



Photo: The River Spree

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Waterworlds: An Alternative History of Brandenburg-Prussia in the Seventeenth Century

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In Person: ENR2 Room S107
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Few people think of Brandenburg or Prussia as watery worlds. Frederick the Great’s famous description of his territory as a “sandbox” tends to dominate our thinking—inaccurately. In fact, the territory was, and remains, one of the “water-richest” states in Germany. Spread across the modern state of Brandenburg lie some 3000 natural and artificial lakes. Interlocking waterways characterize—and characterized—the physical topography of virtually every district, while the structures built on and around them—mills, dams, dikes, causeways, canals, and channels—anchored social and cultural life. Water’s presence was all but inescapable. Thus, in offering an “alternative history” of Brandenburg-Prussia, I do not mean to reject political narratives or socio-cultural analyses but rather to draw our attention to things that deeply concerned virtually all the territory’s inhabitants and that also bore critical political implications. I am asking: how does the history of Brandenburg-Prussia change if we recenter it around water?

Mary Lindemann is Professor Emerita of History, University of Miami. She has written extensively on early modern German and medical history. Her most recent books include: *Liaisons dangereuses: Sex, Law, and Diplomacy in the Age of Frederick the Great* (2006), *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (2nd ed., 2009), and *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648-1790* (2015). She has been the recipient of major scholarly awards, including three NEH Fellowships, a Resident Fellowship at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study, a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, and an Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship. She is currently writing a book on the wars of the mid to late seventeenth century and especially their aftermath in Brandenburg. She has been President of the German Studies Association and was the 2020 President of the American Historical Association.

