

mini-state with six districts, the BSSR became a republic, which in the autumn of 1939 reached in the west to Lomza and Kolno—areas with an exclusively Polish and Jewish population. Earlier, by a decision of the central Soviet authorities, the territory of the BSSR was increased at the expense of the Ukrainian SSR and the Russian Federative SSR. Most strangely, this was taking place at a time when nationality policy changed to the disadvantage of non-Russian peoples in the USSR, and in the BSSR itself there was an intense struggle against all manifestations of national life. According to the author, the expansion of the borders of the BSSR was possible only because its inhabitants were characterized by low national consciousness and little capacity for self-organization. This guaranteed that the territorial strengthening of the BSSR would not strengthen the national spirit of the Belarusians.

Another equally interesting thread taken up in the monograph is the analysis of the formation of Belarusian statehood in relation to the Jewish question, and the Jewish settlement zones within the Russian Empire. These topics are just a small handful of the many threads S. tackles. Many of these are quite well known issues which have long been present in Polish and Belarusian historiography, but the author consistently forces the reader to approach them from new perspectives.

According to S., the expansion of Belarus's borders in the 1920s, carried out by the central authorities of the USSR, was possible because Belarusians lacked national elites and did not threaten the integrity of the Soviet state. This is an interesting conclusion, but additional and more rigorously confirmed sources would be needed in order to verify it. In any case, this issue is a stimulus for further research.

The monograph was created in a very difficult period for archival research in Belarus and Russia (2020–2023). All the more reason to appreciate the library search conducted by the author, which itself affirms that S. is well versed not only in archival resources (which she has repeatedly proved), but also in Belarusian, Russian, Polish and German historiography within the journalism of the period under study.

Toruń

Dorota Michaluk

Nicole Eaton: *German Blood, Slavic Soil*. How Nazi Königsberg became Soviet Kaliningrad. Cornell University Press. Ithaca 2023. IX, 315 S. ISBN 978-1-5017-6736-4. (\$ 35,95.)

For several decades, Königsberg/Kaliningrad has been an object of interest for historians of World War II. While most of the existing literature primarily addresses the military aspects and its place along the Eastern Front, Nicole Eaton's research instead explores the social aspect, documenting how the city transformed following the political decision to transition German Königsberg into Soviet Kaliningrad.

E. grounded her analysis in extensive archival research spanning from Russia to the United States. Adeptly combining social history with spatial analysis, the author cleanly identifies and tracks social changes within the borderland environment. Despite the academic nature of the book, its style and language are compelling. The book's narrative, both accessible and engaging, unfolds within seven chapters, with its content following and corresponding thematically with the chronological order of events. In an analysis spanning two decades (while also referencing earlier and later periods) E. unfolds the transformation processes in Kaliningrad: a Baltic port on the Vistula Lagoon, from a city belong to East Prussia for centuries, to a port that has been under Russian control since 1945.

Chapter 1 ("The Bridge and the Bulwark") begins with an overview of the socio-historical conditions that lead to the mythologized self-identity of Königsberg's residents. With a particular focus on the 1930's and the Nazi regime, E. untangles the cultural patchwork of the port town and broader East Prussia.

The Nazi political movement and its direct effects on the town are handled by the second chapter ("Empire in the East"). Examining the systematic implementation of Nazi polices, the

author describes the (*Volksgemeinschaft*) or “national community” concept of the east Prussian state held by Nazi officials. A region geographically (and also culturally) isolated from the rest of Germany, the cultural and linguistic challenges faced in implementing this dream by Erich Koch, *Gauleiter* of East Prussia, are described in precise detail.

The topic of Königsberg as a battlefield in the defense against the Red Army is covered in the third chapter (“Downfall”). Examining the town’s role in the defense against the Soviet troops, E. blends firsthand testimonies with future autobiographies to create a narrative of turmoil. The residents of Königsberg, spurred on by Nazi policies such as the deportations of Jews, resettlement, mobilization and wartime living conditions, found themselves at the very epicenter of the conflict. Rather than focusing on military maneuvers, however, E. keeps the focus on the home front. German civilians, Red Army soldiers, Jewish prisoners, forced laborers, and POWs, the wars progression is explored through the social dynamics among these radically diverse groups.

An omnipresent theme throughout the later parts of the chapter is the unique brutality experienced by many residents during their encounters with Soviet forces. Covering the events of Königsberg beginning in January 1945, when the city became isolated from the outside world and would later fall to the Red Army within two months. As E. argues, two forms of extreme violence swept through East Prussia. On the one hand, the cruelty of Nazi crimes on the Eastern Front, and the Soviet brutality directed at the powerless German civilians on the other.

Chapter IV (“Liberation and Revenge”) is devoted solely to the topic of the Red Army, and the Soviet soldiers who arrived in East Prussia in late 1944 and early 1945. Warfare and diplomacy remain in the background of this chapter, while E. explains the situation facing the now-defeated Germans on their own soil. She describes the acts of violence and brutality perpetrated by Soviet soldiers against the German civilians, juxtaposing these actions with the acts of revenge on “fascist” Germans.

Chapter V (“City of Death”) explores the postwar power dynamics in Königsberg and the progressing Sovietization, which had to be adapted to local conditions, namely administrative and geographic isolation, and battling against starvation and epidemic disease. E. continues her examination of this process in the next chapter, Chapter VI (“Living Together”). In this part of the book, she delves into the transformation of Königsberg into the distinctly Soviet city of Kaliningrad, highlighting the challenges that accompanied this shift, what included rather unsuccessful efforts of the Soviet civilian administration to convert the German population to socialism.

The final Chapter VII (“Slavic Soil”) investigates the consolidation of Soviet control over the city whilst telling the story of the remaining German residents being forced to relocate to what would become East Germany.

The study offers a comprehensive examination of the interactions between two dictatorships and their propaganda efforts that ultimately shaped the present character of Königsberg. While studies on forging Kaliningrad’s identity already provide some explanation on this matter, E. situates this topic within a broader framework of power relations and social dynamics, both before and after World War II. The monograph contributes to the research on East Prussia’s history by addressing processes that remained rather outside the interests of historiography of the Second World War. Despite the assemblage of interesting archival sources and vivid narration, however, not all insights provided by E. may be posed as novel and path breaking, as the existing scholarship already covers many of the same events and thus reduces novelty. Nevertheless, blending military history and social history exercises a fresh interpretative angle that make readers reinterpret the interplay of military, social, cultural, and memory history.

Given its clear structure and engaging language, the book finds its readers amongst experts in the field, students, and amateur historians alike. As the narrative blends military history

with the personal accounts of diverse witnesses, readers need a basic grasp of the siege of Königsberg's timeline and the military maneuvers in East Prussia to fully appreciate the text.

Warszawa

Izabela Paszko

Bettina Bereś: Awangarda między kuchnią a łazienką. Maria Pinińska-Bereś i Jerzy Bereś [Avant-garde between Kitchen and Bathroom. Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Jerzy Bereś]. Universitas. Kraków 2024. 375 S., Ill. ISBN 978-83-242-4030-2. (PLN 69,—)

The volume constitutes a vivid and insightful analysis of the lives and compositions of two outstanding figures in Polish contemporary art, Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999) and Jerzy Bereś (1930–2012). Written by their daughter, Bettina Bereś (1958–), the book's three chapters possess a distinctive character, combining methodical analysis with a uniquely intimate and personal narrative.

The first two chapters describe the author's multi-generational family history. Reaching back to the times of her great-grandparents and situated amidst a backdrop of fluctuating political and social conditions, the book presents a gallery of diverse and interesting characters who shaped the family. Maria Pinińska-Bereś's ancestors came from the Luxembourg bourgeoisie and the Polish nobility. The artist's mother, Lya Heinzel, decided to give up her studies in Switzerland and marry the soldier Piotr Piniński. The future artist grew up in a modernist villa in Poznań, isolated from her peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and surrounded by wealth. Life in this "ivory tower" was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, which took away her father, murdered in Kharkiv, and the family, having lost their high status and wealth, had to adapt to the new reality. Jerzy Bereś, born in Nowy Sącz and the son of a railway worker who was a member of the Polish Socialist Party, was raised in a completely different environment.

Maria Pinińska and Jerzy Bereś came from different worlds, and their wedding was perceived as improper. Their life paths first crossed at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, where they studied together at the Faculty of Sculpture from 1950 to 1956, under the supervision of the outstanding modernist artist Xawery Dunikowski, among others. The artists made their debut at the exhibition *Przeciw wojnie, przeciw faszyzmowi* [Against War, against Fascism], commonly known as the "Arsenał," held in Warsaw in 1955.

Going down in history as an open and independent statement against socialist realist art, the exhibition was considered a breakthrough in the Polish artistic world. The couple formed part of a new generation of artists emerging, who, instead of works characterized by realistic form and socialist content subordinated to party guidelines, produced forms of expression based on the deformation of form and vibrant imagery. The 2nd Kraków Group was reactivated in 1957 on the wave of change. Under the leadership of Tadeusz Kantor, it gathered artists who maintained contact between Polish art, which was developing behind the Iron Curtain, and Western European art. The Bereś duo became affiliated with the milieu and, like other members, absorbed the information that was coming in, which served as a source of inspiration for their creative endeavors. Throughout the changes occurring in contemporary art in the following decades, Bettina Bereś presents how the achievements of her parents were linked to their personal experiences and beliefs.

Maria Pinińska-Bereś is considered a pioneer of feminist art in Poland. Boldly questioning stereotypes about the role of women in a patriarchal society, she was known for experimenting with various methods of artistic expression. Creating forms that referred to the female body, she applied soft materials, often playing with refined eroticism, such as a sponge covered with fabric, pillows, and quilted fabrics. Jerzy Bereś, on the other hand, gained recognition thanks to his sculptures made of natural materials, mainly wood, and performance art, which he called "manifestations" or "masses", having the character of happenings and performances, which constituted a commentary on politics, religion, art and philosophy.