-century Vilnius. Archaeological research has been conducted in Vilnius Old Town since the mid-20th century, a distinct increase in its frequency and scope being noticeable in the 21st century. The latest studies reflect an intensification of research into early Vilnius based on archaeological material, notably monographs by archaeologists Katalynas (2006) and Vaitkevičius (2010) on Vilnius' expansion as well as Valionienė's dissertation (2015) and book (2019) on its urban development. Two dissertations and articles by this article's authors analyse in detail the history of Christian immigrants specifically in Vilnius². These papers, which appeared in close succession and supplement one another, discuss Vilnius' early development in detail, primarily on the basis of the rich archaeological material. Incidentally, the growing body of archaeological research and the lack of new historical sources have resulted in a noticeable trend where historians have begun to incorporate archaeological research

¹ A collaborative work should also be mentioned (Baronas, Rowell 2015).

² For more on Orthodox Christians in Vilnius, see Jonaitis, 2013; for more on the Catholic community, see Kaplūnaitė 2015.

into their papers and to take archaeologists' interpretations into consideration.³

The Orthodox community, or more precisely, its burial site, was studied in great detail and presented in the present authors' monograph devoted to the Bokšto St. Cemetery and 13th–15th-century burial rite issues in Lithuania (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020). It is this object's discovery and investigation that allows one to talk about the early Orthodox community in still pagan Vilnius and to distinguish the traces it left in the city and its influence on daily life.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN PAGAN VILNIUS

In order to understand the role Orthodox Christians played in the city's life, the conditions and opportunities they experienced in Vilnius, and in what areas and in what intensity this community's influence could have left traces, one must first assess the historical context and circumstances, under which Christians settled in the still pagan city.

Lithuania's geopolitical situation meant that the state ruled by pagan dukes lay between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West. Due to the close proximity of Christianity, the first Lithuanian contacts with it date to before the state's formation (Gudavičius 2006, 9–65; Ščavinskas 2018, 50–71). As usual with peoples so close to one another, the relationships were marked by military campaigns, peace treaties, trade, and cultural ties. The campaigns often resulted in the seizure of captives who could be held for long periods. Moreover, Orthodox families were welcome to settle in Lithuania. However, one can talk about only isolated Lithuanian contacts with Christians

until the mid-13th century, not about heavier immigration flows into a country which still lacked the attractive living and working conditions that urban development processes ultimately created in Lithuania. Only Kernavė may have had an early community of Ruthenian merchants and artisans, which should be connected with a need for these professions in the emerging city, like later occurred in Vilnius (Baronas, Dubonis, Petrauskas 2011, 296). In light of the fairly friendly relations between Grand Duke Traidenis of Lithuania and Duke Leo I of Halych, these Orthodox Christians may have come primarily from the Halych-Volhynia (cf. Dubonis 2009, 79–80).

As the Grand Duchy of Lithuania expanded to the east, the number of Eastern Slavs in the state increased. Part of the ruling elite already in the 13th century had accepted the Orthodox faith, although mainly for political reasons, for example, while going to rule Ruthenian lands annexed by Lithuania (Baronas 2014, 60; Baronas, Rowell 2015, 160–161). The dukes were able to maneuver and adapt – they did not destroy the traditions of the annexed lands, but accepted Orthodoxy themselves, becoming the rulers of these territories; although the grand duke was always a pagan (Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija 2006, 33).

Although written sources first mention Vilnius in only 1323, the historical context and new archaeological data allow its beginning to be sought in the last decades of the 13th century. Traces of human activity from this period have been found in the vicinity of Gediminas Hill and at its foot as well as in the so-called Crooked City and in the east part of present-day Old Town (Vaitkevičius 2010, 63–94). It is possible to date the beginning of Vilnius as a royal administrative centre back to the reign of Grand Duke Traidenis (r.1268–1282) and the

³ A good example being newer studies on Lithuania's history (see: Kiaupienė, Petrauskas 2009; Baronas, Dubonis, Petrauskas 2011).

beginning of its heyday to the reign of Grand Duke Vytenis (r.1295–1316). The grand dukes, aware of the benefits Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, could offer, must have consciously encouraged their settlement in Vilnius, presumably from a desire to have a skilled workforce available for the royal manor and to effectively equip the military forces (Baronas 2014, 59) as well as to promote trade, improve the level of craftsmanship, introduce new knowledge, and handle clerical matters (which was done by Franciscan monks). The new city became a focus for immigration, especially for craftsmen, merchants, and clerics. It should be emphasized that, unlike in the neighbouring countries, Christians came for economic and political reasons rather than religious ones (which the grand dukes did not encourage).

It is likely that the first Christians to appear in Vilnius were Orthodox. The early presence of Orthodox Christians in the city, possibly from its founding, is shown by the chronology of the cemetery at Bokšto St. 6 where burials began in the last decades of the 13th century (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 261–268). Orthodox Christians immigrated to pagan lands for several reasons. The ravaging of Ruthenian lands by Mongols starting in the 1220s–1230s may have been one reason, although not necessarily the main one. As noted in recent historiography, Tatar-Lithuanian relations were not always hostile and the narrative on the attractiveness of pagan Lithuania to Slavs looking for freedom from the Tatars should be reviewed (Baronas, Rowell 2015, 158). It must be acknowledged that Lithuania may not have always been safe for refugees, although the 14th-century is discussed more in the historiography than the reign of Grand Duke Traidenis.

Another, probably the main, reason for the settlement of Orthodox Christians in Lithuanian

lands was the GDL's southeast expansion in the second half of the 13th century and its annexation of some Ruthenian lands, e.g., Vawkavysk, Slonim, and Novogrudok already during the reign of Mindaugas, a tradition continued by Traidenis, Vytenis, Gediminas, and especially Algirdas (Baronas, Rowell 2015, 150–158). This last period saw an Orthodox population increase, which may be linked to captives. Baronas shows that in 1374 Grand Duke Algirdas granted the request of captives 'taken prisoner in various lands' to allow the construction of the wooden Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Vilnius (Baronas, Dubonis, Petrauskas 2011, 298). Since the 1368–1372 Lithuanian-Muscovite War had just ended, the researcher asserts that it can be assumed that most of these captives came from northeast Rus and that after regaining their freedom, at least some of them remained in Vilnius (Baronas, Dubonis, Petrauskas 2011, 298).

Catholics also settled in the city at a similar time or shortly afterwards (for more, see Kaplūnaitė 2015, 42–46)⁴. However, the circumstances of the settling of the two Christian communities in Vilnius were different. Orthodox Christians were close neighbors and subordinates of the grand dukes while Catholics were often associated with 'fire and sword', a result of the constant conflicts between the pagan Lithuanians and the Teutonic Knights. Recently, however, emphasis has moved to the peaceful Catholic missions in the still pagan land. According to Rowell, the activities of the Franciscan missions did not end in 1324 but continued throughout the existence of the pagan Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Rowell 2001, 315). In addition, the need for Catholics as a qualified labor force and as participants in long-distance trade has also been raised (Baronas, Dubonis, Petrauskas

⁴ Although a hypothesis was proposed that King Mindaugas Cathedral stood in Vilnius in the mid-13th century (Kitkauskas 1989, 124), it has already been reasonably criticized in current historiography (Vaitkevičius 2000, 179).

2011, 290). But unlike Orthodox Christians, Catholics had to be specifically invited to pagan Vilnius and given certain guarantees (such as freedom of religion)⁵.

Written and archaeological sources reveal that the first Franciscan mission in Vilnius probably appeared during the reign of Grand Duke Vytenis, the first Catholic community, which was established on the royal estate, during the reign of Grand Duke Gediminas in the first quarter of the 14th century (Kaplūnaitė 2015, 42–46). The systematised archaeological and historic data allows the conclusion to be drawn that in the first half of the 14th century, the first Catholic mission and settlement were located at the southwest foot of Gediminas Hill (Kaplūnaitė 2015, 42–46). Catholics were settled in the pagan environment as a new element intended to satisfy the ruler's needs. Thus, Franciscan monks served in the royal chancellery and also provided the Catholic community with pastoral services. Tradesmen and craftsmen were invited as specialists to assist in the development of trade and the crafts (as is seen in the ceramics and masonry structures (like in their settlement at the foot of Gediminas Hill).

Fresh changes appear in the 1370s during the reign of Grand Duke Jogaila (r.1386–1434) when shifts in the political, social, and economic life under Jogaila contribute to the founding of so-called 'German Town', a settlement of German tradesmen and craftsmen in western part of the city. 1387 marks an essential shift in the history of the Catholic community in Vilnius as the state's baptism meant the Catholics changed from a foreign element in a pagan town to representatives of the dominant religion.

THE BOKŠTO ST. CEMETERY

Bokšto St. 6 is in the east part of present-day Vilnius Old Town, about 640 m south of the Cathedral Basilica of St Stanislaus and St Ladislaus and about 100 m southwest of the Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God, and falls within the so-called Ruthenian City, or the *Civitas Rutenica*⁶, the Vilnius suburb inhabited by Orthodox Christians. The first discovery of burials there in 2005 (Sarcevičius 2006) led to the plot's 2006–2014 archaeological excavation (Jonaitis 2009, 2018; Kaplūnaitė 2014; 2016), which investigated not only the inhumation cemetery's 533 burials, but also the rich cultural layers (up to 7 m thick) above them. 7,000 m² of the entire Bokšto St. 6 plot's roughly 8,000 m² were excavated, making it currently one of the best researched plots in Vilnius Old Town. The old cemetery could have occupied about 2500 m² of this.

Based on all the data, including ¹⁴C dating, the cemetery's chronology covers the last third of the 13th – early 15th centuries. In 2012, the results of the ¹⁴C dating of 26 samples from 26 individuals buried at Bokšto Street cemetery⁷ cover a fairly wide chronological period. By using the broadest confidence level, 95.4% (2σ), the earliest date falls into the 1184–1275 cal ad period (burial 139, Poz-52058); the latest date is 1415 cal ad (burial 15, Poz-52073). Out of 26 samples, 7 date strictly to the 13th century and do not extend into the 14th century.

Based on the material and its analysis, Orthodox Christian residents of Vilnius were buried in the cemetery on Bokšto Street. Some of the individuals buried there must have been immigrants from Ruthenian lands. The Ruthenians who came here

⁵ Such an invitation can be found in the letters of Gediminas (Gedimino laiškai, 2004).

⁶ Limanowski was one of the first to locate the *Civitas Rutenica* there (Limanowski 1930, 132–135).

⁷ The research was carried out in Poland, at the Poznań Radiocarbon Laboratory, operating at the A. Mickiewicz University. They were led by prof. Dr. Tomasz Goslar. All of the results are presented in the monograph (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 264).

were subjects of the grand dukes with the same rights as the pagans; they simply belonged similar Orthodox Christian church. In addition, the individuals buried in the cemetery on Bokšto Street could have been their Vilnius-born descendants as well as local inhabitants, former pagans, who had converted to Orthodox Christianity.

The Bokšto St. Cemetery is a tangible object, the analysis, context, and very existence of which help one to assess Orthodox Christian influence on the city's life. Its analysis has revealed the impact the community left in several different areas, the most prominent being, in the authors' opinion, the urban landscape / layout, burial rites, religion, and crafts.

THE URBAN SPACE

By moving to Vilnius, Christians naturally changed the city's face. The settlement of people from the East and the West (not to mention local pagans), the need for everyone to live together in one city, yet still be apart, and the goal of living comfortably were factors that determined the direction, nature, and intensity of Vilnius' expansion. New immigrants had to consider the existing situation, i.e., the city's pagan element, in exploiting the topographic situation, the relief, and the natural environment, all of which left traces in Vilnius (Fig. 1).

The Bokšto St. Cemetery is in the supposed centre, the earliest part of the Ruthenian City, which written sources first mention in 1383 (Marburgietis 1999, 185). The systematised data, however, shows that the settlement of the east part of today's old town, initially as a burial site, began in the late 13th century, the formation of the Orthodox suburb itself probably starting in the early 14th century (Jonaitis 2013, 36–38). The territory of the *Civitas Rutenica* was then reminiscent of a triangle with three Orthodox churches at the corners. Its

proximity to the royal residence on Gediminas Hill and easy access to the Vilnia's fresh water made it a convenient place to live in the new city and led to the roads running towards all the main destinations (Smolensk, Polotsk, Medininkai, Trakai, Livonia, etc.) intersecting there.

This Orthodox suburb and its places of worship, some in use even now, can be considered the most distinctive vestige the Orthodox community left in Vilnius. This new district would have unavoidably become a focal point not only for the road network but also for the city's development and the specific directions of its expansion. For example, it is the site of the city's oldest known cemetery and marketplace as well as many churches, which also affected the urban space. It is difficult to say how much the ecclesiastical architecture might have influenced the city's architecture in general as the early churches, mostly wooden, have not survived, just fragments of the brick churches, such as the Orthodox Cathedral of the Theotokos, which was built by Kievan craftsmen in the style of Kiev's cathedral (Крачковский 1897, 229). Significant Romanesque features can be seen in the Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva, which has only survived in a 19th-century drawing (Drėma 1991, 181).

The Bokšto St. Cemetery (Fig. 2) is an object that allows the Orthodox community's impact on the urban landscape to be tangibly recreated. Based on the archaeological research data, the present-day Old Town area was uninhabited when the cemetery began to be used, the finds and cultural layer, excluding the cemetery itself, dating from only the 14th century (Katalynas 2006, 40–44). The cemetery was very likely created, it is possible to say, in a place specially designated for it at an empty peripheral site. The question arises as to why this part of Vilnius was chosen. A more detailed examination, especially after an analysis of the cemetery's location in a plan of the new city, shows that the choice would not have been random.

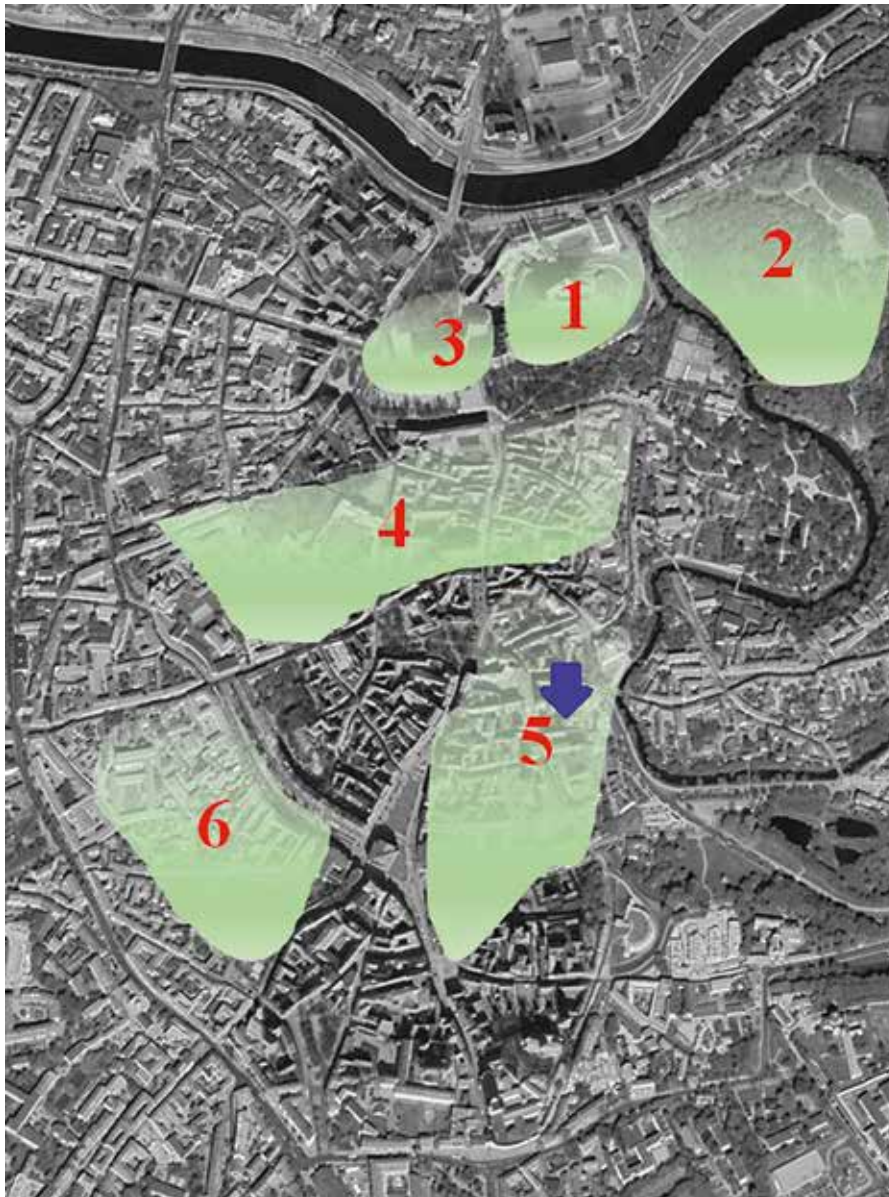


Fig. 1. The zones of medieval Vilnius. A Google Earth Pro Map modified by I. Kaplūnaitė.

1. Gediminas Hill (or the Upper Castle); 2. The Crooked Castle (or Curvum Castrum); 3. The Lower Castle (including the earliest Catholic mission); 4. Pagans; 5. Civitas Rutenica; 6. German Town. The arrow points to the cemetery on Bokšto Street.

1 pav. Viduramžių Vilniaus zonavimas. *Žemėlapis Google Earth Pro Map, papildymai I. Kaplūnaitės.*

1. Gedimino kalnas (arba Aukštutinė pilis); 2. Kreivoji pilis (arba *Curvum Castrum*); 3. Žemutinė pilis (su ankstyviausia katalikų misija); 4. Pagonys; 5. *Civitas Rutenica*; 6. Vokiečių miestas. Rodykle pažymėtas Bokšto gatvės kapinynas.

This peripheral burial site only began to be used after the city's founding, but the city was already nearing it in the 14th century. Even so, it is possible to talk about easy access to the cemetery

from the castle grounds and the Crooked City in the last decades of the 13th century (cf. Valionienė 2019, 152–155) as many roads, both local and intercity, ran near the cemetery (Valionienė 2019,



Fig. 2. The cemetery on Bokšto Street in Vilnius. *Drawing by I. Kaplūnaitė.*
2 pav. Bokšto gatvės kapinynas Vilniuje. *I. Kaplūnaitės parengtas planas.*

93–102, 150–155). In investigating the burial site, the two main arteries were present-day Iŝganytojo and Bokšto Streets, its north and west boundaries, which are likely some of the city's oldest streets and appeared together with the cemetery.

Bokšto St. 6 is on the third terrace in the upper part of the amphitheatre in the east part of present-day Vilnius Old Town (Morkūnaitė 2010). As is typical of medieval burial sites, this is a level location in a picturesque area near the top of the steep bank of the river Vilnia. Although the current riverbed is only 40–70 m east of the cemetery, in the Middle Ages it was even closer (Valionienė 2019, 276–297). It can be seen that the cemetery's location and boundaries must have been greatly influenced by the natural conditions and local terrain as well as by the city's infrastructure, i.e., the network of streets: present-day Bokšto on the west, Iŝganytojo on the north, and Maironio on the east. The first two streets are some of the earliest and could have emerged during the cemetery's existence. The summary plan of the burials shows that the direction of some burials (with a slight orientation error) visually corresponds to Iŝganytojo Street. It can be conjectured that the existing street caused their slight change in direction, or vice versa, that the cemetery could have caused the street to veer.

In Christian countries, burial sites were usually controlled by an ecclesiastical institution or a religious order and were established next to a church but could also be the property of the community or a landowner (Härke 2001, 2). When the Bokšto St. Cemetery was discovered, a question also arose as to whether it belonged to an Orthodox church. In the mid-14th century, several such churches stood nearby: the Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God, St Elijah the Prophet, and the Nativity. While the last one

likely managed the cemetery, its location has yet to be identified nor have any archaeological vestiges of it been discovered on the plot. It could have stood there, but been completely destroyed by later construction work, or simply never stood there. The cemetery need not have been associated exclusively with this church or another nearby church could have consecrated the land.

RELIGION AND BURIAL RITES

The Bokšto St. Cemetery falls into one of the most difficult periods in the history of medieval Lithuania: the transition from cremation to inhumation and the initial penetration of Christian culture into the country. The dating and causal relationships of these processes have provoked many discussions in historiography⁸. It has not been established exactly when Lithuanians stopped cremating their dead and no unequivocal answer exists to the question of whether the spread of Christianity and inhumation are linked. The investigations of flat cemeteries have shown that at least some individuals had been inhumed prior to the country's baptism, but there are also cases where elements of pagan burials are still found at post-1387 buried sites, all of which raises questions when trying to attribute any 13th–15th-century burial site to one denomination or another. Only the detailed study of the burial rites and the analysis of the entire historical context has allowed the Bokšto St. Cemetery to be attributed to the Christian community and identified as an Orthodox burial site.

In order to better understand the ability of Orthodox Christians to express their faith and to spread it in Vilnius, one must first discuss the attitude towards this religion in the still pagan

⁸ For example, Kurila 2002, 122–136; Kurila 2003, 25–38; Petrauskas 2015, 114–136; Petrauskas 2017; Zabiela 2007, 413–467. For more about this discussion, see (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 16–64).

city. It is thought that Lithuanians were tolerant of Orthodox Christianity. For example, all of Grand Duke Traidenis' brothers and Grand Duke Gediminas' sister were Orthodox Christians⁹. It is assumed that even before Lithuania's official Catholic baptism in 1387, some Vilnius residents had received Orthodox baptism (Baronas 2014, 67–68). As the Grand Duchy of Lithuania expanded eastwards, the proportion of Ruthenian subjects also increased and a Slavic influence was felt. Part of the ruling elite adopted the Orthodox faith, primarily for political reasons. There is no reason to assert that Orthodox Christians came to Vilnius to Christianise the country. Catholic baptism was pursued at the state level, Orthodoxy possibly being seen by the rulers as the less attractive religion of its conquered subjects (Baronas, Rowell 2015, 149–174).

Nevertheless, a premise has been raised that the common people leaned more towards Orthodoxy, which was relatively popular among Lithuanians (Nikžentaitis 1996, 18–26). For example, historical sources mention that Nestor, an Orthodox priest who had arrived in Vilnius in the mid-14th century, was able to conduct Orthodox rites both in the presence of the ruler and in the city itself (Баронас 2004, 162). It is also thought that the oldest stratum of Lithuanian Christian terms has Ruthenian roots (Gudavičius 1999, 187). This favourable attitude also created opportunities for the Orthodox faith to spread more easily in the city. Although Orthodox Christianisation was not promoted in the first half of the 14th century, at least officially, it occurred to a degree in everyday life. Nevertheless, the Orthodox priests were few in number and would have had little influence on the decision to be baptized. On

the other hand, the premise that they could have also had a wider impact through contacts and personal examples cannot be ruled out.

While Catholic merchants and craftsmen, as foreign subjects, had to be invited to Vilnius, the Orthodox Christians came more as a result of the royal policies. Therefore, it can be said that the latter felt freer in the new city, as shown by the early formation of a Ruthenian suburb in the east part of the city, further from the royal manor. The grand dukes may not have greatly valued the religion of their Ruthenian subjects, but they probably saw it as less of a threat than Catholicism (in light of their constant struggle with the Teutonic Order at that time).

The martyrdom of three Orthodox Christians, courtiers of Grand Duke Algirdas, definitely needs to be mentioned here. They were not directly involved in the spread of Christianity, unlike the two Catholic martyrs¹⁰, Franciscan monks whose 1341 and 1369 martyrdoms were a direct result of their proselytising (Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija 2006, 48). The Orthodox martyrdom occurred after three of Algirdas' courtiers refused to eat meat during a Christian fast, thereby disobeying the ruler (Baronas 2000, 106–107; Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija, 2006: 48). It can, of course, be said that Orthodox Christians also suffered because of their faith, but not because of attempts to spread it like the Catholics.

In summarizing the sparse historical sources concerning Orthodoxy, it can be assumed that Vilnius residents were able to profess Orthodoxy, at least on a personal level. Moreover, the very existence of a Christian burial site in a pagan city shows that the city had accepted the representatives

⁹ It must be said that contradictions in the depiction of Traidenis' brothers can be seen in the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle. Therefore, Dubonis raised the question as to whether they were really Orthodox Christians or the chronicler had just portrayed them that way (Dubonis 2009, 30).

¹⁰ Darius Baronas' monograph describes the martyrdom of these three Vilnius Orthodox Christians in detail (Baronas 2000)



Fig. 3. The excavation of Area 18 at the Bokšto St. Cemetery. *Photo by A. Baltėnas.*
3 pav. Perkasa Nr. 18 Bokšto gatvės kapinyne. *A. Baltėno nuotrauka.*

of different cultures, thereby, changing and developing. It must be emphasised that the burial rites in the Bokšto St. Cemetery bear all the characteristics of Christian burials: the dead are inhumed in an extended supine position, some in coffin prototypes – wooden structures, one above another, with few detectable grave goods, mostly jewellery and clothing elements, and the children and even infants and newborns were interred identically to the adults.

Naturally, like probably every cemetery in Eastern and Western Europe, the cemetery on Bokšto Street has several unusual burials. For example, some individuals were not interred in the east-west direction and those in 2 burials were interred on their sides. These exceptions can be associated with so-called deviant burials,

e.g., outcasts, criminals, witches, and exceptional individuals. The abundance of stones around and above the graves is a distinctive feature in this cemetery. The presence of stones is associated more with the grave's construction (support for the planks) than with a deviant practice. Nevertheless, such unusual cases are rare, a characteristic of the Christian funeral tradition.

The uniformity of the Bokšto St. Cemetery's burial rites, the construction of its graves, their layout in orderly rows, and their precise orientation reflect adherence to uniform burial rituals (Fig. 3). It also shows that burials were probably regulated there. Since no historical sources that talk about early Vilnius cemeteries, their planning, or their management are available, it is impossible to say who supervised the burial rites or how much the

clergy participated in the process. However, it is possible to state that the analysis of the burial rites at the Bokšto St. Cemetery does not allow any obvious social status, gender, or age differences to be distinguished. The cemetery reflects a community of ordinary townspeople with individuals of different genders and ages buried beside one another, most likely on the principle of family burials. Several richer burials have been found in which the dead (mostly females) were buried with luxury jewellery, but these burials are not distinguished by any other burial rite elements or by their position relative to the cemetery itself or the other burials. Such conclusions are, of course, based on the situation recorded during the archaeological investigation, which does not reflect the entire funeral rite liturgy, the ceremony itself, etc.

It is possible to state that the community that left this burial site was definitely able to demonstrate its religious affiliation, at least in its burial rites.

CRAFTS

In addition to some Christian influences that are harder to identify, more tangible ones can also be seen in everyday life and crafts, e.g., articles specific to Christians. Orthodox immigrants in Vilnius brought with them a knowledge of crafts, which is especially evident in the jewellery, notably in the spread of new non-ferrous metal processing technologies. They also brought a new metal pressing technique (Vėlius 2005, 90; Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 285) as shown by artefacts (chaplet plates) discovered in Kernavė's Kriveikiškis, Vilnius' Bokšto St., and peripheral Lithuanian cemeteries (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 215).

The sparse finds (grave goods) at the Bokšto St. Cemetery were discovered in only 53 (10%) of all the excavated burials, which is typical of Christian cemeteries, where grave goods, usually only jewellery and clothing elements, are rare.

No weapons, tools, or household items, i.e., the typical pagan find complex, were discovered there. This cemetery, in respect to the inventory, fully corresponds to the features of a Christian – Orthodox burial site. While the number of finds was indeed small, at least some are exceptional, extremely high quality, and luxurious in addition to having been made using a technology previously unknown in Lithuania, i.e., new to the country. Thus, their analysis allows one to talk about cultural influences, immigration, and even fashion. While most of the discovered jewellery is typical of Slavs rather than Lithuanians, some also has local features.

Most of the grave goods consisted of jewellery such as chaplets, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and various types of rings. The female burials contained most of the grave goods (63 items in 31 burials), burial no. 114, that of a female adolescent, yielding the largest quantity: gilt silver chaplet plates, a necklace with crotals, glass beads, cowrie shells, and small pendants, three brass bracelets, two symbolic keys, two brass ring fragments with a swastika, and a small iron knife (Jonaitis 2018, 288–289).

The chaplets are particularly interesting (Fig. 4). Most of the burials containing them were in the cemetery's central, oldest part. Correlating the chaplets with the wearer's age clearly showed that most had been found with females over the age of 25. An analysis of the chaplets revealed that all the plates differ, both in terms of shape (triangular, quadrangular, square, pentagonal, and fleur-de-lis) and ornamentation (herbal, geometric, and fleur-de-lis). Almost all were a gilt, thin cast silver sheet domed using a special pressing technique (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 213), a method possibly introduced by the Orthodox immigrants. The grave goods point to the relatively high level of jewellery craftsmanship they brought with them.

Based on the available data, it is thought that the Orthodox Christians brought both this chaplet



Fig. 4. Examples of chaplets from the Bokšto St. Cemetery. Photos by R. Jonaitis and I. Kaplūnaitė.

4 pav. Apgalvių iš Bokšto gatvės kapinyno pavyzdžiai. R. Jonaičio ir I. Kaplūnaitės nuotraukos.

production technique and the fashion of wearing chaplets from Halych-Volhynia. This technique first appeared in the Halych-Volhynia region in the 10th century, the fashion of wearing chaplets spreading from there to its neighbours. The original chaplet prototypes had come from Byzantium, the source of both fashion trends and Christianity for the Kievan Rus' (Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 216). From Halych-Volhynia, the fashion of wearing such chaplets made its way through Yotvingian lands to the first two ethnic Lithuanian centres: Kernavė and Vilnius, spreading from there all across ethnic Lithuanian territory (Jonaitis 2013, 74).

In addition to the chaplets, several other find groups in the Bokšto St. Cemetery reflect cultural influences. First is another type of headpiece, temple ornaments (Fig. 5), 4 of which were found

(Jonaitis, Kaplūnaitė 2020, 218). This artefact type occurs over a very wide range: the Izhora Plateau, Novgorod (Russia), Estonia, various GDL lands, Podlachia, Podolia, etc. (Svetikas 2001, 8–12). Since temple ornaments have mostly been found in the Votskaia Piatina of Novgorod Land, Russian Archaeologist Sedov even misinterpreted them as an ethnic feature of the Votians (Седов 1987, 37), but this ethnicity identification has now been rejected (Лесман 1990, 101; Svetikas 2001, 5–19). Although the origins of some artefact, usually jewellery, may be associated with a religious group, this does not mean that only members of that group wore it. For example, the fashion of wearing earrings and temple ornaments reached Lithuania from Ruthenian lands, but a woman buried with such jewellery need not be a Slav as the spread of



Fig. 5. The temple ornament from grave no. 271. Photos by R. Jonaitis.
5 pav. Antsmilkinis iš kapo Nr. 271. R. Jonaičio nuotraukos.

jewellery can be caused by the simple desire to wear something beautiful and novel.

The origins of some earring types in Vilnius can also be associated with the arrival of the Ruthenians. 4 Bokšto St. burials yielded earrings, 8 items of two types: hoop and question mark. One hoop earring is adorned with the head of a mystical animal (a dragon?), a type that originated in the Golden Horde (Каримова 2013, 34–35) and could have reached Vilnius together with Ruthenian immigrants. Hoop earrings are generally considered to be a typical Ruthenian ornament

(Kuncienė 1974, 73; Седова 1981, 9; Vėlius 2005, 59). The Bokšto St. hoop earrings could have been brought by immigrants or been made locally by an immigrant Ruthenian jeweller or a local craftsman influenced by Ruthenian jewellery traditions.

Several other religious finds also need to be mentioned. Two burials of children aged 2–4 each yielded a small cross, an uncommon find in medieval Christian cemeteries, the tradition becoming established in Orthodox cemeteries no earlier than the 16th century (Мусин 2002, 47). The encolpion found between burials was a more

distinctive find, being rare even in Ruthenian lands, especially in urban cultural strata, and often being classified as a chance find (Корзухина, Пескова 2003, 12). It should be noted that mostly priests wore encolpions. Thus, even though it was found between burials, not in one, its very presence is significant as it indicates the presence of priests in the city. Based on Ruthenian analogies, it belongs to group 2, type II.I.I (according to Корзухина, Пескова 2003, 60, Table 23 in the illustrations) and would have been made in the last quarter of the 12th century (Корзухина, Пескова 2003, 61).

No other exceptional items capable of being specifically associated with Orthodox Christians and their legacy / influence in Vilnius were found in the Bokšto St. Cemetery. Essentially, it is possible to speculate that no large difference existed in the everyday and household inventories, which is especially shown by an analysis of the ceramics. In talking about late 13th–14th-century Vilnius, one cannot point to any exceptional ceramics or ceramic types characteristic of only one of the city's communities, the only exception perhaps being the so-called pre-Gothic 13th – turn of the 14th-century ceramics, fragments of which have been found at Latako St. 2, which is very close to the Bokšto St. Cemetery and where the earliest cultural layer, which dates to the 14th century, was studied in 1980 (Gendrėnas 1983, 49). The examples discovered there are distinguished by their shape and mass (Vaitkevičius 1999, 23–25; 2010: 62; Katalynas, Vaitkevičius 2001, 68–76). This pottery is not typical of the local inhabitants and should be associated with the Orthodox immigrants. According to researchers, its presence suggests that people with other production traditions, possibly Ruthenians, were the first to settle this site (Katalynas, Vaitkevičius 2001, 72, footnote 16). Thus, the first Orthodox immigrants could have lived in the vicinity of Latako Street, just 100 m from the cemetery in Vilnius Old Town. Vestiges

of human activity have been archaeologically identified on Latako Street throughout the 14th century (Gendrėnas 1983, 48). In the late 14th or early 15th century, a new cemetery was set up there in an Orthodox churchyard.

IN CONCLUSION

Lithuania remained a pagan country until the late 14th century, but the Lithuanians, even as pagans, maintained contacts with the neighbouring Christians, who began to settle in the still pagan country. From the very beginning of Vilnius' emergence as a city, several different communities lived and conducted business there: pagans, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. Lithuania's grand dukes understood the benefits: new crafts, knowledge, goods, and, of course, manpower. Christians could offer the city and wanted to attract such immigrants. But they also brought their own religion, culture, and traditions, all of which left traces in the city. Part of this legacy is difficult or even impossible to detect, but some influences have left physical vestiges that are reflected in the city's layout and material culture. One such striking legacy is the inhumation cemetery, which was excavated on Bokšto Street and belonged to the Orthodox community from the last decades of the 13th – early 15th centuries.

The Bokšto St. Cemetery is distinguished by its exclusively Christian burial rite features. Its presence shows that Orthodox Christians should not be considered enemies in pagan Vilnius since they were able to bury their dead in accordance with their religion. While no grounds exist to talk about Lithuania's Orthodox or Catholic Christianisation on an official scale prior to 1387, this religion could have, to some degree, spread through contacts, e.g., marriages. Although Christianity's influence on pagan burial rites still raises questions in historiography, the proximity of Christians may

have contributed, at least in part, to the increasing replacement of cremation with inhumation.

The Bokšto St. burial site was established in the part of the city where in the 14th century, the Ruthenian suburb of Civitas Rutenica emerged at a carefully selected site in an accessible area alongside city streets and intercity routes leading east and near the royal manor. The location chosen for the cemetery: on a flat site at the top of a slope near the river Vilnia, is typical for the Middle Ages. The local terrain and street network definitely influenced the cemetery's topography (and possibly vice versa).

Based on the Bokšto St. Cemetery data, the people who buried their dead there were probably ordinary members of the city's medieval community. The new city greatly needed craftsmen and merchants, who brought various goods, technologies, and craft knowledge with them to Vilnius. The influence can especially be seen in jewellery where a new metal-pressing technique as well as some previously unknown types of jewellery and ornaments appeared and became widespread. Although Orthodox influence was more noticeable in everyday activities, it, to a greater or lesser extent, must have also been felt in the city's political life, especially in the period before the country's Catholic baptism when Lithuania's grand dukes were still vacillating between Eastern and Western Christianity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

LIIBR – Lietuvos istorijos instituto bibliotekos Rankraščių fondas

MAD'A – Mokslų akademijos darbai, A serija

KRIKŠČIONIŲ KULTŪRINIŲ ĮTAKŲ PĖDSAKAI PAGONIŠKAME VILNIUJE: BOKŠTO GATVĖS KAPINYNAS

Rytis Jonaitis, Irma Kaplūnaitė

Santrauka

Iki XIV a. pab. Lietuva išliko pagoniška šalimi, tačiau, ir būdami pagonyms, lietuviai palaikė kontaktus su aplinkui įsikūrusiais krikščionimis. Nuo pat Vilniaus augimo pradžios čia gyveno ir veikė kelios skirtingos bendruomenės – pagonyms, katalikai ir stačiatikiai. Lietuvos didieji kunigaikščiai pageidavo atvykėlių, kaip naujų amatų, žinių, prekių nešėjų ir, be abejo, darbo jėgos. Kartu krikščionys atsinešė ir savo religiją, kultūrą, tradicijas. Visa tai paliko pėdsakų mieste. Dalį tokio palikimo apčiuopti

sunku ar net neįmanoma, tačiau kai kurios įtakos paliko fizinę išraišką, atspindį miesto erdvėse, materialinėje kultūroje. Vienas iš tokių ryškių palikimų – tai XIII a. paskutiniais dešimtmečiais – XV a. pradžia datuojamas stačiatikiams priskiriamas laidojimo paminklas, tirtas Bokšto gatvėje.

Kapinyno buvimas mieste rodo, kad stačiatikiai dar pagoniškame Vilniuje galėjo laidoti miruosius pagal savo išpažįtamą religiją. Nors nėra pagrindo kalbėti apie oficialią stačiatikiškąją ar

katalikišką christianizaciją Lietuvoje iki 1387 m., tačiau religinė sklaida bent kažkokiu mastu galėjo vykti per kontaktus, santuokas, pavyzdį. Nors krikščionybės įtaka pagonių laidosenai istoriografijoje dar kelia klausimų, krikščionių buvimas šalia galėjo bent iš dalies paskatinti griautinio laidojimo būdo plitimą vietoje deginimo.

Laidojimo paminklas Bokšto gatvėje įkurtas miesto dalyje, kurioje XIV a. augo Rusėnų priemiestis – *Civitas Rutenica*. Šio darinio vieta neatitiktinė – jis buvo patogioje teritorijoje, šalia vietinių miesto gatvių ir tolimesnių kelių, vedančių rytų kryptimi, ne per toli nuo valdovo dvaro. Kapinyno vietos parinkimas – lygioje aikštelėje, šlaito viršuje, šalia Vilnios – būdingas viduramžių laidojimo paminklams. Vietos reljefas, taip pat gatvių tinklas, be abejonės, turėjo įtakos kapinyno topografijai (ir, galbūt, atvirkščiai).

Remiantis kapinyno Bokšto gatvėje duomenimis, čia savo mirusiuosius laidoję žmonės greičiausiai buvo eiliniai viduramžių miesto bendruomenės nariai. Besikuriančiam miestui reikalingiausi buvo amatininkai, pirkliai. Šie žmonės į Vilnių atsinešė įvairias prekes, technologijas, amato žinias. Ypač ryški įtaka juvelyrikoje – kartu su naujaisiais į šalį atkeliavo nauja metalo spaudimo technika, paplito kai kurie iki tol nenešioti papuošalų tipai, ornamentika. Nors stačiatikių įtaka labiau pastebima kasdienėje veikloje, tačiau ji, didesnė ar mažesnė, turėjo būti jaučiama ir miesto politiniame gyvenime. Ypač laikotarpyje iki katalikiško krikšto priėmimo, kai Lietuvos didieji kunigaikščiai dar svyravo tarp Rytų ir Vakarų religijos pasirinkimo.

TRACES OF CHRISTIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN PAGAN VILNIUS: THE CEMETERY ON BOKŠTO STREET

Rytis Jonaitis, Irma Kaplūnaitė

Summary

Lithuania remained a pagan country until the late 14th century – but even as pagans, Lithuanians maintained contact with their Christian neighbors. Vilnius was a melting pot of different communities from its earliest days, wherein pagans, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians coexisted and conducted business. Lithuania's grand dukes regarded such diversity as a source of strength, and appreciated the new crafts, knowledge, goods, and, of course, manpower that Christians offered Vilnius. As such, the Lithuanian state actively sought to attract Christian immigrants.

Nonetheless, Christians also brought their own religious faith, cultural practices, and traditions,

all of which undoubtedly left an imprint on Vilnius. While some parts of this legacy are difficult (or even impossible) to ascertain, some influences left are evidently visible in the layout of the city and its material culture. One such striking legacy is the inhumation cemetery, which was excavated on Bokšto Street and belonged to the Orthodox Christian community from the final decades of the 13th century through to the early 15th century.

This cemetery instantiates how Orthodox Christians were able to bury their dead in accordance to their own rituals in pagan Vilnius. While there is no evidence of Lithuania undergoing an Orthodox or Catholic Christianization on

an official scale prior to 1387, this religion could have, to some degree, spread through various forms of contact, such as, marriage. Although Christianity's influence on pagan burial rites still raises historiographical questions, the proximity of Christians may have contributed to the increasing replacement of cremation with inhumation.

The Bokšto Street burial site was established in the 14th-century Ruthenian suburb of Civitas Rutenica in Vilnius – a carefully selected site in an accessible area alongside city streets and intercity routes leading to the East and near the royal manor. The cemetery was located on a flat site at the top of a slope near the Vilnia River, which is a typical venue for cemeteries in the Middle Ages. The local terrain and street network strongly influenced (and indeed, was itself influenced by) the cemetery's topography.

According to data regarding the Bokšto Street Cemetery, ordinary members of the city's Medieval community likely buried their dead therein. The new city greatly needed craftsmen and merchants who brought various goods, technologies, and the knowledge of different crafts with them to Vilnius. Such influence is especially clear when examining that epoch's jewellery, whereby a new metal-pressing technique and previously unknown types of jewellery and ornaments appeared and became widespread.

Although Orthodox Christian influence was more noticeable in everyday activities, it must have also been felt in the city's political life to a certain extent – especially in the period before the country's Catholic Christian baptism, when Lithuania's grand dukes were still alternating between Eastern and Western Christianity.

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