

## Introduction

On the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2004 an international academic conference 'Art in the cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: needs and commissions' took place at the Tamošaitis' family gallery. The conference was organised by the Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Art, and by the Institute of Art History at Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts. Present publication is a collection of articles based on the papers delivered at the conference.

City is understood here as a multifunctional urban space. The texts deal with the cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, addressing, in particular, the centres of craft production and the spaces of coexistence of various religious, ethnic, social, and other communities. The political, cultural, and other needs of the city inhabitants promoted various, sometimes unique creative phenomena. Beside the culture of the manor, the functions of the cities in the society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was especially prominent. It was here that the major part of the archaeological, historical, artistic, and other cultural inheritance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was created and preserved.

Recently the history of the cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was an object of intensive research by the scholars from various disciplines in humanities: archaeologists, cultural historians, art historians, specialists in heritage preservation etc. Thus the array of historiographical data concerning the cities of the Grand Duchy is constantly increasing. Yet these data are mostly evaluated and ab-

sorbed within one given historical discipline. The present publication seeks to highlight the links between historical and artistic facts, as well as to reinforce the connection between the scholarly experiences of various disciplines.

The specific nature of urban art in the culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania has not been previously discussed in the Lithuanian historiography of art. The studies of urban art mostly used to emphasise the stylistic features of the works of art, and to point out their connections to the artistic tradition of the manors or to the history of the Church. However, the objects of art created in the cities were seldom linked to the specific nature of the places where they emerged and functioned. The organising cultural function of the city has not been sufficiently recognised in the historiography of art in Lithuania. Therefore the present publication seeks to approach the phenomena of city art in depth, while simultaneously stressing the importance of the contexts in which the works of art were created and for which they were destined. It seeks to connect the works of art with the social needs of city inhabitants, as well as to disclose various phenomena of art commissioning, ranging from the foundations to artists' work at the properties of the city and jurisdiction-owners.

The texts printed here analyse various aspects of the urban society's needs and artistic commissions. Their authors write about the works of art and architecture, noting the details of their history and social context (Irena Vaišvilaitė), present unpublished works and their authors, comparing them to the artistic traditions of other regions (Ewa Łomnicka-Żakowska), as well as highlight the role of individual clients in the artistic development of the cities (Aleksandr Yaroshevich, Aušra Baniulytė). Papers also disclose the differences between artistic commissions in the cities with divergent history, legal status and economic development. Some articles are devoted to the political and cultural centre of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilnius: to ruler's commissions (Birutė Rūta Vitkauskienė), to the groups of craftsmen (Mindaugas Paknys), to the problems linked to demand for works of art and to their commissioners (Lina



Balaišytė, Aukšė Kaladžinskaitė), as well as to the needs of religious life which a given work of art reveals (Rūta Janonienė). The texts printed here provide new data concerning everyday understanding of a work of art and its importance in the life of Vilnius' inhabitants. Some articles are devoted to the commissioners of art and artistic groups of the private cities that were typical to the region: Slutsk (Yury Piskun), Biała Podlaska (Aistė Paliušytė), Nesvyžius (Olga Gorshkovo-Bazhenova). The particular conditions of artistic life in those cultural centres of the Grand Duchy which were distant from the capital are likewise disclosed. Several articles analyse the question of foundations in the individual regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Dorota Wereda, Paweł Sygowski), and the distinctiveness of the little-explored Uniate architecture and art is revealed.

The authors of the present collection of articles – museum curators, historians of art and culture – represent state institutions of several countries that preserve the patrimony of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuania, Poland, Belarus), as well as different traditions of the art historical studies. The articles range over the sources from different regions of the Grand Duchy, present the heritage that survives in neighbouring countries, and introduce previously unpublished and unstudied sources of city history and art. The articles of the collection present a more varied view of the ways in which the art of the cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania functioned in the society and help one better to understand and evaluate the artistic heritage of Lithuania.

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