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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### How to Represent a Country Erased from the Political World Map: Case Study of Lithuania in the 19th Century.

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#### Abstract

The goal of the article is to discuss the extraordinary cultural initiative manifested in the form of a publication titled “The Vilnius Album” by J. K. Vilčinskis that was released in Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This initiative was a way to widely spread the knowledge to Europe about the existence of Lithuania via non-political means. The chosen case study allowed revealing the problematic aspects of the history, politics, society, religion, culture and art of Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, back when the country had lost its autonomy and had become a part of Russia. The representativeness of the album is chosen as the research object as it is novel aspect which still has not been studied and which, according to the belief of the author of this article, is the fundamental idea behind its creation. The author attempts to affirm this statement in the article. A detailed analysis of the contents of the album consisting of approximately 353 illustrations helped discern and discuss the following key representative categories of images: architectural objects and pieces of art, portraits, historical events and illustrations of literature works. The criteria used for selection of illustrations were explained and the main factors determining positive results, its exceptional quality and aesthetics guaranteeing interest to its viewers, were discerned. Such a study is presented to the community at the international level for the first time. Hopefully, the article will be useful in further development of intercultural communication possibilities.

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#### Introduction:-

The history of each country contains exceptional cultural initiatives that bear great significance both at the local and international level. The edition (1845-1870) of “The Vilnius Album” (original title “Album de Wilna”) by Jonas Kazimieras Vilčinskis (Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński) is considered a case of such an initiative in Lithuania. This work was published during an immensely complex period of history when the small Baltic State of Lithuania was annexed to the Russian Empire as one of its provinces and was wiped entirely off the map. One man’s desire to not give in under the current circumstances and his initiative to immortalize still existing cultural values by representing his country in this unprecedented way gave results of a remarkably wide scale. The album is exceptional in its artistic quality and iconographic value. Its separate engravings have spread all across the world to this very day. Back in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “The Vilnius Album” was presented to Queen Victoria, the ruler of England, as the most beautiful publication of the time (Gasiūnas, 2002, p. 88). The representativeness of the publication in Lithuania is proven by the fact that several lithographs of the album’s adorn the publicly accessible halls of the present-day Presidential Palace, designed for official visits and foreign delegations. Engravings highly valued by collectors can be seen in international auctions and European art museums. It is believed that some of the graphics leafs have also spread as far as America, Asia and Africa. Even though the exact scope of the geographical distribution of “The Vilnius Album” has not yet been recorded and it is not the goal of this scientific article, but the author expects the work to be of benefit in the advancement of intercultural communication possibilities.

### **Material and Methods:-**

Descriptions of “The Vilnius Album” reveal many intersecting problematic facets, e.g. the repressive policy towards Lithuania, the annihilation of the Lithuanian culture and the resistance of J. K. Vilčinskis against such actions with the aim to praise the historic past of Lithuania as an independent state and its renowned citizens, to record still existing valuable pieces of art and architectural heritage, to reveal the unique ethnicity and to consolidate the endeavors of local artists for a common cause. In Lithuania, the structure of the album itself has been analyzed on a somewhat wider scale. As the album was relatively large in volume (over 350 engravings), the researchers first attempted to collect all of its constituent parts and register all works of art (Gasiūnas, 1996; Budrytė, 1987). The process of publishing the album and the participating artists and engravers was also described (Gasiūnas, 2007; Jaworska, 1972). Attempts were made to outline separate works of art belonging to the album and depicting architectural objects and residual iconographic value (Drėma, 1991). Some interest was shown in the aspects of cultural identity revealed by the illustrations in the album (Mickūnienė, 2012). All these studies are undoubtedly of great significance, yet, none of them stress the most important facet of all – the representativeness of the album, which is the fundamental idea behind its creation. Thus, the article is aimed at presenting “The Vilnius Album” to international audience as one of the most unique publications by highlighting its representative nature, explaining it as it was perceived by its author and showing the results of his endeavor. Is this but a cultural initiative or could it also be a covert and well-thought out political maneuver? The case study allows revealing the problematic aspects of the history, politics, society, religion, culture and art of Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a repressed country. Hopefully, revealing this set of problems on an international level will be beneficial for similar comparative researches.

### **Historical and Political Situation of Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century:-**

Lithuania lost its autonomy as an independent state with deep roots and long history after the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1795) and restored its independence only in 1918. The majority of Lithuania was annexed to the Russian Empire and its territory was divided into governorates. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of the governorates had changed slightly: at first, only Vilnius and Grodno Governorates existed but later additional Governorates of Kaunas, Kuršas and Suvalkai were delineated. Such type of an administrative division was to serve the Russian Government as easy means to manage the annexed country and, most importantly, the name of Lithuania could be erased from the world map and replaced with an abstract name of Northwestern Region. The name of Lithuania was prohibited to be used in official documents while Northwestern Region represented but a geographical province of the Russian Empire (Medišauskienė, 2009, p. 70).

The next repressive political maneuver of the tsar impacted the Roman Catholic religion which had been prevalent in Lithuania for more than 400 years. Attempts were made to reduce the influence of the Catholicism and to strengthen and advance the position of the Orthodox Church. Ideas were propagated claiming that Lithuanians had long been followers of the Orthodox Church and had reverted to Catholicism only due to the influence of the Polish. The oppression of the Catholic Church was evident by the abolishment of its monasteries. Pursuant to the Order passed in 1832, more than half of the Catholic monasteries housing monks were closed down across the entire Empire (Bairišauskaitė, 2011, p. 258). The lands and serfs were taken from Catholic monasteries, dioceses, seminaries and parish churches. The priests were prohibited from baptizing children conceived by couples with different religious backgrounds. The sermons given by the Catholic priests were censored and any possibilities to construct new Catholic churches or repair the old ones were heavily restricted (Aleksandravičius, Kulakauskas, 1996, p.76).

The field of education also experienced many losses. Vilnius University, the most important and the only institution of higher education in Lithuania, was closed down pursuant to the Decree of Tsar Nicholas I of 1832. Throughout its relatively many years of existence (year of foundation: 1579), Vilnius University had become a significant cultural and educational center not only to the City of Vilnius but also to the entire Lithuania and its neighboring countries. Many renowned people studied and later lectured at this university from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, e.g. German physician Johann Frank and his son Joseph Frank, also a physician, historian Joachim Lelewel, poets Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, and historian Simonas Daukantas. In addition to the regular educational activities, Vilnius University also carried out intensive scientific researches, published books and periodicals and had an open library with huge collections of books and manuscripts. Various societies involving both professors and students in their activities were also taken under the wing of the university. These societies spread educational and ethical values along with being avid supporters of anti-tsarist views which later led to the

November Uprising (1831) spanning over the entire country (Adomonis, Adomonytė, 1997, p.15). The Russian military forces crushed the uprising and the Government enforced even heavier repressions, including the closing down of Vilnius University. Thus, Lithuania remained without any institution of higher education until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The political restrictions also had an impact on the most active portion of the Lithuania society, i.e. the noblemen, who comprised the crucial power capable of resisting the Russian Government. Firstly, the Russian Empire sought to reduce the numbers of noblemen. Political orders restricting their civic rights were passed and their assets, manors and land were confiscated as punishment for anti-tsarist activities. The numbers of the Lithuanian noblemen were significantly scaled down after Nicholas I passed the order to present documents proving noble birth within two years as of 1833. Unfortunately, many of the minor nobles no longer had such documents as part of the court registers containing proof of nobility had been destroyed by passage of time or fires. Noblemen who failed to prove their noble birth were registered as citizens. Dissatisfaction with the political moves of the tsar was evident among the representatives of the nobility. Historians all agree that two major uprisings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in 1832 and 1863) were organized by the noblemen.

Having lost their political power, the noblemen of Lithuania started playing an increasingly active role in cultural matters. As public cultural life had hit a wall due to the same issues of Russification and censorship, the role of manors as participants of the cultural process increased. Private parties and gatherings at the manors of noblemen involved both revelry and heavy discussions on various scientific, social or arts-related topics. Sometimes these discussions grew into extraordinary initiatives, and “The Vilnius Album” by J. K. Vilčinskis was one of them.

### **“The Vilnius Album” as a Publication Representing the Country:-**

J. K. Vilčinskis was struck by the idea to publish “The Vilnius Album” sometime around 1845. (Gasiūnas, 1996, p.4). During his travels around Europe, J. K. Vilčinskis noticed that every major city had its own representative publications that recorded the most valuable architectural and artistic heritage. Meanwhile, even though the City of Vilnius had a rich history and exceptional artistic heritage, it had nothing of similar nature to represent its grandeur. As J. K. Vilčinskis himself said, “Vilnius City with its beautiful surroundings and a great number of recollections bears a tremendous significance to the history of the Northern Europe; yet, it has been completely unheard-of to foreigners and most of our own people alike who lack any deeper knowledge of the past of the capital city of Lithuania. These were the reasons that motivated me into publishing illustrations of Vilnius as precisely and as detailed as possible” (citation from Budrytė, 1987, p.8). The citation serves well to reveal the educational and representational goals of the publisher that were further developed when the publishing process had been already under way. The quality of the publication was the key factor in attaining these goals. Having printed one exemplar of lithography in Vilnius Lithography Workshop, J. K. Vilčinskis realized that the held technology was not sufficient to obtain the desired quality. Thus, he decided to entrust the album reproduction works to the Printing House of Rose-Joseph Lemerrier, where many talented lithographers, such as Louis-Pierre-Alphonse Bichebois, Jean Victor Adam, Isidore Laurent Deroy, Adolphe Bayot, Leon Sabatier, etc., were employed.

“The Vilnius Album” was published in several stages. The first task was to find artists to draw the objects carefully chosen by the publisher. For this, J. K. Vilčinskis contracted local painters Kanuty Rusiecki, Karol Rypiński, Michał Kulesza, Albert Żamett, Jan Chrucki, Constantin Kukiewicz, Marcin Zaleski, Vasily Sadovnikov and others. The artists painted scenes from real-life and made copies of old valuable paintings. This was a very important act by J. K. Vilčinskis as a patron of art because the artistic life in Vilnius during those times was in stagnation. Even the most gifted artists, having graduated from universities in Rome or Paris, found it difficult to get by from their profession. The only jobs they had consisted of individual orders from well-off noble families and, most often, those involved painting portraits for their manor galleries. Hence, the idea spread by J. K. Vilčinskis about the publication of “The Vilnius Album” and the orders funded by this man for various genres of art managed to disrupt the status quo and unite the artists together for one common goal. The publishing of the album took longer than twenty years and, during this time, six series of the album were generated comprised of approximately 353 works of art (Gasiūnas, 1996, p.5). Even now, it is difficult to tell the precise number of albums sheets as the publisher hardly followed any strict system. Sometimes, even the same series of the album varied. The large volume of the album and its long publishing process became a sort of an artistic phenomenon manifesting all the way from Vilnius to Paris.

The illustrations chosen for the album reflect the perception that J. K. Vilčinskis has on the concept of representativeness, which has surpassed the narrow-minded interests of one person to reveal the general intellectual

approach held by the Lithuanians at that time. The publisher sought to quickly memorialize valuable works of architecture and art condemned for destruction in the time of the Russification regime and to reflect the historical heritage and peculiarities of the national culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for enlightenment purposes. The length of the article restricts the possibilities of discussing all the illustrations contained in the album; thus, only the key topical and representational categories are discerned and reviewed.

The largest category of the engravings of “The Vilnius Album” is comprised of illustrations of architectural objects and works of art. Among these illustrations, the largest focus was gained by the Gate of Dawn of Vilnius City and its painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To this day, this work of art has remained visiting-card of the City of Vilnius. Yet, back in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the painting was under great danger. The Gate of Dawn Monastery of Discalced Carmelites was closed down in 1844 and its buildings were entrusted to the Orthodox Church. The same fate would have befallen the Chapel of the Gate of Dawn if not for the diplomatic efforts of the Catholic priests. Vilnius Archcathedral Basilica with its St. Casimir Chapel was chosen as the next representational object. The Vilnius Archcathedral Basilica was the main Catholic church in Lithuania and an intriguing example of classicism after the renovations carried out during 1783-1801. The album author also included other important buildings of the City of Vilnius, e.g. St. Ann Church which is the oldest Gothic style church and the former Bishop Manor Estate that served as the headquarters of the tsar’s representative in Lithuania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. General Governorate) and today is known as the Presidential Palace of the Republic of Lithuania. The Vilnius Church of the Missionaries and its monastery done in the Baroque style and closed down in 1844 by the order of the tsar were also included. The lithographic illustrations of the J. K. Vilčinskis album are the only source showing us the interior of the Vilnius Church of Jesus the Saviour (Trinitarians) and Verkiai Estate that have been destroyed irreparably. The farsighted mindset of J. K. Vilčinskis also helped commemorate the paintings of the saints held in churches. Having included over sixty reproductions of such paintings, J. K. Vilčinskis believed it important to also register their authentic location. Hence, the graphic illustrations of each painting have an inscription underneath stating the church and the location where it could be found. At the present moment, this information is of great significance for reconstruction and research efforts. The inscriptions bore witness to the fact that the interests of J. K. Vilčinskis were not limited to the pieces of art found in Vilnius churches only. He strove to incorporate other churches as well, including the ones located in certain parts of Kaunas, Grodno, Minsk, Vitebsk and Volyn Governorates (Mickūnienė, p.36-42). This way, J. K. Vilčinskis managed to expand the covered territory to almost match the borders of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Such a move by J. K. Vilčinskis can be assessed as a diplomatically crafty solution as, in reality, the title of the album is not sufficiently comprehensive to reflect all of its content. However, true to its policy, Russia under the tsar’s rule would have never let a publication with the name of Lithuania in its title see the light of day as it would have reminded the people of the country’s political independence and grandeur.

Portraits comprised yet another category of album illustrations. Usually, a country is represented by its prominent rulers or politicians, but J. K. Vilčinskis took a slightly different approach in this situation. He ignored the political status of his country at that time and firstly presented the portraits of cultural representatives, such as artists, poets, musicians, scientists who worked at Vilnius University and active members of the Catholic Church (W. Valentin Wankowicz, J. I. Kraszewski, S. Moniuszko, S. B. Judzil, J. Śniadecki, E. Tyszkiewicz, M. Valančius, etc.). J. K. Vilčinskis also saw exceptional rulers and valiant warriors of Lithuania in its past. Thus, the portraits of Stephen Báthory, Grand Duke of Lithuania, Barbara Radziwiłł, Lithuanian noble who became the Queen of Poland, Lew Sapieha, Voivode of Vilnius, Tadeusz Ogiński, Voivode of Trakai, etc., also made their way into the album. Not all of them were considered the most important historical figures of Lithuania and, thus, naturally, the issue of selection criteria arose. The choices of the publisher could have been influenced by several factors. The threat of censure imposed by the tsar could be one of them and the lack of pieces of art depicting such historical figures could also have played a role in it. J. K. Vilčinskis would send pieces of art to lithographers after receiving them from collectors. This could explain the distinct lack of the portraits of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania Gediminas, Kęstutis or Vytautas in the album.

A similar trend can be noticed in the category of illustrations depicting historical events. The uprisings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or other historical events bearing the highest significance to Lithuania were not included to avoid censure. To make the engravings of the album, paintings of historical events ranging from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century previously made by the artists (F. Smuglewicz, J. Damel) were taken. These illustrations include depictions of the battles between Lithuanian Commanders and Tartars (Jakób Niezabitowski near Zbarazh in 1574), diplomatic missions for the purpose of signing a peace treaty (Entry of Ambassador Michał Radziwiłł into Rome in



1680) and the disastrous Russian campaign by Napoleon, which ruined the last hope of Lithuania to be once more free of the tsar's rule (Retreat of the French Army in 1812 across Vilnius Town Hall Square).

The category of illustrations encompassing literary works has many outstanding lithographic illustrations of Memoirs by Jan Chryzostom Pasek. These pictures depict the times when the nobles were thriving, their battles and daily life, balls, dances, hunts and rambunctious gatherings that more often than not involved sword fighting. The nobles are portrayed only in their typical traditional attire: zupan (inner garment), kontusz (outer garment), pas kontuszowy (cloth sash used for girding the kontusz), knee high boots and headwear adorned in plumes. The exceptional status held by this caste and its political power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century had become but a lovely memory, especially in terms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The representation of the nobility caste in light of the threat to its further existence became one more important topic revealing the uniqueness of the country. The topic was also relevant to the publisher himself as he was of noble birth.

The impressive volume of "The Vilnius Album", the diversity of the topics covered and the diplomatically chosen title reveal J. K. Vilčinskis as an extraordinary figure. Although a medic by profession, J. K. Vilčinskis managed to demonstrate remarkable intellectual prowess. After all, he had to possess deep knowledge in the history of his country, arts, architecture, literature and science, as well as excellent artistic skills, diplomacy and creativity. To J. K. Vilčinskis, "The Vilnius Album" became the project of his life, which demanded vast resources of energy and huge financial investments that never generated any profit. And yet, the man had continued his work for as many as twenty years and would have gone on longer if not for the reinforced regime of the tsar's rule that was imposed prior to the January 1863 Uprising. J. K. Vilčinskis could no longer go to Paris and make contact with the lithographers who worked there. His last recorded trip to Paris was in 1870, right before the Franco-Prussian War (Gasiūnas, 1996, p.11).

Even though publishing the album brought nothing but financial losses to him, the unwavering enthusiasm of J. K. Vilčinskis in his efforts to bring the idea to life gleaned a long-lasting response both in Lithuania and abroad. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the album had gained more recognition in Europe than in Lithuania. As mentioned previously, "The Vilnius Album" was presented to Queen Victoria, ruler of England. J. K. Vilčinskis described this story in one of his letters: "The Consul said the Queen would not accept any gifts, yet, when I showed him the album, he was astounded by its beauty. Later, Lord Palmerston informed me that the Queen would make an exception and would gladly accept this piece of art." (citation from Jaworska, p.395) "The Vilnius Album" also gained recognition in France and the press praised the work of J. K. Vilčinskis for its exceptional beauty, quality and scope (Jaworska, p.395). Individuals bought this album in Lithuania and the neighboring countries of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. However, the price was too steep for the majority of potential buyers due to high publishing costs. Today, the situation has changed immensely and instead of diminishing the "significance of "The Vilnius Album", the passage of time has raised it to new heights. Separate engravings of the album have been taken to adorn the halls of institutions of State importance. In 2009, when the City of Vilnius was granted the title of European Capital of Culture, it was decided that "The Vilnius Album" by J. K. Vilčinskis would once again represent the country. Thus, an exhibition titled "The Theme of Vilnius in J. K. Vilčinskis' Publications" was held.

### **Conclusion:-**

To sum up, the following three key factors comprising the representativeness of "The Vilnius Album" should be pointed out: the premium quality of the edition, its volume and high-value content of illustrations encompassing the noteworthy pieces of art, cultural phenomena, portraits of prominent historical figures and historical events of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By selecting works of art for the album, its editor J. K. Vilčinskis went beyond the narrow-minded interests of one man and transformed the album into a wide-scale cultural phenomenon which rekindled the stagnant community of Lithuanian artists and intellectuals.

"The Vilnius Album" became a type of representative item for a country which had been erased from the political world map of those times. This was the underlying idea behind the album that had always been buried in the mind of its editor, though never publicly announced due to the repressive policy of the tsar in Lithuania and the ever hanging threat of censure. Further confirmation can be seen in the content of the album and the ingeniously selected title that the author had managed to use to conceal so much more. Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania was a symbol that encompassed the culture and history of almost the entire former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The publisher presented to the spectators that which he deemed to be Lithuania, seemingly ignoring the real political situation prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tribute to Russia was duly paid by publishing episodic engravings depicting the arrival of Tsar

Alexander to Vilnius or several portraits of Orthodox priests. In terms of the entire scope of the album, these few illustrations constitute such a small and insignificant portion that they can be called an unavoidable necessity in the prevalent political situation.

The distribution of "The Vilnius Album" both in Lithuania and Europe gave significant results. In Lithuania, the album raised the awareness of the people, encouraged them not to forget the exceptional nature of their country, its cultural heritage or noteworthy historical past, and rekindled the pride in the held high-value pieces of art. For foreigners, the album was a tool shaping the image of Lithuania and spreading the news of its existence far and wide on a non-political level. Through his ambitious goals, the publisher succeeded in achieving aesthetically pleasing and premium quality lithographs that enraptured all and left none unmoved.

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