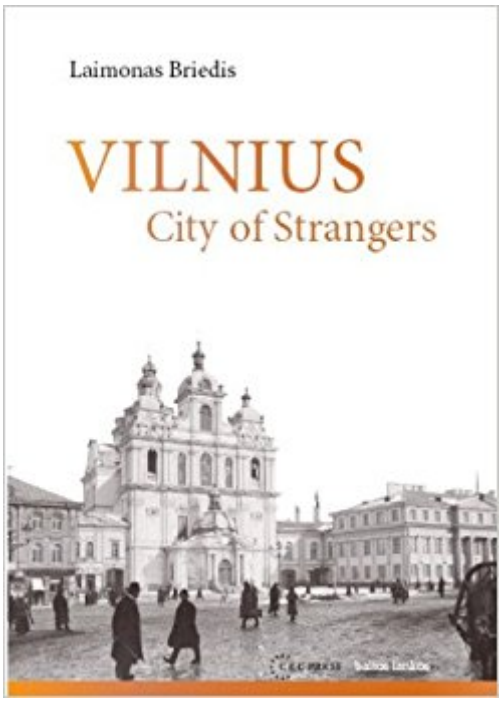
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Vilnius: City Of Strangers



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Synopsis

Presents the history of the capital city of Lithuania from its 14th century legendary beginnings up to 2009, when Vilnius bears the distinction of European Capital of Culture. Besides applying the traditional apparatus of historical investigation and referring to a large amount of sources, the special feature of this book is the ample quotes from travelers who passed through the city during their own life journeys. This list ranges from known artistic giants (such as writers Dostoyevsky, Ostrovsky, Tolstoy, DÃƒÆ'ƒÃƒâ Ã Â¶blin, and Brodsky) through political and cultural icons (such as German general Ludendorff and the Emperors Napoleon and Alexander), to equally compelling forgotten European personas who mark entire generations back to the 14th century.The subtitle refers to the fact that until quite recently, ethnic Lithuanians rarely formed the majority of the inhabitants of Vilnius. Contents; Prologue Chapter 1: The Brink of Europe Chapter 2: Mapping Sarmatia Chapter 3: Enlightenment Shadows Chapter 4: Napoleon s Curse Chapter 5: Russian Intrigue Chapter 6: German Intrusion Chapter 7: The Absent Nation Chapter 8: Maelstrom Europe Notes Illustrations Cited Works Index

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Customer Reviews

Vilnius Contested City In a modern Europe Vilnius can seem peripheral. Mr Briedis, however, begins by noting that when French geographers recently plotted the mid-point between Europe s cartographical extremes, they found the continent s true centre was a derelict farmhouse just outside the city. Foreign visitors have left few written accounts, but Mr Briedis uses them all as sources. A hapless papal delegation provides the first. In 1324 it tried and failed to persuade Lithuania s great pagan ruler, Gediminas, to adopt Christianity. He showed no desire to forsake

Perkunas the thunder god, berating his visitors for their intolerance. Why do you always talk about Christian love? he asked the pope s men. Where do you find so much misery, injustice, violence, sin and greed, if not among the Christians? Lithuania eventually adopted Christianity, along with a dynastic deal with Poland, in 1387. A cathedral was built on the pagan temple, the holy fires doused and the sacred groves felled. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania flourished. At its height in the 16th century it was a vast multiconfessional empire, stretching to the Black Sea, with no fewer than six legal languages, including Hebrew and Armenian. Even as that declined, the Vilnius style of Baroque architecture ripened in glory, a splendid autumn in one of Mr Briedis s many well-turned phrases, that paid a gracious farewell to its phantom golden age . The most poignant chapter is on cemeteries past and present, many of which were desecrated by the Soviets. Mass graves are still unearthed in Vilnius. They hold victims of Stalin s NKVD, of the Nazis, and as in one recent example thousands of fallen soldiers from Napoleon s shattered Grande ArmÃƒÂ©e. Vanished civilisations and lost empires leave a city stalked by horror and steeped in wonder. --The Economist

Laimonas Briedis is a cultural geographer, who received his degree at the University of British Columbia.

well written. enjoyed reading

Loved it, went there for vacation this fall, best vacation ever

Really interesting and personal and informative

While I am familiar with the history of Vilnius, having visited the city a number of times, this book provides a different take on that history, which I found to be very interesting. N.V.Udrys

I heard so much praise for this book that I had to have it. It left me completely disappointed because all the reviews misrepresented the content of the book.It is NOT a history of the city. It is a collection of travel impressions from various "strangers" -- foreigners who happened to visit the city at some point during its history.Much of the content is spent on introducing these "strangers" and then retelling their impressions. Because there is no attempt to weave a coherent history from these accounts, there are significant periods or topics with no coverage. As these accounts were taken from foreigners who spend just a brief time in the city, the insights -- while at times refreshing -- are

often shallow & spotty.

Laimonas Briedis tells his narrative of Vilnius through the eyes of visitors to the city over its long and tumultuous history. The story begins with visits by Papal representatives noting their difficulties in reaching Lithuania and their attempts at converting Lithuania to Christianity, and grows to include observations left by other visitors who stayed in the chartered city for various lengths of time. It isn't so much a history of the city as it is a set of impressions left by strangers through their writings, providing a sense of how the city has grown and developed into a cosmopolitan capital over the centuries.His chapters on Napoleon's Grand Army, which encamped in Vilnius before and after its ill-fated invasion of Russia, and on the Jewish experience over the centuries stand out. He also provides a number of other anecdotes including Dostoevsky's brief stay in Vilnius on his way to European spas, as told through his wife's journal. As such, it becomes a memoir of the city for good and for bad, as experienced by these strangers.One of Briedis' more interesting references is Israel Cohen, who wrote a wonderful history of the city,Ã Â Vilna (Jewish Communities Series), prior to WWII. In it Cohen not only describes the Jewish experience but also the levels of tolerance of the various governments during that time.I felt the flowing narrative broke down in the closing chapters as Briedis bemoans the city's loss of identity with the major changes that occurred during and after WWII, not least of all the Holocaust. The demographics were dramatically altered and the city was transformed greatly under Soviet rule, but since independence in 1991, Vilnius has undergone a profound change, which I didn't feel Briedis had a firm grip of. Nevertheless, I felt this was a very good study of the city and adds to the growing compendium of the city available in English.

This is a wonderful review of historical events that have left marks on the built environment in Vilnius. I am so much more appreciative of this lovely city knowing more about its past. Vilnius: City of Strangers is a great read, and I recommend it to anyone interested in Eastern European history or Vilnius!

Vilnius, City of Strangers. 250 ppThis is an ideal book that ties the people of Vilnius together. The big change is the Grande Armee of Napoleon in 1812. Then comes the Polish-Lithuanian revolt from Russia in 188?. The Jews are heavily into this Jerusalem of Lithuanis. The outstanding rabbi (goan) was there in 1779.It has numerous references and ties strangers together. The author lives in Vancouver and Vilnius.

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