

Journey to Pomerania—Report from a Secret Land
[*Die Reise nach Pommern—Bericht aus einem verschwiegenen Land*]
Christian Graf von Krockow [May 26, 1927 – March 17, 2002]
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Where do all the Kaschuben come from?

“Who, when I cried, heard me from the angel's orders? and set himself, one would suddenly take it to heart: I pass away from his stronger existence. For the beautiful is nothing but the terrible beginning that we still endure, and we admire it in this way, because it is modestly spurned to destroy us.. Every angel is terrible.”

Beginning of the first of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* [melancholy poems]: Begin and End in Terror. We are approaching the zones of calamity, we are coming to the limits, literally: people want what moves their hearts to love, for themselves, secured and fenced in—and, precisely for this, we fall into hatred, destruction and death; they slay one another like Cain his brother Abel.

Understandably, therefore, the dream of true brotherhood, of the boundless, of the dream of past happiness, which will return to it. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the prophet of the original, wrote: “The first to fence a piece of land and insolently claim, ‘This is mine!’ —and people found simple enough to believe him, became the true founder of bourgeois society. How many crimes, wars, sufferings and horrors would have spared the human race, who would have ripped out the stakes or filled in the trench and shouted to those like him: “Do not listen to the deceiver. You are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one!”

Unfortunately, it is not just about a piece of land, about a house and farmyard, money or goods. It is about life in general, which pushes for form and needs a form: its “identity,” as we call it today. But form is not to be had without boundary. And all the beautiful things we love never mean the approximate, but the exact, the unmistakable. How else would we find our home, like a homeland?

The more recent era, however, promises political homeland, the foundation of the homeland through politics. It should be fulfilled in the nation-state. It is precisely the revolutionaries of 1789, who consider themselves heirs of Rousseau, to proclaim this nation-state; they make nationalism historic. But the question of what the nation actually is finds many answers, sometimes none at all. It leads on fluctuating ground—especially for the Germans. However, the greater the uncertainty, the greater the temptation to rely on the demarcation against “the others” who are supposedly so different from “us.”

Heinrich Heine has already told us about the German difficulties: “Weird! Despite their ignorance, the so-called Old Germans had borrowed from the German obsession a certain excessive show of learning that was as disgusting as it was ridiculous. With what petty syllable

stings and punches they discussed the hallmarks of German nationality! Where does the German start, where does it stop? May a German smoke tobacco: No, the majority claimed. Can a German wear gloves? Yes, but from buffalo skin. But drinking beer is allowed a German, and he is to be called a real son of Germania; because Tacitus certainly speaks of German cerevisia [Latin alternative for beer]. In the beer cellar in Göttingen, I once had to admire the thoroughness with which my Old German friends made the proscription lists, for the day when they would come to power. Those descended only a seventh part from French, Jew or Slav were condemned to exile. Those who had written only in the least against Jahn (the ‘door father’) or against Old German ridicule at all could be prepared for death, namely death by the hatchet, not by the guillotine, although this was originally a German invention. and was already known in the Middle Ages, under the name ‘the Welsh trap.’”

It sounds weird, but our laughter freezes as soon as we consider what happened a hundred years later. And it reads uncanny what the Frenchman Ernest Renan said to his German letter partner David Friedrich Strauss during the Franco-German War, 1870/71. It was about the cession of Alsace and Lorraine, citing the “original” affiliation to the people, and Renan wrote:

“You (Germans) have developed the position of archaeological and ethnographic politics instead of liberal politics; this policy will be a disaster for you. The comparative philosophy that you have created and wrongly transferred to the field of politics will play you badly. The Slavs will be enthusiastic about this;... how can you believe that the Slavs have not inflicted on you what you do to others?...When one day the Slavs will claim the proper Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia and Berlin, because all these names are of Slavic origin, if they do to the Elbe or Oder [rivers] what you have done on the Moselle, if they have the finger on the map on the Wendish [West Slavs and South Slavs living within the Holy Roman Empire] or Obotrite [a confederation of medieval West Slavic tribes within the territory of modern Mecklenburg and Holstein in northern Germany] villages, what will you have to say? Nation is not equal to race.”

Indeed. Half of Germany can be maneuvered out of Germany, citing the former people. And not just the area, but also, or even more so, the people. Everywhere the tribes have overlapped, pushed into each other, mixed, still in the 19th century, in the 20th century with the great migration from east to west. Where do the “brothers from the cold homeland” come from, without which the emergence of the Ruhr area is unthinkable for its population?

And what about Pomerania? What was once “original” gets lost in the dark and is at best of archaeological interest; nothing, absolutely nothing, can be deduced politically from this. A Wendish-Slavic region comes into the light of history: Pomorje, the “land by the sea.” It then grows into its own duchy, but often divided and subject to rapidly changing influences or temporary conquests, in which the Danes and the Swedes play just as much a role as the Poles and the people of Brandenburg. The investiture of Duke Bogislaw I by the notable Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa in 1181 adds Pomerania to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation—although it must be added against misunderstandings that this empire just was not a nation-state in the modern sense.

The many names that were mentioned at the beginning of this book were reminiscent of the old heritage. Stolp was once called Slupsk or something similar; Villages were called Wendish-

Silkow, Sochow, Gutzmerov, Brandsechow or Karzin, Klenzin, Zemmin, Warbelin. Forests bore names such as Wossek, Lechow, Dombrow, Iserge, Kaschnowz, Bojenk. Most of the old noble families were also of Wendish-Slavic origin. For, unlike the Land of Prussia, it was not a conquered land and subjugated by the conquerors.

In the back of Pomerania and from there to the gates of Danzig [Gdansk], moreover, a tribe settled which has been particularly tenacious: the Kaschuben. All people of Stolp, the saying went, by which they were often welcomed and teased:

“Where do all the Kaschuben come from?

There are as many as the sand of the sea.

From Stolp, from Stolp, from Stolp.”

It is not uncommon to say “Slupsk” instead of “Stolp”. Even in the 18th and up to the 19th century, Kaschubisch was spoken in parts of the Stolp District and preached in the churches, most recently in the moorlands around Lake Garder and Lake Leba. The memory of Kaschubisch remained in family names such as Pigorsch or Dargusch,.

The German influences initially asserted themselves in two ways. Once through Christianization. In 1124 and 1128, the Pomeranian Apostle Otto von Bamberg undertook his missionary journeys; in 1140, Pope Innocence II donated the Diocese of Wollin, which was moved to Cammin in 1176. The strategy of Christianization included the establishment of the monastery, whose maintenance in turn included villages with German peasants who immigrated from the West.

On the other hand, urban creation is important. They took place mostly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from the pre-Pomeranian Stralsund in 1234 to Stettin [Szczecin], 1243, to Stolp 1310. And with the establishments everywhere, German city law played an important role. The charge spread along the Baltic Sea; the one from Madgeburg migrated inland via Breslau [Wroclaw] and Krakow to the distant Ukrainian Kiev. And with the city establishments and their right, German merchants and craftsmen, often urged by the local princes, migrated to promote economic development.

In Pomerania, therefore, a Slavic-Germanic mixed area was created, in which the German influence gradually, over long periods of time, became more and more influential. This was done peacefully throughout, without heavy fighting between the various groups of people. Of course, there were many conflicts, for example between the native nobility and the emerging cities. Those from Krochow, for example, clashed more than once with the mighty Danzig; A Hans of Krochow was executed on 15 January, 1516, in front of the High Gate. But all of this was the usual feud between knighthood and cities, not opposites that emerged from the different roots of the people. You can study these feuds in Franconia, in Württemberg or in the Rhineland as well as in the East.

However, if one reads the more recent literature, one usually gains a completely different impression. Either it is said to have been almost ever, or at least for centuries, nothing but German, German, German, and the “higher,” German culture has completely wiped out the

“lower,” Slavic-Polish—to its welfare—as if they had never existed. Or, conversely, it is a bloody conquest and barbaric oppression against tough resistance.

But one is like the other, with permission, gross nonsense and sheer nonsense, retrospective construction from the spirit or rather the non-spirit of a nationalist delusion. The border lines, which have been in existence since the 16th century and only mark a contrast between Germans and Poles much later, originally have nothing to do with so-called race, with folklore and language and with the supposedly associated higher or lower culture, no, absolutely nothing to do with it. The central importance is something quite different: the boundary of the confession.

Pomerania finds early on, decisive and without sustained resistance, union to the Reformation. In 1534, the Provincial Diet of Troptow decreed the introduction of Lutheran doctrine. The church order is the work of Johannes Bugenhagen—born in Wollin in 1485 and, being from that place, nicknamed Pomeranus—the great organizer of the Reformation, not only in Pomerania.

One might speculate: Why did the people of Pomerania follow the call of the “Wittenburg nightingale” so quickly? And why then so persistent, with clear defense of all further innovation, as their church hymn puts it:

“Oh God, it moves entirely toward evil,
There is no rest on this earth;
Many sects and many enthusiasts
Come along as a bunch.

Nevertheless, restrain the proud spirits,
Those who rise with power
And always bring something new,
To falsify your right teaching.”

Spiritual enlightenment through the right doctrine was certainly not only in play, rather the signed and sealed and the clear-headed. The Mützenow Church Chronicle, written by Pastor Franz Splittgerber in 1874, knows how to report it in its own way:

“The people of Mützenow, it is said, endured the old doctrine the longest in the area, not letting go of the customs and practices of their ancestors, and satisfied with their old priest of the mass, who clung to the Catholic religion. However, even though these had secular blessing, Joachim Wockenvöt, who had already held a spiritual position elsewhere and was married, applied for the local parish and was called to do so by the Provincial Governor at Stolp. It was now feared that the people of Mützenow would resist his introduction, but it took him and the introduction of the Lutheran divine service favorably, contrary to all expectations.

“When, after the solemn introduction of the new pastor, the Stolp Superintendent and his assistants returned to the city on a farmer's wagon, a lively dispute arose among the spiritual masters about how it was going to happen that the people of Mützenow, with a now completely different mind, would have accepted the Lutheran priest willingly. In the end, however, it can be

concluded that people understood that the papal doctrine does not correspond to the truth and that the Gospel is pure doctrine.

But then the peasant, who had so far sat silently on his straw heritage alliance (*Bund Erbsstroh*) and had the spiritual masters speak calmly, turned around and explained as follows: the matter behaved differently. They would not know from the new doctrine whether it was better than the old one; this they could not judge, for the peasant is too stupid, he must believe what his priest teaches him. But they had accepted the Lutheran pastors willingly because he had a wife.

Astonished, the spiritual masters asked why this circumstance had been so dear to them and had brought about such an important decision? The peasant then replied that the former Catholic priests had had three serious faults, they did not have wives; they were altogether ‘*Afslikers*’ (legacy-hunters), ‘*Pottkierker*’ and dangerous to the women. But of a married priest, they hoped that he would not practice these bad habits.”

It may have been as much as it would have been, but it is certain that the Reformation has decided on a future that is still completely unknown to it. Being a Protestant in this future is being called German—and being Polish: professing to be a Catholic. For Poland, being taken in by the tongs of the new great powers, the Protestant Prussians and orthodox Russia, first overshadowed and threatened by them, then dismembered and divided, preserved its identity as being Catholic. Nowhere else, perhaps apart from Ireland, has such a deep bond emerged between a nation struggling for self-assertion and the old Church—not to mention: similar to a covering over. The nation was preserved in the Church, as a Church, like the Church in the heartbeat of the people.

The border, which gradually developed, thus became the national as well as the confessional. This can be seen in some families; Catholic branches became Polish, as the evangelicals became German., until the old bonds gradually descended into oblivion.

With this development, a second thing, which is very important for the social and political form of life, went hand in hand: In the Protestant-German sphere it prevailed to preserve the possessions as undivided as possible, usually for the eldest son, and the other children to renounce, that is to say, in the case of the male descendants, to urge the civil service. Beyond the border, on the other hand, the division of inheritance prevailed. It often made inevitable the economic decline; landowners became proud but poor farmers. This resulted in a very different relationship with the State—or, connected to the nearest at hand, none at all. “I am a lord, you are a lord, but who will do the work?” —says a Catholic-Kaschubian proverb.

The Kaschuben people: In Pomerania, the tribe and the language faded away hardly noticeably, because there was simply no reason for the Protestants in the Protestant state to assert themselves in the resistance. Different in Pomerellen-West Prussia, in the area that the German Order had ceded to Poland in 1466 and which, therefore, as the “Prussian royal-Polish part” was not accomplished by the Reformation. Here the Catholic Kaschuben preserved their identity much more strongly, and when the Protestant state finally appeared to them as the enemy of the Church, they joined in a common defensive struggle with the Poles. As a “History of the Kaschuben People” tells it:

“The attitude of the Kaschuben people against the Prussian government changed greatly with the cultural struggle that began in 1872. The Kaschub person is deeply religious, especially in respect to the person of the pastor who to him is an object of reverence and veneration. Until the beginning of the cultural struggle, he had fully trusted the government, and there was even a widespread popular view that the king was of the Catholic confession. When the people saw the military police take steps against their pastor, they lost their previous trust in the government in one fell swoop and never quite regained it again.”

In Eastern Prussian Masuria, on the other hand, the Reformation had decided for Germany, as the referendum of 11 July, 1920 proved with a majority of 97.8 percent.

The control-test is provided by areas that once belonged to Austria, such as Upper Silesia. Because the confession there did not offer a benchmark for the demarcation of borders, people often did not know where they belonged when the time demanded of them an either-or.

For Protestant Pomeranian, however, the border line was clear. Far and near, the confession and church were not merely a secondary part, but a main thing, a core of homeland. Therefore, at the height of the crisis, in the Reichstag elections of 31 July, 1932, only 532 votes were cast for the Polish list—a share of 0.04 percent.

It was precisely for this cause that, far and near, had to have a devastating effect when the claim to the political homeland and belonging were ridiculed, with the throbbing of folklore, language, culture or even race—and this with a backdating to origins had never given it in such a fashion and with such a claim. In one sentence, political access to homeland and belonging, founded on forgery and delusion, has turned the history of the 20th century into a history of fear, the history of persecution, exile, expulsion.

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