SUMMARY. Picture crowning is a form of honouring widespread throughout Christianity. The crowning ceremony of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn is an example of how in multilingual and multicultural areas the political elite can use signifiers common to all local religious community and change/actualize theirs signified as a way to integrate masses lacking a clear ethnic/national identification into the nation. The political elite of the Second Polish Republic used the ceremony as a means to actualize an image of memory (Mary) as the guard and defender (Hutmanka) of the Polish state in the Vilnius cityscape. The crowning of the Hutmanka therefore celebrated univocally the rule of Piłsudski in the new Poland and used a religious symbol that the rural Catholic population identified themselves with as a means to stimulate the populace’s feelings of belonging to the state. Conversely, Lithuanian intelligentsia counteracted the Polish actualization of the memory Mary of the Gate of Dawn by stressing the canonical Catholic image of the Virgin and her maternal meaning.

KEYWORDS: Catholicism, Marianism, nationalism, collective memory, national myths, Vilnius.

The link between images and memory has been analyzed in great detail in scientific literature.* Maurice Halbwachs referred to “images de mémoire” as an iconographic shaping defining memory. In more recent years, Jan Assmann modified M. Halbwachs’ words somewhat by introducing the concept of “figures of memory” as “culturally formed, societally binding ‘images of memory’ . . . [having] a specific relation to time and space” and social groups. According to J. Assmann, figures of memory play a crucial part in the process of the formation of cultural memory, as not only “cultural memory concentrates on fixed points in the past”, but the past itself “levitates and fixates . . . [in] symbolic figures”.1 Images, as Aleida Assmann

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has pointed out, represent the mediation between emotions recalled by images themselves and texts (namely, between images and narratives): “... images do not ‘act’ on their explosive force of suggestion but only in the context of their support and connection function to memory”.2 That’s why some images charged with particular meanings in the frame of coherent narrative become cultural memory milestones.3

Although studies on cultural memory have dealt with (national) saints or religious figures of memory, they have often been quite a relatively neglected issue in studies devoted to 19th and 20th century nationalism.4 In scholarly analysis, political religion has enjoyed overwhelming attention that has not always been able to shed light upon the parallel process of shifting involving the meaning of religion and religious lieu de mémoire.5 In fact, even if nationalism can be looked at as a secular religion, elements of traditional religion appear, in some cases, as fundamental for the development of a national narrative and cultural memory.6 Rogers Brubakers recently tried to theoretically systematize the relation between religion and nationalism, and came up with four possible approaches. Brubaker pointed out that in some cases, the link between religion and nationalism can be so interconnected as to make them parts of a common phenomenon. Unless the religious community overlaps the borders of a nation, the role of religion turns out to be central to the development of national movements as “... religion does not necessarily define the boundaries of the nation, but it supplies myths, metaphors and symbols that are central to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation”.7

The analysis of religious myths8 and lieu de mémoire shows itself to be central,

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3 Ibid., 259.
8 By using the word “myth” I indicate here a symbolic figure used by a group as representing the group’s basic values and being coherently related to the foundational mythology accepted by the group’s members. See
especially for the understanding of the processes of nationalisation in traditional rural environments where the church was quite often one of the very few focuses of cultural life and the intertwining of national rhetoric and religious symbols could reach the peasantry more easily.

In the next pages, I will analyze a specific religious site of memory – the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius – on a very particular day in which the memories of it were performed in the city space: the crowning of the painting of the Holy Lady with a Papal crown which took place on 2 July 1927. Over the centuries, Vilnius had been characterized by ethnic plurality. According to the 1897 general census, Vilnius was inhabited by a Jewish and Polish-speaking majority (40% and 31%) and a considerable Russian-speaking community (20%), while the Belarusian and Lithuanian-speaking groups made up barely 4% and 2% of the total population. The latter communities, which were characterized by bi- or even trilingualism and a rather fluid national self-understanding, lived mainly in Vilnius countryside where constituted 42% and 35% of the population and represented along with the 12% of Polish-speaking people the overwhelming majority.9 The situation did not undergo significant change during the interwar period.10 On a symbolic level, Vilnius was the primary centre for East European Jews, and for Poles who considered it the centre of the Eastern kresy. From the late 19th century, when different ethno-cultural movements had begun to take political forms, Vilnius had risen in importance and became the symbolic centre for the ethnic Lithuanian and Belarusian national movements. As other sites in Vilnius, from the beginning of the 20th century, the Gate of Dawn was an object of conflicting national Polish, Lithuanian, and Belarusian cultural memories. By analyzing the 1927 crowning ceremony, first, I will explain the meaning of this particular religious site for different ethnic communities. In particular I will focus on the two main linguistic communities quarrelling over the ethnic ‘belonging’ of Vilnius – the Poles and the Lithuanians – and the importance of Mary and of the Gate of Dawn in their discourses. Second, since public (both lay and religious) commemorations in the 19th and in the 20th centuries were significant for the integration of the masses into the nation, incorporated a number of symbols, and usually performed in space great historical narratives,11 I will study the meaning of the 1927 ceremony and its symbolic

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10 According to the 1931 census, 69% of the whole population living in the Vilnius region declared Polish as their mother tongue. Multilingualism and the importance of religious faith in determining the mother tongue make, however, these data much more understandable. See Eberhardt P. Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie. Warszawa, Przegląd Wschodni, 1997, 114–27.
aims. Third, I explain how non-dominant discourses in Polish, Lithuanian, and (very shortly) Belarusian languages interpreted the crowning ceremony. I argue that while in the mainstream Polish-language discourse the Gate of Dawn was actualized as a part of national memory and became an integral part of the myth of Józef Piłsudski in Vilnius’ urban space, the Gate remained an object of the process of forgetting in Lithuanian and Belarusian discourse. Even if the process of forgetting was intended as a means of separating and ethnicizing the memory of the joint Commonwealth heritage, nonetheless the progressive erasing of the Gates’ political meaning and the attempt to substitute it with the image of Mary as a prototypical mother furthered a process of de-politicization which compromised the very possibility to make it a site of ethnic Lithuanian memory. As a result, the Gate of Dawn remained for Lithuanians a site of religious memory in the “sanctuary-town” of ethnic Lithuania.

The Gate of Dawn has already been an object of study, although no complete study on it as a site of memory has appeared yet. The history of the Gate was briefly analyzed by Juozas Vaišnora and Juozas Jurginis. The cult of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn was the object of Tadeusz Sieczka’s study. Maria Kałamajska-Saeed analyzed the artistic meaning of the Gate of Dawn in Poles’ devotion. Jurgita Pačkauskienė and Skaidrė Urbonienė recently studied attention to the role of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn in popular art, while the role of the Gate of Dawn itself in interwar Lithuanian cultural memory was in part touched upon by Dangiras Mačiulis. Until now, the coronation ceremony has not attracted scholarly interest.

**THE VIRGIN MARY IN PRACTICE: A LOOK AT MARIAN DISCOURSES**

Picture crowning is a form of honouring widespread throughout Christianity. Pictures and statues representing the Holy Virgin have been crowned on all continents and represent the visible acknowledgment of community’s devotion and

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relationship to a particular epiphany of the sacrum. However, when studying a particular site of Marian memory, one should consider quite carefully the general context and the particular Marian tradition in which the discourse on a particular site develops. In fact, unless its theological uniformity, the representation, the attributes and the cult of the Virgin have changed across time and space according to local cultural legacies and sociopolitical environments. Much more than any other saint or god, Mary is a syncretised figure endorsing pre-existing goddesses and cults of fertility. As one can experience in everyday practice, her semantic meaning is therefore highly instable. Mary appears as a protean figure of motherhood, fertility, food, health, virginity and other feminine virtues. As a medium between the Earth and the Sky, between God and the humans, Mary is looked at as a means to achieve God’s help and salvation. This instrumental view makes her the addressee of much more politicized prayers, and the image of destiny and national salvation among other things.

For centuries the Virgin has been a pervasive and omnipresent symbol of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Indeed the first song in Polish (“Bogurodzica”) which was sung by the Polish army before the Battle of Grünwald in 1410 was dedicated to her. In the Baroque period the cult of Mary increased as means to fight against the diffusion of Protestantism. The central event that propelled the cult of the Virgin throughout the Polish-Lithuanian state was the Battle of Częstochowa in 1655, when the defeat of the Swedes was credited to the famous icon of the Pauline monastery at Jasna Góra. Soon after the victory, in a counterreformation mood King Jan Kazimierz organized a celebration in which the Virgin of Częstochowa was crowned “Queen of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia, Prussia, Mazovia, Samogitia, Livonia, Smolensk, and Chernigov.” In 1683, when leading the army against the Ottoman siege of Vienna, Jan Sobieski interpreted the success and defence of Europe as the result of Mary’s intervention and reinforced the idea of the Polish-Lithuanian state as the bulwark of Christianity in Europe. The importance of Mary in battles continued also after the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic. During the Polish-Russian War of 1919-21, the key victory in Warsaw

(the so called *Miracle on the Vistula*) was attributed by Catholic groups to the intervention of the Virgin.\(^{20}\)

As Brian Porter has recently questioned, these continuous actualizations determined the consolidation of a dual-vision of the Holy Virgin as an exemplar model of domestic femininity and the sometimes martial protector of the State. Nonetheless, due to Mary’s direct intervention into human history, the image of the Virgin in the modern Polish-Lithuanian state (and later in independent Poland) overlapped the limits of official Mariology:

Despite the Hetmanka’s popularity, however, there are some undeniable tensions between this metaphor and orthodox Catholic doctrine. Militant Marianism transposed Mary’s position as intercessor onto a geopolitical stage, as the image of her beseeching God for mercy on behalf of her children was recast as a much more active participation in human affairs. She became a Joan of Arc figure leading men into battle for God and fatherland, not merely watching over Poland but forcefully “vanquishing the enemy’s stubborn fury” in order to preserve the country’s independence and domestic well-being.\(^{21}\)

Even if the maternal and martial visions of the Holy Virgin have coexisted until now (at least within Polish-speaking communities) and their popularity shifted along with changes in geopolitics and inner social relations, Mary became a figure of national memory reflecting a couple of issues – the milestones of the State’s history and the central role of the Polish (-Lithuanian) state as the defender of Catholic Europe. Moreover, the dual nature of Mary has been said to be fundamental for the consolidation of the modern Polish nation, since “Marianism thus provides some of the glue that helps hold together two otherwise distinct strains of Polish national thought, one focused on maintaining conservative gender relations and the other on attaining victory in the international realm”.\(^{22}\) Thus, in the territories of *Rzeczpospolita* and, later, in modern Polish national discourse Mary consolidated over time and history her own dual status of Mother and, using Porter’s words, “Hetmanka”, a military ruler that leads and protects the state’s army on the battlefield abroad. Of course, Mary is the Mother of God and of all humanity, but the epithet has been constantly challenged by a second one – Queen. And, as a Queen, the name of Mary is characterized by a constant semantic variability that makes


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 370.

her not only the Queen of the Heavens but also the Queen of Poland, which the Church has officially recognized in the *Litaniae Lauretanae*.\(^{23}\)

Since the history and the socio-political loyalties of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were common to those of the Kingdom of Poland, over the centuries in which the Commonwealth existed the figure of Mary across the territories of the state was not characterized by any relevant difference. The image of Mary as the defender of Christianity against both foreign invasions and the diffusion of Protestantism dominated the Baroque age in both the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland.\(^{24}\) The first changes that occurred in the 19th century, such as the changes in the economic structure, the emergence of new social/ethnic actors and the creation of new loyalties, stimulated the emergence of new concurring narratives. In this regard, important changes occurred in relation to Catholicism in general. On the one hand, since the early stages of modernity, religion was the ultimate factor for self definition throughout the lands of the Grand Duchy. Confession and political loyalties were the most important elements that determined someone belonging to a community, regardless of the language(s) its members used to speak.\(^{25}\) The reshaping of the national Self along ethnic borders implied the progressive substitution of traditional religious criteria with ethno-linguistic ones. This shift inevitably endangered the unity of local Catholicism which in turn became increasingly divided along linguistic criteria. The emergence of the Lithuanian national movement represented a major challenge to such unity. As is already well-known in historiography, the fight for the rights of the Lithuanian language both in churches and in the public sphere in general led with increasing frequency to the definition of Lithuanian language and Lithuanian Catholicism as “pagan” furthered by ethno-linguistic Polish environments. The rediscovery of Lithuanian (Baltic) paganism had actually been a genuine character of the Lithuanian revival movement in its early scholarly stage. In the course of the 19th century, Lithuanian paganism soon became an important literary theme in both Polish- and Lithuanian-language literature. Whilst the pagan era and pagan relics in Lithuanian customs and traditions were univocally regarded with interest during the times of Romanticism, views on the moral *dignitas* of paganism differed greatly. A. Mickiewicz, for example, considered paganism an element at the core of the military strength of the medieval Lithuanian state, but pointed out its insufficiency in terms of civilization. Christianization, therefore, represented the turning point for the fulfilment of Lithuanian civilization. Conversely, Simonas Daukantas, the author

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\(^{23}\) See, for example, Kurczewski J. *Kazania świąteczne*. Wilno, Józef Zawadzki, 1897, 206–216.


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 266–74.
of the first history of Lithuania in Lithuanian language, considered the introduction of the Christian faith to be the reason for the weakening of Lithuanian harmony and strength. As the Lithuanian national movement developed within the territories of ethnic Lithuania, expanded its own cultural goals and especially as the movement broke into several strands that called for different political and social aims, the appeal of paganism started to fade. The Lithuanian movement described itself in ethno-linguistic terms but, at the same time, claimed part of the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Thus, even if paganism could remain in traditional arts and habits, ethnic Lithuanians were implicitly compelled to accept (and discursively reshape) A. Mickiewicz’ version. Despite the progressive fragmentation of the ethnic Lithuanian movement, the Lithuanians needed to demonstrate the introduction of “civilizing” Catholicism to be the result of ethnic Lithuanian will and not the result of Polish civilization. In facts, mainstream historical memory in Polish-language discourse identified the introduction of Christianity in Lithuania as an action fulfilled by the Poles by signing the Krevo Act in 1385. The Lithuanians, therefore, emerged as Christianized barbarians, while the Lithuanian ethnic and linguistic revival was discursively and symbolically transformed into the revival of a pagan ethnos that was attempting to stir up disharmony within the local Catholic community.

The importance of the Catholic faith in a conservative rural environment where people (especially in the Vilnius region) were often bi- or trilingual made it necessary to develop a Catholic counter-narrative as, at once, defending the Lithuanians from accusations of Paganism and furthering the integration of the rural masses into the Lithuanian nation. But how could such a counter-narrative appear? On the one hand, Lithuanians needed to construct a parallel narrative of Lithuanian Catholicism affirming its primacy in time over Polish Catholicism. The introduction of the Christian faith in Lithuania was thus to be understood as an event furthered by an ethnic Lithuanian – Jogaila – and becoming fast so deep-rooted among Lithuanian masses that no historical event was strong enough to eradicate it. On the other hand, the superiority of Lithuanian Catholicism over the “Polish Faith” was to be sought in the major conformity of the first one to the Message of God. The emergence of “Lithuanian” Catholicism reflected the changes the concept of nation had undergone:

People must love each other, and support and help each other as adversities occur, they must love everybody, the entire world, but overall they must love their compatriots [tautiečiai] and the fatherland [tėvynė] where they were born and grew . . . The division of people into nations [tautos] is also positive. Each nation [tauta] represents a union of people who have a common faith, common laws, common uses, language and origin, a common sense of honour [garbė], experienced common pains in the past and sustain common hopes for the future.29

The words Jonas Ambraziejus wrote in 1906 clearly state the spirit of Lithuanian Catholicism. Even if in the national discourse the divide along confessional lines had been widely reconciled through language and the hierarchy of national mythology freely ‘combined’ the Catholic and the Protestant, nonetheless (especially) conservative discourse used Catholicism also as a constitutive element of national identification. On the one hand, Catholicism resulted as fundamental as all other elements that formed the ethnic national discourse. At the beginning of the 20th century, the national interpretation of faith had already undergone a change similar to the one of the nation. Recent historiography has underscored that the emergence of the ethnic Lithuanian nation as a subject of history was connected with the transformation of the concept of honour [garbė]. In modern Polish-Lithuanian society, the word honour [chwala] was traditionally related to the moral character of people belonging to the higher classes of the estate system. Since its cultural stage, the Lithuanian national movement enlarged the spectrum of honour. Honour was not more the prerogative of a class which had a task in society, but became also the task and value of a new subject (the ethnic nation) which operates in the world, seeking its own goals and its development lines.30 Lithuanian Catholicism experienced a similar path to consolidation. As one can see in the quotation, as a Catholic nation the Lithuanians were told to have a “common sense of honour” which embraced Catholic values. In this case, honour (a ‘horizontal’ or spatial value related to the intimate-private sphere of the community) was used as the antithesis to the honour (a ‘vertical’ value merging the public and private spheres of the community) of traditional (Polish-Lithuanian) Catholicism. The love of humanity was the final goal of Lithuanian Catholics, but the love for the “fatherland” represented the means to achieve this goal. The love of the fatherland, however, was diametrically different from the Polish one, since it did denounce any closer symbolic relation between politics and religion.31 Thus, the major “reliability” of Lithuanian Catholicism for the transmission of the divine

message constantly balanced such two elements – the historical ‘rights’ over the introduction of the Christian faith in the Lithuanian lands and the honour guaranteed by self-sufficient, a-political Lithuanian Catholicism.

In the frame of ethnic Lithuanian Catholicism, the figure of Mary was also central. As Mary had been the protector of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its military representative, Lithuanian religiosity implicitly rejected the figure of Mary-Hetmanka linking it with the impurity of the “Polish faith”. As a symbolic refusal of the common Polish-Lithuanian political heritage and aiming to fight with the accusation of paganism, the image of “Lithuanian” Mary lacked history and reflected a different grasp of values. The religious discourse in Lithuanian language consistently represented Mary as a three-fold symbol mirroring rural life and traditional values, namely as a woman/wife/mother holding the three main qualities of traditional femininity – purity, maternity, and fidelity which together defined the quality of feminine wisdom. On the one hand, her function was similar to that of a good mother who seeks to make family relations easier and family unity unbreakable. The family here is all of humanity, while the father is God: “Even if God’s anger would be enormous and would make Him lose his patience and bitterly punish sinners; even if He wouldn’t listen to the prayers of all of saints; also in this case He wouldn’t refuse the intercession of Mary.” This view of the Virgin as a sort of holy mediator in contact with God and interceding for humanity fully confirmed the canonical representation of Mary. This link between her maternal instinct and her ‘influence’ in God’s decisions made her not only the most faithful guide in people’s lives but also the highest aid to achieve eternal life and escape the flames of hell. On the other hand, as the Queen of moral perfection, Mary was at the same time an example of rectitude and a maternal protector for all her children without national or class difference. As Bishop Petras Būčys pointed out in a sermon during the interwar period,

Mary is the lovely and powerful mother of people, families, nations, and humanity. Even if the winds of temptation have hit us, even if sometimes the tempests of sin have made us weak, even if we have had problems in our families, even if the sky over our

34 [?] Garbinkim Mariją. Aušra, 16 May 1913.
36 Gimžauskas S. Pamokslai, 13, 199, 327.
homeland has gotten dark, even if the life of all humanity has become difficult, don’t worry, just make your eyes, heart and thoughts at the disposal of that powerful mother who is merciful and helps everyone live through the difficulties of life and make one’s burdens lighter.40

In a world organically divided into families and nations, Mary could intercede, as a mother does, to make the relations among her children peaceful, but her aid was not supposed to encompass the borders of domestic life. Analogically, Mary was recognized as a queen, but only as Queen of the Heavens. This became evident as the Lithuanian nation state became a reality in the 1920s and 1930s. The Lord, the King of the Heavens – and not his Holy Mother – represented the holder of the state’s destiny and its defender on the battlefields of history. Indeed the “Unique Omnipotent” [Vienintelis Visagalis] should have been thanked for the independence of the Lithuanian national state, “... the almost miraculous result of our battles.”41

TWO OBJECTS AND A MERGING MEMORY: THE GATE OF DAWN AND THE VIRGIN

When considering the Gate of Dawn as a site of memory, one should then consider the complexity of the object. The Gate of Dawn would be better defined as a complex two-folded site of memory. On the one hand, the Gate had had a concrete function in the urban space. Between 1503 and 1522 a defensive wall had been erected around Vilnius in order to secure the town against Tatar invasions. The Gate of Dawn was just one out of the five original gates that were located in the defensive wall, and the only one that survived the demolition ordered by Tsarist authorities and carried out from 1799 to 1802. Until the demolition, not only did the wall defend Vilnius from the Tatars in the 16th century, but it saved the town also from the attacks of the Muscovites and the Swedes in the 17th century. On the other hand, the memory of the Gate is connected to the image of the holy Virgin that is held in the Chapel, which was created inside the Gate of Dawn in the 1670s, and which in later times saw an increasing flow of devotees. The origin of the picture remained a widely discussed issue especially in the 19th century and later. In 1839 Teodor Narbutt referred to the picture as having been taken to Vilnius by Grand Duke Algirdas as booty after the victory over the Tatars on the Black

40 Būčys P. Pamokslai, 189.
Sea in 1363. Even if, one the one hand, the origin of the picture and the supposed request of Algirdas’s wife to keep the picture in Trinity’s Orthodox church represented grounds for speculating about which religion the picture belonged to lasted throughout the entire 19th century, an analysis carried out on the picture during restoration works in 1927 revealed that the icon belongs to a mid-16th century Italian style painter.⁴²

From the beginning of its cult in the second half of the 17th century till the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, the picture was worshipped only locally. Still at the time of the Muscovite and Swedish invasions in the 17th century, the picture at the Gate of Dawn, which became famous as a miraculous intervener, was often semantically connected with the invaders⁴³ in a similar fashion as the case of the Lady of Częstochowa. Nonetheless, the idea of Mary as the defender of Poland remained much more connected to the general idea of Mary that to the particular image of the Gate of Dawn.

It was only after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18th century and the subsequent restrictions of political and religious rights by the Tsarist authorities that the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn – and the Gate of Dawn itself – began to take on an increasing role as a symbol of recently lost freedom. A primary role in furthering this transformation was played by Romantic literature and the still-fresh memory of the 1794 uprising. As General Jasiński’s troops had pushed out the Tsarist forces on 24 April 1794, Vilnius had experienced for a very short time the taste of victory and renewed liberty. Nevertheless, as Jasiński left for Poland to help gen. Tadeusz Kościuszko’s troops, his soldiers got defeated soon. In his Pan Tadeusz, Adam Mickiewicz used a single event connected to these facts – the Tsarist attack on the Gate of Dawn in August 1794 – as a symbolic marker of Tsarist impiety and, conversely, of the Polish-Lithuanian liberty that had been violated.⁴⁴ Thus, even if the religious meaning remained unchanged, the Gate of Dawn and its Virgin entered more strongly into the field of political mythology and became progressively associated with the main figure of the 1794 Uprising, T. Kościuszko, and the resistance to the Tsarist Empire.

Along with the actualisation and the increasing popularity of the Virgin of the Gate of dawn throughout Poland, the semantic value of that very site of memory changed. Even if the historical heritage of the Commonwealth remained obviously in the background, the Virgin of the gate of Dawn started being joined with the Virgin of Częstochowa in the pantheon of Polish national symbols. As the 1893

⁴⁴ Kałamajska-Saeed M. Ostra Brama w Wilnie, 156–158.
stained-glass window in Mary’s church in Cracow shows, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn and the Virgin of Częstochowa were interpreted as two mirroring images representing different (historical) territorial units without underscoring any semantic difference. While the Virgin of Częstochowa protected and preserved the Commonwealth from the Swedes in the 17th century, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn bore witness to the heroic resistance and opposition even in the present day. The diffusion of the devotion to the Vilnius Virgin was shown by the increasing flows of pilgrims from Poland to the Gate of Dawn in the first decades of the 20th century when the presence of masses dressed in traditional Polish costumes, waving flags with the images of St. Casimir, the Virgin of Częstochowa and writings praising the indissolubility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became an object of critics in Vilnius’ periodical press.45

The attempts to “ethnicize” the Gate of Dawn and make it a Polish ethnic site of memory were harshly criticized by members of various groups living in Vilnius. Recalling the autonomy of the local tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, members of Lithuania’s Polish-speaking gentry rejected the “assimilation” of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn into the sphere of the Lady of Częstochowa. As journalist and writer Helena Römer pointed out in the late 1910s, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn reflected a separate maternal and familial tradition in which the military force of the Lady of Częstochowa was absent:

The [icon] in Częstochowa is dominated by the Lady of the Polish Crown, the splendid, severe and a little bit threatening Mother of God [Bogurodzica] holding the Divine Baby in Her hand as a sceptre of the land and of the world. She looks with Her eyes full of Majesty at people that in front of Her begged on their knees: “Oh, Queen of Ancestors, oh, Queen of Patriarchs! Oh Thou, Golden Throne! The Arch of the Covenant!” The eyes of the Mother of God in Częstochowa observe the fertile land and her skilful and happy people who have never felt the yoke of captivity too strongly. There, at the foot of Jasna Góra fortress, plenty of works have been offered to the Queen of the Polish Crown. No Cossack scourge whizzed the backs of those who prayed there. Maybe some exploited farmers arrived at the foot of the Queen from the most remote lands of the Rzeczpospolita, from Podlasie or Białoruś, and prayed Her to intercede or them by the throne of God. The picture of the Holy Virgin of Ostra Brama looks at the exploited people in Polish-Lithuanian Vilnius quite differently. Her face, full of an eternal sadness, constantly observes the misfortunes of Her sons. She listens to their mourning, Her eyes express a deep concern, Her arms, laying on Her painful heart, wait for the decisions of the Eternal.46

The Virgin of the Gate of dawn was, for H. Römer, a mother – the prototypic Mother – whose role remained concretely linked to the historical experience of the

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45 [?], Maldininkai iš Čenstachavos. Vilniaus žinios, 11 September 1907.
Grand Duchy, its rural and conservative characters. For H. Römer, as for a handful of civic oriented gentry living within the borders of historic Lithuania, the tradition was not just something from the past but a heritage that was alive in family traditions. For the ethnic movements born out of the economic and social changes originated in the second part of the 19th century, the heritage was much more similar to an archaeological field in which each group had to seek its own past and original tradition. Thus, even if ethnic Lithuanians shared H. Römer’s idea about the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn belonging to the tradition of historic Lithuania, the Gate of Dawn had to become part of the new ethnic Lithuanian tradition.

As the Polish-Lithuanian fight over the use of Lithuanian in churches was reaching its peak, an interesting, though short-lived quarrel on the meaning of Mary of the Gate of Dawn took place in the pages of Vilnius newspapers in late 1912. Commenting on the visit of Polish pilgrims to Vilnius, Polish rightwing newspaper *Gazeta Codzienna* underlined Mary of the Gate of Dawn as part of the common Polish and Lithuanian memory and a reminder of the formation of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. In stark contrast to these views, the Lithuanian-language newspaper *Viltis* (led by Antanas Smetona) harshly defended the independence of the Vilnius Madonna as part of a different historical unit: “It is at once sad and amazing, the journalist stated, that they write so even today, as the Lithuanians are declaring to the Poles and to the world that they do not recognize that union and finally released the spirit and culture of their nation [tautos dvasia ir kultūra] which had been subjugated for a very long time.”

The statement shows quite clearly the changes that were going on at the very beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, the Gate of Dawn embodied a place of memory common to all the population of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its memory was connected to the history of the ancient past of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Grand Duke Algirdas, the defence from the Tatar and Swedish invasions in the 16th century), as well as to the events of more recent history (the 1794 Uprising). As in the contemporary ethnic Lithuanian historical master narrative, the ethnicization of that place of memory was part of the necessary reinterpretation of the common Polish-Lithuanian history. On the other hand, the ethnicization in a Lithuanian sense of that very place of memory had to fit the already mentioned principles of Lithuanian Catholicism. The relation between ethnicization and the construction of Lithuanian Catholicism within the urban space of Vilnius that resulted, however, was quite problematic. As all measures limiting the use of the Lithuanian language in the public sphere were abolished in 1904 and Lithuanian ethno-linguistic nationalism could take part in public life more freely, the Gate of

Dawn became for many rural Lithuanians the first stage of Catholic patriotic pilgrimages. Going through a fixed itinerary that usually led people to the church of St. Nicolas (the first one to be given the possibility to give sermons in Lithuanian), the Way of the Cross in Verkiai, and the tomb of St. Casimir in the Cathedral, pilgrims used to visit the Gate of Dawn twice, at the very beginning and at the end of their pilgrimage. Pilgrimages, however, were far from becoming veritable patriotic rallies, even though around 125,000 people used to visit the main Vilnius religious sites each year. Of course, people often dressed in traditional costumes and prayed for their families and the fatherland, but “the cross . . . the only flag of us – the Catholics, the People of Lithuania” and “little white-and-blue flags symbolizing our purity and hope” were the only symbols that the Lithuanians used to take with them to these sacred sites as representing their ethnic morality.

This attitude towards that particular place of memory is once more connected with the inner logic leading the rise of a separate ethnic Lithuanian Catholicism. The “creation” of an ethnic Lithuanian Gate of Dawn did not only imply a new partition of the common cultural heritage of the Poles and Lithuanians in the frame of a concrete urban space. If we consider the importance of religious faith for a rural nation, we easily understand the importance that should be given to the religious moment. In a context where the use of Lithuanian and Lithuanian Catholicism in general were indicated as “pagan,” the de-politicization of the Gate of Dawn could be said to have symbolically “purified” Lithuanian Catholicism from political and historical impurity and put it on a higher moral level than the Polish one. Thus, thanks to the refusal of a joint Polish-Lithuanian heritage and the claim to a renewed “pure” Catholicism, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn was introduced as the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and eventually as the protector of those that are suffering, but in no way as the Queen and protector of Poland or some other state. Eventually, the polycentric nature of Lithuanian Marianism helped decrease the importance of the Gate of Dawn. Differently than in the lands of the Kingdom of Poland, where the Virgin of Częstochowa was at the top of the Marian cult hierarchy, Catholicism in Lithuania was characterized by a considerable multiplicity of Marian images and sites. The primacy of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn

50 [?] Ant kranto Nemuno. Nedeldienio skaitymas, 12 June 1907.
52 The national use of the depoliticized cult of the Virgin is visible, for example, in 1910 pilgrimage to the core of Polish Marianism – Częstochowa – when Lithuanians in traditional costumes showed their devotion to the Virgin (whose cult was widespread also in Lithuania) as a means to show that “Lithuanian Catholics exist”. See [?] Maldininkai lietuviai Čenstakavoje. Lietuvos žinios, 19 June 1910.
was challenged *in primis* by the Lady of Iluva. At a more regional level, considerable popular devotion was due to the Virgin of Trakai (also known as Our Lady of Trakai). The popularity of the Virgins of Iluva and Trakai was confirmed also at a hierarchical level: in fact, both of them were officially honoured and crowned with the Pope’s permission in 1786 and 1718 respectively. For ethnic Lithuanians, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn rose in importance as the Lithuanian national movement entered a political phase and became together with the Way of the Cross in Verkiai the spiritual core of the capital of ethnographic Lithuania. Thus the Gate of Dawn became fundamental as a site of ethnic Lithuanian memory because it was in the symbolic spatial core of Lithuanianness rather than for its peculiar religious meaning.

**PIłSUDSKICIZING AND NORMALIZING LOCAL TRADITION: THE 1927 CROWNING CEREMONY AND ITS REASONS**

Although the First World War represented a major reason for the emergence of the Lithuanian and Polish nation states, the need for unity by these two ethnically mixed states and their quarrel over Vilnius merely stoked the fire concerning overlapping sites of memory and their meaning. The years of war, especially 1919-1920, profoundly changed the setting for quarrels over symbols. The emergence of the Soviets in Russia represented a danger at the political level, which also influenced the sphere of symbols. As the heir of the old state tradition as a whole, the new Polish state felt its historical mission had been refreshed: as in Jan Sobieski’s times, when Poland held the role of European civilization’s defender against the Ottoman expansion, so in the 1920s Poland felt its own task as the *Antemurale Christianitatis* was once again renewed. The new non-European, barbaric other the Polish state felt that it needed to stop was Soviet Russia. In this new clash of civilizations, Vilnius was central both in geopolitical and symbolic terms. The conquering of Vilnius was depicted in Polish public discourse as the victorious result of a new crusade that was logically connected with all of earlier Polish campaigns against the Turks and the Tatars, but exceeded them by its meaning for the future.


of all Europe.\textsuperscript{55} The ceremony of J. Piłsudski entering Vilnius after warding off the Bolsheviks on Easter 1919 was prepared as a symbolic performance, while Vilnius became a stage for Polish history. Thanks to its position alongside the axis from the railway station and the Old Town, the Gate of Dawn represented the extreme border of the stage. In fact, the performance in which J. Piłsudski acted as the real protagonist began and ended at the Gate, as in the case of most pilgrimages which was already previously mentioned. After arriving in Vilnius by train, J. Piłsudski, “the first servant and last knight of Europe”\textsuperscript{56} entered the town on the back of a horse through the Gate of Dawn, while his passing through the gate was accompanied by litanies in the Chapel of the Virgin.\textsuperscript{57} As a new T. Kościuszko\textsuperscript{58} – a figure unifying society and territory, and implicitly making a claim for inter-classism\textsuperscript{59} – J. Piłsudski symbolically linked the past of the historic \textit{Rzeczpospolita} with the reality of the new independent Polish state. On the last day of J. Piłsudski’s visit in Vilnius (April 27, 1919), the Gate of Dawn represented the final place where a mass with legionaries was held. On these days, the city centre was full of red-and-white flags and Polish eagles and, as Bishop Jurgis Matulaitis noted down in his own diary, the Jews in the city seemed to have disappeared all at once, giving the town an unreal visual uniformity.\textsuperscript{60} The words pronounced after the mass by Father Oleszczuk and by J. Piłsudski himself marked new ties between the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn and recent events. Accomplishing her natural task together with the Holy Lord, the “Queen of the Polish crown” (namely, the Mother-\textit{Hetmanka}) had chosen J. Piłsudski as the new leader guiding the nation to a new victory, as had been the case for many other heroic figures in Polish history, who had led the Poles in the most difficult mission the country had ever achieved.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, the mainstream Polish memory of the Gate of Dawn got actualized and turned out to be the primary urban element \textit{representing} the new symbolic order and \textit{reminding} others of its place in the non-ending sequence of Polish (-Lithuanian) history.\textsuperscript{62}

After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, and Poland took on a renewed geopolitical role in East Central Europe, memory itself was stimulated to become

\textsuperscript{55} J. G. [?] Wojna krzyżowa. \textit{Dziennik Wileński}, 5 July 1919.
\textsuperscript{57} Matulaitis J. \textit{Užrašai}. Vilnius, Aidai, 1998, 201.
\textsuperscript{58} S. [?] W numerze… \textit{Nasz Kraj}, 29 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{60} Matulaitis J. \textit{Užrašai}, 209.
\textsuperscript{61} [?] Naczelnik Kraju i Wódz Naczelnego Wojsk Polskiego w Ostrej Bramie. \textit{Dziennik Wileński}, 29 April 1919.
a polarized battlefield that pitted a monolithic “Us” (Poland, the defender of European civilization) against “Them” (the Bolsheviks). ‘Hybrid’ subjects that were in-between, such as the Lithuanians – could only diminish Poland’s role, and endanger the symbolic capital of the Polish state. Since they represented an ideal vehicle for political and national identification among the peasant population, religious symbols – especially those which memory was connected with figures or sites of political mythology – could by no means remain polysemic. In that case, however, the change of religious symbolic meanings needed to receive the approval of the church and could only be the result of church and secular power joint cooperation. The crowning of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn in 1927 reflected, and symbolically recorded, a similar logic.

The reasons for the Virgin's coronation were first and foremost religious. Still in the 1920s, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn remained the only important Marian site in Lithuanian lacking a papal crown. In early 1927, the Vilnius clergy obtained the nihil obstat from Pope Pius XI, who prior to becoming Pope had briefly visited Vilnius as an apostolic nuncio. An organizational committee led by Bishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski and members of the clergy and authorities representing orientations of local civil society was formed in mid-March 1927. R. Jałbrzykowski was known in Lithuania even before he was appointed Vilnius bishop in 1926. As Deputy Head at the Sejny Seminary at the beginning of the century, R. Jałbrzykowski had become infamous for his “anti-Lithuanian” policy (introduction of Polish language as compulsory, ban on reading Lithuanian newspapers, introduction of new criteria for entering the seminary, etc.). As the Vilnius bishop, he banned religious services in Lithuanian in a number of parishes and restricted the entry of Lithuanians to the Vilnius Seminary. Even if various strata of society were represented in the committee, his presidency and the religious goal of the event were sufficient means to carry out a consistent program. Since its very beginning, the committee paid attention to Lithuanians that were to be the main ‘guests’ at the ceremony. Juozas Kairūkštis, the director of the Vilnius Lithuanian teachers’ seminar and the only non-Pole in the committee, was responsible for the administration of pilgrims coming from the Republic of Lithuania. According to the Church hierarchy, the religious meaning of the coronation ceremony would stimulate pilgrims to come also from Lithuania; the frontier was to have been re-opened for this occasion. Vilnius was supposed to become the centre of a huge regional celebration that would guide people from Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus to the former capital of

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64 Papers on the Coronation of the Mother of God of the Gate of Dawn, container F51, ap. 1, b. 257, p. 11, Central Archive of the Lithuanian State.
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of Da Wn  in  ViLniUs  (1927) as  a P erforManCe  of  PoLish  reMeMberinG anD LiThU anian  for GeTTinG  PrOCess es

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Since the early spring, people were requested to help the organizers by hosting the huge amount of pilgrims (even 100,000) that were to come. The Ministry of Communication granted a reduction on railway tickets for all pilgrims going to Vilnius. The organizational efforts included the renovation of Vilnius central streets and buildings under the supervision of Ferdynand Ruszczyc the Dean of the Faculty of Art at Stefan Batory University. The restoration of the holy picture represented a central task which was carried out by Jan Rzutkowski. Although the main financial efforts for organization were supported by the Vilnius diocese in cooperation with the Vilnius City Council, the gold crowns which were supposed to replace the two still existing silver ones on the picture were meant to represent the devotional attachment of Vilnius residents for Mary. Within a matter of weeks, Vilnius residents “from very different strata of society” gave enough golden coins and cash for the crown. In mid-June, 456 offerings had been recorded. Apart from crowns, the memory of the coronation day was recorded on a specially issued stamp and on two memorial medals.

However, despite the efforts of organizers, the national and political meaning of the event could hardly be hidden from view. Some members of the organizational committee asked for visible symbolic changes in the city space. Concerning the restoration of the Chapel, artist Stanisław Jarocki, a former student of Jan Matejko in Cracow, and procurer Mieczysław Obiezierski promoted the substitution of the Latin inscription (“Mater Misericordiae, Sub tuum praesidium configimus”) on the external wall of the Chapel of the Gate of Dawn with a Polish one. Even if their action did not achieve its goal, the whole celebration appeared evidently to mirror mainstream Polish discourse. Not only was the crowning ceremony to be performed in the presence of the highest representatives of the Polish state, but the arrival and stay Marshal J. Piłsudski and the President of Poland was used to well-planned ends. The Naczelnik Państwa and the President were to be received at the railway station by the city major, the Vilnius bishop, the delegates of all

65 [?], Ofiary na korony. Dziennik Wileński, 21 June 1927.
66 Papers on the Coronation of the Mother of God of the Gate of Dawn, container F51, ap. 1, b. 257, p. 3, 38, Central Archive of the Lithuanian State.
67 Coronation of Mary’s images was known as way to support and stimulate Polish national consciousness still in the XIX century. See Dabrowski P. M. Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2004, 61–62.
68 Papers on the Coronation of the Mother of God of the Gate of Dawn, container F51, ap. 1, b. 257, p. 5, Central Archive of the Lithuanian State. The Latin inscription dated from 1864 when anti-Polish Tsarist policy replaced the original one that was in Polish. The quarrel on the restitution of the old Polish inscription went on after the celebration and led to the decision to replace it in 1932. The Lithuanians proudly opposed that decision by affirming the ecumenical meaning of the inscription in Latin. See Kałamajska-Saeed M. Ostra Brama w Wilnie, 41; Papers on the Latin inscription on the Chapel of the Gate of Dawn, container F246-358, p. 1, Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Manuscript Section.
local Catholic organizations, all high State and Church officials, and representatives of the army. On the day of the crowning, J. Piłsudski and the President were to participate in all principal ceremonies and occupy the most visible position, just behind the prelates.

Even though the number of pilgrims that came to Vilnius was much smaller than the organizers expected and did not exceed a few thousand, the celebration took regularly place on 2 July 1927. In Cathedral Square, two tribunes had been built up in order to allow a part of the pilgrims participate in the ceremony much more directly, with tickets having to have been distributed some weeks earlier. The celebrations began at 10 o’clock with the Holy Mass in the presence of the President of Poland, J. Piłsudski, Warsaw’s Bishop Aleksander Kakowski and the local religious hierarchy in Vilnius Cathedral. At 11 a.m. a mass in Polish and one in Lithuanian were held for pilgrims, respectively, in Łukiszki and Orzeszkowa Squares. It represented a way to integrate the masses into the celebration, as they were not allowed to participate in the mass at the Cathedral and were only supposed to go accompany the icon during procession through the city streets to the Gate of Dawn. At 12.30 a procession took the picture of the Virgin wrapped in a red mantle with a white eagle on it to the Gate of Dawn, while the city centre was full of people waving red-and-white flags and white eagles decorated windows and walls throughout the city centre. For the afternoon, three highly meaningful events were scheduled: an exhibition about the Holy Virgin of the Gate of Dawn inaugurated by President Ignacy Mościcki at Stefan Batory University and two plays – the Obrona Częstochowy, and Książe niezłomny – that were performed at the Polish Theatre and the Reduta Theatre. In addition, on that day all Vilnius cinemas showed only religious and historical movies. In the late afternoon, sports competitions in the presence of President Mościcki took place in Ogród Bernardyński. On the day after the coronation, the events scheduled had a much clearer and official political connotation. After the mass celebration at the Gate of Dawn, the President met with Vilnius organizations and people, and then participated in a banquet organized by the Vilnius City Council.

The discourse practices that led the coronation widely underlined two complementary elements. On the one hand, although the pope’s decree enabled the coronation of the Virgin without changing the official linguistic attribute of the picture (Mother of Mercy), the press in Polish mainly interpreted the event as the coronation of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn as the “Queen of Poland”

69 [?] Obchody koronacyjne N. M. P. Ostrobramskiej. Dziennik Wileński, 1 July 1927.

– the epithet that was widespread in Poland and symbolically liked to the Virgin of Częstochowa. As a mother, the Virgin appeared much as the simulacrum of another mother – “the Motherland” common to both the Lithuanians and the Poles. Porter has recently pointed out that in the 1920s and 1930s the identification between Polishness and Catholicism did not imply the erasure of religious and ethnic diversity from the nation. Conversely, in Polish master narratives, Catholicism often appeared as a precondition for plurality. The “Queen of Poland” of the Gate of Dawn was intended to accomplish a similar function – protect plurality and reinterpret the history of the Lithuanian-Polish state in the spirit of a renewed union conserving the heritage of the Rzeczpospolita: “The Holy Mother and Queen of Lithuania [Lietuvos valdovė] of the Gate of Dawn receiving the crown as the Queen of Poland [Lenkijos karalienė] will also receive the first title [Queen of Lithuania]”. The first title, however, was supposed to be only implicit.

On the other hand, the “Queen of the Gate of Dawn” was given a martial task related to the defence of Vilnius and Poland. The booklet published by the diocese distributed during the ceremony stated explicitly that “Mary of the Gate of Dawn, as from the most prominent bastion of our Republic, will protect [bronić] the walls of the immortal Polish Vilnius”. The actualization of the Virgin-Mother of the Gate of Dawn as a Mother-Hetmanka had thus a clerical blessing which enabled at the same time the symbolic transformation of Vilnius into a new version of Jasna Góra. The entertainment part of the celebration reveals the semantic consistency of the day. Thus, while the first of the two plays – Obrona Częstochowy by Elżbieta Bośniacka – symbolically related the Marian defence of Częstochowa in the 17th century to the conquest of Vilnius...

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74 “... a territory ... inhabited since the origins by Slavic tribes related to us, the Poles, and speaking the same language as we do” (J. [?], Koronacja Cudownego Obrazu Najświętszej Panny Maryi Ostrobramskiej. Głos Wileński, 3 July 1927. See also Obst J. Historia Cudownego Obrazu Matki Boskiej Ostrobramskiej. Wilno, Ruch, 1927, 4–5.

in 1919–1920,\textsuperscript{76} the virtues of the romantic knight in the *Książę niezłomny* by Calderon de la Barca and Juliusz Słowacki (heroism, self-immolation, sacrifice and moral leadership) reminded the main protagonist that with the aid of the “Queen of Poland” transformed Vilnius into a new Jasna Góra – J. Piłsudski. Furthermore, the ‘Piłsudskization’ of the event was confirmed by a third play – Władysław Anyczy’s *Kościuszko pod Racławicami* – that was performed on the 3 and 4 of July by a Katowice theatre troupe.

The request forwarded by the Vilnius City Council\textsuperscript{77} to award on the coronation day the members of the II Uhlan Regiment with the State Order “Virtuti Militari” for the liberation of Vilnius on 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1919 confirms the tight connection between the celebrations and the J. Piłsudski myth.\textsuperscript{78} The fact is moreover proved by the third entertainment event, which was the inauguration of the exhibition dedicated to the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn. The exhibition had not been organized in a museum but at Stefan Batory University in Vilnius, namely in the university J. Piłsudski had re-founded and named in 1919. One of the oldest universities in the Polish-Lithuanian state, Vilnius University had long been a symbol of Tsarist rule. After the imposed closure in 1832 and a number of plans to reestablish it, the university was recalled to new life only in 1921. The university was renamed in honor of the Polish king that ruled when the university was founded in 1569, however this also symbolically joined him to the re-founder’s figure. In the sermon read during the mass in the Vilnius Cathedral, auxiliary bishop Kazimierz Michalkiewicz, who had sought to sort out the Polish-Lithuanian quarrels over language in religious services in the early 20th century and had embraced a clearly Polish-oriented position only during the German occupation, openly expressed the link between the celebration and the memory of the new Polish state:

*Today’s celebration remind us the memorable day May 1, 1656, when in Lwów Cathedral King Jan Kazimierz with all dignitaries, senators, and his court offered Mary the crowns and the sceptre, and organized the marriage as a symbol of devotion of Himself and the Polish People to Her – the Queen of the Polish Crown. […] But how many miracles and how many graces have our people been given by Mary [in history]? We still remember that not long ago the enemy arrived up to the outskirts of our capital.*

\textsuperscript{76} In the Polish discourse the Virgin of Częstochowa remained a cultural archetype used to represent and explain events over the centuries. See Niedźwiedź A. *Obraz i postać. Znaczenia wizerunku Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej*, Kraków, WUJ, 2005.

\textsuperscript{77} Protocols of Vilnius City Council, container F51, ap. 5, b. 264, p. 86, Central Archive of the Lithuanian State.

But August 15th, 1920 came, the day of the Assumption, the day of the Miracle on the Vistula.79

Not only did the coronation reshape the Virgin’s figure, but it also strengthened – by means of the J. Piłsudski myth – the role of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn within the new Polish catholic state.80

THE LOCAL TRADITION: THE ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE ON THE CORONATION

The political meaning of the coronation ceremony led to opposition as well.81 The most drastic measures were taken by the Lithuanian government, which did not allow many citizens to pass over the border with Poland and participate in the ceremony. Making participation easier and declaring in an official proclamation that “. . . faith has no frontiers . . .,” Lithuanian authorities thought the Polish government would try to endanger the feelings for the Lithuanian political class among its own people.82 The Lithuanian press reacted to the coronation quite univocally and expressed the contrariety to the political meaning of the ceremony shared by all social strata in Lithuania regardless of their political views.83 In particular, the Lithuanian press criticized the ‘nationalizing’ goal of the ceremony. The Lithuanian journal Trimitas observed that

In the counties of Vilnius and Grodno, many people lack a [national] consciousness and do not distinguish religion from nationality [tautybė]. In those lands, for most Catholics inhabitants the Catholic faith is “the Polish Faith” [polska wiara] and therefore they are afraid of admitting they are Lithuanians or Belarusians [gudai], since in their opinion the Lithuanians are pagans and the Belarusians – “Muscovites” or orthodox . . . In our times, when the people [liaudis] has become educated and come into contact with culture, the Poles has understood that the polonization they had carried on for ages is being stopped. Thus, they used religion once more as a means to polonize people and convince them that the Catholic faith is indissolubly linked with Polish identity [lenkybė], so that you are a bad Catholic if you do not consider yourself a Pole.84

79 Dziennik Wilenski, 3 lipca 1927.
80 Mackiewicz-Cat S. Dzisiejsza manifestacja... Słowo, 2 July 1927.
82 V. [?] Nauja lenkų meskerė. Trimitas, 23 June 1927.
83 In the later years, even Lithuanian communist activists remembered the crowning ceremony as an eminently political event. See, for example, Karosas J. Kalba Vilniaus akmenys (iš 1926–1931 m. atsiminimų). Vilnius, Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1963, 95–100.
84 Vl. A. [?].„Vainikavimo” iškilmių.
Although in Polish discourse key elements of the common history merged with the events of recent history could potentially be shared (at least partially) by Lithuanians, the coronation was interpreted as political propaganda which simply aimed to renew the old division between “Polish faith” and “Lithuanian paganism” and, according to member of the Lithuanian Catholic intelligentsia, reminded one of the importance of a-political religious principles for the national education of Lithuanians. On the one hand, the Lithuanian press responded to the Polish attempt to “appropriate” the historical heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by using a historical counter-narrative. Nonetheless, as one can see in a brochure prepared for the coronation day and which was told to be confiscated by Polish authorities,\(^85\) the narrative on the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn lacked any actualization and just repeated well-known arguments. In particular, the Lithuanian author focused on the picture’s origin and authenticity. This was, actually, in sharp contrast to the recent analysis that had proved the Renaissance origin of the picture and shows that the Lithuanians mainly looked at the picture as a relic testifying to the history of the original and non-Polish Lithuanian Catholicism.\(^86\) On the other hand, although the arguments used served as a reminder of the existence of a separate history of Lithuanian Catholicism of which Algirdas could hardly be an image of memory, the central element was again the Virgin herself as an icon of femininity. Her task was once more negative – the neutralization of the historical-political nuances present in the Polish narrative and “protection” of the large masses still lacking a clear national Self in the Vilnius region. Thus, even if in the coronation period the Lithuanians named the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn the “Queen of Lithuania” rather often,\(^87\) her imagined monarchy remained linked to an eminently religious sphere and usually lacked historical references.\(^88\) Also in later years, the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn continued to be represented exclusively as a feminine and familial creature, a “Mother of poor people” protecting her own sons and daughters.\(^89\)

The Lithuanians, however, were not the only groups that harshly criticized the coronation and its meaning. The Vilnius Belarusian newspaper *Krynica* highlighted mainly the same arguments of the Lithuanians, but with slightly different accents. The organizational committee for the coronation ceremony formed in early 1927 had been composed by the main figures of Polish Vilnius. Among them, however,

\(^{85}\) [?], *Aušros vartų paveikslas vainikavimas, Vilniaus varpas*, June/July 1927.


\(^{87}\) Streikus A. *Lietuva ir Sventasis Sostas*, 188.

\(^{88}\) Kraujalis P. *Pamokslas Aušros vartų paveikslavainikavimo dienai (Vilniuje 1927 VII.2)*. Vilnius, Ruch, 1927, 5.

\(^{89}\) See, for example, Milžinas [Švogžlys N.] *Vilniaus sūnūs*. Kaunas, 1932, 12.
was J. Kairūkštis, who was responsible for Lithuania pilgrims. Lithuanians were at least formally recognized as a separate, self-sufficient element. The presence of a Lithuanian (and the lack of Belarusians) in the committee appeared to Catholic Belarusians as the proof of the lack of room granted by Polish authorities for an autonomous Belarusian Catholicism. In fact, among the Slavic populations living in the north-eastern part of independent Poland, the identification between nationality and religious faith was still very strong. The very idea of a Belarusian Catholic was still at least partially unclear, and Catholic Belarusians were usually looked as a part of the Polish Catholic community. Even if the small Belarusian Catholic movement firstly denounced such a hierarchical stratification among Catholics and the ongoing assimilation process that was furthered through the church, its counter-narrative aimed at constructing a historical cultural divide much larger than the Lithuanian one. On the one hand, the celebration was considered “a Polish national manifestation” to which the only response possible consisted of persevering in the (theoretically) pure a-national Catholic faith as a morally right way to build an independent national culture.  

The reaction was therefore very similar to the Lithuanian one even if the formation of an independent Belarusian Catholicism was still an ongoing process in reality. On the other hand, however, Belarusian discourse interestingly related the very site of the Gate of Dawn to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its “historical memory” as a whole. By focusing on the heritage of the former Grand Duchy along with the other groups that lived there (mainly the Lithuanians), Catholic Belarusians proposed a positive alternative narrative, which combined the (common) historical heritage and new ethnic loyalties.

Similar criticisms came from publicists historical literature refers to as krajowcy. Although their criticisms were directed also at Kaunas government, which they accused of making it hard for people to take part in the ceremony and using therefore a religious ceremony for political ends, their main disapproval was connected to the supposed aim of the Polish government to “erase the traces of the historical past of Vilnius as the capital town of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.” Ludwik Abramowicz, one of the most famous intellectuals that already in the early 20th century had expressed the sincere wish to cooperate with all of local ethnic communities in the name of a new civic oriented citizenship, pointed out the very multiethnic essence of the Gate of Dawn as a testimony to the historical past of

90 [?] Karanacyja M.B. Wostrobramskaj, Biełaruskaja Krynica, 30 June 1927.
91 In the 1920s and 1930s Belarusian Catholicism growth and used Vilnius Catholic sites of memory as its own. See, for example, [?] Bielaruskaja katalickaja pilihrimka u Kalwaryju. Biełaruskaja Krynica, 25 June 1935.
the land and affirmed the profound unfamiliarity Poles coming from elsewhere in Poland had with it:

 [...] unless historic Lithuania was arbitrarily divided, all of its parts attract one another towards their common centre, which is the capital town of Giedymin's descents [Giedyminowie], whose walls protect the miraculous picture of the Mother of God at the Gate of Dawn that is worshipped in the whole land [kraj] by the Catholic – and also non-Catholic – population. [...] But the pan-Polish propaganda [of the Government] aims to send to Vilnius priests and even tourists from the most distant corners of Poland and for whom the Gate of Dawn is something exotic or even unheard of.  

Whether it was exotic or not, the Gate of Dawn did express a separate tradition, and constituted a site of memory common to all ethnicities living in Vilnius and in the former territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. L. Abramowicz expressed this idea quite clearly. His words, however, did not resonate loudly and remained almost unheard of in the context of the late 1920s. As in the case of the Catholic Belarusians, the civic oriented krajowcy were a very small group having extremely limited power in the political arena. Their memory could have become a real alternative if the political cooperation between the ‘heirs’ of the afore-mentioned heritage – the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Belarusians – would have found a common civic ground for political cooperation. The polarization of Lithuanian and Polish state-nationalisms was the main reason for its failure.

**FINAL REMARKS: A REASON FOR REMEMBERING AND A REASON FOR FORGETTING?**

The crowning ceremony of the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn is an example of how in multilingual and multicultural areas the political elite can use signifiers common to all local community and change/actualize theirs Signified as a way to integrate the masses (still) lacking a clear ethnic/national identification into the nation. In the case I analyzed how the political elite of the Second Polish Republic used the ceremony as a means to actualize an image of memory (Mary) as the guard and defender (Hetmanka) of the Polish state in the Vilnius cityscape. Anyway, even if, concretely, the ceremony was intended to semantically stir up the memory of the Commonwealth’s heritage (defending itself against the Tatars and the Swedes, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in Vienna in 1683), the actualization of this memory (defending itself against Soviet Russia in 1919-21) underscored the

importance of J. Piłsudski as the principal heroic figure of the new Republic, and the principal actor of the re-born state. The crowning of the Hetmanka therefore celebrated univocally the rule of J. Piłsudski in the new Poland and used a religious symbol that the rural Catholic population identified themselves with as a means to stimulate the populace’s feelings of belonging to the state. Although the independence of the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was not formally denied, nonetheless the geopolitical situation and the renewed symbolic role of Poland as a bulwark of Europe against Communist Russia made semantic divides irrelevant.

After Marshall J. Piłsudski’s heart and his mother relics had been transferred to Vilnius, the symbolic appropriation of the Gate of Dawn was completed: not only did the Virgin as Hetmanka serve as a reminder of Polish history, but also the more intimate femininity of that Virgin in the Vilnius landscape reflected the image of the Mother that gave birth to the re-founder of the Polish state. Thus, the two images – the Mother and the Hetmanka – inevitably merged with each other as a fundamental part of Polish and Polish Vilnius cultural landscape. Poles from “Western Poland” went on patriotic pilgrimages to the regained kresy could recognize in that symbol the elements of religion and history that made Poland their Res Publica; local inhabitants (especially school pupils) were to recognise the elements of their local historical heritage as an integral part of the Polish patria. Conversely, Lithuanian intelligentsia counteracted the Polish actualization of the memory Mary of the Gate of Dawn by stressing the canonical Catholic image of the Virgin and her maternal meaning. Still in 1917 Lithuanian publisher and leftist political activist Mykolas Biržiška had pointed out that the Gate had the same patriotic mean for the Lithuanian intelligentsia that Częstochowa had for the Poles. Nevertheless, he bitterly admitted that “. . . since the level of national consciousness among our people is very low, these historical treasures remains only religious cult objects and one can just hope that society will consider them otherwise in the future”. Even if M. Biržiška’s words sincerely stressed the firm belief of the Lithuanian intelligentsia, and the Gate of Dawn was indeed part of the system of symbols that made up the cultural landscape of Lithuanian Vilnius, as any other religious image it could hardly fully become a site of Lithuanian memory. Since the 19th century Lithuanian Catholicism had been constructed in contrast to the “politicized” Catholicism of

94 J. Piłsudski’s heart and his mother remains had been first transferred to St. Therese church by the Gate of Dawn and then from there to the cemetery. The role of J. Piłsudski’s mother and Vilnius cultural landscape through the Virgin of the Gate of Dawn were also underscored in other occasions such as the exhibition “J. Piłsudski and Vilnius” that took place 1936 at Stefan Batory University. See Lisowski S. Wystawa “Marşałek Józef J. Piłsudski a Wilno”, 11.V – 14.VI.1936 w Bibliotece Uniwersyteckiej w Wilnie. Wilno, 1937.


the Poles. Thus, Lithuanian Catholicism aimed to appropriate part of the Catholic heritage of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuanian by furthering a process of forgetting aimed at erasing the memory of the common Polish-Lithuanian history embedded in religious symbols. The creations of a Grand-Dukes-epoch oriented, defensive national mythology (that is primarily oriented against the enemies that posed a threat to the Lithuanians in the interwar period just like in the case of the 14th century) needed to neutralize the highly concurrent memory of the Poles. That explains why Kaunas’ government was opposed to the Polish proposal and did not let pilgrims from Lithuania freely join the celebrations in Vilnius. The martial image of Mary, which was eminently historical and still clearly echoed in Polish discourse, reflected that common history that Lithuanians had to forget. In no different way than earlier, the Gate of Dawn remained a pivotal paradox – it did fit in the semantics of Lithuanian discourse as a Catholic site in Vilnius, while its secular meaning was actually banned. In contrast to the Piłsudskization of the Gate of Dawn (though with different accents), both the Belarusians and Polish-speaking krajowcy recalled the tradition and the memory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a whole. Both of them considered the possibility of weaving a new religious narrative in which the historical memory of the Grand Duchy might have found a place. The polarization of Poles and Lithuanians that was determined by the geopolitical situation in the Interwar period made this possibility definitively fail.

Andrea Griffante

KATALIKYBĖ, MARIJA IR ISTORIJA: AUŠROS VARTŲ ŠVČ. MERGEΛĖS MARIJOS PAVEIKSLO KARŪNAVIMAS (1927 M.) KAIP LENKŲ ATMINIMO IR LIETUVIŲ UŽMIRŠIMO SUREIKŠMINIMAS
