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# Historical and cultural significance of the Krutynia River (Masuria, Poland)

*Izabela Lewandowska\* and Maria Lawrynowicz-Szczepaniak\*\**

\*Institute of History, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn; [iza.lewandowska@uwm/edu.pl]

\*\*Institute of Linguistics, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn; [maria.lawrynowicz.szczepaniak@gmail.com]

## ABSTRACT

*Among the rivers flowing through East Prussia the longest one is the Pregola, whereas Lyna and Krutynia, which are shorter, are significant for the Masurian Lake District. The 99 km-long Krutynia river flows through the Piska Wilderness and the Masurian Landscape Park. The canoe trail is considered as the most beautiful in all of Poland. This text, however, discusses not the natural values, but the historical and cultural values of Masuria, i.e. the area through which the river flows.*

*For centuries, this area had been inhabited by various national and ethnical groups. The oldest residents — Old Prussians — founded their settlements here. Afterwards, until 1945, this area was under the rule of the Prussian state. At that time, hydraulic engineering monuments were created — sluices, dams, mills. Some of them are still operational. The last seventy-seven years passed under Polish administration. The Krutynia became a tourist attraction at that time.*

*In the vicinity of the Krutynia river one can observe captivating cultural heritage visible on the route: antique wooden cottages, a few manor-houses, or the memory of figures known in Masuria. For centuries, the river gave work, food and was a communication route for the local people. Today it is one of the tourist symbols of Masuria.*

## KEYWORDS

Krutynia river, Masuria, history, culture, tourism

## INTRODUCTION

The Krutynia river is considered to be one of the most delightful waterways in Europe. It travels through the Mrągowskie Lakeland, the Mrągowska Plain and the Great Masurian Lake District, among the enchanting forests of the Piska Wilderness. It stretches across 99 km and has a drainage basin covering an area of 638 km<sup>2</sup>. In terms of hydrology, the Krutynia river rises in the lands surrounding Lake Warpuńskie. Across its entire length, it takes up various names as it flows through the lakes fed by other watercourses (Słomka 2012, p. 651). As early as in 1916, Fritz Skowronek, a German writer from Masuria, wrote:

Masuria is called the ‘Land of a Thousand Lakes’, which many people may consider to be a big exaggeration. This, however, is not an exaggeration at all. The list compiled by my teacher, professor Dr Benecke from Königsberg in the early 80-s of the XIX century, documents exactly three thousand lakes, and it was easy for me to add about three hundred more lakes. (...) These lakes, situated on a sandy and gravel bed, have crystal clear water, the mere sight of which makes you happy. In addition, they are surrounded by impressive ranges of hills, almost always adorned with forests (Skowronek 1916, p. 12).

German and Polish literature contains no direct references to the role of the Krutynia river in the life

of any community or nation. The issue also remains unaddressed in the most recent monographs on East Prussia (Kossert 2005) and Warmia and Masuria (Achremczyk 2011–2012). These days, the river is famous mainly for its kayak trail of nationwide renown, which has become the subject of numerous guidebooks.

In recent years, historians and geographers more and more often research the issues of rivers and their role in the economy, society and politics. This is evidenced by the German-Polish project ‘*Usus aquarum: mills, water and transport in the inland development of East Central Europe (II) – The transformation of the river landscape along the Oder*’ carried out in 2014–2017. It examined the changes that took place in the Middle Ages, in the use of the Oder basin, as well as, to a lesser extent, the Vistula, Elbe, Rhine, Main, and Danube as well as rivers in Transylvania. These changes were shown in various ways: in written documents, archaeological finds, and also in geographical names. The main focus was on the importance of watermills and the role of rivers as transport routes (Mielzarek & Zschieschang 2019). A similar initiative in 2020, although limited only to an international conference, was taken by the geographers from Łódź. The conference was entitled ‘Rivers in the lives of nations in their economy and politics’, and the papers focused on the issue of the river as a political, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural border; rivers in the geographical space as well as the economic and social role of rivers (<http://geopol.geo.uni.lodz.pl/index.>). As the most important river of Masuria, the Krutynia has not received any attention from the scientific community outside Poland so far, the present text meets these expectations.

The river trail starts at the village of Zyndaki, situated between Lake Warpuńskie and Lake Zyndackie and ends in Ruciane-Nida at Lake Nidzkie, extending for approximately 110 km. The kayak trail — the most popular trail in the province of Warmia and Masuria and one of the best-known in Poland — is chiefly noted for its natural qualities (Fig. 1). The local history remains unknown to

most visitors. Tourists coming to the region to find the vestiges of its past are a rare sight and hardly anybody paddles down the Krutynia trail to study the history and the culture of the people who used to inhabit these lands.

The aim of the article is, first of all, to show the material and cultural changes in human use of the river in their long term — from prehistory to the present day. Secondly, it shows how the interaction of man and nature influenced the management of the contemporary landscape of the river.

The article is based on Polish and German scientific and tourist literature, as well as printed reports of a historical nature. The sources are publications from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which show the author’s attitude to the described place, its landscape and history. The author (Izabela Lewandowska)’s own observations made while kayaking down the Krutynia river in the summer of 2016 and 2020 have been complemented by the research. Thanks to the field research, it was possible to confront the information taken from the studies with the surrounding reality. After the first tour, the author published two papers to promote the historical, literary, geographical, and touristic values of the Krutynia trail (Lewandowska 2018, pp. 95–108; 2019, pp. 101–32). Despite this, nobody has yet ventured to present the role of the river in the life of the local communities and the geopolitical situation of the region.

#### THE ROLE OF THE KRUTYNIA RIVER IN PREHISTORY AND OLD PRUSSIA (UNTIL 1226)

In the cultural landscape of the Krutynia river, traces of the last Baltic glaciation (around 13,000 B.C.) have been preserved to this day. Boulders near Rosocha and Wojnowo are the result of a terminal moraine, several to a dozen or so metres high, built of large rock blocks and gravel. Near the village of Rosocha, the boulder field has an area of 4 ha, on which there are about 3,000 boulders with a circumference of 2–5 metres, most often mossy and sunk into the ground. It is the oldest geological object in the entire Masurian Lake District.

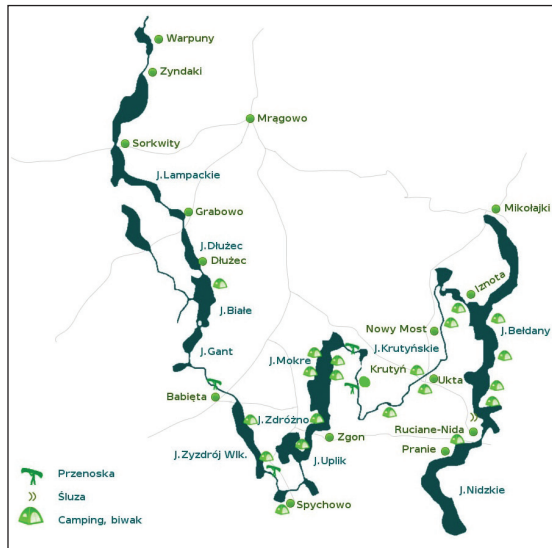


Fig. 1 Contemporary trail of the Krutynia river (Source [www.splywy.pl](http://www.splywy.pl)).

The first traces of human presence are related to the prehistoric period, unfortunately not many artifacts are visible today. Archaeological artefacts from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages have all been unearthed in the region of the Krutynia river. However, upon scientific examination, they have been reburied in the ground. Records of the archaeological excavations are preserved in academic literature, but contemporary inhabitants cannot point to their locations on site. The discoveries in the discussed region were made in several spots. For instance, in the area of Ruciane-Nida the excavations conducted in 1906 revealed an archaeological treasure consisting of a small bronze axe, a knife and fragments of a large necklace (Hoffmann 2000, p. 144). Stone and flint tools were found in Babięta, Sorkwity and Warpuny, and prehistorical ceramics were found in the area of Zgon (Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1975, p. 49).

The majority of the artefacts were retrieved from cemeteries. In prehistorical times, the dead were deposited in flat graves, for instance cemeteries in Machary, Babięta, Sorkwity, Mojtyny, or under burial mounds, e.g. cemeteries in Warpuny, Zyndaki, Jędrychowo, Mojtyny (Hollack & Preiser 1904)

(Pl. I). The most prominent discoveries were made in Babięta and the nearby Machary, where around 600 cremation graves dating from the second to fourth centuries A.D. were found. Precious artefacts included horse skeletons, bits of ceramics, clay utensils, bronze buckles, parts of horse harness, spearheads, spurs, a knife, scissors, a razor, a decorative pin, and bronze Roman coins dating back to the second and the third centuries A.D. (Karczewski 2011, pp. 386–8; Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1975, pp. 57–9). Both towns were situated in proximity to the amber trail. It is possible that the locals participated in trading between the Sambia Peninsula and the Roman Empire.

Of the times preceding the invention of writing, the most thoroughly studied period is that of Old Prussia (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2000). The very name of the Krutynia river is derived from the Old Prussian word *krutin* which meant ‘meandering’ (Bobrowicz *et al.* 2015, p. 19). The section between the waterfront inns in Ukta and Nowy Most is called the ‘Little Amazon’ because of its manifold bends. In the Middle Ages, the riverside was populated by Galindians who founded their settlements and forts on the uplands near the river and the lakes (Nowakowski 1995). These inaccessible sites had natural defences bolstered with palisaded ramparts. The mighty trees, tenebrous forests, and treacherous lakes and rivers are all frequent themes in local folk

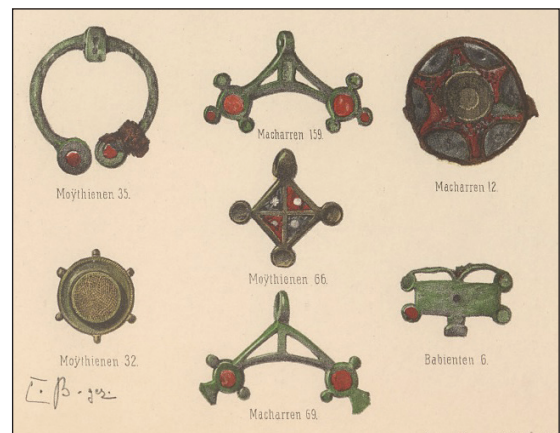


Plate I Mojtyny, Machary, Babięta, archaeological artefacts (Source Hollack & Praiser, 1904).

stories and motifs in the tales and legends alluding to the times of Old Prussia and were immortalised by German and Polish writers alike (Łapo 2008).

#### THE KRUTYNIA RIVER IN THE ERA OF THE TEUTONIC ORDER AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1226–1657)

The Prussian tribes never created a uniform state. For 600 years (seventh–thirteenth centuries) they developed autonomously, sometimes even waging wars among themselves. This, among other things, meant that the old Prussians were defeated by the Order of Our Lady of the German House in Jerusalem, brought to Prussia, called the Teutonic Knights in Polish literature and social awareness (from the black cross on a white cloak), and in German literature and media called the German Order.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, the Old Prussian population was either killed in long wars or assimilated. (Toeppen 1870, pp. 22–30). The Teutonic Knights developed the newly acquired territories by building upon the former Prussian hillforts. A case in point: the villages of Sorkwity and Zyndaki, founded on the well-known forts along the Krutynia river. The incorporation of villages was financed by Grand Masters such as Winrich von Kniprode (Pizuński 2000, pp. 82–7). The communication between Teutonic authorities and the local population was mediated by the Prussians themselves — the experts on the local geography and mentality. From day one, a new village would be laid out on a linear or circular plan. Typical linear villages include Borowe and Dłużec. Borowe stretches for 1 km along the west bank of the Grabówka stream and Lake Dłużec. The same lake borders the linear village of Dłużec, which extends for 1.5 km along the bank line. Teutonic Knights exploited the river and the lakes to expedite transport and fishing, as fish was a common dietary staple. Watermills played an important role in the economy of the German Order. The above-mentioned Kniprode allowed his monastic brothers to grind grain in all mills where it is most convenient for them in

the middle of the fourteenth century. However, he forbade his subjects to use mills outside the Order. How important it was for the monastic economy is evidenced by the fact of planning rural areas with a network of watermills. The documents contain an account of a Teutonic official who in 1424 carried out foundation works around Pisz. It was a description of the plan to establish many new rural settlements with watermills between the Pisa and Wincenta rivers (Kubicki 2019, pp. 37, 40–1). It is true that the territory did not cover the area of the Krutynia river, but its surroundings (approx. 30 km).

The state of the Teutonic Order, which was established as a result of the conquest of the lands of old Prussia, survived for over 300 years (1226–1525). In 1525, the last grand master, Albrecht Hohenzollern, resigned from his function and adopted Lutheranism, thus transforming the country into the first Protestant state in Europe, under the name of Ducal Prussia. They were Polish fiefs for 132 years. It was then that Polish settlement began in northern Mazovia. The Polish Evangelical population living in the southern part of Ducal Prussia and then East Prussia (after the first partition of Poland in 1772) was called Masuria (Sembrzycki 1887; Sakson 1990).

Upon the Old Prussian hillforts, Teutonic Knights erected castles, which they later transformed into hunting manors. This was the fate of the village of Spychowo (formerly Pupy) at Lake Spychowskie. In the late fifteenth century Spychowo boasted a hunting castle, one of the prime and more attractive buildings of this type in the entire Duchy of Prussia. It was in this residence that Duke Albrecht Hohenzollern found shelter as he fled to Masuria in fear of the plague in 1548–1549 (Toeppen 1870, p. 177). The stories of his hunts held from Spychowo survived until World War II. The village of Krutyń, which relied for its survival on the forests, the river, fishing, and tourism for many centuries, shares a similar history. It was established around the year 1500 as a hunting settlement. Friedrich von Wettin of Meissen, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights and the Duke of Saxony, erected a small castle there which he used as a hunting



base (Pizuński 2000, pp. 142–7). In 1527, Duke Albrecht Hohenzollern relocated to the castle for the duration of the plague sweeping across Prussia. The elector of Brandenburg and Duke of Prussia, George William, sojourned in Krutyń in the 1620s and organised great hunts in the local wilderness (Teoppen 1870, pp. 180–1). Successive electors of the Brandenburgs, simultaneously serving as dukes in Prussia, strived to strengthen their realm by expanding their autonomy from Prussian states. To that end, they would arrange the so-called Schatulle ('coffer') settlements (in localities such as Zgon, Krzyże, Wejsuny, Guzianka, Kamień, Wygryny), characteristic in that all the profits were transferred directly to the duke's coffers. Many of these settlements were established as glassworks or wood tar factories — small businesses which required an abundance of water and wood. Their original purpose echoes in some of the toponyms, still unchanged. For instance, a hamlet located at around 5 km from Lake Dłużec bears the name of Szklarnia ('glassworks'). The glass factory which operated there in 1650 brought about the clearing of the local forests. It is in the devastated forest areas that the village itself was founded (Leyding 1975, p. 198). Another glass factory functioned in the village of Ukta, established in the mid-eighteenth century. The facility reportedly shut down in 1766, but the worker's settlement called Krutyńska Szklarnia ('glassworks of Krutynia') has survived (*ibid.*, pp. 212–13).

However, the attitude of the population to the river and the surrounding forests and lakes did not change. The river and lakes provided the population with the necessary food, and were a reservoir of water needed at home and farm, as well as a transport route. Prussian and Polish peasants were engaged in fishing, often for the needs of the monastic court, then the princely court, for wealthy townspeople, but also for their own needs. Larger ships destined for lakes were made by craftsmen who dealt with carpentry (Ossowski 2010, p. 149). Small water transport units were developed by the rural population, who treated the construction of boats as a side and occasional activity.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KRUTYNIA RIVER FOR GERMANS AND MASURIANS IN PRUSSIA (1657–1945)

During the long Polish-Swedish war, in 1657, the feudal dependence of Ducal Prussia on Poland was severed and Prussia began its rapid development as an independent state. In 1700 the kingdom was established in Prussia, and in 1871 Prussia was incorporated into the unified German Empire as the strongest of the federal states. The Masurians, who spoke the Polish dialect of the Evangelical denomination, were then an important ethnic group in the area of East Prussia. The remains of their presence in these lands are historic cottages and village cemeteries, *e.g.* Gałkowo, Krutyń, Mojtyny, Nowa Ukta, Onufryjewo, Ukta, Rosocha, Wejsuny, Iznota, Kamień, Zgon (Żurkowska 2008). The modern-day Masurian Landscape Park, traversed by the Krutynia river, used to have the highest settlement density in the region, hence its large number of cemeteries.

The nineteenth century marked in this area the emergence of the multi-cultural society of East Prussia. Apart from the native Germans and the scarce Polish minority, the population encompassed a large number of locals — the Masurians (typically Masurian villages include Piecki, Zgon, Krutyń, Ukta), who did not clearly define their nationality (Pl. II). After 1825, Old Believers (also called Philipons) who were expelled from Russia after a religious split, began to come here. In Prussia, they were welcomed by King Frederick William III and began clearing forests, building houses, and establishing villages. At that time, Wojnowo, Kadzidłowo, Gałkowo, Piaski, and Onufryjewo were established in the area in question, and they are located near the route of the Krutynia river (Toeppen 1870, pp. 449–52) (Pl. III). The Jewish population was also relatively large (mainly in Mikołajki, where their cemetery has survived to this day — the Jewish cemetery). However, the ethnic changes of the people living here did not affect the use of the river. It was still treated mainly for use — as a reservoir of fish for one's own needs and a local means of transport.



*Left:* Plate II. Traditional buildings of the Masurian village (Photograph I. Lewandowska, 2016).

*Right:* Plate III. Wojnowo, the cemetery of the Old Believers (Photograph I. Lewandowska, 2016).

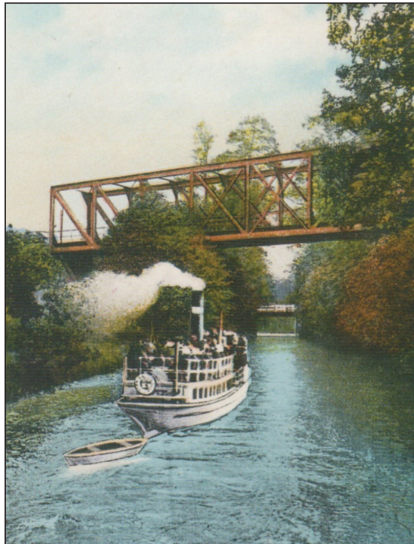


Plate IV. Ruciane, ship on the canal by the railway bridge, around 1910 (Source Kujawski 2021, p. 393).



Plate V. Krutyński Piecok, historic watermill (Photograph I. Lewandowska 2020).

The largest group of Masurian residents were peasants, who heavily depended on the fruits of the forests and the waters (the lakes and the Krutynia river) for their sustenance. The sparse manors were inhabited by Prussian aristocracy. Notable families included the Mirbachs, lords of Sorkwity and the nearby hunting manor in Jędrychowo. The estate of Sorkwity, comprising a palace and surrounding

park, flourished for several hundred years. In the mid-nineteenth century a vineyard was planted on the peninsula of Lake Lampackie along the Krutynia trail, which initiated the local production of wine. Sorkwity was famous for the hunts which attracted eminent figures from the world of politics and the government, as the owner of the estate collaborated closely with Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of the

German Reich. The palace was erected in the years 1850–1856 as a red-brick creation in the English Gothic Revival style with characteristic pinnacles. In August 1914, the site found itself at the frontline and went up in flames. It was burned with all of its entire furnishing and collections by the Russians stationed in the area for several days on the eve of their debacle in the Battle of Tannenberg (Orłowicz 1991, p. 137). After World War I, the palace was reconstructed (Jackiewicz-Garniec & Garniec 2001, pp. 126–31).

It was only after the reunification of Germany in 1871 that there was a significant economic boom in Masuria by running railway lines, introducing water transport and tourist shipping on the Great Masurian Lakes (Ruciane-Nida, Mikołajki). This area had no importance for the economy of Prussia before, as evidenced by the extensive publication: *Die Provinz Preussen* from 1863, in which no attention is given to either the Krutynia or the Great Masurian Lakes.

Books on the history of sailing in Warmia and Masuria contain many mentions of ships traversing the lakes and canals in the nineteenth century, but little is said of the place or manner of assembling these vessels. For instance, the Pisz Chronicle reports that in the year 1814, an enterprising merchant named Meyer sailed with multiple boats from Pisz to Ryn. Later on, he proceeded to build other vessels — both roofed and roofless (Toeppen 1870, pp. 445–6). Nautical tourism commenced after 1891 with the establishment of the Masurian Steam Navigation Company in Giżycko. A year later, the Company registered a modern steamboat (the Löwentin) which could carry 190 passengers on its two roofless decks and in the cabins (Pl. IV). Further years brought the launches of new passenger ships and navigation companies and associations also began to operate in Węgorzewo, Pisz and Mikołajki (Wawrzyński 2014, p. 350). In this way, tourism on the Krutynia river was integrated into the nautical network of the Great Masurian Lakes. The nature of river use changed, from catching fish for the needs of the local population and local transport to German-wide tourism and economic use (Ambrassat 1912, pp. 109, 112, 165).

Water transport could not function without the hydro-technical facilities which empowered people to combine local lakes and rivers into a single shipping lane. When paddling down the Krutynia river, one encounters the lock at Lake Zyzdrój Mały. The ‘Lalka’ lock, as it is called, is out of order, so the kayaks need to be portaged. At Ruciane, the operational ‘Guzianka’ lock allows users to traverse the 2-metre level difference between Lake Beldany and Lake Guzianka Mała, which leads to Lakes Guzianka Wielka and Nidzkie further south. The locks form part of the entire system of lakes and canals which constitute the trail of the Great Masurian Lakes. The construction of the trail — considered a novel hydrological project in its time — was initiated by Prussia after the victory in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763). The years 1764–1765 marked the construction of five canals, 6.7 km long in total, which connected the lakes of Mamry, Niegocińskie and Tałty. As a result, a single shipping lane was established from Pisz to Węgorzewo. Some sources say that the wooden lock at Guzianka was in place as early as in 1775, during the reign of the Prussian king Frederick the Great. With the passage of time, the canals clogged with silt. Once they were dredged, in the mid-nineteenth century, transport could recommence (Wawrzyński 2014, p. 143). The modern-day lock dates back to 1879 and the reign of German Emperor William I. Initially, the chamber was of wooden construction, which twenty years later was replaced with brick-and-stone (Wawrzyński 2014, p. 350). A new object — ‘Guzianka II’ — was commissioned in May 2020.

Water fuelled the energy industry as well (a case in point: watermills). Today, the operating facilities include small power plants in Babięta and Krutyński Piecok (Pl. V). The latter was built in the nineteenth century as a large timber-framed watermill made of red brick. A few years ago, it was transformed into a hydroelectric power plant. The mills were constructed in many towns of the region. For instance, in the second half of the nineteenth century Ukta had two mills, a sawmill, a match factory and a postal station. The end of the century brought the advent of the railway. Thus, Ukta was a large



village of significance for economy and transport (Leyding 1975, pp. 212–13). Meanwhile, in the early twentieth century, a melioration mill made of steel was erected in Zgon at Lake Mokre. It was listed in the national register of historical monuments in 1980 and reconstructed with European Union funds in 2011 (Mierzwa 2018, p. 20). Industrial and rail facilities are the silent witnesses of the economic heritage of this soil.

Another sector highly dependent on the local forests and waters was the wood industry. The sawmill structures preserved in Ruciane-Nida are an industrial monument, exceptional on the regional scale. In the early twentieth century, they were the property of the entrepreneur Richard Anders, hailed in his era as the East Prussian king of wood. He leased his first sawmill in Spsychowo, on the bank of the Krutynia. Then, he brought prosperity to the facility in Ruciane-Nida, one of the most technologically advanced sawmills in Germany. Nowadays, his descendants continue to run the wood company, upholding the family tradition (Liżewska 2008, pp. 45–57). Another eminent and still operational industrial monument of the region is the seed husking mill, also created by R. Anders. The facility was erected in the years 1890–1892 for the needs of the forest inspectorates of the Piska Wilderness. Originally the largest facility of its type in the territory of East Prussia, it was used to extract seeds from the cones of spruces, firs, pines, and larches. Its historical assembly line was modernised in the early twenty-first century and remains in use (Czyżyk & Fonder 2011).

In the first years of the twentieth century, southern East Prussia became the arena of increased fortification efforts. The build-up to World War I commenced at the end of the previous century. The sites of the Krutynia river include two locations of concentrated artillery bunkers. The first one, situated near Spsychowo, is a part of the Forest Position Szczytno, the historical fortified defence line of the former East Prussia which extended from Szczytno to Ruciane. The trail encompasses the most characteristic defence structures of the position, mounted in the years

1901–1944. The accompanying information boards contain descriptions of the bunkers and sketched representations of their hypothetical appearance during the war (author's field research, 2020).

Other defensive structures may be observed at Ruciane-Guzianka, the resistance point located the furthest south in the entire position of the Masurian lakes. The line of fortifications cuts through the Great Masurian Lakes from Giżycko in the north to Ruciane in the south. The ramparts were designed to block the expected swift advance of the Russian cavalry, which could seize the crucial bridge crossings and passages between lakes. Three interesting concrete towers with machine gun positions have survived until today (Bzowski 2016, p. 23), including the tower bunker built in 1900 and shaped after a medieval bastille. This area formed part of the fortifications dubbed the Great Line of Masurian Lakes, designed to defend East Prussia against the Russian invasion during World War I. Apart from the Boyen Fortress in Giżycko, the area was the largest defensive complex of the Great Line, constructed to protect rail and water transport. The main fortifications were erected next to the rail bridge and along the roads to Guzianka Lock and Pisz. They included three bunkers armed with machine guns and five infantry resistance points reinforced with earthworks and a bunker. Currently, the bunker remains open for visitors throughout the summer season. The accompanying exhibition shows information boards, models of the equipment, armaments, and clothing. The site remains in the care of the Nad Nidzkim Association (author's field research, 2016) (Pl. VI).

The nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century are also associated with the development of construction, for which stone was widely used, which is a testimony to several thousand years of history of this land. It was used in foundations and walls of buildings, bridges, churches, in cemeteries as tombstones, and in the construction of roads and railway embankments. It was a free building material for the population. Today it is a characteristic element of the landscape of Warmia and Mazuria, both from the natural and



Plate VI. Guzianka, bunker by the lock (Photograph I. Lewandowska 2020).

also cultural point of view (Klimek & Szczepański 2010).

In the interwar period, life in the Krutynia basin was anything but rushed. People followed the rhythm of nature and withdrew from politics, which only occasionally insinuated itself into their lives. Undisputedly, the most eminent figure of the era was Max Pruss, a zeppelin pilot born in the village of Zgon. Starting in 1934, he commanded the airship 'Graf Zeppelin' on its numerous flights across the Atlantic and the record-breaking trip around the world. In 1936, he took over the command of the

Hindenburg, a zeppelin used on transatlantic routes to South America. Captain M. Pruss commanded the airship 'Hindenburg' during the disaster in Lakehurst (New Jersey, USA) in 1937. Later on, he was involved for many years in the design of new zeppelin types and lobbied for the restoration of their high status in aviation. The tradition of the zeppelins and the memory of the airship captain lived on in the name of the 'Zeppelin Restaurant' located at the heart of the village. Unfortunately, the new owner not only changed the name but also disposed of all information on the topic, together with the photographs of the zeppelins and Pruss himself (author's field research, 2016 and 2020).

In the era of national socialism, a new brick-built facility was erected in Krutyń for the needs of the social welfare programme of the party (Kujawski 2012, p. 222). Women from the Mrągowski District would be sent here for three-week healing retreats to produce healthy German children of the Aryan race. Today, the building houses a waterfront inn of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK).

Simultaneously, as the Germans flocked to the Great Masurian Lakes and the Krutynia river, tourism flourished. The village of Krutyń was a popular holiday spot (Pl. VII). Attractions included



Plate VII. Krutyń, a historic guesthouse (Photograph I. Lewandowska 2020).





with age, he is awaited by a family overwhelmed with fear, who the next day walks calmly to meet the golden morning on a dirt road, planted on both sides with rowan, whose golden-red fruit attracts whole flocks of quarrelsome screaming birds, who finally got to know the magnificent deciduous trees in a colourful autumn coat on the edge of the marshes and in the forest itself among the dark spruces with their richness of colours and shades, as it is rare to see elsewhere, this one with every bit of his heart clings completely to this remote but so poetic country (Wichdorff 1915, p. 14).

On the other hand, the German writer Ernst Wiechert, who lived in the Piersławek forester's lodge (11 km from the Krutynia river) before World War II, recalled the waters of the great Mokre lake, from which 'as if by a miracle, the clean, quick and transparent river of the Krutynia flowed. It floated silently under the grey wooden footbridges stretched over it, it was lit by the lightning of a passing kingfisher, the overhangs of forests were capped, from which the pitiful call of the eagles came' (Wiechert 1936, p. 11). Polish ethnographers also got to know these lands, even though they were outside Poland. The descriptions alluded to the German roots, customs and their ancient and modern glory reflected in the natural and cultural landscape (Traba 2007, p. 220). These passages extolled the world of Masuria and Masurians that resembled more of a myth than reality and inflated the role of the river and the lakes beyond all measure.

The region was explored by Polish sightseers as well. One of them was the geographer Mieczysław Orłowicz. His *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Mazurach Pruskich i Warmii* ['Illustrated Guide of Prussian Masuria and Warmia'] was published in Lviv in 1923. Re-released in 1991, it remains a fountain of knowledge on the region (Orłowicz 1991). Orłowicz reported on the trails of the Masurian lakes (using water transport) and the area of Ruciane — Ukta, Wojnowo, Krutyń, and Piecki (using rail transport from Rudczany to Mrągowo). The area was also toured by Melchior Wańkiewicz — an author, a journalist, and a reporter, and a feature

writer, who sailed the Masurian lakes in June 1935. The journey bore fruit in the reportage entitled *Na tropach Smętka* ['On the Trail of Smętek'] aimed to portray the life of the Polish population in Prussia (Wańkiewicz 1936).

#### THE KRUTYNIA RIVER IN THE POLISH STATE (AFTER 1945)

After the end of World War II, East Prussia was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. The southern part of former Prussia is today's Warmia-Masuria Province, commonly known as Warmia and Mazury, while the northern part has belonged to Russia (Kaliningrad Region) and Lithuania (Klaipeda District) since 1991. As a result of the findings, there was a radical change in the nationality of the entire former East Prussia. The so far dominant Germany and Masuria gave way to Poles and Ukrainians who came here as a result of the Operation Vistula in 1947.

New settlers needed to learn how to sustain themselves with the resources of the river and nearby lakes. Attempts were made to reactivate fishing quickly, for which the necessary condition was the experience of the former native population. Apart from the invigoration of fishing and tourism, their greatest accomplishment was the creation of the Masurian Landscape Park (1977). The aim was to preserve the natural, cultural and historical values of this area for the purposes of science, education and tourism. Within the boundaries of the Park, there is the largest lake in Poland, Śniardwy, and the northern part of the Piska Forest with the Krutynia river (Wittbrodt 2019, p. 168). The seat of the Masurian Landscape Park is located in the village of Krutyń. Information boards placed near the village present the borders of the park, its natural monuments and tourist routes. A nearby Masurian barn dating back to the nineteenth century houses the Centre for Environmental and Cultural Education. The facility features rooms such as the Chamber of Nature and the Memorial Chamber of the writer Karol Małłek. The latter presents a collection of mementoes, souvenirs and



documents related to the writer's life, as well as the original furniture from his house. Additionally, the visitors may admire old photographs of the village and the Krutynia river (Kruszelnicki & Kruszelnicka 2014, pp. 66–8). Karol Małek, writer and social activist, lived in the village of Krutyń in the years 1951–1956. In his memoirs he admired the river:

As we can see, the Krutynia connects numerous lakes into a beautiful canoe trail from Sorkwity to Mikołajki. This trail is one of the most beautiful and very popular canoeing trails. But the most wonderful trail is the section from the lock of Lake Mokre, through Krutyńskie lake and the Krutynia river, to the village of Krutyń. The ride is like in a fairy tale in the forests of the majestic Piska Primeval Forest, where fragments of primeval forest have been preserved, with extensive oaks, majestic spruces, sky-high pines, blue hornbeam and white birches, with rich shrub undergrowth. The coastal trees of the Krutynia river greet every tourist with their bow, creating with their crowns a kind of a green royal canopy, under which masses of canoeing hikers slip through the swift current of the river, admiring the beauty of this charming Masurian river, similar to the holy river Ganges in India. Hence the old Masurians call it the 'Masurian Ganges' (Małek 2011, p. 256).

Other writers, poets and reporters, like Małek, also have their memorials in the localities of the described area. One of them was Melchior Wańkowicz, whose name was marked on the marked hiking trail leading from Sorkwity to Zgon. The name of Wańkowicz is also given to the PTTK riverside hostel in Krutynia. Stanisław Bielikowicz, who became the patron of the PTTK riverside hostel in Sorkwity, is also known among water sports enthusiasts. Another poet who lived here and praised the River Krutynia and its vicinity in his works was Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński. In the post-war years, he lived in the Pranie forester's lodge (13 km from the river). Gałczyński praised this land with a poem: 'You are my lake, I am your sun / I decorate you with lights, my happiness humming. / I gild your reeds. I'm leaving. And I'll be back again.' (1978, p. 21).

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Over the centuries, the Krutynia river has continued to play a vital role in the lives of the local peoples. From prehistory to modern times, its natural defences have provided locations for new settlements. In the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, it became a strategic site for military defence. It has been instrumental in the development of the fishing, transport, and tourism industries. To this day, its natural and environmental values remain intact.

The appeal of this area is corroborated in the reports of the visits of three kings — of Poland, Prussia and Spain. Near the Guzianka–Wygryny road, at the side of the Beldany lake, there is a concentration of ancient oaks (Pl IX). The woodlet is referred to as the royal oaks, in memory of Polish king Władysław IV Vasa who camped at the site in 1639. Another ruler who sojourned in the area was Prussian king Frederick William IV. On 18 June 1854, he stayed encamped in a tent during his travels across the Masurian lakes. The route of the steamboat 'Masovia' led from Ryn through Mikołajki to Giżycko at Lake Śniardwy (Toeppen 1870, p. 454). The last king was Juan Carlos I, who arrived at the invitation of President Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 2004 and stayed for a few days at a hotel in Ruciane-Nida (Mierzwa 2018, p. 27).

Managing the contemporary landscape of the Krutynia river is multi-faceted. On the one hand, it is a widely promoted kayak trail, which is thoroughly described in both Internet sources and various tourist guidebooks. Unfortunately, the available materials tend to focus on its natural and scenic values. Ideally, these narratives should be supplemented with contents on local history and culture, which not only enrich the tourist offer, but also attract new types of visitors (for instance, those afraid of the water). To achieve these goals, it is indispensable to promote the biking and the walking trails which allow the tourists to explore the Krutynia river on land and observe its beauty from selected spots (such as waterfront inns). A recommended drivable road running through the villages scattered along the trail is also a must.



Plate IX. Lake Beldany, angler under the royal oak, around 1900 (Source Kujawski 2012 p. 341).

On the other hand, the historic values of some objects are promoted, such as wooden village buildings, locks, bridges, military facilities from World War I, cemeteries, and souvenirs of the ethnic population — Masurians and Old Believers. In many places it refers to the old history, that is, it promotes the legacy of previous generations (*i.e.* cultural heritage). This is best evidenced by the original hotel-guesthouse operating in Iznota, located in the former Prussian settlement. The inventive owner refers to the beliefs and culture of the Prussians. In several objects stylised as a settlement of an Old Prussian tribe, there are large wooden sculptures, dungeons of demons, a ritual

stone circle, an amber chamber, and the staging of Galindian customs organised here ([www.galindia.com.pl/](http://www.galindia.com.pl/)) (Pl. X). In the village of Spychowo, an annual festival ‘Jurand’s Return to Spychowo’ takes place, which refers to the legendary character from the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz entitled *Teutonic Knights*. This made Spychowo a thematic village, in which an interesting idea is the gate in the style of an old settlement at the entrance to the amphitheatre, where a sculpture of Jurand on the top of the scarp is erected, naming the village streets after the heroes of the novel (authors’ field studies, 2016).

In addition, the river is included in the wider perspective of the area of the Great Masurian Lakes, which in 2011 competed in the Seven Natural Wonders of the World competition. This land has been recognised as one of the twenty-eight most beautiful places on earth and one of the five most beautiful places in Europe. Already in 1900, Albert Zweck in his work *Masuren* gave the river the first place ‘among the most beautiful corners of the province’ (Mierzwa 2018, p. 80). All the communities living here were equally delighted with the beauty of this river and used it in the same way. Today the Krutynia deserves promotion not only in the region, but also throughout the country and Europe. It is considered one of the most beautiful rivers of our Continent.



Plate X. Iznota, Galindia guesthouse referring to the Old Prussians (Source [www.galindia.com.pl](http://www.galindia.com.pl/)).

## PRIMARY/ ONLINE SOURCES

- <http://geopol.geo.uni.lodz.pl/index.php?page=rzeki-w-zycie-narodow-ich-gospodarce-i-polityce/> (access 20.03.2020)
- <https://www.galindia.com.pl/> (access 20.03.2020)
- <https://www.splywy.pl/> (access 20.03.2020)

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