What is the Lithuanian Metrica? This question has often been posed by historians of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. There have been equally frequent discussions of the indisputable value to researchers of the books which are collectively called the Lithuanian Metrica. The lasting value, historical and cultural, of these books is attested to by the continuing interest in them not only by professional historians, but also by genealogists and amateur lovers of history. The latter, given the languages in which the books of the Metrica were compiled (Chancery Ruthenian, Polish and Latin), and the palaeographical skills required to read them, eagerly await the publication of successive volumes, edited and introduced by illustrious specialists from various academic centres. It is with gratitude and curiosity, therefore, that we receive the latest publication on the subject in English. This book, devoted to the history and research on this multidimensional monument of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, is a translation from the Lithuanian original. In some ways, it summarises nearly 40 years of research conducted at the Lithuanian Institute of History on a complex corpus of sources that was created over a period of more than 400 years.

The fate of this monument, which emerges from both the publication being reviewed here, and the literature on the subject, could well provide the plot for an enthralling documentary film about the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its successors. The lasting significance of the Lithuanian Metrica is confirmed by the attention paid to


the locations where it was kept, and by the difficulties experienced by scholars in consulting the original books, even, or perhaps especially, today. The State Russian Archive of Early Acts (Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov) in Moscow, where most of the books are now kept (in fond 389), greets foreign scholars who wish to work on the Metrica much as Cerberus deterred visitors to Hades.

The book under review was conceived and matured in a community of historians connected with the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius, where since 1985 research has been conducted successfully on the Metrica, and many volumes have been edited and published. This is exceptionally time-consuming work, which requires specialist skills. The efforts of the authors of this book, Professors Artūras Dubonis, Darius Antanavičius, Raimonda Ragauskienė and Ramunė Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, all of whom are experienced editors of volumes of the Metrica, deserve all the more appreciation for having written and published this collection of studies devoted to the Metrica and its functioning, which also introduces English-reading scholars, students and lovers of history to the world of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its diverse inhabitants.

Before proceeding to the content of the book, we should note that for many years, important research has also been conducted at Vilnius University, where scholars under the erudite and experienced Professor Irena Valikonytė have edited and published volumes of the Metrica and other works on the subject.3 Altogether, more than 60 volumes of this impressive source have been published in Lithuania. More than a dozen volumes have also been published thanks to the efforts of researchers from Belarus, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. Irrespective of the place of publication, the vast majority of volumes published so far concern the 16th century. But as we know, there are about 700 books in the Lithuanian Metrica.

*The Lithuanian Metrica. History and Research* is composed of ten chapters. It opens with a preface and closes with a bibliography, followed by a mixed index with entries for people, places and institutions. In the Lithuanian original, each chapter is preceded by the name of its author. Readers of the English-language edition are expected to assume that all four authors share responsibility for the entire publication. In the very first paragraph of the preface, the authors have sought to answer the question what lies behind the name of the Lithuanian Metrica. They

show that the term refers to ‘books compiled from copied documents that were issued from or found their way into the chancellery of the Lithuanian grand duke’ (p. vii). The oldest document dates from the pagan era, and concerns events in 1367: the treaty with the Livonian Order agreed by Grand Duke Algirdas and his brother Kęstutis. The most recent books contain copies of documents from the end of the 18th century. The Metrica is therefore ‘justifiably considered the principal archive of the early Lithuanian state’ (p. vii), that is to say, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Of course, more than one nation and more than one state has been built, at least in part, on the inheritance of that early statehood. So the Lithuanian Metrica is a collection of documents important to almost the entire history of East-Central Europe. Various kinds of documents were copied on to the pages of several dozen volumes, which were compiled by the Chancellery of the grand dukes of Lithuania. They included documents of general importance to the state, and documents dealing with local matters: privileges, decrees, fiscal records, inventories, and so on.

The best answer to the question what was once understood by the concept of the Metrica is given by the Latin title of the 25th Book of Inscriptions from the time when Leo Sapieha (1557–1633) was chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Because of the poor condition of the books, he gave instructions for them to be copied and provided with a list of contents. The characterisation is worth quoting:

The metrica (collection, digest) of privileges, court decrees, cases, and other various letters issued to the civilians of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by the [...] kings of Poland and grand dukes of Lithuania, compiled in 1541 [...] at the behest of our [...] Lady Bona, the Queen of Poland and Grand Duchess of Lithuania, rewritten, checked, and together with an index of all the documents within, bound at the order of [...] Leo Sapieha, Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [...] during the appointment of Aleksander Korwin Gosiewski, the secretary of his blessed royal highness [Sigismund Vasa] as the chancellery regent by the aforementioned lord [Leo Sapieha] in [...] 1598 (p. 3).4

The authors explain that ‘the meaning of the word metrica changed from a chancellery term referring to a digest of documents written up in one location, to the collective title given to the books of chancellery documentation copies, that is, a concept’ (p. 5). The term Lithuanian Metrica appeared for the first time in 1623 as ‘Metrica of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’ in descriptions of its books. Shortly afterwards, in

1634, Albrecht Radziwiłł (1593–1656), Sapieha’s successor as chancellor, referred in his memoirs to ‘the Lithuanian Metrica’.

In the light of these facts, while discussing the historiography of the Metrica, the authors have been able to refute arguments made by Irena Sułkowska-Kurasiowa (1917–2006), for whom the Lithuanian Metrica belonged principally to Poland’s cultural heritage, as a part of ‘the state archive of Poland which experienced a catastrophe at the end of the eighteenth century’ (p. 7).\(^5\) The authors also contest the views of Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, who worked with Kurasiowa for many years, and referred to the collection as ‘the so-called Lithuanian Metrica’. She maintained that various fragments were only formed into a collection in the Russian Empire, where it was allegedly given the misleading title of the ‘Lithuanian Metrica’. She ignored the existence of the separate archive of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and held that Poland was the sole successor to the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Her considerable expertise, acquired through archival research on the storage and rearrangements of the Lithuanian Metrica, was, according to the authors of the book under review,

intended to “dilute” the statehood of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the legacy of its written heritage and origins of its early archives, and to justify their plunder, dismantlement and regrouping, and later on, the return of some of the archives to a “home” of doubtful origins – Poland.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, she opposed Lithuania’s claims to its archival heritage as ‘imperialist’ (pp. 11–12). The views of Belarusian scholars are also discussed, including Henadź’i Halenčanka, who described the Lithuanian Metrica as ‘collections of specific material (fascicles, books) made up of document copies and other important auxiliary material’ (p. 12). They highlight the insight of Aliaksandr Hrusha on ‘how an original document and its copy in the chancellery book would make its way to the archive: the original would go to the treasury, while its copy would remain in the chancellery’ (p. 13).

Concluding the first chapter, the authors define the Metrica as ‘a collection of the books of copies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania chancellery’s documents.’ While ‘actually just a part of the state archive’, the Chancellery’s role for ‘the most important central state institutions’, both before and after the 1569 Union of Lublin, justify its description as a ‘state archive’ (p. 13). They highlight the significance of its survival,

when so many other symbols of the statehood of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania have been destroyed.

The second chapter deals with the historiographical disputes about the early history of the Lithuania Metrica up to the late 16th century, and the appearance of the first books in the last quarter of the 15th. The arguments adumbrated by Nikolai Berezhkov, Matvei Liubavskii, Ivan Lappo, Egidijus Banionis, Stanislovas Lazutka, Krzysztof Pietkiewicz, Eugenijus Saviščevas, Laimontas Karalius and finally the co-author of this publication, Darius Antanavičius, are carefully compared and considered. This critical approach to the historiography has not prevented the authors from appreciating that almost every new work on and edition of the Metrica has brought us closer to a better understanding of this monument and its final scholarly publication.

The third chapter analyses the functioning of the Chancellery of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the compilation of the Lithuanian Metrica until the mid-16th century. As with similar institutions, during this formative period, we know most about the principal players and much less about the lowlier officials. This impedes but does not prevent research on the Chancellery which was created by people who were grounded in the realities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Paradoxically, the so-called ‘chancellery’ of Grand Duke Vytautas is better illuminated than the Chancellery in some later periods, and research about it is ongoing. Poles and Germans, often in prominent positions, are noted among those employed by the monarch, while local scribes and notaries prepared documents in Ruthenian. The limited reach of written culture in the grand duchy necessarily limited the role of the secretaries. More documents were produced for foreign recipients than for domestic ones. The copying and storing of more important documents were practised only sporadically, with summaries often thought sufficient. For this reason, most of the surviving complete documents from Vytautas’ reign have been preserved in other countries’ archives. The authors make a useful comparison with the more thorough approach to documentation in the contemporaneous Chancellery of the King of Hungary. Hence their reluctance, despite the marked growth in written evidence of grand ducal activity, to identify the probably mobile office of Vytautas’ scribes as a fully fledged chancellery. The latter should be ‘understood as a stationary institution headed by the chancellor, where documents were prepared and edited, and most importantly, systematically registered and stored’ (p. 43).
It was during the long reign of Casimir Jagiellon (1440-1492) that both the office of chancellor and the grand ducal chancellery became firmly established. Kęsgailaitis served as chancellor from 1444 until his death in 1476; from 1459 he also held the high office of Palatine of Vilnius. Henceforth, the chancellor was expected to serve for life as a member of the Council of Lords. In effect, he would be one of the most prominent magnates of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, heading an office responsible for the preparation of the ruler’s documents. Among those ordered by Kęsgailaitis were privileges for the nobility. At this time, Polish officials remained largely responsible for documents in Latin, while those in Ruthenian were usually prepared by scribes from Volhynia, and even from the Smolensk region. More consistent practices in compiling and maintaining the books that came to compose the Lithuanian Metrica were adopted during the reign of Casimir’s third son Alexander (1492–1506). Documents were kept either in the Treasury or the Chancellery. Treasury business was increasing, and from the 1510s Treasury notaries, accountable to the land treasurer, were recorded. These changes continued through the reign of Casimir’s fifth son Sigismund ‘the Old’ (1506-1548). Gradually the state archive formed out of acts, copies and registers. Although not everything of note was fully inscribed in the records, ‘the goal was to make the Metrica books a kind of treasury of the ruler’s legal “memory”’ (p. 49). From the 1520s, almost all documents issued by the Chancellery bore the signature of either the ruler or the chancellor. The long tenure of the office by Albertas Goštautas (1480-1539) contributed to the stabilisation of practice. Continuity was assured after his death, when no successor was appointed for seven years, by his associate the treasury notary Hornostaj.

Most notaries and scribes at this time were from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which reflected the growth of domestic governance, but besides several Poles, there was also Sigismund’s long-serving and highly influential secretary from Modena, Giovanni Andrea Valentino. He owed his position to the Queen and Grand Duchess Bona Sforza, whom he treated as her personal physician. The marks of his successful career included a deanery and canonry of Vilnius cathedral, a substantial brick house in the city, and the tenure of lands in the Brest region. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Chancellery became a beacon for Renaissance culture and ideas, including political theories, during the first half of the 16th century.

The next two chapters continue the story of the Chancellery, its personnel and its documents. The office of vice-chancellor was created
in 1566, and the Chancellery was divided in two in 1574. The growing entrenchment of documents in political, social and economic life reflected reforms to administration, courts and landholding, notably the introduction of the *volok*, which was accompanied by simpler and cheaper ways of recording transactions and audits. The functioning of the Chancellery was necessarily affected by changes associated with the 1569 Union of Lublin and the first interregna in 1572–1573 and 1574–1576. When the palatinates of Volhynia, Kiev and Bratslav became part of the Polish Crown, some staff transferred to the Crown Chancellery, which continued the practice of keeping the relevant books of the Metrica in the Ruthenian language. Nobles of those lands objected when, after the Union, some documents were sent to them in Polish, which, they said, they had not been taught to read. Besides Ruthenian, some of the Lithuanian Chancellery business was transacted in Latin, and the clerks who dealt with it were better paid than others. There were also Tartar officials who read, translated and prepared documents in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. According to the authors, the years 1550–1579 brought the apogee of the Chancellery, and the position of chancellor, usually held together with that of Palatine of Vilnius, was coveted by the leading magnate families.

The sixth chapter considers the increasingly complex structure and arrangement of the Lithuanian Metrica and the problems regarding its handling and control. Once again, it summarises the state of scholarship: perhaps the task would have been better consolidated at the start of the book. The seventh chapter is devoted to the problem of where the Metrica was stored. Part was located in the treasury. The interests of the state were sometimes disrupted by ‘personal whims’. The 18th century brought the transportation of the Metrica to new locations, first to Warsaw, no later than the 1740s, where it was studied, reordered, partly rewritten and rebound. The books became a resource for the Permanent Council in the 1770s and 1780s. However, the long absence of the records from Vilnius prompted calls from the Lithuanian nobility for its return to the Grand Duchy. Most books were brought back and rehoused in Vilnius in 1792–1793, only for some to be sent back to Warsaw for safekeeping during the 1794 insurrection. The great majority of the archive was shipped from Riga to St Petersburg in January 1795, even before the implementation of the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth later that year.

This subject is continued in the ninth chapter, about the fate of the Metrica in Russian and other hands. Some documents must have been
lost or irreparably damaged in transit. It is still unclear whether the Republic of Lithuania actively sought to recover the Metrica and other cultural treasures as the Soviet Union broke up. Zigmantas Kiaupa has suggested that such efforts only began much later. We have already noted Kennedy Grimsted's hostile reaction to Lithuania's 1992 law on archives, while later positions taken by Russian and Belarusian academics and institutions indicate that Lithuanian aspirations are regarded as hostile. That is not likely to change while the present Russian and Belarusian regimes remain in power.

The tenth and last chapter yet again reviews the state of research and publications on the Lithuanian Metrica. The books are divided into those containing entries, diplomatic missions, court matters, public business, copies of documents that had seals affixed, and surveys. Being a multi-authored collection of studies, the book does not aim to exhaust its subject. The internal structure of the volume, which is not free from repetition, is in some ways a reflection of the internal complexities of the Lithuanian Metrica. Nevertheless, this book is a welcome summary of the existing state of scholarship. It systematises the most important research questions tackled by historians, and it poses some new ones for the future. It would be interesting to investigate, for example, the condition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that emerges from the five books of the Metrica that resulted from the activity of Bona Sforza in Lithuania. This publication can be warmly recommended as a valuable contribution to scholarship on the history of statehood, chancelleries and archives, and not least their fate in lands repeatedly afflicted by war.

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