

Foreword

The principle objective of the project „Historical and Cultural Heritage of Belarusian–Lithuanian Borderland: Between Minsk and Vilnius“ was to examine the cultural objects and personalities of great cross-cultural value to the area at the Lithuania–Belarus border. It could only be reached through direct employment of objects, funds and archives located in Belarus.

Scientists from the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute as well as the Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature Research at the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus have gathered in order to implement the project, and its title has enabled both participating countries to conduct interdisciplinary scientific research engaging art historians, culturologists, ethnologists, linguists and philosophers. The project allowed to partly overcome the mosaic character of exploration in the area and proceed to the intercultural scientific level. Regarding the cultural heritage, Vilnius and Minsk share common history and changes in geopolitical borders. What concerns the scientific contribution of the project, it enables not only practical application but also spiritual rapprochement of the ethnic groups that inhabit the territory. It is especially relevant and timely due to the lack of information and insufficient amount of insight into the objects of material and art culture at the Lithuanian–Belarusian border. The examination conducted during the project enabled the comparison of intensity of cultural relations and interactions between the two countries and helped to reveal the specific character of their differences.

The current book „Between Vilnius and Minsk: Historical and Cultural Heritage of Lithuanian–Belarusian Borderland“ is the result of scientific internships taken by the participants of the project in Belarus and Lithuania. They not only served as an invaluable opportunity for the scientists to acquire first-hand knowledge about the objects and sources of the research from numerous libraries and archives, but also enabled them to find new ways of looking at the stereotypes of the cultural life at the border and its phenomena. It was aimed to investigate the cultural interconnections between Lithuania and Belarus: heritage of sacred architecture and art, artistic life in the 19th–early 20th centuries, activity of intellectual, cultural and scientific societies, heritage of museums, historiography of research in Belarusian culture at Vilnius University and the present state of research of the Lithuanian–Belarusian border region. The culture of the Lithuanian–Belarusian border has been taken into account within the context of the European Union borders, and both material and spiritual symbols of the cultural heritage have been regarded not only on a regional but also on a European scale.

Our colleagues from Belarus have looked into a range of problems that are especially relevant to Lithuanian scientists: role of Belarusian–Lithuanian frontier in the history of book art of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th–18th centuries, image of a minister of Christian religion on the territory of Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, specificity of Belarusian towns and boroughs along the Old Vilnius high road in the 14th–early 20th century, images of Minsk and Vilnius in mythopoeic space and traditional timber architecture in Belarusian and Lithuanian skansens.

The single edition combines different objects of research as well as different methods for their examination. Thus we attempted to treat the cultural heritage of the borderland as a multicultural object and reveal its significance for the national identities of both countries.

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