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THE TRANSLATIONS OF LETTERS OF GEDIMINAS

[See also "[Letters of Gediminas](#)" in this issue, *Lituanus* 15:4]

This translation was made from the texts in V. Pashuto and I. Shtal eds., *Gedimino Laiškai (The Letters of Gediminas)*, Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian SSR, Vilnius, 1966. A first draft was made from the Lithuanian translation of M. Ročka. It was then compared with the original Latin texts, in the case of document 8, with the original German. In those cases where the original texts do not seem to support Ročka's rendition, Ročka's reading is indicated in a footnote. Footnotes were also used to indicate the corrections suggested by Rabikauskas.

The numbering of the letters in the book was retained, although not all the documents were translated. The editors used multiple dots to indicate those places where the manuscript source was illegible. Those dots were retained and serve the same function. The Lithuanian translator used square brackets to enclose words, which while they do not appear in the original, are needed to complete the sense. This usage was retained. Most of the notes were added by the translator and these are so marked. Data concerning the source of the documents are taken from the book. No attempt to verify this information has been made.

The spelling of names raised many difficulties. The translator tried to adhere to several rules. Where the name is clearly Lithuanian, the spelling used was the present day Lithuanian spelling. Thus, "Gediminas" was used instead of any one of a dozen or so ways of spelling his name used in English texts. Where the name is Latvian, it is spelled following Alfred Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951. Other names appear as they do in the Latin or German source, except in the few cases where generally accepted English spellings were available.

The book includes an introductory essay by Vladimir Pashuto, originally published in Russian, titled "The Letters of Gediminas as a Historical Source." Pashuto is the author, in Russian, of the *Formation of the Lithuanian State*, 1959, and work's in Russian history. His essay emphasizes the importance of the letters for understanding the economic conditions of Lithuania at the time. Pashuto also values them for the light they cast upon diplomatic history. The letters depict one chapter of the centuries long effort of Lithuanian rulers to form alliances with Riga and various European powers against the German military order.

At the time these letters were written, there was one order divided into two branches. To the north of Lithuania, mostly in present day Latvia and Estonia, was the Livonian branch. Before 1237, this had been an independent order, the *Fratres Militiae Christi*, usually called the Knights of the Sword, or Sword Brothers. The second branch was located to the south and west of Lithuania, in Prussia. Formally, it was called the *Ordo Militum Hospitalis S. Mariae Teutonicorum Hierosolimitani*. More commonly, it was called the Prussian order, the Teutonic Knights. In Lithuanian, knights of this order are often called "kryžiuočiai," that is, "cross bearers." The letters refer to the order in various ways and it seemed best to retain these forms.

Concerning the authenticity of the letters, there appear to be two theories. One — Pashuto sees to favor it — holds that the letters were written as Gediminas wanted them to be written, and that they accurately represent his thinking. According to this view, Gediminas did express the desire to be converted, perhaps only as a diplomatic maneuver, but was forced to change his mind by pressure from pagan Lithuanian princes and Russians of the Eastern church. According to the other theory, the letters express Gediminas' views only in a general way, the details, particularly those concerning the reception of Christianity, could have been supplied by the secretaries who actually wrote the letters.