

ВСЕОБЩАЯ ИСТОРИЯ

Colonial Reality and Postcolonial Instrumentalization of the Overseas Expansion of the Duchy of Courland*O. I. Yevstratyev*

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The article is devoted to the theoretical understanding of the history of colonial policy of the Duchy of Courland in 1645–1731 through the prism of the phenomenon of a “colonial reality” based on Fernand Braudel’s concept of three levels of historical time and Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis. The article also examines with the help of the postcolonial approach the practice of applying a colonial episode of the history of Courland by some modern nations in the context of “postcolonial instrumentalization” of this issue. The following conclusions are as made: 1) at the level of “event history”, colonialism of Courland organized in a typical way of the 17th century in the form of “point” settlements in Gambia and on Tobago (it included also iron mines in Norway leased from Denmark) was part of Jacob Kettler’s (years of reign 1642–1681) project of turning his state into a “second Holland”; 2) within the “time of very long duration”, Courland had convenient geographic but unfavorable geopolitical conditions for the overseas expansion; 3) within the “time of long duration”, colonial policy of the Duchy faced insurmountable obstacles connected with its ethnosocial structure and its peripheral position within the 17th century world-economy; 4) from 1698 to 1731, Duke Jacob’s heirs contested vainly the Island of Tobago as part of the “Courland inheritance”; 5) at the present stage, we can see how some modern nations use this episode to overcome their “postcolonial syndrome” (Latvians, Belarusians) and justify their “imperial” ambitions (Poles). At both levels (“colonial reality” and “postcolonial instrumentalization”), attempts to escape from the periphery into the core are evident.

Keywords: Duchy of Courland, colonial policy, 17th–18th centuries, world-systems analysis, postcolonial instrumentalization.

Oleg I. Yevstratyev — PhD (History), Associate Professor, the National Institute for Higher Education, 15, ul. Moskovskaia, Minsk, 220007, Republic of Belarus; o.yevstratyev@gmail.com

Олег Игоревич Евстратьев — канд. ист. наук, доц., Республиканский институт высшей школы, Республика Беларусь, 220007, Минск, ул. Московская, 15; o.yevstratyev@gmail.com

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Колониальная действительность и постколониальная инструментализация заморской экспансии Курляндского герцогства

О. И. Евстратьев

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Статья посвящена теоретическому осмыслению истории колониальной политики Курляндского герцогства в 1645–1731 гг. в разрезе существования данного явления в качестве колониальной действительности с опорой на концепцию тройной темпоральности исторического времени Фернана Броделя и на мир-системный подход Иммануила Валлерстайна. Также с применением постколониальной теории рассматривается практика обращения к колониальному эпизоду курляндской истории некоторых современных наций в условиях постколониальной инструментализации представленного сюжета. На основе анализа фактологического материала сделаны следующие выводы: 1) на уровне событийной истории курляндский колониализм, организованный типичным для XVII в. образом в виде точечных поселений в устье реки Гамбия в Западной Африке и на острове Тобаго в Карибском море (также к числу колониальных владений дома Кеттлеров с рядом оговорок можно отнести железные рудники в Норвегии, арендовавшиеся у Дании), был частью замысла курляндского герцога Якоба Кеттлера (годы правления — 1642–1681) по превращению своего государства во «вторую Голландию»; 2) в течение долгого времени Курляндия отличалась удобными географическими, но неблагоприятными геополитическими условиями для осуществления заморской экспансии; 3) колониальная политика герцогства столкнулась с непреодолимыми препятствиями, связанными с его этносоциальной структурой и периферийным положением в рамках мир-экономики XVII в.; 4) с 1698 по 1731 г. наследниками герцога Якоба велась тщетная борьба за остров Тобаго как часть курляндского наследства; 5) на современном этапе наблюдается использование данного сюжета рядом наций для борьбы с постколониальным синдромом (латыши, белорусы) и подкрепления имперских амбиций (поляки). На обоих рассмотренных уровнях (колониальной действительности и постколониальной инструментализации) мы сталкиваемся с попытками вырваться из периферии в центр.

Ключевые слова: Курляндское герцогство, колониальная политика, XVII–XVIII вв., мир-системный анализ, постколониальная инструментализация.

Historical literature clearly distinguishes two zones of the European colonial subjectivity in the early modern era: *the Iberian* (Portugal and Spain), which emerged at the end of the 15th century, and *the North Atlantic* (the Netherlands, England, and France), which replaced the former at the beginning of the 17th century. However, in the 17th–18th centuries, the colonial initiative also came from the region defined as *the Baltic*. It is much less remarkable for historians since it did not have a significant impact on the socio-cultural processes on a global scale, unlike the first two zones. It included the countries of the Baltic Sea coast: Sweden, Denmark, Brandenburg (from 1701, the Kingdom of Prussia), as well as the Duchy of Courland. Individual colonial enterprises of these states are known¹.

¹ See, for example: *Vozgrin V. E. Modeli kolonial'noi politiki Danii: skhodstva i razlichii // Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta. Seriya 2. Istorii. 2010. Issue 4. P. 53–60; Kretzschmar J. Schwedische*

However, a comprehensive study of this phenomenon, overshadowed by the numerous works on the history of the overseas policy of the countries of the “colonial avant-garde”, is yet to be conducted.

Among other countries of the Baltic zone of the colonial subjectivity, Courland is of particular interest. This state did not have such an international influence, political and economic “background” as Sweden, Denmark or Brandenburg-Prussia. Nevertheless, it entered the colonial struggle almost simultaneously with them in the middle of the 17th century. In this article, containing the theoretical conclusions of our PhD thesis on the “Colonial policy of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia in the 17th–18th centuries”, we propose to trace two episodes of the overseas expansion of the Duchy of Courland, from the perspectives of “colonial reality” and “postcolonial instrumentalization”. In the first case, we will rely on Fernand Braudel’s concept of the triple temporality of historical time that implies the division of historical reality within three timescales: the level of “history of events” (l’histoire événementielle), “a very long-term period” (la très longue durée) and “a long-term period” (la longue durée)². The latter is the most important in terms of theoretical comprehension of history. In order to reveal the essence of colonialism of Courland at the level of the “long-term period” we turn to the Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis. Under the “postcolonial instrumentalization”, in the context of this article, we mean the practices of using the colonial episode of the history of Courland by some modern nations to satisfy their actual socio-political needs. In studying of this issue, we will rely on the postcolonial theory.

“**Colonial reality**”. Most researchers agree that at the level of “history of events” overseas expansion of Courland was brought to life by Duke Jacob Kettler’s (years of reign 1642–1681) commitment to the doctrines of mercantilism³. However, such a simplification is unacceptable. In the economic activities of this ruler, the ideals of mercantilism were intricately intertwined with cameralist doctrine. The latter was popular in the German principalities of the Holy Roman Empire, “kindred” to Courland, and assumed the implementation of economic transformations exclusively by the semi-sovereign princes themselves. This is exactly the case of Courland where there was no strong bourgeois class, which was the engine of trade and colonial expansion in the form of powerful joint-stock companies in the “mercantilist” Western Europe. Those companies in no way cared about the welfare, while the cameralists considered its achievement to be one of the most important conditions for the state prosperity⁴. This conviction was shared by Duke Jacob⁵ who consciously or intuitively combined both of these approaches to economic develop-

Handelskompanien und Kolonisationsversuche im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert // Hansische Geschichtsblätter. 1911. Bd. XVII. S. 215–246; *Mattiesen O. H.* Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik der kurländischen Herzöge im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Stuttgart, 1940; *Schück R.* Brandenburg-Preußens Kolonial-Politik unter dem Großen Kurfürsten und seinen Nachfolgern (1647–1721): in 2 Bdn. Leipzig, 1889.

² *Brodell’ F.* Istorii i obschestvennye nauki. Istoricheskaia dlitel’nost’ // *Filosofii i metodologiiia istorii* / ed. by I. S. Kon. Blagoveshchensk, 2000. P. 115–142; *Khakimov G. A.* “Vremia bol’shoi dlitel’nosti” F. Brodelia kak metodologicheskii printsip sotsial’no-gumanitarnogo poznaniiia // *Voprosy filosofii*. 2009. No. 8. P. 135–146.

³ German historian Walter Eckert wrote an entire book about the Duke Jacob’s mercantilist ventures (*Eckert W.* Kurland unter dem Einfluss des Merkantilismus. Ein Beitrag zur Staats- und Wirtschaftspolitik Herzog Jakobs von Kurland (1642–1682). Riga, 1927).

⁴ *Braeuer W.* Kameralismus und Merkantilismus. Ein kritischer Vergleich // *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. 1990. No. 3. S. 107–111.

⁵ *Mattiesen O. H.* Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik... S. 4.

ment in his politics. He tried to implement the “mercantilist” idea of turning his state into a “second Holland”, widespread in the era under consideration⁶, within the “cameralist environment” of the semi-feudal “German principality” which, in fact, was Courland. A prerequisite for achieving this goal was the acquisition of overseas colonies. But the Duke could do this only in accordance with “cameralist” rules relying on his own resources.

Reliable primary sources enable to date the beginning of the colonial policy of the Duchy of Courland to 1645. During this year, Jacob Kettler’s participation in the triangular trade⁷ as well as the sending of his first colonial expedition to Guinea are documented⁸. The overseas expansion of Courland can be considered to have been exclusively a private initiative of the House of Kettlers, namely Duke Jacob and his heirs, the last traces of colonial activity of which are found in 1731⁹. Rulers of Courland owned colonies at the mouth of the Gambia River in West Africa (1651–1660), on the Island of Tobago in the West Indies (1654–1659, 1669, 1681, 1686–1690), as well as iron mines in Norway (1662–1688)¹⁰. The colonies of Courland in Gambia and on Tobago were organized in a typical of the period under consideration way as the “point” settlements in forms of trading posts and small plantations protected by forts and ruled by governors. The projects of the “republican”, that is, self-governing, colonies on Tobago, which were provided in the never implemented Anglo-Courland treaties of 1681, 1698, and 1699 can be deemed innovative. It is noteworthy that the dukes sent Lutheran pastors to their overseas possessions, including for missionary purposes. One of the seven Courland priests known to historians who served in the colonies, namely Joachim Dannenfeldt (he was in Gambia in approximately 1654–1657), received a direct order to learn the language of “black pagans” in order to acquaint them with the “true word of God”¹¹. At the same time, Jacob Kettler was involved in the slave trade, sending African natives to his own and other nations’ colonies in the Caribbean.

Within the framework of the “very long-term period” (*la très longue durée*), i.e. geographically, the Duchy of Courland had convenient conditions for colonial policy. Its territory was even larger than that of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland together or of East England¹² (22,3 thousand km² versus 10,5 and 20 thousand km², respectively); access

⁶ Apparently, Jacob Kettler was inspired by this idea during his trip to Europe in 1634–1637 (*Ibid.* S. 51–52).

⁷ *Anderson E.* Die ersten kurländischen Expeditionen nach Westindien im 17. Jahrhundert // *Baltische Hefte*. 1961. Jg. 8. H. 1. S. 23–24.

⁸ *Mattiesen O. H.* Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik... S. 60–65.

⁹ *Yevstratyev O.* Chronological Dating of the Duchy of Courland’s Colonial Policy // *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*. 2018. No. 3 (108). P. 34–72.

¹⁰ The iron mines in Norway can also be typologically referred to as colonies (*Yevstratyev O.* “Obeshchaem ekhat’ v Norvegiuu”: svedeniia odnogo trudovogo kontrakta o territorial’noi mobil’nosti “rusakov” v XVII v. // *Studia Historica Europæ Orientalis = Issledovaniia po istorii Vostochnoi Evropy*. 2017. Issue 10. P. 135–137). Moreover, they can be considered to be the quintessence of Duke Jacob’s economic thinking and practice. According to German researcher Walter Braeuer, one of the main sources of wealth, from the cameralist point of view, was the metal mining within the borders of the German principalities (*Braeuer W.* *Kameralismus und Merkantilismus...* S. 108). Jacob Kettler, in his turn, combined this typical cameralist approach with the mercantilist concept of overseas colonies, organizing mining far beyond the borders of his state.

¹¹ *Kallmeyer T.* Die evangelischen Kirchen und Prediger Kurlands. Riga, 1910. S. 269, 313, 327, 337–338, 482, 690–691; *Mattiesen O. H.* Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik... S. 287.

¹² According to I. Wallerstein, by 1600 the core of the European world-economy included the north-western Europe, that is, Holland and Zeeland, London and East England, northern and western France

to the Baltic Sea and the abundance of rivers facilitated trade. At the same time, the geopolitical position of Courland was very unfavorable. Surrounded on all sides by pretenders to dominance in the Eastern Baltics — the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Russia, and Sweden — Courland, as the missing element of the “Livonian mosaic”, found itself at the epicenter of every military clash between these countries in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the end, the capture of Duke Jacob by the Swedes in November 1658, which lasted until May 1660, led to the loss of his overseas possessions, which in the meantime were seized by the Dutch and British. Besides, Jacob Kettler began his colonial expansion in the troubled period of the colonial “war of all against all”, when a redistribution of the Iberian overseas possessions by the powers of the North Atlantic zone took place. This circumstance also appeared to be disastrous for colonialism of Courland.

However, the determining factor for the course and results of the colonial policy of the Duchy of Courland was its place within the 17th century capitalist world-economy. This sphere can be attributed to the level of the “long-term period” (*la longue durée*). Courland was distinguished by its abundant nature, especially compared to the Netherlands. Strategic resources at that time — grain and timber — were produced there. According to the data of the Sound Toll Registers¹³, in the period from the emergence of the Duchy to the beginning of the reign of Jacob Kettler, that is, in 1562–1642, the basis of the Courland exports to Western Europe (in terms of regularity and volume), were timber for the shipbuilding¹⁴ (2 061 720 units), rye (15 048 lasts), tar (15 436,75 lasts), flaxseed (1348 lasts), flax (869,06 lasts), wax (15,48 lasts), skins of the livestock (67 727 units). Moreover, 96% of these goods were exported on ships assigned to the ports of the Netherlands: at the time, the Dutch Republic was the hegemon in the core of the capitalist world-economy¹⁵. In comparison with Riga — the trade leader of the Eastern Baltics — and the rest of Livonia, Estonia, and Ingria, Courland exported to Western Europe the following goods: timber for the shipbuilding — 3,4 and 182,5 times more, respectively; tar — 2,5 times less and 1,9 times more, respectively. Thus, within the period under consideration, the Duchy of Courland, among other Eastern Baltic lands, was one of the main suppliers of cheap resources which the Netherlands needed to build and maintain ships, the basis of their economic power. As a “raw materials appendage” to the Dutch Republic, Courland was in the deep periphery of the world-economy, and the hegemon was not interested in its entry into the core. In his turn, Duke Jacob implicitly sought just that.

In the scholarship, the times of Jacob Kettler’s reign (1642–1681) are very often considered to have been the “golden age” in the history of the Duchy, particularly in terms of its economic development. However, the structure of exports from Courland during this period does not confirm such statements. In 1643–1681, the export of timber decreased by 2,5 times, of tar — almost by 2 times: they were needed by Duke Jacob for his own shipbuilding. At the same time, compared with the previous 80 years, during these 38 years,

(*Vallerstain I. Mir-sistema Moderna: v 4 t. T. II: Merkantilizm i konsolidatsiia evropeiskogo mira-ekonomiki, 1600–1750. Moscow, 2015. P.43*).

¹³ The following quantitative data on the structure of Courland exports were obtained as a result of an analysis of the tables contained in: *Bang N.E., Korst K.*: 1) *Tabeller over skibsfart og varetransport gennem Øresund 1497–1660. Bd. 1–2B. København; Leipzig, 1906, 1922, 1933*; 2) *Tabeller over skibsfart og varetransport gennem Øresund 1661–1783 og gennem Storebælt 1701–1748. Bd. 1–2. København; Leipzig, 1930, 1939.*

¹⁴ *Doroshenko V.V. Torgovlia i kupechestvo Rigi v XVII veke. Riga, 1985. P.61.*

¹⁵ *Vallerstain I. Mir-sistema Moderna. P.XXIII, 45.*

the export of other goods, typically “peripheral” for that era, had significantly increased: rye (33 213,05 lasts — growth by 4,6 times), flaxseed (5760,3 lasts — growth by 8,9 times), flax (578,57 lasts — growth by 1,4 times), wax (19 312 lasts — growth by 1,2 times), skins of the livestock (60 700 units — growth by 1,9 times). 72 % of these goods were transported by the Dutch ships. However, Duke Jacob’s efforts to intensify exports did not help him overtake Riga and even the rest of the Eastern Baltic lands. On average, Riga “supplied” 1,7 times more of these goods to the Western Europe, the other Eastern Baltic lands — 1,2 times more. At the same time, this adventurous ruler was able to replenish the list of exported goods with the products of manufactories and mining industries, which was the most important condition for entering the core of the world economy. On the ships from Courland to Western Europe there appeared cloth (2 166 units — 2,1 times more than that exported from Riga and 4,5 times more than from the rest of the Eastern Baltic lands) and metals (91,89 lasts). It is noteworthy that all cloth and 86 % of the metals were exported on the Courland ships. The Netherlands did not want to contribute to the distribution of these goods from Courland: their production and sale were the “monopoly” of the core, which the hegemon did not want to share with its own periphery.

This also was applied to the profitable colonial trade. As far as the effectiveness of the “colonial empire” of Courland, the following fact should be noted. In 1651–1658, during the most productive period of exploitation by Jacob Kettler of his overseas possessions, 5 out of 14 duke’s ships sent to Africa sailed from Gambia to the Baltic Sea bound to Courland, and 2 out of 10 from the Island of Tobago¹⁶. In total, during the active period of the expansion of the Duchy in 1651–1690, 13 vessels entered the Baltic Sea from the Courland colonies on Tobago and in Gambia. Together they delivered about 21,5 thousand pounds of various exotic goods (ivory, gold, pearls, wax, sugar, tobacco, ginger, fruits, etc.). But most of these goods were sold mainly in Amsterdam, and also in Hamburg, Glückstadt, Lübeck, and Copenhagen. The efficiency of the Kettler’s iron mines in Norway was similarly low¹⁷. Thus, it is not possible to confirm the profitable re-export of colonial goods by Courland. Moreover, the demand of the ducal court and the aristocracy of Courland for exotic products was satisfied not with the help of their own colonies, but due to imports from Western Europe.

Thus, in 1642, Duke Jacob headed the state which was firmly “stuck” within the periphery of the capitalist world-economy. Colonial policy together with the shipbuilding, intensifying exports, organizing manufactories and commercial agricultural production was intended to bring Courland from the periphery to the core, or at least to the semi-periphery of the world-economy. Jacob Kettler managed to increase the volume of trade with the core countries, particularly with the Netherlands, which became possible thanks to the efforts of the ducal agent in Amsterdam, Heinrich Momber. However, this commerce was conducted on terms favorable to the hegemon (from Courland, almost exclusively “peripheral” goods were exported). In this respect, the history of the colonial policy of Courland is interesting not so much because it was the first example of a “German colonial

¹⁶ Compare: *Bang N.E., Korst K. Tabeller over skibsfart og varetransport gennem Øresund 1497–1660*. Vol. 1. P. 366–389; Vol. 2A. P. 572; Vol. 2B. P. 62 — with the data of the ships accounts (*Schiffsrechnungen*) (Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs. F. 554. Apr. 1. L. 837. F. 2, 4v–5v, 20–30, 32v, 42v, 44–45v, 47v–50v, 53–57, 80v–81v, 90v–92, 93–94, 104–106, 110–111v, 117–118, 122–122v, 125v–130, 136v, 175–175v). See also: *Mattiesen O.H. Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik...* S. 236–272, 462–470.

¹⁷ *Yevstratyev O. “Obeshchaem ekhat’ v Norvegiuu”...* P. 133–134.

feat” as the German historian Otto Heinz Mattiesen believed¹⁸, but because it represents one of the earliest examples of the failure of the policy of deliberate copying of “modernization”. The Dutch Republic, which was the “role model” for Jacob Kettler, became the “undertaker” of his overseas expansion.

The “golden age” of the history of Courland turned into an economic decline which this state could not overcome until its accession to the Russian Empire in 1795: “even a sharp economic growth in the periphery does not radically change the state of affairs. Under certain circumstances, a rise in production in these countries may even weaken their position. The better the country works, the more “free” or “surplus” capital appears there which is redistributed in favor of the main centers of accumulation”¹⁹. This statement is confirmed by the structure of exports from the Duchy during the reign of Friedrich Casimir (1682–1698), son and successor of Jacob Kettler. During this period, Courland remained a supplier of agricultural raw materials, tar, wax, skins of livestock, and solid fats to the countries of Western Europe, particularly the Netherlands and England²⁰. The export of cloth had become much less frequent, and its volumes in proportion to the 38-year period of the reign of Duke Jacob had decreased by 1,3 times. Thus, the effectiveness of the colonies of Courland as well as all economic enterprises of Duke Jacob turned out to be zero.

As far as the specific features of Courland colonialism are concerned, it is necessary to note its ethno-confessional heterogeneity due to the social structure of the population of the Duchy. By the beginning of Jacob Kettler’s overseas expansion, the number of his subjects varied within 180 thousand people²¹. The elite of the Duchy were Germans who professed Lutheranism (ca. 8% among the population of Courland). The vast majority of the inhabitants of these lands (about 84%²²) were represented by the ancestors of modern Latvians, who were almost exclusively unfree peasants and did not have seafaring experience²³. Due to the lack of the necessary specialists in the Duchy, Jacob and Friedrich Casimir recruited people for colonial expeditions and the settlement of colonies in the core countries (England and the Netherlands) as well as in the states and cities of the Baltic coast (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Königsberg, Lübeck, etc.). Courland Germans took part in the colonial ventures of their masters mostly as governors, commanders of military troops, and priests, and their number among colonists was much lower than the number of foreigners²⁴. It is also noteworthy that the absolute dominance of the Germans as an

¹⁸ *Mattiesen O. H.* Die Kolonial- und Überseepolitik... S. XXXV, XXXIX, XLI.

¹⁹ *Kagarlitskii B. Iu.* Periferiinaia imperiia... P.30–31.

²⁰ See: *Doroshenko V. V.*: 1) Kurliandskii eksport vo vtoroi polovine XVIII v. // *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis = Izvestiia Akademii nauk Latviiskoi SSR.* 1978. No. 12 (377). P. 62–69; 2) Kto postavliat tovary dlia kurliandskogo eksporta na rubezhe XVIII–XIX vekov // *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis = Izvestiia Akademii nauk Latviiskoi SSR.* 1979. No. 9 (386). P. 44–50.

²¹ *Dunsdorfs E.* Die Bevölkerungszahl in Kurzeme (Kurland) im 16. Jahrhundert // *Contributions of Baltic University.* 1947. No. 49. S. 9; *Dybaš B.* Na obrzežach Rzeczypospolitej. Sejmik piltyński w latach 1617–1717 (z dziejów instytucji stanowej). Toruń, 2004. S. 37; *Hoheisel A.* Deutsche und Letten im Herzogtum Kurland 1618 bis 1795 // *Tausend Jahre Nachbarschaft. Die Völker des baltischen Raumes und die Deutschen / Stiftung Ostdeutscher Kulturrat; hrsg. von W. Schlau.* München, 1995. S. 72.

²² *Hoheisel A.* Deutsche und Letten... S. 72.

²³ *Ibid.* S. 77.

²⁴ *Yevstratyev O.* Kolonial’naia “imperiiia” na pogranich’e Evropy: geterogennyi kharakter kolonial’noi politiki gertsogstva Kurliandiia i Semigaliia v XVII–XVIII vekakh // *Problemy istorii i kul’tury pogranich’ia: gumanitarnoe znanie i vyzovy vremeni / Verkhnedvinskii istoriko-kraevedcheskii muzei.* Minsk, 2017. P. 95–103.

ethnic minority in Courland enables to suggest the colonial nature of this state. Thus, the history of the overseas expansion is of interest as the phenomenon known as the “colonies of the colonized”²⁵. The Baltic-German historian Hugo Sewigh wondered why the state, which “was located on the most remote borders of culture and was itself an object of colonization”²⁶ entered into a struggle with the leading maritime powers at that time.

Almost the entire population of Courland lived in rural areas. Only about 5 % of its inhabitants (mostly Germans) inhabited cities.²⁷ Only 7 % of the Courland Germans were representatives of the merchant class who worked mainly within the domestic market and did not have the resources to go “overseas”. The most prosperous group of population was represented by the noble landowners (also 7 % of Courland Germans)²⁸. However, they were “stuck” in the feudal system of values and did not want to get involved in overseas “adventures”. Thus, in the implementation of his ambitious colonial plans, Jacob Kettler had to rely only on his own domain that did not bring much income despite being the largest among all estates in Courland (ca. 34 %)²⁹. All Duke Jacob’s attempts to receive financial support from foreign investors failed. This fact may serve as an argument that the colonial policy of Courland was a private initiative of the House of Kettlers relying on its personal resources. It can be also inferred from the activity of the heirs of Duke Jacob regarding Tobago in the first third of the 18th century. It boiled down to vain attempts to lease the island to English merchants, to receive monetary compensation from the British government for it, or to sell it to the Swedish and even Russian monarchs.

“Postcolonial instrumentalization”. The colonial episode of history of Courland finally ended in 1737 with the death of the last representative of the male branch of the House of Kettlers, the exiled Duke Ferdinand (1655–1737). But it found a second life in the historical memory of the “heirs” of this state. Having been mythologized in German and Latvian national historiographies, the history of the overseas expansion of the Duchy of Courland — quite insignificant within the European colonialism — turned out to be a convenient tool for some modern nations to satisfy their actual socio-political needs. In the first case, it concerns Latvians³⁰, who for most of their history were in a state of dependence on other peoples (Germans, Swedes, Poles, Russians). The Island of Tobago is still considered by many of them to be the “promised land” where their ancestors could get freedom from serfdom and foreign rule turning from slaves to slave owners, from colonized to colonizers. Such perception is reflected in the historiography, fiction literature, cinema, theater, business, tourism, and other spheres of public life³¹. Recently, relying on

²⁵ Merritt H. C. The colony of the colonized: the Duchy of Courland’s Tobago colony and contemporary Latvian national identity // Nationalities Papers. 2010. Vol. 38, no. 4. P. 491–508.

²⁶ Sewigh H. Eine kurländische Colonie // Baltische Monatsschrift. 1872. Bd. 21 (Neuer Folge 3. Bd.). S. 2.

²⁷ Bues A. Das Herzogtum Kurland und der Norden der polnisch-litauischen Adelsrepublik im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Möglichkeiten von Integration und Autonomie. Giessen, 2001. S. 70.

²⁸ Hoheisel A. Deutsche und Letten... S. 72.

²⁹ Dunsdorfs E. Die Gutsbesitzer in Kurland, Semgallen und Pilten am Anfang des 18. Jahrhunderts // Baltische Hefte. 1965. Sonderdruck aus Band 11. S. 219; Eckert W. Kurland unter dem Einfluss... S. 38–39.

³⁰ The Duchy of Courland was located on the territory of modern Latvia and was inhabited mainly by the ancestors of modern Latvians.

³¹ Merritt H. C. The colony of the colonized...; Sooman I., McFarlane J., Tēraudkalns V., Donecker S. From the Port of Ventspils to Great Courland Bay: The Couronian Colony on Tobago in Past and Present // Journal of Baltic Studies. 2013. No. 44 (4). P. 503–526.

the formula “my vassal’s colonies are my colonies”³², Poles and Belarusians have made claims to the colonial episode of Courland history in the form of popular science publications³³. Thus, the colonial policy of Courland, especially on Tobago, having gone through several stages of historiographic mythologization in the spirit of German and Latvian nationalisms, has become a legend that is used by some relatively young post-Soviet nations to overcome painful post-colonial feelings (Latvians, Belarusians) and support their own “imperial” ambitions (Poles).

The following conclusions can be made regarding the nature of the colonial policy of Courland:

- A. At the level of the “history of events” (*l’histoire événementielle*), it was part of the Duke Jacob’s project of transforming his state into a “second Holland”. The colonies of the Duchy of Courland were organized in a typical way of that time — in the form of “point” settlements.
- B. At the level of the “very long-term period” (*la très longue durée*), the Duchy had the prerequisites for overseas expansion in the form of convenient geographic location, which facilitated foreign trade. At the same time, the geopolitical position of Courland was unstable.
- C. At the level of the “long-term period” (*longue durée*) Jacob Kettler faced objective and insurmountable obstacles that determined the form and content of Courland colonialism:
- D. The Duchy was firmly “stuck” within the periphery of the 17th century capitalist world-economy. This circumstance dialectically turned out to be the driving force and the main obstacle on the way of overseas expansion of Duke Jacob, whose actions were implicitly aimed at bringing Courland from the periphery to the core in the context of the struggle for hegemony between the Netherlands, England, and France.
- E. The ethnocultural structure of the population in Courland determined a specific feature of the colonial policy of the duchy — the “colonies of the colonized”.
- F. The social structure of the population determined the nature of Duke Jacob’s colonial policy — its ethno-confessional heterogeneity. For the same reason, the overseas expansion of the Duchy was an exclusively private initiative of the House of Kettlers and was carried out with the support only of its personal funds.
- G. The colonial history of Courland lasted from 1645 to 1731. After the death of Duke Friedrich Casimir in 1698, it was reduced to a vain struggle of the latter’s heirs for the Island of Tobago as part of the “Courland inheritance”.
- H. The colonial episode of the history of Courland is strongly mythologized in historiography as a result of the influence of nationalist intentions of the researchers — Germans and Latvians — who have studied this issue. It is still used (or has a tendency to a public-historical “instrumentalization”) by some nations to overcome their “postcolonial syndrome” (Latvians, Belarusians) and to support their “imperial” ambitions (Poles).

³² The Duchy of Courland was in vassal dependence on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

³³ *Yevstratyev O. I. Kolonial'naiia politika Kurliandskogo gertsogstva v istoricheskoi pamiati narodov Vostochnoi Evropy i Pribaltiki // Sotsial'no-gumanitarnye znaniia. Minsk, 2015. P. 46–48.*

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