Dangiras Mačiulis, Darius Staliūnas, *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883–1940*, Marburg: Herder Institut, 2015. 236 p. ISBN 978-3-87969-401-3

Dangiras Mačiulis and Darius Staliūnas have produced a fascinating study of the role played by the myth of Vilnius in the evolution of Lithuanian nationalism from its beginnings to the first Soviet occupation in 1940. For Lithuanian nationalists, Vilnius was always the capital of their future state, even though the 1897 census made perfectly clear that scarcely 2 per cent of the city's population were Lithuanian by ethnicity. Vilnius, however, was the link to past glory. The remains of Gediminas' Tower standing high above the city symbolised the historic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with its impregnable castle.

So it was inevitable, as we learn in Chapter One, that it was in Vilnius in November 1905 that the first Congress of Lithuanians gathered, establishing a 'Seimas' or parliament. Not surprisingly, after 1905, when the Polish-controlled city council wanted to replace Gediminas' Tower with a modern water tower, there was such a fuss that the issue was raised in the Russian Imperial Duma.

And Lithuanian ambitions were, of course, met under German occupation during the First World War, the theme of Chapter Two. Building on the work of the Lithuanian Society for the Support of War Victims, founded while the Russians still controlled the city, the Lithuanian national movement was able to find favour with the German military authorities, and with its help the Council of Lithuania was established in September 1917. With German support, plans were drawn up for a German prince to be declared King Mindaugas II, even though a German census for 1916 showed that Lithuanian speakers in Vilnius had still not reached 3 per cent of the population.

Chapter Three explores the years 1918 to 1923, when Vilnius was first declared the capital of Lithuania, and then was annexed to Poland. This is a complex story, clearly told. No sooner had the Lithuanian flag been hoisted above Gediminas Tower on 1 January 1919, than the country came under Soviet rule within the short-lived Lit-Bel Soviet Republic. Then, by April 1919, Pilsudski's Polish forces had taken control of the city. During the Russo-Polish War of 1920, the Poles were driven from Vilnius, and the Lithuanians signed a treaty with Moscow recognising the establishment of an independent Lithuanian state with its capital in Vilnius. By the end of

August 1920 the Lithuanian flag flew once more on Gediminas' Tower. However, the Poles then returned, and with the connivance of local Polish paramilitaries, established a Polish-controlled enclave in Vilnius called Middle Lithuania. They then called on the League of Nations to sort out the future of the city. When, at the end of 1921, the Lithuanians rejected the second of two League of Nations plans for the cantonal division of the region, the Poles opted for a Crimea-style solution to the Vilnius problem. Early in 1922, the parliament of Middle Lithuania, boycotted by the Lithuanian population of Vilnius, petitioned to join Poland, and duly became part of Poland, a fact acknowledged by the League of Nations in February 1923.

The heart of this study, however, comes in Chapter Four, which explores the role played by the myth of Vilnius in the politics of interwar Lithuania. The authors show clearly how the slightest hint of a concession on the question of Vilnius could be used to discredit a government during the brief flowering of parliamentary democracy. Although in 1925 the Christian Democratic Party-dominated government started the tradition of marking 9 October (the day in 1920 when the Polish paramilitaries formed Middle Lithuania) as Mourning Day, they also held talks with Poland in Copenhagen and Lausanne to look for a diplomatic solution, and for this they were denounced by the nationalists. Somehow, in April 1926, it was also the fault of the Christian Democrats that the Pope excluded Vilnius from the Lithuanian ecclesiastical province he established at this time. The newly formed left-of-centre administration gained nationalist support later in 1926 by signing a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, which reconfirmed that for Moscow the capital was Vilnius; but then promptly lost that support by suggesting that the recovery of Vilnius would take a long diplomatic struggle. This reforming government's decision to increase the number of Polish schools in Lithuania, when in Vilnius Lithuanian schools were being 'persecuted', played into nationalist hands, and helped pave the way for Smetona's coup at the end of 1926.

Under Smetona, 'the myth of Vilnius's liberation became a myth that helped realise a national identity' (110). At the time of the coup, the Vilnius Liberation Union had only 1,000 members; by 1937, there were 27,000. From 1929 onwards, the topic of the liberation of Vilnius was embodied in the school curriculum: in primary schools, children would build models of Gediminas' Tower. At the same time, publications with titles like 'The Golgotha of Vilnius: A Diary of Work and Suffering' were widely circulated, and secret financial support from the Lithuanian government was transferred to Vilnius to keep the Lithuanian schools there afloat. When diplomatic relations with Poland were finally established in 1938, patriotic Lithuanians were encouraged to go on pilgrimages to Gediminas' Tower, and the newly established Consulate General in Vilnius actively took up the concerns of Vilnius Lithuanians.

If Chapter Four is the heart of this study, Chapter Five, on the recovery of the capital, reads a little like an afterword. This is a pity, because the practicalities of incorporating a mythical entity into a real state proved extremely challenging. The most recent census of 1937 put the Lithuanian population of Vilnius at 19%; so establishing Lithuanian rule, albeit with Soviet military and diplomatic support, was never going to be easy. When on 28 October 1939 the Lithuanian flag flew over Gediminas' Tower for a third time, the 39% of the population who were Poles saw the change as temporary, although the 34% who were Jews mostly welcomed the new authorities. Lithuanian nationalists believed that many of Vilnius' Polish speakers were Polonised Lithuanians whose true ethnicity could be recovered; the imperative, therefore, was to separate them from those Poles who had settled in the city since its annexation. It was therefore decided that residency on 12 July 1920 was the key date for acquiring Lithuanian citizenship. Some more detail could have been useful here. We learn that the process of issuing passports in November 1939 was linked to the Lithuanianisation of surnames, but no detail is given. It would also have been interesting to learn more about those, including Jews, who were designated as newcomers, and forcibly evicted to other parts of the country. Perhaps, though, that is to suggest writing a whole new book: it is enough to know how the myth of Vilnius reinforced nationalist authoritarianism in interwar Lithuania, and that is what Mačiulis and Staliūnas have told us so well.

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