

Memel als Brücke zu den baltischen Ländern. Kulturgeschichte Klaipėdas vom Mittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert (Tagungsberichte der Historischen Kommission für ost- und westpreussische Landesforschung, Bd. 26), hrsg. von Bernhart Jähnig, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2011. 247 S. ISBN 978-3-938400-76-0

Klaipėda (Memel) has certainly not been ignored in historical research. Numerous relevant studies on the city's past have been conducted in recent decades in Lithuania and Germany, some of which have materialised in publications that are important for a broader understanding of the Baltic region's history. Active cooperation in the 1990s between German and Lithuanian historians gave a new impulse to research on Klaipėda's history, already then, for various reasons, covering basically two periods: the Middle Ages, and the 20th century. The analysis of the first period has mainly been undertaken by archaeologists, while the second, naturally, has been the sphere of historians. Regardless of the fact that not all of the initial plans relating to this cooperation could be realised, the appearance of the collected volume entitled *Memel als Brücke zu den baltischen Ländern* (Memel as a Bridge to the Baltic Countries) can be viewed as an attempt to continue the existing partnership between German and Lithuanian researchers.¹ The collection's publication also leads to great expectations because the institution that was behind its organisation, the History Commission for East and West Prussia (*Historischen Kommission für ost- und westpreussische Landesforschung*), founded in 1923, which has undergone various transformations during its existence, has for almost a century been an important assembly promoting learning about the region's history.² The book appeared as the result of one of the Commission's annual conferences. In 2009, Professor Axel E. Walter organised a conference in Klaipėda. The event was devoted to various issues relating to the city's history.

The 11 articles that appear in the volume are presented as a contribution to Klaipėda's cultural history from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, even though it is far from just cultural history that is covered. As

¹ One of the numerous results of this kind of partnership would be the collection of articles entitled *Im Wandel der Zeiten: Die Stadt Memel im 20. Jahrhundert* (*Nordost-Archiv*, Bd. X/2001), hrsg. von Joachim Tauber (Lüneburg, 2002).

² More details about the organisation's activities can be found in: *75 Jahre Historische Kommission für Ost- und Westpreußische Landesforschung: Forschungsrückblick und Forschungswünsche* (*Tagungsberichte der Historischen Kommission für ost- und westpreussische Landesforschung*, Bd. 13), hrsg. von Bernhart Jähnig (Lüneburg, 1999).

well as cultural history, the results of archaeological research from recent decades, economic history (concerning the port), and traditional political history, are discussed, the latter being chronologically divided into two chapters. Considering the publication's concept, what remains unclear is just what is meant by cultural history. This sphere must be represented by four articles in the chapter 'Literature and Self-Awareness', since the other articles in the collection have little to do with cultural history. The main purpose of the book is also called into question. Did the organisers want to depict Klaipėda as a (German) bridge to the Baltic countries, as is stated in the title? Or to highlight the function of a bridge itself, which Klaipėda historically carried out in the Baltic region, as Bernhart Jähnig, the author of the introduction, writes? In any case, most of the articles, strangely, except for those from the chapter 'Literature and Self-Awareness', echo the latter purpose more closely. What this says, at least, is that perhaps giving a collection of articles the same title as the conference they were submitted to is not necessarily always good practice.

The researchers whose articles are included in the collection have presented their results at varying stages of completion. Many of the authors have already written extensively about various aspects of Klaipėda's history; however, the city itself was rarely the main object of research in their studies. The Medieval archaeologist Vladas Žulkus and the historian Andrzej Groth, who has been writing on the history of East and West Prussian ports for decades, both give a summary of their previous research on Klaipėda. Their articles are a weighty contribution to the theme of the volume, but they contain little that has not been published in their earlier monographs.³ A similar point can be made of the articles by Bernhart Jähnig, a researcher into the history of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, and Arūnas Baublys, a historian of Evangelical churches in Lithuania. In their writings, Klaipėda emerges in aspects that are already quite familiar in the existing historiography. New data for this collection undoubtedly comes from the contributions by Stefan Hartmann, the editor of a seven-volume tome on the correspondence of Albert, the Duke of Prussia, with Livonia, completed in 2008;⁴ Dietmar Willoweit, an eminent author of the monumental work the 'History of German Constitutional Law' (*Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*), who analyses the Otto Böttcher cause here, well known to interwar-period historians; as well as from Lutz Oberdörfer and Rikako Shindo, who present their research on foreign policy and diplomatic relations in the Baltic region in the interwar years. At first glance, the

³ Cf. A. Groth, *Żegluga i handel morski Klajpedy w latach 1664–1722* (Gdańsk, 1996); V. Žulkus, *Viduramžių Klaipėda: miestas ir pilis, archeologija ir istorija* (Vilnius, 2002).

⁴ *Herzog Albrecht von Preußen und Livland. Regesten aus dem Herzoglichen Briefarchiv und den Ostpreußischen Folianten*, bearbeitet von U. Müller (vol. 1), S. Hartmann (vols. 2–7) (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 1996–2008).

submissions by Silva Pocyte, Inga Rinau and Renate Knoll, which give new insights into various aspects of the history of 20th-century Klaipėda, appear to give a less convincing reflection of the general idea behind the collection.

Yet despite the fact that not all the articles in the volume relate closely to its title or concept (typical of many collections of articles), the publication is a relevant contribution, firstly because it is aimed at a German-speaking audience. Targeting precisely this group, the book helps them to gain a broader overview of the history of Klaipėda, compared to the traditional concept of the city's role solely in the Prussian (German) context that reaches them from works by 19th-century authors. A similarly devised publication came out in Lithuania at my own initiative in 2013.⁵ Both volumes essentially reflect the same historiographical trend: to look at Klaipėda from a broader point of view than has been done until now, guided by just the Lithuanian context, the German, or that of cooperation and relations between both nations (countries). In this sense, it could be said that the collection of articles *Memel als Brücke zu den baltischen Ländern* makes a contribution to establishing a qualitatively new approach to the history of this Baltic city in historiography.

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⁵ *Klaipėda Europos istorijos kontekstuose*, sud. Vasilijus Safronovas (Klaipėda, 2013).