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## Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Case of the Castle: Context, Problems, Perspectives

One of the Lithuanian Soviet historiography ideologists during the Soviet period said: “*it is not allowed to be interested in castles because it is a united stream*”<sup>1</sup> (Bumblauskas and Šepetyš 1999; on the Soviet Lithuanian historiography see Švedas 2009). Nowadays, that is to say, in about the last twenty years, the Lithuanian historiography is going through a process of renewal and looking for new (theoretical, methodological, thematic) approaches that have been forgotten for about fifty years (or better, to be more precise, have had to be forgotten). From among these, we can mention such examples and topics like the social groups of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), especially the nobility (Kiaupienė 2003; Petrauskas 2003; Kirkienė 2008), the regions of GDL and their societies (Saviščevas 2010), the territory of GDL and the boundaries (frontiers) of the state (Bucevičiūtė 2010; Čelkis 2011), the structure of GDL (the core of the state and its peripheries; Norkus 2009), and many others.

Chronologically, this paper focuses on the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> until the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the following, we will try to discuss some general dimensions that are directly connected with the problem of castles, especially the term itself and the historical sources, secondly, the territorial context of the GDL and finally, we will propose some potential directions for future research and conceptual perspectives regarding the castle as a historical phenomenon.

### Some general remarks

In the historiography of GDL, castles have generally been regarded without the need for a clearer definition of the phenomenon. The historiography of GDL is dominated by a few notions of the castle. First, the castle is perceived as a closed fortification (defensive complex) encompassing a *suburbium* and a settlement (Zabiela 1995). From another point of view the castle could be interpreted as a specific area with certain social categories (for example in historical sources we encounter the so-called *castrensis, armigeri* etc. or separate services of rural groups; Gudavičius 1992). Considering this approach, we can grasp the wider character of the castle and its dependent territories. Understanding the castle as a spatial and social structure, we need to differentiate between the internal (*infra*) and external (*extra*) territories of the castle. The internal structure is defined as a space limited by the walls of the castle. Here are some examples of written references to the internal area of a castle: [...] *ecclesiam in castro nostro Vilnensi constructam et locatam* [...], another example: [...] *in domo Czupurne in castro Wilnensi* [...], [...] *Na zamku willenskim, w domu canoniczem Jana biskupa kiiowskiego, custossa i canonika wilenskiego* [...]. The external territory of the castle lies outside its walls and has no particular landmarks. Here are some examples from the historical sources referring to the external territory of a castle: [...] *intranses terram Lethowie castrum dictum Bisenam* [...] *reliqua pars exercitus intravit dicti castris territorium* [...], [...] *quod castrum Veluna ac predium et territorium ipsius castris fuit et est fundatum* [...] *subiecta inter villas prescriptas in primo articulo et quasi centro earundem villarum et territorii ipsarum* [...]. The external territory cannot be determined precisely based on information from historical sources.

<sup>1</sup> In Soviet times the term denoted those historians, or scholars in general, who were blamed of expressing the bourgeois point of view or discussing problems that were not seen as relevant etc.

It is also important that the castle in the historiography of GDL is starting to be associated with the changed social context: the formation of the ruling dynasty, the origin of feudal system relations and big land ownership. Thus, in the definition of the genesis of the castle the social aspect becomes the most significant one. These changed social circumstances are understood as a necessary condition for the castle itself, hence, the castle is perceived as an integral part of social reality. On the other hand, the castle is also an expression of these new socio-political changes.

One characteristic feature of historiography poses serious limitations to the investigation of these issues, namely the restriction of individual studies considering modern national boundaries (Zabiela 1995; Baranauskas 2004). Thus, historiography artificially splits up a specific historical phenomenon (with its space and historical time) and its development process. This presents a methodological problem when we are trying to identify consistently and systematically the characteristic evolution of the phenomenon. In this paper, we focus on these problems and their context: the language and terminology used to denominate the *castle* in the historical sources and the territorial context, which expresses the spatial and social heterogeneity and thus the diversity of castles within GDL.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century castle was not understood only as an architectural or archaeological object but also as an exclusive right (*regalia*) of the ruler (Schrader 2009; Coulin 1911). It means the building of castles by the nobility without permission of the sovereign was interpreted as illegal and these castles were called adulterine castles. This one example of the German historiography clearly shows that the castle as a research object should be interpreted more broadly.

## Term – concept – definition

When we are talking about the multilingual written sources of GDL, we are dealing with one major problem. We can call this problem the uncertainty of the semantic content of the phenomenon. It means we are facing a problem when trying to reconcile the different regions and linguistic traditions of the phenomenon and to confront the words that were used to identify an object.

One question should be raised with regard to the terminology of the historical sources: how do historical sources denominate the castle?

First, we have to focus our attention on a few Latin words from the period between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century: *arx*, *castellum*, *fortalitium*, *castrum*. The dictionary of medieval Latin does not give just one single meaning of these words but instead implies sporadic practices of using them. We can remember that all these words were used in the whole Latin Europe. Nevertheless, it must be done with one reservation, namely that words like *castrum*, *castellum*, *curtis*, *urbs*, *oppidum*, *civitas* were mostly used with greater precision in Western Europe and expressed the variety of the phenomenon.

We speak about a different situation when we are facing the Ruthenian (Cyrillic) written language and tradition of the former Kievan Rus' territory. In the Ruthenian written language tradition, there was a great variation of terms in the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries: *град*, *городъ*, *городокъ*, *hrad*, *horod*. Later, around 1500, this old Ruthenian word was replaced by a Polonism: *замокъ*, *замочокъ*, *zamek*. This process indicates a strong influence of the Polish language.

It is also very important to stress that the Ruthenian words *городъ* and *градъ* are not unambiguous, as they can mean both *town* and *castle*. Often historical sources do not reveal exactly whether the term is referring to a town or a castle. On the other hand, the town must be understood as a broader subject than the castle. In any case, the castle was the core of the town. Thereby, the relations between the words *городъ* and *градъ* presuppose the genetic connections and common development of town and castle.

When dealing with the historical sources written in *Mittelhochdeutsch* (Middle High German) dialect, we should emphasize the nouns *hwsze*, *hawsze*, *huze*, *huwsze*, *huse*, *hus*, *hous* and also *burc*, *burge*. It is clear that in essence the use of these words, as a specific term to identify a concrete object,

was consistent. Here are some examples with the particular names of castles from the 14th–15th-century sources: *huse Aliten*, *Maysegal czu dem huse*, *Wilkemerge das hus*, *huse czu Trackin*, *hüse czu Merken*, *czum huse Medenikin*.

Summarizing what has been said before, we have to stress that it is necessary to look more closely at the sources written in different languages. As a preliminary conclusion, we may say that *Mittelhochdeutsch huse* and *burc* accord with the Ruthenian *град*, *городок*, *городъ*. And the Polish *zatok*, *замокъ*, *замочокъ* accord with the two last mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

## The territorial context of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The states of Medieval Europe had one very similar feature – territorial heterogeneity, which was expressed by the social and cultural phenomena of the various territories (lands). These differences are obvious when we focus on structures, social groups/categories, political organization and trajectories of development of these lands (Bloch 1985). The same could be said about GDL, which began to form from the so-called *Lithuania propria* (core of the state) in the 13th century and during the second half of the 13th to the 14th centuries occupied large parts of the former early feudal Kievan Rus' (Rowell 1994). These new Ruthenian territories of GDL already possessed well-developed local spatial structures, the so-called *grad*, *hrad*. On the other hand, the western part of the state, Samogitia, was partially ruled by the local tribal aristocracy and the spatial and social structures were not as well developed there. These briefly marked circumstances are especially important to understand the difficult and ambiguous conditions of the status and role of the castle in GDL.

### *Lithuania propria*

This territory was the core in the GDL system of governance. This was the domain of the ruling dynasty with a well-developed network of castles and manors (Halecki 1916; Petrauskas 2005). This area was therefore the economic and political core of the whole state. This was the socio-political ground on which the grand duke's power was based. We thus have to interpret the castle considering the integrated connections of social and spatial structures.

We see a strong contrast when we compare *Lithuania propria* and another land (part) of GDL – Samogitia. The core territory stands out as the most densely settled region of the state with a densely developed network of various settlements. A well-developed structure of socio-topography is also characteristic of this region. This means that the nobility and big land ownership were highly developed and were established near the manors and castles of the grand duke.

It is obvious that in the *Lithuania propria* the entire complex of conditions for the development of castles and their spatial structure was formed (Kuncevičius 2005). Both the political and socio-economic organization of the state were at that stage of development when surplus products were used to expand public organization. From the social point of view, the core of the Lithuanian state was sufficiently far advanced on the road of feudalization, so the nobility and its big land ownership were formed very fast (we can call this process the feudalization of *allodium*).

Without a doubt, *Lithuania propria* with its castles was a central part of GDL. The taxes (tribute) paid by the distant Ruthenian lands for the *Lithuania propria* during the 16th century reflect that fact. We can conclude that it is impossible to understand the phenomenon of castle in GDL without keeping in mind all these socio-political circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to note though, that in this case we do not speak about the castle as an architectural object.

## Samogitia

Samogitia with its political position and social structure was a unique part of the GDL. Especially the Samogitian society reflects its uniqueness (Saviščevas 2000 and 2010). In particular, there is no doubt that until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Samogitia was a poorly differentiated social landscape.

The period from the 13<sup>th</sup> until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century is described as a never-ending war between the Teutonic Order and GDL in the territory of Samogitia. This period is perceived as a gradual and continuous Teutonic attack against Samogitian fortifications.<sup>1</sup> After all, we can mark the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century as the last period of decline of the Samogitian fortifications. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the period of war against GDL, the Teutonic Order tried to establish its own castles and territorial structures in Samogitia, because this was the only way to affirm its local power.

As noted, Samogitia was a poorly integrated part of the state. This is confirmed by the undeveloped network of castles and manors within its territory (Nikžentaitis 1986; Petrauskas 2005). In the south of Samogitia, there were some castles built by the ruling dynasty, but these castles were part of *Lithuania propria* and a direct consequence of the ruling dynasty's territorial expansion. So, attention must be paid to the distinction between a castle and a fortification.

Nevertheless, the castles as the most obvious signs of the changing situation leave no doubt that the grand duke has expanded his domain towards Samogitia. In this situation, we have to focus our attention on the border of the Teutonic territory, where all the defensive forces of the Lithuanian state were concentrated during the war period. However, it cannot be overlooked that at the same time fortifications existed in the territory of Samogitia that were tribal and belonged to the local tribal nobility (dukes). The existence of these fortifications in Samogitia is a very interesting indicator of the autonomy of this territory. But the very low level of local social stratification meant that there were no favourable conditions for further survival and development of these fortifications.

It is necessary to mention one fact about this region (territory). In the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the war between GDL and the Teutonic Order ended, we find the most exceptional situation, which represents the role of the castle in this region. We talk about the so-called Casimir's Jagellonian privilege given to Samogitia in the years 1441–1442 (Antanavičius and Saviščevas 2010), which reflects the status of Samogitia in GDL. The text of this privilege shows the different relations between the grand duke and the various parts of the state. It emphasizes the limitation of power and jurisdiction of the grand duke, especially as regards the bounds of state facilities (infrastructure). It implies a restraint on the development of the castles and manors network. Thereby this document allows us to understand partially the unique situation of Samogitia and the reasons for it. The reason for this was the limited power of the grand duke in the above-mentioned territory and the weakness of the big land ownership and its associated nobility.

## Ruthenian territories (lands)

When GDL began to expand its territories in the 15<sup>th</sup> century towards the east and south (the territories of the former Kievan Rus'), as already mentioned, it encountered the already existing territorial-administrative structures. Castles and fortifications, such as in the Ruthenian lands of Polotsk, Vitebsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Volhynia, Podolia, were already there. All these structures reflected the existing top level of individual power. There were no structures of central power, but there were castles of separate duchies and other formations. This serves to indicate the territorial heterogeneity of the Ruthenian lands and the existence of local societies.

When we focus on the particularity of the Ruthenian territories, we should emphasize the different nature of all of them. First of all, this fact is attested to by the loyalty oaths (*homagialis*) which were

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to stress a significant qualitative difference between the castle as a power structure, which is an exclusive sign of feudalism and a fortification typical for the barbarian (tribal) society.

given by the dukes of Ruthenian lands (Kiaupienė and Petrauskas 2009) to the grand duke of GDL at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the most remarkable passages in these documents must be mentioned here. In the year 1388, Dukes Dimitr Karibut and Vladimir took an oath with castles as the main objects of the ruled lands: [...] *holdowali [...] wernostju [...] s ljudmi i s zemljami i s horody i s twerżami naszimi [...]*. In 1389, other Ruthenian dukes swore, but this time in a Latin document: [...] *velut verus omagialis perpetuo cum omnibus terris, castris, fortaliis, ac hominibus nobis subiectis [...]*. These documents partially reflect the juridical situation of the territories of GDL. It has to be stressed that there are no similar documents for *Lithuania propria* and Samogitia due to their different role within GDL. This means that the castle as a phenomenon did not play the same role in these varying contexts. To be more precise – the different statuses of individual lands/territories of GDL preconditioned the different trajectories of castle development. Despite that, Grand Duke Vytautas (1392–1430) began to pursue a centralization policy of the state. This policy reflected the attempt to eliminate the autonomy of the Ruthenian lands. Of course, it had an influence on the local dukes and their castles as power centers.

Obviously, the status of the individual Ruthenian lands within GDL was not the same. For example, the connection between GDL and the dukes of Czernigow-Nowgorod (one of the Ruthenian lands of GDL) was based only on a treaty about a common defence. This case is eloquent, because it shows how complicated it is to identify the subordination of castles in the various lands of the state. We can assume how difficult it was to consolidate the power of the state and coordinate all castles under such circumstances.

## Perspectives

We can approach the study of castles in GDL from various perspectives and at different levels/layers. First of all, we can approach it from the territorial point of view (excellent examples of such research are to be found in the Polish historiography, see Olejnik 1993; Kołodziejcki 1994; Kajzer and Horonziak 1995):

- a particular castle and its inner area,
- the castle with its constituted external territory and structure,
- regional castle structures (defensive systems, complexes of private castles etc.),
- specific features of castles in the various provinces of the state,
- the distribution of castles in the entire territory of the state.

There are some other potential perspectives. Castles may be understood and investigated from various points of view, for example in connection with other phenomena, such as:

- A. In relationship to local society and its territory:
  - nobility, castle (and its genesis) and the great land ownership,
  - castle and the local society – the diversity of social groups/categories and connections between them,
  - castle and its connections with other medieval territorial structures, such as the town and the church.
- B. In relationship with the constituted/created space (a structuralist point of view; Ebner 1976):
  - juridical aspect (castle as a separate jurisdiction, court, space of nonviolence, connections with other structures: town, church, vicinity),
  - social aspect (the ties of dependence of peasants and other social groups, labour for the castle),
  - economic aspect (the nomenclature of works, payments and natural dues),
  - political aspect (castle as a power structure under the particular territory, castle policy as a policy of the Middle Ages).
- C. From the integral/holistic point of view, the castle can be studied as a phenomenon, which unites many functions of social reality.

D. From the comparativist (synchronic – diachronic) point of view castles inside one state and its various regions could be studied (for example, the castles in the Polish Kingdom and its regions of Masovia, Little Poland, Great Poland, Silesia). On the other hand, the comparative analysis could be applied to regional or European perspectives: the castle genesis in West Europe and in the Middle East Europe, the formation of castles of the nobility in France and Poland).

## Conclusions

1. The Lithuanian historiography is beginning to focus on many historical problems that were not researched during the Soviet era. One of these problems is the castle that must be perceived as an integral part of social reality.

2. The multilinguality of historical sources and the territorial heterogeneity of GDL express the diversity of the castle phenomenon.

3. This diversity promotes a focus on very different problems of the castle, which are directly connected to the territorial heterogeneity of GDL. The three greatest regions of the state, *Lithuania propria*, Samogitia and the Ruthenian lands, presuppose a different development of the castle phenomenon in each of them.

4. The castle as an integral part of social reality can be understood from several points of view: political, territorial (spatial), economic, juridical, social. The comparative analysis of individual castle regions and of the castle's connection to other social phenomena (nobility, social groups/categories, town, church) should be attempted.

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## Großfürstentum Litauen und der Fall Burg: Kontext, Probleme, Perspektiven

*Im vorliegenden Beitrag wird das Phänomen Burg im Großfürstentum Litauen (GFL) behandelt und die Frage der Burg als eines Teils von integralen sozialen Realität aufgeworfen. Das Problem der Burg ist sehr eng mit verschiedenen Territorien (Lithuania propria, Samogitia, Ruthenische Länder) des GFL und mit der sprachlichen Heterogenität der Geschichtsquellen verbunden. Die strukturellen und sozialen Unterschiede zwischen den verschiedenen Ländern des GFL zeigen die Entwicklungs- und Statusunterschiede der Burgen. Im Artikel werden die Forschungsmöglichkeiten und -perspektiven der Burg als Phänomen vorgestellt. Es werden verschiedene Ebenen der Burgproblematik ausgelegt und interpretiert: Burg als Objekt, Burg und das Territorium, Burgen und ihre Regionen, Burg und ihr Verhältnis zum Staat und anderen Strukturen (Stadt, Kirche). Die Burg kann auch in Hinblick auf ihre verschiedenen Funktionen interpretiert werden: die wirtschaftliche, politische, juristische oder soziale.*