Gramadska-politychnae zhytsiio u Balarusi 1772–1917 gg., ed. A. V. Vnutchak etc., Minsk: Belarускаia navuka, 2018. 573 p. ISBN 978-985-08-2241-3

This book is undoubtedly an innovative and significant help in gaining a general picture of the history of Belarus. The chronological boundaries of the research were selected according to political events: the First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was in 1772, while 1917 marked the ultimate collapse of the Russian Empire as a state unit (p. 5). The subject of research is socio-political life in the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the view of the authors, socio-political life is a constituent part of social relations expressed through the social and political activities of citizens, state structures, parties, social organisations and movements, even though each political or social unit mentioned here seeks to realise their own interests (p. 3). The authors of the monograph view ‘socio-political life’, as an analytical category in history, as a science. They are convinced that the history of the Belarusians within the structure of the Russian Empire can be analysed from two points of view. First, to work out the political aims of the Imperial Russian government in the lands it incorporated; and second, to reveal the anti-government, opposition provisions held by society in these territories in order to preserve their own national and social identity, and, if the opportunity arose, to restore their lost state (p. 3).

Based on this ‘government versus society’ juxtaposition, the authors divide the 19th century into three stages. The first stage (late 18th century to 1831) is characterised by the dominance of elements of the social order of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Imperial Russian government did not implement reforms that could have changed life in society, while the social elite viewed the tsarist government as a temporary phenomenon, and did not seek to establish opportunities for long-term cooperation with the local administration (p. 527). In the second stage (from 1831 to the beginning of the 1905–1907 revolution), the Imperial Russian government set itself the aim to socially and politically unify the incorporated region with Russian lands. In this period, the Imperial Russian government started to significantly politicise questions regarding language and religion. During the period between the uprisings,

society tried to join the region to the Kingdom of Poland, and was still thinking in terms of categories that applied in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the 1863–1864 uprising, society started to realise that it was impossible to change the geopolitical situation, either through cooperation with the government or by means of armed resistance. It believed that fundamental changes to how the land was ruled were only possible if the state order in the Russian Empire were to change (p. 529). The third stage (1905–1917) is characterised by the predominance of elements of the Russian political system. According to the authors, if in the 19th century the political initiative was in the hands of society, then by the early 20th century society was reacting to impulses coming from the centre of the empire (such as the events of the 1905–1907 revolution, and elections to the state duma and local government institutions) (p. 531).

The authors base their conclusions about the oppositional position of society to the Imperial Russian government in the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania on arguments presented in six chapters: 'Historiography and Sources', 'The State-Legislative Status of the Belarusian-Lithuanian Lands in the Structure of the Russian Empire as a Condition of Socio-Political Life', 'Political Events and the Political Situation of the Belarusian-Lithuanian Lands (1772–1904)', 'The Political Situation in Belarus in 1905–1914', 'The Formation of Social Movements and their Structure in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries' and 'The Consolidation of National Movements in the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries'. The titles of the chapters alone show that most attention in this monograph is devoted to political processes and an analysis of the actions of the Imperial Russian government, while greater social involvement and activity are noticeable in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

It should be noted that this book takes into account the development of Belarusian historiography today, suggesting new theoretical, methodological and source research approaches for the analysis of separate issues. For example, the authors search for and suggest ways that Belarusian historiography could 'free itself' from conceptual 'traps', especially when evaluating political and socio-cultural processes in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. For a long time, Belarusian historiographical research has been oriented towards several themes: there have been analyses of forms of mass social protest by workers and peasants, and the formation of socialist (social democratic) parties and their history. The authors meanwhile suggest turning attention to

the 'public space', where new forms of awareness and representation were initiated, and to analyse how social mobility, social communication and social structures functioned (p. 41).

The authors present new methodological and source research approaches towards the events of the 1905–1907 revolution, even though this topic is not very popular in present-day Belarusian historiography. They suggest analysing not only the telegrams, announcements and reports by officials in top government institutions in the Northwest Krai (military governors, court structures), but also looking at the documentation of the local government and the written requests by the peasantry and their proclamations that contained projects for social, economic and sometimes even political reform. According to the authors, this approach would allow us to evaluate the full scale of the 1905–1907 revolution, to compare its impact and spread in the centres and districts of the empire's provinces, and to talk about the significance of the revolution to different social and regional groups (p. 50).

As with the 1863–1864 uprising, the events of the 1905–1907 revolution are presented in this book via an analysis of the provisions of different groups in society: university students, the professional classes, workers, the peasantry, the clergy and the nobility. By applying this approach, the authors distinguish five forms of social behaviour: open confrontation, compromise, cooperation, avoidance and conformity (p. 390). They conclude that during the events of the 1905–1907 revolution, there was no solidarity between different groups of society. For example, the professional classes wanted to safeguard their legal status and material welfare. The peasantry (380 requests were analysed) paid more attention to socio-economic problems (the issue of land, social equality, and ensuring universal education), their requests hardly featured any political demands (p. 380). It is recommended to view the position of workers in the context of the 1905–1907 revolution with some caution, to ask to what extent this new social group, like the intelligentsia, cared about strengthening their social status and safeguarding their material welfare, and to what extent workers were politically engaged, how much they were actually able to assess the political situation at the time, what the level of political awareness among workers in provincial centres and districts was, and how it differed (pp. 386–387). In this way, the authors reach the conclusion that it was new social groups that participated in the events of 1905 to 1907, whose position in society was unclear and unsustainable, and their material basis was under threat (this primarily affected the working classes, the professional classes, and young university students). However, the 1905–1907 revolution allowed separate

social groups to understand and articulate their own interests, to see their relationship with and opposition to other groups in society, and thereby to define their place in the system of social relations (p. 390).

The new assessments of 19th-century political events, social processes and social provisions presented in this book are unquestionably important when conducting comparative research. However, we would like to make several observations that could have made the monograph more coherent and conceptual for readers.

First, in our view, the book is missing one fundamental structural element. In seeking to show the opposition between society and the Imperial Russian government, the authors pay a great deal of attention to an analysis of the government's local administrative structures (a separate chapter, 'The State-Legislative Status of the Belarusian-Lithuanian Lands in the Structure of the Russian Empire as a Condition of Socio-Political Life', is even set aside for this topic). The authors believe that an analysis of the local administrative apparatus is a way of learning about the social activity space (p. 84). But when reading the second and subsequent chapters in the book, the question arises, *what* 19th-century society is being looked at, and *who* made up the society that could and did influence political events, and opposed the goals and actions of the Imperial Russian government's national and social policy. The book would have benefited from a separate structural part between the second and the third chapters (the third chapter gives an assessment of political events and the political situation from 1772 to 1904), which could have described the formation of layers in society, how they changed, the interaction between social groups, influences, total population figures, their distribution in agrarian and industrial spaces, and a picture of the religious and ethnic composition of the population. This kind of overview would allow readers to evaluate changes to the social structure, and to compare similar processes and phenomena in other lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Second, the mental maps of the authors are different. On one hand, Belarusian society is seen and described as being in the Vitebsk, Mogilev, Minsk, Hrodno and Vilna provinces. The authors highlight that on some occasions in the 19th century, based on the geographical rather than the ethnic principle, the Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces would be referred to as 'Belarusian', whereas the Minsk, Hrodno and Vilna provinces were considered 'Lithuanian' (p. 5). According to this spatial

¹ It should be noted that the authors of the monograph do not give a separate explanation of whether the mentioned spatial concept is typical of the Russian

concept, the state-legislative status, political events and the political situation from 1772 to 1904 are analysed in a space that is identified as the 'Belarusian-Lithuanian lands'. In the fourth chapter, meanwhile, the political situation from 1905 to 1914 is analysed in 'Belarus', not in the 'Belarusian-Lithuanian lands' as it was in previous chapters. The authors of this chapter, Alena Sakolchyk and Michal Zabauski, do not explain why they follow a different definition of the concept of space (one might presume it to be the territory of present-day Belarus), even though the narrative in this chapter is constructed in the space of the Northwest Krai (along with the Kovno province). In addition, in the introduction, the authors stress that present-day Belarus includes part of the former Novo-Aleksandrovska district in the Kovno province, and part of the Augustów district in the Augustów (Suwałki) province (p. 5). However, when referring to the events of the 1905–1907 revolution, and the political reforms and political party activities from 1907 to 1914, there is no explanation why, for this period, the spatial concept definition that was used earlier has changed from the 'Belarusian-Lithuanian lands' to just 'Belarus', and the spatial concept of present-day Belarusian territory is followed.

Third, one unquestionable Achilles heel of the monograph is the analysis of Imperial Russian government policy. In recent years, Russian, Polish and Lithuanian historiography have devoted a great deal of attention to this question. As the chapter 'Historiography and Sources' shows, the authors are aware of many of these works (research by Mikhail Dolbilov, Aleksej Miller, Anna Komzolova, Henryk Głębocki, Witold Rodkiewicz and Darius Staliūnas) (p. 54). However, the authors use one term to describe the actions of the Imperial government, 'Russification' (pp. 54, 464–473), regardless of the fact that there were various national policy strategies in the 19th century, which differed in terms of ethno-cultural communities and the particular periods when they were applied. Not even one of the separate subsections of the book, 'State Policy: Ideology and Practice' (pp. 464–473), gives a separate definition of the meaning of the term 'Russification', or identifies the application of the term regarding Polish, Jewish and Belarusian ethno-cultural communities.

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discourse, or whether this kind of depiction was relevant to the Belarusian-speaking part of society at the time. Nor are the image(s) of 'Belarus' in the multilingual society living in the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania discussed separately in the book.