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ON THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BELARUSIAN IDENTITY

The most significant moments in the creation of the modern Belarusian nation have with varying degrees of success already been examined in specialist publications (Vakar 1956, Radzik 2000, Radzik 2012, Tereškovič 2004), and they have not aroused great controversy. There is, however, less clarity as regards the pre-national stage of the formation of Belarusians. Soviet historiography presented the Belarusian nationality as a pre-modern ethnic community formed by successors to the East Slavonic tribes on the basis of what was claimed to be one single Old Rus' nationality over the period between the 14th and 16th centuries (Pičeta 1961: 656, 715; Grinblat 1968: 284-285). In independent Belarus the early stage of the country's ethnic history is still regarded in much the same way, although the final stage of the birth of the Belarusian nationality is at times now linked to a later period, the 16th-17th centuries (Kasciuk 2008: 567). Even if we leave to one side any consideration of the accuracy of these time frames and of the features of this ethnic community, the Soviet political ideology behind both the periodisation and the ethnic category 'nationality' casts doubt on their validity. At the core of this paper are several questions relating to the early modern preconditions for the formation of the Belarusians as a nation. First of all an attempt will be made to examine just when and how a separate collective identity began to take shape at the subjective level within the population living on the territory of what is now Belarus. When did the people who dwelt in the region begin to regard themselves as different from neighbouring related peoples? Finally, in accordance with the postulate of the cultural theory of the nation concerning the links between a modern national community and its ancient ethnic basis, we will raise the question of the historical and cultural basis for the formation of a Be-

larusian national identity. The complexity of this particular problem, connected as it is with the insufficiency of resource material and the inadequate state of research of what there is, makes it necessary for the observations to be of an essentially preliminary nature at present.

The importance of dividing the past of the Eastern Slavs into the histories of three separate peoples was first emphasised by Mychajlo Hruševs'kij in 1903. In his understanding, the Ukrainians already constituted a distinct ethno-cultural community that had created the Kyivan state in the epoch of Rus' (Hrushevsky 1984: 356-357). Hrushevsky also influenced the founders of Belarusian historiography; they linked the beginnings of a separate historical path for Belarus with the Princedom of Polack, a state which rivalled Kyiv (Lastoŭski 1910: 7-12; Ihnatoŭski 1919: 17-23). After independence Belarusian historians tended to view the Princedom of Polack as an independent state of the 12th-13th centuries, not subject to the authority of Kyiv (Štychaŭ 1993: 25-33, Zajac 1994: 24-28; Tarasaŭ 1998: 3). In recent years the idea of the independence of Polack has been expressed even more radically: in the latest literature on the subject we find Polack described as the equal of Kyiv; it had never formed part of Kyivan Rus' (Levko - Golubev 2018: 11-12; Levko 2018: 623-632). However, no attempts were made in academic historiography to identify a separate nationality within the Polack Princedom. The authors of certain specialist research work have indeed observed some distinct local features in the language and material culture of the inhabitants of the Polack principality, but as a rule they acknowledge the predominance of a consciousness and use of the name 'Rus' that was common to all the Eastern Slavs (Čakvin 2014: 30-32, 37-38). Certainly the idea that only one nationality existed in Kyivan Rus' can no longer withstand scholarly criticism, but on the other hand there are no additional grounds for ascribing certain distinct ethno-political features to the local population of appanage princedoms and territories of the time.

It is an indisputable fact that the historical paths of the various lands of the east Slavonic world, known collectively by the term Rus', were beginning to diverge irrevocably by the middle of the 13th century, following the Mongol invasion and the disintegration of Kyivan Rus' as a political and territorial unit. Over the next century the west-

ern and south-western regions of Rus' were incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, while the north-eastern regions, later gathered together by Moscow, were for a long time dominated by the Golden Horde. Historians agree that from the 15th century the frontiers of the new political formations led to a situation where the East Slavonic population in the Jagellonian state, or at least the elites, came to view themselves as distinct from the Muscovite Rus'. This was already confirmed by the chroniclers' use of separate terms for the now dismembered parts of Rus', and to an even greater extent by the position of the Rus' people in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, who in the wars with Moscow usually supported Lithuania. At the same time the East Slavonic population of what is now Ukraine and Belarus was conscious of a common cultural, historical and religious heritage. The people were united by both a common name that they used to refer to themselves, and a common culture; from the middle of the 15th century they were also united by a Church structure that was separate from that of Moscow – the Metropolitanate of Kyiv. Moreover, the Metropolitans of Kyiv initially resided in either Navahradak or Vilnia; it was only at the beginning of the 17th century that the most prominent hierarch of the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth came to reside permanently in Kyiv.

Although there were several distinctive features in the dialects and popular culture of the inhabitants of the areas that were to form Ukraine and Belarus (Isaievych 1992: 19), there was no difference in the language employed by educated circles and in the discourse of high culture. In both areas elements of a single cultural identity were predominant among the population – that of Rus', which is customarily referred to in modern scholarship as *Ruthenian*. As the Latin equivalent of Rus', *Ruthenia* enables us to make a distinction between that part of the East Slavonic world that was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, and the north-eastern parts which ultimately formed first the Muscovite state and then Russia: the former was for centuries open to the civilising influence of the Latin world and formed a Catholic/Orthodox transitional zone (Müller et al. 1992: 5-8; Werdt 2006: 18-21), whereas the latter clung jealously to Byzantine traditions and strove to isolate itself from the Latin 'heresy'.

Under the influence of the Reformation and especially as a result of the religious polemics that arose during the lead-up to and the establishment of the Church Union, the Ruthenian elites of the Commonwealth from the second half of the 16th century onwards began to make ever more frequent use of the terms "Ruthenian language", "Ruthenian people", "Ruthenian faith" and "fatherland". Precisely because these terms are closely linked with fundamental concepts of national awareness, we may view them as a reflection of a new level of awareness, and of the development of a proto-national discourse. The intellectual discourse that surrounded questions of faith needed a form of self-identification and a search for historical arguments; in short, it provided the stimulus for the formation of new collective identities within the East Slavonic population of the Polish-Lithuanian state. The Ukrainian historian Serhii Plokhii, author of a contemporary masterful study of the origins of the East Slavonic nations, holds the view that the "Ruthenian nation" came into being as a result of the aforementioned religious conflict within the Metropolitanate of Kyiv, and that this was the first early modern nation of the Eastern Slavs, brought together in defence of the faith of their forefathers, Orthodoxy. This community, in the opinion of the author, comprised several estates of the realm; moreover, loyalty to the "Ruthenian nation" was much stronger than any other type of identification in the society of Ukraine and Belarus at the time (Plokhy 2006: 199-202, 354-356). He considers that identifying with the "Ruthenian nation" was a trait common to both Ukraine and Belarus until the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, *ie* until the establishment of the Hetmanate on the Ukrainian lands led to the formation of a new "Little Russian" (Ukrainian) identity (Plokhy 2006: 358).

However, by no means everything about this view of the "Ruthenian nation" as an early modern nation is convincing. The concept of the early modern "nation" has been recently discussed in specialist literature devoted mainly to the case of Ukraine (Sysyn 1986; Sysyn 2001; Althoen 2003). It should be accepted that this term could cover not only the nobility but the upper stratum of the burgher class and the popular masses as well. However, we can hardly insist that "most frequently" it referred to cultural linguistic communities (Sysyn 2001: 286). From historical sources related to the Grand Duchy

of Lithuania it is possible to infer that this term was used more frequently at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries to refer to the nobility, or a community based on the faith held in common (the "Ruthenian faith"), rather than an ethnocultural community that included all sectors of society. On the other hand, sufficient evidence has been amassed to demonstrate that both in the Polish Crown and even more so in the Grand Duchy at that time the concept "Ruthenian nation" was not applied exclusively to either a single confessional (Orthodox) or a particular ethnic (East Slavonic) group. It is clear that at the beginning the vast majority of the East Slavonic population professed the "Greek faith", but from the middle of the 16th century the religious situation changed rapidly. The existence of "Rus' of the Greek rite" alongside "Rus' of the Roman rite" was perfectly natural for Meletij Smotryc'kyj (Frick 1995). Moreover, Orthodox citizens belonged both to the "Ruthenian people" and the "Lithuanian people" as territorial communities (Starczenko 2020: 200, 202-203). Chrystofor Filalet, in his polemical response to Piotr Skarga, writes of the "Ruthenian and Lithuanian people" as one single community of Orthodox subjects of the Commonwealth who were unjustly subjected to the authority of the Pope in Rome (*Apokrisis* 1882: 1133-1134, 1168, 1586, 1750).

The population of the time is unlikely to have identified itself clearly with the "Ruthenian nation" as an ethnocultural community, especially as one that was dominant and long-lasting. Local and regional forms of identification and their attachment to the land were the norm among the peasantry. This form of self-identification is regarded as typical for the early modern peasantry in several European countries; they identified themselves through the prism of their immediate environment, and their revolts were usually restricted to the borders of the territory closest to them (Hobsbawm 1998; Rauszer 2021: 267-268, 284). There has as yet been no research specifically dealing with the collective identity of peasants of that era based on materials relating to Belarus; nevertheless historians have written on the localised nature and specific targets of peasant actions in the 18th century (Aniščanka et al. 1997: 195, 197-198). Considerably more is known about peasants' identity in 19th-century Belarus; research has shown that at this time too their strongest feeling of attachment was

to their local community and the territory around it (Radzik 2000: 171; Tokc' 2007: 117-120).

Unlike the peasantry, the nobility and the merchant class in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a cultural frontier region were most frequently characterised by dual or multiple self-identification. In practice this meant that a nobleman or merchant would acknowledge that they were Ruthenians as members of a confessional or ethnocultural community, and simultaneously that they were also Lithuanians or Poles as political subjects. These various forms of self-identification were not contradictory, and were articulated by each individual according to the circumstance in which they found themselves. A classic example of this is provided by the way in which Francišak Skaryna, the founder of Belarusian bookprinting, identified himself: the Catholic son of a merchant from Polack, he wrote that he was "born in the Rus'ian people [*jazyk*]" (Skaryna 1990: 37, 43), and referred to his fellow countrymen as "my brethren the Rus'"; however, when he was a student in Kraków, he registered as a *Litphanus*, in Padua he was *Ruthenus* and in Prague he called himself a *Rus*. Later on, his fellow countryman, the Calvinist nobleman Salamon Rysinski (Solomo Pantherus), referred to himself as a "Belarusian" (*Leucorussus*); he acted as a political Lithuanian, identified with the political Sarmatian community, and regarded Polish language and culture as his own (Łatyszonek 2006: 120-128).

Independently of the extent to which members of the Ruthenian community in the Jagiellonian monarchy viewed it as a single whole, its cultural, linguistic and religious homogeneity was under pressure from a number of factors that were eroding its uniformity. One of the greatest of the factors that began this process was the 1569 Union of Lublin, under the terms of which the Ukrainian voivodeships of the Grand Duchy were incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland. By uniting the lands of modern Ukraine within the Polish Crown, the Union created a territorial and administrative frontier between Vilnius (Vilna) and Kyiv. Without doubt, both the territorial and the legal disintegration of Ruthenia aided the process of splitting the single world of the Ruthenians, and the formation of two distinct peoples. Immediately after 1569 the links with Kyiv became noticeably weaker; members of the Grand Duchy elite who owned land in the Kyiv re-

gion began to rid themselves of their estates (Litvin 2011: 3-19). At the same time the lands of Ukraine (the voivodeships of Volhynia, Kyiv and Braclav) were granted privileges of incorporation, which allowed them a certain degree of legal autonomy, and could therefore have served as the basis for the assertion of a separate identity (Litwin 1993: 196). In this way the Union of Lublin created the conditions in which the Ruthenian elites of Ukraine and Belarus were able to turn to two political centres with different state traditions: Kyiv and Vilnius. Distinctions between Ruthenians of the Ukrainian and Belarusian territories existed even before the Union of Lublin, as Natalja Jakovenko has pointed out, underlining the role of the princely families in defining Rus': the concept of the "land of Rus'" from the Ostroz'kyjs' genealogical legend did not include Belarusian territories (Yakovenko 2009: 122-124).

The cultural and religious basis of the earlier unity of Belarusians and Ukrainians was also being gradually eroded. The history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Renaissance period yields a mere handful of examples of Ruthenians who demonstrate the symbolic value of their own language ("Ruthenian"). After Skaryna, the most well-known examples are: Symon Budny's address to the Radziwiłłs, calling on them to "bestow their affection on the language of the people, in which their forefathers of old bore the burden of high positions" (1562) (*Pradmovy* 1991: 25), and the perceptive words of Vasil' Ciapinski, where he talks of "the neglect of their fine language" by the "noble Ruthenian people" (1580) (*Pradmovy* 1991: 34). Similar in sentiment are the words of Chancellor Leŭ Sapieha in his preface to the 1588 edition of the Lithuanian Statute, where he notes with pride that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania now has its own laws, written "not in any foreign tongue, but in our own language" (*Statut* 1989: 48). It should be added that the first two were Protestants, and by that time the third had already become a Catholic.

The paucity of such examples may provide additional evidence that language did not for the Ruthenians of the Grand Duchy play the important role in marking 'us' from 'them' that it came to play in the nation-creating processes of the 19th century. For the same reason, the switch to using Polish did not on its own signify a change in (proto)-national identity. It could have been the result of linguistic polonisa-

tion combined with religious conversion and a change in political awareness and culture (Liedke 1996: 136-137; cf. Niendorf 2006: 118-119). On the other hand, the fact that Protestants spoke out in defence of the "Ruthenian language" shows quite clearly that Ruthenianness should not automatically be linked to the "Greek faith" as the defining feature of the "Ruthenian people". Although religion occupied a considerably more important place than concern for language in the consciousness of people in the early modern period, the role of the particular Christian confession to which individuals belonged in proto-national discourse was dependent on specific historical realities. It is apparent, therefore, that many Ruthenian intellectuals in the Grand Duchy, although not indifferent to local traditions and culture, themselves no longer professed the "Ruthenian faith", and no longer viewed Ruthenia as an exclusively Orthodox community. The consequences of the Reformation, and in particular the results of the Church Union of 1596 created a new confessional reality, in which the identification of Ruthenianness with Orthodoxy was an archaism.

In splitting Orthodox people in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Church Union of Brest greatly assisted the growth of Ruthenian self-awareness and advanced their education, but on the other hand it hastened the divergence of the two branches of Ruthenia, now separated by the Union of Lublin. We know that on the Belarusian lands – with the exception of urban centres in the north and east (Polack, Vicebsk, Mahilëŭ) – the Union of the Churches met with less resistance and spread more successfully than in Ukraine (*Chrześcijaństwo* 1992: 224-225; Kempa 2004: 5-40). More research is needed in this area, but for the moment it can be tentatively linked to one special feature of the ethnogenesis of the Belarusians.

Archaeologists today work on the understanding that, on the lands now recognised as Belarusian ethnographical territory, Slavs had for centuries co-existed with aboriginal Baltic tribes. Over the period between the 8th and 13th centuries, the local population was shaped by the symbiosis of Slavs and Balts (Sedov 1970: 162-186; Sedov 2001: 44-50), an early indicator of some of the particular features of Belarusian language and culture. In the north-western area of the modern territory of Belarus, the mutual interaction between Slavs and Balts

went on longer, when the region was already being ruled by the Grand Dukes of Lithuania. A broad zone of mixed Baltic and Slavonic population stretched approximately from Minsk to Vilnius. After the Christianisation of Lithuania, some 150 Catholic parishes were established for ethnic Lithuanians in the north-western lands of modern Belarus between the end of the 14th and the middle of the 16th centuries (Ochmański 1972: 72-79). In this way a large number of autochthonous inhabitants of the region professing the Latin rite appeared in the midst of an Orthodox East Slavonic population; researchers see in this one of the features of the ethnic and confessional history of Belarus (Turonak 1995: 174-176). This lengthy experience of Orthodox-Catholic co-existence may well have paved the way for a more ready acceptance of the Church union.

The Uniates as well as opponents of subordination to Rome both referred to themselves as the "Ruthenian people", maintaining that it was not they who had broken away from the old Rus' tradition, but those who remained Orthodox. It was no accident that, twenty years after the Synod of Brest, Meletij Smotryc'kyj, when thinking of ways in which the Christians of the Metropolitanate of Kyiv could be reconciled with each other, wrote of the unification of Ruthenians with Ruthenians ("*Rus' with Rus'*"). In the Belarusian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 17th century onwards, both Orthodox and the Uniate camp expressed their preference for applying the terms Ruthenians (*Rusins*) to describe themselves. This was in contrast to Ukraine, which for a long time continued to be a bastion of "old Rus'".

In the lands that were to become Ukraine the spread of the Church union was halted by the Zaporožian Cossacks. This was a force that, after the death of Prince Konstiantyn Vasyl' Ostroz'kyj in 1608, assumed the role of chief protector of the delegalized Orthodox Church. From the 1620s the authority of the Cossacks as defenders of the "Ruthenian faith" grew ever greater in Ukraine, whereas they did not meet with anything like the same admiration among the population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is known that Fama Jaŭlevič (Tomasz Jewlewicz), an Orthodox merchant from Mahilëŭ who studied at the Kraków Academy, published a poem entitled *Labirynt* in Kraków in 1625, in which he praised the Zaporožian Cossacks and por-

trayed them as intercessors for the "Slavonic people" (Krekoten' 1984: 258-284). However, we should bear in mind that Jaŭlevič was soon to become Rector of the Kyiv Brotherhood School, so his work may well reflect the ideas of Orthodox intellectuals in Kyiv. By contrast, the unknown author of the Barkulabaŭ Chronicle, written at about much the same time in an Orthodox milieu near Mahilëŭ had not a kind word to say about Severyn Nalyvajko, or about those Cossack atamans who had left a trail of havoc behind them in the towns of Belarus at the beginning of the 17th century. They all came in for harsh criticism: "they wrought damage and destruction worse than evil enemies or evil Tatars" (Ulaščik 1975: 187). It seems as though even among the Orthodox population above the river Prypjac', the Zaporožians failed to find the kind of support that they enjoyed in the Kyiv region. A further example: in 1625 the deputy abbot of the Vilnius Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Iosif Babrykovič, in his funeral oration on the death of Bahdan Ahinski (Bogdan Ogiński), an active defender of Orthodoxy, praised him for his gallant services to his country and in particular for his suppression of Nalyvajko's Cossack revolt (Mironowicz 2003: 92-93). A little later the abbot from Brest, Afanasij Filipovič, known for his radical statements against the Uniates and his fight for the rights of the "Ruthenian faith", called the war with the Cossacks because of the Union "unnecessary" (Koršunov 1965: 149, 160). It appears that the disruption of peace in the Belarusian lands on the grounds of religious confession was not welcomed even by the Orthodox clergy; among the peasantry and the townsfolk the mere prospect of Cossacks appearing on their land often caused anxiety and fear.

All the same, before the middle of the 17th Century it is not easy to find clear evidence that the Ruthenians of the Grand Duchy were already consciously aware of the extent to which they differed from the East Slavonic population of Ukraine. There are, however, quite a few facts which are linked to events surrounding Bohdan Chmel'nyc'kyj's uprising, and provide examples of how the historical paths of the two parts of Ruthenia were diverging. Ukrainian historians have already noted that the revolt headed by Chmel'nyc'kyj was the main factor in the division of the Ruthenian community of the Commonwealth into Ukrainians and Belarusians (Sysyn 1992: 152-153). This

is probably true, although certain differences had become evident at an earlier stage. Of greatest significance was the fact that on the lands of Belarus, the Cossack revolt did not spread as widely as the leaders of the Zaporožian Host had hoped. Above the river Prypjac' the revolt was mainly supported by the peasantry of the south-eastern counties and the lower classes of the towns that neighboured on Ukraine. Even there one section of the town dwellers joined the Cossacks, while all the rest fought against them on the side of Hetman Janusz Radziwiłł (Sahanovič 2007: 119-125). This division was characteristic of both the Orthodox nobility and the common folk in the towns.

Pinsk occupies a special place in the history of the relations between the Ukrainian Cossacks and the Belarusian lands; it was many years before the inhabitants of the town adopted the Church Union. In 1648 the people of Pinsk joined the uprising, admitted the Cossacks into the town and stubbornly defended it with them against the Radziwiłł's formations. It was possibly significant for their attitude that some 20% of the city's population were Jews – one of the largest communities in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Cieśla 2015: 255). Later, in 1657, during the war between Muscovy and the Commonwealth, representatives of the Pinsk nobility concluded an agreement with the Zaporožian troops and swore an oath of loyalty to Hetman Chmel'nyc'kyj (Lypyns'kyj 1920: 11-14, 220-254; Kotljarchuk 2006: 252-256). This action is sometimes seen as an attempt by the inhabitants of the county to join the Cossack state which was claimed to correspond to the "traditional orientation" towards Kyiv (Lypyns'kyj 1920: 222-225). In actual fact the agreement sprang from the vacillation of part of the szlachta between the centres of power in a difficult military situation and the search for protection from the powerful side of the conflict. At the same time another part of the Pinsk nobility protested against the orientation towards Chmel'nyc'kyj. In 1658 the attempts to join the county to the Cossack state failed completely and the Pinsk lobbyists for a union with the Cossacks returned to the side of the Commonwealth.

The position of the population of Sluck was particularly indicative in this respect; like Pinsk, the town was a bulwark of Orthodoxy in the Slavonic lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The town was

still the capital of an appanage princedom that at first had been in the possession of the Alelkavič (Olelkovyč) family, heirs of Lithuanian Prince Algirdas, and after 1612 owned by the Radziwiłłs of the Protestant line, who acted as protectors of the "Ruthenian faith". The majority of the town's inhabitants were Orthodox, and the Sluck Monastery of the Holy Trinity, founded back in the times of the Alelkavič family, was a major spiritual centre of the region that had ties with Kyiv; its archimandrite was regarded as the Kyiv Metropolitan's deputy. By the end of 1648 the Chmel'nyc'kyj revolt had already spread across the southern lands of Belarus, and Cossacks were laying siege to Sluck. They infiltrated their own men into the town and attempted to bring over the Orthodox clergy and citizenry to their side. However, Sluck did not surrender, and as a result the Cossacks suffered a defeat (Hryckievič 1979: 62-68).

The people of the central and western counties of Belarus probably were repelled by the aim of the Zaporožian Host to destroy not only the Jews, but the Church Union as well; in that region a significant part of the population was already Uniate. In this connection, it was no accident that the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God in the Basilian Monastery of Žyroviči in Navahradak voivodeship became renowned as an intercessor against the Zaporožian Host, even though the icon retained its popularity among the Orthodox faithful. For example, its aid against the Cossacks was sought by the Uniate Brotherhood in Minsk. Local military banners were also solemnly blessed before the icon of the Žyroviči Mother of God, before the troops who fought beneath them went off to do battle against Chmel'nyc'kyj's army (Sahanovič 2018: 46-48).

There really is a clearly observable difference in the attitudes of the local population towards the Chmel'nyc'kyj revolt between the future Ukrainian and Belarusian areas of the Ruthenian lands. In Ukraine, all layers of society became involved in the revolt, and it was transformed into a large-scale popular war. Above the river Prypiac', however, its support was restricted to a quite limited social base. This difference was noted some time ago by scholars researching the history of the Cossacks. Leŭ Akinševič (Okinševyč), for example, working in the interwar period came to the conclusion that the Cossack movement in Belarus in the middle of the 17th century was the result

of the war in Ukraine (Akinševič 1927: 190). He explained the absence of an organised Cossack structure in the lands of Belarus by the natural and geographical features of the region: it had long been settled and was covered with thick forests, conditions in which it was impossible for a military organisation like the Cossacks to evolve. Such an organisation requires a wide open steppe, and needs the centres of state authority to be far away. It is worth adding that there were social reasons for the different attitudes towards the Cossacks.

Even though thousands of people from the Belarusian counties of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania moved southwards to swell the population of the Zaporožian Sič (Pičeta 1961: 574), we find nothing in Belarusian popular culture that resembles the cult of Cossacks and Hetman Chmel'nyc'kyj in the equivalent culture of Ukraine. Belarusian Cossack songs are no more than some kind of vague echo of historical events that took place in Belarus. Of the real persons connected with those events, mention is made only of Hetman Severyn Nalyvajko and Hetman Petro Sahajdačny, describing the destruction they caused and without any sympathy for them; only passing reference is made to Bohdan Chmel'nyc'kyj (Luc 2011: 65-72). Basing their thesis of the age-old struggle of the Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples against their Polish-Lithuanian rulers, Soviet historians in the Belarusian Soviet Republic promoted the legend of the leader of the peasant uprising in Belarus in the mid-18th century, Vasil' Vaščyla. He is supposed to have called himself "the grandson of Chmel'nyc'kyj". In fact, this version is not confirmed by a single authentic source and was most likely a forgery.

Returning to the single "Ruthenian nation" concept, if there really was a feeling among all Ruthenians of the Kyivan Metropolitanate that they belonged to it, and if a single national identity was predominant among the East Slav population of the Commonwealth, then in all probability the Zaporožian Cossacks would have been given greater support by all strata of society in the area that now constitutes modern Belarus. However, the situation there was more complex than just the opposition of the Orthodox Ruthenians (Rusins) to the Polish-Lithuanian camp; it was a simplified version of this opposition that was promoted by official historians of the Russian Empire in the 19th century.

When considering the nature of the "Ruthenian nation" of the Commonwealth as a whole, we should not apply to the territory of the GDL any assertion that the identity of this people was shaped by a "linguistic, cultural and religious boundary between the Ruthenians on the one side, and the Poles and Lithuanians on the other" (Plokhy 2006: 202). The divide there was not clear-cut, and it was constantly shifting. Linguistic variety and polyglossia as an important feature of the Grand Duchy have been examined in a number of specialist research publications (Dini 2000: 49-54; Ivanov 2005: 96-117; Niendorf 2006: 98-119). No restrictions were placed on the use of any language within the state. This aided contact between neighbours, and the use of several languages was never regarded by the inhabitants as a problem. For the numerous gentry class as well as for the burghers linguistic polonisation in essence meant Polish-Belarusian diglossia (Niendorf 2006: 104, 117-118).

The same may be said about any religious "boundary". There was a centuries-old tradition of religious and ethnic tolerance that the Jagellonians had made a principle of their internal policy, and had practised from the very beginning. The secondary nature of confessional adherence was essentially the result of historical factors in the lands of Belarus; this was in stark contrast to the situation in Russia, where both religious and dynastic motives dominated early modern concepts of "us" and "them" (Bushkovitch 2003: 154, 160; Dmitriev 2008: 218-240). There was a contrast with Ukraine as well. At the beginning of the 17th century the towns of Crown Rus' were made entirely Catholic and the rights of Orthodox citizens there were severely restricted. In the towns of the Grand Duchy, however, a strategy was adopted that allowed for the coexistence of various faiths. A comparison of L'viv with Vilnius or Polack makes this contrast clear (Frick 2013: 416-418).

Valuable information about what the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania saw as important factors for self-identification can be found in the lists of students registered at the papal seminary in Vilnius; these sources have recently been researched and published by the Polish historian Henryk Litwin (Litwin 1993a; *Katalog* 2003-2004). After analysing the information about their origin (*patria*), religious confession (*religio parentum*) and language (*lingua*

callet), Litwin was able to state that in the second half of the 17th century, 67% of those students who were registered as "Lithuanian" (*Lithuanus*) gave Lithuanian as their language, while Ruthenian (*lingua ruthenica vel sclavonica*) was given by 76% of the Ruthenians (*Ruthenus*) and 29% of those who were registered as Lithuanians. Over time the proportion of Lithuanians and Ruthenians who listed Lithuanian or Ruthenian accordingly as their language declined inexorably (Litwin 93a: 62-63). It is evident from the student lists of the second half of the 18th century that only half of those registered as Ruthenians gave Ruthenian as their language, and not a single student listed as Lithuanian gave Lithuanian as his language. The place of these languages was taken by Polish, but this did not of course mean that the students had become Poles.

Although the information contained in these columns was entered by the administration of the seminary rather than by the students themselves, it nevertheless reflects the way in which the ethnocultural divide in society was seen at the time. These lists show that, among those students at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries who were registered as Ruthenian (*Ruthenus*), there were both Orthodox and Roman Catholics as well as Uniates, and by no means all of them gave "Ruthenian" as their language. There were also "Ruthenians" who did not match any of the traditional attributes of "Ruthenianness", *eg* Catholics by religious confession whose language was not "Ruthenian". It is clear that those Ruthenians who professed Greek Catholicism (*ex parentibus graeco-unitis*) listed their language as Ruthenian. This is additional evidence of the connection between Uniates and Ruthenian culture and consciousness. On the other hand, many of those who were listed as "*Lithuanus*" used "Ruthenian" rather than Lithuanian as their language. This permits us to conclude that the traditional division of society into "Ruthenians" and "Lithuanians" in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania along religious and linguistic lines is in need of serious correction. This is especially so, when we consider that "Lithuanian" was the general and most widely-used term used to refer to all citizens of the state, not only to ethnic Lithuanians.

It was earlier noted that in the Jagellonian state in the 15th century, the princes and boyars of East Slavonic origin integrated with

the elites of the Baltic population to form a single privileged class. Thanks to the granting of equal rights to both Orthodox and Catholics (the decisive documents were the Charters of Trakai (1434) and Vilnius (1563)), a single "political nation" took shape – a multi-ethnic stratum of society which fulfilled the functions of a central authority, and was linked to the interests of the state. According to the extent of the integration, the number of Ruthenians occupying state positions at various levels in the Grand Duchy continued to grow, so that by the middle of the 16th century they constituted more than 40% of the political nation (Suchocki 1983: 74-75). The Ruthenians regarded the Lithuanian Duchy as their own state, and from this point of view considered themselves to be Lithuanians. In other words, the term Lithuanian in its Slavonic form "Litva", "Litvin" – even before the Union of Lublin – did not refer only to ethnic Lithuanians (Balts): it was often used by Ruthenians, the inhabitants of East Slavonic origin, to refer to themselves (Čakvin - Tereškovič 1990: 44; Kuolis 1995: 39). In some documents of the time, even when Lithuanians and Ruthenians are mentioned separately, the idea of a single "people", a single political community, is apparent (Litwin 2019: 193).

After the signing of the Act of Union of 1569 – which outraged the political elites of the Grand Duchy, and led to their demand for a revision of the terms of the Lublin Union – the Ruthenians on the territory of modern Belarus expressed more clearly their identification with the Lithuanian state in which they lived (Pšyrkoŭ 1975: 87; Sviažynski 1990: 101, 111). It is evident in the documents of the local dietines that by the end of the 16th century, the terms Lithuanians (*Litvins*) and "Lithuanian people" had become the general way of referring to the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, irrespective of the geographical location of the county from which they came. The terms were used by members of the nobility of both ethnic Lithuania and Belarus who were mainly scions of local noble families. Moreover, as a number of facts show, together with the extension of the use of the term "Lithuanian" to cover phenomena of East Slavonic culture, there was also a tendency to identify Lithuania with Slavdom. The writings of the previously mentioned Leŭ Sapieha are among the most well-known examples of this. On more than one occasion he wrote of the "Lithuanian people" as one community, but at the same

time – as we can see from his preface to the Third Lithuanian Statute – he regarded the Slavonic, "Ruthenian" language as an attribute of this people (*Statut* 1989: 48).

Extending the shortened form of the name of the state (in its Slavonic form "Litva") to cover its inhabitants and culture had since the very earliest times been quite natural for the neighbouring Slavonic peoples (Floria 1993: 56-57). When the prominent Orthodox Church figure and teacher of the brotherhood schools Laŭrencij Zizanij arrived in Moscow in 1626 to discuss with Metropolitan Filaret the manuscript of his "Catechesis", both parties to the discussion referred to the "Ruthenian" language of the work as "Lithuanian" (*Prenie* 1859: 81) (by contrast to Church Slavonic, which in Muscovy was considered "Russian"). A year later the Ukrainian Pamva Berynda, in his lexicon also called the Slavonic language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania "Lithuanian" (Nimčuk 1961: 104). Berynda's dictionary was widely used by both the Ruthenians of the Commonwealth (where it was reprinted in 1653, in the Kuciejna Monastery near Orša), and in Muscovy, where the language of the inhabitants of Belarus was at the time also referred to as "Lithuanian". This tradition of everyday usage also passed into scholarly publications; as an example of this we may cite *The Trilingual Lexicon* of Fëdor Polikarpov-Orlov, published in Moscow at the beginning of the 18th century. The compiler felt it necessary to clarify in the introduction that the "Slavonic language" comprises "Polish, Czech, Serbian, Bulgarian, Lithuanian and Little Russian" (Polikarpov-Orlov 1704: 9), *ie* for him the Slavonic people living on land that was to become Belarus spoke "Lithuanian".

All these facts correlate well with the tradition of using "Lithuania" and "Lithuanians" (*Litva, Litvins*) to refer to the entire population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, independently of their ethnic origin and religion; many examples are to be found in sources originating in Russia and Ukraine. In documents emanating from the Muscovite chanceries in the 17th century, all the inhabitants of the neighbouring state were usually called "Litvins"; the term referred only to their citizenship, and was not being used with any ethnic or religious meaning. Even the townspeople of Polack and the peasants in the surrounding countryside were classified as "Litvins" (Abecedarskij - Vol-

kov 1963: 87, 97; *Akty* 1890: 347, 353, 426), yet here was an ancient outpost of the history and culture of Rus'. As a rule this same term was applied to the people of Belarus by representatives of the Cossack Hetmanate. In this regard, there is something symptomatic in the way in which Lazar Baranovyč, Archbishop of Černihiv, divided the peoples of the Commonwealth along etymological lines in his writing. He put forward the idea of transforming the Noble Republic from a state of Two Nations into a home which would also accommodate a third nation – the Ruthenians. In one of his poems dating from the 1670s, Baranovyč portrays the three nations of the Commonwealth in the shape of its sons – a Pole, a Lithuanian and a Ruthenian. He gives them surnames with different suffixes: the surname of the Pole ends in "*-ski*", that of the Lithuanian in "*-icz*", and of the Ruthenian in "*-ko*" (Frick 2003: 28). It must be said that this differentiation corresponds with the data supplied by research into personal names: the patronymic suffixes "*-ovič*", "*-evič*" and "*-ič*" were the most frequently occurring in tripartite names of people living in Belarus from the 16th-17th centuries, and have become very productive in the formation of modern Belarusian surnames (Biryla 1966: 296, 324-325; Mezenka 2009: 79). In Ukraine, suffixes of this type are met with rarely; here surnames ending in "*-enko*" predominate. It remains only to add that Baranovyč himself was familiar with the realities of the Grand Duchy; he had studied in Vilnius and lived for a time in a monastery in Belarus; he applied the term "Rus'" mainly to the Ukrainian lands, then under the control of the Cossack Hetmanate (Plokhy 2006: 323).

It was perfectly normal at that time for the neighbouring peoples to view the peasant population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as "Lithuanians" (*Litvins*). In the first half of the 18th century this is confirmed by the interludes of plays that were staged in the Orthodox colleges on the Ukrainian lands that had been incorporated into Russia (Černihiv, Charkiv, Perejaslav). "Lithuanians" were very often to be found among the characters of the plays; the reference was to the simple folk of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, *i.e.* Belarusian peasants. For instance, the interludes of the play "The Resurrection of the Dead" by Georgij Koniskij, who later became Archbishop of Mahilëŭ, include a "Lithuanian" who speaks Belarusian, is Orthodox and not fond of the "Lechs" (Poles). In the interludes of the play by My-

trofan Dovhalevs'kyj "A Comic Act", as well as the play "Stefanotox", written at approximately the same time by Feofan Trofymovyč, an author of the same Kyiv-Mohyla Academy circle, we again find Belarusian-speaking peasants as "Lithuanians". An exactly identical image of the "Lithuanian" occurs in other interludes, including ones in theatrical productions of the Smolensk seminary of the mid-1700s (Petrov 1911: 372-373; Misko 2000: 140-162). All this may be considered evidence of the fact that even the simple folk of Belarus were regarded as Lithuanians (*Litvins*) rather than Ruthenians (*Rusins*) by their nearest, ethnically related neighbours.

On the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the last century of the Commonwealth's existence, the terms "Lithuania" and "Lithuanian" (*Litva*, *Litvin*) were already in common use with a both historical and ethnographical meaning, rather than in the political sense of belonging to a state. The terms had undergone a kind of "democratisation": the word "Litvin" was now additionally being applied to the population of Belarus below the ranks of the nobility; moreover, adherence to the Roman Catholic faith, which previously had been an important attribute of ethnic Lithuanians, now lost its earlier meaning on the lands of Belarus. The returns of the census of the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries may be an illustration of this tendency: the clergy, monastics and officials of the Minsk, Hrodna and Vilnius provinces called themselves "Lithuanians" (Filatawa 1998: 199).

When examining the historical and cultural sources of Belarusian national identity, it is essential to include, and not simply ignore, the fact that for many centuries the terms "Litva" and "Litvins" were used with reference to citizens of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of both Baltic and Slavonic origin. The Slavs of the Grand Duchy spoke their own language, which for a long time was called by different names; it was only in the 19th century that it received the name "Belarusian".

The term "Belaja Rus'" (White Rus', White Ruthenia) is historically the third name given to the country and its inhabitants. At first it was a term that was not applied to one fixed location, but by the end of the 16th century it came regularly to refer to the north-eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a region extending across the basin of the

Dzvina and the upper reaches of the Dnepr: half the territory of modern Belarus. It was compactly settled by Ruthenians, who were not exclusively Orthodox, as was previously thought, but Christians of various denominations (Łatyszonek 2006: 140, 160). The regular use of "White Rus'" (*Belaja Rus'*) to refer to this region dates from the first half of the 17th century. From the time of the Chmel'nyc'kyj revolt, it is used with great consistency in official documents of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, *eg* in the correspondence of Hetman Janusz Radziwiłł, in constitutions of the Diets, and in the Dietines of the local nobility (Korespondencja 2019: 386; Volumina legum 1859: 898-899). No wonder that in 1655, after the Muscovite troops had seized the entire Belarusian territory and Vilnius, the name "White Rus'" appeared in the tsar's title. At the same time, the Ukrainian lands of the Hetmanate where Cossack rule was being established were more usually referred to as "Little Rossia" and "Ukraine". The fact that these names were becoming attached to the two parts of Ruthenia in a way reflects an awareness of how they differed one from the other. It is significant that, for the Orthodox authors of the chronicle produced at the end of the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries in Mahilëŭ (a city with close links to Kyiv), Ukraine was identical to Little Russia, and was already regarded as a foreign country, "abroad" (Ulaščik 1980: 276-278; Łatyszonek 2006: 251).

The regional name "White Rus'", at first associated with the northern and eastern lands of modern Belarus, gradually began to expand westwards from the 17th century, and came to be applied to those areas which had earlier been called "Black Rus'" and "Litva" (*eg* the Navahradak voivodeship). It may be that the expansion of "White Rus'" reflected the consolidation of the East Slavonic population, or at least the creation of greater ties among them. At times both historical names, "Lithuania" (*Litva*) and "White Rus'", were employed almost as synonyms with reference to the same area. There are many examples of this in sources from outside the country, which, it has to be thought, reflected the view of the local inhabitants and authors from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Special reference must be made to German publications that dealt with the history of the Commonwealth. From the middle of the 17th century they mentioned "Lithuanian Ruthenians" in "Belarus" (*die Littauer Reussen in Weißreußland*)

(Francisci 1666: 27). Such a view was especially characteristic for the authors of the "Universal Lexikon", edited by Johann Heinrich Zedler (Zedler). In it the five voivodeships that made up almost the whole territory of modern Belarus (Navahradak, Minsk, Mscislaŭ, Vicebsk, Polack and Smolensk) were called "Lithuanian or White Rus'" (*Litthauisch oder Weiß-Reussen*). Further on, the unnamed author explained that *Russia Alba* occupies two thirds of the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, "which is why it is also called Lithuanian Rus'". For Smotryc'kyj Polack had been the "head of White Ruthenia", but in this lexicon it is simply situated "in Lithuanian or White Ruthenia" (*in Litthauischen oder Weiß-Reussen*) (Zedler 17: 1686; 28: 1265; 31: 984-985).

However, the terms "Belarus" and "Belarusian" were still being used with reference to a particular region. It was only in the 19th century, when nation-building processes began in Eastern Europe, that they were chosen as names for the purpose of national self-identification. This did not happen immediately; for a long time the name co-existed with "Lithuania" (*Litva*) or "Lithuanian Rus'". The language of the Lithuanian Statute was for the first time called Belarusian in 1815, when Samuel Bogumił Linde raised the question of what it should properly be called (Linde 1816: 13). For some time the language continued to be named in different ways ("Lithuanian, "Kryvian", "Lithuano-Ruthenian"), and traditionally, the people who spoke it were referred to among Vilnius intellectuals as "Lithuanian". In just the same way, Russian government officials and amateur enthusiasts of antiquities in the first half of the nineteenth century quite often wrote of the "Lithuanian customs" of peasants to the east of Minsk, and the river Prypiac' was for them the dividing line between "Lithuania" and the region of "Little Russian dialects" and clothing (Hryckievič - Maldzis 1980: 160), *i.e.* Ukraine. It is symbolic that immediately prior to the anti-Russian uprising of 1863-1864, an underground publication was printed "*in Belarusian* with Latin letters" so as to reach the "*Lithuanian* people" (Hnilamiodaŭ 2010: 293) (emphasis mine – *HS*).

Popular culture as a whole, an important component in Belarusian identity in the 19th century, still appeared under a variety of terminological guises before the beginning of the national revival – both as

"Lithuanian" or "Lithuano-Ruthenian", and as "Belarusian". The modern term became firmly attached to the whole of the ethnographical area settled by the Belarusian people in the final decades of the Russian Empire. The area was identified on the basis of linguistic criteria; the identification process itself took place as a result of two diametrically opposed approaches. On the one hand, it was aided by the historical and philological study of the region undertaken by scholars of the Empire with the aim of proving its "truly Russian" character. On the other hand, the process was furthered by the Belarusian national movement opposed to Russification. When one of the ideologues of the national movement, later dubbed the spiritual "father of the Belarusian renaissance", Francišak Bahuševič formulated the idea of Belarus as an ideological fatherland, he made no mention of Kyiv Rus'. He did, however, emphasise the centuries-old connection of Belarus with Lithuania, and the central role Belarus played within it, "like the kernel inside a nut" (Bahuszewicz 1891: IV-V). This approach to the past of Belarus was a radical departure from the idea of "West Russianism" (*zapadno-russizm*) on which the official ideology of history was based, linking Belarus to an Orthodox heritage and portrayed Belarusians (as well as the "Little Russians") as a branch of the "triune Russian people". One of the features of the conflict was the attitude adopted towards the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The national movement viewed the Lithuanian period of Belarusian history as a "golden age" which affirmed the right of Belarus to an independent existence. By contrast, the "West Russian" (Imperial) ideology portrayed Lithuania as "alien", in order to tie Belarusians with Russians and deprive them of any such right. The key thesis of this ideology was tested in the post-war USSR as well: the task of historiography was to provide the necessary groundwork for the historical unity of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples by utilising the concept of an "all Russian nationality".

Even today there are some historians who are apparently still under the influence of a paradigm that originated in the Russian Empire, and link the ancestors of the Belarusian nation with the "Russian people" as an exclusively Orthodox community. Even Western historical writing tends mostly to equate the modern Belarusian nation with this variant ethnocultural identification. However, as we have attempt-

ed to show, by the 16th century the "Rus'" of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania already included adherents of confessions other than Orthodoxy. A large part of the population that came to form the Belarusian people was comprised of Uniates, who nevertheless managed to preserve their old ethnic name. There was also a third group that used the historical names Lithuania (*Litva, Litvins*). Was this particular group formed by the East Slavonic population of Lithuania as a historical region, or by Slavonicised Balts? Either way, they may at least have managed to preserve their Orthodox faith.

It seems therefore that the "otherness" of Muscovite Rus' was apparently clear to the ancestors of modern Belarusians from the end of the 14th through the 15th centuries, but a considerable amount of time elapsed before they saw themselves as distinct from the Ruthenians of Ukraine. It is only with the events of the middle and second half of the 17th century that we can unhesitatingly link the numerous expressions of a special identity among the inhabitants of the territory of modern Belarus. The Chmel'nyc'kyj revolt and the war with the Tsardom of Moscow were conflicts between ethnic groups that already differed from one another; they realized how unlike they were in the interests they pursued, in their values and cultures. A military conflict made it possible for the masses to become aware of these differences in both previously-shaped customs and language. The separation of the Ukrainian and Belarusian parts of Ruthenia was also manifested in the terms they used to describe themselves. It was these terms that had an important role to play in the early stages of the formation of a national identity.

Many of the particular features of Belarusian culture arose from the interaction of Slavs with the Baltic population, which participated in the ethnogenesis of the Belarusians. In the historical literature on the subject, the creation of the Belarusian nation is usually associated solely with a "Ruthenian" identity; however, contributions to the historical and cultural aspects of nation-building were made by the Lithuanian tradition – in the terminological, rather than ethnic, sense. The historical and cultural foundations of the identity of Belarusians as a distinct national community took shape over the period from the 15th to the 17th centuries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For centuries historical Lithuania (*Litva*) was home to generations of

the ancestors of modern Belarusians who called themselves both Ruthenians and *Lithuanians*. It is no accident that both the creators of Belarusian historiography and the fathers of the first Belarusian state turned in the first instance to the *Lithuanian* tradition. It is the memory of this past history that now has a key role to play in strengthening the identity of Belarusians as an independent nation.

(Translated by Jim Dingley)

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Sui fondamenti storici dell'identità bielorussa

L'articolo affronta il problema delle moderne precondizioni per la formazione della nazione bielorussa. Tra le questioni aperte indagate dall'autore vi sono l'individuazione del periodo in cui è emersa l'identità collettiva specifica della popolazione stanziata nel territorio dell'odierna Bielorussia, oltre allo studio dei fattori storici e culturali che possono averne influenzato l'identità nazionale. Come proposto nell'articolo, gli abitanti dei territori dell'odierna Bielorussia non iniziarono a considerare il Granducato di Mosca come entità politica separata almeno fino al XV secolo: allo stesso modo, è possibile che non si percepissero in maniera differente dai ruteni d'Ucraina prima del XVII secolo. Solo con la rivolta di Chmel'nyc'kyj e, in maniera particolare, durante la guerra fra la Moscovia e la Confederazione polacco-lituana (1654-

1657) le popolazioni delle regioni bielorusse e ucraine della Rutenia iniziarono ad esibire differenze significative nei loro interessi, valori e peculiarità culturali. L'appartenenza di lungo corso al Granducato di Lituania e l'interazione storica degli Slavi con le popolazioni baltiche contribuirono a plasmare molti tratti specifici della cultura bielorussa, oltre a porre le basi per le fondamenta storiche dell'identità bielorussa in quanto comunità nazionale indipendente. Sembra dunque appropriato associare la creazione della nazione bielorussa non solamente all'identità rutena, ma anche alla tradizione lituana.

Keywords: Belarus, Belarusian history, Early Modern Belarus, Belarusian Identity, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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