Rimvydas Petrauskas. **Lietuvos diduomenė XIV a. pabaigoje–XV a.: sudėtis – struktūra – valdžia** [The Lithuanian Nobility at the End of the Fourteenth Century and During the Fifteenth Century: Composition, Structure, and Power]. Vilnius: Aidai, 2003. Pp. 379 ISBN: 9955-445-67-x

The author of this monograph investigates the selected topic in five chapters with conclusions and no less valuable appendices (prosopography of the Lithuanian nobility from the end of the fourteenth century and from the fifteenth century as well as a list of GDL officials during 1387–1492). The principle problem is formulated clearly and precisely: what was the power relationship between the Grand Duke of Lithuania and his nobility, especially their most influential representatives, the high nobility, i.e. the relationship of the authority of the ruler with the authority of the high nobility? The principle tasks of the problem and the questions to be solved are explained one after another in the appropriate section of the Introduction (pp. 9–22). The importance of the problems selected has been determined by a number of opinions prevalent in traditional historical scholarship about the universal, unrestricted (eastern despotic) authority of the grand duke and the servile nature of Lithuania's nobles (which was created in 1387 due to Poland's civilising effects), as well as about the late emergence of high-nobility power, i.e. those close to the ruler. Therefore questions about the power of the nobility remained in the shadow of studies devoted the dukes. Meanwhile it is not difficult for a more careful investigator to ascertain that the nobility was the strength behind the ruler, who always required the support of the high nobility. In addition, it should be borne in mind that only more modern state structures were formed in the region. The problem investigated by the author is part of the context of a considerably broader historical problem, i.e. the identification and description of the Lithuanian ruler's partners and the supportive social-political structures. (The genesis of a group of families, i.e. the dukes, and of Lithuania's nobility also contends with the 'Lietis problem'.) The beginning of the period under study was not chosen arbitrarily. At the end of the fourteenth century somewhat 'more abundant' historical sources appear relating to the ruler's partners: the high nobles of the time of Vytautas and Jogaila, the cream of Lithuania's nobility. The author is concerned about when it developed more independent powers, forcing the ruler to restrict more or less his own authority and whether this actually occurred about the mid-fifteenth century, as is still believed. He is himself confident that this date is actually imprecise because already

at the end of the fourteenth century we see clearly the influence of the nobility in the region and how the nobles performed executive government functions. Leading nobles existed, in whose hands had long been the government of territories and command of the army, and so forth had lain for a long time. The high nobles of that time were a clearly influential class. The most important question of the study is raised: what was the origin and source of the power of this class? Did the ruler grant them their administrative functions and could this right to be in charge be inherited?

In pursuing his goals Petrauskas analyses the personalities of the elite (was the composition of the elite renewed? Were the elite replaced? Could the social position of the high nobles be inherited?), its structure (the significance of family ties, the elite groups and their relationships, signs of friction inside the nobility, and the protection of the lower classes of nobles), and their political, administrative, and social power. In analysing their power, exclusive attention is focussed on the structure of the family (blood ties) since they are older than the caste organisation (social ties) of the nobles. The chronological limits of the study are clear: the end of the fourteenth century through the fifteenth century. The end has a concrete date: the death of Grand Duke Casimir in 1492. The author does not explain this in more detail as he does with the beginning, i.e. the end of the fourteenth century, since it is already somewhat known that the authority of the high nobility was legalised definitively as an institution at more or less that time through the authority of the ruler's Council of Lords. The book is not slavishly tied to its chronological limits. The structure of a work in the form of problems is partially released from this and, due to the lack of sources, effective use is made of prosopographic methods, which allow generalised data from the collective biography to be applied to a separate individual to reveal at the same time a strongly synthesised history of Lithuania's high nobility. The method allows the author to cross the aforementioned boundaries of the period, to glance at older periods and the results obtained, using these to search for universal conclusions about the social structure of pre-Christian Lithuania. After sensing in more than one fuzzy, contradictory conclusion about the emergence of Lithuania's high nobles and their social significance in traditional scholarship and after carefully analysing the totality of sources collected for the work, the author begins researching the question of who was considered part of the high nobility and how a nobleman emerged in the nobility of pre-Krėva Lithuania (prior to 1385–1387). The distinguishing features of those high nobles are described: their performance of government functions (holding office, participation in ruler's council) and the disposition of areas of land of exceptional size. This was the group of people, who, because of good parentage and successful marriages

as well as proximity to the ruler, performed the most important administrative functions. The grand duke was unable to change anything in this structure other than redistributing offices. Because these were representatives of noble families, therefore ancestry was another mark of a nobleman. Some of the nobles must have been active before the date they are first mentioned in written sources. Some of the noblemen from the end of the fourteenth century and from the fifteenth century may even have descended from the oldest tribal high nobility (p. 54). The author stresses that there being no clear legal differences, it is difficult to distinguish the criteria for inclusion in the high nobility. He employed other, more formal criteria, i.e. those persons who had a substantial influence on the life of the country (the ruler's closest advisors, the witnesses of his documents, the envoys-diplomats, and the officials of the central and local authorities). Included among these are close and more distant relatives. However, in this study the concept of the broader meaning of *diduomenė* [high nobility] does not coincide with the narrower concept of the *valdantysis elitas* [ruling elite]. Due to a special feature of the sources, it is easiest to establish the composition of the ruling elite and through this to accumulate important knowledge about the high nobility. Lists of witnesses for the grand dukes during 1392–1492 are used effectively for this. They reveal a group of nobles who clearly inherited a high position from their ancestors, who are the high nobility of the time of Vytautas and who appeared prior to 1392. The oldest record concerns the Goštautas family (1364) but the majority 'appeared' during the last two decades of the fourteenth century during the rule of Jogaila and Vytautas. The high nobility disposed of patrimonial estates in 'true' (ethnic) Lithuania. The author states (pp. 95–96): 'a study of the origin of the most influential high nobles shows that the theory about essential changes having occurred in the composition of Lithuania's ruling elite during the time of Vytautas is unfounded. The data from the sources do not allow the genealogical relationships of earlier times to be established. The continuity of the high nobility can be proven only beginning in the second half of the fourteenth century. This answer now allows the aristocratic origin of Lithuania's high nobility during the 'ducal era' (prior to the events of Krėva or earlier?) to be proven, i.e. to answer affirmatively the question thus raised (p. 76). The origin of the high nobility, however, does not extend back to even earlier eras and does not confirm the author's assertion that some of the nobles are from the old tribal high nobility.

I would call the chapter of the monograph about the structure of the high nobility the cornerstone of the study. In it we find new evaluations and interesting conclusions, which the author consistently strives to use to confirm and develop the assertions of the previous chapters, above all,

to refute the service and position origin of the high nobility as strongly as possible: Lithuania's high nobles arose from old noble families, i.e. the structure of Lithuania's high nobility was based on family not office. At the same time the author also understands the position of researchers, above all Oskar Halecki, who assert that the sources from the time of Vytautas contain no united, closed, and politically effective familial organisations or any common family names. This conception is viable in Polish scholarship. After modifying it a little recently, Jerzy Suchocki has renewed it. According to him, chaotic Lithuanian society was put in order only by the political-administrative processes of the fifteenth century. The concept of family employed in the documents for the nobles from the time of Vytautas does not fit Lithuanian reality of that time. At Horodło Vytautas chose not families but individual nobles to receive Polish coats of arms. On the basis of German scholarship, Petrauskas has proposed an interesting solution to this question. Because a family is a historical formation, it unavoidably experiences change. The sources from the end of the fourteenth century and from the fifteenth century show the Lithuanian noble family as retaining one of the stages of its development and having the open structure ascribed to the early Middle Ages: i.e. as legally undefined, constantly changing formations, where the representatives of each generation live in an entirely different family constellation ('soft family structure'). The composition of the land holdings likewise used to change with any new division, marriage, and succession of the family members. Where are its signs in Lithuania? What do they explain? It is above all impossible to find inherited family names or permanent 'family nest' holdings under these conditions. No genealogical aspect (ancestry, forefathers) is necessary ('functions weakly') for the self-awareness of such a family. The memory of one's forefathers reaches no further back than one's grandparents because the memory of one's ancestors cannot change the descendant's existing situation. 'Only the single-generation family constellation was functional; in the next generation its composition needs must change,' said the author (p. 110). The self-awareness of such a family is 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical', i.e. where the in-laws of the branch lines of the same generation are known while the forefathers are forgotten. One's kinship on the mother's side is very important in it. The open (cognatic) family was replaced by the agnatic, i.e. a strict, hierarchical family limited to inheritance through the male line. The processes for the emergence of the agnatic family must be promoted by a central authority and expanded by a system of regional administrative positions since not all the family members are able to have positions since the right of all the family members to them does not exist. It is very important that the author presents an example of the emergence of an agnatic family from a ducal family: Gediminas divided the country among his seven sons while beginning with the succession of Algirdas and Kęstutis, the

principle of distinguishing one son is clear. Actually, when there is a shortage of facts, each fact is precious, especially in the fourteenth century.

The arguments in the smoothly set out scheme of the development of historical Lithuanian families have some weak links. First of all, out of all of his seven sons, Gediminas nevertheless distinguished his youngest son, Jaunutis, leaving him to rule Vilnius; therefore the facts of agnation could be moved back. And although the short memory of Vytautas about his grandfather, Gediminas, is used to deny genealogical self-awareness (vertical) in this scheme, nevertheless a deeper memory functioned in the Lithuanian royal family: in the work, *Zadonschchina* about the decisive battle between the grand duke of Moscow and the Tartars at Kulikovo Pole in 1380, two of the participants, Andrey and Dmitriy, sons from the first marriage of Algirdas, rallied their spirits by seeking the help of their venerable pagan ancestors (perhaps even prior to those who lived in the time of Mindaugas)¹: 'we are two brothers, the sons of Algirdas, the grandsons of Gediminas, and the great-grandsons of Skalmantas'. They were well aware of their family's ancestors and knew that they themselves purportedly – Andrey, the first-born son of Algirdas, even attempted to seize the capital of Lithuania from Jogaila. I think that in this case the verticality of the family consciousness can be typical of both open and agnatic families. Otherwise, the study loses one of its ancestry (nobility) criteria, i.e. the memory of one's ancestors and weakens an assertion strongly substantiated by the author that the high nobility was composed of aristocratic families from the ducal era and even the tribal era. There is another inconsistency and minor contradictions in the scheme. He speaks about the changing structure of the open family, the role of the maternal relatives in it being no less than that of the paternal ones (p. 110), and the political co-ordination inside the family remaining unclear (p. 114), and, on the contrary, 'the Gediminid dynasty could hardly tolerate a closed and politically effective society' (p. 114) (which is about the transition from a cognatic family to an agnatic one). I think that the question about the agnatic family is not completely clear. Some of its features that are presented in the study are not alien to either cognatic lineage or the family, the extended family. It is possible that it was not the emerging agnatic family but the strengthening of the property rights of individual nuclear families that appeared in land-ownership relationships at the end of the fourteenth century and during the fifteenth century. The representatives of these prospering and strengthening social structures naturally opposed the old traditional common kinship rights to the land, which limited a separate individual's right of ownership of land (The author enumerates

¹ J. Ochmański, *Dawna Litwa* (Olsztyń, 1986) pp. 20, 23.

the approval of family members to the sale of land and the right of redemption-retraction retained by them.) since land became a commodity in the space of several decades of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless this occurred in stages, the most important of which was the free disposition of a third of one's property unrestricted by the rights of other family members. Due to the deficiencies of the sources, it is difficult in this case to obtain one hundred percent conclusive answers. Actually it is possible to agree with the author's conclusions about the emergence of the agnatic family in the fifteenth century. There are noble families who expanded through two-three generations to a solid size, concentrated their property, and chose the head of the family through the male line (the Radvila-Astikas, Goštautas and Kęsgaila families). On the other hand, they are immensely similar to the so-called non-partible fraternal properties, properties which rarely used to break up.

The author raised a serious and important question about the agnatic family but he failed in the work to perform all the research proving it in Lithuania. In addition, I will mention that the reason that no common family (nuclear family) name existed could lie in other than a change in the family structure (cognatic-agnatic) but above all in the strengthening of the land ownership rights of the individual structural parts or representatives of the family (i.e. of the nuclear family). The author makes a good point: 'the emergence of the inheritance of a name from generation to generation chronologically corresponds to certain aspects of the development of the family (for example, it was precisely at this time that the so-called "third-part rule" arose after the competency of family members to dispose of land holdings began to be limited)' (p. 111). It is possible to more broadly substantiate this premise. The emergence of common names also coincides with other facts of the development of the land ownership rights of the nobility: The restriction of the ruler's land ownership rights in the 1387 and later privileges to the benefit of the nobility, the emergence of large land ownership by the high nobility, and the concentration of holdings (this must have created pressure for land to become a commodity). In other words, these aspects of land ownership, just like their not having a common family (nuclear family) name, were not characteristic of pre-Krėva Lithuanian nobility (high nobility), which does not negate their 'vertical' knowledge of the family's ancestors.

The emergence of the large estates is analysed in greater detail in a separate chapter. In it he conclusively refutes the conclusion by Łowmiański that from the time of Vytautas the patrimony of a noble used to consist of one or two estates. According to the author, they used to have several estates but the land was scattered in the same territory (in Lithuania proper and at the state's borders), i.e. 'the topographical

dispersion' of patrimonial holdings. He explains this using the open family structure: the composition of the holdings of each generation differed from that of the previous generation (p. 128). Gradually the land was concentrated and the principle holdings distinguished. An estate and church were built at the centre of large and integral holdings, i.e. the first signs of such development emerged in the fifteenth century. And common (agnatic) family names appeared.

No reader should forget the author's methodological selection to investigate and lay stress on the power of the high nobility as family but not the power of the representatives of the caste structure because the latter is a later phenomenon and had just formed during the period under study; therefore it could not be a source of authority. The influence of the family, meanwhile, is almost dominating although its functions were gradually assumed by state structures. It provided its members with guarantees of stability, protection, and being remembered. The state positions devolved to the representatives of the families instead of the nobility in positions of service to the ruler. Because the system of central state offices and their hierarchy thereof were still being created at the side of the grand duke, the local administrative structures are discussed in the work. The deepest investigation is made of the *starostas* with several worthwhile conclusions about the nature of their power being presented. Local people generally assumed the most important posts, their ancestry and family ties (even with the ruler determining the height of their position). Such relationships between the ruler and a local noble official were long-standing. Thus the grand duke would grant the functions of his authority in the localities to the area's high nobility. The author generalises that the authority of Lithuania's high nobles at the end of the fourteenth century and beginning of the fifteenth century was partially determined by their rights of inheritance and the charters granted by the grand duke only expanded and institutionalised these rights (p. 167). Meanwhile an independent class (*sic*) of high nobles formed fairly slowly since the vitality of the old family structures hindered it. In the end the caste structure with the corresponding self-awareness of the high nobility appeared in the time of the rule of Casimir (1440–1492) and manifested itself as a consolidation of the ruling class, united by the prestigious marriages and institutionally formalised in the Council of Lords, i.e. the region's supreme administrative body, in the most important central and local offices and so forth (pp. 194–195).

It is impossible in this review to evaluate all of the 'old new' problems of the history of the social-political structure of Lithuanian society that are solved in a contemporary, intriguing, and attractive manner by Petrauskas in his book (the strongly positive influence of the latest German scholarship is visible). Each reader will find things

he agrees with and things he doubts. The author succeeded in managing the sources and scholarship of the problem masterfully and in setting everything out in his monograph smoothly. The work succeeded and doubtlessly testifies to a big step forward in Lithuanian medieval studies.

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