



## Litva: The Rise and Fall of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: A Selection from Vanished Kingdoms (Penguin Tracks)

By Norman Davies

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*Vanished Kingdoms* introduces readers to once-powerful European empires that have left scant traces on the modern map. In this excerpt from his widely acclaimed book, Norman Davies tells the ill-fated story of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Founded in the mid-thirteenth century in one of the continent’s first settled regions, where the oldest of its Indo-European languages is spoken, the Grand Duchy at its peak was the largest country in Europe, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and it commanded yet greater influence after uniting with its western neighbor, the Kingdom of Poland, to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Grand Duchy’s huge territory included the great cities of Kiev, Vilnius, Riga, Minsk, and Brest. Despite being ahead of its time as an elective republic in an age of absolute monarchy, power struggles and foreign incursions led to its ultimate demise and forced partition by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1795.

In this selection from a work *The Boston Globe* has called “commendably accessible, magisterial, and uncommonly humane,” Davies chronicles these rich yet unfamiliar chapters in the history of modern Lithuania, Belarus, and Latvia with his signature acuity and verve.

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- Sales Rank: #702486 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-02-19
- Released on: 2013-02-19
- Format: Kindle eBook

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