

The Structure of Postal Routes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th–18th Centuries*

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Summary. This paper analyzes the dynamics of the postal route system of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th–18th centuries. The first postal route connected Vilnius and Krakow in 1562 – weekly postal services were rendered. In 1669, postal carriages started running from Moscow to Vilnius and then further on through Tilsit to Königsberg. The GDL postal route network underwent its largest expansion in the 18th century. An important postal line proceeded along the route of Warsaw – Grodno – Kaunas – Jelgava – Riga. Part of it coincided with the Warsaw – Vilnius route; at Ratnyčia, the postal carriage would turn northeast and continue via Merkinė and Varėna to Vilnius. From Vilnius, one postal route led to Königsberg via Kaunas, and another to Moscow; there are also data about a postal line to Polotsk. Another crossroads of the GDL's postal routes was Grodno. The routes leading from Warsaw to Kaunas, Vilnius, and Riga intersected there. Separate lines to Lublin and Slonim were in operation; one of the postal routes led to the border of the Russian Empire. The network of the GDL's postal routes also consisted of other roads. The location of some of them were subject to change due to the political situation, natural disasters, and seasonal practicability.

Keywords: Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Postal system, Postal routes, Historical geography, Traveling.

Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės pašto kelių struktūra XVI–XVIII amžiuje

Santrauka. Tiriamas Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės pašto kelių sistemos susidarymas ir dinamika XVI–XVIII a. Pirmas pašto kelias Vilnių ir Krokuvą sujungė 1562 m., juo kartą per savaitę važiuo pašto karieta. 1669 m. ėmė kursuoti paštas tarp Maskvos ir Vilniaus, o iš pastarojo per Tilžę jis vežtas į Karaliaučių. Labiausiai LDK pašto kelių tinklas išsiplėtojo XVIII a. Reikšminga linija buvo Varšuva–Gardinas–Kaunas–Jelgava–Ryga. Dalis to paties maršruto nuo Varšuvos atitiko ir pašto kelią į Vilnių, tik prie Ratnyčios buvo pasukama į šiaurės rytus ir pro Merkinę bei Varėną vykstama į LDK sostinę. Iš Vilniaus vedė keliai į Karaliaučių, per Kauną; kita kryptimi – į Maskvą; žinomas maršrutas į Polocką. Dar viena LDK pašto kelių kryžkelė buvo Gardinas. Pro jį važiuota iš Varšuvos į Kauną, Vilnių, Rygą. Iš jo ėjo atskiros linijos į Liubliną, Slanimą. Driekėsi maršrutai net iki Rusijos imperijos sienos. LDK pašto kelių tinklą sudarė ne tik regioniniai, bet ir labiau lokalūs maršrutai. Kai kurių kelių išsidėstymas galėdavo keistis, tam įtakos turėdavo politinės aplinkybės, stichinės nelaimės, sezoninis kelių pravažumas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė, pašto sistema, pašto keliai, istorinė geografija, keliavimas.

* The publication was prepared as part of the project “Homo Viator: Travel Space and Travelers’ Experience in Early Modern Lithuania,” financed by the Research Council of Lithuania (agreement No. S-MIP-21-44).

The prevalent form of human communication has always been and still is eye-to-eye contact. We also transfer information remotely, as the invention of writing and other technologies allow us to do so over a distance. If viewed from the historical perspective, for quite a long time, information was transmitted via a third person. The message was carried to the recipient, especially when its delivery was urgent. Such messengers could convey the information orally or deliver the message written on a piece of paper or some other material and then wait for a reply. However, not every person was able to send or receive messages this way, as the service was rather costly. Therefore, with the intensification of people's communication, eventually their needs were taken into consideration, and a special service – the post – was developed. Initially, it was accessible only to management and administration, but later became an affordable service for many.

In Europe, the concept a post was first used in the late 14th century in Italy (It. *posta*) and signified a wayside station where messengers carrying documents could change horses.¹ Before that, in the Roman Empire, the post was referred to in Latin as *cursus publicus*.

In medieval Europe, the post was not centralized. This means that each institution, including the papal office, dioceses, abbeys, merchant guilds, and trading cities had their own post offices, which served exclusively their needs.² Similarly, in the kingdoms of Western Europe of the 12th–13th century there were isolated postal services, which served the needs of these states. Similar posts were in operation in the neighborhood of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter – the GDL). For example, in the 14th century there a mail service operated between the cities of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia.³ Whereas in the 15th century, the intercity German merchant post had a branch leading to the GDL: Kaunas – Tilsit – Königsberg.⁴ According to historian Jan Obląk, after the Peace of Torun of 1466 (which followed the Thirteen Years' War), when part of the territory of the Teutonic Order became Royal Prussia, a postal system connecting Magdeburgian cities was developed.⁵ Soon afterwards, the postal function (Lat. *cursoria*) was introduced in Warmia as it was in the interests of the bishop. The mail was carried by messengers called *cursor*s or postmen, who moved on foot, horseback, or using carriages.

According to historian Camille Allaz, the European post rapidly developed in the 15th–19th centuries, becoming more centralized, and covered the whole of Europe, transcending national borders. This led to the formation of special roads with accompanying infrastructure connecting distant territories.⁶ The GDL also became part of the new European postal system; however, there is little information in international historiography about the postal routes that functioned in its territory. Therefore, this article purposefully

¹ C. Allaz, 2013, p. 7–8.

² Ibid., p. 90–106, 123–158.

³ Ibid., p. 105–110; E. Rotter, 1989, S. 23–41.

⁴ E. Rotter, 1989, S. 26–28.

⁵ J. Obląk, 1973, s. 75–86; also see J. Kołodziej, 1993, s. 92.

⁶ C. Allaz, 2013, p. 10. For more information on the post of England, see J. C. Hemmeon, 1912; postal services in the United States of America started developing in the 17th c., for more information see W. Gallagher, 2016.

aims to delve into the history of the GDL's post in more detail. Since this kind of research is multi-layered, the focus here primarily lies on the topic that has become traditional in historiography, namely the dynamics of the structure of postal routes. It is this analysis that most researchers start from before moving on to other questions, including postal infrastructure and its functionality, activities of postal officials, prices of postal services, etc. Thus, the **object of the research** covered in this paper is the development of a postal route network in the GDL and its dynamics during the 16th–18th centuries. Even after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (hereinafter – the PLC), when the postal system of the GDL found itself under the administration of the Russian Empire, it continued functioning for a certain period of time. The research aims at implementing two **objectives**:

- 1) To analyze the network of the GDL postal routes in the 16th–17th centuries when the initial system was in the making; and
- 2) To reconstruct the system of the GDL's postal routes in the 18th century.

In historiography, studies on the GDL's post are not very thorough. In scholarly texts, postal routes have been examined episodically, though there were cases when their history was explored in more detail. In 1884, Ivan Petrovich Khrushchov,⁷ Russian philologist and literary historian, published an exhaustive book on the history of the Russian post, concluding his research with the period of the Russian empress Catherine II's rule. A few chapters in it are devoted to the postal routes which in the 17th–18th century connected Moscow and Saint Petersburg with Courland, Vidzeme, Prussia, the GDL's cities, and Poland. The author writes about the shipping of parcels from Moscow to Vilnius and from there to Poland and Prussia. Simultaneously, the work and funding of postal officials is analyzed. Later, in 1913, Ivan Pavlovich Kozlovsky published a two-volume history of the post of Russia, which offered an insight in the work of *pochtmeisters* (Ger. *Postmeister*).⁸ The books delineate the postal route from Moscow to the GDL and the circumstances of its functioning. Similar descriptions of the GDL's postal routes and their functions can be found in the texts of the interwar Polish historian Włodzimierz Polański.⁹

In 1969, Kazimierz Józef Piotrowski's published a paper on the postal routes of Poland and the rendering of postal services in the 16th–18th centuries.¹⁰ Due to the author's Polonocentric approach, the GDL in the study was considered a part of Poland. Therefore, the history of its postal routes was not given a separate consideration. However, this study had a serious shortcoming, as the author mainly based his investigation on the resolutions (constitutions) of the PLC's sejms, for the most part disregarding other sources, such as the 18th century illustrations of the GDL's roads, the preserved descriptions of the PLC's postal routes, and cartography.

⁷ И. П. Хрущов, 1884.

⁸ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 1523; Т. 2, № 5-6, с. 1–606.

⁹ W. Polański, 1925, s. 3–23; W. Polański, 1936, s. 141–143.

¹⁰ K. J. Piotrowski, 1969, s. 3–19.

A few years later, Lech Zimowski¹¹ published one of the most detailed studies of the history of the Polish post. Though the focus here was on the history of Polish postal services, similarly to the abovementioned article, it included a general overview of the history of the GDL's post. The study is supplemented with a map of the 18th century PLC postal routes, which includes roads used for carrying post in the GDL. However, the map drawn by the author is flawed, as part of the routes are inaccurate, while new sources discovered in the archives show that there is plenty of room for improvement. It is noteworthy that valuable sources pertaining to the PLC's postal routes of the late 18th century, their descriptions, and other materials representative of the functioning of the postal services are appended to the book.

Povilas Vitkevičius' book on the history of the Lithuanian post is an example from more recent historiography.¹² The study is of synthetic manner and offers an overview of postal history, which for the most part is based on historiography. Unfortunately, the research is poorly empirically grounded and a number of statements lack validity.

In 1998, Pārsla Pētersone's thesis on the history of Vidzeme's postal routes in the 17th–19th century was defended in Latvia.¹³ For the most part, the research discloses the structure and functioning of postal routes that led to Riga and into which all the postal routes of the neighboring countries, including the GDL, disgorged. The thesis made use of ample archival material, which was also helpful in the reconstruction of the layout of the GDL's postal routes. It is known that in the 17th century, a postal route led from Königsberg via the Curonian Spit to Klaipėda and then through Palanga to Riga. The history of this route was analyzed in Nijolė Strakauskaitė's¹⁴ book published in 2001. The author emphasized the longevity and regional uniqueness of the route; however, it should be noted that after the 17th century, this postal route was one of many and had no particular significance.

The overview of the historiography of postal routes must mention the chapters of several newly published books by Zigmantas Kiaupa¹⁵ and Tomas Čelkis,¹⁶ describing both the layout of routes and postal activities. In summary, it can be stated that all the abovementioned research suggests that the GDL's postal history has been studied fragmentally and to date not much is known about it. Therefore, little information on this topic finds its way into European historiography. Thus, it would be viable to systemically analyze the dynamics of the GDL's postal routes and frame certain guidelines for further research.

From the point of view of problem phrasing and methodology, analogous studies of postal history of other countries should be taken into consideration. Much has been done in Polish historiography.¹⁷ Not only classic but also specific issues have been touched

¹¹ L. Zimowski, 1972a; L. Zimowski, 1972b, s. 71–85.

¹² P. Vitkevičius, 1997; also an article in Russian: П. Виткявичюс, 1980, с. 65–77.

¹³ P. Pētersone, 1998.

¹⁴ N. Strakauskaitė, 2001, p. 7–30.

¹⁵ Z. Kiaupa, 2012, p. 113–116.

¹⁶ T. Čelkis, 2021, p. 145–149.

¹⁷ J. Kołodziej, 1993, s. 85–124. Research of the post that traveled from Poland to West Europe: E. Małachowicz, 1956, s. 113–115; R. Skrycki, 2003, s. 113–122; A. Mrowiński, 2009, s. 107–127.

upon. For example, when writing about the history of the Warsaw post, philatelist Jacek Kosmala dwelled not only on its establishment but also on the postage stamps used in the 18th century.¹⁸ Włodzimierz Polański dedicated several of his texts to discuss post horns.¹⁹ Worth mentioning in addition are texts by Yulia Koniva and Irina Mechnikova on 18th century postal routes in the territory of present-day Ukraine, as these routes brought letters to and from the GDL.²⁰ Later, when the GDL was incorporated into the Russian Empire, part of the old postal routes continued functioning. Therefore, certain studies on postal history in the 19th century are also relevant.²¹

Although these writings mostly regard postal routes that led through land, there is historical evidence suggesting that waterways were also used when necessary. According to researcher Nikolay Luchnik, water mail in Russia dates back to 1720, and in England – to the late 18th century.²² Postal ships sailed only inland waters at first, but by the mid-19th c., regular sea mail was already in operation. According to Aleksandr Konoyko, regular discussions were held in the Treasury Commission of the PLC in 1764–1795 regarding waterways and communication opportunities that they offered with a view to include them in the general road system.²³ It was believed that this would enliven the economic life of the country and encourage water canal digging projects.

Historiography suggests that empirical studies of postal history prevail. Therefore, this paper is also based on various primary archival and published sources. Most of them have not yet been included in scientific circulation.

Best known in historiography are the 16th–17th c. sources of postal history – the privileges authorizing the shipping of mail in the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL. Among them was a privilege issued on July 11, 1562 by King of Poland Žygimantas Augustas (Sigismund II Augustus) to Christoph von Taxis, authorizing him to organize a centralized Royal Post.²⁴ Similar documents allowing administrators to create postal lines were issued throughout the 17th century. These sources not only help us learn more about the people who provided postal services in the GDL but also give an insight into the shipping routes.

A separate and particularly valuable group of sources are the 18th century descriptions of roads and bridges commissioned by the Treasury Commission of the GDL. They

¹⁸ J. Kosmala, 2009; for a view on the PLC's post through the eyes of foreigners, see R. Zgorzelski, 2009.

¹⁹ W. Polański, 1925, s. 3–23; W. Polański, 1936, s. 141–143.

²⁰ Ю. Кони́ва, 2018, с. 121–129; И. Мечникова, 2010, с. 391–402.

²¹ А. Конойко, 2018, с. 73; А. В. Зиброва, 2015, с. 240–245. At the beginning of 1830, the construction of postal routes was a priority in the Russian Empire. In 1833, all roads of the Empire were attributed to one of the five categories: first class roads were the best roads maintained and repaired by the state; second class roads were under the supervision of local administrations; third class roads were the concern of land administrators and managers; fourth class roads included country roads maintained by local villagers; and fifth class roads were mostly forest and field tracks. However, in reality, the state of the roads was not always consistent with their category and varied across the country.

²² Н. Лучник, 1970, с. 33–48.

²³ А. Конойко, 2018, с. 72.

²⁴ P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 5–7. Universal access to postal services in Europe was granted in 1516 when under the rule of Emperor Maximilian I, Franz von Taxis started organizing postal shipping. The shipping was free of charge, as the sovereign paid an annual fee. See A. Essen, 2017, s. 192.

include illustrations featuring some of the postal routes.²⁵ These data are reliable as state officials, whose reports were utilized when drawing up legal acts, accumulated them for practical reasons. A similar type of sources are the acts of church deanery visitations of the second half of the 18th century, which dwell a lot on parish roads, at times mentioning postal routes.²⁶ Here also worth mentioning are the descriptions of the PLC's postal routes published in the second half of the 18th century.²⁷ Their publishers failed to clearly state the circumstances of their compilation; however, a comparison of their data with other sources revealed that they were mutually complementary and thus reliable.

When conducting the research, printed cartographic sources delineating postal routes are particularly relevant. Here the map of the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL, published in 1770 by Italian engraver Bartolomeo de Folin and featuring schematically marked postal routes of that time, stands out from the rest.²⁸ The cartographer lived in Warsaw for some 36 years. He worked as a draughtsman and engraver at the Military School, where he also lectured, eventually attaining the rank of Crown Artillery Major. Bartolomeo de Folin engraved geographic maps, and one of his works was the above-mentioned map of Poland and the GDL of 1770.²⁹ The available information about the author prompts that the map contains reliable data reflecting the territorial realities of that time as well as the layout of postal routes. However, it should be noted that, for unknown reasons, not all postal routes (as suggested by information from other sources) are marked on the map. Therefore, cartographic data are viewed critically and compared against other sources.

The study retrospectively refers to data from 19th century postal route maps.³⁰ During this century, cartography underwent significant improvements. A number of maps were drawn by specialists of the Russian Empire who actively documented and mapped the newly occupied territories. Thus, maps of the GDL postal routes were drawn. Moreover, in the first half of the 19th century, there were no particular rearrangements of communication in these territories, with the exception of isolated cases like the construction of the Saint Petersburg – Warsaw highway, which was also used for postal needs.³¹ Hence, data from 19th century maps were useful in the research, as one of the characteristics of the location of old roads is longevity. Especially having in mind that after the partitions of the PLC, the postal system of the GDL was not abolished and continued functioning for some time under the Russian Empire. The accumulated base of various sources is suffi-

²⁵ Illustration of the GDL's land roads, bridges and žemgrinda constructions of the 2nd half of the 18th c., in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 3702.

²⁶ Visitation acts of Trakai deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19248; Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254.

²⁷ Published: P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87–91; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 385–387.

²⁸ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

²⁹ See: Fonzio Bartolomeo; Encyklopedja, 1931, s. 655.

³⁰ Cartographic sources used in the research are stored in the Rare Book Division of Vilnius University Library and Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Archīvs.

³¹ See L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 313–316.

cient and allows elaborating the research and implementing the set goal of reconstructing the structure of the GDL's postal route system in the 16th–18th centuries.

1. Formation of the GDL's Postal Route Network in the 16th–17th Centuries

In European historiography, the origins of postal services are associated with carriages and the duty of giving a lift.³² In the middle ages and early modern period, citizens were under the obligation to organize free of charge transportation of the sovereign's officials, cargo, post, and documents. The GDL was no exception. For example, in his letter from 1437 the Master of the Livonian Order writes that peasants sent by the Grand Duke of the GDL Žygimantas (Sigismund) Kęstutaitis took a letter to the Bishop of Riga and on their way back in the wilderness of the frontier zone, under unidentified circumstances, were attacked and killed by Livonians.³³

The availability of postal services in a state akin to the present-day understanding of how a post office functions suggests a novel attitude toward human communication and information dissemination. Its functionality requires regular transportation and appropriate communication infrastructure. In the Kingdom of Poland, the rendering of organized postal serviced dates back to the 16th century, when in 1558 the Royal Post was established and the first line connecting Krakow and Venice was opened.³⁴ That year, however, no postal route to the GDL started operating. Nevertheless, quite shortly, on the 11th of July 1562, King Žygimantas Augustas assigned Christoph von Taxis to administer the Royal Post, and the route Vilnius – Krakow – Vienna – Venice was opened.³⁵ Every Wednesday, a carriage would leave Krakow and following that route after 7 days arrive in Vilnius.³⁶ On average, it travelled more than a hundred kilometers a day, which for those times was quite a good pace.³⁷ This was the first state postal line that extended to the GDL and functioned for a long time. According to researcher Lech Zimowski, several types of posts were in operation in the PLC and – first and foremost – Poland, includ-

³² For more information see: *XX Dwadzieścia lat poczty i telekomunikacji w Polsce niepodległej*, Warszawa, 1939, s. 7–8; S. Wysłouch, 1936; K. Buczek, 1967, s. 255–299; M. Konarski, 2019a, s. 111–131; M. Konarski, 2019b, s. 114–121.

³³ *Liv,-Est-und Curländisches Urkundenbuch*, Bd. 9. Hrsg. H. Hildebrand. Riga–Moskau, 1889, nr. 215, S. 128.

³⁴ *Skarbiec dyplomatów papieżkich, cesarskich, krolewskich, książęcych; uchwał narodowych, postanowień różnych władz i urzędów posługujących do krytycznego wyjaśnienia dziejów Litwy, Rusi*. T. 2. Wyd. I. Daniłowicz. Wilno, s. 321; P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 4–5.

³⁵ P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 5–8.

³⁶ After two years, citizen of Krakow Piotr Maffon became the manager of the post. On January 9, 1564 he was bestowed the privilege to administer the Royal Post for 5 years; in 1568 he was succeeded by a merchant from Krakow Sebastian Montelupi; see P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 8–14. With his ruling of 1583, King Steponas Batoras (Stephen Bathory) set prices for certain postal services: fee for private letters – 4 groschen, irrespective of the distance to the place of destination. The fee – 4 groschen for a private letter weighing less than 1 lotus (12.6 grams) – was very big, as a bag of rye then cost around 16–20 groschen. The document published in P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 17–19; A. Essen, 2017, s. 192.

³⁷ On the pace of traveling, see H. von Seggern, 2003, S. 103–107.

ing the Royal Post, which served the needs of the state, and local or particular post.³⁸ The latter functioned within its territorial unit, for instance, a duchy.³⁹ Private post could also be attributed to the latter type, though it was funded by private means. Early evidence of the private post can be found in a document dating back to 1583 – wherein a noblewoman Beata Kmitowna Komarowska demises the Suviekas folwark to her husband Martin Kamarowski, which enumerates the property and does not fail to mention the postal horses – *кони посьтовые* – that were kept on the folwark.⁴⁰

The sources do not properly document the postal route that connected Krakow and Vilnius; there is no information what smaller towns and settlements it intersected. There is also no data suggesting that a new road was constructed to this end. One can assume that the postal route utilized a highway or several highways that connected the two cities. Research of communication in the GDL suggests that the postal route from Vilnius led through Varėna and Merkinė, further on to Ratnyčia (now part of Druskininkai) and Grodno, and then past Brest towards Poland and Krakow.⁴¹ A similar route is retrospectively witnessed in 18th century sources (see Chapter 2). The functionality of the postal line was again endorsed in the constitution of the Sejm of 1620.⁴² By the way, according to Przemysław Dąbkowski, that year marked the start of the universal regulation of activities of the PLC's post and the introduction of a procedure for the exchange of postal horses.⁴³ In the first half of the 17th century, there were attempts in Poland to centralize the post, which had to connect the most important towns of voivodeships and powiats.⁴⁴ According to historian Jerzy Kołodziej, in 1647, King Vladislovas IV Vaza (Władysław IV Vasa) signed a decree providing for the establishment of a unified state post accessible to everyone, which had to substitute privately owned posts; the decree was in force for almost 200 years.⁴⁵ Although the successors of the ruler introduced certain addenda and limitations, the main principle remained unchanged. Undoubtedly, this had an impact on the development of the GDL's post.⁴⁶ According to Przemysław Dąbkowski, *pochtmasters* Berent Fogt in 1649 and 1650 and Reinhold Bizing in 1673 and 1674 were appointed by the constitutions of the GDL's Seimas.⁴⁷ State ordinances adopted in the 17th century stipulated that roads for postmen should be free of any charges and customs duties.⁴⁸

³⁸ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 77; in 1659 the Sejm of Warsaw approved the procedure of the operation of the local post in Poland, see *Volumina legum*, t. 4. Petersburg, 1860, s. 446.

³⁹ A post that served the organization of the church was in operation in the PLC. Bishops' orders and letters to parishes as well as individual addressees in dioceses were sent directly and bore the Latin name *currenta*. This order was followed until the end of the 16th c. See J. Kołodziej, 1993, s. 92.

⁴⁰ Noblewoman Beata Kmitowna Komarowska's demise of Suviekas folwark to her husband Martin Kamarowski of 1583, in: *Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych*, F. 373, nr. 226, p. 14.

⁴¹ T. Čelkis, 2021, p. 168–169.

⁴² See K. J. Piotrowski, 1969, s. 4.

⁴³ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 14.

⁴⁴ K. J. Piotrowski, 1969, s. 3.

⁴⁵ J. Kołodziej, 1993, s. 88.

⁴⁶ In 1664, the GDL's Seimas approved the post service expansion plan – post offices were opened in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Grodno; see P. Dąbkowski, 1928, s. 30–31.

⁴⁷ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 25–26.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 28.

From the geopolitical point of view, the GDL was a link between the East and West; therefore, one of the busiest transit routes to Moscow, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Moscow (hereinafter – GDM), led through its territory.⁴⁹ Thus, there was a demand for a postal route that would serve not only the needs of the state but also merchants and inhabitants of both countries. While thoroughly studying the GDM's sources, a researcher of Russia's postal history I. P. Kozlovsky detected some hints that in 1663, postal carriages from Moscow traveled along two different routes twice a week – to Riga and to Vilnius.⁵⁰ However, the scholar noted that these data are rather vague and do not allow the assumption that this might have been any kind of regular post. It is possible that at that time such a plan was prepared, but we cannot state for certain whether it was implemented.

The first regular postal carriages left Moscow for Riga in 1665 when Dutch merchant Jan van Sweden started shipping mail from Moscow once in two weeks.⁵¹ From Riga, the post would travel further to Western Europe. In 1667, post from Moscow was already shipped via Veliky Novgorod to Courland and then further on to Prussia and Poland. A year later, in 1668, the exact postal line was indicated in the deed of the embassy of Moscow: Moscow–Veliky Novgorod – Pskov – Riga.⁵² From there, the post traveled via the Duchy of Courland to Klaipėda, and then to Königsberg, though it should be noted that postal carriages could travel through the Curonian Spit, as an old route from Riga led there.⁵³ Upon arrival to Königsberg, the postal parcels were unloaded, sorted, and some of them shipped further on to Poland, all the way to Warsaw. Thus, for some time, the post from Moscow traveled to the GDL in a circle, via Königsberg and Poland. However, as I. P. Khrushchov suggests, there were cases – as the one in 1668 – when for convenience particularly large shipments to Vilnius were taken directly from Courland to the GDL.⁵⁴ That way private letters and parcels arrived in Vilnius from Moscow, where the activities of the post were financed by the GDM's administration. Yet it is known that alongside the abovementioned postal line certain private initiatives were in operation, including the merchant post, which delivered letters from Moscow directly to the GDL.⁵⁵

A different situation was observed with the state-level correspondence between the GDL and the GDM. A special service of diplomatic envoys was in operation to this end. Information in the documents from the GDM's embassy of 1668 suggests that state correspondence from Vilnius was carried along the old highway⁵⁶ to Smolensk and then

⁴⁹ T. Čelkis, 2021 p. 168–169, 172, 189.

⁵⁰ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 58.

⁵¹ *Вести-куранты ским текстам 1656 г. 1660–1662 гг. 1664–1670 гг. Часть 2. Иностранные оригиналы к русским текстам исследование и подготовка текстов Ингрид Майер*, Москва, 2008, с. 57–58; И. П. Хрущов, 1884, с. 12–13.

⁵² И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 2, № 6, с. 8.

⁵³ T. Čelkis, 2021, p. 146. Postkarte von Europa in welcher fämtliche Postrouten aller europäischen Staaten, 1813, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, nr. M1346.

⁵⁴ И. П. Хрущов, 1884, с. 13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, с. 14.

⁵⁶ Data about the highway from the 16th c. sources: *Хронологический указатель указов и правительственных распоряжений по губерниям Западной России, Белоруссии и Малороссии за 240 лет, с 1652 по 1892 год*. Сост. С. Ф. Рубинштейн. Вильна, 1894, № 53, с. 19; *Lietuvos Metrika (1522–1530). 4-oji Teismų bylų knyga*. Parengė S. Lazutka, I. Valikonytė, G. Kirkienė, E. Gudavičius (ir kiti), Vilnius, 1997, Nr. 319, p. 265.

further on to Moscow.⁵⁷ However, there were cases when letters were sent by the usual post (via Riga). Most probably, the choice of postal services was subject to the significance and confidentiality of the information.⁵⁸

As communication between the citizens of the two states intensified, the need to open the Vilnius – Moscow postal route ripened. According to I. P. Kozlovsky, the project submitted in 1669 provided for the shipping of mail from Königsberg to Vilnius and then to Moscow.⁵⁹ The postal carriage had to cover the distance from Vilnius to Moscow in 8 days. Its route from Vilnius led via Minsk and Mogilev to the border of the GDM (at the boundary of the former voivodeship of Mstislav), which had to be reached in 4 days. Then, in the village of Kadino (*Кадино*), postal shipments were exchanged between the carriage that came from Vilnius and the one that arrived from Moscow.⁶⁰ After that, the mail was carried via Smolensk and in 4 days reached Moscow.

On the March 11, 1669, the first mail shipment from Moscow to Vilnius was transported via the route Vilnius – Minsk – Mogilev – Moscow.⁶¹ The new line operated as follows: the postal carriage would leave Vilnius each Friday at midday; it would reach Minsk on Saturday at about 3 p.m.; then it would arrive in Mogilev on Monday at about midday; further on it would arrive in Kadino at the border with the GDM on Tuesday morning; around that same time a postal carriage from Moscow would come to the village. After the exchange of postal shipments, the mail from the GDL, now in the Muscovite carriage, would continue on to Moscow; postal shipments from the GDM in the GDL's carriage would reach Mogilev on Tuesday at midnight, Minsk – on Thursday at about 5 p.m., and Vilnius – on Friday at midday. From Vilnius, the mail would continue on to Kaunas and from there to Königsberg.⁶²

The Moscow – Vilnius route was well maintained, as evidenced in the letter sent in May 1669 from the Vilnius postmaster Reinhold Bising to the Moscow administration and listing complaints regarding post shipping delays – it took a post shipment from Moscow 3 weeks to reach the border, though according to the agreement it should take no longer than 4 days. This resulted in the merchants suffering losses due to the Muscovite postmen's lack of discipline and aptitude for drinking. In addition, the Moscow administration was reminded that shipments to Königsberg should go through Vilnius.⁶³ Later documents of the Tsar's administration, issued in 1673, suggest that the postal carriage from Moscow via Smolensk to Vilnius would travel regularly once a week.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 2, № 5-6, с. 78.

⁵⁸ И. П. Хрущов, 1884, с. 14.

⁵⁹ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 117–118, 120.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, с. 66, 100.

⁶¹ P. Vitkevičius, 1997, p. 73; А. Н. Вигилев, 1977, с. 253–275; И. П. Хрущов, 1884, с. 16–17.

⁶² P. Vitkevičius, 1997, p. 74; А. Н. Вигилев, 1977, с. 255–272; Е. П. Карнович, 1884, с. 615–625.

⁶³ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 110–140.

⁶⁴ *Хронологический указатель указов и правительственных распоряжений по губерниям Западной России, Белоруссии и Малороссии за 240 лет, с 1652 по 1892 год*. Сост. С. Ф. Рубинштейн. Вильна, 1894, № 53, с. 19. During the 1670s–1680s, there somewhat of a competition between Vilnius and Riga over the shipping of mail from Moscow; it was fuelled by the frequent disagreements between *pochtmeisters* of the two countries; still the bigger share of mail was transported via Riga; see И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 330–331; *Собрание*

The route from Vilnius to Moscow is more or less clear, but how it could lead from Vilnius to Königsberg?⁶⁵ Unfortunately, as for now no sources that would describe this route in detail have been detected. Here we can refer to research by historian Ekkehart Rotter, in which he indicated that in the 15th century, the intercity merchant post of the Teutonic Order followed the route Königsberg – Tilsit (present-day Sovietsk) – Kaunas.⁶⁶ Perhaps a later postal route from Vilnius led to Kaunas and then via Vilkija and Jurbarkas to Tilsit and Königsberg. It was the old highway that led through the customs of Vilkija and Jurbarkas⁶⁷ and which was also used by foreign diplomats.⁶⁸ According to I. P. Kozlovsky, the postal line Königsberg – Tilsit – Klaipėda – Riga had settled by 1700.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is plausible that part of it coincided with the road section Vilnius – Königsberg. Johann Karl Sembritzki believes that back in 1616 the postal route Riga – Klaipėda – Königsberg – Berlin was under the supervision of the head of the Swedish post, which resided in Riga.⁷⁰ Thus, it is possible that mail from Riga would reach the GDL's cities through this route.

2. Network of the GDL's Postal Routes in the 18th Century

Data from 17th century sources do not allow the proposition that the GDL's authorities had a special interest in creating a local postal structure. It seems that the emerging postal lines were the result of the development of the common postal system in the region. The GDL could not escape the postal organization of the surrounding countries and thus fell under its influence. In his book, P. Vitkevičius states that in 1679, following the outbreak of the Great Plague of Vienna,⁷¹ which spread to the regions in the 1670s–1680s, the intensity of communication declined, thus causing the Königsberg – Kaunas – Vilnius – Moscow postal route to lose its importance.⁷² Letters and parcels from Königsberg to Moscow were shipped via Riga rather than Vilnius. Besides, postal activities in the GDL were often disrupted by wars. However, despite all the difficulties, the rendering of postal services in the GDL continued.

государственныхъ грамотъ и договоровъ, хранящихся въ Государственной коллегии иностранныхъ дель, т. 4. Москва, 1828, № 210, с. 629.

⁶⁵ A later document of the Moscow administration, issued in 1681, once again confirms that the mail from Moscow, which arrived in Vilnius, was shipped further to Königsberg and from there to Western Europe as far as Spain. See *Собрание государственныхъ грамотъ и договоровъ, хранящихся въ Государственной коллегии иностранныхъ дель,* т. 4. Москва, 1828, № 123, с. 378–379; № 171, с. 494; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 44.

⁶⁶ E. Rotter, 1989, S. 26–28.

⁶⁷ See J. Matusas, 1961; T. Čelkis, 2021, p. 120.

⁶⁸ Johann Cobenzl von Prosegg, the emissary of the Emperor of the the Holy Roman Empire, followed the route in 1575: *Konigsperg, Tapiaw, Wöllaw, Toplaukhen, Insterburg, Krupitzkh, Ragnit, Schwaben, Littawische Jörgenburg, Velun, Vilkhin, Kawen, Runzisskhi, Tschimor, Fünfkrieg, Wildaw, Meednikh, Krzewo, Molodesto, Radscouiza, Haina, Lohoszskhi, Juriou, Borissouo, Nakhia, Pober, Heslinicz, Podweresi, Orsa, Dobrowna, Boiano, Iuata, Putiatina, Manchina, Smolensko,* in: Ф. Вержбовский, 1896, с. 51–52.

⁶⁹ И. П. Козловский, 1913, Т. 1, с. 345.

⁷⁰ J. Zembrickis, 2002, p. 133. This statement later was taken over and repeated by D. Elertas, 2014, p. 192.

⁷¹ For more information, see B. Velimirovic, H. Velimirovic, 1989, p. 808–826.

⁷² P. Vitkevičius, 1997, p. 77–78.

In 1717, the Sejm of Warsaw adopted a constitution – resolutions that regulated the shipping of mail in the PLC using horse-drawn means of transport as well as confirmed previously existing and newly introduced postal routes in the GDL.⁷³ The constitution listed mail shipping directions and towns connected by postal routes. One of the main postal lines connected Vilnius, Grodno, and Warsaw, i.e. the capitals, and was intended for weekly mail shippings. Here we are naturally puzzled by the question of whether there was no direct postal line connecting Vilnius and Warsaw before that? It seems that the answer is no, as there is no such evidence in the sources. It is possible that the needs of the GDL administration were satisfied by the messenger post.

The Sejm constitution of 1717 approved the introduction of a new postal line Kaunas – Kėdainiai – Raseiniai – Jelgava (then Mitau) – Riga. It should be noted that this was a regional line, which connected Warsaw, Kaunas (with a branch leading toward Vilnius), and then Riga via Jelgava. In the constitution, the postal line is described in most general terms. However, sources of the second half of the 18th century describe its more detailed location and offer a more particular picture. The map of the Kingdom of Poland and the GDL⁷⁴ drawn in 1770 by engraver Bartolomeo de Folin provides a more detailed picture of the route. Descriptions of postal routes compiled in the second half of the 18th century,⁷⁵ as well as the lists of the GDL's postal routes included in L. Zimowski's book published in 1786,⁷⁶ complement this knowledge well. They enumerate towns and settlements situated along the postal routes.

The route from Warsaw to Kaunas (as well as Vilnius) was as follows: Warsaw – Okóniew – Stanisławów – Makowiec – Węgrów – Sokołów Podlaski – Granne – Pobikry – Brańsk – Bielsk – Wojszki – Białystok⁷⁷ – Straż – Kuźnica (the descriptions of the PLC's roads of 1786 list Buksztel instead of Straż and Kuźnica⁷⁸) – Sokalany (on the map of 1770 it is referred to as *S[fo]kalan*, Sokółka⁷⁹) – Kuźnica⁸⁰ – Grodno.⁸¹ Let us stop for a while at Grodno, as it is noteworthy that at that time this city was one of the most important postal stations in the country, with quite a few branches leading from it to the territory of the GDL. Now we can continue with the reconstruction of the route that led further on from Grodno based on the map of 1770, the GDL's road illustrations

⁷³ *Volamina legum*, t. 4. Petersburg, 1860, s. 160; P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 17; Z. Kiaupa, 2012, p. 113–114.

⁷⁴ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pais limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

⁷⁵ The list of the postal routes of the second half of the 18th c. published in P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87.

⁷⁶ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁷⁷ The PLC's postal route register of 1786 lists Białegi Stoku, see L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁸⁰ The location is only mentioned in the list of the PLC postal routes of 1786, see L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁸¹ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pais limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

from the 1770s–1780s,⁸² and postal route descriptions from 1786.⁸³ The route continued as follows: Grodno – Ratnyčia (now part of Druskininkai) – Merkinė (in the descriptions of 1786 the section from Grodno differs and is as follows: Krinichnaya – Privalka – *Lip-liūnai?* – Krikštonys⁸⁴) – Alytus – Rumbonys (in the descriptions of 1786 the latter two are substituted with Balbieriškis)⁸⁵ – Prienai – Darsūniškis – Guogiai – Panemunė (now part of Kaunas) – Kaunas. It should be noted that Kaunas was also an intersection of postal routes with several branches leading from it. Continuing with the route, from Kaunas it led to Babtai (in other cases the connection Babtai – Vandžiogala is mentioned) – Dasiūnai – Pakapiai – Labūnava – Kėdainiai (there are data about the branch Kėdainiai – Žeimiai⁸⁶) – Apytalaukis – Krekenava – Baisiogala (other sources suggest that from Kėdainiai the route led directly to Mantviliškis and then Baisogala⁸⁷) – Raginėnai – Mažeikoniai – Kriukai⁸⁸ – Jelgava (then Mitau) – Riga – Saint Petersburg.⁸⁹ However, a different section of the route leading toward Riga was documented in the postal route description of 1786; according to it, the route led from Kėdainiai as follows: Mantviliškis – Baisogala – Radviliškis – Šiauliai – Meškuičiai – Joniškis – Kalviai – Jelgava.⁹⁰ The existence of such a postal route is

⁸² Description of Kaunas deanery parishes of 1784, in: *Vyskupo Ignoto Jokūbo Masalskio Kauno dekanato vizitacija 1782 m. (Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai, t. 6)*. Edited by V. Jogėla. Vilnius, 2001 p. 682: *Gošciniec pocztowy z Labunowa do Kowna... Gošciniec także pocztowy i handlowy do Rygi, Nitawy i Lipawy na Kiejdany*; *ibid.*, p. 684–686: *Gošciniec pocztowy do Bobt... na wieś Pokopie... na zachód wioskę Dasiuny*.

Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254, p. 12, 60; Visitation acts of Trakai deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19248, p. 44, 51, 86, 119; P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87.

⁸³ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: *z Grodno do Krynicznej – Przewalki – Leypun – Kryksztan – Olity...*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254: *Droga do Zeym z Kiejdan gošciniec pocztowym ktory do Kowna idzie*.

⁸⁷ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁸⁸ See Z. Kiaupa, 2012, p. 114; P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87.

⁸⁹ *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. by A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 345: *Trakt ten pocztowy y do komercium kupców służący z Grodna idzie w trakt zapuszczański, na Żmuydz, do Kowna, Nitawy, Lipawy, Rygi, Petersburha etc.* (1785). Visitation acts of Trakai deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19248, p. 125–126: *Trakt Publiczny Pocztowy do Grodna*;

Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254, p. 12: *Droga z Kiejdan do Kowna... Trakt pocztowy ze wszystkich stron*; Description of Kaunas deanery parishes of 1784, in: *Vyskupo Ignoto Jokūbo Masalskio Kauno dekanato vizitacija 1782 m. (Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai, t. 6)*. Edited by V. Jogėla. Vilnius, 2001, p. 666: *Droga z Kowna do Dorsuniszek jest dwojaka, [...] druga przez Ponie-munie mil trzy... pocztowym traktem do Grodna [...] Droga z Kowna do Pren, traktem publicznym pocztowym na Ponie-muń, mimo Dorsuniszek*. *Ibid.*, p. 668: The highway and the postal route are mentioned in the visitation acts of Kaunas deanery of 1784: *Droga z Kowna do Wądziagoły... bliżej przez Wądziagołę do Kiejdan, niżeli przez Bobty; droga pocztowa gošciniec publicznym;... z Kiejdan do Nitawy mil 20*.

Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254, p. 13: *Droga do Labunowa traktem pocztowym*.

Description of Kaunas deanery parishes of 1784, in: *Vyskupo Ignoto Jokūbo Masalskio Kauno dekanato vizitacija 1782 m. (Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai, t. 6)*. Edited by V. Jogėla. Vilnius, 2001, p. 684–686: *Gošciniec pocztowy do Bobt... na wieś Pokopie... na zachód wioskę Dasiuny*. P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 87. Map depicting the Riga – Saint Petersburg postal route of 1818: Post Charte Livland 1818, in: *Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs*, F. 6868, ap. 2, No. 267.

⁹⁰ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386; data used retrospectively:

Postkarte von Europa in welcher fämtliche Postrouten aller europäischen Staaten, 1813, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1346.

attested, as in 1793 educator Friedrich Schulz followed it while travelling from Jelgava to Grodno via Kaunas.⁹¹

When analyzing the route in the direction of Riga, it is worth mentioning that different sources contain slightly different information. For instance, one source suggests that from Kėdainiai the route led to Jelgava, then to Riga, and from there the postal carriage continued on to Liepaja (...Kėdainiai – Jelgava – Riga – Liepaja). For example, in the road illustration of 1785, there is a reference to the postal route Grodno – Kaunas – Jelgava – Liepaja – Riga – Saint Petersburg.⁹² Another rather intricate modification of the postal route from Kaunas to Riga was documented in the GDL's road illustration of 1780. Its data suggest that the following *trakt pocztowy* existed there: Kaunas – Vilkija – Kėdainiai – Ariogala – Raseiniai – Jelgava – Riga – Liepaja – Klaipėda.⁹³ This means that the postal carriages were traveling in circles at times.

The analysis of the GDL's postal route structure in the 18th century requires additional reference to the constitution of the Sejm of Warsaw adopted in 1717, as there was no mention of the first GDL's postal route connecting Vilnius and Krakow in the document. Thus, in 1596, when the capital of Poland was finally moved to Warsaw, a new postal line connecting the two capitals was formed. Whereas those who still needed their parcels shipped to Krakow could use the direct postal route from Vilnius to Lublin, as from Lublin the postal carriage continued on to Krakow.

The new postal route connecting Warsaw and Vilnius in part coincided with the already discussed route to Kaunas. Therefore, when the postal carriage arrived from Grodno to Ratnyčia, its further route turned to the northeast leading through Ratnyčia –

⁹¹ *Kraštas ir žmonės. Lietuvos geografiniai ir etnografiniai aprašymai (XIV–XIX a.)*. Eds. J. Jurginis and A. Šidlauskas. Vilnius, 1988 (ed. 2), p. 109–116.

⁹² *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 345: *Trakt ten pocztowy y do komercium kupców szlączy z Grodna idzie w trakt zapuszczański, na Żmuydz, do Kowna, Nitawy, Lipawy, Rygi, Petersburha etc.* (1785).

Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254, p. 60: *Droga z Opitolok do Kowna*.

Description of Kaunas deanery parishes of 1784, in: *Vyskupo Ignoto Jokūbo Masalskio Kauno dekanato vizitacija 1782 m. (Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai, t. 6)*. Edited by V. Jogėla. Vilnius, 2001, p. 668: *Droga z Kowna do Wądziagoły... bliżej przez Wędziagołę do Kiejdan, niżeli przez Bobty; droga pocztowa gościńcem publicznym; [...] z Kiejdan do Nitawy mil 20*.

⁹³ *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. by A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 173; Description of Kaunas deanery parishes of 1784, in: *Vyskupo Ignoto Jokūbo Masalskio Kauno dekanato vizitacija 1782 m. (Lietuvos istorijos šaltiniai, t. 6)*. Edited by V. Jogėla. Vilnius, 2001, p. 682: *Gościńiec pocztowy z Łabunowa do Kowna... Gościńiec także pocztowy i handlowy do Rygi, Nitawy i Lipawy na Kiejdany*. Visitation acts of Ukmergė deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19254, p. 12–13. Also see data used retrospectively: Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, из новейших сведений, собранных от местных Губернских начальств. Часть I. Содержащая вся внутренняя губерний Царство Польское и другая вновь присоединенные области. Санкт-Петербург, 1824, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1715;

Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, 1847 года, in: *Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs*, F. 6828, ap. 7, No. 64.

Merkinė – Varėna – Lieponys – Šventininkai⁹⁴ – Vilnius.⁹⁵ This postal route is delineated both on the map of 1770 and in the description of postal routes of 1786.⁹⁶

The research established that the postal route Moscow – Vilnius – Königsberg, which came into operation in the second half of the 17th century, served its purpose throughout the 18th century. The repeatedly mentioned Sejm constitution of 1717 stated that the postal carriage left Vilnius to go to Kaunas and from there to the Prussian border. This suggests that further on the shipments were carried just like in the 17th century – via Tilsit to Königsberg. This is again evidenced in the sources of the second half of the 18th century.⁹⁷ Therefore, by generalizing on the information derived from the sources, it can be stated that the postal route Vilnius – Kaunas – Vilkija – Jurbarkas⁹⁸ – Tilsit – Königsberg⁹⁹ led in this direction.

In the 18th century, the eastbound postal route from Vilnius went to Moscow. According to the constitution of 1717, a separate postal route had to connect Vilnius and Minsk and from there, via Mogilev, it had to lead further to Moscow's border. This part of the route mostly coincided with the 17th century route. It is delineated in detail on Bartolomeo de Folin's map of 1770¹⁰⁰ and the description of the same route made in 1786,¹⁰¹ which largely repeats the information presented on the map. The route led as follows: Vilnius – *Skirmantava*¹⁰² – Maladzyechna – Minsk – *Prypet*¹⁰³ – Antopole – Zembin – *Janczyn*¹⁰⁴ – Krupki (in a 1786 description the name Hotyuhovo¹⁰⁵ is used instead of Krupi) – Bobr – Orsha (in the description of 1786 – Talachyn¹⁰⁶) – Smolensk –

⁹⁴ Z. Kiaupa, 2012, p. 114–145.

Visitation acts of Trakai deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19248, p. 44: *Trakt Wielki z Merezca do Wilna, Poczsztowy*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 44.

⁹⁶ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pais limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

⁹⁷ Visitation acts of Trakai deanery of 1784, in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 19248, p. 86; *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 173.

⁹⁸ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pais limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234: the Kaunas – Jurbarkas route is delineated on the map; Jurbarkas is mentioned in the description of the 17th c. postal route.

⁹⁹ *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 173, 248–249.

¹⁰⁰ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pais limitrofes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Courone de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

¹⁰¹ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

¹⁰² Place-name on the map: *Skirmontowka*; this location has not been identified but it must have been near Smarhon, around present-day Zhuprany.

¹⁰³ Location unidentified.

¹⁰⁴ Location unidentified.

¹⁰⁵ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Moscow.¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that on Bartolomeo de Folin's map of 1770, in contrast to the constitution of 1717, the postal route to the border of Moscow led via Orsha and Smolensk instead of Mogilev, as it used to in the 16th century.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, there is no other unequivocal information which would single out one of the abovementioned sections as the main one; therefore, we cannot rule out the hypothesis that the postal routes might have varied according to seasonality, as not all roads were passable during all seasons.¹⁰⁹ The routes could have been modified due to urgency – shortened when the postal carriage was running late.

The analyzed sources suggest that in the 18th century, Vilnius was at the crossroads of postal routes as quite a few of them led to the city. For example, the description of the PLC's postal routes of 1786 delineates the route from Vilnius to Polotsk: Vilnius – Mikhalishki – Teshelovo – Hlybokaye – Polotsk.¹¹⁰ Bartolomeo de Folin's map of 1770 features a few more postal routes from Vilnius.¹¹¹ These include a separate postal line Vilnius – Kalniškės – Novogrudok¹¹² and a short branch Vilnius – Čiobiškis (*Zodziski*).¹¹³ Data pertaining to the latter two cases on the one hand are intriguing, yet on the other raise quite a few doubts. It cannot be stated for certain that both routes were functional, as there are no other sources that would confirm this information. However, it is interesting to note that the route from Vilnius to Novogrudok is delineated on later postal route maps of 1824 and 1850.¹¹⁴ Hence, it is possible that the branch operated on the local scale.

Sources from the 18th century suggest that Grodno was also at the crossroads of postal routes. Postal carriages travelling to Warsaw, Kaunas, Vilnius, and Riga would pass through the city. There were also several branches of postal routes leading from it. The Sejm constitution of 1717 stipulates for the development of a new postal route *regarding*

¹⁰⁷ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrophes. Gravée par Bartolomeo Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Couronne de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234. According to Z. Kiaupa, in the 18th c. postal stations were located every 30–35 km, but the map of 1770 suggests that distances between them were bigger. See Z. Kiaupa, 2012, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸ T. Čelkis, 2021, p. 124–125.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65, 135–136, 140–141.

¹¹⁰ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 387.

¹¹¹ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrophes. Gravée par Bartolomeo Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Couronne de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, из новейших сведений, собранных от местных Губернских начальств. Часть I. Содержащая вся внутренняя губерний Царство Польское и другие вновь присоединенные области. Санкт-Петербург, 1824, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1715; Carte physique, hydrographique et routière de la Pologne dans ses anciennes limites et avec ses partages successifs; embrassant les pays limitrophes entre la mer Baltique et la mer Noire; et entre Vienne et Moscou. Dressée par M. M. A. H. Dufour et F. Wrotnowski, d'après des documents historiques et entr'autres la grande carte de la Pologne dressée au 1:300 000 par M. M. le [lieutenant] général Chrzanowski et Dufour. 1850, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M811. This route led via Lida: Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, 1847 года, in: *Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs*, F. 6828, ap. 7, No. 64.

communication with the Ruthenian lands: Grodno – Brest – Lublin. Unfortunately, little can be said about the functioning and layout of the route, as no comprehensive data about it have so far been detected in historical sources. However, part of the route was depicted on the map of 1770, where the section from Grodno to Brest ran as follows: Grodno – Sokalany – Kuźnica – Straż – Białystok – Wojszki – Bielsk Podlaski – Volchin – Brest.¹¹⁵ From Brest, the postal route continued on to Lublin. Another branch from Brest led to Kobryn. The same map of 1770 featured another postal route from Grodno: Grodno – Masty – Slonim.¹¹⁶

A unique postal route is delineated on the map of 1770 – a postal line from Grodno almost leading to the border of the Russian Empire: Grodno – Skidzyel – Kamyanka-Zheludok (in a 1786 description the name Shchuchyn¹¹⁷ is used instead of the latter two) – Bielica – Novogrudok – Karelichy – Turec¹¹⁸ – Mir – Nesvizh – *Cynkowicze*¹¹⁹ – Slutsk – Glusk-Dubrovickij¹²⁰ – Lady – Babruysk – Rahachow.¹²¹ By the way, this route had a branch: Glusk-Dubrovickij – *Rozhanov* (?¹²²).¹²³ Another branch led from Mir: Mir – Stowbtsy – Dzyarzhynsk (until 1932 Koydanava) – Minsk.¹²⁴ In this case, it is noteworthy that in the description of postal routes compiled in the second half of the 18th century,¹²⁵ the route differs a little. The section of the route from Grodno to Mir delineated in the description is identical to the abovementioned sources, but from Mir onward, the route leads along the Mir – Stowbtsy – Dzyarzhynsk (until 1932 Koydanava) – Minsk branch and then, in the section Vilnius – Moscow, for the most part continues as depicted on Bartolomeo de Folin's map of 1770. One can assume that the line which led from Grodno connected to the abovementioned route. Thus, according to the

¹¹⁵ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrophes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Couronne de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

¹¹⁸ This location with the postal station is marked on the map of 1770 – it is rather distant from the delineated route; it is also witnessed on the later postal route map of 1850, which for the most part depicts unchanged locations of the late 18th century postal routes:

Carte physique, hydrographique et routière de la Pologne dans ses anciennes limites et avec ses partages successifs; embrassant les pays limitrophes entre la mer Baltique et la mer Noire; et entre Vienne et Moscou. Dressée par M. M. A. H. Dufour et F. Wrotnowski, d'après des documents historiques et entr'autres la grande carte de la Pologne dressée au 1:300 000 par M. M. le [jeutenant] général Chrzanowski et Dufour. 1850, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M811.

¹¹⁹ Location unidentified.

¹²⁰ On the map: *Hlusko Dubrowickie*, today the settlement has moved further south: *Глуцк, Глуцк-Дубровицкый*.

¹²¹ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrophes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Couronne de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

¹²² In the source referred to as *Rzaryco*, a location to the south of present-day Porechye with no possibilities of accurate identification; it was situated around the site of present-day *Rozhanov/Ражанов*.

¹²³ Carte Générale et nouvelle de toute la Pologne du Grand Duché de Lithuanie et des pays limitrophes. Gravée par Bartolome Folino Capitane au Corps d'Artillerie de la Couronne de Pologne a Varsovie, MDCCLXX, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1234.

¹²⁴ Ibid.; P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 89; L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 386.

¹²⁵ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 89.

description of the second half of the 18th century, the route from Minsk led to *Prypet*¹²⁶ – Antopole – Barysaw – Loshnitsa – Nacha – Bobr – Talachyn – Tuminichi – Orsha – Glusk-Dubrovickij – Lady – Smolensk.¹²⁷ Therefore, the layout of the line in a number of instances differs, but the settlements that it passes remain the same.

In the 18th century, a postal route connecting Königsberg and Riga winded along the GDL's western coastline via Palanga. Its importance significantly increased in the early 18th century with the emergence of the new capital of Russia – Saint Petersburg – which could be reached using regional roads.¹²⁸ The route witnessed in the GDL's sources, namely the road illustrations of 1783–1785, led from Königsberg via Palanga to Liepāja, Riga, and finally Saint Petersburg (*miescie Połondze pod samą komorą na trakcie walnym z różnych krajów do Peterzburga idącym na Lipawę y Rygę do Kurlandyi y różnych miast pruskich*).¹²⁹ Thus, as it has already been mentioned, the 17th century route from Königsberg to Riga ran through the Curonian Spit to Klaipėda, then via Palanga to Liepāja, Jelgava and Riga.¹³⁰ However, data from the historical sources suggest that in some cases in the 18th century, as in the 17th, mail from Königsberg was shipped to Tilsit, then to Klaipėda, Palanga, and Liepāja, from which it travelled to Jelgava.¹³¹ Here it is worth mentioning that another postal route from the GDL, delineated in the GDL's road illustration of 1780,¹³² could have disorged into this route. It is described as running from Vilnius via Kaunas and Kėdainiai, then taking a turn to Raseiniai, and from there to Jelgava and Riga. From Riga, as the document suggests, the postal carriage would travel to Liepāja and, via Palanga, to Klaipėda. Its final destination was Königsberg. It is difficult to explain this delineation of the postal route, but one can assume that the illustration of 1780 offers a general scheme of mail movement – how letters were carried. Its most striking distinction is the detour from Kėdainiai to Raseiniai and only then to Jelgava. Here it is necessary to emphasize once again that when needed or when faced with unforeseen circumstances, the layout of postal routes in the GDL could be modified. Such “improvisations” were the result of road conditions, changes in the political

¹²⁶ Location unidentified.

¹²⁷ P. Dąbkowski, 1903, s. 89. On the map of 1770 this section runs: ...Zembin – Janczyn – Krupki – Bobr – Orsha – Smolensk – Moscow.

¹²⁸ L. Zimowski, 1972a, s. 87.

¹²⁹ Illustration of the GDL's land roads, bridges and žemgrinda constructions of the 2nd half of the 18th c., in: *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, F. Senieji aktai 3702, l. 61v.: *Deligence Pocztowy przechodzący od Rygi do Prus* (1783); *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 347.

¹³⁰ N. Strakauskaitė, 2001, p. 7–30.

¹³¹ *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 248: the highway is featured on the illustration of 1781 and 1782 – *na trakcie do Tylży, Klaypedy, Lipawy, Nitawy etc.* Also see: Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, из новейших сведений, собранных от местных Губернских начальств. Часть I. Содержащая вся внутренняя губерний Царство Польское и другия вновь присоединенныя области. Санкт-Петербург, 1824, in: *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Retų spaudinių skyrius*, no. M1715; Почтовая карта Российской империи, составленная Почтовым департаментом, 1847 года, in: *LIVVA*, F. 6828, ap. 7, No. 64.

¹³² *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai. Descriptions of the Old Roads of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Eds. A. A. Baliulis, T. Čelkis. Vilnius, 2018, p. 173.

circumstances in the country, or outbreaks of war. The activities of the post were subject to public life and the needs of the country's inhabitants, which, needless to say, could change any time.

Conclusions

1. The formation of the GDL's postal route structure was under the influence of the development of the post in the Kingdom of Poland. In 1562, King Žygimantas Augustas granted a privilege to Christoph von Taxis to organize a centralized Royal Post. The newly established postal route Vilnius – Krakow – Vienna – Venice connected Krakow with the capital of the GDL for the first time. This line consisted mainly of highways. The route from Vilnius led through Varėna, Merkinė, Ratnyčia, Garodno, and Brest to Krakow.
2. In 1665, the shipping of mail from Moscow to Riga and then further on to Europe was initiated. By the 1660s, the postal line Moscow – Veliky Novgorod – Pskov – Riga, via Courland to Klaipėda and Königsberg and from there to Poland, had settled. The mail from Moscow would travel in a circle – via Königsberg. In certain cases, when the shipment was particularly large, the postal carriage would travel from Riga directly to Vilnius. A simultaneously operating merchant post would offer direct shipping of letters from Moscow to the GDL. For state-level correspondence, the service of diplomatic envoys was employed.
3. In 1669, the mail from Königsberg was taken to Vilnius and from there to Moscow. The route from Vilnius led through Minsk and Mogilev to the village of Kadino at the GDM's border. There, postal carriages from the GDL and the GDM would exchange shipments and return to their respective countries. The mail delivered to Vilnius would continue to Kaunas and then via Vilkija, Jurbarkas, and Tilsit to Königsberg.
4. The constitution of the Sejm of Warsaw of 1717 set forth the procedure of mail shipping and postal routes in the GDL. It provided for the establishment of a new route: Warsaw – Grodno – Kaunas – Kėdainiai – Jelgava – Riga. Based on the 18th century sources, the postal route leading not only through big cities but also smaller towns and settlements was reconstructed. The sources suggest that the route might have been modified at times. Sometimes, from Kėdainiai the postal carriage would travel directly to Riga, and from there to Liepaja. Whereas on other occasions the mail from Kaunas would be shipped via Vilkija, Kėdainiai, Ariogala, Raseiniai, Jelgava, Riga, Liepaja, and Klaipėda. Postal carriages could take detours and visit various settlements.
5. In the 18th century, Vilnius found itself at the crossroads of postal routes. Vilnius was at the other end of the postal route from Warsaw, part of which coincided with the Warsaw – Kaunas line; only at Ratnyčia the postal carriage would turn northeast and continue via Merkinė and Varėna to Vilnius. To the west of Vilnius, similarly to the second half of the 17th century, a route ran to Königsberg. From Vilnius, the mail would be taken to Kaunas and from there, via Vilkija, Jurbarkas, and Tilsit, to Königsberg. To the east, another postal route connected Vilnius with Moscow. Ac-

According to the constitution of the Sejm of Warsaw of 1717, the postal carriage from Vilnius would travel to Minsk, Mogilev (in other cases to Orsha) and then to the border of Moscow. The description of the PLC's postal routes of 1786 offers information on the postal line from Vilnius to Polotsk. Historical sources also hint at the existence of local postal routes.

6. In the 18th century, Grodno was also at the junction of postal routes, as it was passed on the way from Warsaw to Kaunas, Vilnius, and Riga. It was the starting point for the postal lines Brest – Lublin and Kobryn – Slonim. A unique postal route led from Grodno to the border of the Russian Empire, crossing such urban centres as Skidzyel, Bielica, Mir, Slutsk, Babruysk, and Rahachow. The latter route had several smaller branches including the Mir – Minsk branch, which connected to the Vilnius – Moscow route.
7. The postal route connecting Königsberg and Riga via Palanga winded along the western part of the GDL. Its significance grew in the 18th century, when Saint Petersburg was built. The route led from Königsberg via Klaipėda, Palanga, Liepāja, Jelgava, and Riga to Saint Petersburg. Similarly to the 17th century, part of the route from Königsberg led through the Curonian Spit or via Tilsit to Klaipėda. Another postal route from the GDL, delineated in the GDL's road illustration of 1780 as connecting Vilnius – Kaunas – Kėdainiai – Raseiniai – Jelgava – Riga, disgorged into this route. From Riga, the mail continued to Liepāja, Palanga, Klaipėda, and Königsberg. Such was the route of mail shipping as described by contemporaries.
8. The GDL postal route network was part of the regional postal route system. The sources suggest that in the 17th–18th centuries, the locations of postal routes could change subject to political situation, wars, and natural disasters. Routes could also be modified due to seasonality, when unfavorable weather conditions would render part of the roads dysfunctional. The information on the layout of certain postal routes collected from sources at times differed during the course of the research. In each case, the optimal route was reconstructed indicating its identified branches and detours, which would serve as modifications of the route. The research not only helped reconstruct the structure of the GDL's postal routes but also posed some new questions – how and why the layout of postal routes was changed in the 18th century, and to what extent were post services significant in the public life of the GDL?

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