

Contacts and Cultural Transfer in the Historical Region of East Prussia, 1700 – 2000

Veranstalter: Klaus Richter, University of Birmingham; Vasilijus Safronovas, Institute of Baltic Sea Region History and Archaeology, University of Klaipėda; Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Centre for Research on Anti-Semitism, Technical University of Berlin

Datum, Ort: 20.09.2013-22.09.2013,

Bericht von: Adam Storrington, St. John's College, Cambridge

This conference examined identity (primarily but not only ethnic identity) and cultural transfer in the historical region of East Prussia, both under Hohenzollern rule and subsequently. Its overarching aim, as set out by ANDREAS KOSSERT (Berlin) in his keynote address, and by the organisers in their introductory remarks, was to continue to move away from national viewpoints on East Prussian history, and to recognise East Prussia as a place of multiple ethnicities and multiple identities, and as a meeting point for cultures from east and west. To emphasise this multi-ethnicity, the conference was organised by both German and Lithuanian institutions (the Institute for Anti-Semitism Research at the Technical University of Berlin, the Institute of Baltic Sea Region History and Archaeology at the University of Klaipėda, the Academia Baltica, and the Thomas Mann Cultural Centre, Nida), and the participants, who came from seven countries, included speakers from Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Russia. The event was generously funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

Three papers established the underlying background for what followed. ARŪNAS BAUBLYS (Klaipėda) described how the numerous Prussian court preachers from Lithuania in the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries brought with them ideas from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's „Golden Age“ of religious tolerance, playing a part in establishing Prussia too as a place of religious tolerance (though not, it was noted, for Catholics). In contrast, DARIUS BARASA (Klaipėda) described the disciplining power of the Hohenzollern state in the same peri-

od, with church and state working together to achieve social control through confessionalisation. Moving away from the activities of the Prussian state, AXEL WALTER (Osnabrück) demonstrated how its very absence fostered a specific East Prussian identity. The movement of power away from East Prussia, begun with the royal family's conversion to Calvinism in 1613 and completed with the coronation of 1701 (the last major state event in East Prussia), led East Prussian intellectuals to develop their own idea of „Old Prussia“ during the Eighteenth Century, harkening back to the region's earlier history. The sense of a distinct East Prussian identity was seen again during the following centuries, culminating in the inter-war idea of the territory as an island of German-ness.

Papers on the Nineteenth, Twentieth and Twentieth-First Centuries focused particularly on ethnic identities, with discussion of the attempts by states to influence these identities and a particular emphasis on the effects of borders, transport and other meeting places. Many papers stressed the ethnic diversity of the region. VASILIJUS SAFRONOVAS (Klaipėda) noted that, although ethnographers identified Prussian Lithuania as covering a substantial portion of East Prussia, and its administrative borders were even greater, in practice Lithuanians in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries were a tiny minority in most towns, with only 4 percent of the population in Tilsit (the main centre of Lithuanian nationalist activity) being Lithuanian, and 5 percent in Memel. Similarly, JAN MUSEKAMP (Frankfurt / Oder), discussing the German border with Polish Russia in the Nineteenth Century, noted that many Germans with Polish names, and Poles with German names, lived on both sides. Even when discussing the cruel subject of Polish child forced labour during the Second World War, MACHTELD VENKEN (Vienna) noted that many of the farmers they worked for in Germany were in fact Poles.

Borders played a significant role in identity formation. JAN MUSEKAMP described how the Poles and Germans living around Toruń, artificially divided by the Partition, continued to move freely back and forth across the border; a system institutionalised by the

two states in the 1880s with the introduction of „legitimation cards“ for inhabitants of their joint border regions. In contrast, while recognising the frequent movement of locals, ANNA ZGLIŃSKA (Toruń) demonstrated how, for those who lived further away, the border helped to create a distinct sense of the „other“. She described German tourists' fascination with the border: they visited it, bought postcards showing the border posts and railways, then crossed the border to post them from the Polish side. Numerous myths developed around the border, portraying the lands on the other side as empty, wild and filled with dangerous Cossacks.

Dealing with ethnic relations within a state's borders, papers described the limited capacity of states to mould unified identities, even where they wanted to. This was demonstrated with particular force by ROMUALDAS ADOMAVICIUS (Klaipėda), describing the situation after a border had actually been rolled forward through the Lithuanian occupation of the Klaipėda/Memelland region in 1923. The efforts of the Lithuanian government to tie the new territory to Greater Lithuania, for instance by bringing Greater Lithuanians not just into senior but also junior administrative posts, and into the port authorities, aroused great resentment not just among ethnic Germans but also other inhabitants of Lithuania Minor. Even Jews, who the government encouraged to move to Klaipėda and treated as Lithuanians, sent their children to German schools and associated themselves with German culture. ANDRZEJ KOPICZKO (Olsztyn) described the government's greater success in achieving the more limited aim of taking control of the Catholic Church in the new territory and increasing its influence. On the German side of the border, before 1914, CHARLES PERRIN (Atlanta) described the story of the Lithuanian Prussian *Martynas Jankus*, showing how circumstances led him to reject the German culture that surrounded him, and to become a Lithuanian nationalist.

The contrast with these stories of porous borders and diverse identities was provided by STEFAN THIERFELDER (Freiburg), whose paper described the successful work of the East German *Heimatdienst* in 1919-1920 to mobilise the population of Masuria and Erm-

land for the 1920 plebiscite to decide whether they would be part of Poland or Germany. THIERFELDER emphasised the success of the *Heimatdienst's* propaganda in creating a clear sense of „us“ and „them“, with the Masurians and Ermlanders defined as Prussians in opposition to Poles. The 97.86 percent vote in favour of union with Germany was a resounding expression of a united single identity, which also established an international border to define this identity. Noticeably, this was achieved through civil society, not the action of the state.

The focus on East Prussia as place of cultural transfer between east and west was particularly reflected by papers discussing the importance of travel and transport. JAN MUSEKAMP argued that the growth of nationalism among ethnic minorities in the Nineteenth Century reflected the better communications, particularly the railway, which gave them more information about the outside world. He described the substantial movement of people both up to the German-Russian border for commerce and across it, in huge numbers, for emigration. NIJOLĖ STRAKAUSKAITĖ (Klaipėda) described how the improvement in communications made Curonian fishing villages easily accessible as spa resorts. Conversely, however, it was the traditional lifestyle of the fishermen living there which particularly attracted the tourists.

Turning to the period after 1945, papers again confronted multiple identities, but also the absence of identity and the search for it. BERT HOPPE (Berlin) described how, for decades up to 2000 (first because of the absence of information about Kaliningrad), German ideas focused overwhelmingly on the city's past as Königsberg, trying to ignore its Russian present. In contrast, ILYA DEMENTYEV (Kaliningrad) and LINA MOTUZIENĖ (Klaipėda) demonstrated the numerous possible identities of Russians living in the Kaliningrad region. While the Soviet view of the region as ancient Slavic territory, or simple pride in the achievements of Russian soldiers in conquering the territory in 1945, offer Russian nationalist identities, both speakers described the fascination of Kaliningraders with their land's German past, reflected in the use of old German place names and an enormous

interest in Prussian history, archaeology and historical re-enactment, starting in the 1970s and proliferating after 1991. On one level, this simply shows an inherent need to develop a regional identity. However, it also puts the gloomy subtitle of STEFAN THIERFELDER'S paper, which described the Heimatdienst as „the end of peaceful co-existence“, into context: even after huge annexations and forcible movements of peoples, the historical space of East Prussia is clearly still a place which facilitates the formation and cultivation of multiple identities.

In his keynote address, Andreas Kossert warned that we must not romanticise East Prussia as a model of multi-culturalism. Nevertheless, this conference showed that historians of the region have at least, as he put it, „done [their] homework“: they have escaped from nationalist interpretations of East Prussian history, and recognised the region's multi-layered diversity. Several speakers delivered papers questioning their own countries' nationalist myths, although others balanced the picture with reminders that East Prussian history also contained examples of conflict and intolerance. In summary, RUTH LEISEROWITZ (Warsaw) looked toward future research which would continue to examine the region's multiple ethnicities, seeking out new sources and viewing them from multiple perspectives

Konferenzübersicht

Silva Pocyte (Klaipėda): Address of welcome

Lina Motuzienė (Klaipėda): The History of the Thomas Mann House in Nida

Andreas Kossert (Berlin): Key-note speech

Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin), VASILIJUS SAFRONOVAS (Klaipėda), KLAUS RICHTER (Birmingham): Introductory remarks

Sektion 1 – Loyalty and Identity Politics in East Prussia

Chair: Vacys Vaivada (Klaipėda)

Arūnas Baublys (Klaipėda): From Court Church to Intellectual Elite. The Reformed Preachers in Prussia, 17th to 18th C.

Darius Barasa (Klaipėda): Confessionalizati-

on as a Means of Social and Cultural Integration in East Prussia in the 18th C.

Commentary: Esther-beate Körber (Berlin)

Sektion 2: Border Regions and Cultural Transfer

Chair: Klaus Richter (Birmingham)

Jan Musekamp (Frankfurt Oder.): The Royal Prussian Ostbahn and German-Polish Cross-border Relations in the 19th C.

Anna Zgłirska (Toruń): „Ein Blick nach Russland“. Myth and Reality of Border and Borderland between Prussia and Russia in 19th Century

Commentary: Christian Pletzing (Sankelmark)

Sektion 3 – Defining and Practicing Space in East Prussia

Chair: Lina Motuzienė (Klaipėda)

Axel Walter (Osnabrück): (Re-)Constructions of Old Prussian Identities in East Prussia. The Beginnings of the Writing of a Regional Cultural History (Arnoldt, Lilienthal, Pisanski) in the 18th C. and Their Repercussions

Nijolė Strakauskaitė (Klaipėda): East Prussian Health Resorts in the Context of the Popularization of Tourism (19th C. – 1st Half of 20th C.)

Vasilijus Safronovas (Klaipėda): The Creation of a National Space in Prussian Lithuania at the Turn of the 20th C.

Commentary: Jörg Hackmann (Szczecin)

Sektion 4 – Intercultural Contacts and the Change from Imperial to National Order

Chair: Silva Pocyte (Klaipėda)

Charles Perrin (Atlanta): Between German and Lithuanian Culture, Between the Intelligentsia and the Peasantry. The Intellectual Development of Martynas Jankus (1858 – 1946)

Romualdas Adomavičius (Klaipėda): The Port of Klaipėda as a Place of Cultural Contact in the Interwar Period

Andrzej Kopiczko (Olsztyn): The Catholic Church in the Memelland, 1923 – 1939

Commentary: Ruth Leiserowitz (Warsaw)

Sektion 5 – Consequences of Annexations

Chair: Werner Bergmann (Berlin)

Stefan Thierfelder (Freiburg): The East German Heimatdienst and the Plebiscite Period in East Prussia. The Beginning of the End of Peaceful Co-existence?

Machteld Venken (Vienna): Polish Children's Forced Labour Experiences in Ego Documents and Testimonies

Commentary: Andrzej Sakson (Poznań)

Sektion 6 – Transcribing East Prussia

Chair: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin)

Bert Hoppe (Berlin): Kaliningrad as a „Prussian Atlantis“

Ilya Dementyev (Kaliningrad): From „Ancient Slavialand“ to „Paradise Lost“. Rehabilitation of Cultural Heritage in Cultural Memory of Kaliningrad Citizens (End of 1940s – Beginning of 1980s)

Lina Motuzienė (Klaipėda): The Past as a Basis for Cultural Contacts. Initiatives of Social Groups in Kaliningrad in the Late 20th C.

Commentary: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin)

Concluding discussion

Moderation: Ruth Leiserowitz (Warsaw)

Tagungsbericht *Contacts and Cultural Transfer in the Historical Region of East Prussia, 1700 – 2000*. 20.09.2013-22.09.2013, , in: H-Soz-Kult 24.10.2013.