



NEXUSES OF INTERACTION IN THE BORDERLAND BETWEEN LITHUANIA AND PRUSSIA IN THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL PERIOD. INTRODUCTION

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When the Golub War, which broke out in the summer of 1422, came to an end with the treaty concluded between Władysław II Jagiełło (Jogaila), Vytautas and Paul von Rusdorf, it might have appeared to be merely another temporary agreement in the longstanding conflict in which Poland and Lithuania on one side, and the Teutonic Order on the other, were engaged for some time. However, the Peace of Melno established a border between Lithuania and the Prussian domains of the Teutonic Order, or more precisely principles for where it should be marked. Once implemented, the border with Prussia remained essentially unchanged along parts of its course for several centuries.

Historians find the emergence of this border in northern Europe particularly noteworthy, because although it initially marked 'spheres of influence' in almost uninhabited areas, it eventually became an important line of demarcation. It has often been depicted as part of the border between Protestant and Catholic Europe, and in the 19th and early 20th centuries as part of the frontier between progress and backwardness, civilisation and barbarism, and even as a cultural boundary between Europe and Asia.

Despite these images, far removed from the realities of the place, people living on both sides of the border interacted, established contacts, exchanged goods, services and information, and in some cases even spoke the same Lithuanian language (albeit different dialects). They created and shaped the border not as an insurmountable obstacle, but as a distinctive zone of contact.

The articles in this volume examine three cases, each focusing on selected nexuses of interaction in the borderland in the pre-industrial period. Although these studies are separate, and differ in their locations, periods and the phenomena they explore, together they offer a glimpse of the distinctive, long-vanished and still largely unfamiliar nexuses of interaction that once characterised the border between Lithuania and Prussia.

Where was the border?

The Lithuania and Prussia referred to in this volume are understood as historical entities. On one side was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, whose ruler, after concluding a personal union with the Polish nobility in 1385, also became King of Poland. In 1569, these ties were transformed at Lublin, creating the dualistic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. On the other side was Prussia, which until the reform of 1525 was ruled by the Teutonic Order, then became a fief of the Polish king with hereditary authority vested in the Duke in Prussia, in the 17th century was bound by ties of subordination to Brandenburg in the Holy Roman Empire, and finally evolved (1656–1657) into a sovereign territory of the Hohenzollerns.

8

One stretch of the former border between Prussia and Lithuania still separates two nations today, and also functions as the external border of the European Union and the Schengen Area. This part of the old border lies near what is better known in Europe as the Suwałki Corridor. It runs from the River Nemunas/Neman to the point where the borders of three countries, Lithuania, Poland and Russia, meet just south of Lake Vištytis (in German Wyszyten/Wyszytyer/Wystiter See).

However, as recently as 100 years ago, in the first half of the 20th century, another section of the border, extending from Palanga–Nemirseta to the River Šventoji near Smalininkai, was still relevant. Until the final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in October 1795, a third section also existed, from south of Lake Vištytis to the Kielen (in Polish Kile)–Chomontowo line, northwest of Lake Necko. Finally, before March 1569, the border between Lithuania and Prussia extended even further south to the River Ełk (formerly Łek, in German Leck or Lyck), which flows out of the Masurian Lake District into the River Biebrza (in German Bober).

Of all these sections, the only one still functioning in its former capacity covers slightly more than half the current border between the Republic of Lithuania and the Russian Federation: 142 kilometres, or about 100 kilometres in a straight line. As in the past, this section mostly follows small rivers and streams (the Šešupė, Širvinta and Liepona). The remaining 130 kilometres of the Lithuanian-Russian border is a 'new' section, crossing the Curonian Spit, the Curonian Lagoon, and running along the rivers Skirvytė, Rusnė and Nemunas. However, it is 'new' only in a conditional sense: it was established in 1920, when the Klaipėda region (Territory of Memel) was separated from the German Reich (of which Prussia was a part). But it also has a six-century-old precedent: in the early 15th century, during border negotiations, Lithuania demanded that the River Nemunas (including its Rusnė branch) should separate the lands of the Grand Duke of Lithuania from those of the Teutonic Order.¹

¹ IVINSKIS, Zenonas. Kovos bruožai dėl Žemaičių ir jų sienų. Nuo Tannenbergo iki 16-tojo amžiaus pradžios. *Athenaeum*, 1935, t. 6, p. 70–71.

At that time, the demand was not fulfilled: the border was moved further north, positioning it two to three miles from the river, the Curonian Lagoon and Memel/Klaipėda. (The word *miliare* in the treaty did not refer to the modern mile. At the time, a mile was around seven to eight kilometres.) In the texts of the Treaty of Melno,² this section, unlike the one mentioned above, was described only in general terms, and was only later measured and 'translated' into physical space according to its principles. Although the 185-kilometre stretch no longer exists, it served an important role for an exceptionally long time: as an administrative border, it lasted until 1945–1947.

The section of the historical border south of Lake Vištytis to the Kielen–Chomontowo line covered a further 96 kilometres, and the section extending to the River Ełk added another 47 kilometres. *Mutatis mutandis*, these correspond today to portions of the eastern and southeast administrative boundary of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in Poland.

Thus, of the more than 470 kilometres that once constituted the border between Lithuania and Prussia, less than one third continues to serve as an international border.

To this must be added an often forgotten fact: the Treaty of Melno also established a small stretch of border between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order's domains in Livonia, namely along the River Šventoji. This stretch adds another 60 kilometres.

When did the border emerge?

When examining how Lithuanian and Polish historians depict the western border of the grand duchy in the 14th and 15th centuries, we often find that they tend to draw a continuous line, whose shape corresponds remarkably closely to the border between the Prussian and Russian monarchies in the 19th century.³ This practice

² There were two main documents to the Treaty of Melno: a preliminary agreement drawn up by representatives (negotiators) of the Order, Poland and Lithuania at the camp near Lake Melno (27 September 1422), and the final treaty, which was to be exchanged in two copies in November of the same year; however, this did not happen until 18 May 1423 in Veluona. The final text of the Treaty of Melno is available in the following publications: *Codex diplomaticus Regni Poloniae et Magni Ducatus Litvaniae*. T. IV. [Ed. Maciej DOGIEL.] Vilnae, [1764], p. 110–115, No. 90; *Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*. Hrsg. von Friedrich Georg von BUNGE (hereinafter *LUB*). Bd. 5. Riga, 1867, Sp. 877–892, Nr. 2637–2638. Both texts can be found at: *Die Staatsverträge des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen im 15. Jahrhundert*. Bd. 1: 1398–1437. Hrsg. von Erich WEISE. 2. Aufl. Marburg, 1970, S. 150–167, Nr. 152–156; *Dokumenty strony polsko-litewskiej pokoju melneńskiego z 1422 roku*. Wyd. Przemysław NOWAK, Piotr POKORA. Poznań, 2004, s. 1–13. There are certain differences in spelling in all four publications. The process of concluding the treaty is comprehensively retraced in: NEITMANN, Klaus. *Die Staatsverträge des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen 1230–1449. Studien zur Diplomatie eines spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Territorialstaates*. Köln, Wien, 1986, S. 171–193.

³ To give just a few examples: BISKUP, Marian; CZAJA, Roman; DŁUGOKĘCKI, Wiesław; DYGO, Marian; JÓŹWIĄK, Sławomir; RADZIMIŃSKI, Andrzej; TANDECKI, Janusz. *Państwo zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach:*

misleads the historical imagination in at least three respects. First, it projects a later border back into earlier periods, either to the time before the Peace of Melno or to the 15th century, when the border was clearly far from being a continuous line. Second, it implicitly transfers into the past a modern understanding of what a border is. This understanding did not yet exist in the 15th and even the 16th centuries: armed border guards did not patrol a border, and people could cross it virtually wherever they wished, and not merely at designated checkpoints. Thirdly, it creates a legend of a 'very old' border that allegedly remained unchanged for centuries and survived into the 20th century in the same form it supposedly had in 1422.

As for the legend of 'one of the oldest borders in Europe', which has become particularly popular in Lithuania in recent years, it should be stated from the outset that it contains far less truth than is sometimes imagined. There are borders on the European continent that were established much earlier and have remained practically unchanged to this day. For example, a significant stretch of today's Czech-German border dates back to the ninth to the 11th centuries; a large portion of the border between England and Scotland has remained constant since 1237; and the borders of Andorra have been stable since 1278. The claim regarding the Lithuanian-Russian border must therefore be viewed in a similar light to the recent critical reassessment of the 'oldness' of *La Raia*, the section of the Spanish-Portuguese border.⁴ If part of today's Lithuanian-Russian border is one of the oldest, it is only within the context of the Baltic Sea region, and even here the claim is challenged by 'rivals', such as the River Narva, which has separated different political entities since the 13th century.

We should also approach critically the tendency to project the 19th-century shape of the border on to the past, sometimes even beyond the provisions of the Treaty of Melno itself. Admittedly, this tendency has some basis. First, the description of the border in the peace treaty resembles a consistently defined line. Second, later documents repeated the text describing the border. For instance, in December 1435, the Treaty of Brest in Kuyavia, which defined the border between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order, reproduced the wording of the 1422 treaty.⁵ Likewise, in June 1529, the Treaty of Vilnius, concluded between Sigismund the Old (in his capacity as Grand Duke of Lithuania) and Albrecht, Duke in Prussia, contained a description of the border between Lithuania and Prussia that was essentially identical to that in the 1422 treaty.⁶

władza i społeczeństwo. Warszawa, 2009, s. 107, 135, 155, 207; BARONAS, Darius; DUBONIS, Artūras; PETRAUSKAS, Rimvydas. *Lietuvos istorija*. T. III: XIII a. – 1385 m. *Valstybės iškilimas tarp Rytų ir Vakarų*. Vilnius, 2011, p. 454–455; *Lietuvos nacionalinis atlasas*. T. II. 2-oji laida. Vilnius, 2016, p. 17, 18.

⁴ TRILLO-SANTAMARÍA, Juan-Manuel; PAÜL, Valerià. The Oldest Boundary in Europe? A Critical Approach to the Spanish-Portuguese Border: The *Raia* Between Galicia and Portugal. *Geopolitics*, 2014, Vol. 19, pp. 161–181.

⁵ *Die Staatsverträge des Deutschen Ordens in Preußen...*, S. 195–213, here 204.

⁶ *Limites regni Poloniae & Magni Ducatus Litvaniae*. [Ed. Maciej DOGIEL.] Vilnae, 1758, p. 206–207; *Codex diplomaticus...*, p. 257–262.

However, although the border was referred to as a continuous line in the documents of the Treaty of Melno, it was not defined with precision. A considerable period elapsed before inspection, surveying and demarcation took place. Sources indicate that a meeting concerning the precise line of the border took place in Memel/Klaipėda at the end of 1423, but it yielded no tangible results.⁷ Information related to the marking of the border in 1425–1427 is rather contradictory. We know that disputes arose over which mile should be used, the Prussian (Kulm) mile or the Lithuanian mile, as well as over the point from which measurements were to be taken. If the border was marked at this time, it was most likely only in a few places, as the evidence points to renewed efforts in 1447.⁸ The border was usually marked by signs cut into oak trees or other trees, or by mounds of soil.⁹ Therefore, along large parts of the Lithuanian–Prussian border that did not coincide with *limites naturelles*, its course could only be approximated in the 15th century. A series of documents from the second half of the century indicates that such an approximate understanding did exist,¹⁰ but they also suggest that the border was not yet a ‘continuous’ or ‘clearly visible’ line in the landscape. Records suggesting that the border was being surveyed again and was marked more clearly and consistently begin to increase only in the 16th century.¹¹ However, it was not until 1576 that Caspar Henneberger’s map depicted it for the first time as a continuous line.¹²

With regard to the latter fact, it is difficult not to recall Michel Foucher’s observation that ‘what may be only a more or less free arrangement of border markers and posts on the ground’ becomes, thanks to cartographers, the elegant ‘invention of linear borders’.¹³

⁷ LUB. Bd. 7. Riga, Moskau, 1881, S. 45–46, Nr. 61.

⁸ Cf. IVINSKIS, Z. *Kovos bruožai...*, p. 88–89, 99–100; TOTORAİTIS, Jonas. *Sūduvos Suvalkijos istorija*. D. 1. Kaunas, 1938, p. 14; NEITMANN, K. *Op. cit.*, S. 555–559; NIKŽENTAITIS, Alvydas. *Palanga XIII–XV amžiais*. In *Palangos istorija*. Sud. Vladas ŽULKUS. Klaipėda, 1999, p. 111–112; ČELKIS, Tomas. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės teritorija: sienų samprata ir delimitaciniai procesai XIV–XVI amžiuje*. Vilnius, 2014, p. 164–165; BUCEVIČIŪTĖ, Laima. *Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė XV–XVI a.: valstybės erdvės ir jos sienų samprata*. Vilnius, 2015, p. 207.

⁹ NEITMANN, K. *Op. cit.*, S. 547.

¹⁰ IVINSKIS, Z. *Kovos bruožai...*, p. 112; ČELKIS, T. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės teritorija...*, p. 166–167.

¹¹ See, e.g., ROEDDER, H[enrich]. *Zur Geschichte des Vermessungswesens Preussens, insbesondere Altpreussens aus der ältesten Zeit bis in das 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart, 1908, S. 42–45.

¹² Cf. *Caspar Hennenberger's Grosse Landtafel von Preussen*. In 9 Blättern. (Erste Ausgabe vom Jahre 1576.) Königsberg, 1863.

¹³ The entire relevant quote reads as follows: ‘ce qui, sur le terrain, peut n’être qu’un alignement plus ou moins lâche de bornes et de poteaux, et dont l’emplacement n’est cartographiable qu’aux très grandes échelles [...] devient [...] ligne continue. En ce sens, technique, la frontière linéaire est une invention, élégante, de cartographe’: FOUCHER, Michel. *L’invention des frontières*. Paris, 1986, p. 37.

An unchanging border that actually changed

The fact that the border 'evolved' from paper to physical space much later than 1422 was primarily due to the late formation of landed possessions on both sides, which in turn was linked to the late settlement of the borderland.

In both the 1420 proposal for border negotiations and the 1422 treaty, the border is described chiefly with reference to natural features: rivers (Lyk; Leppuna; Syrowintha, or Schirwintha; Scheschuppa, alias Suppa or Schessuppa; Swantha, alias Swantona or Swanthaa; Memel, alias Niemen; Jura; Rusna or Russna), lakes (Greyow et Thocylow; Raygrad, alias Rogel or Rogort; Dwisticz, alias Wysiten), and lagoons (Wintenburg haap or Happ). This was because the border ran through what was essentially an uninhabited wilderness (*solitudo*). On the border with Žemaitija (Samogitia), the only man-made structure mentioned in these documents was a castle (castrum Memel alias Klawppeda or Claypeda).¹⁴ On the border with Sūduva (Sudovia), the places called Preywisti and Merunisky, sometimes translated into Lithuanian as farmsteads or plains,¹⁵ cannot, on the basis of the texts of the treaty, be confidently identified as anything more than geographical reference points. It is unclear whether they were inhabited at all.

Moreover, the treaty offered only a vague description of the line of the border, and its demarcation on the ground took a long time. As a result, various claims persisted well after 1422. For several decades after the Peace of Melno, the Teutonic Order continued to lay claim to Palanga. It is unclear what Palanga was at that time, a stopping place or a populated settlement,¹⁶ but it was of considerable importance to the Order as a link on the land route between its Prussian and Livonian domains. It was so important that the Lithuanian dukes Vytautas and Švitrigaila understood they could use this matter as leverage when seeking the Order's favour or alliance.¹⁷

¹⁴ The spelling of the text of the Treaty of Melno comes from: *Dokumenty strony polsko-litewskiej pokoju melneńskiego...*, s. 4–5. The spelling of the border wording proposed by Vytautas comes from: *Codex epistolaris Vitoldi, magni ducis Lithuaniae 1376–1430*. Coll. Antonii PROCHASKA. Cracoviae, 1882, p. 494–495, no. 898.

¹⁵ Cf. translations of the border description into Lithuanian offered by: IVINSKIS, Z. *Kovos bruožai...*, p. 83; TOTORAITIS, J. *Op. cit.*, p. 8, 13–14; *Lietuvos TSR istorijos šaltiniai*. T. 1. Ats. red. Konstantinas JABLONSKIS. Vilnius, 1955, p. 94–95, Nr. 133 (misdated). Max Toeppen used the term *Feldmark* in the sense of an open, unwooded, but also 'uncultivated' area. – TOEPPEN, M[ax]. *Historisch-comparative Geographie von Preussen*. Gotha, 1858, S. 109. For *Merunske*, cf. TOEPPEN, M. *Op. cit.*, S. 21; BARKOWSKI, Otto. *Die Besiedlung des Hauptamtes Insterburg unter Herzog Albrecht und Markgraf Geogr. Friedrich von Ansbach 1525–1603. Prussia*, 1928, Hf. 28, S. 165.

¹⁶ The inhabitants near Palanga are recorded only later, around 1453–1455: SALYS, Antanas. *Die žemaitischen Mundarten. Teil I: Geschichte des žemaitischen Sprachgebiets. Tauta ir žodis*, 1930, t. 6, p. 193, 260.

¹⁷ TOEPPEN, M. *Op. cit.*, S. 109–110.



Figure 1. The map shows two stretches of the border between Lithuania and the domains of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia. The shape of the border was roughly defined by the Treaty of Melno. The map also indicates many locations mentioned in the introductory article. © Vasilijus Safronovas, 2025

Such disputes and claims increased towards the end of the 15th century, when settlement of the wilderness accelerated.¹⁸ Members of the Order repeatedly complained that the Žemaitijans were crossing and altering the border. At the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the area around Koadjuthen/Katyčiai became the subject of prolonged conflict; it was not resolved until 1554–1555.¹⁹ Other stretches of the border were also contested. Disputes became particularly frequent from the 1530s to the 1550s, with both sides accusing each other of crossing the border, seizing fields, rivers, lakes and forests to which they had no right, and even establishing whole villages, as occurred along the southern section of the border.²⁰ Special commissions and bilateral agreements were convened to resolve such conflicts.

All this demonstrates that a 'stable' border between Prussia and Lithuania emerged much later than 1422. In reality, the shape of the border was influenced by patterns of land ownership, and by those who held the land. Small adjustments to its course were introduced repeatedly, and this process continued for more than a century after the Treaty of Melno. For example, correspondence from 1530 to 1544 shows that even then, local inhabitants north of Memel/Klaipėda were uncertain where Prussia actually ended.²¹ The Prussian Privy State Archives preserve more than a dozen of undated drawings of demarcation efforts that, judging from all indications, were produced in the 16th century.²² Special commissions tasked with coordinating border demarcation between Prussia and Žemaitija are recorded in 1598 and 1613.²³

Finally, various transactions involving individual estates also affected changes in the border's shape. When the Teutonic Order in Livonia mortgaged the Grobin/Grobiņa estate (*Vogtei*) to Duke Albrecht in 1560 in exchange for a loan to finance the war against Muscovy, Prussian efforts concerning the Palanga section, which physically separated Prussia from the estate, intensified once more. Albrecht even considered negotiating with Sigismund Augustus for the temporary possession of that section,

¹⁸ FORSTREUTER, Kurt. Die Entwicklung der Grenze zwischen Preußen und Litauen seit 1422. *Altpreußische Forschungen*, 1941, 18. Jhg., Hf. 1, S. 55.

¹⁹ Cf. IVINSKIS, Z. Kovos bruožai..., p. 115–116; ROWELL, S.C. The Lithuano-Prussian Forest Frontier, c. 1422–1600. In *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700*. Ed. by Daniel POWER, Naomi STANDEN. Houndmills-Basingstoke, 1999, pp. 199–201.

²⁰ KOLANKOWSKI, Ludwik. *Zygmunt August, wielki książę Litwy do roku 1548*. Lwów, 1913, s. 271.

²¹ IVINSKIS, Z. Kovos bruožai..., p. 116.

²² See, e.g., *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Prussian Privy State Archives, Berlin-Dahlem, hereinafter *GStA PK*), XX. HA, AK, A 10016 (section north of Memel/Klaipėda), XX. HA, AK, A 10120 (the entire Memel/Klaipėda district), XX. HA, AK, B 10043 (section between the Jūra and Šešupė rivers), XX. HA, AK, G 10673/1–2 (section near Rajgród). The first three are of a later date, probably from the second half of the 16th century; the last one seems to be from the first half or the middle of the 16th century. The first three are written in a similar hand. One of them is believed to have been drawn up in 1583 or 1584 by the surveyor Hermann Runge. – Cf. ROEDDER, H. Op. cit. S. 74; JÄGER, Eckhard. *Prussia-Karten 1542–1810. Geschichte der kartographischer Darstellung Ostpreußens vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*. Weißenhorn, 1982, S. 32.

²³ VAIVADA, Vacys. Žemaitija XV–XVIII amžiuje. In *Žemaitijos istorija*. Sud. Alvydas NIKŽENTAITIS. Vilnius, 1997, p. 105; ČELKIS, T. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės teritorija...*, p. 175.

along with Kretinga and Gargždai, based on a mortgage arrangement. Around the same time, between 1561 and 1567, and for the same reason (the need to finance the Livonian war against the Muscovites), Sigismund Augustus mortgaged two border counties, Jurbarkas and Nowa Wola (now Virbalis), to Albrecht.²⁴ Although Albrecht did not acquire Palanga via this route, another similar case illustrates how such matters might have ended not only in mortgages but in outright purchases. In 1601, Georg Friedrich, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, and since 1577 the effective administrator of the Duchy of Prussia (acting on behalf of Duke Albrecht Friedrich), purchased two thirds of the Tauragė estate along the border, which, despite the purchase, continued to lie entirely within Lithuania. On his death in 1603 without male heirs, those lands passed to a member of another branch of the Hohenzollern family, the Margrave of Brandenburg. In 1616–1617 he purchased the remaining third. The estate remained under the Margrave's authority until it was reassigned in 1621 and sold outright in 1639.²⁵ But from 1688 (1691) to 1793, the Tauragė estate again came under the control of the Margrave of Brandenburg, who at that time also ruled Prussia, yet it remained within the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As we shall see from one of the articles included in this volume, this situation caused as much confusion to contemporaries as it may to the reader of these lines, attempting to determine where the border actually ran at that time.

Settlement in the borderland

The emergence of landholdings on both sides of the border was driven by the settlement of a wilderness whose interpretation was, for a long time, the subject of considerable debate among historians. This was largely because, in the 20th century, part of the discussion became entangled in politically motivated attempts to address societies agitated by the conflict between Lithuania and Germany over the Klaipėda region (the Territory of Memel).

Despite the problematic reputation that the wilderness settlement theory acquired through its political misuse, contemporary historiography does not question the settlement process itself.²⁶ The establishment of new farms and the holdings that

²⁴ On this, see: FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Entwicklung der Grenze...*, S. 62–64.

²⁵ HELLMANN, Manfred. *Die preussische Herrschaft Taugoggen in Litauen (1690–1793)*. Berlin, 1940, S. 7–9.

²⁶ Cf. interpretations of contemporary historians: GUDAVIČIUS, Edvardas. *Lietuvos istorija*. T. 1: *Nuo seniausių laikų iki 1569 metų*. Vilnius, 1999, p. 439–441; JÄHNIG, Bernhart. Litauische Einwanderung nach Preußen im 16. Jahrhundert. Ein Bericht zum dritten Band von Hans und Gertrud Mortensen. In *Zur Siedlungs-, Bevölkerungs- und Kirchengeschichte Preußens* (Tagungsberichte der Historischen Kommission für ost- und westpreußische Landesforschung, Bd. 12). Hrsg. von Udo ARNOLD. Lüneburg, 1999, S. 75–94; ROWELL, S.C. *The Lithuano-Prussian Forest Frontier...*, pp. 182–208; ROWELL, S.C. *Aspects of Settlement in the Klaipėda District (Memelland) in the Late Fifteenth and Early-Sixteenth Centuries*.

consolidated them began in the 15th century and continued intensively throughout the 16th, affecting vast areas on both sides of the border established by the Treaty of Melno: Žemaitija, Sūduva and Prussia. This development can be divided broadly into two stages: the first affecting Žemaitija and parts of Prussia around Memel/Klaipėda, Tilsit/Sovetsk and Lyck/Ełk; the second was most evident in Sūduva and the eastern regions of Prussia around Insterburg/Chernyakhovsk and Marggrabowa/Olecko.

Chronologically, these stages can be arranged as follows. According to the linguist Antanas Salys, the settlement of the wilderness in Žemaitija began in the first half of the 15th century, with a second phase in the early 16th century.²⁷ This trajectory essentially coincided with similar developments in Prussia. South of Lyck/Ełk, as well as along the Baltic shore and the Curonian Lagoon near Memel/Klaipėda and on the Curonian Spit, settlement also began in the first half of the 15th century, but intensified in northern Prussia during the early 16th century. Data from 1540, which may serve as a marker dividing the two stages, suggest that only the areas around Memel/Klaipėda, Tilsit/Sovetsk, Ragnit/Neman, and Lyck/Ełk were more densely populated at that time.²⁸ The middle to late 16th century can therefore be regarded as the second stage. Although individual localities in Sūduva, and in Prussia between Tilsit-Ragnit and the Masurian Lakes, are mentioned as early as the 15th century, settlement there only intensified around 1540.

As well-documented cases such as the Ragnit district show,²⁹ the process in Prussia also involved two stages, in the sense that it consisted of an initial wave of settlement 'from outside', followed by the expansion of the families of those earlier settlers into new farms. However, 'from outside' should not be taken to refer exclusively to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While substantial evidence indicates that many settlers indeed came from Lithuania, especially from Žemaitija, others arrived from Courland (especially in northern Prussia), while the southern districts of Johannisburg/Pisz, Lyck/Ełk and Rhein/Ryn, some of which bordered Lithuania, were characterised primarily by resettlement from neighbouring Mazovia.

Settlers were limited not by the border, which in many places had not even been clearly demarcated, but by rivers, lakes and dense forests. Their movement was facilitated by the fact that even under the Teutonic Order, Prussia had shown an interest in putting scarcely used lands under cultivation. Although this was far from a continuous policy

In *Klaipėdos visuomenės ir miesto struktūros* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, t. 11). Sud. Vacys VAIVADA, Dainius ELERTAS. Klaipėda, 2005, p. 22–34.

²⁷ SALYS, A. Op. cit., p. 191–192, 247–248, 263–265.

²⁸ Cf. *Historisch-geographischer Atlas des Preußenlandes*. Hrsg. von Hans MORTENSEN, Gertrud MORTENSEN, Reinhard WENSKUS, Helmut JÄGER (hereinafter *HGAP*). Lf. 5. Wiesbaden, 1978; Lf. 8. Wiesbaden, 1982.

²⁹ MORTENSEN, Hans. Einwanderung und innerer Ausbau in den Anfängen der Besiedlung des Hauptamtes Ragnit. In *Acta Prussica. Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Ost- und Westpreußens. Fritz Gause zum 75. Geburtstag* (Beihefte zum Jahrbuch der Albertus-Universität Königsberg/Pr., XXIX). Würzburg, 1968, S. 67–76.

over more than a century, contrary to narratives extolling the prudent leadership of great men,³⁰ the interest repeatedly resurfaced. Moreover, the border region was no longer afflicted by devastating military campaigns: the peace treaty concluded with Lithuania in 1422 was generally honoured. The weakened Teutonic Order did experience tension owing to the insecurity of travel along the 15-kilometre Lithuanian coastline separating Prussia from Livonia, but after 1422 it avoided direct military conflicts with Lithuania, although several occurred with Poland. Finally, the Treaty of Kraków of 1525 transformed the geopolitical situation, making the King of Poland, who was also the Grand Duke of Lithuania, the principal guarantor of Prussia's security.

This cross-border settlement created distinct regions in Prussia that soon came to be known as 'Lithuanian districts' and 'Polish districts', later 'Lithuania' and 'Masuria'.³¹ However, these terms did not imply that the areas were continuations of Lithuania or Poland within Prussia, an idea that only arose later, shaped by nationalist attempts to determine the 'nationalities' of settlers. Rather, the differences between these regions and their inhabitants in the 16th century were shaped by the fact that Prussia under Duke Albrecht had embraced confessional reform.

The border as a dividing factor

The political, social and economic conditions in Lithuania and Prussia naturally differed when the border was defined. But these differences were not immediately visible in the borderland so long as a wilderness dominated on both sides. As it gradually gave way to new farms and emerging holdings, the contrasts became more evident. However, the border acquired its greatest dividing force only after Prussia embarked on a series of major reforms that culminated in the Treaty of Kraków on 8 April 1525.

Under the treaty, Grand Master Albrecht of the Teutonic Order recognised King Sigismund the Old of Poland as his liege lord (*naturali et haereditario domino*), and pledged to assist him. Sigismund, for his part, undertook to defend Prussia, and recognised Albrecht as his vassal (*princeps vasallum*). All the Prussian lands held by the Order under the 1466 peace treaty were now granted by Sigismund to Albrecht alone, to be ruled as a hereditary fief (*haereditarium feudum*) by him and his three brothers, so long as they had legitimate male heirs; failing that, Prussia would revert to Poland.³² After the ceremony of paying homage, Sigismund acknowledged Albrecht as sole

³⁰ Cf. BARKOWSKI, O. Op. cit., S. 161–162.

³¹ Cf. SAFRONOVAS, Vasilijus. *The Creation of National Spaces in a Pluricultural Region. The Case of Prussian Lithuania*. Boston, 2016, pp. 22–24, 39–86.

³² The documents of the Treaty of Kraków in Latin and German were edited and published by Oswald Balzer – see *Corpus iuris polonici*. Sectionis Primae. Vol. 4. Ed. Osvaldus BALZER. Cracoviae, 1910, p. 141–178, no. 46–49.

ruler. Having cast off his monk's habit, Albrecht renounced the Teutonic Order, confiscated all its property in Prussia, and absolved the area from its subordination to the Pope, arguably making Prussia the first European territory where a duke sought to establish a territorial church independent of papal authority.

The course of this reform reflected Albrecht's long-term political aims. When he joined the Teutonic Order in December 1510 and was immediately elected grand master, he sought conditions favourable for revising the consequences of the Thirteen Years' War: to free Prussia from its formal subordination to the King of Poland, and possibly to recover the part of Prussia that was lost in 1466. He also wished to reform the Teutonic Order itself, which was ripe for change. The 1519–1521 war with Poland brought no success, and left him in an even more difficult position. But a few years later, as we know, the ideas of Martin Luther prompted a decision on both issues. The discussion seems to be open only on the question of whether Luther should be seen as the 'godfather' of the entire Prussian reform plan, or whether Albrecht simply exploited his ideas for his own political ends. What is certain is that Luther's ideas had circulated in Albrecht's inner circle for several years before 1525, and that the grand master himself ensured they reached Königsberg.

For the purposes of this volume, what matters is that, in implementing reforms within its own society, Prussia gradually stepped back from the Catholic Church, a process that would become evident in the following years against the backdrop of Europe's growing religious division over Luther's reforms. In multilingual and multi-cultural Prussia, these reforms were required to affect all segments of society.

The population of the eastern borderlands, many of whom, or whose predecessors, had resettled from elsewhere, were no exception. They, too, were expected to adopt Luther's ideas and Albrecht's reforms.³³ The authorities' intensive efforts in this direction are best illustrated by the rapid expansion of the parish network. Early 16th-century data indicate that only a handful of parish churches existed in northeast Prussia, mainly in localities near major castles (Memel, Tilsit, Ragnit, Saalau, Georgenburg, Insterburg) and in Russ/Rusnė, further evidence that churches could not yet be sustained elsewhere. The network was somewhat denser in the southeast, between Nordenburg (now Krylovo), Johannesburg and Lyck, although even there the density was incomparably lower than in the western part of the duchy. However, from around 1540, and in just five decades, 26 new parish churches were established in the Prussian border zone, all within roughly 20 kilometres of the border.³⁴

³³ The main work on the changes in the eastern borderlands that has appeared to date remains LUKŠAITĖ, Ingė. *Die Reformation im Großfürstentum Litauen und in Preußisch-Litauen (1520er Jahre bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts)*. Leipzig, 2017, S. 85–136, 165–250, 341–406.

³⁴ This is based on: *HGAP*, Lf. 3. Wiesbaden, 1973. The following churches are included: Ostrokollen (1538), Goldap (1540–68), Mierunskén (1545), Kaukehmen (1547), Schirwindt (1549), Pissanitzen (1552), Wielitzken (1552), Wischwill (1553), Schwentainen (1554–74), Willkischken (1554), Pillkallen (1556),

Among other effects, this meant that, in terms of confessional identity, the dominant form of collective identity at the time, the Prussian borderland was becoming increasingly distinct from its counterpart on the Lithuanian side.

In Lithuania, the Catholic Church eventually succeeded in establishing itself. Initial attempts to do so in the borderlands appeared in the 1550s, but they gathered momentum somewhat later. The earliest parish network in the Diocese of Medininkai, dating back to the early 15th century, covered primarily the Žemaitijan uplands. Apart from Veluona, the earliest churches or foundations in the lowlands to the west and south, where a wilderness once prevailed, date from the early 16th century, though the network remained sparse (Švėkšna, Šilalė, Batakiai, Tauragė, Nemaškščiai, Eržvilkas, Skirsnemunė, Veluona, Vilkija). In 1554 and 1555, two new Catholic churches were founded near the border, in Jurbarkas and Nowa Wola (Virbalis). Although activity slowed down afterwards, efforts resumed in the 1560s and 1570s: parishes were organised and new churches established in Rietavas, Plungė, Kvėdarna and Gelgaudiškis, and later (around 1590 to 1605) directly on or near the border, in Palanga, Gargždai, Kretinga, Vainutas and Žvingiai.³⁵

This process should not be viewed simply as an unambiguous 'consolidation of positions'. On one hand, a comment by Martynas Mažvydas, a priest in Ragnit, in a letter to Duke Albrecht around 1550 or 1551, notes that his parishioners still attended various Church festivals in Žemaitija.³⁶ This suggests that the territorial church in Prussia faced challenges in converting the duke's new subjects, while also testifying to the continuing attachment of settlers in Prussia, and their descendants, to the learned truths maintained across the border in Žemaitija. On the other hand, it was precisely this Lithuanian-Prussian borderland in Žemaitija that became the region where the Reformation of the nobility first manifested extensively in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The priest at Šilalė, regarded as the first to preach Luther's ideas in Žemaitija, had to flee to Prussia in 1536, but from the mid-16th century these ideas spread widely (an estimated 32 communities had been established in Žemaitija by the early 17th century). The influence of Prussia played a major role in this.³⁷

This brings us to another aspect of the borderland region.

Pillupönen (1557), Marggrabowa (1560), Kattenau (c. 1562), Lasdehnen (1563), Czychen (1566), Gurnen (1566), Werden (1566), Koadjuthen (1568), Piktupönen (1574), Prökuls (1578), Szittkehmen (1579), Schareyken (1581), Grabowen (1589), Stallupönen (1589), Tollmingkehmen (1589).

³⁵ The network of parishes and dates is taken from the most reliable research available so far: BŁASZCZYK, Grzegorz. *Diecezja żmudzka od XV do początku XVII wieku. Ustrój*. Poznań, 1993, s. 163, 190–192, but also considers clarifications from later studies, in particular: VAIVADA, Vacys. *Katalikų Bažnyčia ir Reformacija Žemaitijoje XVI a: esminiai raidos bruožai*. Klaipėda, 2004.

³⁶ MAŽVYDAS, Martynas. *Pirmoji lietuviška knyga*. Vilnius, 1970, p. 278.

³⁷ This point was explicitly addressed by VAIVADA, Vacys. Über die Beziehungen zwischen Žemaitija und Herzogtum Preußen im 16. Jahrhundert. *Annaberger Annalen*, 1996, Nr. 4, S. 93–106.

Traffic across the border

The fact that Prussia embraced Luther's reforms while the Catholic Church eventually reestablished and strengthened its position in Lithuania pushed the populations on either side of the border in opposite confessional directions. Yet another process had begun much earlier: the steady growth of traffic between the regions divided by the border.

From the very beginning, the main traffic route was the Nemunas. Previously used sporadically for military purposes, it became in the 15th century an essential link between Lithuania and Prussia, and, via the Baltic Sea route, between Lithuania and the rest of Europe. Navigable throughout the year, this route was increasingly used for trade. On the Lithuanian side, Kaunas began to assume a notable role, with merchants from Danzig (now Gdańsk), Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), and other Prussian towns establishing their *Kontor* there. Local merchants also appeared, stimulated by urban development in the 15th and 16th centuries. In addition, the estates of the ruler and the bishops, and from the 16th century the noble folwarks, sought ways of selling their surplus produce.³⁸

Goods from the upper reaches of the Nemunas and its tributaries could only be transported as far as Kaunas in smaller vessels. After unloading in Kaunas, they were transferred to larger boats, which travelled steadily downstream to the lower reaches, where the Nemunas divides into the Gilija/Gilge and Rusnė/Russ branches. These branches led towards Königsberg and Danzig (the main direction), and towards Memel/Klaipėda (a secondary direction). In both cases, vessels had to cross the Curonian Lagoon and additional obstacles. Nevertheless, of all the waterways linking Lithuania and Prussia, the Nemunas and its tributaries retained their dominant importance for an exceptionally long time, indeed into the 19th century. Waterways that were not connected with the Nemunas, primarily the tributaries of the Biebrza in the south and, to a very limited extent, the Dangė flowing through Memel/Klaipėda, played a much smaller role in cross-border traffic. Once the Oginski Canal was built in 1765–1783 and subsequently improved, connecting the Nemunas with the Dnieper via the Shchara and the Pripyat, the significance of the Nemunas grew

³⁸ For more on this trade route, see especially: FORSTREUTER, Kurt. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse Preussens nach Osten*. Königsberg, 1931; IVINSKIS, Zenonas. *Lietuvos prekyba su Prūsais*. D. 1: *Iki XVI amžiaus pabaigos*. Kaunas, 1934, esp. p. 114–122; KIAUPIENĖ, Jūratė. *Nemuno prekybos keliu į Baltijos jūros uostus. XVII amžius*. In *Klaipėdos miesto ir regiono archeologijos ir istorijos problemos* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, t. 2). Sud. Alvydas NIKŽENTAITIS, Vladas ŽULKUS. Klaipėda, 1994, p. 40–43. Cf. also ROWELL, S.C. *Anekdotai emporika: Kaip XV a. Lietuvos pirkliai įveikė Dievo ir valdovų sukurtas kliūtis prekiauti. Lietuvos istorijos metraštis, 2008/2*. Vilnius, 2009, p. 87–88, 94; SAKALAUSKAS, Darius; POŠKA, Aivaras. *Prekybos Nemunu organizavimas iš Sapiegų ir Radvilų šios upės aukštupio uostų XVIII a. septintajame ir aštuntajame dešimtmėčiuose. Lietuvos istorijos studijos, 2020, t. 45, p. 61–78.*

even further. This was particularly evident during the Crimean War (1853–1856), when the canal system became strategically important.

This major waterway was complemented by land routes. A comparison of data from the first half of the 15th century with data from around 1700³⁹ shows that the two principal land routes across the border remained unchanged. One had linked Prussia with Livonia since the Middle Ages, and in the 17th century became part of the most important regular postal route in the Hohenzollern dominions, forming one of the major trans-European corridors connecting Riga, Königsberg, Danzig, Berlin, Kleve and Amsterdam.⁴⁰ The second connected Königsberg with Kaunas, Vilnius, and regions further east. From the 1660s, both routes served as the Riga and Vilnius postal routes to Muscovy. Their relative importance fluctuated: at first, the Vilnius route declined, but the Great Northern War (1700–1721) reduced postal traffic through Riga.⁴¹ However, when Peter I, tsar of Russia, moved his empire's capital to the newly built St Petersburg and subsequently occupied Riga, the Russian Senate decided in 1714 to open a postal route between St Petersburg and Riga. Thus, even in 1821, when Prussia and Russia, by then in possession of the Lithuanian lands, planned an agreement obliging the Russian side to direct almost all correspondence with Europe through Prussia, these two routes were still listed in the draft as the principal postal links.⁴²

Historiography also refers to a third major land route between Prussia and Lithuania.⁴³ It ran from Königsberg via Rastenburg, Rhein and Lyck to Hrodna and Navahrudak. Although it was known since the 15th century and was used for a long time, as is indicated by the development of the Lithuanian town of Augustów (granted a town charter in 1557), which was incorporated into Poland in 1569 and remained significant for some time, it never became part of a trans-European corridor or a main postal route. By 1700 its importance was merely regional.⁴⁴ Two factors largely explain this: first, on the Lithuanian side it led to sparsely populated areas; second, in the 16th and 17th centuries numerous new local and regional roads were built from Prussia into Lithuania, especially across Sūduva.

³⁹ Cf. *HGAP*, Lf. 1. Wiesbaden, 1968; Lf. 9. Wiesbaden, 1984.

⁴⁰ STEPHAN, Heinrich von. *Geschichte der Preußischen Post von ihrem Ursprunge bis auf die Gegenwart*. Berlin, 1859, S. 16–19.

⁴¹ Cf. KOZLOVSKII, Ivan. *Pervija pochty i pervye pochthmeistry v" Moskovskom" gosudarstve*. T. I. Varshava, 1913, s. 59, 63, 108, 110–111, 161–162, 304, 306, 328–332, 343.

⁴² Cf. STEPHAN, H. Op. cit., S. 559–560. More recent work on this topic reproduces the same information – BRANDTNER, Gerhard; VOGELSSANG, Ernst. *Die Post in Ostpreußen: Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*. Lüneburg, 2000, S. 127.

⁴³ Cf. FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 26.

⁴⁴ This can be seen in *HGAP*, Lf. 9: the old route is still shown, but the postal route from Königsberg via Rastenburg, Rhein and Arys ran only as far as Lyck; the rest of the route towards the border did not serve as a postal route. Another internal postal route played a similar role: from Rastenburg, it led through Angerburg to Marggrabowa, but from there, only a regular road led to the border. This route played a minor role already in the first half of the 15th century (cf. *HGAP*, Lf. 1).

Regional land routes connecting lesser centres played a secondary but still meaningful role. Two such routes emerged at the beginning of the 16th century, when Tilsit, which was granted market rights in 1511 and became a town in 1552, began to grow.⁴⁵ One route led from Tilsit via Tauragė, Kražiai, Kurtuvėnai and Šiauliai to Mitau/Jelgava. It is mentioned in 1540,⁴⁶ although by the 18th century its course had altered significantly.⁴⁷ The second route crossed the border twice, connecting Tilsit, via Koadjuthen/Katyčiai, with Memel/Klaipėda. Around 1700, this route was still relatively important, but later its significance in cross-border traffic declined.⁴⁸

In Sūduva, the first centre of this type was Virbalis (in Polish Nowa Wola, later Wierzbołów), which was founded and granted market rights in 1536, and became a town in 1593. It served to divert land traffic from Kaunas and Jurbarkas towards Prussia. Initially its impact was limited, but with the growth of Insterburg (granted a town charter in 1583) on the Prussian side, Alytus (granted a town charter in 1581), and Vilkaviškis (granted a town charter in 1660) on the Lithuanian side, the route through Virbalis was described by the late 17th century as part of an alternative route from Danzig to Moscow, via Insterburg, Stallupönen (now Nesterovo), Alytus, Vilnius and Minsk.⁴⁹

In the southern part of the border, several centres appeared in the second half of the 16th century: Bakalarzewo (referred to as a town in 1558), Filipów (granted a town charter in 1570), and Przerośl (granted a town charter in 1576). These played a more local role in cross-border traffic. Their development was encouraged by the emergence of Marggrabowa/Olecko (granted a town charter in 1560) and Goldap/Gołdap (granted a town charter in 1570) on the Prussian side. Within a 100-kilometre stretch between Insterburg and Lyck (granted a town charter in 1435), these were the first two towns founded in what had been the Prussian wilderness. By the 17th century, both were well connected with Königsberg. Roads leading from Marggrabowa and Goldap to the aforementioned border towns were, for some time, important links with Merkinė and Hrodna, two centres on the Lithuanian side. At the end of the 18th

⁴⁵ Cf. THALMANN, Waldemar. Die bauliche Entwicklung der Stadt Tilsit. In *Tilsit. Zur Geschichte und Entwicklung der Stadt*. Hrsg. vom Magistrat. Tilsit, 1926, S. 8–10.

⁴⁶ FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 27; Čelkis also indicates this route, but only as far as Šiauliai – ČELKIS, Tomas. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių evoliucija. Sausumos užvaldymas*. Vilnius, 2021, 168, 196.

⁴⁷ In the 18th century, the section between Šiauliai and Tauragė offered only poor roads winding between numerous small towns. At that time, the better route through Tauragė ran along the Lithuanian side of the border – from Jurbarkas through Pagramantis, Šilalė and Rietavas to Plungė. Cf. ČELKIS, T. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių evoliucija...*, p. 327 and folding map; *Podrobnaiia Militernaia Karta po Granitse Rossii s" Prussieiu*, [sochinil] inzh. polk. OPPERMAN""", 1799.

⁴⁸ Cf. FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 27; HGAP, Lf. 9; *Podrobnaiia Militernaia Karta...*

⁴⁹ FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 32; IVINSKIS, Z. *Lietuvos prekyba...*, p. 124.

century, the only major regional road connecting Marggrabowa and Hrodna ran via Raczki, Szczebra and Halynka, bypassing Augustów to the north.⁵⁰

At the same time, similar regional links in Sūduva were provided by two cross-border routes. One connected Insterburg and Alytus. In the 17th century, it passed through Stallupönen, Vištytis (granted a town charter in 1570) on the Lithuanian side, and Kalvarija. In the 18th century, the principal Prussian route ran from Insterburg via Gumbinnen and Walterkehmen to Vištytis. The second connected Tilsit and Alytus. In the 17th century, it passed through Ragnit and Schirwindt in Prussia, and reached Władysławów (now Kudirkos Naumiestis), which was granted a town charter in 1643. From there the main road led to Vilkaviškis, and then, via Marijampolė, to Alytus.⁵¹

In the northern part of the borderland, two land routes provided regional connections between Plateliai and Memel/Klaipėda as early as the 16th century.⁵² These crossed the border near Kretinga and Gargždai. In the 17th century, Kretinga gained in importance due to its connection with Plungė, from where main routes led to Rietavas (and then to Raseiniai), Telšiai (and to Šiauliai), and Seda (and to Akmenė, Žagarė and Mitau/Jelgava). Gargždai's role, however, declined, as another major route crossing it connected a chain of settlements on the Lithuanian side, Kretinga, Veiviržėnai, Švėkšna, Gardamas, Naumiestis and Tauragė, and thus enabled travel along the border rather than across it.⁵³

Alongside the principal routes connecting Lithuania and Prussia before the 19th century, briefly outlined above, numerous other border crossings were occasionally used by travellers. Yet from the mid-16th century, both sides sought to limit the number of such crossings. This shows that although the border was not yet fully demarcated or guarded, efforts were already being made to control cross-border movement. In Prussia, these efforts developed into permanent border protection in the 18th century, as is evidenced by a detailed map of border security arrangements based on royal instructions in October 1738.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cf. HGAP, Lf. 9; ČELKIS, T. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių evoliucija...*, p. 168, folding map; *Podrobniaia Militarnaia Karta...*

⁵¹ Cf. HGAP, Lf. 9; *Podrobniaia Militarnaia Karta...*

⁵² IVINSKIS, Z. *Lietuvos prekyba...*, p. 123.

⁵³ Cf. ČELKIS, T. *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių evoliucija...*, p. 168, folding map; *Podrobniaia Militarnaia Karta...*

⁵⁴ Preussische Postirungs-Carte des Lithauischen Territorii gegen Pohlen, von des Amts Kiauten [...] bis Löbegallen an die Szezuppe und letzten Grentz-Dorffs Schillehnen, ohnweit dem Memel-Strohm, 1739. *GStA PK*, XX. HA, F 10738. The drawing represents the framework of the system established along the southern section of the border, including border guard stations (*Wachthaus*) with the planned number of officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers; temporary shelters (*Unterkommen*); and two types of information signs (*Placat-Stenge* and *Warnungs-Taffel*) at the barriers (*Schlagbaum*).

Nexus of interaction across the border

The concentration of cross-border traffic in certain localities, through which the largest flows of people and goods passed, and the efforts of the authorities from the 16th century onwards to restrict movement outside those localities, allow us to speak of the emergence of nexuses of interaction. On one hand, this was a process largely beyond government control: the most significant nexuses developed where the main routes crossed the border. On the other hand, attempts by the authorities to impose 'order' on the borderland ultimately served to reinforce this process.

The two most important nexuses of interaction arose where the River Nemunas and two major land routes crossed the border: near Nemirseta/Nimmersatt-Palanga, and near Smalininkai/Schmalleningken-Jurbarkas. Like less prominent nexuses, these were shaped both by the increasing demand for cross-border services and by the establishment of customs offices in towns that sprang up on the Lithuanian side. The only exception, where the nexus consisted of a town on each side of the border, was Schirwindt-Władysławów. But this was a relatively late,⁵⁵ and, as mentioned, secondary phenomenon.

Elsewhere on the Prussian side, no towns were established directly adjacent to the border: Marggrabowa, founded in the 16th century, still lay some ten kilometres away. A full explanation of this pattern requires further research, but one plausible answer lies in differences between Lithuanian and Prussian customs systems. Prussia introduced border customs duties relatively late, only in 1775.⁵⁶ Several factors contributed to this delay: earlier treaties prohibited the introduction of new duties; until the mid-17th century, Prussia was a fiefdom of the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania; elsewhere in Europe, duties at that time were also often not levied right at the border; and separate Hohenzollern dominions maintained their own customs systems, which were only gradually harmonised.⁵⁷ Consequently, in Prussia, only a handful of customs duties on trade with Lithuania persisted for centuries, some dating from the times of the Teutonic Order: lock duties charged in Labiau and Tapiau based on the value of goods; canal duties introduced at the end of the 17th century on the Great and Small Friedrich canals (later combined with the Labiau duty and transferred to Königsberg); and the pound duty levied on ships in seaports (Memel being the relevant point on the border).⁵⁸ In other words, customs duties

⁵⁵ Although the village of Schirwindt dates back to the 16th century, it only received a town charter in 1725. Władysławów, formerly the village of Duliebaičiai, also founded in the 16th century, was renamed in 1643 when it was granted a town charter.

⁵⁶ FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 32.

⁵⁷ Cf. FREYMARK, Hermann. *Zur preussischen Handels- und Zollpolitik von 1648–1818*. Inaugural-Dissertation. Halle a. S., 1897, S. 3, 10.

⁵⁸ FORSTREUTER, K. *Die Memel als Handelsstrasse...*, S. 14–22, 32.

were not collected in border localities. Until the 18th century, goods in transit to Prussia were reloaded, weighed, sorted or repackaged solely in localities along the Nemunas waterway (in the broadest sense). The situation in Lithuania was markedly different. Customs duties were collected there from the 15th century at the latest, and formed a permanent source of state revenue, revenue that Lithuania continued to administer independently even after the Union of Lublin in 1569. There were two types of duty: *clo*, customs at the border, and *myto*, charges for using infrastructure, although the distinction was often blurred.⁵⁹ From the early 16th century, customs duties were also divided into old and new.⁶⁰ In addition, the Lithuanian treasury was supplemented by income from renting out customs houses and duties themselves, a common practice by the 15th century. The principal and oldest customs office in the region operated in Kaunas in the 15th century, but sources from the first half of the 16th century also mention several customs offices near the Prussian border: Palanga, Kretinga, Gargždai, Pajūris, Tauragė and Jurbarkas.⁶¹ Later, as the once sparsely inhabited Sūduva became populated, customs offices appeared on the southern part of the border as well, for example in Virbalis and Szczebra. Although the network changed over time,⁶² the fundamental principle, that border customs duties were collected only on one side of the border, remained in place for a long

⁵⁹ Cf. ZHEREBTSOVA, Larisa. Struktura tamozhennoi sistemy Velikogo kniazhestva Litovskogo v kontse XV – seređine XVI v. *Ukraina Lithuanica: studii z istorii Velykoho kniazivstva Lytovskoho*, 2009, t. 1, s. 144–162.

⁶⁰ On their differences, cf.: ŠAPOKA, Mindaugas. Senųjų muitų administravimas Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje 1710–1717 m. *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 2019/1. Vilnius, 2019, p. 81. In 1588–1589, when the lord's (court) treasury in Lithuania was finally separated from the state treasury, the 'old' customs duties remained with the lord, while the 'new' ones were collected for the needs of the state treasury. Cf. SLIESORIŪNAS, Gintautas. *Lietuvos istorija*. T. VI: *Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė XVI a. pabaigoje – XVIII a. pradžioje (1588–1733 metais)*. Vilnius, 2015, p. 185, 191.

⁶¹ Ivinskis indicates that all of them were already operating in 1529: IVINSKIS, Zenonas. Lietuvių ir prūsų prekybiniai santykiai pirmoje 16-tojo amžiaus pusėje. *Židinys*, 1933, Nr. 8–9, p. 145. Other information suggests that the customs offices in Gargždai and Jurbarkas were established in 1540: DOVNAR^{****}-ZAPOL^{****}SKII, Mitrofan^{****}. *Gosudarstvennoe khoziaistvo Velikago Kniazhestva Litovskago pri Iagellonakh^{****}*. T. 1. Kiev^{****}, 1901, s. 498, 533, 536. For more on Kaunas customs, which served the entire district as early as the 15th century, see: Ibid., 535. Dovnar-Zapol'skii argues that by the 16th century, there were different types of customs offices, some central, serving the entire district (*komora*), while others were local (*przykomórek*). He also mentions that in the second half of the 16th century, sources note the district of Žemaitija alongside the Kaunas district, speculating that the centre of the former was in Gargždai: Ibid., 536, 562. There was also a separate district of Podlasie with its centre in Bielsk; its *przykomórek* was in Hrodna: Ibid., 536.

⁶² In the 1790s, central customs offices (plural *komory*) operated in Palanga, Jurbarkas, Virbalis and Szczebra, while local customs offices (plural *przykomorki*) operated in the following locations: Kretinga [Kretynga], Bobruny, Aisėnai [Oysiany], [Žemaičių] Naumiestis [Nowe miasto], Šilinė [Szylina] and Kudirkos Naumiestis [Nowe Miasto]. This is evident from the handwritten border customs map: Mappa komor, przykomorkow y straż w repertycyi litewskiey umieszczonych, a pód osobliwemi znakami w realney odsiebie odległości zakonotowanych, sporządzona, [1788]. *Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka*, F 23–203. The date was provided by: ČELKIS, Tomas. 1788 m. Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės ir Prūsijos karalystės sienos žemėlapis. In *Krikščionių visuomenės raidos atodangos LDK vakarinėje dalyje ir Prūsijoje: nuo užuomazgos iki brandos*. Skiriama prof. Stephen C. Rowell 50-mečiui. Sud. Marius ŠČAVINSKAS. Klaipėda, 2015, p. 254–263.

period. Prussia did not develop a network of border customs posts until the late 18th century.⁶³

This situation led to the formation of nexuses of interaction that brought together the main border crossing points, customs facilities, and other service infrastructure. Interaction in these nexuses depended heavily on cross-border communication, and involved a wide range of actors, not all of whom are exhaustively covered in the articles in this volume. They included not only the inhabitants of border towns and villages, and not only casual travellers, but also permanent actors in the borderland: intermediaries in trade and other contacts (often Lithuanian Jews, who also frequently held customs leases⁶⁴), boat and barge-steersmen, ferry operators, and officials whose temporary assignments were related to transit, such as postal station keepers and border guards.

26

The first example addressed in this volume is the nexus between Nemirseta and Palanga. These two localities, situated only five kilometres apart on opposite sides of the border, evolved in markedly different ways. Nemirseta, known from later geographical primers as the westernmost point of Imperial Germany,⁶⁵ was first mentioned in 1434 as an inn,⁶⁶ and by 1540 it had become a village, with 17 farms and an innkeeper.⁶⁷ A comparison with data from 1785 (12 hearths⁶⁸) suggests that the settlement on the Prussian side did not grow over the long term. Palanga, by contrast, developed more dynamically. Information on Palanga in the 14th and 15th centuries is sparse; it is not even clear whether it was permanently inhabited. This changed at the beginning of the 16th century, when it was clearly functioning as a village, and by 1547 it was described as a small town.⁶⁹

⁶³ In 1788, this network on the border with Lithuania encompassed the border customs offices (*Grenz-Zollamt*) in Klaipėda (Memel), Žagantai (Szagmanten), Smalininkai (Schmallenincken), Schillenen, Eydtkuhnen and Woynassen, and border excise offices (*Grenz-Acciseamt*) in Schirwindt, Pillkallen, Goldap, Marggrabowa and Lyck. – Cf. Verordnung von 1788. No. 47. In *Novum Corpus Constitutionum prussico-brandenburgensium*. Bd. 8. Berlin, 1791, Sp. 2163.

⁶⁴ Cf. ZHEREBTSOVA, Larisa. Deiatel'nost' evreev-mytnikov Velikogo kniazhestva Litovskogo v kontse XV – seredine XVI veka (na materialakh Litovskoi Metriki). In *Baltijos regiono istorija ir kultūra: Lietuva ir Lenkija. Socialinė istorija, kultūrologija* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, t. 14). Sud. Rimantas SLIUŽINSKAS. Klaipėda, 2007, p. 9–23; CIEŚLA, Maria. Żydowscy celnicy w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVII–XVIII wieku. *Studia Judaica*, 2016, Nr. 2 (38), s. 229–249.

⁶⁵ At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a popular saying describing the geography of imperial Germany was: 'Nimmersatt, wo das deutsche Reich ein Ende hat.'

⁶⁶ *Das grosse Ämterbuch des Deutschen Ordens*. Hrsg. von Walther ZIESEMER. Nachdruck. Wiesbaden, 1968, S. 311.

⁶⁷ DIEHLMANN, Hans Heinz. *Die Türkensteuer im Herzogtum Preussen 1540*. Bd. 2: *Memel-Tilsit*. Hamburg, 2006, S. 115–116.

⁶⁸ *Volständige Topographie des Königreichs Preussen*. 1. Theil. Hrsg. von Johann Friedrich GOLDBECK. Königsberg und Leipzig, [1785], [7. Hauptst.], S. 106.

⁶⁹ ALEXANDROWICZ, Stanisław. Geneza i rozwój sieci miasteczek Białorusi i Litwy do połowy XVII w. *Acta Baltico-Slavica*, 1970, t. 7, s. 74; KIAUPA, Zigmantas. Palanga ir Šventoji – Lietuvos pajūrio miesteliai XVI–XVII a. In *Palangos istorija...*, p. 124–130.

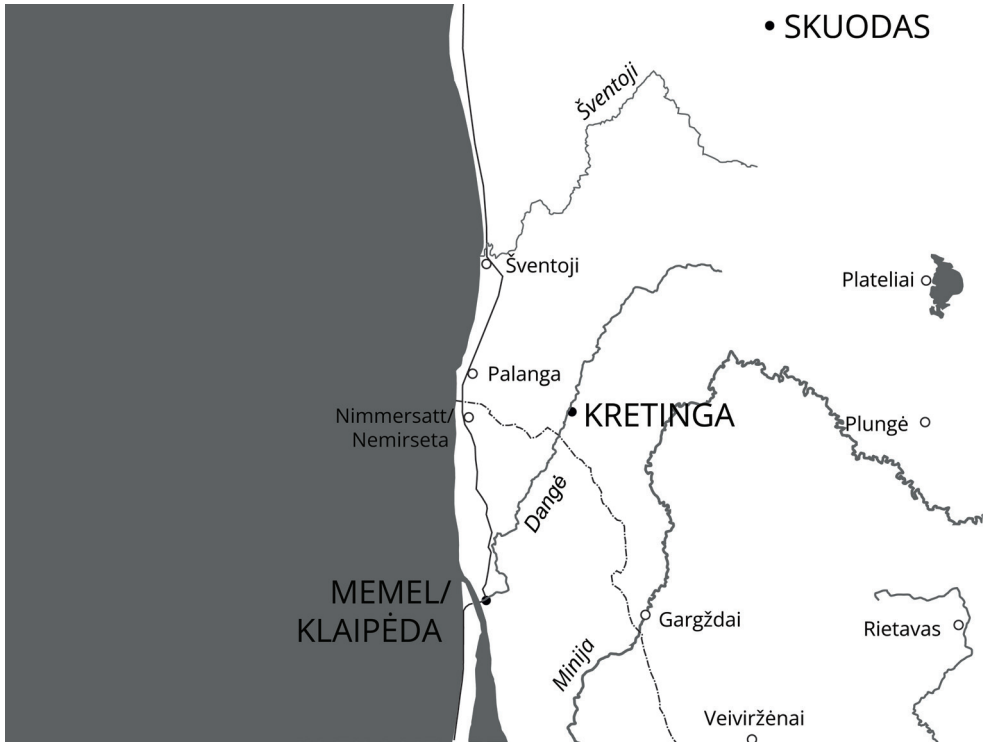


Figure 2. Map of the Palanga nexus of interaction. Black dots indicate towns, while circles mark other important settlements (small towns, villages). The dot-dashed line shows the border between Lithuania and Prussia, and the solid line marks the major land route across the border in the 18th century. © Vasilijus Safronovas, 2025

These two neighbouring localities are also noteworthy because another border existed only 13 kilometres to the north of Palanga, between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order's domains in Livonia. A third settlement, Šventoji (Heiligen Aa), first mentioned in 1410 as an inn,⁷⁰ stood adjacent to this border. After 1561–1562, part of the Teutonic Order's Livonian territories became the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, a Lithuanian fiefdom. But the territory just beyond the border across the River Šventoji belonged for some time not to the Duke of Courland but to the Duke in Prussia, since the Grobin/Grobiņa estate was Prussian property from 1560 until 1609/10. Nearby lay Pilten/Piltene, which belonged successively to Denmark (1559–1583), Prussia (1585–1609), the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Courland (1656/57–1717), and the Commonwealth again. Thus, in a coastal strip barely 20 kilometres long, the

⁷⁰ LUB. Bd. 11. Riga, Moskau, 1905, S. 275, Nr. 314; MORTENSEN, Hans; MORTENSEN, Gertrud. *Die Besiedlung des nordöstlichen Ostpreußens bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Teil II. Leipzig, 1938, S. 241.

main route passed not only through three settlements but also across two borders, on either side of which a dense and shifting web of interests and allegiances developed between the 16th and the 18th centuries.⁷¹ This strip continued to serve as an important nexus of interaction for some time after 1795, when the Russian Empire annexed both Courland and Lithuania during the partitions of the Commonwealth.

Another nexus considered in this volume was, in comparison with the first, of secondary, if not tertiary, importance for a long time, but it too eventually became an intermediate point on the route from Prussia to Courland via Lithuania. This is the nexus of Tauragė/Tauroggen, which might be remembered from an event in December 1812 that drew Europe's attention. Unlike the Palanga nexus, where segments of the old arterial route survive to this day, the Tauragė nexus changed considerably. At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the main route from Prussia to Lithuania (already incorporated into the Russian Empire) ran along the River Jūra via Oplankis, Kalėnai and Meldiklaukiai, rather than through Lauksargiai as it does today. Everything changed when the Prussian government decided to extend the Berlin–Königsberg road to Tilsit, and proposed to Russia that it extend its planned road from Mitau/Jelgava to Tauragė instead of to Jurbarkas. When Prussia implemented this plan (1830–1834), Russia, having taken the decision in April 1830, established a first-class customs office in Tauragė in late 1831, and in 1836 began to build a new post road with stations running almost in a straight line from Tauragė through Šiauliai to Mitau/Jelgava. This replaced the older network of winding roads passing through Karapolis, Batakiai, Skaudvilė and Nemakščiai towards Kelmė.⁷² Formally, this transformation did not yet make Tauragė a town. As in the case of Palanga, this occurred only in the interwar period. But the diversion of one of the two main land transport arteries between the Imperial Russian capital and Europe through Tauragė, combined with the great fire of 1836, changed Tauragė so profoundly that it was rebuilt in a new location. Lauksargiai (Laugszargen), on the Prussian side, also

⁷¹ The most recent account of the role of this strip in communication during the early period (15th and 16th centuries) comes from HECKMANN, Dieter. ‚Der Samaitische Strand‘. Beobachtungen zur Rechtsqualität einer Verkehrsverbindung zwischen den Deutschordensherrschaften Preußen und Livland vom 15. bis zum frühen 16. Jahrhundert. In *Deutschordensgeschichte aus internationaler Perspektive. Festschrift für Udo Arnold zum 80. Geburtstag*. Hrsg. von Roman CZAJA, Hubert HOUBEN. Ilmtal-Weinstraße, 2020, S. 83–93.

⁷² Cf. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Sobranie vtoroe*. T. V. Sankt-Peterburg", 1831, s. 337–338; T. VIII. Sankt-Peterburg", 1834, s. 412–413; STEPHAN, H. Op. cit., S. 561; THALMANN, Waldemar. *Stadtgeschichte Tilsits*. Tilsit, 1938, S. 27. See also the files of the Tauragė road construction committee in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives (*Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas*, Vilnius), f. 563, ap. 1, b. 22–23, 25, 27–30 and Plan indiquant les stations des postes et casernes des chaussées, sur la nouvelle route, conduisant de la frontière de Prusse par Taurogen à Szhawle, [s.d.]. *Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskijų biblioteka*, K-2360//03819. The Tauragė–Riga road, divided into three sectors (Tauragė, Šiauliai and Joniškis) and built in stages according to different projects, was completed only in 1858: *Kovenskaia guberniia za vremia 1843–1893 g.* Kovna, 1893, s. 136. One traveller witnessed that in 1845, the road had been built only in the section between Tauragė and Šiauliai: VASILIAUSKAS, Ernestas. Dailininko J. Dioringo kelionė per Lietuvą ir Tauragės kraštą 1845, 1847 m. *Tauragės kurjeris*, 2017-04-25, priedas *Tauragis*, p. 8–9.



Figure 3. Map of the Tauragė nexus of interaction before 1830. The black dot marks the town, while circles indicate other important settlements (towns, villages). The dot-dashed lines show the border between Lithuania and Prussia and the boundaries of the Tauragė estate, while the solid line marks the land route from Tauragė to Tilsit in the 18th century. © Vasilijus Safronovas, 2025

began to change. In 1785 it was still a small royal village with 15 hearths. The establishment of a post station in 1833 marked the beginning of its transformation.⁷³

Before these changes, Tauragė had played a certain role in transit during the 16th century, but by the 18th century this role had diminished considerably. This is illustrated by the stagnation and even decline of settlements on the Prussian side along the route to Tauragė. Kalėnai, the largest of these before the transformation, had 26 hearths in 1785, but 37 farmstead owners in 1539–1540. Meldiklaukiai, the village closest to the border, had eight hearths in 1785, but nine owners in 1539–1540. In other words, these settlements did not grow as a result of cross-border communication (a pattern also visible at Nemirseta near Palanga); rather, they declined.

⁷³ KOPP, Jenny. *Geschichte des Landkreises Tilsit*. Tilsit, 1918, S. 172.

This decline, together with Tauragė's decreasing significance in the 18th century, can likely be explained by its particular political status, which has already been discussed briefly above. First mentioned in the church foundation act of 1507,⁷⁴ Tauragė repeatedly changed its administrative affiliation, and remained a private estate (in German *Herrschaft*) of the Margrave of Brandenburg, who became King of Prussia in 1701, throughout almost the entire 18th century. In 1785 the estate comprised a town, three folwarks, and 35 villages and smaller holdings, totalling 299 hearths, or roughly 1,200 'souls'.⁷⁵ In other words, the explanation for Tauragė's decline in importance may lie in the fact that although it was established on the border with Prussia and maintained a customs office in the 16th century, it later developed a particular political affiliation with Prussia itself.

30

The second article in the volume discusses the period when this affiliation still shaped Tauragė's future.

The third nexus addressed in this volume, the Smalininkai–Jurbarkas nexus, is distinctive in several ways. The nexus encompassed these two settlements on different sides of the border, separated by a distance of 12 kilometres, divided by the River Mituva, the Šventoji rivulet, and the village of Pašventys, located on the Lithuanian side close to the border and the Šventoji. Like Palanga, this nexus belonged to the earliest cross-border nexuses between Lithuania and Prussia. Situated on an important arterial route, like Palanga, Jurbarkas had a customs office from the 16th century. In the 19th century, however, changes in the transit role of Tauragė affected Palanga profoundly: the European postal route, previously running from Königsberg via the Curonian Spit, Memel/Klaipėda and Palanga to Riga, was rerouted along the Tilsit–Tauragė–Šiauliai line. This shift also affected Jurbarkas: sources indicate that its customs office declined in importance,⁷⁶ although it remained the administrative centre of the customs district.

Like Palanga, Gargždai, and other Lithuanian border towns, Jurbarkas had a Jewish population from the 17th century, who played an important role as communication intermediaries (Tauragė was an exception due to its distinct affiliation, as its Jewish population grew only from the second half of the 18th century, and especially in the 19th century).

The Smalininkai–Jurbarkas nexus, however, differed significantly from the Palanga nexus. First, it involved not only land but also river transport. The region's most

⁷⁴ *Codex medicenensis seu Samogitiae dioecesis*. Vol. I. Coll. Paulus JATULIS. Romae, 1984, p. 165–166, no. 106. Błaszczuk, who was one of the first to examine this date and fact, doubted their authenticity. Vaivada presented a series of counter-arguments to his claims. Cf. BŁASZCZYK, G. Op. cit., s. 168–169; VAIVADA, V. *Katalikų Bažnyčia ir Reformacija...*, p. 42–54.

⁷⁵ Data from 1785 here comes from: *Volständige Topographie des Königreichs Preussen*. 1. Theil. Hrsg. von Johann Friedrich GOLDBECK. Königsberg und Leipzig, [1785], 2. Hauptstück, S. 43–44; [7. Hauptst.], S. 63, 83, 96. Data for 1539–1540 come from DIEHLMANN, Hans Heinz. *Die Türkensteuer im Herzogtum Preussen 1540*. Bd. 3: *Rognit–Insterburg–Georgenburg und Saalau*. Hamburg, 2008, S. 29–32.

⁷⁶ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii...*, t. VIII, s. 412–413.

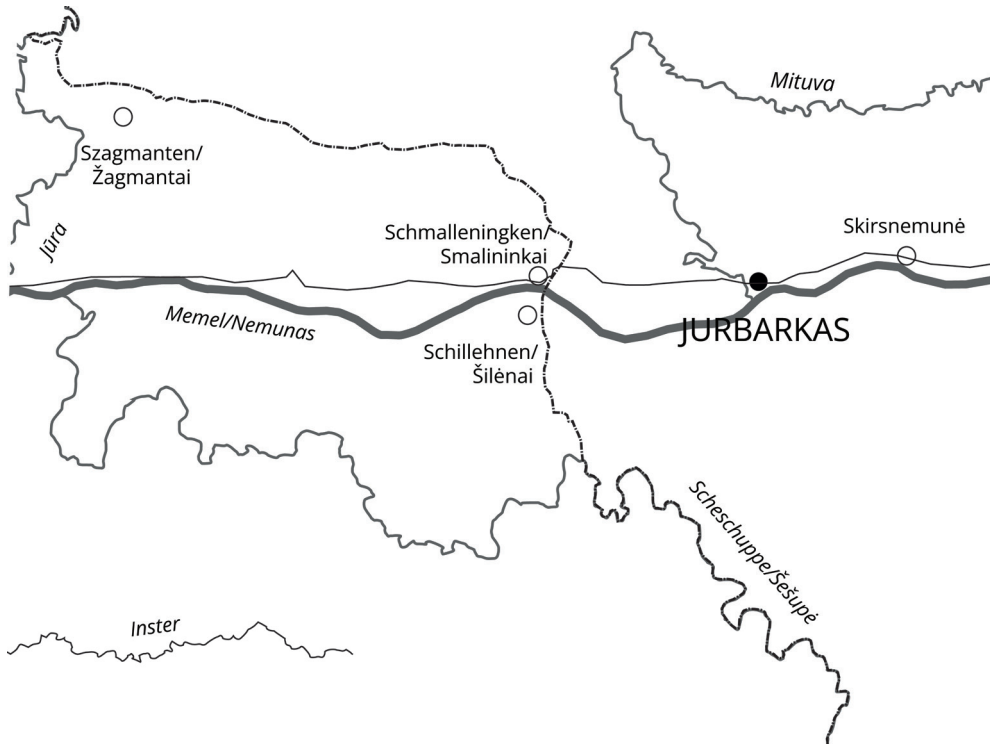


Figure 4. Map of the Jurbarkas–Smalininkai nexus of interaction. The black dot marks the town, while circles indicate other important settlements (towns, villages). The dot-dashed line shows the border between Lithuania and Prussia, while the solid line marks the major land route across the border in the 18th century. © Vasilijus Safronovas, 2025

important waterway, the Nemunas on the Lithuanian side, became the Memel in Prussia there. The river remained a major transport route well into the early 20th century, particularly for the downstream shipment of timber. Second, this different nature of the nexus encouraged the growth of settlements on both sides of the border. Jurbarkas, which was established near an estate and was granted market rights in 1540,⁷⁷ received a town charter in 1611, and developed into a small border town that remained important until the 19th century. Although Smalininkai, first mentioned in the 16th century,⁷⁸ became a town in the 20th century, it too expanded as

⁷⁷ *Lietuvos metrika (1540–1543). 12-oji Teismų bylų knyga*. Parengė Irena VALIKONYTĖ, Neringa ŠLIMIENĖ, Saulė VISKANTAITĖ-SAVIŠČVIENĖ, Lirija STEPONAVIČIENĖ. Vilnius, 2007, p. 85, Nr. 83.

⁷⁸ Taxpayers in the village of *Smalnick villa* in the Ragnit district are mentioned as early as 1539–1540 (DIEHLMANN, H. H. Op. cit., Bd. 3, S. 63–65). A map of the border dating from the second half of the 16th century also shows *Smolniken* (GStA PK, XX. HA, AK, B 10043), while around 1650 it is already referred to as *Schmalnicken* (GStA PK, XX. HA, AK, A 10147).

long as the Nemunas route flourished. In 1539–1540, there were 21 farms there. By 1785, the three Smalininkai settlements upstream, Endriušiai (Endruszen), Vidkiemis (Wittkehmen) and Aukštogaliai (Augstogallen), had 41 hearths, rising to 239 ‘souls’ in all three by 1820.⁷⁹ Whether this growth can be attributed to the fact that an excise collector is documented much earlier in Smalininkai than in other border villages on the Prussian side⁸⁰ is something that further research may yet reveal.

Epilogue

32

The period covered by the stories of the three nexuses discussed here is deliberately limited to the mid-19th century, with each story offering a distinct perspective. This decision was made on the basis of at least three developments that altered the character of the border and the interactions that took place across it.

First, as we have seen, government efforts to regulate movement across the border between Lithuania and Prussia intensified in the 18th century. This is evident in the reforms to duties and customs, the introduction of border guards, and other measures implemented on both sides.⁸¹ Yet despite such efforts, enforcing restrictions on mobility and control over the border remained difficult in practice, as crossing between Lithuania and Prussia was relatively easy in many places. Those living in the borderland and involved in cross-border communication devised numerous ways to circumvent these controls. Consequently, the more strictly the authorities attempted to regulate movement, especially the movement of goods, the more smuggling increased, and the more the local population became involved in it.⁸² The establishment of the border between Prussia and Russia in 1795 (and in

⁷⁹ DIEHLMANN, H. H. Op. cit., Bd. 3, S. 63–65; *Volständige Topographie...*, [7. Hauptst.], S. 143–144; *Neues topographisch-statistisch-geographisches Wörterbuch des preussischen Staats*. Hrsg. von Alexander A. MÜTZELL. Bd. 4. Halle, 1823, S. 251.

⁸⁰ As early as 1732, an *accise-Einehmer* is mentioned in Aukštogaliai, which may be seen as further evidence of a peculiarity of the Prussian customs system of the time, namely, that it was relevant primarily to those making use of waterways rather than to those crossing the land border. See *GStA PK*, XX. HA, A 10055.

⁸¹ New research on this topic includes JAKULIS, Martynas; POŠKA, Aivaras; RYČKOV, Andrej; GIORDANO, Alberto; VERBICKIENĖ, Jurgita. The Creation of the Border Control Infrastructure at the Border of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Prussia in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century. *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 2024, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 219–250; GIORDANO, Alberto; JAKULIS, Martynas; VERBICKIENĖ, Jurgita; POŠKA, Aivaras; RYČKOV, Andrej. Methodological Perspectives on Smuggling: The GDL-Prussia Borderlands in the Late Eighteenth Century. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2025, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 713–740; JAKULIS, Martynas; RYČKOV, Andrej; POŠKA, Aivaras; GIORDANO, Alberto; ŠIAUČIŪNAITĖ-VERBICKIENĖ, Jurgita. Smuggling in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania–Kingdom of Prussia borderland at the end of the eighteenth century: the case of Palanga customs. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2025, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 165–181.

⁸² Cf. LEISEROWITZ, Ruth. Schmuggel als Lebensform an der Grenze. Einblicke in Grenzwelten des 19. Jahrhunderts. In *Kultūriniai saitai abipus Nemuno: Mažosios Lietuvos reikšmė Didžiąjai Lietuvai spaudos draudimo metais* (Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis, t. 10). Sud. Silva POCTYĖ, Rimantas SLIUŽINSKAS. Klaipėda, 2004, p. 70–77. See also: LEISEROWITZ, Ruth. *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein*.

Sūduva in 1815) in place of the former Prussian-Lithuanian border did not fundamentally change these tendencies. If anything, it strengthened them.

Second, the emancipation of the serfs, enacted in Sūduva in 1807, and in the rest of former Lithuania in 1861, gradually altered the nature of cross-border movement. Mobility expanded and assumed new forms, involving not only those groups that had already been able to travel, but also former serfs who had been 'tied to the land'. No less importantly, emancipation stimulated the emergence of new services along the border. One illustration of this is the effect of mass transatlantic migration, movement predominantly in one direction, to 'the New World'. Another is the large-scale, seasonal movement of borderland peasants seeking work in East Prussia, and travelling back and forth across the border.

Third, significant changes to the route network began to take place in the 19th century. The first major development followed the aforementioned agreement between the Prussian and Russian governments to redirect the postal route towards the Tilsit–Tauragė corridor. Then, at the end of 1860, a more transformative innovation arrived when the first railway line reached the former Lithuanian-Prussian border at the village of Eydtkuhnen on the Prussian side, an extension of the Eastern Railway (in German *Ostbahn*) from Königsberg. On the Lithuanian (Imperial Russian) side, a connection was established from Vilnius via Kaunas to Kybartai, creating a distinct communication junction between Berlin and St Petersburg at this border point. Technically, the junction did not function as a transit point: German trains terminated at Kybartai, while Russian trains terminated at Eydtkuhnen, owing to the difference between the Russian broad gauge and the European standard gauge. As a result, a completely new centre of activity emerged at the border.⁸³ A similar, though smaller, centre developed in the village of Prostken (in Polish Prostki), south of Lyck. In 1871, a railway from Königsberg, the East Prussian Southern Line, reached Prostken. In 1873, a connecting line on the Russian side, part of the Southwest Railway network that linked major stations such as Brest, Kiev and Odessa, reached Grajewo. All these changes, together with similar transformations along the border, including the construction of additional railway lines, and the Žemaičių highway in the 20th century, dramatically reshaped the established patterns of transit.

Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812–1942 (Einzelveröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Warschau, Bd. 24). Osnabrück, 2010, esp. S. 103–137.

⁸³ For more on its significance, see the recent study: MUSEKAMP, Jan. *Shifting Lines, Entangled Borderlands. Mobilities and Migration along the Prussian Eastern Railroad*. Bloomington, 2024.



Figure 5. The old road across the border that once connected Kudirkos Naumiestis (formerly Władysławów) in Lithuania and Schirwindt in Prussia. Photo: Vasilijus Safronovas, 2023.



Figure 6. The Schirwindt/Širvinta River – a natural dividing line established in 1422 between Lithuania and Prussia, which today still separates Lithuania and the European Union from Russia. View from the bridge in Kudirkos Naumiestis. Photo: Vasilijus Safronovas, 2023.



Figure 7. Information about the Treaty of Melno on a walking trail for visitors, installed by Palanga Municipality on the Baltic Sea coast in 2025. Photo: Vasilijus Safronovas, 2025.



Figure 8. A sign in Kudirkos Naumiestis commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Treaty of Melno (architect Mantas Paketuris; manufactured by Andrius Vencius). Photo: Vasilijus Safronovas, 2023.

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36

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