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An Overview of the Documents of the Archive of Kaunas Benedictine Convent

Abstract

In 2024, Kaunas Benedictine Convent will celebrate its 400th anniversary. Throughout this period, the convent's existence has not been interrupted. During the Soviet period, from 1948 to 1988, the convent still operated in secret. However, the archives of the convent began to be organized anew at the beginning of the 21st century revealing important documentation not only for the convent, but also for monastic research. It is for this reason that this article aims to present the documents of Kaunas Benedictine Convent's archive.

Keywords

Archive of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, archival funds of Kaunas Benedictine Convent

1. Introduction

The Kaunas Benedictine Convent has been operating in Lithuania for almost 400 years. In the 16th–17th centuries, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, approximately 20 women's convents had been founded (Bernardine, Benedictine, Bridgettine,

Dominican, Discalced Carmelite, St. Catherine, and Visitandine). However, only three monasteries have remained to these days: the Benedictine convents in Kaunas and Vilnius and St. Catherine's Convent in Kraków. Since the foundation of the convent in 1624, the Kaunas Benedictine sisters collected and stored documents as evidenced by a rather abundant archive including material from the first half of the 17th century to present days. The purpose of this research is to present the composition of the archives and document types at the Kaunas Benedictine Convent, to describe the peculiarities of how the Kaunas Benedictines' archive formed, the changes that have taken place over the centuries, and to highlight the importance of the archive for monastic research.

In 2012–2014, a group of scientists of Vytautas Magnus University (Sr. Gabrielė Aušra Vasiliauskaitė OSB, Vaida Kamuntavičienė, Aušra Vasiliauskienė, and Kęstutis Žemaitis) investigated the history, art and theology of Kaunas Benedictine Convent.¹ As a result, in 2015, part of the document catalogue of the Benedictines' archive (from the 15th to the beginning of the 20th century) was published in Lithuanian, in *Kaunas History Chronicle (Kauno istorijos metraštis)*.² However, the document catalogue of the 20th century has not been published so far. Therefore, it is meaningful to continue the initiated research and to present a more comprehensive description of the Kaunas Benedictines' archive stored at Kaunas Benedictine Convent (address: Benediktinių St. 10, Kaunas, Lithuania).

It should be noted that documents related to the history of Kaunas Benedictines can be found in various Lithuanian and foreign archives (for example, in the Princes Czartoryski Library in Kraków (Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich)). Especially important are the archives of Vilnius, Samogitian and Kaunas Dioceses (until 1849, Kaunas belonged to the Diocese of Vilnius, then to the Diocese of Samogitia, and from 1926 to the present day to the Archdiocese of Kaunas). Part of the old documents of these dioceses, the Samogitian land court and other documentation related to the legal and economic situation

¹ Research results have been published in two studies: V. Kamuntavičienė, *Kauno benediktinių vienuolyno tyrimai*, t. 1. *Kauno benediktinių vienuolyno istorija XVII–XX a. pradžioje*, Kaunas 2016, VDU, Versus Aureus; A. Vasiliauskienė, *Kauno benediktinių vienuolyno tyrimai*, t. 2. *Kauno benediktinių vienuolyno meninė savastis*, Kaunas 2016, VDU, Versus Aureus. At present, research of the 20th century documentation is being conducted.

² V. Kamuntavičienė, A. Vasiliauskaitė (Sr. Gabrielė OSB), A. Vasiliauskienė, K. Žemaitis, *Kauno benediktinių archyvo XV–XX a. pradžios dokumentų katalogas*, "Kauno istorijos metraštis" 15 (2015), pp. 287–295.

of Benedictine sisters are stored in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives (documentation of Samogitian Diocese, the Old Acts, etc.), the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (documentation of Vilnius chapter, Kaunas Benedictine sisters' funds, etc.), the Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library (Samogitian land court fund, etc.), and other establishments. The most recent documents of the 20th century, especially related to the persecution of sisters during the Soviet Period, are stored in the Lithuanian Central State Archives or the Lithuanian Special Archives. However, the Kaunas Benedictines' archive collected by Benedictine sisters is especially important for the formation of a more complete picture of the convent's history.

2. The Formation of Kaunas Benedictines' Archive

The archive of Kaunas Benedictine Convent began to form in the 17th century when the first Benedictine sisters came to Kaunas from Nesvizh and settled in Rekutis manor, in 1622, at the invitation of the marshal of Kaunas district (*pavietas*) and chevalier of the Order of Jerusalem, Andrzej Skorulski.³ The sisters brought the first documents and books with them. These personal documents were supplemented by land ownership documents from the beginning of the 16th century: on November 28th, 1624, Andrzej Skorulski issued a foundational document donating the Benedictine sisters land (Raginė (Roginie)) near Kaunas and Sudvariškės (Sudwoiszki). In 1621, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Sigismund Vaza donated the Benedictine sisters St. Nicholas Church⁴ near Kaunas, whereas Vilnius Bishop Eustachy Wołłowicz approved this order in 1627.⁵ In this way, Benedictines acquired the church documentation dating to the end of the 15th century, as the Church of St Nicholas was built in the 15th century.

³ Vidra (Rekučio) manor inventory, Kaunas, 1622 02 28, *Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrubevskių bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius (MAB)*, f. 38-3, l. 20-21. Kristupas Kulvinskis made and inventory of the manor before transferring it to Andrzej Skorulski. Extract from Kaunas acts 1622 12 02, *Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus (LNM)*, R 11660-5. This act mentions the convent of Benedictine sisters near the borders of Kaunas town.

⁴ Privilege of Sigismundus Vaza, Warsaw, 1621 09 27, *Kauno arkivyskupijos kurijos archyvas (KAKA)*, b. 14, l. 230; *Biblioteka Czartoryskich*, BCz. 1775, l. 963.

⁵ E. Valavičius's document, Vilnius, 1627 09 15, *Kauno benediktinių archyvas (KBA)*, 7-2-20.

The Kaunas Benedictines' archive gradually grew by adding new land ownership documentation, daily economic documents, various contracts with peasants of the land, purchase and sale acts, household and church inventories, correspondence documents, court cases, writings of bishops or other hierarchs, letters of governmental institutions, etc. Kaunas Benedictines' holdings survived some disasters such as fires. For example, a document written on September 20, 1653, testifies that 20 houses were completely burned down in Raginė suburb owned by the convent;⁶ during the Russian occupation in the second half of the 17th century, a part of the archives of the convent taken to Paštuva was destroyed by the fire.

From time to time archival registers were compiled. The first remaining registers date back to the second decade of the 17th century; they are signed by the first abbess of the convent Ona Eufemia Skorulska, the daughter of the founder of the convent.⁷ Archival documents were very important legal acts used to litigate on land holdings, peasant dependence, and other affairs. Therefore, they are carefully registered and stored. The register of the holding documents written in 1819–1820 is a thick book consisting of 201 pages. The documents were divided into 4 parts according to the main land holdings (Raginė, Sudvariškės, Petrašiūnai (Pietraszuny), Paštuva (Pocztowo)). These four parts were organized into packs (fascykuły): the holding documents of Raginė and Sudvariškės consisted of 8 packs, Petrašiūnai – 12, and Paštuva – 6 packs.⁸

Documents related to the religious life of the sisters can also be found in the Kaunas Benedictines' archive. For example, the acts of Benedictine vows of the 19th–20th centuries, documentation of church and convent visitations and inventories. In 1897, Kražiai Benedictine Convent was closed, and sisters moved to live in Kaunas. In this way, the documentation of Kražiai Benedictines appeared in the Kaunas Benedictines' archive. In 1934, the convent' archive was described in the following way: “two chests of old documents in Latin, Belorussian, Russian, and Polish languages.”⁹ As is seen, the archives were stored in large chests which evidences that the nuns, since their first settlement in Kaunas, have

⁶ V. Kamuntavičienė, *Kauno benediktinių vienuolyno tyrimai, t. 1*, *ibid*, p. 106.

⁷ Document register compiled by K. Kulvinskis, given to A. Skorulskis, signed by O. E. Skorulskytė, [approx. 1625], *MAB*, f. 38-3, l. 12-13.

⁸ The register of economic documents of the Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 1919–1920, *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (LVIA)*, f. 696-2-967.

⁹ Visitation of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 1934, *KBA*, 21-1-2, l. 15.

appreciated and stored the archive as the greatest and most precious treasure and as a heritage and inheritance for future generations.

At the end of the Second World War, Lithuania was occupied by Soviet Russia. According to the order of the occupational authorities, in 1948–1949, all Lithuanian monasteries were liquidated in a year and a half. Kaunas Benedictine Convent (with 12 sisters living in the convent at that time) was also closed. Kaunas women's monasteries were liquidated practically in one day, on August 25, 1948.¹⁰ According to the memories of Kaunas Benedictines, they were ordered to leave within 48 hours. The sick and the old sheltered in the corridor connecting the convent and the church. The corridor was referred to as *furtyte* in Lithuanian (from the Polish word *furta*). Along with the convent, St. Nicholas Church was also closed and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament disrupted.¹¹ St. Nicholas Church was turned into a book storehouse. In 1948–1963, it belonged to the national library,¹² whereas in 1963–1990, it was used as a storage of the Kaunas Public Library. The installed book racks destroyed the whole interior of the church.

When Kaunas Benedictine Convent was closed, the entire convent archive had to be handed over to the state for storage, however, the Benedictine sisters did not agree with it. They sought to preserve the most important monastic documents as, for example, the material related to the founder Andrzej Skorulski. The Benedictine sisters have also preserved some of the 19th century economic documents (perhaps inadvertently not confiscated by government representatives) and certain interwar period cases as having practical significance at that time. Some documents were hidden in the basement of the church, others were taken away with them or hidden in *furtyte*, where the sick were lying, and others had to be given to the soviets. In general, a larger part of the documents was confiscated and taken to different archival institutions of Lithuania.

The largest part of the old Benedictine archive was placed in the Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy

¹⁰ R. Laukaitytė, *Lietuvos vienuolijos. XX a. istorijos bruožai*, Vilnius 1997, Lietuvos istorijos institutas, pp. 136–139.

¹¹ Verification that St. Nicholas Church in Kaunas is really closed: statistical data on Kaunas Catholic Archdiocese's churches and cult servants, December 31, 1950, *Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (LCVA)*, f. R-181, ap. 1, b. 55, l. 76.

¹² A. Jankevičienė, *Dar apie šv. Mikalojaus bažnyčią*, "Kauno tiesa" 88 (1990), p. 5.

of Sciences. In 1953, the Benedictines' fund (No 38) containing 144 cases was formed. Another part of the archive was taken to the National Museum of Lithuania where it stayed in boxes during the whole Soviet Period. Only at the end of the 20th century, Kaunas Benedictine Convent's fund with over 100 cases from 16th to the beginning of the 20th century was formed. Some documents appeared in the Curia archives of the Kaunas Archdiocese (c. 82, 89, etc.), where they were stored and used by Curia's archivist, priest Petras Veblaitis.

On March 11, 1990, after the restoration of an independent state of Lithuania and liberation from the soviet occupation, Kaunas Benedictines were able to return home. Already in 1989, a Committee on the Restoration of the Church was formed. It was chaired by Mons. Assoc. Prof. Vytautas Sidaras who took care of the restoration of St. Nicholas Church. On March 25, 1992, the Benedictine church was ordained, devoting it again to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Thus, the Benedictine sisters were able to come back home, evict the residents of the convent (turned into a builders' dormitory) as well as return to the legacy of the Blessed Archbishop Teofilus Matulionis – the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

After the restoration of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, the archive was also recreated. Unfortunately, the document losses during the Soviet Period were significant. For example, the original foundation document of Andrzej Skorulski written in 1624 did not survive. From the remaining documents, the sisters began to form monastic archive and established 27 funds.

It is important to emphasize that the funds are constantly being supplemented with new documents, photographs, things, etc., which are left by the deceased sisters. Therefore, the register of the archive is also constantly changing. Due to the personal information about the sisters, the archive is kept private and can only be used with the permission of Reverend Mother.

3. An Overview of the Archival Funds of Kaunas Benedictine Convent

The Benedictine archive consists of 26 document funds. The old books are stored in the 27th fund and periodicals in the 28th fund. In this section, we will overview the funds of the archive, present their contents and the most important documents stored.

In the 1st fund of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, all received and sent documentations of the convent (over 2,400 pages) from 1907 to 2003 are kept. The material includes general sent and received writings from various institutions related to the admission of sisters into the convent, novice vows' ceremonies, the election of Reverend Mothers, renovation and interior restauration works of St. Nicholas Church, the issues of the convent reform of the third decade of the 20th century, and the closing of the convent in 1948. Correspondence with the Curias of Samogitian and Kaunas Dioceses, the Holy See, and the Apostolic Visitor Antonino Zecchini (for example, writings from Rome confirming the authenticity of the relics, letters on remissions, etc.) is also stored in the 1st fund. Of particular importance is a group of letters on the closing of Regina Pacis Convent of Benedictine Sisters, which operated in Bedford, in the United States from 1948 to 1997 (Kaunas Benedictines who escaped from the soviet occupation found shelter in this convent). Various documentation, sermons, or accounts related to the convent left by the visitator Father Samuel Russel, lists and documents of sisters who lived in Bedford's Convent (Sr. Agnes Cyzaite, Sr. Casimir Petkeviciute, Sr. Alfonsa Eidimtas) are also kept here.

The 2nd fund contains a large number of photographs. At present, 19th–20th century photographs have been registered and are being scanned (currently, about 1,000 photos have been processed). Most of them (860 photos) depict Benedictine sisters of the 20th century, their family and relatives, homesteads and animals. Other 182 photos depict the church and convent, their maintenance, even the repair of the convent fence in 2000. 8 exceptional photos show Easter caskets of Kaunas Benedictines' church (1993–2000), and 3 photos show Christmas Crib (1981–1998). The archives contain 66 photographs of the stained-glass windows of the Kaunas Benedictines' church before the restauration taken about 1990. Over 2,000 photos will be processed in the future.

The 3rd and 4th funds contain the personal sisters' manuscripts, which help to form a general image of the 20th century community i.e., what were the sisters as personalities, what they were interested in, what they read, etc. The notes and thoughts of the sisters of the 20th century are stored in the 3rd fund, whereas their lecture materials, manuscripts from different areas of studies are in the 4th fund. These funds are not yet thoroughly investigated, new material is added each year. However, only nuns can get access to these documents.

The 5th fund is devoted to obituaries and memorialization of the deceased sisters. In the 20th century, obituaries (152 pages) were largely written by Sr.

Boleslova Aleksandra Girevičaitė (*Girewiczówna*), Sr. Liudgarda Elena Julija Miniataitė (*Miniatówna*), and Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinskaitė. There is also memorializing documentation about Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinskaitė, Sr. Benjamina Halina Michelevičiūtė, and Sr. Benedikta Justina Dobkevičiūtė, various funeral photos, death certificates, etc., from the first decade of the 20th century (79 pages in total).

In the 6th fund, the property documents, the church and convent household inventories and other letters related to the convent's economic affairs, and the inventory of the Kražiai Church and convent, written in 1889, are kept. Also, the 6th fund stores lease documents of plots and houses under the jurisdiction of Benedictines from 1851 to the fourth decade of the 20th century; books on income and expenditure (the oldest one dating to 1900); household books including cadastre and registry files since 1948, tenants' book kept since 1939, and house book kept since 1958. Sales agreement of Paštuva – Kvesai land (1924) and other related documents are also available here.

A very important group of documents in this fund relate to Kačiūniškės (*Kaczeniszki*) manor, built by the nuns in the beginning of the 20th century. The manor had a large farm and an exclusive orangery. The fund includes the inventory of Kačiūniškės of 1934 and 1940, farm description of 1938, various receipts (1928–1939), notifications, policies and documents related to restoration of ownership rights to Kačiūniškės (1990–2010). Finally, a research paper on “The Growing of Cabbages in the Kačioniškių Farm of the Benedictine Convent” (*Gūžinių kopūstų auginimas s. benediktinių vienuolyno ūky, Kačionišky*) written in 1937, by Sr. Serafina Zuzana Lapaitė is available in the fund. In total, the files consist of more than 2,180 pages.

The 7th fund contains the oldest documents of the church: the first mentioning of this stone building in the Roman Cardinals' writing of 1493 to the priest Stanislovas of the St. Nicholas Church. This document allowed to organize the feast during the days of St. Nicolas, St. Margaret, St. Magdalen, St. Bartholomew and Church consecration. The letter is not an original, but rather a Polish transcript made in the 18th century which has a mistake in the date (1495 instead of 1493).¹³ The 16th century documents include: the king Stephen Báthory's privilege to the Kaunas standard-bearer Jonas Vidra (written in 1577) allowing

¹³ The Roman Cardinals' writing to the priest Stanislovas of the St. Nicholas Church, Rome, 1495 12 04, KBA, 7-1-1.

to build an inn in Kaunas suburb;¹⁴ the testament of Motiejus Marcinovičius (1583).¹⁵ The 17th century documents relate to the foundation of Kaunas Benedictine convent: the documents of the first abbess Sr. Eufemija Ona Skorulskytė and her father, the founder of the convent; Sigismund Vasa's writing (1621) on the establishment of the Benedictine Convent in Kaunas and the donation of the abandoned St. Nicholas Church;¹⁶ the testament of Andrzej Skorulski (1623);¹⁷ the Lithuanian translation of the foundation document of Andrzej Skorulski (1624);¹⁸ an extract from the land court book of Kaunas County (1625) on the approval of Skorulski's foundation for Benedictines;¹⁹ Eufemija Ona Skorulskytė's writing on the succession of St. Nicholas Church (approximately 1637);²⁰ the writing of the Vilnius Bishop Eustachijus Valavičius on the donation of St. Nicholas Church (1627).²¹ This fund also holds documentation relating to other Benedictine possessions: summons to court, litigations, wills, and holding inventories of the 17th century. The 18th century documents contain the following original writings: the letter of Gegužinė's Parson, Paweł Franciszek Tołoczko, approving the Benedictine Chaplain (1710); the writings of Vilnius bishops as, for example, the letter from Jesuit Laurentius Ricci from Rome on the recognition of relics of St. Nicholas Church (1767); the bull of Pope Benedict XIV allowing the nuns to establish the Confraternity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at St. Nicholas Church (1756);²² the document of Veronika Modesta Zabitovska (Weronika Modesta Zabitowska) eternal vows (1780) given to the abbess of Kražiai Convent

¹⁴ The king Stephen Báthory's privilege to the Kaunas standard-bearer Jonas Vidra, 1577 12 04, *KBA*, 7-2-23.

¹⁵ Testament verification of Motiejus Marcinowicz, 1583, *KBA*, 7-2-3.

¹⁶ Sigismund Vasa's writing, 1621 09 27, *KBA*, 7-2-25.

¹⁷ The testament of Andrzej Skorulski, 1623 03 10; the writing of the abbess of Kaunas Benedictines, Eufemija Ona Skorulskytė, to peasants of Sudvoiškės, 1640 07 08, *KBA*, 7-2-21.

¹⁸ The Lithuanian translation of the foundation document of Andrzej Skorulski, 1624 11 28, *KBA*, 7-2-24 (typescript).

¹⁹ An extract from the land court book of Kaunas County (1625) on the approval of Skorulski's foundation for Benedictines, 1625 01 16, *KBA*, 7-2-17.

²⁰ Eufemija Ona Skorulskytė's writing on the succession of St. Nicholas church, [approx. 1637], *KBA*, 7-2-2.

²¹ The writing of the Vilnius Bishop Eustachijus Valavičius on the donation of St. Nicholas Church, 1627 09 15, *KBA*, 7-2-20.

²² The bull of Pope Benedict XIV allowing the nuns to establish the Confraternity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at St. Nicholas Church, 1756 01 10, *KBA*, 7-1-5.

Antonija Skolastika Mackevičiūtė (Antonia Skolastyka Mackiewiczówna). Some of the more exceptional documents of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries are as follows: the writing of Raimondas Stasiulewicz from Papatėiai Dominican Monastery (1845) which allows the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary;²³ the letter of Bishop Motiejus Valančius (Maciej Wołonczewski) (1861) resending (in 1862) the letter from the Prior Provincial of the Dominican Order Simonas Gavarskis (Szymon Gawarski).²⁴ The largest document collection of the 7th fund comes from the last decade of the 20th century when St. Nicholas Church was returned to Benedictines. The documents relate to the return of the church and the sacral art values which belonged to St. Nicholas Church, the research of its state, church drawings, and its restoration projects.

The 8th fund contains documentation from the beginning of the 20th to the 21st centuries such as accounts, invoices, monastery accounting, receipts, checks, taxes, and work estimates. There are more than 500 pages in these files.

The 9th fund includes copies of documents related to the history of Kaunas Benedictines from other archives: Kaunas Regional Archives, Archives of the Curia of Kaunas Archdiocese, Lithuanian State Historical Archives, Lithuanian Central State Archives, Lithuanian Special Archives, Manuscript Department of Vilnius University Library, National Museum of Lithuania, the Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, the Microfilm Department of the National Library of Poland in Warsaw (which stores the microfilms of the library documents of the Princes Czartoryski Museum in Krakow), the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, and the National Historical Archives of Belarus. The number of these documents exceed 1,000 pages.

The 10th fund includes letters, greetings, leaflets, and postcards that Benedictines received from Lithuania and other countries (from 1918 to the beginning of the 21st century). Particularly important are letters to sisters received from Siberia, dating 1944–1998.²⁵ These files are made up of more than 1,380 pages.

The 11th fund contains audio recordings of the convent. In the 12th fund, works written by the nuns are kept: BA and MA theses, licentiates, course papers, etc.

²³ The writing of Raimondas Stasiulewicz from Papatėiai Dominican monastery allowing to establish the Confraternity of the Rosary, 1845 10 01, *KBA*, 7-1-3.

²⁴ The letter of Bishop Motiejus Valančius, 1862, *KBA*, 7-1-2.

²⁵ Letters for sisters, 1944–1998, *KBA*, 10-1-1.

The 13th fund stores questionnaires completed by the nuns. The questionnaires, as a part of empirical research conducted by Aušra Vasiliauskaitė's licentiate and dissertation, contain information on American sisters and their activities during the soviet times. These funds are little researched and described.

In the 14th fund, personal files of the sisters are collected. At present, there are several files such as the legacy of Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinkaitė (1924–2005). The file stores her memoirs and works. Sister Leonija was a very sociable person with many interests in history, literature, music, and theatre. She was actively involved in the reinstatement of the convent and the church, and the preservation of traditions of spirituality. Her writings portray the everyday life of the convent.²⁶ This abundant legacy is valuable not only to the Kaunas Benedictine Convent, but also to Lithuania as a heritage of the cultural, historical, and monastic memory. This file contains more than 7,305 pages.

The 15th fund (111 pages) includes the chronicle of the convent, written since the third decade of the 20th century. The main authors were Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinkaitė and Sr. Liucina Rozalija Rimšaitė among others.²⁷ In the 16th fund, the history of Kaunas Benedictine Convent (112 pages) written by Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinkaitė is stored.²⁸

The 17th fund consists of various documents of former and present property of the convent as, for example, the documents of the refrigerators, microwave, washing machines, etc.

The 18th fund has a collection of the convent's publications issued in 1938 and 1944. Mostly, these are the newspapers by novices on the convent's realia. These publications are especially interesting as research material as they reflect the contemporary life of the convent. The reference name of the publication was "The Bells of St. Nicholas Mount" with various modification as "The Bells of St. Nicholas Hill". At present, this fund is made up of 80 pages.

The 19th fund (1,160 pages) is dedicated to the convent's statutes, constitutions and customs. Written in the second half of the 20th century, it includes explanations, commentaries, declarations, and constitutions of St. Benedict's Rule

²⁶ For further reference on Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinskaitė see: A. Vasiliauskaitė, Sister Leonija's OSB (Birute Širvinskaite) manuscript legacy, "Soter: Journal of Religious Science" 48 (2013) 76, pp. 129–145.

²⁷ Sr. Liucina Rozalija Rimšaitė, Convent's history, the 3rd decade of the 20th century, *KBA*, 15-1-2.

²⁸ Sr. Leonija (Birutė Širvinskaitė), History of Kaunas Benedictines I, *KBA*, 16-1-1-1; Sr. Leonija (Birutė Širvinskaitė), History of Kaunas Benedictines II, *KBA*, 16-1-1-2.

and specific behaviour instructions for sisters working in further homes of the convent. Especially interesting are the Benedictine statutes and guidelines for Oblates and missionary sisters (1970–1976).²⁹ In addition, the fund contains the statutes of the convent dating from the 19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries. The statutes describe responsibilities of the sisters, the order of worship, the list of sins, and the ceremony of the consecration of the abbess.

The 20th fund is dedicated to the documents necessary for the everyday affairs kept by the Reverend Mother. The 21st fund (over 260 pages) includes: lists of sisters,³⁰ convent's visitation documents of 1919, 1934, 1948, 1992–1999,³¹ as well as inventories of 1919, 1920, the second decade of the 20th century, and 1934.³² Of particular importance are the documents of appointment of Reverend Mothers (1924–1943)³³ and the inventory of the Dominican Monastery of Samogitian Calvary.³⁴

The convent's book, started in the 18th century, is stored in the 22nd fund (over 384 pages). The book contains information about Benedictine dowries and convent's bills.³⁵ On the basis of this information, Sr. Małgorzata Borkowska wrote an article about the economic situation of the Kaunas Benedictine Convent.³⁶ The fund also includes acts of sisters' vows (1865–1997).³⁷ The earliest acts of the vows (17th c. – first half of the 19th c.) were confiscated during the Soviet Period

²⁹ The St. Benedict's statutes and guidelines for Oblates and missionary sisters. 1970–1976; Pax. St. Benedict's statutes and guidelines for eremites and devoted missionaries – Benedictines, 1971, *KBA*, 19-1-5, 19-1-9, 19-1-12 (typescript).

³⁰ List of Benedictine nuns; News about sisters, 1934, *KBA*, 21-1-1; Registration of statutes of congregation; memories about the saving of the Jews. 1990–2002, *KBA*, 21-1-10.

³¹ Visitations of Kaunas Benedictine Convent in 1948, 1934, 1919, etc. *KBA*, 21-1-2; S. Russel's visitation of the convent and other documents, 1992–1999, *KBA*, 21-1-3.

³² Inventory of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 1919 12, *KBA*, 21-1-5; Inventory of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 1920 03 15, *KBA*, 21-1-6; Inventory of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 2nd decade of the 20th century., *KBA*, 21-1-7; Inventory of Kaunas Benedictine Convent, 1934, *KBA*, 21-1-8.

³³ Appointment of Reverend Mothers, 1924–1943, *KBA*, 21-1-4.

³⁴ The inventory of the Dominican monastery of Samogitian Calvary, 1856, *KBA*, 21-1-9.

³⁵ Convent's balance book, 18th c. – beginning of 20th c., *KBA*, 22-1.

³⁶ M. Borkowska OSB, *Rachunki benedyktynek kowieńskich*, in ks. St. Rospond CM (red.), *Nasza Przeszłość. Studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce, t. 106*, Kraków 2006, pp. 261–278.

³⁷ Acts of nun vows, 1865–1948, *KBA*, 22-3; Acts of nun vows and related documentation, 1936–1997, *KBA*, 22-4.

and are currently kept at the Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. Finally, the fund stores the protocol books of the first half of the 20th century.

The 23rd fund contains various periodicals, books, extracts, etc., which mention the Kaunas Benedictine Convent. Publications also include articles by sisters on the spiritual life of the Benedictines in the convent, statistical data about sisters, history and facts related to convent and the church. Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinskaitė's articles in "Krivulė" magazine can stand as an example of such publications.

The 24th fund (over 4,518 pages) holds the documents of Benedictine sisters: Rozalija Rimkutė, Pranė Norvilaitė, Laima Slizinaitė, Vida Urbonaitė, Angelė Klėtkutė, Birutė Šlekytė, Eglė Diržiūtė, Bronė Makaravičiūtė, Agnė Čizaitė, Agota Misiūnaitė, Salomėja Mikšytė, Justina Dobkevičiūtė, Valerija Strakšytė, and Bedford sisters' data. Some exceptional 19th–20th century files of the fund include: birth metrics, personal certificates, passports, retirement certificates, disability certificates, work books,³⁸ death certificates,³⁹ graduation certificates (first half of the 20th c.), student certificates, employment documents,⁴⁰ note books (the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st c.).⁴¹

Income and expense documents of the third decade of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries are stored in the 25th fund. They include various estimates, bank statements, income and expense books (the most important books are those of 1941 and 1942–1945),⁴² checks, and cash advance orders. The 26th fund keeps practical documents of the convent: electricity and heating bills, invoices, receipts and checks for utility services (water and premises, electricity, heating, and telephone communication), maintenance bills, lightning protection documents, documents related to heating, and Kaunas Energy documents.

³⁸ Birth metrics, personal certificates, passports, retirement certificates, disability certificates, work books, etc., 19th–20th c., *KBA*, 24-4-2.

³⁹ Death certificates, *KBA*, 24-4-3.

⁴⁰ Graduation certificates (first half of the 20th c.), student certificates, employment documents, first half of the 20th c., *KBA*, 24-4-1.

⁴¹ Note book 1999, *KBA*, 24-2-1; Note book 2002, *KBA*, 24-2-2; Note book 2003, *KBA*, 24-2-3; Note book 2004, *KBA*, 24-2-4.

⁴² Income and expense book, 1942–1945, *KBA*, 25-3-1; Income and expense book, 1941, *KBA*, 25-3-2.

The 27th fund consists of 266 books of the 17th–20th centuries: 3 books of the 17th century,⁴³ 5 books of the 18th century,⁴⁴ 19 books of the 19th century, and the rest of them – written in the 20th century. This is what remained from the old library of the convent destroyed after the closure of the convent in 1948. Although the Kaunas Benedictine Convent was restored, it did not recover the expropriated archives or the library.

⁴³ OFFICIA Propria SS. Patronorum SACRI ORDINIS DIVI BENEDICTI EX RECENTI BREVIARIO BENEDICTINO DESUMPTA ET Iuxta Rubricas Romani Breviarij usumq; Provinciae Polonae cum NONNULLIS CEREMONIIS in Sacro Ordine BENEDICTINO sieri solitis In gratiam sanctimonialium ejusdem Ordinis Utentium Romano Breviario PERMISSU SUPERIORUM Typis mandata Anno à Partu Virginis M. DC. LXXXI [1681]. *KBA*, 27-7-17.

O ZYWOCIE Y CUDACH S. BENEDYKTA OPATA, Wielu zakonow w Kościele Zachodnym sławnego PATRIARCHY TRAKTAT. Przytym Świętey SCHOLASTYKI KSIĘNI, Świętego MAURA OPATA, Świętego PLACYDA OPATA Y M. Zywoty y cudá, od starodawnych Pisarzow po Łacinnie pisane: á teraz ná Polski ięzyk, Przez W. X. STANISŁAWA SZCZYGIELSKIEGO, Opatá Trockiego, Zakonu S. Benedyktá przełożone, y do druku, w Wilnie, w Typografey Soc: Iesu Roku Pańskiego 1683 podane. *KBA*, 27-8-17 ir 27-9-17 (two at the same books).

⁴⁴ Święta przez pustynia zakonna droga do konsekracji Panieństwa wiekuistego Oblubieńcowo Niebieskiemu zaślubionego. Abo rozmyślania na dziesięć dni przed Konsekracja Panien Zakonnych z samego prawie Pontyfału przez W. X. Marcina Bogumiła Grymosza S. J. T. sporządzone roku od Panieństwa w Maryi Macierzyństwem Boskim uświęconego 1690. Teraz w Drukarni J. K. M. Akademickiëy Soc. Jesu Roku 1756. *KBA*, 27-1-18.

Cwiczenia duchowne świętego oycá Ignacego na osm dni rozłożone. Przez W. X. Ludwika Bourdaloue Soc. Jesu, francuskim językiem wydane. A przez X. Jerzego Devina tegoż Zakonu Kapłana na Oczysty Język przełożone. Niegdyś w Kaliszu teraz w Wilnie. W Drukarni J. K. M. i Rzeczpltey Akad: Societatis Jesu. Roku Pańskiego 1773. *KBA*, 27-3-18.

OFFICIA PROPRIA PATRONORUM ORDINIS Nec non Et aliorum Regni Poloniae, ac Mag: Ducat: Litvaniae SANCTORUM AC BEATORUM Quae iuxta Decreta Sac: Rit: Congregat: recitari quotannis debent à Monachis & Monialibus Antiqui & Celeberrimi Ordinis Benedictini, Pro usu commodiori Praesertim Sanctimonialium ejusdem Ordinis per Regnum Poloniae & Magn: Ducat: Litvan: Studiosiori Compendio cum adjunctis Novissimis COLLECTA, à P. LEONARDO GRABKOWSKI Congregat: Bened: Polonae Archi-Caenobii Calvomontani San: Crucis Proses: p. t. in Ascaeterio Vilnen: VV. Monialium ad Aedes S. Catharinae V. M. Theologo Paenitentiario. Autoritate & Permissu Illmi Loci Ordinarii. Anno Domini MDCCLIX [1759]. *KBA*, 27-6-18 ir 27-12-18.

Posel boskiey łaskawos[ci] albo wielkich łask duchownyc[h] przedziwniey pannie y zakonnicy reguły Benedykta świętego Gertrudzie s. bogomyslnością wielce sławney obwieszczenia wszelkiego stanu ludziod, do gorętszey się, w miłości bozey zaprawy, bardzo pożyteczne. Pięcią części tey xiązki opisane dawniey złacinskiego na polski język przetłumaczone a teraz powtornie dla pozytku zbawiennego za pozwoleniem starszych przedrukowane w Wilnie w drukarni J K Mci y Rzeczyposp. XX. Scholarum Piarum. Roku Pańskiego 1763. *KBA*, 27-13-18.

The documents are also complemented by the 28th fund of the periodicals of the 20th century: magazines as “Mokslas ir gyvenimas”, “Mūsų Vilnius”, “Naujoji Sodyba”, “Moteris”, “Moteris ir pasaulis”, “Milujcie sie!”, “Židinyš”, “Naujoji Romuva”, “Iliustruota Lietuva”, “Krivulė”, etc., individual publications and newspapers as “Pranciškonų pasaulis”, “Lietuvos aidas”, “Tiesos kelias”, etc., calendars, extracts from various newspapers and magazines as “Sargyba”, “Sąjūdžio Žinios”, etc. The 29th fund preserves the belongings of the deceased sisters with a historical value: for example, leather document tray, audio recording (last words), rosary and ring, funeral photo album and other things of Sr. Angelė Misiūnaitė who worked for and took care of the Blessed Archbishop of Teofilius Matulionis until his death.

4. The Value of the Archive of Kaunas Benedictine Sisters (Instead of Conclusions)

The discussed archive of Kaunas Benedictine sisters includes documents from the 15th to the 21st centuries and authentic documents related to the convent's foundation. As the analysis has revealed, the largest part of the documents is related to the economic life of the convent. Information about the sisters' vow acts or personal files can be traced back to the 19th century. A large part of the convent's archive was confiscated in 1948 when the soviet government closed the convent and the church. Nevertheless, the sisters managed to save most of the documents of the first half of the 20th century, which are especially valuable for the studies of nuns' life in 1918–1945.

During the soviet times, Benedictines were working in secret and due to security reasons, did not keep the written records of their lives. That is why there is a shortage of documentation for this period. The lack of research of Benedictine activities in the soviet time is partly compensated by sisters' memoirs, especially the material collected by Sr. Leonija Birutė Širvinskaitė (e.g., obituaries, biographies and convent chronicles). Of course, the notes kept by other sisters have their own value, especially in the field of spiritual theology.

The documents stored in the archive provide data not only about Kaunas Benedictines, but also about other Lithuanian monasteries: Kražiai Benedictine Convent, Dominicans of Samogitian Calvary, Kaunas Jesuits and others.

The material also makes it possible to get a better understanding of the life of the people related to the convent, for example, the family of the convent's

founders, Skorulskiai. This archive is important for the investigation of the history of Kaunas city and region as well as monastic heritage of the whole Lithuania.

The formation of the archives of the Benedictine sisters of Kaunas is not yet complete; it is continuously being updated with the documents of the deceased sisters; at present, the 20th century documents and photographs are being registered. It can be said that only the documents of the 15th–19th centuries are fully registered and ordered. However, they may also be supplemented. For example, recently the Curia of Kaunas Archdiocese transferred a box with 19th century economic documents, mostly contracts with the persons who lived in the jurisdiction of Benedictines. There may be more similar gifts in the future. Also, the Kaunas Benedictines have set a goal to accumulate copies of documents related to the history of the convent stored in Lithuanian and foreign archives in order to better understand the life of the Kaunas Benedictine Convent throughout the centuries of its existence.

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