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Peculiarities of Confessional Music in Vilnius: Problems of Research and Perspectives

The history of Lithuanian nation contains several symbolic milestones. Lithuania gained interest in European history in the 13th century when a sovereign centralized state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, was founded. Here, Pagan religion was practiced longer than in other countries.

After its christianization in 1387, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered into a dynastic union with the Kingdom of Poland. In 1569 the Union of Lublin was drawn up. It led to the creation of a uniform Commonwealth of the two nations of Poland and Lithuania in one state (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). By the end of the 18th century, the federal Republic of Poland-Lithuania was divided between its great neighbors Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia. From 1795 to 1919, Lithuania was part of the Russian Empire¹.

This article aims to reveal the situation of Lithuanian contemporary research and to acknowledge peculiarities of confessional music in Vilnius. Today, the situation of research as well as confessional music's development specifics. These specifics were stipulated by complicated Lithuanian statehood's history and the country's confessional diversity. In order to reveal some of the confessional music's commonalities and differences, it is important to know and to outline the ties that had previously been established between Vilnius and other cities. This is necessary to understand the situation of the safeguarded musical sources in Lithuania. Furthermore, it is of great importance to clarify the problems to which investigation must be directed in future in order to find out about its connection to confessional music's research.

Up to today, in Lithuanian, as well as in foreign historiography, essential Lithuanian historical questions have not been investigated sufficiently. Until the First World War, foreign cultural historians of Central Europe did not acknowledge Lithuania as a

¹About the history of Lithuania see: Zigmantas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania*, Vilnius 2005.

separate research object. The country was left behind the European boundaries of interests. Yet, there are sufficiently exhaustive works about other Western European countries in possession of more ancient statehood and Christian cultural traditions.

Starting with Lithuanian Christening and, more precisely, after the Lublin Union [in 1569], Polish music culture gained extensive influence. On the one hand, Catholic music maintained, cultivated and encouraged its influence, accompanied by a passing-on of Western European confessional music repertoire and traditions. On the other hand, Polish became the exclusive language of Lithuanian church service. The church became one of the main factors of Lithuania's polonization. Consequently, the national Lithuanian consciousness got stifled.

Lithuania, a multi-ethnic state with its capital Vilnius, was dominated by the Catholic churches and interspersed with the onion domes of Orthodox churches. Jews, who had come to Grand Duchy of Lithuania, chanted their own sacred chants in synagogues.

Arabic prayers were held by tatars in mosques. Until the Second World War, Vilnius had become an important centre of Slavic and Jewish culture. In this context, some historians engaged in research about the confessional music of Vilnius, one of the largest cities of Eastern lands and cross-road between East and West countries and culture. Church confessional music developed vividly. However, research only occupied with the relation to the culture of Poland and the Polish language. Furthermore, some confessional music's manifestations that attracted fragmental historians' attention, need to be questioned because of their one-sided interpretation and their lack of historians' principles.

Several reasons for this development can be found. One needs to remember the fact that, historical research in West Europe's countries had only just started in the 19th century. In Lithuania, however, the whole 19th century was marked with occupation and annexation, as well as the nation's resistance.

As mentioned before, after the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, conditions for cultural life in Lithuania deteriorated. Catholic churches were closed and turned into Orthodox churches. At the end of the 19th century. Lithuania possessed

29 Orthodox and 17 Catholic churches. Russian language was imposed in public life.

Furthermore, after the revolt against the Czarist Empire in 1863, the University of Vilnius closed down. The Latin-Polish alphabet was forbidden, whereas *Grazdaka* (the Cyrillic alphabet) was introduced, which proved totally unadaptable for the Lithuanian language. No opportunities had been left for the Lithuanian intelligentsia to develop and to grow².

In Lithuanian music historiography after the First World War, as opposite to the above-mentioned rudely imposed cultural politics, the attention of researchers diverted in the culture that had been created in Lithuanian language³. Reasons for this development can be found in the phenomenon of national revival during the period of the reconstructed Lithuanian independent Republic (1920–1940). Cultural inheritance, yet composed in Lithuanian language received more attention. Likewise, in opposition to former politics of polonization and russification, no culture created in Polish, Latin or other former national minorities' languages, received much recognition. The two-decade period of the occupation of the Vilnius' area by the Polish Army in 1920, which ended up in various forms of Lithuanian ethnic suppression, did not prove to be conducive to Lithuanistic research⁴.

The reason for leaving aside in research the majority of the inheritance of the Lithuanian confessional music (Catholic and Protestant) is to be found in this situation.

²Egidijus Aleksandravičius/Antanas Kulakauskas, *Carų valdžioje. Lietuva XIX amžiuje* [Under the power of Tsars: Lithuania in the XIXth century], n. p. [Vilnius] 1996; Rimantas Vėbra, *Lietuvių visuomenė XIX a. antroje pusėje: socialinės struktūros bruožai* [Lithuanian society during the second half of the 19th century: Features of social structure], Vilnius 1990; Meilė Lukšienė, *Demokratinė ugdymo mintis Lietuvoje* [Thought of democratic education in Lithuania], Vilnius 1985; *Lietuvos muziko istorija* [Lithuanian music history], book 1: Tautinio atgimimo metai 1883–1918 [The years of national revival: 1883–1918], Vilnius 2002.

³Vaclovas Biržiška, *Aleksandrynas*, 3 vols., Chicago, fotogr. Vilnius 1990; Karol Estreicher, *Bibliografia Polska* (34 vols., 1870–2000).

⁴Zenonas Ivinskis, *Kirchengesang in Litauen im 16.–17. Jahrhundert*, in: *Commentationes Balticae I*, 1954.

Furthermore, there is no need to occupy with the situation of confessional music's historical research during the Soviet period, remembering the fact that, under Soviet government, culture used to be a very ideological topic which, generally speaking, provided to be unwelcome for any deeper investigation.

Until the beginning of 1990, confessional music was not widely researched. Consequently, there are only few articles on the subject of old Lithuanian confessional music⁵. There can scarcely be any doubt that most of the Lithuanian confessional music's historical research was done by Polish scientists⁶. Their fundamental works were used in researching Lithuanian musical culture. Up to today, they still remain useful. However, it took the regain of Independence in 1990 for allowing Lithuanian researchers to enter archives, which had previously been closed for them. After the demise of the Soviet Union researchers have been able to continue their investigation in foreign libraries.

In its history, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had been multinational territory. As mentioned before, two dominant Christian branches existed in this territory, namely Eastern Greek and Latin Roman churches. Being the center of worship of those confessions, Vilnius proved to be a place where church music got reformed. However, the changes taking place in music theory in the largest centres of European culture sooner or later spread to other countries.

It is a well-known fact that this was the age of Europe's baroque flourish. Although Lithuanian baroque did not present itself as vividly as in other countries, the main genres and features of baroque music were adopted by Lithuania's cultural environment. One of the most illustrative examples can be found in the early operatic performances "dramma per musica" staged at the Lower Castle of Vilnius in 1636 at the initiative of Lithuanian noblemen and the ruler of the state. Large vocal-instrumental works such as the motet *Sacerdotes Dei Benedictum Dominum* were performed here. This piece of music, using the form of Venetian rondo concert was written by the Jesuit Martin Kreczmer,

⁵Jūratė Trilupaitienė, *Jėzuitų muzikinė veikla Lietuvoje* [Musical activities of the Lithuanian jesuits], Vilnius 1995.

⁶See H. Feicht, K. Hławoczka, Z. Szweykowski, J. Mizgalski, etc.

who worked as a professor at the Vilnius Jesuit Academy. To evaluate the jesuitical context it is necessary for the future to inspect the authorship of musical creation⁷.

The Jesuits particularly distinguished themselves by holding colorful and pompous para-theatrical events, in which music played an important role. However, this important topic has not yet been explored⁸.

In Lithuania local musicians presented the Western European repertoire. No evidence could be found yet which states that they had any difficulties in acquiring the musical knowledge necessary to perform it.

Quite a different situation is presented in teaching and performing Gregorian chant in Lithuania. After the victory of the Counter-Reformation, the jesuit order established in Lithuania and dominated its cultural and musical life, such as in education, theatre, composition, etc.

However, in the midst of all this baroque musical activity, alarm bells started ringing. The Synod of 1647 pointed out that, on account of uneducated and unqualified persons⁹, the quality of teaching of Gregorian chant had declined markedly. It decided to reiterate the instructions on church singing given by the Council of Trent.

However, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's Gregorian chant reform was delayed for about a hundred years. Furthermore, it had its own peculiarities. The very theory of Gregorian chant and its teaching were founded on an old theory of past centuries. The Vilnius Jesuit Academy set itself to save Gregorian chant. It looked for a man able to prepare a textbook suitable for the teaching of Gregorian chant and corresponding hymnals. No expert in chant could be found. Finally, the work has been done by Zygimantas

⁷Jūratė Trilupaitienė, XVI–XVII a. Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės muzikinis palikimas ir jo interpretacijos aspektai [Aspects of the 16th and 17th centuries musical creative inheritance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania], in: Menotyra 1998, No. 4.

⁸Jūratė Trilupaitienė, Jėzuitų (see footnote 5); Vanda Zaborskaitė, Prie Lietuvos teatro ištakų [To sources of the Lithuanian theatre], Vilnius 1981.

⁹Vilniaus Akademijos vizitatorių memorialai ir vyresniųjų nutarimai [Liber memorialium relictorum in visitatione provincialium Academy of Vilnius], Vilnius 1987, p. 205.

Liauksminas (1596–1670), one of the most famous specialists in rhetoric¹⁰. Born in Samogitia, he became member of the Jesuit order and worked as a prefect, rector and professor of rhetoric and theology at colleges of the Lithuanian Academy. Liauksminas wrote many books. One of them, the textbook of oratory, was published in Braunsberg, followed by two editions in Munich and Frankfurt/Main, three editions in Cologne, and publications in Würzburg, Prague and Vienna. Among Liauksminas' works there is a trilogy on Gregorian chant – “Ars et praxis musica”, “Graduale” and “Antiphonale” – published by the printing house of the Vilnius Academy in 1667¹¹.

However, his work on Gregorian chant was not an entirely new step, a new stage in the theory and practice of the Gregorian chant. On the contrary, the chant theory presented by Liauksminas remains quite restricted. Repeating precepts of the past without regard to the future, it seems to go back to the Middle Ages. Liauksminas returned to the medieval hexachord system of Guido d'Arezzo, presenting the positions of cantus mollis and cantus durus hexachords, describing the alterations and transitions, i. e. mutations in hexachord scales.

In “Graduale” and “Antiphonale”, a small part of corresponding Gregorian chant is presented. However, “Graduale” also includes other kinds of songs, namely new polyphonic songs (six of them constitute the cycle of matins) and several three-part latin songs.

The latter are the most surprising. Neither the artistic level nor their very elementary composition techniques are worthy to be trusted. However, it is clear that, even though these were rather primitive solfeggio exercises instead of works of art, they were the examples necessary for the developing skills in polyphonic singing. Evaluating Liauksminas' trilogy, one must take into account the general attitude of the Vilnius Academy towards music. Only this allows to understand the reasons why Liauksminas based his theory of Gregorian chant on the out-dated system, and

¹⁰Žygimantas Liauksminas, *Rinkiniai raštai = Sigismundus Lauxmin, Opera selecta*, Vilnius 2004.

¹¹Ars et praxis musica; Graduale pro exercitatione studentivm; Antiphonale ad psalmos, iuxta ritum s. Romanae ecclesiae, decantandos, necessarium, Vilnae 1667.

why, not being a composer (as seen from the above-mentioned three-part examples), he inserted new songs of a different kind in the Gregorian chant. What authorities did he rely on? Here the already-mentioned problem of the Vilnius Academy's position arises, reflecting a certain dualism of music as art and music as science. In fact, the members of the Jesuit order working in the musical sphere in Lithuania were in contact with the works of the German aesthetician and cosmographer Athanasius Kircher.

The authority of the German jesuits in the Vilnius Academy is confirmed by the fact that only Germans were among the composers of church music being mentioned in the register of the newly-opened music library, with no other authors. To give an example: Vespers and antiphons (red-bound books containing works by various composers): 13 volumes; Rosler books: 6 volumes; Miserere in the red-bound books containing works by Radgiber: 6 volumes; Vespers and antiphons of Königsparger: 1 volume; Vespers and litanies: various composers – 114 volumes; Miscellaneous arias: 31 volumes¹².

Consequently, it seems very likely that Liauksminas and his colleagues, then at the Vilnius Academy, were in complete agreement with the medieval ideal of classifying music as one of the 7 free sciences. According to this classification, music was often restricted to church singing and regarded as being a science rather than art.

By preparing a chant trilogy, Liauksminas laid the foundation to the school of Gregorian chant in Lithuania which lasted till the 20th century.

Furthermore, the vitality and relevance of Liauksminas' works is shown by the fact that they were reprinted until the middle of the 18th century.

What were the consequences? First of all, theoretical thinking became stagnant for a long time. Repeating old things meant to step backwards.

However, some people tried to resist or to find a way to change the situation. These people, probably priests or organists, wrote

¹²Jūratė Trilupaitienė, Zygmunt Lauksmin w życiu muzycznym akademii Wileńskiej [Zygmunt Lauksmin and the musical life of Vilnius Academy], in: *Muzyka* 1991, No. 1.

theoretical works on the Gregorian chant, setting out theoretical knowledge in their own way. Judging from the manuscripts that have survived we find that the odds were in favour of those unknown theoreticians who fostered the tree planted by Liauksminas, namely the hexachord scale. A new treatise on chant theory by an unknown author, “Compendium cantus”, published in Vilnius in 1753 was still based on Liauksminas’ system, hereby confirming its viability¹³. The same holds for the Woronec’s textbook published in Vilnius in 1809. The author follows Kircher by stating that “... music is part of mathematics and as such has its own clear, strong and unchangeable basis”¹⁴.

It seems that as late as the 19th century we encounter this theory of Gregorian chant. Among the note manuscripts written by organists or ordinary singers we find original examples – created by unknown people, who, working in their parishes and their churches, tried to rise above everyday life and to express their own talent. They include songs of their own in the chant singing. Their songs remained close to the chant in their structure. Furthermore, there were authors of entire masses or parts of them which should be to be sung by two or more voices¹⁵. Simple and unpretentious songs are close to church folk music, reflect the new church song repertoire. Today it is not only the artistic but also the technical side of these songs which are of historic importance, because many of these original compositions were written in chant notation. This restricted the possibilities of musical expression and made the songs themselves very similar. Such works may often be called “parachants”.

The situation in the theory and teaching of Gregorian chant changed when Teodoras Brazys (1870–1930) brought a new notion of Gregorian chant theory to Vilnius from the Regensburg Higher Church Music School. For the first time, he prepared text-

¹³Compendium regularum generalum cantus ecclesiastici regularis, seu plani /.../ Typis S. R. M. Academ: Societatis Jesu, 1753.

¹⁴Arnuf Voronec, Pocàtki muzyki tak figuralnego, jak choralnego kantu [Many-voiced and single-voiced chanting ABC book], Wilno 1809.

¹⁵Jerzy Morawski, Dwugłosowe msze na chór męski ze zbiorów biblioteki uniwersyteckiej w Wilnie [Two-voiced Mess for men Choir from the Vilnius University library collections], in: Muzyka 1996, No. 1.

books, setting out the theory of Gregorian chant in Lithuanian language¹⁶. In the first quarter of the 20th century, Brazys' works became the handbooks for Lithuanian musicians.

Culture and political life in Vilnius had an impact on church music. Large churches such as Saint Johns', Saint Casimir', Holy Spirit, Saint Trinity, and the Cathedral had a choir and instrumental cappellas. The examination of church cappellas' repertoire and its characteristic types of compositions leads to the hypothesis that in the end of the 18th and in the 19th century dissemination became central to musical culture, done by works of local composers and performers. As an outcome of classicism with baroque and romanticism stylistic peculiarities, amateur and professional composers formed a distinctive style of Lithuanian church music¹⁷. Nowadays, only for two of them, information can be found in archival documents, namely on the Vilnius Cathedral's and Lord Jesus' (Trinitarian) chorus and orchestra (instrumental ensemble)¹⁸.

It would be necessary to search for confessional music reform in Catholic and Orthodox chanting in the Jesuit Academy of Vilnius. A distinct example of that topic is given in Nikolaj Dilecki's (he was student of the Vilnius Jesuit Academy) book "Togo zlota w nowej swiata metamorphosi" (1675). It was conceived in Vilnius and reformed the Russian church singing. Furthermore, the book presented the basis for the first version of his latest "Grammatika musikijskaia"¹⁹. However, it remains clear that without professor Liauksminas works printed in Vilnius (1667), "Ars et praxis musica" and "Graduale" the work of Dilecki would not have been written. These works of Liauksminas and Dilecki have been researched separately. However, even though serious efforts

¹⁶Teodoras Brazys, *Choralo mokykla* [Plainsong school], Kaunas 1926.

¹⁷Laima Budzinauskienė, XVIII a. pabaigos–XIX a. Lietuvos Bažnytinės kapelos [Lithuanian church cappellas at the end of the 18th and in the 19th century. Activity and repertoire] Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation, Vilnius 2000.

¹⁸Laima Budzinauskienė, *Vilniaus katedros ir Viešpaties Jėzaus (trinitorių) bažnyčios kapelos* [Choirs in Vilnius cathedral and Lord Jesus' (trinitarian) churches], in: *Menotyra* 1998, No. 4.

¹⁹D. Lehmann, *Nikolaj Dylecki a muzyka polska* [Nikolaj Dilecki and Polish music], in: *Muzyka* 1965, No. 3.

have been undertaken to get to know them, contemporary research lacks broader context.

The diversity of musical life distinguished itself in the Eastern Orthodox Holy Trinity Church in Vilnius. Obviously, musical life in this church had been outstanding. However, we are only informed by document written in 1774, that it had a large orchestra, a collection of various musical instruments, e. g. violins, manufactured by the old masters Wilhelm Heber, Fridrich Pitetechner, Johan Gabriel Martyn, Michael Seidela, Johan Tayfel Lauten, Johan Adam, and Krystan Hawemann.

Furthermore, the music library of this orchestra was enormously big and varied. However, in an available description of the above-mentioned document, many music collections were not listed in a detailed manner and the authors are not always indicated. Speaking about this orchestral repertoire, it must be said that the performed compositions were not only Western classical compositions, but a repertoire that served both the Latin as well as the Eastern Christians: “Mass of the Roman Rites of various authors – 7 pieces. Russian Vespers – 6 pieces, Roman Rites Vespers – 13 pieces. Russian Mass – 2 pieces”, etc.

Remembering these facts, it becomes clear that the Russian church orchestra served various confessional needs. The orchestra itself united Eastern and Western confessional cultures and different repertoires. Up to the present, little interest has been shown towards this cultural center, and no research is done on its impact on different other institutions.

Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize, that uniat found itself in great disfavor of Russia’s highest authority, the Czar. One reason for this could be found in their indirect participation in the country’s political life. From the mid of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century Basilicans (monks of Orthodox rites, uni) had an exceptional musical impact. In some monasteries they were in possession of printing press facilities which published a variety of literature. Furthermore, hymnals with rebellious hymns about the country’s political events existed there. To give an example: in 1792 in Suprasalis (now situated near Belystok), the Basilican Convent Press released 49 hymn collection “Devotional Hymns” (Piesni nabozne). Two of them were

dedicated to the new State Constitution of 1791²⁰. This all happened in a stormy political period, when the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth worked out the second constitution in Europe.

In 1829 the Vilnius Basilican Press published a lament about a dying state containing revolutionary forebodings against the Czarist government and hints to the tragic destiny of a nation. After an unsuccessful uprising in 1863, which aimed to resist the Czarists government and to reestablish statehood, uniat convents and churches were closed.

The manuscript collection libraries in Vilnius saved the old Slavic hymnals of that period. However, they have not yet been researched in an adequate manner, although they could render a lot of new knowledge about the Orthodox musical culture.

Speaking about Catholic church music, it is impossible to restrict the analysis to international ties. Instead, one may also look at viable ties between different cities in a multinational country. These ties are proved by a large 19th century hymnal (kept in Lithuanian National Library) that contains quite a few Catholic masses. Most interestingly, that part of the masses is assigned to different cities. To name examples, one may refer to *Credo Vilnense*, *Missa Grodnensis*, *Missa Cracoviensis*, *Missa Carmelitana*, *Missa Roxolana* and so on²¹. On what occasions they were performed, cannot yet be determined.

In Vilnius, different confessional traditions of religious music such as old Russian Orthodox chants were preserved. They can be found until the very end of the 20th century. They retained their long-standing tradition which elsewhere is hard to find. Part of the Jewish religious songs were influenced by local musical intonations. This influence is reflected in a collection of Jewish melodies, collected in Vilnius by A. M. Bernstein²².

²⁰Pieśni Nabożne na świętą urozyste w Wilnie w Drukarni Xs. Bazylianów [Chants for sacred celebrations printed in Vilnius Basilicans printing house], n. p. 1829.

²¹Claviscueli vox clamentrium in toto Corde Psallentium in Ecclesia Sancto (...). Lithuanian National Martynas Mazvydas Library. Sygnat.: M 125686.

²²Muzikališer Pinkos. Zbiór żydowskich melodji i motywów ludowych. (Zebr. A. M. Berenstein) [The collection of Jewish melodies and folk motives (collected by A. M. Berenstein), Wilno 1927.

To sum up the topic, new research of various confessional musical traditions of Vilnius denizens could become an important aim of East European confessional music history.