The Polish city of Gdańsk (Danzig) played a crucial role in sustaining Protestantism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which in the post-Reformation period had permanently turned toward Catholicism and slowly began to limit the religious tolerance that the Konfederacja Warszawska (1573) had once granted Polish Protestants. In the sphere of education, the Gdańskie Gimnazjum Akademickie (Akademisches Gymnasium Danzig), or Danzig Academic Gymnasium, became well known for training young Protestants not only from Poland-Lithuania but also from abroad. Under the leadership of the Reformed theologian Jakub Fabricius from 1580–1629, the Danzig Gymnasium reached a high academic status (it was sometimes even compared to a university), and produced several excellent theologians, philosophers, and scientists of early modern Europe. The gymnasium's list of alumni includes Peter Crüger (1580–1639), Johann Botsack (1600–1674), Abraham Calov (1612–1686), Johannes Hevelius (1611–1687), Jakob Teodor Klein (1685–1759), Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664), Christian Hoffmann von Hoffmannswaldau (1616–1679), Heinrich Kühn (1690–1769), Gottfried Lengnich (1689–1774), Michael Christoph Hanow (1695–1773), and Daniel Gralatha (1708–1767), as well as its most famous alumnus—and, later, professor of philosophy—Bartholomäus Keckermann (1572–1609).

In this brief essay, I would like to draw a historical sketch of Keckermann's immediate context and thus supply English historiography with some necessary but missing historical and biographical information, in the hope of contributing to a better understanding not only of Keckermann's surroundings but also of the complexity of Reformed Christianity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹

¹ Celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Danzig Gymnasium's establishment, Polish scholars have produced five massive volumes with primary and secondary literature, as well as many illustrations, concerning the school. Volumes 1–4 were published in 2008, Volume 5 in 2012: Gdańskie Gimnazjum Akademickie, ed. Kotarski, et al., 5 vols. (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008–2012). Hereafter GGA.
Since 1457 Gdańsk had enjoyed special privilege in the Polish kingdom, as King Casimir IV Jagiellon had granted it autonomy for its opposition to the Teutonic Order in Prussia. This privilege limited the Polish king's rights toward Gdańsk and gave the city independent jurisdiction, legislation, and administration. After the incorporation of Royal Prussia into the Kingdom of Poland, Gdańsk continued, with some changes, to enjoy a limited independence, confirmed by the successive kings of the vast Commonwealth. Gdańsk's unique status allowed it to exercise more religious freedom and it soon became a major stronghold of Protestant Christianity in the country. Further, due to its economic prosperity and coastal location, Gdańsk also became an attractive destination for an ethnically diverse population that included Jews, Germans, Dutch, and even Scots. Culturally, German language dominated in the city, but citizens of Gdańsk were able to share Polish and German languages, and, despite hailing from various cultures, often found themselves united by the Protestant confessions and the Polish Crown. The majority of the inhabitants were Lutheran, but Gdańsk also was home to a significant Reformed minority that exercised great influence; thus many Reformed found the city to be a safe place in otherwise Catholic-dominated Poland-Lithuania.  

Daniel Kałaj, a persecuted Reformed pastor and later superintendent of the Reformed Church in Lithuania, preached at Gdańsk's Kościół Piotra i Pawła (St. Peter und Paulus Kirche). Kałaj describes in the following poem the town that had granted him safety:

In a word—Gdańsk has all fortune  
A precious jewel in the Polish crown  
An abundant marine food pantry  
A lighthouse for those lost at sea  
A guard and a key to the Baltic Sea  
And what is most important: a treasury of God's Word!

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