Сергей Владимирович Полехов, *Наследники Витовта. Династическая война в Великом княжестве Литовском в 30-е годы XV века*, Москва: Индрик, 2015. 712 p. ISBN 978-5-91674-366-1

In 2015, Indrik publishers in Moscow issued a debut monograph by Sergei Polekhov, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Russian History, which was based on his dissertation and a post-doctoral internship.¹ The monograph's title *Наследники Витовта. Династическая война в Великом княжестве Литовском в 30-е годы XV века* (Vytautas' Heirs. Civil War in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 1430s) not only identifies the question and the chronology of the research topic, it also gives a very accurate description of the concept the author has created. The civil war that erupted in the 1430s challenged the stability of the state created by Vytautas, the late Grand Duke of Lithuania. According to the author, Vytautas' state handled the challenge successfully, experiencing only relatively small territorial losses (pp. 507–508).

The book consists of two main parts, the research and the appendices. The research part has an introduction (formulation of the research aim, discussion of the historiography, and sources), and three chapters in chronological order. The choice of the research aim was based on the fact that the fragmentary source data that represents the course of the civil war contradicts the claims in historiography which suggest that this war was based on religious (Anatol Lewicki, Matvei Liubavski) or social (Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapolski, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Bogdan Barvinsky, Andrei Dvornichenko) divisions in society. According to the author, researchers who have analysed the civil war in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) in the 1430s do not give a convincing answer, or do not even try to answer the question why, as the outcome of this civil war, the state remained intact, rather than disintegrating into separate parts (p. 14). After all, following the overthrow in Ašmena in 1432, the state divided into two opposing camps. In trying to answer this question, the author was encouraged to formulate a very broad research aim: 'to ascertain the reasons for and the nature of events that took place in the GDL after Vytautas' death' (p. 14). In order to work this out, he had to look deeper at the events of the 1430s, and also to take into consideration the political and social realities of the GDL in the late 14th and mid-15th centuries.

¹ He defended his dissertation in 2011 at the Faculty of History of the M. V. Lomonosov State University in Moscow; his post-doctoral internship was carried out in 2013–2015 at the Faculty of History at Vilnius University.

Guided by the research by Rimvydas Petrauskas, Polekhov focuses his attention on how authority was realised and implemented in the GDL. Analysing the functioning of early state structures in Lithuania, Petrauskas has convincingly demonstrated that the grand duke's reign did not compete with but coexisted alongside the power of the nobility. This noble estate was rather homogeneous in the late 14th and 15th centuries. Most of its members belonged to the highest layer of the Lithuanian boyar estate.² Polekhov continues and expands this concept, going so far as to undertake an analysis not only of the nobility, but of the elite in general. He makes a distinction between the state's ruling and regional elites. According to the author, people who were part of the elite 'witnessed the grand duke's documents or had been guarantors of those documents, were politically active, received official posts, and belonged to specific families or dynastic lines'. The state's ruling elite had an influence on the resolutions the ruler passed, while the regional elite could influence the ruler's officials in the lands of the GDL (pp. 12–13, footnote 4). To simplify Polekhov's scheme, we can say that the Lithuanian nobility and the members of the ruling Gediminid dynastic line were part of the state's ruling elite.

The expansionist policies of Lithuania's rulers into Rus' did not necessarily mean that the elite of those lands was integrated into the state's ruling elite (pp. 111–115). This process only took place during the reign of Kazimieras Jogailaitis (Casimir Jagiellon) in the second half of the 15th century (p. 501). Taking an in-depth look at the social and political realities of the GDL in the early 15th century, the author concludes that regardless of the unequal status of Ruthenian princes, boyars, and, to some extent, the burghers and the Orthodox Church, the integration of Ruthenian lands into the GDL produced obvious results. Like other inhabitants of the GDL, the Ruthenians' interests lay in preserving a sovereign state separate from Poland. They considered themselves subjects of the grand duke (pp. 119–129).

Grand Duke Švitrigaila of Lithuania was removed from power by a small but very influential group of the state's ruling elite. It was based around a cluster of the Lithuanian nobility and Orthodox princes descended from the Gediminids. According to the author, these princes did not see themselves as Ruthenians; rather, they considered themselves members of the ruling dynasty (p. 276, footnote 82). The regional elite was not included in the conspirators' plans, which is why it is no wonder that precisely this elite group backed Švitrigaila (the legitimate ruler, in their view), and not Žygimantas Kęstutaitis (a usurper) (pp. 276, 288). Had the conspiracy succeeded, the regional elite (as well as the remainder of the state's ruling elite) would have recognised Lithuania's new ruler. Polekhov notes that,

² R. Petrauskas, *Lietuvos diduomenė. XIV a. pabaigoje – XV a. Sudėtis – struktūra – valdžia* (Vilnius, 2003).

following the death of Grand Duke Vytautas, it was also only a very small group of people (the Lithuanian nobility and princes of Gediminid origin) representing the state's ruling elite that elected Švitrigaila as the next grand duke. This sufficed for the decision to be legitimised/confirmed throughout all the lands of the GDL. The example of Švitrigaila's election is not a single case in point, or representative. The author uses later cases, the elections of Kazimieras Jogailaitis and Sigismund the Old, as a basis for his premise (pp. 167–171). A paradoxical situation developed during the civil war: both Švitrigaila and Žygimantas Kęstutaitis were considered legitimate rulers of Lithuania. Thus, the war in 1432–1438 between Švitrigaila and Žygimantas Kęstutaitis was actually a clash between members of two ruling dynasties for the throne, and for authority across all the lands of the GDL.

Although the period analysed in the study is not noted for its volumes of unpublished sources, the author does manage to give the reader a pleasant surprise. In Appendix I, he publishes as many as 15 lesser-known sources covering the civil war in the GDL (in Ruthenian, Old German and Latin). These sources were found by the author in archives and library manuscript departments in Austria, Belarus, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine and Germany.³ Five of the sources are introduced to scholarly circulation for the first time; while another five were known in historiography, but this is the first chance scholars have had to see them published. In addition to a detailed internal and external description of these manuscripts, the author presents Russian translations of the Latin and Old German sources. This makes these sources more accessible to a broader community of scientists, especially Russian-speaking specialists. The monograph also presents a facsimile of one of these sources.⁴ The published sources are not unrelated to the research text itself. They enrich the study with new data, and help the author create his dynastic war concept. In Appendix II, the author presents the itineraria of Švitrigaila and Žygimantas Kęstutaitis, which significantly expands on the prior contributions by Bogdan Barvinsky, Oskar Halecki and Raimonda Ragauskienė on this topic.⁵

³ Some are available online. For example, using the Polish scientific and cultural institutions digital resource portal: fbc.pionier.net.pl.

⁴ Appendix I, 9. Text from the legation of Lithuania's magnates dated 25 September 1433, addressed to the King of Poland, Jogaila. A facsimile is published on p. 347.

⁵ For more, see: Б. Барвіньский, *Жигимонт Кейстутович Великий князь Литовско-русский (1432–1440)* (Жовква, 1905), pp. 121–123; O. Halecki, *Ostatnie lata Świdrygiełły i sprawa wołyńska za Kazimierza Jagiellończyka* (Kraków, 1915), pp. 285–296; R. Ragauskienė, 'Lietuvos valdovų vilnietiški itinerariumai', *Vilniaus žemutinė pilis XIV a. – XIX a. pradžioje. 2002–2004 m. istorinių šaltinių paieškos*, sud. R. Ragauskienė (Vilnius, 2006), pp. 318–319.

The last appendix, Appendix III, is quite controversial, and thus demands more attention. In this appendix, basing his arguments on the prosopographic method, whose popularity is steadily growing in the context of research into the GDL, the author presents biographical descriptions of supporters (*сторонники*) of Grand Duke Švitrigaila of Lithuania from 1432–1438. The author considers Švitrigaila's supporters as people who 'are mentioned in sources as having recognised Švitrigaila's authority [...] his councillors, envoys, members of the clergy, recipients of land grants, officials, servants (*служу*) and foreign "guests", as well as vassals' (p. 561). Švitrigaila's allies (*союзники*) who were outside the borders of the GDL were also considered his supporters, but their lives have deliberately not been presented (p. 561). The inclusion of this data in the appendix would have expanded the scope of the study even further; however, it would hardly have contributed to realising the aim and objectives of the author. The 153 biographies in Appendix III are divided into three larger groups: the clergy, the dukes and the nobility, and servants and burghers. This distinction is convenient and obviously useful, but it is not used widely in the actual research text. A collective biography of Švitrigaila's supporters is created in the research text (pp. 282–288, 422–423, 493–494, 499–503);⁶ however, it is associated more with the ruling state elite, or the elites from separate regions of the GDL. Rather than being distinguished in any way, members of the lower social groups, such as ordinary clergymen, burghers, Švitrigaila's servants, foreign mercenaries and 'adventure hounds', are lost in the general biographical description. Similarly, it is not clear whether the servants and members of the household of Švitrigaila's supporters should also be attributed to this category. For example, was Ignotas, the servant of the former Vilnius burgher Aleksei, who is mentioned in the appendix, also Švitrigaila's supporter or not (pp. 589–590)? I would say that a stricter and more conceptual selection of people belonging to the category of Švitrigaila's supporters would have been worthwhile. It is not clear how the subordination ('advocacy') to Švitrigaila of the already-mentioned burgher Aleksei, or the Olesk landmen who recognised Jogaila's authority in 1432 (pp. 602, 607, 611–612, 613, 616, 622, 624, 629), was actually expressed. Formally speaking, we could consider all the inhabitants of the GDL who did not recognise the authority of Žygimantas Kęstutaitis as Švitrigaila's supporters. Regardless of this, according to the author, being a subject does not equate to being a supporter. For example, in 1399–1400, the lands of Western Podolia came under Švitrigaila's rule, but according to Polekhov, at the beginning of 1401, he still did not have

⁶ Several collective biographies are given, as the composition of Švitrigaila's supporters changed during the course of the civil war.

any supporters there (pp. 134, 511–512). It appears that the author only considers as Švitrigaila's supporters those who are actually mentioned in sources as his subjects.

Polekhov's study could be read as an 'encyclopedia' of the GDL from the first half of the 15th century. The author is quite adept in navigating the latest multilingual historiography (in English, Belarusian, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian and German), analysing not just already-known and published material, but also archival sources. In his study, he takes a deeper look at the narrow topic of the civil war, while also examining a wide circle of questions regarding the political and social history of the GDL.

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