



Microhistories: Social and Cultural Relations in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1387-1795)

**An international conference at the
UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies,
16 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW**

Friday 20 March 2015: 2 pm-5.45 pm – Saturday 21 March 2015: 9 am-6.30 pm

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was one of the largest and most linguistically, ethnically and religiously diverse polities in late medieval and early modern Europe. On its territory Eastern and Western Christendom overlapped, the Protestant Reformation made significant inroads, one of the most numerous Jewish communities in the world grew to maturity, while Muslims, Karaites, Old Believers and others found their niches. Integrated into a predominantly agrarian economy and society were several hundred urban communities, many of whom flourished for centuries.

In the mid-1380s the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered into a long and often difficult process of union with the Kingdom of Poland, culminating in the formation of a joint 'Commonwealth of the Two Nations' in 1569. Since the destruction of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the history and memory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania have been much contested among its successor nations, including modern Lithuanians, Belarusians, Poles, Ukrainians, Tatars, Latvians, Russians and Israelis. This conference aims to excavate a level below these largely incompatible meta-narratives. In an encounter with hitherto neglected sources it seeks new stories about the communities, clans and cultures of the Grand Duchy in 'microhistories'.

This conference is inspired by the pioneering work of Professor David Frick in reconstructing the social, religious and cultural bonds between and within families and their spatial context in the Grand Duchy's capital city of Vilnius (Vilna, Vilnia, Vilne, Wilno) during the seventeenth century. But to what extent is the pattern of intra-, inter- and trans-confessional relations reconstructed by Professor Frick typical of other, smaller cities and of rural neighbourhoods within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania?

Another problem to be addressed is the functioning of the bonds of patronage and clientage which linked elites (both individual families and corporations) with persons lower down the political, social and cultural scales, including the relief of the poor and vulnerable. Then there is the question of social and legal barriers between different strata of the population. To what extent could they be transgressed? Finally, to what extent did the observed social and cultural relations cross the boundaries of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth?

These and other questions will be considered over a long timeframe – between the ‘baptism’ of the hitherto pagan parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into the Roman Catholic Church in 1387 and the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795. It is hoped that a richly textured picture of the Grand Duchy and its inhabitants will emerge from the papers and discussion.

The keynote lecture will be delivered by Professor David Frick of the University of California at Berkeley. Papers will be given by seventeen other historians from Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, the UK and the USA.

The conference is organized jointly by the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, as part of its Centenary Year of 2015, and the Lithuanian Institute of History in Vilnius. The holding of the conference has been made possible by generous assistance from the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in London, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London, the Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius University, the Polish Cultural Institute in London, the Patron of the Anglo-Belarusian Society, the British-Lithuanian Society, the Centre for the Study of Central Europe at SSEES and the Chair of European Civilization at the College of Europe at Natolin, with the support of the Bronisław Geremek Foundation and the Director of SSEES.

