

An Ancient Prussian Sacred Site According to Lucas David's Description in the "Preussische Chronik" [Prussian Chronicle] (1583)

Summary

Lucas David is considered a pioneer of historical science in 16th-century Prussia. He was born in Allenstein (currently Olsztyn, Poland) in 1503. He graduated in law from the University of Leipzig. After that he served as the chancellor of Bishop of Kulm (Chełmno), later Lucas David became a member of the Council of the Court of Albert of Prussia. Alongside this work, he delved into the history of Prussia, collecting material from various archives for about 40 years to write it. He worked on history until his death. However, he did not finish writing it all. The first volume was published only in 1812, entirely dedicated to the ancient Prussians – their religion and customs.

The Prussians were Western Balts who lived in the territory between the Vistula and Nemunas Rivers. As an ethnic group, they were exterminated by the Teutonic Order, which settled in those lands in the 13th century with the goal of converting pagans to Christianity and occupying the territory.

The present publication presents excerpts translated from German into Lithuanian from Lucas David's *Preussische*

Chronik, which describes the religious centre of *Romaue*, located in the territory of the Prussian Nadruvia. A huge oak tree grew there, with images of three Prussian gods (*Patollo*, *Perkuno*, *Potrimpo*) placed in the hollows of its trunk. Near the oak, their attributes were placed, the eternal fire burned, the priests performed sacrifices, and national assemblies met, where not only religious matters were decided, but also other issues, such as those concerning war and peace. Priests lived close to the sacred oak. The chief priest (*Kriue Kirvaito*) held a special place in Prussian society. David writes that all the inhabitants had to obey him, not excluding the Prussian ruler (*Widewuto*). When the chief priest grew old, it was customary to ritually to burn oneself in front of the oak tree.

The translations of the chronicle presented to the reader are supplemented with comments explaining the terms and unclear parts of the text. Lucas David's information about the Prussian sacred site is compared with the data from the earlier written *Prussian Chronicle* by Simon Grunau (1529).

Keywords: Lucas David, Ancient Prussians, the religious centre of *Romaue*, sacred oak, Prussian ruler *Widewuto*, chief priest *Bruteno*, sacrifices.

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