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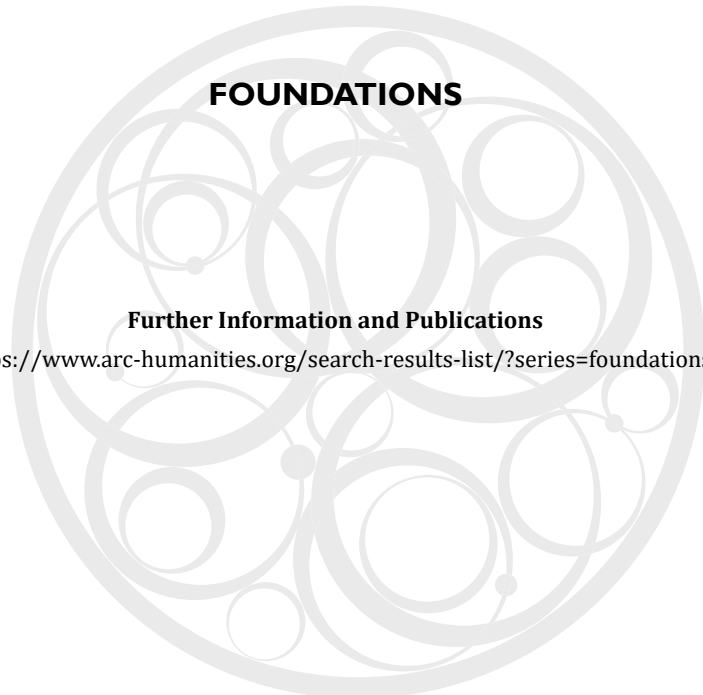
PAGANS IN THE EARLY MODERN BALTIC

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNTS OF BALTIC PAGANISM

Edited and translated from Latin by

FRANCIS YOUNG

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS



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Woodcut showing Lithuanian pagans worshipping trees, snakes and fire, from Olaus Magnus, *On the Northern Peoples* (reproduced with the permission of The History Collection / Alamy Stock Photo)

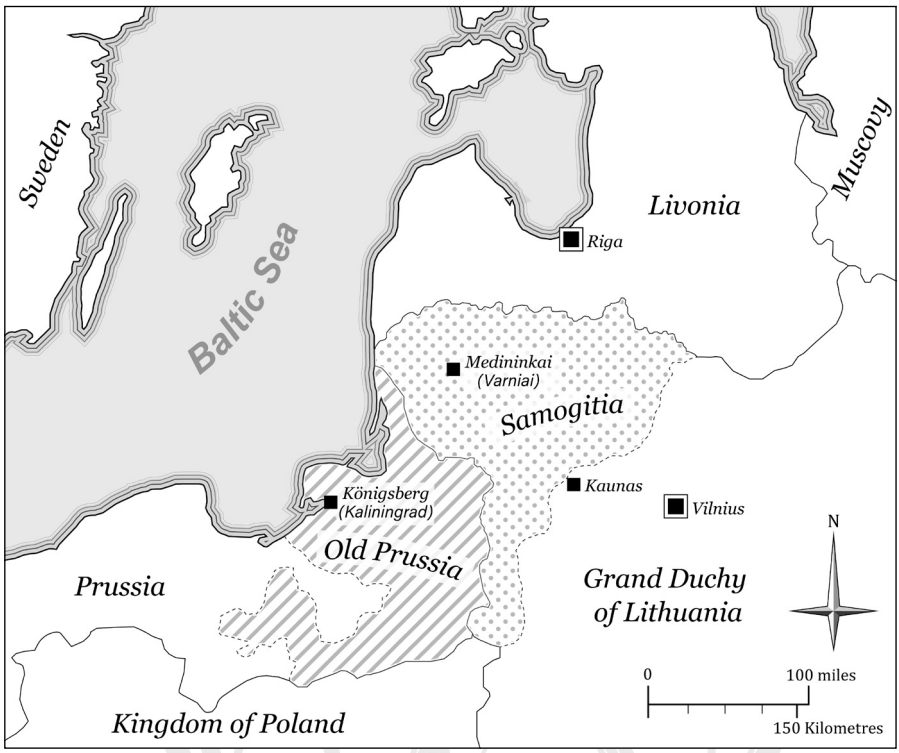
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As their citizens will often tell visitors with pride, the Baltic nations were among the last in Europe to accept the Christian faith and lay aside their ancestral religions. In spite of considerable academic and popular interest in the persistence of pagan beliefs and practices in medieval Europe, the writings of late medieval and early modern ethnographical commentators on Prussia and Lithuania (which constitute an important body of evidence for the beliefs and practices of European pagans) have remained inaccessible to most scholars. While the pagan Balts attracted attention during the Northern Crusades of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the fifteenth century curiosity partially overcame abhorrence. Humanist scholars began to write about pagans in new ways, informed by new methods of historiography and ethnography. The resulting commentary is the subject of this book.

This project emerged from the convergence of two things: a research agenda that was increasingly focussed on expressions of popular Christianity and the question of "pagan survivals," and a longstanding personal fascination with the history of Lithuania. The book started from the thought that a good way to gain a better understanding of what was and was not "pagan" in medieval Europe might be to look at the documentary evidence for Baltic paganism, where paganism was truly a force to be reckoned with. From the start, therefore, this project has never been narrowly focussed on the Baltic, and the research questions underpinning the book pertain to European (and indeed global) history: how did early modern European scholars make sense of alien ancestral belief systems? And to what extent can we rely on their reports as a reliable account of pagan beliefs? It is these questions of interpretation that the present volume seeks to address.

I have incurred many debts of gratitude in the course of preparing this book. I thank my wife Rachel and daughters Abigail and Talitha for their forebearance with—and support for—all my historical research. The staff of the British Library and Cambridge University Library were, as usual, unfailingly helpful, and it is also appropriate for me to record my appreciation of the University of Valladolid for its digitization of the *Cosmographia* of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the "Polona" project (Projekt Patrimonium) for its digitization of Filippo Buonacorssi's *Vita et mores Sbignei cardinalis*, and the University of Vilnius for its digitization of the *Catechismusa* of Martynas Mažvydas. I acknowledge with gratitude the generous award of a book subvention to support the publication of this book by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. I thank Peter Lorimer for preparing the map of the Baltic region, Sarah Clark for her expert transcriptions of many of the Latin texts, Anna Henderson of Arc Humanities Press for her support for the project, and Saulė Kubiliūtė for not only reading and commenting on the manuscript but also translating the Lithuanian summary of the book's introduction. I am also grateful to all those who, over the years, deepened my understanding of the richness of Baltic culture—Jolanta Coverdale, Jūratė Terleckaitė, and Mantas Adomėnas, to name but a few. Above all, however, I am grateful to Vaida Balsevičiūtė for first introducing me to the culture, language, and people of Lithuania. This book is dedicated to her.

F. Y., Peterborough, England



The southeastern Baltic region in the early modern period.
(Drawn by Peter Lorimer.)

INTRODUCTION

THE PEOPLES OF the southeastern shore of the Baltic Sea were among the last in Europe to accept baptism and abandon their ancestral religions. Indeed, in the twelfth century the persistence of ancestral religion in the Baltic region when the rest of northern Europe had been brought within Catholic or Orthodox Christendom inspired the Northern Crusades, a series of campaigns against the unconverted Slavs and Balts which eventually resulted in the establishment of the crusader states of Prussia and Livonia. While the Baltic peoples under the rule of crusading orders were forcibly (albeit often unsuccessfully) converted to Christianity, the Lithuanians and Samogitians not only remained ostentatiously pagan, but also expanded their rule over Orthodox principalities in today's Belarus and Ukraine until the Grand Duchy of Lithuania grew into one of the largest polities in Europe. Finally, between 1387 and 1417 Lithuania was formally (yet superficially) converted to Catholic Christianity. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the apparent continued existence of paganism in the Baltic fascinated a new generation of humanist historians and ethnographers in Poland, German Prussia, and elsewhere, who applied novel methods of historiography and ethnography to some of Europe's last pagan societies.

The Latin writings of humanist writers about Baltic religion constitute one of the most detailed collections of records of a non-literate ancestral religion in northern Europe. While there is no shortage of evidence from many European countries of "pagan" beliefs and practices deemed unacceptable by the church, the evidence for Baltic paganism stands apart because it was recorded by historians and ethnographers whose curiosity about paganism often went beyond the desire to condemn it. While attempts to suppress paganism were well underway in fifteenth-century Lithuania, there was also a new climate of secular scholarly curiosity in and about the Baltic region. The arrival of humanist learning in Poland and Prussia, along with the newly Christianized Lithuanian nobility's desire for a distinguished pedigree, produced intense curiosity about the origin of the Baltic peoples and their religion. As Lithuania took its place not only as one of the nations of Christendom, but also as a major Catholic power, Lithuania's history became a matter of European importance.

The transition from medieval anti-pagan polemic to humanist proto-ethnography in early modern writing on the Baltic peoples anticipated the far better-known development of sympathetic scholarly attitudes to the indigenous peoples of the New World. Catholic Europe's engagement with the "barbarian" Balts invites comparison with Catholic Europe's imminent encounter with indigenous peoples across the Atlantic who had no knowledge of the Christian faith.[1] The ethnographic discourse developed by writers on the non-Christian peoples of Europe, whether Baltic pagans or Muslim Tatars and Turks, created the space for positive evaluations of indigenous cultures in the aftermath of European contact with the Americas, and provided a language, conceptual framework, and range of imagery for scholars seeking to describe beliefs very different from

1 On the term "barbarian" and its equation with "pagan" in medieval discourse see Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 40–42.

their own. Far from being a subject of narrow national interest only to the Baltic states, the ethnographic literature on Baltic paganism is of European and, indeed, global importance for understanding how Europeans perceived and interacted with alien belief systems in the so-called "age of discovery."

The purpose of this book is to provide English translations of Latin accounts of the origins and religion of the Prussians and Lithuanians written in the "long" sixteenth century, with the earliest account written in around 1458 and the last in around 1582. While some authors speculated briefly about the origins of the Balts before the middle of the fifteenth century, Piccolomini was the first humanist author to contribute an entirely new perspective to the study of Baltic religion by recording an eyewitness account of mission in Lithuania. The purpose of the introduction is to set these "humanistic" accounts of Baltic religion in their religious, historiographical, ethnographic, and literary contexts. The scope of this volume does not permit extensive interpretation or reconstruction of Baltic religion itself, a debate that has sometimes been a source of friction between historians primarily concerned with understanding the Christianization of Baltic lands and ethnographers primarily interested in reconstructing Baltic mythology and religion. Rather than the faithfulness or otherwise of the texts' portrayals of Baltic religion (which can be very difficult to assess), this book is concerned primarily with the uses to which discourses about Baltic paganism were put by humanist scholars. Such uses included the formation of a newly Christianized Lithuanian national identity, the formation of a common Polish-Lithuanian identity before and after the Union of Lublin, and Reformation-era debates over the religious future of Prussia and Lithuania.

This introduction sets the early modern Baltic region in its historical context before examining the phenomenon of "Baltic paganism" and the difficulties of defining it. The introduction sets the texts within the context of the extended Christianization of the Baltic region, critically assessing approaches to reconstructing Baltic religion, and considers the impact of the Reformation and rising interest in vernacular languages on discourses about ancestral beliefs and practices. The introduction then sets the texts within the context of the development of early modern ethnography, analyzing the various purposes to which these texts were put and the interpretative traditions on which their authors drew. Finally, the introduction analyzes the relationship between the different texts included in the volume and the textual traditions they represent, and considers their broader importance. A summary of the introduction in Lithuanian is included below for the benefit of Lithuanian readers.

The Historical Context: The Late Medieval and Early Modern Baltic Region

In the late Middle Ages the Baltic peoples inhabited not only the territory of the modern states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia but also parts of modern Belarus, Poland, and the exclave of the Russian Federation now known as Kaliningrad Oblast.[2] The names of

2 The term "Baltic peoples" is here used in its inclusive sense to cover the indigenous inhabitants of the Baltic region, rather than in its more specific sense of speakers of Baltic languages (which

many Baltic tribes, such as the Sudovians and Yotvingians, have long since disappeared from the map, while the name of the Prussians was co-opted by their German-speaking conquerors as the "Old Prussians" themselves were gradually assimilated into the new German Prussia. By the mid-fourteenth century modern-day Latvia and Estonia, known together as Livonia, were under the rule of the Teutonic Knights, a German crusading order originally founded to convert the pagan Balts that developed into a powerful monastic-military polity. The core territory of the Teutonic Knights, however, was Prussia, traditionally the entire coastal territory lying between the rivers Vistula and Nemunas on the southeastern Baltic littoral. South and east of the Teutonic Knights lay Samogitia and Lithuania, the two pagan territories never successfully conquered or assimilated in the Northern Crusades.

The name "Lithuania" was used in at least three different ways in the late Middle Ages. The strictest use of the term was confined to what are today the ethnographic regions of Aukštaitija and Dzūkija in the Republic of Lithuania—roughly the eastern two-thirds of the modern country. Samogitia (Žemaitija) was sometimes included within this restricted meaning of Lithuania, and sometimes considered a separate territory with its own language and customs. However, "Lithuania" also had an extraordinarily broad geographical meaning: the entire territory controlled by the grand dukes of Lithuania. The late medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the largest polity in Europe, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. "Lithuania" in this broadest sense referred to western Rus' (modern Belarus and Ukraine), along with the ethnic Lithuanians in the far north of the Grand Duchy. To further complicate matters, some ethnic Lithuanians lived under the rule of the Teutonic Order in "Lithuania Minor" (the coastal territory south and west of Klaipėda) so "ethnic Lithuania" did not neatly correspond to a territory within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in spite of the latter's vast size.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a remarkable composite state that developed as a result of the gradual conquest of Rus'ian principalities by pagan Lithuanians from the thirteenth century onwards, at a time when the princes of Rus' were weakened by Tatar invasion.[3] Although they were themselves the target of periodic territorial incursions by the Teutonic Knights, the Lithuanians were protected by the thick forests of their homeland from both German and Tatar invaders, and used this position to their advantage to dominate western Rus'. After Grand Duke Mindaugas's failed experiment with Catholicism in 1251–1263 (for which he received papal recognition as Lithuania's first and only king), the grand dukes reverted to their pagan traditions.[4] However, while the Grand Duchy was controlled by a pagan Lithuanian military elite, it was from the start an inclusive, multilingual, and multiconfessional polity where pagans lived alongside Catholics, Orthodox Ruthenians, Muslim Tatars, and Jews.

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would exclude the Uralic-speaking Estonians). Kaliningrad is also referred to in historiographical literature in its German and Polish forms, Königsberg and Królewiec.

3 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 17–25.

4 On the conversion of Mindaugas see Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 51–52; Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 55–118.

While the Grand Duchy remained officially pagan, Lithuanian paganism in no way challenged the Orthodox Christianity of the Rus'ian principalities it controlled. Indeed, the Gediminid rulers of Lithuania actively protected Orthodoxy in order to command the loyalty of their Ruthenian subjects, while the Ruthenian language (the ancestor of modern Belarusian) became the Grand Duchy's administrative language.[5] The complex religious policy of Grand Duke Gediminas (ca. 1275–1341) upheld paganism as the Grand Duchy's state religion, while at the same time Gediminas supported Orthodoxy and invited Franciscan friars to establish a religious house in Vilnius on condition they did not engage in proselytism; he was prepared to execute them if they did.[6] On one interpretation, Gediminas's religious policy was designed to play off Lithuania's rivals—and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faiths—against one another, as Gediminas gave periodic tantalizing indications that he might convert to Christianity, but never did.[7]

On this reading, the state paganism of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania—which was a set of ancestral traditions rather than a proselytizing faith—was first and foremost a political device designed to keep Lithuania independent of the influence of its Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim neighbours. It constituted a politically-motivated refusal to accept one of the great monotheistic religions rather than a coherently formulated alternative to them; Lithuanian paganism was certainly not a rival to Europe's monotheistic faiths, and is better understood as a collection of ancestral practices that filled the void left by an absence of confessional commitment to any one of them.[8] When their refusal to commit to a religion ceased to confer a political advantage on the grand dukes, as Lithuania found itself squeezed between the Teutonic Order and the ever-present threat of Orthodox defections to Muscovy, a tactical conversion became the best policy.[9]

That policy came to fruition with Jogaila (d. 1434), the son of Grand Duke Algirdas (ca. 1296–1377) and grandson of Gediminas, who succeeded his father as grand duke but shared power first with his uncle Kęstutis and then his cousin Vytautas. In return for Samogitia and a promise to accept Catholic baptism, in 1382 the Teutonic Order helped Jogaila overthrow Kęstutis, but gave safe haven to the rebellious Vytautas after Jogaila failed to ratify the treaty. Faced with the prospect of the Order taking revenge, in 1383–1384 Jogaila's stepmother Yuliana of Tver reputedly signed a treaty with the grand prince of Muscovy, Dmitrii Donskoy, agreeing that Jogaila would receive Orthodox

5 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 26.

6 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 275–77. On the Franciscan missions see also Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 175–220.

7 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 195–98.

8 On the state cult in medieval Lithuania see Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 118–48; Vaitkevičius, "The Main Features of the State Religion." For a skeptical assessment of the idea of Lithuanian paganism as state policy see Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania."

9 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 28. On Jogaila's road to Catholicism and the crown of Poland see Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 221–60.

baptism,[10] but in the end Jogaila decided his best option was to marry the young queen of Poland, Jadwiga. By a treaty signed at Krewo (in present-day Belarus) Jogaila promised "to apply his lands of Lithuania and Rus' to the crown of Poland forever" (*terras suas Lithuaniae et Rusiae coronae regni Poloniae perpetuo applicare*) in return for recognition as king of Poland.[11] Accordingly, Jogaila finally received Catholic baptism in Wawel Cathedral on February 14, 1385.[12]

The exact meaning of the dynastic union into which Jogaila entered with Poland continues to be debated to this day, but Jogaila reinvented himself as King Władysław II Jagiełło and set about bringing the Christian faith to Lithuania. The conversion of Lithuania formally occurred in Vilnius in February 1387, and marked the nominal acceptance of Catholicism by Lithuania's noble elite (apart from those who were already Orthodox) and the superficial conversion of the people of Aukštaitija and Dzūkija. However, the majority of the Grand Duchy's people were Orthodox Ruthenians, and the Duchy of Samogitia remained pagan, and formally in the hands of the Teutonic Order. It was only after Władysław's decisive defeat of the Order at the Battle of Grunwald (or Žalgiris) in 1410 that he was able to assert his authority over Samogitia by going there to formally convert the region to the Christian faith in October 1413.[13] When the Teutonic Order continued to contest Samogitia, Władysław arranged for a Samogitian delegation to arrive at the Council of Constance in December 1415, as a demonstration of the success of his Christianization of the region in contrast to the methods of the Order, whose violence had done nothing to bring the Samogitians to the faith.[14] In reality, as will be discussed further below, the "conversion" of Samogitia was not the resounding success Władysław liked to portray.

While the "personal union" between Poland and Lithuania remained complex and unstable over the next century and a half, the Jagiellonian dynasty continued to rule both countries and Christianity was—at least officially—triumphant in Lithuania after the final Samogitian rebellion against Lithuanian rule in 1441.[15] Although the Grand Duchy faced major challenges from the Muscovites and Ottomans, Casimir IV Jagiełło managed to annexe the western part of Prussia ("Royal Prussia") to the crown of Poland by the Second Peace of Thorn in 1466, while eastern Prussia (later known as "Ducal Prussia") remained under the control of the Teutonic Order, albeit feudally subject to Poland.[16] The

10 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 28–35. Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 251–56 dispute the authenticity of the treaty and argue that Jogaila's conversion to Orthodoxy was never contemplated.

11 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 47.

12 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 30–33.

13 On the conversion of Samogitia see Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 342–47.

14 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 125; Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 347–53.

15 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 299.

16 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 228, 230

canonization of Casimir's second son Casimir (1458–84), whose body was enshrined in Vilnius Cathedral, lent the once pagan Jagiellonians the aura of royal sanctity.[17]

Sigismund I "the Old" (1467–1548) lost Lithuanian territory to both the Muscovites and Ottomans, but also managed to bring eastern Prussia under the Polish crown. Sigismund's nephew Albert von Hohenzollern (1490–1568) was elected Grand Master of the struggling Teutonic Order in 1511. Convinced by Martin Luther that the Order had no future after Albert's confrontations with Poland resulted in defeat, Albert formally submitted to Poland on April 1525 on condition that the *Ordenstaat* of the Teutonic Knights become a secular duchy with him as duke.[18] Albert also became a Lutheran, and founded the Albertina (University of Königsberg), the first university in the Baltic region, in 1544.

Sigismund resisted the Reformation, but by the 1550s Lithuania was increasingly controlled by the Radziwiłł family in the name of the grand duke, who, in spite of being polonized themselves, opposed closer union with Poland.[19] Mikołaj Czarny ("the Black") Radziwiłł (1515–1565), grand chancellor of Lithuania, was a Calvinist who took advantage of the weakness of the Catholic church in Lithuania to promote Calvinism,[20] while Lutheran missionaries sought the souls of still "pagan" Prussians and Lithuanians in the territories of Ducal Prussia. While it may be too simplistic to say that Lithuanians turned to Protestantism because they resented Polish dominance of the Catholic church,[21] the small number of Catholic bishops in Lithuania and the weakness of parochial structures meant that Catholicism had shallow roots in the country even a century and a half after formal conversion.

The Union of Lublin in July 1569, whereby Poland-Lithuania became a federal commonwealth with an elected monarchy, resulted in the more intensive polonization of Lithuania and a resurgence of Catholicism led by the Jesuits, who founded a Jesuit academy in Vilnius in 1579 that would become Vilnius University.[22] On the death of Grand Duchess Anna Jagiellon in 1596 the Jagiellonian dynasty, which had ruled Lithuania since around 1289 and expanded its rule to most of Eastern Europe, came to an end. The grand dukes of Lithuania would thenceforth be elected monarchs, and always one and the same individual as the king of Poland.

In the space of less than a century the Jagiellonians had transformed themselves from pagan warrior rulers into Renaissance monarchs who rivalled the Habsburgs as the greatest European dynasty of the fifteenth century. However, the success of the transformation of Lithuania's people into faithful Christians in the same period is more questionable. Even in Prussia, under the watchful eye of the Teutonic Order and its Lutheran successors, paganism in some form seems to have survived into the sixteenth

17 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 280.

18 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 392–93.

19 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 323.

20 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 443.

21 Mullett, *Historical Dictionary of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation*, 300–301.

22 On the Union of Lublin see Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 477–94.

century. Exactly how that Baltic "paganism" should be defined and understood is the question to which we now turn.

Baltic Paganism

The vocabulary we choose to use to discuss Baltic religion is fraught with difficulty. In the first place, "Baltic religion" should not be understood as a single religion of Baltic peoples, each of whom had their own distinct religious practices; it is, rather a conventional term used for the pre-Christian ancestral religious beliefs and practices of the various Baltic peoples.[23] The definition of "pagan," a term developed by early Christians to describe the followers of the old, local faith of the *pagus* (countryside) rather than the universal faith of the one God, is notoriously problematic.[24] Paganism is hard to define because Christian authors were in the habit of labelling as "pagan" any belief or practice they disapproved of, particularly in the Reformation period. "Pagan" is not only an etic term (bestowed by outsiders), but also a pejorative one.

There is no sign that ancestral ritual practices in the Baltic admitted any sort of clear distinction between "religious" and "secular" ritual, and if we choose to define paganism negatively as "non-Christian (or pre-Christian) religious practices," that begs the question of what counts as religious practice to begin with. For example, Christian writers often dwelt on funeral, burial, and nuptial rites as part of descriptions of the "pagan" Balts. Such rites can be interpreted as part of a "religiously neutral" festive culture which, while it clearly had religious implications (such as equipping the dead for a materialistic afterlife), was only "pagan" if critics chose to interpret it that way.[25] Sources produced in the ferment of the Reformation—as several of the texts translated in this volume were—are especially problematic, since it was a standard trope of Protestant anti-Catholic discourse to accuse Catholics (and, in the case of Jan Łasicki, Orthodox Christians too) of being pagans.[26] Teasing out the "real" pagan practices denounced in an anti-Catholic text from the popular Christianity imagined to be pagan by Protestants and Counter-Reformation Catholics is not straightforward.

The example of sacred trees provides one illustration of the interpretative pitfalls of "paganism" as a concept. As late as the 1760s Stanisław Rostowski wrote of "the gods of the Couronians, still secretly worshipped secretly in groves by the people today, from their oaks and altars …."[27] Jesuit missionaries in Lithuania periodically cut down sacred trees well into the eighteenth century, but it is unclear why these trees were more idolatrous than the sacred trees of other long since Christianized European nations, such as

23 Ališauskas, ed., *Baltų Religijos ir Mitologijos Reliktai*, 14 (hereafter abbreviated to *BRMR*).

24 On the definition of paganism see Chauvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, 7–9; Owen Davies, *Paganism*, 1–6; for a discussion of the definition of paganism within the context of medieval northern Europe see Palmer, "Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World."

25 Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 261.

26 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 208–10.

27 *BRMR*, 432: "Curonum deos, in lucis adhuc furtim a plebe cultos, e quercubus suis et aris …."

the fairy trees of Ireland or the "Ladies' Tree" of Domrémy described by Joan of Arc.[28] One difference was that Jesuit missionaries in eighteenth-century Lithuania knew that Lithuania was one of the last European nations to accept baptism. Did they therefore conclude, following a circular pattern of reasoning, that Lithuania's sacred trees were pagan because the survival of customs such as the veneration of trees confirmed that Lithuanians were inclined to paganism? In the absence of detailed information about the rites performed at sacred trees, we cannot be certain; but it is possible that practices little different from the popular religion practised all over Catholic Europe were met with particularly intense opprobrium in Baltic lands because those areas had a pagan reputation.

"Paganness" was not and is not an objective category, and the legacy of nineteenth-century folklorists determined to see "pagan survivals" in folk cultures all over Europe has distorted perceptions just as much as the religious paranoia of post-Reformation clergy. One approach that may mitigate the danger of mislabelling "pagan" practices is to adopt a minimal definition of pagans: unbaptized adults adhering to pre-Christian beliefs and practices, or people who may or may not have been baptized who sacrificed to ancestral gods. The act of sacrifice to a named deity arguably set someone apart as definitively pagan in a way less ambiguous than inhumation practices, for example. Yet even here the definition is not without difficulty, since a minor ritual act such as a libation could be classed as a sacrifice as well as the formal ritual slaughter of an animal—and, as we shall see below, there are questions about what constituted a deity in Baltic belief.[29] This book broadly adopts Ronald Hutton's "minimalist" approach to the category of paganism, defining paganism in contradistinction to Christianity as "the pre-Christian religions of Europe and the Near East," understood as "active worship of the deities associated with those old religious traditions."[30]

Recent scholarship on Baltic paganism has been cautious in accepting contemporary descriptions of pagan beliefs and practices at face value. S. C. Rowell has argued both that Lithuania before 1387 was more Christianized than it seemed, and that the Slavs were less Christianized than they seemed,[31] while Endre Bojtár put forward a pessimistic assessment of the extent to which the reality of Baltic religious belief can be retrieved from Christian sources that are essentially literary in nature.[32] Likewise, Baronas and Rowell evince skepticism regarding the existence of pagan temples and priests in late fourteenth-century Lithuania, arguing that the countryside was inhabited by a mixed population of pagan Lithuanians and more or less Christianized Orthodox Ruthenians; and, while various forms of divination were practised by the Lithuanians, accounts of a pagan temple on the site of Vilnius Cathedral are unreliable, and organized paganism was essentially extinct in Lithuania by 1387. The idea of pagan Lithuania was, rather, a

28 Meltzer, "Reviving the Fairy Tree."

29 Offerings to fairies remained common in the modern Balkans and other parts of southeastern Europe into the twentieth century, for example (Pócs, "Small Gods, Small Demons," 263).

30 Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, viii.

31 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 296–300.

32 Bojtár, *Foreword to the Past*, 278–356.

rhetorical *topos* necessary to establish Władysław's credentials as a Christian monarch; if Lithuania was portrayed as completely pagan it brought more glory to Władysław for converting the nation.[33]

While the evidence base for Baltic paganism in the medieval and early modern periods is greater than for most other non-literate northern European paganisms, it remains a slender body of evidence from which to attempt a reconstruction of Baltic paganism. It is beyond the scope of this book to attempt such a reconstruction; rather, the purpose of this volume is to contextualize the key sources for Baltic pagan religion and their authors (thereby providing a crucial foundation for any future attempts at reconstruction other scholars may wish to undertake). It is worth noting, however, that attempts at reconstruction and systematization based on folkloric material and comparative mythology (such as the work of Norbertas Vėlius, Algirdas Greimas, Jonas Trinkūnas and Gintaras Beresnevičius) are historiographically problematic.[34] The merits of comparative mythology as a methodology continue to be debated,[35] while supplementing medieval and early modern historical evidence for Baltic paganism with folkloric material collected in the nineteenth century (such as the collections of Jonas Basanavičius), on the assumption that it encoded lingering pagan practices, can lead to significant problems of interpretation.

Pre-Christian religion cannot be reliably reconstructed from practices in a Christianized society assumed to derive from pre-Christian religion, since whether practices are deemed "pagan" or not will depend, in most cases, on little more than subjective intuition and personal prejudice. We can no longer speak with the same confidence as Marija Gimbutas of "the [Baltic] folk religion which still lives in folklore in surprisingly pure elements going back to earliest antiquity."[36] The excesses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British folklorists in identifying "pagan survivals," inspired by the writings of Sir James Frazer, provide a cautionary example against these fallacious lines of reasoning,[37] which often involve the enthusiastic exploitation of sources for their content with scant regard for their chronological priority or literary context. The Lithuanian folklore of the nineteenth century is evidence for Lithuanian popular religion in the nineteenth century, but not in the fourteenth.

Similarly, the idea that Baltic religion (by analogy with the remarkably archaic Lithuanian and Samogitian languages) represents a "pure" inheritance of the earliest stratum of belief from a common Indo-European culture is attractive, yet entirely unverifiable. It is an idea that rests on ignoring the possibility that Baltic paganism, like every other religion, was subject to continual and ongoing outside influence and reinvention. In the

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33 Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 266–76.

34 Vėlius, *The World Outlook of the Ancient Balts*; Greimas, *Of Gods and Men*; Trinkūnas, ed., *Of Gods and Holidays*; Beresnevičius, *Lietuvių Religija ir Mitologija*.

35 For discussions of the merits of comparative mythology see Belier, *Decayed Gods*, 15–20, 228–40; Allen, "Debating Dumézil"; Segal, ed., *Structuralism in Myth*; Miller, "Georges Dumézil."

36 Gimbutas, *The Balts*, 204.

37 For a discussion of reading "paganism" back on Christianized societies see Hutton, "How Pagan Were Medieval English Peasants?"

aftermath of conversion, "pagan-seeming" practices can arise in a number of different ways, including complex processes of religious syncretism in popular Christianity, so that assertions of pagan survival can only truly be justified by historical rather than folkloric evidence. As Baronas and Rowell have observed, studies of Baltic mythology, characterized by a "headlong rush to catch glimpses of a lost mythical world," have not been accompanied by much critical analysis of the sources. Instead, they have generally focussed on "holistic" approaches to interpreting a very diverse range of material.[38]

None of this is to say that reconstructing Baltic ancestral beliefs is impossible, but it should be undertaken with the utmost caution. It is easy to forget that we have no account of Baltic paganism from a Baltic pagan, nor even from a former pagan. All of our sources were written by classically educated Christian authors who, even if they did not write for the express purpose of condemning paganism, viewed Baltic religion through the twin lenses of Christian theology and classical literature. At the very least, their views on what constituted the important elements of Baltic religion were influenced by their own faith and education. These authors did not write as dispassionate witnesses but as individuals with political, cultural, and religious agendas; they also wrote in a long tradition of interpretation of northern paganism. Disentangling the reality of Baltic religion from all of this is, evidently, a task of immense difficulty.

The paganism of the Balts was often mentioned in medieval Latin sources such as chronicles, papal letters, treaties, and geographical works. These sources usually describe warfare between Christians and pagans and comment on the unusual beliefs and practices of the Balts, but contain little detail about the deities worshipped by Baltic pagans. Medieval Christian accounts of Baltic religion generally emphasized the Balts' mistaking of the creature for the creator, ridiculed and expressed horror at the Balts' worship of animals, and wondered at Baltic funeral customs (such as the cremation of horses alongside their owners).[39] Christian authors often denied Baltic deities the title of "gods," but as time went on commentators on the Baltic wanted to understand more about Baltic paganism and therefore turned to Greece and Rome. Thus the fifteenth-century Greek chronicler Laonikas Chalkokondylas reported that the Prussians worshipped Apollo and Artemis,[40] adopting a tradition of *interpretatio Romana* (or, in this case, actually *interpretatio Graeca*) whose significance will be further discussed later in this introduction.

The Christianization of the Baltic

Several of the texts in this volume deal with the conversions of Lithuania in 1387 and Samogitia in 1413–1417, and all of them are preoccupied, to a greater or lesser degree, with the extent to which the Lithuanians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could be said to be Christians. The formal moment of "conversion" (signified by elite accept-

38 Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 264.

39 For a comprehensive collection of medieval accounts of Baltic paganism see the first volume of Norbertas Vėlius, ed., *Baltų Religijos ir Mitologijos Šaltiniai* [hereafter *BRMŠ*].

40 *BRMŠ*, 1:541.

ance of Christianity and mass baptisms symbolic of the baptism of an entire nation) should not be confused with the process of Christianization, which in Lithuania was a long-drawn-out process, arguably continuing into the eighteenth century. Many of the texts included in this volume display an ambivalence towards the status of Christianity in the Baltic that is evident in the grammatical tenses used by the authors to describe pagan practices. While the imperfect tense predominates, with the sense of former practices that used to occur, the authors periodically switch to the present tense to describe ongoing pagan rites.[41] Martynas Mažvydas and Jan Łasicki lay a much greater stress on paganism as a present-day reality, but the other authors portray paganism as simultaneously a thing of the past and a feature of the now.

This apparent inconsistency in the portrayal of paganism reflects the rhetorical tensions at play in accounts of Christianization. On the one hand, portraying Christianization as a successful process brought glory to God and emphasized the political integration of the Lithuanians into Christendom; but on the other hand, it was necessary to portray paganism as a recrudescent threat in order to support and motivate continuing efforts to Christianize the nation. Assessing the extent and speed of a society's Christianization at any point in time is very difficult indeed, on account of the tendency of writers concerned about Christianization to exaggerate the surviving "pagan" elements of a society as a rhetorical and evangelistic strategy. Views of what constituted acceptable Christian behaviour changed over time, thereby casting those who failed to meet the required standards at any time as "pagan."[42] Christian literature on the pagan Baltic was often designed to shame Christians into doing more to bring pagans or semi-converted Christians to the fullness of faith. Furthermore, the prominence of outraged records of "pagan" practices in missionary literature such as the letters of the Jesuits can have the effect of concealing the extent of unremarkable religious compliance—which, by definition, was not worth reporting.

Hutton has astutely observed that debates about Christianization (and, by the same token, pagan survivalism) can lead into "endless, and irreconcilable, arguments over the extent of the survival of the essence of a religion when the people who professed it have been formally converted to another."[43] The Baltic region is unusual because the processes of conversion and Christianization happened there centuries later than in most of the rest of Europe, and the military role of the Teutonic Knights made the conversion

41 For example, see Johannes Stüler (Erasmus Stella), *De Borussiae antiquitatibus* (1518), 28–29: "Even now they are still buried in this fashion …" (*Quo more usque nunc sepeliuntur*); Lituanus, *De moribus Tartarorum*, ed. Grasser (1615), 23: "The cult of Aesculapius still very greatly endures in certain places" (*adhuc in quibusdam locis durantibus maxime cultu Aesculapii …*); Alessandro Guagnini, *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* (1581), fol. 60v: "Four miles from Vilnius is the royal village of Lavoriškės, in which many snakes are still worshipped" (*Est etiam quatuor a Vilna miliaribus Lauariiki villa Regia, in qua a multis adhuc serpentes coluntur*); Malecki, *Libellus de sacrificiis et idolatria*, ed. Schmidt-Lötzen, 185: "For many superstitious rites and idolatrous cults are still secretly preserved in these regions" (*Multi enim superstitiosi ritus, idolatricique cultis passim in his regionibus adhuc occulte servantur*).

42 Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania," 53.

43 Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, viii.

of Prussia and Livonia different from that of nations who accepted Christianity under an indigenous leadership. However, in spite of their late date the conversions of Lithuania and Samogitia were not significantly structurally dissimilar from other European conversions, involving a "top-down" conversion of the ruler and the elite followed by the baptism of ordinary people.[44]

The "stages of conversion" identified by the Norwegian scholar Fridjof Birkeli in the 1970s have proved influential in framing interpretation of the Christianization of medieval European societies. Birkeli argued that an "infiltration" phase (in which a pagan society has extensive passive contact with Christianity) is followed by mission, when missionaries actively introduce Christianity and a formal conversion event may occur. The third phase of "institution" involves the erection of diocesan and parochial structures and the establishment of the Christian church as an organization.[45] Timothy Insoll adds a phase of "identification," whereby a population begins to assimilate Christianity into its worldview and to align itself with the new faith, followed by a final displacement of the old religion.[46]

If we take the sources at face value, these stages of identification and displacement seem to have taken a very long time in the Baltic territories. The medieval rulers of Prussia and Estonia faced significant pagan rebellions against their rule and against the Christian faith—most seriously in 1260–1274 in Prussia and in 1343–1345 in Estonia. In Lithuania, the Samogitians reverted to paganism after their first "conversion" in 1413, requiring a "relaunch" of the conversion in 1417 (including the establishment of the bishopric of Medininkai),[47] but the Samogitians rose against Christian Lithuanian rule in 1418 and 1441,[48] on the last occasion led by Daumantas, who has been portrayed as the last Samogitian nobleman to openly espouse paganism.[49] At a local level there is much evidence for the persistence of old customs and a lukewarm attitude towards Catholicism in rural Lithuania in the sixteenth, seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries.[50]

Baronas and Rowell have argued that, while the conversion of Lithuania in 1387 was not inevitable, the decay of Lithuania's pagan official religion was already far advanced, and Christianity was already well entrenched in the Grand Duchy.[51] On this interpretation, a religious vacuum needed filling, and the choice facing Jogaila before his marriage to Jadwiga was not so much whether to convert at all, but whether Lithuania's future lay with the Orthodox or Catholic worlds. Baronas has portrayed the conversion process as the assumption of ever more Christian elements into fourteenth-century Lithuanian

44 For studies of other national conversions in Northern and Eastern Europe see the individual chapters in Carver, ed., *The Cross goes North* and Berend, ed., *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*.

45 For a summary of Birkeli's scheme see Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion*, 15.

46 Insoll, "Introduction" in Insoll, ed., *Archaeology and World Religion*.

47 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 125.

48 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 299.

49 Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania," 70–71.

50 See the primary sources collated by Vytautas Ališauskas in *BRMR*.

51 Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 266.

society, "which gradually combined and won the day,"[52] largely as a result of the lifestyle preferences of individual grand dukes.

In contrast to the late yet incremental (and relatively peaceful) Christianization of Lithuania, in Estonia paganism continued to be a site of resistance to foreign rule well into the seventeenth century. In the 1630s and '40s Lutheran clergy reported that people continued to gather on hilltops for sacrifices and elderly people refused to learn about Christianity, come to church, or receive communion.[53] Some rural Estonians saw Christianity as "an alien form of magic" and ridiculed neighbours who went to church. In many areas, pre-Christian burial mounds remained in use,[54] and as late as 1698 the authorities threatened people with dispersal by cavalry if they did not cease gathering for sacrifices on a hill at Lääne-Nigula.[55] At the same time, however, these Estonian practices were not unconnected with Christianity at this date, with sacrifices sometimes celebrated at chapels and on specific saints' days (although whether Estonians were sacrificing to saints or to traditional gods is sometimes unclear). In both Lithuania and Estonia, Christianization was accompanied by an alien language—German or Danish in Estonia, Polish in ethnic Lithuania—and it is not always easy to disentangle hostility to Christianity from hostility to foreigners.

Popular religion in early modern Estonia comes across as an entirely syncretistic mixed faith, perhaps comparable to Haitian Vodou's syncretism of Yoruba religion and Catholicism.[56] The assumption that what we encounter in accounts of Baltic paganism is "pristine" pagan religion hides from sight the possibility that the Lithuanian religion being described in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources was really a syncretistic faith based partly on badly understood and half-assimilated Christianity. As Baronas has pointed out, the missionary John-Jerome of Prague told lurid tales of Lithuanian paganism but made no mention of baptizing anyone, suggesting the people he encountered had already been formally converted. Furthermore, when a group of women approached Grand Duke Vytautas asking him to put an end to John-Jerome's activities, they complained that cutting down sacred trees was driving God from his abode—suggesting that they now associated holy trees with the Christian deity, or some version of him.[57]

The Christianization debate hinges, ultimately, on how the religion of a people is defined. If that religion is defined from the top down (a people adheres to the religion expected by its ruler) then the Lithuanians were essentially Christian from at least 1417, in spite of any wavering or deviant forms of popular religion. If, however, a people's religion is reconstructed from the evidence for worship "on the ground," a different picture may emerge. Yet while this latter approach may be desirable, since it takes seriously the

52 Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania," 53.

53 Kahk, "Estonia II," 278–79.

54 Kahk, "Estonia II," 280–81.

55 Kahk, "Estonia II," 283.

56 On the Christianization of Estonia see also Valk, "Christianisation in Estonia."

57 Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania," 72–73. Piccolomini's Latin is ambiguous, however, and it is unclear whether he is referring to some god of a polytheistic pantheon or to the Christian God.

actual beliefs of ordinary people, it is questionable whether sufficient evidence survives to attempt a reconstruction of the religious status of a people at any point in time. In the absence of self-conscious articulations of belief of the kind encouraged within Christianity and other monotheistic religions—but often absent from ancestral religions—the essence of the faith and religious beliefs of past people remains frustratingly opaque.

Gods or Spirits?

When it comes to belief systems that are only faintly understood, apparently insignificant choices in vocabulary can have major consequences for the conceptual framework adopted. For example, while many medieval commentators on Baltic religion identified the beings worshipped by the Balts as *numina* ("spirits"), the decision to name these entities as *dii* ("gods") by Jan Łasicki and other authors implicitly invited comparisons between the "gods" of the Balts and the gods known to all educated people in early modern Europe—the deities of ancient Greece and Rome. Combined with the desire to trace the origins of the Lithuanians to Rome (discussed further below), the temptation to discern a "Lithuanian pantheon" became overpowering—even before the rise of Indo-European comparative mythology created yet another motive to link Lithuanian deities with their supposed Greek, Roman, or Indic counterparts.

Norbertas Vėlius believed that medieval accounts of Baltic religion provided sufficient evidence to assert that the Balts had "personified gods, sharing some of them with other Indo-Europeans,"[58] but it is important to remember that the idea of "Indo-Europeans" as a group of people (other than the speakers of languages belonging to the Indo-European language groups) is a contentious construct, and there is no substantive evidence (setting aside hypothetical reconstructions derived from comparative mythology) for the nature of "Indo-European gods" or "Indo-European religion." Algirdas Greimas displayed some caution in this respect, arguing that comparative mythology might be used to identify divine functions but ought not to be used to identify individual gods.[59]

In his commentary on the "Samogitian gods," Łasicki was describing the beliefs of a people that had been formally Christian for almost a century and a half, not an unconverted pagan population untouched by Christian belief. It is possible (though unlikely) that Christianity in Samogitia was in full retreat by the sixteenth century. But it is also possible that Łasicki saw what he wanted to see, taking beliefs in spirits of nature that were current in many Christianized European cultures and treating them as evidence of pagan worship, because Samogitia (as the last well-defined European territory to formally receive Christianity) had a pagan reputation. But Łasicki would have been wrong to assume that whatever pre-Christian beliefs the Samogitians cherished made them pagans, unless we designate as pagans anyone in early modern Europe who held pre-Christian beliefs (such as belief in fairies or other minor spirits of nature) as part of their worldview.

58 *BRMŠ*, 1:74.

59 Greimas, *Of Gods and Men*, 193.

Some of the beings Łasicki described, such as the Kaukai and Barstukai, should probably be placed in the category of what Michael Ostling terms "small gods," tentatively defined as "animistic 'survivals' problematically present within a Christianity that attempts to exclude them."[60] The anthropologist Joel Robbins has pointed to the "ontological preservation" of local spiritual entities within a universalizing Christian framework in post-conversion contexts,[61] and this may be one way of interpreting the evidence of pagan survivals in early modern Prussia and Lithuania. While some Baltic gods seem to have exercised celestial sovereignty—most notably Perkūnas—the gods and goddesses of the earth, of the forests, and of plants and trees described by several of the authors included in this volume are hardly comparable with the deities of the Olympian pantheon. Writing to authorize a crusade in 1199, Pope Innocent III emphasized the Balts' worship of the natural world above their veneration of "unclean spirits,"[62] and Oliver of Paderborn (writing in around 1220) reported that the Livonians, Estonians, and Prussians worshipped "the spirits of the Gentiles" (*numina gentilium*), listing an array of mythical creatures: *Dryades, Amadryades, Oreades, Napeas, Humides [Naides?], Satyros et Faunos*.[63] Thomas of Cantimpré, writing in 1263, identified the forest gods of the Prussians with the Dusii of the Gauls, a group of nature spirits mentioned by Augustine.[64] A minority of medieval authors used the terms *deus* or *dii* for the objects of Baltic worship.

The idea proposed by Lewis Spence in *British Fairy Origins* (1946) that folkloric nature spirits are the remnants of degenerated gods, while not entirely abandoned by folklorists and anthropologists, has generally been succeeded by a greater recognition that "small gods" exist in pagan as well as post-pagan cultures.[65] The near-universal belief in these beings (under many names) across European cultures into the very recent past suggests that "small gods" often played an indispensable role in people's experience of reality in pre-industrial rural societies. Such spirits were not always the recipients of a formal cult, and they therefore survived in popular religion with little difficulty alongside the adoption of Christianity as an overarching framework of spiritual understanding. However, there were moments in the Middle Ages when the "fairy faith" that most ordinary people saw as compatible with a broad commitment to Christianity was elaborated to such an extent that inquisitors perceived it as a challenge to the Christian faith.[66]

Models of conversion and Christianity as the straightforward replacement of one faith by another fail to do justice to the complexity and endurance of popular belief. In a study of Rus'ian folk belief (which coexisted alongside Lithuanian ancestral beliefs in

60 Ostling, "Introduction," 10.

61 Robbins, "Crypto-Religion and the Study of Cultural Mixtures."

62 *BRMŠ*, 1:201.

63 *BRMŠ*, 1:224–25.

64 *BRMŠ*, 1:249. On Augustine's Dusii see Green, *Elf Queens*, 3.

65 Nevertheless, "demotion" of entities from the higher to the lower ranks of spiritual beings still occurs in some converted societies (Ostling, "Introduction," 20–22).

66 Green, *Elf Queens*, 16–18.

the Grand Duchy) Dmitriy Antonov has shown that the Orthodox church elided nature spirits with the realm of the demonic, yet people continued to offer prayers to *Leshii* ("masters of the forest") and *Vodyanye* ("masters of the water") at forest margins and bodies of water. "Vernacular Orthodoxy" increasingly influenced official portrayals of demons in the seventeenth century, who became progressively less spiritual and more fleshly.[67] The persistence of "small gods" in nominally Christian Lithuania can perhaps be discerned in John-Jerome of Prague's report that, even after he had cut down the sacred groves, "lesser groves" (*minores lucos*) still remained where women made offerings.[68]

In recent decades, historians of magic and supernatural belief have emphasized the slow and incremental progress of a Weberian "disenchantment" in early modern and modern Europe, which can no longer be linked unproblematically to any single process—be it Christianization, Reformation, Enlightenment or industrialization.[69] While nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators on popular belief often saw "superstitions" as shadows that vanished instantaneously when the light of education was thrown upon them, the effect of modernity on traditional belief might be better compared with the slow peeling of the layers of an onion, where the outermost layers correspond to abstract assertions about divine sovereignty and the origins of the universe, while the inner layers represent supernatural beliefs associated with the mundane, everyday experiences of rural subsistence common to the majority of early modern Europeans.

The persistence of pagan practices in early modern Lithuania need not be perceived as a rejection of Christianity. A syncretistic response to conversion in late medieval Lithuania is altogether more plausible than the kind of decisive turning away from ancestral belief sometimes portrayed in evangelistic propaganda, and would explain the recrudescence of beliefs and practices deemed unacceptable by the missionaries. Nevertheless, Christianity's association with earthly power and with ultimate accounts of the origin of reality seems to have led, over time, to popular adoption of a broadly Christian framework for understanding the universe—the replacement of the outer layer of the onion, in other words, with abstract presuppositions coloured by Christianity. It may be no accident that the first sermon preached to the Samogitians by the Dominican friar Nicholas Vazik focussed on the creation of the world and the fall of Adam and Eve,[70] suggesting that the priority of conversion was to correct the Samogitians' cosmology and install the Christian God above all.

Yet the installation of the Christian God above all afforded no guarantee against the flourishing of a rich ecosystem of "small gods" at lower levels of the cosmos. A belief in spirits that might have been described as "superstition" (or, at worst, "heresy") in Western Europe was "pagan" if detected in Prussia or Lithuania. But the late Christianization of the Baltic did not necessarily mean there was any greater risk of folk belief

67 Antonov, "Between Fallen Angels and Nature Spirits," 136–39.

68 Piccolomini, *Cosmographia Pii Papae* (1509), fol. 111v.

69 Ostling, "Introduction," 13. For an overview of critical responses to Max Weber's "disenchantment" thesis, see Mishima, "The 'Disenchantment of the World'."

70 Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae* (1711–1712), 1:345–46.

overpowering Christianity there than in Western Europe. In the end, whether we choose to interpret post-conversion Baltic folk religion as full-blown paganism, pagan survivalism, syncretism or an eccentric form of popular Christianity depends on the story we wish to tell about it.

The Reformation and Vernacular Culture

Several of the texts in this volume were influenced by the Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, and their authors wrote in the shadow of the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century even if they did not address them directly in their comments on Baltic paganism and its origins. Martynas Mažvydas's 1547 preface to his Lithuanian catechism (the first book published in the Lithuanian language) is the text in this collection most overtly concerned with evangelism, but both the Maleckis' *Libellus* and Łasicki's *De diis Samagitarum* bear the hallmarks of Protestant preoccupation with unacceptable popular beliefs and practices.

The tide of religious reform overtook the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at a time when the Christianization of the Lithuanians and Samogitians was still an ongoing process. For Protestants such as Hieronim Malecki, the Catholics' failure to stamp out paganism in the decades since the Teutonic Order's conquest of Prussia and the conversion of Lithuania was evidence of the inadequacy of Catholicism as an idolatrous parody of the true Christian faith, little better than paganism itself. The Protestant tendency to accuse Catholics and Orthodox Christians of being pagans makes it difficult to distinguish those who may actually have been pagans from those whose Christianity was deemed unacceptable. The Calvinist Łasicki, for example, directly attacked the faith of the Orthodox Ruthenians as idolatrous in his treatise on the gods of the Samogitians, making clear his belief that Ruthenians simply worshipped pagan gods under the guise of saints.[71]

The equation of Catholicism (and Orthodoxy) with paganism was a central plank of Reformation polemic against the Catholic church,[72] but it depended on the earlier critique of the Catholic humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536). In colloquys such as *The Shipwreck* (where mariners in a storm in the English Channel debate who they should invoke), Erasmus inveighed against mercenary, mechanical, and self-serving late medieval religion, although he stopped short of the later Protestant claim that saints were nothing more than reconditioned pagan gods.[73] While a discourse of unacceptable religious practice as superstition stretched far back into Christian antiquity, Erasmus "broadened the literary critique of popular religious practices outwards from the obviously and profanely magical to include the most materialistic and apparently 'mechanical' cults found in traditional religion."[74] Erasmus extended the meaning of "superstition"—a term usually applied quite narrowly to magical practices in the Middle Ages—to cover a very flexible range of deviant and unacceptable religiosity.

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71 Łasicki, *De diis Samagitarum* (1615), 51–53.

72 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 208–10.

73 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 151.

74 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 155.

Erasmus enjoyed immense popularity in Poland-Lithuania during his lifetime—to a greater extent, perhaps, than in any other country.[75] For Protestants, the fact that Erasmus was a Catholic gave them a rhetorical advantage, since it showed that even some Catholics agreed with them about the parlous state of Catholic popular religion. Thus Łasicki was able to quote the *Shipwreck* of Erasmus, "not at all a Lutheran," with approval.[76] However, Łasicki also quoted the Reformer Heinrich Bullinger, who took Erasmus's thought a stage further and openly denounced the saints as substitutes for gods.[77] One of the more skeptical interpreters of Łasicki dismissed *De diis Samagitarum* as not directed against paganism at all; the book was simply an attack on Catholicism and Orthodoxy as religions derived from paganism.[78]

It is certainly true that a paranoid Reformation theology sometimes saw pagans around every corner, but one of the paradoxes of the Reformation was that Protestantism actually drove renewed interest in folk culture. Where the medieval church had interacted with the people largely through the medium of more or less tolerated forms of popular religion, the reformers were adamant that the people would interact directly with the Bible as the Word of God—and that required the translation of the Bible and catechetical texts into vernacular languages, including Prussian and Lithuanian. This task was facilitated by Königsberg's Albertina, the centre of Protestant learning in the Baltic. Translations of Lutheran catechisms into Prussian were printed at Königsberg [Kaliningrad] in 1540, 1545, and 1561,[79] and the Lithuanian catechism of Mažvydas (whose Latin preface is translated in this volume) was printed in 1547.

The Reformation simultaneously attacked vernacular popular religion as idolatrous paganism and precipitated a revival of interest in the cultures and languages of hitherto marginalized nationalities. Dorothy Noyes has argued that, even before the Reformation, Renaissance interest in "popular antiquities" such as folk beliefs and customs emerged from interest in vernacular languages.[80] Communicating with people in their own language entailed encountering their conceptual world, just as Władysław II managed to communicate the Christian faith in a form they could understand to the Lithuanians and Samogitians. Conversely, Łasicki's *De diis Samagitarum* reveals the perils of trying to understand a conceptual world in the absence of proper knowledge of a people's language.

The Counter-Reformation in Lithuania, led by the Jesuits, portrayed the confusion sown by Calvinist and Lutheran missionaries as the cause of a resurgence of paganism.[81] Whether such a resurgence was real is unclear, but the same factors that enabled the spread of Protestantism in mid-sixteenth-century Lithuania could also have allowed the

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75 On Poland's love affair with Erasmus see Louthan, "A Model of Christendom."

76 Łasicki, *De diis Samagitarum* (1615), 53.

77 Łasicki, *De diis Samagitarum* (1615), 52.

78 Jaskiewicz, "A Study in Lithuanian Mythology," 65.

79 Klussis, ed., *Old Prussian Written Monuments*, 8–9.

80 Noyes, "The Social Base of Folklore," 16.

81 Rostowski, *Lituanicarum Societatis Iesu historiarum*, 118.

reappearance of pre-Christian practices—namely the weakness of church structures in Lithuania, the large size of dioceses, and the lack of many clergy who spoke the Lithuanian language. It seems unlikely that the Reformation increased the speed of Lithuania's Christianization—it may even have slowed it down—but the Reformation played a crucial role in the appearance of Lithuanian at long last as a written language (and therefore, in the long run, to the awakening of Lithuanian national identity).

Early Modern Ethnography

In addition to describing the religion of the Baltic peoples, the texts in this volume are concerned with their origin and customs—in other words, with ethnography. The ancient Greek writer Herodotus, often considered the "father of history," was also an ethnographer who was interested in the customs, location, and character of alien peoples. Herodotus inaugurated a classical ethnographic tradition that persisted into the Middle Ages, albeit overlaid with new Christian evangelistic imperatives. Recent scholarship has challenged an older view of medieval Europe as insular and uninterested in foreign peoples, and drawn attention to a rich ethnographic tradition.[82] Above all, what made a people alien to medieval Christians was the absence of the Christian faith, or even a faith familiar to the medieval Christian world such as Judaism or Islam. The religion of a pagan people was a key element of any ethnographic description, to the extent that ethnography cannot be meaningfully separated from medieval discussions of "barbarian" paganism.

Paganism (or any kind of infidelism) rendered foreigners monstrous to Christian eyes, and medieval Lithuanians were sometimes portrayed as *cynocephali* (dog-headed people).[83] Baltic peoples did not live as far away from the civilized world as the peoples of the New World encountered at the close of the fifteenth century—and their customs were not as radically different—but they nevertheless lived in regions unknown to the authors of antiquity, and therefore encounters with Lithuanian paganism raised similar questions about the relationship between textual authority and empirical experience.[84] When Enea Silvio Piccolomini first heard the missionary John-Jerome of Prague describe the religion of the Lithuanians at Basel he was incredulous, and felt the need to seek out the old man to hear his story again.[85] The rediscovery and printing of Tacitus's *Germania* in the 1470s, one of the most important ethnographical texts of the Roman world, introduced a richer language for talking about the customs of non-literate "barbarian"

82 On ancient ethnography see Almagor and Skinner, eds., *Ancient Ethnography*. On medieval ethnography see Classen, ed., *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*; Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word*.

83 Rowell, "Unexpected Contacts," 558–59. On the portrayal of foreign peoples as monsters see Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 14–15.

84 On the epistemological tensions thrown up by fifteenth-century encounters with the other see Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 23–24.

85 Piccolomini, *Cosmographia Pii Papae* (1509), fol. 110r.

peoples.[86] It seems likely that John-Jerome's account would have been more plausible to Piccolomini if the latter had had the opportunity to read the *Germania*.

While paganism was of course abhorrent to Christian writers, the Christian world faced the paradox that, in order to eradicate idolatry, pagans had to be brought to faith, and that required a recognition of their capacity for rationality—which in turn implied that some degree of rationality subsisted within pagan religion in the first place.[87] Medieval Christian horror at paganism was tempered by curiosity, and even admiration. The "virtuous pagan" narrative of Sir John Mandeville, for example, acted as a mirror to the vices of European Christians by showing that even those who did not know Christ could behave better than they did.[88] Similarly, Rowell has argued that Peter of Dusburg's elaborate fictitious account of a Baltic religion led by a "pope" in a pagan "Rome" was a literary device designed to shame Christians.[89]

As European Christians increasingly came into contact with adherents of ancestral religions in the fourteenth century—such as the Mongols and the Guanches of the Canary Islands—a strand of sympathetic commentary on paganism developed.[90] When Portuguese sailors found an idol on the Canary Islands in 1341 they brought it back to Lisbon as a curiosity, while the Christianized Guanches were encouraged to venerate the Virgin Mary where once they had worshipped idols.[91] The Franciscans of Vilnius seem to have had a similar attitude, keeping an idol of Perkūnas in their dormitory as a trophy of the conversion of Lithuania for centuries thereafter.[92] In the sixteenth century, the proto-ethnographer Sebastian Münster, who briefly surveyed the pagans of the Baltic,[93] was prepared to regard pagans in a sympathetic light "who conducted themselves with simple virtue" and had never heard the Gospel preached.[94]

This rather relaxed attitude towards the conversion of pagans may have owed something to a perception that peoples at the European margins such as the Lithuanians and Guanches of Gran Canaria were unthreatening "pagan remnants" to be assimilated into European Christianity. The pagan peoples of the New World, on the other hand, represented a threatening and apocalyptic prospect whose conversion signalled the likely end of the world.[95] Yet the fourteenth-century pagan Lithuanians, the masters of a great European empire who were in possession of cannon by the 1380s, were hardly the unthreat-

86 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 42.

87 Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word*, 29; Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 32–33.

88 Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word*, 113–44.

89 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 125–28.

90 Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World*, 12. On Christian encounters with Mongolia see Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word*, 57–87.

91 Young, *A History of Exorcism*, 142.

92 *BRMR*, 438.

93 Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographiae universalis* (1554), 906.

94 McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster*, 194.

95 Weber, "Conquistadores of the Spirit," 129.

ening Guanches of Gran Canaria.[96] They were, rather, the "Saracens of the north," and the implacable opponents of a centuries-long crusade.[97] Nevertheless, the accession to the Polish throne of a recently pagan king still ruling over a largely pagan people produced an unusual set of circumstances where Polish intellectuals had a motive to defend the rights of pagans—most notably Paweł Włodkowic (Paulus Vladimiri), who in 1410 advanced a strikingly bold argument for the sovereignty of pagan peoples in the context of Władysław II's struggle to regain Samogitia from the Teutonic Order.[98]

Along with Władysław's political agenda against the Teutonic Knights, the seemingly inexplicable rise of the Ottoman Turks in Asia Minor (leading eventually to the traumatic fall of Constantinople in 1453) led medieval Christians to become increasingly fascinated by non-Christians.[99] Margaret Meserve has argued that authors such as Piccolomini displayed a "compulsion to look to the past in order to make sense of a messy and disturbing present."[100] The sudden arrival of the Turks exposed the ethnically fluid character of the Eurasian steppe, and fuelled a renewed interest in the Scythians, Sarmatians, Cimbrians, and other peoples mentioned by classical authors.[101] While their scholarship was often not as original as humanist authors claimed,[102] the humanist historians of the fifteenth century were asking new questions and developing a new historiography. Meserve identified four characteristics of the "historiographical revolution" of the fifteenth century: adherence to classical models of history writing; skepticism towards earlier authorities; a strong interest in rhetoric (including the use of history for rhetorical purposes); and an approach to historical causation that eschewed overt religious claims such as a reliance on divine providence.[103]

"Secular" humanist historiography presented historians with the problem that they were less able to critique infidel religion—whether Islam, Judaism, or paganism.[104] Yet unlike the threatening Islam of the Ottomans, the paganism of the Lithuanians had been politically neutralized (albeit not eradicated) by the time humanist historians came to write about it. The imperative for writers such as Jan Długosz was to explain to Poles and other Christian Europeans who the Lithuanians were, since this formerly pagan and "barbarian" people had been suddenly thrust to the centre of European affairs with the marriage of Jogaila to Jadwiga and the extraordinary success of the Jagiellonian dynasty. Lithuania could no longer be without a history—and therefore its religion and customs were crucial for understanding its origins, and no longer primarily objects of Christian opprobrium.

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96 Kaushik, *Military Transition in Early Modern Asia*, 20.

97 On western European perceptions of Lithuanians see Murray, "The Saracens of the Baltic."

98 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 123–24.

99 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 3.

100 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 2.

101 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 152–53.

102 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 4.

103 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 8.

104 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 9.

Cultural interest in Lithuania that went beyond an agenda of converting the Lithuanians to the Christian faith was not entirely new in the fifteenth century.[105] Rowell has argued that there was already a vogue for Lithuanian "pagan chic" at western European royal courts in the fourteenth century.[106] In his personal copy of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Petrarch (1304–1374) annotated the line "they stood and made a treaty over the slaughtered pig" with a reference to a treaty sworn between the Lithuanians and Hungarians in 1351, when Gediminas's son Kęstutis slaughtered an ox, cut off its head, and walked three times through the blood between the animal's body and severed head while pronouncing a ritual formula.[107] While many Christians in medieval Europe might have dismissed Kęstutis's ritual as nothing more than pagan barbarism, Petrarch drew on a tradition that saw all paganism as essentially the same, meaning that the practices of contemporary Lithuanians could elucidate the *Aeneid*, at the time perhaps the single most valued literary product of the Graeco-Roman world.

Fifteenth-century ethnography was dominated by "The idea of nations as homogenetic groups, each enjoying direct and unbroken descent from a primordial race of founding fathers and marked by inborn and unchanging traits of character," and early ethnographical accounts of Lithuanians were no different.[108] Rather than the *Germania* of Tacitus, however, Jakub Niedźwiedź has shown that the most important ancient literary influence on portrayals of Lithuania was Virgil's *Aeneid*.[109] It was Długosz who first claimed that the Lithuanians were the descendants of Romans fleeing the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, a narrative of flight and settlement recalling the flight of Aeneas from Troy. The name "Lithuania," according to Długosz, was a corruption of "Lithalia," from "La Italia."[110] While Buonacorssi was critical of the Italian hypothesis, linking the Lithuanians instead to the Bosphorus and comparing their rites to those of the Gauls, subsequent authors enthusiastically elaborated the "Virgilian" Roman origin myth.[111] Michalo the Lithuanian, most notably, argued that the Lithuanians were descended from Roman soldiers lost at sea during Caesar's departure from Britain, along with their British captives—an idea also taken up by Łasicki.[112]

Meanwhile, in the Ruthenian chronicle tradition the name Palemon was given to a mythical leader of the Romans who colonized Lithuania in the principate of Nero, although the imaginary Palemon did not make his way into Latin writings on Lithuania until Alessandro Guagnini.[113] Christine Watson has argued that Długosz probably docu-

105 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 32–33.

106 Rowell, "Unexpected Contacts," 557–77.

107 Virgil, *Aeneid*, bk. 8, line 641: "stabant et caesa iungebant foedera porca." On Petrarch's annotation see Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 145n128.

108 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 243.

109 Niedźwiedź, "How Did Virgil Help Forge Lithuanian Identity," 36–40.

110 Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae* (1711–1712), 1:113.

111 Buonaccorsi, *Vita et mores Sbignei cardinalis*, ed. Finkel, 28.

112 Lituanus, *De moribus Tartarorum*, ed. Grasser (1615), 24; Łasicki, *De diis Samagitarum* (1615), 43.

113 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 41; Watson, *Tradition and Translation*, 42–43; Guagnini, *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* (1581), fol. 45r.

mented a story that was genuinely current at the time, since he did not usually display a great deal of interest in Lithuania.[114] In Robert Frost's view the second recension of the *Chronicle of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Samogitia*, where Palemon made his first appearance, was compiled between 1510 and 1517, partly in response to a Polish historiographical tradition that portrayed the Lithuanians as barbarous, and partly to match Muscovite claims of Roman ancestry.[115] In 1555 Martin Kromer identified the Palemon of the Ruthenian chronicles with a certain Publius Libo.[116]

Frost has argued that Albertas Goštautas (ca. 1480–1522), grand chancellor of Lithuania from 1522, was responsible for an alternative Lithuanian origin myth in the Bychowiec Chronicle (ca. 1525). In this narrative, five hundred families accompanied a Roman prince, Apolonus, to Lithuania in order to escape Attila the Hun's depredations in Italy. The Bychowiec Chronicle was specifically designed to counter Maciej z Miechowa's portrayal of Lithuania as a subordinate partner in a personal union with Poland, and presented Poland and Lithuania as equals. Długosz was a protégé of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki (1389–1455) whose agenda for Lithuania was the assimilation of the Grand Duchy in an unequal union with Poland, [117] and subsequent authors in the "Dlugossian" tradition, such as Buonacorssi and Miechowa, reflected this attitude.

There was a tension in the writings of Polish authors like Długosz and Miechowa between a nationalistic desire to portray the Lithuanians as barbarians brought to civilization by the Polish nation and the need to give an illustrious history to the land that produced the Jagiellonian dynasty. Lithuanian religion was generally treated as evidence of the Lithuanians' Roman origin. With the exception of Buonacorssi, who thought Lithuanian religion resembled Gaulish Druidism,[118] ethnographic commentators linked Lithuanian worship to Roman religion, comparing the cult of snakes to the worship of Aesculapius and the perpetual fire to the flame guarded by the Vestal Virgins.[119] However barbarian the Lithuanians were said to be, seeking to understand Lithuanian religion through the lens of Roman paganism was still a world away from the ecclesiastical denunciations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In addition to the supposed similarity between Lithuanian and Roman rites, according to some authors the Roman origin of the Lithuanians was also proved by the similarity of the Lithuanian language to Latin.[120] Michalo was the most vocal advocate of Lithuanian as a "semi-Latin speech,"[121] at a time when some Lithuanians were so convinced

114 Watson, *Tradition and Translation*, 42.

115 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 413–14.

116 Kromer, *De origine et rebus gestis Polonorum* (1555), 61.

117 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 414–15.

118 Buonaccorsi, *Vita et mores Sbignei cardinalis*, ed. Finkel, 28.

119 Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae* (1711–1712), 1:113; Lituanus, *De moribus Tartarorum*, ed. Grasser (1615), 23; Malecki, *Libellus de sacrificiis et idolatria*, ed. Schmidt-Lötzen, 187.

120 Długosz, *Historiae Polonicae* (1711–1712), 1:113; Miechowa, *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* (1518), sig. (e vr); Guagnini, *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* (1581), fol. 45r; Łasicki, *De diis Samagitarum* (1615), 43.

121 Lituanus, *De moribus Tartarorum*, ed. Grasser (1615), 23–24.

Lithuanian was a degraded form of Latin that they argued Latin should be adopted as the Grand Duchy's official language.[122] Just as the development of Renaissance ethnography allowed new questions to be asked about the origins of peoples hitherto without a history, so the development of Renaissance linguistics and emerging awareness of vernaculars allowed new questions to be asked about hitherto overlooked languages such as Lithuanian.[123] As it turned out, the Lithuanian Latinizers were wrong about the relationship between Lithuanian and Latin, but their recognition of the similarities between two Indo-European languages laid the foundation for the later exploration of Lithuanian as an archaic representative of the Indo-European family.[124]

Interpretative Traditions: *interpretatio Christiana* and *interpretatio Romana*

The two hermeneutical pillars of late medieval and early modern religious ethnography were the traditions of *interpretatio Christiana* and *interpretatio Romana*, the former stretching back to the Church Fathers of late antiquity while the latter can be traced even further into the writings of classical authors. While *interpretatio Christiana* furnished a framework for Christians to understand paganism, *interpretatio Romana* provided the resources to understand alien, barbarian religion by assimilating it to the well-understood Graeco-Roman pantheon. While *paganus* was a word derived from early Christian anti-pagan polemic, and *gentilis* (Gentile) derived from Scripture, the word *superstitio* (superstition) derived from *interpretatio Romana*. In ancient Rome, *superstitio* signified unacceptable or barbarian religious and magical practices, but the early Christians adopted the word to refer to paganism as well as unsanctioned popular beliefs and practices among Christians.[125] All three terms were deployed to describe Baltic pagans.

While many of the Church Fathers wrote about paganism, it was above all Augustine of Hippo (354–430) who established the conceptual parameters for *interpretatio Christiana* recognized by the authors included in this volume.[126] Within a medieval Christian worldview, where Scholastic theologians proclaimed that the reality of God was evident from nature, the existence of pagan "error" required an explanation. Building on St. Paul's denunciation of the foolishness of pagans for worshipping "an image made like to corruptible man, and … birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:22–25), as well as many other Biblical condemnations of idolatry, early Christian authors portrayed paganism as a consequence of both the fall of human beings and

122 On sixteenth-century Lithuanian Latinism see Zinkevičius, *The History of the Lithuanian Language*, 73; Dini, *Prelude to Baltic Linguistics*, 45–82; Narbutas, "Latinitas in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania"; Young, "Lingua semilatina."

123 For an overview of early modern linguistics see Lepschy, ed., *History of Linguistics, Volume III*.

124 Zinkevičius, *The History of the Lithuanian Language*, 277–79.

125 On the meaning of *superstitio* in ancient Rome see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:215–19. On changing definitions of *superstitio* in medieval Europe see Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 4–7.

126 On Augustine's views on paganism and *superstitio* see Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 81–84.

demonic deceit, since demons tricked humans into worshipping them under the guise of gods. Even when the authors in this volume did not directly quote Augustine, his thinking permeates their approach to paganism. For instance, Jan Łasicki's ever-lengthening list of Samogitian deities with ever more specialist tasks can be traced back to a well-known example of anti-pagan rhetoric in Augustine's *City of God* (4.9), where Augustine mocks the proliferation of Roman deities presiding over every aspect of agriculture, and even over the doors of houses—such as Forculus the god of doors, Cardea the goddess of hinges, and Limentinus the god of threshholds.[127]

Christian authors who wrote on Baltic paganism were convinced that the Prussians and Lithuanians worshipped demons who actively deceived their devotees. This explained the Balts' fear of extinguishing perpetual fires or profaning sacred groves. John-Jerome of Prague gave Piccolomini a vivid description of how he believed a demon had deceived the people by an illusion in which a man trying to cut down a sacred tree seemed to have struck and injured himself.[128] On the other hand, the confidence with which John-Jerome and, indeed, the Polish soldiers of Władysław II cut down the sacred groves suggests they believed the demons had no power to harm Christians. This was consistent with an early Christian tradition that viewed demonic power primarily as deceit, in contrast to the more fearful attitude to the demonic that developed from the early fourteenth century onwards (which emphasized the reality of demonic power and demons' collaboration with sects of sorcerers).[129]

If *interpretatio Christiana* established that pagans were deluded worshippers of demons, *interpretatio Romana* assimilated alien barbarian religions to the familiar pagan religion of Greece and Rome. Authors routinely identified the thunder god Perkūnas with Jupiter, compared the Baltic worship of snakes with the cult of Aesculapius, and used terms such as *lares* and *penates* (the Roman household and domestic gods) to describe household spirits. Similarly, Malecki and Łasicki directly identified the Baltic festival of communing with the dead, Ilgės or Vėlinės, with the Roman Parentalia.

Perhaps the most famous (or notorious) exponents of *interpretatio Romana* in the Roman world were Julius Caesar in his accounts of Gaul and Britain and Tacitus in his account of Germanic tribes. Caesar and Tacitus presumed that the "pantheons" of barbarians could usually be slotted into the Roman pantheon, with barbarian gods taking on the classic functions of deities such as Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, and Ceres. So great was Caesar's confidence in his interpretation that he did not even bother to record the names of the deities of the Gauls and Britons—leaving scholars to guess at the correct identification of Gaulish Mercury, for example.[130] Comparative mythology has the potential to do much the same as *interpretatio Romana*, deploying a kind of *interpretatio Indoeuropeana* that forces the fragmentary mythology of every Indo-European culture into patterns derived from well-attested textual traditions from India, Iran, Greece, and Rome.

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127 Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Dyson, 153.

128 Piccolomini, *Cosmographia Pii Papae* (1509), fol. 110v.

129 Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, 22–27.

130 On *interpretatio Romana* see Ando, "Interpretatio Romana."

The attempt to understand a culture by assimilating it to the familiar patterns of another, whether by *interpretatio Romana* or the slightly more sophisticated process of *interpretatio Indoeuropeana*, rests on large assumptions about the similarity of cultures and ignores the possibility that one ancestral religion might differ very greatly from another in form as well as in substance. Classicizing assumptions, such as the existence of an Olympian-style pantheon led by a thunder god and gendered deities with distinct personalities and functions, risk obscuring the distinctiveness of indigenous belief systems and determining subsequent patterns of research. The listing of gods in Łasicki's *De diis Samagitarum*, along with their supposed functions, is an approach rooted in *interpretatio Romana* and presupposes a single religion shared by the Samogitians with a uniform texture and an established pantheon. By contrast, John-Jerome of Prague portrayed Lithuanian cults as highly localized, with one people group worshipping snakes and another the Sun. The shift from John-Jerome's emphasis on worship of natural phenomena to Łasicki's complex pantheon is a striking one that has no adequate explanation, although the influence of *interpretatio Romana* and Łasicki's possible confusion between senior gods and local nature spirits may partly account for it.

W. C. Jaskiewicz, one of the more extreme skeptics about the possibility of reconstructing Baltic religion, argued that Łasicki or his informant essentially made up the content of *De diis Samagitarum*—even arguing there was insufficient evidence the Lithuanians ever worshipped snakes,[131] a practice alluded to in virtually every later medieval and early modern account of Lithuanian religion. Decades before Jaskiewicz had produced his withering assessment of Łasicki, however, Christian Krollmann had already argued persuasively for the improbability of Simon Grunau simply making up a list of Prussian gods to match a Nordic scheme—a proposition that, in Gregory Nagy's words, "strains credulity."[132] Although Endre Bojtár continued to uphold the view that Grunau invented the Prussian pantheon entirely,[133] there is a point when a skeptical position, taken to extremes, becomes less plausible than the shaky hypotheses it originally set out to challenge.

The most recent commentator on Łasicki, Vytautas Ališauskas, is adamant that Łasicki must be considered an unreliable source, because he writes with a specific polemical purpose and wants to surprise and entertain his readers.[134] Furthermore, neither Łasicki nor his informants knew the Lithuanian language; nor did they know the country they were living in very well.[135] Łasicki lists "an incredible number of deities," many of them not attested in other sources, while some of Łasicki's theonyms are not really the names of gods at all, but rather place names or the names of things.[136] Łasicki

131 Jaskiewicz, "A Study in Lithuanian Mythology," 105.

132 Krollmann, *Das Religionswesen der alten Preußen*, 14–17; Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, 184n21.

133 Bojtár, *Foreword to the Past*, 314–15.

134 Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas, 23–29.

135 Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas, 29–40.

136 Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas, 40–47.

did not properly understand the material he was collecting, and he therefore misidentified deified forces of nature as personal beings, turned spirits into gods, and did not know the functions of mythological beings.[137]

Nevertheless, in spite of all these flaws, Ališauskas insists that by paying careful attention to correspondences with other sources for Balto-Slavic mythology, the Samogitian gods can be reconstructed (albeit tentatively) from Łasicki's text. Correspondences between Łasicki's material and later records of folklore, ritual, and belief are sufficient argument, in Ališauskas's view, against skeptics who deny the authenticity of Łasicki's gods altogether.[138] Understanding the literary and rhetorical context of texts like Łasicki's *De diis Samagitarum* is a crucial precondition of any attempt to separate genuine ethnographic information from a soup of rhetorical *topoi*, religious polemic and inherited stereotypes.

The Texts

The texts translated in this volume are Latin accounts by authors educated within the humanist milieu of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who were, for a variety of different reasons, interested in the origins and religious beliefs and practices of the Baltic peoples of Prussia and Lithuania. Five of the authors were Polish (Jan Długosz, Maciej z Miechowa, Jan and Hieronim Malecki, and Jan Łasicki), three Italian (Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Filippo Buonacorssi, and Alessandro Guagnini), two Lithuanian (Martynas Mažvydas and the mysterious "Michalo the Lithuanian"), and one German (Johannes Stüler). What united these disparate authors was the language they wrote in: Latin, western Christendom's universal language of learning—which several of them also believed was the ancient language of Lithuania itself. The writings of Simon Grunau (ca. 1470–ca. 1530) and Maciej Stryjkowski (ca. 1547–ca. 1593), authors of the period who wrote about Baltic paganism in German and Polish respectively,[139] are not included in this edition, which focusses on Latin texts that had the potential to be read widely in the transnational intellectual culture of early modern humanism.

Just as the authors included in this volume were diverse in nationality, so they wrote in a variety of genres. The extracts from Długosz, Miechowa, and Guagnini are digressions discussing ethnography and religion within annalistic histories. Piccolomini's account of his interview with a former missionary to Lithuania takes the form of autobiographical personal reminiscence, while Buonacorssi included an ethnographic digression in a work of biography. Stüler's account of Prussian paganism is an aside in a larger work on Prussian history, while Mažvydas's preface is evangelistic and exhortatory. Michalo, meanwhile, was writing political and social polemic. Only the works by

137 Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas, 72–80.

138 Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas, 47.

139 Simon Grunau, *Preussische Chronik*, ed. Perlbach; Maciej Stryjkowski, *Kronika Polska*. For discussions of Grunau's and Stryjkowski's accounts of Baltic paganism see Beresnevičius, "Rickoyotto šventykla"; Usačiovaitė, "Motiejus Strijkovskis apie lietuvių pagonybę." On Stryjkowski's reliance on Malecki's *Libellus* see Pompeo, "Etnografia umanistica," 64.

Malecki and Łasicki were focussed exclusively on Baltic religion. In several cases the works of these authors were published decades after the authors first wrote, with the result that the religious and cultural landscape of the era of publication bore little relation to the circumstances in which the author originally wrote. This temporal distortion no doubt contributed to the confusion of some early modern writers about the extent to which the Lithuanians and Samogitians had been converted or were still pagans.

Not every chronicler of Lithuanian history displayed an interest in the religion of the Lithuanians. Augustine Rotundus, the chronicler of the grand dukes of Lithuania, declined to describe the conversion of Lithuania in his "Summary of the princes of Lithuania" (1576) because it was adequately dealt with by Polish chroniclers,[140] while Stanisław Sarnicki similar skimmed over the conversion of Lithuania and did not even mention the conversion of Samogitia in his *Annales* (1587).[141] My selection of texts for inclusion in this volume was largely determined by their authors' level of interest in Baltic religion, the origins of the Baltic peoples, and the Christianization of the pagan Balts. Chroniclers with little interest in these matters are excluded. Furthermore, with the exception of the Maleckis' *Libellus* and Łasicki's *De diis Samagitarum* (which are given in full), the texts presented here are extracts from larger works.

In all cases, these translations are the first time the texts have appeared in English.[142] When English-speaking scholarship has paid attention to Baltic paganism in Prussia and Livonia, it has generally been as part of studies of the Northern Crusades.[143] S. C. Rowell (latterly in collaboration with Darius Baronas) has focussed specifically on the history of medieval pagan Lithuania,[144] but interest in the early modern sources for Baltic paganism has hitherto been confined largely to Lithuanian-language scholarship. In particular, the work of Norbertas Vėlius, Vytautas Ališauskas, and Pranas Vildžiūnas in comprehensively collating and interpreting the medieval and early modern sources for Baltic religion and translating them into Lithuanian stands out as an immense achievement.[145]

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140 Augustine Rotundus, *Epitome principum Lituaniae*, ed. Jakubowski, 102.

141 Stanisław Sarnicki, *Annales* (1587), 337–38.

142 A comprehensive collection of Lithuanian translations of sixteenth-century texts about Baltic religion and mythology can be found in the second volume of *BRMŠ*. The sole English translation of Jan Długosz is a translation from an abridged Polish edition, not from the original Latin (*The Annals of Jan Długosz*, trans. Michael). One Latin text featuring ethnographical and religious commentary on the Lithuanians that has recently appeared in translation is Nicolaus Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison*, ed. Booth; for that reason Hussovianus is not included in this volume.

143 Recent studies on the Northern Crusades include Murray, ed., *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic*; Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades*; Murray, ed., *The Clash of Cultures*; Tamm, Kaljundi, and Jensen, eds., *Crusading and Chronicle Writing on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*; Gładysz, *The Forgotten Crusaders*; Pluskowski, *The Archaeology of the Prussian Crusade*; Selart, *Livonia, Rus' and the Baltic Crusades*; Reynold, *The Prehistory of the Crusades*; Mänd and Tamm, eds., *Making Livonia*.

144 Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 118–48, 189–228; Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*.

145 See the four volumes of *BRMŠ*; *BRMR*; Łasicki, *Pasakojimas apie Žemaičių Dievus*, ed. Ališauskas; Ališauskas and Vildžiūnas, *Dingęs Šventybės Pasaulis*.

The texts in this volume are not isolated documents, but rather the chief representatives of a textual tradition of ethnographic and historical commentary on Baltic peoples and their religion that began in the fifteenth century. While it is not altogether clear whether Enea Silvio Piccolomini wrote his reminiscences of a meeting with a former missionary to Lithuania before Długosz wrote his accounts of the conversions of Lithuania and Samogitia, it seems likely that the future Pope Pius II's recollections mark the beginning of humanist historiography's engagement with Baltic culture.[146] Piccolomini's account of the Lithuanians in his *Cosmographia* subsequently found its way (largely unaltered) into Marcus Antonius Sabellicus's *Enneades* (1498),[147] but although it contains similar elements (such as the emphasis on the worship of snakes and fire), it is not obvious that Długosz's "annalistic" account of Lithuanian religion was derived from Piccolomini.

Ališauskas declined to include Długosz's accounts of Lithuanian paganism in his collection of sources for Baltic mythology on the grounds that they were "retrospective or reconstructive presentations of the old religion" written after the conversion,[148] while Frost is critical of Długosz's reliability as a historian owing to Długosz's dislike of the "foreign" Jagiellonian dynasty ruling his native Poland.[149] However, it is unclear how a "reconstructive" account of Lithuanian paganism can be distinguished from an account based on firsthand testimonies at this early date, when it is likely almost all of the practices described by Długosz were still part of life in barely Christianized Lithuania and Samogitia. In Długosz's favour, the content and themes of his account of Lithuanian religion correlate closely with Piccolomini's, in the absence of indications that Długosz knew of or borrowed from Piccolomini's recollections of the missionary memoirs of John-Jerome of Prague—suggesting both men relied on different sources reporting the same genuine religion.

Unlike Piccolomini, Długosz never specified the source of his information on Lithuanian paganism, and Baronas and Rowell are skeptical that, writing around eighty years after the events he described, Długosz could have had a living informant.[150] It does not follow from this, however, that Długosz simply made everything up. The broad consistency between Długosz's account and Piccolomini's has already been noted, and while no living person may have remembered the events of 1387 by 1455 (when Długosz began his chronicle), the final conversion of Samogitia had occurred less than forty years earlier. Lithuanians routinely attended the university in Kraków after 1387,[151] and many would surely have heard stories about the ongoing pagan practices of their countrymen.

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146 On John-Jerome of Prague see Hyland, "John-Jerome of Prague"; Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 309–15.

147 *BRMŠ*, 1:607–8.

148 *BRMR*, 9.

149 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 75. On Długosz's dislike of the Jagiellonians see Koczerska, "L'amour de la patrie et l'aversion pour la dynastie," 171–80.

150 Baronas and Rowell, *The Conversion of Lithuania*, 272–73.

151 Frost, *Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 318.

Although Długosz's chronicles remained unpublished until the early eighteenth century, his account would prove very influential, and parts of it were copied almost verbatim by Maciej z Miechowa, Alessandro Guagnini, and Jan Łasicki. These authors added their own elements to the "annalistic" tradition, with Miechowa (alone among Latin humanist authors) referencing the fourteenth-century Dutch chronicler Peter of Dusburg's myth of Romowe, the legendary pagan city ruled by the "pagan pope" called the Krivė.[152] Miechowa also brought his own distinctive theory of the Baltic languages as a single "quadripartite" language, which led him to see speakers of Baltic languages as a unified culture in some sense.[153] Guagnini produced a synthesis largely based on Długosz's account, although a few elements in his narrative (such as his striking account of a man punished with mutilation for forsaking paganism) were new.[154] Guagnini relied heavily on Stryjkowski to the point of plagiarism.[155] For Łasicki, Długosz continued to provide a basic template for the description of Baltic religion which Łasicki elaborated.

Alongside the Dlugossian or "annalistic" tradition, quite different textual traditions were represented by the German Prussian Johannes Stüler (known in Latin as Erasmus Stella) and the father and son Polish-Prussian authors Jan and Hieronim Malecki. Stüler largely drew on unflattering descriptions of the customs and beliefs of the Old Prussians in medieval chronicles of the Teutonic Knights, and portrayed the Prussians as little better than beasts. This was characteristic of much German commentary on the Prussians, since there was no *prima facie* political incentive for settler colonialists to portray the people they sought to replace in a positive light. Nevertheless, as Rasa Mažeika has argued, extended proximity and interaction between German Christians and Baltic pagans produced a kind of grudging and sullen respect between enemies.[156] This phenomenon, as well as traces of humanist ethnographic interest, can perhaps be discerned even in Stüler's writing on the Prussians. Stüler is keen to explain how the Prussians acquired their customs from a legendary leader, Widewuto. Thus the beginnings of German Prussians' later fascination with their Baltic Prussian forebears can be discerned in Stüler's *De Borussiae antiquitatibus*.

Stüler's commentary pre-dated the Prussian Reformation and the secularization of the duchy, which sharpened the importance of converting any still pagan Prussians and Sudovians. Jan Malecki and his son Hieronim, although they were Poles, lived and worked as printers and translators in Königsberg, the capital of Ducal Prussia. They published Latin and German versions of a text known as the Sudovian (or Yotvingian) Book, which described the customs of the pagan Sudovians in Prussia. Whether Jan Malecki was actually responsible for writing the Sudovian Book remains unclear, but he sent it to George Sabinus in the form of a letter around 1545. This letter was published in

152 Miechowa, *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* (1518), sigs f IIJv–(f vr). Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending*, 125–28 has shown that Peter of Dusburg's narrative is a literary excursus and moral lesson rather than an attempt to describe the actual organisation of Baltic paganism.

153 On Miechowa see Bonda, *History of Lithuanian Historiography*, 86–87.

154 Guagnini, *Sarmatiae Europeae descriptio* (1581), fol. 60v.

155 Bonda, *History of Lithuanian Historiography*, 89.

156 Mažeika, "Granting Power to Enemy Gods," 157–58.

1551 but subsequently augmented by Jan Malecki's son Hieronim in 1561.[157] The Maleckis' *Libellus* portrayed the Catholicism of the Teutonic Knights as the direct successor of the paganism of the Prussians: "[Prussia] was submerged in the horrible furies of the popes, from which men fell into such confusion of opinions that they considered that God might be placated and propitiated by whatever sacrifices and rites were brought in by the audacity of human invention."[158] The justification for a book about pagan practices, therefore, was to show those in the duchy who still hankered after Catholicism that their rites were scarcely different from those of the pagans. Malecki's *Libellus* went on to be a key source for Łasicki, who copied a significant portion of it verbatim into his *De diis Samagitarum*.

The two Lithuanian authors included in this volume were a Lutheran catechist and an obscure figure whose true identity remains unclear. While the purpose of Mažvydas's Latin preface to the first book published in the Lithuanian language was to explain the need for a vernacular Lutheran catechism, Michalo's *De moribus* is a secular social and political jeremiad against what the author perceives as a decadent and degenerate Lithuania that has declined from its former glory and is now weak in the sight of its neighbours.[159] Mažvydas offers a snapshot of how a Lutheran missionary—himself a native Lithuanian—saw the state of his country in the late 1540s. Mažvydas denounces the worship of the Kaukai, Žemėpatis, Laukasargis, and the Aitvarai in his preface, a theme he returns to in the Lithuanian text of the catechism itself.[160] Both Mažvydas and Michalo, for different reasons, were motivated by embarassment on their nation's behalf—Mažvydas because Lithuania was "before other nations … ignorant, unsophisticated and lacking in all piety and the Christian religion,"[161] and Michalo because Lithuania was weakened by luxury.

While Michalo writes as a Catholic and makes few direct references to pre-Christian Lithuanian religion, a striking feature of his commentary is the unfavourable comparisons he makes between the Lithuanians and the Muslim Tatars. Meserve has argued that the fifteenth-century Christian project of discrediting the Ottoman Turks as illegitimate interlopers who destabilized Europe caused Christian scholars to portray other Muslim states in a positive light as potential allies against the Ottomans.[162] Michalo's positive evaluation of the Tatars should perhaps be seen as part of this anti-Ottoman tradition (although Michalo does not actually discuss the Ottomans).[163]

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157 For a detailed source analysis of the Sudovian Book see Kregždys, "Sūduvių knygelės nuorašų formalioji analizė." On Malecki see Pompeo, "Etnografia umanistica."

158 Malecki, *Libellus de sacrificiis et idolatria*, ed. Schmidt-Lötzen, 180.

159 On Michalo see Bonda, *History of Lithuanian Historiography*, 81–83.

160 Mažvydas, *Catechismusa prasty szadei* (1547), sigs A vr–A vv.

161 Mažvydas, *Catechismusa prasty szadei* (1547), sig. A iijr.

162 Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 5.

163 On Christian views of Muslims in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, 30–56. For examples of positive approaches to Muslims by European Christians see Brummett, "The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi"; Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, 3.

Conclusion: Baltic Pagans in Global Context

A late medieval growth of interest in Baltic religion and ethnography was motivated, first and foremost, by political considerations. The rise of the Jagiellonian dynasty and the conversion of Lithuania at the end of the fourteenth century meant that Lithuania was no longer a territory to be forcibly converted by the agents of Christendom, but a power within Christendom to be reckoned with. Accordingly, the Lithuanian people required a history, and the distinctiveness of their beliefs and customs required explanation. The continued presence of adherents of ancestral religions in the Baltic region, even after formal Christianization, both fascinated and appalled literary commentators, and the rhetorical tropes developed by Erasmus and the Protestant reformers opened up new ways of making sense of Baltic infidels. Yet even the most overtly evangelistic texts displayed a desire to understand Baltic vernacular culture, as Protestants were faced with the paradox that "irrational," "barbarian" pagans had to be brought to faith by persuasion. Above all, humanist engagement with Baltic religion was characterized by a triumph of curiosity over condemnation; while the authors had multiple agendas, several of them also found Baltic paganism interesting in and of itself.

The body of humanist writing on Baltic paganism is unique, since other pagan peoples (such as the Sámi of northern Scandinavia) were of insufficient political importance to attract much attention,[164] while aberrant religiosity among nominally Christian peoples might be viewed through a lens of sorcery and witchcraft rather than paganism.[165] The open paganism of the Prussians and Lithuanians may have largely spared them accusations of witchcraft, a crime that often implied the existence of a secret Satanic conspiracy. If pagans unabashedly worshipped "demons" in the form of their gods, there was hardly any need for the devil to deceive them in the form of witchcraft, and sorcery is little discussed in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature on Lithuanian paganism.[166]

While the Catholic Michalo never went so far as to openly commend the ancient religion of his people, the implications of his claims of the Lithuanians' Roman ancestry, their former fierceness, and his scathing critique of the Catholic church, were quite clear: the pagan past could not be recovered, but it was nothing to be ashamed of. The cocktail of curiosity and repulsion that characterized Renaissance engagement with European paganism would be carried to the New World, where the earliest portrayals of indigenous peoples drew on imagined accounts of "wild" European ancestors such as the German tribes described by Tacitus.[167] Many writers on the peoples of the New World reflected Stüler's attitude to the Prussians as little better than wild animals. However,

164 The religion of the pagan Sámi people of northern Scandinavia was not the subject of a book until 1613 (Rasmussen, "The Protracted Sámi Reformation," 172).

165 For a text aimed at the semi-converted peoples of Scandinavia see Hemming/Hemmingsen, *Admonitio de superstitonibus magicis vitandis*.

166 On witchcraft in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania see my forthcoming chapter "Authorities and Control," in *A Cultural History of Magic in the Age of Enlightenment*.

167 Brienen, *Visions of Savage Paradise*, 77; Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, 42.

the writings of Bartolomeo de las Casas on indigenous peoples were tinged with anxieties about lingering paganism in Europe, and he accused colonizers of hypocrisy for suspecting indigenous people of syncretism and hidden paganism when they failed to discern their own failure to suppress pagan practices in the Old World.[168] In Mexico, just as in the pagan Baltic, *interpretatio Romana* was applied to indigenous deities,[169] while in Peru the gods and origin myths of the Incas were interpreted according to Roman models.[170] Similarly, the historical contextualization of pagan belief in the Baltic provided a precedent for "the increasing historicization of human political and religious diversity" that led Catholic missionaries in the Indian Subcontinent to go beyond mere condemnation of Hindu idolatry to express curiosity about Indian religion,[171] and the peasants of Lithuania were a point of reference for the Jesuit Giovanni Botero when describing the lives of people in the Vijayanagara Empire of South India.[172]

Perhaps because German Prussians and Poles were rarely directly involved with the early colonization of the New World, the possibility that their writings on the pagans of Eastern Europe had some influence on European perceptions of native American peoples has not received much consideration. While scholars no longer argue that Paweł Włodkowic's arguments in favour of the rights of the pagan Samogitians had a direct influence on New World debates about indigenous peoples,[173] Eastern European scholars interacted with their western counterparts, and the products of printing presses in Königsberg and Kraków were accessible to humanists throughout Europe.

In 1531 the prince-bishop of Warmia, Jan Dantyszek (Dantiscus), wrote to Esteban Gabriel Merino (who held the title of Patriarch of the West Indies) that Poland's recent victory over the Moldavians "should incite Christian princes by a similar example against the enemies of our religion," referring specifically to "all your most fortunate Spanish part of the Christian globe."[174] Anna Skolimowska has argued that Dantyszek saw Jagiellonian Poland's struggle against the enemies of Christianity in Eastern Europe as part of the global struggle for the assertion of the Christian faith led by Spain.[175] Although it was fighting the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, Poland's credentials as a champion of Christianity historically depended on Władysław II Jagiełło's conversion of Lithuania. An interaction like this suggests that the question of whether humanists interested in the New World read texts about the Baltic peoples is one that merits further investigation.[176]

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168 Lupher, *Romans in a New World*, 315.

169 Torres, *Military Ethos and Visual Culture*, 70.

170 MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time*, 53–54.

171 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 311.

172 Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, 296.

173 Russell, "Paulus Vladimiri's Attack on the Just War," 253; Knoll, *"A Pearl of Powerful Learning"*, 460–61.

174 Dantyszek, *Victoria serenissimi Poloniae regis*.

175 Dantyszek, *Ioannes Dantiscus' Correspondence with Alfonso de Valdés*, 60.

176 On Eastern European interest in the New World see Tasbir, "La conquête de l'Amérique."

The Polish-Lithuanian author Nicolaus Hussovianus, who elsewhere denounced Baltic paganism, reported with horror that the citizens of Rome—the centre of Christendom—sacrificed a black bull in the Colosseum to ward off plague in 1522.[177] Paganism was a lingering presence in early modern literature, whether as the religion of indigenous peoples in the New World, the preoccupation of artists and writers with pagan antiquity, the recrudescent deviance of popular European Christianity, or the polemic of Protestant reformers against a Catholic church they saw as pagan. In comparison with these "paganisms," the paganism of the Baltic peoples has received little attention, but as the texts in this volume show, the past and present beliefs and practices of the Prussians and Lithuanians were an object of fascination to humanist scholars. Those scholars, applying new historiographical and ethnographical methods, preserved a remarkable body of evidence at a time when Baltic ancestral religion was still, to some extent, a living reality. In spite of the considerable difficulties attendant on interpreting that evidence, it remains a unique witness to one of Europe's last pagan cultures.

177 Hussovianus, *Song of the Bison*, 4–5.