

Vygantas Vareikis

Memellander/Klaipėdiškiai Identity and German-Lithuanian Relations in Lithuania Minor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries

Santrauka

XX a. lietuvių istoriografijoje retai svarstyti Klaipėdos krašto gyventojų (klaipėdiškių/memelenderių), turėjusių dvigubą, panašų į elzasiečių, identitetą klausimai. Paprastai šioji grupė tapatinama su lietuviais, o klaipėdiškių identiteto reiškiny, jų politinė orientacija XX a. pirmoje pusėje aiškinami kaip aktyvios vokietinimo politikos bei lietuvių tautinės sąmonės silpnumo padariniai. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami klausimai: kaip Prūsijoje (Vokietijoje) gyvenę lietuviai, išlaikydami kalbą ir identiteto savarankiškumą, vykstant akulturacijai, perėmė vokiečių kultūros vertybes ir socialines konvencijas; kokie politiniai veiksniai formavo Prūsijos lietuvių identitetą ir kaip skirtingas Prūsijos (ir Klaipėdos krašto) lietuviškumas veikė Didžiosios Lietuvos lietuvių pažiūras.

1.

The history of Lithuania and Lithuania Minor began to follow divergent courses when, during the Middle Ages, the Teutonic Knights conquered the tribes that dwelt on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Lithuanians living in the lands governed by the Order and then by the dukes of Prussia (after 1525) were strongly affected by German language, lifestyle and culture. The acculturation process increased during and following the Reformation. Gradually the Prussian Lithuanian adopted German cultural values and social conventions whilst retaining a separate identity and the Lithuanian language. What factors, then, formed the Prussian Lithuanian and what effect did the differentiated Prussian and Klaipėda Region Lithuanicity have on the national consciousness of those living inside the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Greater Lithuania, *Didžioji Lietuva*)?

The *Mazlietuvis* was formed under many years of political allegiance to German Prussia.

Living in a German state the *Mazlietuvis* was naturally prevailed upon to integrate into state political life and naturally became bilingual in German and Lithuanian. Especially after the industrialisation and modernization of Prussia the *Mazlietuvis* was bilingual. This bilingualism is a constant characteristic up to the end of World War Two, when Zero Hour changed the demographic and geopolitical situation in the eastern Baltic Region. Many Lithuanian inhabitants of Lithuania Minor found it difficult to answer the question: “what is your native tongue, German or Lithuanian”? In the second half of the 19th century as a result of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*, German came to dominate public life according to national law and Lithuanian began to be pushed out of Prussian schools. Thus it is no surprise that German entered the daily life of the ethnically Lithuanian family primarily through the influence of the school-room, when children returned from their classes

to speak *plattdeutsch* with their parents. By 1900 Lithuanian pupils usually spoke German. According to official Reich statistics in 1871 Lithuanians led other imperial national minorities in the table of who spoke good German: 45% of Lithuanian schoolchildren spoke German well, as opposed to 32% of Moravians, 9% of Rhineland wallons, 16% of Poles in Western Prussia, 17% of Danes, 32% of Czechs. The best figures were achieved by Dutch schoolchildren (99%)¹, but Dutch is of the same linguistic family as German, which is distinctly separate from the Baltic Group. These statistics reveal not that Lithuanians are more linguistically capable but that their degree of acculturation was higher, their ethnic consciousness lower than those of Czechs, Poles and those Lithuanians dwelling in the Grand Duchy, then part of the Russian Empire. The national movement that took root in the Grand Duchy in the second half of the 19th century was essentially an ethno-linguistic movement devoted to the preservation of the Lithuanian language. Following the failed Uprising of 1863 the imperial prohibition of books printed with Latin characters in the Russian Empire encouraged the illegal publication and distribution of Lithuanian texts in eastern Prussia.

2.

Polish aspirations and opposition to German language and the influence of German in Western Prussia was also conditioned in part by reaction to Bismarck's legislation towards the Catholic Church and Polish Minority. This policy led Polish villagers to form a *Polonische Wirtschaft* to counter the influence of the depolonised nobility which Bismarck attempted to exploit. The Polish peasant may well have remained faithful to the Kaiser if his religion had not been persecuted and his language out-

lawed, and thus little by little he came to regard himself once more as Polish.

Polish language, from the 18th century, had been stronger as a cultural medium in Lithuania than in Poland. In contrast to the Latinized nobility of the Polish Kingdom, the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had the Polish language as a means of setting themselves apart from the Lithuanian or Ruthenian peasantry. Under the Russian Empire Polish became a general force for unity, it united the nobility with peasantry, pushing them together towards a common cultural heritage. The Polish language became an essential touchstone for the Polish nationality. In the phrase of the Polish poet Julian Tuwim's (1894-1953) it was their "*Ojczyzna-Polszczyzna*" (Their Motherland and their Polish Essence).² For the Lithuanian peasantry of the Grand Duchy too language became synonymous with the idea of motherland, not merely by association but it also naturally became the touchstone of the newly emerging modern Lithuanian identity. In the Grand Duchy in second half of the nineteenth century to speak Lithuanian was to pronounce one's ethnic national identity as separate from the Poles. Czesław Miłosz characterises the Lithuanians as a people born of philology. The practical centre of national revival was Lithuania Minor, although the revivalist ideas that strengthened Lithuanian identity culturally and, after 1918, politically, had no echo in Lithuania Minor.

The Lithuanian language and its preservation were not such pressing problems in Lithuania Minor as in the Grand Duchy where language expressed common identity and was the one real element uniting the nation. In Lithuania Minor Lithuanians was drawn into bilingualism. This social stratum was dominated by Low German blent with Lithuanian loanwords. In the words of Eduard Gisevius the

lietuvinkai spoke “a motley blend of Lithuanian and German”.

German was a natural means of communication in the linguistically diverse Baltic region from the days of the Hanse. Low German was *lingua franca* in Baltic, David Kirby write, the language of commerce and navigation, and on occasion of diplomacy. It was also the language of a colonising ruling class. The influx of settlers from Germany into the eastern Baltic lands was weaker than in the southern Baltic and the rigid exclusivity of the German urban upper classes and the landowners placed obstacles in the way of any wholesale Germanisation of the native population.³ Those who did not speak German became excluded from many activities. Other languages were little spoken in Lithuania Minor. There were not many Jews in the district and contact with them took place at a commercial rather than a cultural level.

In the Grand Duchy, the western gubernias of the Russian Empire at the end of the 19th century Lithuanian was peripheral in the polyethnic, multicultural towns that were home to Jews, Poles, Russians and Germans and it seemed doomed to extinction in those places. Norman Davis poignantly describes what seemed to be a hopeless situation:

*The Lithuanian language, like the Gaelic language of the Scots in Scotland, had only survived in the remoter rural areas, and in certain segments of the peasantry. It was normally spoken by any significant group in the country's capital, Vilnius (Wilno), whose Lithuanian population at the last Tsarist Census in 1897 reached only 2 per cent. It had no settled written form, and no literature of note <... > No seriously imagined that they could become a serious political factor. But they did.*⁴

Leaders of the Lithuanian national revival stressed the importance of the Lithuanian lan-

guage, mythologising and politicising its essence so as to provide a weapon to fight the “alien” Polish tongue. To a Lithuanian subject of the Kaiser living in eastern Prussia German was not an alien tongue and he did not need to stress to heavily language in his claim to be *homo lituanicus* as did his cousins in the Grand Duchy. This provides us with a clear example of the difference between Lithuanians on either side of the Nemunas River. The Lithuanians of eastern Prussia were connected with Lithuanians across the Nemunas by a passive language rather than an active national revival mythology.⁵

4.

In the Klaipėda Region which between 1924 and 1939 was an autonomous region of the Lithuanian Republic, bilingualism was natural. Language in the Lithuania Minor was a very flexible means of communication, with speakers moving easily from one language to another. A microcosm of this situation can still be found when after a long period of separation two elderly Memelland matrons, one from Lithuania, the other from Germany, meet. They speak Lithuanian and German as need arises, even though German dominates the exchange.

A similar situation occurred in villages within the Grand Duchy in the middle of the last century when Lithuanian began to replace Polish and a hybrid dialect, *po prostu* developed, intertwined with Russian words. However, in the Lithuanian Republic (especially following A.Smetona's coup in 1926) Polish was spoken only by Poles and Polonophiles. For a Lithuanian it became natural and a sign of his patriotic sentiment to speak Lithuanian. In the villages of the Klaipėda Region Lithuanian and German were used freely as need dictated. It was natural for a Memellander to be Lithuanian and speak German - this at a time when to be

Lithuanian and speak Polish amounted to treason and anti-national activity in Greater Lithuania. It would be useful, perhaps, too digress a little and fill in the political background to life in the Klaipėda Region between 1923 and 1939. Longaeval subjection to the German Reich formed a paternalist tradition: loyalty to the King-Kaiser and the local squire. Peasants in Lithuania Minor were conservative, obedient to authority and inclined to maintain their traditional ways of life. Although we encounter strong strains of self-respect among the peasantry influenced by Protestantism, the sense of duty and loyalty inspired by congregational preachers was even stronger. The German journalist from Viena Otto Glagau wrote this of the conservatism and obedience of the Lithuania Minor peasant:

The Prussian Lithuanian is not only a faithful subject but also an easily trained soldier. For his dutifulness and obedience, verging on the powerless, you could not wish for better muster material; he fights valiantly and fearlessly in all battles; if he has served in the army he is eternally proud of his achievement and bears himself with such decorum which is clear from his words and actions on every relevant and irrelevant opportunity.⁶

In his ethnographic studies of Lithuania Minor Eduard Gisevius (1798-1880) says that the village youth of Bitėnai were very keen to adorn themselves with military caps and short pipes which were the essential outfit of the village dandies.⁷ Military service with its smart uniform attracted Prussian Lithuanians and was an object of pride.

5.

Lithuania Minor was home to a strong congregational movement - the evangelical fellowships or *Versammlung* - led by preachers. These were similar to the pietist movements estab-

lished in Germany. Evangelical fellowships was certain societies of worship the members which say prayers at home. In Lithuania Minor these congregations date from 1732 when German colonists, who did not want to convert Catholicism emigrated from Salzburg to Lithuania Minor. The congregational were a unique phenomenon not only in Lithuanian religious history, but also in North-East European Protestantism. The main centres of congregational movement were towns of Priekulė in the Šilutė district and Tilsit (Tilžė). In Priekulė at the end of 18th century the old type of congregation (main principles of the old fellowships were worship, poverty, fast, kindness, justice, honesty and patience) called *klimkiškiai* was founded by Klimkus Grigaitis (1750-1825).

The *klimkiškiai* required rejection of bodily pleasures and worldly delights: abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, satanic card playing, wicked books, physical pleasure. The old congregation forbade its members to read the secular press, sing folksongs, attend concerts or dances, sports grounds or take part in the activities of certain German and *Mažlietuvis* organisations (*Birutė* or the Tilsit Lithuanian Songsters Association). German entertainments and dances earned their displeasure as did modern European fashions in dress, all this in their eyes was backsliding and sin. The principles of the Religion bound the congregational with the village, the land, native language and stressed the superiority of (Lithuanian) tradition over modern German influence. Lithuanian spirit was maintained by the members of this close organization in accordance with strict requirements for the Lithuanian language and by permitting hymns (*giesmės*) in Lithuanian only.

The new gathering *kukaitiškiai* was founded by Kristupas Kukaitis (1844-1914) in the Tilžės district. This new gathering was not so strict in secular life (entertainments, cloth-

ing, education in German cities, like Königsberg) as the old one, *klimkiškiai*, had been.

The congregational movement in Lithuania Minor, Arthur Hermann asserts, attracted approximately 40% of Lithuanian adults.⁸ Such a spontaneous, unofficial church movement was unique. In the Grand Duchy there was no strong Christian movement independent of the Catholic Church. V.Gaigalaitis, J.Pauper, F.Tetzner regarded the congregationalists as servants of Lithuanissness who preached the Word of God in the native language and thereby halted the Germanisation process. However, since the congregationalists also preached obedience to the Powers that be, duty and opposition to modern innovations, they quelled any sense of opposition among the Prussian Lithuanians and induced them to surrender to fate. Fearing that children might abandon their national traditions, the congregationalists attempted to prevent children being sent to larger towns such as Königsberg to attend school or make a career. Moreover the town represented a den of iniquity to the village mind. The congregationalist movement turned the *Madžietuviai* in on themselves. There formed an obedient, devout, Godüfearing, honest Lithuanian type who did not seek a career or higher education. On the one hand the preacher tradition made independent, on the other he became dutifully obedient thanks to his loyalty to the powers that be ordained from God on earth. Moreover, the congregationalists were set against Catholic Lithuania which they termed "Muscovite". All the national revival movement's ideas were alien to them.

6.

In the 19th century the aim of the more politically active Prussian Lithuanians, as expressed through the petitionary movement (sup-

ported by the congregationalists), was the preservation of the right to teach children Lithuanian in schools (threatened by Bismarck's reforms). The essential need to preserve the Lithuanian language (and Lithuanian *Ehre*) was expressed poetically, expressively and sentimentally not by a Lithuanian but by a German, Georg Julius Justus Sauerwein (1831-1904), who wrote the *Madžietuvis* anthem:

*Als Litauer sind wir geboren
Als Litauer soll'n wir bestehn.
Die Ehre ist uns angeboren.
Sie darf uns nie verloren gehn.*

*Lietuvninkai mes esam gimę,
Lietuvninkai mes turim būt.
Tą garbę gavome užgimę,
Tą ir neturim leist pražūt.*⁹

Under the influence of the 18th century Enlightenment ideals Sauerwein depicted them as suffering aborigenes whose rights became the subject of increasing liberal intellectual interest during the 19th century. The way of life of the Prussian Lithuanian, his archaic traditions and most especially his archaic language which fascinated German philosophers such as Herder, who included eight Prussian Lithuanian songs in in collection *Stimmen der Volker in Leidern*, ethnographers, journalists, writers such as Sudermann, who realistically introduced a positive image of the *Madžietuvis* into his descriptions of Lithuania Minor in the German cultural context. Lithuanian local colour (ethnic chic) served Sudermann's artistic requirements and thus the real Lithuanians, fisherfolk, farmers in the almost sterile swamp, and their real lives appeared only superficially in his works. For Sudermann Lithuania Minor was a stage setting for him to play out his stories in a mixture of High German and *Lokalfarbung*.

Sauerwein was an exception to this tradi-

tion among German Lithuania-fanciers. He was a genuine Lithuanophile. Like other Germans in the Baltic and Central Europe, he sought to defend the rights of local native populations and raise their cultural and moral level. The first efforts at Estonian literature were made by Estophile Germans such as J. Luce and A. Huppel. Through the latter some Estonian folk songs were included in Herder's famous collection. Later the first Estonian song festivals which took on the form of national demonstrations, were supported likewise by the *Baltdeutschen*. Johan Voldemar Jannsen had organized the first singing festival (1869) with the full consent of the German ecclesiastical and lay authorities. In fact, Germans figured as representative patrons of the festival, which was held to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the peasants.¹⁰

The founders of the Czech organisation *Sokol* which took on a nationalist character were also of German origin: Miroslav Tirsch, Heinrich Fugner, German businessmen of Prague, who later became "Czechs".¹¹

At the end of the 19th century a whole host of German philologists and historians Ch. Bartsch, O. Kolberg, A. Nesselmann, A. Schleicher, F. Tetzner, E. Gisevius, A. Bezzenberger *inter alios* collected Lithuanian folklore, tales, sayings and translated Lithuanian material into German. They were interested mainly, of course, by the archaic (one hesitates to say primitive) nature of Lithuanian language and customs, folklore elements, peculiarities. Such interest sprang from the *Sturm und Drang* movement, romanticism and the traditions of Herder, when the highest value was placed on a man's right to express himself in his native language, the characteristics of each people's culture, customs, folklore, language. We may consider Sauerwein as part of this long tradition too. For him defence of the rights of the

Lithuanian language was part of his German consciousness. Sauerwein's sentimental Lithuanian verse may be regarded as the German Lithuanophile's paternalist view of the *Mažlietuvis* as lesser beings with a deeply inbred sense of duty and loyalty to the Kaiser. The poem published in the Lithuanian "The Dawn (*Aušra*) Calendar" of 1884, *Als Litauer sind wir geboren* where he invites people to speak Lithuanian boldly, ends with a eulogy to the Kaiser:

*Den Kaiser wollen wir wohl ehren,
Sind auch dem Reich ergeben stets,
Doch kann dem Herzen niemand wehren
Das Innigste - nur litau'isch geht's.*

*Vis ciecorių viernai mylėsim,
Mylėsim ciecorystę vis,
Tikt, kas širdy yr' iškalbėsim
Lietuviškomis lūpomis.*¹²

Sauerwein wrote German and Lithuanian verses for the Lithuanian Girls' Delegation. This delegation was received in December 1878 by the Kaiser, Wilhelm I and his wife, Victoria. This delegation begged favour to preserve the Lithuanian language from extinction and, standing by Otto Glagau's words concerning *Mažlietuvis* loyalty to the throne and pride in serving in the Prussian army, stressed that after Napoleon invaded Prussia in 1806 only the Lithuanians remained loyal to the House of Brandenburg:

*Auch, als einst durch Gottes Walten
Deutschlands Stern zu Boden lag,
Hat der Littau' r Treu' gehalten,
Bis der Feind zusammenbrach.*

*Vokietija veik pražuvo
Valdant syk jau neprieteliams,
Vien lietuvninks viernas buvo
Viern's kareiviams vokiečiams.*¹³

7.

The Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor were politically indifferent. As a result, a sharp discussion of nationhood did not arise: there was no radical choice “Either Lithuanian or German, not both” to be made. However, at that time in the Grand Duchy the choice between being a Lithuanian or a Pole was marked *modus vivendi*: the physician Vincas Kudirka moved from almost being a fanatic Polonophile, ashamed to speak Lithuanian like a peasant, to become a fanatical Lithuanophile, and leader of the liberal wing of the national revival movement. At the end of the nineteenth century the Prussian Lithuanian held no ambition to remove Lithuania Minor from Prussia and during the period of national revival remained doubtful generally of any need to unite the territory with the Grand Duchy. Vincas Kudirka scolded the *Mazlietuviai* for their passivity and for writing comparatively little in the Lithuanian prints:

*Finding scant information about the Mazlietuviai in our newspapers, it seems that they do not know these newspapers, that they are separate from the Lithuanians living under the Muscovite yoke or, that in Lithuania Minor there are no Lithuanians who care for their Lithuanicity, who would be able to write something about the state of their brethren there.*¹⁴

Lithuanian candidates to the Prussian Landtag and the Reichstag barely gained enough votes at the end of the century to become members of these bodies. In the 1893 Elections J. Smakalys received 19% of the vote in the Memel-Heydekrug constituency, the farmer Dovas Zaunius gained 4.5% for the Tilsit - Landau seat, Simonas Angaitis at Ragnit - Pilkaln - 3%, and in Labiau - Wehlau Jurgis Lapaitis managed to scrape a mere 41 votes.¹⁵

In later elections (1898, 1901) two Lithuanian members were elected to the Reichstag. Lithuanian voters tended to support German Conservative representatives. The Lithuanian language was championed most actively by Dr Vilius Gaigalaitis who was elected to the Prussian Landtag for Šilute. He held that seat until 1918. His speeches in the Landtag in support of the language was a moral exhortation rather than a political demand. The aims of Lithuanian politicians were exceptionally cultural in nature. There were no political aspirations, the more so as even in nationally more active Greater Lithuania politico-territorial aspirations, where Lithuania Minor was concerned, were unrealistic. Moreover the congregationalists regarded politics as unnecessary worldliness, which distracts men from God.

At the end of 1917, assessing the Lithuanian Act for Restored Independence (11th December, 1917), according to which Lithuania was to be restored in union with the German Reich, after Antanas Smetona's lecture on the German Question for the Berlin *Adlonas*, Vilius Gaigalaitis said that “it does not enter the head of a single Prussian Lithuanian to secede from Prussia and snuggle up to the new Lithuania”.¹⁶

The petitionary movement in the Baltic provinces began in Estonia in 1864. It was directed against the influence of the German *Ritterschaften* and in favour of the propagation of the German language. In 1864 Estonian delegation, comprising representatives from 24 communities, presented a petition to the Russian Tzar with demands such as legal reforms to give the Estonian equal rights and to make Estonian language of the courts. To limit the role of German language, the Estonian delegation proposed that Russian should be taught even in the village schools.

Lithuanian activists in Lithuania Minor with the assistance of German Lithuanophiles

organised a mass collection of signatures for Prussian Authorities, seeking to defend the use of Lithuanian in schools and churches. Such petitions were organised in 1879, 1882, 1892, 1902 and 1904. The signing and presentation of a petition was a legal form of action and was in accordance with the Lithuanian tradition of loyalty and respect for the Prussian Authorities. In the autocratic Russian Empire the struggle for rights (especially as concerned religion) took on the form of bloody uprisings against the repressive structures of Russian rule. The attempt made by the Russian authorities in 1893 to destroy the church, convent and graveyard at Kražiai provoked the opposition of the local *Žemaitijan* population which was subdued by Cossack troops. In *Varpas* (The Bell) of 1892 Vincas Kudirka commented on the Petition delivered to the Prussian Education Ministry in the following way: “*blessed are the Lithuanians of Prussia! They can petition. Under the Muscovite yoke Lithuanians cannot and dare not do that, for they know in advance that each petitioner is regarded by the authorities as a rebel*”.¹⁷ The right of petition was legalised in Russia in 1904.

The petitionary movement included a section of politically active and most nationally conscious Prussian Lithuanians. The movement became more popular as a result of Prussian repressive measures under the *Kulturkampf* programme. From c.1870 Prussian policy in Lithuania Minor changed. By edict of Bismarck and the Prussian Minister of Religion and Education Falck from October 15, 1872 all foreign languages (especially Polish) were forbidden in Prussian schools. In 1876 German was made state language in Prussia, although exceptions were made for Lithuanians and Mazurians. In 1879 16,000 Lithuanians signed a petition to Kaiser Wilhelm I and the 1892 petition bore 19,537 signatures. 27,765 signatures, mostly of people from the Tilžė, Klaipėda and Šilutė dis-

tricts, were inscribed on the 1896 petition concerning the teaching of Lithuanian in schools. This was the largest petition.

8.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Lithuanian life and traditions were sharply influenced by industrialisation processes which had begun in Germany. Germany's central and western provinces experienced an economic boom after 1871 while the eastern German provinces entered a depression. Eastern Prussia was flooded with cheap products from western parts of the Reich. The flood of cheap grain to Europe from America and proximity to another agricultural giant, Russia, weakened the farming potential of East Prussia. In the second half of the century market prices for grain fell constantly. As peasant farmers suffered from the crisis, migration began from Prussian peasant regions to the western industrial provinces where there were jobs and wages were twice the size of those in the east. The outflow of seasonal farm labour in the 1870s (their wages were lower in Prussia but still higher than those in *Žemaitija*) also fostered emigration to the western provinces. According to the calculations of the Polish historian A. Münch 17,000/18,000 peasants migrated annually to the west for seasonal labour.¹⁸ The Lithuanian population also decreased as a result of social mobility, since emigration from Gumbinė (Gumbinnen), the most heavily populated Lithuanian district, was the highest. Migration processes merely served to consolidate the national-social structures which had formed in Lithuania Minor: Lithuanians remained villagers because village emigration to the west where Lithuanians, free from their native village influence, assimilated heavily, and Germans remained in the towns.¹⁹ In the 1870s 6% of the burghers of Ragainė (Ragnit), 5% of those in Klaipėda, 4% of the

population of Tilžė (Tilsit), where the main Lithuanian presses were and which formed the heart of the literary activities of the Lithuanian national revival movement, were Lithuanian.²⁰ As the depression deepened the towns required no additional members of the work force and Lithuanians became enclosed in the villages. The traditions and culture of the *Mažlietuviai* also changed under German urban influence, traditional clothes were no longer worn and in their place were simplified versions of new European fashions.

We notice wider economic contacts between Lithuanians and Germans although closer cultural and intellectual relations did not exist between members of these two ethnic groups. *Mažlietuviai* culture was village culture which regarded German urban traditions as alien and the anti-town congregationalist movement regarded urban values as sinful. Until there arose large political conflicts with the Lithuanian majority in the Klaipėda region, the German view of local Lithuanians was warmly paternalistic. The paucity of contacts between the two ethnic groups was underscored further by the lack of a joint Lithuano-German intelligentsia. In Polish and Lithuanian relations there existed a borderline group of those who regarded themselves as *gente polonus, natione lituanus*. They carried on the gentry traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth-Mykol Römer, Ludwik Abramowicz, Jozef Mackiewicz (and today, Czesław Miłosz). There were people who lived on the German-Mozurian, German-Polish cultural frontier and expressed a dual identity and strong cultural essence: e.g. Günter Grass (born in Gdansk) and Siegfried Lenz from Mozuria.

However, Lithuania Minor had no intellectuals with a sense of dual identity. The poet and writer Johannes Bobrowski (1917-1965) of Tilsit used local colour (words, scenes, specifi-

cally Lithuanian customs) as the *Gestus des Sprechens* in his work. "I grew up by the Nemunas where Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, Germans dwelt together and everywhere there were Jews", wrote Bobrowski.²¹ However, he was a German employing local colour, mixed vocabulary and feeling a strong tie to his homeland. Georg Sauerwein called himself a Lithuanian even though he composed verse in German:

*Ich bin deutschland hergekommen,
Doch neugeboren Litauersohn,
Bin lieb von Litauen angenommen -
Im Herzen bin ich Liatuer schon.*

*Aš, norint vokiečių, rods gimtas
Persigimdžiau lietuvininku.
Meilingai Lietuvoj priimtas
Lietuvininks širdžia pats esu.*²²

But really he remained a German. Hermann Sudermann was another German who wrote sympathetically of Lithuanians. Vydūnas, who wrote about Germans was himself a Lithuanian, as was the most famous writer of Lithuania Minor, Ieva Simonaitytė.

Local people, both Lithuanians and Germans, were linked by a *genius loci* and shared Heimat traditions. The Klaipėda Region (Memelland) was the distant outback of East Prussia, noted only for its part in the emancipation of the Prussian serfs. Siegfried Lenz, living on the cultural frontier of German and Mozurian depicts the simplicity of his native land in the *So zärtlich war Suleyken* thus:

*Meine Heimat lag sozusagen im Rücken der
Geschichte; sie hat keine berühmten
Physiker hervorgebracht, keine
Rollschuhmeister oder Präsidenten; was hier
vielmehr gefunden wurde, war das
unscheinbare Gold der menschlichen
Gesellschaft: Holzarbeiter und Bauer,
Fischer, Deputatarbeiter, kleine
Handwerker und Besenbinder.*

The sense of homeland and common exchange in German united Germans and Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor. Here formed the Memellander/*Klaipėdiškis* type, mostly of Lithuanian origin, strongly influenced by German culture and language. He is similar to the Alsatian (of German origin but dominated by French cultural values) type. Such a type may be found also in central European towns such as Prague. The Czech revival leader Heidrich Fügner described himself as: „I was never a German. I am a citizen of Prague, a Germanophone citizen of Prague“.²³

Memellanderers defined themselves separately not by ethnicity but by birthplace. Traditionally they were more inclined towards the German element and German structures but they did not regard themselves as German. They did not regard themselves as Lithuanian either - those they called *Žemaitijans* or Russian Lithuanians who were different from them and they stressed this difference by their way of life, work ethic, order, and the Protestant Religion. After World War One German propaganda attempted to heighten these differences, asserting that between Russian Lithuanians, *Žemaitijans* and the Lithuanian population of the Reich there lies a vast cultural and economic gulf, as between Asia and Europe. Simonaitytė writes in her memoirs, that while still an adolescent she understood that Catholic *Žemaitijans* are not the same as we Protestants. According to her, these *Žemaitijans* “endlessly praised German order and hated Luther”.²⁴

9.

According to the pre-war Lithuanian view, the Memellanders were Germanised Lithuanians who should be re-Lithuanised. Traditional Lithuanian historical scholarship, also failed to leave separate room for Memellander, accounting them Lithuanian. According to sta-

tistics from January 20, 1925 in the Klaipėda region 59,315 declared themselves German, 37,626 Lithuanian and 34,337 called themselves Memellander/*Klaipėdiškiai*.²⁵ Lithuanian scholars from the interwar author Rudolfas Valsonokas to modern authors such as Petronėlė Žostautaitė and Zigmantas Zinkevičius regard the *Klaipėdiškiai* simply as Lithuanian.²⁶ The existence of a local identity is relegated by these authors to the realms of weakness of national consciousness.

By the Treaty of Versailles the Klaipėda Region was cut off from the German Reich and following the 1923 Lithuanian *coup d'état* was handed to Lithuania. The Memel Convention of May 8 1924, signed at Paris by Representatives of the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan, granted the region autonomous status within the Lithuanian Republic. East Prussia became a German island, a strong centre of German nationalism, surrounded by Polish and Lithuanian territory. German cities as Tilžė and Klaipėda were characterised by a chauvinistic spirit. In the German communities of the Klaipėda Region as in other places in East Prussia, the *Deutschtumerei* became strong.

Between 1919 and the Paris Convention of 1924 there was considerable diplomatic and political struggle over the separate status of the Klaipėda Region. In the Region there grew up a strong *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für den Freistaat Memelland* which enjoyed the support of the majority of the local population. At the end of 1921 the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* organised a referendum and petition among local inhabitants in favour of a freistaat. According to established rules, every local inhabitant, resident in the Region since January 10 1920, or those whom had been permitted by the Evacuee Committee to reside there, had the right to take part in a plebiscite. The supporters of the movement for a Freistaat (among whom there were no

Lithuanians) issued the Yellow Book “Memel” in 1922 to support their demands. This Yellow Book stressed the separate political, economic and cultural nature between the Region and the Lithuanian Republic as established in 1918. The community of local and regional identity was stressed rather than the German past and Germanicity of the Region. This propagatory text employs such terms as “Wir Memelländer” and “memelländische Bevölkerung”.²⁷

Lithuanian influence in the region was weaker between the Wars than the German. The political determination of the *Klaipėdiškiai* to vote for German parties rather than Lithuanian ones was stable and strong: between 1925 and 1939 Lithuanian parties never won more than 20% of votes in elections to the Regional Landtag and in the 1926 Lithuanian General Election all five seats in the Region fell to German Members.

Between the Wars German and Lithuanian disputes were particularly sharp in the Region in matters of religion and culture. These dis-

putes arose mostly out of language, educational and religious questions. The ecclesiastical dispute over the affiliation of the Evangelical Church in the Klaipėda Region was even termed a *Volkstumkampf*. It was stressed that Pastor V. Gaigalaitis was expelled from the Königsberg Consistory in 1919 for having taken part in the Prussian Lithuanian Council which sought to join the Region to Lithuania. However, in 1923 he spoke out against the enforced introduction of Lithuanian into schools in the Region. Ethnic tension between inhabitants of the Region during the Ecclesiastical dispute was greater but it should be stressed that parishes did not divide into ethnic camps. In March 1939 the majority of Memelländer greeted the reunion with the Reich with joy. In 1945 following the Soviet appropriation of the Region, the *Klaipėdiškiai* experienced persecution and exile. The German-Lithuanian dispute over the Region and long tradition of coexistence between the Germans, Lithuanians and *Mažlietuviai* came to the end.

Išnašos

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⁴ Davies N. *Ibidem*, p. 69.

⁵ Kavolis V. Epochų signatūros. Kn.: *Žmogus istorijoje*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1994, p. 447.

⁶ Otto Galgau. Kn.: *Lietuvninkai. Apie Vakarų Lietuvą ir jos gyventojus XIX amžiuje*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1970, p. 242.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

⁸ Hermann A. Das Nationalbewußtsein der litauischen Lutheraner in Preußisch - Litauen und in Litauen. – Sonderdruck, Lutherische Kirche in der Welt, 1988/35, p. 123.

⁹ Sauerwein- Gedichte. Rugštaus vyno eilėraščiai. Hg. Alferd Franzkeit. Wehrbleck & Vilnius: Ewald Hein / Melinda-Bucherverlag, 1993, p. 26-27.

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¹⁷ Kudirka V. *Ibidem*, p. 503.

¹⁸ Gudas K. *Mažosios Lietuvos lietuvių tautinė padėtis XIX a. pabaigoje kanclerio O. Bismarko administracijos valdymo*

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¹⁹ See: Vareikis V. Migrationsprozesse und der Wandel der sozialen Struktur Kleinlitauens. In.: *Selbstbewusstsein und Modernisierung. Soziokultureller Wandel in Preußisch-Litauen vor und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. Hg. R. Traba. Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2000, p. 55 - 68.

²⁰ Vileišis V. *Ibidem*, p.165.

²¹ Bobrowski J. *Gesammelte Werke*. Berlin: Rowolt, 1987, Bd.4, p.335.

²² Sauerwein- Gedichte. *Ibidem*, p. 38-39.

²³ Nolte C. *Ibidem*, p.39.

²⁴ Simonaitytė I. *Ne ta pastogė*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1962, p. 379.

²⁵ *Lietuvos statistikos metraštinis 1927-1928m.* Kaunas, 1929/2, p. 4 - 5.

²⁶ Valsonokas R. *Klaipėdos problema*. Klaipėda: Rytas, 1932, p. 267-269. Žostautaitė P. *Klaipėdos kraštas 1923-1939*. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1990, p.55. Zinkevičius Z. *Lietuvių kalbos istorija. Bendrinės kalbos iškilimas*, Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidykla, 1992, t. 5, p. 245.

²⁷ *Memel.Denkschrift der wirtschaftlichen Korperschaften und Verbände zur Selbstständigkeit der Memelgebietes*. Memel, 1922, p. 4-9.

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Vyngantas Vareikis

Tilžės 13, Klaipėda

Tel. 410190

el.paštas: klist13@ip.ku.lt