А. К. Краўцэвіч. *Стварэнне Вялікага Княства Літоўскага*. Мінск: Беларуская навука, 1998. 208 с., 5 карт. ISBN 985-08-0249-9 [A. K. Krautsevich. *Formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. Minsk: Belarускаia navuka. 1998. Pp. 208, 5 maps.]

In recent years quite a number of Belorussian works have been published on the formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) or the Lithuanian State. However, the problems dealt with in the works of Belorussian scholars, the declarations they make, their theses, postulates and conclusions are, as a rule, amazing and provoke severe criticism.¹ Really, what can one say after having learned that the Lithuanians developed from the Žemaitians between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, since the historical Lithuanians (of the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries) are the ancestors of present-day Belorussians, and contemporary Lithuania is a political structure, created by the Aukštaitians and Žemaitians only in the twentieth century.

The work of Alesii Kanstantinavich Krautsevich is full of such discoveries. Having investigated the formation of the GDL and its development between the mid-thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, he acknowledges that, in general, the problem of the formation of the Lithuanian state has been solved everywhere, except Belorussia. Thus, Mikola Iarmalovich looked at it in a new way – as the result of inter-tribal ties between the Balts and the Eastern Slavs, and he shifted Lithuania, the nucleus of its statehood, to the upper and middle reaches of the river Nemunas (p. 4). Krautsevich liked these conclusions. Here are the results of his research (p. 172-174). The principal hypotheses which, dominate up to the present time, as far as the formation of the Lithuanian state is concerned, are as follows: after age-long confrontation with the Slavs, the ethnic Lithuanian state occupied a part of the Slav lands and developed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; the Lithuanians, being in a minority, nevertheless remained the dominating nation. Krautsevich declares this thesis erroneous – there was no confrontation whatever. The nucleus of the state – the

¹See: E. Gudavičius. Following the Tracks of a Myth. *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, vol. 1, Vilnius, 1996, 38-58.

upper and middle reaches of the Nemunas – became a peaceful area of Balto-Slavic contacts. It was here that the state originated. The contacts were extremely pacific; not a single conflict was recorded. The support behind the Balt (this ethnic group is acknowledged to have existed!) Mindaugas was the Slavic cities at the Nemunas in present-day Belorussia. The Baltic ruling dynasty did not check up the assimilation of the Balts (the result of these relations was the ‘*Litsvins*’), it even encouraged that process by taking over the political organization of Eastern Slavs with Old Belorussian as its state language. As the Baltic conception of the formation of the Lithuanian state contains too many insurmountable controversies, one ‘must’ discard it. The formulation of a new concept, corresponding to modern historiography, inspired Krautsevich to set to work. He argues that: (1) the GDL appeared in the contact area of the Balts and the Slavs (in the upper and middle reaches of the Nemunas) in the middle of the thirteenth century; (2) the stimulus behind its formation was the threat presented by the Golden Horde and the Teutonic Order; (3) the existence of the pre-state confederation of the Baltic lands is a myth; (4) the beginning of the state is to be dated to the year 1248, when the Eastern Slavic city Nowogrudok entered into a union with the Baltic nobleman Mindaugas; (5) from the very beginning the GDL was a bi-ethnic ‘Balto-Eastern Slavic state, in which the Slavic component predominated.

Let us examine the *instrumenta* of Krautsevich’s work. In the first place his politicizing of the problem is strikingly evident. The heritage of the GDL seems to the author to be a big cake, which so far remains undivided. In his opinion, the historiographical issue of state formation was connected with the struggle of national political forces in the division of the heritage of the GDL. That started in the middle of the nineteenth century (p. 28). Nearly half of the book is devoted to a historiographical review (p. 27-75). Everything is very simple. After the uprising of 1863, Russian historical scholarship began arguing that Lithuania is indigenous Russian territory and the Lithuanian state was merely a kind of Russian statehood – ‘*russo-litovskoe gosudarstvo*’ (Russo-Lithuanian state). It was like that from the beginning. The Poles, however, reacted without delay: Lithuania had appeared as the ethnic Lithuanian state and extended its territory by conquering the weakened lands of Rus’. The Polish theses were elaborated and reinforced by Vladimir Pashuto, the author of the Soviet concept of the GDL. The pre-war *Lituvis* historiography was based on the Polish groundwork, and afterwards the Soviet *Lituvis* historical scholarship was developed by Pashuto. In order to disrupt the reliability of the concept of the ethnic Lithuanian state,

Krautsevich calls it synonymically the 'official Soviet' (p. 65) and *savetskaia-letuviskaia kantsepsiia* (p. 94). In such a form this concept is to be found in the works of Lithuanian historians. But is the Belorussian author well acquainted with these works? He quotes Lithuanian historians, but he does not know Lithuanian: from the Lithuanian gen. sg. form *Lietaukos* he failed to reconstruct the nom. sg. *Lietauka* (p. 99). Therefore, it is little wonder that the work of Juozapas Stakauskas seemed to him only a popular book (p. 48). Meanwhile, in Krautsevich's opinion, Mikola Iarmalovich, although making some errors, produced a serious work. Some of his theses took root in Belorussian historical scholarship (pp. 59-60, 67). By means of a superficial historiographical review Krautsevich attempts to discard the hundred-and-fifty-year-old generally accepted literature on the formation of the Lithuanian state and to offer a false, albeit personal, conception. Even directives (but not those of the Communist Party) are set in motion. They are taken from a certain international 'round table' of 1992, at which a unanimous resolution was adopted stating that the Belorussian state existed in the upper reaches of the Nemunas (p. 62). As if assuming the role of an Arthurian knight of the Round Table the author fights for that resolution in his book.

After Frida Gurevich's excavations, Krautsevich and a number of other Belorussian historians began exaggerating the importance of the Nowogrudok region. Krautsevich writes about the area of the upper and middle reaches of the Nemunas which in actual fact was inhabited by a mixed population of the Balts (Lithuanians and Yotvingians) and Eastern Slavs since the tenth century. In his opinion, the Slavs assimilated the Balts, and a new ethnic community – the Belorussians – arose there in the thirteenth century. Simultaneously that region acquired the name *Litva*. It extended up to Minsk and Vilnius. In the contact area of *Litva* the Eastern Slavs founded the cities of Grodno, Nowogrudok, Valkavysk, Slonim, Astrieja, Veviaresk... and possibly Vilnius (p. 80). At first the author has some doubts as to Vilnius, but later gives it also to the Slavs. Why one should grudge it... The use is made of Holubovichi excavations (p. 91). Slavic cities attended the Baltic areas. From there the Balts received Old Belorussian as their state language, political organization, the organs of government and other attributes of civilization. At the same time the author contradicts himself in his statements. Although the population of the *Litva* area was mixed symbiotically, but it was evident that even in the thirteenth century there were more Balts in the north and more Slavs in the south (p. 126); the inhabitants of Nowogrudok were Slavs, while the population of its environs

came from ethnic Lithuania (p. 128). It is even possible to draw a clear ethnic boundary between the Balts (Lithuanians) and the Eastern Slavs on the map (p. 198, no. 5), the author, in general, rejects it and eulogizes the symbiosis, the contact area and its Belorussian population – a new ethnic community (p. 96). The author roams between a pine and a fir and argues that he is in a mixed forest. It was a peaceful area. There was no confrontation between the Balts and the Eastern Slavs. There were neither ethnic Lithuanians, nor was there any conquest on their part. 'There are no records about the attacks on Novgorodok', Krautsevich argues (p. 95). There is no need to teach the author, or indicate the sources and literature on the question – 'Soviet writings' do not interest him. The situation in Novgorodok after its invasion by the son of Mindaugas Vaišelga is, nevertheless, eloquently described in the Ipat'evskaiia Chronicle: 'Vaišelga began to rule Novgorodok while he was still a heathen; and he started spilling much blood, every day killing three or four people; if one day he did not kill anybody, he was sad; he was happy when he killed'. Further comment is superfluous.

But why did the Belorussians, a new ethnic community of the symbiotic area *Litva*, not have their own dynasty? In the 1230s *Litva* was ruled by the Slav Iziaslav of Novgorodok. In the following decade he was replaced by Mindaugas and Vaišelga: the neighbouring Baltic nobleman appears like *deus ex machina* as a ruler of the area *Litva*. That represented the beginning of the Baltic dynasty. Krautsevich argues that Mindaugas was invited to rule. The author wonders whether he was a Varangian, rather than a Balt (p. 125, 133-135).

Anyways, Krautsevich's matters are complicated by Mindaugas' baptism – he was not christened according to the Eastern Orthodox rite, but as a Roman Catholic (the Latin heresy). This situation is difficult to account for, if one takes into consideration the domination of the Old Belorussian language, faith and culture. The author of the book dodges this question by saying that Mindaugas' baptism was a mere political game (p. 151-152). The nobleman Mindaugas goes on playing and bestows the centre of the country, the contact area *Litva*, in the words of the author, upon Galich-Volyn' (p. 149-150). In Krautsevich's opinion, Mindaugas ruled in the upper reaches of the Nemunas, while the Slavic part belonged to the Romanovichi (p. 150). Another blow is dealt to the 'symbiosis' by Mindaugas' efforts to obtain a crown for his successor and not for the Orthodox Vaišelga. The author retorts: the latter was a monk, so how could he rule? (p. 153). Failures like that are frequent in Krautsevich's reasoning.

The new conception is confused by the presence of the ethnic Lithuanians who still exist as neighbours of the Belorussians. In the twentieth century everything is clear – they are *Letuvisy*. They appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developing as a new ethnicity from the Žemaitians (p. 119). *Letuva* has nothing to do with the old ‘*Litva*’; the same is true of *Lituvisy* and *Litva*, *Litviny* – in spite of the existence of the Baltic ‘*Litva*’, which became ‘Belorussianized’ in the contact area between the tenth and twelfth centuries. According to the author, that name *Litva* also designated a part of the Balts, and the Belorussians, a new ethnic community. The northern contact regions – Lithuanian lands to the north of the river Neris – were inhabited by the Baltic variety of the old ‘*Litva*’; they were not Žemaitian-speaking Aukštaitians, who created the Eastern Lithuanian barrow culture (p. 81). Unexpectedly Krautsevich falls into a trap. In the 1180s, when the basin of the Nemunas was inhabited by the already Slavicized symbiotic ‘*Litva*’, one more Baltic ‘*Litva*’ began its attacks. The author is glad that it failed to destroy the political system of the Nemunas basin (p. 129). He acknowledges what he has denied throughout his book, namely the conflict between the Balts and the Slavs. Such an intellectual tension can lead one to seeing double – the author does not go into details concerning the rise of the second ‘*Litva*’. The Baltic part of *Litva* – the Aukštaitians – were unable to build a town, establish a state and to set up administrative structures. Everything was borrowed from the contact Slavicized (Belorussian) area. All the time (including the twentieth century) the Balts lose their national identity, they are Slavicized, Belorussianized, their state language is Old Belorussian. They are aboriginal inhabitants, but ... Eastern Slavs have taken over something from them (p. 125).

What was needed for the formation of such a neo-ethnic theory? Firstly, to distort as many known data as possible. For instance, in his letter to the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund of Luxembourg, in 1420 Vytautas wrote about the Žemaitians, the Aukštaitians, Lithuania and the Lithuanian language. It is a well-known letter and there is no need to go into its details. Krautsevich is displeased that in it Lithuania is treated as a synonym of Aukštaitija, that it is a sum of Žemaitians and Aukštaitians and that Lithuanian is spoken both in Lithuania and Žemaitija (p. 108–109). He declares that Vytautas fails to mention the Slavicization of Lithuania and that he does not identify Lithuania with Aukštaitija in his letter. Probably Vytautas at his time knew what the author knows now. Was it not the Grand Duke who originated the Soviet conception of the formation of the Lithuanian state of *Lituvisy*? It sounds like a real conspiracy. Secondly, the ‘adepts of

the Balto-*Lituvisk* conception' (p. 130) discover a pre-state Lithuanian organization in the pact of 1219 (p. 130-131). This is not supported by the *Chronicle* of Henry of Livonia and personally by Krautsevich – the union of lands did not exist. There was only a union of a group of leaders for the achievement of a particular temporary purpose (p. 132). Thirdly, a state of ethnic Lithuanians did not exist. It must be stated four times: 'a mythical state' (p. 16); 'a state of *Lituvisy* is a myth, a dream' (p. 67); 'a mythical Baltic state' (p. 138); 'the Baltic state formation of the early feudalism seems to be a myth' (p. 174). Fourthly, one can invent one's arguments in a dream...

A careful study of the book shows that its author is liable to omit inconvenient facts, to select suitable ones and to comment on them in a biased way. The relation of the land of Novgorodok with that of Lithuania is worth noting. All historical sources clearly distinguish between these two political, ethnic and territorial units. The author is also aware of that (p. 120). The commentaries, however, are quite different. The information contained in the *Chronicle of Prussia* by Peter of Dusburg is ignored by Krautsevich and no mention is made of the 1314 attack in the land of Novgorodok Krivichi (not Lithuania). The chronicler also does not refer to Grodno as a land of Lithuania, considering it a separate territory. The lands of the Lithuanian king begin beyond that territory. A contemporary of those events did not attribute any towns to the contact area '*Litva*'. The chronicler of the Teutonic Order is inexpedient to Krautsevich, therefore he shuns that work, simply stating that it contains only facts of military and geographical nature (p. 17). Using the linguistic works of Jan Otrębski, Kazys Kuzavinis and Zigmantas Zinkevičius, who clearly showed the process of the change of Lithuanian *Lietuva*/*Leituva* into *Jumbea* in East Slavic, the author naively mutters about these equivalents. Here as in many other places of the book everything is turned upside down.

Krautsevich's methodology is simple. The centre of GDL statehood is shifted from the lands of the Lithuanian tribes to the upper reaches of the Nemunas. Thus, the significance of Novgorodok and other Slavic cities in that territory is enhanced. The Lithuanian tribes are annulled, and afterwards the same fate befalls the Lithuanian nation. They are substituted by enigmatic pseudo-ethnicities, which previously haunted the 'works' of the Belorussian émigrés, and now are practiced by the scholars, too. In order to support these theses, political, historiographical, historical, ethnic and other kinds of facts are bulldozed into a conceptual heap. If the historical sources contradict their theses, they are 'not noticed' by the author. Thus, a 'real' history of the formation of the Lithuanian state is produced. The eth-

nic *Letuvisy* are turned into an insignificant periphery of the grandiose process. By the way, they did not exist at all in the thirteenth century. This is the most unsuccessful ‘discovery’ of Krautsevich. His conception is a variety of the tsarist Russian theory of the ‘Russo-Lithuanian state’. The Lithuanians created their ethnic state; having conquered the Russian lands, they lost their national identity and turned into *литовская русь* (Lithuanian Rus’). The new – Belorussian – conception is even more reactionary. Russian scholars did not go so far astray – they did not annul the Lithuanian ethnicity and acknowledged that contemporary western Belorussian lands had been old ethnic Lithuanian territories.

Judging from the bibliography in the book under review, one can see that Krautsevich is an archaeologist-turned-historian. He investigated the places along the Nemunas in Belorussia, and he was a serious archaeologist. However, he has written a poor historical work, thus leading Belorussian historiography into one more impasse. Several solid organizations – Фонд допомоги незалежній літературі і науці (Парыж) (Foundation for the Support of Independent Literature and Scholarship (Paris), Kasa im. Mianowskiego (Warsaw), Фонд фундаментальних наукових дослідження Республіки Беларусь (Foundation of Fundamental Research (Minsk), Foundation of Brothers Jan and Jędrzej Śniadecki (Cracow) – supported Krautsevich’s ‘innovative’ studies financially.

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