

# History: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and The Idea of a Greater Croatia. Pavao Ritter Vitezović

## Part III

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*The Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Vitezović's anthropological-political ideology*

*One of the most significant questions of our interest, which needs a satisfactory answer, is: Why P. R. Vitezović considered Lithuania as a Croato-Slavonic land, and therefore, Lithuania's inhabitants as the Croato-Slavs?*

The most possible and realistic answers to this question are:

1. Because of the historical development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which brought the ethnic Lithuanians into very closer cultural relations with the Slavs (the Eastern and the Western) that resulted in the graduate process of Slavization of Lithuania's cultural life and Lithuania's ruling class. This historical fact influenced Vitezović to conclude that all (or majority) inhabitants of Lithuania were of the Slavic, i.e. the Croat origin.
2. Because of pro-Slavic and pro-Polish historical sources and writings related to the affairs of the common Polish-Lithuanian state which were read and used by Vitezović. Consequently, a Croatian nobleman got the impression that the entire territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was settled by the Slavic population and that their common spoken and written language was Slavic.

In the next paragraphs the most remarkable historical facts in connection with this problem and offered hypothetical answers to the formulated question are going to be presented.

In several letters written by the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas (1316–1341) from 1322 to 1324, he named himself as *lethphanorum ruthenorumque rex* ("King of the Lithuanians and Ruthenians"[1]), although he did not have in reality a title of the king. However, it clearly shows that he was a ruler of the Slavic subjects. When the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the time of Gediminas extended its state borders towards the east and the south-east, i.e. when the territories populated by the Slavic people became incorporated into the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Lithuania, the country became multiethnic, multilingual and multiconfessional medieval state in which gradually the Slavs significantly outnumbered the ethnic Lithuanians: for instance, there were 70% of the Slavs and 30% of the Lithuanians in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kapleris, Meištās 2013: 123).[2] Furthermore, in the following centuries, as Lithuania was extending her borders far

to the east, south-east and south-west, making more profound contacts with her Slavic neighbors and even including them into her state borders, the Lithuanian language acquired significant and numerous Slavic borrowings.



#### The map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The conflict with the Polish Kingdom over Galicia, Volynia and Podolia in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries ended in the sharing of these three provinces, mainly populated by the Slavs, between Poland and Lithuania (Kojelavičius 1650/1669: 489-513). It is known that nearly 150 Slavisms entered Lithuanian language, either from the side of East Slavs or from the Poles, before the 17<sup>th</sup> century (for instance, words like *angelas*, *bažničia*, *gavėnia*, *kalėdos*, *krikštas*, *velykos*, etc). A number of the Slavic borrowings in the Lithuanian language appreciably increased during the time of J. Križanić and P. R. Vitezović – for both of whom the language was a crucial indicator of the national identity.

The Slavic population (for example, tradesmen from Rus' lands) was living in Lithuania's capital Vilnius from the time of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Algirdas (1345-1377), who declared in 1358 that all "lands of Rus'" should belong to Lithuania (Kiaupa et al. 2000: 110). J. Križanić, who was travelling across the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and was living in Vilnius for several months in a Dominican monastery, became familiar with ethnically and religiously heterogeneous situation within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with number of Slavic population in Lithuania and Vilnius and with often usage for the official purposes of the Slavic language within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which in general became a Lithuanian-Slavic state.

An influence of the Slavic tradition, culture, and especially vernacular, within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, have been particularly strong in the area of writings (literal-administrative language). In the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Old Slavonic language was used in Lithuania as one of the three written languages alongside with the Latin and the German. The so-called Old Church Slavonic language was used in Lithuania in relations with the Russian duchies, the Tatars in Crimea and in the internal life of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For instance, during the time of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great 1390-1430, a state-official Slavonic language (Old Church Slavic) was used for writing of the first annals of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes (*Chronicle of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes*, 1429-1430, with *Shorter Compilation of Lithuanian Chronicles* added around 1446). Furthermore, Christianisation of Lithuania from 1387 established strong prerequisites for the usage of the Polish language for the official purposes in the next centuries.

In a period of the Lithuanian history after the death of Vytautas the Great, in the official domestic civic life, in addition to the Lithuanian and the East Slavic language (spoken in the cities) were used as well as the German, Latin and Polish (spread out in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century). In the Renaissance time, there were many texts and books in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania printed in the Old East Slavonic or the Polish language (as well as in the Lithuanian). It is a fact that on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the first books were printed in two Slavonic languages: the Old East Slavonic and the Polish. The printing of the so-called *Brasta Bible* in the Polish language in 1563 shows clearly that a sphere of influence of the Polish (i.e. Slavic) language within the

Grand Duchy of Lithuania was significantly spreading on. At that time, the Lithuanian rulers, court, and nobility (magnates) already used overwhelmingly the Polish language in a public life within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is paradoxically, but true, that the Lithuanian aristocracy and ruling political elite, which tried to defend Lithuania's state (political) independence from the Kingdom of Poland, accepted both the Polish culture and the Polish language, which became an official language of their communication with a Polish-Lithuanian ruler and the Polish political elite. Shortly, Lithuanian magnates did not become defenders of the Lithuanian language, as they were defenders of the Lithuanian independent statehood. Subsequently, spoken Polish language became a very serious competitor to the Lithuanian language (vernacular) within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that finally led to the gradual, but inevitable, Polonization, i.e. Slavization, of Lithuania's cultural life.[3] Literary and linguistic developments within the Republic of Two Nations (Poland-Lithuania) helped to accelerate the Polonization of the ethnic Lithuanian, Russian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian aristocratic circles (Kamiński 1980; Kamiński 1983: 14-45; Maczak 1992: 194; Bideleux, Jeffries 1999: 129).

For Lithuania's ruling elite the notion of "nation" was not connected with the language (spoken or written) or ethnicity as it was in the case of J. Križanić and P. R. Vitezović for whom spoken and written language was a crucial national identifier. Contrary to these two Croatian intellectuals, for Lithuania's magnates, the "nation" (*natio*) was connected to the statehood and social strata belonging, but not to the language or ethnicity. Therefore, for example, during the conclusion of the Lublin Union with Poland in 1569 the ruling elites of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, composed by the ethnic Lithuanians and the ethnic Slavs, who spoke and wrote in the Polish language, called themselves Lithuanians what means actually *natio Lithuanica* (Lithuania's "political nation"), i.e. the aristocracy who lived within the state borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[4] In this respect, the most influential champion and ideologist of *natio Lithuanica* was Mykolas Lietuvis (Vaclavas Mikolajaitis/Michalo Lituanus), a Lithuanian aristocrat from Maišiagala, who developed his theory about "political nation" of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in his historic treatise *De Moribus Tartarorum, Lithuanorum et Moschorum* ("On the Customs of the Tatars, Lithuanians and Muscovites"), written in the Latin in 1550 (incomplete text of this treatise was printed in 1615). It is a matter of fact that after the Lublin Union of 1569 the Poles became the senior partners in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth till its final dismemberment in 1795 (Wandycz 1997: 72-78, 88-93, 102-107). The Lithuanian nobility, i.e. *natio Lithuanica*, became assimilated or Polonized to such extent that the term "Polish" represented joint Lithuanian and Polish interests. In fact, Polish and Lithuanian ethnically different groups of aristocracy identified themselves with one cultural tradition and as a united "political nation" (Davies 1981: 115-159; Johnson 1996, 52).

The ethnolinguistic structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the following centuries was changing in the favor of the ethnic Slavs. Thus, at the time of the Lublin Union in 1569, the ethnic Lithuanians constituted around one-third of total Lithuania's population (approximately 3.000.000 people were living at that time within the whole territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania). However, at the same time, 2/3 of the population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were ethnic Slavs who lived in the eastern and south-eastern provinces annexed by the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, i.e. the former duchies of Polotsk, Vitebsk, Volynia, Kiev and Smolensk (Kiaupa et al. 2000: 162). We have to keep in mind as well the fact that the Slavic territories, ruled by Lithuania's nobility till the Lublin Union of 1569, were approximately ten times bigger than Lithuania proper (Samalavičius 1995: 42).

After 1569, a linguistic polarization within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained. There were still two basic spoken languages – the Lithuanian and the Slavic – and two bureaucratic languages – the Old Slavic and the Latin (Bideleux, Jeffries 1999: 122). However, in present-day West Belarus and present-day West Ukraine after 1569, the educated, middle, and administrative classes and the landowning gentry became predominantly the Polish-speaking social strata. The spreading of the Polish language in both written and spoken forms in Lithuania was going through Lithuania's landowning and political aristocracy who have been in most frequent contacts with their Polish counterparts, through the Polish priests, monks and the Polish intellectuals.

Especially the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a century of J. Križanić and P. R. Vitezović, was a period of expansion of the Polish language in the public life in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, at the first year of realm of Friedrich August II Saxon (1697–1706/1709–1733) in 1697 the Polish language officially eliminated the Old East Slavonic language from public offices in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – *coaequatio iurium* (Šapoka 1936: 371–374; Kiaupa et al. 2000: 265). In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, both magnates and gentry of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania knew Polish and used it. There was formed, even, the so-called Lithuanian type of the Polish language. On the same territories of the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania through which J. Križanić traveled, the urban centers were as well Polonized (i.e. got Slavic feature). The lower classes and the rural population of serfs were East Slavs. Even Lithuania's capital Vilnius or Ukrainian L'viv, a political-cultural center of Galicia, became the "Polish", i.e. the Slavic, that the Polish-speakers regarded themselves as essentially Poles even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Johnson 1996, 52).

The Polish historiography during the last two centuries created an image that a federal state of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after 1569 was actually only the Polish one. Certainly, cultural-linguistic Polonization spread faster, but in the sphere of politics and social life the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was as well, gradually, but certainly becoming the "Polish" for the reason that people from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania did not oppose in high degree the appropriation of the Polish language and culture (Kiaupa et al. 2000, 362). According to Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, "since Lithuanian [language] is directly related to the Slavonic languages, and since an old form of Byelorussian (not Lithuanian) was the official language of the grand duchy [of Lithuania], the Lithuanian nobility probably felt some degree of cultural kinship with their Polish counterparts... Indeed, the Lithuanian nobility gradually became thoroughly 'polonized'" (Bideleux, Jeffries 1999: 122)... "with the ironic result that Polish [language] eventually became more widely used among the Lithuanian than among the Polish nobility in the future Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" (Davies 1982: 20–21).

Because of right belief that the Lithuanian language is closely related to Slavonic languages (the standpoint favored by our-days contemporary linguistics) and because of the Polonization (Slavization) of upper strata of the Lithuanian society, Pavao Ritter Vitezović at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century considered all (or at least overwhelming majority) inhabitants of Lithuania as the Slavs (i.e. the Croats) and Lithuania as the Slavic (i.e. Croatian) country.

As a result of the Polonization of the vast territories of East-Central Europe from 1569 to 1795 many Poles considered these lands as the Polish linguistic and cultural space. It became a common attitude of modern Western historians of non-Polish origin to describe the Republic of Two Nations as an exclusively the Polish one, due to the great scope of the

Polonization of the Lithuanian society and culture. For example, Alan Palmer has an opinion that the ethnic Lithuanians were readily assimilated by the Poles: the greatest of the Polish dynasties, the Jagiellonian one (1386–1572) was in fact of the Lithuanian origin, and Vilnius (Wilno) was a city, despite its Lithuanian foundation, a symbol of the Polish-Lithuanian cultural union (Palmer 1970: 4). Such impression had and Juraj Križanić who passed across the whole present-day Ukraine, a main part of present-day Belarus and who spent some time in Vilnius as well becoming a member of estate circle of the Dominican Order in Lithuania's capital. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the members of *natio Lithuanica* and the Lithuanian middle-class society faced the real danger of denationalization through the process of Polonization. Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that overwhelming majority of 7,5 million of total population of the Republic of Two Nations (*Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodow*), i.e. the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (established by the Lublin Union in 1569) were the ethnic Slavs; the fact which induced P. R. Vitezović to consider the whole Republic as exclusively the Slavic state and, according to his Croatocentric theory, to understand the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as in fact the Croatian ethnolinguistic territory.

A pro-Polish viewpoint of Stanislaw Orzechowski and especially of Martinu Kromer (Martin Cromer) about the Polish-Lithuanian relationships, Lithuania's incorporation into the Polish Kingdom after 1569, and the Polonization of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, became one of the most significant sources about the ethnolinguistic situation within the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for both J. Križanić and P. R. Vitezović. In his *Razgowori ob wladateljstwu* (1661–1667), J. Križanić frequently cited Martinu Kromer, the author of a history of Poland under the title *De origine et rebus gestis Poloniarum* (Basel, 1555), who saw Lithuania as an ordinary province of Poland. Particularly it has been Križanić who was acquainted with quite number of the Polish and other authors who wrote on "Slavic matters" and who considered the whole territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as an exclusively Slavic country.

As a consequence, J. Križanić became acquainted with the work *Bellum Prutenum* ("The Prussian War") written in 1515 by the poet Jan Vislicius who presented the Lithuanian history as a part of the Slavic one. J. Vislicius viewed the future development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania only within a united "Polish Sarmatian Empire". After the Lublin Union of 1569, the Polish doctrine of *Sarmatism*, which proclaimed Lithuania, Samogitia (Žemaitia) and the Russian duchies as integral parts of the Polish state, became popular on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a result of firm contacts of Lithuania's nobles (ethnic Lithuanians and ethnic Slavs) with Poland, the Polish culture and the Polish state ideology. It is quite sure that J. Križanić and P. R. Vitezović were familiar with the Polish doctrine of Sarmatism and especially J. Križanić with the influence of this doctrine among noble circles within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, the line of reasoning of the Sarmatian doctrine presented the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the Slavic one; a viewpoint that was accepted by P. R. Vitezović and even served him to name total population of the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Muscovite Russia as *Sarmaticos*, which belonged to his *Croatia Septemtrionalis*.

Finally, if we know that J. Križanić's writings about the "Slavic matters", based very much on his personal experience about the Polonization of Lithuania, were one of the most significant sources for P. R. Vitezović, it is not surprising that Pavao Ritter Vitezović interpolated the whole territory of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into the Slavic lands, and furthermore, according to his ideological doctrine into a Greater Croatia.



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## Notes

[1] A meaning of the ethnonym „Ruthenians“ is very disputed among the historians and ethnologists. Undoubtedly, it labels the East European Slavs in whole or in part.

[2] According to *Istorijos egzamino gidas*, in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1430, there were 24% Lithuanians, 72% East Slavs and 4% Tatars while in 1569, there were 30% Lithuanians, 63% East Slavs and 7% Poles (Kapleris, Meištas 2013: 123).

[3] For a more extensive treatment of the Polish-Lithuanian relationships, see in (Davies 1981).

[4] About differences between the feudal-time “political” and Romanticism-time “linguistic” conceptions of “nation”, see in (Hutchinson, Smith 1994; Johnson 1996: 45–62, 136–148; Bideleux, Jeffries 1999: 153–161; Guibernau, Rex 1999; Hobsbawm 2000).

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