POETRY AND NATION-BUILDING IN THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA

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POETRY AND NATION-BUILDING IN THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA

THREE EARLY MODERN LATIN EPICS

Edited and translated by
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK IS a translation of three Latin epic poems important to the development of the literary tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: *Bellum Prutenum* (1516) by Joannes Vislicensis; *Hodoeporicon Moschicum* (1582) by Franciszek Gradowski; and *Virtus dexterae Domini* (1674) by James Bennett. Epic has been part of nation-building since ancient times, and the popularity of epic in the Grand Duchy reveals the processes by which its citizens came to understand their state, its history, and its place within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Europe as a whole. The poems translated in this volume were building blocks in the forging of a common identity for citizens of the Grand Duchy via the popular memory of military victories over the Teutonic Order, the Muscovites, and the Ottoman Turks.

I have incurred many debts of gratitude in the course of completing this book. Anna Henderson of Arc Humanities Press has been unfailingly helpful and supportive from my first tentative suggestions of a volume on Lithuanian epic poetry to its conclusion. Darius Mereckis and Simone Carboni kindly shared key texts with me on the epic poetic tradition in Lithuania, and I thank Dr. Margaret Hilditch for her help in interpreting secondary sources in Russian, the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript for making many helpful suggestions for improving the translation, Dr. Tim Roe for being willing to cast his expert eye over some difficult passages, and Dr. Charlotte Gauthier for her advice. I am grateful to Cambridge University Library and the Bodleian Library, Oxford for facilitating much of my research, while recording my appreciation of the institutions whose digitisations of rare printed texts have made this edition possible: the Digital National Museum in Warsaw for its digitisation of Bronisław Kruczkiewicz's edition of the poems of Joannes Vislicensis; the Lower Silesian Digital Library for its digitisation of Franciszek Gradowski's *Hodoeporicon Moschicum*; and Vilnius University for its digitisation of James Bennett's *Virtus dexterae Domini*. I thank Saulė Kubiliūtė for her expert translation of the summary of the book's introduction into Lithuanian. As always, my wife Rachel and daughters Abigail and Talitha deserve my thanks for their forbearance of my sometimes recondite research interests. I am eternally indebted to Vaida Balsevičiūtė for introducing me to Lithuania (and, indeed, Lithuania's *hegzametrai*) so many years ago; to her I owe my interest in both the country and its literary tradition.

This book is dedicated, with gratitude, to Dr. Kathryn Loveridge *qui me primum linguam Latinam optime edocuit*.

F. Y., Peterborough, England

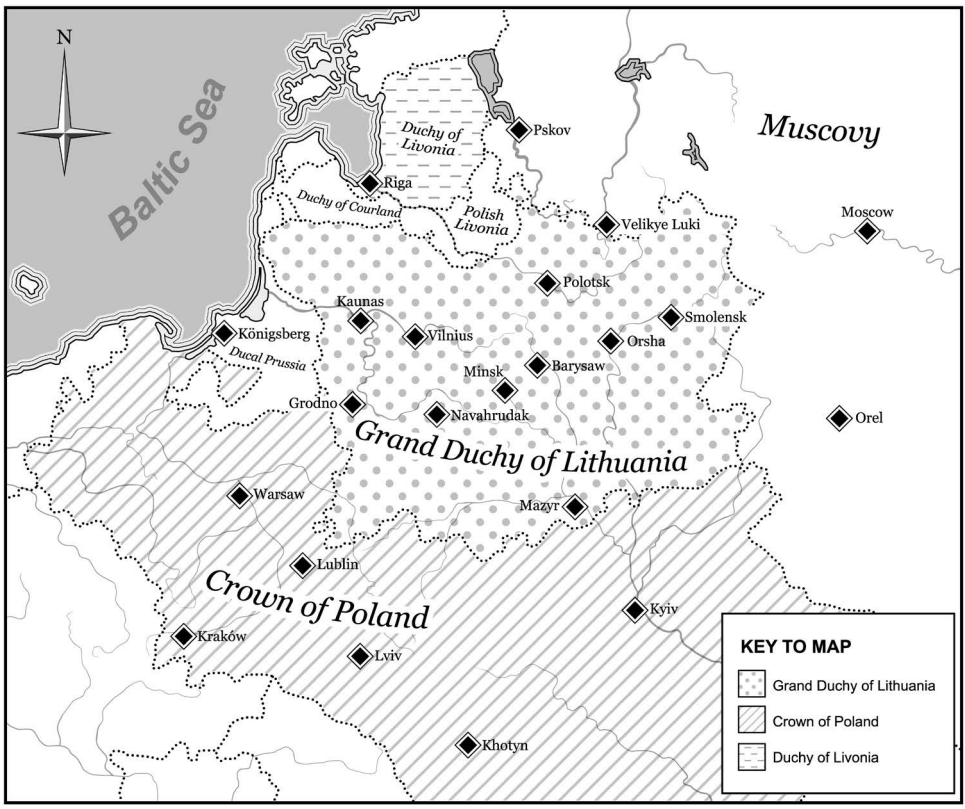

Fig. 1: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and neighbouring nations in ca. 1655.
Map drawn by Peter Lorimer.

INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT THE SIXTEENTH, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the writing of epic poetry in Latin flourished in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania—a vast country whose borders changed somewhat throughout the period, but which included, at its greatest extent, the territory of the modern nations of Lithuania and Belarus, as well as large parts of present-day Latvia and Ukraine, and even parts of today's Russian Federation.[1] The Grand Duchy was joined in personal union (and then from 1569 in a more formal political union) to the Crown of Poland and came under the cultural influence of Poland, most notably in the spread of the Polish language among Lithuanian elites. However, Lithuania also retained its own cultural distinctiveness, and the dominance of Latin as a literary language was one such distinctive feature. While the Polish language progressively replaced Latin as a literary language in the Crown of Poland, Latin continued to flourish in Lithuania—partly because Lithuania was a multilinguistic polity, and partly on account of a belief (historically unfounded, as it turned out) that the Lithuanian language was a form of Latin and the Lithuanians were descended from Romans. Lithuania's Latin literature was thus conceived as a national literature for a Latinate people and was not finally supplanted by a literature in the Lithuanian language until the late eighteenth century.

The corpus of Lithuanian Latin literature is considerable. This volume presents editions and translations of three shorter epics that represent the beginnings of the tradition in the early sixteenth century, its period of maturity in the late sixteenth century, and the final form taken by the genre at the end of the seventeenth century. The three epics selected are *The Prussian War* (1516) by Joannes Vislicensis, the earliest epic poem dealing with Lithuania, celebrating the Battle of Grunwald in 1410; *The Muscovite Expedition* (1582) by the Lithuanian-born poet Franciszek Gradowski, celebrating Krzysztof Radziwiłł's daring raid deep into Muscovy in 1581; and *The Strength of the Lord's Right Arm* (1674) by the Scottish-Lithuanian author James Bennett, celebrating Lithuanian victory over the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Khotyn in 1673. These three epics are here translated into English for the first time. One long Lithuanian Latin poem (albeit not technically an epic),[2] *The Song of the Bison* (1523) by Nicolaus Hussovianus has already been translated into English in another volume of Arc Humanities Press's Foundations Series with an extensive introduction to Hussovianus's poetry; the work of Hussovianus is therefore omitted from this edition.[3]

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1 Throughout this Introduction, the ethnonym "Lithuanian" is used with the sense "of or pertaining to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania," and not in its more restricted modern sense as an ethnonym for Lithuanian-speaking people and/or citizens of the present-day Republic of Lithuania. Similarly, "Lithuania" should be taken to refer to the Grand Duchy as a whole, while "the Republic of Lithuania" refers to the modern country.

2 Hussovianus's poem is in elegiac couplets and not, therefore, a typical Latin epic in dactylic hexameters.

3 Nicolaus Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison: Text and Translation of Nicolaus Hussovianus's "Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis"*, ed. and trans. Frederick J. Booth (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019).

Any post-Classical epic poetry in Latin almost invariably harks back to Virgil's *Aeneid* as its model, both for the "heroic metre" of dactylic hexameter and for its characteristic subject-matter—*arma virumque* ("arms and man"); that is, heroic feats in war. Furthermore, just as Virgil lauded the Julian dynasty in the *Aeneid*, so Lithuanian epics were much preoccupied with dynastic identity. The poetry of Virgil was so well-known in the Classical, medieval and early modern worlds that it represented an unchanging "norm" in European literature,[4] but the Virgilian epic register was also so familiar that it was a canvas on which almost any agenda could be painted.

Early modern Latin literature (also referred to as Neo-Latin literature) is sometimes dismissed as an obscure literary backwater, the preoccupation of learned elites who failed to see that the future of national literatures lay in harnessing the literary power of the vernacular. If it is deemed worthy of study at all, it is as background to the development of subsequent vernacular literatures. The stereotyping of Latin literature as a recondite learned cultural dead-end owes something to the imposition of an Anglocentric model of literary history on the rest of Europe. While the English language did indeed triumph over its competitors (including Latin) in late medieval and early modern England, creating a highly successful and versatile literary vernacular, the same pattern was not replicated in every country, and Latin did not decline in some regions until much later than it did in England.

Local nationalisms, just as much as Anglocentrism, have likewise hindered historiographical appreciation for Latin literature. The national revival movements of the late nineteenth century that underpinned the self-determination and independence of many of the nations of East-Central Europe in the interwar era privileged the vernacular literary tradition and approached earlier Latin literature with ambivalence. As a result of these sometimes-hostile linguistic historiographies, Latin can seem to emerge as the villain of Central European literary history: the reactionary delusion of Latin's prestige delayed the emergence of vernacular national literatures, as authors wasted their time on a language that was not their own under the lingering intellectual tyranny of Renaissance humanism. Whether this caricature has any foundation or not, there can be no doubt that it does not apply to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where the use of Latin was a great deal more than a learned affectation. Miguel de Cervantes commented that "among the northern nations, the upper classes are well-versed in the Latin language and in the ancient poets,"[5] drawing attention to the high quality of Latin in those countries to whom the Latin literary tradition was both fairly new and precious, in contrast to movements for vernacular writing in Spain and Italy.

Sigitas Narbutas noted in 2006 that a "Lithuanocentric" hermeneutic in the interpretation of early modern Lithuanian literature (which privileged early signs of a mod-

4 Zhanna Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, "Latin Epic Poetry and its Evolution in Central and Eastern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities*, ed. Giovanna Siedina (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 21–33, at 21.

5 Quoted in S. C. Rowell, "The Face Beneath the Snow: The Baltic Region in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 2 (2001): 541–58, at 547.

ern Lithuanian nationalism) was already giving way to greater recognition of the multireligious, multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the Grand Duchy.[6] Recognition of the Grand Duchy as a multilingual society has counteracted an older idea of Lithuania as essentially culturally Polish, as Polish writing in Lithuania is revealed to be just one aspect of the Grand Duchy's literature.[7] For example, a search of the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC) in February 2023 revealed 1,645 books published in Lithuania before 1650, of which 523 were in Polish—around half of the number published in Latin (1,098). Latin-language publications made up 67 percent of all Lithuanian books on the USTC catalogue, compared to 32 percent of books published in Polish.[8] Understanding Lithuania's Latin literature, which represents a distinctive characteristic of Lithuanian culture, is now foundational to studying the Grand Duchy's other literatures—since Latin writing often pre-dates writings in Polish, Ruthenian, German, and Lithuanian.[9]

For Narbutas, the "binary model" of Latinate and vernacular cultures that Jerzy Axer applied to Poland does not work well for Lithuania,[10] where Polish and Latin did not so much represent stable alternatives as rivals. Indeed, it was Latin rather than Polish that had the stabler status in Lithuania, since Latin had the potential to unite a multi-ethnic nation of free citizens.[11] The perennial advantage of Latin in the early modern period was its common currency as the language of all scholars, but Latin in Lithuania went far beyond scholarly convenience and functioned, in fact, as a national literary language. Indeed, it is artificial to make any meaningful literary distinction between Lithuanian literature written in Latin and Lithuanian literature written in the Lithuanian or Polish languages, since all drew upon a common tradition. For example, when Kristijonas Donelaitis began writing the first epic poem in the Lithuanian language in the 1760s, *Metai* ("The Seasons"), he did so in dactylic hexameters in conscious continuity with his nation's Latin epic tradition. The Lithuanian Latin epic tradition provides the historical background to the modern national literatures of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, as well as holding a great deal of cultural importance for Poland; but it also represents a unique flowering of the Renaissance Latin tradition that took on distinctive "national" features.

The key scholars in Lithuania, Belarus, and Poland studying the Latin epic tradition in the Grand Duchy include Eugenija Ulčinaitė, Sigitas Narbutas, Zhanna Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, Jerzy Axer, and Jakub Niedźwiedź, all of whom have produced some scholar-

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6 Sigitas Narbutas, "*Latinitas* LDK raštijos raidoje," in *Senoji Lietuvos Literatūra 21*, ed. Sigitas Narbutas (Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2006), 137–70, at 137.

7 Narbutas, "*Latinitas* LDK," 144.

8 The Universal Short Title Catalogue, accessed February 20, 2023, https://www.ustc.ac.uk/search. Daiva Narbutienė, *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštijos lotyniškoji knyga XV–XVII a.* (Vilnius: *Lietuvių* Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2004), 60, calculated that 1,549 Latin books were published in or for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

9 Narbutas, "*Latinitas* LDK," 145.

10 Narbutas, "*Latinitas* LDK," 150–51.

11 Narbutas, "*Latinitas* LDK," 153.

ship in English. However, interest in translating Lithuanian epics in the English-speaking world itself has so far been confined to Frederick J. Booth's work on Nicolaus Hussovianus. It is the aim of the present volume, therefore, to introduce the broader Lithuanian tradition of Latin epic—which was arguably the most important iteration of Latin epic in early modern Europe—to a wider world than has previously had access to it. The epic tradition of early modern Lithuania, like much of the Neo-Latin literature of Europe, represents a "lost" literature hiding in plain sight, overlooked not just on account of unfamiliarity with the Latin language but also because of disregard for or prejudice against Renaissance and Baroque Latin literature as seemingly irrelevant to literary history. This volume aims to re-centre Latin literature in our understanding of the culture of early modern Lithuania, which was an exceptionally successful, stable, and culturally and politically innovative polity before the mid-seventeenth century, when the Grand Duchy came under devastating attack from Sweden and Russia.

Latinitas and *Lituanitas*

Among the effects of Lithuania's conversion to Catholicism in 1387 was the introduction of the Latin language, although even before the conversion event the pagan Lithuanian rulers Mindaugas and Gediminas had issued letters in Latin. At first, Latin was primarily the language of the Church and clergy, while official administration was conducted in Ruthenian. However, as Lithuania increasingly came into conflict with the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, which competed with the Jagiellonians for the loyalty of the Orthodox principalities of the former Kyivan Rus', Latin became more attractive to Lithuania's ruling elites.[12] Giovanna Siedina has emphasized "the fundamental role of *Latinitas* in the elaboration and celebration of the history of the peoples constituting the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and thus in the formation of their identity"[13]—even if, in truth, Latin never quite achieved the status that its proponents craved for it.

The adoption of Latin in the Grand Duchy had both a practical and a mythological dimension. From a practical point of view, in the first half of the sixteenth century, Polish (the language of the grand ducal court in Vilnius) was not yet a language sufficiently widely understood in Lithuania to be considered a national language, while the Lithuanian language was in its infancy as a written language and had long since been set aside by the nation's elite; it was associated primarily with the still pagan or semi-pagan peasantry. Latin was the only workable alternative to Ruthenian as a literary language at this stage, not least because there already existed a body of people (the Catholic clergy)

12 Eugenija Ulčinaitė, "Lithuanian National Identity and Statehood in the Latin Literature of the Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries," in *Mare Balticum, Mare Nostrum: Latin in the Countries of the Baltic Sea (1500–1800)*, ed. Outi Merisalo and Raija Sarasti-Wilenius (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1994), 126–38, at 123–33.

13 Giovanna Siedina, "*Latinitas* and Identity Formation in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries): An Introduction," in *Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities*, ed. Giovanna Siedina (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 11–18, at 18.

well versed in the language. For Lithuanians seeking to inaugurate a national literature, Latin was not an optional elite language; nor was it merely the *lingua franca* of the global Republic of Letters. Latin was, rather, the *only* language in which Lithuania could receive a poetic voice; and while the use of Latin declined in the Crown of Poland in favour of Polish over the course of the sixteenth century, Latin remained strong as a "national" language in early modern Lithuania.[14] Not only did Latin maintain its position in Lithuania, but heroic epic forms remained dominant. Unlike in Poland, where other genres (such as the novel) developed, Lithuania retained a distinctive trend toward the "epicisation" of literature.[15]

According to Zacharias Ferreri, the earliest hagiographer of the Jagiellonian prince, St. Casimir (1458–84), the young Casimir was moved by devotion to the Virgin Mary to write a poem dedicated to her in hexameters, which was apparently available to Ferreri but no longer survives.[16] The so-called "Hymn of St. Casimir," which was reportedly found in Casimir's coffin, was not written by Casimir and is not in hexameters, and should not be confused with the lost poem mentioned by Ferreri. Whether or not St. Casimir's liking for hexameters influenced subsequent Lithuanian poetic taste, another powerful cultural factor influenced Lithuanian enthusiasm for Virgilian poetry: the belief that the Lithuanians were Romans. Scholars debate when the myth of the Roman origins of the Lithuanians first appeared. Rasa Jurgelėnaitė ascribed the tradition to Ruthenian chronicles of the early fifteenth century,[17] but the dating of these chronicles is disputed. However, Jan Długosz included the idea that Lithuanians were descended from Romans in his *Historiae Polonicae* ("Polish Histories"), written between 1455 and 1480.[18] In Christine Watson's view, it is unlikely that Długosz made the story up entirely.[19] Robert Frost has argued that the introduction of the myth of Palemon (the legendary leader of a Roman expedition to Lithuania) to the *Chronicle of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Samogitia* (compiled between 1510 and 1517) was partly an attempt to place Lithuania on an equal footing to Poland and partly a response to Muscovite claims that Moscow was Rome's legitimate successor as the "Third Rome."[20]

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14 Siedina, "*Latinitas*," 12.

15 Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, "Latin Epic Poetry," 30.

16 Zacharias Ferreri, *Vita beati Casimiri confessoris* (Kraków: Johannes Haller, 1521), sig. Aiijv.

17 Rasa Jurgelėnaitė, "Vilnius University as the Centre of the Study and Creation of Latin Literature in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania," in *Mare Balticum, Mare Nostrum: Latin in the Countries of the Baltic Sea (1500–1800)*, ed. Outi Merisalo and Raija Sarasti-Wilenius (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1994), 139–49, at 140.

18 Jan Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae Libri XII* (Frankfurt, 1711), vol. 1, 113.

19 Christine Watson, *Tradition and Translation: Maciej Stryjkowski's Polish Chronicle in Seventeenth-Century Russian Manuscripts* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsalensis, 2012), 42.

20 Robert Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 413–14. On the idea the Lithuanians were descended from Romans, see Francis Young, ed., *Pagans in the Early Modern Baltic: Sixteenth-Century Ethnographic Accounts of Baltic Paganism* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2022), 22–4; Kęstutis Gudmantas, "Lietuvių kilmės iš romėnų teorijos genezė ir ankstyvosios lietuvos vardo etimologijos," in *Literatūros istorija ir jos kūrėjai*, (*Senoji Lietuvos literatūra*, 17) (Vilnius: Lietuvių

Clearly, the claim that Lithuanians were Romans had consequences for the interpretation of the Lithuanian language. Already in his *Historiae*, Długosz had put forward the distinctive character of the Prussian and Lithuanian languages as evidence for a Latin derivation.[21] By 1553 Wenceslaus Agrippa was able to say with confidence in his funeral oration for Jan Radziwiłł that "the speech of the Lithuanians was once Latin" (*idioma Lithuanorum olim latina fuisse*).[22] Writing in around 1550, Michalo Lituanus lamented that Lithuania was "lacking in schools of literature," and although the Lithuanians had formerly written in Ruthenian, "we learn nothing effective for developing virtue, since the Ruthenian manner of speech is alien to us Lithuanians—that is, Italians, born of Italian blood." Michalo went on to enumerate the similarities between Lithuanian and Latin.[23] The implication was clear: Lithuanians should adopt the Latin language as their own, and they should do so out of patriotic pride in their own language (which was really Latin) rather than because they lacked a language of their own.

The idea that Lithuanian *is* Latin may seem ridiculous in the light of modern philology; but Michalo Lituanus based his theory on a comparison of Latin and Lithuanian vocabulary which was convincing to him—and for good reason.[24] In many cases the Latin and Lithuanian words Michalo cited are indeed cognates, albeit for a reason Michalo could not possibly have imagined: the existence of a shared Proto-Indo-European substrate lying behind both Latin and the rather conservative Baltic language of the Lithuanians. It was Augustinus Rotundus (ca. 1520–82), secretary to Sigismund II August, who went a step further and proposed to the king that Latin should be restored as Lithuania's national language. Once again, Rotundus framed his case in anti-Muscovite terms: it was not fitting that Lithuania should be promulgating its laws in the language of an enemy nation (Ruthenian was seen, in this case, as the same language as early modern Russian).[25] Because the Lithuanian "Latinizers" considered Latin to be the pure form of Lithuanian, Latin and Lithuanian became for them interchangeable terms for the same national language.[26]

The adoption of Latin in Lithuania, even if it was never entirely successful, served at least four political purposes: the cultural differentiation of Lithuania from Poland

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Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2004), 245–69; Kęstutis Gudmantas, "Vėlyvųjų lietuvos metraščių veikėjai ir jų prototipai: 'Romėnai'," in *Istorijos Rašymo Horizontai* (*Senoji Lietuvos literatūra*, 18) (Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2005), 113–39; Sigitas Narbutas, "Lietuvių kilmės iš romėnų legenda kultūrinės integracijos šviesoje," in *Literatūros Istorija ir Jos Kūrėjai* (*Senoji Lietuvos literatūra*, 17) (Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2004), 286–315.

21 P. U. Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics: Earliest Theories about the Baltic Languages (16th Century)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 46–9.

22 Quoted in Jurgelėnaitė, "Vilnius University," 140.

23 Michalo Lituanus, "On the Customs of the Tatars, Lithuanians and Muscovites," in *Pagans in the Early Modern Baltic*, ed. Young, 93–5.

24 Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics*, 54–6.

25 Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics*, 56–8.

26 Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics*, 62.

(where vernacular literature was gaining ground) within the Union of Lublin; the replacement of Ruthenian as a language too closely associated with Muscovy; the identification of Lithuania as part of the Latin world of western Christendom; and the self-definition of Lithuania as a characteristically "Roman" patrician republic. As Jūratė Kiaupienė has argued, "the elite, which created the concept of Lithuania in the sixteenth century, adopted Latin culture as a program endowed with a fully formed set of ideals and concurrently served as a force that created, disseminated, protected, and shared Europe's cultural heritage."[27] Lithuanian *Romanitas* (or *Lituanitas*) was grounded not in admiration or mimicry of ancient Roman culture (as in many other European nations), but in the conviction that Lithuania was a Roman nation.

However, assessments of Lithuanian competence in Latin vary, and it is not always easy to separate rhetoric from reality when it comes to *Lituanitas*. Jurgelėnaitė argued that virtually the whole Lithuanian nobility would have read and written Latin by the mid-sixteenth century,[28] while Robert Frost takes the more pessimistic view that the adoption of Latin was never a realistic option for the Grand Duchy, where levels of education among the elite were often rather basic.[29] However, even if the hard realities of political power were propelling Polish to the heart of Lithuania's elite, literature was another matter. Even before the foundation of the Jesuit-dominated Vilnius University in 1579, the centre of production of Poland-Lithuania's Latin literature was Kraków's Jagiellonian University, and in this academic context Latin reigned supreme. Furthermore, some key political figures in Lithuania, such as Augustinus Rotundus and Albertas Goštautas (ca. 1480–1539), the mastermind of the First Statute of Lithuania, were indeed excellent Latinists.[30]

The Lithuanians' belief that they were descendants of the Romans was also accompanied by a general identification of all the peoples of the Jagiellonian lands with the ancient Sarmatians, a warlike tribe mentioned by Classical authors and thus part of the imaginative world of the antiquity valued by the Renaissance.[31] The Sarmatian identity made it possible for Poles and Lithuanians to envisage themselves simultaneously as civilized and barbarian, with the sophistication of the former and the martial prowess of the latter.[32] "Sarmatia" was also a convenient term for Jagiellonian dominions in personal union that were beginning to develop (in some respects) a unified culture, since

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27 Jūratė Kiaupienė, *Between Rome and Byzantium: The Golden Age of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's Political Culture, Second Half of the Fifteenth Century to First Half of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Jayde Will (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 68.

28 Jurgelėnaitė, "Vilnius University," 140.

29 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 320.

30 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 410–11.

31 Marcello Garzaniti, "Foreword," in *Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities*, ed. Giovanna Siedina (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 7–10, at 8.

32 On "Sarmatianism" in Poland-Lithuania, see Maria Bogucka, *The Lost World of the "Sarmatians": Custom as the Regulator of Polish Social Life in Early Modern Times* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii (Polska Akademia Nauk), 1996).

before 1569 the personal union of the Polish Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania was not usually known as Poland-Lithuania. *Sarmatia* was a convenient shorthand for an East-Central European cultural and political domain without a name, and it is a particularly important concept in the first poem included in this volume, *The Prussian War* by Joannes Vislicensis. S. C. Rowell has noted the resemblance of the Sarmatian national *mythos*, "concocted to provide a distinctive garment for the social and political freedoms of the Polish and Lithuanian gentry, without replacing a deeply ingrained local patriotism" to the promotion of a "Gothic" identity in early modern Sweden.[33]

While *Latinitas* elsewhere in Europe may have presented a potential challenge to the development of concepts of nationality and nationhood—harking back as it did to the Roman Empire and connecting scholars across national boundaries—Narbutas has argued that the development of a Latin literature in Lithuania was an integral part of the development of Lithuanian statehood.[34] Jan Radwan's epic *Radivilias* (1592),[35] in particular, was seen by Nekrashevich-Karotkaja as a "protonational" epic comparable to the Hungarian Latin epic *Hungaridos* (1599) by Jan Bocatius or the Polish Latin epic *Roxolania* (1584) by Sebastian Klonowic.[36] After the Union of Lublin, in particular, it became especially important for Lithuanian elites to define the nature of their polity. While Lithuania shared a ruler with the Crown of Poland, it was not a kingdom; nor was its ruler hereditary, but was chosen by the nobility. The model for Lithuania was, therefore, the patrician-ruled Roman Republic, with the grand duke as an Augustan-style *princeps*. Poland-Lithuania famously extended noble status to more of its population than any other early modern state, and nobles saw themselves as free citizens within a republic. Furthermore, like Roman citizenship, citizenship in Lithuania could (in theory) be acquired by anyone. While the old Lithuanian families were obsessed with genealogy, they were also willing to accept Ruthenians, Poles, Germans, Scots, and even Jews as equal citizens. *Lituanitas* was thus an inherently inclusive as well as a nationalistic concept; if the Lithuanians were Romans, then *Lituanitas* could be as inclusive as the *Romanitas* of the Roman Republic. Noble status, and not nationality, was what mattered most in a patrician *res publica*.

Selecting the Poems

The rationale for selecting the three poems included in this volume has four dimensions. First, the poems are selected for their subject matter, which includes commentary and reflection on the nature of a specifically *Lithuanian* nationhood (understood in the

33 Rowell, "Face Beneath the Snow," 544.

34 Sigitas Narbutas, "*Latinitas* in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Chronology, Specifics, and Forms of Reception," in *Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities*, ed. Giovanna Siedina (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 145–60, at 146.

35 Jan Radwan, *Radivilias, sive de vita, et rebus praeclarissime gestis, immortalis memoriae, illustrissimi principis Nicolai Radivili* (Vilnius: Ex Officia Joannis Kartzani, 1592).

36 Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, "Latin Epic Poetry," 27.

sense of the broad *Lituanitas* of the Grand Duchy). Second, the poems share a common "heroic" and martial theme situating them firmly in the Virgilian epic tradition. Third, the poems are short enough to be included in a single volume in their entirety, since I determined early on that presenting entire works was preferable to offering a selection of extracts ripped from their narrative context. Finally, my choice of three poems—and these three poems specifically—is influenced by Nekrashevich-Karotkaja's argument that the history of Lithuanian Latin epic over two centuries can be seen in terms of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.[37]

Jakub Niedźwiedź has lamented the influence of national biases on the scholarship on early modern Latin literature produced in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with Polish scholars sometimes ignoring the "Lithuanity" of poems written by authors such as Gradowski whom they claimed as "Polish," while Belarusian and Lithuanian scholars sometimes ignored Polish poets.[38] Of the poems included in this edition, *The Prussian War* has received the most attention, with translations into Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Polish.[39] Gradowski's *Muscovite Expedition*, by contrast, has been translated in print only into Polish,[40] while Bennett's *Strength of the Lord's Right Arm* was translated into Lithuanian in 1974 by Benediktas Kazlauskas,[41] but has not yet been translated into any other language. Jan Radwan's *Radivilias*, the most significant Lithuanian Latin epic, has been translated into Lithuanian by Narbutas (and recently into Italian by Simone Carboni),[42] while the *Carolomachia* (1606) of Laurentius Bojerius was also translated into Lithuanian by Kazlauskas.[43] Hussovianus's *Song of the Bison* has fared much better, being translated into Belarusian, Polish, Lithuanian, and English.[44]

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37 Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, "Latin Epic Poetry," 29, also suggests an alternative model for the development of Lithuanian Latin epic in the form of a positive Renaissance model, early Baroque renewal, late Baroque automatization, and finally parody in the eighteenth century.

38 Jakub Niedźwiedź, "How did Vergil Help Forge Lithuanian Identity in the Sixteenth Century?" in *Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Its Impact on the Development of Identities*, ed. Giovanna Siedina (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 35–48, at 36 n.2.

39 Jan z Wiślicy, *Wojna pruska*, trans. Jan Smereka (Lviv: Filomata, 1932); Jonas Vislicietis, *Prūsų karas*, trans. Eugenija Ulčinaitė (Vilnius: Mintis, 1997); Jan Vislitsky, *Пруская вайна*, trans. Zhanna Nekrashevich-Karotkaja (Minsk: Prapilei, 2005).

40 Franciszek Gradowski, *Hodoeporicon Moschicum: Wyprawa Moskiewska*, ed. and trans. Bartłomiej Czarski and Ariadna Masłowska-Nowak (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2011). An unpublished Lithuanian translation of the poem also exists, prepared by Ieva Skaržinskaitė in 1995 as a bachelor's thesis under the supervision of Eugenija Ulčinaitė (Eugenija Ulčinaitė, "Pranciškaus Gradausko *Žygis prieš Maskvą* ir jo literatūrinis bei politinis kontekstas," in *Senoji Lietuvos Literatūra 47* (Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2019), 281–8, at 282 n.5).

41 Benediktas Kazlauskas, "Trys šimtai metų Vilniaus akademijos leidiniui: Jokūbas Benetis 'Virtus dexterae domini', 1674 *m*.," *Knygotyra* 4, no. 11 (1974): 113–46 (translation at 123–42).

42 Jan Radwan, *Radivilias: L'Epopea del Popolo Lituano*, trans. Simone Carboni (Rome: Brigante, 2022).

43 Laurencijus Bojeris, *Karolomachija*, trans. Benediktas Kazlauskas (Vilnius: Vaga, 1992).

44 Mikola Husovski, *Паэма жыцця / Песня пра зубра*, trans. Yazep Semezhon (Minsk: Mastatskaja Literatura, 1980); Mikołaj Hussowski, *Wiadomość o Mikołaju z Hussowa*, trans. Jan Kasprowicz (Lviv:

Virgil in Sarmatia: *The Prussian War* (1516) by Joannes Vislicensis

The Prussian War is an epic poem of 1,059 lines of hexameters divided into three books that was written in Kraków in 1515 by an author of whom we know little more for certain than his Latinized name, Joannes Vislicensis. The poem was written in the months following Sigismund I's defeat of the Muscovites at the battle of Orsha in September 1514, a theme to which the poet returns several times, although its chief subject is Sigismund's ancestor Jogaila (Władysław II Jagiełło), the progenitor of the Jagiellonian dynasty. The focus of the first book is the legendary history of Poland and the city of Kraków (the stories of Krakus and Wanda), while Book Two introduces the land of Lithuania and the history of the Teutonic Knights before describing Vytautas's first attack on the Knights at Grunwald in 1410, and initial defeat; Vytautas then entreats his "brother" Jogaila to join him, which Jogaila eventually does (after receiving a vision of St. Stanisław), and the Knights are routed and the Grand Master beheaded. The poet then compares Sigismund's defeat of Muscovy at Orsha with his grandfather Jogaila's achievements. The third book opens with a "council of the gods" in which the Olympians decide to find a bride for the ageing Jogaila: Sophia of Halshany (who was Sigismund's grandmother). Jogaila marries Sophia and we learn of the exploits of their descendants, including Sigismund himself.

While *The Prussian War* was not the first Latin poem to be written by a scholar of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, it was the first to celebrate the union of the Polish Crown and Lithuania under the Jagiellonian dynasty. While its author was probably a Pole by birth, *The Prussian War* introduced Lithuania and its native dynasty to European literature and can thus be seen as the beginning of the literature of Lithuania. *The Prussian War* inaugurated a Latin epic tradition in Lithuania and set a Virgilian standard of heroic verse that subsequent authors variously imitated, developed, rejected, or subverted.

In Nekrashevich-Karotkaja's view, *The Prussian War* is "essentially a panegyric and dynastic epic in honor of the Jagiellonian dynasty,"[45] following the model of Italian and Austrian epics that celebrated dynasties such as the Sforzas and Habsburgs. The Battle of Grunwald was far more than just a dynastic triumph, however. The victory marked the beginning of the formation of a new collective identity for Poles, Lithuanians, and Ruthenians as citizens of a vast Polish-Lithuanian realm under the Jagiellonians. Grunwald "made it possible to talk about the unity of the nations of Central Europe and their common destiny."[46] Furthermore, the Jagiellonian triumph was not just an event of

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Łowca, 1933); Mikolajus Husovianas, *Giesmė apie stumbrą*, trans. Benediktas Kazlauskas (Vilnius: Lituanistinė Biblioteka, 1977); Nicolaus Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison: Text and Translation of Nicolaus Hussovianus's "Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis"*, ed. and trans. Frederick J. Booth (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019).

45 Nekrashevich-Karotkaja, "Latin Epic Poetry," 21–2.

46 Ulčinaitė, "Lithuanian National Identity," 135.

regional significance in East-Central Europe, but had an impact on the entire European Continent, marking the emergence of a new composite power, Poland-Lithuania.

Joannes Vislicensis wrote *The Prussian War* in 1515, 105 years after the Battle of Grunwald, and Johannes Haller printed it at Kraków in 1516. The poem is addressed to King Sigismund I Jagiełło (known as "the Old"), whose forces had recently (on September 8, 1514) inflicted a decisive defeat on the Muscovites at Orsha.[47] In the same period, Poland-Lithuania enjoyed poor relations with the Teutonic Order, which had been led since 1511 by Grand Master Albrecht von Hohenzollern (who was also Sigismund's nephew).[48] The Latin literary tradition was already well-established in Kraków by the early sixteenth century. Gregory of Sanok (ca. 1403–77) had been responsible for welcoming the fugitive Italian humanist Filippo Buonaccorsi (1437–96) to Poland. Buonnacorsi was followed by Conrad Celtis in 1489, and by a flowering of Polish Latin poetry under such poets as Jan Dantyszek (Joannes Dantiscus, 1485–1548) and Andrzej Krzycki (Andreas Cricius, 1482–1537).[49] The first editor of *The Prussian War*, Bronisław Kruczkiewicz, thought that Joannes Vislicensis came from the town of Wiślica in Lesser Poland,[50] and this remains the most likely reality. Although the Belarusian scholar Viktar Ivanavich Darashkevich linked Joannes with the River Vislitsa near Pinsk in modern-day Belarus,[51] on balance a connection with Wiślica presents the most obvious explanation for Joannes's name.

In addition to *The Prussian War* being a self-consciously Virgilian epic, Joannes Vislicensis consciously saw himself as inaugurating a Latin epic tradition: Apollo reassures the poet that "there are and there will be poets who will afterwards set forth those kings whom hard Sarmatia honours" (Book One, lines 252–3). Joannes was right in one sense, but wrong in another: there would indeed be many Latin poets to follow him, but they would not generally write about ancient kings. Indeed, some poets would openly reject Joannes's approach. Nicolaus Hussovianus, who was undoubtedly the most significant Polish-Lithuanian Latin poet of the first half of the sixteenth century, both expanded the scope of epic poetry and discarded Joannes's somewhat heavy-handed Classicism, particularly when it came to the involvement of the Olympian gods: "In place of Jove," he declared, "I worship Christ, and my poems address not Juno, but the Mother of Christ. I refuse to mingle the truth with fable."[52] This was perhaps a pointed reference to Joannes's juxtaposition of a prayer to the Virgin Mary (Book One, lines 90–109) with a vision of the god Apollo (Book One, lines 225–56), as well as the elaborate "council of the gods" that takes up a significant portion of Book Three (1–115).

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47 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 345–6.

48 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 392–3.

49 Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison*, trans. Booth, 8–10.

50 Paulus Crosnensis and Joannes Vislicensis, *Pauli Crosnensis Rutheni atque Ioannis Vislicensis Carmina*, ed. Bronisław Kruczkiewicz (Kraków: Typis Universitatis Jagellonicae, 1887), xxxix.

51 V. I. Darashkevich, *Новолатинская поэзия Белоруссии и Литвы: первая половина XVI в.* (Minsk: Nauka i Tekhnika, 1979), 90–4.

52 Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison*, trans. Booth, 29.