Vasilijus Safronovas, *The Creation of National Spaces in a Pluricultural Region: The Case of Prussian Lithuania*, Lithuanian Studies without Borders, Academic Studies Press, 2016. 464 p. ISBN 978-1618-115-24-9

As Lithuania celebrates one hundred years since independence, it seems an appropriate time to cast an eye back over the history of this spatial concept. Contrary to many popular accounts of Lithuanian national history, the concept of a singular 'Lithuania' was problematic before the First World War. The territory was split between Prussia (after 1871, Germany) and the Russian Empire, which meant that a concept of 'Lithuania' that transcended these imperial and state borders did not resonate with the horizons of experience of most contemporaries, or feature on their mental maps. Although the term 'Lithuania' existed prior to the First World War, over the course of history the name was applied to various ecclesiastical, administrative, historical, ethnographic, linguistic and political territorial configurations. The borders of these variously imagined 'Lithuanias' ebbed and flowed, as they were mobilised by different political, nation-building, regional, separatist, irredentist and diasporic projects. How and why did these different concepts of Lithuania emerge? In what way did these meanings overlap and interact with one another? How did the discourses about 'Lithuania' developed by scholars, politicians, statisticians and cartographers compare with how the space was imagined by the inhabitants themselves? Why did some meanings catch on, while others were blotted out, or reframed in new contexts? These are some of the key questions that Vasilijus Safronovas sets out to answer in his study of the development of concepts of 'Lithuania' from the 16th to the early 20th century.

The history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) of 'Lithuania' has been a popular topic of research in recent years, resulting in the publication of several excellent monographs, edited volumes, and doctoral dissertations. However, whereas these previous studies concentrate primarily on the discourses and debates in the so-called Northwest Territory (*Severo-Zapadnyi Krai*) of the Russian Empire, or the struggles by various groups to claim the city of Vil'na/Wilno/Vilnius, Safronovas focuses on 'another' Lithuania (p. 7) across the border in neighbouring Prussia and post-1871 Germany.¹

¹ V. Petronis, *Constructing Lithuania: Ethnic Mapping in Tsarist Russia, ca. 1800–1914* (Stockholm University Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations, 2007); *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. D. Staliūnas (Boston, 2016). For insights into recent research on the city of Vilnius as a nodal point

By bringing the neglected case of Prussian Lithuania into a dialogue with research on the Russian Empire, Safronovas' book fills an important gap in scholarship, and enables us to build up a picture of the complex articulation of ideas about 'Lithuania' that occurred within different states and across borders.

The book's narrative is structured chronologically around the changing uses of terms to describe the territory: Lithuania, East Prussia, Prussian Lithuania, Lithuania Minor, and the Memel Territory. By analysing maps, newspapers, memoirs, historiography, photographs, published sources and archival materials, Safronovas compares how different media constructed images and ideas about space. One of his key aims is to explore the differences between the 'Lithuanias' represented on the map, and how the territory was imagined by the inhabitants as 'their own' (p. 13), that is, from the bottom up.

The book's introduction suffers slightly from being overly theoretical in its discussion of mental mapping and Lefebvre's work on the production of space. The momentum picks up in Chapter One, which presents readers with a general overview of Lithuanians in East Prussia, but also emphasises how the region was a significant place for many religious, ethno-linguistic, local and national communities. Over the course of history, different states, actors and political movements sought to exercise interpretative control over the concepts attached to the region. Safronovas also sets out to challenge the historiographical emphasis placed on the First World War as a turning point, arguing that the developments which led to the transfer of the Memel Territory to the newly independent Lithuanian state in 1923 were embedded in ideas which had been incubating over the previous century. In short, the First World War 'g[a]ve national content to an old form' (p. 27).

Chapter Two traces the changing concepts of Lithuania in Prussia between the 16th and early 19th centuries. Safronovas analyses how the designation 'Lithuania' gradually transformed from an ecclesiastical, to an administrative, and finally, to a cultural concept based on ethnolinguistic criteria. The term appears in 16th-century ecclesiastical sources to indicate a region with Lithuanian-language churches, a practice carried over from

between different spatial narratives, see: T.R. Weeks, *Vilnius between Nations, 1795–2000* (DeKalb, IL, 2015); *Lithuanian Nationalism and the Vilnius Question, 1883–1940*, eds. D. Mačiulis and D. Staliūnas (Marburg, 2015); T. Nenartovič, *Kaiserlich-russische, deutsche, polnische, litauische, belarussische und sowjetische kartographische Vorstellungen und territoriale Projekte zur Kontaktregion von Wilna 1795–1939* (Collegium Carolinum e.V., 2016). For a discussion on this historiography, see C. Gibson, 'History, Memory, and Urban Symbolic Geographies: Recent Contributions to the Historiography of Vilnius', in: *Acta Slavonica Iaponica*, vol. 38 (2017), pp. 145–152, also available in Belarusian as 'Гісторыя, памяць і сімвалічная тапаграфія горада: найноўшыя публікацыі да гістарыяграфіі Вільні', in: *Беларускі Гістарычны Агляд / Belarusian Historical Review*, vol. 24 (2017), pp. 233–246.

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the early 18th century, the term gradually took on an administrative association, as East Prussia and Lithuania came to be used synonymously. As Safronovas emphasises, the ecclesiastical and administrative concepts of 'Lithuania' overlapped, but did not always coincide (p. 56). Later, in the early 19th century, the idea of 'being Lithuanian' (p. 59) was appropriated by the local Prussian nobility and urban elites as a statement of their Old Prussian patriotism, and an expression of their regional particularism. However, by the mid-19th century, against the rising current of German cultural nationalism and the linguistic and ethnographic work of scholars at the University of Königsberg on Lithuanians as a distinct Slav-oriented people, the popularity of the Old Prussian discourse gradually declined. One of the key themes of Safronovas' study is the role played by expert knowledge in defining national spaces, which led to the shift in the 1850s in German-language scholarship to term the region 'Lithuania' on the basis of ethnolinguistic research.

The third and fourth chapters focus on the formation of ideas about Lithuania within Prussia in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These chapters constitute the main body of the work, and examine ways in which ideas about Prussian Lithuania were mobilised at the juncture between region-building and nationalising projects. Chapter Three examines how, on the one hand, 'Lithuania' featured prominently in the construction of the idea of the Prussian *Heimat*. The collection and elaboration of Lithuanian language, history and folklore formed a key component of Prussian *Heimatkunde* (local studies), and was used to make a strong statement about the region's rich and unique heritage. Research on Lithuania(n) thus became a means of asserting Prussian particularism against the backdrop of attempts to integrate Prussia into the orbit of 'German(ic) spaces' (p. 92) in the second half of the 19th century, and especially after 1871. On the other hand, official statistics played an important role in presenting East Prussia as an integral part of Germanism (*Deutschtum*), and of transforming the region's Lithuanian speakers into a 'minority'. The 1861 Prussian census, which strongly equated language (*Familiensprache*) with nationality (*Nationalität*), provided administrators with statistical ammunition to *show* where 'Germans' were predominant. On ethnographic maps, the adoption of the 'absolute majority principle' for designating ethnographic areas meant that Lithuanians became 'less visible', and the territory designated as 'Lithuanian' shrank considerably (p. 146).

Chapter Four examines spatial concepts of Lithuania between the 1870s and the 1910s in the context of the evolving Lithuanian national movement in three distinct spaces: the Russian Empire, Prussia (after 1871, Germany), and among émigrés and the diaspora. Here, Safronovas makes an important contribution to our understanding of the ways in which national movements developed in different milieus. Their diverse ideas and aims meant that there was little consensus among these individuals, who have

often been banded together under the umbrella of ‘Lithuanian nationalists’. The concept of ‘Lithuania Minor’ was ‘invented’ within this context, to imply that political borders had separated some ethnolinguistic Lithuanians from the main ‘geo-body’ of Lithuanians in the Russian Empire, referred to in Prussian Lithuania from the 1890s as ‘Lithuania Major’.² However, Safronovas demonstrates how Lithuanian speakers living in Prussia and the Russian Empire operated in two different information spaces, and thus did not think of themselves as a collective ‘imagined community’.³ Religious divides between the predominantly Catholic Lithuanian speakers in the Russian Empire and Lutherans in Prussia, socio-economic disparities arising from the date when serfdom was abolished in the respective areas,⁴ and differences in literacy and education, all continued to exert a powerful influence over the mental maps of Lithuanian speakers. Irredentism was not present in the Lithuanian nationalist discourse until the First World War, as practically speaking, there were no grounds for thinking that the borders could be altered. This all changed with the outbreak of the Great War, when talk of ‘convergence’ with Lithuania Minor was immediately raised among Lithuanian nationalists in the Russian Empire, and among the Lithuanian émigré community (p. 193). Similarly, it was only during the First World War that scholars in Germany began widely to associate ‘Lithuania’ with the adjacent lands in the Russian Empire, too. However, Safronovas shows how the idea of joining Lithuania Major and Minor proved contentious. Many inhabitants of Lithuania Minor had to be persuaded of their Lithuanianness. Ethnographic maps from the mid-19th century were used to present arguments about the ‘origins’ of the territory’s inhabitants, and the languages spoken by their ancestors (p. 240).

The short Chapter Five functions as a 20-page conclusion to the previous two chapters, in which Safronovas builds an overarching argument about the interactions between Lithuanian and German national concepts of Prussian Lithuania in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Moving beyond just looking at intermediaries and smugglers who trafficked Lithuanian-language books published in Prussia into the Russian Empire during the ban on printing in Latin script (1865 to 1904), Safronovas examines the transfer of the German-language body of knowledge about Prussian Lithuania to Lithuanian nationalists in Prussia and the Russian Empire, who then reframed and repackaged this knowledge through the lens of ethnolinguistic nationalism.

² T. Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, 1994).

³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York, 2006).

⁴ Serfdom was abolished in Prussia and the Augustów province (1807) and three Baltic provinces (1816–1819) half a century earlier than in the other territories of the Russian Empire inhabited by Latvian and Lithuanian-speakers (1861).

Finally, Chapter Six examines the post-1918 period, and the ‘battles over spaces’ that unfolded in the region in the 20th century. A large part of the chapter is devoted to the well-known controversy surrounding the separation and transfer of the part of Lithuania Minor known as ‘the Memel Territory’ (Klaipėda) in 1923. Importantly, Safronovas illuminates how the redrawing of borders was motivated less by ethnolinguistic arguments, but rather by strategic concerns over access to the important sea port of Memel/Klaipėda. The territorial acquisition enabled Lithuania to fashion itself as a maritime state, and functioned as a band-aid to the bullet wound in the Lithuanian state-building project caused by the ongoing conflict with Poland over Vilnius/Wilno to the east. Nevertheless, despite joining parts of Lithuania Minor and Major to create an independent Lithuanian state, a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of the Memel/Klaipėda region continued to identify as *Memelländer*, based on their place of habitation, rather than as Lithuanians or Germans on ethnolinguistic national terms. Famously, in the 1925 census, 24.24% of the inhabitants of the Klaipėda region identified their nationality as *Memelländer*. However, today Prussian Lithuania does not exist in any physical form. The fate of the region in the 20th century follows a path which will already be familiar to many historians of Central and Eastern Europe, namely the gradual erosion of the regional particularism of borderlands and border regions, as states inscribed national meanings on to space and history, and divided inhabitants into national categories.

The book is well written, extensively researched and draws attention to a region which has often been overlooked in the wider discussion on spatial concepts of Lithuania. One of the particular strengths of the book is Safronovas’ ability to bring German, Lithuanian, Russian and Polish sources into a dialogue with one another to historicise the spatial discourse on ‘Lithuania’ within the multilingual and pre-national context of the long 19th century. The book no doubt occupies a key place in the historiography of 19th-century Lithuanian and Prussian history, but also raises many questions and topics that will resonate with scholars who are interested more broadly in the invention and construction of national spaces spanning administrative or imperial border regions. Comparisons of the Lithuanian case and the development of the spatial concepts of ‘Ukraine’ between the Russian Empire and Galicia in the Habsburg Empire, or even the development of ideas of a ‘Latvian’ territory uniting the two Baltic provinces of Livland and Kurland with the western Vitebsk province (the territory of former Polish Livonia, known since the early 20th century as Latgale), promise fruitful scope for future research.

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