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COMMENTARY ON THE "LETTERS OF GEDIMINAS"

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

Among the several noteworthy books published recently in Lithuania, we find the *Letters of Gediminas*, edited by V. Pashuto and I. Shtal, published by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian SSR, Vilnius, 1966, 200pp. Not everything was as successful as it should have been, especially the white lettering of the title, and the golden ornamentation printed on the dark blue, almost black, hard cover came out fuzzy and smudged. These same marks were more successfully printed on the black dust jacket. The lettering in Gothic style and the outlines of a wax seal, designed by the artist A. Kučas, effectively prepare the reader to journey into our historical past and to find, in its pages, important documents of the 14th century. Also praiseworthy is the manner in which the texts of the letters are presented. Four parallel columns are printed on each pair of facing pages. The first column contains information about the sources of the documents and explanations of some passages of the text; in the second, we find a translation of the text into Russian; in the third, the documents in the original language, either Latin or German; in the fourth, a translation of the text into Lithuanian. The publishers had a happy thought: in order to more sharply distinguish the original text, the third column is printed in red ink. In this way, the most important, for scholars, part of the book — the letters in their original form — becomes clearly evident. The color red is also used in the first column for the running title, which gives the number of the letter. We thus have a collection of the correspondence of Gediminas which in appearance is attractive and dignified.

However, it is not enough for a book to be attractive; its value depends upon its content. The title, the *Letters of Gediminas*, does not indicate completely the contents of this book. Some may think that he will find here only those letters written by Gediminas himself. In fact, only six of the eighteen documents published in this book are letters by Gediminas. Of the other documents, two are letters written to Gediminas, one by pope John XXII and the other by the council of the city of Riga. The remaining texts touch upon Gediminas or the problems of the country at that time only indirectly: two treaties of Gediminas with the order and other rulers of Livonian lands, those of 1323 and 1338; two letters of the Prussian clergy to the faithful, one by the bishop of Varmia and the other by the Franciscan custodian in Prussia; an excerpt from a letter of John XXII to the king of France; a letter by the same pope to the Teutonic Order; an important and interesting report by the papal envoys who traveled to Gediminas to Vilnius; a letter, by the council of the city of Riga to Lübeck; a report by Lesse, Gediminas' legate; and finally — although the first document published in the book — the letter of Mindaugas to bishop Christian, which definitely mentions the seal of the ruler and thus testifies that an orderly secretarial office existed in Lithuania already in the time of Mindaugas.

Thus, the collection of documents is varied and valuable. It is true that all the texts published here were known to historians and have been published previously several times. Several of the same letters were published by V. Gidžiūnas in his *De Fratibus Minoribus in Lituania*, Rome, 1950; this fact, of course is not even mentioned in the publication we are describing. The major value of this new publication lies in the fact that it makes available for the first time Lithuanian translations of the above mentioned documents. The difficult task of translating was carried out by candidate in philology, M. Ročka. The translator, making use of the translation into Russian prepared earlier, presents a translation of the documents into Lithuanian which is generally accurate and easily comprehensible and which will be of use also to historians. Excerpts from some of the letters had been translated earlier and published in the first volume of *Lietuvos TSR istorijos šaltiniai* (Sources of the History of the Lithuanian SSR), Vilnius, 1955, pp. 32-33; a comparison makes it quite clear

that the present translation is much more accurate than the earlier. However, in some places it seems that the translator misunderstood the original text. For example, in letter 2, Gediminas, writing to the pope, complains about the damage the Teutonic Order has been doing to Lithuania and mentions that they have even captured by force John, the archbishop of Riga, "who was put to death in the curia in the time of the lord Boniface," p. 25, lines 26-28. In Latin, this passage reads: "...qui temporibus domini Bonifacii in curia fuit defunctus." "Fuit defunctus" does not mean "was put to death," but simply "died," as the *Missae defunctorum* does not mean the mass of those put to death, but the mass of the dead. Most likely, the translator was here misled by the Russian translation where it is even said: "kotorogo umertvili v kurii vo vremena gospodina Bonifacija," as if the Teutonic Order had somehow contributed to the death of the archbishop. In fact, the text only says that the archbishop of Riga, John III, died in Rome in the curia of pope Boniface VIII; this is attested to by other historical documents. The Teutonic Order is guilty only of not allowing the archbishop to return to his archdiocese. Again, on p. 107, in letter 12, an inaccurate Latin text — in lines 12 - 13, Ex recta confidentia should be written instead of ex nostra confidentia — confused both the Russian and the Lithuanian translations, with the Lithuanian, in this respect, faithfully following the Russian. The letter refers here not to the pope's favor and sincere good will, but to similar feelings expressed by Gediminas. For this reason, this passage should be translated: "we, seeing, flowing out of true confidence and sincere good will, that you do not refuse..." It would be possible to add several more comments of this sort, but we will not worry the reader any further with such minor points.

While the book, as we have noted, is in some ways successful and really useful, none can prevent us from asking whether it could have been done better. It seems that it was not only possible but needful to make some things more perfect. Everyone who picks up a source book of this type, hopes to find in it as complete as possible a collection of documents about the subject in question. In this case, everyone hopes to find the complete documentation, translated into Lithuanian, concerning the relations of Gediminas with Western Europe and the question of the Christianization of Lithuania which was made prominent by these relations. Without a doubt, the students of our history will be happy to find the texts and translations of all six of the letters of Gediminas which have survived to our day, and will gratefully use all the other documents so conveniently placed at hand. However, many historians will search in vain among these documents for the letter, so important for the proper understanding of these events, of pope John XXII to Gediminas written already in 1317, in which the pope invites the ruler of Lithuania to accept baptism ("Post primam" — February 3, 1317); in vain will they search for the formula of the confession of faith sent to Gediminas by the same pope through legates ("Inter precipuos" — June 1, 1324); many historians will lament the absence of the bull of John XXII which approved the treaty between Gediminas and the Order, the Livonian bishops, and city officials ("Gratias agimus" — August 31, 1324). Actually, the editors knew of this bull and, when giving the original texts of the mentioned treaty, noted the variants of its Latin translation which had been inserted in the bull; still, it would have been useful also to have the history of the making of this treaty described in the papal bull, and the formula of its approval. All these three letters which we have mentioned directly concern Gediminas himself and are closely related to the problems raised by the texts actually published. Hence, in our opinion, they too should have been included in the *Letters of Gediminas*. It is not possible to plead ignorance of the existence of these letters, because all of them have already been published; at least two of them can be found together with the other letters of John XXII to Gediminas.

A second and more important shortcoming is the unscholarly selection of the original texts. The work was prepared by a doctor of history and a candidate in philology; in its preparation, valuable advice was given by a doctor of philology; the responsible editor of the work is a doctor of history. But for some reason none of them paid any attention to the fact that it is both risky and irresponsible to reprint texts taking them from old published sources, especially when it is possible to use the original sources, from which directly or indirectly the earlier editors took them. I have especially in mind here the letters of pope John XXII reprinted in the *Letters of Gediminas*. It is not hard to see that all three, letters 10, 12, and 13, are taken not from their originals, but from copies — registers — made in the papal chancery. This is revealed by the so-called protocols of these letters, the introductory formulae, which note the author and the recipient of the document; of those reprinted in the *Letters of Gediminas*, none of them could have been written in this way in the originals. In letter 10, the title "rex francorum" could not have been used, since already since the time of Gregory IX (1227 - 41), the papal chancery most of the time used the title "rex Francie." In letter 12, the words "Ioannes episcopus, servus servorum Dei" could not have been written at the end of the protocol, because since the 9th century, the popes name and title were written first in all papal documents, while the name of the recipient of the letter always followed this. In letter 13, the name "Ioannes XXII" could not have been used in any original document of that time, because this form — the name of the pope followed by the number — was first used in breves, and the earliest of these known dates only from 1390. In the earlier editions, such deviations could have been due to the fact that the editors, lacking the originals, used the texts found in registers where the formulae of the protocols were usually indicated in an abbreviated form. These they would have expanded, often adding such inaccurate phrasings. These same inaccurate expressions are repeated in the *Letters of Gediminas*. The correct original beginning of all three of the papal letters would have been: "Ioannes episcopus, servus servorum Dei"; then, the name and title of the recipient; and finally, "salutem et apostolicam benedictionem."

When the source from which texts are taken is known, scholarly method requires that in publishing them, one make use of the source closest to the original. In this case, one should have compared the texts of the papal letters being published with the texts in the registers, all of which have survived. This does not require a great deal of work. The present reviewer spent three hours in the Vatican archives, in the course of which he compared the texts of these three and two other letters of pope John XXII to Gediminas. And this turned out to be very useful, because Bunge and Theiner [*Liv -Est-und Curländisches Urkundenbuch*, F. G. Bunge, editor, 3 vols., 1853 - 1871; A. Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta Poloniae et*

Lithuaniae, vol. 1, 1860] here as elsewhere did not avoid errors when copying. I think it will be useful to notice here at least those corrections of the texts which affect the meaning of sentences and words. The numbering and page references refer to the *Letters of Gediminas*.

Letter 10: what is published in the *Letters of Gediminas* is not the complete letter of the pope to the king of France, but only the last section of a longer letter. In the Vatican registers (Reg. Vat. 112, fol. 156 r-v) this letter begins as follows: "Carolo, regi Francie. Ad nostram nuper presentiam..."; the last section is introduced with the words: "Rursus Gedennem, qui se regem Lethovie..."; further on, in place of "nobis nuper per suas litteras intimavit" we read in the registers "nobis nudius per suas litteras iniciavit." The complete text of this letter, with some inaccuracies, is published in *Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, 3rd series, *Ioannis papae XXII epistulae tam secretae quam curiales ad gallicam historiam spectantes*, A. Coulon, editor, II, Paris, 1913, col. 408-409 n. 1850.

Letter 12 (Reg. Vat. 76 fol. 6r-v): the register does not in the introduction of the letter contain the words "Ioannes episcopus, servus servorum Dei." Pp. 91-93: "dum admittimus" should be replaced by "dum advertimus"; p. 93, line 10: "salvacionis" should be replaced by "salutacionis"; p. 93, lines 17-18: "predecessor tuus Mindowe" should be replaced by "predecessor tuus rex Mindowe"; p. 93, line 20: "et inimicabiles" should be replaced by "et innumerabiles"; p. 95, line 14: "qui paratus" should be replaced by "quia paratus"; p. 97, lines 24-25: "Deo vero et vivo" should be replaced by "Deo vivo et vero"; p. 99, line 1: read "nostrisque"; p. 99, lines 6-7: "quam secundis debita" should be replaced by "quam secundis huiusmodi litteris debita" also, the word "litteris" does not appear after "discussis"; p. 99, line 19: "regalis prudentia" should be replaced by "regalis providentia"; p. 99, line 28: "conspectemus magnum" should be replaced by "expectemus magnum"; p. 107, lines 2-3: "fortificari mereamini sacramento" should be replaced by "purificari mereamini in sacramento"; p. 107, line 12: "quod ex nostra confidentia" should be replaced by "quod ex recta confidentia"; p. 107, lines 1-2 from the bottom: "tibi de ceteris" should be replaced by "tibi de cetero"; p. 111, line 15: "eorum salubrius" should be replaced by "eorum salubribus"; furthermore, the abbreviation qt' frequently used in this letter means "quatenus," and not "quantinus."

Letter 13 (Reg. Vat. 76 fol. 7r-v): in the register the letter begins with the words "Dilectis filiis... magistro...", and the title "Ioannes XXII et." does not appear. In the address, the word "Theutonicorum" should be followed by "Ierusalimitani," namely "Hospitalis"; in the register there is no "etc." after "salutem," the obvious complete formula "salutem et apostolicam benedictionem" appears. P. 113, line 14: "nobis directas" should be replaced by "nuper directas"; p. 115, line 3: "destinando" should be replaced by "destinandos"; p. 115, line 20: in the register, the word "quod" does not follow "volentes"; p. 115, line 21: "fovere favore" should be replaced by "fovere favoribus"; in the register, at the end of the letter we find "Dat. Avinion." and nothing more.

These are inaccuracies found in only three of the *Letters of Gediminas*. One should hope that the other fifteen letters published here appear in a better condition. But complete confidence is impossible, because the others also were taken from the same old editions, without comparing them with the originals or surviving manuscript copies. Those who prepared the book for publication could justify themselves by claiming that under present condition they could not give us a better text. One may believe this. But this does not mean that there are no guilty ones. Those are guilty who have created the present conditions and hold in thrall Lithuanian scholarship and cultural life. When scholars throughout the whole world can correspond with each other and travel wherever they need to, not only can Lithuanian historians not travel, for example, to Rome to collect materials needed for their work, but, it would appear, they cannot correspond with Lithuanian historians living in Rome, who would have, in the case of the letters of John XXII, gladly supplied the needed controls.

The *Letters of Gediminas* was prepared for publication by the well known Russian specialist in Lithuanian history V. Pashuto, and a young candidate in philology I. Shtal. The letters were translated into Lithuanian by M. Ročka. The same V. Pashuto wrote a competent and noteworthy introduction in which he analyzes the importance for history of the sources published here, especially in respect of the economy of the country, the social organization, the political structure, and Lithuanian foreign policy.