LITHUANIAN HISTORICAL STUDIES 27 2023
ISSN 1392-2343 PP. 202–218
https://doi.org/10.30965/25386565-02701007

Kogda zarozhdaiutsia natsii na vostoke Evropy?, edited by A.V. Doronin, Bonn-Vilnius: Fond Maksa Webera, 2022, 639 pp. ISBN 978-609-8314-17-5

'The term "Eastern Europe" should be reserved for those regions which developed under the aegis of the Orthodox Church.'[1]

The development of a nation is a long and complicated historical process. By looking at it in closer detail, we may arrive at a strange opinion: it is easier to associate contemporary nations with the ethnic, social and political forms of their forerunners than it is to unreservedly attest to the congruity of these early nations to their successors. Along this long path of development, nations not only gain a great deal; they also end up losing a lot. In what way are contemporary nations more developed, or better, than their predecessors? Are their advantages universal? Can these be measured, and if so, by whom? Is the measurement system required for such an evaluation not merely an expression of the measurer's self-will? These are some of the doubts that entered my mind having just worked my way through the book 'When are Nations Born in Eastern Europe?' (*Kogda zarozhdaiutsa natsii na vostoke Evropy?*)

Two problems confront historians seeking to explore the transformation of an ethnic-political organisation, which we are accustomed to calling Early Modern Period society, into a nation (i.e. essentially a political-social organisation). On one hand, it is heuristic: clearly, when searching for the time and space in which a nation is said to have been born, we will find ourselves wandering through a labyrinth of long-forgotten, or perhaps even hitherto unnoticed, opinions. On the other hand, it is ideological: from the very outset of such research, the historian will be burdened with prior knowledge of the current nation. And it is unlikely that the historian will be able to shake off the ideology of the nation to which they actually belong. That is why, when picking up this book, we are intrigued by at least two questions. What new interpretations of the history of nations will the researchers be presenting to us? And how will these historians searching for the birth of their nations

[1] S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996), p. 160.

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deal with the national self-worth already instilled in them? The latter circumstance is all the more interesting due to the format chosen for the book: representatives of four neighbouring national historiographies (historians from Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia) worked on a joint project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation in Germany, and were forced to harmonise their opinions. Andrei Doronin, the project leader and a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Moscow, was charged with the far from easy task of seeking out compromises in the name of a common goal, and, as we know, compromises are not frequently marked by peace, but rather, merely a truce.

The book consists of three parts: 1) Rus'-Ukraine (authors Vasiliy Ulyanovskiy, Andrey Bovgiria, Natalia Sinkevich and Vitaliy Tkachuk); 2) GDL Rus' (Oleg Dziarnovič, Genad' Saganovič, Vasiliy Voronin, Artūras Dubonis and Kęstutis Gudmantas); and 3) Muscovian Rus' (Andrei Doronin, Aleksei Sirenov, Michail Odeskiy and Piotr Stefanovich). The enormous introduction (pages 5 to 109) and extensive summary (pages 623 to 634), written by Doronin, the project leader, are worthy of separate attention. Unfortunately, the book lacks indexes of toponyms and names, and a general bibliography. This will make it more difficult for those wishing to delve deeper into the contents of the book.

The introduction devotes a great deal of attention to considering various Early Modern 'national-genesis' theories, and an account of issues of the formation of the nation in Eastern Europe elaborated by the project's researchers during preliminary discussions. In the end, Doronin himself proposes a definition of this 'theory'. He rejects those suggested by contemporary sociologists who position the birth of nations in the 'nationalistic' 19th century (pp. 94–95). In his understanding, the civil nations of Europe from this epoch emerged from the earlier 16th to 18th-century forms of nationalism that had over time influenced people's self-awareness, turning into a unique kind of heritage. According to Doronin, the self-identification of a nation should be traced back to the Renaissance, when people's world-view changed fundamentally, leading to the need to seek out provisions legitimising a nation and the state it inhabited. This task could be performed by ruling dynasties, the noble estates or church hierarchs, but they were all influenced by narrow group or estate-related interests, and thus could not expect to receive the support of the nation they alleged to represent. Only when they were joined by intellectuals did the situation change (p. 101). Renaissance intellectuals intertwined primordialistic (*lingua et mores*) arguments about the uniqueness of a given nation

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with the Old Testament story of Noah (the forefather of humanity), from among whose descendants everyone could 'extrapolate' the origins of their own nation. This gave rise to myths of the origins of nations, which, according to Doronin, are the material bonding all the other characteristics of a nation (historical memory, language, culture, etc) (p. 108). It is these myths that deserve the greatest attention from researchers of national genesis. Doronin asserts that the most influential Renaissance-era creator of national origin myths would have to be Giovanni Nanni, also known as Annio da Viterbo (1432–1502), who falsified works by the Babylonian historian Berossus, who lived in the third century BC, and thus created a genealogy of the nations of Europe. Many of Europe's intellectuals referred to this genealogy, including the Polish chroniclers Bernard Wapowski, Marcin Bielski and Maciej Stryjkowski (the latter should be attributed not just to Poland, as Doronin does (p. 63), but to Lithuania as well). Therefore, the aim of this project was to test how this concept affected the different variants of Rus' that existed in Eastern Europe in the 16th to 18th centuries (these being Ukrainian Rus', Lithuanian Rus' and Muscovy/Russia), and how it contributed to the formation of nations.

The aim of the introduction in any book is to provide the reader with a 'road map' for the journey ahead. If such a thing does exist in this part of the book, I cannot say I found it. Apart from the discussion about myths of the origin of nations, the essential directions of the research were not highlighted. Indeed, there are elucidations on the importance of places of memory, territory, language and customs to a nation, but there are no attempts to explain how they should correlate with each other. As a result, we are taken completely by surprise, when, having read the introduction, we see on the contents page the parts of the book dedicated to the three Rus', only with a completely different internal structure to each: the part about Ukrainian Rus' is structured thematically and then chronologically; Lithuanian Rus' is structured in a bipolar manner (Rus' versus Lithuania); while Muscovian Rus' is essentially laid out chronologically. Relevant themes are indeed highlighted, but they all appear in the text largely as ideas or thoughts, rather than as structural parts of the book. This can be justified, I suppose, by the unusual international circumstances under which this project was realised.

I am not a specialist in the formation of Europe's nations in the Early Modern Period; quite conversely, I am interested more in regional history, which is why I do not have a deep understanding of the historiography on this subject. Nonetheless, I did notice a couple of books that had a

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strong significance on the planning of this project. While I would not place too much significance on any conclusions that may arise from this fact, I do think that those wanting to gain a better understanding of the climate in which the plan for this book emerged, it would be worth taking a look at a collective monograph by German historians devoted to the discourse by Late Medieval and Renaissance German and Italian intellectuals on nations[2] (this is most likely the source of Doronin's provisions that Renaissance intellectuals created nations), and at Sergii Plokhy's book about the development of the East Slavic nations.[3] The authors of both books, much like the leader of the project under discussion here, have a propensity for abstacting the historical reality from which they create theories. Only, it is unclear how equally the theorising Doronin and the historians-researchers understood the essential concepts of their research: primordialism, nation, the pre-modern and modern nation. Plokhy states that national identities have been in flux in the East Slavic lands ever since the Middle Ages: a Kievan Rus' identity existed, which died out and was replaced by a Grand Duchy of Lithuania Rus'ian identity, which almost became a nation, but also died out, which was followed by a Cossack identity, which laid the foundations for the Ukrainian nation, and so on.[4] When reading the book under review, one gets the impression that the researchers adhered to a different perception of the nation: for them, once born, nations do not die, by becoming memory accumulators of their earlier forms. In this way, the Ruthenians of early Rus' are the ancestors of GDL Rus', while both of their descendants are the Cossacks, who formed the basis for the contemporary Ukrainian nation. As we can see, we are dealing with two completely different concepts for the understanding of a nation. This is not a bad thing in itself. What is less than ideal is that this inconsistency never develops into an object of analysis, and it is difficult to say why the scheme suggested by Plokhy does not suit the authors of the texts published in this book. Incidentally, only the

[2] H. Münkler, H. Grünberger, K. Mayer, *Nationenbildung: die Nationalisierung Europas im Diskurs humanistischer Intellektueller: Italien und Deutschland* (Berlin, 1988).

[3] S. Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations. Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). The second half of this book was translated into Russian and was published as: S. Plokhy, *Proiskhozhdenie slavianskikh nagtsii. Domodernye identichnosti v Ukraine i Rossii*. Neither the place nor the year of publication was given in the book.

[4] A concentrated outline of this way of thinking was given in the conclusion: S. Plokhy, op. cit., pp. 354–361.

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Ukrainian historians refer at least minimally to Plokhy's ideas, but even they do not explore his theory.

In the first part of the book, entitled Rus'-Ukraine, the Ukrainian historians discuss the contacts between Ukrainian Rus' and West European culture in the 15th to the 18th centuries, the mythologised ideas regarding the origins of the Ukrainians, and the concepts of 'their own' land and language. A brief summary of the ideas presented by the researchers would result more or less in the following general picture. By the 16th century, Western Europe was already open to inhabitants of Ukrainian Rus'. This openness allowed them to obtain a West European education, and to bring these ideas back to their homeland. Along with these ideas, books also spread, many of which were Polish, although a number were in Latin as well. Ukrainian iconography from this period also reveals imagery borrowed from the West. One of the most famous of these was the Sarmatian costume, originating in Poland, which Ukrainian Cossacks supplemented with their own element, the *khokhol* or *oseledets* (a tuft of hair left on the crown of a male's shaven head) that gave rise to the generic sobriquet for Ukrainians which carries disdainful overtones and is still in use today. According to the historians, ever since the time of the Union of Lublin, representatives from the three Ukrainian voivodeships (Kiev, Volhynia and Podolia) would stand their ground and remain united at Commonwealth seims (parliaments) (pp. 162–163). All of them were united not only by Orthodoxy but also by the crystalisation of a common theory of origins. The latter was prompted by Maciej Miechowita's *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis* (Treatise on the Two Sarmatias), to which a new significance was imparted by Stanisław Orzechowski, who attributed the Ruthenians not directly to the Sarmatians, but to one of their tribes, the Roxolani. Nonetheless, the Roxolani idea led to the common origins theory with the Polish nobility (the *szlachta*), as, according to Miechowita, the Poles were descended from a different Sarmatian line. Another element unifying the Ukrainians were the Rurikid princes, who ostensibly united 16th-century Ukrainian Ruthenians with the historical tradition of early Rus' (pp. 178–181). However, in the epoch of the Cossack uprisings, the myth of the Ukrainian origins changed. What prevailed then was the myth mentioned at the start of the 17th century and outlined in the Synopsis (a short history of the Cossacks) published in Kiev in 1674, where the Ukrainian Cossacks were said to originate from the Khazars. According to the researchers, this myth embodied the ethnocultural identity and led to the formation of an independent state (p. 277). In fact, the Synopsis was created at a

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time when the Cossacks had grown closer to Muscovy, which is why it was declared that Muscovy was the true inheritor of the Rus' tradition (p. 221). The perception among Ukrainians themselves of their country, its borders and language has also been a complex affair. If at the end of the 16th century the ancestors of the Ukrainians still saw themselves as Ruthenians from three voivodeships that had been taken from the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian at the time of the Union of Lublin and joined to Poland, then the Cossacks under the leadership of Bohdan Khmelnystsky imagined their land as extending as far as the Vistula in the west and to Putivl in the east (p. 246), i.e. they extended it further west than the borders of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at the expense of the Crown territory of Poland, and likewise to the east into *terra nullius*. Even with the end of the 17th-century wars between Muscovy and the Commonwealth, after the Truce of Andrusowo (1667), Cossack chronicles still fantasised about their land extending as far as Vilnius and Smolensk (p. 239), thereby as if laying claim to all the Ruthenian lands that had belonged to Lithuania. During the Khmelnytsky Uprising, the Cossacks clearly broke all connections with the Ruthenian language used in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. New traditions emerged in the chancery of the Cossack army, where the written language was increasingly referred to as Ukrainian. Its users sought to distance themselves from the Polish, Church Slavonic and Muscovite languages. Alas, this was a temporary phenomenon. By the 18th century, the influence of Muscovite, or Russian, increased in the Hetmanate territory (p. 288), while Polish grew in its prevalence on the right bank of the Dnieper, which belonged to Crown Poland (p. 287).

The first chapter in the second part, GDL Rus' (the way the title has been formulated is particularly vague, as it is not clear what the intended message is, or what the intended declension was meant to be when the abbreviation GDL [Grand Duchy of Lithuania] is expanded), correlates with the topic in the first chapter of the Ukrainian part, the development of West European culture after the Union of Lublin in the Ruthenian lands that belonged to the GDL, i.e. in the territory of present-day Belarus. Incidentally, it is totally unclear what the object of discussion is. The author (Dziarnovich) fails to define clearly what he is talking about: is it the Ruthenians of the GDL, who, incidentally, it would not be right to understand just as the ancestors of the future Belarusians (the ancestors of the future Ukrainians also fit into the concept of the GDL Ruthenians), or is he talking about processes that took place in present-day Belarus. The second approach seems to be the prevalent

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one (suggestions of this can be found on pages 298, 317, etc). However, as we continue with the text, we find inconsistencies: both Rykantai (p. 309) and Vievis (p. 311) end up in the 'Belarusian' GDL domain, not to mention Vilnius, which, without explanation, the author sees only in the context of a Ruthenian-Belarusian cultural object. Schools and students, books and libraries, paintings and architecture, theatre and music ... all these elements point to the Western character of 16th to 18th-century GDL Rus'.

In the second chapter in Part II, the authors discuss what constituted the identity of GDL Rus', raising the question of Ruthenian integration into Lithuania, evident from the 13th century, as a phenomenon of political organisation. They allege it followed a distinctly directional development, where even Ruthenians who had accepted Catholicism remained East Slavs (meaning Belarusians. Why not Poles?), while simultaneously Lithuanian communities (or did they mean groups in eastern Lithuania?) were disappearing (pp. 332, 333). It is not very clear how the researcher verified the national self-attribution of people from that epoch. The Counter Reformation pushed Ruthenian magnate families into Catholicism, while the ecumenical Union of Brest (1596) created a religious alternative to 'the Ruthenian faith' (*russkaia vera*) for the Ruthenian populace of the GDL (p. 335). The ecumenical Ruthenian community formed on the basis of the Polotsk Greek Catholic diocese had more opportunities to develop their (future Belarusian) language; meanwhile, the Mogilev diocese that joined the Kiev Orthodox Metropolitan Church experienced the greater influence of the Polish language. It was precisely this kind of spread of confessional communities that allowed the development of a climate of coexistence in which common GDL Ruthenian values could emerge: *places of memory*. In truth, it must be said that the author who wrote this part of the text, Saganovič, devoted more attention to places of memory of GDL Rus' as people (I would correct this term to the less modernised Lithuanian Rus'): the figures of Euphrosyne (or Efrosinia) of *Polotsk*, Josaphat Kuntsevych, and Athanasius of Brest (Filipovich). We could hardly say they were common to both Ruthenians and Lithuanians, yet this is precisely how Doronin understood Saganovič's research when he wrote a summary of it (p. 627). Belarusian historians could find better shared places of memory common to both Lithuanians and Ruthenians if they took more interest in Lithuanian historiography. Yet again, this illustrates the ingrained habit of Belarusian specialists in the history of the GDL: a total ignorance of the Lithuanian literature, purely due

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to a lack of language skills (it suffices to glance through the footnotes to the Belarusian historians' texts). This leads to a failure to account for certain aspects, for example, Lithuanian Church history researchers note the tradition of the veneration of paintings of Our Lady, evident in *Częstochowa* in Poland, Trakai in Lithuania, and Zhyrovichy in Lithuanian Rus'. Images of the sacred paintings in these locations would be copied and disseminated throughout the entire GDL.[5] On the other hand, the places of memory Saganovič mentions feature the attributes of class-based society, such as Magdeburg Law and the Statutes of Lithuania, which are more like civilisational phenomena. In fact, the paths of development of civilisation and the nation could have been intertwined. We may agree that the common values of the ancestors of the Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belarusians did form at a particular time based on class-based social structures, city self-government, criminal law, and the like, and from these values a new nation could indeed have emerged. In all probability, this would have been the new Polish nation, whose establishment scenario can be envisaged in the Constitution of 3 May 1791. But none of the authors of the texts in this book saw the need to discuss the issue of the emergence of such a nation.

The third chapter in Part II, entitled 'Litvins: An Unrealised Nation?', demands separate attention, because it was written largely by Lithuanian historians (Dubonis and Gudmantas). At around this point, the book's narrative breaks off, and is hardly related to the earlier chapters, either in terms of the object of research and narrative lines, or in terms of conflicting opinions. Already in the first subchapter, the narrative returns to the origins of the early Lithuanian state: reference is made to firmly established Baltic (Lithuanian and East Slavic) Ruthenian (Dubonis refers to them as Russian) 13th-century spaces of settlement, which more or less remained stable, but by the 16th century indicated boundaries of areas of settlement no longer inhabited by Lithuanians and Ruthenians, but rather by Catholic and Orthodox believers respectively. The discussion of the issue of the Lithuanian language is raised to a national level: it is perceptibly juxtaposed with the Ruthenian and Polish languages; we see the most important religious and academic texts, e.g. a Polish-Latin-Lithuanian dictionary, a Lithuanian language grammar, a Lithuanian history, etc, all being printed (unfortunately, the integration of Samogitians into this process is not visible). Finally, there is a discussion of the Lithuanian political nation, the development of the noble nation,

[5] *Krikščionybės Lietuvoje istorija*, ed. V. Ališauskas (Vilnius, 2006), pp. 282, 283.

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which began with Lithuanians dominating this estate in the late 14th century, and ending with the dominance of families of Ruthenian origin by the second half of the 16th century. Incidentally, these families did not lay any ideological foundations for the emergence of the modern Belarusian nation (p. 403); quite the reverse, they brought back to life the old legend about the Roman origins of the Lithuanians, which competed rather successfully against the Sarmatian ideology coming from Poland (pp. 410, 417). In this respect, the Belarusian historian Voronin in effect agrees with the Lithuanian historians. Voronin admits that the rudiments of a Belarusian identity found it difficult to take root in the GDL: the Ruthenian aristocracy converted to Catholicism, and adopted the Polish language (p. 429); the basics of the Belarusian language were not distinguished from the Ruthenian (or East Slavic) language (subdialects); the Barkulabov Chronicle (Barkulabovskaia letopis') which emerged at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries seems to imply the nascency of a separate, Belarusian, perception of history; however, the chronicle did not create a continuous tradition, nor did it offer a unique theory of the origins of Lithuania's Ruthenians or the future Belarusians (pp. 440–444). In the final conclusion, the idea of 'Litvins' as a nation is rejected. It is a shame, however, that the authors did not touch on the problem of the polonisation of the populace; an analysis of this issue, to my mind, would have offered at least some answers to the question of the source of 'Litvinism'.

Part III of the book, Muscovian Rus', written by Russian historians, has a notably less complicated structure than Part II. The first chapter delineates the period when Muscovy's isolationist policy was finally overcome during the reign of Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645–1676). During the Deluge, the Muscovites plundered Lithuania's libraries, and thereby gained the opportunity to become better acquainted with Western literature (pp. 458–459). Polish chronicles, e.g. by Marcin Bielski, started being translated into the Muscovite language, where mention is made of the possible origins of the Muscovites in one of Noah's descendants, Mosoch (p. 460). This figure is the main character in the second chapter. He emerged from Maciej Stryjkowski's chronicle, which had gained immense popularity in the second half of the 17th century, with Muscovian translations being published in several editions. However, in the self-awareness of enlightened Russians, the Kievan Synopsis (1674) helped the most in the establishment of Mosoch as the forefather of the Muscovites, eventually becoming akin to a textbook of Russian history. According to Russian historians, the Synopsis offers a concept

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of history common to both Russia and Ukraine (pp. 503–504), where all Slavs or *slavnorossy* (*slavenorusy, slavnorussy*) are the descendants of Japheth's son Mosoch (meaning Moscow, Moskva). Interestingly, the Cossack chronicles, somewhat later than the Kievan Synopsis, do not mention Mosoch, while in Muscovian/Russian texts from the same period, his popularity increased. This earlier mythologeme was easily cast aside by a myth emerging from the local chronicle tradition in the 1630s about the great grandchildren of Noah's son Japheth, the Scythian princes Sloven and Rus. In his assessment of the situation, Doronin admits that the myth about Mosoch was probably a state rather than a national project (p. 518), but even from the perspective of a state, it could not have been very strong, as it did not contain anything that would have benefitted the ruling dynasty. As a result, the Romanovs did not support it, and basically allowed the myth to be publicly denounced during Mikhail Lomonosov's debates with Friedrich Müller (1749–1750). In the latter, the most important question was the origins of the Russian state. Müller formulated an approach that later became established among Germanophile historians: he derived Russia's statehood, as the sole legitimate successor of Rus', from a Germanic people, the Varangians, who had conquered the East Slavs. Lomonosov explained that ever since prehistoric times, the ancestors of the Russian people had lived in a territory ranging from the Elbe to Beloozero, and from the Danube to the Don (p. 531), while Russia's creators, the Varangians, were themselves of Ruthenian origin. Moreover, the Slavs themselves had their own princes prior to the Varangians (pp. 539, 540). In this very extensive discursus into Lomonosov's ideas, Doronin is obviously searching for mythologemes that could serve in the creation of a myth about the origins of the Russians/Muscovites. And even though Lomonosov can justifiably be called the forefather of Slavianophiles, Doronin is forced to admit that Lomonosov was not so much the nation's as the empire's ideologue (p. 544). This is confirmed in turn by Stefanovič (p. 609). Lomonosov's historical ideological construct can be illustrated by the following scheme: Slavs = Rus' = Russia = Autocracy = Orthodoxy.

The third and last chapter in Part III discusses several aspects of the Russian national identity as variations of the imperial ideology. It begins with a rather unexpected chronological throwback to the myth born in the early 16th century in Moscow that grew in popularity in the middle of the century about the so-called 'legend of Augustus' (why was it not discussed earlier?). It emerged as a response to the theory of the Roman origins of the Lithuanians. According to that, the Rurikids who

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were ruling in Rus' originated from the brother of the Roman emperor Octavian Augustus, Prus. Of course, the underlying idea behind this formula pertained to the Roman-imperial status of Moscow's rulers and their claims upon not just the Slavic but also the Baltic-Prussian lands (implying the Lithuanian lands as well) (pp. 556–560). However, when the Rurikids died out, the Augustan legend lost its popularity. The 'Sacred Rus'' project affected the Russian consciousness for a much longer time, which, despite its ecumenical origins, was strongly supported by the imperial authorities. At this point, the authors would have been wise to try to explain how the 'Sacred Rus'' idea could have affected believers in Ukraine, who belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople up to the end of the 17th century, and not in Moscow. A unique challenge to the 'Sacred Rus'' project turned out to be the reform of the Orthodox Church (1653), and the confrontation with the Old Believers. Imperial thinking also dictated the appearance of Great Russian, i.e. Russian, and Little Russian, i.e. Ukrainian, 'national names' in Moscow's written legacy, thereby seeking to remind people that Ukraine was the 'younger brother' unduly torn from the embrace of its 'big brother', Russia. This idea was ostensibly inferred in the Kievan Synopsis (1674) when mentioning the history of the 'Russian nation' (*rossiiskii narod*) (p. 595). Even though this is not elucidated word-for-word in the text, we are led to understand that it marks the movement of two nations towards one nation. According to Stefanovič, the Soviet Union inherited this understanding from the Russian Empire (pp. 593, 594). In turn, we can add that the myth about the three 'brotherly' Slavic nations is still actively promoted by the Russian government, and thus is still vibrant in the consciousness of contemporary Russians, and to an extent Belarusians as well.

The content of this book is grandiose to say the least: the quantity of issues discussed is enormous and complex; the narratives are intertwined and contradictory, and often fail to fit into one general scheme; and, what I consider to be its worst failure, when the assessments given from different positions do eventually collide, they do not progress into an intellectual conflict, but rather retreat from it. All of these aspects make for difficult reading and a poor understanding of the ideas outlined. Attentive readers will easily find weak arguments in such texts, along with dubious interpretations, points that have been left out, and even errors. I will admit that I attempted to put all these shortcomings into one list, though at a certain point I found myself getting stuck in trivialities rather than focusing on the fundamentals. I shall try to discuss some of the latter in more detail below.

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The first comment is easy to guess from my earlier critique regarding the introduction to this book. I think that when raising questions such as the formation of nations, when we are talking about not one, but three (essentially four), nations, and when we see their development not as a linear process, the topics of research and even the subtopics must be laid out according to one strict module of inquiry. Collective monographs written according to free-form principles are a guarantee of hell for their readers! The Ukrainian historians have managed, regardless of how complicated it seemed, to devote a whole chapter to establishing an understanding of 'their own' land. Meanwhile, their Belarusian colleagues 'hid' this question in a small subchapter, whereas the Russian historians did not write anything at all about the Muscovites' 'own' land. I can guess why this happened; but I shall not speculate here, but only note that, as a reader, I can see an inadequacy that I do not like, because it leaves certain questions unanswered. Another aspect is language. The Ukrainian historians are leaders in this regard: in the last subchapter in their part of the book, they discuss the distinction of the 'Cossack dialect' in the Ruthenian subdialect (*Rus'ka mova*). Meanwhile, it was left to the Lithuanians (Dubonis) to write about the languages of the GDL in the respective section (the third chapter in Part II) on behalf of the Belarusians. While he does assert the instrumental (Chancery language) function of Ruthenian (seemingly Doronin does not approve of this, as he repeats the mantra of Belarusian historians alleging that Ruthenian had the status of a state language in the GDL (p. 627)), he does not try to explain how Lithuania's Ruthenian language developed, or how it compares with the contemporary Belarusian language. Quite the opposite: more attention is devoted to Lithuanian language culture. Finally, the Russian historians saw no need to write anything about the Muscovite language.

The object of research here was the formation of East European nations in the 16th to the 18th century (p. 94). Thus, we are talking about both a particular time and space. How were the nations selected which the project participants perceived as being part of Eastern Europe? The project authors did try to trace the destiny of the East Slavic nations that carried on the legacy of Rus' (or Kievan Rus'). But what then is Lithuania doing in this company, a country whose separate source research or literature is not even discussed in the book's introduction (pp. 7–26)? Let us presume that without Lithuania it would be difficult to unpack the phenomenon of Lithuanian Rus'. But if that is the case, can we then reveal the identity of Ukrainians or Belarusians without explaining the

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influence of the Poles, or the identity of Muscovites without the influence of the Tatars? I think not! What grounds are there then for the project authors' choice of East European nations? I can only guess that this must have emerged subconsciously from outdated imperial dreams about the Russian (*sic*!) origins of the GDL.

The attribution of Lithuania to Eastern Europe will hardly impress contemporary Lithuanians, but I do not think this matter needs to be overly dramatised. The civilisational subtext of Eastern Europe is of much greater significance. The book's authors do not pay separate attention to the lines of collision of civilisations, although representatives of all three national historiographies write in unison about their countries' relations with Western culture in the Early Modern Period, i.e. they position themselves as representatives of eastern culture. Truth be said, these chapters of the book in which the Ukrainian and Belarusian historians list 'their' students, libraries, books, paintings and coats of arms procured from the West (pp. 110–162, 296–322) constitute the strangest parts of the book. Why are they necessary? To prove their openness to Western civilisation in the context of Muscovy's closed-off stance? Nitpicking for little facts about 'their own' people who brought back Renaissance ideas can (or perhaps must?) form an opinion about the Western ways that Ukrainian and Belarusian ancestors returned with as trophies? When thinking about cultural exchange, I always recall Samuel Huntington's comment about the fate of students from Islamic countries who received an education in the West at the end of the 20th century. Many of them turned into real radicals on their return. In other words, ideas that bridge the collision line of civilisations do not necessarily bring civilisations closer to one another. The example of Bohdan Khmelnytsky is the best illustration of this point. Thus, readers will not miss much by skipping this part of the text.

Huntington's book, whose relevance to both Early Modern Period and contemporary history is unquestionable, raises another serious question. In terms of the history of civilisations, Belarus, and especially Ukraine, are 'shattered' cultures.[6] In other words, having changed its configuration several times in history already, the East-West civilisational divide splits these countries in half. By ignoring this divide, we risk failing to understand what Eastern Europe is. Of course, by way of this comment, I am seeking to add significance to what the historiography of the Russian Empire, and later of the Soviet Union, has tried to push

[6] S. Huntington, op. cit., pp. 164–168.

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into oblivion. No, not the role of the GDL, but of Lithuania in Eastern Europe. Incidentally, in this sense, the historiographies of the Ukrainians and the Belarusians were good students of the imperial tradition, and, in my belief, they remain as much to a great extent even today, especially when representatives of the former constantly repeat that they received nothing from Lithuania, only what they took back themselves, while representatives of the latter seek to prove that the rightful successor of early Lithuania is present-day Belarus. Where in the Ruthenian lands did regional and estate privileges emerge from, the Statutes of Lithuania and Magdeburg Law (as we saw, Belarusian historians envisage historical *places of memory* in these phenomena), the phenomenon of townships, certain women's rights, the Renaissance, and, most importantly, private ownership? All of this precipitated already in the 15th century the basis for the emergence of a different type of Ruthenian, a different type of future Ukrainian or Belarusian identity. All of this is the outcome of the baptism of Lithuania, realised with Poland's assistance. Again, it was not the products of the GDL but elements of Western civilisation, whose transit through the Ruthenian lands was guaranteed by the union of Lithuania and Poland, strengthened not so much by political agreements as by the baptism of the Lithuanian nation. Another circumstance, the epoch of the Cossack uprisings (the first half and the middle of the 17th century), is the reaction of Eastern or Orthodox civilisation to the spread of Western civilisation. It correlates nicely with the emergence of the new myth of Cossack origins, which, according to Ukrainian historians, was meant to drive out the Sarmatian origin myth. It is a shame that historians never ended up explaining how and when this happened in the right-bank Ukrainian lands that then belonged to the Commonwealth. Does this not mean that in the second half of the 17th and the 18th century there were two mutually conflicting Ukrainian identities?

The civilisational foundation undoubtedly impacts on the ethnic identity; moreover, it pushes it towards the formation of a national identity. I am not certain that I am not distorting the ideas of the book's authors, but I think that national identity is somewhat more complicated than ethnic identity. Ethnic identities usually develop when the values of different nations are contrasted: 'us and them'. National identity, meanwhile, is oriented towards more universal values, which allow people from different ethnicities or cultures to live together in one country, i.e. in a kind of political encasing, although 'us and them' continues to remain relevant, only the 'us' becomes 'we', a more important phenomenon. We need not search for a finer example than

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the Lithuanians. As early as the 16th century, Lithuanian intellectuals wrote (sometimes even very angrily)[7] about how different their nation's customs and language were to the Slavs, but they by no means spoke badly of Catholicism, which had joined Lithuania with Slavic Poland. Can this then be deemed a sign of a nation? I think it can. Only what sort of a nation? In the book, Dubonis and Gudmantas assert that the Lithuanian nation formed in the 17th century (pp. 402–403). I cannot discern any qualitative difference between the Lithuanian nation of the 16th versus the 17th century. Moreover, when evaluating the 18th-century experience (which the Lithuanian historians do not discuss in the book), I can see clearly what type of nation the Lithuanians were progressing towards already from the 15th century, a new Polish nation, in which the Lithuanian language would become a dialect of Polish, while its customs would be resigned to an exotic regional status (the equivalent of today's Scotland in relation to England). I do not think that a different situation existed in the 18th century in right-bank Ukraine or Lithuanian Rus', which some Belarusian historians want to turn into Litwa. And this is my fundamental reproach to the authors of this book: when searching so intently for facts proving the development of their own nations, did they not turn their back on sources showing the formation of a new Polish nation in the lands of the GDL and Western Ukraine?

One of the leitmotifs of the plan for this book was the formation of the nation as a supra-regional structure. In order to solve a problem of this kind, the researchers would have had to search for an answer to the question of what a region is in 16th to 18th-century Eastern Europe? I doubt whether in the 16th century, much less later on, a regional self-awareness ever existed in Muscovy. It was Ivan III who pulled out this idea from the roots from Greater Novgorod, whose example was

[7] Albertas Goštautas about Duke Konstanty Ostrogiski: 'If Your Eminence were to look at both of our hearts, like God you would learn that the heart of my opponent the Ruthenian is insincere, insidious, malignant and unjust, due to its Ruthenian nature and custom of not having the slightest drop of loyalty to the ruler; the heart of one who is accustomed to always speaking one thing, while keeping something else hidden within.' *Senoji Lietuvos literatūra,* 5 kn.: *Šešioliktojo amžiaus raštija*, sud. A. Samulionis [ir kt.], (Vilnius, 2000), p. 52.

'We are learning the Muscovite script, which has nothing ancient in it and cannot arouse virtue as the Russian language is foreign to us Lithuanians, i.e. Italians, coming from Italian blood. The fact that this is so is evident from our semi-Latin language and our ancient Roman customs that have only recently ceased to exist, such as the burning of human corpses, from spells ...' Translated from: M. Lietuvis, *Apie totorių, lietuvių ir maskvėnų papročius* (Vilnius, 1966), p. 49 (Latin text p. 23).

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followed by his son Vasily III when he captured Smolensk, and then his grandson Ivan IV who seized Kazan. But regions did exist in the GDL and the Commonwealth. They grew out of old tribes and the tradition of ducal communities, which was reflected in the regional privileges that were granted. These privileges provided for separate rights and freedoms for the local populace (not just the nobility) that applied only to a given region. By the 17th and 18th centuries, such privileges had almost lost their meaning, except perhaps for Samogitia. That is why in the part of the book about GDL Rus', the authors had the chance to answer this question; alas, they did not. In truth, the Belarusian historians do try to talk about a certain kind of regionalism, which incidentally has nothing to do with the historic regions of the GDL (the 'map of regions of the GDL' given in an insert in the book is not worth paying attention to). The Ukrainian historians' understanding of regionalism is even more problematic. They mention the Kievan land, Volhynia, Podolia, Halych and Zaporozhye, they write about life in general in some of them, yet they avoid the question of differences between these places, as if the formation of the Ukrainian nation followed the same rhythm in all of them. This comes across as suspicious, to say the least.

Without doubt, the most successful parts of the book are those that analyse the variations in myths of the origins of nations. This is probably the only axis of coordinates on which we can place sections of the path of development undertaken by different nations, although their boundaries will certainly still be points of argument. There is no question that the Cossacks ultimately had a fundamental impact on the formation of the contemporary Ukrainian nation. Yet the chronology of the development of Cossack values in space is less clear. In the case of Muscovy, on the other hand, it is obvious that as far back as the 16th century, the imperial imprint completely overwhelmed the social one, while the values of the state outrivalled national ones. However, it is not completely clear how the Muscovite identity spread eastwards into non-Slavic communities. Meanwhile, the myth of Palemon and the legendary story of Lithuania's dukes (or more correctly, almost all the legendary and non-legendary characters in the so-called Bychowiec Chronicle) are not merely a dynastic myth, as Doronin claims in his final summary (p. 628). The myth and the legends have deep national roots, which are declared in the Lithuanian names of the Palemonids, the Gediminids and the Lithuanian magnates. The latter often correlated with Lithuanian (Aukštaitian, Highlander) and Samogitian (Lowlander) toponyms, and the names, surnames and nicknames of the populace.

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They function to this day. This is why both myths and legends continue to remain vibrant in the Lithuanian consciousness. Moreover, the Palemonid mythology inseparably intertwined the identities of Lithuania and Samogitia.[8] Again, it is a shame that the book's authors overlook this.

I gained the impression that most of the project's participants understand the formation of nations as a progressing process. I refuse to believe this. Historical processes are always conflicting, while nations go through both lighter and darker moments in their paths of development. The authors of this book oriented themselves to the lighter ones, as if history had an axis of coordinates only for marking positive phenomena. In any case, this is all well and good, but it does not mean that there will be any less darkness in history as a result.

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[8] E. Saviščevas, 'Palemonidai, Gediminaičiai ir žemaičiai: kelios pastabos apie lituanistiką Lietuvos Didžiosios kunigaikštystės ir Žemaitijos kronikoje', *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, vol. 48 (2021), pp. 8–32.

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