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0521583357 - The Other Prussia: Royal Prussia, Poland and Liberty, 1569-1772

Karin Friedrich

Excerpt

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## I

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## Introduction

The essence of a nation is that all individuals have a lot of things in common, but also that they have eliminated many things from their collective memory. Forgetting, and, I would say, historical error are an essential factor in the creation of a nation, and thus the advances of historical study are often threatening to a nationality.<sup>1</sup>

## I

In 1902, a curious masquerade took place at Marienburg Castle in West Prussia. Emperor William II, flanked by knights in medieval armour, entered this formidable fortress overlooking the plain of the Nogat and Vistula Delta. Among them were several members of the Order of the Hospital of St Mary of Jerusalem; others were ordinary Prussian soldiers dressed up as knights of the Teutonic Order, as this organisation was commonly called. It was a memorable moment: for over 450 years, no Teutonic Knight had set foot in the castle. Marienburg had been the seat of the grand masters of the Order from 1309 until 1457, when the Knights surrendered it to a Polish-Lithuanian army. In 1454 the noble and urban estates of Prussia rebelled against their Teutonic masters and accepted the king of Poland, Casimir Jagiellończyk, as their new overlord. The resultant war lasted thirteen years, ending in 1466, with the Second Peace of Thorn.

From 1455 there were two countries known by the name of Prussia. The eastern territories, stretching from the lower Vistula near Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) in the South-West to the Niemen river and Memel in the North-East, with the capital in Königsberg, remained under the administration of the Teutonic Order, whose Grand Masters now owed an oath of allegiance to the Polish crown. The end of Teutonic rule came in 1525, when the last Grand Master, Albrecht of Hohenzollern, converted to Lutheranism, secularised the country and, with Polish support, declared himself Duke of Prussia as a vassal of the Polish crown. In 1657, Frederick William, the Elector of Brandenburg, negotiated full sovereignty over the duchy. The more urbanised and commercially more successful western territories of Prussia, however, were incorporated into the Polish crown on the basis of the act of

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?' in Stuart Woolf (ed.), *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 50.

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union of 1454, which confirmed all privileges and rights the Prussian estates had previously enjoyed.<sup>2</sup>

In 1902, however, these events were hardly on people's minds during the ceremonies celebrating the completion of the castle's restoration, partly destroyed under Hohenzollern rule in the last decades of the eighteenth century. William II visited the Marienburg as the ruler of a united Germany that was just thirty years old. The visit was the proud self-assertion of this new state whose mission, as the Emperor defined it in his speech, was to spread superior Prusso-German culture to the 'barbaric' East, to defend German 'national values and treasures against Polish hubris'.<sup>3</sup> Historians loyal to the court in Berlin played a crucial role in popularising this imperial agenda. Heinrich Treitschke, who was greatly admired by William II, made it his personal crusade to emphasise Prussia's central role in the creation of the new Germany:

What thrills us inhabitants of petty German particularist states even more in the history of the *Ordensland* . . . is the profound doctrine of the supreme value of the state and of civic subordination to the purposes of the state, which the Teutonic Knights perhaps proclaimed more clearly than do any other voices speaking to us from the German past . . . The full harshness of the Germans favoured the position of the Order amidst the heedless frivolity of the Slavs. Thus Prussia earns the name of the new Germany.<sup>4</sup>

The depiction of the Teutonic Knights as champions of the 'German cause' in the East, the close identification of everything Prussian with unified Germany, the attempt to blot out the memory of older federal traditions of Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, and the brandishing of anti-Hohenzollern traditions as 'dangerous particularism', lie at the root of the distortions which still dominate popular, and even many scholarly, views of Prussia. This vision of the German past was not only extremely successful in justifying the unification of 1871, the continued partition of Poland, and the primacy of the Prussian state as orchestrator of German politics; but it also legitimised German expansion into territories even further East. According to Bruno Schumacher, whose 1937 *History of East and West Prussia* was until recently the only complete German history of both parts of Prussia from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century: 'We not only rely on the historical right of the Teutonic Order, but also on the persistent right of the German people, who by hard work under the rule of the Teutonic Knights made the country what it became, and what it still is, namely a country of German character.'<sup>5</sup>

Yet the Hohenzollern view of history was not always focused on a united

<sup>2</sup> Marian Biskup, *Wojna Pruska czyli walka Polski z zakonem krzyzackim z lat 1519-1521* (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Pojezierze, 1991), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Hartmut Boockmann, *Die Marienburg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein Propyläen, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, 'Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen', *Preussische Jahrbücher* 10 (1862), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Schumacher, *Geschichte Ost- und Westpreußens* (1937), repr., ed. Walter Hubatsch (Würzburg: Holzner-Verlag, 1977), p. 216.

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Germany, and the supposed continuity between the military success of the medieval knights and the boastful martial culture of Wilhelmine Germany is a false one. It was Hohenzollern rule that had spelt the end of the Teutonic Order's power in Prussia, and it was a Hohenzollern – Frederick III of Brandenburg – who in 1701 claimed the crown of a country to which the Grand Masters of the Teutonic Order never surrendered their title. After the first partition of Poland in 1772, Marienburg Castle was partly destroyed under Frederick the Great and his successors, who used it to store grain and ammunition.<sup>6</sup> In Prussia the negative image of the Teutonic Knights survived well into the nineteenth century, as the Order was protected after 1525 by the Catholic Habsburg Emperor in Vienna, the arch-foe of Prussia's pretensions to leadership in Germany.<sup>7</sup> Thus the Teutonic Knights who flanked William II's entry into Marienburg Castle in 1902 symbolised all too clearly the victory which Hohenzollern Prussia had won over the Habsburg dynasty – not only on the battle-fields, but also in German history-books.

Historical myths do not have to be very old to be effective. We rationalise them, and they sometimes amuse us. In the light of Treitschke's quote, we know why Hitler found the comparison of his Germany with the state of the Teutonic Knights so attractive. But rarely do we take myths seriously enough as a political discourse, linked to a specific historical and cultural context. Myths have an easily underestimated dynamic of their own: the Germanisation of Prussian history is one of the most strikingly successful examples of the survival of a historical myth to the present. Even during the renewed enthusiasm for Prussia that swept West Germany in the early 1980s, on the occasion of a widely publicised exhibition in Berlin, Prussia – officially abolished by allied decree in February 1947 as the 'cause of German militarism and aggression' – was defined as part of an exclusively German past.<sup>8</sup>

Nineteenth-century historians of Prussia constructed a continuity driven by a relentless determinism: they drew a direct line from the Teutonic Knights to the establishment of a strong military and bureaucratic state under Frederick William, the Great Elector in the seventeenth century, to Frederick the Great in the eighteenth century. Thereafter, 'historical necessity' pushed German history towards unification in 1871.<sup>9</sup> In pre-1918 Germany, scholars such as Max Toeppen,

<sup>6</sup> Boockmann, *Die Marienburg*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der Ordensstaat als Ideologie. Das Bild des Deutschen Ordens in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung und Publizistik*, Historische Kommission zu Berlin 24 (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1979), pp. 90–2; Michael Burleigh, 'The Knights, Nationalists and the Historians: Images of Medieval Prussia from the Enlightenment to 1945', *European History Quarterly* 17 (1987), 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Preußen. Politik, Kultur, Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986, 2nd edn).

<sup>9</sup> For a good summary of the historiography on Brandenburg-Prussia since 1871, see Jürgen Mirow, *Das alte Preußen im deutschen Geschichtsbild seit der Reichsgründung* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1981); Jerzy Serczyk and Andrzej Tomczak (eds.), *Dzieje historiografii Prus Wschodnich i Zachodnich do 1920 roku. Kierunki, ośrodki, najwybitniejsi przedstawiciele* (Toruń: TNT, 1989); and Andrzej Tomczak (ed.), *Dzieje historiografii Pomorza Gdańskiego i Prus Wschodnich 1920–1939 (1944). Materiały sesji w Toruniu 15–16 IX 1991 r.* (Toruń: TNT, 1992).

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Karl Lohmeyer, Ernst Wichert, Hans Prutz and Max Bär, who had a deep knowledge of the local archives they directed in Danzig, Königsberg and Elbing, and who distanced themselves from the cruder forms of the ideological battle, did not receive the recognition they deserved.<sup>10</sup> From the early 1920s, when a broad German political consensus demanded the revision of the Versailles treaty, historians of Germany's eastern provinces became valuable instruments of political propaganda: Edward Carstenn and Erich Maschke, Theodor Schieder, Hermann Aubin and Kurt Forstreuter all continued their careers during the national-socialist regime. Erich Keyser in Danzig supported the *völkisch* idea of history and considered the 'German people the real (and only) representative of historical life' in Prussia.<sup>11</sup> After the Second World War, Keyser and his colleagues duly resumed their posts and chairs in the new West German state.<sup>12</sup>

Outside Germany, the historiographical focus on Prussia as the state embodying the worst of Germany's national character continued to dominate history books: the violence of the Teutonic conquest, the imposition of serfdom and the decline of the cities, the oppression of the Brandenburg-Prussian estates,<sup>13</sup> absolute monarchy, the militarisation of society and bureaucratic despotism<sup>14</sup> were associated as much with Prussian as with German traditions; the designation of Frederick William I as the 'Potsdam Führer' is but one example of this tendency.<sup>15</sup> The history of Prussia remained the history of a German country and a German dynasty. German historians continued to speak of the territories that gave the state its name – the ancient lands of the Teutonic Order – as 'East and West Prussia', although for over three hundred years they had belonged to two different states and political systems. 'East Prussia', or the duchy of Prussia, was linked with Brandenburg exclusively by a personal union and served the Hohenzollern rulers as a power base outside the Holy Roman Empire. 'West Prussia', only called by that name after the province's conquest and annexation by Frederick II in the wake of the first partition of Poland, was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1466 to 1772. Its historically correct name was 'Royal Prussia' until, in the early eighteenth century, its inhabitants started to call it 'Polish Prussia', to distinguish their province from the neighbouring Prussian monarchy.<sup>16</sup> To use the name 'West Prussia', as several

<sup>10</sup> Burleigh, 'The Knights', p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Jörg Hackmann, 'Der Kampf um die Weichsel: Die deutsche Ostforschung in Danzig von 1918–1945', *Zapiski Historyczne* 58 (1993), 49. On Aubin, recently M. Raeff, 'Some observations on the work of Hermann Aubin (1885–1969)', in H. Lehmann and J. van Horn Melton (eds.), *Paths of Continuity. Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 239–49.

<sup>12</sup> Hackmann, 'Kampf', p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> F. L. Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), pp. 136–64.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy. The Prussian Experience, 1660–1815* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> R. Ergang, *The Potsdam Führer. Frederick William I, Father of Prussian Militarism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

<sup>16</sup> This book will follow this convention.

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recent works have done, is therefore a political statement which implicitly rejects Royal Prussia's status as part of the Polish crown and wrongly suggests a continued political, cultural and national unity of the Prussian lands.<sup>17</sup> The 'Borussian' myth of Prussia as Germany's unifier and saviour effectively suppressed historical reality. Its success depended on silence, forgetfulness and the denigration of the political system of the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Despite certain difficulties in gaining access to Polish archives before the fall of communism in 1989, it was more due to historians' ideological attitudes and their ignorance of the Polish language that so little research was done on Royal Prussia outside Poland. Above all, in Germany, the longevity of aggressively anti-Polish traditions of historical *Ostforschung*<sup>18</sup> reflected a tradition of conflict and tension in Polish-German relations and produced much deplorable scholarship. After 1945, the history of Royal or Polish Prussia was left to non-scholars, usually members of the *Vertriebenenverbände*: organisations of those expelled from West and East Prussia in 1945, who were more interested in venting political claims and expressing a sentimental attachment to their village or home town than in studying the history of the whole region. Younger historians shunned the topic: until 1993, no attempt was made to produce a modern synthesis of the history of either part of Prussia, or to react to the prolific flowering of Polish historiography on early modern Royal or Ducal Prussia.<sup>19</sup> Even when a new project for a history of the Prussian lands, intent on 'conducting a dialogue between greatly differing Polish and German historiographical traditions', finally saw the light of day, no such dialogue resulted. It is hardly a sign of constructive discussion when one contributor writes that in the Prussian lands 'the only cultural nation were the Germans', and polemicalises about seventeenth-century Polish Catholics as 'nationalists and religious fanatics'.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the writing of the history of Royal or Polish Prussia

<sup>17</sup> Examples include Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Politischer Wandel im Osten. Ost- und Westpreußen von den alten Ständen zum Konstitutionalismus* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992); Ernst Oppenoorth, (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte Ost- und Westpreußens*, 3 vols. (Lüneburg: Verlag Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1994-7); and Bernhart Jähnig, 'Die landesgeschichtliche Forschung des Preußenlandes (Ost- und Westpreußen) seit 1960 im Überblick', *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 38 (1989), 81-141. See the critical remarks on this anachronistic use of 'West Prussia' in Jörg Hackmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen in deutscher und polnischer Sicht. Landeshistorie als beziehungs-geschichtliches Problem* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), pp. 19-21; Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Zwischen polnischer Ständegesellschaft und preußischem Obrigkeitsstaat. Vom Königlichen Preußen zu Westpreußen, 1756-1806* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), p. 27; and his 'Die königlich preußische bzw. westpreußische Landesgeschichte in der frühen Neuzeit - Probleme und Tendenzen. Eine Streitschrift', *Nordost-Archiv* (1998), forthcoming. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read this work in typescript.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastward. A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Karen Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik. Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus*, *Historische Studien* 9 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Hackmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, pp. 329-32. For a valuable critique of West German historiographical traditions after 1945, see *ibid.*, pp. 305-21.

<sup>20</sup> Heinz Neumeyer, in Oppenoorth (ed.), *Handbuch der Geschichte Ost- und Westpreußens*, vol. II/1, p. 163; for a critique, see Hackmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, pp. 319-20.

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was left almost entirely in Polish hands after 1945. Klaus Zernack's 1992 prediction that the history of Germans in North-East Central Europe would remain a preoccupation of historians of Poland as long as Germans did not bother to research the close historical links between Germans, Poles, Lithuanians and Russians, except from a Germanocentric perspective, has proved largely accurate; his hope that the opening of the Iron Curtain would lead to the recognition of the place of the Polish population in the history of Prussia has only been fulfilled in few works, all published very recently.<sup>21</sup>

Inevitably, the few works in English on Prussian history in this period reflected the weaknesses of the German approach. None has sought to break the hegemony of the Hohenzollern-centred, 'Borussian' school of Prussian history. The most comprehensive account of Prussian history, by Hans W. Koch, was published in 1978, and denies any need to take account of the Polish and East Central European context of Prussian history: in contrast to the multi-national Habsburg Empire, Koch described Prussia as 'a purely German state, untroubled by the problems of minorities . . . until the final phases of its history'.<sup>22</sup> Other histories of Prussia, such as Giles MacDonogh's *Prussia, the Perversion of an Idea*, aimed at a popular readership, and Margaret Sheehan's *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia*, which targets A-level pupils and first-year university students, repeat the exclusive focus on the Hohenzollern success story and Prussia's German roots. With the exception of William Hagen's study on the relationship between Poles, Jews and Germans in the Prussian territories of partitioned Poland, even detailed studies of eighteenth-century Prussian enlightened absolutism, its education system, the emergence of Pietism and the success of cameralist government,<sup>23</sup> pay little or no attention to the Polish population and the historical link of a substantial part of Prussia to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

## II

The nationalisation of history was, of course, not only a German phenomenon. The invention of modern German nationalism was paralleled elsewhere in Europe, as public opinion, mass literacy and education, newspapers and journals, the militarisation of society and the development of mass political parties served the cause

<sup>21</sup> Klaus Zernack, 'Der historische Begriff "Ostdeutschland" und die deutsche Landesgeschichte', *Nordost-Archiv* NS 1, no. 1 (1992), 162. Works by Michael G. Müller, Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg and Jörg Hackmann are well researched and take full account of the sources in Polish archives, as well as Polish historiographical developments; see the bibliography for full titles.

<sup>22</sup> Hans W. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 284.

<sup>23</sup> For example, C. B. A. Behrens, *Society, Government and the Enlightenment. The Experiences of Eighteenth-Century France and Prussia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); James Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); William Hagen, *Germans, Poles and Jews. The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

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of nationalising the collective memory. In 1771, a year before the first partition of Poland-Lithuania, Jean-Jacques Rousseau proclaimed that the Polish nation, even after its dismemberment, would live on in the 'hearts and minds' of the people, in the memory of national customs, institutions and virtues, which would make the nation immortal – even without the formal context of an independent statehood.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, under the influence of Johann Gottfried Herder, the idea of the modern European nation was based on an imagined community which shared certain traditions, corresponding to the nation's emotional and physical needs. This 'national spirit', or *Volksgeist*, was imagined usually by a small educated elite, who thrived on instrumentalising the nation's past.<sup>25</sup> The result of this intellectual construct was usually the primordial view of an 'eternal' nation, a 'natural' phenomenon, which belonged to people like their language, culture, customs and origins, something that was 'always there'. It was this type of modern nationalism which started to consider German-Polish antagonism a 'fact of nature'. The provinces of Prussia, where Poles and Germans had lived together for centuries, increasingly became a national battleground, in the history books almost more so than in real life.

Hostilities intensified after the foundation of a Polish state in 1918, which, regardless of its large non-Polish populations, projected a narrowly defined Polish national image of the multinational and multicultural Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Polish historians followed politicians in subjecting the historical communities of Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Prussians to the fictitious construct of an eternal Polish and Catholic nation-state. Historians of Royal Prussia, such as Szymon Askenazy and Łukasz Kurdybacha,<sup>26</sup> emphasised the loyalty of the Prussian cities, especially of Danzig, to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in order to enforce Polish political and historical claims to the Polish Corridor and Danzig, playing down the German or Baltic origin of Royal Prussia's population. Polish historical research into Royal Prussia as a province in its own right led to many serious, source-based social and economic analyses,<sup>27</sup> but the ideologically most successful approach to Polish Prussian history in interwar Poland, which survived into the post-1945 era, regarded the territories on the Baltic, including Eastern and Western Pomerania, Royal and Ducal Prussia (and the later kingdom of Prussia) as one region, under the name of *Pomorze*. This geographical and political term finds

<sup>24</sup> *The Government of Poland*, trans. and with an introduction by W. Kendall (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), pp. 11–12.

<sup>25</sup> Dusan Trestik, 'Moderne Nation, hochmittelalterliche politische Nation, frühmittelalterliche Gens und unsere genetische Software. Der Fall Mitteleuropa', in A. Bues and R. Rexheuser (eds.), *Mittelalterliche Nationen – Neuzeitliche Nationen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), p. 165; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> Szymon Askenazy, *Gdańsk a Polska* (Warsaw: Gebethner and Wolff, 1918); Łukasz Kurdybacha, *Stosunki kulturalne polsko-gdańskie w XVIII w.* (Danzig: TPN, 1937).

<sup>27</sup> For example by Kazimierz Tymieniecki and Zygmunt Mocarski; see Hackmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, pp. 217–21.

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no correlation in the German word *Pommern* (Pomerania), which more narrowly focuses on Western Pomerania, between Stralsund and Stolp (Słupsk).

From 1935, the writing of a comprehensive history of *Pomorze* became a political programme under the aegis of the Instytut Bałtycki in Toruń and the Instytut Zachodni in Poznań. The most pressing concern was the gathering of evidence for the continuity of an ethnic Polish population, and of Polish culture and language in Royal Prussia, the bishopric of Warmia and parts of Ducal Prussia. Only since the late 1970s have Polish historians working on the Prussian and Pomeranian territories distanced themselves from an exclusively national perspective and concentrated on the multinational character of the alleged geographical and political unity of *Pomorze*.<sup>28</sup> The influence of historical materialism, however, and the focus on the role of early modern 'feudalism' in the social and economic history of the region, replaced the older, national perspective. The important question of whether Prussia carried any specifically national, political and historical connotations for early modern people who lived in both parts of the ancient Prussian lands remained unaddressed.

## III

This book is a case study of nation-building before the French Revolution and the age of modern nationalism. It focuses on the province of Royal or Polish Prussia – the 'other Prussia', which was an integral part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1466 to 1772/93 – and specifically on the urban elites in the three major urban centres of the province, Danzig, Thorn and Elbing. The local patriciate, the shapers of urban politics, economy and culture,<sup>29</sup> were most active and vociferous in defining the notion of an early modern Prussian nation. Social scientists who have constructed models of modern nation-building usually deny that what they term early modern 'patriots' have any claim to constitute a nation. Hans Kohn, one of the most influential theorists on modern nationalism, saw the nation as a product of the French Revolution and the idea of popular sovereignty, thereby ignoring the deep roots of such ideas reaching back to the conciliarist movement of the late Middle Ages and early modern republicanism and monarchomachism.<sup>30</sup> Anthony Smith's emphasis on a 'Western' concept of nation, which, according to French Enlightenment thinkers, represented a 'community of people obeying the same laws and institutions within a given territory', overlooks the fact that Poland-Lithuania cultivated this principle as the ideological basis of its multi-national political commonwealth two centuries before the Encyclopédie saw

<sup>28</sup> Hackmann, *Ostpreußen und Westpreußen*, pp. 290–98.

<sup>29</sup> Mack Walker, *The German Home Towns, 1648–1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 61–7; Christopher F. Friedrichs, *The Early Modern City* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 45–8, 182–213.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Collier, 1967), p. 3.



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the light of day.<sup>31</sup> In classical political terms, they were part of their *patria*, the *res publica*, an emotional as well as a rational principle of order, following Cicero's recommendation that a people should be bound together by similar legal, political and historical ties which provide useful social cohesion.<sup>32</sup> Early modern political and historical writing all over Europe applied the concepts of *gens*, *patria* and *natio* interchangeably. As John Elliott has observed with regard to the history of Spain, which possessed a nobility as numerous and self-conscious as Poland-Lithuania, 'the apparent uncertainty of modern historians when faced with the question of nationalism in early modern Europe stands in marked contrast to the increasingly confident use in the sixteenth century of the words *patria* and *patrie*'.<sup>33</sup> The citizens of Royal Prussia formulated a constitutional and political concept of the nation rather than an 'ethnic' one based on blood or genealogy. Thus the distinction between a 'West European political' and an 'East European ethnic' national identity makes little sense. The Prussian burghers imagined a community, albeit small, whose history and sense of origin, constitutions, privileges and parliamentary institutions connected the Prussian province with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a harbour for many nations. In contrast to early nineteenth-century definitions of the cultural and ethnic nation, the Prussian nation of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was an intellectual construct based on citizenship and property, and individual and corporate liberty. Its strong sense of an idealised past spent in liberty from oppression was clearly linked to the principle that a ruler must be bound to positive law. Royal Prussia was a typical early modern nation of estates, orders and parliaments, deeply rooted in European constitutionalist traditions. John Elliott's observation that 'national constitutionalism learnt the language of law, of history and antiquity'<sup>34</sup> was as true for Poles, Lithuanians and Prussians, as it was for the Castilians, the Dutch, the English or the Scots.

The most contentious issue between modern theoreticians of nationhood and historians of the early modern nation concerns the mass character of national ideology. Smith insists that 'a common, mass public culture' was a necessary element of national identity.<sup>35</sup> It is undeniable that the early modern nation was more or less the creation of its articulate and political elites, but this is also true for 'modern' nationalism, particularly in the nineteenth century, when small circles of intellectuals dominated the formulation of a national ideology and culture.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London and New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 9. See also Jerzy Szacki, *Ojczyzna, Naród, Rewolucja. Problematyka narodowa w polskiej myśli szlacheckorewolucyjnej* (Warsaw: PWN, 1962), p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> Horst Zillesen (ed.), *Volk, Nation und Vaterland. Der deutsche Protestantismus und der Nationalismus*, (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1970), p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> John Elliott, 'Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe', in Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith (eds.), *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London, Henley, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Trestik, 'Moderne Nation', p. 164.

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Nevertheless, the following analysis of Royal Prussian identity will show that this political nation was not restricted to the nobility, but included burghers, and in a few cases was extended even to the free peasantry. Considering the weak development of democracy in Europe, Royal Prussian national identity before the age of Enlightenment was surprisingly inclusive. In the seventeenth century, Prussian historians explored the historical myths of origin of their nation by collecting popular legends among the peasant population of Warmia and the Vistula delta. National and historical myths were discussed in city council chambers and in local parliamentary sessions. They permeated private letters, diaries, but also printed political treatises and historical accounts of the history of Prussia and Poland-Lithuania. Teachers and pastors, burgomasters, merchants and craftsmen alike became familiar with these myths through school textbooks, at home, during public festivals and ceremonies in their cities and parishes, in news-sheets and by oral tradition. In his comparative study of medieval and modern national identity in Europe, Benedykt Zientara demonstrated that historical mythology was always an integral part of national identity, and that patriotic self-absorption could turn communities into nations at any point in history.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the historical element of national identity features most prominently in this study. Historical myths are neither rational, nor are they consistent.<sup>38</sup> Changes in emphasis and meaning, and the introduction or elimination of specific historical metaphors are essential barometers of a nation's collective identity. They reflect private and communal interests and political agendas, and adapt to altered circumstances. Erik Ringmar has stressed the necessity of self-definition, particularly during periods of unrest and upheaval which upset traditional patterns of self-consciousness. It is the acquisition, loss or change of an identity which influences people, affecting not only their consciousness but also their actions:

What we take ourselves to be is not a question of what essences constitute us, but instead a question of what metaphors we apply to ourselves and of the stories we tell about what we see . . . A crime against an identity is an act of omission . . . If we want to deny a person recognition, all we have to do is to look the other way – no big gestures are needed . . . Actions undertaken in defence of an identity are of a peculiar kind. The action does not seek to maximise utility or minimise loss, but instead to establish a standard – a self – by which utilities and losses can be measured.<sup>39</sup>

'Formative moments', in which identities are lost, redefined and established, are vital clues for historians, as they provide patterns of explanation for collective

<sup>37</sup> B. Zientara, 'Świadomość narodowa w Europie Zachodniej w średniowieczu. Powstanie i mechanizmy zjawiska', in A. Gieysztor and S. Gawlas (eds.), *Państwo, naród, stany w świadomości wieków średnich* (Warsaw: PWN, 1990), pp. 11–26; and Trestik, 'Moderne Nation', p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action. A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 88–9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 82–3.