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The 1416 Indulgence for the Franciscan Friary in Ashmiany: Context and Text

This publication seeks to draw attention to a newly found text of an indulgence issued during the Council of Constance for the Ashmiany friary (in modern Belarus). It bears the date of January 16, 1416. This is one of the oldest currently known surviving indulgences related directly to a religious house on the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.¹ Due to its relatively early date, this indulgence belongs to the meagre fund of primary evidence illuminating the progress of Christianization in the Lithuanian lands converted to the Roman Catholic faith starting in 1387. The following remarks are intended to provide contextual evidence enabling us to appreciate better the value of the information contained in this indulgence.

The study of indulgences constitutes an essential part of research into medieval religious practices, devotion, and piety. Large numbers of their texts were made available in print already in the nineteenth century. There are numerous works that trace the history of indulgences and illumine

* I would like to express my thanks to Professors S.C. Rowell and Halina Manikowska and to two anonymous reviewers.

1. The earliest surviving indulgence that may be said to bear directly upon the faithful in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was issued by Pope Boniface IX on the eve of the crusading campaign that ended in the Vorskla debacle: *Vetera Monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae gentiumque finitimarum historiam illustrantia*, vol. 1, ed. A. Theiner, Romae 1860, no. 1041, pp. 771–773 (4 May 1399). The indulgences presented to the parish church in Kaunas in 1413 and 1417 were still in place in Vilnius before the First World War: *Kodeks dyplomatyczny katedry i diecezji wileńskiej = Codex diplomaticus ecclesiae cathedralis necnon dioeceseos Vilmensis* (hereinafter: *KDKDW*), vol. 1 (1387–1507), ed. J. Fijałek, W. Semkowicz, Kraków 1932–1948.

indulgence-related phenomena either across Europe or with regard to specific countries.² The same holds true of Hungarian, Bohemian, or Polish lands with their regional differences in the reception of particular devotional trends across time and space.³ The situation becomes dim and murky once you move further afield into the lands of the erstwhile Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Even though some of the late medieval indulgences related to Lithuania were known to Fr Jan Fijałek, Władysław Semkowicz,⁴ Fr Paulius Rabikauskas, and Fr Paulius Jatulis, the sustained study of this source material has been undertaken quite recently and largely by Stephen C. Rowell. The results of research conducted by the latter historian have been made available either in Lithuanian or in English.⁵ His editorial efforts have resulted in several indulgences being published for the first time. These are: 1) the indulgence of 10 January 1427 granted by the Bishop of Płock Stanislaus II of Pawłowice (1425–1439) and the Bishop of Kiev Michael Trestke (1407–1427) for Vilnius St John the Baptist parish church;⁶ 2) the indulgence of 12 February 1454 granted for the same parish church by the Bishop of Vilnius Nicholas

2. E.g. H.C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, Philadelphia 1896, vols. 1–3; N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, Paderborn 1922–1923, vols. 1–3; R.N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise*, Cambridge 2008; *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. R.N. Swanson, Leiden–Boston 2006; A. Ehlers, *Die Ablasspraxis des Deutschen Ordens im Mittelalter* (series: *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens*, 64), Marburg 2007.
3. J. Hrdina, *Papal indulgences during the era of the Great Western Schism (1378–1417) and the cultural foundation of their reception in Central Europe*, in: *Processes of Cultural Exchange in Central Europe, 1200–1800*, ed. V. Čapuská, R. Antonín, M. Čapuský, Opava 2014, pp. 345–387. W. Szymborski, *Odpusty w Polsce średnio-wiecznej*, Kraków 2011.
4. Indulgences granted to the newly established cathedral church in Medininkai, Žemaitija, and the Holy Ghost church in Vilnius: *KDKDW*, no. 76, pp. 106–107 (27 August 1418). Indulgences granted to the altar of the Holy Cross in the cathedral church in Vilnius: *ibid.*, no. 96, pp. 123–124 (13 May 1427). Indulgences granted to the cathedral church in Vilnius: *ibid.*, no. 97, pp. 124–125 (13 May 1427), no. 98 pp. 125–126 (13 May 1427), no. 141, pp. 159–160 (18 January 1436). See also *Bullarium Poloniae*, eds. I. Sułkowska-Kuraś, S. Kuraś, H. Wajs, Romae–Lublina 1992, vol. 4 (1417–1431), no. 327, p. 60 (27 August 1418), no. 1951, p. 358 (13 May 1427), no. 1952, p. 358 (13 May 1427), and no. 1953, p. 358 (13 May 1427).
5. S.C. Rowell, *XV a. vyskupų atlaidos raštai Vilniaus katedrai ir miestui: tekstas ir kontekstas*, „Lietuvos pilys“ 3 (2007), pp. 94–104. D. Baronas, S.C. Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians*, Vilnius 2015, pp. 403–436.
6. S.C. Rowell, *XV a. vyskupų atlaidos raštai...*, Appendix no. 2, p. 101.

of Šalčininkai (1453–1467), the Bishop of Chełm John Tarnowski (1452–1462), and the Bishop of Kiev Clemens of Widawa (1451–1473).⁷ The cathedral church of Vilnius was graced by an indulgence issued sometime between 1450–55 by Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, Bishop of Kraków (Cracow).⁸ Still another indulgence for Vilnius St John the Baptist church was issued on 11 February 1454 by the above-mentioned bishops of Vilnius, Chełm, and Kiev, and the Bishop of Kamianets-Podilskyi Nicholas Łabuńki (1453–1467).⁹ It represents a much bigger piece of parchment (64x34,5 cm) as compared to the indulgence issued for the same church a day later (22x13 cm). The former may have been used in display in the church advertising the graces available to the confessed penitents. This was a charter that was destined to be updated as time went on. During the course of the second half of the fifteenth century, seven more Roman Catholic Bishops made their inscriptions on it granting indulgences and encouraging devotional practices and charitable work among the members of the confraternity centered in the above-mentioned main church of the town of Vilnius. Among these hierarchs, there is one cardinal, Frederick Jagiellon, primate of Poland (1493–1503).

The cumulative effect of the published indulgences allows scholars to delineate the devotional trends current in fifteenth-century Vilnius Roman Catholic Church. An outstanding feature of this local piety points to strongly expressed popularity of Corpus Christi processions, reaching a theoretical total number of twelve a year.¹⁰ The analysis of the distribution of indulgences related to Vilnius allows us to point to the orchestration of the devotional life in the capital city of Lithuania in the fifteenth century. For example, the faithful could reap the greatest spiritual harvest while attending the parish church on the Easter cycle feasts; the Franciscan church of Virgin Mary *in Arena* was the center of Marian feasts; while spiritual benefits of all sorts were readily available at the cathedral church of Vilnius all year round.¹¹

7. Ibid., Appendix no. 3, pp. 101–102.

8. Ibid., Appendix no. 1, p. 101.

9. The edition of this indulgence has been provided by D. Baronas, *Katalikiškojo pamaldumo raiška Vilniuje XIV a. pabaigoje – XV a. viduryje*, in: *Krikščioniškojo gyvenimo Lietuvoje atodangos: XIV–XX a.* (series *Bažnyčios istorijos studijos*, 8), Vilnius 2016, Appendix no. 1, pp. 40–44. Partial edition: *Codex Mednicensis seu Samogitiae Dioecesis*, Pars I: *1416.II.13–1609.IV.2*, ed. P. Jatulis (series: *Fontes Historiae Lituaniae*, vol. 3), Rome 1984, no. 54, pp. 97–98.

10. Cf. S.C. Rowell, *XV a. vyskupų atlaidos raštai...*, p. 100.

11. D. Baronas, *Katalikiškojo pamaldumo raiška Vilniuje...*, op. cit., pp. 33–34, 45. See also S.C. Rowell, op. cit., pp. 94–95.

The study of the process of Christianization of Lithuania reveals, on balance, an astonishing speed with which the social and political elites adopted and adapted the Christian ways of devotion to their daily life.¹² During the "long" fifteenth century, the Roman Catholic population became essentially similar to its counterparts in East-Central European countries. However, the institutional weakness of ecclesiastical bodies in terms of the number of parish churches and well-established monasteries and convents in Lithuania stands in sharp contrast to neighboring countries in which the pedigree of Christian presence stretched back to the ninth-tenth century in the case of Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, or Rus', or to the thirteenth century in the case of Prussia and Livonia. This state of affairs plus man-made destructions and natural disasters during the last two centuries account for the poor preservation of written records, which had not been numerous and widespread anyway. To make matters worse, some late-fourteenth-to-fifteenth-century documents disappeared quite recently, in the second half of the twentieth century, and no one can be absolutely sure that similar fate might not happen to those that remain unpublished or undigitized so far.¹³

In regard to the early history of the diocese of Vilnius, the most comprehensive corpus of documentary evidence has been compiled and edited in the well-known collection of *Codex Diplomaticus ecclesiae cathedralis necnon dioeceseos Vilnensis*. However valuable and indispensable this edition is, it does not contain all diploma and every act of late medieval

12. See e.g. S.C. Rowell, *Was fifteenth-century Lithuanian Catholicism as lukewarm as sixteenth-century reformers and later commentators would have us believe?* "Central Europe" 8 (2010), pp. 86–106. S.C. Rowell, *Kaip šaukė, taip ir atsiliėpė: XV a. lietuvių katalikų gyvenimas ir pagonybės liekanų mitas*, in: *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės istorijos kraštovaizdis: Mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys. Skiriama profesorės Jūratės Kiaupienės 65-mečiui*, ed. R. Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, Vilnius 2012, pp. 295–320.
13. A sad case in point is the fate of the endowment of the parish church of Medininkai, dated 2 April 1391. As late as 1980, it must have been kept in the Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences: *Pergamentų katalogas*, ed. R. Jasas, Vilnius 1980, no. 14, p. 23. Nowadays, it is simply missing. The remains of the early fifteenth-century Franciscan calendar were accessible in Vilnius before WWI: Z. Dunin-Kozicki, *Szczątek kalendarza Franciszkanów wileńskich z XV wieku*, "Kwartalnik Litewski" 4 (1910), pp. 3–12. Today, the traces of this calendar have been lost. For the corrected edition based on a few photographs made then, see S.C. Rowell, *Winning the living by remembering the dead? Franciscan tactics and social change in fifteenth-century Vilnius*, in: *Tarp istorijos ir būtovės. Studijos prof. Edvardo Gudavičiaus 70-mečiui*, eds. A. Bumblauskas, R. Petrauskas, Vilnius 1999, Appendix no. 2, pp. 117–119.

bishopric of Vilnius for the simple reason that not all the pertinent material was available on the spot at the time when Fr Jan Fijałek and Prof. Władysław Semkowicz were pursuing their mutual editorial project. A case in point is that they could not lay their hands on some late medieval and early modern documents that at the time were in Königsberg and now are kept at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin/Dahlem) as the Zasztowt Collection.¹⁴ The collection of sources gathered by J. Fijałek and W. Semkowicz has been supplemented recently by *Acta primae visitationis diocesis Vilnensis anno Domini 1522*.¹⁵ The new finds pertaining to the early history of the diocese of Vilnius can still be detected either in the Vatican Archives,¹⁶ or in Siedlce, or in Vilnius itself. As far as Vilnius itself is concerned, new evidence keeps cropping up in tandem with the ongoing description of the archival materials preserved as Fund No. 4 at the Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library. Even though the absolute majority of new descriptions pertaining to ecclesiastical institutions date to the early modern period, there is some probability that late medieval evidence might also come to light as a result. The most promising avenue may be the early modern collections of transcribed late medieval documents.

The validity of this remark may be proven by the discovery of the particular indulgence mentioned at the outset. Its text represents the early modern transcription of the original copy that was included in a collection

14. The author of these lines entertains the idea of publishing the Zasztowt Collection one day. A case illustrating the consequences of the dispersal of archival collections may be exemplified by the indulgences granted by Cardinals Isidore, Filippo Calandrini, and Prospero Colonna to Vilnius churches during the Council of Mantua in 1459. The letter of indulgence given to the Franciscans was published long ago: *KDKDW*, no. 231, pp. 256–258 (15 November 1459). That given to St John the Baptist church in Vilnius remains unpublished so far: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin/Dahlem), *Urkundensammlung Zasztowt*, Schieblade no. 7 (15 November 1459). Incidentally, but unsurprisingly, it may be noted that these indulgences and, consequently some contacts between Cardinal Isidore and Polish and Lithuanian Catholics, have remained unknown to American and Russian scholars who in the same year have published two monographs devoted to this prominent churchman: M. Philippides, W.K. Hanak, *Cardinal Isidore, c. 1390–1462: A Late Byzantine Scholar, Warlord, and Prelate*, London—New York 2018; С. Ю. Акишин, *Митрополит Исугор Киевский (1385/1390–1463)*, Ekaterinburg 2018.
15. *Acta primae visitationis diocesis Vilnensis anno Domini 1522 peractae: Vilniaus Kapitulos Archyvo Liber IIb atkūrimas*, ed. S.C. Rowell, Vilnius 2015.
16. M.D. Kowalski, *Nieznany dokument papieski dla Andrzeja, pierwszego biskupa Seretu i Wilna, i powstanie biskupstwa wileńskiego*, "Studia Źródłoznawcze" 53 (2015), pp. 129–134.

of miscellaneous documents pertaining to the Franciscan friary in Ashmiany, established in ca. 1397.¹⁷ This codex thus represents a cartulary containing legal deeds indicating the rights to landholding and exposing spiritual benefits accorded to this establishment. Even though the date of its composition cannot be established with certainty, at least for now, in all probability it dates to the early seventeenth century. This book contains a sequence of indulgences that applied to the Franciscan church in Ashmiany.¹⁸

There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the text of this indulgence. It was issued by well-known ecclesiastics: Francesco Lando, Cardinal-Priest of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (1411–1427), Antonio Pancera, (Pseudo)cardinal-Priest of S. Susanna (1411–1431), and Francesco Zabarella, (Pseudo)cardinal-Deacon of Ss. Cosma e Damiano (1411–1417).¹⁹ The date itself characterized as *sede vacante* must be regarded as correct – the future pope Martin V would be elected on 11 November 1417. This indulgence represents nothing special in the sea of spiritual grants that reached every nook and cranny of late medieval Christendom. However, in the case of Lithuania, it stands out not only because of its relatively early date of issue, but also because of its timing. It was issued on 16 January 1416 in Constance at a time when Polish-Lithuanian diplomatic efforts were harnessed in the dispute with the Teutonic Order and when the question of who was to be authorized to evangelize the last pagan enclave of Europe, Žemaitija/Samogitia, was deliberated. It is worth reminding that the famous address of the Žemaitijans was read out aloud at this period of time, most probably on 17 February 1416.²⁰ The Ashmiany indulgence allows us to expand the circle of the known participants from Lithuania present at the Council of Constance

17. K. Kantak, *Franciszkanie polscy*, vol. 1: 1237–1517, Kraków 1937, p. 306.

18. The copies of the indulgences are as follows: Vilnius University Library, Manuscript Department F. 114–13, fol 8v: "Indulgentia Woiciecha Biskupa Wileńskiego na bractwo S. Michała, ktore chłopi trzymają naszymy y czterdziesti dni odpustu" (Vilnius, 1 May 1508); fol. 9r: "Indulgentia Zachariasza Biskupa Gardęńskiego na dziesięć lath, perpetue" (Vilnius, 10 November 1520); fol. 9v: "Indulgentie kilku Cardinalów pozwolone Sede vacante" – published here; fol. 10v: "Indulgentia Sixta Piątego na święta Zakonu naszego" (Rome, 28 September 1585).

19. For more on these churchmen see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-lando_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-lando_(Dizionario-Biografico)); [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-pancera_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-pancera_(Dizionario-Biografico)); <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-zabarella> (all accessed on 16 June 2020).

20. D. Baronas, S.C. Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania...*, p. 348.

by including (some) Franciscans actively involved in the service of grand ducal policy. This indulgence is one more proof indicating the phenomenon that still awaits its scholarly elaboration. The internal evidence also begs a number of questions. Why, for example, there is no mention of Franciscan saints in the letter of indulgence granted to the Franciscan friary? Why the Cardinals, who granted a standard remission of one hundred days, left the duration of this grace open-ended (the usual practice was to circumscribe the validity of such indulgences to the specified period of time)? These and other questions deserve to be addressed in a more specialized exploration of the phenomenon of indulgences in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This contribution claims no more than being considered a step in an old-fashioned endeavor of collecting and comprehending primary source material, which still remains indispensable for the most elaborate reconstructions of the life of medieval man.

Appendix

THE TEXT

Vilnius University Library, Manuscript Department

F. 114–13

(Size: 29 × 19,5 cm)

f. 9v [...]

Indulgentie kilku Cardinalow pozwolone Sede vacante

Universis et singulis Christifidelibus praesentes visuris et auditoris. || [f. 10r]
Nos miseratione divina Franciscus et S. Crucis in Hierusalem Veneciarum
communiter nuncupatus, Antonius et Sanctae Susannae dictus vulgariter
Aquilegiae, presbyteri nec non Franciscus Sanctorum Cosmae et Damiani
[!] nominatus vulgariter Florentinus diaconus, Sacrosanctae Romanae Eccle-
siae Cardinales salutem in Domino sempiternam. Licet is de cuius munere
venit, ut sibi a suis fidelibus digne et laudabiliter serviatur de abundantia
suae pietatis quae merita supplicum excedit et vota fidelium sibi servien-
tium multo maiora retribuatur quam valeant promereri. Nihilominus deside-
rantes Domino populum reddere placabilem et bonorum operum imitorem
fideles ipsos quasi quibusdam allicientes muneribus, indulgentiis videlicet
et remissionibus, invitamus, ut exinde divinae gratiae reddantur aptiores.
Cupientes igitur monasterium Gloriosissimae Virginis Mariae in Oszmiana
Vilnensis diocesis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum S. Francisci aliquibus donis
decorare et indulgentiis in perpetuum illuminare quodque dictum monas-
terium congruis honoribus frequentetur et a Christifidelibus iugiter vene-
retur et ut fideles ipsi eo libentius devotionis, orationis aut peregrinationis
causa confluent ad illum ac ad ipsius conservationem, sustentationem divi-
nique in eodem cultus continuationem et augmentationem manus porrigant
adiutrices quo ex hoc ibidem dono caelestis gratiae uberius conspexerint se
reffectos, omnibus vere paenitentibus, confessis et contritis monasterium

in omnibus et singulis Gloriosae Virginis Mariae ipsius monasterii primo dedicatione eiusdem ac infrascriptis festiuitatibus utpote: Natiuitatis Domini nostri Iesu Christi, Circumcisionis, Epiphaniarum, Parasceves, Paschae, Ascensionis, Pentecostes, Trinitatis, Corporis Christi, Inventionis et Exaltationis S. Crucis, Natiuitatis et Decollationis S. Ioannis Baptistae, Petri et Pauli ac omnium Apostolorum et Evangelistarum, S. Stephani, Laurentii, Georgii, Antonii, Gregorii, Martini, Nicolai, Sanctarum Annae, Mariae Magdalenae, Catherinae, Margarithae, Getrudis, Barbarae et Luciae Virginum, in celebritate Omnium Sanctorum et in commemoratione animarum et per octavas dictorum [!] festiuitatum devote visitauerint, quique in eorum testamentis vel extra praefato monasterio pro conseruatione, sustentatione diuiniq[ue] in eodem cultus continuatione et augmentatione praenominatis aurum, argentum, census, redditus sive aliquid aliud charitativum subsidium procurauerint, quotiescumq[ue] praemissorum devote egerint, de Omnipotentis Dei misericordia et Beatorum Petri et Pauli [apostolorum] eius meritis et intercessionibus confisi, singuli nostrum Cardinalium || [f. 10v] centum dies indulgentiarum de iniunctis eis paenitentiis misericorditer in Domino relaxamus praesentibus perpetuis temporibus duraturum. In quorum omnium et singulorum fidem et testimonium praemissorum fieri fecimus nostrorumq[ue] iussimus sigillorum appensione communiri. Datum Constantiae sub anno a Natiuitate Domini millesimo quadringentesimo decimo sexto, indictione nona, die vero sexta decima mensis ianuarii.

Apostolica Sede pastore vacante, cum sigillis.

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Abstract

Darius Baronas

The 1416 Indulgence for the Franciscan Friary in Ashmiany: Context and Text

This article contains the edition of the newly found letter of indulgence that was granted by three Roman Cardinals: Francesco Lando, Antonio Pancera, and Francesco Zabarella, for the no-longer extant Franciscan friary in Ashmiany in present-day Belarus. It was issued on 16 January 1416 during the Council of Constance, *sede vacante*. The text of this indulgence has been preserved as a copy in the collection of documents of the above-mentioned friary that was compiled in the early seventeenth century (now kept at Vilnius University Library, Manuscript Department, F. 114–13). For the time being, this text represents one of the earliest known indulgences related to a specific religious house in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and thus makes part and parcel of the meagre fund of primary sources illuminating the first steps in the process of Christianization of post-conversion Lithuania. This indulgence may also serve as a clue allowing us to expand the circle of the known participants from Lithuania at the Council of Constance by including Friars Minor, whose scope of service for the Grand Dukes of Lithuania still awaits a more thorough investigation.

Keywords:
Indulgences,
Franciscan
Friars, Council
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Ashmiany

Abstrakt

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Odpust dla klasztoru franciszkanów w Oszmianie w 1416 r.: tekst i kontekst

Słowa kluczowe:

Indulgence,
Franciszkanie,
Sobór
w Konstancji,
diecezja
wileńska,
Oszmiana

Niniejszy artykuł zawiera edycję niedawno odnalezionego listu odpustowego wydanego przez trzech rzymskich kardynałów: Francesco Landę, Antonio Pancere i Francesco Zabarellę dla nieistniejącego już klasztoru franciszkanów w Oszmianie na terenie dzisiejszej Białorusi. Odpustu udzielono 16 stycznia 1416 r. podczas soboru w Konstancji, *sede vacante*. Tekst listu odpustowego zachował się jako odpis w zbiorze dokumentów ww. klasztoru, zebranych na początku XIX w. (obecnie przechowywanym w Bibliotece Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego, Dział Rękopisów, F. 114–13). W chwili obecnej tekst ten jest najstarszym znanym odpustem, jakiego udzielono klasztorowi w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim, tym samym zaliczając się do skromnych zasobów źródeł pierwotnych naświetlających pierwsze etapy chrystianizacji Litwy w okresie po jej chrzcie. Odpust może także stanowić wskazówkę umożliwiającą poszerzenie kręgu znanych nam przedstawicieli Litwy na soborze w Konstancji o braci mniejszych, których zasługi dla wielkich książąt litewskich nadal oczekują bardziej skrupulatnych badań.