

# The Late Baroque Organ Building Art in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

## Summary

The Vilnius Late Baroque Organ Building School dated from the second half of the 18th to the first half of the 19th century played an important role in the history of Lithuanian organs. The heritage of its representatives – organ builders – holds an important place in the history of the art of organ building in Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia and Poland. The organs of the school that functioned for about a century were distinguished by original late baroque features and a stylistic conversion from baroque-style instruments (a combination of a baroque instrument and baroque facade) to a combination of baroque instrument and classicist facade. This stylistic fusion of baroque and classicism appeared at the end of the 18th century when rococo and classicist applied art tendencies appeared in facade ornamentation and form, while the musical part did not change much stylistically: late baroque stop lists remained in organs until the middle of the 19th century.

For a long time, this century of the history of Lithuanian organ building was little and un-systematically researched. Many valuable instruments perished in fires, were destroyed during the Second World War or in ruined churches, which were closed during Soviet years. Some instruments perished in fires over the last few decades (e.g. the late baroque-style organs in the Catholic churches in Batakiai, Gaurė, Buivydžiai and Balbieriškis); others are neglected, rotting and disappearing quickly (many historical instruments are in a critical condition; they have been damaged, broken or “repaired” by unprofessional technicians).<sup>1</sup> Despite all this, more than a hundred late baroque and classicist organs have survived, fully or in fragments, in Lithuania, which opens up many opportunities to review the Lithuanian organ heritage from the second half of the 18th to the first half of the 19th century and to evaluate it in a European context.

Organs in almost every Central and West European country are original; instruments in countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, England, the Czech Republic and Sweden. Part of lesser organ building schools, whose organs differ in architectural composition with a variety of organ stops and pipe scales, and tone pitch<sup>2</sup> should also be mentioned. In this respect, the rather large number of surviving instruments of a certain period and stylistics in Lithuania makes it possible not only to carry out complex analysis of the instruments, but also to evaluate the heritage as a whole raising the issue of an independent organ building school in our country, which is the goal of this monograph: the phenomenon of the Vilnius late baroque organ building

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1 In Lithuania, historical organs are protected by the laws on the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage and Immovable Cultural Values, however, the organ owners, managers or the so-called technicians often have no understanding and knowledge about how authentic organ facades and/or instruments should be protected. The writer of this monograph has seen cases where after painting an organ facade in one colour the authentic polychrome or the remains of gilding were hidden (e.g. the organs in the churches in Kantaučiai and Dapšionys), or plastic plates, keyboards of an accordion or synthesisers were stuck onto unique ebony and bone keyboards with carved tips (e.g. organs in the churches in Notėnai, Kantaučiai and Balbieriškis).

2 Organ pipes were measured in the same foot unit measure in countries such as France, Germany and Italy, but they varied in length from country to country as it was the so-called ruler's foot. Therefore, organ tuning and pitch depended on the differences in the length of the foot of the ruler in every country.

school that complies with the requirements<sup>3</sup> imposed on the concept of the school, its formation, aspects of its originality and independence, the main differences compared with the works of the masters of the schools of Hamburg, Gdańsk, or Königsberg as well as the influence exerted on the organ culture of Central and Eastern Europe are analysed.

It should be noted that for a long time the stylistically unique organ building school of our country was analysed inseparably from the heritage of the Königsberg organ masters as a marginal expression of the region on the territory of our country. This point of view must have been formed by the fact that the sources of the Vilnius organ building school were the activities of the masters who arrived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from Germany and East Prussia in the middle of the 18th century and brought the organ building traditions of these countries. This is evident from books published at that time by researchers from various countries, for instance, in an article by Father Jan Galicz<sup>4</sup> published in the middle of the 19th century or in books by Göran Grahn, Ewa Smulikowska, Jerzy Golos, Vladimir Nevdach<sup>5</sup> and others printed in the last decades of the 20th century or the beginning of the 21st century. These researchers drew on the outer similarities, most often the construction of the organ facades, without giving a reasonable substantiation and/or any analysis of the instrumental part of the organ attributed to the Königsberg school or German tradition. Thus, on the whole such instruments, as, for instance, in Rózanystok,<sup>6</sup> the churches of St Johns<sup>7</sup> and Bernardine in Vilnius, in Tytuvėnai or Vilnius Cathedral that at present have been incontestably attributed to the independent Vilnius organ building school. The instrument in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius by the organ builder Adam Gottlob Casparini (1776) or the grand organs in the Bernardine Church in Vilnius (1764–1766) and in the church in Tytuvėnai (1789)<sup>8</sup> attributed to this master must have attracted most attention and have been researched in historiography, while lesser baroque organs (positive organs)<sup>9</sup> that constitute a greater part of the Lithuanian organ heritage were considered provincial repetitions (copies), dismissing the integrity of the development of the architectural composition and ornamentation of their facades and without defining features that distinguish this numerous group of instruments from the organ building tradition of neighbouring countries.

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- 3 An organ building school is the activities of one organ builder or a group of them and their pupils and followers in a defined territory (city, region) that operated for 50–100 or more years and formed clear distinctive features.
  - 4 The article “O organach w Wilnie” was printed in 1861 in the magazine *Ruch muzyczny* in Warsaw (Galicz, 1861). It must be the first text that mentioned the organs in the churches of Vilnius in 1861 in the periodical press. However, there are mistakes in the instruments’ stop lists given there: for instance, in the organ in the Holy Spirit’s Church in Vilnius three stops *Principal 4’*, *Spiel Flöt 4’* and *Octava 2’* of the second manual are missing; in the instruments in other churches the wrong numbers of the stops’ feet are given, for instance, Vilnius Bernardine church organ’s first manual and pedal stops *Quinta* pitches instead of *3’* are recorded as *6’* feet, the pedal stop *Kornet 2’* is missing; there are even more mistakes in the pitches of the stops of St Johns Church in Vilnius and so on.
  - 5 Galicz, 1861; Grahn & McCrea, 2003; Smulikowska, 1989; Smulikowska, 1993; Golos, 1972; Golos, 1993; Heřлаx, 1999.
  - 6 Present day Poland.
  - 7 The Church of St John the Baptist and St John the Apostle and Evangelist in Vilnius.
  - 8 The author of the monograph, having carried out practical, archival sources and comparative analysis attributed the authorship of Tytuvėnai church organ to the Vilnius master Nicolaus Jantzón; after the results of the research were publicised in scientific articles and at organ researchers and restorers’ conferences this authorship became established. There is more about the discourse about authorship in Chapter 5.
  - 9 Positive organs or positives are a lesser organ of one manual and no pedals. Larger instruments with several stops are called manuals in archival documents.

The organ building traditions of neighbouring countries, or rather, their historically prevailing significance was the main reason that stood in the way of proving the originality of the organ heritage in the region of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Nevertheless, there are cases where concrete organs are defined employing the concept “Vilnius School”. For instance, back in 1938 in an article art critic Marian Morelowski called the organs in the churches of St Johns, Bernardine and the Lutheran church in Vilnius *Vilniaus grupė* (Vilnius Group, in Polish *Organy Grupy Wileńskiej*);<sup>10</sup> the term *Vilniaus vargonų meistrų dirbtuvės* (Vilnius Organ Masters’ Workshop, in Polish *Wileńskie Warsztaty Organmistrzowie*) was used by Marcin Zgliński in his study about organ facades.<sup>11</sup> However, the concept “Vilnius School” is used here not for exceptionally stylistic purposes, but to emphasise the geographical aspect, while in the work of the researchers mentioned the main Vilnius organs are presented as part of the Königsberg organ school.

This monograph sums up the results of the field and scientific research carried out over more than fifteen years; the material was gathered during various expeditions, at various archives, and organ research centres in Lithuania and elsewhere. In order to search for the Vilnius late baroque school organ builders and instruments linked to their environment over four hundred churches were visited in Lithuania, Latvia (in the small towns of Pasīne, Laši, Lēnas, Feimaņi), in Poland (Gdańsk, Młynary/Mühlhausen, Barciany, Sątoczno, Pasłek and elsewhere), Belarus (Zhirmuny, Staryya Vasilishki, Gieraniony, Hermanishki, Kemelishki and other small towns), Ukraine (Lviv, Sidorów, etc.) and Sweden (Stockholm, Västervik, Lövestabruk [Leufsta Bruk], Ulrika, etc.). Thus, an attempt was made to research them as they have survived and to become practically acquainted with samples of the tradition of organ building in neighbouring countries. Inventories were made and over a hundred and fifty baroque and classicist organ cases and instruments were examined; in various archives, church inspection documents and inventory acts<sup>12</sup> comprehensive data about organ builders and the work of those who lived and worked in Vilnius in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century was collected and analysed.

Analysing historical organs in our country, the issue of authorship has to be addressed as at that time in Lithuania the trade of the organ builder was not exceptional (like other spheres of applied art), unlike in neighbouring Eastern Prussia, the Courland or Livonia with Lutheranism prevailing, where more attention was paid to the individuality of the organ builder. Archival data about the organ masters who built instruments in the churches of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the 17th and 19th centuries is scarce and scattered with church documents showing mostly the names of the donors or those who commissioned them, while the masters’ names are not even mentioned. The organs in church inspection documents and inventories are defined by a sentence or two, pointing out where they stand, how many manuals they have (if more than one, which was rather seldom), stops, additional parts (bells, drums), bellows, a short description of the condition, sometimes the date when it was built or repaired.<sup>13</sup> It is known that the organ builder and those who commissioned them signed a contract but the surviving individual entries are not enough to indisputably establish the authorship of many instruments in our country.

10 Morelowski, 1938–1939.

11 Zgliński, 2012, pp. 332–333.

12 The information was collected from many Lithuanian state, church, institutional and private archives (the Lithuanian State History Archive, Kaunas Archdiocese Curia Archive, Cultural Heritage Centre Archive, Rare Publications and Manuscripts Departments of the Wroblewski Library of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Vilnius University Library Manuscripts Department, National Martynas Mažvydas Library Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, archives of Lithuanian churches) and archives in other countries: archives of Belarusian churches, Łomża Diocese Archive in Poland, Latvian State History Archive (the monograph’s bibliography carries a detailed list of more than 400 archival documents – church inspections and inventories).

13 Incidentally, not only the names of organ builders, but also artists’, sculptors’ and other craft-people were “forgotten” to be mentioned in church documents.

Another problem that is often faced while establishing the authorship of instruments is that they are in a bad state of repair: the organs have undergone much change; pipes, bellows, separate stops or only facades have survived; quite a few organs have been moved once or twice to other churches from the original place where they used to stand. In such cases inscriptions on the inside part of organs were searched, for instance, about the repair carried out in which the name of the master, a priest, or a donor or place would be recorded. Such things are rare, but it makes it possible to establish the original place of the organ, which compared with the information in archival documents, can help identify the organ builder.

Later work on an organ, for example, decoration of the facades which masters did only after they had finished building the instrument sometimes interfered with establishing the precise date it was completed. Ornamentation would often last for decades; therefore, taking into account the stylistics of the carvings can be misleading. For instance, the organ in the church in Linkuva was built in 1764–1765, but it is recorded in the church documents that the organ ornamentation work was completed a decade later (“in 1774 the carving master Anton Chalckiewicz was paid for gluing the seventy carvings onto the organ”; at the same time the “painter Anton Żyglinski covered the organ facade in alabaster and gilded it”).<sup>14</sup>

The definition of the Vilnius late baroque organ building school as an independent and integral phenomenon made it possible to renew discourse about the authorship of the organs attributed to the Vilnius School, to put forward hypotheses that are substantiated, for instance, by the stylistic peculiarities of the organ facades. It is possible to substantiate the attribution to the Vilnius School of only a few organs with the help of archival sources. Therefore, drawing on the distinguishing features of this school, surviving instruments built by Vilnius masters were discovered during fieldwork, as were analogues with the characteristics of this school, and gradually the names of the masters of the existing Vilnius organ building school were established in historiography.

In Lithuania, individual organs were built by masters from abroad, who mostly worked on the territory of present day Lithuania, which was under the administration of the Kingdom of Prussia (the so-called Užnemunė, Lithuania to the west of the Nemunas or Trans-Nemunas region) at the end of the 18th century. In Lithuania, there are about twenty instruments built by masters from East Prussia and Courland that have their authorship confirmed by archival documents, physical examination or deduced from analogues or obvious characteristics of other organ building schools. There may be more instruments built by masters from East Prussia or Courland. However, if the traditions of the Vilnius organ building school are more evident in them (which was really possible due to an especially wide geographical spread and strong influence on provincial masters exerted by the Vilnius School) such instruments are hypothetically to be attributed to the Vilnius School.

Part of the research was published in 2009 in the form of an inventory collection, which is a catalogue with data about 127 surviving and lost baroque and classicist organs in churches in Lithuania and neighbouring countries (Latvia, Belarus).<sup>15</sup> Research outside Lithuania's borders was determined by the administrative links of church institutions in the century researched, which at that time encompassed the territories of the Vilnius and Samogitian dioceses and the dioceses of

14 The documents of the church in Linkuva: MAB RS, f. 42, b. 13, l. 82–83.

15 Information about the catalogue: Girėnas Povilionis. *Vargondirbystės menas Lietuvoje: nuo baroko iki klasicizmo. Vargonų katalogas. XVII a.–XIX a. I p.* [The Art of Organbuilding in Lithuania: From Baroque to Classicism. The Organ Catalogue, from the 17th c. to the first half of the 19th c.], Vilnius: Savastis, 2009, 364 pp. ISBN 978-9986-420-78-1. Other significant publications about the subject: doctor's thesis defended by the monograph's author in 2006 (Girėnas Povilionis. *Vilniaus vėlyvojo baroko vargondirbystės mokykla* [The Vilnius Late Baroque Organ Building School], supervisor Prof. Dr. A. Aleksandravičiūtė, Vilnius Art Academy); catalogue of Lithuanian Organs by Rimantas Gučas, its first part is a concise history of the art of the Lithuanian organ building (Rimantas Gučas. *Lietuvos vargonai. Katalogas* [Lithuanian Organs. Catalogue], Vilnius: Petro ofsetas, 2009, 560 pp. ISBN 978-609-420-000-7).

Courland and Livonia<sup>16</sup> that were under their administrative jurisdiction. A political map of the eastern part of Central Europe and frequent corrections on it between the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century did not have a decisive influence on the Vilnius organ building school. However, administratively those territories that currently encompass Lithuania, West Belarus, South-eastern Latvia and North-eastern Poland belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Principality of Courland and the Livonian Principality. The spread of the organs attributed to the Vilnius organ building school is illustrated by a map of the instruments built in the 18th century made by the monograph author (see Illustration 1); in the other map (Illustration 2) the situation during the first decade of the 21st century of the surviving organs attributed to the Vilnius organ building school that were moved from one place to another is presented.

This monograph sums up research that was carried out over a period of many years. It started during the author's studies at the Lithuanian academy of Music and Theatre, and continued later while working on a dissertation at the Vilnius Art Academy. The author made an inventory of Lithuanian historical organs while at the Culture Heritage Centre and did further research during his post-doctoral studies at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute.<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon of the Vilnius organ building school is dealt with in five chapters of the monograph. Chapter 1 presents the information about the organs in our country from the first mention of organs in written records in the 15th century, aspects of the spread of the traditions of neighbouring countries and the formation and consolidation of the Vilnius organ building school. It presents systemised archival information about the masters who built organs in our country from the 16th to the first half of the 19th century. In Chapter 2 the original characteristics of the Vilnius organ building school from the aspect of the structure of the organ facade are analysed; a classification of typical organ facades of the Vilnius organ building school is given, as well as analysis of design sketches of authentic organ facades of the second half of the 18th that are kept at the department of the Old and Rare Publications at the library of the Vilnius Art Academy. The originality of the ornamentation and the instrument itself (stop lists, separate stops, etc.) are dealt with in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 gives distinguishing features of the Vilnius organ building school and deals with the authorship of the organs at the Church of St Johns and the Cathedral of Vilnius with the help of a hypothetical facade and instrument reconstruction.

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16 Between the end of the 17th and the end of the 18th century, Courland and Livonia belonged to the Livonian diocese (bishops were either Polish or Lithuanian; the bishop resided in Dau-gavpils). When in 1773 during the first partition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Latgala was incorporated into the Russian Empire, this Livonian part of the diocese was included into the new Mogilev diocese (later archdiocese). Courland and Zemgale (Semigalia) were annexed in 1795 during the third partition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; this part of the Livonian bishopric was included into the Vilnius diocese. In 1847 when the tsarist authorities signed a concordat with the Holy See, the borders of the dioceses were redrawn, while the deaneries of Courland and Mintauja that belonged to the Courland province were united with the Samogitian diocese (implemented in 1849).

17 The training period financed according to the programme of the Human Resources Development Action Plan, the Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, funded by the European Union Structural Funds project "Postdoctoral Fellowship Implementation in Lithuania" within the framework of the Measure for Enhancing Mobility of Scholars and Other Researchers and the Promotion of Student Research VP1-3.1-ŠMM-01.