

An Unproclaimed Empire. Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the Viewpoint of Comparative Historical Sociology.

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The book contributes to discussion whether ancient Lithuanian state (The Grand Duchy of Lithuania; the GDL) was an empire. While scattered references to the ancient „Lithuanian empire“ or the „Vytautas the Great¹ empire“ can be found in the historiography (A.Bumblauskas, Z. Ivinskis, A. Nikžentaitis, H. Lowmianski, S.C. Rowell, W.Urban) and texts representing Lithuanian historical culture (A.Andrijauskas, G. Beresnevičius, A. Bučys, R. Ozolas, K. Pakštas, S. Sužiedėlis), there are others (E. Machovenko, G. Mickūnaitė) who dispute this statement, and there is no systematic investigation of the topic. In the historiography, main intellectual obstacle for such enterprise is that the rulers of the ancient Lithuanian state (with possible exception for Algirdas (1345-1377) who designated himself as *basileus* in a letter to Constantinople patriarch in 1371) neither claimed (differently from the grand dukes in Moscow since late XVth century) to be successors of the Roman empire nor were recognized as such by their contemporaries. Vytautas the Great died in 1430 during the preparations to crown him as Lithuanian king.² This failure of Lithuanian state to achieve the rank of kingdom remains important part of the historical memory of the modern Lithuanian nation, leaving no space in its historical imaginary for the idea of the GDL as empire and blinds most historians for the imperial features of its past. The same effect has the accustomed self-image of Lithuania as eternal victim of the rapacious imperialism of neighbouring nations (Russian, German, Polish),

The goal of the book is to investigate these features systematically, using ideas from the recent comparative research on empires in the comparative imperial history, international relations studies, and comparative historical sociology. The book includes three parts. The first one („*Translatio imperii* and Lithuanian history“) presents the survey of the career of the idea of empire in the Western political and legal thinking since its ancient Roman origins through the medieval heights of the empire as most precious symbolical capital, its devaluation after 1648 the Westphalian peace treaty, the transformation into the stigma in the 20th century, and its very recent rehabilitation in the wake of the crisis of nationalism and national state. These changes of the opposite sign in

¹ Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1392-1430.

² In 1253 the ruler of the Lithuania Mindaugas was crowned as king of Lithuania by the plenipotentiaries of the Pope Innocentius IV. However, after his death in 1263, Lithuania reverted to paganism until 1387.

the evaluative connotations of the „empire“ and „imperialism“ levelled the ground for the recent rise of comparative imperiology struggling to transform these concepts into useful analytical tools. The first part also contains the inventory of descriptions of the GDL as empire in the historiography and Lithuanian historical culture, including also the presentation of uncertain evidence that at least one medieval Lithuanian ruler (Algirdas) could conceive himself as the emperor. This evidence includes also finding that both in Roman Catholic and Orthodox parts in medieval Europe there were rulers (in Anglo-Saxon England, Spain, Bulgaria, Serbia) who claimed for themselves the title of emperors, but not the universal rule.

The decoupling of the empire from the claims of the universal rule increasingly marks the use of the empire as descriptive concept in social scientific and comparative historical imperiology that is scrutinized in the second part “Methodological strategies for the formation of the empire concept and the explanation of imperialism”. The goal of this part is to sort out core features of empires, arriving at the concept of the empire with maximum illuminating power for the research on the GDL. This part starts with the discussion of the general issues of the concept building in the social sciences and humanities where central categories are essentially contested concepts. While promising venues to solve controversies over such concepts include their reconstruction as quantitative concepts (one can imagine an index of empire with values from 0 till 100 for each polity) and fuzzy set concepts, the author prefers as intermediate solution the reconstruction of the concept of empires along the lines suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his remarks on family resemblance. In this reconstruction, empire is defined as (A) sovereign polity with (B) territory size that exceeds significantly other polities of the same region and time and has at least three features from the following list: polity (C) pursues territorial expansion on large scale; (D) holds hegemony in the interpolity system³ or strives after it; (E) is ethnically or culturally heterogeneous and includes politically dominant ethnocultural minority; (F) is differentiated into the metropole and peripheries in territorial terms.

The logical structure of this definition is displayed by the formula:

³ This concept is used instead „international system“ (and „international society“) to avoid anachronism menacing application of the concept „international system“ in the contexts where no modern territorial or nation states are present.

$(A \& B \& C \& D \& E \& F) \vee (A \& B \& C \& D \& E) \vee (A \& B \& C \& D \& F) \vee (A \& B \& C \& E \& F) \vee (A \& B \& D \& E \& F)$. First disjunct in this formula defines the empire as an ideal type, and the remaining four are diminished subtypes of the empire. By adding new features to the ideal type or subtypes, much more stringent ideal types or classical subtypes of empires can be constructed. The features (A)-(F) are singled out by the analysis of imperiological literature. Even if usefulness of this definition for empirical research has still to be proved, it is helpful for the systematization of the imperiological literature itself.

The feature (B) is foregrounded in the quantitative (cliometric) research on the empires, pioneered by the American political scientist of Estonian origins Rein Taagepera, who elaborated useful criteria to identify emergence, adulthood, and failure thresholds in the history of the empire. They are context-specific, insofar as „imperial“ size of territory is different for each of the periods in the „collective“ history of empires, that can be singled out by quantitative analysis. I am arguing that while (A) and (B) are necessary features of empires, their presence is not sufficient to classify a polity as empire, if it does not display at least three features from remaining part of the list ((C)-(F)).

Features (C) and (D) are usual in the body of literature on empires and imperialism produced in the field of international studies. About empires, most important contributions were provided by scholars from „England school“. They include the distinction between „sovereign states system“ and „suzerain state system“ (M. Wight), and the analysis of empires in terms of the breakdowns of the interpolity systems recurrent in the premodern world (A. Watson). This analysis includes elaboration of the concepts of the spheres of hegemony, suzerainty, dominion, and imperial core as elements of an interpolity system undergoing the transformation into empire. Another important ideas of „England school“ used for the interpretation of the history of the GDL, are ideas of (strategic) interpolity system and interpolity society.

Attributes (E) and (F) are recurrent in the research literature from comparative politics. While legal scholars working in the field known as the „theory of state“ generally bypass empires in their classifications, important exceptions are Georg Jellinek who defines empire as „state of states“, and Lithuanian legal scholar Mykolas Römeris (1880-1945), who taught in the interwar Lithuania at the Kaunas Vytautas

Magnus University, and was its three-times Rector (in 1927-1928, 1933-1936, 1936-1939). M. Römeris contribution was unique in providing the analysis of differences between empire and federation that is accepted in this book. According to M. Römeris, the principle of subordination is common to both empire and federation. However, member polities of a federal polity are equal or equalized as its members among themselves, and the federal center is different from the government of one these member polities. This is the case in empire, where a one of the member polities (metropole) dominates over others (peripheries).

M. Römeris' analysis can be supplemented in an useful way by the insight of J. Galtung who points out that there are no direct relations between peripheries of empire. All relations among them are mediated by the metropolitan center, extracting and redistributing resources among peripheries according to the interests of the metropolitan polity and its ruling elite. This gives political structure that is visualized by A. Motyl who describes empire as a rimless wheel, with a hub (metropole), spokes (relations between peripheries and metropole), and a missing rim (relations between peripheries). The fund of ideas used in the third part of the book includes also distinctions between primary and secondary empires (Th. Barfield), patrimonial and bureaucratic empires (S.N. Eisenstadt), territorial and hegemonic empires (E. Luttwak, M. Mann).

However, the most important theoretical source for the interpretation of the history of the GDL is the magisterial work by Michael Doyle "Empires" (1986). His most important contributions are definition of imperialism and metaanalysis of its causal theories. Differently from the influential view that conceives imperialism as policy of some (aggressive) states, and empires themselves as creations of such policy (if successful), M. Doyle theorizes imperialism as a process of subordination that can be driven by metropolity-based ("metrocentric"), periphery-based ("pericentric") causes, or and transnational forces. So although all empires are human made, not all of them are of human design. M. Doyle also provides the analysis of the structure of empires in terms of distinction between sphere of hegemony (no control over internal politics of peripheral polity by the metropolitan polity), informal empire (control both over foreign policy and internal politics without formal vassalage or incorporation of peripheral polity), and formal empire.

These distinctions are elaborated in the book by proposing a test by extremal situation criterion inspired by the work of German political theorist Carl Schmitt. The first problem solved by this criterion is the ambiguity surrounding relations between polities that differ greatly in power: is there a relation of equal alliance or that of hegemony? Another problem is ambiguity about multinational and multicultural polities: how to distinguish between (voluntary) federations and (compulsory) empires, if some empires are federations in formal terms (as was in the case of Soviet Union)? The first ambiguity is cleared by the critical test situation where weaker polity makes foreign policy decisions against the will of its stronger alliance partner: will (or would) it be punished? The second ambiguity is cleared in the situation of the lost war, especially if victorious polity is populated by the kinsfolk for the part of population in defeated polity. Will parts of population of defeated polity use the situation for secession or union with victorious polity?

Second part of the book closes with the survey of work attempting to substantiate causal generalizations about rise and demise of empires. Most of them are limited to the early modern and modern European colonial empires. Therefore, they are irrelevant for the goals pursued in the book. The relevant work includes, firstly, the work by M. Doyle, who provides the analysis of the temporal dynamics of empires in terms of three thresholds (metropolitan/peripheric, Augustean, Carracallian), and makes the attempt at synthesis of the metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic (working within the framework of the theory of international system) explanations of the rise of empires. Secondly, this is the work of American scholar of Russian descent Peter Turchin, who provides “ethnogenetic” theory of the rise of empires, elaborating the ideas of mediaeval Arab sociologist Ibn Khaldun. The promise of P. Turchin’s theory derives from restriction of its intended scope to the secondary agrarian empires. This is the specification that the GDL meets. Another reason of interest is that P. Turchin offers a quantitative test of his hypotheses. After R. Taagepera’s pioneering work, this is second significant contribution to the quantitative (statistical) research on empires. Both researchers include the GDL into their sets of empires under analysis. However, their treatment of the GDL case is marred by wrong assumptions (R. Taagepera describes the case as Lithuanian-Polish empire, not the GDL), false data, or both.

The correction of these mistakes is one of the objectives pursued in the third part of the book (“The GDL as empire”). This part starts with argument that Krèva and the subsequent union treaties with Poland did not annihilate or even limit (with possible exception for 1386-1392 period) real sovereignty of the GDL. This may not be the case from the formal (legal) point of view. However, the GDL remained completely sovereign in terms of real politics, as far as it pursued its own foreign and internal policies, and Poland had no decisive influence on the selection processes who would govern the GDL. Until 1569 the Lublin union, relations with Poland remained those of strategic alliance that was used by the GDL more frequently for its own goals than Poland was able to do. In terms of territory size, by the end of XIV century the GDL became the greatest polity in the Europe. Its expansion continued in early XV century, approaching 1 million km². Although this is not a very impressive figure in comparison with greatest empires from the same time, it is sufficient to qualify the GDL for a membership in the “imperial club.” Despite the loss about one third of territory in the wars with Moscow state in the late XVth-early XVIth centuries, the GDL preserved necessary imperial features ((A) and (B)) until the Lublin union in 1569, when federation with Poland was established. However, this was the closing point only for the independent ancient Lithuania, but not for its statehood that survived until 1791 or even 1795.

Although after 1430 Lithuanian eastward territorial expansion ceased, and by the 1449 treaty with Muscovite state Lithuania resigned from its goal to establish hegemony or annex all the lands of former Kiev Rus’, it never became “peaceful empire” that would conduct only defensive wars. Relevant evidence are their attempts at the reconquest of the eastern territories (first of all, Smolensk) lost to Moscow (e.g. “Starodub war” in 1534-1537), to establish its hegemony over Livonia (by the Pasvalys treaty in 1557) that led to its annexation (in 1561) and the Livonian war that could not be won, however, by the GDL forces only.

Since its emergence in the XIIIth century, ancient Lithuanian state was a player in at least two different iterated strategic power games, each of the constituting a separate interpolity system with its own balance of power. The first of them was Central-North Western Europe interpolity system with Teutonic order, Poland, Masuria, Pskov and (until 1340) Galicia-Volhynia as main players. The second one was Kievan Rus’

interpolity system that collapsed in the middle of the XIIIth century, becoming part of the greater Eastern European interpolity system with Golden Horde as its suzerain state. Because of its paganism, until the late XIV century (with short exception for 1252-1263) Lithuania was an outsider to European medieval Roman Catholic interpolity society with its two suzerain forces – Roman Pope and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Since the second half of XIII century, Golden Horde became increasingly integrated into Islamic interpolity society. After the sack of Constantinople by crusaders in 1204 and Mongol invasion of Rus', the Orthodox Christian interpolity society in Eastern and Southern Eastern Europe collapsed and was never reestablished.

Rulers of the pagan Lithuania could aspire to unite under their power all Baltic ethnic groups. However, such aspirations never could be realistic because of the military superiority of Teutonic order drawing on the manpower resources of all Roman Catholic Europe. So the stance of Lithuania was strategically defensive in its relations with polities belonging to Central-North Western European interpolity system. In the East, geopolitical space for Lithuanian imperialism was opened already by the early XIII century, when Russian Rurikid princes struggling for supremacy in the Kievan Rus' interpolity system, implicated neighbouring powers (among them Lithuanians) into these struggles. For the short time in the middle of XIIIth century, when Mongol invasion destroyed Kievan Rus' interpolity system, this space was very broad. However, after first successes (annexation of the Black Rus' and establishment of Lithuanian suzerainty over Polotsk and Minsk) this space was closed again until the early XIV century due to consolidation of the Golden Horde domination over most of former Kievan Rus' lands. Lithuanian possessions could expand only in the areas beyond the effective range of Tatar cavalry (mainly in the direction of the lands of at upper Western Dvina river, then continuing into the lands at the upper Volga river).

Tatar domination is judged extremely negatively in Russian (and Soviet) historiography tradition, representing it as “Tatar yoke”. By implication, Lithuanian expansion into Russian lands can be described as liberation war, not unsimilar to those many “liberations” that were instrumental in building Russian, than Soviet empire according to their official historiographies. The outcome of this war was the division of the lands of former Kievan Rus' into “free” Lithuanian Rus' and “enslaved” Tatar Rus'.

However, most of Russian (and Soviet) historians refrain from drawing this implication, because among the enemies of the Lithuanian rulers there were not only Tatars, but also their Russian vassals Rurikids. They included the branch that established in the XV century Muscovite state, claiming to be the only legitimate inheritor not only to Kievan Rus', but also to Golden Horde itself and even to ancient Roman empire.

While Tatars ruled Rus' from distance, making Russian dukes to compete for their favours, the highest being the appointment ("yarlyk") as Grand Duke of Vladimir (the elder among Tatar Russian vassals), Lithuanians were more of "occupants", stripping Rurikids (except those quick enough to exchange their loyalties from old to new masters) of their possessions. Among Rurikids that remained loyal to Tatars, Moscow princes were the most successful at gaining the favours of Golden Horde rulers: first of all by staunch resistance against Lithuanians that were the most dangerous rivals for Tatars in the struggle over control of Rus' lands. As a result Moscow princes could keep the position of the Grand Duke of Vladimir for several generations in their house and to emerge as the leading power among Tatar Rus' principalities.

Because of incessant wars with other Tatar empires, internal strife, and plague Golden Horde was so weakened by the middle of XIVth century that Lithuanians were able to penetrate into Southern and Southern West Rus' and to make an attempt to put under their rule all lands of the former Kievan Rus'. This was central idea of Lithuanian imperialism and hegemonism pursued for a century by three Lithuanian rulers – Algirdas, Jogaila, and Vytautas. Algirdas and Jogaila failed to break the resistance of Moscow princes whose main source of strength was the control over the office of the highest Orthodox church dignitary in the Rus' – that of Kievan Mitropolit who as a matter of fact resided in Moscow. However, Moscow was not able to establish its independence from Tatar empire that reemerged for a brief time in the 1380s to power under khan Tokhtamysh. However, in the 1390s Tokhtamysh was defeated by the builder of another short-lived Central Asian empire Tamerlan, providing for Lithuanian ruler Vytautas the chance for an attempt to put under his suzerainty not only all Russian lands, but also the Golden Horde by making Tokhtamysh puppet ruler of the Golden Horde. This would mean the preservation Eastern European suzerain state system, but with the GDL, not the Golden Horde, as suzerain power.

The defeat at Vorskla in 1399 precluded the realization of this enlarged version of the Lithuanian imperial idea. However, during the last decade of his rule Vytautas was able to make true for the short time his program by establishing himself as final arbiter in the power struggles among the pretenders to become Golden Horde khan and the *de facto* regent (in 1425-1430) of the Grand Duchy of Moscow due to preteen age of his grandson, the future grand prince of Moscow Vasily II the Dark. But Lithuanian hegemony in Eastern Europe lasted only very few years. The 1449 treaty with Moscow sealed Lithuania's resignation from hegemonic aspirations in Eastern Europe, mainly due to the policies of the joint ruler of Poland and Lithuania Casimir Jagiellon. His preferences were smashing of Teutonic order (attempted in the 1454-1466 war) and then establishing of Poland's hegemony in the Central Europe by placing Jagiellonian princes on the thrones of Hungary and Czech kingdoms. The GDL became non-hegemonic regional empire.

Since its emergence ancient Lithuanian state was multicultural and multiethnic polity with Baltic and Slavic populations. During the rule of Gediminas (1316-1341) Slavs became the increasing majority. This is the reason why many historians have considered the GDL as Russian or Slavic state. However, the quantitative predominance of Slavs in the population of the GDL is rather an evidence for the imperial character of this polity, because minority status of politically dominant ethno cultural group is common feature of empires as diverse as Assyrian, Achemenid or British empire. Neither the use of Slavic language for administration needs is evidence for Slavic cultural dominance in the GDL, because this was interlocally used Orthodox Church ceremony language, akin to Latin and other script (often "dead" ones) languages used in ancient empires. Since XV century, members of Lithuanian ruling elite considered themselves as descendants of ancient Romans who according to Palemonas tale came to Lithuania in the 1. Century A.D.⁴ Another sharp line of differentiation from the former Kievan Rus' populations was drawn by Catholic baptism in 1387 that made impossible the Russification of Baltic population. The Slavonification of the parts of Baltic population took place, but this was no simple Russification but rather the

⁴ Although Palemonas tale could be used to ground the claims of Lithuania as successor to Roman empire in obvious way, it never was.

emergence of the new multilingual horizontal ethnies (in the sense of Anthony Smith) encompassing Catholic nobility of the GDL proud of its alleged ancient Roman origins and distancing itself both from Baltic and Slavic commoners.

According to the established wisdom in the historiography of the GDL going back to Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapolski and Matvei Lubavski, the GDL was a federation built by voluntary accession treaties that preserved complete autonomy of Russian lands. Supplementing M. Römeris' analysis of the differences between empire and federation with the ideas of contemporary comparative sociological research on empires and imperialism (M. Doyle, A. Motyl, Ch. Tilly), the author argues that the GDL was empire because relations between Lithuania in a strict sense (including also some Russian lands annexed in the XIII century) and Polotsk, Vitebsk, Smolensk, Volynia, Podole, Kiev lands and other dependent territories were those of subordination of the periphery to imperial metropole. The proponents of federalist thesis mistake as federalism what in reality was system of indirect rule characteristic for empires in premodern times. Most of them represented a type of hegemonic empires (E. Luttwak), alternatively called also empires of domination (M. Mann).

The historiographical tradition was blind to imperial features of the GDL because it implicitly or explicitly compared the GDL with Moscow state considering it as paradigmatic case of empires. However, Moscow empire represents only one specific type of empire – territorial or Westphalian (J. Zielonka) empires, characterized by the early application of direct rule. Among the colonial empires of the modern times, the system of indirect rule was most frequently and consistently applied by British empire that also followed the rule “do not destroy tradition and do not introduce novelties” famous as the principle of the Lithuanian rule over Russian lands. While most of medieval polities were transformed into sovereign territorial states and territorial empires in the early modern time, the GDL was unique in following the path of federalization. However, the GDL was transformed into federation only on the eve of the Lublin union 1569, while until the XVIth century it still was hegemonic empire including metropolitan domain and indirectly ruled peripheric areas shading into the areas of mere hegemony.

The typological characteristic of the GDL in terms of diminished subtypes built by subtracting attributes from the alternative ideal types of empire involves its

description as an “empire with adjectives”. Drawing on the distinction between primary and secondary (or “shadow”) empires proposed by Th. J. Barfield, the GDL is classified as a case of the subtype of “shadow empires”, called “vulture empires”. The GDL started as a “vulture empire”, using for its expansion geopolitical situation created by the decline of the Mongol empire and aspiring to become its successor as the suzerain over Russian lands. As a matter of principle, a shadow empire can evolve into primary empire, by 1) organizing itself to administer and exploit economic, political, religious, or ethnic diversity; 2) establishing monopoly of force within territories ruled and projecting the military force outward; 3) establishing transportation systems to serve imperial center militarily and economically; 4) building sophisticated systems of communication that allow to administer peripheral areas from the center directly; 5) fostering an “imperial project” or “idea” that imposes some type of unity throughout the system.

The GDL was quite successful at solving the (1) and (2) tasks. In the XIV century, it was patrimonial empire (in the sense of Shmuel N.Eisenstadt), displaying many features of sultonist patrimonialism (in the sense of Max Weber) during the rule of Vytautas. Thereafter, it transformed into the estate patrimonial empire, where government offices were appropriated by the small military landowner elite of the metropole. During this transformation, it passed (after the internal crisis in the 1432–1440) the “Augustan threshold” (M.Doyle). This means that ways how to accommodate interests of metropole and periphery elites and to administrate heterogeneous populations were found to make the GDL durable corporate transpersonal political body.

The GDL did not succeed at (3), (4), and (5). Therefore, it never became primary empire. Important test for the unity of the GDL was the Glinsky’s revolt in 1508, when Orthodox elites in the peripheral lands remained loyal to Lithuanian state despite the invasion by the forces co-religionist Muscovite state trying to use the revolt for conquest of the Russian peripheries of the GDL. However, although the GDL approached “Caracallan threshold”, it never passed it before 1569, because the religion remained dividing line that precluded fusion of metropolitan and peripheric elites in the new horizontal ethnies that was also the political class of the GDL. The annexation of its southern peripheries to Poland on the eve of the Lublin union met no resistance on the part of the local Orthodox elite and was at least in part initiated by them.

1569 was the year of the failure of Lithuanian empire also by formal quantitative criteria as defined by R. Taagepera, because it was for the first time when its territory size decreased below 50% of its maximum stable size (MSS). According to R. Taagepera, MSS is better indicator of the historical impact of an empire than simply its maximal territory size (reached in the late years of Vytautas rule and equaling according to author's measurement using planimeter and historical maps $928\,000 \pm 93\,000 \text{ km}^2$). The MSS is defined by R. Taagepera as the size at which size-time integral of an empire has its 95% area.⁵ Under assumption that the GDL as a state existed from 1250 until 1795, R. Taagepera's integral was measured to be 2,5 mln. $\text{km}^2\text{Centuries}$, and the MSS was calculated as $740\,000 \text{ km}^2$.⁶ Using R. Taagepera's definition of the empire's rise time as the point at which its territory size reaches 20% MSS, and its adulthood time as the point of its increasing over 80% MSS, one should date the emergence of Lithuanian empire by 1260 ($148\,000 \text{ km}^2$), and its adulthood ($592\,000 \text{ km}^2$) by 1362-1363. While second date makes perfect sense, the first one is found unacceptable because after 1258-59 until XIV century Lithuanian territorial expansion was checked by Golden Horde, and there is no evidence about hegemony aspirations. Besides, until XIV century Balts were majority of population, and there was no clear imperial structure (division into metropole and peripheries) in its territorial organization. So until the times of Gediminas (1316-1341) Lithuania still was no empire if measured by definition advanced in this book.

However, empires are created by imperialism that precedes them. The history of Lithuanian imperialism can be traced back into the late XIIth century. In this time, at the metaethnic fault line separating Baltic and Slavic lands due to the intensive group selection processes new Baltic vertical ethnies (Lithuanians) emerged. This hypothesis is suggested by the Reinhard Venskus' theory of ethnogenesis and that of P. Turchin explaining the rise of secondary (conquest) empires at the metaethnic fault lines. This hypothesis seems to provide best explanation for sudden surge of the large-scale Viking-style marauding expeditions into other Baltic (lower Daugava) and Rus'

⁵ Size-time integral is called in the book Taagepera's integral to honor the contribution of the American-Estonian scholar.

⁶ The measurement of Taagepera's integral under assumption of the time span between 1250-1569 as the existence time of [the](#) GDL gives 1,71 mln. $\text{km}^2\text{Centuries}$ as Taagepera's integral value, $790\,000 \text{ km}^2$ as its MSS, but leads to no significant changes for the assessment of rise, adulthood, and failure times of Lithuanian empire.

lands from the area to the West of the midstream of Nemunas and to the South from the upper Neris river since the late XII century.

The emergence of Lithuanian state in the middle of XIII century is considered as the case of „premature rash imperialism“ (*überstürzten Imperialismus*) analyzed by Otto Hintze in his theory of feudalism. Victims of this imperialism are more politically, socially and economically developed areas (sometimes former empire metropolises), attacked and subjugated by pre-state polities emerging at their fringes. In such cases, emergence of state is one of the outcomes of imperialism, but not a part of its initial conditions. Social and political structures already available in the conquered Rus' land were used by the builder of the Lithuanian state Mindaugas to maintain military force that was used to subjugate more lands populated by Baltic population in the ways not unsimilar to the conquest of Alemanni and Saxons by Franks after the establishment of Frank kingdom to rule over the conquered Roman Galia. In this way author elaborates the explanation of the emergence of Lithuanian monarchy provided by Henryk Lowmianski in his path-breaking research on the history of Lithuania in the XII-XIII centuries.

However, expansion into the Russian lands had mixed effects on the social and political development of Lithuanian metropole. In some parts of it (those that were the core of the domain of the ruling dynasty), it accelerated the emergence of the political and social authority structures serving to extract resources from the population. However, the empire building provided the resources to establish in the early XIV century the dual system distantly similar to that established in China by some nomad dynasties (e.g. Jin and Qing). While population of mainland China was subject to heavy fiscal exploitation, the nomadic tribes inhabiting territories closed for Chinese settlement received subsidies (donations) to maintain their traditional way of life, and their only duty to state was military service. In the GDL, similar reservations of the „military democracy“ were preserved on the western military borders of empire (first of all, in the Samogitia) to defend them from the the crusader military pressure. The extraction of resources from Russian peripheries allowed to keep the fiscal burden more easy in the metropole and to redistribute resources in ways favourable for preservation of the high levels of social

capital in Samogitia, its political and economic organization displaying until the XV century features characteristic for the militant pre-state polities.

Differently from many empires, (in)famous as „prisons of nations“, the GDL served rather as a „cradle of nations“. The relative stabilization of its Eastern borders after huge territorial losses to Muscovite state in the late XV-early XVI century was decisive for the emergence of three different Eastern Slavic nations (Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians) instead of one Slavic ethnicity in Kievan Rus'. Although the GDL (and Poland) succumbed to the military pressure of the Russian empire by XVIII century, neither this empire nor its successor (Soviet Union) were able to assimilate all Eastern Slavic nationalities in the Great Russian nation. The only chance to make this Great Russian chauvinist dream true was the eventual victory of the GDL over Moscow and the unification of all former Kievan Rus' lands under the power of Lithuanian dynasty in the XIV or early XV century.

Barely avoidable collateral outcome of such victory would be Orthodox baptism and assimilation of all Baltic population in this contrary-to-fact „Vilnius Rus““. Under the assumption of the intrinsic value of the existence of the modern Lithuanian nation and its state, there is no reason to consider the factual course of history as suboptimal. However, after resigning from the claims to hegemony in Eastern Europe, the GDL failed miserably at keeping emerging multipolar balance of power in the interpolity system that existed in this area. According to the unconventional account of the so-called the „feudal war“ (1431-1453) in the Great Duchy of Moscow by Alexander Zimin, there was real possibility of the establishment at least two Russian states in the lands ruled by the Muscovite princes. Great Novgorod was viable polity too, bearing promise of the protobourgeois and protodemocratic Russia. Another viable polity was created in Kazan by Tatars who have changed to sedentary life of agriculturalists, and were about to become the power, filling out the geopolitical space that in older times was held by Volga Bulgaria. However, mainly due to the pursuit by Jagiellonian of the dynastic politics in Central Europe, at least three windows of opportunity to preserve this interpolity system from its annihilation by Muscovite empire were not used. Last of them was the opportunity to re-establish the independence of Great Novgorod in 1480. These

failures of Lithuanian statesmanship sealed the fate of ancient Lithuania as great power and empire.