



Latinitas in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Its Impact on the Development of Identities

edited by

Giovanna Siedina

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Giovanna Siedina

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INDICE

M. Garzaniti	<i>Foreword</i>	7
G. Siedina	<i>Latinitas and Identity Formation in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries). An Introduction</i>	11
Ž. Nekraševič-Karotkaja	<i>Latin Epic Poetry and its Evolution as a Factor of Cultural Identity in Central and Eastern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries</i>	21
J. Niedźwiedz	<i>How did Virgil Help Forge Lithuanian Identity in the Sixteenth Century?</i>	35
A. Osipian	<i>Constructing Noble Ancestors and Ignoble Neighbours. Uses of Cornelius Tacitus's Germania and Annales in J.B. Zimorowicz's Leopoldis triplex (1650s-1670s)</i>	49
A.W. Mikołajczak	<i>Antique and Christian Traditions in the Latin Poetry of Renaissance and Baroque Poland</i>	71
P. Urbański	<i>Cultural and National Identity in Jesuit Neo-Latin Poetry in Poland in the Seventeenth Century. The Case of Sarbiewski</i>	81
G. Siedina	<i>The Teaching of Lyric Meters and the Reception of Horace in Kyiv-Mohylanian Poetics</i>	99
V. Myronova	<i>Chancellery Latin in Fifteenth-Sixteenth Century Ukraine</i>	131
S. Narbutas	<i>Latinitas in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Chronology, Specifics and Forms of Reception</i>	145
D. Pociūtė	<i>Abraomas Kulvietis. Humanistic Origins of the Early Reformation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania</i>	161

Latin Epic Poetry and its Evolution as a Factor of Cultural Identity in Central and Eastern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries¹

Žanna Nekraševič-Karotkaja (Belarussian State University, Minsk)

Epopée (*epos, carmen heroicum*) was evaluated in literary-theoretical research as a model poetic genre, *perfecta poesis* (Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius), from ancient times to the late Baroque, and had been in great demand in the poetry of new European states since the early Middle Ages. In the literatures of many European peoples (including the Slavs) this genre was written in Latin rather than in national languages. Effective research into Medieval and Renaissance epopée in Latin may best be served by adopting a complex approach, which implies taking into account the typology of the given genre and comparing it with corresponding written records of different nations. As well as following the main principles of the historical-comparative method, our methodology uses the theory of reader-response criticism (referring to the concept of Hans Robert Jauss) as well as the main principles of hermeneutic literary studies.

As S. Averincev rightly pointed out, the cult of Virgil was “the most important factor of stability in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and from the Renaissance to the following centuries”, and the *Aeneid* was “a true center and the norm” (Averincev 1989: 23). In spite of the search for new epic forms, Virgil’s classical epopée never left the history of European literature.

Even when folk (or primary, see: Chassang, Marcou 1894: 17) epopees (such as *Beowulf*, *La Chanson de Roland* or *Das Nibelungenlied*, *Cantar de mio Cid*) began to emerge in the early Middle Ages, *carmen heroicum* remained popular in poetry. From the mid-fifteenth century “historical and panegyric epos” (“historisch-panegyrische Epos”, see Traube 1911: 334) or “epos about history and modern times” (“historisch-zeitgeschichtliche Epos”, see Hoffmann 2001: 146) was popular in the literatures of various European nations. In most cases, these poems were devoted to members of the ruling dynasties of Europe, some of them claimed to be national epos. When choosing titles for their works, authors followed the models of *Ilias* or *Aeneis*. Between 1448 and 1453, an Italian poet named Basinio Basini created one of the first examples of this kind of epic, the poem *Hesperis* (Hoffmann 2001: 147). However, more often names of representatives of a dynasty (*Sfortias*, *Cosmias*, *Laurentias*) were perpetuated in the titles of historic and dynastic epopees. In the sixteenth century Latin poems were created to glorify the representatives of the Habsburg dynasty, four of them

¹ I am sincerely grateful to Svjatlana Adaska, Svjatlana Savik and Giovanna Siedina for assistance with the translation of this article into English.

had the same title – *Austrias*. Chronologically the first was *Austrias* by Riccardo Bartolini, known to his contemporaries as Marone Perugino. It was published in 1516. It is interesting that in the same year in Kraków Ioannes Visliciensis published the poem *Bellum Prutenum* which is thematically connected with the Battle of Tannenberg in 1410 but is essentially a panegyric and dynastic epos in honor of the Jagiellonian dynasty. It is the poem that shows the first poetic presentation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – the birthplace of the founder of the dynasty, King Jagello (Jogaila).

Early humanists (especially those who belonged to the ‘German cultural space’, see: Wiegand 1984) already had a specific Renaissance understanding of *herois perfecti* (see: Sarbievius 2009: 301) and the heroic theme in general. Their works reflect the idea that *studia humaniora* is an aristocratic activity as noble as military feats on the battlefield. Therefore, everything that is associated with intellectual (mainly philological) activity was considered worth describing in ‘heroic’ meter – the hexameter. Thus, the Czech poet Bohuslav Lobkowitz from Hassenstein (1462-1510) glorifies the invention of printing in his poem *De propriis Germanorum inventis* with the subtitle *carmen heroicum*. In Wittenberg Ulrich von Gutten published the book *De arte versificandi* with the same subtitle. The Renaissance poets thus greatly expanded the heroic concept and departed from Horace’s topic *carminis heroici*: “res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella” (Horace, *De arte poetica*, 73). Such understanding established new benchmarks for epic poetry. The sacred history of Christianity was extremely popular in neo-Latin epic poetry during the Renaissance. At that time early Christian poets such as Juvencus, Lactantius and Sulpicius Severus (in Germany) not only published biblical epos but also created new samples of this genre. The Croatian poet Marco Marulič (1450-1524) justly called “a Christian Virgil” by scholars, wrote not only the poem *Judita* (published in 1521) in the Croatian language, but also the poem *Davidias* (1516) in Latin. The literature of the Slavic people of the region *la Slavia occidentale* (Sante Graciotti, see: Graciotti 2006: 109) abounded in hagiographical poems, which replaced the traditional prosaic *Lives* (*vitae*). Departing from the pragmatism and primitiveness typical of the *Lives*, these works satisfied the readers’ “horizon of expectations” (Jauss 1970: 177). These poems were normally dedicated to saints of national importance, and their composition often coincided with the completion of the canonization process: cf., for instance, *De vita et gestis divi Hyacinthi* (Cracoviae 1525) by Nicolaus Hussovianus, *Epos de S. Casimiro* (Vilna 1604) by Ioannes Krajkowski, *Iosaphatidos sive de vita et nece B. Iosaphat Kuncewicz libri tres* (Vilna 1628) by Iosaphat Isakowicz. The seminal development of hagiographical poetry during the Renaissance and early Baroque was associated with the poets’ desire to add verbal preciousness to their favorite hagiographical scenes. It is essential here that the specific ‘gap’ that occurred in the development of Latin poetry in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the second third of the sixteenth century (after the death of Nicolaus Hussovianus) was filled with the hagiographical epyllion by Jan Andruszewicz (see Ročka 2002: 220). This short poem was dedicated to the Franciscan missionaries killed in Vilna at the time of

Grand Duke Alhierd (Lithuan. Algirdas, pol. Olgierd). In contrast to the authors of the *Lives*, those authors who wrote secular poems in Latin were not limited by the hagiographical canon and were able to use a wide variety of literary devices. Besides that, the greatest attention was paid to the cult of the man of faith, who acted as a spiritual representative of a certain community in the world arena.

In spite of the clear predominance of the hexameter as the meter of epic poetry, *carmina maiora* written in elegiac distichs were well represented in ancient literature (for example, *Smyrneis* by Mimnermus, *Ars amatoria*, *Fasti* by Ovid). This fact became the basis for the development of a lyric and epic poem, *Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione bisontis* (Krakow 1523) (hereinafter *Carmen de bisonte*) by Nicolaus Hussovianus, which is the best example of this genre in Renaissance literature. This unique piece of art, a true masterpiece of Renaissance poetry, holds a special place in the literature of many nations – Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian. It is no coincidence that the Regular Session of the International School of Humanities at the University of Warsaw in 2003 (led by Professor Jerzy Axer) was devoted to this poem. Here, besides the main topic of bison hunting, a wide range of social and aesthetic issues are discussed and a unique image of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is created.

The aesthetic program of Nicolaus Hussovianus was imbued with the idea that people should focus on fulfilling their divine purpose in life. The artistic realization of this idea reveals the features of the author's Christian humanism: the problem of protecting the Motherland and the Christian faith is at the center of his attention, and solving this problem is connected with developing the intellectual power of society. The spiritual potential of the people is recognized as the primary factor of stability in the country. So, in the preface to the poem *Carmen de bisonte*, addressed to Queen Bona Sforza, the poet developed Sallust's idea about the priority of perfection of the soul over bodily strength and formulated the thesis which is fundamental not only for his work, but for all humanistic culture: "a state becomes stronger due to the perfection of the human soul, rather than the power of the body, it is evident from Greek and Roman history; military power flourished together with science in these two civilizations, and when talents began to decline, power weakened as well, the state fell into despair and slavery was established"².

The poet embodies the idea of the priority of the intellectual potential of society in literary form not only in the dedication, but in the poem itself: he is aware of the opposition eloquently articulated in the works of Roman authors (Ovid, Tibullus, Pliny the Elder and others), between *otia* (leisure) and *labor* (hard work). The poet uses the word *otia* in contrast to the creation of poetry and hunting (the latter for him – labor) (*Carmen de bisonte*, 96, see Hussovia-

² "Virtute animi magis, quam vi corporis niti, tam Graeci, quam Romani documento sunt, apud quos arma semper tum maxime dum litterae floruerunt et labentibus primum ingeniis debilitatae vires sunt, quibus lapsis, imperium corrui et servitus imposita est" (hereinafter translations from Latin are by the author of this article)" (Hussovianus 1523: 4 n. n.).

nus 1894). He uses this word in its humanistic conception, as learned by Renaissance poets from the works of their idol Cicero. This is not just ‘rest and free time’, this is a fundamental position of the artist, his introversion and concentration on his inner world. Andriy Sodomora the creator of one of the best (both metrically and artistically) Ukrainian translations of the poem *Carmen de bisonte*, believes that this work “may serve as an example (in literature, in particular) how the basic rule of the ancients – to combine the useful (*utile*) with the pleasant (*dulci*) – manifested itself in the early modern period”³. In the poem itself, the key for the ancient aesthetic concepts of *otia* and *labor* appear in the same context – the context of bison hunting. The continuation of the ideals of ancient *kalos kagathos* can be seen in this ancient chivalric tradition of the elite of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Nicolaus Hussovianus’ heritage is a rich source of literary achievements and it looks like an unusual literary phenomenon compared to the rhetorically sophisticated works of such Polish poets as Paulus Crosnensis, Ioannes Dantiscus and Andrzej Krzycki, who competed for mastership in the adoption of the poetic heritage handed down by ancient authors. The deliberate, almost complete disregard of ancient imagery in Nicolaus Hussovianus’ poetry is primarily associated with his Christian outlook. In the poem *Carmen de bisonte* he expresses his opinion regarding the subject: “I honor Christ instead of Jupiter, and my songs usually celebrate the Virgin Mary instead of Juno”⁴. Everything that is associated with Christianity is *certi res* for the poet, i.e. it is credible. The gods of the ancient Romans clash with the *pietas* of the poet; they are only *fabula* for him.

In the poem *De vita et gestis Divi Hyacinthi*⁵ (hereinafter – *De vita*) Nicolaus Hussovianus speaks out against the reformation of traditional Christianity. He criticizes the religious doctrine of Luther, who proposed simplifying and cheapening liturgical practice. The poet emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of Christian worship. The rich garments of the priest, temple decorations, icons, gold plate, choral and organ music are essential, from the humanist’s point of view, at least initially when a child first becomes familiar with Christian values, “...in order that a child gets used to it since his childhood and imbibes with his mother’s milk the basic doctrines of Christianity which grow in strength together with a young body”⁶. The poet believes that the soul of man is improved by the beauty of Christian worship, which activates the *quinta essentia*, which the German philosopher Philippus Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493-1541) wrote about. The splendor and majesty of traditional Christian liturgy and the rich decoration of

³ “Може бути зразком того, як, уже в нові часи, проявляла себе (зокрема, в літературі) основна засада античних – корисне (*utile*) поєднувати з приємним (*dulci*)” (Sodomora 2007: 13).

⁴ “Pro Iove qui Christum veneror Christique Parentem // pro Iunone loqui carmina nostra solent” (*Carmen de bisonte*, 405-406).

⁵ Onwards – *De vita*.

⁶ “Ut puer hinc etiam primos insuesceret annos // et cum lacte suae fidei primordia sugat, // quae pariter tenero sumant cum corpore vires” (*De vita*, 557-559, see Hussovianus 1894).

the temple are good for the human soul, elevating man above his daily exertions and reinforcing his faith. Man's moral duty, according to Nicolaus Hussovianus, is to preserve the sacred covenant of his ancestors, "...and we should not argue about what is good and what is bad"⁷. Arguing with the followers of Luther, who abolished the cult of the saints, the poet comes to the conclusion that attempts to make fundamental changes to the Christian faith can have the opposite effect. He speaks about the necessity to preserve the Christian tradition, in spite of difficulties. That is why he condemns the contemporary inhabitants of Rome, the world center of Christianity, who turned not to Christ and the Virgin Mary for help, but to the ancient pagan gods of their ancestors, sacrificing a black bull to them at the time of the plague in 1522 (the poem *In sacrificium nigri tauri Romae opera cuiusdam Graeculi contra vim pestis publice factum*; see Hussovianus 1523, Hussovianus 1894).

From the mid-sixteenth century, after the publication of tracts by Sperone Speroni *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542) and Joachim Du Bellay *Defense et illustration de la langue française* (1549), many humanists set themselves the task of creating an epopee in their national language. The literary talent of Jan Kochanowski was formed under the influence of Speroni. In his early period the Polish poet wrote in Latin, but during the last quarter of the sixteenth century he gradually switched to Polish. He created a pattern of poetic epos, the poem *Jezda do Moskwy* in Polish. Jan Kochanowski's example was decisive for the further development of Polish poetry. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Latin poetry still flourished in the works of Szymon Szymonowicz and Fabian Klonowic, but as time passed the number of poems in Polish steadily increased. At the same time Latin played a much greater role in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania than in other European countries. This is evident from the fact that two heroic poems were written almost at the same time: in the Polish Crown – *Wojna chocimska* (1670) by Waclaw Potocki and in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – *Virtus dextrae Domini* (1674) by Iacobus Bennet.

In the transition period between the Renaissance and the Baroque, the genre repertoire of epic poetry expanded significantly. Thus, there are several poems of different genres dedicated to the events of the Livonian war (1558-1583): epinicion (*Victoria de Moschis reportata per ... D. Gregorium Chodcevitium* (1564) by Ioannes Mylius from Libenrode), panegyric poem (*Panegyricus in excidium Polocense* (1580) by Basilius Hyacinthus), poem-hodoeporicon (*Hodoeporicon Moschicum* (1582) by Franciscus Gradovius), carmen heroicum (*Stephaneis Moschovitica* (1582) by Daniel Hermann Borusser). The heroic poem *Radivilias, sive De vita et gestis ... Nicolai Radivili* (1592) by Jan Radvan holds a special place among epic works of this period. According to Eugenia Ulčinaite, the concept of the heroic poem and the national epic was most vividly and variously embodied in this work (see Ulčinaite 2001: 70). The idea of *translatio imperii*, essential for sixteenth-century Europe, was reflected in this poem in relation to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. We cannot but agree with the

⁷ "Nec sit discernere nostrum, // "quae bona vel mala sint" (*De vita*, 668-669).

opinion of the Lithuanian scholar Sigitas Narbutas, who states that “heroic epos may appear and obtain recognition only in the state where they were created and at a time when, for different reasons, society started to feel the need for the regenerating force of history which is able to help to find necessary ways in those unstable conditions that are typical of the periods when two epochs collide”⁸. Namely, this period saw the creation of the poem *Radivilias sive De vita et rebus praeclarissime gestis, immortalis memoriae, illustrissimi principis Nicolai Radivili* (hereinafter – *Radivilias*), which reflected the ‘Roman’ concept of aristocracy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (from the patrician *Publius Polemo Libo*; see Strykowski 1582: 62-79).

The Belarusian territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania appear in the poem *Radivilias* in the unity of aesthetic and cognitive aspects. Ioannes Radvanus’ work is the first in Latin poetry where Belarusian geography is widely presented: in fact, it mentions no fewer than twenty Belarusian cities and towns as well as seven rivers. *Radivilias* contributes to forming an appropriate idea about the role of the Belarusian nation in the heroic history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. *Catalogus optimatum et ductorum* at the beginning of the third book of *Radivilias* starts with the names of Belarusian noblemen: Hrehory and Jan Chodkiewicz, Georgy Zienowicz, Filon Kmita, Bahdan Salamjaretsky, Barkulab Korsak and others. The warriors who resist the military aggression of the Principality of Moscow are presented in the poem not only with the common politonym *Lithuani*, but also with a more specific identification regarding their origin, for example: “those heroes who inhabit Vitebsk”⁹, “those who inhabit the lands of blossoming Orsha”¹⁰, “those who frequently walk in the fields where the light Berezhina braids the banks with reed”¹¹, “those who cultivate the vast lands of Minsk and see Lida”¹², “those who plough your lands, Mahiljou”¹³, “those who cultivate the fields of Kobryn”¹⁴, “Men from Slonim”¹⁵; the poet mentions “those mighty heroes who are brought up by ancient Polatsk”¹⁶, “those men who are reared by Homel”¹⁷, “those who are brought up by Mscislaul in the glorious fields”¹⁸ and “the inhabitants of Vaŭkavysk”¹⁹ (*Radivilias* IV, 147-171; see: Radvanus 2009).

⁸ “Herojinis epas tegali atsirasti ir gyvuoti savoje valstybėje ir tuo metu, kai dėl įvairių priežasčių visuomenei pririekia istorijos gaivinančios jėgos, siekiant surasti gyvybiškai svarbius kelius epochų sąvartos nežinomybėje” (Narbutas 2009: 495).

⁹ “Qui fortes Vitebas late habitant”.

¹⁰ “Qui sunt Orsae florentis in arvis”.

¹¹ “Qui agros frequentant, qua Beresina nitens praetexerit arundine ripas”.

¹² “Qui aequora Minsci lata colunt Lidamque legunt”.

¹³ “Qui terras Mohilaeae tuas vertunt”.

¹⁴ “Qui colunt Cobrinia aequora”.

¹⁵ “Slonimii viri”.

¹⁶ “Quos vetus pascit fortissima corda Polottus”.

¹⁷ “Quos Homella viros alit”.

¹⁸ “Egregiis pascit quos agris Mscislaus”.

¹⁹ “Volcoviscum colentes”.

The poem by Jan Radvan – *carmen heroicum*, ideologically closely associated with a specific etiological myth (the Polemon legend) – provides a holistic depiction of public life and customs in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the sixteenth century. At the same time, significant elements of mythopoetic and ideological paradigm of the Belarusian nation that existed within *natio lituanica* (see e.g.: Niendorf 2006: 22-38) are embodied in the poem. This semantic perspective allows us to consider the poem *Radivilias* as the first experience of creating a ‘national’ epos at the stage of protonational discourse. In general it should be noted that the other Latin poems of the late Renaissance (eg., *Hungaridos libri poematum quinque* (1599) by the Slovak poet Jan Bocatius or *Roxolania* by the Polish poet Sebastian Klonowic) acquired a clear etiological connotation.

The Renaissance cult of the ‘almighty man’ was corrected in Baroque poetry according to the objectives of a Christian upbringing. The poetics of contrast obtained a considerable value. The heroic poem *Carolomachia, qua felix victoria, ope Divina, auspiciis [...] Sigismundi III. ... per [...] d. Joan[nem] Carolum Chodkiewiczium... de Carolo Duce Sudermanniae S.R.M. perduelli V. Kalend[as] Octob[res] A. D. 1605 in Livonia sub Kyrkholmum reportata, narratur* (1606) by Christophorus Zawisza became a new implementation of Virgil’s epos forms. It was dedicated to the Battle of Kirchholm (Salaspils) in 1605. The *heros perfectus* of the poem, the great military commander Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, who defeated the Swedish army of Charles IX, is shown not only as a military leader but also as a true patriarch of his people and the upholder of Christian virtues.

Research into the Medieval and Renaissance heroic epos in Latin inevitably leads to the conclusion that these works are a valuable source of information about the ancient history of European nations. The Ukrainian researcher Vasyl Jaremenko justly points out: “The historical views of the new Latin poets were based on literature of which we know nothing. To date there are no known historical sources that could teach us more about the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, other than those of historians”²⁰. New European eposes focus on the commoners’ view of history, and that is something that cannot be found in official historical sources: ancient chronicles, historians’ annals or state and clerical written records. It should be mentioned that the Ukrainian scholars Natalja Jakovenko, Volodymyr Lytvynov and Valerij Ševčuk link the first attempts of poetic presentation of the history of Ukraine-Rus’ with the Latin poems *De bello Ostrogiano* (1600) by Simones Pecalides and *Camoenae Borysthenides* (1620) by Ioannes Dąbrowski (Jakovenko 2002: 163-167, 275; Lytvynov 2005: 11-15; Ševčuk 2004: 113-114).

In the poetry of many Central and Eastern European countries in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, epic elements appeared (Nekraševič-Karotkaja 2011: 186-194) and were formally marked by the predominance of the hex-

²⁰ “Історична досвіченість новолатинських поетів України походить із літератури, інколи уже нам не відомої. За браком історичних джерел із їхніх творів про XV-XVI ст. ми можемо довідатися часом більше, ніж із праць істориків” (Jaremenko 1987: 10).

ameter as the poetic meter. This meter was used not only in *carmina heroica*, but also in hymns, odes, eclogues, epithalamia, panegyrics, even scientific treatises (in verse). Speaking about the development of multilingual literature, Sjarhej Kavaljoŭ noted that "... heroic epos is becoming the dominant genre in the poetry of the late Renaissance"²¹. Perhaps the academic Alexandr Pančenko, speaking about the formation of a poetic tradition among the Slavs, was referring to the Latin poetry of Dalmatia and Dubrovnik, as well as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, when he emphasized that "... a magnificent flowering of the epos is typical of the southern and eastern Slavs and atypical for the western Slavs"²².

If we compare the history of written culture in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that was closely interconnected with the literature of the Polish Crown throughout the Renaissance (during the sixteenth century), we can say that the pattern of its development is quite different from that of other countries. Epic poems in the literature of this state remained mostly in Latin. According to Sergej Averincev (regarding antique epos) such poems went through four stages of evolution: *thesis* – *antithesis* – *synthesis* (*the second classic*) – *removal* (Averincev 1978: 212-214). The poem *Bellum Prutenum* (1516) by Ioannes Visliciensis, which appeared due to the common European tendency of creating historical and dynastic poems, became a new *thesis* (as compared to Virgil's *Aeneid*), a new classical example of *carmen heroicum*. Stylistically, this work is within the framework of ancient tradition. *Carmen de bisonte* by Nicolaus Hussovianus is an example of a completely different understanding of the epic genre (namely, as a lyric-epic) and, therefore, belongs to the *antithesis* stage. Thus, the end of the *thesis* stage and the beginning of the *antithesis* stage in Latin language epos in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania happened almost at the same period of time (there is only a seven-year difference). Most of the poems from the 'Livonian' cycle belong to the same stage – lyrical epic works by Ioannes Mylius, Basilius Hyacinthus and Franciscus Gradovius. The works written at the *antithesis* stage are characterized by a new aesthetic program, by the sharp contrast between their authors' artistic style and that of their predecessors. *Radivilias* by Ioannes Radvanus belongs to the *synthesis* stage. Jan Radvan strongly distances himself from antique images and explicitly shows his ironic attitude to the artistic experience of his predecessors. He accepts plot and composition models that are typical of Homer and Virgil (the army register, the commander's dream, monologues, battle descriptions) and fills them with heroic material from the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The heroic poem *Carolomachia* by Christophorus Zawisza as well as the hagiographical poems by Ioannes Krajkowski and Iosaphat Isakowicz also belong to the *synthesis* stage. Rhetoric and panegyricism prevail over narration in these poems. On the other hand, poems written at this stage (as well as the *Aeneid* by Virgil) are closer to the implementation of the author's patriotic program.

²¹ "Героїчна епіка робіцца дамінуючым жанрам у паэзіі позняга Рэнэсансу" (Kavaljoŭ 2005: 19).

²² "Пышный расцвет эпоса характерен для южных и восточных славян и нехарактерен для славян западных" (Pančenko 1999: 265).

Lastly, all the numerous literary monuments of the Latin language epics included in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the late Baroque period and the Age of the Enlightenment, that unfortunately have neither been studied nor analyzed, can be attributed to the *removal* stage of the Renaissance epos at the moment of its already non-Renaissance condition²³.

The position of the classical school in the written culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was stable to the extent that the *removal* stage co-existed with the relics of *the second classics* for a certain period of time. This situation provided the cultural foundations for the creation of the first poem in the Lithuanian language – *Metai* (Seasons, 1765-1775) by Kristijonas Donelaitis, and to a certain extent also influenced the artistic manner of the most outstanding poets of the nineteenth century – Adam Mickiewicz, Tadeusz Lada-Zablocki and Władysław Syrokomla – who were originally from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the same time, the emergence of classical epopees of Virgilian style in Renaissance and early Baroque literature (*Bellum Prutenum*, *Radivilias*, *Carolomachia*) inevitably led to the emergence of a parody and travesty of this genre form in the literature of the Enlightenment. Heroic epos was replaced by mock-heroic epos: first in Latin (*Avium comitium* by Michaelles (Michał) Korycki), and later in the national languages as well (*Енеїда* by Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj, *Энеїда навыварат* by Wikencij Rawinski). All these works confirm the continuity of the epic tradition.

The way, described above, in which epic poetry evolved in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania also matches the correlation developed by H. R. Jauss, which allows us to perceive a new literary work as an event but at the same time to see it in the relevant literary line. According to the researcher, "... the background for a new literary work is either the previous works or competing ones; later on it is recognized as a successful form, it reaches the peak of literature era, then it begins to renew, it is automatized, and, finally, when a new literature form is established, the previous one is perceived with a feeling of defiance in the literary discourse"²⁴. The evolution of epic poetry in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania can be described with the help of the pattern suggested by this scholar: the Renaissance poems as *a positive model*, then *the renewal stage* during the early Baroque period, gradual *automatization* in the late Baroque and the Age of Enlightenment and, finally, the period of *parody*.

At the same time, the fact that the large poetic form clearly prevails in the multilingual literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the sixteenth-

²³ Here I am paraphrasing the words of Averincev: "снятие античного эпоса в точке его уже не-античного состояния ("removal of the ancient epos at the point of its already non-ancient condition"; Averincev 1978: 213).

²⁴ "Das neue Werk gegen den Hintergrund vorangegangener oder konkurrierender Werke entsteht, als erfolgreiche Form den 'Höhenkamm' einer literarischen Epoche erreicht, bald reproduziert und damit fortschreitend automatisiert wird, um schließlich, wenn sich die nächste Form durchgesetzt hat, als abgegriffene Gattung im Alltag der Literatur weiterzubeleben" (Jauss 1970: 187).

seventeenth centuries does not completely fit into the framework of any evolutionary conception. Taking into account the specific character of the literary development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the absence of novels, strong interest in ethnographism and etiology in the chronicles and memoirs) and the results of the holistic analysis of a significant number of epic works, we can draw the following conclusion: poetic works in Latin in the literature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania are characterized by the tendency to episation²⁵ of poetic narration starting from the early Renaissance period. Later, at the end of the sixteenth century, the tendency to episation is transformed into the epic dominant of the poetic development.

Now that numerous previously unknown records of Latin poetry, related to the history of Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian literatures, have been found and published, there are grounds for talking about the preservation of the Latin tradition in the epic poetry of various nations in Central and Eastern Europe instead of the gradual decay of literary creation in Latin. Most of the epic writers of the Renaissance and Baroque sought to set their works against those of Homer and Virgil. The cult of antiquity was not essential for them as it was for the poets of Western Europe. The tendency to discuss with ancient authors induces (produces) the dynamics of the genre structure – “...the moment of uncertain, nonstandard forms, that was replaced by a new, quite significant artistic idea”²⁶, which coincides with the dynamics of the genre structure of the classical epic. The intensification of the author’s role became a “quite significant artistic idea” in the Latin epos of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. It was connected, first of all, with the aim of creating the image of a national hero. Latin poems offered two ways of achieving this goal: the military and Christian ideal *herois perfecti*. It was Latin epos that allowed many, mostly Slavic authors, to determine their identity and creative originality while poets of Western Europe created heroic poems in their national languages. Even in the poems of early humanists (*Ioannes Visliciensis* and *Nicolaus Hussovianus*) you can see their clearly expressed creative program oriented to strengthening their creative position in relation to both their predecessors and contemporaries. They expressed this position by means of epithets *impar* (*dispar*). This predominant aesthetic idea was maintained in works of many Latin authors (first of all, the poets of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Para-

²⁵ Episation – the increment of the epic (narrative) principle, “the introduction of traditionally epic features not only into the poem’s composition but also in the way the author expresses himself as if he was hiding the lyrical hero in the decorations of existence” (“привнесение традиционно эпических черт не только в композицию стихотворения, но и в сам способ выражения автора, как бы прячущего своего лирического героя в декорациях бытия”, Alechin 2007: 57) – was a common tendency typical for the poetry in Latin not only in a certain cultural region but in many European countries (for the details see: Nekraševič-Karotkaja 2011: 186-191).

²⁶ “Момант няпэўнасці, нясталасці, нестандартнасці формы; момант унікальнасці, момант якасна новага для свайго часу мастацкага сэнсавага звязу; момант нараджэння новай, дастаткова значнай мастацкай ідэі” (Koran’ 1996: 7).

doxically, their literary works became a sign of originality compared to the traditions of Western European humanism rather than a sign of integration with the Renaissance culture of Europe.

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Abstract

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Latin Epic Poetry and its Evolution as a Factor of Cultural Identity in Central and Eastern Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The article evaluates the role of the epos genre in the literary process of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Renaissance and early Baroque periods. Epos was considered the genre par excellence in Classical poetry. In the Renaissance this genre developed mostly in Latin, and not in national languages. The genre started with the historical-dynastic epos *Bellum Prutenum* by Ioannes Visliciensis. Meanwhile, the traditions of elegiac, hagiographical and panegyric poetry, as well as the poem-*hodo-eporicon*, continued. A new humanistic understanding of the idea of *herois perfecti* (perfect hero) was formed in the literature of the region as well as in the creative work of the poets belonging to the 'German cultural space'. From the middle of the sixteenth century the role of Latin diminished in the heroic epos genre in the literature of the Polish Crown while in that of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Latin preserved its dominant position. The special place enjoyed by epos poetry in Latin in the literature of Central and Eastern European countries gave rise to a tendency to eposise poetic narration, which, in turn, influenced the formation of the poetic manner of the most prominent poets of the nineteenth century.