



SCHMALLENINGKEN: LIFE ON THE NORTHEAST PRUSSIAN BORDER IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Schmalleningken (in Lithuanian Smalininkai) was a village consisting of three parts on the Prussian-Lithuanian border until 1795. It served as a customs office for the Kingdom of Prussia in the 18th century, and was an important cross-border transit point for both water and land traffic. At the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the lands to the east of the village on the right bank of the River Nemunas were taken over by Russia, while those on the left bank became part of Prussia, which established the province of New East Prussia there. The Congress of Vienna restored the previous configuration of the border, with the only difference being that Lithuania's place as Prussia's neighbour was taken over by the Russian Empire, part of which on the left bank was the Kingdom of Poland. This article examines the various institutions and actors that operated in this border area, located at the intersection of three political entities, during both this transitional period and the subsequent years leading up to the Crimean War. The aim is to show what kind of contacts took place there, what forms they took, and what changes the microcosm of Schmalleningken underwent in the early 19th century. The article explores who contributed to this, and what significance the town of Jurbarkas, located on the other side of the border, had in this contact zone. It shows the role of the Christian and Jewish populations, with their somewhat different goals. Although their cultural practices differed, their interaction was based on a common understanding of the role of a nexus on the border. This role was primarily to provide services for cross-border traffic by land and on the River Nemunas, and to promote cross-border trade.

KEY WORDS: Prussia, Russia, border, borderland, cross-border traffic, contact zone, cultural practices, Christians, Jews.

ANOTACIJA

Smalininkai (vok. *Schmalleningken*) iki 1795 m. buvo kaimas iš trijų dalių Prūsijos pasienyje su Lietuva, kuriame XVIII a. jau veikė Prūsijos karališkoji muitinė ir kuris buvo svarbus susisiekimui per sieną tiek vandens, tiek sausumos keliais. Per Abiejų Tautų Respublikos trečiąjį padalijimą žemės į rytus nuo jų dešiniame Nemuno krante perėmė Rusija, o kairiajame – Prūsija, įkūrusi ten Naująją Rytų Prūsijos provinciją. Vienos kongresas sienos kontūrą grąžino į senąją padėtį: skirtumas tik tas, kad Lietuvos vietą Prūsijos kaimynystėje per visą ruožą užėmė Rusijos imperija, kurios dalis kairiajame krante buvo Lenkijos karalystė. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos įvairios institucijos ir aktoriai, kurie šiuo pereinamoju etapu ir vėlesniu laikotarpiu iki Krymo karo veikė šiame pasienio taške trijų politinių darinių sankirtoje. Siekiama parodyti, kokie kontaktai jame vyko, kokiais pavidalais jie reiškėsi ir kokius pokyčius XIX a. pirmojoje pusėje patyrė Smalininkų mikrokosmas. Aiškinamasi, kas prie to prisidėjo ir kokią reikšmę šioje kontaktų zonoje turėjo kitoje sienos pusėje buvęs Jurbarko miestelis. Parodomas krikščionių ir žydų gyventojų, kurie turėjo iš dalies skirtingus tikslus, vaidmuo. Nors jų kultūrinės praktikos skyrėsi, jų sąveika rėmėsi bendru supratimu apie pasienio mazgo vaidmenį. Šis vaidmuo pirmiausia buvo teikti paslaugas judėjimui per sieną sausumos keliu bei Nemuno upe ir skatinti pasienio prekybą.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Prūsija, Rusija, siena, pasienis, judėjimas per sieną, kontaktų zona, kultūrinės praktikos, krikščionys, žydai.

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

Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis XLVI, 2025, 137–160. ISSN 1392-4095 (Print), ISSN 2351-6526 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/ahuk.v46i0.2784>

The village of Schmallengken (Smalininkai) occupied a geographically important position on the border between Prussia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, later the Russian Empire, as at this point the border crosses the Nemunas, the largest river in the entire region. However, the perception of the village changed over the centuries, depending on the importance of the respective trade that passed through it. One of the most important phases in Schmallengken's history took place in the first half of the 19th century, more precisely in the period between 1795 and 1856. This 60-year period was marked by key turning points shaped by political events. The first occurred with the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 which brought the Russian Empire as Prussia's new border neighbour. The second followed the end of the Crimean War in 1856. The extent to which this southern European theatre of war influenced the northern European border village, and what developments coincided with it, will become clear in the article.

How did this border settlement function? On one hand, it was described as 'an ordinary Prussian village'.¹ On the other hand, it had institutions and inhabitants that were utterly untypical for a village at that time. There is a certain tension between these two descriptions. How can the place and its actors be narrated for the period in question? The concept of the contact zone as a theoretical approach (Mary Louise Pratt) was chosen for the description.² With the help of this perspective, the spatial and temporal co-presence of people whose objectives are entirely different, and who also pursue different cultural practices, can be represented.

The sources used are Prussian handbooks and periodicals from the period under investigation, as well as a list of the Jewish inhabitants of the village, which was compiled by the office of the district administration in 1856.³ This list is, to a certain extent, a snapshot of a part of the population constituting this border village. Some questions can be answered with the help of the list. The source material is challenging, because it only partially covers topics and issues.⁴ A few files relating to Schmallengken, which were found in the Prussian Privy State Archives, supplement the sources.

Overall, one could be left with the impression that the article is overly concerned with Jews in Schmallengken; however, it should be noted that its purpose is to discuss all the inhabitants of the village in the first half of the 19th century, and

¹ SYROKOMLA, Władysław. *Niemien od źródeł do ujścia: monografia rzeki Niemna od jego źródeł do Kowna*. Wilno, 1861, s. 95.

² PRATT, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd Ed. London 2008, p. 7.

³ For the records of Jews residing in the district of the Royal Police Administration in Schmaleningken who are citizens and have a permanent place of residence, see: *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (Prussian Privy State Archives, hereafter *GStA PK*), XX. HA, Rep. 18 Landratsämter, Tilsit Nr 6.

⁴ Parts of the local archives, in particular those of the Protestant parish and the civil records, were lost in the turmoil of the Second World War.

that Jews played a very constitutive role among them. Moreover, at the turn of the 19th century, during the Napoleonic Wars, there was still no local press, and the East Prussian region only gradually developed during the century.

Research questions and state of research

Smalininkai/Schmalleningken was chosen for this study because it experienced a unique period of growth for border settlements of the province of East Prussia in the Kingdom of Prussia during the first half of the 19th century. This growth was based on its favourable geographical location, its political and economic development, and the activities of various local actors.

It is worth noting that the village is not mentioned in Lithuanian research dealing with trade and the border area between Prussia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the second half of the 18th century,⁵ and in particular in the latest research on this topic.⁶ The research mentioned refers to trade relations between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Prussia, Lithuanian customs offices, and smuggling. The profiles of border settlements and their specific populations are not addressed.⁷ Overall, there are very few studies on East Prussian border settlements, particularly on the period after 1860.⁸ However, as Börries Kuzmany has well demonstrated in his monograph on Brody, border settlements can have many distinctive features, and their history can also shed a light on larger questions and problems in European history.⁹ In this respect, there is a research gap that needs to be filled.

How did the place develop? To what extent did different local actors, through their activities, contributed to its prosperity?

⁵ ŽIEMELIS, Darius. XVI-XVIII a. Abiejų Tautų Respublikos užsienio prekybos struktūra bei mastas: LDK atvejis (II). *Lituanistica*, 2011, t. 57, nr. 4, p. 365–385.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Although the topic concerns Palanga, the town itself is not examined: 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.

⁸ On Schmalleningken, see: PURVINAS, Martynas. Smalininkų urbanistinės raidos bruožai. *Kultūros paminklai*, 2003, t. 10, p. 154–167. On Eydtkuhnen, Kybartai, and Virbalis, see: LEISEROWITZ, Ruth. *Sabbat-leuchter und Kriegerverein. Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812–1942*. Osnabrück, 2010, Chapter 8 'Im verdichteten Grenzraum', S. 171–181. On Prostki, see: MARCINKIEWICZ, Stefan Michał. *Prosto przez Prostki. W czasie przestrzeni po gminie Prostki*. Ełk, 2022.

⁹ KUZMANY, Börries. *Brody. Eine galizische Grenzstadt in langen 19. Jahrhundert*. Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2011.

The aim is to show what kind of contacts occurred here on the border, and what changes the microcosm of Smalininkai/Schmalleningken¹⁰ underwent during the first half of the 19th century. Which actors contributed to this? And finally, how far did the border town of Jurbarkas (Jurborg), positioned on the other side, contribute to the dynamics of this contact zone? What forms did these contacts take?

Mary Louise Pratt has stated that:

[...] 'contact zone' shifts the center of gravity and the point of view. It invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect. The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations [...] not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.¹¹

140

However, the concept is often applied in a broader sense without all of the above conditions necessarily being met.¹²

This article proposes that the area constituted a multi-layered contact zone operating on several levels. On one hand, residents of Schmalleningken had developed competencies characteristic of peripheral communities, enabling them to engage effectively with actors on the opposite side of the border. On the other hand, the settlement's specific position and economic circumstances drew in additional actors from the country's interior, whose arrival prompted changes and who, in turn, acquired new skills through their interaction with both the local community and the cross-border actors. The analysis that follows therefore considers the inhabitants of Schmalleningken and their activities through the lens of a contact zone.

Temporal context

After 1795, the River Nemunas east of Schmalleningken formed the border between Prussia and the Russian Empire. The demarcation on the Nemunas, following the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, took the local population

¹⁰ Because the sources present the place name in several different spellings, this text reproduces each spelling as it appears in its respective source.

¹¹ PRATT, M. L. *Imperial Eyes...*, p. 7.

¹² PRATT, Mary Louise. *Arts of the Contact Zone*. *Profession*, 1991, p. 34.

largely by surprise. Although nothing changed on the Schmalleningken side of the border, commonly referred to at the time as Smaleningken, the neighbouring territory came under a new political authority. No eyewitness accounts survive describing how the inhabitants received or reacted to the news of the change of sovereignty next door.

For capital cities and other major centres, power shifts and political changes tended to be moderated for the population, while discourses, behavioural patterns and perspectives circulated freely. But what about the periphery? Many political developments reached the border regions, yet local inhabitants had to decide how to respond to challenges and which opportunities to seize. In some cases, the periphery attracted attention and even became a desirable target.

On the Russian side, administrators lacked a master plan and possessed only minimal knowledge of the areas they sought to integrate. St Petersburg monitored Lithuania closely, yet it is striking how little attention the region received, apparently due to limited understanding. Immediately after the Third Partition in 1795, the newly incorporated territories were divided into two provinces, reorganised again the following year, and reunited five years later. These changes, however, had not yet produced a stable administrative structure. In 1800, authorities introduced the Julian calendar in the Lithuanian provinces, creating various curiosities along the border, since the dates of the different monarchies now differed by 11 days. It remains uncertain whether local inhabitants perceived the beginning of a new century or regarded the shift in state affiliation, albeit gradual, as the more significant temporal landmark.

Meanwhile, trade and border traffic, which had been very lively in the second half of the 18th century along this section of the border between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Prussia, were about to undergo significant change.

The tsarist government issued a multitude of border regulations that severely restricted, and often outright prohibited, the export and import of goods. (This does not contradict the previously noted lack of interest in the region, as these measures stemmed from the broader reorganisation of Russian foreign trade and customs.) One of the first instructions concerned money transports in 1798.¹³ In the summer of 1800, the Hamburg *Politisches Journal* reported on the confusion caused by the halt of Russian grain exports via Riga, Libau and Palanga, but noted that rye exports via Smaleninken had so far proceeded without interruption.¹⁴

¹³ Verbot von Geldfrachtfahrten von Königsberg nach Kurland über Memel und Polangen durch die russische Regierung. *GStA PK*, II. HA, Dept. 6, II, Nr. 78.

¹⁴ Von der Russischen Grenze (vom 2t Julius). *Politisches Journal. Nebst Anzeige von gelehrten und andern Sachen*, 1800, Bd. 2, Stück 7, S. 708–709.

This situation, however, soon changed. In 1813, merchants in Königsberg complained that trade with the former territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had come to a complete standstill. An *ukaz* from 1811¹⁵ prohibited the transport of goods from Königsberg upstream into the neighbouring country, allowing only imports by axle.¹⁶ Exports via the River Nemunas at Smaleninken were entirely forbidden, forcing all transport onto the roads.

Such sudden and unpredictable measures, which became more frequent around the turn of the 18th to the 19th century, caused considerable confusion for traders on both sides of the border and often placed them in difficult situations. Traders suddenly faced intense competition to protect domestic markets. The Russian authorities also restricted cross-border passenger traffic to a minimum.

142

Jurbarkas had already suffered in 1806 when Russian troops crossed the River Nemunas on their way to the battles of Heilsberg and Friedland.¹⁷

Following the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, the Kingdom of Prussia lost the Province of New East Prussia, which it had controlled since 1795; the territory was now transformed into the Duchy of Warsaw. From that point onwards, Smaleningken became a place where three states met: Prussia, Russia, and the Duchy of Warsaw. However, the political situation remained unsettled until the resolutions of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which brought a preliminary end to the region's upheavals. The Duchy of Warsaw was replaced by the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland), now in a personal union with Russia, and Smaleningken continued to mark the meeting point of three political entities. This is where the Prussian-Lithuanian saying 'At Smaleningken, the cock crows three kings' originated.¹⁸

The process of the Third Partition was not fully completed until 1818, two decades after the agreements of the partitioning powers. The provisions of the Congress of Vienna also prompted modifications, and neighbouring states issued a series of decrees to regulate the resulting situation and their relations with each other. The Russian Empire primarily pursued a policy of isolation. Many of these regulations remained in force for nearly a century, until the First World War.

In line with all these developments, the region's trade experienced substantial transformation. Only the economic pressure Russia faced during the Crimean War, combined with the introduction of cross-border railway lines, gradually made the border

¹⁵ LATAWIEC, Krzysztof. Institution of Customs District Chief in Russia in the First Half of the 19th Century. *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych*, 2022, r. 21, Nr. 1, s. 173–196.

¹⁶ STRAUBEL, Rolf. *Die Handelsstädte Königsberg und Memel in friderizianischer Zeit Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ost- und gesamtpreußischen „Commercium“ sowie seiner sozialen Träger (1763–1806/15)*. Berlin, 2003, S. 526.

¹⁷ WUTZKE, Johann Christian. Einige Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1806 und 1807 (Fortsetzung). *Preussische Provinzial-Blätter*, 1835, Bd. 13, S. 28–34, 249–255, 349–354.

¹⁸ FRIEDEBERG, Meyer. *Bilder von der Ostgrenze*. Tilsit, 1886, S. 6.

more permeable from the mid-1850s, fostering an interdependent border region (Oscar Martinez). These developments affected the border community of Smaleningken, though they fall outside the scope of this article.

The border communities

In 1821, Smaleningken, comprising three villages, a customs office and a market community, had 51 houses and 341 inhabitants.¹⁹ That year, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian Empire negotiated a state postal agreement that aimed to establish the route from Tilsit to Vilnius, via Smaleningken, Jurbarkas and Kaunas, as one of the key postal connections between the two countries.²⁰ They planned for the service to run twice a week, although this hardly added anything new, as the route ranked among the oldest postal lines between Prussia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.²¹

Travellers using this route passed through Smaleningken frequently. In 1829, an anonymous passenger, presumably a Polish nobleman, described his impressions as follows:

Schmaleningken [...] is nothing more than a small Prussian village. The construction of the huts is not very different to our villages. The huts are made of wood and thatch, not only those of the villagers but also those of the German merchants who live there. But these cottages have large windows, beautiful trees, and clean courtyards. The inhabitants there are partly merchants and partly farmers who used to live in the countryside but now live on their land after paying off their owners. The people's excitement is beautiful; their faces are red and cheerful, and even old age seems to grace their faces instead of imprinting its sad mark on them. Everyone greets the passer-by in a friendly way, with their hats raised, and everyone speaks to them.²²

Shortly afterwards, in 1831, Zedlitz's travel guide said: 'Schmaleningken is a church village with a license for a market, and the seat of a royal main customs office. Inns

¹⁹ RUMPF, Johann Daniel Friedrich. *Vollständiges topographisches Wörterbuch des preußischen Stats, enthaltend...* Bd. 3: S–Z. Berlin, 1821, S. 47. Mützell gives a total population of 350 for 1822. – MÜTZELL, Alexander August; KRUG, Leopold. *Neues topographisch-statistisch-geographisches Wörterbuch des preußischen Staates*. Bd. 4: P–S. Halle, 1823, S. 251.

²⁰ STEPHAN, Heinrich. *Geschichte der preussischen Post von ihrem Ursprung bis auf die Gegenwart nach amtlichen Quellen*. Berlin, 1859, S. 559.

²¹ ČELKIS, Tomas. The Structure of Postal Routes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th–18th Centuries. *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2002, Vol. 50, pp. 61, 65.

²² SYROKOMLA, W. Op. cit., s. 95.

include those of Bersowitz, Bullal and the Jew Schaymoses.²³ Yet the village he described had no church, and the innkeepers' names did not match reality.

The *Grosses Adressbuch der Kaufleute und Fabrikanten*²⁴ of 1841 listed five carting companies in Smaleningken, as well as a sixth that operated both as a carting firm and an inn. It also named three commission agents: L. Genbusch, Schiller and Rosenkranz.²⁵

In 1845, the authorities declared the village a separate parish, at least provisionally. From 1859, the postal route from Königsberg to Kaunas no longer ran through Smaleningken,²⁶ which reduced the number of stagecoach passengers passing through the village. Instead, regular passenger steamers between Tilsit and Smaleningken, and between Königsberg and Memel, had begun running in 1850 and attracted many people. These steamers carried freight as well.

144

By mid-century, both the number of houses and the population had grown considerably, although only limited statistical data survives. Ludwig Kühnast records 314 houses and 1,624 inhabitants for 1863.²⁷ As many reports note a decline in the village's economy after 1856, and as numerous residents left Smaleningken when the railway between Königsberg and Eydtkuhnen was built, it seems likely that these figures also approximate the situation in 1856.

What was the character of the town on the opposite side of the border?

Jurborg (today Jurbarkas) stood 12 kilometres east of the Prussian-Russian border on the right bank of the Nemunas. A customs office had operated there since 1540,²⁸ and the town also maintained a post station.²⁹ In 1611, Jurborg received its town charter, and during the 17th century a Jewish community had already taken shape and was growing quickly. It became a centre for Litvaks, as Lithuanian Jews called themselves. Almost no data survives on the size of the town's population during the early 19th century. However, a census of Jews in 1816 recorded 148 resident families; between 1812 and 1816, 36 families, almost a quarter, had left the town, while five families had moved in. The largest number, namely 20 families, had departed in

²³ ZEDLITZ, Leopold Freiherr, von. *Reisetaschenbuch für Berlin, alle Preussischen Staaten und die benachbarten Länder. Mit genauer Berücksichtigung, nach amtlichen Quellen der diplomatischen, Post-, Zoll- und Strassen-Verhältnisse, und einer Uebersicht sämtlichen Preussischen Bäder.* Berlin, 1831, S. 356.

²⁴ *Großes Adressbuch der Kaufleute, Fabrikanten und handelnden Gewerbsleute von Europa und den Hauptplätzen der fremden Welttheile.* Nr. 9: Brandenburg, Preussen, Posen, Pommern, Schlesien. Nürnberg, 1843, S. 334.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, S. 125.

²⁶ Bekanntmachung. *Amtsblatt der Königlichen Regierung in Gumbinnen*, 1859, Hf. 18, S. 103.

²⁷ KÜHNAST, Ludwig Christoph Franz. *Nachrichten über Grundbesitz, Viehstand, Bevölkerung und öffentliche Abgaben der Ortschaften in Littauen nach amtlichen Quellen.* Bd. 3. Gumbinnen, 1863, S. 417–418.

²⁸ IVINSKIS, Zenonas. *Lietuvos prekyba su Prūsais.* Kaunas, 1934, p. 124.

²⁹ BALIULIS, Algirdas. Jurbarko praeitis istoriniuose dokumentuose. In *Jurbarkas. Istorijos puslapiai.* Sud. Arnoldas PIROČKINAS. Vilnius, 1996, p. 43.

1812,³⁰ probably because of the war. Once peace returned, trade revived. Alongside the weekly Friday market, five annual fairs drew traders from far and wide.³¹

The traveller mentioned earlier also formed an impression of Jurbarkas in 1829. He noted:

I went to take a look around the little town. At that time it was very poor. Two or three hundred houses, mostly Jewish, mostly wooden, two hills, interesting with history but without any trace of antiquity, and finally the church where I was in the morning, that's all there is to see here. Mr Adelson's houses are an exception. Five of them are made of stone, well built, and surrounded by beautiful gardens.³²

Statistics from 1841 record 245 houses, including 14 built of stone, and 4,014 inhabitants. They also list 16 merchants of the first guild, 34 of the third guild, a wooden church, 18 shops and two inns.³³

It is therefore clear that the town on the opposite side of the border was far larger in terms of both population and administrative status. Yet its relationship with the Kingdom of Prussia differed in several respects. Alongside cross-border trade, books and journals arriving from Prussia and read by Jurbarkas's educated residents played an important role. The poet Abraham Mapu, who worked as a private tutor in the town in the 1830s, absorbed much there about the *Haskalah*. This Jewish Enlightenment movement had emerged in Berlin and Königsberg and was now spreading across the border.³⁴

One important distinction between the two border settlements lay in their structures: Jurbarkas functioned as a small town with modest but established infrastructure, whereas Smaleningken was a 'market' community of three neighbouring villages that lacked both a church or a synagogue until the 1860s.³⁵ Local educational provision was also underdeveloped. Many administrative matters had to be handled in Wischwill (today Viešvilė), the centre of the parish of the same name, located 12 kilometres to the west. Several improvements that raised living standards in Smaleningken only began to take shape during the period under study. (Here one might

³⁰ For all Lithuania database, see URL: <https://www.litvaksig.org/search-ald/> (last access 14.04.2025).

³¹ PIROČKINAS, Arnoldas. Du Jurbarko istorijos pjūviai. In *Jurbarkas. Istorijos puslapai...*, p. 102.

³² SYROKOMLA, Op. cit., p. 92.

³³ *Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas* (Lithuanian State Historical Archives, LVIA), f. 388, ap. 1, b. 50, l. 10–41. Data from the 1850s and 1860s indicates that, by that time, the town had roughly 2,600 to 2,900 residents. Cf. *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami General'nogo shtaba. Kovenskaia guberniia*. Sost. D. AFANAS'EV. Sankt-Peterburg, 1861, s. 686; *Geograficheskoi statisticheskii slovar' Rossiiskoi imperii*. Sost. P. SEMENOV". T. V. Sankt-Peterburg", 1885, s. 901.

³⁴ PATTERSON, David. *Abraham Mapu, the Creator of the Modern Hebrew Novel*. London, 1964, p. 17.

³⁵ The Protestant church was built on the site in 1877–1878, and the synagogue was consecrated in 1865.

draw a parallel with the border settlements of Eydtkuhnen and Virbalis. The former Lithuanian town of Virbalis already possessed an old urban core with infrastructure, churches and synagogues, whereas Eydtkuhnen had to build such structures gradually. Tellingly, a synagogue appeared there before funds were available to construct a church.)

The border as a state organ

146

Border settlements received much attention under the changed political conditions on both sides following the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Unfortunately, no records indicate when or how the Russian Empire's withdrawal from the Continental System in 1810 affected cross-border trade, which for a short time flourished in smuggled English goods across the border into Prussia. The Napoleonic campaign of 1812 immediately followed, causing immense war damage along the Nemunas. After the war, Prussian officials in Smaleningken demanded compensation for the looting by Russian troops; however, even on inquiry, these claims could not be substantiated.³⁶

The extent to which Smaleningken was directly affected by the passage of various armies remains unknown. Parts of the forces under Wittgenstein and Chichagov passed through the area and crossed the Nemunas at Jurbarkas at the end of December 1812.³⁷

Following the Prussian Customs Act of 26 May 1818, the customs office in Smaleningken was elevated to the status of Royal Main Customs Office and granted numerous powers. The various interpretations of the law underline the importance of this location and its role in regional trade. Meanwhile, the Russian Customs Act of 1819 classified Jurbarkas as a third-class customs office. This comparatively low classification should be understood within the broader context of the Russian Empire. After the conclusion of the Russian-Prussian Trade and Navigation Treaty of 27 February/11 March 1825, the Jurbarkas office, like Palanga, was upgraded to first-class status.³⁸ This reclassification allowed all goods to be imported, exported and cleared through this customs office, providing a real boost to trade along this route.

³⁶ Entschädigungsforderungen der Beamten in Schmalleningken (Prov. Ostpreußen) wegen Plünderungen durch russische Truppen, 1812–1815. *GStA PK*, III. HA MdA, III, Nr. 12113.

³⁷ BUTURLIN", Dmitrii. *Istoriia nashestviia imperatora Napoleona na Rossiiu v" 1812-m" godu*. Ch. 2. Sankt-Peterburg", 1838, s. 307.

³⁸ LATAWIEC, Krzysztof; GÓRAK, Artur; KRAJKA, Jarosław. *Dyrektorzy komór celnych w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1851–1914 (1918)*. Lublin, 2023, s. 47.

The heads of the customs authorities received attention and honours from both their own state and the neighbouring state, particularly during the 1830s and 1840s, often through the award of orders. In 1846, for example, the King of Prussia awarded the second-class Order of the Red Eagle to the Russian district customs chief, Karl Wilhelm von Alfthon, in Jurbarkas. The Russian Colonel Andreas von Eichler in Palanga, who oversaw customs there, received the third-class Order of the Red Eagle.³⁹

The reasons for these awards are unclear, but they suggest constructive relations prevailed at the time. Such honours reflected a cultural practice used to express appreciation. Alfthon received his award at the end of his term in Jurbarkas.⁴⁰ Similarly, Senior Customs Inspector Schmidt in Smaleningken received the king's permission to wear the third-class Order of St Stanislaus, previously awarded to him by the tsar.⁴¹

To impact of customs and customs officers on local life can only be speculated for this period. They represented state authority on the ground and were highly respected. The directors of the customs offices on both sides of the border maintained regular contact with one another, which was well known locally and commanded respect. Customs officials were thus at the heart of the contact zone. Maintaining these contacts was not always easy, given frequent personnel changes on both sides, yet it was a natural aspect of their roles. This is underscored by the fact that both the Prussian and Russian customs administrations routinely employed interpreters.

Customs officers formed part of the essential personnel of their respective administrations. Prussian officials were typically drawn from the two East Prussian administrative districts, while Russian officers often arrived with experience from remote areas of the empire. They entered an entirely new environment and were usually transferred again after a few years of service.

The Jewish residents of Smaleningken

For centuries, an inn run by the Jewish Berlowitz family had been a defining feature of Smaleningken.

In 1708, Pincas Isakowitz, a Jew from nearby Jurbarkas received a patent from Count zu Dohna granting him the right to build a pub, a granary, a brewery, and other nec-

³⁹ Meldung. *Das Inland. Eine Wochenschrift für Liv-, Esth- und Kurlands Geschichte, Geographie, Statistik und Literatur*, 15.8.1846, Jg. 11, Nr. 33, S. 792.

⁴⁰ Verleihung des Roten Adlerordens, Bd. 20: Verleihung des Roten Adlerordens 2. Klasse an den russischen Kreis Zollchef [...] von Alfthon in Georgenburg und Verleihung des Roten Adlerordens 3. Klasse an den russischen Oberst [...] von Eichler in Polangen, 1846. *GStA PK*, I. HA, Rep. 89, Nr. 2000.

⁴¹ Meldung. *Allgemeine Zeitung* [München], *Beilage*, 1.2.1857, S. 510.

essary buildings for himself and his heirs, and also to lay out a garden. For a long time, this remained the only such patent issued to a Jew on the border and in East Prussia, underscoring the importance of the trade route along the Nemunas. During the period under investigation, descendants of the family, who had changed their surname from Isakowitz to Berlowitz, continued to live in Smaleningken, forming a substantial part of the local Jewish community. Of the seven children of the innkeeper Pinkus Berlowitz, born between 1799 and 1822, four sons and two daughters remained in the village; only one son married outside it.⁴²

The two sons-in-law each ran a carting business (Levin Hirsch Dobriner and Tobias Hirsch Theodor). The oldest son, David Pinkus Berlowitz, worked as a Jewish bell-ringer, likely serving as a guard or night watchman. Of the other three sons, one was an innkeeper and landowner (Schmul Pinkus), one a tenant of a pub and bakery (Israel Pinkus Berlowitz), and the youngest was a merchant (Jossel Pinkus Berlowitz). That most of the siblings stayed in the area and established livelihoods there suggests that development since the 1830s had been strongly upward. In addition to this close circle of Berlowitz, their wives and children, other relatives bearing the same surname also lived in the village, including Chaie, widow of the kosher butcher Hirsch Behr Berlowitz, the tailor Chaim Berlowitz, and the baker Berlowitz.

These Jewish families lived according to traditional Litvak patterns, yet within a predominantly Christian society. They were an active and integrated part of local life, exemplifying hybridity in a border contact zone.⁴³

Other related families, such as the local Isakowitz line, were also present. Moses Schey Isakowitz, for example, worked as a publican and baker. Cross-border traffic strongly shaped the livelihoods of publicans, innkeepers, leaseholders, and carters, who acquired specific expertise in dealing with domestic and foreign traders, travelers, and the complexities of the border economy.

They were in the middle of an imaginary contact zone. Anyone who considers the constellation described here may find it hard to believe that there was still room for other actors. Yet the spheres of activity for individual families and newcomers were narrowly defined, leaving space for additional Jewish immigrants to settle and establish themselves. Merchants and landowners such as Israel Samuel Orbach migrated from West Prussia in the 1820s, part of the wave of West Prussian Jews moving to East Prussia after the Edict of Tolerance of 1812. The reason for this migration was that the edict's privileges applied only to the old parts of the Kingdom of Prussia, not the areas annexed in 1772, which included West Prussia. Many young Jews relocated

⁴² *GS tA PK*, XX. HA, Rep. 18 Landratsämter, Tilsit, Nr. 6.

⁴³ FRIEDMAN, Susan Stanford. Das Sprechen über Grenzen, Hybridität und Performavität. Kulturtheorie und Identität in den Zwischenräumen der Differenz. *Mittelweg*, 36, 2003, 12. Jhg., Hf. 5, S. 37.

to East Prussia, where competition was lower, and established their lives and businesses.

In the early decades following the edict, West Prussian Jews were more readily accepted as citizens in the Province of East Prussia. They had grown under Prussian governance, understood its social and administrative practices, dressed similarly to Christian neighbours, and spoke German with little accent, appearing as integrated members of their society. In contrast, the Litvaks, with their traditional customs, accent, and dress, seemed more foreign and were widely perceived as coming from the neighbouring state across the border.⁴⁴

These newcomers quickly established themselves in Smaleningken's commercial life, bringing new skills and extending the variety of services and goods available in the village. Orbach ran a fabric shop and expanded the range of goods. Levin Hirsch Dobriner, a carter and husband of a Berlowitz sister, also arrived during this migration wave. Other newcomers of this origin included the merchant Schmul Abraham Schoenfeld from Zempelburg (West Prussia), who died in 1855, and his son Moses (born in Smaleningken in 1824), Alexander Less and his adult sons Simon and Markus, who were pedlars and also came from Zempelburg, and the baker Israel Wohlgemuth from Landeck in West Prussia, living in Smaleningken since 1840. Another notable arrival was the merchant Salomon Tiktin, a citizen of Breslau, who opened a carting business in 1844.

From across the border came the Jurbarkas merchant Mendel Liebermann, who had lived in Prussia since 1838 as a Russian citizen with a residence permit. Tobias Theodor, a carter who had lived in the area since 1826 and married one of the Berlowitz sisters, also came from Jurbarkas.

Jews coming from across the border included six merchants, two tradesmen, three pedlars, three innkeepers, four bakers, one tailor, and one bell-ringer. All practised professions serving the wider public, not just their own religious community. The kosher butcher, discussed later, played an important role as the local specialist for animal health, especially when veterinary services were unavailable. Unfortunately, source material for Christian craftsmen is lacking, but in spring 1856 two Christian carters, Lagenpusch and Carl Schiller, were recorded;⁴⁵ Lagenpusch appears to have served the Prussian state particularly well, being the only civilian in the area awarded the fourth-class Order of the Red Eagle at that time.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See OSTERHAMMEL, Jürgen. Kulturelle Grenzen in der Expansion Europas. *Saeculum: Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte*, 1995, Hf. 46, S. 101–138.

⁴⁵ *Großes Adressbuch...*, S. 334.

⁴⁶ Mitteilung. *Allgemeine Zeitung* [München], *Beilage*, 1859, Hf. 25, S. 398.

Another set of residents consisted of employees serving the informal Jewish community should be mentioned. One was the *shochet* (kosher butcher) and prayer leader Baruch Salomon Finkelstein, from Seredžius, married to the eldest daughter of the previous kosher butcher Hirsch Rehfeld, who had passed away. He was a Russian citizen, with only temporary residency status. The local teaching position, vacant for several years after the death of Tobias Bernstein, proved difficult to fill. Additionally, a Jewish tutor from Berlin prepared the son of the carter Tiktin for high school.

Several widows, including those of the two former *shochetim* and of the teacher Bernstein, along with their children, were also part of the community. In spring 1856, Smaleningken Jewish population numbered 97: 31 men, 32 women, and 34 children under 14. Including Jews from the neighbouring Schillehnen and other villages associated with the informal community, the total came to 122.

The Christian residents of Smaleningken

Only certain circles and individual functionaries can be identified among Smaleningken's Christian residents. In addition to a large number of farmers and their families, there were undoubtedly millers and craftsmen, including carpenters, joiners, wheelwrights, shoemakers and blacksmiths. It is reasonable to assume that carters also lived in this village, connected to the coaching inn, along with men capable of repairing carts, stagecoaches, and even shoes in emergencies. Brewers supplying the inns were probably present as well. Although this substantial group remains largely undocumented, they can be considered part of the contact zone, albeit on its periphery. They generally maintained an observational role, encountering strangers only occasionally – at the market or during an emergency that required their services. Workers at the port, by contrast, had regular contact with arriving and departing sailors and raftsmen.

The local boatmen, who transported goods on the Nemunas, operated largely unnoticed in the village's everyday life.⁴⁷ Just as the border settlement itself can be understood as a contact zone, the river, with its traffic of goods and people, constituted a contact zone of its own. The boatmen moved freely within in and brought their experiences back to the village. However, it is impossible to determine the extent to which effectively capitalised on this knowledge.

⁴⁷ Cf. examples in the Local Heritage Book of the Memel Region: Heinrich Christlieb(m) Lewrigkait, URL: <<https://www.online-ofb.de/famreport.php?ofb=memelland&ID=I526099>> (last access 14.4.2025); George Amelang, URL: <<https://www.online-ofb.de/famreport.php?ofb=memelland&ID=I525615>> (last access 14.4.2025).

The military stationed at the border also played a role. Particularly in the early 1820s, there were several incidents in which soldiers from the area left their unit without permission. While the army was formally part of the border apparatus, personal contact and exchange were generally undesirable, placing soldiers in an extremely static, peripheral position within the contact zone model.

Officials such as the postal clerk and the police administrator, by contrast, interacted with travellers as part of their daily duties. Their contact was routine, positioning them in the middle of the imagined contact zone, alongside innkeepers and carters.

The resident physician and the pharmacist had only sporadic contact with foreigners, placing them at the outer edge of the contact zone. Dr Brachvogel, who practised in Smaleningken until 1842, even published a case study of the treatment of a skipper in a medical journal.⁴⁸ However, such interactions were exceptions; at most, they may have encountered one or two students whose parents came from nearby Jurbarkas.

Private female teachers from provincial towns occasionally provided home tuition for girls.⁴⁹ As unmarried women, they primarily moved within the households that employed them and were rarely visible in public. Civil servants usually came from towns and small towns within East Prussia, meaning their cultural background largely matched that of the local population. Nevertheless, the distinction between town and country was significant. A few civil servants maintained contact with members of the customs service and took an interest in conditions on and beyond the border. In this respect, they were also active participants within the contact zone.

The local community and communities in the locality

How could a local community even exist within such an extremely heterogeneous population? One might be tempted to divide the inhabitants into two categories: those oriented towards the border and external contacts, moving within the contact zone, and those who lived more self-sufficiently, apart from these interactions. However, the evidence above shows that such a strict separation is impossible. People from diverse backgrounds engaged with passers-by from the other side when circumstances required it; this was not an everyday occurrence for most, yet it was part of normal life. Just as the Christian population comprised both locals and newcomers, with inevitable fluctuation, the local Jewish community was equally heterogeneous, encompassing members from various cultures.

⁴⁸ BRACHVOGEL. Vermischtes. *Wochenschrift für die gesammte Heilkunde*, 4.6.1842, Nr. 23, S. 376.

⁴⁹ Bekanntmachung. *Amtsblatt der Königlichen Regierung in Gumbinnen*, 1853, Jg. 43, Hf. 36, S. 212.

During the period under discussion, the primary focus was on satisfying different economic interests, and as a result, apparent conflicts were minimal. It was a community in which cooperation prevailed.

Within the village, the inns and taprooms formed small contact zones where travellers, merchants, residents and officials encountered one another and exchanged impressions and opinions. Multilingualism was likely common, with German, Lithuanian, Yiddish and Russian serving as the principal languages of communication.

For a variety of reasons, the district administration tended to underestimate or ignore the cultural needs of these diverse groups during the first half of the century. One notable example was the village's lack of a church. Smaleningken was provisionally declared a separate parish in 1845, but it was not until 1861 that regulations came fully into effect, allowing planning for a place of worship to begin.⁵⁰ For a long time, Jews were also denied the right to establish a congregation as a legal entity, under the Prussian law of 1847, which grouped all Jews into district congregations. The small size of a local Jewish community held little weight with officials. Nevertheless, petitions initiated by the Berlowitz brothers in 1855 succeeded, and the community was officially established in 1857. They had already advocated for the employment of a teacher.⁵¹

In 1844, the travelling preacher Emmanuel Mendel Tartakover, a converted Jew trained in London and Jerusalem as a missionary of Messianic Judaism, who found employment in the East Prussian province, visited Smaleningken. He reported:

I visited the following towns in the north-est part of the province of East Prussia: Tilsit, Schmallingken, Schirwind, Stallupoenen, Gumbinnen, and Insterburg [...] While visiting these places, I observed that there is a great difference between the Prussian Jews who are living on the frontiers and those residing in the interior of the kingdom, the former being more accustomed to reading the Holy Scriptures, and their minds more inclined to the consideration of spiritual things.⁵²

He observed that the Litvak influence on the Jewish community in Smaleningken was predominant. This derived, on the one hand, from the Berlowitz family's commitment to tradition and the origins of their lineage, and on the other hand, from the relationships they maintained with Litvak *shochetim*, teachers and prayer leaders,

⁵⁰ Errichtung eines neuen evangelischen Kirchen- und Pfarrsystems zu Schmallingken sowie die Berufung, Anstellung und Besoldung der Geistlichen und Kirchenbedienten daselbst, 1845–1869. *GStA PK*, I. HA, Rep. 76, III Sekt. 3 Abt. XX, Nr. 36.

⁵¹ Anstellung jüdischer Lehrer in Schmallingken, 1849. *GStA PK*, XX. HA, Rep. 12, Nr. 350.

⁵² Letter from the Rev. E. M. Tartakover. *Jewish Intelligence, and Monthly Account of the Proceedings of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*, 1844, Vol. 10, Sept., p. 299.

who were trained in the Talmud and brought their influence to the village. Thus, a form of co-presence emerged in this Prussian border settlement. In other words, the Jews in Smaleningken, to a certain extent, anticipated the characteristics of Jurbar-kas across the border.

Another point bears emphasising: the carters and merchants, both Christian and Jewish, largely came from urban backgrounds. Along with the civil servants and army and customs officers, they constituted the 'townspeople' of the village. This urban-influenced environment provided significant educational opportunities. Several sons from different families were first sent to high school in the town and subsequently progressed to university.

Two highlights from the 1840s

153

In the late autumn of 1842, a new doctor arrived in the area, Dr Heinrich K. Harnisch, originally from Merseburg. Appointed as a district and wound doctor, he was also responsible for obstetric care.⁵³ He had recently earned his doctorate from the Königsberg Albertina for his research on peritonitis and would remain in the region for 35 years, until his death in 1878. A remarkable testimony from him survives: a report published in 1843 in the inaugural issue of *Jahrbüchern der deutschen Turnkunst* (Yearbooks of German Gymnastics), issued in Danzig. In it, under the heading 'The Gymnastics Community of Schmallingken', he recounted:

As the local doctor, I considered it my duty to take care of the physical education of the adolescent youth in my sphere of influence, and where can the body be strengthened more and earlier than on the gymnastics field? My suggestion to found a gymnastics institution was received with great joy by the parents and teachers of the local youth, especially by the youth themselves, and the plan was immediately implemented. In the teachers, I found and still have the most active and loyal helpers in Mr Gamradt and Mr Meyer, the former of whom is a graduate of the Fridericianum in Königsberg.⁵⁴

Harnisch described how he, the teachers mentioned earlier, and about 30 boys aged six to 15 practiced gymnastics every day at a different location from 6pm to 8pm during the spring and summer months. In the summer, they would regularly swim in the River Nemunas beforehand. He emphasised that boys from both Christian

⁵³ Bekanntmachung. *Amtsblatt der Königlichen Regierung in Gumbinnen*, 1842, Hf. 47, S. 271.

⁵⁴ HARNISCH, Heinrich. Die Turngemeinde von Schmallingken. *Jahrbücher der deutschen Turnkunst*, 1843, Hf. 1, S. 37.

and Jewish families, representing different social classes, participated in activities. He concluded that these sporting exercises had a positive effect not only on the children but also on their parents.

This initiative, launched in the spring of 1843, took place just under two years after the lifting of the 22-year 'gymnastics ban' in Prussia. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the local residents, the teachers employed in the village, and Dr Harnisch, who had relocated from the city, the joy of gymnastics spread quickly even to the very edge of the state. That he explicitly noted the participation of both Christian and Jewish boys indicates that religious difference was perceived, yet did not prevent inclusion in this activity.

The presence of a Jewish-Christian dynamic in the area was also noted by the aforementioned travelling preacher Emmanuel Mendel Tartakover:

At Schmallengken I visited the *chasan*, or head of the synagogue, and soon commenced a very interesting conversation [...] The *chasan*, however, contradicted all I said, and called the rabbi, who is a Talmudist, for assistance; he came, accompanied by two young men. You can easily imagine the noise and bustle occasioned by this. It brought many of the neighbours together [...] They continued disputing among themselves long after I left the room [...] As no missionary had ever visited Schmallengken before, my visit excited a considerable degree of interest among some Christians there who, as a mark of their goodwill towards our cause, paid for my stay at the inn; they had previously offered to provide a horse and a *britchka* for my journey to Shirwind (*sic!*), which I was obliged to decline, as I had already hired one.⁵⁵

The interest generated by his presence in the village was perhaps also influenced by the hope that it might be possible to proselytise Jews after all. The hospitality described by Tartakover on the part of the Christian residents may likewise have reflected their expectations for his mission. Further evidence regarding the general mood and conditions in the town has not yet been uncovered.

It is clear, however, that the Jewish presence in the village, widely recognised as originating from the neighbouring country, continued to play a significant role. This was evident even in small details, such as the announcement in 1853 that the annual fair had been postponed from 3–4 to 10–11 October.⁵⁶ In other words, it did not occur on the first weekend of the month, as was customary. The reason for this adjustment was the Jewish holiday coinciding with the originally scheduled dates. The organisers took account of merchants who would otherwise have been unable

⁵⁵ Letter from the Rev. E. M. Tartakover..., p. 299

⁵⁶ Bekanntmachung. *Amtsblatt der Königlichen Regierung in Gumbinnen*, 1853, Hf. 38, S. 219.

to attend. More importantly, they aimed to accommodate the Jewish clientele from neighbouring regions, whose attendance they did not wish to forfeit. This serves as a small illustration of what Pratt describes as ‘interlocking understandings’ in the functioning of a contact zone.⁵⁷

Marriages

Another phenomenon of the border village in the first half of the 19th century appears surprising in the context of German-Jewish family history. It points to close cross-border ties and clearly reflects the Litvak identity of these families.

During the period under study, at least five young Jewish women from the village married and moved to neighbouring Lithuanian settlements, and three others left for Poland, as shown in the 1856 register of Jews from Smaleningken.⁵⁸

This pattern contrasts markedly with that of West Prussian Jews who, after 1812, came to East Prussia to obtain Prussian citizenship. They took great care to marry within Prussia; marrying into the Russian Empire or Congress Poland never entered their minds.

Because weddings traditionally took place in the bride’s home, large groups of Litvaks probably crossed the border for these celebrations and filled the local inns. As most of the young women mostly married merchants, some of their future husbands may well have met them during trading trips to Smaleningken. Other patterns also emerged, in which a Litvak husband married into Jewish family networks on the Prussian side of the border and built his career there.

One example is the merchant Jeremias Dubowski from Vilnius, who married Johanna Berlowitz, the daughter of a Smaleningken merchant. The couple settled in Eydkuhnen, the growing border settlement on the railway. From the 1870s onwards they ran a carting business in Prostken, at the border railway station on the line to Grajewo. Later, Jeremias and his six children, who all joined their parents’ commercial ventures, moved to Hamburg, where they opened and managed a thriving foreign-trade business.⁵⁹ Their story shows yet again that, in the mid-19th century, many commercial careers took shape at the borders, and that family networks often played a crucial role. The young Jewish women who married abroad carried with

⁵⁷ PRATT, M. L. *Imperial Eyes...*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ *GStA PK*, XX. HA, Rep. 18 Landratsämter, Tilsit Nr. 6.

⁵⁹ Cf. FLADHAMMER, Christa. Wanda Dugowski *1869, Stand: Juli 2020. In *Stolpersteine Hamburg*, URL: <https://www.stolpersteine-hamburg.de/index.php?MAIN_ID=7&BIO_ID=5669> (last access 14.04.2025).

them not only dowries but also social capital tailored to their destinations, rooted above all in family trading ties and contacts.

It is worth adding that, later in the century, once border regulations in the Russian Empire had relaxed and the railway operated reliably, daughters of Christian families in Smaleningken also began to marry into Russian households. One such case was Juliana, daughter of the carter Lagenpusch, who moved to St Petersburg.⁶⁰

A turning point in the 1850s

156

The Paris Peace Treaty of late March 1856 brought the Crimean War to an end. With it, the British lifted their blockade of Russian ports, and cross-border trade along the East Prussian border abruptly lost its significance. The construction of the railway from Königsberg to Eydtkuhnen, and its continuation from Virbalis to Kaunas, also reshaped the region. When the line opened in 1860, merchants and carters moved their business from Smaleningken to Eydtkuhnen.

The Königsberg journalist Otto Glagau described the consequences of this shift when he visited Smaleningken in the summer of 1867:

But the golden days are over, gone for ever, and the people of Schmallingken must now live on memories, and their savings if they have any. With the opening of the railway from St Petersburg to Königsberg in Prussia, trade and shipping on the River Nemunas suffered a severe blow, and what remains of it no longer touches Schmallingken, but passes by heedlessly. The Prussian government has abolished almost all import duties, goods coming from Russia are no longer reloaded in Schmallingken, and the skippers hardly ever go ashore. The local main customs office, which used to collect hundreds of thousands of thalers every month, can scarcely cover the salaries of its officials with its current income, and will probably soon be converted into a secondary customs office.⁶¹

His assessment sounds deeply pessimistic. Certainly, by the second half of the 1850s, a historic era for the settlement had ended. Although Glagau's bleakest predictions did not come true, Prussian-Russian border trade continued along the Nemunas, and a winter harbour even took shape. that story lies beyond the scope of this article.

⁶⁰ Cf. Lagenpusch, Juliana Marianne. In *Erik-Amburger-Datenbank. Ausländer im vorrevolutionären Russland*, URL: <<https://amburger.ios-regensburg.de/index.php?id=29226>> (last access 14.04.2025).

⁶¹ GLAGAU, Otto. *Littauen und die Littauer*. Tilsit, 1869, S. 50.

Another perspective from Jurbarkas

When we consider how far Smaleningken attracted interest from the Jews of Jurbarkas, it becomes clear that focus on the Prussian border village remained limited. Merchants from Jurbarkas, many of whom spent considerable time in Prussia, set their sights on Memel and, even more ambitiously, on Königsberg. This amounted to a form of economic 'leapfrogging'. Examples include the applications submitted in 1798 by the brothers Tanckel and Jossel Isaac of Jurbarkas,⁶² the Meyerowitz family's acquisition of Prussian citizenship after first settling in Tilsit and later in Königsberg,⁶³ and the family of Jacob Adelson, who had been based mainly in Königsberg since around 1835.

Many of these emigré merchants converted to Christianity yet continued to cultivate the trading connections they had established over decades. They saw themselves as intermediaries between Prussia and Russia. Jacob Adelson's career illustrates this most clearly: after his baptism, he became Russian consul-general in Königsberg in 1847.⁶⁴

Alongside these financially strong figures from Jurbarkas, several active merchants also settled in the immediate border region. Among them was the merchant Mendel Liebermann, mentioned earlier, who lived in Schmallengken on a Russian passport and built his livelihood on a deep knowledge of the local people and conditions.

Conclusion

In the second half of the 18th century, during the lively border trade between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Prussia, the border village of Schmallengken played only a minor role. This changed after the Congress of Vienna, when the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia reclassified their customs offices and concluded a trade agreement. These new conditions called for energetic and capable actors, and Litvak families who had settled in the region assumed a key role.

In the first half of the 19th century, the inhabitants of Schmallengken formed a strikingly heterogeneous community. They pursued different aims and followed different cultural practices, yet they shared an overlapping understanding of the village's identity. Above all, they recognised its task: to provide services for cross-border movement, by land or river, and to foster trade across the border.

⁶² Gesuch der Gebrüder Tanckel und Jossel Isaac aus Georgenburg in Russisch-Polen hinsichtlich eines Hauptschutzprivilegs für sich und ihre Nachkommen auf Königsberg oder Memel, 1798–1799. *GStA PK*, II. HA, Abt. 7, II, Nr. 4667.

⁶³ Preußische Regierung. Zivilkabinett 1841–1846. Meyerowitz. *GStA PK*, I. HA, Rep. 89, Nr. 23688.

⁶⁴ STRECKFUSS, Karl. *Jacob Ludwig und Fanny von Adelson samt ihren Sippen*. Berlin, 1928, S. 21.

The interaction between local actors from diverse backgrounds contributed decisively to the economic upswing that the border village experienced in the first half of the 19th century.

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SMALININKAI – GYVENIMAS PRIE SIENOS PRŪSIJOS ŠIAURĖS RYTUOSE XIX A. PIRMOJOJE PUSĖJE

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Santrauka

Smalininkai, trys pasienio kaimai Prūsijoje prie Nemuno upės, buvo įsikūrę strategiškai svarbioje vietoje tarp Prūsijos ir Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės (vėliau – Rusijos imperijos) ir funkcionavo kaip svarbus judėjimo per sieną sausumos ir vandens keliais centras. Jų raidą XIX a. pirmojoje pusėje lėmė trečiasis Abiejų Tautų Respublikos padalijimas (1795 m.), Napoleono karai ir muitų režimų pertvarkymas po Vienos kongreso, taip pat kintantis prekybos reglamentavimas abiejose sienos pusėse.

Remiantis Mary Louise Pratt *kontaktų zonos* samprata ir Cliffordo Geertzo tankiojo aprašymo prieiga, straipsnyje teigiama, kad Smalininkai formavosi kaip daugiasluksnė kontaktų zona, kurioje sąveikavo įvairūs veikėjai, besiskiriantys savo tikslais ir kultūrinėmis praktikomis. Nors kai kurie keliautojai Smalininkus apibūdino kaip „paprastą Prūsijos kaimą“, jame buvo įsikūrusios kitoms kaimo vietovėms nebūdingos įstaigos: karališkoji muitinė, ekspedijavimo agentūros, karčemos, pasienio apsaugos postas, paštas ir policinė administracija, kuriems reikėjo nuolat bendrauti su užsienio prekybininkais, keliautojais ir pareigūnais.

Smalininkų gyventojai krikščionys ir žydai skirtingai prisidėjo prie ten kuriamos ekonominės ir kultūrinės aplinkos. Žydų šeimos, ypač Berlowitz giminė, turėjusi galias litvakų šaknis, atliko vieną pagrindinių vaidmenų kaip karčemos savininkai, ekspeditoriai, prekybininkai, kepėjai ir amatininkai. Jų artimi ryšiai su Jurbarko miestu Rusijos pusėje palaikė mobilumą, prekybą ir mišrias santuokas per sieną. Tuo pačiu metu žydų migrantai iš Vakarų Prūsijos, įsiliesdami į šią Prūsijos pasienio aplinką, atnešė vokiečių kalbinių ir kultūrinių praktikų, formavo naujus prekybos įgūdžius. Tad žydai kūrė mišrią bendruomenę, kuri sklandžiai veikė atliepdama pasienio poreikius.

Žydams tą padėjo daryti kontaktai su Jurbarku, miestu kitapus sienos, svarbiu komerciniu centru su muitine, paštu, turgumi. Jame taip pat daugiausia gyveno žydai. Be komercinio vaidmens, tai buvo ir intelektinių mainų centras: knygos, laikraščiai ir idėjos iš Karaliaučiaus per Jurbarką plito Lietuvoje, darė įtaką tokioms asmenybėms kaip hebrajų rašytojas Abrahamas Mapu. Nors labiau pasiturintys Jurbarko pirkliai dažnai orientavosi ne į Smalininkus, o į Klaipėdą ar Karaliaučių, kasdieniai ekonominiai ir socialiniai ryšiai, mišrios santuokos, bendri religiniai ar komerciniai interesai artino abi bendruomenes. Dėl to Jurbarkas neretai tapdavo Smalininkų partneriu ar net Smalininkų kaitos katalizatoriumi, tuo prisidėdamas prie kontaktų zonos, apėmusios abi sienos puses, dinamikos.

Krikščionių gretose Smalininkuose būta ūkininkų, amatininkų, uosto darbininkų ir įvairių tarnautojų (pavyzdžiui, pašto, muitinės pareigūnų). Dalis jų į mainus per sieną buvo įsitraukę tik ribotu mastu, bet kiti, ypač karčemų savininkai, tarnautojai, laivininkai ir prekybininkai, kontaktų zonoje vaidino svarbius vaidmenis. Dviejų valstybių muitinės parei-

gūnų, kurie palaikė oficialius kontaktus ir net keitėsi garbės ženklais, buvimas liudijo, kaip kasdieniame vietos gyvenime buvo įsitvirtinusios valstybės institucijos.

Straipsnyje išskiriami keli epizodai, iliustruojantys Smalininkų dinamiškumą. 1842 m. atvykus gydytojui Heinrichui Harnischui, buvo įkurtas krikščionių ir žydų berniukams skirtas sporto klubas, tapęs retu socialinės integracijos pavyzdžiu. Kitas pavyzdys susijęs su misionieriaus Emanuelio Mendelio Tartakoverio vizitu 1844 m., kuris paskatino viešas diskusijas ir religiška mišrioje aplinkoje atskleidė įtampas ir smalsumą. Parodoma, kad dinamiškumui darė įtaką ir kai kurie ekonominiai motyvai, pavyzdžiui, turgaus dienos buvo derinamos siekiant prisitaikyti prie iš kaimyninių regionų atvykstančių žydų prekybininkų.

Taigi parodoma, kad Smalininkų klestėjimas buvo daugelio vietos aktorių – ypač žydų litvakų šeimų, bet taip pat Prūsijos pareigūnų, pirklių ir laivininkų – sąveikos rezultatas. Jų tapatinimasis su funkcijomis, kurios būdingos vietai prie sienos, skatino bendradarbiauti, kūrė ekonomiškai orientuotą ir tarpusavio ryšiais susietą bendruomenę.

Šimtmečio viduryje Smalininkai buvo gyvybinga bendruomenė su augančiu gyventojų skaičiumi, besiplečiančia komercine infrastruktūra ir socialiniais ryšiais, kurie jungė Prūsiją su Rusijos imperija. Tačiau XIX a. viduryje šį klestėjimą nutraukė. Kai nuo 1859 m. pašto kelias iš Karaliaučiaus į Kauną jau nėjo per Smalininkus ir dėl to sumažėjo keleivių, kurie pro šią vietą važiuodavo pašto vežimais, srautas, šį nuostolį šiek tiek kompensavo reguliarūs garlaivių maršrutai. Bet Krymo karo pabaiga ir 1860 m. baigtas Karaliaučiaus–Eitkūnų geležinkelis Smalininkams tapo lūžio tašku, kai Nemuno upės, kaip prekybos kelio, reikšmė ėmė mažėti.