

# CHAPTER I

## THE PAGAN SUPERSTATE THAT EMERGED FROM THE MIST



<b>Lithuania's Ancestors, the Balts</b>	14
The Road to a Lithuanian Nation	16
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Hillfort Country	18
The World of Gods and Goddesses	20
Life in the Cycle of Seasons and Paradise	22
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Baltic Gold – Amber	24

<b>26 From First Mention of Lithuania to Statehood</b>	
28 Changes in the territory of the Lithuanian state, 13 <sup>th</sup> – late 18 <sup>th</sup> century	
30 Lithuanian 'Land Vikings'	
32 <b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Baltic Sea Curonian Vikings	
34 Mindaugas, King of Lithuania	
36 <b>CLOSE UP:</b> Voruta and the Secret of the Grave of Mindaugas	

<b>Under the Gediminids</b>	38
The 13 <sup>th</sup> –14 <sup>th</sup> -Century Rulers of the GDL	40
The Gediminid Dynasty, the Late 13 <sup>th</sup> –15 <sup>th</sup> -century Genealogical Tree	42
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Šventaragis Valley in Vilnius	43
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Kernavė – Lithuania's Troy	44
A Militaristic, Idolatrous, Illiterate Society	46
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Dream of an Iron Wolf	48
Expansion of the Pagan Empire to the East	50
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Golden Horde: Friend or Enemy?	52

<b>54 War with Christian Europe</b>	
56 <b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Baltic Missionary Martyrs	
58 Baptism by the Sword Replaces the Peace Missions	
60 The Period of Great Victories	
62 The Desperate Fight on the Nemunas	
64 <b>CLOSE UP:</b> 'War Tourists' from Europe	



## CHAPTER II THE AUTUMN OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

<b>Lithuania Arrives in Catholic Europe</b>	68
Marriage with Poland	70
14 <sup>th</sup> –16 <sup>th</sup> -century GDL Monarchs	72
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Last Pagan Knight	74
Lithuania's Baptism	76
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Vilnius – A Fortress Never Taken by the Crusaders	78



The Jagiellonian dynasty. The late 14<sup>th</sup> –second half of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Genealogical Tree

<b>CLOSE UP:</b> St Casimir, Lithuania's Patron Saint	100
The Council of Lords with the Sejm	102
Threats from the East	104
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Moscow's Princess in Vilnius	106
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Triumph at Orsha	108



80	<b>The Age of Vytautas the Great</b>
82	The Winding Road to Power
84	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Catastrophe on the Vorskla
86	The Great War with the Teutonic Order
88	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Epoch Victory at Grunwald
90	The Uncrowned King of Lithuania
92	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Mystery of the Royal Pantheon

<b>Under the Jagiellonians</b>	94
Europe's Lithuanian Dynasty	96
The Council of Lords with the Sejm	102
Threats from the East	104
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Moscow's Princess in Vilnius	106
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Triumph at Orsha	108

110	<b>European Society</b>
112	Divine Order – Class Society
114	Stadtluft Macht Frei
116	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Kingdom of Hades in Vilnius
118	Lords and Serfs
120	Written Culture and Education
122	Lithuania's Gothic Church in Napoleon's Palm



## CHAPTER III

### THE RENAISSANCE, THE REFORMATION, AND THE COMMONWEALTH



<b>The Culture's Golden Age</b>	126
Italian Fashion – the Renaissance	128
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Bona Sforza, the Black Queen	130
Humanism and the Printed Word	132
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Lithuania's Romeo and Juliet	134
The Reformation and Written Lithuanian	136
The Pope or John Calvin?	138



140	<b>Together with Poland</b>	
142	The Union of Lublin	
144	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> War over Livonia	
146	Lithuania in a New State	
148	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Statute of Lithuania – the Constitution of the nobility	

<b>A Spot of Tolerance in Europe</b>	150
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> A Backlash of Intolerance	152
The Personal Guards of Vytautas the Great: Karaites and Tatars	154
Lithuanian Jews and their Communities	156
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Great Synagogue, the Heart of the Jerusalem of the North	158
The Cradle of the Belarusian and Ukrainian Nations	160
<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Orthodox Christians between Moscow and Rome	162



## CHAPTER IV BAROQUE CITADEL OF CHRISTIANITY

	<b>The King Must Be Elected</b>	166
	Elected PLC monarchs, second half of the 16 <sup>th</sup> – Late 18 <sup>th</sup> centuries	168
	The Fugitive King	170
	A Hungarian on the Throne	172
	The Swedish House of Vasa	174
	From Own to Saxon	176
	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Traces of Lithuania in Wawel	178



180	<b>An Aristocratic Nation and State</b>	
182	Magnates and Gentry	
184	The Life of the Nobility	
186	A Nobles' Democracy	
188	County Sejmiks	
190	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The <i>Patres Patriae</i> Radziwiłłs	

	<b>The Commonwealth's Never-ending Wars</b>	192
	The Overseas Swedish Threat	194
	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Lithuania's Military Genius	196
	Lithuanians in the Kremlin and Muscovites in Vilnius	198
	Conflicts with the Ottoman Empire	200
	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Winged Hussars	202
	The Northern War over the Baltic	204



206	<b>The Silver Era of Baroque Culture</b>	
208	Lithuanian Baroque Pearls	
210	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> Jesuits, God's Soldiers	
212	Vilnius University: 'From Here the Way Leads to the Stars'	
214	Concern for the Faith and Lithuanian	
216	<b>CLOSE UP:</b> The Orphan Radziwiłł, Baroque Rover	





**CHAPTER V**  
**THE COMMONWEALTH'S**  
**HOT SECOND SUMMER**

**A Moment of Enlightenment in the State's Twilight** | 220

The First Ministry of Education in Europe | 222

**CLOSE UP:** An Island of Freedom in an Ocean of Serfdom | 224

Art after an Ancient Example | 226

**CLOSE UP:** Vilnius Cathedral, the Mother of Churches | 228

230 | **Surrounded by Black Eagles**

232 | The Last Monarch

234 | The First Attempt at Liberation by force

236 | The Vultures Divvy up the Spoils

238 | **CLOSE UP:** 'Don't Kill the Homeland'

**A Period of Reform** | 240

The May 3 Constitution | 242

**CLOSE UP:** Freemasons, Heralds of the Enlightenment | 244

The First Lithuanian Constitution | 246

In Defence of the Constitution | 248



250 | **The Tadeusz Kościuszko Uprising**

252 | 'Keep Courage in your Heart' – the Uprising in the GDL

254 | **CLOSE UP:** A Salute to the Heroic Defenders of Vilnius

256 | The End of the Commonwealth

258 | The Third Partition and the Collapse of the State



**Principal men and women of**  
**11<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup>-century Lithuanian history** | 260

**Index of Place Names** | 265

**Index of People** | 276

**Sources of Illustrations** | 286



## CLOSE UP:

# THE BALTIC SEA CURONIAN VIKINGS

For several centuries in the early Middle Ages, Europeans endured attacks by Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish pirates, i.e. the Vikings. People believed that the appearance of pagan Northmen was God's punishment, a warning to lukewarm Christians. From the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Baltic tribes living on the Baltic coast and along the Daugava River, an important trade route, encountered Vikings, who traded in the Baltic lands, establishing colonies and trading posts such as Truso (Lith. Drusuo) in Prussia and Grobiņa in present-day Latvia. Archaeological finds show that Vikings also lived in Palanga together with the Curonians, whom the Vikings knew well and valued for their militancy and who probably joined the ranks of the Northmen terrorizing Europe. The Balts exchanged wax and furs for high-quality Viking weapons: swords, battle axes, and spears. From the Vikings, the Balts learned how to make and decorate weapons and to use the system of measuring weights. Commerce-related words of Swedish origin have survived in the Baltic languages, such as an old Lithuanian word for commerce *vaizba* from Visby, a city in Sweden. The Curonian jewellery found in Scandinavia shows the mutual exchange. Swedish Viking sa-

gas and runic inscriptions on stones also speak of campaigns in Baltic lands, the most famous being the sieges in c.853-4 of the fiercely defended Curonian castle at Apuolė (Skuodas District) by first a Danish army and then by King Olof of Sweden with another army that resulted in a peace treaty whereby the Curonians agreed to continue paying the Swedes tribute. Apuolė is the oldest place in Lithuania mentioned in written historical sources. After the Vikings converted to Christianity, the successful Curonians replaced them in the Baltic Sea in the 11<sup>th</sup> – early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the chronicles calling them 'a very brutal tribe of idolaters' who had gold in abundance and were 'sorcerers and seers' at home. They attacked merchant ships, terrorized the Danish and Swedish coasts, looted everything of value, even church bells, and made women and children slaves. The fate of the Curonian tribe, who were close to creating their own state, is sad. After their conquest by the Brothers of the Sword (later Livonian Order) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they were eventually assimilated and disappeared. Their greatness and prosperity are recalled by the Imbarė and Ipiltis castle sites and some place names: Courland, Kuršėnai, and the Curonian Spit.



► The extensive 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>-century trade along the River Daugava is shown by the Arabic coins found in Selonian lands.

▼ The 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>-century weaponry of a high status Curonian warrior reconstructed by the Vilkatlakai club on the basis of material discovered in Latvian and Lithuanian cemeteries.





▲ A Gotland Island (Sweden) Viking tombstone that speaks of a military campaign. 9<sup>th</sup> century.

▲ A 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>-century antenna sword discovered in a Curonian cemetery. This elegant sword was the signature type of the Curonian smiths.

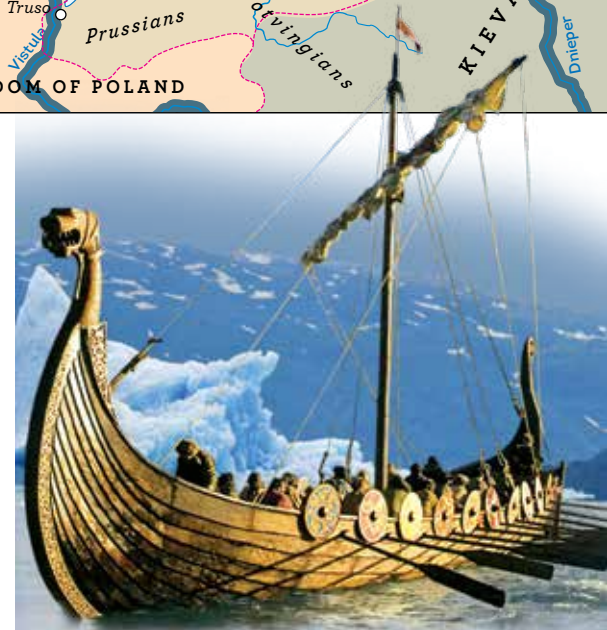
▲ A 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>-century horde of silver bullion discovered in Semigallian lands. This precious metal was the most important means of settlement in barter trade at that time. A female slave was worth two ingots, 4 swords - the entire collection.



▲ The reconstructed Viking and Prussian city of Truso in its heyday in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries.



▲ The Balts and their neighbours. 9<sup>th</sup> - late 11<sup>th</sup> century.



▲ A reconstructed Viking drakkar longship.

### A Prussian merchant encounters the Curonians

One summer, he [Viðgautr] sailed east, intending to stay home as he was late, but when he arrived east at Courland, the Curonians lay there before him on warships and at once attacked him, wishing to kill him and take his money for themselves. Since he was a lone ship and the Curonians had a large force, he saw no chance against them and wanted to escape and sail home to Samland. But the Curonians, wishing to have his life and money, immediately sailed after him and at once turned him away from the land.

*1250s Knjittinga saga, chapter 87.*

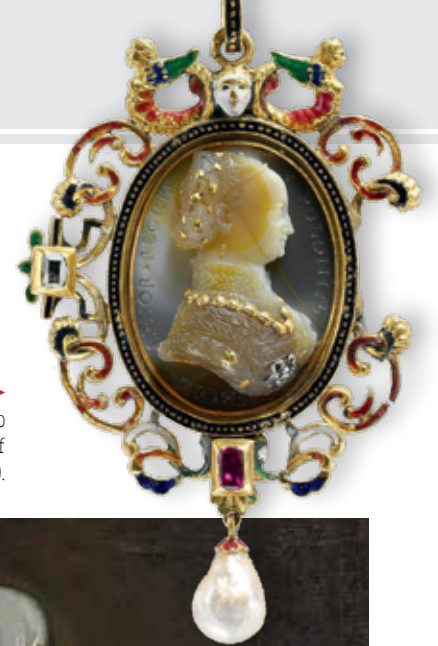
## CLOSE UP:

# BONA SFORZA, THE BLACK QUEEN

‘These houses, which once ruled countries and kingdoms, received the Mark from their relatives for good reason. Children don’t pity the snake when the wicked are devoured so that good people can agreeably chance to live in peace,’ intones Mikołaj Hussowczyk’s poem dedicated to Bona Sforza, the PLC monarch from the Duchy of Milan, where Leonard da Vinci enjoyed the patronage of Bona’s uncle, who had usurped power. The same Milan biscione (serpent) can be seen on the Sforza coat of arms and the Alfa Romeo sports car logo. Bona’s parents, Gian Galeazzo Sforza and the beautiful Isabella of Aragon, provided their daughter with an excellent education in the humanities, an education that most noble European women of the day could only dream of. From an early age, Bona’s teachers taught her to understand men and manage them. Lithuanian and Polish nobles called the ruling wife of Sigismund I the Old, a snake under their breath. After becoming a monarch of Lithuania and Poland, she was especially active in solving the state’s main problems. ‘The queen is rushing around here and there like a maniac and his majesty, the king, quickly becomes weary. So I ask if nothing bad will happen, seeing as the queen alone is pushing the figures around the board?’ wondered courtier Pedro Ruiz de Moros about her Machiavellian abilities. Bona intro-

duced Lithuania to the Renaissance, especially the culture. She was a patron of Abraomas Kulvietis, the first Protestant in the GDL. She brought Italian architects, painters and musicians to the royal estate, where she introduced the idea of patronage, the renaissance culture of banqueting, dancing, cooking, and serving etiquette as well as the new culinary traditions of Mediterranean cuisine. Having come from the homeland of banking, Northern Italy, this active queen, who was financially and economically astute, put the royal demesne in order, was the first to implement the Vok reform, and oversaw the development of the GDL’s cities, crafts, and trade. The legendary image of a poisoner and the Black Queen was the result of the conflict over Barbara Radziwiłł (actually over power) with her son, Sigismund II Augustus. His marriage to her thwarted Bona’s lofty dynastic plans. Sigismund II Augustus, in his mother’s opinion, was worthy of a wife descended from the most famous kings of Europe, not lesser nobles like the Radziwiłłs. In reality, Bona did not wish to see Barbara die and later even acknowledged the queen as the love of her son’s life. It was not the hated daughter-in-law, but Bona herself who became the victim of poison.

▶  
Bona Sforza in mourning after the death of Sigismund I the Old. 1551 portrait.



▶  
A Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio cameo with an image of Bona Sforza. c. 1540.







▲ *The Poisoning of Bona Sforza*. Second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting by Jan Matejko. The poisoning of Sforza, who had returned to Bari, was a carefully planned crime. The forged will created a major legal dispute between King Philip II of Spain, who coveted the wealth of the Sforzas, and Sigismund II Augustus. Her son regained only a small portion of his mother's estate.

► Bona Sforza's prayer book displaying the Vytis and the Sforza biscione. First half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



**From the 1516 letter of Bona's teacher, Crisostomo Colonna, to Polish diplomat Johannes Dantiscus**

Duchess Bona Sforza ... is very educated, has an almost sanguine temperament, is of medium height, neither too lean nor too heavy, very gentle, knows by heart four books of Virgil, many letters of Cicero, various epigrams, many Italian works, and Petrarch, and writes and speaks in a very educated manner.

*G. Cioffari, Bona Sforza: donna del Rinascimento tra Italia e Polonia, Bari, Levante: Centro studi nicolaiani, 2000, p. 55.*



▲ A page from Bona Sforza's prayer book.

► Bona Sforza. 1517 engraving made a year before her marriage to Sigismund.



▲ The Bona Sforza's sarcophagus, which was ordered by her daughter, Anna Jagiellon. Late 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most famous women in Lithuanian history is buried in the Basilica di San Nicola in Bari, Italy.



## UP CLOSE:

# TRIUMPH AT ORSHA

**H**ere was buried in 1533 Konstanty Iwanowicz, Prince of Ostroh, Voivode (Palatine) of Trakai, [Grand] Hetman of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, cut down by death at the age of 70 after many victories. He won 63 bloody victories against Moscow and the Tatars, including on the “Ros, Dnieper, and Olshanka”, renovated and built many castles, many monasteries, and many holy Orthodox churches both in the Principality of Ostroh and in the GDL capital, Vilnius. ... He provided shelter for the weak, schools for the children, and spears and swords for the knights at the Academy of Mars...’ attests a 16<sup>th</sup>-century epitaph in the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra Monastery. This high praise was for one of Lithuania’s most famous generals, the Second Hannibal, the Ruthenian Scipio, as Ostrogski’s contemporaries called him. The Orthodox Christian Ruthenian prince was tempered in the GDL’s unsuccessful wars with Moscow. After his defeat at Vedrosha, he became a captive of the Muscovites. The events leading to his greatest triumph began in late July 1514 when, after a long siege and a betrayal, the Muscovites captured the city-fortress of Smolensk, which was especially important for the country’s defence. This opened the door into the depths of the GDL for

an 80,000-strong enemy army. A hurriedly-assembled conscript army, reinforced by heavy Polish cavalry and mercenary infantry, rapidly crossed the Dnieper at Orsha (Belarus) on the morning of 8 September and blocked the path of a Muscovite force twice its size. The victory was the result of the courage of the soldiers and the talent of Grand Hetman Ostrogski. The Lithuanian light cavalry pretended to flee, enticing the enemy into an artillery ambush. ‘The sky, the ground, and the hills shook and the Muscovites fell, unable to return such fire’ – the cannon fire mowed down the enemy and the Lithuanian and Polish cavalry attack forced the confused and disoriented Muscovites to flee ‘like animals through every field while enduring a terrible slaughter’. Thousands became captives, including their commander, Ivan Chelyadnin, but Grand Prince Vasili III of Moscow refused to redeem any of them. Word of this spectacular victory spread all over Europe. The resulting 40-year truce gave Lithuania time to recover and grow stronger. A triumphal procession was held in Vilnius to display the captives, trophies, weapons, and gold; the captured standards were hung in Vilnius Cathedral. For years, the spectators called Aušra Gate ‘Ostrogski Gate’. This victory became an especially important part of the Belarusian and Ukrainian national conscious and a symbol of resistance to Moscow’s tyranny.



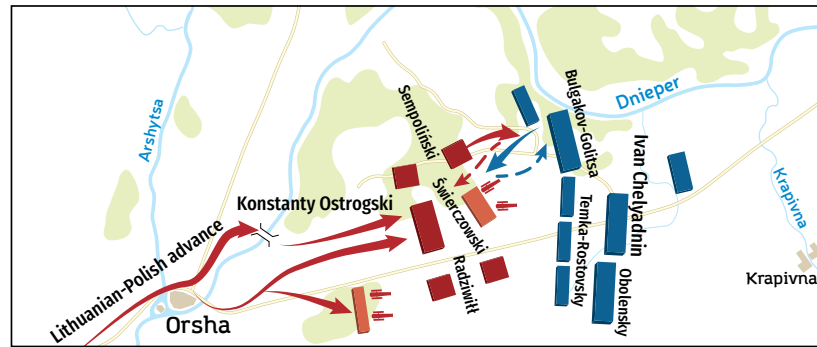
▶ The early 16<sup>th</sup>-century armour of GDL noble, Jurgis Radvila, Lithuania's Hercules, who commanded the Lithuanian cavalry at the battle.



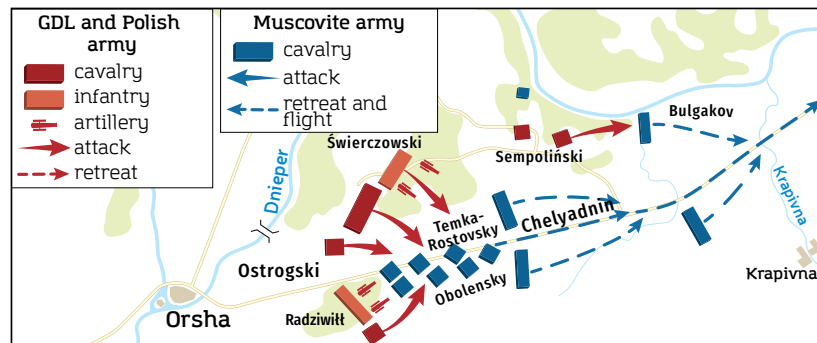
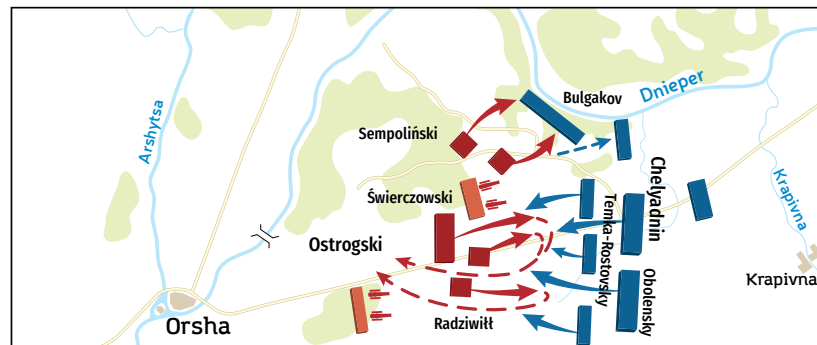


◀ The reconstructed monument to Konstanty Ostrogski in the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra Monastery. The original was blown up by the retreating Red Army in the autumn of 1941.

▼ The GDL and Polish army crush the Muscovites at the *Battle of Orsha*. A portion of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century painting by Hans Krell.



◀ Diagrams of the 8 September 1514 Battle of Orsha.



#### Bielski's 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Chronicle of Poland* on the Battle of Orsha

After crossing the river, our soldiers formed up but the Muscovites avoided an open battle and retreated from the place. Not wishing the Muscovites to flee, our soldiers did not rush to pursue them with cannons. The Lithuanian cavalry advanced on the right wing, the Polish the left while the infantry and musketeers did not move. The Muscovites thought to surround our soldiers and placed their best units in the forefront. These had no cannon and were heavily loaded down. Then the fight began, filling the air with the sound of explosions, shouting, entreaties, shots, the clang of weapons, drums, and bugles, of which just the Muscovites had five hundred. While both sides were striving for victory with all their might, the King of Poland's people greatly surpassed Moscow's in courage and agility, not to mention being well supported by their artillery, which inflicted great injury on the enemy, who, as a result, began to flee and were beaten, chopped, and run through by our soldiers.

*Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kasdienis gyvenimas. Vilnius, Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001, p. 65.*

# I THE AUTUMN OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

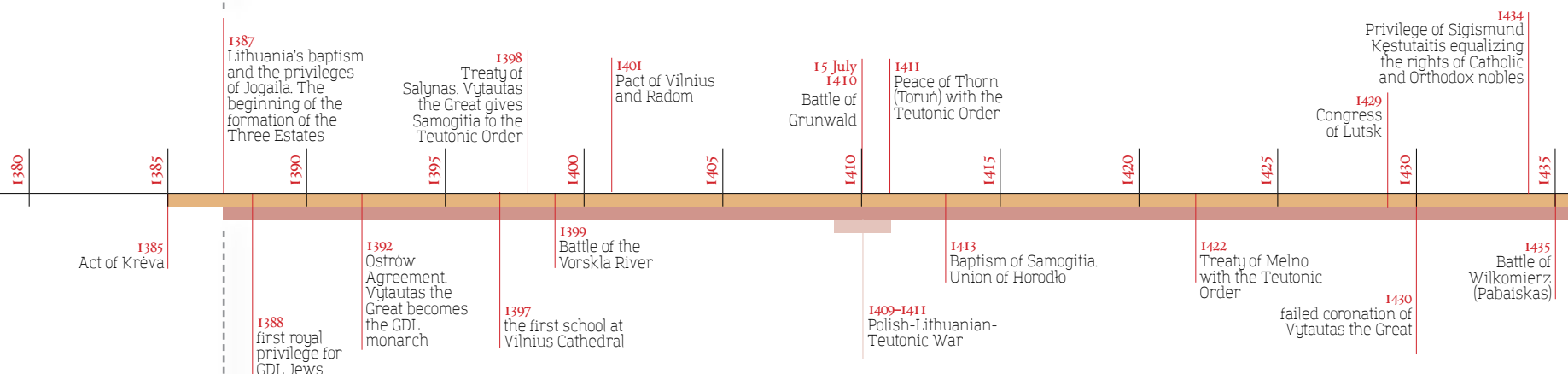
Historian Johan Huizinga poetically named the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe the autumn of the Middle Ages. In the Late Middle Ages, almost a quarter of Europeans lost their lives in a catastrophic plague pandemic, accompanied by famine and impoverishing wars. After the rampage of the Black Death, change approached: the first renaissance blossoms opened their petals in the city-states of northern Italy. The most important contemporary event in the history of Lithuania was its baptism, which ended the period of paganism. The wise choice of Jogaila, the well-deserved royal crown, and the Catholic baptism from Poland firmly caused Lithuania to turn from the East to the West and to choose the path of Western European civilization. In honour of Vytautas the Great, the very prominent Lithuanian ruler and a contemporary

of these events, Balys Sruoga created a historical drama, *Milžino Paunksmė* [In the Shadow of a Giant], in which the action occurs in the absence of Vytautas but with a constant sense of his presence and influence. In reality, judging by their significance for the fate of Lithuania and neighbouring countries, it would be advisable to call both cousins giants of history as their work meant that the 15<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries became the period of Lithuania's rapid Europeanization. In a very short time on a historical scale, Lithuania adopted Western European culture: Catholicism, schools, writing, the basics of medieval society, and the nuances of state governance. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania became a full-fledged European state.



▲  
Jogaila Triumphant – The Baptism of Lithuania. Early 15<sup>th</sup>-century fresco in the Holy Trinity Chapel of Lublin Castle.

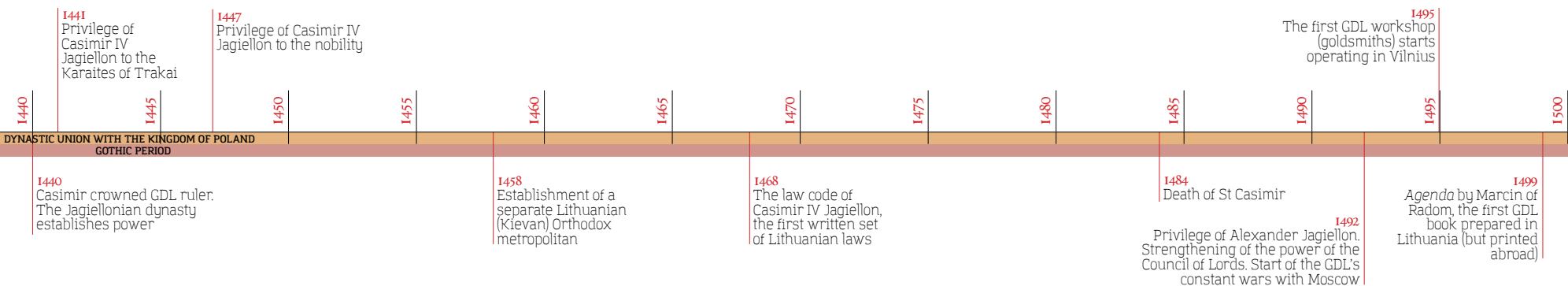
PAGANISM      CHRISTIAN SOCIETY



▼ *The Battle of Grunwald*. 1878 painting by Jan Matejko. In the centre is Vytautas the Great holding a sword, on the left, Ulrich von Jungingen, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, wearing a white cloak, and on the right in the distance, King Jogaila of Poland, on a horse and holding a flag.



► The GDL coat of arms is the Vytis, a mounted knight. From Jogaila's Gothic sarcophagus in Wawel Cathedral. Circa the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century.



# THE KING MUST BE ELECTED

“Gentlemen, name which of these many honourable competitors you like, and I am ready.” Others also spoke, some for, some against, in a rapid-fire debate: “I want this one.” “I do too.” “I like this one.” “So do I” Some agree one way, others another. Even more excited, they are already shouting: “Vivat rex!” (Long live the King!)’ was the description of a witness to a 17<sup>th</sup>-century PLC royal election in a field at Wola near Warsaw. While all of the Commonwealth’s nobles were entitled to participate in elections, only the wealthier ones and those elected to the Sejm, usually 10–15,000, came, together with servants, food, and bedding. Food was cooked near the tents set up in the field while the participants talked, argued, drank, and more than once came to blows. When the GDL nobility arrived, they pitched their tents together, acted in unison, stubbornly raised their own candidate for king, and, not wanting to recognise the Polish candidate, even went home on occasion. Due to incessant disputes, elections sometimes lasted as long as a couple of months. After the winner was announced, the nobles began to shout ‘Vivat!’ (Long may he live!), threw their hats into the air, and raised their swords. In other European countries at that time, the crown was inherited. The PLC royal Electoral Sejm could

elect any local or foreign noble monarch, who was weak and so reigned but did not rule, being dependent on the will of the state’s real masters, the nobility. ‘They don’t want to listen to me while I’m alive, so why will they obey my will when I’m dead?’ complained one monarch. On the other hand, having a ruler elected and controlled by the Sejm was a major step on the path to democracy. At a time when absolute monarchies were emerging in Western Europe and despots in the East (the Russian Tsar and Ottoman Empire Sultan), the PLC seemed like an island of freedom with a citizen-elected ruler and a parliament. The elected king was traditionally crowned King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania only once, in Wawel Cathedral, Kraków. Although the king bore the title of Grand Duke of Lithuania, he was no longer presented with the Grand Duke’s mitre, called the cap of Gediminas, or a sword. The ruler did not live permanently in Vilnius, only visiting the GDL occasionally and not even spending a third of the time there as the Lithuanians demanded.

▶ The 1697 election of PLC monarch Augustus II the Strong in a field at Wola. In the centre is the Senate pavilion, where the highest state officials, the senators, sat, and around it, the noble field, where the nobles participating in the royal election gathered. Late 17<sup>th</sup>-century painting by Jean-Pierre Norblin de La Gourdain.



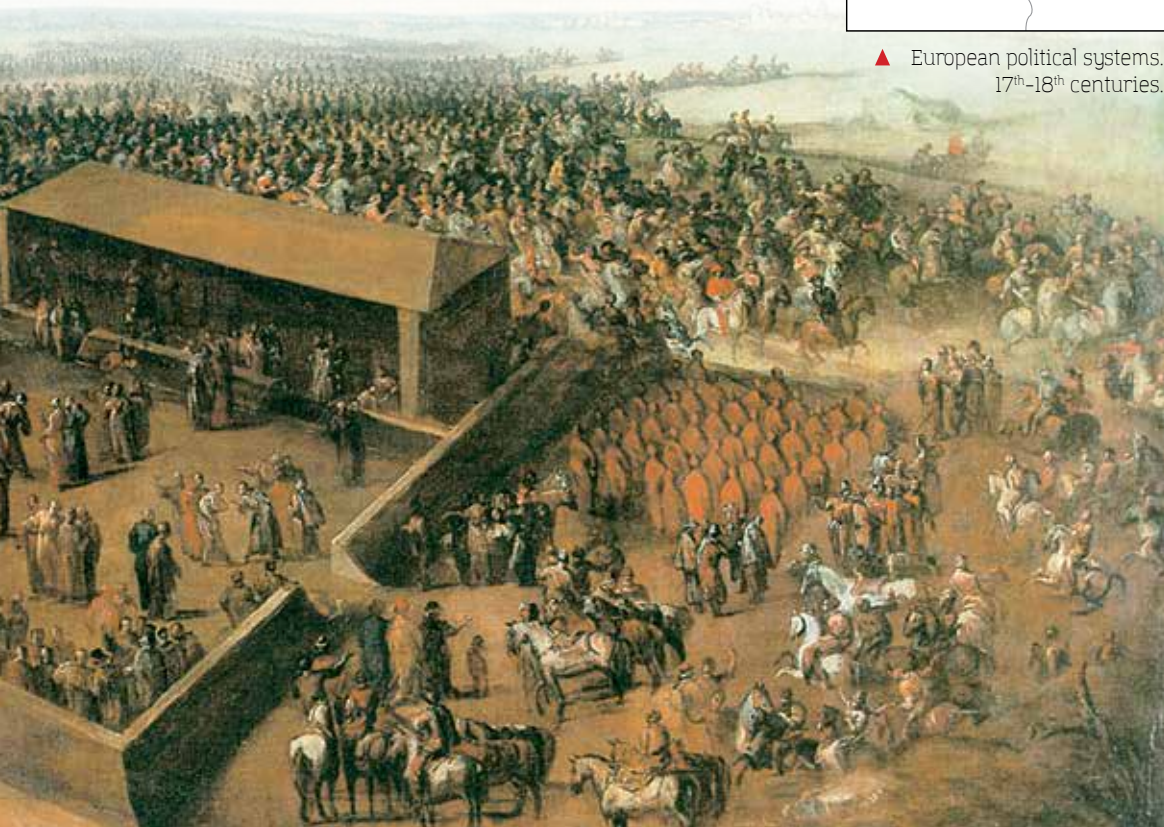
▶ The crown, orb, and sceptre of PLC monarch Augustus III of Poland. First half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



▲ The 1705 coronation of PLC monarch Stanisław I Leszczyński in Warsaw. Part of a contemporary engraving.



▲ European political systems. 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.



### A French officer's observations about the PLC royal election. 1632

As soon as King Sigismund III Vasa died, the Archbishop of Gniezno summoned the senate to Warsaw, where it convened and set the time and place for the election of a new king. They then return to their voivodeships and local sejms, where they and their fellow nobles look for the advantages of each candidate and write resolutions. All of this must be adopted unanimously, one word 'Veto' destroying everything. On the day designated, everyone gathers in Warsaw at a place called Wola. There they dig a ditch around a square field so that no horse can enter. In the middle of that field, two large tents are erected, one for the Senate, the other for the emissaries from the lands. After reviewing the resolutions of the local sejm, the emissaries and Senate discuss daily who to choose as a candidate and who would guarantee their freedoms and privileges. In the election of His Majesty, King Vladislovas IV Vaza, these meetings lasted two weeks and were attended by over 80,000 mounted nobles. And each senator and greater gentleman brought his own army.

*Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kasdienis gyvenimas. Vilnius, Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001, p. 84.*

## THE MAY 3 CONSTITUTION

A crowd of thousands gathered in Warsaw's Castle Square to greet the proclamation of the Constitution with joyful shouts: 'Vivat Rex! Vivat Constitutio!' (Long live the king! Long live the Constitution!). The country received a basic state law corresponding to the modern spirit. Proud to be a co-author, Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski wrote to French National Constituent Assembly that France was not alone in Europe. This Enlightenment-inspired Constitution was the first Constitution in Europe, beating France by a few months, and the second in the world, after the United States. It promoted the modernization of society and laid the foundation for the state's rebirth. Its ideas guided later uprisings against the Russian Empire and it was defended by clergymen in sermons, by professors at Vilnius University, and by Kościuszko insurgents. It affirmed the privileges and freedoms of the nobility and the already adopted rights of the townspeople but abolished the election of kings, the liberum veto, and the rights of confederations. Religious rights and freedoms were guaranteed, but Catholicism was declared to be the state religion and Catholics were forbidden from converting to another faith. Unfortunately, the Constitution did not free the serfs, who remained without any rights. In accordance with Enlightenment ideas, the Commonwealth's government was divided into legislative (Sejm), executive (king and the cabinet of ministers aka the Guardians of the Laws) and judicial (courts) branches. It proclaimed that power arose from the will of the nation, not from the will of the king. The state became a constitutional monarchy.



▲ That the Constitution of 3 May 1791 is an Enlightenment document of European significance is shown by the fact that it was translated into English, German, and French at that time and has been included in the UNESCO Memory of the World register.

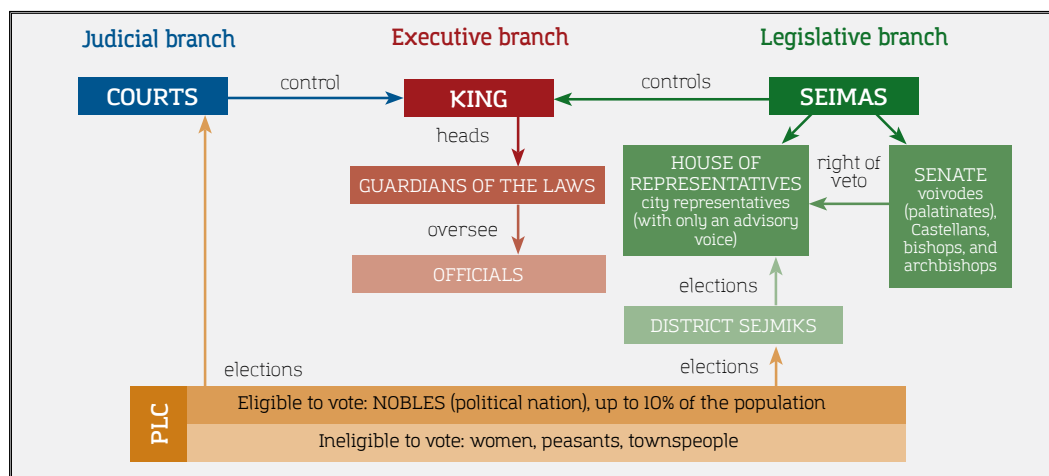
► *The Constitution of 3 May 1791.* 1891 painting by Jan Matejko. This portrays the triumphant procession of the Constitution's proponents in Warsaw with Sejm Marshal Stanisław Małachowski (centre) holding the text aloft and the opponents of the Four-Year Sejm's reforms on the ground.



▲ A sword with the constitutional slogan 'The nation with the king'. Late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.







◀ The PLC government according to the 1791 Constitution.

▶ Title page of the Constitution of the 3 May 1791.



### From the Constitution of the 3 May 1791

**Art. I. THE DOMINANT NATIONAL RELIGION**  
The Holy Roman-Catholic Faith, with all its privileges and immunities, shall be the dominant national religion. ...

**Art. II. NOBILITY, OR THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER**  
... We acknowledge the rank of the noble Equestrian order in Poland to be equal to all degrees of nobility—all persons of that order to be equal among themselves, not only in the eligibility to all posts of honour, trust, or emolument, but in the enjoyment of all privileges and prerogatives appertaining to the said order: ... It is in this order that we repose the defence of our liberties and the present constitution ...

**Art. V. FORM OF GOVERNMENT, OR THE DEFINITION OF PUBLIC POWERS**  
All power in civil society should be derived from the will of the people, its end and object being the preservation and integrity of the State, the civil liberty, and the good order of society, on an equal scale, and on a lasting foundation. Three distinct powers shall compose the government of the Polish nation, according to the present constitution; viz. 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative power in the States assembled. 2<sup>nd</sup> Executive power of the King and the Council of Inspection. 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial power in Jurisdictions existing, or to be established. ...

**Art. VI. THE DIET, OR THE LEGISLATIVE POWER**  
... The majority of votes shall decide everything everywhere; therefore we abolish, and utterly annihilate, liberum veto, ...

1791 m. gegužės 3 d. Konstitucija  
Vilnius, Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001

