

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 17, No.4 - Winter 1971

Editors of this issue: Antanas Klimas, Ignas K.Skrupskelis

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ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF BALTIC STUDIES BY THE AABS

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To state its purpose and activities briefly, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, Inc. (AABS), is an international educational and scholarly nonprofit organization for the purpose of promoting research and education in Baltic studies. Its planned activities include sponsoring meetings and conferences for the exchange of scholarly views and the evaluation of research in Baltic studies, and supporting the publication of research and other information about Baltic studies.

The First Conference on Baltic Studies was convened at the University of Maryland, from November 28 to December 1, 1968, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as independent democratic states. About 150 people were drawn to the conference to hear and discuss fifty scholarly papers, which were given in eight separate sessions, preceded and concluded by general sessions.¹ The speakers, highly qualified specialists in their own academic disciplines and in Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian studies, came from many American universities, colleges and other research institutions. They concentrated mainly on recent developments in Baltic studies. Of the fifty papers presented, twenty-four were in the humanities, seventeen in social sciences, and nine in natural sciences, with the following categories in the lead: literature (8), political sciences (7), history (7), science and technology (6).

At the concluding general session, led by general chairmen Dr. Peter P. Lejinš, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, and Dr. V. Stanley Vardys, Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma, the AABS was established on December 1, 1968, by the unanimous vote of the scholars assembled. As Janis Gaigulis, Chairman of the Steering Committee for this conference and Executive Director of the AABS, pointed out,

The conference was initiated by the Association of Latvian Academic Fraternities, especially its Committee for Sciences, and was supported in every way by all the major Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian academic and cultural organizations in the United States. Such broad-based sponsorship made possible this first meeting of scholars interested in Baltic studies. The Conference also provided the means for the continuation of planned and coordinated research in this area by founding the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. After the event, one can only wonder why it took several decades to achieve this result.²

As Dr. Edgar Anderson, Professor of History at San Jose State College in California, pointed it out in his article on the motives and aims of the AABS, up to the time of the First Conference on Baltic Studies and the founding of the AABS scholars from all three Baltic countries had conducted their research independently:

Until now, most scholars have been strangers to one another and in most cases have not even been aware of each other's existence. The rare Western scholars, German, Polish, Scandinavian, British, American, Canadian, Australian, etc., who have been attracted to Baltic studies by sheer interest and fascination, have not been in contact with the Baltic nationals abroad, or even with one another. It is high time to found a center which will unite all scholars in the West interested in Baltic matters, in order to facilitate their studies, to form common bonds, to exchange their information and source materials, and to make a common front in their efforts to make Baltic studies a "legitimate" field of inquiry. Such a center would promote the general public's acquaintance with these scholars' research activities and with the role of the Baltic area, past and present.³

As envisioned by its founders, the AABS — similarly to other "roof organizations" such as the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAA-SS), the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies (SASS) — was to focus its work on sponsoring conferences and special meetings for the exchange of professional views and research, with the emphasis on intra-regional, interdisciplinary, and specialized Baltic studies, and on supporting the publication and dissemination of completed studies.⁴ To further this objective, an Organizing Committee of eleven was formed to plan the organizational details, to develop its basic policies and procedures, and to start initial operations.⁵ Dr. Gundar J. King, Professor of Industrial Management at the Pacific Lutheran University, in Tacoma, Washington, became Chairman of the Organizing Committee.

The first major publication of the AABS was the compilation of summaries of papers at the First Conference in Maryland. This volume, edited by Dr. Ivar Ivask, Professor of Modern Languages and Editor of Books Abroad at the University of Oklahoma, was more than a calling card of the Association. "It was a full reflection of the state and the scope of Baltic scholarship. Strengths and weaknesses were exposed. Above all, the *First Conference on Baltic Studies: Summary of Proceedings* showed the need and the promise for better Baltic studies," observed Professor King in retrospect.⁶

With enthusiasm and dedication the work for the advancement of Baltic studies continued. A sure foundation of the AABS was laid through the Association's constitution and by-laws, which were officially adopted at the AABS Membership Meeting at Columbia University, on December 27, 1969. Also, the Association's official quarterly publication, the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, was approved. The leadership of the AABS was passed on from the Organizing Committee to the first Board of Directors, with Professor Gundar J. King, President. Dr. Herbert Valdsaar, Research Chemist at Du Pont de Nemours, in Wilmington, Delaware, became the Association's Associate Executive Director.

Since the first issue of the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, published in February 1970, this scholarly publication has become increasingly important as a link between scholars of Baltic and also non-Baltic origin, and it has established contact with graduate students interested in Eastern European studies. The *Bulletin of Baltic Studies* also has established contacts and exchange programs with Books Abroad, *Lituanus*, *Scandinavian Studies*, *Acta Baltica*, *Deutsche Studien*, *Metmenys*, and others.

While the First Conference on Baltic Studies was attended mainly by Baltic scholars from American institutions of higher learning, the Second Conference on Baltic Studies, held at San Jose State College, in San Jose, California, in November 1970, proved to be a truly international event.

Leading up to this culmination was the Conference on Baltic Literatures, a literature workshop, held at the Ohio State University from January 31 to February 1, 1970, with Dr. Rimvydas Šilbajoris, Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at the Ohio State University, as Chairman. The main papers presented at this conference were published in several 1970 issues of *Lituanus*.⁷

Another important event was the AABS Symposium in Toronto, with Dr. Olev Trass, Professor of Chemical Engineering at the University of Toronto, as Chairman. This symposium was held July 1, 1970, as part of the Project 70 Conference, which was co-sponsored by the AABS and the Latvian Youth Organizations during the Latvian Song Festival in Toronto, Canada. Lectures and panel discussions concentrated on the present economic, political and cultural situation in the three Baltic republics, which created vivid interest and comments especially from the younger generation of the audience of about 300 Baits and Canadians.⁸

Since this time was also the beginning of a new fiscal year for the AABS, new officers were elected, and Professor V. Stanley Vardys, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Munich Center for Russian Language and Soviet Area Studies of the University of Oklahoma, became the second President of the Association. In his address to the membership, Professor Vardys stressed development of research of the Baltic area, the promotion of courses in Baltic studies at institutions of higher learning, greater emphasis on the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies* as a vital link of communication and exchange of scholarship, and expansion in the areas of membership, communications and exchanges with academic groups, and fund raising.⁹

Activities during 1970 included all of these areas for the further advancement of Baltic studies; and, due to the untiring efforts of lawyers Theodore Houlis and Juris Padešs, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, Inc., was recognized officially by the District Director of the Internal Revenue Services of the State of New York as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization as of December 16, 1970. Several meetings of the AABS Finance Committee were held during the year in the effort to seek funds. Increased membership and greater involvement with academic groups warranted the calling of Dr. Elona Vainys to the position of second Associate Executive Director of the AABS in the Fall of 1970. Already in the summer the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies* had been reorganized with the calling of Dr. Arvids Ziedonis, Jr., Professor of Foreign Languages and Director of Russian Studies at Muhlenberg College, as its editor. This quarterly journal, with a circulation of 1,000 copies, reached AABS members, as well as a number of universities, colleges, research institutions here and abroad, with advance notification and program details of the Second Conference on Baltic Studies.

The Second Conference on Baltic Studies, held at San Jose State College, San Jose, California, November 26-29, 1970, with Professor Edgar Anderson as General Chairman, was, indeed, the highlight of the year. This international conference was co-sponsored by the AABS and San Jose State College. The program committee, consisting of Professor Edgar Anderson; Dr. Marija Gimbutas, Professor of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles; Professor Ivar Ivask; Dr. Jaan Puhvel, Professor of Classics and Indo-European Linguistics at the University of California, Los Angeles; and Professor V. Stanley Vardys, President of the AABS; arranged a very successful two-and-a-half day program of 28 panels and one colloquium in three to four simultaneous sessions, in which participated a total of 127 lecturers, section chairmen and commentators. On the theme, "The Baltic Area Through the Ages," which allowed a very wide variety of subjects, a total of 98 papers were presented, representing sixteen academic disciplines and sub disciplines: history, political science, ancient and modern Baltic languages, archeology, folklore and folk art, literature and drama, religion, law, bibliography and sources of Baltic studies, economics, education, industrial development and technology. Proportionately, the greatest number of papers read were on history (33), literature (16), and linguistics (10),

with jurisprudence, religion, and political science following close behind. Participants on the program represented 89 American universities, colleges, research institutions, libraries and archives; and as many as 19 foreign universities and 11 foreign research institutions from various parts of the globe: Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden. In the audience, which together with the participants totalled 400 persons, were scholars also from Czechoslovakia, England, Hungary, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Spain.¹⁰

Summaries of the papers presented at the Second Conference on Baltic Studies are being compiled presently in a book, *The Second Conference on Baltic Studies: Summary of Proceedings*, edited by Professors Rimvydas F. Šilbajoris, Arvids Ziedonis, Jr., and Edgar Anderson. This volume, the second major publication of the AABS will be available in the Fall of 1971.

The Second Conference on Baltic Studies has made possible closer contacts with Baltic scholars overseas; as a result, the Editorial Board of the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies* was enlarged to include Editorial Advisors in Canada, Germany, Sweden, and Australia and several in the U.S. for better coverage here. Besides English, German was accepted as the second language for short articles and book reviews, especially for the benefit of participating European scholars. At the Second Conference the Board of Directors also approved the publication of entire papers and even longer articles in the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*; therefore, a number of high-quality papers from the Second Conference have been selected for publication in this journal; others have been published elsewhere. Besides articles, the *Bulletin of Baltic Studies* regularly featured sections on past and coming events, bibliographical notes, book reviews (which in the latest, sixth issue includes also a reciprocal listing of book reviews from *Books Abroad* and *Lituanus*), AABS items, research in progress and completed and personal notes of the profession. One such section, a continuing report on Baltic Studies at Institutions of Higher Learning, which was started in the second issue, shows a definite increase in importance and quantity of specifically Baltic courses that are being taught at various universities in the U.S. and abroad. Likewise, specifically Baltic sections at certain research institutes or libraries are either being established or are expanding: Collections of Baltica at the Hoover Institute on Revolution, War, and Peace have been expanding especially in history; the New York Public Library has a growing collection in literature;¹¹ and, according to the latest reports, a Baltic Room has been established at Kent State University, and a whole volume on Finnish and Baltic History and Literature selections is available at the Harvard University Library.¹² About twenty-five universities and colleges have reported on courses in Baltic history, linguistics, folklore, literature, political science, and Baltic studies in general.

During 1971, another important step has taken place toward the advancement of Baltic studies: For the first time in twenty years, the Program Committee of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) at its Fourth National Convention in Denver, Colorado, in March 25-27, 1971, which was attended by about 300 delegates from the U.S. and from abroad, designated a special panel for the discussion of "The Search for National Identity in the Baltic States, 1917 -1940: A Reappraisal," chaired by Dr. Raphael Sealey, Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley. Also, at the Northeastern Slavic Conference, held at the Sir George Williams University in Montreal from May 5 to 8, 1971, with about 500 scholars attending, a total of three panels were exclusively concerned with Baltic problems: Professor Jiri Marvan of the University of California, Davis, chaired a panel on "Baltic Linguistics"; Professor Rimvydas F. Šilbajoris was chairman of a panel on "Baltic Émigré Literature"; and Professor H. W. Dewey of the University of Michigan chaired a panel entitled "Muscovy and Lithuania."¹³

Canadian institutions have been very gracious toward the AABS. The Third Conference on Baltic Studies, will be held in Toronto, Canada, from May 11 to 14, in 1972; with Dr. Mardi Valgema, Professor of English at the Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York, as Program Chairman; and with Professor Olev Trass of the University of Toronto as Chairman of Technical Arrangements. The conference will be co-sponsored by the AABS and the University of Toronto.

1 Ivar Ivask, editor, "Editor's Remarks," in *First Conference on Baltic Studies: Summary of Proceedings* (Tacoma, Washington: Pacific Lutheran University, 1969), p. v.

2 Janis Gaigulis, "Note on the Organization of the Conference," in *First Conference on Baltic Studies: Summary of Proceedings*, p. v.

3 Edgar Anderson, "The Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies: Motivation, Plans," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 1, p. 3.

4 Cited from a letter by Gundar J. King, entitled, "What Is the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies?", which was sent to prospective members from Tacoma, Washington, on July 1, 1969.

5 Ibid.

6 Gundar J. King, "The Association in Retrospect and Prospect," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 1, p. 5.

7 "Conference on Baltic Literatures," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 1, p. 18.

8 "AABS Baltic Symposium in Toronto," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 3, p. 21.

9 V. Stanley Vardys, "Some Thoughts About What We Should Do in 1970/71," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 3, pp. 3-4.

10 Edgar Anderson, "Report on the Second Conference," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 4, pp. 22 - 27.

11 Gundar J. King, letter to Dr. V. Stanley Vardys, June 30, 1971.

12 "Kent State University" and "Harvard University Library" in "Baltic Studies at Institutions of Higher Learning," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 6, pp. 19 - 20.

13 Nicholas Balabkins, "Baltic Studies at the AAASS Convention in Denver, Colorado," and Andrievs Ezergailis, "Baltic and Slavic Studies at the Northeastern Slavic Conference in Montreal," *Bulletin of Baltic Studies*, 6, pp. 22 - 23.