

### The works of modern Russian historians and the historiography of medieval Lithuania before and after the Red October

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Megem, M., & Wakar, M. (2014). The works of modern Russian historians and the historiography of medieval Lithuania before and after the Red October. *Baltic Region*, 4, 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2074-2079-8555-4-8>

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**THE WORKS  
OF MODERN RUSSIAN  
HISTORIANS  
AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY  
OF MEDIEVAL LITHUANIA  
BEFORE AND AFTER  
THE RED OCTOBER**

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**M. Wakar**<sup>\*\*</sup>



*This article examines the views of modern Russian scholars A. Dvornichenko, M. Krom, A. Filyushkin, and S. Mikhailchenko on the pre-revolutionary and Soviet historiography of medieval Lithuania. Chronological problem analysis constitutes the methodological framework of the study. Special attention is paid to the priorities of the Russian scholars in the analysis of the pre-revolutionary and Soviet Lithuanian studies. It is shown that the disintegration of the Soviet Union marked a new period in research on the historiography of medieval Lithuania. The activation of historical and historiographical studies was a result of a revision of views of Lithuanian past. The authors believe that modern historiography exhibits a “nostalgic” attitude to pre-revolutionary works, while the reception of the later, Soviet-era publications is more critically inclined. Post-Soviet historians do not restrict themselves by describing previous historiography: they also consider factors behind the change in the attitudes to Lithuanian past. Thus, the scholars pay special attention to studying the connection between the political situation and the evolution of the views of Russian scholars on the events of Lithuanian history.*

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*Submitted on April 17, 2014*

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2014-4-8

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**Key words:** pre-revolutionary and Soviet historiography of medieval Lithuania, history of Lithuania, Dvornichenko, Krom, Filyushkin, Mikhailchenko

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a new stage in studying the historiography of medieval

Lithuania. The development of historical and associated historiographical studies related to a revision of the Lithuanian past. The uniformity of ideological clichés and methodological frameworks was replaced by a diversity of interpretations, objects, and methodologies [1—18].

In post-Soviet Russia, Saint Petersburg became the centre of historiographical research on the history of medieval Lithuania. In 1990—2000, A. Yu. Dvornichenko, M.M. Krom, and A.N. Filyushkin published a number of works on different aspects of the Lithuanian past. An analysis of earlier historiography is an integral part of these studies. Therefore, it is possible to speak of the St Petersburg historiographical tradition in modern Russian historiography.

The first post-Soviet author to address the Lithuanian Middle Ages was A. Yu. Dvornichenko<sup>1</sup>. In 1993, he published a monograph entitled *The Russian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (until the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Essays on the history of the community, estates, and statehood* [4]. In 2004, he wrote a preface to the new edition of the *Essays on the history of the State of Lithuania and Russia* by M.K. Lyubavsky [27]. A. Yu. Dvorkovich pays special attention to the situation of Russian lands within the GDL. He presents his view of the historiography of the GDL from this perspective.

A. Yu. Dvornichenko stresses that political events, in particular the Polish Uprising aroused interest in the history of western Russian lands [4, p. 5; 27, p. 15]. He calls the first works on the history of the State of Lithuania and Russia authored by N.G. Ustryalov, N.I. Kostomarov, M.O. Koyalovich, and I.D. Belyaev “naïve,” since they simply list facts. However, he stresses that these works formulated the question as to the community and zemstvo-based nature of the political organisation of western Russian lands [4, p. 6].

Dvornichenko also addresses the research conducted at St Vladimir University in Kiev, which he describes as a major centre for studying the past of the GDL. The development of research on the history of Western Russia in Kiev is explained by the need to counterbalance the Polish influence [27, p. 16]. Dvornichenko examines of Kiev historians V.B. Antonovich, N.P. Dashkevich, M.F. Vladimirsky-Budanov, and F.I. Leontovich [4, p. 7—12]. He believes that the works of Antonovich and Dashkevich outlined the “controversial issues in the Russian historiography of the GDL that will be revisited in the future: the relations of ethnic groups within the state, the nature of the state per se, the situation of Russian lands, Lithuanian “feudalism”, etc.” [27, p. 17].

<sup>1</sup> He studies the historiography of the urban organisation of the GDL as early as the 1980s [19].

Dvorkovich stresses that the GDL studies reached a peak in the late 19<sup>th</sup>—early 20<sup>th</sup> century [4, p. 28; 27, p. 17], when historians made the first serious generalisations [27, p. 19] and the leading universities in Kiev, Moscow, and St Petersburg set out to create “summarising” studies [4, p. 14]. The major specialists on the history of the State of Lithuania and Russia included M.K. Lyubavsky, M.V. Dovnar-Zapolsky, M.S. Grushevsky, and A.E. Presnyakov [4, p. 14—24].

Although Dvornichenko gives a positive assessment of pre-revolutionary historiography, he is highly critical of Soviet history. He believes that the GDL studies were abandoned in Soviet Russian to be replaced by studying several particular problems of its history [27, p. 24]. Dvornichenko interprets the works of V.T. Pashuto as an attempt to create a Marxist history of the GDL, calling his work *The formation of the Lithuanian State* as a “state order” written to a ready-made design and outdated to a greater degree than many pre-revolutionary works of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries [4, p. 24—26]. Dvornichenko regrets that Pashuto’s conclusions were only detailed and developed later, whereas the Lithuanian-Russian history was explored in the framework of “general edition” [4, p. 26], “which featured unsubstantiated schemes and pompous rhetoric” [27, p. 26]. Moreover, the GDL studies were spread across the union republics [27, p. 26]. In conclusion, Dvornichenko stresses that although the research on the Western Russian lands withered, there is a need to revive it [4, p. 28].

Another St Petersburg scholar, A.I. Filyushkin, compares the GDL history to pieces of a broken mirror, a product of difference between the interpretations of the past provided by the Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Russia historiographies. Russian historiography also offers numerous interpretations of the Lithuanian past [28, p. 599—600]. He comes to this conclusion through comparing the pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and contemporary Russian perception of the GDL [28; 29]. He believes that the GDL heritage occupies an important position in the Russian historical memory: “in the Lithuanian mirror of historical memory, Russia can see itself” [28, p. 561]. However, he stresses that the interest in the GDL history is caused not only by the political situation and the attempts to justify expansionist attitudes, but also by the intellectual and spiritual search of Russian thinkers [28, p. 561—562].

Following the Western methodology, Filyushkin bases his research on analysis historical discourses. He distinguishes between four discourses of the GDL history: Russian lands as victims of Lithuanian occupation [28, p. 562—569] or the GDL aggression discourse [29, p. 95], the incorporation



of the Great Limitrophe as a Western project of the Russian Empire [28, p. 569—574] or the historical predestination discourse [29, p. 95], “it is our lands” [28, p. 574—594] or the conquest discourse [29, p. 95], despotic Russia could become a democracy following the example of the GDL [28, p. 595—598] or the “right Russia” discourse [29, p. 95].

In conclusion, Filyushkin gives an overview of the pre-revolutionary and Soviet historiography. When addressing the pre-revolutionary historiography, he stresses that the insufficient knowledge of the GDL history posed a problem during the Polish Uprising of 1863. The attempts to solve this problem resulted in a number of historical publications on Lithuanian history. “However, the reflection of the Polish Uprising of 1863 produced more journalistic and propagandistic texts than historical works” [28, p. 598—599]. Studying Lithuanian history was not popular among Soviet historians. Addressing the history of certain GDL areas was required only in the framework of certain narratives, thus the historical memory of this state became fragmented in Soviet science [28, p. 599]. Filyushkin pays special attention to the research of V.T. Pashuto, whose views had a profound effect on the development of Lithuanian studies. However, Pashuto’s ideas did not find any followers who could create an independent school of thought and publish works on the GDL history [29, p. 108].

Another St Petersburg scholar, M.M. Krom, addressed a number of general problems of Lithuanian historiography when reviewing the historiography of Russian-Lithuanian relations of the 15<sup>th</sup>-the first third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Not unlike his colleagues, he believes that the Polish Uprising aroused interest in Lithuanian history in the Russian society. The political component of the Polish led to the publication of a number of pro-governmental works (by M.O. Koyalovich, P.N. Batyushkov, P.D. Bryantsev, and others) that exhibited a pronounced anti-Polish and anti-Catholic sentiment. The key ideologist behind it was M.M. Koyalovich, whose works “did not contain new fact, and were not research works in a strict sense, but they did affect further studies” [30, p. 13]. Krom cites the works of I.D. Belyaev and M.F. Vladimirsky-Budanov as examples that show a belief in the supremacy of Orthodoxy over other religions [30, p. 14].

Krom stresses that the reality of the Russian Empire could not serve as a model of equal co-existence of different peoples. In this connection, he poses the question: “Wasn’t it the reason behind the suspicion Russian historians had of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania?” [30, p. 14]. He arrives at the conclusion that the pre-revolutionary historiography of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century interprets the GDL as an “unnatural union of different elements, an unviable formation torn apart by national and religious conflicts” [30, p. 15].



In the 1890s, the historiographical situation changed: historians made a transition from the “search for abstract “origins” to studying real processes” [30, p. 15]. Krom considers the works of M.K. Lyubavsky, M.V. Dovnar-Zapolsky, and I.I. Lappo the classics of Lithuanian studies [30, p. 16] and calls A.E. Presnyakov’s lectures a summary of Russian and international Lithuanian studies [30, p. 18].

According to Krom, the focus of post-war Soviet historiography was on studying Russian-Lithuania relations in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the situation of Slavic lands within the GDL. This approach cast the history of the GDL into oblivion, since Lithuania, Ukrainian, and Belarusian historiography studied the past of their part of this state. Despite that, the regional approach contributed a large body of factual material [30, p. 21—22]. M.M. Krom’s main conclusion is that the history of Lithuania-Russian relations depended on a number of ideological schemes: the idea of opposition between Orthodox Russian and Catholic West and the belief in the leading role of the masses in history etc. [30, p. 24].

Alongside the studies of Saint Petersburg authors, Lithuanian historiography is analysed in the pages of Bryansk historian S.I. Mikhalchenko. However, he considers Lithuanian historiography not as the central research object, but rather as one of the areas of interest of the Kiev school of history [20—26]<sup>2</sup>.

Mikhalchenko covers all milestones of the biographies, research work, methodological positions, and social and political views of the first generation of the Kiev school — V.B. Antonovich, M.V. Vladimirsky-Budanov, F.I. Leontovich, — as well as their flowers — M.V. Dovnar-Zapolsky, P.V. Golubovsky, N.V. Molchanovsky. A.M. Andriyashev, V.G. Lyaskoronsky. V.E. Danilevich, A.S. Grushevsky, M.S. Yasinsky, I.A. Malinovsky, etc. He also analyses a number of episodes relating to the perspective of Kiev scholars on the vicissitudes of Lithuanian history. For instance, he examines V.B. Antonovich’s doctoral thesis on the history of the GDL [31, p. 25—26]. Mikhalchenko supposes that the perception of Lithuanian past as relations between peoples rather than function of the state was borrowed from N.I. Kostomarov. He also addresses the debate between N.P. Dashkevich and V.B. Antonovich on the opposition of ethnographic origins in the early period of the GDL history and that between F.I. Leontovich and M.K. Lyubavsky on the state structure of the GDL [31, p. 56—57].

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<sup>2</sup> In a multi-authored monograph *Historians of Russia*, S.I. Mikhalchenko contributed sections on V.B. Antonovich, F.I. Leontovich, M.F. Vladimirsky-Budanov, and M.S. Grushevsky [32].



Post-Soviet solo- and multi-authored works on the historiography of Russian history pay more attention than Soviet scientists to the biographies of scholars engaged in Lithuanian studies [32—34]. These works focus not only on “classical” authors (M.P. Pogodin, N.I. Kostomarov, K.N. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, A.E. Presnyakov) whose works were analysed in detail in Soviet times, but also other pre-revolutionary scholars (N.G. Ustryalov. M.O. Koyalovich, I.D. Belyaev, A.F. Hilferding, M.K. Lyubavsky, F.I. Leontovich, V.B. Antonovich, M.F. Vladimirsky-Budanov, M.S. Grushevsky). Moreover, the authors analyse the research of Soviet historians V.I. Picheta and V.T. Pashuto. Whereas Soviet “summarising” works on historiography reconstruct the professional development of scholars in the context of historical and ideological movements, modern studies devote a special section to each researcher. A different format of presenting information makes it possible to give a more comprehensive picture of achievements in the field of Lithuanian studies.

Post-Soviet history exhibits a keen interest in Lithuanian historiography. Modern Russian historiography is characterised by a “nostalgic” attitude to pre-revolutionary works and a critical perception of Soviet studies. Historians see the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century as the most important and productive period in Russian Lithuanian studies. On the other hand, they stress the excessive schematism, regionalism, and preconceptions. The authors do not only describe earlier historiography but also analyse factors behind the changes in the attitude towards the Lithuanian past. Special attention is paid to studying the connection between the political situation and the evolution of perspectives on the key stages of Lithuanian history. The role of the Polish Uprising of 1863—1864 is strongly emphasised in this context.

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