

**Paths to Empire: The Production and Mobilization of Historical Narratives by Baltic
German Émigrés, 1905-1918**

by

ERIKS EDUARDS BREDOVSKIS

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Baltic German émigrés living in the German Empire argued for the inclusion of the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire (Estland, Kurland, and Livland) into the *Kaiserreich*. At the start of the twentieth century, Baltic German intellectuals took up academic positions at universities in Germany. Embittered by their previous experience of Russification in the 1880s and then surrounded by a German nationalist academic and political environment, they produced numerous histories of Russia and the Baltic Provinces, which underscored the region's Germanness and its perceived trajectory away from a German national teleology. World War One was a crucial moment in the development of these narratives as now there was a possibility of actually acquiring these provinces.

This thesis argues that *Balten* narratives of eastern Europe demanded the incorporation of the Baltic Provinces into the German Empire through the construction of a specific historical narrative about Germany's role in eastern Europe. These narratives were informed by existing German conceptions of history—particularly those propagated by Heinrich von Treitschke—and from other nineteenth-century discourses of empire—in particular the domestication of “wild” spaces and the “civilizing mission.” Their narratives can be understood as a form of “the civilizing mission,” which mobilized the concept of *Kulturboden*—the understanding that specific spaces (soils) had become Germanized over time. These various aspects came together in the decade before World War One in order to inform the German reading public of the social changes occurring in the Baltic Provinces. During World War One, however, Baltic German émigrés mobilized these narratives in order to contribute to broader discourses surrounding Germany's role in Europe and its war aims. During the war, either collectively or individually, Baltic Germans produced histories and studies on the Baltic Provinces, all of which framed the Provinces as a German space possessing German forms, be they cultural, environmental, or historic. While the rhetoric can be seen as successful in convincing the German government to incorporate the Baltic Provinces in the German Empire in mid-1918, the collapse of Imperial Germany and the Treaty of Versailles resulted in territorial losses. The institutional memory and legacy of these works, however, informed future scholars of the type of language and evidence that would demonstrate the presence of Germanic spaces outside of Germany's borders and show that individuals are able to transform the nature of spaces to suit their specific historical trajectory.

Preface

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Eriks Eduards Bredovskis.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Images	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Map	1
Paths to Empire	2
Images	41
Bibliography	44

List of Images

Image 1	Teutonic Castle Ruins	41
Image 2	Hanseatic Cityscapes	42
Image 3	Baltic Landscapes	43

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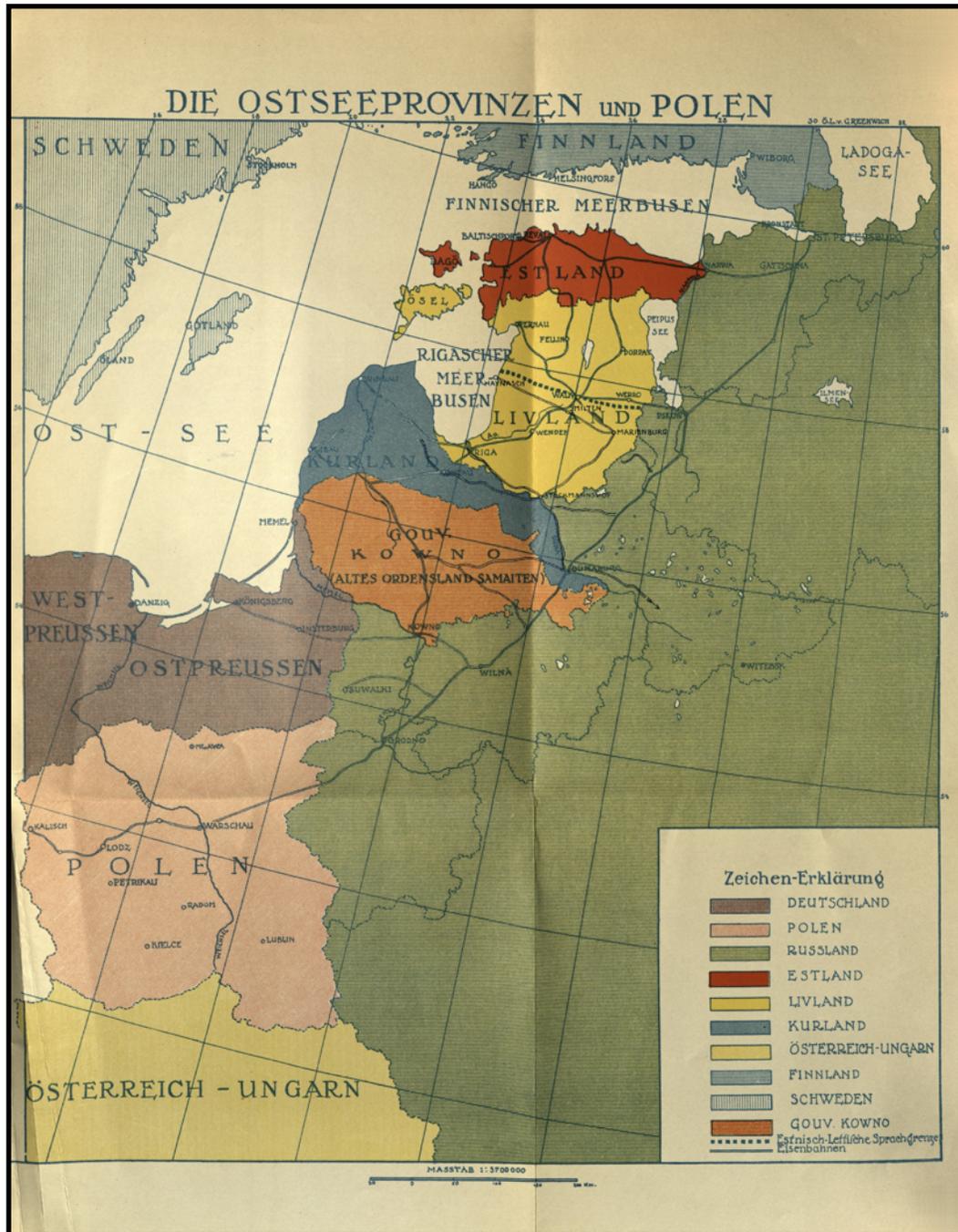
I thank all my friends and colleagues from my undergraduate school, the University of Toronto. I thank all members of the *Stammtisch*, during whose meetings at the GSU or Einstein's we engaged in memorable discussions of political, historical, or comedic interests. 🍷 I want to thank my friends Kevin Hempstead, Dainis Kalniņš, Alex Kritikopoulos, Christine Pitson, Semra Sevi, and Lizzie Tutor for inspiration and support. A very special thank you goes to Barbara Kołodziej, William Roelofs, and Rachel Trode, who have provided constant advice, friendship, and support over the past six years. This work is, in part, the product of their insight and friendship.

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I also want to thank my family. Particularly my mother and father, Baiba and Arnis Bredovskis, for their continued support in my interest in history. I also want to thank my grandparents. I am sure they would be proud of my interest in looking at the past and to try to make sense of it; *Paldies*.

Map



Map 1. "The Baltic Provinces and Poland," in Theodor Schiemann and Otto von Voh, eds. *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland* (Berlin, 1915), back insert.

Paths to Empire

At the Prussian Privy State Archives in Berlin, I was conducting research on Baltic German academics, in particular the historian Theodor Schiemann. Born in 1847 in the Russian province of Kurland, modern-day western Latvia, Schiemann studied at Dorpat University in the 1870s and left for Germany in 1887. There he worked with the historian Heinrich von Treitschke, serving as his successor at the University of Berlin, and became a leading authority in the field of *Ostforschung* (studies of eastern Europe). It was my first time at the Prussian archives, so one day, simply to have the experience of handling a document written by Otto von Bismarck, I ordered his reports from when he was the Prussian ambassador in Russia in 1861. At the Prussian archives, when anyone orders a document, they must sign their name on that document's sign-out sheet. Thus, I was able to see everyone who had read the document before me. I saw several familiar names, but at the top of the list was the signature of Theodor Schiemann, the very person whom I was researching, dated May 1895. As he was an authority on Russia, perhaps it is not surprising that he might have read Bismarck's reports. Yet what particularly struck me was what he hoped to find there. How did he, among other Baltic German émigrés, make sense of Bismarck's reports from Russia? How did the reports inform him on Germany's past and present role in Russia? How did the visible entanglement of Schiemann's personal experience and his professional career—as a Baltic German émigré and as a historian—affect the type of history he wrote?

This thesis examines Baltic German émigrés living in the German Empire and the historical narratives they constructed and mobilized during World War One. Many of the Baltic German émigrés investigated here arrived in Germany in the 1880s and 1890s as a result of

Russification policies at Baltic universities. Germans were socially dominant in the Baltic Provinces and when they moved to Germany, many remained in positions of cultural and political influence. Yet, they lamented and longed for their lost homeland. Back home, the Baltic German émigrés had been targets of a process that attempted to limit regional autonomy in the Russian Empire which they saw as an encroachment on German *Kultur*. They advocated for the preservation of the old political and social structures, but such proposals could only be imagined within the geopolitical realities of the European balance of power and Bismarckian international relations. When World War One began, the nineteenth-century balance of power and its conceptual restrictions suddenly evaporated and new vistas materialized for a German-dominated Europe. It was a transformative moment for Baltic German émigrés and German nationalists. Their imagination expanded alongside a new horizon of possibilities. Their nebulous and abstract thoughts transformed into direct proposals of annexation that seemed attainable. Baltic German émigrés collaborated with each other in writing monographs, pamphlets, and newspaper articles to manipulate public opinion, and appealed to policy-makers to push for the incorporation of the Baltic Provinces into the *Kaiserreich*. Their conception of empire focused on a flexible cultural, rather than immutable racial, definition of Germanness and sheds light onto what this relatively small but influential group of individuals saw as “being German.”

The region referred to as the Baltic Provinces roughly followed the modern-day borders of Estonia and Latvia. In the thirteenth century, during the northern Crusades, this region was conquered by the Teutonic Knights. There, they established the Teutonic Order which formed the genesis of the German-speaking nobility. In the sixteenth century, the Teutonic Order collapsed and the region was contested by Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, and the Russian Empire. In 1721, the

northern half of the Baltic Provinces fall into Russian hands, while the southern half established itself as a vassal state of Poland-Lithuania. The entire region came under Russian control during the third partition of Poland in 1795 and the three provinces, also called governorates, of Estland, Kurland, and Livland were established. Within these provinces, the Baltic German nobility were able to maintain their traditional rights and functioned with greater autonomy than other elites within the Russian Empire. This relative autonomy lasted until the 1880s when the restructuring of the region's administration, a process often described as Russification, curbed the Baltic Germans' political and social autonomy.¹

During Russification, Dorpat University (today called the University of Tartu), the social and intellectual centre for Baltic Germans, came under direct Russian administrative control.² The German language was forbidden and many professors came under suspicion for anti-Russian tendencies.³ As a result, many professors and students, the most notable of whom were Adolf von Harnack, Paul Rohrbach, Theodor Schiemann, and Carl Schirren, left the Baltic Provinces and migrated to the newly formed German Empire.⁴ Harnack became a theologian and journalist in Berlin;⁵ Rohrbach lived in Berlin and was an academic and journalist who specialized in colonial economy and history (he was one of the leading public intellectuals in discourses on

¹ For a concise overview of the history of Latvia, see Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995); for a concise overview of the history of Estonia, see Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 2001); for the authoritative account of Russification, see Edward Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

² Dorpat University was the eleventh largest German-language university in the world, and the largest outside of the German Empire or Austria.

³ Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland*, 174-176.

⁴ Loren Camion, "Behind the Modern Drang nach Osten: Émigrés and Russophobia in Nineteenth-Century Germany" (PhD diss., Indiana U, 1966) is still the most concise summary of Baltic German émigré activities in English.

⁵ Martin Rumscheidt, ed., *Adolf von Harnack: Liberal Theology at its Height* (London: Harper & Row, 1989).

colonialism);⁶ Schiemann, as we saw, was the authority figure on *Ostforschung* and was the founding professor of the seminars for eastern European history and regional studies (*Seminare für osteuropäische Geschichte und Landeskunde*) at the University of Berlin;⁷ Schirren was a professor of history and rector at the Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel.⁸ In addition to similar career paths, they all had common perspectives of the Baltic Provinces. Embittered by their experience of Russification and surrounded by a German academic and political environment imbued with a nationalist understanding of history led by Heinrich von Treitschke, these Baltic German émigrés attempted to make sense of their past experiences.⁹ From the 1880s onward, they produced numerous histories of “the east,” Russia, and the Baltic Provinces. During World War One, many Baltic German émigrés used their political positions to advocate for the inclusion of the Provinces into the German Empire. They formed associations, of which the most notable was the *Baltische Vertrauensrat* (the Baltic Advisory Committee) which facilitated the exchange of knowledge and collectively published works relating to the Baltic Provinces and the Russian Empire.¹⁰ The knowledge that these individuals and associations produced is an entry-point to the fantasies of an upper class who were obsessed with

⁶ Walter Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das “Größere Deutschland”*: *Ethischer Imperialismus im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter* (München, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1972).

⁷ Klaus Meyer, *Theodor Schiemann als Politischer Publizist* (Frankfurt & Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1956).

⁸ Michael Garleff, ed., *Carl Schirren als Gelehrter im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politischer Publizistik* (Lüneberg, Verlag Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2013).

⁹ German historians during the *Kaiserreich* understood German unification under Prussian leadership as an inevitable step in Germany’s development towards modernity. Their nationalist histories were also referred to as the “Borussian myth.” For a concise summary of German historiography during the *Kaiserreich*, see Matthew Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire 1871-1918* (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2008), 7-11; also see Stephan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany Since 1800* (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 29-36; Wolfgang Mommsen, *Kultur und Krieg: die Rolle der Intellektuellen, Künstler und Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996).

¹⁰ Claus Grimm, *Jahre deutsche Entscheidung im Baltikum 1918/1919* (Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1939), 43; Bastian Filaretow, “Die Baltische Bruderschaft. Wider den Zeitgeist?” in Michael Garleff, ed., *Deutschbalten, Weimar Republik und Drittes Reich* vol. 1, (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 17; Joachim Lehmann, “Der Baltische Vertrauensrat und die Unabhängigkeit der baltischen Staaten Ausgang des Ersten Weltkriegs” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 25, no. 2 (June 1994): 131-138. The most prominent members of the *Baltischer Vertrauensrat* were Johannes Haller, Adolf von Harnack, Paul Rohrbach, Theodor Schiemann, Rheinhold Seeberg, and Otto von Veh.

reestablishing the cultural, political, and social *status quo ante* within the Baltic Provinces, their *Heimat*.

This group of Baltic German émigrés were commonly referred to as *die Balten* (singl. *ein Balte*). Within the context of Imperial Germany, the *Balten* were the Dorpat-educated Baltic Germans who moved to the *Kaiserreich* and possessed a memory of Russification. This use of *Balte* (Baltic) illustrates the semantic complexity of the region. Before the establishment of an independent Latvia and Lithuania in 1918, “*die Balten*” typically followed the aforementioned definition—the Baltic Germans. But in the 1920s, the term shifted to today’s sense of the word of the Baltic peoples (the Latvians and Lithuanians).¹¹ The variety of meanings of the word Baltic perhaps highlights the difficulty in producing a singular historic narrative as Baltic can represent a variety of peoples, places, or ideas.

* * *

This linguistic complexity comes forward when we examine the historiography on the Baltic Germans. Recently, there has been a growing interest in studying the legacy of Baltic Germans in Estonian and Latvian culture. These works, however, often ignore Baltic Germans once they have left the Provinces. This limits histories of Baltic Germans to geographic boundaries—

¹¹ The complexity of the word “Baltic” becomes evident when one notices that Lithuanians are a Baltic people (Lithuanian is part of the Baltic language family) but were not part of the Baltic Provinces, as they did not possess a German nobility, but rather a Polish-speaking nobility.

emphasizing “baltic” as a geographic adjective and not a part of one’s identity.¹² As we will see, many *Balten* saw the Provinces as their *Heimat*. Furthermore, few works exist which examine the activities of the *Balten* in the German Empire during World War One. Those that do typically place the *Balten* within other identifying categories such as academics, the German nobility, or Russian émigrés.¹³ The *Balten* are, most often, seen as secondary characters in histories of the German right and visions of eastern Europe, who advocated for conquest and settlement of the Provinces or of other eastern European territories.¹⁴ But these works rely on only one aspect of Baltic German identity, rather than considering the complex entanglement of their relationship to various empires, nations, and peoples. In fact, for the *Balten*, their vision of eastern Europe, German imperialism, and colonialism was informed by many factors, so arguing that its roots lay only in their conservatism or their Russian (geographic) heritage ignores the more subtle and interconnected development of their historic and national consciousness.

Thematically, this thesis addresses questions relating to German colonialism and imperialism in eastern Europe, specifically the new approach by historians in tracking the

¹² Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972); Mark Hatlie, *Riga at War 1914-1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multi-ethnic Metropolis* (Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut, 2014); Anders Henriksson, *The Tsar's Loyal Germans: the Riga German Community, Social Change and the Nationality Question, 1855-1905* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983); Anders Henriksson, *Vassals and Citizens: the Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia, 1905-1914* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2009); Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit: Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Gert von Pistohlkors, Norbert Angermann, Michael Garleff, and Wilhelm Lenz, *Ostseeprovinzen, Baltische Staaten und das Nationale: Festschrift für Gert von Pistohlkors zum 70. Geburtstag* (Münster: Lit, 2005); Heide Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity: Family, Caste and Capitalism Among the Baltic German Nobility* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999). One notable exception is the two-volume work Michael Garleff, ed., *Deutschbalten, Weimarer Republik und Drittes Reich* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001).

¹³ Camion, “Behind the Modern Drang nach Osten”; Robert Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Émigrés in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

¹⁴ Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race*; Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, trans. Marian Jackson (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975); John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington, UK; New York: Berg Publishers, 1985) are the most well-known examples.

development of eastern Europe as a colonial space for Germany. This approach was stimulated by Fritz Fischer and his assertion that the political elites of the *Kaiserreich* possessed the broad war aim of establishing a *Mitteleuropa*—an economic zone with Germany dominating the continent—so that it could take on the British Empire to become a world power (*Weltmacht*).¹⁵ Fisher’s work set off a string of research searching for Germany’s *Sonderweg*, or “special path,” by tracing continuities or discontinuities between imperial and Nazi pasts. Hans-Ulrich Wehler furthered Fischer’s argument in the 1970s by suggesting that Germany experienced a “partial modernization.” Germany’s political elites maintained the *status quo* of social relations by deflecting domestic tensions outward and best seen through Wilhelm II’s aggressive foreign policy—Wehler’s concept of “social imperialism.”¹⁶ When it came to Germany’s war aims in eastern Europe, Wehler argued that the economic (capitalists), political (notables), and social (*Junkers*) elites were always interested in “concrete gains, whether economic or strategic in nature, or concerned with new settlement programmes and national minorities.”¹⁷ With the *telos* of Hitler and World War Two, historians like Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler asserted that the domestic social conditions and international expansionist visions of the Wilhelmine era were simply less developed forms of the imperial and genocidal practices of Hitler’s Germany.¹⁸ The sharpest academic responses came from the Anglo-American world during the various social and cultural turns of the 1980s and 1990s. The pathbreaking evaluations on the continuities of

¹⁵ Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967), 274-277; Fischer, *War of Illusions*. For a concise summary of the Fischer controversy see Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*, 20-25.

¹⁶ Wehler, *The German Empire*, 170-181.

¹⁷ Wehler, *The German Empire*, 209-211. Quote from 209.

¹⁸ For a systematic engagement with questions of continuity between the imperial and Nazi eras, especially between German colonial rule in South-West Africa and Nazi rule in Europe, see Robert Gerwarth, Stephan Malinowski, “Hanna Arendt’s Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz” *Central European History* 42, no. 2 (June 2009): 279-300.

German history by David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley, and Richard Evans argued, first, that historians like Fischer and Wehler worked from the assumption that there was only one “correct” path to modernity—the path which France and the United Kingdom took—and, second, that the political and social experience of many middle and working class Germans were similar to their counterparts in other European states.¹⁹ In short, Germany’s development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was one possible path towards modernity or, as Blackbourn put it, “all national histories are peculiar, but some appear to me more peculiar than others.”²⁰

Looking for the peculiarities of German history revitalized research on Germany’s views of eastern Europe. Michael Burleigh’s rather early (1988) work on *Ostforschung* called for historians to examine how the legacy of Prussian and then German governance of Poles influenced the views and treatment of people of eastern Europe during the Weimar and Nazi eras.²¹ More recently, scholars of Germany—with additional methodological support from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe*²²—have commonly argued that in discourses surrounding eastern Europe, “what was at stake [...] was often actually a definition of German national identity.”²³ The production of these identities resulted in a wide,

¹⁹ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²⁰ Quote from Blackbourn and Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 286; David Blackbourn and Richard Evans *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Alf Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²¹ Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*; for another early take on looking at eastern Europe within colonial terms—and adding further nuance to Fischer’s argument—see Woodruff Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²³ Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

horizontal view of competing ideas, visions, and actions in the same geographic and temporal context.²⁴

Philipp Ther wrote in 2004 of the benefits of reading the German Empire “under the paradigm of imperial rule.” He wrote that such thinking, first, “provides an opportunity to go beyond the prevalent ethnocentrism of postwar historiography” and helps “to Europeanize and even globalize German history” and, second, brings to our attention that “the various non-German populations were not just objects of German rule, but they deeply influenced German history.”²⁵ Ther’s call for considering the German Empire an empire is extremely useful in thinking of German imaginations of eastern Europe.²⁶ While many historians have already answered his call, most of these works have focused on Prussian Poland, and its role as Germany’s “internal colony,” as Germany’s “wild East” in need of German *Kultur* and rationalization.²⁷ Histories of Germany’s views of eastern Europe rarely look beyond the border posts of the *Kaiserreich*. Germans in the nineteenth century, like other Europeans, constructed imagined spaces and communities—of themselves and of others—which often did not align with

²⁴ Shelly Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013); Elizabeth B. Jones, “The Rural “Social Ladder”: Internal Colonization, Germanization and Civilizing Missions in the German Empire” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40, 4 (2014): 457–92; Kristin Kopp, *Germany’s Wild East: Constructing Poland as a Colonial Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*; Vejas Liulevicius, *Warland on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robert Nelson, ed., *Germans, Poland, and Colonial Expansion to the East, 1850 Through the Present* (New York, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Henry Cord Meyer, *Drang nach Osten Fortunes of a Slogan-Concept in German Slavic Relations, 1849-1990* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996); Annemarie Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914-1922* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Die Deutschen und der Osten: Feindbild und Traumland* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2007).

²⁵ Philipp Ther, “Imperial Instead of National History: Positioning Modern German History on the Map of European Empire” in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, eds., *Imperial Rule* (Budapest, New York: Central European Press, 2004), 48.

²⁶ For a concise and thought-provoking article on seeing the German Empire through an imperial lens, see Edward Ross Dickinson, “The German Empire an Empire?” *History Workshop Journal* 66 (Autumn, 2008): 129-162. Also see Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*; Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East*.

²⁷ The term “wild east” is from Kopp, *Germany’s Wild East*; also see Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*.

state borders. Regions with a highly mixed population—often at the borders of imperial polities—were seen as frontiers, peripheries, or borderlands. Within the borderlands of empires, power relations and forms of identity were constantly in flux, moving with the ebbs and flows of imperial policy. Polities attempted to reconfigure, construct, and assert immutable categories of ethnic, national, or racial identity to maintain control over diverse populations—such politics were what Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper saw as one of the many “imperial repertoires” operating at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸ The Baltic German émigrés, with their lived-experience of such policies (Russification), tried to fill gaps in their knowledge of Russian motivations by constructing a historical narrative.²⁹ Their narratives, in contrast to other German groups like the Pan-Germans or the German Eastern Marches Society had a different tone. It imagined a more dire situation for the enclaves of German settlers and, more broadly, for Germany and German *Kultur*; other empires were already imposing their own policies and rule onto German peoples and places. But bound by the geopolitical reality of pre-war Europe, all that the Baltic Germans could do was to inform the reading public and propagate Russophobic

²⁸ Quote from Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 331-333, 366-368; This article’s definition of empire is informed by *Ibid.*, 8-11; Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-58; Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, 1 (1989): 134-161. Thinking of the Baltic Provinces as a potential “external colony” of the German Empire puts an external colony in close geographic proximity with an “internal colony” (Prussian Poland).

²⁹ For an insightful study on the role of knowledge production in nineteenth-century European empire (the British Empire in particular), see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993). Richards describes how bureaucrats, diplomats and scholars “were painfully aware of the gaps in their knowledge [about the World] and did their best to fill them in. The filler they liked best was information” and often the works produced by this information (secondary literature) “about the British Empire not as it was but as it was imagined to have been.” See, *Ibid.*, 1-8.

and anti-Russian sentiments in newspapers and monographs.³⁰ Before 1914, Germans were not able to conceive of a situation where they might be in a position to directly manipulate the political and social environment outside of their own borders. But this did not stop the *Balten* and others from thinking about the area's significance for Germany. Similarly, the *Balten* did not think that new nation-states—one people, one territory one state—would materialize in Europe, especially at the expense of European empires. Their thinking was locked within forms of empire and the preservation of its structures—that in empires, different people were ruled differently.³¹ Once World War One began, they could mobilize their intellectual and social capital to influence discourses on Germany's war aims. The *Balten* produced one set of the history of Germany and its path to empire. This forgotten alternative to Germany's role, its past, present, and future, shows the uneven territory of Germany's understanding of eastern Europe and of empire.

* * *

Balten narratives of eastern Europe argued for the incorporation of the Baltic Provinces into the German Empire through the construction of a specific historical narrative about Germany's role in eastern Europe. The narrative's trajectory was heavily informed by nationalist discourses in Germany and ideas stemming from discourses surrounding nineteenth-century European imperialism and colonialism. When it came to considering the "Germanness" of people or places,

³⁰ For Baltic German examples, see Troy Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril: Education, the Public Sphere, and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1890-1914* (London: Camden House, 2010). The production of written work is still important to examine in order to better understand the development and transmission of ideas within (or between) empires. Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr have recently reminded us about the importance of the "paper empire"—that monographs, pamphlets, periodicals, and brochures acted as "a carrier of imperial opinion and authority and a provocation to imperial power as well." Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, eds., *Ten Books that Shaped the British Empire. Creating an Imperial Commons* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.

³¹ This thesis' definition of empire is informed by Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 8-11. For a similar definition, see Jürgen Osterhammel, "Europamodelle und imperiale Kontexte" *Journal of Modern European History* 2 (2004), 172. Also see Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 366-368; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), 11, 157-158; Ther, "Imperial Instead of National History" 47-66.

scholars commonly follow Fichte's or Herder's belief that in the nineteenth century, language was the central yardstick for the German nation, which only later transformed into a polity with immutable ethnic or racial boundaries.³² However, religion, geographies, and histories were additional prerequisites for membership in the nation of equal or greater importance. The *Balten*, in particular, focused on the historicity of the Baltic Sea and the cultural and cultivation practices of the Provinces as evidence of a German past and, when presented in their histories of Germany, evidence of the region's Germanic future. World War One would become a watershed in the range of possibilities they could imagine. The *Balten* wanted to expand direct German control to what they regarded as existing German spaces, thus fulfilling what they saw as one *telos* of German history—the unification of all Germanic lands.

To the *Balten*, this was not expansion, but rather reunification of a distant and forgotten German land. Nor did they look at land as the only historic place or as the only arena of German history. Their eyes were on the sea.³³ The *Balten* adopted a definition of the German nation which from 1915 onward presented the Baltic Sea as a historic German space whose watershed served as one part of Germany's eastern border. The *Balten* wanted to draw a "German line"—that is, a border between Germans and non-Germans—and within these borders lay the Baltic Provinces. They re-cast their own and others' intellectual tools to do this. They used their social position within the *Kaiserreich* to construct historical narratives that used the Baltic Sea as one

³² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1966); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism: Myth and Reality since 1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³³ The idea that *Balten* understood the sea as the arena of German history could be expanded to include the North Sea—especially that the *Balten* were obsessed with England's control of global trading routes. For historic examples of this see; Paul Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt* (Leipzig: Verlag Königstein im Tanus, 1912) and Paul Rohrbach, *Deutschland unter den Weltvölkern: Materialien zur auswärtigen Politik* (Berlin=Schöneberg, 1912). For secondary literature on Baltic Germans' advocacy for war with the British Empire, see Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, 60-66; Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, 160-164.

important element of German history. Informed by the dominating Treitschkean understanding of the past, they positioned the incorporation of the Provinces as a historic necessity on Germany's "path to modernity." Their view of the Provinces instructed them to see German cultural, economic, geographic, and historical forms in the Baltic landscape. To them, the Provinces' cultural and physical characteristics had been shaped by the ruling Baltic German gentry, and the past historical exposure to German *Kultur* had made the Provinces' cityscapes, farmscapes, and landscapes German.

This reconfiguration of the Provinces towards German forms was part of larger nineteenth century processes. The *Balten* mobilized discourses from other imperial European powers' expansion and domination of the majority of the world's surface. Of particular interest was the "opening of the West" by the United States in North America. Many Germans saw this as an example of European domination of nature and the domestication of "irrational" and "wild" spaces to serve one's nation.³⁴ This example complemented more immediate memories of attempts by German engineers like Otto Intze to "modernize" the German landscape through dam construction or romantic nationalists' desire to preserve original and intrinsically German landscapes by establishing *Heimat* protection associations.³⁵ Additionally, the *Balten* aroused notions of the "civilizing mission" from British and French imperial projects and refashioned

³⁴ For a theoretical take on modern states' desire to domesticate and homogenize nature, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1998); For works on German interests in the expansion of the United States, see David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: WW Norton, 2006); Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Williard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); Jeffery Wilson, "Environmental Chauvinism in the Prussian East: Forestry as a Civilizing Mission on the Ethnic Frontier, 1871-1914" *Central European History* 41 (2008), 27-70.

³⁵ Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*; Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller, eds., *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Simon Shama, *Landscape and Memory* (Toronto: Random House, 1995).

them to encompass control of the economic system, peoples, and bodies, in addition to imposing cultural and cultivational forms.³⁶

The resulting synthesis of ideas articulated that membership in the German nation was flexible enough for the indigenous population, the Estonians and Latvians, to gain or lose their “Germanness.” The *Balten* thus felt that in order to secure the Baltic Provinces as a German space indefinitely, they needed to continue previous Baltic German initiatives such as language education and civil administration. This would, they understood, gradually integrate the indigenous populations and the Provinces into an expanded German Empire.

The personal history of the *Balten* influenced this vision of eastern Europe. Their conception of history saw that all deviations from their path was detrimental to Germany. Russification and the Revolution of 1905 were moments when the Provinces veered away from their *telos*. At the time, they could do little except inform the reading public. But World War One changed the range of possibilities. They needed to recast and mobilize their histories to argue for the inclusion of the Baltic Provinces into the German Empire. Their assessment of the Germanness of areas outside of the imperial (pre-1914) borders would be influential in future thinking about eastern Europe. The knowledge and documents they created demonstrated the Germanness of territories outside of the German state and the ability to further Germanize them.

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The *Balten* wanted a history. Social groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began producing historical narratives which put the national community—and the establishment of a

³⁶ Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Zivilisierungsmissionen: Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Harals Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Wilmeldon Publishing Company, 2004).

nation-state—front and centre. Political elites and intellectuals actively constructed collective pasts in order to assert themselves as the cultural, political, and social authorities for their national group.³⁷ As part of these elites, historians in particular came to read history “backwards from a particular *telos*, which lay in the future [and] that *telos* tended to be the nation-state.”³⁸ Stefan Berger reminds us that “historians came to set themselves up as key arbiters in borderland conflicts tied up with the imagining of nations.”³⁹ The desire to include all German speakers into a single state was the *telos* for the *Balten*. They were intellectuals who used their political and social positions to produce a specific narrative of German history that included the Baltic Provinces.

The narratives the *Balten* constructed did not attempt to simply homogenize the Baltic German gentry into the German nation, which would abolish their unique historical and social position within the Provinces. Rather, they portrayed the Baltic German gentry and their history as a local expression of German nationhood: a Baltic German *Heimat*.⁴⁰ Celia Applegate and Alon Confino’s work on localism and particularism informs us that Germans expressed allegiance to the new-founded German Empire through localized performances and expressions

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006); John Breuilly, *Nations and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*; Anthony Smith, *Nationalism in the 20th Century* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979).

³⁸ Quote from Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5; also see Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz, *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Berger, *The Search for Normality*.

³⁹ Berger and Conrad *The Past as History*, 144.

⁴⁰ “*Heimat*” is a difficult word to translate. Literally it means home, but it represents more than just the physical buildings. Its meaning includes the social and cultural interactions of individuals within the home as well as the immediate region surrounding it, say, the homestead, the parish, the pub, or the marketplace. For an interesting take on *Heimat*’s various meanings and its importance to studying German history see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 4-6; for a more detailed discussion on the historical development of “*Heimat*,” also see Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 3-8.

of their immediate—local and pre-unification—identity.⁴¹ Existing constructions of the past as, say, Bavarians or Saxons became components of German national identity. For many members of the upper and middle classes, to flex their cultural and political muscles as Bavarians or Saxons demonstrated their membership within a larger German nation. For those living outside of the German Empire, such relationships to the nation through local metaphors became examples to follow.

The *Balten* wanted a nation for their local metaphors. They re-crafted intellectual and rhetorical tools used by other Germans in order to integrate their geographic and social community into the constellation of other German localities.⁴² They painted landscapes, wrote novels and poems, and held annual processions in order to mimic the notions of *Heimat* present in Imperial Germany.⁴³ Novelists like Eduard von Keyserling wrote about the Baltic shores as part of “Germandom,” while painters like Eugen Dücker depicted Baltic landscapes as one dialect of the German form.⁴⁴ Historians too, were aware of the Provinces’ position relative to the German Empire and thus tried to portray the region as a unique iteration of Germanness. Valerian Tornius, a younger *Balte*, explained that he “cannot emphasize enough that the Baltic Germans, unlike the *Reichsdeutsche* or German-Austrians, do not know of a fatherland. [They are]

⁴¹ Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Abigail Green, *Fatherland: State-building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Retallack and David Blackbourn, eds., *Localism, Landscape and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

⁴² For a thought-provoking discussion on the role of empires in nation-building projects in “peripheries,” see Stephan Berger, Aleksey Miller, “Nation-Building and Regional Integration, c.1800-1914: the Role of Empires” *European Review of History* 15 no. 3 (June 2008): 317-330.

⁴³ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*; Kristina Jöekalda, “Baltic Identity via German Heritage? Seeking Baltic German Art in the Nineteenth Century” *Kunsteaduslikke Uurimusi* 23 (2014): 79-110; John Perkins & Felix Patrikeeff, “National Identity Formation in the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire: The Skerst Family in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” *National Identities* 3, no. 1 (2001): 37-49; Ulrike Plath, “Heimat: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging” *Kunsteaduslikke Uurimusi* 23 (2014): 55-78.

⁴⁴ Jöekalda, “Baltic Identity via German Heritage?”: 79-110; Eduard von Keyserling, *Wellen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1971), originally published in 1911.

considered aliens in the Russian Empire.”⁴⁵ Paul Rohrbach once recalled a conversation with his German colleague while travelling from Königsberg to the Baltic Provinces: “So, now we are in Russia! No, I retorted, we are not in Russia, rather in Kurland!”⁴⁶ Similar statements were written in poems that concluded with calls like “We, without a fatherland! [*Wir ohne Vaterland!*]”⁴⁷ The *Balten* had a *Heimat* but no nation-state. In the *Kaiserreich*, the *Balten* became known as “Baltic-experts” (*Baltenexperten*) and this position encouraged them to believe that they possessed a better understanding of the Provinces’ past than the Baltic Germans who remained in the Russian Empire. From this privileged position, they wrote the Provinces as one of the many Germanies, as one part of Germandom.

At the end of the nineteenth century, this part of Germandom was under threat. In their history, Russification was a significant turning point when the Baltic Provinces veered away from its organic evolution towards German *Kultur*. Russification was primarily a standardization of state administration and as such targeted people within positions of power and wealth, therefore not significantly affecting most Estonians and Latvians in their daily lives. Yet the *Balten* saw it both as an attack on the historic Baltic German privileges—on the position of Germans in Baltic society—and as a microcosm of a metaphysical conflict between the Russian and German empires.

Changes to the education system struck a chord with the *Balten* because they saw it as an attack on the German cultural tradition of *Bildung*. Theodor Schiemann’s summary of

⁴⁵ Valerian Tornius, *Die Baltischen Provinzen* (Leipzig and Berlin: BGTeubner, 1916), 20. Unless otherwise indicated translations are my own.

⁴⁶ Paul Rohrbach, ed., *Das Baltenbuch: Die Baltischen Provinzen und ihre Deutsche Kultur* (Dachau, 1916), 60.

⁴⁷ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch) R 8054/61. “Neues Ostland” *Ostland*, September 18, 1915; Anon., “Ohne Vaterland,” in Rohrbach, ed. *Das Baltenbuch*, 6. This sentiment goes back to the 1880s, see Anon. [einem Balten], *Ein verlassener Bruderstamm Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der baltischen Provinzen Rußlands* (Berlin: Verlag von A. Deubner, 1889).

Russification from 1886 was quintessentially Baltic German. He wrote that there are “three things which the Russian government wants to rob from the Baltic Provinces: its language, its political rights and its religion” and argued that during Russification, the Baltic Germans’ “political rights have been broken [...] their language has been snubbed by other tongues; [and] the third aspect, the taking of Lutheranism from this land, will soon be successful.”⁴⁸ Schieman, like others, saw Russification policies as threatening the German characteristics of the Provinces. The restriction of German language instruction in elementary schools attended by Estonians and Latvians was one example of such attempts. The *Balten* saw these elementary schools as providing the opportunity for high-performing Estonians and Latvians to prepare for studies at German-speaking higher institutions.⁴⁹

This change in language instruction affected Baltic German attempts at the Germanization (*Eindeutschung*) of the indigenous population. During the transformation of cities like Libau, Reval, and Riga into centres of industrial production, trade, and consumption, Estonian and Latvian families increasingly entered the middle class and effectively “became German.” The Baltic Germans used the term “*Aufgehen*” (to rise up) when discussing assimilation of the indigenous population.⁵⁰ The presence of German *Bildung* and *Kultur* in the Provinces made Estonians and Latvians easier to “Germanize,” as Alexis von Engelhardt commented, so that by the turn of the century “uncountable thousands of Latvians and Estonians have risen up [*aufgehen*] to the German *Volkstum* [because] the Lutheran church [has] imbued

⁴⁸ Theodor Schieman [Although technically anonymous “von einem Balten”], *Die Vergewaltigung der Russischen Ostsee-Provinzen — Appell an das Ehrgefühl des Protestantismus* (Berlin: Verlag von A. Deubner, 1886), 1.

⁴⁹ Paul Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland* (München: G. Bruckmann, 1917), 95-96.

⁵⁰ “*Aufgehen* as a “to rise up” has socio-economic in addition to cultural and linguistic hierarchical connotations.

both [indigenous] peoples with the essence of Germanness [*deutschem Wesen*].”⁵¹ Russification was the reconfiguration of Russian imperial policy. With it, came the dismissal of Baltic German claims to cultural and social privilege in the Provinces. The Baltic Germans understood this as an attack on the natural order of society and of history. While Germanization was seen as an organic process that was ruled by laws of nature, Russification presented to the *Balten* a negation of this understanding. It appeared to them that the Russian state was able to interfere with a seemingly natural process.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was another turning point for the *Balten*. Not only was it fresh in their minds, but the Revolution of 1905 seemed to be a symptom of Russification and the Provinces’ drift away from Germany. Several *Balten* referred to the Revolution of 1905 as “the Latvian Revolution” whose objectives were not political enfranchisement, but rather a rejection of German rule and *Kultur*.⁵² During World War One, the *Balten* understood the Revolution of 1905 as a fight “against Germandom in general.”⁵³ During the Revolution of 1905, Baltic German estates were the main targets for Estonian and Latvian peasants, rather than municipal or state administrative buildings.⁵⁴ From the balconies of the *Kaiserreich*, the *Balten* saw the roots of these attacks in the disruption of the Provinces’ *status quo*. Because they assumed the extended exposure to German *Kultur* would make the indigenous population favour the German gentry, the *Balten* rationalized that Russification policies had deflected the Latvians and

⁵¹ Alexis von Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands: Ihre politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* (München: Georg Müller Verlag, 1916), 201.

⁵² Theodor Schiemann, *Die Lettische Revolution* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1907).

⁵³ Adolf Harnack, *Aus der Friedens- und Kriegesarbeit* (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1916), 359.

⁵⁴ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 104-107; Raun, *Estonia and The Estonians*, 83-86; James White, “The 1905 Revolution in Russia's Baltic Provinces” in Jon Smele and Anthony Heywood, eds., *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 55-78.

Estonians from their actual source of discontent, the Russian government.⁵⁵ The Baltic Germans were afraid of losing their unique and privileged position in the social hierarchy of the Provinces. The Revolution of 1905 was, as Max Sering wrote, “a turning point in the history of the cultural development of Baltic Germandom [*baltischen Deutschtum*].”⁵⁶

The *Balten* hoped that the Germanization of the region and its people would continue. They imagined that the indigenous population would follow the same trajectory as in other instances of assimilation between Germans and non-Germans. They compared the historic trajectory of the Old Prussians with that of the Estonians and Latvians. The Old Prussians were an indigenous Baltic tribe living in East Prussia (modern-day Kaliningrad Oblast). The Teutonic Knights took over the region in the late twelfth century, but unlike the Estonians and Latvians, the Old Prussians were assimilated into other local—German or Polish—cultures by the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ The *Balten* saw the gradual assimilation of the Old Prussian population as a historical model to be replicated when it came to the indigenous Baltic populations.⁵⁸ Their imagination stressed the desire for a “realignment” or “correction” of the past in order to continue on a certain historical trajectory exemplified by the conquest and assimilation of the Old Prussians.

The lived experiences of the *Balten* in the Provinces remained with them throughout their entire lives. They saw the inclusion of the Provinces in the German Empire as a correction of a

⁵⁵ Schieman, *Die Lettische Revolution*.

⁵⁶ Quote from Max Sering, *Westrußland in seiner Bedeutung für die Entwicklung Mitteleuropas* (Leipzig: B.G.Teubner, 1917), 41; also see Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland*, 47-50.

⁵⁷ For a concise overview of the Old-Prussians and their collapse and assimilation, see Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The History of Half-Forgotten Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 325-394; for an examination of other (non-*Balten*) use of the Teutonic Order’s conquests as historical examples, see Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der Ordensstaat als Ideologie: Das Bild des Deutschen Ordens in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung und Publizistik* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1979).

⁵⁸ Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 197; Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 51.

historical process. A reassertion of Baltic German domination and administration would realign the Baltic Provinces' trajectory to their *telos*—their form of empire. Paul Rohrbach reflected in 1917 that for the non-German population, “Russification was a moment of weakness” and that “the Estonians and Latvians [have] aligned themselves not to Russian, rather German [...] *Volkstum* through the colonial period, through the Polish and Swedish and through the Russian eras because of their schooling and education [*Schulung und Bildung*].”⁵⁹ The *Balten* saw themselves as not only the rightful gentry of the Provinces, but also the heirs to the Provinces. After a favourable conclusion to the war, the *Balten* hoped to “rebuild the once destroyed [Baltic Provinces] and reestablish the bridge to *Mitteleuropean* culture after fending off Russian un-culture [*Unkultur*] for a century or even longer.”⁶⁰

The Baltic Germans believed that the effects of Russification could be reversed. In spite of Russian control since the late eighteenth century, “Russians were foreigners on this soil, [and] the little Asiatic varnish will peel off once the last [Russian] leaves this land.”⁶¹ They saw that Russian characteristics could be easily removed if exposure to German *Kultur* returned. This could be done, within the minds of the *Balten*, simply through German administration and state protection. The establishment of the political and social hierarchy would put the Baltic Provinces towards—or in their words, back to—a German trajectory. This kind of reunification would not only be to the *Kaiserreich*, but to their particular path of history. The *Balten* identified Russification and the Revolution of 1905 as the key moment when the history of the Baltic

⁵⁹ Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 95.

⁶⁰ BArch R 8054/61. “Zur Einführung” *Ostland*, September 18, 1915.

⁶¹ Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 241.

Provinces turned, or began to turn away, from near successful Germanization of the local population and the idyllic hierarchy of the three Provinces.

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World War One was a crucial moment for the *Balten* to inform Germans about the Provinces' position within a meta-history of Germany and to advocate for the incorporation of the Provinces into the German Empire. Their conception of the Baltic Provinces as "Germany's oldest colony [which] has been as good as completely forgotten by its motherland," was rooted in the historic trajectory and memory of Russification and the Revolution of 1905 as turning points. World War One, with its suspension of geopolitical limits, allowed the *Balten* to mobilize their history in order to intervene in broader discourses surrounding Germany's war aims.⁶² Before 1914, geopolitical realities limited the actions of the *Balten* to informing the reading public. At the height of the Revolution of 1905, they pressured the *Reichstag* to send several battleships of the German Navy to Libau and Riga to intimidate the Latvians and protect the Germans, but attempts to gain political support totally failed.⁶³ World War One, on the other hand, brought more opportunities to remake and recreate historical narratives that would treat the Baltic Provinces as an integral part of Germany. The war upset the existing *status quo* of borders. Large swaths of territory in eastern Europe changed hands, as opposed to the static Western Front in Flanders and France. By the summer of 1915, Kurland and what is known today as Lithuania fell under German control—it was not until December 1917 when the remaining Baltic Provinces, Estland and Livland, fell under German control. Questions about the "Germanness" of the land

⁶² Hermann Rosen and W. Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1: Stadt und Land* (Berlin=Charlottenburg: Felix Lehmann Verlag GmbH, 1916), v; Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*; Rohrbach, ed., *Das Baltenbuch*; Anon. [Theodor Schiemann], *Die Vergewaltigung der Russischen Ostsee-Provinzen*; Theodor Schiemann and Otto von Veh, eds., *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland* (Berlin, 1915).

⁶³ Cited in Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigrés in Germany*, 46-47.

and people came to the fore along with a rising feeling of the necessity of “border-corrections [*Grenzkorrekturen*]”—a redrawing of the “German line.”⁶⁴ The *Balten* began to write in imperatives. They asserted the German quality of their *Heimat* and the need to protect it from any further imperial or national threats. The *Balten* saw the war with Russia differently than other German nationalists, such as the Pan-Germans. They used their lived experience as émigrés from the Russian Empire to their advantage. The rhetoric the *Balten* used during the war contradictorily demanded concessions from Russia, while simultaneously claiming to express a non-annexationist position. For as we saw above, it was seen not as expansion, but reunification.

This is in contrast to other German nationalist groups like the Pan-Germans. Here, we can consider Heinrich Claß and his 1912 publication *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär* (*If I Were the Kaiser*). Claß was the leader of the Pan-German League from 1908 until its dissolution in 1939 and *If I Were the Kaiser* became a sort of manifesto of the Pan-German League.⁶⁵ Apart from his critique of various domestic and foreign policies, what is most important here are his demands for Germany to become autarkic, especially in terms of food supply. His solution was to establish a *Siedlungsgebiet* (settlement-area) in south-eastern Europe that lay “within Austria-Hungary [and the German settlement] of the south-east would represent an adequate solution for Germany’s population and ecological problems,” through the subjugation of its peoples and exploitation of the region’s soil.⁶⁶ The Pan-Germans’ imagination of settlements in south-eastern Europe focused on the Hungarian territories of Austria-Hungary and south-west Russia, thus drawing a

⁶⁴ Term from Imanuel Geiss, *Der Polnische Grenzstreifen 1914-1918 Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Lübeck and Hamburg: Mattiesen Verlag, 1960); for a more recent take, see Sammartino, *The Impossible Border*.

⁶⁵ Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German* (Boston Allen & Unwin, 1984), 285-287; Daniel Frymann [Heinrich Claß], *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär: Politische Warheiten und Notwendigkeiten* (Leipzig: Dieterich’schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912).

⁶⁶ Frymann [Claß], *Wenn ich der Kaiser wär*, 142.

“German line” close to the nineteenth-century conception of *Großdeutschland*, areas already under nominal German (Austrian) rule.⁶⁷ Claß’ views of looking towards the soil of the Balkans, Poland, and Ukraine as the space of German settlement was only one possible direction and it proposed a reorganization of territory and property mostly within a nominally controlled German space.⁶⁸ The *Balten*, rather obviously, focused on their own *Heimat*, but with this focus, their eyes were on lands outside of nominal German rule.

In spite of these differences, Germans were nonetheless drawing from a broad desire to establish a *Mitteleuropa*. The most popular articulation of this concept during World War One came from Friedrich Naumann’s 1915 publication, *Mitteleuropa*. It argued for the establishment of a centralized political and economic union of semi-autonomous states of central and eastern Europe, in which the *Kaiserreich* and the German regions of Austria-Hungary would act as its industrialized, innovative, and administrative core, while the remaining non-German-speaking regions would act as an imperial periphery producing raw materials and foodstuffs.⁶⁹ This was the political and social structure that German conservatives imagined would end the “crisis era”

⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century the two main competing visions, sometimes referred to as “solutions” of Germany were *Kleindeutschland* (Small-Germany—Imperial Germany) and *Großdeutschland* (Greater-Germany—Imperial Germany plus the Habsburg possessions of Austria and Bohemia). Dennis Sweeney has argued that the Pan-Germans conception of *Mitteleuropa* was only representative of the immediate formal empire around the *Kaiserreich* and that Pan-Germans envisioned a more informal economic and political empire globally. Dennis Sweeney, “Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire” in Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley, eds., *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 265-282; also see Rainer Herning, *Konstruierte Nation: der Alldeutsche Verband, 1890 bis 1939* (Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 2003) 133-138; for an interesting take on the Pan-Germans’ relationship between possible sites of German colonial expansion on the European continent and the ideologies of *Lebensraum*, *Mitteleuropa*, and *Weltmacht*, see Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, 94-111.

⁶⁸ Sweeney, “Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire,” 268-270, 276-280.

⁶⁹ Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Verlag Georg Reimer, 1916); for elaborations on the other proposals of *Mitteleuropa*, see Jörg Brechtefeld, *Mitteleuropa and German Politics: 1848 to Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996); Peter Gerlich, Kuysztof Glass, Barbara Seloth, eds., *Mitteleuropäische Mythen und Wirklichkeiten* (Wien: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Mitteleuropäische Studien, 1996). Friedrich Naumann was very close with many *Balten*, especially Paul Rohrbach. Their colleague, Theodor Heuss, saw that “Rohrbach played the chief role in inspiring Naumann’s foreign-policy program.” Camion, “Behind the Modern Drang nach Osten,” 472-498 (quote on 472).

of turn of the century Germany. The *Balten* had comparable outlooks. Their *Mitteleuropa*, however, stretched even further than most. Alexis von Engelhardt wrote in 1916 that “the entire swath [from the Baltic Provinces to Lithuania] is connected admirably to *Mitteleuropa*, the boundary between the real Russian hinterland is clean and simple, [we can see] where Russia begins, [and where] the Baltic, Lithuanian, and Polish territories end.”⁷⁰ He and other *Balten* considered the Provinces as *Mitteleuropa*’s eastern border and as a key site, a microcosm, of the larger conflict between “Germandom” and “Slavdom.” One *Balte* vividly described that the Provinces are situated “between [the] two fires [...] of Germandom and Slavdom.”⁷¹

The Baltic Provinces were part of *Mitteleuropa*, but lay within the Russian Empire. The *Balten* thus needed to justify why the Provinces should be included within *Mitteleuropa* and the German Empire. In order to do this, the *Balten* imagined the Provinces as at the frontier of German history, in geographic and historic terms. The Provinces’ “mission” was to serve “as outposts [*Vorposten*] of Germandom in the east.”⁷² The imagery of the Provinces as “outposts” never escaped the *Balten*. This combined with their understanding of the Baltic Sea watershed as a significant arena of Germany’s past, and as a traditionally German space. Alexis von Engelhardt wrote in 1916 that “Russia does not [at present] have access to the Baltic Sea. Control of the sea’s shores by the Germanic peoples [*germanischen Völkern*] must be certain.

⁷⁰ Quote from Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 243; similar statements made in appeals by the *Baltischer Vertrauensrat* to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, which demanded that “Liv-, Est-, and Kurland from Palanga to Reval and Narva be secured within the ring of the German Empire [*in den Ring des Deutschen Reiches*].” GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Baltischee Vertrauensrat to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915.

⁷¹ Anon., *Die deutsch-lettischen Beziehungen in den baltischen Provinzen* (Leipzig: Verlag S. Hirzel, 1916), 66. According to the marginalia on the copy I used (Available here: <http://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/45473>), the author is Oswald Külpe—the author of the preface.

⁷² Anon., *Die deutsch-lettischen Beziehungen in den Baltischen Provinzen*, 66; for a similar view—which described the Provinces as the “oldest preliminary-wall [*Vormauer*] of Germandom against the slavic push [*Andrang*] in the east”—see GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Baltischer Vertrauensrat to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915.

And there, where the Germans once had colonized the shore, they must also rule.”⁷³ The *Balten* looked to the past to find German traces that would support their argument for German lands outside of the German Empire.

For the *Balten*, the horizon of Germany’s imagined community was the Baltic Sea. They synthesized histories of the Baltic Provinces with the popular historical narratives of the German nation. By 1915, the notion of a German Baltic Sea became a leading instrument in the *Balten* repertoire to explain the position of the Provinces in relation to the German Empire and Europe; The sea connected a distinctive German history to the Provinces. One of the most common strategies was to evoke historic terms such as the “dominium maris Baltici” (dominium of the Baltic Sea).⁷⁴ The term comes from the political aims of Sweden in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was most likely coined by Sweden’s opponents in 1563 as a critique of Sweden’s hegemonic rule of the Baltic Sea.⁷⁵ Its original geopolitical meanings were used ahistorically by the *Balten* as a trope that described for the necessity to reinstate and maintain German(ic) control of the Baltic Sea watershed.⁷⁶ Historical conceptual frameworks, like “dominium maris Baltici,” were crucial in the production of narratives of the Baltic Provinces and to link this region to broader histories of Germany and Europe. These conceptualizations extended the current war’s rhetoric backwards in time in order to maintain the notion of an intrinsic and perpetual conflict between the German and Russian peoples and empires.

⁷³ Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 244.

⁷⁴ GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Baltischer Vertrauensrat to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915; GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Schiemann and Veh, eds., *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland*, 71.

⁷⁵ Reinhard Wittram, *Baltische Geschichte: Die Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180-1918* (München: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1954), 73; Michael North, *The Baltic: A History*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4, 118-122.

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Theodor Schiemann als Politischer Publizist*, 212.

Paul Rohrbach's *Der Kampf um Livland (The Struggle for Livland)* published in 1917 encapsulated the typical history promulgated by the *Balten* during World War One.⁷⁷ Rohrbach, who was born in 1869 and emigrated to the *Kaiserreich* in 1891, was known as an “ethical imperialist” who insisted that Germany’s “mission abroad was not just a matter of power or dominance, but also, more importantly, of culture and humanity.”⁷⁸ He was an economist, historian, and journalist. He was appointed as the *Ansiedlungskommissar* (commissioner of settlement) of German South-West Africa from 1903 to 1906, where he witnessed and criticized the genocide of the Herero and Nama people first-hand—he may have been the most well-informed German civilian on the genocide.⁷⁹ Interestingly, most historical works which mention Rohrbach do not spend much time on his Baltic German background. Rather, they focus on his ideas of Germany’s position within a “natural world” hierarchy and Germany’s necessity to become a world power (*Weltmacht*).⁸⁰ During World War One, he served as the head of press supervision (*Leiter der Pressekontrolle*) for the German foreign office. When it came to the Baltic Provinces, Rohrbach saw the events of Germany’s past as having a “natural pull” towards the Baltic Sea and he framed the Provinces’ past as a key arena in the conflict between Germanism and Slavdom. He portrayed *Ostsiedlung*, the eastward migration of Germanic tribes of the tenth and eleventh centuries, as the genesis of the “conquest [of soil] against the Slavic

⁷⁷ For the most notable examples, see Rohrbach, ed., *Das Baltentbuch*; Schiemann and Veh, eds., *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland*.

⁷⁸ Quote from Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 202; also see, Walter Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das “Größere Deutschland”*, 178-183.

⁷⁹ Smith, *The Continuities of German History*, 203.

⁸⁰ Camion, “Behind the Modern Drang nach Osten”, 456-498; Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das “Größere Deutschland”*, 178-183; Paddock, *Creating the Russian Peril*, 60-66; Smith, *The Continuities of German History*, 193-204; Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, 160-164; George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007), xiii-xxiv.

tribes.”⁸¹ He further expressed that the Viking expansion into northwest Russia and the crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were crucial moments in the long-term conflict between Germans and Slavs.⁸² He then depicted the German, Swedish, and even Polish rule of the Provinces in a positive light and praised the Baltic Germans’ “quick adoption” of typical western European, that is Prussian-like, characteristics such as Lutheranism and, to use his words, the “marine and mercantile spirit” (*See- und Handelsgeist*) which was “transferred very quickly from the old low-German area to the new lands and cities along the Baltic Sea.”⁸³ When discussing the nineteenth century, Rohrbach contrasted the previous eras with the bleak “backwardness” of Russian imperial rule, especially from the start of Russification in the 1880s.⁸⁴ The turning points in his history of Livland were extensions of historical processes that began in western and central Europe and then travelled to the Provinces. The avenue of these processes was the Baltic Sea. Histories of the Provinces like Rohrbach’s took the sea as one significant arena for the progression of German history. For the authors, it did not matter that the Baltic Provinces were not joined by land to Germany, as the Baltic Sea currents connected the Provinces to the *Kaiserreich*.

Images of the Provinces, too, became evidence of these historic ties to the *Kaiserreich*.

Bilderbücher, didactic picture books, contained representations of Germanic landscapes and

⁸¹ Quote from Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 9; for a concise overview of the northern crusades in the Baltic Provinces see Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier* (London, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1980), 89-117.

⁸² Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 10, 18-19; *Ostsiedlung* and Teutonic expansion were common historical tropes in German national histories during the *Kaiserreich*. To see how others (non-Balten) used the Teutonic Order’s conquests as a historical example, see Wippermann, *Der Ordensstaat als Ideologie*, 155-174, 197-209.

⁸³ Quote from Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 19, 29; Kurland existed as the Duchy of Kurland and Semigallia from 1561-1795 as a vassal state of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During this time, the duchy operated with relative autonomy and its dukes were typically of German or Baltic German descent. Plakans, *The Latvians*, 49-52.

⁸⁴ Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 61, 82, 92.

cityscapes. Castle ruins from the Teutonic Knights highlighted a German past within lands outside of the German Empire and connected the imagery of former Germanic rule with a renewed desire to control this territory. (Image 1) It was not just the Germanic past that they evoked, but also an imperial legacy present in the Provinces. Skylines of Riga and Reval depicted these Hanseatic city ports as nodes of a German commercial and cultural network; the cities became concentrations of German *Kultur*.⁸⁵ Riga's or Reval's skyline was placed beside Lübeck's and Hamburg's to stress the "Hanseatic quality" of the cities. In a appeal addressed to Bethmann Hollweg, the *Baltische Vertrauensrat* declared that the "prosperity of the Provinces' cities derived from the days of the Hansa, during which Riga and Reval belonged as respectful members."⁸⁶ (Image 2) Such *Bilderbücher* connected the Provinces' and port cities' history to a German past. The Baltic Sea watershed was a traditionally German space and one component of the history and geography of the German nation.

It was not just the sea that the *Balten* saw as German. It was the entire Baltic Provinces. From the sea and onto the shore; the Baltic Sea watershed was a site of German rule. They argued that the very soil on which the families of the *Balten* had been the ruling gentry, was German. Their term "*Kulturboden*" helps us understand the intimate connection between geographic, historic and cultural forms. *Kulturboden* has two meanings. The first meaning relates to arable land and soil suitable for cultivation. The second meaning refers to spaces possessing

⁸⁵ Otto Grautoff, *Ostsee und Ostland: Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 3: Bauten und Bilder* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Felix Lehmann Verlag GmbH, 1916); K.R. Kupffer, *Baltische Landeskunde: Im Verein mit Mehreren Mitarbeitern Herausgegeben von KR Kupffer* (Riga: Verlag von G.Löffler, 1911), Tafel xvii; Hermann Rosen and W. Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1*, 35-38, 74.

⁸⁶ Quote from GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Baltischer Vertrauensrat to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915. For images, see Grautoff, *Ostsee und Ostland: Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 3*, viii; Rosen and Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1*; images displayed the architecture of the old town and churches. Skyline images typically place the river or body of water in the foreground and the old town in the background, similar to images of Lübeck and Hamburg.

German *Kultur*: that is, spaces that possessed similar cultural, economic, epistemological, and social roots as the *Kaiserreich*. This second meaning sheds light on the same etymological roots in German and in English of *Kultur/Kultivation* and *Culture/Cultivation*. Often, this term is connected to arguments about the relationship between racial categories and place in the Weimar and National Socialist eras, but *Kulturboden* possessed a different meaning at the start of the twentieth century.⁸⁷

Kulturboden in the era of World War One was more plastic than other concepts like *Volksboden*, which were popularized during World War One by conservatives and later by National Socialists. In an article comparing German *Volksboden* with *Kulturboden* from 1925, Albrecht Penck, a German geographer (not a *Balte*), wrote that “the German *Kulturboden* is the largest achievement of the German *Volk*. Wherever Germans live and use the earth’s surface [*Erdoberfläche*], one encounters the phenomenon of whether [the area] will develop into a [German] *Volksboden* or not,”⁸⁸ and stressed that “the German cultural landscape [*Kulturlandschaft*] does not result from various natural causes, but it is the work of people with definite natural abilities, who change nature according to their wills.”⁸⁹ The *Balten* used *Kulturboden* and synonymous terms like *Kulturgebiet* to discuss the German characteristic of the region in both meanings of the aforementioned word—as arable land and as soil possessing

⁸⁷ For a discussion of how other Germans used the term *Kulturboden* from 1918 onward, see Jan M. Piskorski, Jörg Hackmann, and Rudolf Jaworski, *Deutsche Ostforschung und polnische Westforschung im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politik: Disziplinen im Vergleich* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2002); also see Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*, 255-261; Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 25-28.

⁸⁸ Albrecht Penck, “Deutscher Volks- und Kulturboden” in K.C von Loesch, ed., *Volk unter Völkern: Bücher des Deutschtums Band I* (Berlin: Ferdinand Hirt, 1925), 69-70; Penck also described the Germanization of the Baltic Provinces by stressing that “a small number of Germans can be enough to transform a big territory [*ein großes Land*] into *Kulturboden*. So it was in the former Russian Baltic Provinces. The *Baltland* [Baltic-land], by the German barons and its cities by the German merchants and artisans had retained its German character, in spite of the overwhelming Estonian and Latvian populations.” It is interesting to note how in Penck’s assessment, which was published *after* the establishment of independent Estonian and Latvian nation-states, emphasized Estonians and Latvians as threats key threats to Germans and Germany and not the Russians or its imperial administration.

⁸⁹ Cited in Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 26.

German *Kultur*. *Kulturboden* prevented the separation between cultivation and cultural practices, between landscape and culture. As certain crops and cultivation practices could be imposed upon foreign landscapes, so too could *Kultur* be imposed upon foreign populations. Following popular scientific trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Balten* saw that non-Germans could be “Germanized” culturally, just as foreign territory could become “Germanized” through the imposition of physical forms like cityscapes, cultivation practices, and landscapes. Thinking of *Kulturboden* opens up new ways to approach the Baltic Provinces and Germany’s views of eastern Europe during World War One. The *Balten* saw the Provinces as constantly having been “Germanizing” since the thirteenth century and, as we saw, feared that Russification had compromised these attempts.

Elements of the idea of *Kulturboden* did not come exclusively from German intellectual environments, but also from other imperial projects of the late nineteenth century. German notions of landscapes, while certainly informed by historic attempts in Prussia to drain the marshes and establish a more concrete “German” landscape, also came from the recent past of the United States and the “opening of the West.”⁹⁰ There, individuals who travelled west imagined that they entered an uncultivated and wild territory which needed to be controlled and rationalized through the deforestation and implementation of Western (essentially Anglo-Saxon) agricultural practices. Ray Allen Billington aptly summarized this phenomenon writing that Europeans in the nineteenth century saw that “nature was an evil to be subdued, not a god to be worshiped.”⁹¹ Recent historians of Germany have investigated the desire and assumed right by

⁹⁰ Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*; Wilson, “Environmental Chauvinism in the Prussian East”, 27–70.

⁹¹ Quote from Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery/Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: WW Norton, 1981), 80.

humans to manipulate their physical environment. David Blackbourn in *Conquest of Nature* tracks Frederick the Great's obsession with draining Prussian marshes, and Himmler's National Socialist visions of settlement in eastern Poland and Ukraine, among other examples. Blackbourn points out that the purposeful transformation of landscapes was inadvertently tied to changing views of Germans'—and humans'—relationship with nature, often seeing its subjugation as a necessary step towards modernity.⁹² Ben Kiernan takes a similar stance with his idea of the “cult of cultivation.” He posits that societies have employed the perceived misuse of land by local (or “othered”) populations and imagined a loss of this land in the past, as justification for conquest.⁹³ The long domination of the Baltic Provinces encouraged the *Balten* to see the Baltic Provinces as a space whose German roots had grown deep. The repurposing of the soil away from German *Kultur* (Russification) stimulates both aspects of Kiernan's “cult of cultivation.” For the *Balten* the German trees in the Provinces have begun to decay.

The *Balten* possessed an ideological motivation for control, whose cultural hierarchy privileged Baltic Germans. This structure took justification from contemporary notions of *la mission civilisatrice* (the civilizing mission) and *deutsche Arbeit* (German Work). The former, stemming from the official ideology of the French Third Republic in the 1880s, stressed the “mastery of nature, including the body” and liberation from “specific forms of tyranny: the tyranny of the elements over man, [and] of ignorance over knowledge.”⁹⁴ Relating to Germany,

⁹² Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*, 7-14.

⁹³ The term “cult of cultivation” from Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 29; see also Hyung Gu Lynn, “Malthusian Dreams, Colonial Imaginary: The Oriental Development Company and Japanese Emigration to Korea” in Caroline Elkins, Susan Pedersen, eds., *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 25-40.

⁹⁴ Quote from Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 6; see also Barth and Osterhammel, *Zivilisierungsmissionen*; Fischer-Tiné and Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*.

historians have examined religious evocations of *la mission civilisatrice* in South-West Africa and Cameroon.⁹⁵ A German civilizing mission, however, included more than religious facets, as Sebastian Conrad has noted.⁹⁶ It also included *deutsche Arbeit* (German Work). This concept took shape in the 1880s as a method of recognizing the economic and industrial prosperity of German industry—encapsulating the production of industrial material goods and efficient German work ethic—as a form of successful nation-building.⁹⁷ It also had cultural connotations relating to social superiority of Germans. During World War One in eastern Europe—specifically within the Baltic Provinces’ occupation zone, *Ober Ost*—this concept included the dissemination and propagation of German *Kultur* through infrastructure building projects and education reform policies.⁹⁸ The civilizing mission and *deutsche Arbeit* were ideas that assisted the *Balten* to understand the relationship between the Baltic Provinces and the German Empire. It helped them see what they wanted to see. The *Balten* synthesized and reconfigured these concepts in order to present the Provinces as a German *Kulturboden*. The Provinces’ land had been rationalized, that is “Germanified” by the Baltic German gentry. The *Balten* imagined that the region was losing its German characteristics, and by understanding that Germanness can be acquired or lost, they feared that the imposition of “improper” and “irrational” land usage—through Russification—had put into question the Germanness of the Baltic Provinces.

⁹⁵ Klaus J Bade, ed., *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission: Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982); Nina Berman, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Patrice Nganang, eds., *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Woodruff Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill, 1978); Steinmetz *The Devil’s Handwriting*. One recent exception is Jones, “The Rural “Social Ladder””, 457-492.

⁹⁶ Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111-117; for a good example of this new trend, see Deborah J. Neill, “Science and Civilizing Missions: Germans and the Transnational Community of Tropical Medicine” in Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley, eds., *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 74-92.

⁹⁷ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 334-379.

⁹⁸ Liulevicius, *Warland*, 44-47.

The *Balten* only saw German *Kulturboden*. We see this fixation through the way they described the minimal distinction between the landscapes of the German Empire and the Provinces. Max Sering wrote in 1917 that “if you were to come from East Prussia to Kurland [...] you will encounter a landscape [*Landschaft*] of similar character and it is the same case if one kept travelling north to Livland.”⁹⁹ The Provinces were one variation of the German landscape. Germanization gradually resulted in the creation of German landscapes in the Provinces and the institutionalization of German *Kultur* substantiated the claim that the Provinces were part of a large German cultural sphere.¹⁰⁰ Additional *Bilderbücher* contained images of German estates, farms, and uncultivated landscapes of forests and the Baltic coast. The sequence of these images presented a fluctuating scenery of farms or forests, of German or non-German homes, or of decayed castles and newly-built churches.¹⁰¹ (Image 2 and 3) These pastoral images are complemented by claims that “within the Baltic churches and Baltic houses wafts German air.”¹⁰² In terms of aesthetic forms, the Baltic Provinces were predominantly German.

The *Balten* saw the dominating culture of the Provinces as German: “the Baltic Provinces form a *Kulturgebiet* [culture-region], they have *one* religion, Lutheranism, *one Kultursprache* [cultural-language], German, [and] *one* constitution, with only local deviations.”¹⁰³ One anonymously written article in the *Balten*-led newspaper, *Die Ostsee*, argued that while “the Baltic Sea lands [*Ostseeländer*] have many different nations and tribes [*Nationen und Stämmen*],

⁹⁹ Sering, *Westrußland in seiner Bedeutung für die Entwicklung Mitteleuropa*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 152.

¹⁰¹ Grautoff, *Ostsee und Ostland: Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 3*, 111-117; Rosen and Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1*, 50-53.

¹⁰² Grautoff, *Ostsee und Ostland: Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 3*, ix.

¹⁰³ BArch R 8054/59, “Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung der Baltischen Vertrauensrat,” 17 May 1915; Their emphasis.

they all have one thing in common: They belong without exception to the Germanic cultural sphere [*Kulturkreis*].”¹⁰⁴ The indigenous population of the Estonians and Latvians were part of German culture. It was not exclusively racial or biological characteristics which defined who was German and who was not; rather individuals could be considered German if they possessed the necessary cultural characteristics. Engelhardt, rather eloquently, concluded his history of the Baltic Provinces as follows:

These little peoples [*Völkchen*—the Estonians and Latvians] can continue their existence only under the protection of a large, politically functioning, powerful and high-cultured nation. This nation are the Germans, whose culture the Latvians and Estonians have accepted. German is the feudal constitution of the land, which instructed the [social] position of both indigenous populations. German is the private law. Germans have, after the German model, given the peasantry their municipal code [...] German is the settlement-form [*Siedlungsform*] of the Latvians and Estonians. German is the Lutheran church, to which nearly all of the peasantry confesses. Germans created and ran the elementary schools, Germans founded the cities [...] Although the differences between the Latvians and Estonians is not minor, the soil which the descendants of these people [*Völker*] inhabit, is of German culture.¹⁰⁵

The Provinces were in their eyes German. The Baltic German gentry owned most of the land and imposed their own cultivation practices onto the landscape. Similarly, the *Balten* saw the historical presence of the Baltic Germans facilitated the cultural assimilation of the indigenous population into German *Kultur*. Theodor Schiemann’s *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland* (The German Baltic Provinces in Russia), published in 1915, concluded with a list of twelve “findings” [*Ergebnisse*], three of which are worth fully quoting:

(1)The culture of the Baltic Provinces is German. It has been such since the foundation of the German colony and throughout its entire history, even during the Polish, Swedish, and Russian times and is still today.

¹⁰⁴ BArch R 8054/61, *Die Ostsee Deutsche Zeitschrift für Wirtschaft und Kultur der Ostseeländer* 1, April 10 1915, (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn).

¹⁰⁵ Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 241-242.

(2) Even the culture of the Latvians and Estonians is German. They owe it to the Germans, in particular the pastors and not least to the nobility of the *Ritterschaften* [Baltic Knighthoods], [and] in the cities the bourgeoisie. The Baltic provinces are the most German of all the Russian borderlands. [...]

(12) Only the control of the Baltic Provinces secures the Baltic Sea and its trade [*Handels*], the *Dominium maris Baltici*.”¹⁰⁶

Provinces had German history and German *Kultur*. They argued that if individuals possessed the necessary cultural characteristics and if the space they inhabited was of German *Kulturboden*, the area should be part of the *Kaiserreich*. Looking at the landscape was one facet which the *Balten* used to argue the region’s incorporation into the German Empire. They also looked at past events as signs of ownership. Valerian Tornius, in his history of the Provinces wrote that over the previous centuries, Baltic Germans had successfully “impressed their own cultural physiognomy in the Baltic Provinces.”¹⁰⁷ The incorporation of this region into the German Empire was the top priority for the *Balten*, not only as it was their *Heimat*—although that was certainly one motive—but also because, as Paul Rohrbach wrote, “only when Russia loses this conquered, foreign, old-European, eastern *Kulturboden*, can Russia no longer be a danger to Europe.”¹⁰⁸ The *Balten* saw the space as already having Germanic qualities, in spite of it not being part of the German Empire. While they wanted to secure the region’s Germanness from further decay, speaking more broadly, *Balten* narratives portrayed the Provinces as playing a more significant role in Germany’s progression and Russia’s regression from the imperial world-stage. The histories

¹⁰⁶ GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Schieman and Veh, eds., *Die Deutschen Ostseeprovinzen im Rußland*, 71.

¹⁰⁷ Quote from Tornius, *Die Baltischen Provinzen*, 19. See also Engelhardt, *Die deutschen Ostseeprovinzen Rußlands*, 200; for similar usage of “physiognomy” to describe the Baltic Provinces see GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Valerian Tornius, “Kurland,” *Der Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 28, 1915.

¹⁰⁸ Rohrbach, *Der Kampf um Livland*, 100. Similar views written in GStA PK I HA Rep. 89 Nr. 13204. Baltischer Vertrauensrat to Bethmann Hollweg, 9 July 1915; which wrote that “Russia will become powerless, if it loses the Baltic Provinces.”

fostered a new approach to thinking about German *Kultur* and German stakes in Europe *outside* of the borders of the German Empire.

* * *

Let us return to Theodor Schiemann and his visit to the Prussian archive in 1895. He and other *Balten* scoured the archives for traces of a German past in the Provinces. The works produced complemented their imagination and understanding of the Baltic Provinces' role within German history. They attempted to frame the annexation of the Baltic Provinces as a continuation and reaffirmation of a historical process of German eastern colonization (*Ostsiedlung*) within the Baltic Sea watershed. Theodor Schiemann wrote in *Deutsche Politik* in 1916 that “the Russian people are not a single united entity, nor do they consist of a single race, rather they are a highly elastic, confessional society, [which is held together] through the Tsar’s appalling absolutism.”¹⁰⁹ Schiemann, like Engelhardt, Rohrbach and other *Balten*, constructed a history which argued that the Baltic Provinces were traditionally connected to Germany through the arena of the Baltic Sea. Linking the Provinces to German events in the past, such as the Reformation and the Hanseatic League, and the presence of *Kulturboden*—a place that had been steeped in German *Kultur*—demonstrated to themselves and their readers that the Baltic Provinces were in an anomalous position within the Russian Empire. As a result, their works stressed that the Provinces were a German space within the “elastic society” of the Russian Empire. Russification and the Revolution of 1905 symbolized a turning point away from the Provinces’ German path. Exposed to additional rhetoric from German nationalists, which would form the basis of their historical narrative, they called for action against Russia and the reassertion of German control

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, 275; Meyer, *Theodor Schiemann als Politischer Publizist*, 102-103.

over the Provinces. But within the diplomatic realities of pre-1914 Europe, they could do very little. World War One, however, changed the realm of possibilities. No longer was *Balten* or German rhetoric bound by old material or political realities. This environment produced a flurry of works which demonstrated the presence of old, traditional German spaces outside of the German Empire.

In 1918, Bolshevik Russia and the German Empire signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In the treaty, Russia ceded to Germany the Baltic Provinces as well as what would become the interwar states of Lithuania and Poland and the Belorussian SSR and Ukrainian SSR of the future Soviet Union. In the brief eight month period of nominal German rule in eastern Europe, the German state established various autonomous or semi-autonomous polities. The *Balten* successfully demanded that the German government establish the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia and the United Baltic Duchy in place of the Provinces.¹¹⁰ But the collapse of the western front and the collapse of the *Kaiserreich's* political system ended in Germany having to sign the armistice and, later, the Treaty of Versailles which required Germany to renounce its gains from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in addition to giving up various border regions and colonies to Denmark, France, Poland, and the United Kingdom. This triggered German nationalists to decry the Treaty of Versailles as an attack on Germandom (*Deutschtum*) and German *Kultur*. Politicians and scholars looked to past examples of people (particularly Germans) who had experienced a similar fate. The Baltic Germans would have been the most

¹¹⁰ The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia was in a personal union with Prussia and the United Baltic Duchy's head of state was Adolf Friedrich of Mecklenburg. For *Balten* interventions in establishing these states, see Lehmann, "Der Baltische Vertrauensrat und die Unabhängigkeit der baltischen Staaten Ausgangs des Ersten Weltkriegs": 131-138; For a concise summary of German attempts at establishing states in the Baltic Provinces see Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 5-10; For discussion on the establishment of the United Baltic Duchy, see Hans-Erich Volkmann, *Die deutsche Baltikumpolitik zwischen Brest-Litovsk und Compiègne: Ein Beitrag zur "Kriegszieldiskussion."* (Wien: Böhlau, 1970), 229.

clear example. The *Balten* imagined their *Heimat*, the Baltic Provinces, as a traditionally German space whose Germanness became endangered by imperial policies (Russification) and that such actions were a slip in a natural historical trajectory. They felt the need to advocate for a return or reunification of these spaces towards German *Kultur* and German control.

In post-World War One German society, the *Balten* left an intellectual trail. Their traces provided evidence of the Germanness of territories outside of the German state's borders and the way to discuss the steps along Germany's path to the imperial stage. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that "the new Reich must again set itself on the march along the road of the Teutonic Knights of old, to obtain by the German sword sod for the German plow and daily bread for the nation."¹¹¹ He may have derived his trajectory—this path of Germany's empire—from Heinrich von Treitschke, or from Treitschke's successor Paul Rohrbach, or from other *Balten*. During World War One, the intense mobilization of histories displayed the presence of Germans and German soil outside of existing borders. These histories encouraged Germans to imagine their ability to change state borders and, more importantly, established an intellectual precedent to manipulate social structures in the name of preserving German *Kultur*. The histories the *Balten* wrote were one attempts in trying to make sense of a world that was rapidly changing. During Germany's "crisis era" in the decades preceding the war their call for the incorporation of the Baltic Provinces and conservation of Germany's *Kulturboden* in the east was only one path to Germany's empire in eastern Europe.

¹¹¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 140.

Images

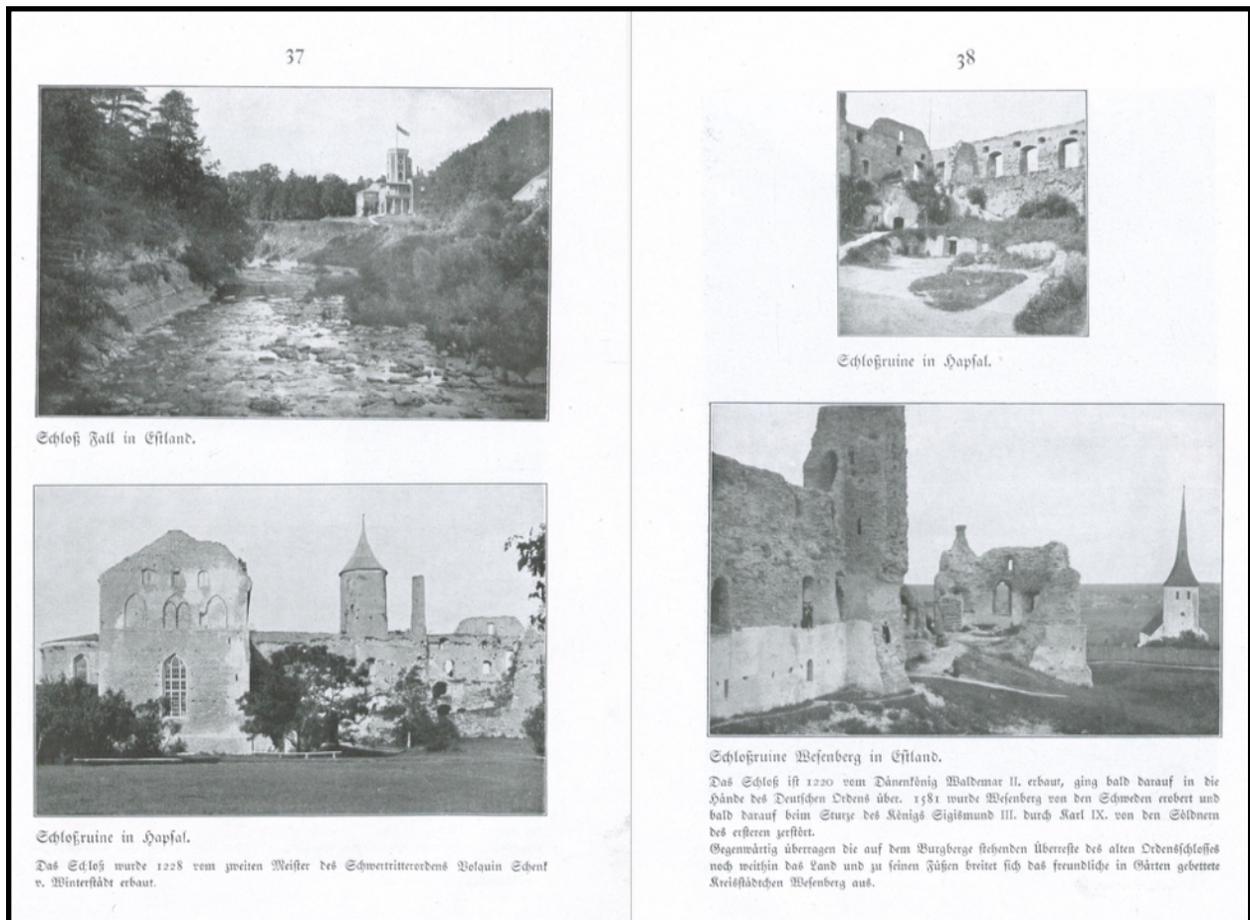


Image 1. Hermann Rosen and W. Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1: Stadt und Land* (Berlin=Charlottenburg: Felix Lehmann Verlag GmbH, 1916), 37-38.

Wie keine salomonische Urteilskraft dazu gehört, das Gemeinsame in der asiatischen und in der moskowitzischen Kunst zu erkennen, das auch der große, russische Schriftsteller Gorki nachdrücklich betont hat, so ist die Verwandtschaft zwischen der baltischen und der norddeutschen



Lübeck.



Riga.

Kunst schon für jeden unvorbereiteten Laien ebenso unmittelbar ersichtlich.

Die Gesamtansicht von Lübecks Tochterstadt Riga ist von der gleichen Art wie das giebelige Stadtbild Lübecks, aus dem gotische Backsteinkirchen mit ihrem mächtigen Leib und ihren schlanken, in den Himmel ragenden Türme sich herausheben.

Auch in Riga ist eine Vielheit von alten Giebelhäusern, überhöht von breiten Kirchenschiffen, an deren Westseite schlanke, vielleicht noch schlankere Türme als in Lübeck, emporragen.

Fehlt dem Bilde von Riga die Schwere und Behäbigkeit des lübecker Bildes, so mangelt der lübecker Silhouette dagegen die Feinheit, die

Grazie, der Adel der Linien.

Den gleichen norddeutschen Stadtcharakter erkennen wir in Reval (Seite 21). Wie in Lübeck, Wismar oder Rostock die Backsteinkirchen sich über die malerische Unordnung der Giebel erheben, so wird auch in Reval die giebelige Mannigfaltigkeit des Stadtbildes von den kühn oder zierlich aufragenden Türmen von St. Olai, St. Nicolas und von

Image 2. Otto Grautoff, *Ostsee und Ostland. Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 3: Bauten und Bilder* (Berlin=Charlottenburg: Felix Lehmann Verlag GmbH, 1916), viii.

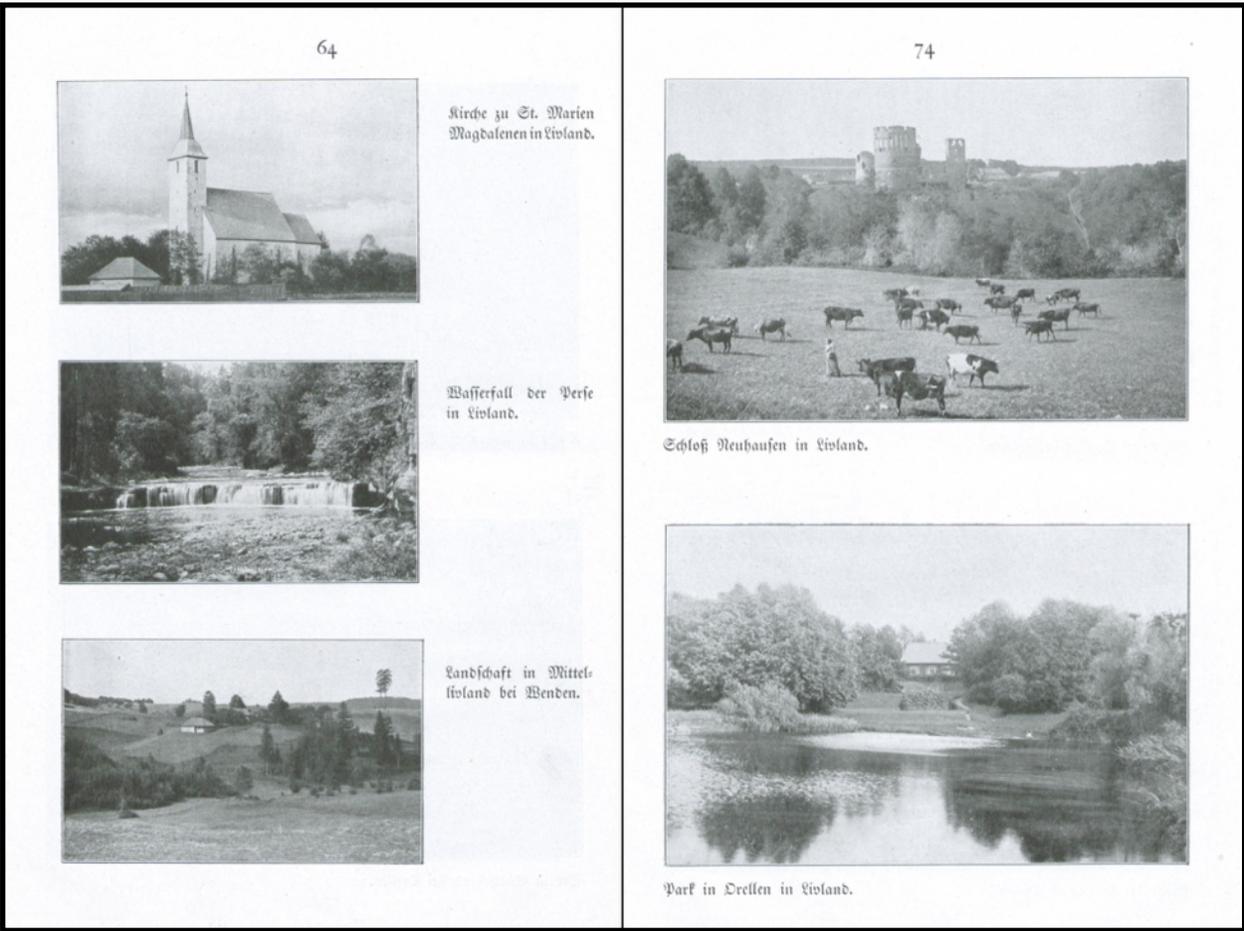


Image 3. Hermann Rosen and W. Engelhardt, *Die Baltische Provinzen: Band 1: Stadt und Land* (Berlin=Charlottenburg: Felix Lehmann Verlag GmbH, 1916), 64, 74. Images edited (non-sequential pages juxtaposed) by Eriks Bredovskis.

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