

PhD-topic Vitali Byl

## **Witchcraft across the cultural boundary: witch hunting in the Grand Duchy Of Lithuania in the 16th-18th centuries**

The aim of my research project is to determine the specific features of witchcraft trials in the Grand Duchy in the context of multiple cultural influences in the society. Witch hunt as a European phenomenon had its specific characteristics in each country due to local legal, religious, cultural and other local factors. On the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), as well as in whole Europe of those times, persecution of those accused of witchcraft activities was legalized by the state and society. The beginning of this process should be dated by the middle of the 16th century and its end - by the year 1776, when the Sejm ruled in favor of the abolition of death penalty for witchcraft. Despite the conclusion of the Union of Lublin (1569), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania retained within the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth not only considerable independence but also its distinctive features of the state and society. These specific features require studying witch trials on these lands separately from the Polish Kingdom. The GDL society dealt with the coexistence and active interaction of diverse religions and Christian denominations, law systems, cultural traditions that contributed to the specific character of borrowed witchcraft ideas and witch trials. The study of witch trials demonstrates differences as well as an integration of various concepts, practices, and institutions. The phenomenon of witch trials in the GDL is, to a great extent, a result of fluid boundaries between states, ethnic groups, religions, which exchanged traditions and concepts in different ways. Thus, witchcraft is a great marker for exploring social and ideological integration.

The following questions are to be answered in this work. What specific features characterized the witch hunt in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania? How can they be explained? What consequences did they have for the society? What was the role of cross-cultural contacts in this multicultural society? This Ph.D. research will be an attempt to contribute to the elimination of this gap in historical knowledge.