

At the Beginning Was a Dream

Vilnius is situated in one of the most beautiful spots in Lithuania: at the confluence of the Vilnia and the Neris rivers and on the amphitheatre of the surrounding hills. The volumes of its buildings do not overshadow adjacent hills, but rather repeat or extend them: it seems that belfries and towers big and small try to connect two landscapes – the earthly and the divine. The surrounding forests and groves with their picturesque inserts into the inner city create the background for the morning and evening glows, mists and rain, and the constant change of light. The entire city of Vilnius is reminiscent of a work of art. One can observe this perfect ensemble from all sides, and each viewpoint will reveal a multifarious panorama, each time apparently new. From whichever side you arrive in Vilnius, the city will enchant you at first sight, revealing for your view a panorama, which, though somewhat disordered by the turmoil of time, continues to receive superlative descriptions from both local residents and city guests already for five centuries.

Anyway, if we believe the legend, everything began from a fateful dream. The romantic, even slightly mystical aura of Vilnius is created by the legend of Gediminas' dream balancing on the boundary of reality and tale, which explains the origin of the city. The legend has it that Duke Gediminas came from Trakai to hunt at the Vilnia river and shot an aurochs on a large hill, now called Taurakalnis. It was already late to go back, and Gediminas put up for the night in the valley of Šventaragis close to the mouth of the Vilnia, where the remains of Lithuanian dukes used to be burned. There he had a dream: an iron wolf was howling in a stentorian voice on the Crooked Hill (Hill of Three Crosses). Asked to explain the dream, priest Lizdeika told him, "My Lord, Duke, the great iron wolf means that the capital city will stand here, and the howling means that its glory will spread around the world." The duke immediately set off to build a new capital in the valley surrounded by seven hills.

This story indirectly equates Vilnius with the eternal city: the legend of Rome involves a she-wolf, who brought up the founders of the city, twin brothers Romulus and Remus; besides, Rome also rose on seven hills. Because of these coincidences, it is not surprising that Gediminas' dream became an inspiring symbol for the Romanticist figures of the national revival movement in the 19th century. Obviously the myth





1
*Cathedral-Basilica of St. Stanislaus and
St. Vladislaus and the belfry*

2
*Interior of St. Casimir Chapel in the
Cathedral*

3
The left (north) nave

