

Aurimas Švedas, *In the Captivity of the Matrix: Soviet Lithuanian Historiography, 1944–1985*, Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2014. 280 p. ISBN 978-90-420-3911-7

When Maurice Halbwachs, the founding father of the collective memory theory, defined the concept of *collective memory* as fundamentally different from *historical memory*, he evidently had in mind the 19th-century positivist understanding of historians. The 20th century, however, has severely challenged this professional image, by assigning to historians the role of ideological actors who participate in the construction of collective memory. Moreover, the so-called postmodern turn has framed the historical text as literary artefact, which, as Hyden White has insisted, is inclined to moralise reality. On the other hand, history as a professional discipline still matters, particularly when it is seen in a Blochian perspective as ‘the science of men in time’. Aurimas Švedas’ book *In the Captivity of the Matrix: Soviet Lithuanian Historiography, 1944–1985* has brought the Blochian perspective to a self-reflective level by exploring Lithuanian historians in time, and Lithuanian history writing during the Soviet period.

Švedas’ book focuses on crucial questions regarding the sovietisation of national history: how was history research institutionalised during the Soviet era, and how was this process shaped by particular Lithuanian historians? The indiscriminate condemnation of the Soviet period in Lithuania, as well as in other post-communist countries, has often generated ready-made and rather uninformative interpretations of the historians’ modus operandi within the Soviet regime. Arguably, the self-sufficient descriptive categories of the totalitarian paradigm have motivated scholars, including historians, to look for alternative conceptual layers, in order to demonstrate the complexity of the seemingly obvious relations between historians and Soviet ideology, and to explain the construction of national historiographies. Acknowledging this intricacy, Švedas regards Soviet history writing through the lens of generations and paradigms. Namely, the analytical story of the construction of Soviet-era historiography is told from the perspective of generational and paradigmatic consensus building and differentiation. We should admit that a similar approach has also been used in the analysis of Latvian and Estonian historiographies.¹

¹ P. Grönholm, M. Wulf, ‘Generating meaning across generations. The role of historians in the codification of history in Soviet and post-Soviet Estonia’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 41(3) (2010), pp. 351–382; J. Keruss, et al., *Latvijas Universitātes Vēstures un filozofijas fakultātes vēsture padomju laikā: personības, struktūras, idejas (1944–1991)*. 2. Izdevums, (Rīga, 2011).

The book is based around five chapters which chronologically explore the evolution of Soviet Lithuanian historiography, illuminating the major conditions and actors that facilitated the introduction and (re)definition of a class-based Lithuanian historiography. But before going into the Soviet era, the book provides an important outline of the prewar Lithuanian historiography that emerged from the Kaunas school of history. Švedas calls the interwar period ‘a time of opportunity’, when the prominent Lithuanian historian Adolfas Šapokas called for discovering ‘Lithuanians in Lithuanian history’. This nationally inclined and perhaps inevitable paradigm resulted in a selective approach to history, which, it is argued, reflected only a strong state, disregarding non-Lithuanian (shameful) history. The description of the interwar period and the ‘historian-ploughman generation’ gives a more grounded understanding of Lithuanian historiography, which was dismantled by the generation of ‘warrior historians’. However, Švedas avoids addressing the issue of whether and how these different generations and historiographical conceptions were structurally similar, and what Lithuanian interwar historiography looked like in comparison with other states in the region.

The origins of Soviet Lithuanian historiography are analysed along with external and internal contexts. The external context, particularly the role of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania (CC CPL) and Moscow’s influence, reveals structural limitations which defined clear hierarchies and rules for the milieu of historians. Simultaneously, Švedas discerns the internal context (e.g. meetings of historians, polemics in the media) as dialectical sites where the power relations and agency of historians emerged in different capacities during the Stalinist and post-Stalinist stages. This ‘duality of structure’, when limitations also provide opportunities to challenge these limitations, ultimately becomes the leitmotif of this book.

The first phase (1944–1956) of the construction of Lithuanian historiography is largely related to the seemingly invincible Juozas Žiugžda, the director of the Institute of History. Žiugžda’s individual characteristics, as well as ideological sins, in the 1930s determined his unconditional obedience and opportunism, and made him so useful to the Soviet regime. At the same time, Švedas highlights historians and their various opposition strategies, whereby the ideological dictate was neutralised or ignored. Three types of opposition are extrapolated in the book. The first type is assigned to the oldest or prewar generation of Lithuanian historians (e.g. Ignas Jonynas, Augustinas Janulaitis, Konstantinas Jablonskis), whose strategies varied from different forms of self-isolation to challenging the rigid ideological order. The second type represents ‘ideologically oriented humanists’ who, regardless of their communist beliefs, advocated the idea that history as a scientific discipline should be separated from the political agenda of the Communist Party. Finally, the third type embraces

historians-outsiders who 'wanted to do small but good deeds in history'. This type is vividly illustrated by the activities of the high-ranking party functionary Justas Paleckis, whose works were seen as ideologically erroneous by the Party elite.

The same power relations and attempts to expand the ideological matrix are explored in terms of the late Soviet period. Nevertheless, the chapter which deals with the development of historiographical discourse in the late Soviet period (1957–1985) does not draw such sharp dividing lines any more between position and opposition. Švedas is evidently aware of the fact that analytical categories which are embedded in the totalitarian paradigm do not facilitate the understanding of historians' behavioural models within the official discourse during the late Soviet period. As the control of the CC CPL over Lithuanian history writing eased off, along with the Thaw and normalisation processes, it opened up space for methodological reflections by historians. Discussions on the methodology used in Soviet Lithuanian history research emerged in the early 1960s, and became a major watershed between the rather demoralised 'warrior historians' and historians who had already understood the name of the game in the post-Stalinist era. Švedas suggests that 'methodological reflection can be considered as a symbol of the maturity of the professional community.' Juozas Jurginis is presented as one of the most active and prominent representatives of this self-reflective trend, thereby symbolising a clear opposition to the illustrative-descriptive approach supported by Žiugžda. Although Švedas provides an appealing insight into the historians' habitus of the 1970s and 1980s, this complicated and still under-theorised period lacks more thorough reflections with respect to Lithuania and the other Baltic states.

The last two chapters of the book explore the construction of the official Soviet narrative of Lithuania's history in diverse books which sought to synthesise Lithuanian history. A comparative analysis of various sources reveals the persistent and dynamic elements of this narrative. Švedas focuses particularly on temporal and spatial dimensions of this narrative that might appear as a too narrow analytical perspective, but ultimately he manages to reveal the fascinating ideological rivalry over narrative models of Lithuanian history. The analysis of temporal and spatial dimensions demonstrates the steady emancipation of the Soviet narrative and the emergence of alternative narratives. Švedas also takes a closer look at the period of feudalism, which, along with the rise of capitalism, plays an important role in terms of Lithuania's statehood. The feudalism period was perhaps the most sensitive topic for Soviet Lithuanian historiography, as it had the power to dismantle the myth of the homology of historical development in Lithuania and Russia, as was suggested by Žiugžda and others.

The epilogue of the book sets out to reflect on the legacy of Soviet Lithuanian historiography. However, instead of speculating on possible remnants of Soviet history writing in contemporary Lithuanian historiog-

raphy, and in the historical consciousness of Lithuanian society, it focuses on the influence of globalisation and postmodern thinking on contemporary Lithuanian historiography. Švedas concludes that ‘a process of change within the Lithuanian community of historians and historiography is underway,’ thus implicitly suggesting that Lithuania’s collective memory is also going to change, moving away from the (post)Soviet matrix, and searching for more emancipated matrices of historical imagination. In line with this dynamic view, Švedas’ book can be seen as part and parcel of these changes, providing a more complicated picture of Soviet-era historiography in Lithuania.

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