

PRUSSIAN LANDS THROUGHOUT THE AGES – TERRITORIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES

Izabela LEWANDOWSKA*

Abstract: Warmia and Mazury is a compound region, which today constitutes a homogenous administrative unit: Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship. Nowadays it is situated in the north-eastern part of Poland, but in the past it spread from the Lower Vistula to Niemen. In the prehistoric times the region was inhabited by Balt tribes, and later on Prussian tribes. In XIII century Prussian tribes were conquered by the Teutonic Order, which formed the most powerful religious state in contemporary Europe here. There was constant struggle between the Polish and the Order over the Prussian lands until 1466, when created Royal Prussia (Gdansk Pomerania, Chełmno and Michałów Land, Warmia bishopric, Toruń, Elbląg and Malbork). The Grand Master moved the capital to Królewiec (Koenigsberg), and his lands were hence called Order (Teuton) Prussia. Next, in XVI c. Grand Master of the Order Albrecht Hohenzollern converted to Lutheranism, secularized the Order and converted it into a secular duchy. He made his homage in Kraków to the Polish king and Princely Prussia became a Polish fief. In 1657 Princely Prussia ceased being a Polish fief, thus initiating their rise to power. Kingdom of Prussia existing in the years 1701-1871, and next German Empire 1871-1945. East Prussia after World War II was artificially divided. The leader of the Soviet Union Stalin marked a straight line on a map to serve as boundary – but it regarded no historical or cultural criteria. From that moment, the region is divided between two countries – Poland and Russia (Kaliningrad District). After the war the process of inhabiting the land began again – settlers from central Poland were brought; Poles from eastern Borderland were settled and in 1947 Ukrainians from south-eastern Poland were displaced here.

Keywords: Prussian tribes, Teutonic Order, bishopric of Warmia, Royal Prussia, Princely Prussia, kingdom in Prussia, Eastern Prussia, Mazury, Kaliningrad District, Kłajpeda District, Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship.

The territory of former Prussian lands is now divided between a numbers of countries – Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and political history caused Germany to have large influence here as well. The below article is aimed at showing the territorial and political complexity of these lands and also point out the sources of the multicultural tradition. Today, Prussian lands a part of Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship in Poland, Kaliningrad District in Russia and Kłajpeda District in Lithuania.

The oldest traces of human activity in this area date back 14 thousand years B.C. Excavations from Stone, Bronze and Iron Age are known (Hoffman, 2000). However, the best researched period of the unwritten times, are **the times of the Prussians** (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2000). In the area bordered from the west by the mouth of Vistula, from the east by the mouth of Niemen, from the

* University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Institute for History and International Affairs, Poland,
e-mail: izabelalew6@wp.pl

north by the Baltic Sea and from the south by northern borders of Masovia, following lands were formed **Pomezania, Pomezania, Warmia, Natangia, Sambia, Nadrowia, Skalovia, Barcia, Galindia and Jaćwież (Sudovia)** (Fig. 1). Many of them were later merged with or incorporated by stronger organisms. Mutual relations of the Prussian tribes with neighboring Poles were characterized by continuous raids and rivalry over lands, as well as Christianization attempts on the part of the Poles. The tragically ended Christianization missions to Prussia made by St. Wojciech (997 A.D.) and St. Brunon from Kwerfurt (1009 A.D.) were the most known in the Prussian – Polish relations.

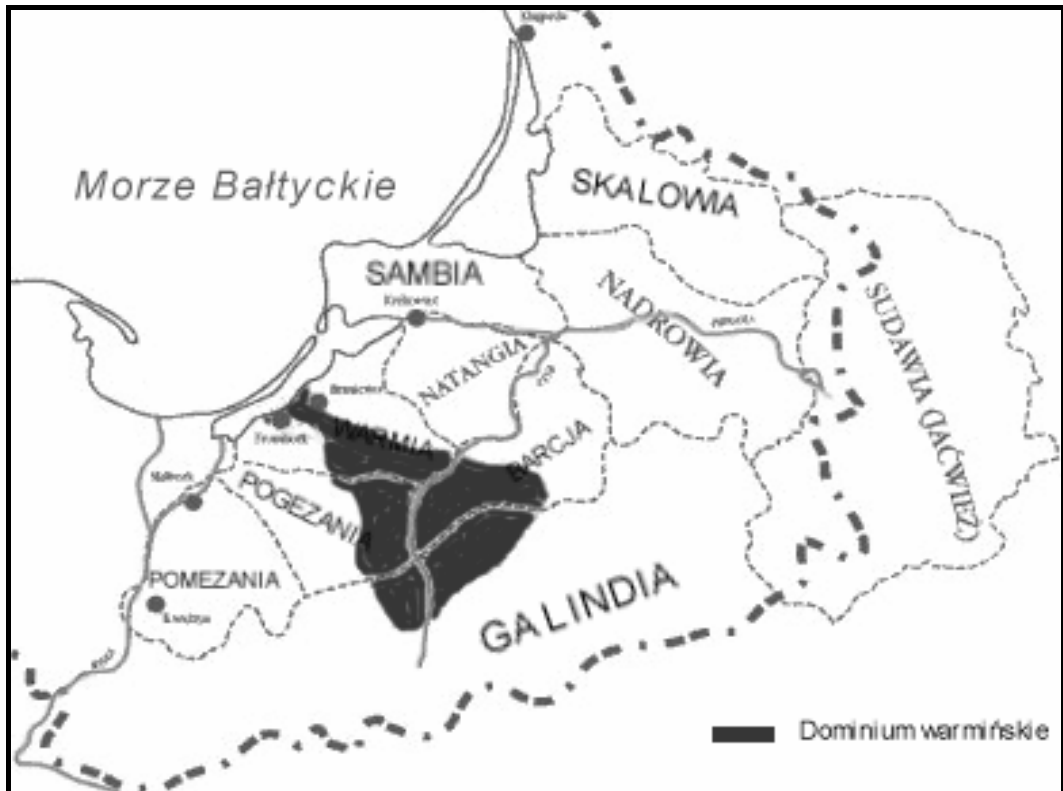


Fig. 1 Prussian tribes and a bishopric of Warmia (Ermland)

Source: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grafika:Plemiona_pruskie.png

Unable to handle Prussian attacks, Masovian prince Konrad made an offer to conquer Prussia to the **Teutonic Order** in 1226 (Biskup, Labuda, 1986). The Teutonic Knight received confirmation of endowment of Chełmno Land and future conquests over pagans from the emperor and the pope and began systematic conquest of the Prussian lands. Multiple Prussian uprisings (the last subdued in 1283 A.D.) ended with failures. The Teutonic Knight conducted a wide settlement action on the conquered lands (Fig. 2). New castles, towns and cities were created: Kwidzyn, Elbląg, Braniewo, Królewiec, Malbork, Frombork, Iława, Dobrze Miasto, Bartoszyce, Ełk, Kętrzyn and others.

In 1243, the pope Innocent IV created four dioceses in the Prussian lands: Chełmno, Pomezania, Warmia and Sambia (Szorc, 1990). The Teutonic Order

was attributed two thirds of the territory of each diocese (except Chełmno where relations were different). This was done, because the Church recognized the Order as the superior of the Prussian lands and they were charged with the obligation to conquer, colonize and maintain order in this land. The remaining parts of the dioceses became the property of the bishops as a base of their support. The name **Warmia** was brought down to history and historical – geographical maps as the lands given to the bishops (Fig.1). In 1260, according to the empowerment given by the pope, bishop Anzelm constituted the Warmian cathedral chapter with the seat at first in Braniewo, and later (until this day) in Frombork. He allotted one third of his territory to support it. Only in 1375 were Warmian borders finally shaped, which remained unchanged until 1772 (Achremczyk, 2000).



Fig. 2 The land of Teutonic Order in Prussia

Source: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grafika:Panstwo_krzyzackie_w_prusach.png

There was constant struggle between the Polish and the Order over the Prussian lands, intensified especially after 1308, when the Order conquered Gdansk Pomerania. The most famous fact from the Polish – Teutonic history is the Great War and the battle of Grunwald on July 15th 1410 (Kuczyński, 1980). The huge victory of the Polish – Lithuanian forces did not bring anticipated political results and territorial acquisitions. As a result of the Grunwald loss and following wars with Poland and Lithuania (1414-1420, 1432-1435) the might of the Order was weakened. Imposing high taxes and other economic burdens as well as not allowing Prussian nobility to take part in the rule resulted in the creation of the Prussian Union. The act of incorporation of Prussia into Poland made by the envoys of Prussian nobility led to another war with the Teutonic Order (1454-1466) (Biskup, 1967). By the power of the peace ending the war, Poland regained Gdansk Pomerania, Chełmno and Michałów Land, also took Powiśle with Malbork and Elbląg and Warmia. Since that time the Polish period

in Warmia is dated, it lasted until 1772. The lands incorporated into Poland took the name of **Royal Prussia and Warmia** (Fig. 3), while the lands remaining with the Order - **Teutonic (Order) Prussia**. The Order state with its capital in Koenigsberg became Polish fief, while the Grand Master of the Order was obliged to make homage to the Polish king.



Fig. 3 Royal Prussia (Prusy Królewskie) as a part of Poland 1466-1772

Source: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grafika:Prusy_Krolewskie.PNG

As a result of the Krakow treaty signed in **1525** by prince Albrecht Hohenzollern and king Zygmunt Stary, the Teutonic Order in Prussia was secularized, and its lands took the name of **Princely Prussia** (Biskup 1983; Małek 1987). Current Grand Master – Albrecht Hohenzollern became the hereditary duke of Prussia and Polish liegeman. Throughout the years, until 1641, next Prussian dukes made their homage to the kings of Poland, however the time of the Swedish invasion changed this relation fundamentally.

In 1655 Swedish armies entered Princely Prussia and Warmia and in the following year, Brandenburg elector – Fredric Wilhelm crossed to Swedish side breaking off all relations with Poland. In exchange he became Warmia as a fief. At the same time, Swedish king Karl X Gustav acknowledged the electors sovereignty over Princely Prussia and Warmia. To draw Fredric Wilhelm to the Polish side, in 1657, on the base of Welawa–Bydgosz treaties, Jan Kazimierz granted him **sovereignty in Princely Prussia** thus initiating their rise to power (Wachowiak, 2001; Kamieński 2002). The culmination of the ambitions of Brandenburg electors was the crowning and establishing **a kingdom in Prussia**

in 1701. Kingdom of Prussia, existing in the years 1701- 1871, became a state of well organized administration, universal education obligation, and long standing military service. Effective fiscal policy and subduing all signs of discontent favored the birth of an absolute state. It did not lack neither military nor political achievements, which was confirmed by e.g. taking part in partitions of Poland.

Prussian involvement in the first partition of Poland (1772) caused another change in the name of current Warmia and Mazury. Warmia was incorporated into the kingdom of Prussia, and Warmian dominion was officially disbanded. Due to administrative reforms in 1815, Prussia was divided into ten provinces, including **Eastern Prussia** reaching Königsberg and Kłajpeda in the North-East and **Western Prussia** with Malbork, Elbląg and Kwidzyn (Pletzing, 2003).

In the first half of the 19th century, the southern part of Eastern Prussia was more and more frequently called **Mazury** and their people Mazurzy. The process of creating these names was long-lasting and complicated (Sakson, 1990; Jasiński 1994). Mazury as an area, were named after an ethnical group inhabiting these lands. They were Polish dialect speaking group inhabiting the southern part of Prussia, who in distinction to Poles and Germans were called Mazurzy. The ethnical Prussian population vanished completely in the 17th century, so these names also started losing their justification. The cluster of Polish population migrating into these lands from Masovia and settling here for a number of centuries was significant. Mazury were given status of a homeland (Heimat), this means – a land being a part of a larger home country. Disputes over the borders and the name of Mazury are still relevant today. Because they rise from symbolical – ethnographic, religious, language – character of these borders.

In the 19th century Mazury were mentioned by Polish (Kętrzyński, 1872) and German (Toppen, 1870) historians. They distinguished **Natangia and Oberland**, being **Upper Prussia**, apart from Warmia and Mazury. Natangia is a land previously inhabited by a Prussian tribe, the area of current Bartoszyce, Górowo Iławeckie, and Sępól. The borders of the Upper Prussia are outlined by Szczytno, Nidzica, Olsztynek, Dąbrówno, Ostróda.

The unification of Germany in 1871, which were thereafter named **German Empire**, was another reinforcement of the Prussian kingdom. Since that time Germanization actions were strengthened, and with them the interest in Polish language and culture raised – especially among Warmian people (Jasiński, 1983). Imperial and expansive policy of Germany led to the outbreak of World War I, as a result of which, independent Poland was reborn. According to the Versailles Treaty, Free City of Gdańsk was distinguished, and Poland received Dziąldowo and surrounding villages. The incorporation of other disputable parts of Eastern Prussia into Poland or Germany was to be decided in a **poll** (Wrzesiński, 1974). Its outcome appeared unbelievably low to Poland and Poles living in Prussia. There were 476 thousand votes in the whole area of the poll, where Poland won almost 16 thousand. In Powiśle 7,2% voted in favor of Poland, in Warmia – 6,6% and in Mazury – only 0,7%. The result of the poll was incorporating 5 villages in Powiśle and 3 villages in Ostróda district into Poland.

The lands of East Prussia again became the object of international settlement during World War II. During the conference in Teheran in 1943, USSR expressed their claim to the north-eastern part of East Prussia. In **Jafta (February 1945)**, it was agreed that Poland was going to receive the southern part of the disputable territory, while USSR was going to become the northern

part with Königsberg. The Red Army offensive in East Prussia was a great tragedy for the inhabitants, because the Russians treated this area as the first lands of the hated enemy. They did not realize, not only Germans (mainly women, elderly and children) were living there, but also Poles, Warmia and Mazury people, who had nothing in common with Nazi ideology (*Vertreibung...*, 2000; Kossert, 2001). **Polish officials started taking over authority only in March 1945** (*Okręg Mazurski...*, 1996).

After the end of World War II, lands which fell to Poland in the West and in the North were being called the Regained Lands, and the territory was divided into 4 districts. One of them was the **Mazury District**. In 1946 the name Mazury District was abolished, and the name **Olsztyn voivodship** was implemented. Intensifying the administrative pressure in Socialist Poland caused the administrative reform in 1975. It increased the number of voivodships from 14 to 49, which caused breaking regional bonds and degeneration of regional identity. As a result of another administrative reform in **1999** new borders of the voivodship were shaped giving it the name of *warmińsko-mazurskie*. It currently borders Kaliningrad District of the Russian Federation and Polish voivodships – *podlaskie*, *mazowieckie*, *kujawsko-pomorskie* and *pomorskie*. It has the area of 24 thousand square kilometers, which makes it fourth largest voivodship in the country and twelfth most populated (1,4 million people). Thereby the old names of the southern part of East Prussia were restored, that is Warmia and Mazury.

This territory, despite the efforts of Polish authorities – displacement of Germans, emigration of Warmia and Mazury people, was and remains multinational. Right after the war, migrants from Eastern Marches, mainly from Vilnius region (Murawska, 2000) and central Poland were settled here. In 1947 as a result of “Wisła” action, 55 thousand Ukrainians from south-eastern Poland were displaced into Olsztyn voivodship, which was a form of fighting against Ukrainian guerillas on the territory of Poland. Equally tragic were the fates of people in Kaliningrad District (*Kaliningradskije...*, 1998; *Przesiedleńcy...*, 2000) and Kłajpeda Land - Memelland (Kibelka, 2002).

Current area of the former Prussian lands in the territory of Poland includes – indigenous lands of **Warmia and Mazury**, and other lands which through the ages were only temporarily bound with this territory. These are: **Natangia** – area in the north-east of Warmia, which name nobody ever uses anymore; **Lubawa Land** – the area of Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, shaped by Polish colonization and Catholic culture; **Powiśle** – western part of the voivodship with the border along rivers: Vistula, Nogat, Pasłęka, Drwęca, which reaches Iława in the south. In the area of Powiśle there are **Elbląg and Żuławy**, having particular multinational social structure; **Oberland (Upper Prussia)** – historical name of the part of East Prussia surrounding Warmia from the south. In the territory of Russia – the northern part of East Prussia with Königsberg as the capital being current **Kaliningrad District**. In the territory of the Republic of Lithuania has created of **Kłajpeda District** named Memelland in the 19th century.

This complex history and changes of political adherence have caused the inhabitants of these lands to have multicultural traditions. Old-Prussian, German, Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Lemko, and even French and Dutch influences overlap with these. Nowadays it is undoubtedly a social and tourist wealth. However, much time will pass until the Polish, Lithuanian and Russian authorities understand that this is an important element of promoting the region not only in Europe, but also around the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACHREMCZYK, S., (2000), *Warmia*, Olsztyn;
- BISKUP, M., (1967), *Trzynastoletnia wojna z zakonem krzyżackim 1454-1466*, Warszawa;
- BISKUP, M., (1983), *Polska a zakon krzyżacki w Prusach w początkach XVI wieku. U źródeł sekularyzacji Prus Krzyżackich*, Olsztyn;
- BISKUP, M., LABUDA G. (1986), *Dzieje zakonu krzyżackiego w Prusach. Gospodarka – Społeczeństwo – Państwo – Ideologia*, Gdańsk;
- HOFFMANN, M. J., (2000), *Kultura i osadnictwo południowo-wschodniej strefy nadbałtyckiej w I tysiącleciu p.n.e.*, Olsztyn;
- JASIŃSKI, G. (1994), *Mazurzy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku. Kształtowanie się świadomości narodowej*, Olsztyn;
- JASIŃSKI, J., (1983), *Świadomość narodowa na Warmii w XIX wieku. Narodziny i rozwój*, Olsztyn;
- KAMIENSKI, A., (2002), *Polska a Brandenburgia-Prusy w drugiej połowie XVII wieku. Dzieje polityczne*, Poznań;
- KETRZYŃSKI, W., (1872), *O Mazurach*, Poznań;
- KIBELKA, R., (2002), *Memelland. Fünf Jahrzehnte Nachkriegsgeschichte*, Berlin;
- KOSSERT, A., (2001), *Preussen, Deutsche oder Polen? Die Masuren im Spannungsfeld des ethnischen Nationalismus 1870-1956*, Wiesbaden;
- KOSSERT, A., (2005), *Ostpreussen. Geschichte und Mythos*, München;
- KUCZYŃSKI, M. S., (1980), *Wielka wojna z zakonem krzyżackim w latach 1409-1411*, Warszawa;
- MAŁŁEK, J., (1987), *Dwie części Prus. Studia z dziejów Prus Książęcych i Prus Królewskich w XVI i XVII wieku*, Olsztyn;
- OKULICZ-KOZARYN, L., (2000), *Dzieje Prusów*, 3rd ed., Wrocław;
- PLETZING, Ch., (2003), *Vom Völkerfrühling zum nationalen Konflikt. Deutscher und polnischer Nationalismus in Ost- und Westpreussen 1830-1871*, Wiesbaden;
- SAKSON, A., (1990), *Mazurzy – społeczność pogranicza*, Poznań;
- SZORC, A., (1990), *Dominium warmińskie 1243-1772. Przywilej i prawo chełmińskie na tle ustroju Warmii*, Olsztyn;
- TOEPPEN, M., (1870), *Geschichte Masuren. Ein Beitrag zur preussischen Landes- und Kulturgeschichte. Nach gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen dergestellt von Dr. M. Toeppen, Director des Gymnasii zu Marienwerder*, Danzig;
- WACHOWIAK, B., KAMIENSKI, A., (2001), *Dzieje Brandenburgii-Prus na progu czasów nowożytnych (1500-1701)*, Poznań;
- WRZESIŃSKI, W., (1974), *Plebiscyty na Warmii i Mazurach oraz na Powiślu w 1920 roku*, Olsztyn;
- *** (1998), *Kaliningradskije archiwy. Materiały i issliedowanija*, Kaliningrad;
- *** (1996), *Okręg Mazurski w raportach Jakuba Prawina. Wybór dokumentów. 1945*, prepared for print T. Baryła, Olsztyn;
- *** (2000), *Przesiedleńcy opowiadają. Pierwsze lata obwodu kaliningradzkiego we wspomnieniach i dokumentach*, red. J. W. Kostjaszow, Polish edition by T. Baryła, Olsztyn;
- *** (2000), *Vertreibung aus dem Osten. Deutsche und Polen erinnern sich*, red. H.-J. Bömelburg, R. Stössinger, R. Traba, Olsztyn.