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Rituals of pagan Lithuanians related to the military campaigns in the 13th - 14th cc.

Annotation: The article deals with the key aspects of the issue of the rituals of pagan rulers and the nobility of Lithuania in the 13th-14th centuries. First of all, rituals related to the military campaigns of the Lithuanians are emphasized. It can be explained by the specific nature of the Lithuanian state in the specified period. Analysis of Latin and Russian narrative sources allows to reconstruct a wide range of rituals related to the military activities of Lithuanian rulers and army leaders. The following groups can be distinguished among them: rituals, connected with the beginning of military campaigns (decision on the possibility of attack or defence, choosing the date of a battle, prognosis and prediction, actions aimed at receiving the favour of deities in upcoming military actions); rituals, conducted during the military campaigns (choice of the place of a battle, start of the battle); ritual actions, providing the ending of military campaigns as well as conducting negotiations (gratitude to the deities for help – sacrifice, conclusion of treaties, burial of dead soldiers, rulers). The preserved material of narrative sources allows consider pagan rituals of oath, drawing the lots and sacrifice to be the most significant and influential ones among Lithuanian rulers and nobility in the 13th-14th centuries.

Keywords: Lithuania, ruler, rituals, military campaign, paganism, oath, lot, sacrifice.

Obrzędy pogańskich Litwinów związane z kampaniami wojennymi w XIII - XIV wieku
Streszczenie. W artykule przeanalizowano rytuały władców i elit litewskich w XIII-XIV wieku. Główna uwaga została skoncentrowana na omówieniu rytuałów związanych z wyprawami militarnymi, co uzasadnia się specyfiką rozwoju i charakterem państwa litewskiego w badanym okresie. Analiza łacińskojęzycznych i ruskich źródeł narracyjnych pozwoliła zrekonstruować cały szereg rytuałów, mających ścisły związek z działaniami wojennymi Litwinów. Wśród nich można wyróżnić kilka podstawowych grup: rytuały, wykonywane przed rozpoczęciem kampanii wojskowych (związane z podjęciem decyzji o rozpoczęciu wypraw, próbami prognozowania przebiegu przyszłych strac oraz dążeniem do zaręczenia się poparciem bogów); rytuały, przeprowadzane bezpośrednio w czasie działań wojennych (związane z wyborem miejsca i daty bitwy, początek bitwy); rytuały, towarzyszące ukoń-

czeniu działań wojskowych i zawarciu umów pokojowych (złożenie ofiar bogom, rytuały wzmacniające zawarte umowy, czynności pogrzebowe wojowników i władców). Zachowany materiał źródłowy pozwala uważać, że wśród elit litewskich w XIII-XIV wieku największego rozpowszechnienia nabrały oparte na tradycji pogańskiej rytuały złożenia przysięgi, rzucania losów i złożenia ofiar siłom wyższym.

Słowa kluczowe: Litwa, władca, rytuały, kampania wojenna, pogaństwo, przysięga, rzucanie losów, złożenie ofiar.

At the beginning of the 14th century, Lithuania¹ was an original socio-cultural, political and religious estate. The latter was due to the dualistic confessional situation of the society, in which the Baltic nobility, including the rulers, remained pagans, while a significant part of the population inhabiting the territory of former Rus', which had become the part of Lithuania, was Christian. This fact left a strong impact on the policy of the Lithuanian rulers concerning the annexed territories, and also affected their ritualism. And if the issues of the power ceremonial of the Lithuanian rulers, associated with their enthronement, as well as diplomatic negotiations, were analysed in sufficient detail in historical studies, the rituals associated with the military actions of Lithuanian nobility and rulers until the end of the 14th century remains on the margins of historical research. Although the study of this issue is complicated by the paucity and fragmentation of the surviving data, this kind of analysis is of high historiographic relevance and value, since military contacts were an integral part of the policy of the Lithuanian state, and also largely determined the specifics of its political structure.

Exploring the issues related to the rituals of pagan rulers and nobles of Lithuania, it is necessary to emphasize a wide theoretical basis for this kind of research. The political and sacred rituals of the rulers, as well as the ceremonies associated with the life of medieval monarchs, have attracted considerable attention from many generations of historians.

The foundations of theoretical approaches to the ritualism of power were laid as early as the beginning of the 20th century in the works of Emile Durkheim². During the 20th - early 21st century a number of conceptual studies, devoted to the ritual as one of the key elements of the legitimization and sacralization of rulers' power and preserving stability and order in pre-state and early-state societies, appeared. Among them there are works by Max Gluckman, Cyril Daryll Forde, Clifford Geertz, Aron Guriewicz, David I. Kertzer, Timothy Earle, Robert L. Carneiro, Andrey Korotaev, Don Handelman, Catherine Bell, Henri J.M. Claessen, Ronald L. Grimes, Ervin Goffman, Aleksander Gieysztor, etc.³ In the context of this study, the monograph *Ritual and reli-*

¹ The author uses the term "Lithuania" regarding not the ethnic lands and the territory of initial settlement of the Lithuanians, but the forming "Grand Duchy of Lithuania", as it was the term used in the narrative sources in relation to this state during the process of its state formation, namely in the thirteenth - fourteenth centuries.

² E. Durkheim, *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris 1912; E. Durkheim, *Elementarne formy życia religijnego. System totemiczny w Australii*, transl. A. Zadroznyńska, edit. E. Tarkowska, Warszawa 1990.

³ M. Gluckman, C. D. Forde, *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester 1962; C. Geertz, *Religion as a Cultural System*, [in:] *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. by M. Banton, London 1966, pp. 1-46; A. Гуревич, *Категории средневековой культуры*, Москва 1972, pp. 192, 214, 241; R. L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Washington, D.C. 1982; D. I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*,

gion in the making of humanity by Roy A. Rappaport can be considered to be one of the most informative works of the late 20th century, which is a comprehensive analysis of theoretical foundations of the ritual and its connection with sacredness, religion.⁴ As for the theoretical aspects of the role of ritual in the development of society, as well as the institutionalization and sacralization of power in the Christian European medieval state, one can point out the works of Przemysław Urbańczyk, Anna J. Duggan, Robert Bartlett, Gerd Althoff, Gerhard Jaritz, Gábor Klaniczay, Zbigniew Dalewski, Igor Daniilevski, Piotr Toloczko, etc.⁵

However, they mainly consider the medieval states of Europe that are described in more details by sources and also rely on fairly numerous documentary evidence of the epoch under study. The rituals used by the grand dukes and nobility of Lithuania have remained outside the circle of special studies. Among the works that in one way or another are devoted to the rituals of the pagan Lithuanian nobility of the indicated chronological period, one can point out the works of Edvardas Gudavičius, Marcell Kosman, Michał Giedroyc, Rasa Mažeika, Stephen C. Rowell, Rimvydas Petrauskas, Darius Baronas, and others.⁶ At the same time, they focus mostly on rituals and cer-

New Haven and London 1988; R. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory*, Columbia, SC 1990; T. Earle, *How Chiefs come to power. The political economy in prehistory*, Stanford 1997; R. L. Carneiro, *Multiple Trajectories in Political Development: From Leaders to Rulers*, "Social Evolution and History", vol. 3, nr 1, 2004, pp. 162–175; A. Коротаев, *О сакрализации власти*, [in:] *Сакрализация власти в истории цивилизаций*, ред. Д. Бондаренко, Москва 2005, pp. 5–32; D. Handelman, *Conceptual Alternatives to Ritual*, [in:] *Theorizing Rituals: Classic Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts, Annotated Bibliography*, ed. by J. Kreinath, J. Snoek, and M. Stausberg, Leiden and Boston 2006, pp. 37–49; C. Bell, *Ritual: perspectives and dimensions*, Oxford 2009; H. J. M. Claessen, *On Early States – Structure, Development and Fall*, "Social Evolution and History", vol. 9, nr 1, 2010, pp. 3–51; R. L. Grimes, *Ritual*, [in:] *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. by W. Braun, R. T. McCutcheon, London and New York 2000, pp. 259–270; E. Goffman, *Rytuał interakcyjny*, transl. A. Szulżycka, Warszawa 2006; A. Gieysztor, *Władza: Symbole i Rytuały*, Warszawa 2016.

⁴ R. A. Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, Cambridge 1999.

⁵ H. Łowmiański, *Studia nad dziejami Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego*, Poznań 1983; A. J. Duggan, *Kings and kingship in medieval Europe*, London 1993; G. Klaniczay, *The uses of supernatural power: the transformation of popular religion in medieval and early-modern Europe*, Princeton 1990; J. Ochmański, *Historia Litwy*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1990; Z. Dalewski, *Władza, przestrzeń, ceremonial. Miejsce i uroczystość inauguracji władcy w Polsce średniowiecznej do końca XIV w.*, Warszawa 1996; P. Urbańczyk, *Władza i polityka we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Wrocław 2000, pp. 42–44; T. Baranauskas, *Lietuvos valstybes istakas*, Vilnius 2000; И. Данилевский, *Русские земли глазами современников и потомков (XII–XIV вв.)*, Москва 2001; G. Althoff, *The Variability of Rituals in the Middle Ages*, [in:] *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. idem, Cambridge 2002, pp. 71–87; R. Bartlett, *From Paganism to Christianity in medieval Europe*, [in:] *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200*, ed. by N. Berend, Cambridge 2007, pp. 47–73; S. Bylina, *Religijność późnego średniowiecza: Chrześcijaństwo a kultura tradycyjna w Europie środkowo-wschodniej w XIV–XV w.*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 148–149; G. Jaritz, *Ritual, Images, and Daily Life: Some Introductory Notes*, [in:] *Rituals, images and daily life: the medieval perspective*, ed. by G. Jaritz, Berlin 2012, pp. 1–7; J. Keskiäho, *Dreams and the Discoveries of Relicts in the Early Middle Ages: Observations on Narrative Models and the Effects of Authorial Context*, [in:] *Relicts, identity and memory in medieval Europe*, ed. by M. Räsänen, G. Hartmann, E. J. Richards, Brepols 2016.

⁶ M. Giedroyc, *The Arrival of Christianity in Lithuania. Early Contacts (13th century)*, [in:] *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol. 18, 1985, pp. 1–30; M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*, Warszawa 1992; S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan's Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*, [in:] *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 18, 1992, pp. 145–160; S. C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: a Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345*, Cambridge 1994; E. Gudavičius, *Mindaugas*, Vilnius 1998; R. Mažeika, *Granting Power to Enemy Gods*

emonies related to the enthronization, diplomatic procedure, as well as description of Baltic deities and process of Christianization of Lithuania.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the rituals performed by pagan rulers and the nobility of Lithuania in situations related to military actions and campaigns that were reflected in the Christian narrative tradition. It is worth emphasizing that for this period there are no surviving authentic written sources on this issue, and the main information about Lithuania, the customs and traditions, as well as the policy of its pagan rulers, is drawn from rather disparate and heterogeneous Christian narratives of neighbouring states, having often been in confrontation with the Lithuanian state. This fact, as well as the specifics of medieval Christian chronicles, must be taken into account when conducting such a study. At the same time, there is no doubt that the authors of these sources were well aware of the religious situation in Lithuania, and also had a wide knowledge of the beliefs and rituals of the Lithuanians. In addition, it should be pointed out that part of the research items will somehow relate the issues of diplomacy ceremonial and the burial procedure as phenomena directly connected with military events. The emphasis on the analysis of rituals associated with the military activities of the Lithuanian nobles is due to the specifics of the Lithuanian state formation at the specified time. The chronological framework of this article (from the beginning of Mindaugas' reign to the death of Algirdas) can be explained by the commitment of the Lithuanian rulers to paganism and the predominance of pagan ritual tradition among the military nobility at that time. At the same time, the dualism of the ritual structure of society, based on the interaction of the culture of Baltic nobility and the survival and predominance of the Christian tradition in the lands of Rus' having been annexed during the state-forming processes, is emphasised.

It should be also pointed out that the term "ritual", chosen by the author, is a rather debatable concept, although the most generalized and at the same time accurate in the context of the chosen problematic and chronological framework. From the author's point of view, it is the "ritual" that accurately reflects the subject of this study, namely, the set of actions of a certain established form, endowed with special significance, possessing sacredness, accompanying important military campaigns and political activity of the nobles.⁷

In the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades, [in:] *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. D. Abulafia, N. Berend, Aldershot 2002, pp. 153–171; Petrauskas R., *Lietuvos diduomene XIV a. Pabaigoje – XV a.: Sudėtis – struktūra – valdžia*, Vilnius 2003; Petrauskas R., *Praviaszczij rod i znat': k voprosu o predposylkach formirovaniya litowskiego gosudarstwa*, „*Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*”, 2012, nr 1/11, pp. 95–116; D. Baronas, S. C. Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians*, Vilnius 2015; D. Baronas, *Good Faith and Realpolitik. Approaching the Art of Politics of Lithuanian Rulers in the Fourteenth Century*, [in:] *Studia historica Brunensia*, nr 2 (66), 2019, pp. 31–44.

⁷ R. Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, p. 24. More detailed analysis of theoretical differences and use of the terms "ritual" and "ceremony", see in: J. Goody, *Religion and ritual: The definition problem*, [in:] *British Journal of Sociology*, nr 12, 1961, pp. 142–164; M. Gluckman, C. D. Forde, *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester 1962; R. L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Washington, D.C. 1982; C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford 1992; D. Handelman, *Conceptual Alternatives to Ritual*, [in:] *Theorizing Rituals: Classic Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts, Annotated Bibliography*, ed. by J. Kteinath, J. Snoek, and M. Stausberg, Leiden and Boston 2006, pp. 37–49.

As the main criterion for defining the concept of ritual in this context, the author was guided by Roy Rappaport's definition, namely, its characterization as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers."⁸ This concept most clearly represents the nature of the rituals of the Lithuanian rulers and representatives of the nobility, and also determines the main difference from the ceremonial which was usually fixed in written or oral tradition. Rituals had to deal with belief in the sacral power of specific actions, often aimed at changing the surrounding world, contacting divine forces, and getting help and support from them⁹. At the same time, a ceremony can be considered to be a ritual action, in which the emphasis is put on symbolic recognition and demonstration of the particular event in which the procedure is performed. While rituals themselves had a magical (and even sacral) power, the ceremonies, having been more formal in nature, could not exist in isolation from the context and were a reflection of a particular situation demonstrating the expected effect (often political) of a series of programmed actions and words.¹⁰

A ritual, as a form of action, had not only its structure and elements but also differed in social and material consequences. It was often implemented based on a tradition, even a myth, confirming its effectiveness. At the same time, the "new" rituals were often based on the "old" ones that had existed earlier. Thus, in the context of this study, a ritual can be characterized as an action with features of formalization, stereotyping, sacredness, carried out and repeated under certain conditions and often in a certain place, time, and physical and social circumstances.¹¹

Appealing to the rituals performed by the Lithuanian rulers and representatives of the nobility in the 13th – 14th centuries, it should be pointed out that their structure and nature were largely dependent on political and cultural features of the developing state, its dualistic religious character, as well as long and strong positions of paganism, which determined not only the cultural foundations of the worldview of the Lithuanians but also in many ways influenced the policy of the forming state. Despite the fact that by the middle of the 14th century the main part of the territory of the emerging Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the lands of former Rus` with its mainly Christian population, Lithuania was perceived as a pagan military entity in Christian narratives, including the chronicles of the Teutonic Order and Russian annals¹². This was due not only to difficult foreign and internal political circumstances but also to the worldview of its rulers. The ruling class came mainly from the ethnic Lithuanian nobility, predominantly pagan.¹³ Therefore, in many respects, the customs of the sacralisation of the leader's power, used by the first rulers, as well as the rituals performed by them, went back to the traditions of the proto-state formations of pagan Lithuanians.¹⁴ Analy-

⁸ R. Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, p. 24.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 38; M. Gluckman, M. Gluckman, *On drama, games, and athletic contests*, [in:] *Secular Ritual*, ed. by S. Moore, B. Myerhoff, Amsterdam 1977, p. 231.

¹⁰ R. Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, p. 39.

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 26, 29, 33.

¹² S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan's Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*, p. 145.

¹³ Э. Гудавичюс, *История Литвы с древнейших времен до 1569 года*, Москва 2005.

¹⁴ M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*, p. 103; М. Косман, *3 гісторыі і культуры ВКЛ*, Мінск 2010, p. 20.

sis of texts of the 13th – 15th centuries allows us to say that in their mentality the bearer of supreme power was perceived as a sacred figure. At the same time, the cult of the priesthood was not widespread. Although the sources contain data about the priests who maintained the sacred fire, as well as performed certain magical and deliberative functions¹⁵, the grand duke performed the most important sacral rituals aimed at ensuring the well-being of his subjects quite independently.¹⁶

Considering the high role of military activity in the life of Lithuanian society, it is not surprising that a significant place was occupied by rituals connected with the preparation, implementation, or end of military campaigns. Though the Lithuanian rulers knew the basic norms and traditions of Christianity and actively used them for political purposes, both within the state (to maintain their authority not only in the eyes of the Baltic pagan nobility but also the so-called “old” Ruthenian nobility – representatives of the most influential clans of the annexed lands of Rus’) and beyond its borders (to establish contacts with neighbouring Christian states and achieve certain political goals), they continued to worship their deities and use pagan rituals of their ancestors. At the same time, some ritual actions performed by Lithuanian rulers or military leaders during this time were not purely pagan or Christian but were universal – having originated in the old pagan tradition and being actively used in the Christian environment of the epoch under the study.¹⁷ But the paganism of Lithuanian rulers and nobility undoubtedly influenced the direct implementation of such actions giving it peculiar features.

Speaking about the general structure of the ritualism of Lithuanian nobility at that time, it should be pointed out that the rituals ensuring the functioning of society, especially those associated with successful military campaigns and also aimed at the establishment of diplomatic relations, were the most significant ones. To a lesser extent, we can talk about the rituals aimed at ensuring the personal well-being of the ruler. In a separate category, one can allocate the rituals performed not by the ruler (or a representative of nobility) himself, but by his subjects as the markers of acceptance of the legality and sacredness of his reign. This category includes rituals associated with taking the oath by subjects, recognizing the legality of the ruler (for example, greeting the ruler entering the city, in particular, after a military campaign), enthroning the grand duke, as well as his burial. Taking into account the high role of ceremonial in these procedures, as well as a big number of studies devoted to these issues, the author will not focus on ritual actions or ceremonies accompanying the coronation, enthronement procedure, as well as diplomatic negotiations in general.¹⁸ At the same time, it seems to

¹⁵ Хроника Быховца, [in:] *Полное собрание русских летописей*, т. 32, Москва 1975, p. 32.

¹⁶ Э. Гудавичюс, *История Литвы с древнейших времен до 1569 года*, p. 184.

¹⁷ M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*, p. 112; S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan’s Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*, p. 145.

¹⁸ Mentioned aspects are analysed in more details in: M. Giedroyc, *The Arrival of Christianity in Lithuania. Early Contacts (13th century)*, pp. 1–30; M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*; S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan’s Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*; А. Жлутка, *Каранацыя Міндоўга і заснаванне першага біскупства ў дакументах XIII ст.*, [in:] “*Наша Вера*”, nr 2 (24), 2003, pp. 36–44; D. Baronas, S. C. Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians*, Vilnius 2015; D. Baronas, *Good Faith and Realpolitik. Approaching the Art of Politics of Lithuanian Rulers in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 31–44.

be reasonable to analyse the rituals associated with military campaigns by the Lithuanians, which determined the character of the state in the 13th – 14th centuries as a military state formation. Their range is quite wide – from the beginning of military actions (the decision on the possibility of an offense or defence, the choice of a date for a battle, predictions about the results of a campaign, asking deities for help and support), the course of a campaign, to ritual actions mentioned at the end of battles, wars (including the conclusion of peace, making sacrifices to deities, gratitude to them for help, as well as the burial of dead soldiers, rulers).

In medieval society, both pagans and Christians paid great attention to the ability to look into the future and predict the further development of history or the fate of a human. In this regard, great attention was paid to the signs which could predict the future events. It was especially actual before or during military campaigns. Such appeal to the future was characteristic of Lithuanian grand dukes and nobles, and one can distinguish several types of rituals, allowing Lithuanian rulers and nobles to open the veil of upcoming events.

One of these rituals, having had pagan roots and being later adopted into the Christian world, was the casting of lots. With the help of this action, the representative of authority found out the will of deities in difficult matters. It was often related to the choice of the direction of a noble's (ruler's) actions. During military campaigns, it could be used in order to choose the safe way, predict the course of a battle, or find out the will of the deities. At the same time, the sign received while casting of lots was usually not questioned, since it was not only a prediction of the future but a sacral signal, sent directly by deities. So, a negative sign could influence the military leader's decision on the beginning or course of an offense or defence, but also be one of the reasons for concluding agreements, or vice versa – abandoning previously established plans. Such signs could also help the soldiers to recognize danger and avoid it. Thus, casting the lots could show the ambush to the Lithuanians and prevent them from a sudden offense: „*Sed Lethowini sequentes dum venirent ad locum, ubi fratres posuerant insidias, unus missa sorte secundum ritum gentilitatis clamavit alta voce: cito revertamur, insidie Theutonicorum sunthic*“.¹⁹ What is more important, one couldn't doubt the veracity of such results. There are several pieces of evidence presenting the irrefutability of such predictions and even punishment for disobedience. The fragment described in the *Chronicon terrae Prussia* tells that once the captain of the Lithuanian troops didn't believe in the result of casting the lots and didn't want to return back, while the soldiers were terrified and didn't want to continue their way, having a strong belief in this sign. The punishment for such a disobedient came soon. There was the ambush of the Teutonic knights, so many Lithuanians were killed, some of them hanged themselves in the wood, while others died of thirst and hunger.²⁰

¹⁹ Petri de Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, [in:] *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum*, ed. by T. Hirsch, M. Töppen, E. Strehle, Leipzig 1861, p. 189.

²⁰ „Tandem dum revertentes essent in vicino, primus Lethowinus in acie missa sorte clamavit: ve nobis male ibit negocium nostrum. Quem capitaneus increpavit, ut taceret. Ille autem non cessavit id ipsum clamare, quousque fratres cum suis de insidiis erumpentes insilirent in eos, et CCCL ex ipsis occiderent. Alii fugerunt, et in solitudine quidam pre tristitia se suspenderunt, reliqui siti et fame attriti moriebantur, sic quod pauci sine mortis periculo evaserunt“, Ibidem, p. 153. Similar evidence can also be found in: Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi*, t. 1, ed. by I. Daniłowicz,

All sorts of “signs” received in the course of performing certain ritual actions to recognize possible danger were also taken into account. Thus, Peter of Dusburg describes a case when the knights of the Teutonic Order were waiting for Lithuanian knights in ambush, when one of the pagans, having performed a ritual according to pagan customs, shouted that they had to return since the enemy was nearby.²¹ Taking into account the fact that the mentioned battle had taken place just a few years before the author wrote his chronicle, it is likely that he was well aware of the events, and also had an idea of the rituals that were characteristic of the Lithuanians. Data from other chronicles can confirm these testimonies. For example, in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, a pagan leader performs a series of rituals and sacrifices an animal, receiving a sign that the upcoming campaign would succeed and thereby predicting victory in the battle in Samogitia: “*Ir bluotekirl der warf zehant, sin loz nach ir alden site: zehant er bluotete allez mite ein quek, als er wol wiste.*”²² It is obvious that the Lithuanians paid great attention to such signs received as a result of certain actions (rituals), and believed in their veracity. One of the most striking examples, although not directly related to military battles, is the prophetic dream of Gediminas, who saw a wolf during his sleep and which subsequently led to the founding of the new capital of Lithuania. Upon awakening, the grand duke sent to his nobles to discuss his dream. An invited priest explained his dream by the need to build a castle on the hill, which was done.²³ Thus, the signs sent from heaven were dressed in a halo of magic and possessed an irrefutable faith on the part of the nobility. What is even more important in this regard, is the fact that the author of the chronicle containing this fragment, says that it was widespread among the Lithuanians to perform rituals and believe in their magical power.²⁴

One more custom of ritualistic character, that was directly related to military campaigns and the previous ritual, was an appeal to astrology, in particular, accounting for favourable dates for the outbreak of war.²⁵ It should be also emphasised here that the appeal to astral signs was also used by Christian rulers, who considered them to be the signals sent from heaven and believed in their predictive ability and strength to interfere in Earth affairs. At the same time, the appeal to celestial objects and astrology took place not only before or during military campaigns, but also before other important events, including those related to the personal well-being of the ruler, as well

M. Malinowski, Warszawa 1846, p. 267.

²¹ “Sed Lethowini sequentes dum venirent ad locum, ubi fratres posuerant insidias, unus missa sorte secundum ritum gentilitatis clamavit alta voce: cito revertamur, insidie Theutonicorum sunt hic”, Petri de Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, p. 189; R. Mažeika, *Granting Power to Enemy Gods In the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades*, p. 162, 164.

²² *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. by Franz Pfeiffer, Stuttgart 1844, p. 127, l. 4683–87.

²³ “...и в том очнулся, и впал ему той сон в мысль, и долго мыслил, що бы то значило. А назавтрее Гедимин вставши, зозвал всѣх панов и дворан своих, и повѣдал сон свой, радячися и питаючи, що бы ся то розумѣло быти, и що значил той сон, бо литва на он час яко погане ледачому вѣрили и сами ворожками бавилися, але той сон здался каждому быти трудным и выложити не могли его”. See: *Хроника Литовская и Жмоитская*, [in:] *Полное собрание русских летописей*, т. 35, ред. Н. Улащик, Москва 1980, p. 471.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ “Eodem anno et tempore, quo reges solent procedere ad Bella, rex Vithenus cum multitudine copiosa Lethowinorum pugnaturus contra fratrem, intravit terram Lyvonie.” See: Petri de Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, p. 163.

as prediction of future. A temple, or a repository of eternal fire, played an important role in this regard. Revered by pagan Lithuanians as sacred and possessing, it had not only a protective function, but it was also capable of predicting the future. Describing the customs of the Lithuanians, Jan Długosz wrote that the sacral fire was kept in the most important places of their possessions. It was believed to be eternal and sacral and was secured by a priest who could answer the people's questions while performing sacral rituals.²⁶

Another important ritual – the oath – had almost universal significance. It was one of the fundamental ritual actions that accompanied the most important events in the life of the ruler and nobles, as well as the ordinary citizens. Although within this study the oath will be analysed primarily in the context of peace-war, it is obvious that its use went far beyond military contacts and was one of the key elements in the most diverse areas of the state political development and the activities of its representatives (for example, the procedure for erecting ruler to the throne, diplomatic negotiations, etc.). Moreover, it could come both on behalf of the ruler himself (as a promise to fulfil his obligations, a binding force of the concluded agreements, or appealing to the deities for help before important or dangerous events) and on behalf of his subjects (as the oath of allegiance to the ruler).

At the same time, the oath given not to a person (another ruler, warrior or subject), but to the deities, had the greatest power. In this regard, it was an important element in the worldview of the pagan Lithuanian ruler and his military leaders. The first evidence of an oath to deities, contained in the narratives, dates back to the pre-state stage of Lithuania. Obviously, it remained in the following centuries. Thus, *Chronicon terrae Prussia* of Peter of Dusburg contains an abstract describing that a Lithuanian leader swore by the power of deities that he would no longer wait for the assault of the knights of the Order in any castle, securing his promise by the oath and thus adding an element of sacredness to it.²⁷

The oath had a special significance when concluding agreements, especially international ones, at the end of military campaigns or as a source of preventing them. According to S. C. Rowell, during this period the diplomatic procedure consisted of two key elements: the exchange of promises, which could be written down or pronounced by both parties to the negotiations, and oaths, given to reinforce the spoken words.²⁸ At the same time, the appeal to the deities could be carried out not only by the leader of the army or the grand duke but also by ordinary participants of the battles. The form of gratitude, meanwhile, could vary from oral to material (in the form of ritual sacrifice).

²⁶ "Po miastach głośniejszych utrzymywali ogień, który zwali i wyobrażali sobie wiecznie płonącym; tego zaś strzegł kapłan, z natchnienia czarta dający wątpliwe odpowiedzi tym, którzy do niego z ofiarami i zapytaniami przychodzili..." See: *Joannis Długossi Senioris Canonici Cracoviensis Opera Omnia* = *Jana Długosza kanonika Krakowskiego dzieła wszystkie, Dziejów polski ksiąg dwanaście*, t. 2. Kraków: typ. Czas, 1867, p. 445.

²⁷ "Surminus autem capitaneus non longe postea dictum castrum desolatum reliquit, jurans per deorum potentiam, quo nunquam impugnationem fratrum in aliquo castro de cetero exspectaret", *Petri de Dusburg, Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, p. 152.

²⁸ S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan's Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*, p. 149.

The sacrifice was directly related to the oath to deities, as well as the belief in the possible influence of divine forces on Earth affairs, being, in fact, one of the key elements of the pagan cult. At the same time, sacrifice, including the shedding of blood, played a special role. Thus, the early sources contain evidence of the use of the blood sacrifice of an animal (bull) performed by the Lithuanians, symbolizing confirmation of a promise. The earliest records of this ritual among the Balts are contained in the *Livonian Chronicle* of Henry under 1201.²⁹ In especially important cases, the blood of the animal was smeared over the face of the swearer.³⁰ It is obvious that this trend was continued in the later times. Being pagans, the rulers of Lithuania kept the traditions of their ancestors, even though they were in constant contact – cultural and political – with the representatives of Christianity. In written sources, one can find evidence of various ritual actions performed by Lithuanian rulers during diplomatic negotiations, not only showing the great importance attached to them by the authorities but also emphasizing their sacredness.³¹ In the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, when describing the events of 1257, it is said that the shaking hands of the rulers sealed the oath given during the events that had taken place in Samogitia.³² At the same time, it should be noted that the above-mentioned shaking hands and exchanging gifts as a constituent element of negotiations or concluding agreements are nothing more than regular rituals performed by rulers to consolidate the result of their actions. These rituals were often passed down from generation to generation, becoming a kind of fixed tradition. In 1298, Lithuanian ambassadors arrived in Riga to discuss the defence of the city from the attacks of the Teutonic Order. Having given the necessary arguments, they concluded the agreement, sealing it with an old ritual: “...qui etiam gentiles praelibata sensibilibus argumentis ac sacramentis, secundum eorum morem ac pactis inconcusse servandis...”³³

References to similar rituals performed during the conclusion of military treaties can also be found in a later period, namely in 1338, when a truce was concluded between the Lithuanians and the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order in Riga. To secure the promise having been made during the negotiations, the Christians kissed the cross, while the pagans also performed certain rituals: „oc ere hilligh hir up hebben ghe dan.”³⁴ It seems likely that with the development of statehood and strengthening of the power of the first Lithuanian rulers, the functioning of such rituals – oaths, sacrifices, as well as the use of blood as a sacred element for securing agreements – continued.³⁵

²⁹ “Interim Curones, audito adventu Episcopi et civitatis inchoatione, non timore belli, sed vocatione Christi, pro pace facienda nuncios suos ad civitatem dirigunt: quam pacem, consentientibus Christianis, sicut mos est paganorum, sanguinis effusione stabiliunt”, Henricus Lettus, *Livländische Chronik*, [in:] *Scriptores rerum Livonicarum*, ed. A. Hansen, Riga–Leipzig 1853, p. 74.

³⁰ S. C. Rowell, *A Pagan’s Word. Lithuanian Diplomatic Procedure 1200–1385*, p. 149.

³¹ See more details on the issue in: S. C. Rowell, *A pagan’s word: Lithuanian diplomatic procedure 1200–1385*, pp. 145–160; R. Mažeika, *Of cabbages and knights: trade and trade treaties with the infidel on the northern frontier*, [in:] *Journal of Medieval History*, nr 20, 1994, pp. 63–76.

³² *Livländische Reimchronik*, p. 53.

³³ *Liv-, Est- und Kurländisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. by F. G. von Bunge, Reval 1853, col. 715. See also: S. C. Rowell, *A pagan’s word: Lithuanian diplomatic procedure 1200–1385*, p. 149.

³⁴ *Russisch-Livländische Urkunden*, ed. by K. E. Napiersky, St. Petersburg 1868, p. 69; R. Mažeika, *Granting Power to Enemy Gods In the Chronicles of the Baltic Crusades*, p. 157.

³⁵ M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*, p. 106.

Speaking about the rituals performed during military campaigns, one cannot fail to mention the most important activities associated with their successful course and completion, namely, turning to the deities for help and subsequent gratitude to them for their favour.³⁶ The Lithuanians started their battles with an appeal to the deities, which was mentioned in the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*.³⁷ In addition, success in a battle was often associated precisely with the intervention of divine forces, which was often accompanied by elements of magic. Thus, the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* mentions that it was the intervention of Perun, the main god of the Lithuanians, called with the help of a special ritual, that helped them to freeze the Baltic Sea, which allowed the pagan army to cross it easily: "... als es Perkune ir apgot gap das nimmer so hart georos."³⁸ Gediminas also appealed to the protection of the deities and their intervention in Earth affairs in his conversation with Władysław I Łokietek after their unsuccessful joint campaign in 1331. The episode, reflected in *Chronica nova Prutenica* by Wigand of Marburg, shows the belief of Lithuanian grand duke in the security provided by the deities that helped him to avoid an assault and his possible capturing: "unde nisi a diis meis protectus fuissem, captivatus fuissem tradimento, cum no verim traditores."³⁹

At the same time, Jan Długosz in his *Chronicle* mentioned human sacrifices as a special form of gratitude for a successful battle. He pointed out that returning from enemy lands with a victory, the Lithuanians built a fire, and each soldier threw a log into it. After that, the most noble and beautiful prisoner was burned in this fire. The Lithuanians believed that they could thank their deities for help in the battle and please them in such a way.⁴⁰ Similar pieces of evidence can also be found in the chronicles of the Teutonic Order. In particular, Wigand of Marburg, when describing the events of 1365, noted that the Lithuanians, on their way back from a successful campaign in Prussia, stayed not far from Ragnitam and celebrated the victory by sacrificing the blood of a bull and a man, namely, Hensel Neuwenstein (Hensel Neuwensteyn), to the deities, throwing them into the fire.⁴¹

An even more picturesque description can be found in the same chronicle of Wigand of Marburg when another event is mentioned. According to it, the Lithuanians captured a young merchant who was heading to Riga. They tied him up, cut open his belly, led him around a tree, waiting until his insides came out, and rejoiced at the irrigation of the earth with his blood, thereby offering a sacrifice to their deities.⁴² Of

³⁶ Petri de Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, p. 189.

³⁷ „Тоужахж ж[е] и плевахж, по-свойскы | рекоуша: «!Ан[б]да!» - възывающе богы своа, Аньда, | и Дивириза, и вса богы своа поминаючи, рекомыа | бѣси.” *Kronika Halicko-Wołyńska (Kronika Romanowiczów)*, ed. by D. Dąbrowski, A. Jusupović, Kraków-Warszawa 2017, p. 386.

³⁸ *Livländische Reimchronik*, l. 1435–37.

³⁹ *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, [in:] *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, ed. by T. Hirsch, M. Töppen, E. Strehlke, vol. 2, Leipzig 1863, p. 471.

⁴⁰ Jan Długosz, p. 132–133, 443; В. Антонович, *Очерк истории Великого княжества Литовского до смерти великого князя Ольгерда*, [in:] *Моя словідь : вибрані історичні та публіцистичні твори*, под ред. О. Тодійчук, В. Ульяновського, Київ 1995, p. 717.

⁴¹ "... Caustriten etc., captivos educentes viros et mulieres festinantque ad stagnum vulgariter Kurisch-Hab, in quo piscatores captivaverunt, XIV. etiam equos commendatoris deduxerunt, festini redeunt ad regem prope Ragnitam leti, sacrificantes Diis sanguinem thauri, et quendam vocabulo Hensel Neuwensteyn in ignem prociunt et sacrificant." *Die Chronik Wigands von Marburg*, p. 549.

⁴² "Festinans ad transitum occurrit ei juvenis mercator, sarcinam mercandorum ferens, volens in-

course, there is no certainty that such an event took place. Perhaps such a colourful description was used by the author on purpose, to enhance the dramatic effect. Nevertheless, the presence of similar evidence in the chronicle of Peter of Dusburg, the *Older chronicle of Oliva* (when describing the rituals performed by the pagan Prussians), and other chronicles, allows us to speak about the real presence of human sacrifices used by the Lithuanians during military campaigns.⁴³

Thus, Maciej Strykowski describes the Samogitians burning a Magdeburg gentry as a sacrifice to their deities in gratitude for the victory in 1260. What was more interesting in that case, it is that the victim was chosen by casting of lots, and twice the evil fate fell to the gentry Girkhas, but he was saved by familiar pagans, but after the lot fell to him for the third time, he accepted his fate and voluntarily went to his death.⁴⁴ It should be emphasized that this message not only confirms the performance of human sacrifices by the Lithuanians as a gratitude to the deities for their favour, but also confirms the use of lots as a ritual performed by pagan warriors under important circumstances, as well as the high level of faith in the strength of this ritual action not only by the Lithuanians themselves but also by their Christian opponents.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the article, rituals performed by other persons (subjects) in order to recognize the legality or sacredness of the ruler's power can be distinguished into a separate category. Since wars were always accompanied by the death of warriors, and often by the death of military leaders and rulers, it is necessary to turn to the rituals associated with the burial ceremony. The surviving data from sources show that burial was an important element of the Lithuanian worldview, which was given great importance by the rulers themselves, as well as by their close entourage and members of the family. Presumably, until the middle of the 13th century, the corpses of the dead were burned at the place of death. But by the 70s of the 13th century, there had been evidence of the founding of a special temple on the site of the burning of Svintorog, which became the burial place of the subsequent Lithuanian princes and their nobles. According to the *Chronicle* of Maciej Strykowski, the grand duke of Lithuania Swintorog went hunting and found a beautiful place at the confluence of the Vilna to the Viliya (Neris). He appreciated it so much that asked his son Germunt to burn him there after his death according to the pagan ritual and to found a burial site for later Lithuanian princes at that place.⁴⁵ Moreover, Maciej Strykowski wrote that in order to enhance the significance and sacredness of this place, prince Germunt founded a temple for priests who guarded the divine fire, offered up prayers to the

trare opidum Rigense, nihil sciens de guerris, quem apprehenderunt, ligaverunt pagani, ventrem eius sciderunt et circumducunt eum arbori, donec intestina eius omnia extraheret, deposueruntque eum de trunco, sanguinem eius sic sacrificando, in quo delectabantur exultantes." Ibidem, p. 505.

⁴³ Petri de Dusburg, *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, p. 87; *Die Chroniken von Oliva Und Bruchstuecke aelterer Chroniken*, [in:] *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum*, vol. 5, ed. by T. Hirsch, M. Töppen, E. Strehlke, Leipzig 1874, pp. 596–597: „... et in breui ipso duce castrum inferius per cruciferos fuit captum et insuper Pipinum sororium suum cruciferis tradidit, quem delete castro suo taliter peremerunt: Ventrem ipsius circa umbilicum aperiri fecerunt et umbilicum arbori affixerunt et per circuitum arboris eum agitare preceperunt, quosque penitus euisceratus fuit; et sic qui multos Christianos impie necauerat crudeliter fuit et miserabiliter interemptus”.

⁴⁴ “... a tak Hirschas zacny rycerz w kirysie i s koniem na którym siedział, żywo był spalony na ofiarę złośliwą pogańską”, Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi*, vol. 1, p. 295.

⁴⁵ Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi*, t. 1, p. 308.

deities (including Perun) and brought sacrifices to them.⁴⁶ In addition, the chronicler emphasized that it was extremely important for the Lithuanians to bring the deceased leader to this sacred place for a farewell ritual. To confirm his words, he even cites the example of the battle of 1324 near the castle of Christmemel, during which a noble Lithuanian was killed. The Lithuanians wanted to drag him off, and though the knights of the Order tried to prevent them from this by strong shooting, the pagans managed to take this dead man right out of the enemy crowd. True, it cost them a lot – many Lithuanians were wounded or killed, which made the author conclude that it should have been a noble person or even the grand duke.⁴⁷ Similar evidence is also contained in the *Chronicle of Lithuania and Samogitia* when describing the death of Gediminas in battle and his subsequent burial. The source tells that the body of the grand duke was taken to Vilno, and all his knights together with his seven sons buried him according to the pagan tradition at the mentioned site. The Lithuanian ruler was burned in rich princely clothes, with his arms, a horse and falcon, and other important things. Moreover, his servant, accompanied by enemy captives, was burned during the ritual too. All those present were crying and throwing claws of lynx and bear into the fire. After the ritual had been completed, the ashes were buried and everybody returned to Vilno.⁴⁸ As can be seen from the message, as well as quite detailed information contained in such narratives as the *Bychowiec Chronicle* or the chronicles of the Teutonic Order (Chronicles by Peter of Dusburg, Wigand of Marburg), the burial ritual of Lithuanian princes included burning of the body in a special sacral place, with the most valuable items accompanied him during his lifetime (including animals and servants). The mound was covered with bones. The latter, together with other ritual elements, was part of the worldview of pagan Lithuanians and reflected their mythological ideas about the afterlife.⁴⁹ Algirdas and Kestutis were also buried and burned according to this old ritual.⁵⁰ From the author's point of view, it is possible that the burial process of their predecessors could have been similar. At the same time, it was important for the Lithuanians not only to perform certain rituals aimed at sending a ruler or a noble person to his last "journey". An integral part of the ritual of the funeral cult was also the veneration of the deities

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 311; Jan Długosz, p. 443.

⁴⁷ Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszytkiej Rusi*, t. 1, p. 280.

⁴⁸ «Кгедимин, великий князь, того року от нѣмцов в Прусех забит з ручници и там на том же мѣсту душу вырихнул. Сынове тѣло его припрводили до Виля и все его рицество, и там обычаем поганским, наложивши великий сруб смолного дерева, смолины сосновой, гроб ему наготовали. А потым, гды всѣ семь сынов на погреб отца своего з[ѣ]вхалися, убрали его в одежу княжую цвѣтную, в которой сам за живота найтѣпшей кохался, а при нем шаблю, рогатину, сагайдак, соколов пару, хоргов пару, коня животного з седлом, слугу его, найвѣрнѣйшого коханка, з ним звязавши на стос дров положили, так теж зброю его и часть нѣкую лупов неприятельских и трох вязнев нѣмцов збройных живых, вколь дрова запаливши, з ним спалили. А гды горѣли уже, на той час плакали з великою жалостю всего рицества, кидали в огонь пазногти рисии и медвежий, як был в них звычай стародавний. Потым, гды тѣла погорѣли, пепел особно и кости якая если не згорѣла, княжие от конских и псих зобравши в в труну зашпунтовавши, там же в землю поховали и до мѣста Виля вернулись всѣ» *Хроника Литовская и Жмойтская*, p. 473.

⁴⁹ *Хроника Литовская и Жмойтская*, p. 465; *Хроника Быховца*, p. 19.

⁵⁰ „А так Куновойт поставил балвана на памятку отца своего, того балвана люде хвалили за бога, а гды балван за часом згинул, на том мѣсту липы выросли, которых литва и жомойт аж до часов Ягелловых за бога хвалили, пѣсни спросны Поянѣ, жонѣ Живинбудовой, спѣваючи.” Ibidem.

who were witnesses of this transition and integral participants in the ceremony of farewell and subsequent memory.⁵¹

It is noteworthy that it is the description of the rituals associated with the burial of the rulers of Lithuania that is given the greatest attention by Christian chroniclers. This may indicate not only their good knowledge of the traditions and rituals that existed among the pagan Lithuanian nobility but also the great importance that the latter attached to this ritual.

Nevertheless, one cannot say that the rulers and nobility of Lithuania were entirely under the influence of pagan ritualism. During the mentioned chronological period, the ruler and his surrounding were characterized by religious syncretism, which was largely due not only to the complicated socio-political circumstances in which the formation of the new state took place but also to the desire of the grand dukes to strengthen their influence in the annexed territories of Rus' with its strong Christian traditions.⁵² This is evidenced by the nature of the rituals described above, most of which, although they had pagan roots and content, was later borrowed and actively used by the representatives of the Christian world. The religious syncretism, as well as the dualistic nature of the rituals used by the rulers and nobles of Lithuania, is also evidenced by their policies both within the state and outside it. Though they were familiar with the norms and traditions of Christianity, using it for achieving their political goals, they remained pagans, died, and were buried according to the old pagan tradition.⁵³ Thus, pagan traditions and cults were predominant in the surrounding of the Lithuanian grand dukes and military nobility. The main part of the rituals described in Christian sources refers to the military campaigns by the Lithuanians. The military sphere played an extremely important role in Lithuanian society as it was one of the key features of the emerging and developing state. It makes it possible to distinguish rituals used by the Lithuanian rulers and nobles within their military activity in a separate category. Among them, one can point out the rituals, connected with making a decision on the start of a campaign or a battle, choosing the date of it, the prognosis of the course of the battle, actions aimed at receiving the favour of deities in upcoming activities, gratitude to the deities for help (including sacrifice), as well as the burial of dead knights. The data from narrative sources allow considering pagan rituals of the oath, drawing the lots, and sacrifice to be the most significant and influential ones among Lithuanian rulers and nobility during their military campaigns in the 13th–14th centuries.

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⁵¹ *Хроника Литовская и Жмойтская*, p. 457.

⁵² M. Kosman, *Od chrztu do chrystianizacji*, p. 103.

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