

RESEARCH OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS

LITHUANIA OF THE 11th- 14th CENTURIES IN THE WORKS OF RUSSIAN HISTORIANS IN 1850-1870s

*M. Ye. Megem**

*M. Wakar***



The article analyses the works on the history of medieval Lithuania (11th—14th centuries) by I.D. Belyaev, K.N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, N.I. Kostomarov and M.O. Koyalovitch. It focuses on Russian scholars' perception of Lithuania in 1850—870.

Employing the comparative historical method and content analysis, the authors identify the key characteristics underlying the perception of Lithuania in research discourse in the 1850s—1870s. Particular attention is paid to an analysis of preconceptions that affected the presentation of Lithuania's past by Russian historians who studied it in the context of history of western Russia rather than as an independent subject.

Special attention is paid to the process of formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Lithuanian State of the 14th century is perceived as "ours" in the historiography of the second half of the 19th century. The main thesis of Russian scholars — in line with their Slavophil positions — is that Russian culture is more developed than Lithuanian and more perspective for the Balts than the Polish one.

Key words: historiography, history of Lithuania, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, I.D. Belyaev, K.N. Bestuzhev-Rumin, N.I. Kostomarov, M.O. Koyalovich

Russian historians who were studying medieval Russia (Rus) would address the history of Lithuania which was dictated by Russian history to a large extent — Russian dukes levied a tribute from Lithuanian tribes in the XI-XII century; in the late XII century and in the XIII century already the Lithuanians had campaigns on the neighbouring Russian acres; and in the XIV century Lithuanian kings started to annex some

* Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University
14 Nevskogo str., Kaliningrad 236041,
Russia

** Wojciech Kętrzyński Research Centre
87, ul. Partyzantów, Olsztyn 10-402,
Poland

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Russian territories which resulted in the emerged Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). All these events have reflections in the works of Russian historians; however, there are various interpretations of them.

Different interpretations are determined by periods and places of historical writings. Each period has some influence on a train of interpretation of Lithuanian history.

Until the XIX century Russian historians had done almost no research into medieval South-East Baltics. The study of the GDL started not early as in the first half of the XIX century, though only with respect to Russian-Lithuanian relations¹. However, there is almost no information on Lithuanian historical events in these works. Due to the given approach, Lithuania and the Lithuanians are conceived by the authors through a prism of Russian-Lithuanian relations, and the struggle of duchies against Lithuania becomes the key subject of historical research the first half of the XIX century. The image of Lithuania is formed on the same grounds — such characteristics as a ‘dangerous rival’ and a ‘conqueror’ are the foremost².

In the first half of the XIX century, a great number of works on the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were carried out in Polish by Polish historians [11, c. 15]. Russian historiography had one exception — N.G. Ustryalov’s study on the role of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Russian history (1839) [12]. The author defined a special character of GDL nation-building — as a result of Gedeminas’s and his successors’ successful activity Russian and Lithuanian tribes “melted into one nation with the dominating Russian language, Russian faith and Russian statutes” [13, c. 138]. Such researches telling about the past of the Lithuanian nation were rather scarce; however, the situation began to change in the middle of the XIX century — some primary sources concerning the history of GDL were published. The commission publishing papers on the history of West Russia took up work in St. Petersburg; similar commissions were set up later in Vilna and Kiev [10, p. 422].

The attention of researchers focused on the history of West and South-West Russian acres was justified. The logic of development of historical knowledge imposed the statement of a new research issue — the history of Lithuania and GDL in the context of West-Russian history. Moreover, many prominent researchers focused on the “Polish issue” in the XIX century. In 1863, an armed revolt broke out in Poland; one part of the Lithuanians and the Byelorussians supported the national liberation movement. In order to grasp the character and the background of this movement, researcher in Moscow and St. Petersburg referred to history of the western part of the Russian Empire. The works of M.O. Koyalovitch, N.I. Kostomarov, I.D. Belyaev and K.N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin partly sealed a gap in historical knowledge on this region.

¹ The following authors are to be mentioned in this respect: N.M. Karamzin, S.M. Solovyov, D.N. Bantysh-Kamenskiy, A.A. Skalkovskiy, M.P. Pogodin, N.A. Polevoy.

² Further information: Megem M. E. 2011, *Obraz srednevekovoj Litvy v istoriografii pervoj poloviny XIX veka*, *Vestnik Baltijskogo federal'nogo universiteta im. I. Kanta*, no. 12, p. 50—54.

We cannot disagree with A. Yu. Dvorchenko that the above-mentioned works were rather naive and merely recounted the events [5, p. 6]. More than that, lack of scientific critical approach to the fact analysis resulted in further critical remarks of the research community. However, these works formed the basis of Russian historiography of Lithuania and GDL (after N. G. Ustryalov).

In 1859, the established and well-known historian N. I. Kostomarov gave a lecture in Saint-Petersburg University on the history of ancient Lithuania and life of the Lithuanians, which was later published in the “*Russkoe Slovo*” journal [7, p. 33]. His perception of Lithuania had several interdependent postulates:

Firstly, he characterized the Lithuanians as a “barbaric” [7, p. 5], isolated “rural nation” [7, p. 49] which firmly sticks to “rudiments of its antiquity” [7, p. 6] in its small “boggy motherland” [7, p. 7] and contrary to Christian civilization tracks the path of “slavery and spiritual ignorance” [7, p. 6—8].

Secondly, according to N. I. Kostomarov, Lithuania is regarded as a means of historical movement and union of Russian people. The Balts gave them the name “Rus” and a single princely kin in the IX century, which united several but close peoples. As a result, the Lithuanians gave the Russians an impetus to historical development. In the XIV century, the “Lithuanian element” gave another impetus to unification of Russia and gave it the name “Lithuania”; however, this time it happened only to one half of the Russian territory [7, p. 7].

N. I. Kostomarov concludes that despite the key role of the Lithuanians in the Russian history, they had no influence on the Russian territories and did not borrow anything themselves out of the more culturally advanced Russian civilization for their progressive advance [7, p. 8—9]. This attitude is clear — he characterizes Lithuania as a reserved nation at an “infant stage of development” [7, p. 46]. It is no wonder for him that Lithuanian “primitive, barbaric civilization” resigns itself to the “superior Slavic and yet Christian” one [7, p. 10].

Thirdly, the historian emphasizes the fact that the Lithuanians are “decent and unwarlike” people, who were recalled out of their “rural sleep” by the Normans in the IX century, and by the Russian and Germans in the XIII and XIV centuries. Consequently, the character of this non-aggressive tribe becomes “warlike”, and the Balts appeared at the historical arena furiously and “carrying consequences to the others but not for themselves” [7, p. 9]. This assumption carries N. Kostomarov’s main idea on Lithuania — this tribe has a special mission to wake up on occasions to unify Rus with appendage principalities and veches (town’s meeting) and to give it an impetus in the historical development, and to go back to its native “non-developing antiquity” [7, p. 9]. The author claims that Lithuania fulfilled its historical predestination after the Union of Krewo [7, p. 77].

The work of M. O. Koyalovitch, professor in theology at Saint-Petersburg Ecclesiastical Academy, called “Readings on the history of West Russia” and issued in 1864 is one of the first works to establish close attention to the history of West Russia, which had been part of GDL for a long period [8, p. 11]. The author studies the history of Lithuania with an assumption that

the Lithuanians had a systematically important role in the history of West Russia. This conclusion can be drawn on the grounds of “watersheds in history of West Russia” defined by M. Koyalovitch. According to him, in West Russia it was exactly Lithuania³ that served a connecting link for the creation of Russian and Lithuanian state.

The Lithuanians were “guard regiments of the Russians protecting them for a long period from Prussian and Livonian knights” [8, p. 40]. M. Koyalovitch characterizes the relations between the Lithuanians and the Russians through a prism of formation of a joint state: “We have to deal with the Lithuanian tribe until peaceful cohabitation is settled” [8, p. 58].

He defines two important events which had a drastic influence on the historical development of West Russia in the XIII century: Mongol-Tatar Invasion and the emergence of knight orders in the South-East Baltic predetermined the formation of Russian and Lithuanian state. Lithuania and South-West Russian duchies under constraint of enemies unified into a single state formation in order to preserve its sovereignty and culture and to offer rebuff to the enemy [8, p. 39, 75, 78—79].

The author, being a clerical historian, pays special attention to a pagan character of Lithuania. He believes that paganism was an important element of Lithuanian uniqueness but the course of life demonstrated that this element was unpromising for the formation of the state, “the Lithuanian pagan life was doomed to die and regenerate into the Christian one”. The historian mentions two ways Lithuania could have chosen in those circumstances — to get christianized into the catholic dissent by the knights or into the Orthodox dissent by the Russians. The first way meant the end of Lithuanian culture and national identity, that is why the Balts held grimly against the crusaders. The second way, as the historian puts it, was more advantageous for Lithuania as it did not necessarily mean the end of national identity for the Lithuanians and the paganism could have been gradually substituted by orthodoxy [8, p. 83]. He draws a conclusion that before the Union of Krewo, the pagan system of Lithuania had started to collapse giving place to Russian religious principalities. M. Koyalovitch also specifies the mutually beneficial influence of the Russians and the Lithuanians — the Russians brought their culture, legislation, military art and power; the Lithuanians gave their state system and tendencies to centralization [8, p. 88—89], as a result the symbiosis of Russian and Lithuanian duchy stood up successfully to the invasions of their neighbours. This historical development resulted in the “involvement of the given state formation into life and affairs of East Russia” [8, p. 91]. But the conclusion of a dynastical alliance between the GDL and Poland in Krewo castle, according to the historian, turned the course of his-

³ M. Koyalovitch defines five periods:

- I. The division of the Russian nation into two halves and the attempts of West Russia to form its state center.
- II. The unification of West Russia with Lithuania.
- III. The unification of Lithuanian-West Russian duchy with Poland by means of a merely external union.
- IV. The unification of Russia and Poland, and a break-up of the Russian-Polish state.
- V. Further “wrong” development of the Russian-Polish issue [8, p. 54].

tory of the South-East Baltics and South-West Russia because “Russian historical development of the Lithuanian duchy was sacrificed to the union with Latin Poland” for the sake of local benefits of King Jogaila. M. Koyalovitsh criticizes the given process as, according to him, such a vector of development turned out to be destructive for the Russian and Lithuanian state formation [8, p. 131].

I. D. Belyaev, professor at Moscow University Russian Law Department, studied the history of acres which joined the Russian state when he was writing a work “Stories about Russian history” describing the formation of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy. In his work “The history of Polotsk or North-West Russia since ancient times to the Union of Lyublin” he outlined his perception of Lithuania and the GDL. At first, the Lithuanians are dwellers of “dense forests and marshes” for him, who live a semiferal life [1, p. 72] separately from each other in large or small families and obey to the alderman only [1, p. 81]. However, with the influence of Polotsk duchy on Lithuania this nation was represented “in history by more or less Russian people” [1, p. 83]. I. Belyaev characterizes the Lithuanians as the closest and most friendly neighbours [1, p. 63], who were more “sensitive” to Polotsk nature, more “flexible and energetic” than other tribes [1, p. 114]. They always had peaceful and “brotherly” relations [1, p. 25] as their traditions and customs were very alike [1, p. 67, 69]. Hence, the author concludes that “the Lithuanians and the Russians are a kind of one nation or a family nation” [1, p. 65, 69, 83], the interests of which became common in the course of history [1, p. 22]. Polotsk, according to the historian, brought “Russian civilization” to Lithuania [1, p. 69, 83—84], that was “the forms of social life” [1, p. 81, 137], folk culture [1, p. 69], and agriculture [1, p. 71]. Lithuania became “warlike”, as he puts it, under the influence of Polotsk [1, c. 83].

I. Belyaev focuses on the fact, that some specific characteristics were preserved and borne in Lithuania; they were some kind of a “natural type” of the Lithuanians [1, p. 84]: language, paganism, traditions [1, p. 81—84], indigenous prince power [1, p. 77—79] — all these did not contradict the “Russian civilization” [1, p. 64, 83—84, 178—180].

The “Russian civilization” took roots in Lithuania peacefully and firmly, thus it was no surprise that Vilno managed to take the place of Polotsk after its decay and to proceed the development in “Russian direction with no separation of Lithuania from Russia” [1, p. 112]. Contrary to Polotsk which gave the Balts civilization, Poland forced its rule and “latinism” which is “dangerous and destructive” into application there [1, p. 121—122]. The author believes that Lithuania was on its way to “the triumph of orthodoxy” and “Polotsk civilization” but Polish “evil intrigues” led the Balts astray the right track of development [1, p. 250]. I. Belyaev calls the conclusion of the Union of Krewo the beginning of the “dark years” [1, p. 291—292].

K. N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, a prominent Russian historian, source researcher and historiographer, continued traditions of Saint-Petersburg research-scholars in the studies of the GDL history. Following N. Kostomarov, he details the issues of Lithuanian history in his two-volume work “Russian history”. One of the chapters of the second volume was devoted to Lithuania [6, p. 105]. The historian believed that the history of West Russia can help to

grasp the history of Kiev Rus [3, p. 494]. At the same time, as A. Yu. Dvorchenko emphasized, Bestuzhev-Ryumin “made the period-division of Russian history in accordance with two centres of unification of Russian acres — Moscovian and Lithuanian” [4, p. 16].

Lithuania in the perception of the historian had long time been the “solitary nation” which preserved many “initial traits” typical of Aryan tribes [2, v. 1, issue 1, p. 83]. The crusaders who came to the South-East Baltics gave the Lithuanians an impetus to “historical activity” [2, v. 1, issue 1, p. 299]. In order to increase the military potential and to stand up to the enemy the Lithuanian dukes “charged at Russia weakened by the disunity and Tatar Invasion” [2, v. 2, issue 1, p. 1—2, 54], as a result the GDL was set up and, as Bestuzhev-Ryumin puts it, the Duchy was rather “Russian than Lithuanian” [2, v. 1, issue 1, p. 83; v. 2, issue 1, p. 53]. He clarified his approach by the fact that “Russian civilization” leaves “Lithuanian element” behind. The Russians brought their language to the GDL, “princely power, “veche” type of town organization, the unity of city and land” and the Lithuanians actually borrowed “Russian order” obeying which they “peacefully ruled over the joined cities and acres” [2, v. 1, issue. 1, p. 53].

However, the historian points out to a specific feature which was not typical of “Russian order” — the defensive “warlike character” of the duchy which influenced its structure. According to the author, the Lithuanian dukes while conquering Russian territories left local knyazes the power but demanded the levy and military service in return [2, v. 2, issue 1, p. 53—55]. The conclusion of the Union of Kreow was the struggle of Russian and Polish principalities [2, v. 2, issue 1, p. 52—53] which had a negative effect on the Lithuanian state [2, v. 2, issue 1, p. 37—38].

To conclude with, we can mention that Russian historians of the 1850s-1870s began to study the historical events relating to Lithuanian past through a prism of West Russia’s history. Until that time the history of Lithuania had been a subject of historical research only as an issue of relations between East Russian principalities and Baltic tribes.

Contrary to the historians of the second half of the XIX century, the researchers of the 1850s-1870s do not characterize the Lithuanians as “conquerors” and “dangerous rivals”. However, they constantly emphasize the “warlike” character of the Lithuanians. One of the central issues of their research is the issue of external factor interrelation (the appearance of the crusaders in the South-East Baltics) with the activation of the Lithuanians in historical development. The historians mainly focus on the formation of the GDL. They perceive the Lithuanian state of the XIV century as “ours” and emphasize a special formative role of the Lithuanians who brought the ideas of centralization. The issues of cultural interaction of Russian and Lithuanian elements are of significant importance in the works of the historians. They perceive Lithuania as a beam of less developed and less perspective culture compared to the “Russian civilization”, which resulted in borrowing of more advanced Russian culture by the Lithuanians along with the Russian way of life, language, orthodoxy, legislation, etc.

According to the historians, the GDL (or Lithuanian-Russian State) is more Russian than Lithuanian. The concept “Another Russia” of N. Ustrya-

lov keeps developing in the 1850s-1870s which treats the GDL as one of the centres of unification of disintegrated Russian territories. According to this approach, the results of the Union of Kreow concluded by the GDL and Poland in 1385 are considered to be negative for Russian and Lithuanian territories of the GDL. The researchers' view (except the works by N. Kostomarov) is focused on producing negative characteristics of Poland and its policy in the GDL. The authors emphasize that "Russian civilization" was more perspective for the Lithuanians than Polish. In this case there is a connection between the negative image of Poland in the works of the 60—70s of the XIX century and the political unrest in South-West Russia in 1863—1864 which was strongly criticized by a considerable part of Russian intellectuals.

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About the authors

Maxim Ye. Megem, Deputy Head of the Baltic Studies Unit, Baltic Region Institute, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University.

E-mail: megem@yandex.ru

Dr *Marcin Wakar*, adjunct, Wojciech Kętrzyński Research Centre, Olsztyn.

E-mail: marcin.wakar@gmail.com