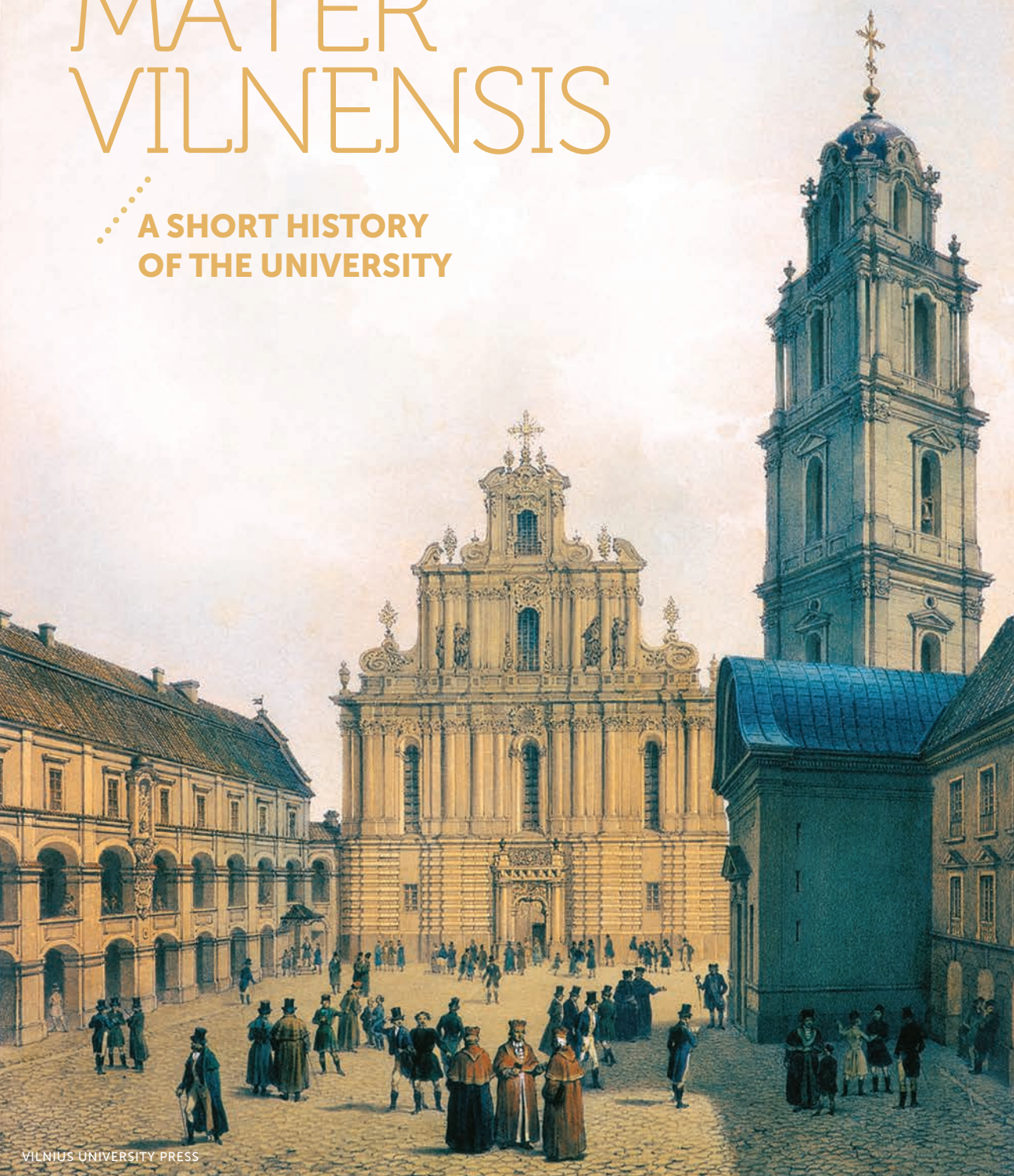


# ALMA MATER VILNENSIS

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A SHORT HISTORY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY





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# VILNIUS UNIVERSITY THAT DREW THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST

What is in common between the history of Vilnius University, Baroque spaces of Poland and the Lithuanian state, the Carmelite Church in Mstislavl at the current Belarusian-Russian border, the Kiev-Mohyla Academy, the boundary of Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire resting against Mariupol situated on the northern coast of the Sea of Azov and Donetsk Front today?

We all know the boundaries of the Donetsk Front. Why do we have to speak about that today? Let us begin with stating that the most eminent American political scientist who gained prominence through his *Clash of Civilisations* Samuel P. Huntington looks for the boundaries of Western civilisation. Sometimes Huntington's conception is regarded as one of the most influential conceptions at the end of the 20th century, all the more so, that it forecasted the Balkan Wars. According to it, features of Western civilisation are as follows: legacy of classical (antique) civilisation, Western (rather than Oriental) Christianity, multitude of languages, separateness of spiritual and secular authorities, and primacy of law, social pluralism, political representation and individuality. It is well known that Huntington considered the boundary of Western civilisation to run through the Ukraine and Belarus. He attributed only western parts of these countries to Western civilisation, hence, only Galicia with Lviv and Volhynia in the Ukraine. Therefore it seemed to him that the largest part of Ukraine was related to Russian civilisation. This seems to have determined the fate of Ukraine's nuclear weapon.

Therefore it is very important to draw attention to the correction of Huntington's conception, which was made by a famous intellectual of the Solidarity, Polish historian and geo-politician Leszek Moczulski. He moved the boundaries of European civilisation much farther towards the East than Huntington had proposed. According to Moczulski, as far back as the 19th century the boundary of European civilisation included the whole space of the Polish and Lithuanian state annexed to the Russian Empire, hence, Belarus and Ukraine.

In this map attention should be paid to the Sea of Azov (let us call it the point of Mariupol) to which several lines drawn by Moczulski run. Firstly, this is the boundary of individual households and Russian community-based agriculture. It became visible in 1861 after serfdom was abolished in the Russian Empire – it was only towards the West of this boundary that there were no regular redivisions of land between the members of the community (*Mir*). Secondly, the boundary of the Jewish settlement did not extend beyond



■ Boundaries of European civilisation in the 19th century (according to Leszek Moczulski).

Mariupol – the Russian Empire prohibited the Jews to move from the Polish and Lithuanian state further to the East. The most interesting thing is that this boundary coincided with the former boundary of the Hetmanate. Even after annexing eastern Ukraine to Russia, following Khmielnitsky uprising in the middle of the 17th century, the Ukrainian Hetmanate continued to exist for another century – the protectorate of Russia ruled by the Cossack Hetman was abolished in the middle of the 18th century only.

Thirdly, the boundaries of Latin education. The Cossack Hetmanate is of significance here, where during the reign of Ivan Mazepa, the educational system developed by the Kiev Peter Mohyla Academy in the first half of the 17th century in essence functioned. It was designed according to the system that operated at Vilnius University because Mohyla was an alumnus of Vilnius Jesuits; it is true, later, in the times of the Cossacks, he decided to associate his life with orthodox believers and created an orthodox system of education. This system, however, was totally oriented towards





■ Students of Kiev-Mohyla Academy. Author Ivan Shchyrsky, 1698.

Vilnius University and its legacy. This criterion can be highlighted by drawing the Baroque boundaries. In essence the system of Jesuit education overlaps with the Baroque space. Polish art historians admitted a long time ago that Vilnius baroque (the so-called Ioannes Christophorus Glaubicus Baroque or the Vilnius School of Baroque) was the School of Baroque of the most spacious effect in Europe. Polish historian Stanisław Aleksandrowicz stated the same about the space of the impact of the University of Vilnius. Hence, the Carmelite Church in Mstislavl reconstructed by Glaubicus, 500 km east of Vilnius or 100 km beyond the Dnieper, is its most convincing proof. The ‘Cossack-like baroque’, which flourished in the Hetmanate, i.e. in Kiev and in left-coastal Ukraine should also be mentioned in this context. The origin of this school of Baroque, however, obviously goes back to Vilnius too because its main architect was German-born Joannes Baptista who arrived in the Hetmanate from Vilnius at the end of the 17th century.



#### ■ Network of universities until 1579.

It was his architectural ideas that Ivan Mazepa himself developed. Hence, we have to speak about Vilnius University in this context. In other words, we have to speak about the role of the University of the Baroque Epoch in our history and the history of Europe.

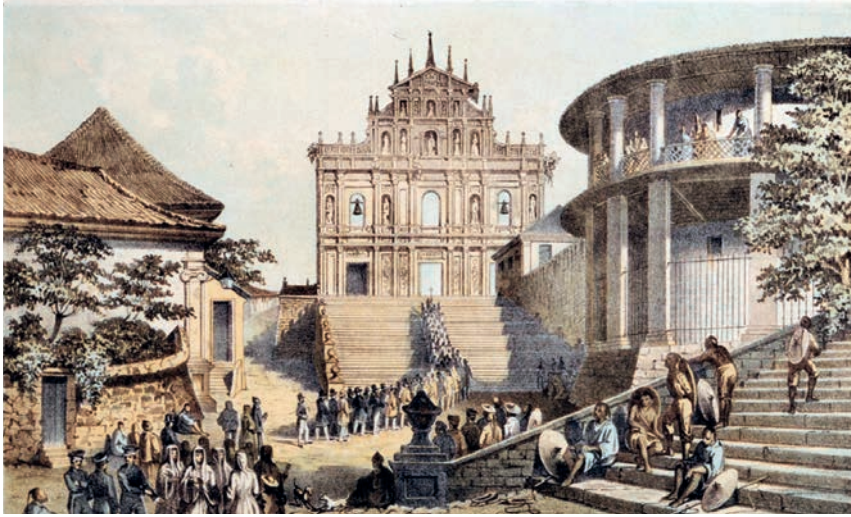
Usually it is said that the equals sign can be placed between the University and European culture. Universities created the identity of Europe. The boundaries of the Latin system of education, at the top of which there were universities, are actually boundaries of European culture. The idea of the purport of universities, which was the initial paradigm of the history of universities, is especially relevant nowadays because it is quite often that a pragmatic, commercial attitude towards universities stifles the fundamental idea of searching for their purport.

Vilnius University got into the second wave of the founding of universities; for a long time our University was a university of the far-reaching influence. In terms of space of our direct influence we had no analogues in Europe. Vilnius University drew the boundaries of European civilisation. It was founded as the 112th university in Europe. It is not without reason that the Poles take pride in the fact that the University of Cracow was the most easterly point of the network of Western civilisation and Latin universities for two hundred years. Afterwards Vilnius University played the role of the easternmost university in Europe for another two hundred years. Later, beginning with 1755, the University of Moscow took over that title.

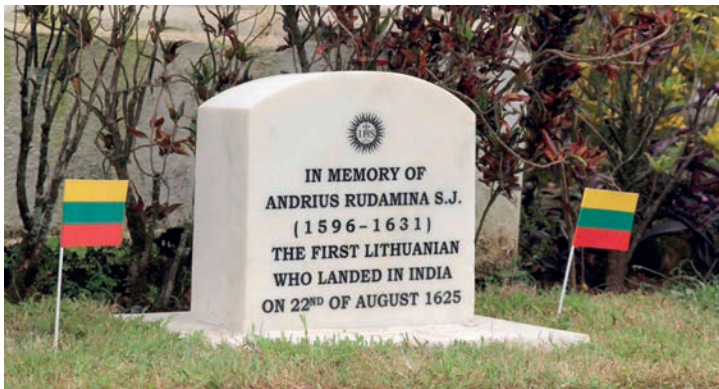
Vilnius University is often called as the easternmost Western university. This could be associated with the concept 'provincial'. However, in the times of Jesuits this was not the case. *Ratio studiorum* was the system which operated in any Jesuit university as far as Latin America. The same system and studies of the same academic level were implemented everywhere. It was not for nothing that the professors from Spain to Norway arrived there, and the space of its influence was huge and reached Kiev and the Dnieper.

How we can prove that the University of Vilnius during the first hundred years, until its troubles started (1655), had to belong to the hundred of European universities? In the middle of the 17th century the number of universities increased and totalled 150. The University of Vilnius could not compete with such Protestant universities as the universities of Wittenberg or Geneva, Leiden or Basel, Cambridge or Oxford. Their number totalled forty in the middle of the 17th century. They are usually regarded as progressive and related to advance of science in Holland and England. Let us reject another forty Catholic universities, which operated uninterruptedly from the Middle Ages, the entire group of universities in Italy. However, the University of Vilnius could easily compete with other seventy universities, all the more so, that out of those seventy universities thirty can be safely rejected as they were closed down in the 17th century and nobody remembers them. Consequently, about forty universities can be rivals to the University of Vilnius.

We are not inferior to other universities in anything because the names of the first half of the 17th century representing the University of Vilnius are prominent and significant. Perhaps the names themselves do not tell much but the *Logica* of the Polish Jesuit, Martinus Smiglecius was recognised not only by the Jesuits but also by the universities in England. The same can be said about Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius who was crowned *poeta laureatus* (poet laureate) by the Pope. Also, mention should be made of Sigismundus Lauxminus



■ St. Paul's Church in Macau (China). Painting by Wilhelm Heine, 1854.



■ At the Catholic Cathedral in the town of Goa in India; a monumental stone perpetuating Andreas Rudamina's S.J. visit to that town was unveiled in 2015.

*The ruins of St. Paul's Church in Macau. It includes what was originally St. Paul's Jesuit College, which became the first western university in East Asia at the end of the 16th century. The Jesuits who arrived there were taught the Chinese language and trained to work as missionaries. In 1626, Andreas Rudamina S.J. the first Lithuanian missionary in those countries also arrived in Macau from Goa in India.*



known for his writings in rhetoric and music and many others, the array of Jesuit professors whose works were published in Western Europe in the 17th century. Our saint, apostle and martyr Andreas Bobola should be added to that list too. According to Edvardas Gudavičius, the title of 'Saint' is greater than that of 'the Great'. All that allows us to state that in the middle of the 17th century Vilnius University had to belong to the hundred of universities of Europe.

Until the middle of the 17th century, being among the hundred of European universities, Vilnius University drew us into a much broader space of the Baroque world, which went as far as the Philippines in the Far East, Macau (the colony of Portugal in China) or Goa (the colony of Portugal in India). This is a Latin Baroque world which was started in our country by Radivillus Orphanus by building the Jesuit Corpus Christi Church in Nesvizh that was analogous to the Church of the Gesù (Chiesa del Gesù), a main Jesuit Church in Rome. He became one of the first pilgrims in the history of Lithuania; he travelled to Egypt and the Holy Land, initiated exact cartography and a map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The beginning of Baroque and the first Lithuanian Jesuit missionary Andreas Rudamina S.J. who travelled to Goa, later to Macau where he worked as a missionary, can be related to that man.

Hence, we entered the world from the Philippines to Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Mexico. In founding the university the Jesuits already understood that such assessment of the role of Vilnius University was not formally geographic. 'It should also be remembered that here the door to Moscow opens widely for us, and from it, through the Tartars we shall be able to reach China. Furthermore, Sweden and Livonia should not be forgotten either: it would also be possible to reach these countries and we have to pray to God that He should turn His gracious eye to these nations,' wrote Jesuit Vice-provincial Francisco Sunyer in his report to Rome.

We often look down on the Jesuits. Napoleon destroyed Jesuit universities and was of the opinion that Jesuit studies were not real science because they could not be adapted to creative work. Napoleon was the first to have turned the university away from the Church towards the barracks. Such understanding of a military university, which could not be changed even by Alexander von Humboldt's spirit of humanistic balance, has survived. It is quite often that even today universities are assessed in the spirit of scientific progress or scientism that emerged in the epoch of the Enlightenment.

In creating the university in Vilnius the Jesuits reasoned at global level, however, they had to take into consideration the opinion and desires of the





■ The bust of Adam Mickiewicz in Sts. Johns' Church made in 1899.  
Photo by Vidas Naujikas.

elite of Lithuania – the Bishop of Vilnius Valerianus Protasevicius and the nobility – that the University of Lithuania should be created as a counterbalance to the University of Cracow. After the Union of Lublin, by means of this ideological battle it was sought to show that Lithuania was an independent state. Hence, Vilnius University embodies this perception of Lithuania's statehood and at the same time the ambition on a world scale.

At the beginning of the 19th century, after the French Revolution and the Napoleon's period in Europe, only eighty-three of almost a hundred and a half universities remained. Vilnius University had gone through a century of misfortunes (from the time of the Deluge in the middle of the 17th century to the middle of the 18th century), therefore it is difficult to hope that during that period some special developments could have occurred. However, we can already see that at the end of the 18th century Vilnius University was starting a new life. It is true, the destruction of the Jesuits was still carried out; however, the University survived with the former Jesuits for another half of a century. For example, Marcin Poczubutt founded the astronomical observatory of the University, which found itself among the five most prominent observatories of European universities and maintained the bar set really high.



■ Lecture of Marian Zdziechowski at Sorbonne University, 1925.

It seems that thus far we have not asked the question as to when the history of Vilnius University reached its culmination. According to the *WorldCat* knowledge base, Adam Mickiewicz was the most famous and most frequently worldwide quoted University man. Next to him is Juliusz Słowacki, the entire array of the representatives of natural sciences – Jan and Andrzej Śniadecki, physicians Johann Peter and Joseph Frank. Therefore, I would regard the first third of the 19th century as the culmination. At that time the historian of a European dimension Joachim Lelewel worked at the University, his work *Historyka* (1815) signified the beginning of the theory of modern historiography. Józef Piłsudski commemorated the hundredth anniversary of Adam Mickiewicz's *Poetry* in 1922 by inviting the poet's son Władysław Mickiewicz, thus demonstrating that the Polish Stephanus Bathoreus University set great store on the entire history of Vilnius University.

The Polish Stephanus Bathoreus University by at least one aspect confirms that the boundaries of Western civilisation were drawn there. Professor

Marian Zdziechowski founded the Institute of East European Studies. It can be said that Marian Zdziechowski is one of the first sovietologists in the world.

Here we have to remember Czesław Miłosz in whose works we find reflections on freedom, communism, Western civilisation and Western Europe. The following words belong to Czesław Miłosz: ‘It is good to be born in a small country where nature is in keeping with the scale of man and where different languages and different religions have peacefully coexisted in the course of centuries. I am speaking about Lithuania – the land of myths and poetry... It is a bliss to receive from fate such school and university studies as Vilnius was – a fantastic city of Italian Baroque architecture moved to northern forests where history is hidden in every stone’. The writer uttered these words in his Nobel Prize reception speech in 1980.

It should be acknowledged that a large part of the history of Vilnius University has not found an adequate place in Lithuanian memory yet. However, it is only now that the old University finds a due place in the national narrative. The best argument is the ensemble of Vilnius University in the Mini-Europe Park in Brussels. Lithuania is the only one representing itself by its University.

*Haec domus Uraniae est: Curae procul este profanae: Temnitur hic humilis tellus: Hinc itur ad astra*

(This is Urania’s house, go away vain worries! Here the poor Earth is disdained; from here one rises to the stars).

These words were written on the wall of the observatory of Vilnius University. Are they not the maxim of Greek, Roman and Christian, hence European and Western civilisation?



■ The ensemble of Vilnius University in Mini-Europe Park in Brussels.

*Nobody doubts the significance of the legacy of Vilnius University. It is the model of the architectural ensemble of Vilnius University that Lithuania presented in Mini-Europe Park in Brussels. It was unveiled on 6 July 2006 in commemorating the State Day – the coronation of Lithuania's only King, Mindaugas. It is in this ensemble that, alongside other institutions of modern university, there is a library whose collections are a real link between the epochs of Lithuania's culture. Different forms of historical memory – names and their galleries, monuments and commemorative plaques – make the ensemble of Vilnius University a real pantheon of Lithuania's culture.*

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