

## THE CARE FOR FOUNDLINGS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VILNIUS

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This article examines phenomenon of child abandonment and the patterns of care for foundlings in eighteenth-century Vilnius. Western European social historians have produced many studies on the history of foundlings, thus revealing a problem of enormous proportions. However, there have been only limited efforts to examine the history of foundlings in early modern Vilnius, usually concentrating on the activities of the foundling hospital, while important questions about the number of foundlings and the patterns of care prior to the foundation of the institution are left unanswered. Research in the records of the parishes of SS Johns and SS Joseph and Nicodemus revealed steady growing numbers of illegitimate births and abandoned children in the second half of the eighteenth century (see appendices no. 1–3), which could be attributed to immigration and the rise of city's population. This shift challenged traditional mechanisms of care and made the clergy, who were the first to confront infants left at the steps of their churches, convents and hospitals, to look for other ways to care for abandoned children. The first known institution – foundation to support several wet-nurses – was founded by the bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Jakub Massalski in 1771. It seems that it was a short-lived initiative, and since the late 1780s the hospital of St Roch emerged as the leading institution in the care of foundlings. The hospital acted not only as a place to leave unwanted infants, but also as institution supporting a network of wet-nurses living in the city as well as in the suburbs. Without a doubt, the foundation of the hospital of Infant Jesus for foundlings and orphans by Jadwiga Teresa Ogińska née Załuska in 1786 represented a turning point in providing institutional care for abandoned infants. Situated in the Subocz suburb beyond the city walls, the hospital under the management of the Sisters of Charity and the Congregation of Mission, was opened on 17 October 1791. In the first decade, 438 infants, mostly female (see appendix no. 3), were baptised and accepted to the hospital. In contrast, there were 307 baptisms of abandoned infants in the aforementioned parishes through the whole of eighteenth century. The author argues that the founding of the hospital was the main factor behind the significant decline in the number of foundlings, as well as illegitimate children, baptised in the two parishes after 1791 (see appendix no. 3). Without a doubt, the foundling hospital has helped to save more infants, however, the opportunity to safely and anonymously leave the unwanted progeny at the institution, arguably,

encouraged mothers and/or parents to abandon their infants, instead of baptising them as illegitimate.

Keywords: foundlings, illegitimate children, Vilnius, hospitals, Sisters of Charity, Brothers of St Roch, eighteenth century.