

# **Last Prussians, or *Translatio Borussiae*<sup>1</sup>**

Tomasz Kamusella  
University of St Andrews

*Andrzyjowi Rocznikowi  
a  
Darkowi Jerczyńskiemu*

*My old home, the Monarchy, alone, was a great mansion with many doors and many chambers, for every condition of men. This mansion has been divided, split up, splintered. I have nothing more to seek for, there. I am used to living in a home, not in cabins.*

Joseph Roth 'The Bust of the Emperor'

'Prussia is no longer with us,' I hear. 'Dead,' they say, a half-forgotten Kingdom of Iron, erased from the map by the victorious Allies with the stroke of pen in 1947, the same year British India was divided one midnight. In the case of Prussia it was Law Forty-Six that did the job. On February the Twenty-Seventh, at the seat of the Allied Control Council in occupied Berlin, Generals Lucius D Clay, Sir Brian Robinson and Joseph Pierre Koenig, and Marshal Vassily Sokolovski signed the document. It opened with the chilling statement: 'The Prussian State, which from early days had been the bearer of militarism and reaction in Germany, has *de facto* ceased to exist.' The end. Irrevocably, the end with no reprieve in sight. No thought spared for the fact that in the 'early days', Prussia was not a Germany or even part thereof.

I have heard that not all of Prussia has vanished into thin air. A piece of it, a shred of the mirror that was shattered at Berlin, flew all the way down and got stuck in the woodlands, fields and marshes in the armpit formed by the Opava stream flowing into the Oder river, today in the far northeastern corner of the Czech Republic, just across the border from Poland. The German Oder is 'Odra' both in Czech and Polish, but the Czech name of the Opava brook is 'Oppa' in German and 'Opawa' in Polish. So many different names for the same, so far away from the

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Prussia of the late Middle Ages, this aqueous land is tentatively huddled, far away from everywhere else, by the southern littoral of the distant Baltic.

That Baltic Prussia of yesteryear is now divided between Russia and Poland, six hundred kilometers away from my home village of Czissowa. This hamlet is hidden from the relentless winds of history and globalization in the shadow of the Holy Mount of the Silesians, safely tucked under the protective mantle of Jesus's Grandma, Saint Anne, to whom the shrine on the top is devoted. *Anka*, 'Little Anne,' is what the villagers affectionately call the long-extinct volcano. Before 1945, when it was in Germany, the mountain (and the eponymous montane settlement at the top with a Bavarian air about it) was Sankt Annaberg, then in Poland it became officially known as Góra św. Anny. A EU-ropean compromise was reached in 2008, and the pilgrimage town is now bilingual Góra św. Anny / Sankt Annaberg. Not that much attention is paid by the ecclesiastical and secular lords to the Silesians, from among whom most pilgrims stem. Even less the hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church and their temporal counterparts care of the Silesian language, and of the fact that Silesians politely say of the shrine 'Świyntô Ana' or 'Anaberg.'

Similarly, my Silesian and German neighbors in Czissowa, and my Polish friends from the nearby town of Kędzierzyn don't believe in the existence of any Prussians in the Czech Republic. 'Rumors, fools always fall for them,' is their typical comment, which also stands as a word of caution. But driving sixty kilometers for a mirage is a risk I am prepared to take on this day in May: sunny, yet not too hot. Perfect for sight-seeing with an unhurried lunch en route, that is a proper *oběd*, *Mitagessen*, a two-course meal rounded off with a dessert and washed down with coffee, to be eaten, as elsewhere in Central Europe, shortly after noon. What do I have to lose? Dispelling a myth to which I haven't yet developed an attachment. It's not much of a loss. Going six hundred kilometers north, all the way to Allenstein (which nowadays is Polish Olsztyn), or even further, across the EU-Russian border to Kaliningrad (that is, pre-1945 Königsberg) would cost me dearly in petrol and four long –ultimately boring and nerve-wrecking – days behind the steering wheel. There is still not a single freeway – *Autobahn* – that would allow for the easy crossing of Poland from south to north.

Who were (or are?) these elusive Prussians? By all signs in the heavens and on the earth, this forgotten people, more than half a century ago obliterated from history books, should fish and toil in the fields at the

Baltic seashores, instead of snuggling in the 'heart of Europe,' a badge of distinction claimed by the Habsburgs for Bohemia. The Czechs gladly concur, but wish for a bigger European heart that would contain all of their Czech Republic, including Moravia and Czech Silesia.

Enough thinking on the dry, and wriggling on the swivel chair trying to decide: to go or not to go? Off with me! The day is too beautiful to spend on fruitless broodings. Let's check out the facts on the ground.

I've started the engine of my silver metallic Toyota Yaris, bid a farewell to the Holy Mount and am already in the forest, crossing the former Adolf Hitler canal, now named after its industrial terminus in the city of Gliwice. The erstwhile charcoal burners' settlement of Kuźniczka welcomes me at the wood's other end, and sees me off to the sometimes wild river of Kłodnica. Horst Bienek eulogized it in his *Gleiwitz Tetralogy*, devoted to the lost land of childhood, lost to the mad realpolitik of the borders dancing to the beats of the whip of history that made his native German city into the Polish Gliwice. The traffic circle swallows the Toyota and then rapidly spits it out onto the dual carriageway. I speed westward, to the Oder, errr, Odra. The intervening roundabout greets me with the towering Tertium Millennium cross, as 'empty as our Catholic faith,' my father-in-law liked to sagely opine, prior to his departure from this world to the hereafter, on the invisible third and a half side of the Holy Mount.

To the right the cross is upstaged by a smaller pretender, erected in 1995, five years before the giant. In the snowy winter my Uncle driving his old Syrenka car tumbled over into the field, several meters lower than the tarmac. The thick duvet of snow cover cushioned the automobile's fall. Uncle survived, thanks to Blessed Virgin Mary the Mediatrix, he believes. As an alderman, he twisted the hand of the planning department, and in no time bought, from the devout farmer susceptible to pecuniary incentives, a suitably tiny plot of land, and had a traditional roadside cross erected.

In the summer of 1997 the area was devastated by massive flooding that, in the wake of week-long torrential rains, suddenly swelled across entire Central Europe, from the Danube in the south to the Oder drainage area in the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland. The mighty current of the primordial Oder – resurrected in its huge prehistoric bed, twenty kilometers wide – got hold of an armored amphibious cargo vehicle. The hapless conscript soldiers' cries for help were drowned by the roar of the elements, milling water in whirlpools, sucking in flotsam. The soldiers, too, were being swept to their early grave, but for the aforementioned

Mediatrix and her – that is, Uncle’s – cross. One of its puny arms stopped the amphibian. The water receded soon and the soldiers were saved. This was a miracle to be reckoned with by the gigantic Tertium Millennium cross with no achievements of this kind to its metallic soul.

The religious divagations and spats left behind, my car – courtesy of the new bridge – has jumped over the Oder and, is leaving Koźle on the right. I drive upward into the hilly land, heading for Racibórz. Yes, I am approaching the southern end of Upper Silesia, but I should be thinking of the Prussians and their land. They were an ethnic group, close to today’s Latvians and Lithuanians, who know these original Prussians as *Prūši* and *Prūsai*, respectively. The early Prussians’ fault was that they continued to profess their own religion, instead of Christianity, already preferred by their neighbors. The conclusion was simple: ‘You are not a Christian, which means I can grab your land and kill you with impunity.’ The caveat was: ‘Should you accept Christ, you may save your life and enjoy the privilege of working for me for free, as a God-fearing serf.’

The crusading Ordo Sanctae Mariae Teutonicorum Ierosolimitanorum (or Order of Brothers of the Teutonic House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem) made good on this promise of guiltless slaughter and easy riches, following the loss of Jerusalem in 1187 and of the Order’s seat near Acre (today, Akko in Israel), that fell to the Muslims in 1271. The knights had developed a Plan B for this occasion. Half a century earlier, in the late 1220s they had embarked on an easier northern crusade in the southern Baltic littoral. They jotted down the name of the Prūši in their own Germanic tongue as *Pruzzen*, and conveyed it into Latin as *Pruteni* or *Prutheni*. It was the source of the now antiquated, but most appropriate, English name of ‘Pruthenians’ for this people, even more forgotten than the former Prussia banished from the map of Europe sixty-six years ago.

The successful conquest in the name of Christ and his Gospel of Love spelled the end of the Pruthenians. Their language and culture lingered for a while yet were all but gone by the Seventeenth century. The modern German name for the Pruthenians, *Preußen*, yielded the exactly eponymous name of the German land, known as ‘Prussia’ in English. I said ‘German,’ pardon me. Most of the knights and their descendants spoke various Germanic idioms before the Nineteenth century when the new generation settled on the foreign *Hochdeutsch*, or standard German, which had to be acquired laboriously in elementary school, like Latin.

Akin to the Pruthenians, their fellow Baltic-speakers, Lithuanians and Latvians were harder nuts to crack. They survived the loving Christianization meted out by the Order and its successors, Protestant dukes. From the Slavic land of Mazovia, Catholic settlers arrived in southern Prussia, where they gave rise to the ethnic group of Lutheran Mazurs in the Sixteenth century. At the westernmost end of their monastic realm, pushing across Pomerania in the direction of the Holy Roman Empire, the knights seized the Hanseatic City of Danzig (Gdańsk) from Poland in 1308. The Slavophone group of Catholic Kashubs lived around the city, and they still reside in this area. Since 2005 their Kashubian language has been officially recognized as another language of the Polish nation (alongside Polish). Following their defeat at the hands of the Polish-Lithuanian armies in 1410 at the Battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald in Polish, Griunvald in Ruthenian, or Žalgirio in Lithuanian) and further unsuccessful warring, in 1466 the knights gave up the western half of their realm with the coveted Hansestadt of Danzig to the Kingdom of Poland.

What about the Pruthenians? Their name was forgotten, forgotten almost for good. Nowadays, when their memory is recalled, the Pruthenians need to be referred to as 'Old Prussians,' so as not to confuse them with the Low German-speakers of post-medieval Prussia.

In 1525, the Teutonic Grand Master Albert of Brandenburg-Ansbach, a Hohenzollern, became a Lutheran and paid homage to the Polish-Lithuanian monarch. It was the end of the Catholic Teutonic Knights' rump dominion in Prussia. Their estate was seized by the newly created Duke of Prussia and by the disloyal burghers residing in the land's rich Hanseatic cities. Some knights joined in this confessional revolution of grabbing privatization, too. What did not change was the fate of the serfs. Mostly of Pruthenian origin, they remained serfs, held equally tight by the knights and their Protestant successors. Their toiling on the land was not for its owners. As always, the owners were busy with more pressing questions of faith and power, that is, of owning.

Those knights who remained loyal to the Order had to leave the newly Protestant Prussia, now a Polish fiefdom. The nearby province of Royal Prussia in Catholic Poland was not an option; as the Order's former exploits were not really appreciated there. Instead, the loyalists found refuge in a clutch of small territories possessed by the Teutonic Knights across the Holy Roman Empire. The recurrent religious wars, sealed with the apocalyptic conflagration of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) expelled them farther south, confining their remnants to the Habsburgs'

hereditary lands, where at long last they found a safe haven. Napoleon deprived the Order of its lands outside the Austrian Empire (founded in 1804 from the Habsburgs' territories in the southern half of the Holy Roman Empire), and he finally dissolved the ancient Ordo Sanctae Mariae Teutonicorum Ierosolimitanorum in 1809. The knights had to make do with the Order's small bailiwicks of Tyrol and Austria in their impoverished and diminished lap.

Meanwhile, the Protestant Prussia of the Baltic Sea grew from strength to strength. In 1618 it joined Brandenburg to form a common monarchical polity. In 1701 the weakened Polish-Lithuanian king had no choice but to let the fief of Ducal Prussia go, and recognize the elevation of its duke to the rank of 'King in Prussia.' This elevation of the Elector of Brandenburg and Prussian Duke, Friedrich (number III in the former role, and number I in the latter), was facilitated by the Catholic Habsburg Emperor, Joseph I, who needed all the military help he could muster to confront the French Bourbons over the succession to the Spanish throne.

The Polish-Lithuanian monarch at that time was the Elector of Saxony, Augustus II the Strong. In 1697, in order to be eligible for election to the Polish-Lithuania throne, he had converted to Catholicism. Warsaw turned out to be 'well worth a Mass,' but earned him the reputation as a confessional turncoat. His newly-found Catholicism made him more obliging to the Emperor's will, causing some of the Polish-Lithuanian nobles, led by Stanisław Leszczyński, to contest his rule. This challenge proved successful, and Leszczyński replaced Augustus on the Polish-Lithuanian throne for five years, between 1704 and 1709.

Thanks to this serendipitous constellation of dynastic and religious interests, and to territorial politics at that time, the composite realm of Brandenburg-Prussia became the Kingdom of Prussia. The scattered territories extending from the French frontier to Muscovy (made the Russian Empire in 1721) were gathered under a unified royal supervision. The counting of the monarchs of the new kingdom was commenced ab novo; the Brandenburgian Friedrich III and the Prussian Duke Friedrich I, coalesced into the kingdom's singular King Friedrich I. The former Ducal Prussia became a province of East Prussia, the name of Prussia extending now for one thousand five hundred kilometers from eastern France to northwestern Muscovy.

In the early 1740s, the Prussian King Friedrich II, taking advantage of the legal problems the Habsburgs faced with no male successor, conquered their richest province, Silesia. This annexation left Maria

Theresia with a 'mere fence' (as the contemporary saying had it), that is, with the southern sliver of Upper Silesia, which came to be known as 'Austrian Silesia.'

In the first partition of Poland-Lithuania (1772), Prussia seized the western half of the Teutonic realm lost to Poland three centuries earlier. It became the province of West Prussia, which usefully connected the Prussian and Brandenburg sections of the Kingdom of Prussia into a single continuous territory. In the two further partitions of Poland-Lithuania (1793 and 1795) Prussia annexed Gdańsk (which was named Danzig, again) and most of the lands from which today's western and central Poland is composed (that is, Mazovia and Wielkopolska), including the Polish-Lithuanian capital of Warsaw. The newly-formed provinces of South Prussia and New East Prussia with their seats in Posen (Poznań) and in Warschau (Warsaw) replaced the large 'Polish wedge' between East Prussia and Silesia with even more Prussian territory. At that time close to two thirds of the Prussian king's subjects spoke a form of Slavic, not German or a Germanic dialect.

Prussia not only extended southward as a typical dynastic polity, but also spread its name, renaming each land where Prussian armies ventured as another Prussia. From the original land of the Pruthenians in the secluded and wooded southeastern corner of the Baltic littoral, their name ranged widely, as far as the feet of the Sudeten Mountains in the south, that is, seven, eight hundred kilometers away from the Baltic Sea. In the relentless translation of the late medieval into the early modern, the Pruthenians not only lost their lives and community, but even the right to their own name. They forgot to copyright it, their fault. Thus, no acknowledgement for them in history's credits.

The streak of Prussia's geopolitical fortune ran out with the eastward onslaught of the Napoleonic armies. Prussia stood in the way of Imperial France, blocking its extension to the Russian borders and beyond. In 1807 a repentant Friedrich Wilhelm II had to give up the short-lived and beautifully named South Prussia (Wielkopolska) and New East Prussia (Mazovia) in order to preserve the teetering existence of his realm. Both lost provinces were incorporated into the French protectorate of the Duchy of Warsaw. The Polish-Lithuanian nobility were unreservedly loyal to Napoleon, trusting, in vain, that the duchy would be the first stage to the 'resurrection' of their lost patria of Poland-Lithuania. But the Corsican needed it only as a secure bridgehead for launching a fateful campaign against the Russian Empire.

In the year following Napoleon's 1812 debacle at Moscow, Friedrich Wilhelm II delivered the famous speech *An Mein Volk* (To my People) in order to mobilize his subjects against the French armies. This event took place in Breslau (today, Wrocław in Poland), the provincial capital of Silesia, at a secure distance from the Prussian capital of Berlin, still crawling with French spies and envoys.

In coalition with the Russians and other anti-Napoleonic forces, Prussians entered Paris in 1814. Instrumental to this success was the now forgotten Klodnitzer Kanal (nowadays, Kanał Kłodnicki in Poland), the forerunner of today's Gliwice Canal (Kanał Gliwicki) that separates Czissowa from Kędzierzyn. Again, serendipitously finished in 1813, the Klodnitzer Kanal connected the budding metallurgical and coal mining complex in the Upper Silesian town of Gleiwitz and its vicinity with the Oder. Weapons produced there had been swiftly transported to Breslau, which straddles the Oder, thus securing the initial momentum in the struggle against French troops who were badly overextended from Lisbon to Moscow.

The Congress of Vienna (1815) reintroduced a modicum of the old order. Tellingly, its documents refer to Prussia as a 'Slavic-Germanic' realm. But it was the victorious Russian Tsar Alexander I to whom most of the lands of the Duchy of Warsaw were given, reshaped now into a Kingdom of Poland in personal union with the Russian Empire. Friedrich Wilhelm III had to content himself with the western half of the former South Prussia, minus the name of Prussia. 'West-Southern Prussia' would not have sounded too bad, but the land was dubbed as an equally grand Grand Duchy of Posen. But it was, nevertheless, a loss to the undeclared mission of spreading the name of Prussia wider and wider.

Napoleon's dissolution of the Order of Teutonic Knights was eventually prevented by the Holy Roman Emperor, now the Austrian Emperor. Francis II of the former imperial realm, who became Francis I of Austria would do everything in his power to frustrate French usurpations in *his* Mitteleuropa (Middle Europe, nowadays known as 'Central Europe' among English-speakers). He saw to it that beginning with the founding of the Austrian Empire in 1804, a Habsburg became the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. The seat of the Order was moved to Vienna, where it remained ensconced under the watchful gaze of the Emperor's eye until after the Great War.

Meanwhile, a semblance of the Holy Roman Empire was re-established in the form of the German Confederation. This confederation contained only the western half of the Austrian Empire, its Hungarian lands remaining

outside. The participation of Prussia in this confederation was similarly half-hearted, since its 'true heart' of East and West Prussia, with the Polish-Lithuanian addition of the Grand Duchy of Posen, stayed out. Imperious Austria bossed Prussia and the other members of the confederation until the middle of the Nineteenth century. Soon after Vienna lost in the unfolding economic and industrializing competition to Berlin, whose victory was sealed by the deadly 1866 military defeat, dealt by Prussia to the Austrian armies at Königgratz (Hradec Králové, today in the Czech Republic) in northern Moravia, a stone's throw from Austrian Silesia in the east.

This momentous event extinguished the confederation and opened the way for the 1871 founding of the German Empire, composed from Prussia and the polities in the northern half of the erstwhile confederation, *not* ruled by Habsburgs. What a success! But not for the name of Prussia, which at exactly this moment disappeared from the political map of Europe, erased, as it no longer denoted the name of any sovereign state. The Kingdom of Prussia became a mere province of the new-style nation-state. But what a province!, accounting as it did for almost two thirds of this novel Germany's territory.

The First World War turned Central Europe into ashes. Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire were gone. Brand-new nation-states replaced the former empire and the western borderlands of the latter. Prussian King Wilhelm II, simultaneously reigning as German Emperor, abdicated in 1918. But even without any monarch at their helm, the German Empire and its largest province of the Kingdom of Prussia did survive. As in the case of the interwar Kingdom of Hungary ruled by the Admiral-cum-Regent, monarchs turned out to be mere political decorations, not indispensable for the happy and continued existence of empires and kingdoms.

The deposed Habsburgs did not have it as easy in comparison with the Hohenzollerns. Following the breakup of the Dual Monarchy, a small interwar republican Austria was all that remained from the imperial lands extending from Bukovina to Vorarlberg and from Austrian Silesia to Dalmatia. Though Vienna granted the dynasty's members Austrian citizenship and passports, the government decided that it had to expel them in order to preserve the country's newly-found republican character. Emperor Charles vindicated the Austrian republicans' fears by attempting to win back the royal throne of the rump Kingdom of Hungary *twice* in 1921.

The Order of Brothers of the Teutonic House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem, seen as a docile tool of the House of Habsburgs and a throwback from the ancien régime, was not welcome in interwar Austria, either. The last hereditary Habsburg Grand Master, Archduke Eugen of Austria, resigned from the post in 1923. Otherwise, the Order might have been dissolved and its possessions nationalized. In 1923, in order to escape secular Vienna's constant scrutiny and distrust, the knights moved their seat to the small montane town of Freudenthal, or Bruntál, in Austrian Silesia, now within the frontiers of the new nation-state of Czechoslovakia.

To a degree the move was in keeping with the Archduke's full surname, von Österreich-Teschen: the second part of the double-barreled name. 'Teschen' refers to the second most important town of Austrian Silesia that in 1920 was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The part accorded to the former state, included Teschen's historical center, and became known as Cieszyn. Prague had to content itself with the town's industrial section and the railway station that crucially ensured the sole rail connection between the Czech lands and Slovakia. The Czechoslovak half of Teschen was renamed Český Těšín.

Norbert Klein, a knight and the Bishop of Brno in southern Moravia, relieved the Archduke of his duties as Grand Master. Klein's German-speaking background was detrimental to his episcopal work in officially Slavophone and ideologically anti-Catholic Czechoslovakia, so he resigned from leading the diocese in 1926. For the Grand Master moving to Bruntál was going home, as Klein had been born in the nearby village of Braunseifen (Ryžoviště) and began his high-flying ecclesiastical career as Prior of Troppau (Opava), the provincial capital of Austrian Silesia. This province, less its easternmost sliver given by the Allies to Poland in 1920 (and entailing the aforementioned split of Teschen), became known as 'Czech Silesia,' afterward.

The province was the only one in Czechoslovakia with a German-speaking plurality. This singularity disagreed strongly with the political emphasis on the Slavic character of the nation-state, so in 1928 Czech Silesia was merged with Moravia into a Moravian-Silesian Land, where German-speakers became a statistical minority. Recognizing the inevitability of keeping up with the changing times, Klein resigned from the Order's traditional crusading and paramilitary character by transforming it, in 1929, into a *Deutscher Orden* ('German Order'), or a typical monastic order.

Upon Klein's death in 1933, the post of Grand Master passed to the Moravian, Paul Heider, who had succeeded Klein as Prior (*Propst*, or the head of the main parish in the region) of Troppau (Opava) in 1916, when the latter had become Bishop of Brünn / Brno. A Moravian by birth, like the Archduke, Heider had served as a priest in various localities of Austrian Silesia since 1896. The new Grand Master ruled briefly, for a mere three years, over the veritable Indian summer of the Order in Czech Silesia. His successor, Robert Schälzky, not only was born in the same village as Klein, but was the latter's nephew. It is likely that this made him unpopular, and he was voted in to the position by such a slim margin that the embittered Schälzky had to be coaxed to assume the responsibilities of Grand Master.

The Third Reich amply employed the popular image of the chivalrous Teutonic knights as the 'civilizers' of the barbaric East, the notional 'barbarians' equated with Slavs and Bolsheviks. The stereotype, for better or worse, included the Baltic-speaking Lithuanians and Latvians (the Pruthenians' closest ethnic kin) in the outer confines of the Aryan race, among those peoples connected to the Germans proper by shared German culture, and thus Germanize-able. Slavs, with the rare exception of Czechs and Slovaks, were to be made into a subaltern class of servants to this pure race of masters, *Übermenschen*.

But the actual Order, defanged of its military pretences, as it then existed in its Catholic, pro-Habsburg and royalist fashion, it was of no use to Joseph Goebbels's Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. This 'really existing' Order was a disdainful pussy cat when put side by side the predatory-cum-'civilizational' lion-like memory of the 'real Order' of the glorious past. It would have been better for the war effort, if the lamely renamed *Deutscher Orden* had disappeared for good, rather than unduly trouble the powers that be with its whining protests and requests.

Following the Munich Agreement (1938), the Czech lands of Czechoslovakia were shorn of their border areas, and the latter incorporated into Germany as the so-called 'Sudetenland.' Almost all of Czech Silesia (apart from an eastern sliver, with all of Teschen, seized by Poland) found itself in this Sudetenland, including the knights' headquarters in the Bruntál palace. Both, palace and town, became Freudenthal again, Slavic names removed from the map and road signs. The Nazi administration expropriated and dissolved the Order in the Third Reich, meaning also in Austria, which the Third Reich had annexed in 1938.

Protests lodged with the Reich Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs were of no avail. Schälzky and his brethren were forced to leave the sumptuous palace in Freudenthal, and were left to their own devices. The Order survived in Italy's province of Venezia Tridentina, or in South Tyrol, seized from Austria-Hungary by Rome. This land in the midst of the Alps had turned out to be the Order's safe haven during the Napoleonic Wars, and again during another European conflagration, in the course of the Second World War.

To Benito Mussolini, then insisting on the Italianization of South Tyrol, the Deutscher Orden shunned by Berlin appeared to be an ally in the process, despite the adjective 'German' in its name. The alpine land was a good choice. The solid rock on which Peter built his Church was safer than the Order's earlier addiction to maritime solutions. The knights were no Christs, able to walk on water, when Europe was ablaze. Mortals need to obey earthly rules that do not bind genuine mystics, but these are always in short supply.

When Schälzky's term in office as Grand Master expired in 1942, Pope Pius XII extended it, loath to see an arm of the Roman Catholic Church amputated for good. Schälzky and the closest circle of his brethren continued to reside in Freudenthal, as unattached and good-for-nothing clergymen or monks in the eyes of the powers that be. Nine hundred kilometers away from the surviving recognized seat of the Order in northern Italy.

A tiny thorn, but a thorn nevertheless, in the rapidly souring relations between the Axis allies. Following the collapse of Italy in 1943, Hitler endowed Mussolini with the northern Italian polity of Repubblica Sociale Italiana (Italian Social Republic). Although Venezia Tridentina formally remained part of the new republic's territory, Berlin extended de facto military control over it in the form of an Operationszone Alpenvorland (Operational Zone of the Alpine Foothills). The unsung reunification of Tyrol was accomplished, but the authorities faced with the Soviet victories on the eastern front, had no time to deal with the German Order. This bureaucratic oversight meant its survival, however, tenuous.

In 1945, the tired Grand Master and the remaining members of the Order fled from the Sudetenland before the advancing Red Army. The war was over soon, so they made their way back on foot to Freudenthal that had already been transformed back into Czech Bruntál. It was all for nothing. Classified as Germans – the adjective 'German' in the Order's name being of no help, as it had not been in the Third Reich, either – Schälzky and

his brethren were expelled from Czechoslovakia to Vienna. The seat of the Order was re-established in this former Austrian capital divided among the Allies. However, the financial and material state of the brethren was so precarious that the Grand Master could not even pay for his medicines and hospitalization. Schälzky died in 1948, when visiting a prospering Italian house of the Order in Lana, South Tyrol, that is, in the province of Trentino-Alto Adige.

It was the end of the Silesian and Prussian connection for the German Order. Despite all the wrongs experienced at the hands of Hitler's Germany, and the brethren's silent loyalty to the Habsburgs, they nevertheless saw the adjective 'German' as more fitting for the name of their Order than 'Prussian.' After the war, 'Prussia' had unwanted associations, as did 'Germany.'. Settling for 'Pruthenian,' or even better, 'Prūši,' could have been an excellent solution to the dilemma. Why not adopt the name of those whom the original knights vanquished. That would be a more suitable repentance than organizing pilgrimages to the Holy Land, vel Israel and Palestine, with which the Grand Master and his brethren busy themselves nowadays. But Jerusalem is a much better trademark than the forgotten Pruthenians, civilized out of existence.

'Hear, hear,' I exclaimed. It could be the right trail to follow. Freudenthal sounded so enticing, announcing in the quaintly antiquated German, a 'valley of joy,' or Vallis Gaudiorum as the learned liked to refer to their town in Latin until the Nineteenth century. A good, self-promoting name, which undoubtedly acquired quite an ironic undertone during the Second World War, which plunged Europe into darkness. To those at the receiving end and to observers who stood helplessly watching this decent into hell, such cozy and Central European towns, as Freudenthal, like the rest of the wartime continent, appeared to be the boundless vale of tears.

The small but beautifully turned out town of Bruntál, not scarred too much by rampant industrialization in communist Czechoslovakia, today lies in the Czech Republic. It is a stone's throw from where I am heading. Maybe the disaffected knights planted some dormant seeds of Prussiandom there, I have often mused, when they resided in their Czechoslovak refuge. And now I am to see the flowering of what they planted. But first thing first, as I still need to drive up there.

In Racibórz, at the busy and confusingly elongated roundabout in the shape of the figure of eight, made from two former traffic circles, I have turned in the direction of Opava. Approaching the Polish-Czech border, not guarded since late 2007, when the Czech Republic and Poland joined

the Schengen Area of free travel, I have a sudden recollection of Silesians from Texas. A delegation of them came to the land of their ancestors after the fall of communism, on a pilgrimage to the Sankt Annaberg shrine on the Holy Mount. They wine and dined in the ancient town of Sławięcice, or ten minutes by bus from my Czissowa. The delegates' ancestors had migrated to Texas from the mountain's vicinity in 1852, seven years after the admission of the Republic of Texas to the United States.

The hopeful emigrants left with the fresh memories of the now largely forgotten string of potato blight-induced crop failures that scarred all Central Europe's peasantry in the 1840s, as much as the Great Famine did the Irish during the same time; but in Mitteleuropa it happened on a much bigger scale. For two years the Silesian pioneers traveled to the 'Wild West,' led by their Franciscan priest, Leopold Moczygamba. The last stage of the way to their land grant near San Antonio they covered on foot. The closely-knit community of these Silesian Catholics arrived at the destination on the Christmas Eve of 1854. In recognition of this auspicious coincidence, the town they built was named Panna Maria, or Holy Virgin Mary.

The United States authorities registered the settlers as 'Prussians,' because they came from the Kingdom of Prussia. In their letters back home Panna Maria-ites referred to themselves and their kin remaining in Upper Silesia as 'Prussians.' Unlike today's stereotype that sees Prussia as a synonym for Germany, or even for the idealized pure national community of Germans only, to the Upper Silesian settlers in Texas, their Prussia appeared as a multilingual land of Protestants and Catholics, united under the Prussian King's benevolent rule. After all, it was a mere two generations after the Congress of Vienna, which had dubbed Prussia as a 'Slavo-German' kingdom.

The peasants had already lost any attachment to the Habsburgs. It was under the Prussian King that they were freed from the last shackles of serfdom in 1849. That was the most momentous event in their living memory, and there had been nothing comparable for which they could be thankful to the Habsburg Emperor. Less than a century after the conquest of Silesia, the Lutheran King of Prussia had made these Catholic and Slavophone Upper Silesians into staunch Prussians.

The largely happy status quo was breached by the founding of the German Empire in 1871. Two years later all languages but German were removed from the state's schools and offices. In order to become a

German, as the brand-new empire required, one had to speak German and be a Protestant. It was a shock to the Slavic (Upper) Silesians. Prussiandom was more flexible and practical. At home Silesians spoke their Silesian language, during the Holy Mass they mumbled liturgical Latin, in the early grades of elementary school they were inducted to the mysteries of the written word in Polish that was also the language of prayer books and pastoral services, while a smattering of German – acquired later in elementary education – came in handy in a state office. What counted were not these idle puffs of air that go by the name of language, or some scrawny letters committed to paper, but unwavering loyalty to ‘our Prussian *König*,’ proved by patient service in numerous wars in which the country had been engaged.

Now the entente cordiale between the monarch and his subjects was unexpectedly over. The state – involved in over a decade long national *Kulturkampf* (‘war of culture’) against the non-national universalism of the Roman Catholic Church, waged until 1888 – did not manage to sever the connections of the German Catholic dioceses with the Holy See. But this ideological struggle that deprived the faithful of bishops and priests alienated the Silesians and the other German- and non-German-speaking Catholics in the German Empire. Faced with this outrage, an average Silesian wanted the old Prussia back on the political map of Europe, so that he could be a good Prussian again. This wish was not granted.

Irrevocably, Prussians became a thing of the past. Prussia remained a province of the German Empire, but the law did not allow one to be a citizen of a mere province, and talking of a Prussian nation already smacked of treason. Peasants must be practical. Falling for sentiments may leave your family dying of hunger in early spring. It is not peasants who set the rules of the game called ‘IdEnTiTy,’ but politicians in the faraway capital. The Silesians acquiesced, after the government allowed them to profess their Catholic faith freely, and they did their best to become good, but nevertheless Catholic, Germans.

The Prussian identity lingered for some time longer in Panna Maria, however it disappeared without a trace at the beginning of the twentieth century, the font of Prussiandom already dry in Europe. The Silesians of the Texan town became Americans, but until the onset of television in the mid-twentieth century, they retained Silesian as the language of their community. Similarly, until then one could easily find Bohemian-, Moravian- and Sorbian-speaking towns strewn across Texas’s dry landscape, all founded by Nineteenth-century settlers from southern Prussia and Austria’s Czech lands.

The prematurely deceased scholar, Kevin Hannan, was lucky enough to grow up in this Slavophone milieu of pre-television Texas. His knowledge of Silesian and Moravian acquired at home predisposed him to become the first-ever student to receive a PhD in Slavic languages from the University of Texas at Austin. He devoted his doctorate *Borders of Language and Identity in Teschen Silesia* (1996) to the Heimat, 'old country,' or the Slavophone-Germanic borderlands of Germany's Prussia and Austria-Hungary's Silesia, Moravia, Galicia and Upper Hungary. Nowadays the area is split among the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. Its old tolerant Prussian-Austrian-Hungarian and Polish-Lithuanian spirit of many tongues spoken to communicate with neighbors, of confessions deftly circumvented so that they would not impinge on marriages, and of capacious identities is all but gone. It is replaced by the national homogeneities of language and identity that strictly coincide with the state frontiers.

The shred of the broken mirror of Prussiandom I am looking for is not to be found in America. Alas, it is there no more. Pondering wistfully on the question of where the real Prussia still may be, I fail to notice I've crossed the now invisible Polish-Czech border. The empty buildings of the border crossing check point is a give-away, but even more the change in the color of the tarmac, visibly darker on the Czech road leading to the small town of Sudice. Another thing are signs, there is no mistaking Czech letters and spelling for the Polish language. The physical border, reinforced by soldiers ready to fire at 'illegal crossers,' is gone, but that of different idioms and diacritical letters – the veritable narcissism of small differences – has stayed.

It will take longer to blunt its sharp edge, a generation or two. Love knows no borders and is happy to take chances, when life is no more endangered by trigger-happy border guards. In spite of, or maybe even because of, speaking differently, lovers from the bureaucratically disappeared borderlands first will twist their tongues, before their children will do the same with their parents' languages. For once people will seal for good the fate of the frontiers that scarred the lives of their ancestors for the better part of the Twentieth century.

In the past, the current Czech-Polish frontier separated Austria-Hungary and the German Empire. But you could then cross it at will, wherever you wanted, with neither the hassle of paperwork nor that of looking for an authorized border crossing. What is more, on both sides the same Upper Silesia extended, spanning the boundary with fields, farms and families

speaking the same Slavic dialect, and more rarely standard German acquired through hard study at school and on seasonal work stints in Berlin or Vienna.

Then, frontiers were still what they should be, notional lines separating states, of interest to politicians and cartographers, but of no bearing on the Everyman's life. Nowadays, after nine decades of state-sponsored border terror from 1918 to 2007, we are back to square one. With the privilege of hindsight, from the Central European vantage, the short Twentieth century of dictatorships and of the two totalitarianisms looks like a long and unnecessary detour from normalcy via lunacy back again to normalcy.

But there I go again, flying off on a tangent. What place do the Prussians have in all that? Have I forgotten them? No. But I beg some patience.

Obviously, there is no Dual Monarchy nor any German *Kaiserdom* in sight today, and not even a Czechoslovakia. But I am wrong about the frontier. In 1918 it lay more than twenty kilometers farther south from Sudice (then known as Zauditz), almost touching Austria-Hungary's cities of Troppau and Ostrau (Ostrava), the latter at the center of Vienna's largest industrial basin, which later became 'the republic's steel lungs' in Czechoslovakia. Here, where I am driving now, it was still Germany before the armistice, or Prussia as the area's inhabitants continue to claim to this day. They speak of their land endearingly as *Prajzsko* or *Prajská*, which in the local Slavic tongue means 'Little Prussia.' The big Prussia of old was *Prusy*, or *Prusko*, as Czechs dub it nowadays in history textbooks.

Maybe after all, I won't need to continue to Bruntál, forty kilometers west of Opava and across the wooded mountains, where I could count on communicating with only the spirits of the Teutonic knights, if even that. Now a chance has appeared to encounter a living Prussian in his natural element, in his Prussian Heimat. I decided to seize this rare opportunity, as exciting as observing a fossil fish sprightly and alive, while it is dashing through the deep blue of the sea.

Until 1920 *Prajzsko* constituted the southern half of Ratibor (Racibórz) County in the German Empire. Czech national activists claimed this land for Czechoslovakia and its inhabitants for the Czech nation, because in the German censuses the language of the majority of the population living there was recorded as *Mährisch*, or 'Moravian.' In 1919, in the Palace of Versailles, the Allies decided that the future *Prajzsko*, slightly

more than three hundred square kilometers, with its nearly fifty thousand inhabitants, would be given to Prague. Nobody consulted the people concerned, who saw those living across the border rivulet Oppa in Austria-Hungary as *Cíсарáky* or *Cíсорóky*, meaning 'people loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Emperor,' that is, his subjects. Prajzsko was part of the Kingdom of Prussia, and its inhabitants swore allegiance to the Prussian-cum-German Monarch.

During the same year of 1920, when Prajzsko passed to Czechoslovakia, the Allies gifted a similar territory of three hundred and eighty square kilometers to Poland. The area, located in the north of Upper Silesia, was centered on the town of Groß Wartenberg (Syców). Simultaneously, the eastern half of Austrian Silesia was split between Czechoslovakia and Poland including its main city of Teschen. Also during the same year, 1920, the Allied forces took over the administration of most of Germany's province of Upper Silesia. For two years the Commission Interalliée de Gouvernement et de Plébiscite de Haute Silésie (Interallied Commission for the Government of and [for the Preparation of] the Plebiscite in Upper Silesia) governed the region from its seat in Oppeln (Opole). Unlike in the previous situations, on this occasion the inhabitants were consulted on the future fate of their homeland in the plebiscite of 1921. The majority voted for Upper Silesia to stay in Germany, but the vox populi was not to be respected. In 1922 the Commission presided over the complicated, painful and protracted division of the region between Germany and Poland.

This complex, multilateral section and resection of historical Upper Silesia (composed of Prussia's Upper Silesia and Austrian Silesia) sent waves of refugees across the newly established borders that tore their homeland apart. The tragedy of the common man, woman and child went unnoticed in faraway Paris, London or Washington.

It took August Scholtis, the Upper Silesian writer from the village of Bolatitz (Bolaticze) in Prajzsko, to care to listen to the sad stories of Upper Silesians about their region cut into pieces and their lives turned upside down, and often into ashes. Stemming from a poor peasant family, he completed only elementary education. Earning a living as a lowly bricklayer, Scholtis self-taught himself. The young villager's brilliance and hard work caught the attention of none other than Prince Karl Max von Lichnowsky, a high-flying German diplomat. Scholtis was made the prince's valet and secretary, mainly responsible for running the Von Lichnowskys' estates in Kreuzenort (today, Krzyżanowice in Poland) in southern Upper Silesia, between Ratibor and Hultschin. Following the

Great War, Scholtis administered farms, worked in banks and as a civil servant. After some protracted periods of unemployment, eventually, in 1929, he came into his own as a journalist and novelist based in Berlin.

Like the better known Joseph Roth, who in his writings lamented the destruction of the all-inclusive Central European patria of Austria-Hungary, thus depriving Central Europe's Jews of their home, Scholtis cried over the fate of the Upper Silesian pushed around by the pirouetting frontiers and the conflicting policies arbitrarily imposed on him by fiat from Paris, Berlin, Prague and Warsaw. The archetypal common Silesian, Kaczmarek, is the main character of Scholtis's first and best known novel, *Ostwind: Roman der oberschlesischen Katastrophe* (Wind from the East: A Novel on the Upper Silesian Catastrophe). *Nomen omen*, this warning against politicians' disrespect for the people at large, their desires and lives, appeared in Berlin in 1932, a year before the National Socialists, under Adolf Hitler's guidance, gained power in the Kaiser-less German Empire.

Kacper Teofil Kaczmarek, not enjoying the prospect of his homeland being included in either Czechoslovakia or Poland, and offending German sensibilities with his Slavic name, wanders aimlessly around the postwar wasteland of his Upper Silesia, all of a sudden so un-Upper Silesian any more. His quest for home is fruitless, the undivided Upper Silesia of many tongues and faiths is irrevocably gone, and in his travels and travails Kaczmarek cannot help but stray into the gradually mono-national and mutually opposed Czech, German and Polish Upper Silesias. The frontiers that criss-crossed the region after 1918 were to be reduced again to mere unobtrusive lines on the map only in 2007, when the Czech Republic and Poland joined the Schengen Area. Unfortunately, Kaczmarek never had a chance to live that long.

Scholtis followed *Ostwind* with another novel in 1934, *Baba und Ihre Kinder* (Baba and Her Children). He put the Slavic word *baba* for 'mature woman' in the title as the generic name for the book's character. Baba dared to walk on foot to the Jasna Góra (Clara Montana) Shrine of the Black Madonna in Częstochowa, then Chenstokhova in the Russian Empire, and to give birth, while on the way back to Upper Silesia. She speaks enough of all the languages in her corner of Mitteleuropa, to be 'from here,' or Tutejsza, as interwar Poland's statistics recorded those who persistently refused to identify with any nation on the official offer. Scholtis's elegy for the multilingual, accepting of differences Upper Silesia, Prussia and Central Europe of the pre-national good old times was not to the Nazi administration's liking. He was banned from writing

and publishing, first in 1933-1934, and again in 1941-1945. The plot lines of Scholtis's books were detrimental to the truly German culture. There was no place for the author and his weepy defeatism in the Greater German Empire of the Third Reich, just as there was none for the knights of the German Order.

But what about the Morawecs? What was the story of the people of Prajzsko, prior to the 1920 detachment of their island of Little Prussia from the Kingdom of Prussia submerged in the German Empire? The story of their homeland before European politicians carelessly cast this region adrift in the waters of the freshly former ocean of Kakania ripped up into the seas and bays of novel nation-states. Was Prajzsko an unimportant crumb at the high table of Great Power politics to be swiped away, disposed of at will? Unfortunately, as it was, ambassadors couldn't care less about Prajzsko, another small chip in the grand game, not unlike an Aden or a Latakia, barely remembered at the beginning of the Twenty-First century.

Earlier in Prajzsko, it wasn't necessary to call yourself a Prussian, as long as Císoróky kept to themselves on their own side of the border beyond the Oppa. The Holy See never recognized the Prussian conquest of Habsburg Silesia in the mid-Eighteenth century, and that is why the ecclesiastical boundaries were not adjusted to the new political frontiers, as the custom generally is. Most of historical Silesia was included in the Archdiocese of Breslau, whereas the southernmost area of Upper Silesia was in the Archdiocese of Olmütz (Olomouc), largely coterminous with the Margravate of Moravia. The new Prussian-Habsburg border left a piece of this Archdiocese in the newly Prussian Silesia, and two pieces of the Breslau Diocese in Austrian Silesia.

The fragment of ecclesiastical Moravia lost in Prussia mostly overlapped with the southern half of Ratibor County. The Slavophone Catholic peasants, mistrustful of the Protestant ruler, stuck to their faith and to their Moravian Archbishop. They preferred to call themselves *Morawci* in their own idiom, which after 1849 became the medium of their schools, and thus acquired a written form. The Morawec language was quite close to the Bohemian (Czech) of Prague, bar some regionalisms, the rich infusion of German(ic) words and phrases, and a few peculiarities of spelling. For example Czechs preferred the letter 'v' in place of the Morawecs' letter 'w.' Hence, in Czech the Morawecs' name is *Moravci*. In German it became *Morawzen*, but in official Prussian and German statistics they were known as *Mährer*, or Moravians.

It begot confusion, as according to Morawecs, Moravians were *Císoróky*. Moravians, on the other hand, spoke of themselves as *Morawané*, while Czechs wrote down the name of Moravians as *Moravané*. Again, where Moravians used to keep the letter 'w,' Czechs replaced it with 'v.' To Moravians, Morawecs were *Morawci*. The groups were as close – or as distant – to each other as Franks to French or Slovaks to Slovenes.

The type of print also marked further divisions and affinities. Czech- and Moravian-speakers, beginning in the second half of the Nineteenth century, preferred books and newspapers in their languages to be printed in Antiqua, or the type commonly used in English and in other languages that employ the Latin alphabet for writing and book production. Leaders of the Czech national movement did so to make Czech-language texts graphically different from German ones, typically published in *Fraktur*, or a kind of Black Letter, also known as the Gothic type. On the other hand the Morawecs kept *Fraktur* for books and periodicals in their language to draw a firm line between themselves and the Czechs, Moravians and Silesians (who settled for Polish-language books in Antiqua), while simultaneously emphasizing their confessional and cultural closeness to German-speaking Catholics elsewhere in Prussia.

Father Cyprian Lelek was the first to write for the Morawecs in their own tongue. In 1844 he had his Gothic-type primer for children, *Slabikář a čítanku pro menší dítky*, published. Two years later it was followed by a textbook on the regional geography of Silesia, *Opis Slezska*. Lelek died in 1883, but ten years later, the publication of the weekly, *Katolické nowiny pro lid morawský w Pruském Slezsku*, began. This 'Catholic Newspaper for the Morawecs in Prussian Silesia,' printed in *Fraktur*, amounted to the first-ever continuous flowering of the literate Morawec-language culture. The weekly proudly announced on the title page that it was the sole Morawec-language newspaper published in Germany (*[j]ediné w morawské řeči vycházející nowiny w Německu*). Morawec-language books followed in the weekly's wake, too, though mostly on religious matters.

The dismantling of this nascent tradition of Morawec literacy began in 1920 with the transfer of Prajzsko to Czechoslovakia. First, the printing of this weekly was moved from Ratibor in Germany to Opava in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak authorities replaced *Fraktur* with Antiqua, w's with v's, and insisted on purging 'ugly Germanisms' from the newspaper's prose. These measures meant the wholesale supplanting of the Morawec language with standard Czech. Morawecs wanted their own Morawec-language periodical. As there were numerous Czech ones to be had in Czechoslovakia, they had no need for another one. Sales of the

Czechized weekly plummeted. It was allowed to go defunct in 1922; from Prague's point of view the difference between Morawecs and Czechs had been successfully bridged.

What Morawecs? What's that thing? Have people choosing to bear such an exotic name ever existed?

'Not really.'

'Really?'

In interwar Czechoslovakia, Prajzsko came to be officially known as the Hlučínsko, thanks to the area's largest small town of Hlučín. Until 1920 its name was written in German as Hultschin, so in this language the part of old Prussian lost to Prague was dubbed as the Hultschiner Ländchen. To the surprise of many Czechoslovak civil servants, the officially Czech-speaking Morawec parents expressly desired to send their children to German minority schools. This had to be prevented lest the lost tribe of the Czech nation, saved in 1920 from inevitable Germanization, would Germanize itself of its own accord. The parents didn't know what they were doing and what was good for them and their children. The government knew better.

Bitterness marred the Morawecs' further relations with Czechoslovak officialdom. Knowing little or next to nothing of German, Morawecs aspired to use this language, and feigned huge problems with understanding Czech. Watchful foreign correspondents heralded the birth of the Slavophone, but pro-German, Hultschiner. Czechs called him disparagingly a *Prajzák* ('Prussian'), but the Morawec-turned-Hultschiner didn't bat an eyelid, just insisted on the form *Prajz*, more usual in his own Morawec language.

This overnight change in the name of the Morawecs-turned-*Prajzové*, rubbed on their tongue, too, since then known as *prajština*, or the 'Prussian language.' Interwar Czechoslovak linguists and their Polish colleagues added to this veritable confusion of conflicting names christening the idioms of these newly-found Prussians, and of Czech Silesia's Moravians, Czechs and other Slavophones with the group name of *Lašská nářečí* in Czech and *gwary laskie* in Polish, meaning 'Lachian (sub-)dialects.' These dialects were declared as 'transitory' between Czech and Polish, with no role for German foreseen in this neat bilateral scholarly-cum-political arrangement between Prague and Warsaw.

The language of the *Prajzové*, or the Prussians of Prajzsko (Little Prussia), was arbitrarily subsumed in this freshly coined category. Once

again no one asked those concerned. The academic lumping of them with Cíсорóky, the Hlučín Prussians saw as odious, especially with those from this part of the Breslau Diocese that found itself in eastern Czech Silesia. This deft public relations move on the part of Prague diminished the perceived German character of the Hultschiners (to which they did strive to live up), and allowed to 'dissolve' the Prussians in a larger, indubitably Slavic ethnographic group of Lachians, with no political or cultural pretences. Usefully, there were no Lachians in sight on the ground, as the group was an invention of scholars and politicians.

Even more surprisingly, the bureaucratic-cum-'scientific' identity gerrymandering in the interest of Prague and Warsaw was over in the mid-1930s with the meteoric rise on the firmament of Czechoslovak literature of the excellent multilingual poet of socialist sympathies, Óndra Łysohorsky. He sang of the Lachian worker and peasant in his beautiful homeland of *Lašsko*, or Lachia. The poet alloyed the transitoriness of the Lachian dialects into a Lachian language written with diacritical letters borrowed in equal measure from Czech and Polish. The Morawec language was definitively over. The Prussian language was purely oral, and as such could be brushed aside as one of the Lachian dialects destined to die out in the course of modernization. But the appearance of this Lachian language was serious. It was not a joke any more.

A poetic project led to a linguistic one. And in Central Europe, so enamored of the belief that languages create nations and their patrias, this new language of Lachian could easily give birth to a new national movement in search of a suitable fatherland. The gut feeling was not far off the mark. During the Second World War Łysohorsky found a safe haven in the Soviet Union. His volumes of poetry were rapidly published in Russian translations, conducted by, among others, Boris Pasternak. Łysohorsky became a member of the All-Slavic Committee, in which he was to represent the Lachians and their homeland of Lachia, soon to be transformed into a nation-state in its own right.

Stalin lent his ear to Łysohorsky, perhaps eager to keep his options open when it would come to negotiating terms of the postwar settlement with Czechoslovakia. The idea of an autonomous or independent Lachia, thus doing away with Czechoslovakia's sole industrial basin, was a potent bargaining chip. Czechoslovak émigré politicians loathed Łysohorsky's influence in the Kremlin. In 1945 Stalin decided not to return to Prague interwar Czechoslovakia's easternmost province of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The Czechoslovak president let this disparagingly denoted 'Czechoslovak Siberia' go without an audible word of opposition. In the

good Twentieth-century fashion the region's inhabitants, the Ruthenians (Rusyns), were not consulted. Nowadays their homeland is Ukraine's Transcarpathia. In exchange for this 'sacrifice' Stalin permitted Prague to hold onto the provisional Lachia with its crown jewel of the republic's steel lungs.

Łysohorsky betrayed by the powers that be was banned from publishing in Lachian. According to Czechoslovak officials there had been no such language, there was no Lachian, and there would be no language by such name on the territory of Czechoslovakia, or elsewhere in the fraternal people's republics of the Soviet bloc. The poet was made to leave his Lachia, and found a new home in Bratislava, the capital of the Czechoslovak province of Slovakia. There was no love lost between Slovaks and Czechs, because the reestablishment of Czechoslovakia after the war robbed the Slovaks of their own wartime nation-state of independent Slovakia. Prague promised, but didn't keep its word, to ensure a wide-ranging autonomy for Slovakia within postwar Czechoslovakia. Unsurprisingly, Slovak intellectuals and officials sympathized with the plight of Łysohorsky, somewhat similar to the fate of their own country.

Unable to make his song heard in Lachian, the poet turned to the other of his two mother tongues, German. This could not be prevented; Prague was not able to deny the existence of this language of the fraternal people's democracy of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The poet's new, German-language collections of poems came off the press in East Germany, where on the undead trunk of Prussia the authorities were busy grafting the sapling of a socialist East German nation.

Symbolically, Łysohorsky died in 1989, when communism collapsed, the Soviet bloc broke up, and the old certainties disappeared into thin air. Neither Lachia, nor the Lachian tongue took off again. To add insult to injury, in the following year the Berlin wall fell and the capitalist West Germany absorbed the GDR. The socialist nation seeing its father in the figure the Prussian King, Friedrich the Great, vanished from the stage of European history without a whimper. However, the cultural and political flowering of the reunified Berlin as the capital of the similarly reunified Germany is steeped in the muscular Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (*Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz*). It takes care of the cultural and political legacy of the Kingdom of Prussia by running a total of twenty-seven surviving Prussian institutions, among them all of Berlin's state-owned museums, the Berlin State Library and the Prussian Privy State Archives. In the archives, the oldest documents date back to

the times of the Pruthenians in the State of the Teutonic Order on the Baltic littoral.

But are the curators of this virtual, demilitarized Prussia of culture and memory, Prussians themselves? No, they are Germans and good Europeans, perhaps hyphenated Europeans, that is, German-Europeans. Or maybe even post-post-modern Europeans, already free of hyphens, and of the stifling strictures of the past; not wanting to remember about uncomfortable events, such as the *Endlösung*, or the Teutonic-cum-Prussian genocide of the Pruthenians. Have they heard about the Prussians of Prajzsko? In all probability no, and the curators wouldn't like to meet them, either. These Slavophone Prussians reek too much of the pre-modern times, of pigsties, manure and technologically unsophisticated, though fashionably 'organic,' field work. Their multilingualism and history of unmerited and unjustified marginalization gives them more right to the distinction of being a 'proud Prussian,' than to the German-speaking European officials at the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. Prajzsko's Prussians, so far removed from the Baltic, appear to have so much in common with the Pruthenians.

The short Twentieth century cost the Prajzové dearly. In interwar Czechoslovakia bureaucrats did not permit them to send their children to German-medium schools. They were Czechs, pardon me, Czechoslovaks as the state's Constitution decreed, so only Czech-language educational institutions were open to the Prajzsko Prussians. Although, at three million, German-speakers were, after the Czechs, the second most numerous linguistic group in Czechoslovakia, they were deemed a minority. In order to convert them to Czechdom the border regions of Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia, where they mostly lived, were gradually starved of job opportunities.

The Great Depression of the early 1930s exacerbated their situation dramatically. But instead of learning Czech and finding gainful employment in Prague, Brno, Bratislava or Užhorod (Uzhhorod), the shameful shirkers migrated to the nearby areas of Germany or Austria. With the dynamic program of armaments, after the 1933 seizure of power, the National Socialists ensured employment and a decent standard of living to all who unquestioningly accepted their ideology and didn't happen to be a Jew or Rom.

Numerous Hlučín Prussians followed the example of their German-speaking neighbors, and many began to identify as Germans. In 1938 Britain and France betrayed Czechoslovakia. At Munich Neville

Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier signed an agreement with Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini that required Czechoslovakia to give up its predominantly Germanophone areas, or the so-called Sudetenland, to Germany (already enlarged with the annexation of Austria).

The good twentieth-century tradition of not consulting those concerned did continue. Thus, as a matter of course, Prague was not invited to the negotiating table in the Bavarian city of Munich. This sad development for the Czechoslovaks was greeted with celebrations by the Hlučín Prussians. Their Prajzsko returned to Germany, and in a manner much more visible to the common man, their region was back within the frontiers of Ratibor County, in turn housed safely in the Province of Silesia, which itself constituted part of the Land of Prussia. Hear, hear, Prajzsko – Little Prussia – was back again in Prussia. However, Warsaw seized the eastern half of Czech Silesia with its industrial basin for Poland. It was a warning. Every state was on its own grabbing as and where it could, national egoism at its acme. There was no return to the good old days, and the future would leave no stone unturned.

Prophecy of a coming Pan-European tragedy fell on deaf ears. Life was going from good to better. At long last the Prajzové could send their children to German schools and buy German newspapers in a kiosk. The best improvement was that now they could find work in their own region, and within the frontiers of their country of Germany. Previously, going there necessitated venturing abroad. The joy lasted exactly one year. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 cast a dark shadow on Europe and Prajzsko. Many a Prajz soon regretted the reincorporation of Prajzsko to Germany. Berlin had seized the rump Czech lands and turned them into a Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. If Prajzsko had been part of this administrative unit, Prajzové like the Czechs would not have been subject to the military draft.

After the defeat of the Third Reich in May 1945, the front lines stopped around the Protectorate. The Czech lands escaped unscathed; no significant military operation has scarred them since the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. Prajzsko was not so lucky, it was a theater of heavy fighting due to the proximity of the Ostrau (Ostrava) industrial basin.

At Potsdam, Winston Churchill (replaced midway by Clement Attlee), Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin decided on the new political order in postwar Europe. Czechoslovakia and Poland were reestablished, but the latter state was moved three hundred kilometers westward at the expense of Germany. (Yes, it is boring but necessary to repeat that none

of those concerned were consulted.) From the German territories east of the Oder-Neisse line Germans were to be 'transferred' (that is, expelled) to the little postwar Germany. The Sudetenland, (alongside Prajzsko) back in Czechoslovakia was to be emptied of its German population, as well. In Poland, Upper Silesia was exempt from this measure because Warsaw saw its indigenous inhabitants, Silesians, as 'autochthons,' or Germanized Poles inadequately aware of their innate Polishness. Prague adopted a similar policy to Prajzsko, declaring its inhabitants as Czechs who under the Germanizing pressure could not help but forget of their innate Czechness.

When a Prajz or a Silesian wanted to be recognized as a German and permitted to leave for postwar Germany, such a wish officially expressed was seen as a national treason and would cost a person fines, roughing up by civil militia, expropriation, or a spell in a forced labor camp. While Warsaw was set on the course of de-Germanizing its Silesians and teaching them how to speak correctly in Polish, Prague followed suit with regard to the Prajzové, except that the correct language which was taught to them was, obviously, Czech.

Prajzové, like Silesians, learned to lie low and say in reply to officialdom's questions what civil servants wanted to hear. The state did not trust the Prajzové, and they did not lay any trust in the state. During the 1968 Prague Spring of short-lived liberty, when socialism acquired briefly a human face, some Prajzové followed the example of their compatriots and left for West Germany and Austria before the Warsaw Pact intervention sealed off the frontier with the West. The Détente, after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, allowed more Prajzové to leave for West Germany, like in the case of Poland's Silesians. After crossing the Iron Curtain, Prajzové and Silesians received (West) German citizenship, apartments, integration aid money, year-long free language courses, and German-style pensions when already retired. In no time, they were indistinguishable from other Germans, and their children never mastered the languages of the old homelands, becoming monolingual Germans through and through.

Forced Czechization imposed on the Prajzové made them into staunch Germans, as Polonization did in the case of many a Silesian, especially those from interwar Germany's section of Upper Silesia. In communist Czechoslovakia Prajzové were not allowed to declare themselves to be Germans, or to found any German minority organizations. Silesians suffered the same disability in Poland. In the late 1980s, when the communist regimes were on their last legs, clandestine German

organizations emerged in Prajzsko and Poland's Upper Silesia. The fall of communism in 1989 ushered in democratization in Czechoslovakia and Poland, allowing for massive emigration of Prajzové and Silesians to Germany.

Shortly after, the German minorities were recognized in both states, with inclusion of Prajzové and Silesians, who no longer had to be Czechs and Poles, respectively, if they did not want to. After 1993, Berlin allowed members of both groups to receive German citizenship, without the necessity of prior migration to Germany, which previously was the very condition of the process. When the systemic transformation from centrally-planned economy to capitalism resulted in unbridled unemployment, German passports allowed Prajzové and Silesians to undertake seasonal work in Germany without any bureaucratic hassle. Even better, prior to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, these passports let them work wherever they chose across the entire Union, while this possibility became available to other citizens of the Czech Republic and Poland only after 2004.

Following the 1993 peaceful division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the economic situation in the former country stabilized by the turn of the Twenty-first century. Prajzové did not have to look for better employment and living opportunities outside of Prajzsko or the Czech Republic, unlike Silesians. The irresistible lure of the German passport and identity has dimmed. A Prajz could be proud of himself and Prajzsko anew. In Hlučín and Kravaře, the museums located in the local palaces support a revival of interest in the history and culture of Prajzsko. A veritable stream of brochures, books, DVD films, music CDs and thematic websites followed. In 2000 the historian and Prajz himself, Vilém Plaček, published the first-ever monograph on the Prajzové and Prajzsko written from their own perspective, *Prajzáci, aneb, K osudům Hlučínska 1742-1960* (The Prussians, or on the Fortunes of the Hlučínsko, 1742-1960).

In 2002 the poet, Lidie Rumanová, declared in the title of her collection of poetry in Praj(z)ština, or the Prussian language, that she and her countrymen want to be Prussians (*Chcu byč enem Prajz*). The Morawec language, stripped of literacy and demoted to the lowly status of an unwritten subdialect of Lachian in interwar Czechoslovakia, the latter idiom made into a language by Łysohorsky, summarily subdued after the war, is finally back under the name of the Prussian language. For a time, scholars clad in the high-sounding authority of their universities,

proclaimed that this language is nothing more than the *Hlučínské nářečí* or *Opavské nářečí*, Hlučín or Opava subdialect of the Czech language.

However, in a democracy, the voice of the majority counts more than the wily wishes of an intellectual or politician. Nowadays Prajzové can speak what they want, in a language of their own choice, and decide on their own community and homeland of Prajzsko in agreement with their desires. After almost a century of de-Morawec-ization, Czechization and Germanization, followed by another wave of Czechization, today's Prussian language is quite akin to Czech in vocabulary, spelling and syntax. But its users are emphatic that it is *not* Czech. They know best as they speak and write it. Perhaps there is no return to Fraktur or 'w' in the place of the Czech 'v.' But enthusiasts, local historians, amateur linguists, writers and poets shape and reinvent their Prussian-language literacy and culture back into existence.

The attraction of this newly found Slavic-cum-Germanic Prussiandom is such that Prussian-language folk story-tellers are regularly invited over to schools and social clubs on the Polish side of the border in Racibórz County. The county's Silesians start recollecting that the old ecclesiastical border between the Archdiocese of Wrocław (Breslau) and the Archdiocese of Olomouc (Olmütz) was adjusted in line with the Czechoslovak-Polish frontier only in 1977. The not so distant memory of the surviving ecclesiastical Moravianness convinces some that maybe they are not Silesians but *echte* (real) Prussians.

That is what I learned upon driving into and spending a charming afternoon in Hlučín. I visited the unassuming palace with the town's museum and a rich offering of publications on Prajzsko and in the Prussian language. Unfortunately, the decent bookshop Knihcentrum at the typically Central European market square dealt in the usual Czech fare, with no concessions to the Prussian language. But if the latter-day Prussians want to read and write in Czech, while speaking Prussian, why not? That is *their* choice, at long last.

Before returning home, my home, to the Silesian village of Czissowa, I am sipping an excellent Italian-style coffee in the Cukrárna Verona on the aforesaid market square. I'm thinking on what I've seen, 'They're Prussians. Good for them. But where's Prussia?' The café is crowded. Kids are running riot, while their mums are chatting. Dads, for sure, are headed for lager in a nearby *krčma*, pub.

A young lady is coming to my table and asks in Prussian if she may sit at my table. I agree, replying in Silesian. We have small talk. I learn she teaches Czech and German in a local elementary school. She smiles and in no time places me squarely in Upper Silesia on the basis of how I speak. As easy as that, I feel I am at home in this Prussia.

'Yes, of course, I'm from Upper Silesia,' I admit.

'I knew it.'

I waver a bit, but I do ask, 'Do you consider yourself a Prajz?'

'Yes, I do,' is her quick reply.

'But what does it mean, when there is no Prussia in sight.'

'You've got it wrong,' she is surprised, 'It's enough to look around to see it,' she is patiently explaining, the seraphic smile, again, playing on her elegantly rouged lips.

'I'm looking, but what I see is the Hlučínsko.'

'That's true, but we, Prussians, *are* Prussia,' she asserts proudly.

Perhaps it is high time the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz moved its seat to Hlučín, the monolingualism of Berlin not becoming the true memory of the multiethnic Prussia of old. It is more alive on this Prajzsko town's market square than on the Ku'damm.

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