



Omnis nobilitas ab equo (Latin proverb)

STUD FARM OF THE GRAND DUKE OF LITHUANIA: TRADITIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HORSE IN WARFARE AND MESSENGER SERVICE 14-16 CENTURY

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National Museum Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania

Grand Duchy's of Lithuania name takes us back to the past, to the time of large historical contrasts and changes. It is rather difficult to understand the global significance Grand Duchy of Lithuanian in the historical maps without the definition of the situation. During the examination of the royal stud farms theme, it is necessary to take into account the fact that we are talking about the times when duchy was spread over the current part of Lithuania: it contained – territory of Lithuania and Belarus, and in the fourteenth century also owned the majority of the Ukraine and western Russia. During the existence of the Duchy in these lands occurred numbers of castles, fortresses, residences, as well as hunting castles and stud farms¹.

Lithuanian history is full of drama, from the prosperity of the Grand Duchy to the occupation, enslavement, ban of Lithuanian language and even the loss of Lithuania's state name, then - long wars, struggles for independence, and exile periods. After the last partition of Lithuanian-Poland commonwealth lands, the

¹ VILNIUS, Vilnius University Library, Old prints storage, Nr. 27-2334, vol. IV, fols. 28.

largest part of the territory went to Russia, smelters to other neighboring countries².

The reconstruction of Lithuanian rulers and kings residences, manor houses, hunting castles and stud farms for the current re-established and independent Lithuanian state – is a real challenge, first of all, it is a major financial problem, and secondly - the test for imperfect heritage legislative base.

According to various historical sources, works of art, documents and so on, - Horse Breeding, stud farms, Hunting and its archaic rituals - has always been extremely important cultural phenomenon in Lithuanian manors³. Archaeological findings and conclusion from the recent years, constructs a clearer picture of the evolution of the Grand Duchy's equestrian, which leave no doubt that the scale of this phenomenon, it's luxury and value⁴.

There are a lot of historical data on the development of Lithuanian Horse Breeding and noble stud farms, however they lack structure and deeper exploration, there can be found only few detailed studies. And even if the horse is recognized part of Lithuania's image, scientific historical equestrian themes are not popular.

The Horse Breeding theme in Lithuania has long been especially sacralized, horse – was identified with the mythical god Thunder, and horse archetype as a universal symbol, dominated in many spheres of life. State heraldic history clearly demonstrates the importance of this animal, over the ages Lithuania was represented by symbols of horses and noble horsemen. Horse Breeding, as far as is currently known from archaeological research was very important from the beginning of our era⁵.

² Third partition – 1795, was the last in a series of the Partitions Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth among Prussia, the Austrian Empire, and the Russian Empire which effectively ended Polish–Lithuanian national sovereignty until 1918. On October 24, 1795, the representatives of the Russian Empire, Austria, and the Kingdom of Prussia assembled to write the treaty formally dissolving the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and all of her institutions. Despite a heated disagreement between Austria and Prussia over the division of land that almost led the negotiations to collapse, it was eventually agreed that Austria would receive the territories of Western Galicia and Southern Masovia, along with approximately 1.2 million people, Prussia received Podlachia, the remainder of Masovia, and Warsaw, with 1 million people, and Russia received the remainder, including the city of Vilnius and 1.2 million people.

³ D. Steponavičienė: *Luxury in the estate of Lithuanian Ruler 13th–16th century*, Vilnius 2007, p. 135.

⁴ K. Pietkiewicz: *Dwór litewski wielkiego księcia Aleksandra Jagiellończyka*, Poznań 1995.

⁵ VILNIUS, The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Science, Jablonskis Konstantinas records, vol. IV, fols. 83-85.

This is confirmed by the graves with horses and the burials only for horses which are pervasive in all historical Lithuania's territory. Horse tombs tradition is Indo-European, it is also known in other countries, but it is so widespread and consistently detected only in the Baltic lands and Scythian tribal areas. Horses were buried particularly richly decorated.

The position in the grave, pit shape and other characteristics suggest there existed a complex ritual - this opinion is supported by surviving written sources. Large part of Horse graves – are mostly sacrifices to honor the dead nobles horseman. However, in widespread mass graves in Central Lithuania, decorated horses were buried separately from the men. There are even repositories, which seek the 9th century, where once were found a lot of saddled horsemen graves.

While Lithuanian state was ruled by King Mindaugas, the Grand Dukes and the first Gediminids, country was constantly at war: intensive fights with the Teutonic Order in Livonia and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The referred period because of the war was unfavorable to the country's economic growth, but the Horse Breeding became an exception. Horses were exceptionally needed for military and diplomatic actions, communication. From the 14th mention the stud farms owned by Grand Duke of Lithuania, the origin of the horse, quite wide range of staff designed to look after them. All this shows a well-developed Horse Farm and allows to say without hesitation that even at the early stage of Lithuanian State life, Horse Breeding took a very important, probably even a prominent position among the interests of the Grand Duke⁶.

Horse Breeding and hunting had a certain effect on the Lithuanian ruler everyday life, economic life of the state, warfare, diplomacy and foreign policy.

Hunting of large animals: a noble, aurochs, elk, deer, bears and so on, was exclusively elite pastime and privilege, often referred to as the "royal" sport and treated as knights tournaments. Royal hunting retinue, which usually consisted of foreign nobles, was accompanied by service personnel which significant part took care of the horses. Especially memorable seem the expensive and long hunts with maneuverable horses, described in historical sources⁷. They mention not only records about the stud farms, impressive range of dog breeds⁸, but also

⁶ Z. Ivinskis: "Economic policy of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in their estates till 16th century" in *Lithuanian past*, vol.1, 1940, pp. 12-13.

⁷ D. Baronas: *Lithuanian warfare features*, Vilnius 2002, p. 59.

⁸ R. Ragauskienė: "Cave canem: a man and a dog in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania 16th century", in *History*, Vilnius 2010.

used for hunting and gifts - lavishly inlaid exclusive weapons (muskets, rifles, arcs, crossbows, decorated hunting daggers, swords and knives)⁹.

In the beginning of the 15th century Vytautas the Grand Duke of Lithuania, commits many state reforms, which probably impacted all areas of life¹⁰. The old state development phase was crowned by historic victory in the battle of Grunewald. During the reign of the Grand Duke Vytautas the most common areas of the national economy, as well as horses farms became institutionalized. And the 16th century historical sources notes already a well-formed and highly specialized horse care system, consisting of a various obligatory service, craftsmen and state officials. Polish scientists, among them Karol Buczek says that then Lithuanian horse breeding farm system has been much more developed and diverse than Polish.

In Lithuania there has been grown a local breed horses – Žemaitukai, currently recognized as one of Europe's oldest breed, known since the 6th-7th century. The historian Jean Krashevski wrote about the battle between the Lithuanians and the Mongols in 1241 the following: "...this battle put a stop to the Tartars' invasion towards the West, hence Europe is indebted to Lithuania for not having been destroyed. These and other battles, sudden maneuvers, distant marches were possible if one had fast, strong and tough horses"¹¹. Therefore fame of the Žemaitukai had spread wide and far. These are tough, long-living horses that do not require special fodder, are noted for graceful movements and obedient character. The Žemaitukai pass the qualities that have established in their genes for centuries down to their progeny very well: toughness, strong constitution, universal working capacity, energetic temperament, nice appearance, therefore they form an invaluable genetic fund of Lithuanian horse-breeding. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations recognized the Žemaitukai as the protected breed and entered it in the Catalogue of Agricultural Animals of the World.

It is important to drawn attention to the fact that it was the Grand Marshal of Lithuania Kristupas Manvydas Dorohostaiskis, who wrote the book "Hippika - first equestrian textbook not only in Lithuania, but also in the eastern Europe"¹². In the beginning of the book, as it was usual for those times, is noble word to

⁹ VILNIUS, Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania, Lithuanian microfilm records, Nr. 560.

¹⁰ G. Mickūnaitė: *Vytautas the Great, the image of the Ruler*, Vilnius 2008, p. 105.

¹¹ A. Nikžentaitis: "13th-15th centuries Lithuanian army features; arrangement, tactics, customs" in *War archive*, Vilnius 1992, t. XIII, pp. 8-9.

¹² Kristupas Manvydas Dorohostaiskis (pol. Krzysztof Dorohostajski; 1562-1615) was Lithuanian grand marshal. For a while was living in Naples and studied about horses and later on in 1603 published a book "Hippika or books about horses".

the gracious reader and dedication to the ruler Sigismund Vasa. The work consists of four books. The first one expounds horse body structure, its functioning (physiology), described the variety of horse breeds in the world, their features, cultivation and breeding. Among the varieties of horses he talks about the famous Lithuanian breed žemaitukai. The second book describes the horse training and the secrets of skillful riding. In the biggest, third part, author collected the knowledge about harness used in various countries: halter, bits, snaffle and so on. The fourth part is dedicated to treatment of horses. It described the diseases, medicine and their use, as well as treatments for injuries.

However the Ruler and the nobles kept large flocks of horses from Italy, Germany, Turkey, there were also Arabian horses. Written sources state that Lithuanians in 14th – 15th centuries for upcoming battle used to build some tens of thousands of horses formations¹³. In the 16th century in particularly popular became Polish light and elegant cavalry horses. If brought from the foreign countries Grand Duchy's rulers mostly used horses in combat, communication and representation purposes. Good breed has always been an expensive luxury and a royal gift, so is often mentioned in the diplomatic gift lists¹⁴.

When arrived to the solemn audience, messengers during the introduction presented fairings. Historical sources usually mention such gifts: golden coins, the horses, expensive guns, hunting dogs and hunting birds¹⁵.

Interstate relations followed a certain behavior system, which formed the basis of mutually recognized standards and diplomatic ceremonial - solemn ceremony, involving rituals which marked individual diplomatic mission phases. In the performance of power and image of the Head of the State, were often used highborn horses.

In the mention period of time the only transport of lord's messengers were horses, at the border diplomatic representatives of another country were also met by horseback escort. Which means that part of first impression was made not only by appearance of a representative, but also by his horse. For example, in Moscow members of diplomatic missions and hosting countries representatives would line up in two rows, while in the middle remained messengers and the highest rang representatives from the hosting country. They removed the hats, dismounted from the horses, the newcomers listened to the greetings in the name of the local ruler. It is also often mentioned that diplomats

¹³ K. Dorohostajski: *Hippika ... op. cit.*, p. 15-17.

¹⁴ VILNIUS, Vilnius University Library, Rare books and prints department, Nr. 239-241, vol. IX, fols. 70-72.

¹⁵ R. Ragauskienė: "Cave canem... op. cit".

and messengers while entering the mansion were met by the ruler's officials and stud farm staff.

The arrival of the Ruler and a large delegation of envoys in to the area had to mean considerable commotion. 15th – 16th centuries envoys also sometimes consisted of hundreds of people and horses. Here is some interesting information from historical sources:

Back in 1418 Master of the Livonia and Tartu Bishop while staying in Veliuona had 300 horses; in the year 1427 messengers from the Great Novgorod traveled to Grand Duke Vytautas with 350 horses; In 1566 3 grand messengers and 9 nobles traveled to Moscow with 906 people and 1289 horses. This surviving information allows us to imagine what numbers of horses were gathered in one place, and how many staff was needed.

The strongest influence on the Horse Breeding, cavalry and the formation of new military tactics had 13th-15th centuries fierce battles against the German knights, which army base was heavy cavalry and, no doubt, the same period various contacts with the Mongol-Tatar tribes¹⁶.

It is important to note that the geographical position of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania determined, that there met and intertwined different Western and Eastern concepts of Horse Breeding. The horses of the Ruler guaranteed quick access, efficient transportation and movement of food, trade, and weapons, even news. Therefore, became indispensable helpers in state management, administration, communication and off course in the battlefield. In the end of 14th century we see a beginning of a new phase, associated with a vibrant economic and military policy of Grand Duke Vytautas¹⁷. He was setting up a militaristic nobility layer, where the principal obligation was to go to the battle with your own horse. The one's who could not afford to have a horse, were ironically pushed by public opinion to rather sell his wife and children, than stay without a horse. The laws were quite strict, and it is not surprising, keeping in mind Lithuania's almost constant state of war.

Therefore, while discussing this topic, it is worth, based on historical sources, but from a modern perspective to take a look at another important stud farm function – horse as a mean of transport.

Since the establishment of the state, and in particular during the fights and the expansion of the territory, communication formed the framework of state management. It was relevant for both – the early "traveling" ruler's court, and

¹⁶ VILNIUS, Vilnius University Library, Old prints storage, Nr. 28-2334, vol. V, fols. 53-54.

¹⁷ G. Mickūnaitė: *Vytautas the Great, the image of the Ruler*, Vilnius 2008, p. 95.

phase afterwards when permanent capital emerged and the ruler began to reside in one place. After forming commonwealth with Poland, the head of the state had to travel and live between two capitals¹⁸.

The Grand Duke's guests, messengers and officials provision while traveling in the state was possible due to obligations. There were formed a sub-stations (podwody) functioning because of the obligation to supply horses and chariots¹⁹.

The development of horse breeding – is an integral part of the great history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which clearly shows what the state's economic, cultural and military potential.

Due to the lack of large areas of large pasture, Lithuanian ruler stud farm was decentralized. Its network is usually matched with the Grand Duke's estate's network. This is confirmed by the remaining historical place names.

¹⁸ Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth as a dualistic state with two capitals Vilnius and Krakow, ruled by common monarch was established at the Union of Lublin in July 1659.

¹⁹ VILNIUS, Vilnius University Library, Rare books and prints department, Nr. 28-2334, vol. V, fols. 35-36.

Table which shows the amount of words and synonyms of the word horse

| Lithuanian | | Latin | Russian | Polish |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Word | Notes | | | |
| arkl-nas | asil- ³ ir eržilo hibridas. | | | |
| arklid- | | | СТАЙНА / КОНЮШНЯ | |
| arklin- žagr- | | | КОННИЦА | |
| arkliokas | | | МАШИТАК | |
| arklys | bendrinis gyvūno pav., dažniausiai – darbinis; žinomas šaltiniuose nuo XVI a. | jumentum | КОНЫ. КЛЕСЯ | |
| arklidininkas: | | magister stabuli | КОНЮШ(И)ВЪ: | |
| a) dvaro | | | a) ДВОРЪВЪ | |
| arklininkas: | | equosus. | КОНЮК(Ь): | koniarz |
| a) ašvininkas; | | subequosus. | a) ОШЕВЕНЕК: | |
| b) balninis; | | | b) СЕДЕЛЬНИК: | |
| c) bandos (raitininkas); | | | c) СТАДЫВЪ: | |
| d) dvaro. | | | d) ДВОРЪВЪ | |
| ašva, ašvienis | senoviniai kumel- ³ ir arklio pav. | canterius, i m | КЛЕСЯ | |
| butas | tamsiai rudas, kaštoninis, o karčiai ir uodega – juodi. | | | |
| bulanas | geltonas juodom kojom, uodega ir karčiai. | | | |
| eidininkas, šuolininkas | žirgas, išmokytas einant vienu metu kelti abi to pačios pus- ³ kojas. | | ДОБРАНИ, ПАРКОЖНИК / СКАКУН, ИНОХОДЕЦ | |
| eržilas | veislinis žirgas | | | |
| husarai | smogiamoji kavalerija | | | |
| išdaras | romytinis, kastruotas arklys | | БЕЛАХ / МЕРДИН | |
| kaimen- | būtent arklių | jumentum equorum | СТАДО | stada |
| kavalerija | raitoji kariuomen- | | | |
| kazokai | lengvoji kavalerija | | | |
| keliuotis | tarnybinis bajoras, pagalbin- karo tarnyba. | | | |
| keršas | bet kokios spalvos arklys su daug didelių baltų pl- ³ my. | | | |
| k- ³ - | ryt. d.ž. term. - prastas kuinas | canterius, i m | | |
| kuinas | prastas, senas, nusidirbęs arklys. | | | |
| kumel- | arklio patel- | | све(и)рпа / КОБЫЦА | Świeczopa/ kobyca |
| kumelys | patinas | | | |
| laitis, laitis | pagalbin- karo tarnyba. | jumentarii leuther | ЛАНЦ, ЛАНЦИ, ЛАНЦИ, ЛАНЦЕВ | kobylniki |
| maistalietis | techninis pareigūnas, XVII a. | | | |
| moldaviškas arkl. | veisl- | | БЕКМАТ, БЕКМАТЫЙ | |
| mulas | asilo ir kumel- ³ hibridas, tvirtesnis ir ištvėrimingesnis už arkl- ³ na. | | | |
| obuolmušis | bet kokios spalvos arklys išmuštas obuoliukais. | | | |
| psbaln- | | | ПОЛНИЦА / ПОЛНИК | |
| paarklidininkis | valstybinis pareigūnas | | ПОДКОНЮШ(И)ВЪ | |



Fig. 1 *Battle of Grunwald*, Jan Matejko, 1878, National Museum, Warsaw



Fig. 2 *Tapestry with Lithuanian coat of arms*, Wawel Castle, Cracow



Fig. 3 *Sigismund Augustus Armor*, ca. 1548-1569, Royal Armoury, Stockholm



Fig. 4 *Wladyslaw IV Vasa*, artist from the circle of Peter Paul Rubens, ca. 1625, Wawel Royal Castle National Art Collection

