



Ruzhany Palace — a 17th century architectural monument

# Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian scientists collect Sapegi heritage

By 2014-2015, the palaces of the famous noble family will be restored in Ruzhany and Vilnius

By Viktor Korbut

The first constitution of the Lithuanian state — the ‘Statute’ — was printed in Vilnius in Belarusian, in 1588, then signed by Chancellor Lev Sapega, whose family originated from Belarus. The noble family unites our two countries and has left a huge legacy of treasures.

## Manuscript from Zhirovichi Monastery goes on show

Vilnius is currently hosting an exhibition of the Sapegi family, exploring their role in the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Little of their heritage is found in Lithuania or Belarus, as the family left our lands many years ago, but the opening ceremony was attended

by Michał Ksawery — an heir of the Sapegis, who currently lives in Belgium. Poland has provided most of the exhibits: brought to Vilnius’ city gallery under guard and insured for around 1m Euros. The exhibition is showcasing 72 portraits for the first time, creating a true gallery of the Sapegi family (all brought from Poland). Also on show are the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’s Statute in Belarusian and a lock of Tadeusz Kosciuszko’s hair (kept in a tobacco box by a Sapegi family member). One of the most valuable exhibits is a Gospel presented by the Sapegis to Zhirovichi Orthodox Monastery (which still operates today, near Slonim, in Belarus’ Grodno Region). The 15th-16th century Belarusian printed edition usually resides in Vilnius.

Last year, the National Library of Belarus released a CD: *Sapegiana — Book Collections of the Sapegi Family*. The library’s director, Roman Motulsky, tells us, “The e-edition contains materials on the history of the Sapegis’ book collections; the family owned several large libraries in Slonim, Ruzhany and Derechin. Most of these books are now kept at the Russian National Library and at the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Library, at Vilnius University Library and at Warsaw University Library. The CD contains a catalogue of books previously owned by the Sapegi family, in addition to copies of the most valuable editions from the Russian National Library and materials on the family tree and bibliography on the Sapegis and their libraries’ history. The CD was re-

leased with support from UNESCO, as part of the *Virtual Reconstruction of the Sapegi Family’s Library* international project.”

## Walls stronger than time

By 2014, restorers plan to have completely reconstructed the Sapegis’ Baroque-style palace, in Vilnius’ Antakalnis. Its late 17th century decor is to be restored, inside and out: doors, windows, stairs and the neighbouring balustrade are to be worked upon.

The reconstructed palace will be the only preserved Baroque-style complex in Lithuania; the site will be open to the public. In the late 17th century, the Grand Hetman of Lithuania, Kazimierz Jan Sapega, built the palace but, from 1809, it was used as a hospital, with recon-

struction following in 1840.

Another Sapegi residence is being reconstructed in the Brest Region’s Ruzhany. Its gate tower is being worked upon, as is the East Wing (which now houses an exhibition). A manege and unique theatre are to be reconstructed in the East Wing, with work taking 2-3 years to complete — on condition of sufficient funding. Ruzhany Palace — a true pearl of architectural art — should open to the public in 2015.

Vladimir Schastny, the Chairman of the National Commission of Belarus for UNESCO, reminds us, “Belarusians lived not only in village houses but in palaces and mansions. Importantly, restoration will bring new life to Ruzhany, with cultural tourism developing.”



Museum exhibition at the palace



At Khatyn Memorial Complex

# Khatyn’s tragedy remembered

## Khatyn Memorial Complex hosts Day of Memory — dedicated to 69th anniversary of Khatyn tragedy

War veterans joined those from public organisations and labour collectives from the Minsk Region, alongside schoolchildren, in laying flowers and wreaths at the Eternal Flame. The remembrance event was dedicated to the memory of those killed at Khatyn and culminated in a mournful radio-call for the burnt villages.

Khatyn symbolises a sorrowful page in the nation’s history: the Great Patriotic War.

On March 22nd, 1943, the fascists razed this village, murdering its residents; 149 people, including 75 children, were burnt after being locked in a barn. The only survivor was 56 year rural blacksmith Iosif Kaminsky.

The memorial complex honouring those killed opened on July 5th, 1969, marking the 25th anniversary of Belarus’ liberation. In fact, its first stage opened even earlier — in December 1968. Its design almost completely copies the plan of the destroyed village, with a log structure located on the site of each of its 26 burnt houses.

Inside each, an obelisk represents the original hearth and chimney, bearing a memorable plaque which lists the names of the deceased occupants. Each obelisk is crowned with a bell which rings through the day. The sculpture of the Unconquered Man is situated at the centre of the complex.

Belarus suffered greatly at the hands of the Nazis, losing a third of its population. Over 9,000 villages and settlements were burnt, of which 600 were razed with their residents.