



The Royal Prussian Eastern Railway (Ostbahn) and its importance for East-West transportation

Railways in transition – Eastern Europe Railways
Past, Present and Future in the 20th and 21st Centuries
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Chair for Eastern European History



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Topics

I Prussia 1830-1850

II Beginnings of the Ostbahn's construction

III Economic and military aspects

IV The Ostbahn as part of an early European railway network

V Decline

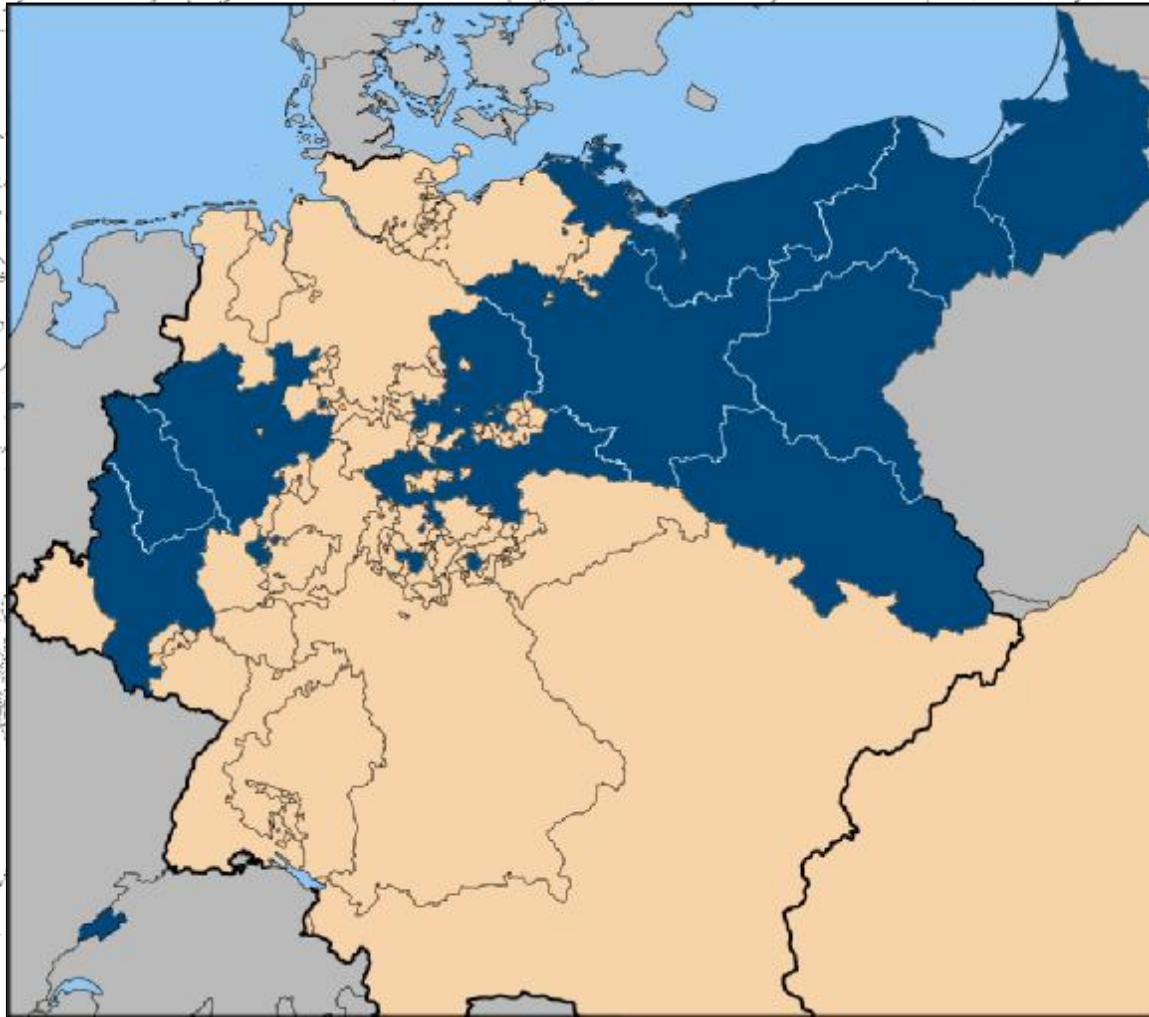
VI Perspectives

VII Research Project: Cultural History of the Ostbahn in its international relations

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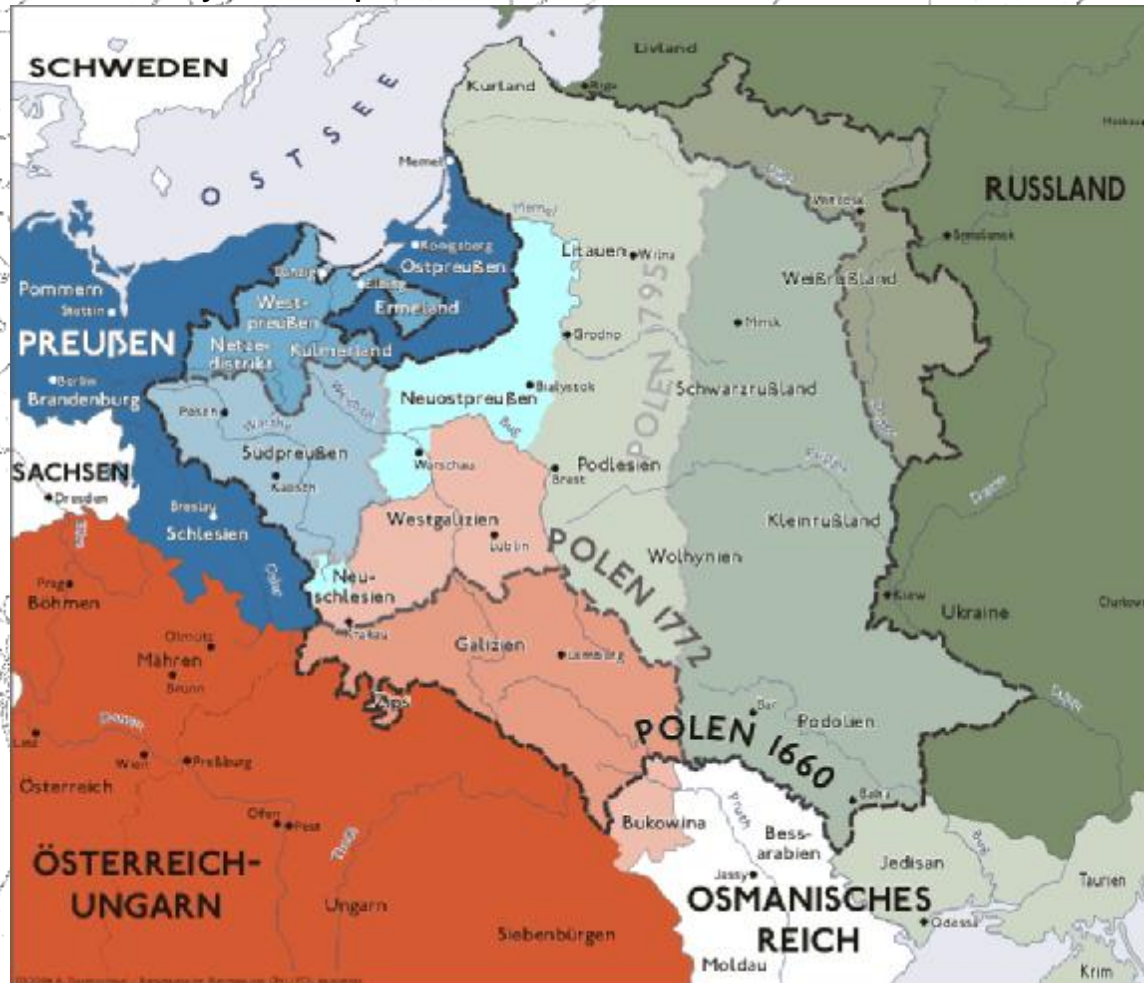
I Prussia 1830-1850



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I Prussia 1830-1850: Beneficiary of the partitions of Poland



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I Prussia 1830-1850

- 
- 1825 first public railway in England (Stockton & Darlington Railway)
 - 1835 Bavarian Ludwigsbahn Nürnberg-Fürth
 - 1837 Russia: St. Petersburg-Zarskoje Selo
 - 1838 Berlin-Potsdam Railways
 - 1843 Berlin-Stettin Railway (extension to Posen in 1848)
 - 1848 Berlin-Breslau/Lower Silesia (Niederschlesisch-Märkische Eisenbahn)
 - 1857 Ostbahn Berlin-Königsberg (Kaliningrad)

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I Prussia 1830-1850

Geography

- divided into two parts
- large parts of the east had been ceded by Poland as result of 1st forced partition

Population

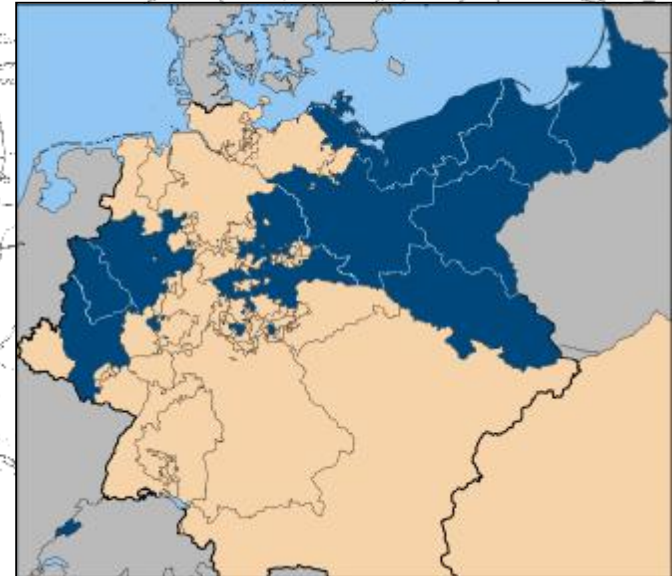
- density shrinking from west to east and from south to north
- Polish majority in some regions of the east

Economy

- fastly developing western and southern parts
- mostly underdeveloped east and north

Communication

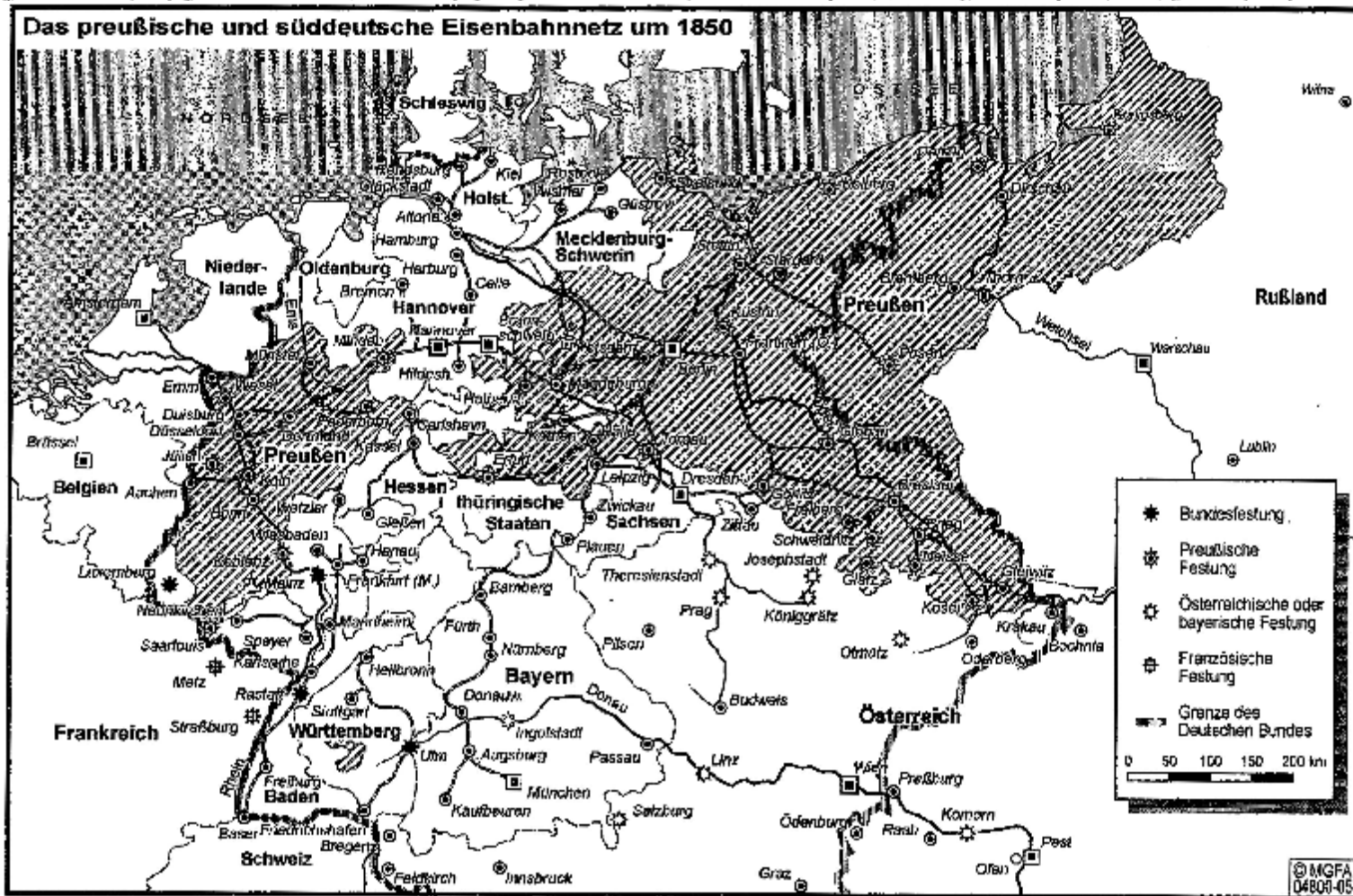
- dominance of newly constructed roads, especially in the east
- Railway construction of the 1840s mainly in the western part (private investment)



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I Prussia 1830-1850



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II Beginnings of the Ostbahn's Construction

Private investment in railway construction

- kind of „railway fever“: massive acquisition of private funds throughout the German states (compare Ralf Roth's work on German railways)

Profitability of the investment

- only in economically prospering or densely inhabited regions (western half of Prussia)
- Berlin-Königsberg: underdeveloped, low population density
- lack of private funds

Solution: “Ostbahn” as state-owned enterprise

- connection Berlin-Königsberg declared to be of high national interest
- development as part of an European railway network with connections to Russia
- economic and military importance

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III Economic and military importance

Military: Memorandums of 1837 and 1840

- Connection of isolated fortresses
- Defence of the eastern borders
- Idea of a "strategic railway network"

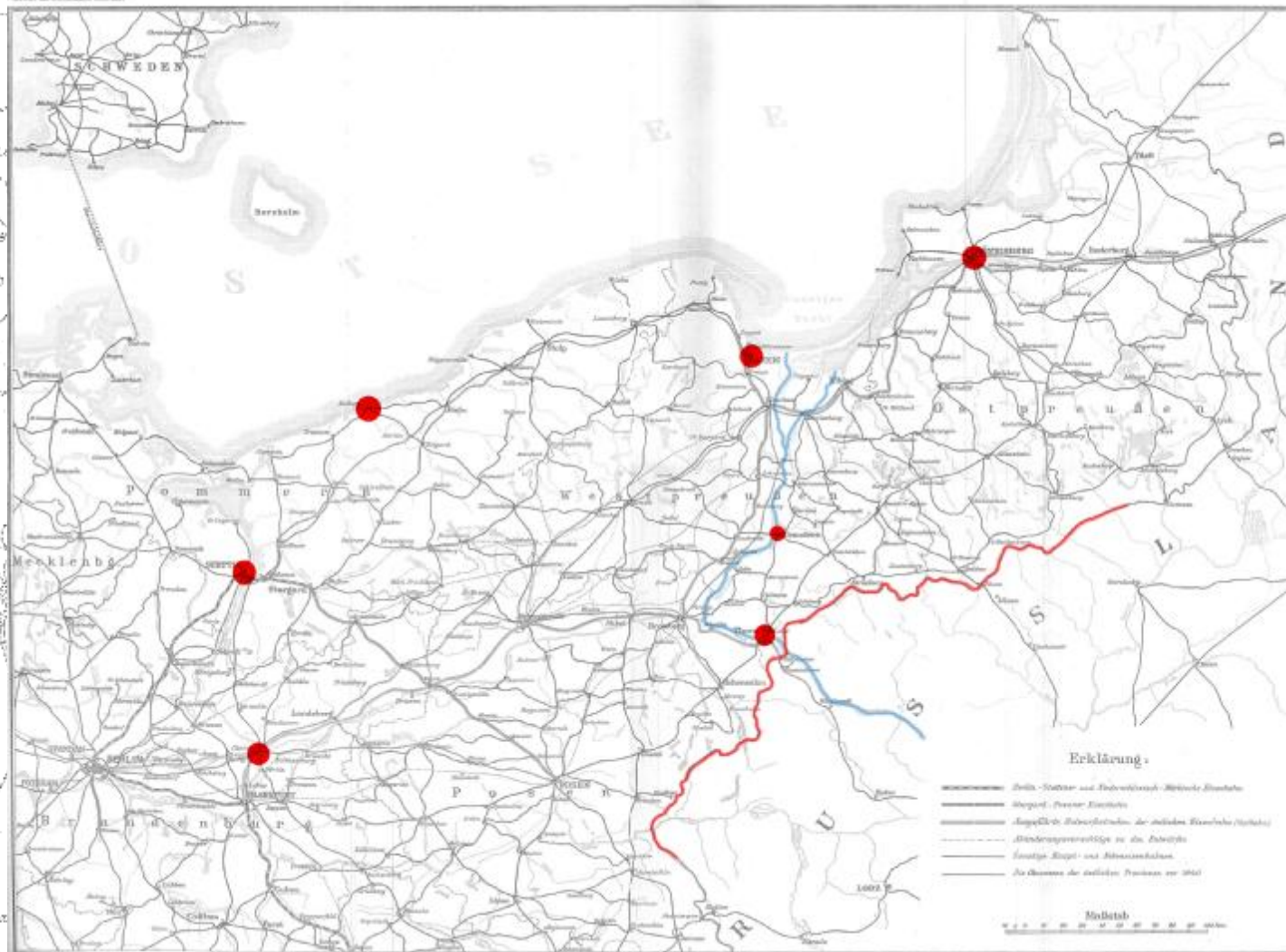
Economy

- affordable agricultural products from the east to be transported to the prospering Prussian capital
- towns alongside the future railway try to influence the future line

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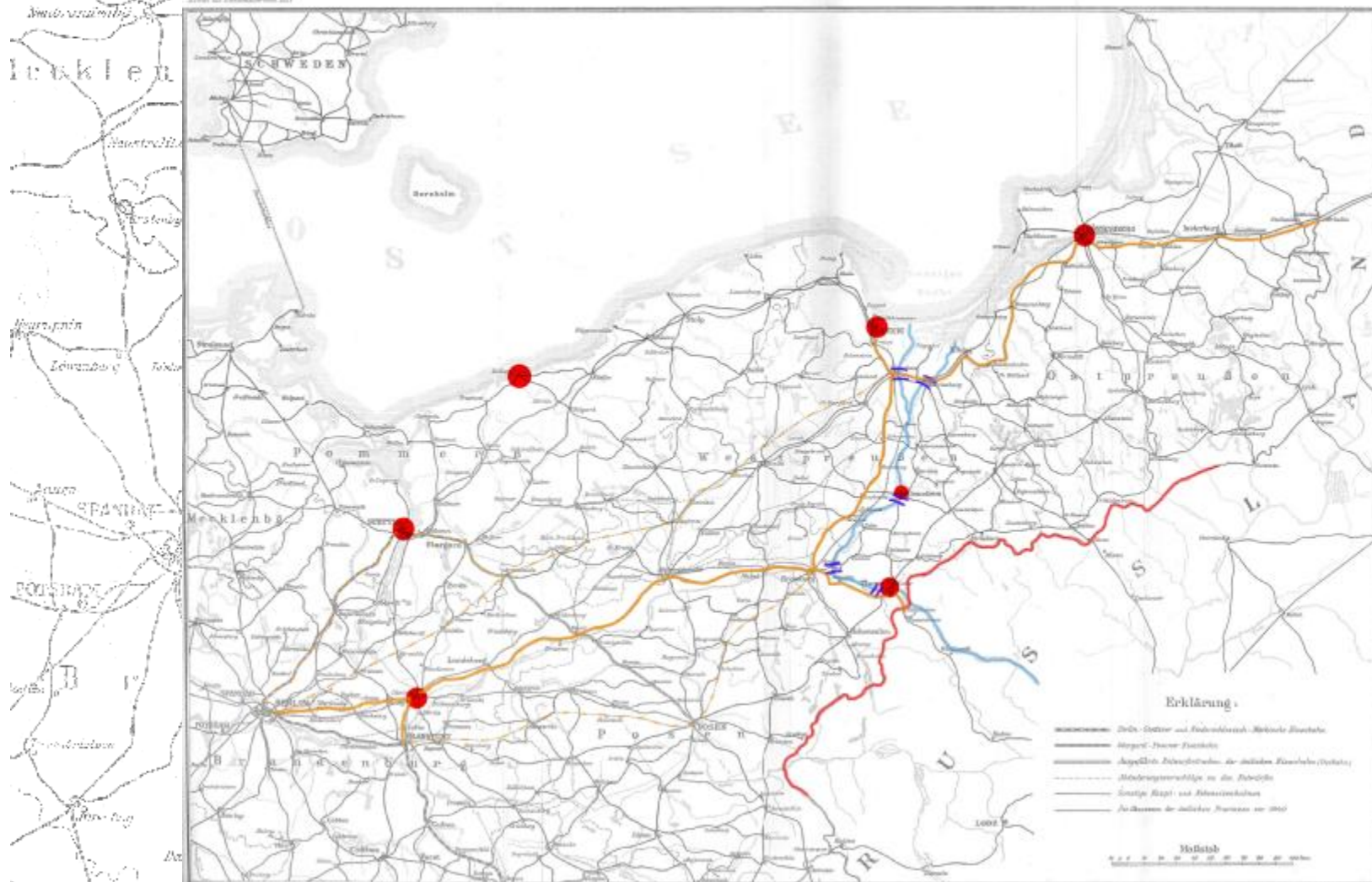
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III Economic and military importance



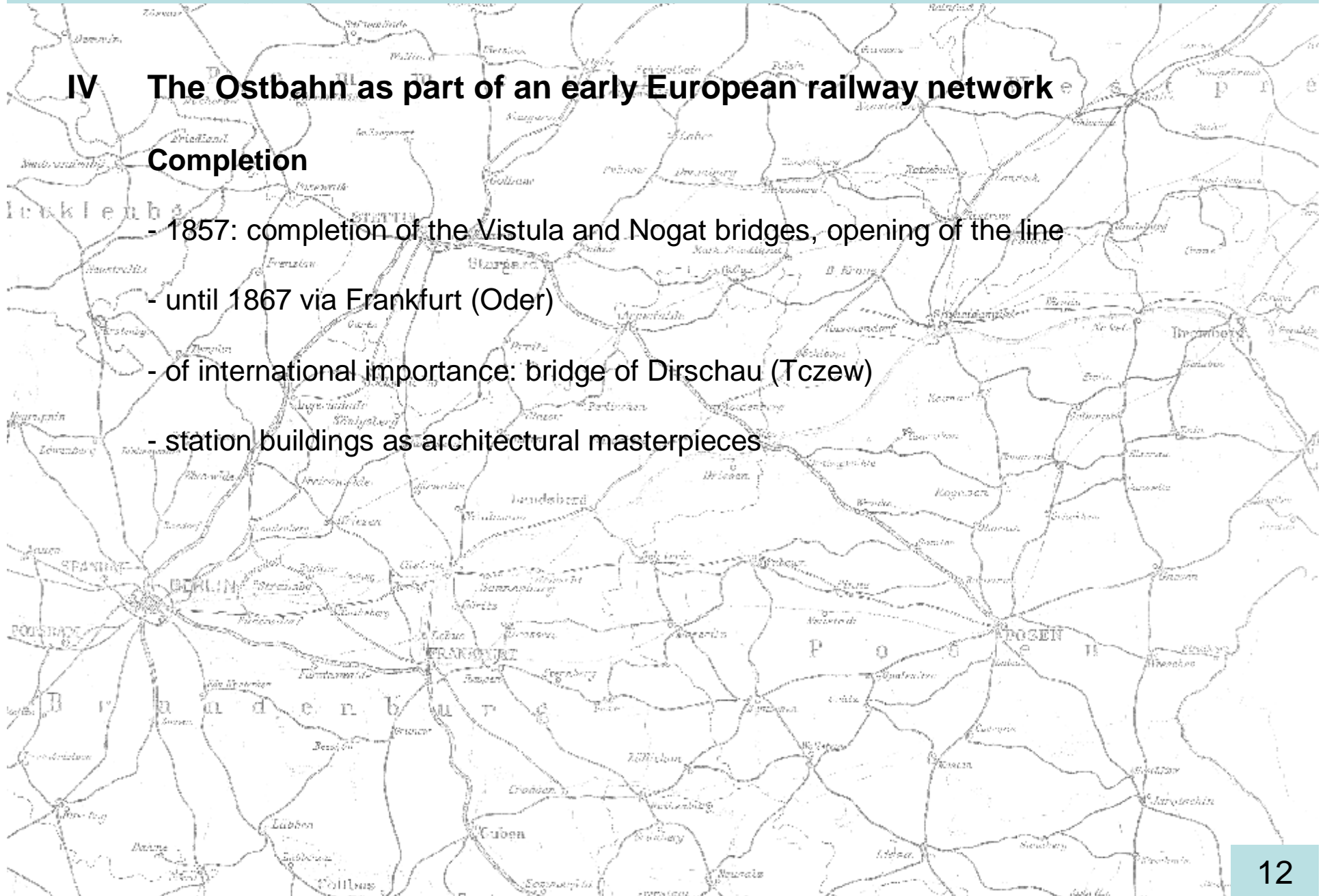
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IV The Ostbahn as part of an early European railway network

Completion

- 1857: completion of the Vistula and Nogat bridges, opening of the line
- until 1867 via Frankfurt (Oder)
- of international importance: bridge of Dirschau (Tczew)
- station buildings as architectural masterpieces



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Bridge of Dirschau (Tczew)

- architect.: Oberbaurat Carl Lentze
- ideal: Britannia Bridge
- length: 837 m, main spans: 130 m



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IV The Ostbahn as part of an early European railway network

Railway stations

- Ostbahnhof Berlin: 1867-1882, demolished in 1952



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IV The Ostbahn as part of an early European railway network

Railway stations

- Ostbahnhof Königsberg (Kaliningrad): 1867-1929



Königsberg i. Pr.

Verlag: M. F. K.

Ostbahnhof



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V Decline

WW I and its consequences

- war sets an end to international transport
- Versailles: new Polish state, so called corridor between the German mainland and Eastern Prussia, transit problem
- reduction of number of trains regular ferry connection
- “Seedienst Ostpreußen”
- 1895: 7 goods trains, 15 passenger trains per day Berlin-Königsberg (Kaliningrad)
- 1920: number of trains at half the level of 1895
- transit problems settled only in 1936; 1939: Berlin-Königsberg in 6.5 hrs



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V Decline

WW II and its consequences

- new borders, dismantling of the second track
- importance today:
 - Germany: local importance
 - Poland: national importance
 - Soviet Union: Kaliningrad-Moscow transit
- Military: Soviet transports
Kaliningrad-Berlin



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VI Perspectives

- after 1989: one daily direct train
- through-carriage Berlin-Kaliningrad: 16,5 hours
- Interessengemeinschaft Ostbahn IGOB:
European pressure group: re-establishment of transborder connections
- new transport axis: Berlin-Frankfurt (Oder)-Poznan-Brest-Moscow
- tour of Viadrina/Kantiana with German,
Polish and Russian students in 2008



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VII Research Project: Cultural History of the Ostbahn in its international relations

Research period:

Mid 19th century-today

elements:

1. Social and economic history:

- research on the beginnings and economic importance of the line as part of a „re-composition of the capitalist world” (Schivelbusch)

2. History of perception:

- relation of the population towards railways in its manifold aspects (trade, social change, migration und tourism)

3. History of international contacts:

- international aspects:
Nord-Express Paris – Berlin – Königsberg – St. Petersburg/
Paris-Riga

4. Perspectives:

- possible future importance of the line: IGOB