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CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION AND TACTICS OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMY IN THE 13TH, 14TH AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE 15TH CENTURY

The Lithuanian army of the Middle Ages has not been systematically studied so far. Although a few monographs devoted to the Balts,¹ arms and armour and the army of the Lithuanian Republic² have already been published, the history of the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania has only been presented in few general articles³. This situation has recently started to change⁴. However, no fundamental monographs have appeared. Therefore the ideas presented in this paper should be treated as an introduction to broader elaborations and the conclusions may constitute a prelude to further investigations.

The lack of thorough research on the medieval Lithuanian army is best manifested in the fact that the fundamental question about the structure of this army and its transformations cannot be answered. Therefore the aim of this article is to determine the basic changes in the organization and tactics of the army.

As no detailed archaeological research has been carried out, this paper is based on data coming from the historical sources exclusively. These sources allow us to divide the Middle Ages into three periods:

1. From the beginning of the 13th century till the first decades of the 14th century;
2. From the beginning till the 80s and 90s of the 14th century;
3. After the 80s and 90s of the 14th century.

The remark found in archaeological literature about the lack of any important differences between the military sciences of the tribes living in the Baltic region in the 12th and the 13th century appears to be crucial for characterizing the first period. It justifies the use of all materials referring to the Balts, while discussing the Lithuanian army of the 13th century. On the basis of data available for study the common duty of military service (which means that every man was a potential warrior then) may be assumed to be the rule as far as all

the armies of the Baltic tribes are concerned. In the period of "war democracy" the community of the Balts did not have any regular army despite small body-guard troops belonging to the lords. The example of the Lithuanian duke, Daumantas, shows that such an army contingent consisted of over a dozen or even several hundred men⁵ (the Lithuanian State already existed at that time). The Balts' armed forces did not constitute a permanent formation then. In the period preceding the appearance of the Lithuanian State the army used to be organized in case of an enemy's attack or before a big war expedition. Shortly after it, as soon as the menace of the war had been over, the army was dismissed. Therefore, as a regular army did not exist, a coordination of the army's activities can hardly be imagined.

In the 13th century, before the emergence of the Lithuanian State, participation in military actions weighed most heavily on the armies of particular tribes or provinces. Bigger military expeditions organized by the united forces of several provinces were rare. Issues of strategy or tactics used to be solved during the expeditions. In this historical period the ravaging of neighbouring territories was the main aim of the Balts' army and after a successful expedition it was difficult to make the army go into action again.

The situation was changed when the Lithuanian State came into being, especially in the first years of its existence. Besides the armies of particular provinces, a bigger state army appeared, which was in fact the sum of the provincial armies, at least in the first period of its functioning. The Grand Duke of Lithuania could directly control the army of his own province only. The role of this army was to coordinate the actions of the other provinces the country consisted of. The provincial armies enjoyed a considerable autonomy and were commanded by the rulers of the provinces. The civil war in the middle of the 13th century seems to be the evidence of the Duke of Lithuania's victory over Vyckintas, Tautvila and Gedvidas' army⁶.

Generally, in the 13th century the ruler's role in the army was a considerable one. He had the right to call up

¹ V. Kazakevičius, *Oružje baltiskich plemion na teritorii Litvy*, Vilnius 1988.

² V. Statkus, *Lietuvos ginkluotosios pajegos*, Chicago 1987.

³ A. Aščik, *O szyku bojowym Baltów*, "Studia i materiały do historii wojskowości", 1970, vol. 16, part 1, pp. 3-10.

⁴ R. Batura, *Lietuviškos taktikos reikšmė Žalgirio mūšyje*, "Mokslas ir gyvenimas", 1990, No. 7, pp. 4-6; *Lietuviu karas su kryžiuočiais*, Vilnius 1964, pp. 84-109.

⁵ *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, 1841, vol. 3, p. 58.

⁶ More information about the Civil War in Lithuania in: E. Gudavičius, *Kryžiaus karai Pabaltijyje ir Lietuva XIII amžiuje*, 1989, pp. 92-110.

the army and suggest where the castles were to be erected⁷; his death or injury resulted in the cease of all military actions⁸. On the other hand, however, before the emergence of the State, in the community of the Balts, the ruler received an unlimited power as a result of the election held by the council of the tribe's potentates. Subsequently, he had to prove his valour in battle⁹. He was obliged to take an active part in military activities. Therefore, a potentate or a duke who aspired to leadership, should not only be of noble birth but prove to be an excellent warrior, too. It was only during military expeditions that the ruler was granted wide authority. In case of capitulation, for example, the ruler had to recover his own castle by attacking it assisted by the Teutonic Knights¹⁰.

In Samogitia the custom of electing the ruler is still recorded in the middle of the 13th century. The last election of 1259 A.D. was held before the greatest battle of the 13th century in the Baltic region, namely the battle of Durbe in 1260 A.D.¹¹. This custom preserved in the Samogitian community may be considered anachronistic, as in the contemporary Lithuanian State different rules had already been established. The State authority as well as the status of commander-in-chief of the grand-ducal army became hereditary.

In the period of "war democracy" the armies of the Baltic tribes used to be very big. According to the chronicle writer Peter of Dusburg, the army of Sambia consisted of 4000 mounted warriors and 40000 infantry warriors¹². It may be risky to consider these numbers as accurate and precise; they may, however, be important if one wants to estimate the general numerical force of an army (big, medium, small). The evidence provided by the Teutonic Knights' chronicle writer appears to be extremely helpful in researching the structure of the Balts' army. It should be pointed out that the above quoted relation: 1 mounted warrior to 10 infantry ones is quite probable. It has already been pointed out by E. Gudavičius that a 13th century mounted warrior may be considered a nobleman in the community of the Balts¹³. Therefore, on the basis of Peter of Dusburg's record as well as information collected from other sources it may be assumed that the infantry constituted the fundamental part of the Balts' army. This conclusion corresponds to the social structure of the 13th century Balts' community. It is doubtful whether an average member of the contemporary Baltic tribe was able to provide a horse for a military expedition, as this problem can hardly be solved in the successive 14th, 15th and even 16th centuries¹⁴.

⁷ *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum* [SRP], vol. 1, Leipzig 1861, p. 63; see: E. Gudavičius, *Lietuvių pašauktines kariuomenes organizacijos bruožai XIII-XVI a.*, [in:] "Karo Archyvas", vol. 13, 1992, pp. 43-118.

⁸ SRP, pp. 112, 118.

⁹ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 62, 112, 127-128, 129 passim.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹¹ *Livländische Reimchronik*, Paderborn 1877, pp. 130-133.

¹² SRP, vol. 1, p. 52.

¹³ See E. Gudavičius' work, ref. 7.

¹⁴ See E. Gudavičius' work, ref. 7.

As the priority of the infantry in the communities of both the Balts and the Lithuanians in the 13th century has been acknowledged, the coordination of actions of the cavalry and the infantry on battlefield should subsequently be analysed. There are numerous written sources providing information relevant to this topic. Two episodes from the middle of the 13th century may be selected here. The activities of the Prussian army commanded by Henricus Monte in the last stage of the battle described by Peter of Dusburg are recounted in the first of these episodes. When the army of the Teutonic Knights was retreating from battlefield, Henricus Monte caught one of the knights and killed him with a spear¹⁵. The battle of Karusa of 1270 is the second episode that may be quoted here. The author of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle points out that the Lithuanians travelled to Estonia on sleighs¹⁶. From the above episodes it appears that in the 13th century Lithuanian army horses served as a means of transport exclusively and were not used in battle. Thus the question arises of whether we are allowed to draw conclusions based on two short mentions only. Sources offering contrary information can also be found. One of the numerous battles fought between the Lithuanians and the Teutonic Knights is described by Henry of Livonia. In his account the role of the Lithuanian cavalry is stressed and the fact that it was the Lithuanian cavalry that dispersed the Teutonic Knights' battle array¹⁷ is mentioned. Henry of Livonia's account appears to be inconsistent. The details connected with the last and the most interesting for us stage of the battle are missing and the question about the author of the ultimate defeat of the Teutonic Knights cannot be answered. Therefore we do not know whether the decisive victory was won by the cavalry or the infantry. The actual battle situation seems to speak in favour of the infantry. The Teutonic Knights carefully prepared themselves for the fight and were reinforced by an auxiliary army composed of warriors from the Baltic tribes. The Lithuanian army must have also been numerous. Otherwise the Lithuanian victory could hardly be imagined. The social situation made the introduction of a bigger number of mounted warriors impossible. Therefore it may be assumed that it was the infantry and not the cavalry that played a major role in the battle.

The second evidence provided by the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle seems to confirm our assumption that for a 13th century warrior the horse served only as a means of transport. The chronicle writer informs us that the Lithuanians, according to an ancient custom maintained in their country, used to dismount before battle and fight on foot: "Waz der Lettowen was geriten,

die tâen nâch des landes siten,
sie trâten von der pferden nidèr.
nicht lange sûmeten sie sich sider,
sie liefen ûf der brùdere her"¹⁸.

¹⁵ SRP, vol. 1, p. 107.

¹⁶ *Livländische ...*, pp. 180-181.

¹⁷ *Henrici Chronicon Livoniae*, ed. R. Kleis, E. Tarvel. Tallinn 1982, p. 146; *Lietuvių karas ...*, p. 102.

¹⁸ *Livländische ...*, p. 268.

The above description casts aside all doubts concerning the Lithuanians' way of fighting on foot with the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century. Consequently, there exists a sufficient evidence that it was the infantry and not the cavalry that the Lithuanian army of the 13th century was structurally composed of. This might be the case with all the Balts' armies.

The battles fought by the Balts, the Lithuanians included, with the Germanic knights in the 13th century were confrontations not only of two communities at different stages of development, but also of two armies formed according to different rules and on two opposite foundations: the infantry faced with the cavalry¹⁹. The Teutonic knights possessed not only better armours, but were superior as far as the organization of the army is concerned. It was this unfavourable relation in the organization of the army that brought about the introduction of many basic elements into the tactics that the Lithuanians employed against the Teutonic Knights.

The Teutonic Order realized its organizational superiority. Therefore the Lithuanian army and the armies of the Balts put in practice the whole arsenal of tactical moves in order to make the enemy engage in battles fought on foot. The range of such moves appeared to be relatively broad: starting with the primitive use of local terrain and finishing with the simulated retreat from battlefield meant to disperse the Order's cavalry array. In case the land relief appeared to be unfavourable, other tactical moves were employed, among which setting of obstacles was the commonest one. In forests, fallen down trees held up advancing cavalry. Piles of tree trunks blocking the roads were arranged just before battles, but were also treated as a means of impeding the Teutonic Knights' expeditions to Lithuania. The descriptions of roads leading to Lithuania written by some Teutonic Knights may serve as illustrations here²⁰.

In the open space, where no natural features could be found, the obstacles used to be made of simplest sleighs²¹. The battle of Karusa may serve as an example here. In the 13th century the Teutonic Knights were no longer surprised by the tactical moves of the Balts' army. One of the attempts made by the Prussian army to lure the enemy into a ready-prepared trap in the first half of the 13th century failed. The Teutonic Knights walled off the roads to the fences and the Prussians fell into the trap themselves²². Of course, each of the tactical moves made by the Balts was camouflaged in a different, sometimes very primitive, way. In the battle of Karusa in 1270, for example, the obstacle constructed of sleighs was hidden behind the Lithuanian army²³. As a result of a simulated retreat of the Prussian troops in the

battle of Lubawa in the year 1263²⁴, the Teutonic Knights were dispersed and defeated. In many cases, as in the above discussed event²⁵ recorded by Henry of Livonia, the Balts' small cavalry regiments decoyed the Teutonic Knights²⁶. Such practices of leading the enemy into a trap or tricks used to disperse his battle array, e.g. by means of a simulated retreat, were not invented by the Lithuanians or the Tatars, as it has been assumed in the existing literature²⁷. These methods were characteristic of all the "barbaric" nations fighting against a mounted army²⁸. In the 13th century the social structure of the Balts' army to a considerable extent determined the kinds of weapons and arms used in this historical period. Peter of Dusburg, the chronicle writer of the Teutonic Order's opinion that one of the Prussian tribes, the Galindians, was practically unarmed is partly true²⁹. This statement is further confirmed by pieces of information found in other written sources. The account of the battle of Šiauliai fought in 1236 from the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle seems to be the most glaring example. As it has already been pointed out by E. Gudavičius in the last stage of the battle many Germanic knights were killed by ordinary battering rams³⁰.

On the other hand, however, Peter of Dusburg's relation about the Galindians refers most probably to ordinary members of a rural community. According to the 13th century written sources the Balt potentates were well armed and equipped. The most important ones used to buy their arms abroad. It is not accidental that one of the Pope's bans issued in the period of wars between the Teutonic Order and the Prussians was the ban on arms trade. Thus the sale of arms to the Prussians was forbidden³¹. Besides, the Balts' army of the 13th century appeared to be the disciple of the Teutonic Knights. The Prussians and the Lithuanians as well as other tribes which inhabited the Baltic region soon adopted various kinds of arms e.g. the arbalest³², learned to construct bridges across rivers and successfully fought against German ships³³. The technique of besieging towns applied by the Balts was highly estimated by the Germans. During the storming of the castle of Wizenburg the Teutonic crew won one of the machines used to besiege the fortress from the Prussians and successfully defended itself against the attack³⁴. It should be stressed that those were the qualitative and the quantitative factors that played a decisive role in battles. The Prussian and the Lithuanian boats could not compare with the much

²⁴ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 112-113; R. B a t u r a (see ref. 4).

²⁵ See ref. 17.

²⁶ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 122, 129-130; vol. 2, pp. 583, 584 passim.

²⁷ See R. B a t u r a's work, ref. 4 and A. N a d o l s k i, *Grunwald. Problemy wybrane*, Olsztyn 1990, pp. 167-168.

²⁸ F. K a r d i n i, *Istoki srednevekovogo rytsarstva*, Moscow 1987, pp. 83-84, 261, 284.

²⁹ SRP, vol. 1, p. 52

³⁰ See ref. 7.

³¹ *Lietuviu karas ...*, p. 73.

³² SRP, vol. 1, p. 107. From the description of the situation it appears that the arbalest was not used in Sambia in the 13th century. It was, however, used by the Semigallians. See: *Livländische ...*, p. 198.

³³ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 106-107, 114.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 110, 111.

¹⁹ S. E k d a h l, *Das Pferd und seine Rolle im Kriegswesen des Deutschen Ordens*, [in:] *Ordines militares*, vol. 6, Toruń 1991, pp. 29.

²⁰ SRP, vol. 2, Leipzig 1863, pp. 678, 681 (it is pointed out that no constructions harrng the road can be found in the forest).

²¹ See ref. 16.

²² SRP, vol. 1, p. 58. In this case the Duke of Pomerania and his brother "magis experti in bello Prutenorum" helped to discover the Prussians' betrayal.

²³ See ref. 16.

better German ships. The Balts' army had at its disposal not only primitive weapons, but also examples of modern arms. Unfortunately, it was only the elite that was armed with this kind of equipment. As far as the outcome of the military actions taking place on rivers is concerned, the quantitative and not the qualitative factor seems to be crucial. An even battle fought by the tiny Lithuanian boats³⁵ made of tree bark against the Teutonic ships could hardly be imagined.

All the above mentioned successes enjoyed by the Balts' army could not compensate for its general backwardness as compared with the Teutonic Knights' military art. The primitive arms and limited capabilities of contemporary communities to a considerable extent brought about the misfortune of Lithuania's neighbours, the inhabitants of the Baltic region. In the 13th century all the Baltic tribes, except the Lithuanians, were conquered by the Teutonic Order. The uneven but persistent struggle fought by these tribes against the German knights made the reorganization of the Lithuanian army and society possible. At the end of the 13th century and during the first decades of the 14th century a new stage in the development of Lithuanian military art began. It was mainly connected with some qualitative transformations which affected Lithuanian society. The beginning of the 13th century marks the rise of the nobility in Lithuania³⁶. It was this social class that joined the ranks of the armed forces of the Lithuanian State, which in turn brought about the qualitative and the quantitative changes in this army. At the beginning of the 13th century Lithuanian society was able to maintain and arm a professional core of the state army. It may be assumed that it was at that time that the cavalry was introduced and the role of the horse was changed; it was no longer used as a means of transport only, but mounted warriors started to take active part in battles. Therefore, it is not accidental that special studs³⁷ are mentioned in the written sources of the second half of the 14th century. Horses from these studs were highly estimated also in the Teutonic State. However, problems connected with the number and quality of horses were not solved for good yet and a good battle horse remained the most precious gift that the Grand Duke of Lithuania could be presented with³⁸.

The end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century constituted the outset of a few important changes that occurred in the Lithuanian army. However, the transitional period should not be omitted. Nonetheless, the appearance of the cavalry is connected with the process of gaining practice and experience characteristic of mounted warriors. In historical literature dealing with the formation of the cavalry in Europe this transitional

period is discussed in connection with the emergence of professional bandits, who were paid or received tributes for their services³⁹. In Lithuania such bands were already formed in the first half of the 13th century. Although the infantry might be the case here, their structure cannot be discussed as no source materials are available. Certainly, the cavalry was present in Lithuania at the beginning of the 14th century⁴⁰.

The results of the structural changes introduced in the Lithuanian army were soon visible. The Lithuanian army's military activities in Prussia in 1311 illustrate the superiority of the cavalry as compared with the infantry. Select Lithuanian troops devastated the territories belonging to the Teutonic Order and the Teutonic Knights had no courage to impede these attacks until the basic forces had been gathered. Although the Lithuanian army was defeated in the battle of Woplawki in 1311⁴¹, it was a painful victory for the Teutonic Knights. It was shortly after this battle that the Teutonic Order was forced to make a truce for a few years⁴². The formation of the new improved Lithuanian troops was also highly estimated by the Teutonic Knights. Before the battle fought in the vicinity of Ragnit (Ragaine) in the year 1338, for example, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights appealed to his troops asking them not to be afraid of the Lithuanians' attacks. He argued that the Lithuanians had already lost their best men in the battle of Bayerburg the year before⁴³.

The structural changes in the Lithuanian army influenced both the position and functions of the commander. The beginnings of these transformations, further strengthened by the formation of regular troops, should be connected with the emergence of the Lithuanian State. The commander was no longer elected by the council of nobles. He should come from a prince's family and occupy an important social position. He did not have to prove his valour and courage in each battle and used to be protected by his bodyguard (e.g. Duke Marger in 1336⁴⁴). The army could also be led by commanders appointed by the Grand Duke (e.g. Traidenis and Neimeisis; Gediminas and David of Grodno)⁴⁵. In any case the commander-in-chief was carefully guarded during a battle and he was usually one of the last men to die (e.g. Marger)⁴⁶ or he was even taken captive (Vaidot in 1362)⁴⁷. As compared with the 13th century, the role of the provincial armies is diminished. It is reduced to the defence of the territories of particular provinces. These

³⁹ SRP, vol. 176-177; vol. 2, p. 454.

⁴⁰ E. Gudavičius, *Lietuvos valstybės susidarymo reikšmė Vokietijos "Veržimesi i Rytus"*, [in:] "Lituanistika", No. 3, 1990, p. 23; some bandit gangs in Lithuania are also mentioned at the beginning of the 14th century. cf.: SRP, vol. 1, p. 167.

⁴¹ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 176-177; vol. 2, p. 454.

⁴² SRP, vol. 2, pp. 456-457.

⁴³ Ibidem. p. 496; *Lietuvių karas* ..., p. 85.

⁴⁴ Ibidem. pp. 489-490. A. Nikžentaitis, *Pilėnu mistė*. Vilnius, 1993.

⁴⁵ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 193-194; A. Nikžentaitis, *Gediminas*, Vilnius 1989, p. 40; E. Gudavičius, *Kryžiaus karai Pabaltijyje ir Lietuva XIII amžiuje*, Vilnius 1989, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁶ See ref. 44.

⁴⁷ SRP, vol. 2, pp. 531-537.

³⁵ Lithuanian boats made of tree bark are mentioned in Hermann of Wartberge' chronicle: SRP, vol. 2, p. 108. Those were the Lithuanian select troops (Lithuanians electi).

³⁶ E. Gudavičius, *Šlehtu atiskyrimas nuo bajoru Lietuvoje XVI a., Bajoru luomo susidarymas Lietuvoje XV a.*, [in:] "Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademijos darbai, series A", vol. 2, 1975, p. 105, ref. 77.

³⁷ *Lietuvių karas*..., p. 87.

³⁸ See S. Ekdahl's work, ref. 19.

armies frequently overrun the neighbouring territories, which is also a result of the integration processes affecting all the State and provincial territories.

The turning point is clearly visible in the 1320s when the war expeditions of particular provinces or even individual fortresses changed into regional (Samogitian) or State military activities. Various written sources allow us to assume that Samogitian armed expeditions were either commissioned by or at least consulted with Vilnius or Trakai⁴⁸, two political centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania⁴⁹. It is possible to base our discussion on the outset of the consolidation processes of ethnic Lithuania on actual and precise dates. As a result of the political situation the above mentioned consolidation processes accelerated the course of events in the Baltic region. The unfulfilled agreement reached by the Samogitian potentates and Master Ludwig Libenzel of Ragnit changed the Lithuanian rulers' opinion about Samogitia⁵⁰.

From the second half of the 14th century, similar integration processes spread over the whole territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although a few battles in which the Lithuanian army was reinforced by Russian troops had already taken place before, e.g. in the storming of the castle of Christmemel⁵¹, where Vytenis was helped by the Russian bowmen, a more regular participation of Russian provincial armies in the Lithuanians' struggle with the Teutonic Order could only be noticed after the battle of Streva of 1348.

The changes in the coordination of military activities which occurred at the end of the 13th century and at the beginning of the 14th century also affected the lowest element of military structure - the castle. Since the end of the 13th century the castles situated on the Niemen may be looked upon as an active defensive system with its particular units — castles — connected into a complicated enough network of mutual assistance⁵². Similar links might have already existed in the period of war democracy, however, it was only at the end of the 13th century that these links achieved the status of the State policy. Individual castles were commanded by the governors⁵³ appointed by the Grand Duke. From the mid-thirteenth century⁵⁴, the fortresses commanded by the

governors were manned with permanent garrisons⁵⁵. Although the number of the written sources available at the moment is limited, it may be assumed that similar castle systems existed in the vicinity of Kaunas, Trakai, Vilnius and other important political centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Certainly, all the above mentioned ways of re-organizing the Lithuanian army strengthened its defensive potential. The fact that in the 14th century the Grand Duchy of Lithuania could not only repel the attacks of the Teutonic Order, but also extend its eastern boundaries, fighting hard battles with Poland, the Golden Horde and the Duchy of Moscow, is not accidental.

The 14th century may be termed the period of technical re-armament of the Lithuanian army. Gediminas' appeal to the towns of Hanse⁵⁶ reflects the fact that Lithuania lacked good craftsmen and armourers at that time, but it was also in the 14th century that new kinds of weapons appeared. It has already been pointed out by Polish archaeologists⁵⁷ that some kinds of arms were highly estimated in the Teutonic State and even in Central Europe. There were several kinds of arms⁵⁸ valued by the Teutonic Knights. It was already at the end of the 13th century and in the first half of the 14th century that the so called quadrangular-type castles started to be constructed in Lithuania. During the first few years of the reign of the Gediminas family the castles of this type were constructed in Vilnius, Trakai, Medininkai and in other places⁵⁹. They were strongly fortified fortresses. Data concerning their spatial form have recently been confirmed by the results of the research works conducted by the Polish archaeologist Tadeusz Poklewski. On the basis of the above mentioned excavation works it may be concluded that the Lithuanian technique was used in the construction of stone city walls built around several towns (Dąbrówno alias Gilgenburg and others) in Prussia. The city walls date back to the first quarter of the 14th century⁶⁰. The fact that the new kinds of

Die jüngere livländische Reimchronik des Bartholomäus Hoeneke, Leipzig 1872, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *Lietuvio karas ...*, p. 199.

⁴⁹ *Gedimino laišakai*, Vilnius 1966, pp. 29-47. About the dating and authenticity of these letters see: A. N i k ž e n t a i t i s, *Del Gedimino laišku autentiškumo (I. Gedimino laišakai Hanzos miestams)*, [in:] "Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademijos darbai, series A", vol. 4, 1987, pp. 92-99; A. N i k ž e n t a i t i s, *Del Gedimino laišku autentiškumo (2. Gedimino laišakai popiežiui ir krikščionybės įvedimo Lietuvoje klausimas 1323-1324 m.)*, [in:] *ibidem*, 1988, vol. 2, p. 66.

⁵⁰ *Denkschriften. Elemente wschodnie i zachodnie w czeskim uzbrojeniu XV wieku*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", 1973, No. 2, pp. 285-287; A. N a d o l s k i, *Niektóre elementy batto-słowiańskie w uzbrojeniu i sztuce wojennej Krzyżaków*, "Pomorania Antiqua", vol. 5, 1974, pp. 165-173; A. N o w a k o w s k i, *Uzbrojenie wojsk krzyżackich w Prusach w XIV i na początku XV w.*, Łódź 1980, pp. 73-74; A. N o w a k o w s k i, *O wojskach Zakonu Szpitala Najświętszej Marii Panny Domu Niemieckiego w Jerozolimie zwanego krzyżackim*, Olsztyn 1988, pp. 129, 134-135, 143-147, 155; *Uzbrojenie w Polsce średniowiecznej 350-1450*, Łódź 1990, pp. 57, 95, 132 seqq.

⁵¹ Cf. ref. 57.

⁵² *Lietuvos pilyys*, Vilnius 1971, pp. 17-18; *Lietuvos architektūros istorija. Nuo seniausiu laikų iki XVII a. vidurio*, Vilnius 1987, vol. 1, pp. 32, 37, 39.

⁵³ T. P o k l e w s k i, *Elementy litewskie w fortyfikacjach krzyżackich* (the paper presented at the conference on 5th Dec. 1990.

⁴⁸ More information in: A. N i k ž e n t a i t i s, *Gediminas*, pp. 16-21.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ SRP, vol. 1, p. 181; on the basis of the written sources the bowmen mentioned in the text should be considered Russians. See: H. Ł o w m i a n i s k i, *Studia nad początkami społeczeństwa i państwa litewskiego*, Vilnius 1932, p. 230. R. Batura's attempt to refute this thesis on the basis of excavation works seems to be unsuccessful. The archaeological data does not allow us to determine who the spearheads belonged to (see *Lietuvio karas*, p. 90). The participation of Russian warriors in the Lithuanians' struggle with the Teutonic Order had become a usual phenomenon since the middle of the 14th century.

⁵² A. N i k ž e n t a i t i s, *Ražytiniai šaltiniai apie lietuvių pili sistemą XIII a. pabaigoje - XIV a. pradžioje*, [in:] "Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademijos Darbai, series A", vol. 3, 1986, pp. 51-62.

⁵³ SRP, vol. 1, pp. 152, 179-180.

⁵⁴ In the middle of the 14th century the defenders of the castle situated on the Dubysa River, in the province of Šiauliai, and belonging to the community used to gather only in case of danger. See:

weapons were brought into use in the Lithuanian army of that time has already been mentioned in historical studies as an important turning point in the history of Lithuanian armament⁶¹. It should be remembered that cannons (bombardae) were for the first time used in the Baltic region by the Teutonic Knights in 1362⁶², while they were employed by the Lithuanian army⁶³ in 1382 etc. One must bear in mind, however, that despite this qualitative turn in the Lithuanian weaponry, its quality was far from being satisfactory. In 1382, for example, Vytautas, after he had joined the side of the Teutonic Order, asked the Teutonic Knights for arms and horses⁶⁴. These remarks are further confirmed by the following facts. According to Iohannes Dlugossius' chronicle, a day before the battle of Grunwald the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen was very surprised to learn that Vytautas's army was so powerful and well armed. Ulrich von Jungingen said that in the Lithuanian army 'more men ready to hold spoons than men ready to hold arms may be found'⁶⁵. These words are quoted by Dlugossius in his chronicle⁶⁶.

No important changes are visible in the 14th century Lithuanian army's tactics. Considerable transformations can be observed in the military structure of this army. The appearance of the cavalry and the introduction of new kinds of weapons serve as examples here. The above facts allowed the select troops of the Lithuanian army to approximate to the Teutonic Order in terms of tactics employed. In the 14th century, especially from the second half of the 14th century onwards, the tactics of Lithuanian military expeditions became similar to those of the Teutonic Order. The Lithuanians, like the Teutonic Knights, used to avoid big battles and concentrated upon raids on the enemy's country. In the 14th century the number of military expeditions undertaken by both the Lithuanians and the Teutonic Order increased, while the number of big battles decreased, as compared with the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century. In the second half of the 14th century the grand-ducal army would storm Teutonic castles only after it had gained the support of the Prussian warriors, members of the Teutonic ranks⁶⁷. However, these positive changes were introduced only in select troops of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As it was the levy-in-mass that constituted the greater part of the army in the 14th

and in the 15th centuries, the tactics did not undergo any considerable changes. This assumption is further supported by various examples. The troops enrolled as a result of the levy-in-mass usually fought on foot⁶⁸, which made them use various tactical tricks already tested in the 13th century. In the year 1394, for example, a difficult terrain was intended to be exploited in battle. Had the plan really existed, it would have been frustrated by the Burgundian infantry and the cross-bowmen⁶⁹ fighting in the Teutonic army who murdered the majority of the Lithuanian troops hidden in a forest. Romas Batura supposes that in the battle of Rudava of 1370 the Lithuanians attempted to disperse the Teutonic Knights' battle array by simulating a retreat, but their plans frustrated. According to us, the above presented assumption cannot be supported by sufficient written source materials. However, the use of the simulated retreat from battlefield tactics, well known in the 13th century, by Lithuanian troops in the 14th century cannot be excluded. On the other hand, these tactics stopped to be so widespread as the modernized military strategy was introduced in the 14th century.

In terms of organization some important changes occurred in the Lithuanian army in the 70s-90s of the 14th century, which allows us to consider this period to be the beginning of a new stage in the development of military history of Lithuania. The chronicle writer of the Teutonic Order Hermann of Wartberge recounts the Lithuanians' expedition to Livonia in 1375. He claims that the Lithuanians "more prutenorum" divided into three divisions ravaged the territories of the Inflantian Order⁷⁰. In this case, it is certain that those were the Teutonic Knights who were referred to as "the Prussians" and the division of the army into three parts was the "three divisions tactic"⁷¹ widespread in contemporary Europe and in the Teutonic State. It might be assumed that the situation was much simpler and Herman of Wartberge's description should be understood as an ordinary, purely mechanical division of the army. The latter interpretation, however, seems to be contradicted by the fact that similar divisions had been introduced in the Lithuanian army before⁷² and it is Hermann of Wartberge himself who mentions such practices in his chronicle without paying any special attention to these facts. Our thesis, that the mention of 1375 referring to the division of the Lithuanian army into three parts means the adoption of the "three divisions tactic" by the Lithuanian army, is further supported by other facts. During the Council of Constance, for example, one of the representatives of the Order accused Poland of teaching the Christian art of war to the pagans⁷³. This episode seems

Mierki, Poland). At present T. Poklewski is working on a publication devoted to this subject.

⁶¹ W. Urban, *The Samogitian Crusade*, Chicago 1990.

⁶² R. Batura, *Lietuviu karas...*, p. 96; A. Nowakowski, *O Wojskach* ..., p. 92.

⁶³ SRP, vol. 2, p. 613; *Lietuviu karas...*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ SRP, vol. 2, p. 622.

⁶⁵ According to: M. Jučas, *Žalgirio muis*, Vilnius 1990, p. 83.

⁶⁶ Some other facts which according to M. Jučas indicate that the Lithuanians were militarily well prepared for fighting are also quoted by this author: p. 83. The fact that Vytautas ordered his men to sell their wives and children, if necessary, in order to provide horses for military expeditions seems to point to an acute problem which existed in Lithuania at that time, namely the shortage of horses. See *ibidem* p. 85.

⁶⁷ More information about the Prussians' betrayal in: SRP, vol. 3, pp. 84, 110-111, 153 passim.

⁶⁸ Cf.: SRP, vol. 2, pp. 583, 654 passim.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 196.

⁷⁰ SRP, vol. 2, pp. 107-108.

⁷¹ S. Ekdahl, *Die "Banderia Prutenorum" des Jan Długosz - eine Quelle zur Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410*, Göttingen 1976, pp. 10-17.

⁷² Cf.: SRP, vol. 2, pp. 80, 516-520 passim.

⁷³ According to: S. Ekdahl, *Die "Banderia Prutenorum" ...*, p. 11. the quotation from ref. 12.

to prove that at the beginning of the 15th century the Lithuanians already possessed the knowledge of east and central-European art of war. The period between the 80s of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century is not a long one. The Teutonic Knights' accusation might have been exaggerated as it was undoubtedly the Teutonic Knights who taught the Lithuanian warriors during their permanent wars.

At the end of the 15th century another important change in the organization of the Lithuanian army took place: the army started to be divided into banners, singled out according to their tactical tasks. If we are to believe the chronicle writer Wigand of Marburg, banners were for the first time introduced already in 1337⁷⁴, during the storming of the castle of Bayerburg. In this case, however, the mention refers to the Duke of Trakai's own standard. After the year 1337, banners appearing in the Lithuanian army are only once mentioned in the Teutonic written sources, i.e. in 1394⁷⁵. The account of the battle of Grunwald seems to support the thesis that the division of the Lithuanian army into tactical units according to banners had already been introduced into the Lithuanian army by that time. The Lithuanian army arrived for the battle without banners and the commanders of particular troops were given banners by Vytautas just before the battle started⁷⁶. The close similarities between individual banners (most of the troops possessed banners with the same sign) proves their short tradition.

The late appearance of banners in Lithuania should not be surprising. The form of banner used in the Middle Ages (the German term "Banner") appeared only in the middle of the 12th century, though its earlier form — the gonfalon — was known in Western Europe as early as the 9th century⁷⁷. Therefore, the appearance of banners in Lithuania at the end of the 14th century seems to be quite natural. The spread of the use of coats of arms may be quoted as another example here. Except for the Duke's family, coats of arms started to spread among the nobility only on the turn of the 14th century. The first preserved coat of arms belonging to the Lithuanian nobleman Thomas Survila was already known in the early 90s of the 14th century. However, it was clearly formed under the influence of West-European tradition⁷⁸.

In Lithuania changes affecting both arms and tactics as well as other military domains were accompanied by the spread of chivalric customs. The range of the latter,

however, was not so extensive as in other west and central-European countries. As early as 1317, for example, in the battle of Veliuona the Czech knight Plicht won a duel with a Lithuanian paladin⁷⁹. Marger, a Lithuanian duke, was defeated in a duel by Johannes of Luxemburg, the King of Bohemia in 1329⁸⁰.

The appearance of a new social class — the knights — as well as frequent contacts between the Lithuanians and the flower of West-European chivalry in numerous battles influenced both the customs and the lifestyles of the Lithuanian nobility. The model of the European knight was adopted in Lithuania at that time. The characteristics of Kestutis, the Lithuanian prince, found in the German chronicles of the second half of the 14th century prove the popularity of this model: "Kestutis was a gallant and honest man. He used to let the enemy know about an advancing expedition and the expedition really took place. If he considered any of the Teutonic brothers to be brave, he would show his love and respect towards him". The above characteristics were written down by the author of the *Ältere Hochmeisterchronik*⁸¹. A close similarity between this picture and the ideal model of medieval knight is clearly visible.

Some elements of chivalric culture are easily noticed in Lithuania at the end of the 14th century. The traditional elements of chivalric culture such as the knight's honour and the offence of the ruler appear. In 1403, when the Commander of Brandenburg, Marquard von Zaltzbach, offended Duke Vytautas, six "best" Lithuanian noblemen challenged six Teutonic Knights for a duel⁸². Although the fight did not eventually take place, about ten years after the event Marquard paid with his head⁸³. It is shortly after the battle of Grunwald that some Lithuanian knights take part in a tournament⁸⁴, which is recorded in the written sources (1413). The year 1413, when Vytautas bestowed a knighthood on Benedict Makra⁸⁵, is evidence of the fact that the social elite of Lithuania had already adopted the etiquette of European knights.

The changes which occurred in Lithuania in the 14th

⁷⁴ SRP, vol. 2, pp. 493-494; E. Gudavičius, *Ka reiške "ugninė ietis" ["telum igneum"] Vygando kronikoje? "Lietuvos istorijos metraštis"*, 1984 metai, 1985, pp. 78-80.

⁷⁵ SRP, vol. 3, p. 195.

⁷⁶ Cf.: M. Jučas, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁷⁷ S. Ekdahl, *Die "Banderia Prutenorum"...* p. 20.

⁷⁸ W. Paravicini, *Heraldische Quellen zur Geschichte der Preussenreisen*, [in:] *Ordines militares*. Tübingen 1987, vol. 4, pp. 117 passim. The badge is mentioned in: W. Paravicini, *Verlorene Denkmäler europäischer Ritterschaft: Die heraldischen Malereien des 14. Jahrhunderts im Dom zu Königsberg*, [in:] *Kunst und Geschichte in Ostseeraum. Tagungen 1988 und 1989, Hamburg Gespräche*. Kiel 1990. Heft 12. 59 illustrations.

⁷⁹ SRP, vol. 1, p. 286. This Czech knight died a couple of years later. He was one of the best Czech knights. See: W. I w a n i c z a k, *Tropem rycerskiej przygody*, Warsaw 1985, pp. 143-145, 304; *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum* [FRB], vol. 4, Prague 1884, pp. 395, 478. Some duels between Lithuanian and Czech knights might have taken place before. Already the Prussians knew how to challenge a German knight for a duel. See: SRP, vol. 1, p. 111.

⁸⁰ FRB, vol. 4, p. 403; *Johannis abbatis Victoriensis Liber certarum Historiarum*, [in:] *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, vol. 2, Hannover-Leipzig 1910, lib. IV-VI, p. 135. There exists a detailed description of this duel, though some of the circumstances presented appear to be hardly real: *Collection de chroniques Belges. Ly Myreur des Histoires. Chronique de Jean des Preiss dit D'Outremeuse*, Brussels 1880, vol. 6, pp.412-417. Cf.: A. N i k ž e n t a i t i s, *Pilenu misle*, Vilnius 1993.

⁸¹ SRP, vol. 3, pp. 593-594; A. K u č i n s k a s, *Kęstutis*, Vilnius 1988, p. 192.

⁸² SRP, vol. 3, p. 267.

⁸³ Cf. the explanation of this story in: S. Ekdahl, *Die "Banderia Prutenorum"...*, pp. 117-122.

⁸⁴ *Johannis Dlugossii Opera omnia*, vol. 13, Cracow 1877, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁵ *Vytautas Didysis*, ed. P. Š l e ž a s, Vilnius 1988, p. 127.

century brought about some radical transformations in the army. They determined, to a certain extent, the ultimate outcome of the Lithuanians' struggle with the Teutonic Knights.

The discussion on the role played by the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the early stage of the battle of Grunwald has been carried on in historical literature for a long time. Older historiography clearly following up Iohannes Długossius' chronicle claimed that the Lithuanians had escaped from battlefield⁸⁶. It was only after the serious criticism of Iohannes Długossius' chronicle made by the Swedish historian Sven Ekdahl that this situation really started to change⁸⁷: Polish historians are also becoming more careful in their opinions concerning the initial stage of the battle⁸⁸. The results of Ekdahl's work⁸⁹ are further confirmed by the above discussed data. It has been assumed so far that in the battle of Grunwald the Lithuanians used tactics adopted from the Tatars. Consequently, the proving of this fact has been the aim of all studies. It has recently been established that these tactics were characteristic of the Lithuanians as well as of other 'barbarian nations'. Therefore the above mentioned scholarly aim has to be dropped. The discussed material coming from various sources points to the fact that the simulated retreat tactics were used in Lithuania in the 13th century and sometimes also in the 14th century. The Lithuanians were forced to use this kind of tactic by the inferiority of their army and its organization. The select troops of the Lithuanian army could partly approximate to the army of the Teutonic Order as far as their arms and training are concerned. The number of these troops, however, was too small when a big battle was to be fought. During big battles, troops enrolled as a result of the levy-in-mass still constituted the fundamental part of the army. Unfortunately, they were poorly trained and armed. Such was the proportion of forces just before the battle of Grunwald. The false information about the excellent preparation of the Lithuanian warriors for the battle the Grand Master was supplied with by his scouts does not seem to influence these facts in any way⁹⁰. Iohannes Długossius quoting the Grand Master's words of surprise, simultaneously explains the way in which Vytautas managed to deceive the commanders of the Teutonic Order: according to their old practice, the Lithuanians placed worse armed warriors among better equipped mounted ones⁹¹.

⁸⁶ A thorough discussion on old literature in: M. Jučas, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-115.

⁸⁷ See ref. 71; S. Ekdahl, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen*, vol. 1, Berlin 1982, pp. 260-297.

⁸⁸ M. Biskup, *Wielka wojna Polski i Litwy z zakonem krzyżackim (1409-1411) w świetle najnowszych badań*, [in:] *Ekspansja niemieckich zakonów rycerskich*, Toruń 1990, p.178; A. Nadołski, *Grunwald...*, pp. 167-170.

⁸⁹ S. Ekdahl, *Die Schlacht von Tannenberg und ihre Bedeutung in der Geschichte des Ordensstaates*, "Deutsche Ostkunde", vol. 3, 1989, pp. 63-80. The participation of the Lithuanian army in the battle of Grunwald is discussed in the article with the same title in: *Zalgirio laiku Lietuva ir jos kaimynai*, Vilnius 1993, pp. 34-64. Cf. ref. 71, 87.

⁹⁰ M. Jučas, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

In the analysis of the beginning of the battle of Grunwald and the Lithuanians' military actions, the French Monk of Saint Denis' account, already noticed by S. Ekdahl, should be referred to⁹². His description seems to be the first response to the battle of Grunwald in Western Europe and it is most probably based on a participant's account⁹³. On the basis of the information provided by this work, the course of events in the early stage of the battle may be reconstructed. It appears that the decisive stage of the battle began when the Lithuanians had already retreated from battlefield towards a forest, where the Teutonic Knights were subsequently attacked and defeated by the Polish troops. This attack was totally unexpected as the Teutonic Knights believed that their victory over the Lithuanian army was an ultimate one⁹⁴. In the monk of Saint Denis' report all the indispensable elements of a simulated retreat can easily be noticed. In this case, just like in numerous battles of the 13th and the 14th century, the Lithuanians lured their enemy towards a place which was inconvenient for fighting and where the main Polish and Lithuanian forces awaited battle. The most important difference between the above described situation and the 13th and the 14th century battles lies in the fact that in the battle of Grunwald it was the whole Lithuanian army, or the majority of it, that served as a decoy and was chased by the enemy. Therefore, the premise concerning the use of a tactical trick seems to be upheld by the results of S. Ekdahl's research.

The judgements made by the Lithuanian warriors who took part in the battle of Grunwald about the above recounted events should also be mentioned here. At the same time one of the three parts of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, where the traditional judgements on the events recorded according to the participants' relations may be preserved, could be rehabilitated⁹⁵. The author of the *Bychowiec Chronicle*, who describes the "Lithuanian" stage of the battle, stresses the difficult moment of the Lithuanians' fight with the Teutonic Knights. He accuses the Poles saying they did not succour the Lithuanian troops and only watched them fight⁹⁶.

The studies of the battle of Grunwald, especially the recent ones, have shown that questions asked about the battle as a whole as well as about its particular aspects cannot be answered by one research work only.

This is also true in the case of the studies of the history of the Lithuanian army in the Middle Ages. Re-

⁹² See ref. 89. The source is discussed in: S. Ekdahl, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410 ...*, pp. 183-184.

⁹³ S. Ekdahl, *Die Schlacht bei Tannenberg 1410 ...*, pp. 183-184. Cf.: A. Nadołski, *Grunwald...*, pp. 163-167.

⁹⁴ SRP, vol. 3, pp. 453-454.

⁹⁵ E. Gudavičius, *Bychovco kronikos pasakojimas apie Zalgirio mūšį*, [in:] *Zalgirio laiku Lietuva ir jos kaimynai*, pp. 123-137.

⁹⁶ More information about the evaluation of the battle of Grunwald in Lithuania in: A. Nikžentaitis, *Zalgirio mūšio vertinimas XV-XVI a. lietuviu visuomenėje*, "Lietuvos istorijos metraštis", 1990 metai, 1991, pp. 5-13; A. Nadołski, *Grunwald ...*, pp. 163-167; the author of this work disagrees as far as the evaluation of the two stages of the battle is concerned.

search on the history of military science in Lithuania will not be successful unless it is undertaken by more historians and especially by archaeologists. This paper should be considered as an introduction to wider research on the army of medieval Lithuania.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

