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CHANGING ALLEGIANCES IN THE AGE OF STATE-BUILDING:
THE BORDER BETWEEN THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA
AND THE GRAND PRINCIPALITY OF MOSCOW

The shaping of the border between the biggest East European powers in the late Middle Ages, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Principality of Moscow, has usually been studied against the background of military conflicts and diplomatic relations between the two neighbouring countries. Scholars have exerted great efforts in order to locate the settlements mentioned in the Lithuanian-Muscovite peace treaties and to put them on a map.¹ But paying these diplomatic or geographical histories of the Russian-Lithuanian border their due, I would like to draw attention to some other important aspects of the problem which so far have been neglected by scholars.

First of all, it seems promising to regard the formation of the border between Lithuania and Muscovy as a part of the state-building process in Eastern Europe. Besides, it is essential to assess the impact of the borderland population's changing loyalties on shifts in the border itself in the course of time. In this article I will adopt a kind of double perspective, situating the events under review both in a macro-historical context of state formation and in a local context.

*STATE-BUILDING AND THE EMERGENCE OF STATE BORDERS
IN EASTERN EUROPE*

The rivalry between the Lithuanian dukes and the Muscovite princes for dominance over Russian lands began in the second half of the 14th century, but at that time it did not involve any territorial claims or border issues. In 1368, 1370, and 1372 Algirdas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania (1345–1377), marched against Grand Prince Dmitry of Moscow (1359–1389). In these campaigns Algirdas sided with Prince Mikhail of Tver', his ally and father-in-law, who was competing with Dmitry for the grand-princely throne of Vladimir. Although Algirdas twice besieged the Muscovite Kremlin, he failed to derive any political gains from those raids.²

Hostilities were resumed in 1406 under Vytautas the Great, Duke of Lithuania (1392–1430), and Basil I, Grand Prince of Moscow (1389–1425) on account of Vytautas' conquest of Smolensk (1404) and pressure on Pskov (1406), and this situation lasted for three years.³ By the time of Vytautas' death (1430) his sphere of influence in the Russian lands had reached its peak: not

only had he conquered the towns of Smolensk and Viaz'ma but he had also forced Pskov and Great Novgorod to pay him indemnities, while the princes of the Upper Oka, Pronsk and Riazan' acknowledged him as their suzerain.⁴

But at the same time the territory controlled by the grand prince of Moscow expanded as well and his influence on the other Russian princes increased. By the mid-fifteenth century the two grand duchies, Lithuania and Muscovy, had become the strongest powers in Eastern Europe. The balance of forces was reflected in a peace treaty concluded on August 31, 1449 between Casimir, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Basil II (Vasilii Vasil'evich), Grand Prince of Moscow. This is the first treaty between the two countries which has been preserved although in a later copy included in the *Lithuanian Metrica*.

The document proclaims "brotherhood and love, and eternal agreement" between the monarchs. It should be noted, however, that the text contains no description of the border: instead it lists a number of possessions belonging to Casimir and Basil II, with obligations to respect the rights of the other side to this or that town. Thus Basil II promised not to intrude into Smolensk, Liubutsk, Mtsensk or the outlying districts (*ukrainnyie mesta*) surrounding these towns,⁵ while Casimir was to refrain from intruding into the town of Rzheva on the River Volga and the district around it.⁶

The treaty also confirmed protectorates for Casimir and Basil II over certain Russian principalities and cities. Thus the Grand Principality of Tver', formerly Moscow's principal rival, was referred to as being under Casimir's control or protection or literally, "on his side" while Grand Prince Ivan Fedorovich of Riasan' was referred to as Basil II's vassal or literally, "junior brother" and friend. Casimir promised not to offend Ivan of Riasan', although the latter was free to change his allegiance and to enter the grand duke of Lithuania's service.⁷ Basil II also secured his suzerainty over certain borderland princes, such as Prince Vasilii Ivanovich of Tarusa and his kin. The city republics of Great Novgorod and Pskov were treated as Basil II's protectorates, and Casimir pledged to refrain from intruding into them or doing any harm to them. Moreover, even if the Novgorodians and Pskovites were to decide pledge allegiance to him, the king would have to refuse to accept them.⁸

The Muscovite-Lithuanian treaty of 1449 exemplifies a medieval type of agreement between two realms: instead of changing a previous border or establishing a new one, it delineated spheres of influence.⁹ The "high contracting parties", i.e. Grand Prince Basil II and King Casimir, did not represent nation-states, but rather each of them was an overlord at the head of a complex network of autonomous and semiautonomous principalities, city communes and possessions of various kinds. Such a loose political organization was cemented by personal and collective oaths of allegiance to the sovereign. Since neither the Grand Duchy of Lithuania nor the Grand

Principality of Moscow constituted a homogeneous territorial unit, it is no wonder that for many decades they were separated not by a clearly demarcated borderline but by a broad buffer zone whose inhabitants could choose which sovereign to serve.¹⁰

The situation began to change in the reign of Ivan III, Grand Prince of Moscow (1462–1505). In 1478 he annexed Great Novgorod with its vast territories in the Northern Russia. Soon after that Ivan III assumed the title of the “sovereign of all Rus’ (*gosudar’ vsea Rusi*).¹¹ In domestic affairs, the new title reflected the growing power of the Muscovite ruler, who now claimed absolute and unquestioned authority in his realm. The idea of sovereignty marked the transition from a principality to an emerging nation-state.

In foreign relations, the new title of Ivan III implied his claims to all Russian lands, including those which had formerly been incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1485, Ivan III conquered the Grand Principality of Tver’. The new acquisitions brought Muscovy into closer contact with the Lithuanian realm, and the buffer zone started to shrink. In the late 1480s, the border disputes between vassals of Ivan III and Casimir grew into a Muscovite-Lithuanian war (on the role of local princes in the origins and outcomes of this military conflict, see the following section). Ivan III won this undeclared war, as in winter 1493 his troops occupied the town of Viaz’ma, the centre of the principality of the same name, and some principalities in the upper Oka region also passed under his control.

It is significant that the peace treaty of 1494, which put an end to the war, provided a much more detailed description of the border than had the previous treaty of 1449. Listing the recent acquisitions of Ivan III, including Great Novgorod and Tver’, the agreement specifies that the borders of these formerly independent territories with Lithuania should be preserved as before (*a rubezh...po staromu rubezhu*).¹² Special attention to territorial issues can also be discerned in the detailed lists of possessions held by each of the sides after the war, in which the area of the recent military conflict – the principality of Viaz’ma and the upper Oka region – was demarcated especially meticulously. Thus the treaty secured Ivan III’s title to the newly conquered towns of Viaz’ma, Kozel’sk, Liudimsk, Serensk, etc. and confirmed his patrimonial rights to Aleksin, Tarusa, Venev and Obolensk, which had already been parts of the grand princely domain.¹³ The main participants in the disputes over the upper Oka district, the local princes of Odoev, Vorotynsk, Peremyshl’ and Belev, were explicitly referred to in the treaty of 1494 as belonging to the Grand Principality of Moscow.¹⁴

On the other hand, the text of the agreement contained a list of possessions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the disputed area, including Smolensk, Liubutsk, Mtsensk, Briansk, Serpeisk, Mosal’sk, Dmitrov and other towns and rural districts.¹⁵ The buffer zone between the neighbouring

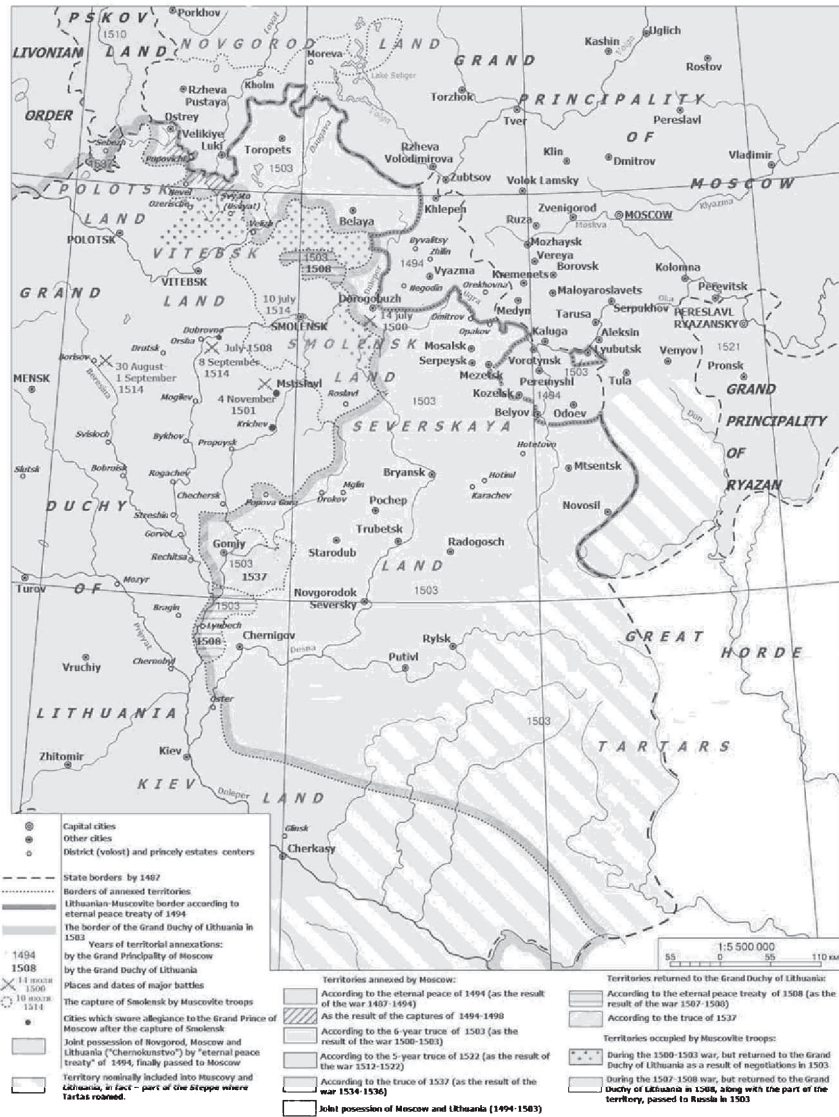
realms remained, but in 1494 it contracted to the tiny principality of Mezetsk, the possessors of which could declare allegiance to either the Lithuanian or the Muscovite sovereign.¹⁶ On the whole, the treaty of 1494 is the first document which provides sufficient information for a reconstruction and mapping of the Muscovite-Lithuanian border (see the map).

The text of the next agreement between the Grand Principality of Moscow and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, namely the truce of 1503, is even more lengthy. Not only did it fix the new acquisitions of Ivan III made during the war of 1500–1503 but it also listed *all the possessions* of both sides in the borderlands, including dozens of cities, towns, rural districts (*volosti*), and even villages.¹⁷ Since then all subsequent Muscovite-Lithuanian treaties followed the same pattern and contained a full description of the border. The peace treaty of 1508, for instance, which put an end to the short military conflict of 1507–1508, mentioned all the possessions of the Grand Duchies of Lithuania and Muscovy on both sides of the border, notwithstanding the fact that the gains and losses of the two parties in the war of 1507–1508, and therefore the changes in the border, were insignificant.¹⁸

Thus we may conclude that the *state border* between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Principality of Moscow had come into being by the beginning of the sixteenth century. As a definite borderline replacing a vast buffer zone between the two rival duchies, it was a by-product of the state formation process, which entailed the integration of semiautonomous principalities and independent city republics into the territory of an emerging state. This process took place in both countries, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Muscovy alike, but in different ways and at different speeds.

The Muscovite way of state-building implied the extensive use of military force and coercion. The new-born Muscovite state did not tolerate any forms of autonomy or self-government, as the fate of Great Novgorod and Pskov clearly shows. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania developed towards a *Ständestaat*, and its rulers actively used privileges as a means of integration within the realm.¹⁹ In the initial phase until the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Muscovite strategy proved to be more effective in terms of expanding its territory westwards at the expense of the Grand Duchy, but starting from the second decade of the sixteenth century the Lithuanian policy began to bear fruit and the Muscovite advance was arrested.

This is, of course, a rough outline of the processes that took place on the two sides of the Muscovite-Lithuanian border. In order to fill out this scheme with facts, we need to consider the crucial phases of border formation in some detail. Special attention will be paid to the role of the borderland population like princes, townsmen and nobles. Were these people merely victims of the clashes between the rival powers or they could really affect the course and outcome of events?²⁰



Map 1. The Muscovite-Lithuanian border at the end of 15th and in the first third of 16th century

LOCAL PRINCIPALITIES AND THE LITHUANIAN-MUSCOVITE BORDER

The eastern borderlands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fifteenth century comprised a host of principalities varying in origin and legal status. In the north, between Toropets and Rzheva on the upper Volga – the latter belonged to the Muscovite domain – there was an appanage of the ruling dynasty with its centre in the town of Belaia, where the local princes were descended from the grandson of Algirdas, Prince Ivan Vladimirovich.²¹ The principality of Belaia bordered in the south on Viaz'ma, the patrimony of the Viazemskii princes, the Riurikids, who were a branch of the Smolensk princes, while further south, in the upper Oka basin, there were many tiny principalities whose owners descended from the Chernigov branch of the Riurikid dynasty. The most important of these, the principedom of Novosil', which was a mere name at the time under consideration here, had split into the principalities of Odoev, Vorotyensk and Belev by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Two related but rival princely clans, the Odoevskis and the Vorotyenskis, contested the title of Prince of Novosil', which carried with it the notion of seniority within the family. Meanwhile both clans maintained contract-based relations with the grand dukes of Lithuania, a tradition that goes back to the reign of Vytautas, although the earliest extant agreement to his effect dates from 1442 or 1447, having been concluded between Prince Fedor Lvovich Vorotyenskii – who styled himself as Prince Novosil'skii and Odoevskii – on the one hand, and Grand Duke Casimir on the other.²² The agreement defined the mutual obligations of the contracting parties: Prince Fedor promised loyalty and obedience to the grand duke, while the latter was to protect him and treat him honourably. In the event of Fedor's death his sons were to inherit his patrimony and to conclude the same agreement with the grand duke. The latter was also to play the role of an arbiter in internal disputes involving the princes of Novosil' but if he refused to observe the contract, they were free of any obligations.²³

These agreements were renewed several times up to the 1480s, the heads of the two rival houses of the princes of Novosil' (i.e. the Odoevskii and Vorotyenskii families) making separate contracts with Casimir, although the texts of agreements themselves were absolutely identical.²⁴ The neighbours of the princes of Novosil' in the upper Oka region, the princes of Mezetsk and Mosal'sk, did not enjoy the same privileged status. They had never concluded contracts with the grand dukes of Lithuania, and they were actually treated not as autonomous princes but rather as major landowners with hereditary rights over their lands (patrimones).²⁵

Finally, the south-eastern part of the Lithuanian borderlands in the mid-fifteenth century was formed by the vast possessions of recent Muscovite

refugees: Prince Ivan Andreevich Mozhaiskii, cousin of Basil II, and the latter's nephew Prince Ivan Dmitrievich Shemiachich. Both had fled to Lithuania in 1454 because they belonged to clans who had lost out in the recent Muscovite internal strife. As close relatives of the Grand Prince of Moscow and his rivals, they were generously remunerated by the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Casimir. Ivan Mozhaiskii was granted the towns of Starodub and Gomel with their adjacent areas, while Ivan Shemiachich received Novgorod-Severskii. Thus the vast Severskaia territory²⁶ was divided between two Muscovite refugees, although, like the appanage of the Belskii princes mentioned above, this territory was considered to be part of the grand-ducal domain and the princes remained only the holders of the lands granted to them by the grand dukes.

Thus the eastern Lithuanian borderlands in the mid-fifteenth century looked like a patchwork of appanages, semiautonomous principalities and patrimonies, which were loosely connected to the core of the Grand Duchy. It is no wonder that this heterogeneous conglomeration could not withstand pressure from the neighbouring realm, the Grand Principality of Moscow, which had been successfully consolidated under Ivan III (1462–1505).

As border conflicts had become more frequent, it appeared that the grand duke of Lithuania was unable to protect his vassals. Under these circumstances the local princes behaved differently: some of them went over to the stronger side, i.e. that of Ivan III, while others passively followed the course of events. Quite predictably, the princes of Novosil', who enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, were the most active. Prince Semen Yur'evich Odoevskii was the first to pledge allegiance to Ivan III, doing so before autumn 1473, when the chroniclers recorded Prince Semen's death in a skirmish with the townsmen of Liubech, who thus took revenge for the preceding Muscovite raid upon their town.²⁷ Three of the sons of Semen Odoevskii – the Princes Ivan, Vasilii and Petr – may have accompanied their father in deserting the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for Moscow, or else they may have followed his lead later, but in 1487 they were definitely referred to as being in the Muscovite camp, as the Lithuanian ambassador complained in October 1487 about their raid on the town of Mezetsk, the patrimony of the princes of the same name.²⁸ None of them was bound by an agreement with the grand duke of Lithuania, and so they felt free to choose another sovereign.

It is important to note that Semen Odoevskii's brother, Prince Ivan Yur'evich, and the latter's sons (Mikhail and Fedor) retained their allegiance to King Casimir. Thus there was a bitter split within the clan of the Odoevskii princes, cousins who were vassals of different sovereigns and were engaged in fighting each other. Finally these family conflicts grew into an undeclared war between the two neighbouring realms.

Towards the end of the 1480s defections to Moscow had become a widespread phenomenon among the princes of the upper Oka region. The Princes Ivan Mikhailovich Vorotynskii and Ivan Vasil'evich Belevskii declared allegiance to Ivan III in 1487, and they were followed by Prince Dmitrii Fedorovich Vorotynskii in 1489.²⁹ The latter's change of allegiance meant that family feud had now split the clan of the Vorotynskii princes, because Dmitrii's brother, Prince Semen Fedorovich Vorotynskii, remained a faithful vassal of Casimir until the latter's death in 1492.

It was the grand prince of Moscow who reaped the greatest benefit from the rivalry between the border princes, for he successfully extended the territory of his realm in the 1480s and early 1490s with the help of his new vassals, without resorting to his own military forces. When Prince Dmitrii Vorotynskii went over to Ivan III's side in 1489, for instance, not only did he hold the town of Kozelsk, which had recently been given to him by King Casimir, but he also seized a part of his brother Semen's patrimony as well as towns and rural districts such as Serensk, Byshkovichi and Nedokhodov that belonged to other landowners.³⁰

It was only in August 1492, after the death of Grand Duke and King Casimir that Ivan III seized the opportunity to intervene in the border disputes and send his troops into the upper Oka region. Simultaneously, his vassals, Prince Ivan Vorotynskii and the sons of Semen Odoevskii, acting on Ivan's orders, conducted a raid on Mosal'sk, burned the town and captured the local princes.³¹ The Muscovite predominance in the border area was now so evident and impressive that new defections followed. The Princes Andrei and Vasilii Belevskii, Mikhail Mezetskii and Semen Vorotynskii swore fealty to Ivan III at the end of 1492.

It is significant that Prince Semen Vorotynskii, when changing allegiance from Lithuania to Moscow, sent a message to the new grand duke, Alexander, explaining the motives for his action. First of all, he reminded the Lithuanian ruler of the fealty he had shown to the late King Casimir in return for his protection, but the latter had neither protected Semen's patrimony nor had he compensated him for the lands he had lost. Moreover, when Alexander ascended the Lithuanian throne, Semen Vorotynskii had hoped that the new sovereign would grant him a town as compensation for his losses. He had wanted to renew his agreement with the grand duke, but none of these hopes had come true. In his disappointment, Prince Semen declared himself free of any obligations to the grand duke and went over to the side of Ivan III.³²

Prince Vorotynskii's declaration graphically demonstrates the decay of the vassalage system in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in that the grand dukes had stopped concluding agreements with their vassal princes after the 1480s, while Ivan III, in accepting the allegiance of the Odoevskii and Vorotynskii princes, did not sign any contract with them either, as he regar-

ded them not as vassals but simply as subjects. Thus the concept of vassalage gradually disappeared on both sides of the border.

The Lithuanian-Muscovite peace treaty of 1494, which crowned Ivan III's success, clearly reflected the role of the local princes, whose support had predetermined Moscow's victory. It is instructive that the border principalities of Odoev, Vorotynsk, Peremyshl', Belev and Viaz'ma, whose owners had – voluntarily or under compulsion – pledged allegiance to Ivan III, were finally confirmed as new Muscovite acquisitions in the treaty of 1494, while the towns where Ivan III had failed to find support – e.g. Mtsensk, Liubutsk and Mosal'sk – were restored to the grand duke of Lithuania.³³ The most dramatic fate befell the princely town of Mezetsk, which, as already mentioned above, was divided between princes loyal to Muscovite and Lithuanian sovereigns.³⁴ As a result, the district of Mezetsk remained the only border area which was not delimited in 1494 (see the map 1).

The “eternal peace” between Muscovy and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, concluded in 1494, lasted only six years, and a new war broke out in 1500. As before, Ivan III incited the border princes to defect from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and promised to act as their “protector”. What was new in this carefully rehearsed drama was the attempt to use a religious factor as a *casus belli*. At the end of 1499 Prince Semen Belskii, who ruled over the tiny principality of Belaia in the north-eastern sector of the Lithuanian frontier, went over to Ivan III. Explaining his defection in a message to the grand duke, Semen mentioned that he had fallen into disgrace with Alexander, having rebelled against the latter's alleged attempt to convert some Orthodox princes to Catholicism by force.³⁵ In April 1500 the Princes Semen Mozhaiskii and Vasilii Shemiachich, the mightiest lords in the land of Severskaia located in the south-east, on the edge of the Steppes, also swore allegiance to Ivan III, and the Muscovite chronicles refer to the same motive for their defection: the religious persecutions of Orthodox people.³⁶ Ivan III willingly accepted the princes and approved of their alleged motives for leaving the Lithuanian camp. In fact he made a formal protest against the persecution of Orthodox believers in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, declared war on Alexander and sent his troops to protect his new vassals.³⁷

Scholars have found that an attempt to enforce a union between the Orthodox and Catholic churches really did take place in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the end of the fifteenth century, but it was only a short-lived episode which did not affect the mass of the Orthodox population that constituted a majority in the Lithuanian realm even though it was ruled by a Catholic dynasty.³⁸ Thus there is no doubt that the attempt to implement such a church union in that neighbouring country was used by Ivan III as a pretext for violating the peace treaty of 1494. What really deserves our attention, however, is the clearly expressed intention, so typical of an

early modern state, to justify a military campaign by the necessity to defend the people's faith. Rhetoric of that sort was to become commonplace in Muscovite diplomacy during the sixteenth century, but on the local level, in the borderlands, such propaganda was of no use, as the population was much the same in ethnic, cultural and religious terms on both sides of the emerging boundary.

The truce of 1503 was the last triumph for Ivan III. Having defeated the Lithuanian army in a battle on the Vedrosha River on July 14, 1500, the Muscovite troops, assisted in some places by Ivan's new vassals, occupied a vast territory that included dozens of towns and rural districts. According to the armistice concluded on April 2, 1503, the Muscovite-Lithuanian border was moved further westwards, by a distance of 25 to 90 km in the north and 180 to 500 km in the south³⁹. In the subsequent decades, however, the Muscovites encountered growing resistance on the part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its inhabitants. As a result, the Muscovite-Lithuanian border had become stabilized by the 1520s. To understand why, we should examine the changes in both the structure and attitudes of the population on the eastern frontier of Lithuania in the first third of the sixteenth century.

THE NOBILITY, PRIVILEGED CITIES AND STABILIZATION OF THE MUSCOVITE-LITHUANIAN BORDER

The severe blows that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania suffered at the end of the fifteenth century from the ascending Muscovite power produced a paradoxical effect on the former's state-building. On the one hand, Lithuania lost vast territories on its distant eastern periphery, but on the other hand, being deprived of these lands that were loosely connected with its core, the Grand Duchy had become more consolidated during the reign of Sigismund I (1506–1548) than ever before. The formation of the two main privileged social groups (*stany*, *Stände*), i.e. the townspeople and the nobility (*szlachta*), contributed greatly to the unity of the state.⁴⁰

As for the principalities within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, only a few of them remained after 1503. Those which survived (e.g. those in Mstislavl', Pinsk, and Slutsk) could not compare with the upper Oka or "Northern" (*Severskie*) principalities either in size or in degree of autonomy. They were much closer to the centre of the Lithuanian state both geographically and politically, and supreme administrative and judicial control over these principalities rested with the grand duke.

Meanwhile, the majority of the early sixteenth-century princes in the Grand Duchy could not boast any sovereign rights, not to mention any "autonomy". It was actually only the princely title that distinguished them

from the rest of petty nobles. Many of them, like the Mosalskii or Kroshinskii princes, had lost their patrimonies in the eastern borderlands, which had been annexed by the grand prince of Moscow and had received areas of land in other parts of the Lithuanian realm in compensation.⁴¹

The same fate befell the boyars (the local nobility) of the Briansk district, which was conquered by the Muscovites in 1500, whereupon more than twenty boyar families left their native lands and were recompensed for their losses later by the grand duke of Lithuania.⁴² Thus various elite groups, including impoverished princes, local boyars and servitors of various ranks, gradually melted into a noble class known as the *szlachta*. This process was judicially formalized and accelerated by the promulgation of the First Lithuanian Statute in 1529. In the third part of the law code entitled "On the liberties of the *szlachta* and the growth of the Grand Duchy", the various ranks of the nobility – princes, lords (*pany horugovnye*), boyars and urban servitors (*meschane*) – were treated together as a unified privileged category of *szlachta* and the grand duke promised to preserve the rights and liberties of "the whole of the nobility" (*vsia shliakhta*) as granted by his predecessors and by himself. He also promised not to elevate commoners to higher positions than noblemen have (*ne shliakhtu nad shliakhtu ne maem povyshati*).⁴³

The formation of a unified privileged estate in the realm, one which brought together Catholic lords (*pany*), Orthodox princes and petty nobles from the eastern periphery (boyars), a group that some scholars have labelled "the political nation" of the Grand Duchy,⁴⁴ probably prevented this multiethnic and multi-confessional state from disintegration.

The loyalty of the Orthodox princes and nobility to the Grand Duchy was put to a severe test during the revolt stirred up by Prince Mikhail Glinskii in 1508. A favourite of the late Grand Duke Alexander who died in 1506, Glinskii fell into disgrace with the new sovereign, Sigismund I. In an attempt to restore his dominant position in the realm by force, he incited a rebellion and unleashed a civil war in the Grand Duchy. Being himself a Catholic, Glinskii tried to play on the religious feelings of the Orthodox population by spreading rumours that the Lithuanian government wanted to convert "Rus" to the "Polish", i.e. Catholic faith. But neither such tricks nor the military intervention of Grand Prince Basil III (Vasilii Ivanovich) of Moscow, who allied himself with Glinskii, was of any help to the latter. It is significant that many Orthodox princes, such as Konstantin Ostrozhskii and Fedor and Semen Chartoryiskii, took part in the campaign against Mikhail Glinskii and the Muscovite troops. As the failure of the whole enterprise became evident, Glinskii with his kin and a handful of followers left for Moscow.⁴⁵

Thus the rebels and their Muscovite allies failed to win sympathy with their Orthodox "brethren" among the princes and nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The same attitude was taken by the city communes

that found themselves in the border zone after 1503. Unlike the small princely towns of the upper Oka region or the Severskaia (Northern) lands mentioned above, whose fate had been decided by their owners, the large cities preferred to take their destiny into their own hands. As a rule, they enjoyed rights and privileges conferred on them by the grand dukes of Lithuania, beginning with Vytautas the Great. Thus Polotsk, Vitebsk, and Smolensk had grand-ducal regional charters, in effect codices of local common law.⁴⁶ Also, the Polotsk urban community received the Magdeburg Law as a privilege in 1498, which established a city government after the German pattern: a mayor, two burgomasters and twenty councillors – to whom the merchants, artisans and similar categories within the urban population were henceforth subordinate.⁴⁷ Minsk also received a Magdeburg charter in 1499.⁴⁸

These charters contained impressive lists of benefits, rights and privileges guaranteed to the inhabitants by the grand duke. The townspeople of Polotsk and Vitebsk even had a right to demand the replacement of a governor if he did not please them: “if they do not like their governor and denounce him before us,” the Vitebsk charter reads, “then we will give them another one according to their will”.⁴⁹ These urban communities were very active in upholding their rights and remonstrating with the grand duke over every case of the governor’s abuse of power.⁵⁰

It is no wonder that the larger cities, being firmly entrenched in the political system of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, were reluctant to surrender when Muscovite armies appeared near their walls. This became evident during the Muscovite-Lithuanian wars of the first decades of the sixteenth century, when Polotsk, for instance, withstood three severe sieges, in 1507, 1513 and 1518, while Vitebsk was besieged twice, in 1513 and 1516, not to mention devastations of its environs in 1518, 1520 and 1535. Nevertheless, both cities remained loyal to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Muscovite troops besieged the city of Smolensk four times between 1502 and 1514, but it was only in July 1514, after the fourth siege, when they were in a hopeless position, that the citizens surrendered their town to Basil III.⁵¹ It is instructive that, in response to demands from the inhabitants, the Muscovite sovereign issued a charter to Smolensk confirming all the privileges conferred on the city by the grand dukes of Lithuania, but annulled this document later after the discovery of a pro-Lithuanian conspiracy in Smolensk in autumn 1514.⁵²

The capture of Smolensk remained the only serious success of Basil III, in spite of further military efforts. By 1522, when an armistice was finally signed, the border between the two rival states had been stabilized, and a new war waged in 1534–1537 caused only minor corrections in the border.⁵³ From that time on the Muscovite-Lithuanian boundary remained unchanged for several decades.

CONCLUSIONS

For several reasons the history of how the Muscovite-Lithuanian border was shaped in the course of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries may be of some interest for scholars engaged in border studies. First of all, this gradually emerging border did not reflect any original ethnic differences or religious divisions among the local population. Moreover, even when the boundary was clearly established, as in 1503, it did not become a cultural or religious dividing line for the ordinary people of the borderlands unlike the elites in Moscow or Vilnius. It was only later, after it had become stabilized in the 1520s, that it served as a watershed between different political cultures, which in turn engendered further differences between the two neighbouring countries, quite noticeably at the end of the sixteenth century.

Thus the formation of the border in this area was primarily a political process and a part of state-building. The two ascending great powers of Eastern Europe, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Principality of Moscow, in their rivalry and expansion, put an end to a patchwork of independent and semiautonomous principalities, appanages, patrimonies and city communes which had formed a buffer zone between them for most of the fifteenth century and replaced it with two state territories divided by a carefully delimited border.⁵⁴ But, as I have attempted to show, the shape of this border at any given moment between 1449 and the 1530s was determined to a very significant degree by the attitudes of different layers of the borderland population: the princes, nobility and townspeople – who could really make a choice between the two rival sovereign powers.

REFERENCES

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- 2 A short account of these events in English can be found in Zigmantas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania*, Vilnius 2002, 69–70. For more details, see Edvardas Gudavičius, *Lietuvos istorija: nuo seniausių laikų iki 1569 metų*, vol. 1, Vilnius 1999; I will cite the Russian translation of Gudavičius's book: *Istoriia Litvy s drevneishikh vremen do 1569 goda*, vol. 1, Moscow 2005, here: 140–144.
- 3 Gudavičius, *Istoriia Litvy*, Loc. Cit. (Note 2), vol. I, 212–214.

- 4 For a brief survey of Moscow's growth between 1380 and 1462, see Robert Crummey, *The Formation of Muscovy 1304–1613*, New York – London 1987, chap. 3, 56–83.
- 5 Lietuvos Metrika (henceforth LM). Knyga Nr. 5 / Egidius Banionis (ed.), *Lithuanian Metrica, Book of Inscriptions no. 5 (1427–1506)*, Vilnius 1993, no. 78/1, 131.
- 6 Ibid., 131–132.
- 7 Ibid., 132; 133.
- 8 LM, bk. 5, 132; 133.
- 9 The transition from jurisdictional to territorial sovereignty, to use Peter Sahlins' terminology (see Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley etc. 1991, 93), was rather slow in early modern Western Europe as well. On the particular situation in France, see Bernard Guenée, *Des limites féodales aux frontières politiques*, in: Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire: La Nation*, vol. 2, Paris 1986, 11–33.
- 10 The state of confusion which was typical of border relations in this buffer zone is well illustrated by the fact that some rural districts (*volosti*) of Great Novgorod paid regular taxes to the grand dukes of Lithuania. This situation persisted until the conquest of Novgorod by Ivan III in 1478. For more details, see Valentin L. Yanin, *Novgorod i Litva: pogranichnye situatsii XIII–XV vekov*, Moscow 1998, 5–22.
- 11 According to Anna L. Khoroshkevich, this title was used for the first time in domestic affairs in 1479; see her *Russkoie gosudarstvo v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii kontsa XV – nachala XVI v.*, Moscow 1980, 85. Recently Alexander Filiushkin has questioned such accuracy in dating the adoption of the new title: in his view it was a long process which lasted from the 1470s to the 1490s: Alexander I. Filiushkin, *Tituly russkikh gosudarei*, Moscow – St. Petersburg 2006, 65.
- 12 LM, bk. 5, no. 78/2, 134.
- 13 Ibid., 135.
- 14 Ibid., 135.
- 15 Ibid., 134.
- 16 Ibid., 135.
- 17 The text of the truce of 1503 see in: *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva* (henceforth Sb. RIO), vol. 35, St. Petersburg 1882, 398–402, esp. 399–400.
- 18 The peace treaty of 1508 see in: *Akty, odnosiaschiesia k istorii Zapadnoi Rossii, sobrannye i izdannye Arkheograficheskoi komissiei* (henceforth AZR), vol. 2, St. Petersburg 1848, no. 43, 53–56.
- 19 On the social and political development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 15th and 16th centuries and the formation of classes (*stany, Stände*) see M. K. Liubavskii, *Litovsko-russkii seim*, Moscow 1901; Michail M. Krom, *Die Konstituierung der Szlachta als Stand und das Problem staatlicher Einheit im Grossfürstentum Litauen (15./16. Jahrhundert)*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 42 (1994) 4, 481–492; Jūratė Kiaupienė, *Lithuanian Society between Vytautas and the Union of Lublin*, in: Zigmantas Kiaupa, Jūratė Kiaupienė and Albinas Kuncevičius, *The History of Lithuania before 1795*, Vilnius, 2000, 161–204.
- 20 In the following sections I will draw on the findings presented in my book: M. M. Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi. Pogranichnye zemli v sisteme russko-litovskikh otnoshenii kontsa XV – pervoi treti XVI v.* 2d ed. Moscow 2010. Three chapters from the 1st edition of the book (1995) are also available in English translation, see M. M. Krom, *Between Rus' and Lithuania: The West Russian Lands in the System of Russo-Lithuanian Relations at the End of the Fifteenth and in the First Third of the Sixteenth Centuries*, in: *Russian Studies in History* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2002), 9–93.

- 21 The standard reference book on genealogy of princes in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is Józef Wolff's work: *Kniaziowie litewsko-ruscy od końca czternastego wieku*, Warsaw 1895, on Belskies see: *ibid.*, 3.
- 22 LM, bk. 5, no. 136, 247–248. The date of the document is contradictory: it refers simultaneously to the year of 1447 and to the 5th indiction which corresponds to 1442. The most recent publisher of the document, Egidius Banionis, has adopted the year of 1447, while the traditional date (more plausible, in my opinion) is 1442. For a critical analysis of alternative dates for the document, see Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 47–48, footnote 22.
- 23 LM, bk. 5, 247.
- 24 On 21.04.1459 Prince Ivan Yur'evich Novosil'skii and Odoevskii, also acting in the name of his cousin's sons, Princes Fedor and Vasilii Belevskii, made an agreement with Casimir, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland (LM, bk. 5, no. 137, 254–255). On 10.04.1483 a contract was concluded between Casimir and Princes Dmitrii and Semen Vorotynskii (sons of the above-mentioned Prince Fedor Vorotynskii) who was also acting in the name of their nephew Prince Ivan Mikhailovich, see AZR, vol. 1, St. Petersburg 1846, no. 80, 100–101.
- 25 On the status of the Mezetskii and Mosal'skii princes see Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 59–64.
- 26 Literally, the “Northern land”; the term goes back to the time of Kiev' hegemony in the Rus'ian lands and means “located to the north of Kiev”.
- 27 See an entry for 1473 in Russian chronicles: *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (henceforth PSRL), vol. 18, St. Petersburg 1913, 247; PSRL, vol. 25, Moscow 1949, 301.
- 28 Cf. Sb. RIO, vol. 35, 3–5.
- 29 Cf. Sb. RIO, vol. 35, 1 (footnote); 3; 4; 8.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 47–48; 51; 54.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 33 Cf. LM, bk. 5, 134–135.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 35 Sb. RIO, vol. 35, 295.
- 36 Cf. PSRL, vol. 8, St. Petersburg 1859, 239; PSRL, vol. 12, St. Petersburg 1901, 252; PSRL, vol. 28, Moscow – Leningrad 1963, 333.
- 37 Cf. LM, bk. 5, 148–149; PSRL, vol. 8, 239.
- 38 See, e.g.: Boris N. Floria, *Popytka osuschestvleniia tserkovnoi unii v Velikom kniazhestvie Litovskom v poslednei chetverti XV – nachale XVI veka*, in: *Slaviane i ikh sosedi*, no. 7, Moskau 1999, 40–81.
- 39 For a list of the Muscovite acquisitions of 1503, see: Sb. RIO, vol. 35, 399–400.
- 40 This is the main argument of my paper: Krom, *Die Konstituierung der Szlachta als Stand*, Loc. Cit. (Note 19).
- 41 On the changing conditions of Orthodox princes in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the beginning of the 16th century see: Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 124–136.

- 42 Cf. *ibid.*, 234; Append. II, 264–267.
- 43 Cf. *Pirmasis Lietuvos Statutas*, Stanislovas Lazutka (ed.), vol. II, part 1, Vilnius 1991, 108; 112; 114.
- 44 Cf. Jerzy Suchocki, *Formowanie się i skład narodu politycznego w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim późnego średniowiecza*, in: *Zapiski Historyczne*, vol. 48 (1983), 31–78.
- 45 For more details on Glinkii's revolt and its failure, see: Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 141–150.
- 46 The extant texts of these charters date back to the early 16th century, when they were confirmed by grand dukes Alexander and Sigismund I, respectively, see AZR, vol. 1, no. 204, 351–353 (Vitebsk, 1503); *ibid.*, no. 213, 359–363 (Smolensk, 1505); *ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 70, 86–90 (Polotsk, 1511).
- 47 For the text of the Magdeburg charter issued to Polotsk by Grand Duke Alexander on 7.10.1498, see: *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka* (henceforth RIB), vol. 27, St. Petersburg 1910, no. 176, 701–706.
- 48 For the text of the Magdeburg charter issued to Minsk by Grand Duke Alexander on 14.03.1499, see: RIB, vol. 27, no. 202, 739–746.
- 49 AZR, vol. 1, 352. Quotation from Carolyn Pouncy's translation of this article of the Vitebsk charter which appeared in: Krom, *Between Rus' and Lithuania*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 32.
- 50 For numerous cases in which cities tried to rid themselves of their governors, see Krom, *Between Rus' and Lithuania*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 37–41.
- 51 For a survey of the major events in the course of the Muscovite-Lithuanian wars of the first third of the 16th century, see: Krom, *Mezh Rus'iu i Litvoi*, Loc. Cit. (Note 20), 207–227.
- 52 This unique document dated 10.07.1514 has been preserved in the Russian archives; see its publication in *Sobranie gosudarstvennykh gramot i dogovorov*, vol. 1, Moscow 1813, no. 148, 411–413.
- 53 On the war of 1534–1537, see: Mikhail Krom, *Starodubaskaia voina (1534–1537). Iz istorii rusko-litovskikh otnoshenii*, Moscow 2008.
- 54 It should be noted that neither the Grand Duchy of Lithuania nor Muscovy possessed a “normal” border in the south, even in the mid-16th century. There was only a steppe frontier that was vulnerable to Tartar raids.