

Forschungsbericht

Belarusian National Historiography and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Belarusian State

by

Jakub Zejmis

Over the past two centuries the movements for national self-determination in Europe gave rise to new and often contradictory conceptions of regional history. In the greater Baltic area the case of Belarus, a country usually bypassed by Western scholarship, has been no exception. By the 1920s the Belarusian national movement produced a historiography which defined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Belarusian state.¹ The Belarusian interpretation of regional history distinguished between a strictly ethnic Lithuania and the poly-ethnic Grand Duchy where East Slavs made up most of the population. It thereby established Belarusians' historical-geographical identity as "Lithuanians."² Some versions added an ethnic component based on archeological and linguistic evidence of a Baltic substratum in Belarusians' ethnic makeup. Belarusian historians, echoing their Ukrainian counterparts, looked to the Grand Duchy to separate their people's ethnogenesis and early history from Poland and particularly Muscovite Russia. The Belarusian claim to past statehood promised to make Belarus a historical nation worthy of renewed statehood in the 20th century, instead of a non-historical ethnic minority subject to assimilation by Russians and Poles. The national conception of Belarusian history, compromised by Stalinism, has seen a resurgence among academics in post-Soviet Belarus. Ideologically it remains one of the elements of Belarusian national identity opposed to President Aleksandr Lukashenko's policy of cultural and political reintegration with Russia.

¹ The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, born in the mid-13th century, existed in various forms until 1795. In 1386 it entered a dynastic union with the Kingdom of Poland, superseded by the constitutional Union of Lublin in 1569 which established the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This paper will address the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's origins, formation and pre-1569 history in light of the concerns of Belarusian national historiography.

² The emigre historian Jan Stankevich insisted on the historical "Lits'vin" or "Vialikalits'vin" (Great Lithuanian) as a national term for Belarusians. See JAN STANKEVICH: *Narysy z' Historyi Vialikalitvy-Belarusi* [Outline of the History of Great Lithuania-Belarus] (New Jersey, 1978), pp. 8–10. Other Belarusian historians such as Mitrafan Dounar-Zapolski rejected such nomenclature in favor of "Belarusian." See M. B. DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI: *Historyia Belarusi* [History of Belarus], Minsk 1991 (1st ed. 1926), p. 20.

The first scholarly work devoted to Belarusian history as a distinct topic came out in 1857 in St. Petersburg. While not quite equating the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Belarus, it saw "Lithuanian Rus'" as the Slavic core of the new state which emerged as a result of Lithuanian southward expansion in the mid-13th century.³ Subsequent Belarusian historians such as Mitrafan Dou-nar-Zapolski, Vatslau Lastouski, and Uladzimir Picheta distinguished between ethnic and historical Lithuania in a more conscious Belarusian light.⁴ From the late 19th century through the 1920s these Belarusian scholars as well as Efim Karski and Usevalad Ihnatouski traced the history of an ethnically-defined Belarusian nation to the medieval principality of Polotsk and to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The pioneers of Belarusian history-writing wanted to establish a geneology of Belarusian statehood despite their often populist and/or Marxist approaches. They also built much of their analysis upon and Belarusianized the Russo-centric conclusions of Imperial Russian historiography. When the Russian Empire crumbled after 1917, Belarusian historians were emboldened to openly call the Grand Duchy a Belarusian state.⁵

Muscovite and then Imperial Russian ideologists and historians had long insisted on the "Russian" character of the Grand Duchy. The Great Russian claim to these lands was tied to the linear conception of Russian history presenting Muscovite Russia as the legitimate successor to Kievan Rus'. According to this conception, Kiev and the western and northwestern lands associated with it succumbed to foreign Lithuanian rule which together with the Mongol invasions broke up an original Rus' unity. It applies not only to the Belarusian, but also to the Ukrainian lands that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania absorbed during the 14th century. According to Muscovite political ideology of the 15th and 16th centuries, all of these western Rus' lands were subject to "recovery" by Moscow as part of its Kievan inheritance.⁶

Despite Catherine II's partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793 and 1795) which brought the Grand Duchy into the Russian Empire, it had come to be associated with Poland in the course of more than 400 years of political and cultural influence. It was the Polish insurrection of

³ F. TURCHINOVICH: *Obozrenie istorii Belorussii s drevneishikh vremen* [Survey of Belarusian History from Ancient Times], St. Peterburg 1857, pp. 14–19, 73–87, 93.

⁴ M. B. DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI: *Asnovy dziazhaunastsi Belarusi* [Foundations of Belarusian Statehood], Minsk 1994 (1st ed. 1919), p. 6.; DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 2), p. 16; VATSLAU LASTOUSKI: *Karotkaia historyia Belarusi* [Brief History of Belarus], Minsk 1993 (1st ed. 1910), p. 17.; ULADZIMIR PICHETA: *Istoriia Belorusskogo naroda* [History of the Belarusian People], in: *Kurs Belorussovedeniia* [Course of Belarusian Studies], Moskva 1918–1920, pp. 1–86, here p. 16.

⁵ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 9.; USEVALAD IHNATOUSKI: *Karotki narys historyi belarusi* [Brief Outline of Belarusian History], Minsk 1991 (1st ed. 1919), pp. 28, 62.; EFIM KARSKI: *Belaruski narod i iaho mova* [The Belarusian People and its Language], Minsk 1992 (1st ed. 1920), p. 8.

⁶ I. U. BUDOVNITS: *Russkaia publitsistika XVI veka* [Russian 16th Century Political Tracts], Moskva, Leningrad 1947, pp. 167–187.

1831 which alerted Russian officials as well as historians of the need to address the local people's ancestry and national identity. N. Ustrialov, writing during the 1830s, revived the Russian claim to this territory. Ustrialov set the stage for later historians by showing a lack of foreignness to Lithuanian rule which was accompanied by intermarriage between Lithuanian and Rus' princely families. The Grand Duchy, although it unified the western Rus' lands both by conquest and peaceful arrangements (marriage, treaties, etc.), itself came to be dominated by Rus' religion, language, and laws. According to Ustrialov, this was possible because the East Slavs were more highly developed culturally and greatly outnumbered the pagan Lithuanians.⁷ Ustrialov also targetted Polish influence as alien and corrupting to the local East Slavic population.⁸ Ustrialov and some of the Russian historians following him identified the local Orthodox population with Russia and attempted to dissociate it from Poland.⁹ Scholars of the ensuing "Western Rus'" historical school recognized an autonomous regional history but insisted on Russian unity and opposed Belarusian and Little Russian (Ukrainian) separatism.¹⁰

Russian historians coming after Ustrialov elaborated on his themes, in the main keeping to his portrayal of the Grand Duchy as a "Lithuanian-Rus'ian" state.¹¹ They addressed the question of Baltic-Slavic interaction, drawing from previous toponymic research of Slavic colonization of Lithuanian and Latvian regions.¹² In particular, they saw the intermixing of Rus' and Lithuanian princely families as an avenue for Rus' culture to penetrate the Lithuanian elite, and as a means by which Lithuania peacefully incorporated Rus' lands.¹³ Russian historians originated a key tenet of Belarusian historiography – the core role of proto-Belarusian lands in the Grand Duchy's formation. Specifically, authors referred to the principality of Polatsk and the associated East

⁷ N. USTRIALOV: *Izsledovanie voprosu, kakoe mesto v Russkoi istorii dolzhno zanimat' Velikoe Kniazhestvo Litovskoe* [Study of the Question of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's Place in Russian History], Moskva 1839, p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–19, 24.

⁹ N. BORICHEVSKII: *Pravoslavie i Russkaia Narodnost' v Litve* [Orthodoxy and the Russian Population in Lithuania], St. Petersburg 1851, p. 3.

¹⁰ M. KOIALOVICH: *Chteniia po istorii Zapadnoi Rossii* [Readings in the History of Western Russia], St. Petersburg 1884 (1st ed. 1864), pp. 19–20. For an analysis of "West-Rus'ism" see ALIAKSANDR TSVIKEVICH: "Zapadno-Russizm." *Narysy z historyi hramadzkai mys'li na Belarusi u XIX i pachatku XX v.* ["West-Rus'ism." Outline of the History of Social Thought in Belarus in the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries], Minsk 1993 (1st ed. 1928).

¹¹ For an overview of Russian historiography on the Grand Duchy, see V. T. PASHUTO: *Obrazovanie Litovskogo Gosudarstva* [Formation of the Lithuanian State], Moskva 1959, pp. 162–191.

¹² P. D. BRIANTSEV: *Istoriia Litovskogo gosudarstva s drevneishykh vremen* [History of the Lithuanian State from Ancient Times], Vilnius 1889, pp. 78–80.

¹³ V. ANTONOVICH: *Ocherki istorii Velikogo kniazhestva litovskogo do poloviny XV stoletii* [Outline of the History of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Mid-15th Century], Kiev 1878, pp. 40–41.

Slavic lands around the Grand Duchy's first capital of Novaharodak.¹⁴ Anticipating their Belarusian colleagues, Russian historians argued that Mindoug (Mindovg, Mindaugas), founder of the Grand Duchy in the mid-13th century, was able to unite a multitude of petty clans into a strong state by using neighboring Rus'lands as a platform to extend control over ethnic Lithuanian territories.¹⁵ M. K. Liubavskii in particular underscored the stronger foundations for statehood in the Rus' lands due to their more structured and permanent relations between prince and servitors. He considered these lands to be the center around which the Lithuanian state formed.¹⁶

Belarusian historians proceeded to Belarusianize many of these formulations. As scholars filled the Grand Duchy with Belarusian content, they made it home to Belarusian ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. They saw the Grand Duchy as both the product of Belarusian statecraft and as the crucible of Belarusian national formation. As Belarusians' historical homeland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania separated them politically and culturally from Russia.

In their accounts of proto-Belarusians' ethnic distinctiveness, some scholars reached into the distant past preceeding the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A key feature of arguments for separate ethnogenesis was the claim that Belarusians had always lived in at least part of their current territory in relative isolation from other East Slavic tribes. Karski, in his seminal linguistic history of the Belarusian people (1904); Lastouski, in the first native-language survey of Belarusian history (1910); and Dounar-Zapolski in a brief outline of Belarusian history produced during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference all voiced themes of territorial longevity and ethnic purity.¹⁷ Belarusians' claim to being the purest Slavs applies in particular to the southern Polesie region of contemporary Belarus bordering on Ukraine,¹⁸ which some scholars believe was part of an original Slavic homeland.¹⁹

Belarusian historians and ethnologists also took account of evidence somewhat contradicting the thesis of Slavic purity but likewise setting Belarusians apart from other East Slavs. They built upon archeological, linguistic and top-

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 44–45.; P. N. BATIUSHKOV: *Belorussia i Litva, istoricheskii sud'by severo-zapadnogo kraia* [Belorussia and Lithuania: Historical Fate of the Northwestern Land], St. Petersburg 1890, pp. 54–63.; M. K. LIUBAVSKII: *Ocherk istorii Litovsko-Russkago gosudarstva do Liublianskoi unii vkluchitel'no* [Outline of the History of the Lithuanian-Russian State up to the Union of Lublin Inclusive], 2nd ed., Moscow 1915, pp. 14–17. The present article uses the modern Belarusian place names of Polatsk and Novaharodak. The Russian equivalents are Polotsk and Novogrudok. The commonly known English place name Vilnius will be used instead of the Belarusian Vil'nia.

¹⁵ ANTONOVICH (cf. footnote 13), pp. 40–41.; LIUBAVSKII (cf. footnote 14), pp. 16–17.

¹⁶ LIUBAVSKII (cf. footnote 14), pp. 16–18, 29.

¹⁷ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 14.; EFIM KARSKI: *Belorussii* [Belarusians]. Vol. I, Vilnius 1904, p. 71.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 7.

¹⁸ KARSKI (cf. footnote 17), pp. 63, 71.

¹⁹ FRANCIS CONTE: *The Slavs*, New York 1995, p. 20.

onymic research showing that between the 6th and 9th centuries incoming Slavs mixed with and assimilated an original Baltic population in what later became known as Belarusian ethnographic territory.²⁰ In his work to promote Belarusian studies immediately following the Russian Revolution, Picheta pointed out that proto-Belarusian tribes of Krivichi and Dregovichs colonized Latvian, Lithuanian and Finnic-populated areas.²¹ He nonetheless did not add Lithuanians to his list of Slavic contributors to Belarusian ethnogenesis until a later point in his career.²² Karski considered that a Belarusian ethnicity had formed on the basis of the three Slavic tribes of Krivichi, Dregovichs and Radimichi, but acknowledged that in some places the proto-Belarusians assimilated Latvian and Lithuanian tribes.²³ Lastouski noted that proto-Belarusians lived intermixed with Lithuanians and added the Baltic Iatvingians to his list of tribes which merged into a Belarusian ethnicity.²⁴ Further twentieth century research corroborated the presence of such a Baltic substratum which became established in Soviet and post-Soviet scholarly literature.²⁵

Contending longtime familiarity between Baltic and Slavic tribes, Belarusian scholars portrayed Lithuanian southward expansion not as foreign conquest but as the unification of neighboring lands, sometimes by force yet at other times peacefully by marriage and mutual agreement.²⁶ Lastouski and Ihnatouski, for example, related a mixed Slavic-Baltic population along the northern Rus' perimeter to political interaction and fusing among local princely lines, facilitating Lithuanian southward expansion.²⁷ Moreover, to various degrees Belarusian historians interpreted the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's formation as having actually been an expansion of Belarusian statehood, through both mutual politics and institutional borrowing.

Scholars in particular established a link between the proto-Belarusian principality of Polatsk and the emerging Grand Duchy. Here they went further than Russian historians by presenting the Belarusians as state-builders, a role relevant to 20th century political nationalism. Dounar-Zapolski, for example, drew a sharp contrast between proto-Belarusians' highly developed form of statehood and the alleged absence of any state structures among the

²⁰ PICHETA (cf. footnote 4), p. 3. For an overview of early Russian and Polish research, see V.F. ISAENKO et al. (eds.): *Ocherki po arkheologii Belorussii* [Outline of the Archeology of Belorussia]. Vol. II., Minsk 1972, pp. 5–10.

²¹ PICHETA (cf. footnote 4), pp. 3–8.

²² V.I. PICHETA: *Belorussia i Litva XV–XVI vv.* [Belorussia and Lithuania in the 15th–16th Centuries], Mokva 1961, p. 646. This material was published post-humously; Picheta died in 1947.

²³ KARSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 8; KARSKI (cf. footnote 17), p. 80.

²⁴ LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), pp. 8, 12.

²⁵ ISAENKO (cf. footnote 20), p. 214. See also PAVEL M. DOLUKHANOV: *The Early Slavs. Eastern Europe from the Initial Settlement to the Kievan Rus*, London 1996, p. 170.

²⁶ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), pp. 8–9.; IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 28.; KARSKI (cf. footnote 17), pp. 112–114.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 8.

²⁷ IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 29.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 12.

Lithuanians.²⁸ The resulting image is one of proto-Belarusians filling a political void, transferring their institutions to their presumed conquerers. Lastouski wrote that in the 12th century Polatsk princes fleeing North under Kievan assault organized the local Baltic people into principalities, laying the foundations for a larger state.²⁹ Ihnatouski developed a state-centered periodization of Belarusian history, where a "Lithuanian-Belarusian" period directly followed from the initial Polatsk phase.³⁰ However he took a more ambiguous position than Lastouski regarding Polatsk state-building in the Grand Duchy. In his view the Lithuanians were organizationally stronger than Polatsk, which had suffered from internal strife and continuous independence struggles against Kiev.³¹ But he concurred with Lastouski that while the Lithuanians took the initiative to forge a common state, they accomplished it with Polatsk institutional and cultural resources.³² Picheta, like Ihnatouski, perceived that a weakened Polatsk fell under Lithuanian rule. But unlike Ihnatouski he alluded to Polatsk influence on Lithuanian political organization before the 13th century when only Polatsk princes were able to seize Lithuanian lands and arrange them into dependencies.³³ By insisting on an uninterrupted line of political history, Belarusian scholars challenged 19th century Imperial Russian historiography's Muscovite orientation. They mirrored the earlier challenge mounted by the Ukrainian historian Mikhailo Hrushevsky, who insisted on Ukrainian historical continuity apart from Moscow.

Along with a political role in forging the Grand Duchy, Belarusian scholars attributed an enhanced cultural role to their medieval predecessors. Following the mainstream of Imperial Russian historiography, Belarusian historians insisted that the Christianized East Slavs were culturally more advanced than the pagan Balts. But unlike Great Russian historians, most Belarusian scholars looked to East Slavic cultural processes in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the perspective of Belarusian culture and national formation. They contended that historic Lithuanian statehood unified the proto-Belarusian tribes and enabled a Belarusian culture and nationality to definitively emerge. For example, Karski wrote that Lithuanian rule provided conditions for the crystallization of a single Belarusian language, which he considered the defining element of nationality.³⁴ According to Picheta a Belarusian nationality had formed by the mid-14th century, separating Belarusians from Ukrainians and Great Rus-

²⁸ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 9.

²⁹ LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 12.

³⁰ IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 28.

³¹ Other Belarusian historians likewise insist on Polatsk autonomy from Kievan Rus', and thereby draw a line between Belarusian and Ukrainian statehood. See DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 2), pp. 36–38.; KARSKI (cf. footnote 17), p. 79.

³² IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), pp. 72–73.

³³ V. PICHETA: *Istoriia Litovskogo Gosudarstva do Liublinskoi Unii* [History of the Lithuanian State up to the Union of Lublin], Vilnius 1921, p. 3.

³⁴ KARSKI (cf. footnote 17), pp. 113–114.

sians, as a result of inclusion in a unified Lithuanian state.³⁵ Ihnatouski analogously pointed out that although the state was ruled by a Lithuanian Grand Prince, it was dominated by the culture and language of Polatsk, which he argued took on the character of Belarusian language and culture during the "Lithuanian-Belarusian" period as the East Slavs became differentiated into Belarusians, Ukrainians and Great Russians.³⁶

Belarusian scholars not only equated the Rus' culture which flourished in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Belarusian national culture but lauded its achievements. Historians demonstrated the prominence of the old Belarusian language by citing its use as the state or chancellery language of the Grand Duchy, as well as the language spoken at the Grand Ducal court. They beheld the three Lithuanian Statutes (1529, 1566, 1588) as examples of both old Belarusian language and law.³⁷ Dounar-Zapolski claimed that the old Belarusian language was so widespread that even ethnic Lithuanians spoke it at home.³⁸ Lastouski and Dounar-Zapolski linked the development of a Belarusian literary language from the second half of the 15th century to the wide extent of printing, evidenced in prayer books, religious and polemical works, chronicles, and grammars.³⁹ Scholars contrasted the large amount of printing in the Grand Duchy in the old Belarusian language to its later introduction in most of Eastern Europe not to mention Muscovite Russia. Lastouski and Ignatouski pointed out that a Belarusian press opened in Cracow in 1483, preceeding a Polish press by 22 years (1505) and a Russian press in Moscow by 90 years (1573). Belarusians, represented by Frantsishak Skaryna, were in 1517 second only to the Czechs (1488) to print a translation of the Bible.⁴⁰ Picheta saw the libraries accumulated by Belarusian noblemen (szlachta) as the expression of a humanistic renaissance.⁴¹ Historians associated the Reformation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with an overall high cultural level among nobles and burghers who, according to Lastouski, spoke, read and wrote in old Belarusian.⁴² Ihnatouski contrasted this high cultural level to the contemporary stigma attached to Belarusians as illiterate peasants without a high culture of their own.⁴³

The Belarusian national historiography of the first two decades of the 20th century, especially Ihnatouski's work which combined political and social

³⁵ PICHETA (cf. footnote 4), pp. 3–8.

³⁶ IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), pp. 62, 97.

³⁷ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 17.; IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), pp. 97–99.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 50.; KARSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 8.; PICHETA (cf. footnote 4), p. 16.

³⁸ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 17.

³⁹ DOUNAR-ZAPOLSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 18.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), pp. 50–51.

⁴⁰ IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), pp. 100–101.; LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 48.

⁴¹ PICHETA (cf. footnote 4), p. 38.

⁴² LASTOUSKI (cf. footnote 4), p. 51.

⁴³ IHNATOUSKI (cf. footnote 5), p. 100.

history, became the official view in Soviet Belarus during the 1920s. Its established status was reflected in school curricula, which used Ihnatouski's history as a textbook, and government publications which referred to a Lithuanian-Belarusian state where the Belarusian element dominated.⁴⁴ Stalin's "cultural revolution" beginning in the late 1920s condemned these authors as anti-Soviet "national-democrats" and suppressed their works. The concept of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a "Lithuanian-Belarusian" state survived in muted form in some 1930s works which imposed a mechanical Marxist periodization onto Belarusian history.⁴⁵ Post-war histories became even more diluted of their national content. The Academy of Sciences official history published in 1961 under the chief editorship of L. S. Abetsedarskii no longer projected Belarusian statehood to the Grand Duchy. On the other hand it recognized the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's role in disrupting an original East Slavic unity.⁴⁶ The Academy of Sciences five-volume history published during the 1970s likewise linked the political division of Eastern Slavic lands to the split into Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian nationalities. Although it highlights Polatsk's privileged position in the Grand Duchy by virtue of a high level of socio-economic and political development, this work echoed Imperial Russian historiography by labelling the Rus' culture which flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries as "western Russian" rather than Belarusian.⁴⁷ While these accounts reflected some aspects of Belarusian national historiography, such as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's role in stimulating Belarusian ethnogenesis, on the whole they dissolved such themes in class analysis and Russo-centrism. The convergence of Belarusian history with the Grand Duchy persisted in an extremely modified form.

Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika of the late 1980s allowed historians and journalists to critically reevaluate their nation's past. Even more so the years since the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 have seen a revival of Belarusian national historiography. Scholars exposed the crimes of the Soviet period and investigated political alternatives, including the short-lived Belarusian Democratic Republic of 1918.⁴⁸ The Grand Duchy of Lithuania likewise became

⁴⁴ Belorusskaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika [Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic], ed. by S. N. K. BSSR, Minsk 1927, pp. 27–29.

⁴⁵ V. K. SHCHERBAKOU: *Narysy Historyi Belarusi* [Outline History of Belarus], Minsk 1934, pp. 20, 80.

⁴⁶ L. S. ABETSEDARSKII et al. (eds.): *Istoriia Belorusskoi SSR v dvukh tomakh* [History of the Belarusian SSR in Two Volumes]. Vol. I, Minsk 1961, p. 135.

⁴⁷ I. M. IGNATSENKA et al. (eds.): *Historyia Belaruskai SSR u piatsi tomakh* [History of the Belarusian SSR in Five Volumes]. Vol. I, Minsk 1972, pp. 10, 161.

⁴⁸ See I. M. IGNATENKO: *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i samopredelenie Belarusi* [The October Revolution and the Self-Determination of Belarus], Minsk 1992; VALIANT-SIN MAZETS: *Histrychny vopyt BNR pa kul'tyrna-natsyional'namu adradzhenniu belaruskaha naroda* [The Historical Experience of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the Cultural-National Renaissance of the Belarusian People], in: *Belaru-*

prominent in both scholarly and popular historical literature. New editions of classic works on Belarusian history, portraying the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Belarusian state, have been published along with biographies of their authors, many of whom helped lead the early 20th century national awakening.⁴⁹ Moreover, professional academics and publicists are themselves generating works which cite and mirror much of the material produced early in the century.

The main themes of the new literature are historical geography, ethno-national formation and national statehood. Like their predecessors, authors are linking Belarus geographically to Lithuanian Rus' and politically to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. More importantly, they are restoring the Grand Duchy's Belarusian national content. Belarusian ethnogenesis is again being tied not only to the consolidation of Belarusian lands by the Grand Duchy but to the dominance there of Belarusian culture.⁵⁰

The most pronounced nationalist position regarding the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's status as a "Lithuanian-Belarusian state" belongs to Mikola Ermalovich, who locates historical Lithuania in central Belarusian ethnographic lands and reverses the Lithuanian conquest of Belarus into a Belarusian conquest of Lithuania.⁵¹ Ermalovich argues that the local elite in the Grand Principality's first capital of Novaharodak chose the refugee Lithuanian prince Mindoug (Mindovg, Mindaugas) to conquer ethnic Lithuanian lands on their behalf. He interprets the ensuing expansion of the Grand Duchy over both Baltic and Slavic areas as an enlargement and strengthening of the proto-Belarusian Novaharodak state.⁵² Besides Ermalovich, Anatol' Hrytskevich has forcefully revived the "Lithuanian-Belarusian" nomenclature of the 1920s and extols the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a great power in the late 14th and 15th centuries.⁵³ Hrytskevich follows Ihnatouski's periodization beginning with

sika-Albaruthenica 2, Minsk 1992; N. S. STASHKEVICH et al.: Oktiaбр' 1917 i sud'by politicheskoi oppozitsii [October 1917 and the Fate of the Political Opposition], Gomel 1993.

⁴⁹ See I. M. IHNATSENKA: Usevalad Ihnatouski i iaho chas [Usevalad Ihnatouski and His Time], Minsk 1991; I. A. IANUSHKEVICH: Neadmennyy sakratar adradzhennia Vatslau Lastouski [Permanent Secretary of the Renaissance Vatslau Lastouski], Minsk 1995; A. MIASNIKOU: Natsdemy: Les i trahedyia Fabiana Shantyra, Usevalada Ihnatouskaha i Iazepa Liosika [National Democrats: The Fate and Tragedy of Fabian Shantyr, Usevalad Ihnatouski and Iazep Liosik], Minsk 1993.

⁵⁰ VLADIMIR ORLOV: Tainy Polotskoi istorii [Secrets of the History of Polotsk], Minsk 1995, pp. 140–142.; KASTUS TARASAU: Pamiats pra legendy [Memory of Legends], Minsk 1994, pp. 43–58.

⁵¹ M. ERMALOVICH: Starazhytnaia Belarus. Polatski i Novaharodski peryady [Old Belarus. The Polatsk and Novaharodak Periods], Minsk 1990, pp. 310, 319.; M. ERMALOVICH: Pa sliadakh adnaho mifa [On the Trail of a Myth], 2nd ed., Minsk 1991, pp. 58–81.

⁵² ERMALOVICH (cf. footnote 51), pp. 317–318.

⁵³ ANATOL' HRYTSKEVICH: Baratsba Vialikaha kniastva litouskaha i ruskaha (Belarуска-Litouskae Dziarzhavy) z Teutonskim ordenam u kantys XIV-pershai palove XV st.

medieval Polatsk followed by the Grand Duchy as historically Belarusian states.⁵⁴ Another heavily statist interpretation is that of Ivan Saverchanka, who portrays the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a strong Belarusian state in the center of Europe. Like Ermalovich, Saverchanka depicts an aggressive, expansionist policy on the part of Novaharodak during the 13th century which succeeded in creating the Grand Duchy out of Slavic and ethnic Lithuanian lands.⁵⁵

Unlike Ermalovich, the majority of post-Soviet works on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's formation and its place in Belarusian history have taken a more measured approach. They see the Grand Duchy as a home to many nationalities which also played a formative role in Belarusian national consolidation. V.L. Nasevich, for example, considers the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to have been a medieval state for both Lithuanians and Belarusians as well as Ukrainians, all of whom have a right to its historical legacy.⁵⁶ In his popular history on the beginnings of the Grand Duchy Nasevich criticizes official Soviet historiography for adopting the tsarist conception of a single East Slavic path leading from Kievan Rus to medieval Muscovy to the Russian Empire. He laments that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained understudied in Soviet historical literature due to its status as a temporary deviation from the single road to Moscow. Nasevich counters this approach by affirming the Grand Duchy's importance as the longest period in Belarusian history during which the Belarusians emerged as a distinct national group. At the same time, he criticizes post-1991 Belarusian historiography for applying modern national terminology to the 13th and 14th centuries. He calls for historians to avoid the label "Belarusian" when referring to medieval princes as well as "old Belarusian" when describing the pre-16th century language used in the Grand Duchy.⁵⁷ P. Ts. Petrikau, in a critical article addressing Ermalovich's methodology, similarly calls on scholars to avoid simplified associations, such as labelling the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as an exclusively Belarusian state due to the

[The Struggle of the Grand Principality of Lithuania and Rus' (Belarusian-Lithuanian State) with the Teutonic Order at the End of the 14th-First Half of the 15th Centuries], in: *Adradzhenne [Renaissance]*, Minsk 1995, pp. 36–61, here pp. 36–37.

⁵⁴ ANATOL' HRYTSKEVICH: *Historyia heapalityki Belarusi [History of the Geopolitics of Belarus]*, in: *Spadchyna*, No. 1 (1994), pp. 85–93, here p. 85.

⁵⁵ IVAN SAVERCHANKA: *Vialikae kniastva litouskae: Ytvarenne dziazrhavy [The Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Formation of the State]*, in: *Belaruski Historychny Chasopis*, No. 2 (1993), pp. 11–18, here pp. 12–13.

⁵⁶ V.L. NASEVICH: *Pratses utvareniia vialikaha kniastva Litouskaha (XIII–XIV stst.) [Process of the Formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (13th–14th Centuries)]*, in: *Aktual'nyia pytanni historyi Belarusi ad starazhytnykh chasou do nashykh dzen: sbornik artykulau [Relevant Questions of Belarusian History from Ancient Times to Our Days: Collection of Articles]*, Minsk 1992, pp. 54–63, here pp. 54, 62.

⁵⁷ V.L. NASEVICH: *Pachatki vialikaha kniastva litouskaha. Padzei i asoby [Beginnings of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Events and Personalities]*, Minsk 1993, pp. 4–8.

prevalence there of an earlier form of the Belarusian language.⁵⁸ V. E. Zagrul'skaia, like Nasevich, takes a moderate approach to the question of Belarusian conquest of Lithuania or vice-versa, and calls for historians to recognize the complexity of Slavic-Baltic relations leading to the foundation of a common state.⁵⁹

Some post-Soviet works not only appraise the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the perspective of Belarusian statehood but study its political culture, presenting its political system as a constitutional model essentially different from Muscovite autocracy. V. E. Zagrul'skaia writes that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania holds special interest for Belarusians today since it exemplified an alternative to Muscovite centralization and authoritarianism.⁶⁰ The 1993 reference aid on the Grand Duchy for students of Belarusian technical institutes similarly distances the Grand Duchy from Moscow by contending that it represented general cultural tendencies proper to a West European state. It shows the Grand Duchy of Lithuania beginning as a "Belarusian-Lithuanian state" but growing into a decentralized, multinational state or "feudal federation" in the 14th century.⁶¹ Iazep Iukho offers a more statist interpretation of the Grand Duchy's legal and political system. He argues that the 1468 Law Code was based in Belarusian common law, and upholds the Lithuanian Statutes of 1529, 1566 and 1588 as achievements of Belarusian legal thought which represented a transition from medieval into modern law.⁶²

A corollary to the newly found appreciation for constitutionalism is an interest in the Belarusian nobility, or szlachta, whose members adopted the political culture of their Polish counterparts. Aleh Louka rehabilitates the feudal elite from its populist and Soviet stigmatization as an alien oppressor of the common people. He reveals the Belarusian szlachta's genuine patriotism in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, extols its democratism, and depicts it as a positive force standing for the honor of the nation. He creates a national geneology by drawing a straight line from the cultural and political leaders of the 16th century to the Belarusian writers and activists of the 19th and early 20th cen-

⁵⁸ P. Ts. PETRIKAU: *Historyia hrafiiia Vialikaha kniastva litouskaha* [Historiography of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania], in: *Vestsi Akademii Navuk Belarusi. Seryia humanitar-nykh navuk* [News of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Humanities Series], No. 3 (1993), pp. 51–63, here p. 63.

⁵⁹ V. E. ZAGRUL'SKAIA: *Vialikae kniastvo litouskai i rolia Belaruskikh ziamel' u iahopalitychnym, satsyial'na-ekanamichnym i kul'turnym razvitsi. Druhaia palova XII-pershaia palova XV stst.* [The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Role of Belarusian Lands in its Political, Socio-Economic and Cultural Development. Second Half of the 12th-First Half of the 15th Centuries], Minsk 1994, pp. 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶¹ N. I. PAKHVALAVA (ed.): *Vialikae kniastvo litouskai – Asnova belarуска-litouskai dziazrhavy* [Grand Duchy of Lithuania – Foundation of the Belarusian-Lithuanian State], Mogilev 1993, pp. 11, 37.

⁶² Ia. A. IUKHO: *Karotki narys historyi dziazrhavy i prava Belarusi* [Brief Outline of the History of Belarusian Law and Statehood], Minsk 1992, pp. 161, 163.

turies.⁶³ Anatol' Hrytskevich also lavishes praise on szlachta political culture. He depicts this culture to manifest itself in political rights and equality among members of the noble estate, including the right to elect kings, as well as personal inviolability and the right of nobles to be tried only by their peers. Hrytskevich complements these characteristics with military virtues to contend that the szlachta bore a strong sense of personal dignity, honor and patriotism.⁶⁴ Similarly to Louka, Hrytskevich attributes to the Belarusian nobility an important role in two Belarusian national revivals – during the 16th and late 19th/early 20th centuries. He nonetheless differs from Louka by rendering the Belarusian nobility's role in a more statist light, emphasizing the nobility's place at the helm of the state and its duty to come to the armed defense of the fatherland.⁶⁵

As in the past, historians continue to explore the theme of a Baltic substratum in Belarusians' ethnic makeup. For example, Ermalovich has emphasized its importance in contributing to Belarusian ethnogenesis but cautions against exaggerating the Baltic element, calling Belarusians Slavicized Balts rather than Balticized Slavs.⁶⁶ Ermalovich moreover argues that the transfer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's capital from Novaharodak to Vilnius in the early 14th century quickened the Belarusian assimilation of Balts and caused a rise in Belarusian, and corresponding fall in Baltic-Lithuanian, population and territory.⁶⁷ Edvard Zaikowski similarly combines ethnic with historical factors to argue for a strong Belarusian role in the foundation of Vilnius and its early history.⁶⁸ Paula Urban, on the other hand, argues that the sources show a blurring of the line between Lithuanians and Slavs, pointing to their ethnic integration.⁶⁹ M. F. Pilipenka goes further to portray the complexity of ethnic mixing, recognizing that proto-Belarusian Eastern Slavs merged with various populations in various places including Polish, Baltic and Turkic groups.⁷⁰

⁶³ ALEH LOUKA: *Dlia chaho isnye adradzhenne* [What the Renaissance Exists For], in: *Histrychny al'manakh* [Historical Almanac], Minsk 1995, pp. 82–93, here pp. 89–90.

⁶⁴ A. HRYTSKEVICH: *Belaruskai Szlachta* [Belarusian Nobility], in: *Spadchyna*, No. 1 (1993), pp. 11–16, here pp. 12–13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ M. ERMALOVICH (cf. footnote 51), pp. 45–46.; H. SHYKHAU: *Nasel'nitsva ziamel' Belarusi v IX–XIII st. (vytoki belaruskai narodnastsy)* [The Population of Belarusian Lands in the 9th–13th Centuries (Sources of the Belarusian Nationality)], in: *Z Hlyby Viakou. Nash Krai: Histryka-kul'turalahichny zbornik* [From the Depth of Ages. Our Country: Historical-Cultural Anthology], Minsk 1992, pp. 15–40.

⁶⁷ M. ERMALOVICH: *Starazhytnaia Belarus: Vilenski peryiad* [Old Belarus: The Vilnius Period], Minsk 1994, pp. 84–85.

⁶⁸ EDVARD ZAIKOUSKI: *Kryvitskaia Vil'nia* [Krivian Vilnius], in: *Belaruski Histrychny Chasopis*, No. 1 (January–March 1994), pp. 10–16, here p. 10.

⁶⁹ PAULA URBAN: *Da pytan'nia etnichnoi prynalezhnas'tsi starazhytnykh lits'vinou* [Regarding the Ethnic Classification of Old Lithuanians], Minsk 1994, pp. 92–100.

⁷⁰ M. F. PILIPENKA: *Novyi pahliad na etnagenez belarusau* [A New Look at Belarusian Ethnogenesis], in: *Aktual'nyia pytanni historyi Belarusi ad starazhytnykh chasou do*

The post-Soviet revival of Belarusian national historiography has slowed down since President Alexandr Lukashenko came to power in 1994 and began to push for integration with Russia. Lukashenko traces Belarusian historical statehood not to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania but to the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic created in January, 1919. The shift in emphasis is illustrated by notable differences between the two officially sanctioned histories of Belarus, published in 1994 and 1998 respectively, and recommended by the Ministry of Education for university students. The Belarusian Academy of Sciences 1994 survey history of Belarus returned to the main themes of Belarusian national historiography, calling the Grand Duchy a "Belarusian-Lithuanian" state.⁷¹ On the other hand its authors avoided taking an extreme nationalist position and declared the Grand Duchy a common historical homeland to many nations, of which Belarusians and Lithuanians were the most important.⁷² The 1998 survey history takes a very different approach. Methodologically, it reverts to Soviet-era concepts of class struggle and economic determinism to explain the political unification of petty principalities into the Grand Duchy.⁷³ Just as tellingly it replaces the national focus on the role of proto-Belarusian lands with the broader concept of Western Rus' reminiscent of Imperial Russian historiography. Although this history text acknowledges that the less developed Lithuanians borrowed from the more advanced Rus' culture, it maintains that Lithuanians were always politically dominant in the new state. Instead of seeing the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a historically Belarusian state, this newest official history portrays it as a restoration of the alleged political unity of Kievan Rus'. The authors openly criticize what they call the "new" or "Belarusian" conception exemplified by Ermalovich. They refrain from emphasizing a Belarusian role, and neutrally conclude that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a polyethnic state of four main nationalities: Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians and Lithuanians.⁷⁴

As history forms one of the building blocks of national identity, so Belarusian historians have interpreted the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to represent a stage of Belarusian historical statehood. Their claim to a political history supported efforts to achieve statehood in the 20th century. It raised their standing from that of an ethnic minority to that of a historical nation. Likewise the history of publishing in the Grand Duchy gave Belarusians a past literary language and precedent for the development of a modern Belarusian literary lan-

nashykh dzen: zbornik artykulau [Relevant Questions of Belarusian History from Ancient Times to Our Days: Collection of Articles], Minsk 1992, pp. 34–40, here pp. 38–40.

⁷¹ M. P. KASTSIUK et al. (eds.): *Narysy Historyi Belarusi* [Outline History of Belarus], Part I, Minsk 1994, p. 101.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷³ I. A. K. NOVIK and H. S. MARIUL (eds.): *Historyia Belarusi u dvukh chastkakh* [History of Belarus in Two Parts], Part 1, Minsk 1998, pp. 80–81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–101.

guage. Moreover, the Belarusian interpretation of cultural creativity and dominance in the Grand Duchy contrasted sharply with the widespread image of Belarusian culture as the culture of illiterate peasants. Belarusian scholars' national interpretation of the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, tied to the processes of ethnogenesis and national formation, has been above all an argument for ethnic uniqueness and national existence. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania separated the predecessors of modern Belarusians from Moscow, and therefore enabled them to follow a separate path of historical and cultural development. The revival of interest in this period of Belarusian history today similarly reflects a desire by a segment of Belarusian society to distance Belarus from Russia and oppose the Belarusian government's integrationist policies at the turn of the 21st century.