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SELF-ORGANIZATION VERSUS AUTOCRACY IN BALTIC LIFE, A. D. 1000-2000*

WALTER C. CLEMENS,
Jr. Boston University

Theoretical Assumptions

This essay attempts to apply complexity theory, mainly as developed at the Santa Fe Institute (founded in 1984), to Baltic history. Complexity theory posits that a fit human society is one that can cope with complex challenges and opportunities at home and abroad. A fit society avoids the Scylla of rigid hierarchy and Charybdis of social chaos. As Darwin argues, fitness depends on strength - mutations that help an organism adapt to changing circumstances. But classic Darwinism omits the potential role of self-organization -crucial to "fitness" as understood by recent authors on complexity theory.1

Complexity theory converges with liberal peace theory and a normative theory of mutual gain grounded in interdependence.2 Their synthesis suggests that a fit society is likely to be self-organized for the mutual gain of its members and, as international conditions permit, for cooperative value-creation with other societies. In principle, a society or an international system could also be organized for the common good from the top down by enlightened despots, but this is unlikely. Their vision will probably be myopic due to vested interests and ignorance of local strengths and problems.

Nonstate Actors and States in Baltic Life

Baltic developments in the late 20th century are more remarkable if we compare them with other forms of social organization that existed on the Amber Coast in earlier times.3 Many forms of social life appeared and disappeared on the Baltic coast in the second millennium. Their diversity and varying longevity illustrate the many ways that humans can organize their lives. Not till the 20th century was the nation-state an ideal pursued by many actors.

Summarizing this article, the following table lists the main actors on the Baltic stage from the Viking era until the breakdown of the Soviet empire. It ranks their fitness—high, medium, or low—relative to the resources available to them, and the extent to which they practiced self-organization. The reasons for the rankings are explained in the text that follows.

Fitness on the Amber Coast: Correlations with Self-Organization
Key: H=high, M=medium, L=low (author's estimates)

Actors	Self-Organization	Fitness
Vikings/Varangians	M	M
Estonian and Latvian tribes	L	L
Teutonic Knights	M	M
Hanseatic towns	H	H
Lithuania before 1569	M	M
Swedish absolutism in the 17th century	L	H
Polish Republic in the 18th century	L	L
Tsarist Empire	L	L-M
Baltic Republics in 1920s-1930s	L-M	L-M
Soviet Union	M	M

Fitness on the Amber Coast: Correlations with Self-Organization

With several important exceptions, the fittest actors relied heavily on self-organization; the least fit, on command and coercion. The least fit resided in a rigid order that sometimes turned into chaos. The fittest actors operated near the apex of a bell curve between order and chaos. But the table highlights a paradox: Only two actors received high fitness rankings, yet they followed opposite routes. The Hansas enhanced their fitness by self-organization; 17th century Sweden by top-down, but enlightened, absolutism.

Theory Meets Reality
Vikings/Varangians

Scandinavians interacted with Baltic peoples long before the Vikings emerged in the 8th and 9th centuries. But Vikings were driven by energies and ambitions greater than their ancestors. Vikings/Varangians passed through the eastern Baltic in search of booty and trade in Kazaria, Byzantium, Baghdad, and beyond. They imposed tributary regimes on Baits late in the first millennium. On several occasions, Baits threw off these regimes, but then the Scandinavians returned with greater force. Seeking bigger game to the south, however, Varangians did little to disturb life on the Amber Coast. Some Varangians halted in northern Russia—with Slavic and Estonian cooperation or acquiescence—and turned Novgorod into a vital commercial center linking Europe with Eurasia.

By many measures, the Vikings/Varangians were immensely fit. Their ability to cope with complexity is underscored if we consider the harsh habitat form which they emerged, the rough waters and passages they traveled, and the limited numbers with which they confronted and often mastered more settled societies. But the Viking way of life lasted only a few centuries. Wherever Vikings traveled, except Iceland, they assimilated—losing their religion as well as their language.

How Vikings decided to embark on long journeys, when to fight and when to trade is not clear. But Scandinavian society, like that of Baltic tribes (and many other peoples), was divided into haves and have-nots. Kings and warriors dominated peasants and slaves; the voices of the haves were decisive when free men met in councils (Things) to decide big issues. Exploring alien and often hostile lands, Vikings probably depended even more on top-down leadership than those Scandinavians who farmed and fished at home.

Finnic, Baltic, and Slavic Tribes

At the onset of the second millennium, the local players in the eastern Baltic were ethnic groups—tribes—rather than states. The Finnic and Baltic peoples did not hold their ground against the Slavs and Germanic peoples who pushed them into narrow confines along the Amber Coast and then, in turns, dominated them for nearly 1000 years. This brute fact says that most Baits were less fit than their encroaching neighbors. Estonian, Latvian, and most other tribes on the Amber Coast were subjugated by invaders from the north and west; some tribes, such as the Old Prussians, disappeared—killed or assimilated by others. The exceptions were the Lithuanian tribes, who united and formed one of Europe's most powerful states for several centuries until, they too, were subdued.

Still, Estonians and Latvians as well as Lithuanians were sufficiently fit to inhabit the eastern Baltic for at last two thousand years before Christ and to survive till the 20th century, when they formed states. Their fitness is underscored by numbers: There were more speakers of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian in the late 20th century than at any time in history. Thus, at the height of Lithuanian power (approximately 1350-1430), there were probably about 590, 000 ethnic Lithuanians. When Russia absorbed Lithuania in 1795, this number had increased to about 1, 540, 000; it reached two million in 1923; and despite losses in the 1940s, some four million in A. D. 2000—including more than one million abroad.[4] Similar growth trajectories characterized Latvians and Estonians.[5]

The Baltic peoples before 1200 represented a heroic /warrior culture in which young men and aspiring chieftains demonstrated their courage and ability in raids against their neighbors. They took booty and slaves. They believed that their pagan gods justified this militarism: The gods had to approve every expedition; the gods shared in the booty; they welcomed the dead who rode straight to them from the funeral pyre. When Viking energies subsided, raiders from the eastern Baltic raided Denmark; in 1187 they burned the capital of Sweden.

Why were some Baltic tribes vulnerable to outside domination? Many tribes exalted violence and bravery. Communist historians have referred to the Baltic peoples as "military democracies."[6] But this is a romanticized misnomer. They were closer to military oligarchies. Elders and large landowners made the big decisions, which the mass of tenant farmers followed. Most Baits identified with their own village and clan—not with their own language group or some other larger principle.

Discord among Baltic peoples helped foreigners—from Scandinavia, Germany and, later, Russia—to divide and conquer. Relations between Baltic peoples were not cooperative. There was a kind of pecking order: Estonians bullied Latvians, while Lithuanians raided both Estonians and Latvians. Lithuanian tribes were reported to have captured more than a thousand slaves in a single battle, later selling some to Byzantine and Turkish traders.[7]

When German and other crusaders besieged the Amber Coast in the 13th century, Baits showed little solidarity with one another. By contrast, Swiss cantons fighting the Habsburgs at that time had the political wit to submerge their political, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences. Baits seldom did. As a result, they could not raise the money or men needed

to build forts far from their fields, wage preventive war or initiate preemptive attacks. Tribal leaders often failed to persuade clan elites to surrender power to them.

Lack of social differentiation and central political direction made it difficult for Baltic tribes to defend against encroachments from outside. These conditions also impeded development of advanced military technologies. Orientation toward one's own village made it difficult to organize extensive and reliable cross-village strategic cooperation.[8]

The subjugation of Baltic tribes by outside forces was far more total than that contemporaneously suffered by the patrimonial principalities of Russia. Baltic organization was rudimentary. Because social roles overlap in tribal societies, change—when it comes—tends to overthrow the old ways. Outsiders, when they take control, tend to rule from the top down rather than depend on local agents. In contrast to the Baltic peoples, when Russians paid tribute to the Golden Horde, Moscow and other Russian principalities continued to live in their familiar ways.

In 1342-1343, however, many Estonians rose up against Danish-German rule and religion. So individualistic were the Estonians that they chose four local "kings" to lead the revolt. The Estonians nonetheless destroyed Danish control outside Tallinn, but were eventually crushed by the German knights, who then bought northern Estonia from the Danish king. The revolt failed in part because Estonians in some regions did not take part and because help from Sweden, arranged in advance, arrived too late.[9] Also, as noted below, Lithuania's grand duke spurned Estonian overtures for collaboration.

Most Baltic tribes failed to cope with the complex challenges to their security. Their internal order was too rigid. The class structure of haves and have-nots prevented tapping the full energies of each tribe. Their "us-first" orientation blinded them to possibilities of strategic cooperation with others—kinfolk and neighboring tribes. A value-claiming orientation led to myopia and, in time, servitude.

The Baltic Crusades: A Knightly-Clerical-Mercantile Consortium

Three major crusader orders conquered and governed the Amber Coast for centuries. They blended top-down centralization with some self-organization. The crusaders sought to protect missionaries and merchants; protect converts to Christianity; and to repress if not extirpate piracy, highway robbery, polygamy, infanticide, human sacrifice, and worship of pagan gods.[10]

The synergies of Western technology, social organization, and ideology rapidly vanquished the Estonians and Latvians, but Lithuanians and Poles maintained their independence; more than five hundred years passed before they too fell to Germanic and Russian onslaughts.

Blessed by a distant pope and Holy Roman Emperor, the monk-knights relied fundamentally on their own wits and muscles. The knights elected a Grand Master [*Hochmeister*] who, in turn, appointed a Supreme Bailiff and other top officials responsible for functional tasks (for example, logistics, finances, hospitals) and consulted with them on important decisions.[11]

The *Deutsche Orden* (D.O.) was one of the best administered polities of the Middle Ages. The Grand Master was not only a territorial lord in Prussia, but the sovereign head of an ecclesiatico-political institution whose activities extended from the Holy Land over the Mediterranean and through the whole of Europe. The D.O. organized efficient mail services and intelligence gathering, for example, on the rise and fall of Jeanne d'Arc. The Order's representatives at the Vatican were the first standing ambassadors in Europe.[12]

Initially, alien rule was tempered by expediency: The knights needed Baits to fight with them as well as to till the fields. Within a few centuries, however, the knights enserfed Estonians and Latvians—sometimes selling them like cattle. The vassal landlords began only with rights of *dominium*, but these gave way to the rights of *proprietas*. What the vassals gained, the yeomen lost.[13]

The knights and the city merchants in Tallinn and Riga shared a common interest in trade: Grain from the knights' estates filled the cargo ships sailing from Baltic ports to London, Edinburgh, Boston, Bruges, and even Cadiz. But the knights overreached. They received permission from the pope to engage in trade, not for a profit, but to overcome their poverty. When the knights encroached, merchants in the port towns complained and began to buy grain directly from those yeomen who still controlled their own produce. Some Hanseatic towns even sided with Lithuanians and Poles against the Order. And some bishops objected to the increasingly brutal treatment of the peasants by the knights.[14]

For centuries, the Amber Coast was a confused condominium in which many actors asserted their rights—the D.O., bishops (local and Scandinavian), town councils, provincial assemblies, overseas potentates—all subject to a distant pope and, under him, the Holy Roman Emperor. This was not self-organization, but chaos. And it splintered Germanic unity.

The D.O. was often at odds with Riga's archbishop and the town's merchants in the late 13th and 14th centuries. Each side practiced the arts of war and diplomacy. Each sought to bargain from strength, but when that failed, it accepted compromise and even arbitration. Other Baltic towns such as Tallinn and its overlord, the faraway king of Denmark, usually

backed Riga against the knights. But the others preferred that Riga and the D.O. resolve their disputes peacefully. The knights had military might, but Riga had an ace in reserve: It could align with the pagan Lithuanians against the Order.

When war erupted between Riga and the Order early in the 14th century, the two sides agreed to make peace. To arbitrate unresolved issues, the conferees selected the archbishop of Lund. But Riga spurned his judgment and instead negotiated a deal directly with the D.O.[15] Riga would buy the Order's fort at the mouth of the Dvina River for 1000 silver marks and promise for one year not to join the Lithuanians against the D.O. or sign a peace treaty with the Lithuanians without the Order's approval. Both sides agreed in the future to make common cause against the pagans and do nothing harmful to each other. A year later, however, Riga again allied with the Lithuanians against the knights, who had retaken the fort.[16]

Such internecine struggles persisted among the Germans.[17] They weakened the D.O. and facilitated its defeats by combined Lithuanian-Polish forces in 1410 and again in 1466. The 1466 Treaty of Thorn transferred to Poland full sovereignty over most of west Prussia, leaving only a fragment of east Prussia to the D.O. The order moved its headquarters to Königsberg, where the Grand Master became a vassal of the Polish king.

Still, no other German state in the 14th and 15th centuries could rival the D.O. in political and economic power. The Order often partnered with the Hanseatic towns and shared with them a German-speakers' community of interests in dealing with other actors. The Order gave Hanseatic merchants abroad that backing which the Holy Roman Emperor could no longer provide. The influence of the Order's Grand Master was so great that in 1451 he was addressed in England as head of the Hanseatic League.

The Order's death blow came from within: In 1525 the Grand Master accepted the Reformation, declared Prussia a secular duchy, was invested as duke by Polish King Sigismund I.[18] In Livonia, the Sword Brothers held on until the mid-16th century when Tsar Ivan IV invaded. Soon Livonia was partitioned between Russia, Sweden, and Poland. The Livonian Order was disbanded in 1561; its Grand Master became the Duke of Courland under Polish suzerainty.

Strange but true, an order of monkish knights acquired fitness sufficient to dominate Baltic life for hundreds of years. The knights transformed the region while keeping their own tongue and values. Their belief that God was on their side gave them courage, but also reinforced their tendency to claim and seize values rather than work with others for mutual gain.

The Hansas

As cities grew larger across Europe, they wanted the grains, timber, wax, skins, and furs abundant in the Baltic region and its Slavic hinterlands. German merchants—*die Hanse*, as they came to be known—transported heavy cargoes in the largest ship of the time, *die Kogge*, with a shallow draft (useful in rivers), but much sturdier than Viking craft.[19]

Hanseatic merchants settled on the Baltic, converting port towns such as Tallinn, Riga, and Gdansk into vital hubs in a network of transnational trade.[20] The Hanseatic city-states rose in the 12th and 13th centuries and flourished for some five hundred years—into the 17th century. Here was the first European Economic Community—more than one hundred Hanseatic towns and outposts, led by the cities of Lübeck and Rostock on Germany's northern coast, extending to Novgorod in the east and to London in the west.

The Hansas offered the leading model of self-organization in Baltic history, at least until the 20th century. Their fitness was demonstrated by an ability to master complex challenges at home, regionally, and in distant places. They promoted mutual gain—not just for the merchants who ruled each town, but also for those with whom they traded in distant ports; they also benefited some local Estonians and Latvians who, escaping serfdom, became artisans in Hanseatic towns such as Tallinn.

The term "Hansą" meant "flock, " but it came to apply to the foreign trade merchants, mostly Germanic, who banded together in the Baltic Sea and beyond to promote their mutual security and commercial interests.[21] Had a stronger German state existed, the Hansas would have had neither the need nor the freedom to act as they did. But they served as the merchant class of the Holy Roman Empire, known in some official documents as *universi mercatores imperii*. They sought market access—not territory. They armed for defense—not for attack. For the Hansas, international relations were through trade—not war.

The merchants helped to break the rigid ways of medieval Europe. They resided in towns—"nonfeudal islands in a feudal world."[22] The Hanseatic city-states were virtually independent from the principalities, kingdoms, and empires that struggled for power in other parts of Europe and Russia.

The Hansas embodied some features that Immanuel Kant forecast in his booklet, *On Perpetual Peace* (1795-1796), would generate perpetual peace. They lived by the "spirit of commerce" and supported the development of law and cosmopolitan ways. Their politics were neither "republican" nor "authoritarian. " Each town was governed by a patriarchate elected by the top merchant families. The system's rigidity sometimes spawned revolt as up-and-coming merchants and prosperous artisans sought admission to the ruling class. The ruling class responded by coopting a few of the rebels, who then deserted their fellows.[23]

The German-speaking upper class did little to foster mutual gain with native Baits. German-speakers dominated not only the foreign trade but also the local artisan guilds, the church, and local government. No locals joined the clergy until after the Protestant Reformation. But the towns served as a refuge for runaway serfs, many of whom became artisans. Reliable social statistics are hard to come by, but a 1688 census of Tallinn (total population: 12, 500 to 13, 000) showed the upper and middle classes composed mainly of ethnic Germans and a few Swedes; Estonians and a few Swedes made up the lowest class. Of business people and hand workers in Tallinn, only 3 to 4 percent were from Estonia, Latvia, or Courland. The largest percentage of handworkers (19 percent) came from Saxony, while 67 percent of the business people were local Germans—followed by 12 percent form Lübeck.[24]

The towns' major export, grain, came from estates ruled by Germans but worked by the indigenous peoples. The prosperity of the upper-class Hansards trickled down to the German-speaking middle classes, but barely percolated to the natives. Hanseatic fitness and self-organization were formidable, but Hanseatic prosperity depended ultimately on exploitation of native Baits, whom many Germans saw as inferior—even subhuman. Had the Hansas done more to bring native Baits into a system of joint value-creation, the city-states' independence and prosperity might have stood on broader foundations.

The terms League or Confederation, exaggerate the ties binding the Hanseatic city-states. To be sure, these towns rarely fought one another, as did Genoa, Florence, and Venice. But the Hanseatic towns had no unifying covenant; no regular time and place to council; no regular mode of taxation; and no established military force. Still, when confronted with a serious external threat, they often self-organized to meet the challenge.[25]

The Hansa's spirit of commerce, we should also note, did not include free trade. Merchants from different towns sought monopoly control over trade in certain commodities, for example, herring from Norway.[26] More generally, they sought to prevent merchants form non-Hansa towns from trading in basic commodities important to Baltic producers and consumers.

In the 15th century, Hansa towns passed laws to exclude competitors. In Livonia, foreigners were at times forbidden to learn Russian to prevent their dealing with the natives of Pskov and Novgorod. Foreigners could not stay in Livonian towns more than three or four months, so no colony could be formed. Foreigners could not become citizens of any Livonian town foreign merchants in Novgorod were prohibited from entering joint ventures with Russians.[27]

Hansa efforts to prevent foreigners form trading in the Baltic achieved some successes in the 15th century, but eventually failed. They backfired when rivals, such as Amsterdam and London, became powerful and ended the privileges once extended to Hanseatic merchants.

But size *plus* organization is a plus. As European kingdoms became larger and better organized, the Hanseatic towns found it harder to maintain their independence and to compete in commerce. Amsterdam, enriched by wealth from the Dutch East Indies, became far richer and more powerful than Lübeck or Danzig. The Americas, revealed by Columbus, promised riches far greater than Baltic grain.

The Protestant Reformation sparked conflicts among the Hanseatic towns. Both the towns and their hinterlands were attacked and wasted by invaders in the Thirty Years War (1608-1648) and the Great Northern War (1700-1721).

In the 17th century, the Hansa towns lost their vitality and their independence. They fell to the monarchs of Poland, of Prussia, or Russia. They were not invited to sign the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. The Hanseatic diet met one last time in 1669, but the Hanseatic association never formally dissolved. In the 1990s Riga and Tallinn boldly recalled their Hanseatic ties; Hamburg and Bremen boasted that they were Hanseatic Free Cities.

Lithuania and Poland

In the second millennium, Lithuanians met challenges better and maintained their independence much longer than the other Baltic peoples. In the 13th century, Lithuanian tribes formed a duchy. This state became an empire, then a confederation, and then a junior partner to Poland. With Poland's partition, Lithuania was submerged in the Russian empire, but reemerged independent in the 1920s and 1930s. It became a Soviet "union-republic" for half a century, but regained independence in 1990-1991.

Even before Christian missionaries and knights landed on the Baltic coast, Lithuanians were regional hegemons. They bullied neighbors to the west and north and expanded into Slavic lands to the east and south. Unlike Latvians and Estonians, the Lithuanians banded together and defeated the Teutonic Knights in 1236. The continuing need to cooperate against the Sword Brothers in the north and the Teutonic Knights in the west goaded Lithuanian tribal leaders in 1253 to form a kingdom—later a Grand Duchy. To keep the German knights at bay, Lithuanian dukes used not only war but opportunistic realpolitik—balancing against foes, jumping on the winners' bandwagon, and dividing the opposition. The dukes' maneuvers, however, were complicated by their internal struggles for power. Some allied with Muscovy; others with the Tatars fighting Russia.

Cultural and political lines hardened in the 14th century. In 1385, Lithuania's rulers opted for a dynastic union with Poland and Roman Catholic Christianity. Partnership with Poland brought some geopolitical gains, but also some real costs.

Lithuania's acceptance of Catholicism alienated many of its Orthodox subjects to the east. Lithuania's cultural fitness suffered. The alliance with Poland cost Lithuania its pagan faith and led to Polonization of the ruling classes, who embraced not just Roman Catholicism but the Polish language. Lithuania's class structure also came to emulate that of the Baltic barons in Courland.[28]

Lithuania failed to balance its eastern and western traditions and still maintain a national identity. This failure, as William Urban has pointed out, left its mark in the 1990s as Lithuanians glorified their military past *and* portrayed themselves as perpetual victims. The Protestant-Catholic split in the 16th century put the Baltic peoples on different trajectories that endured into the 21st century.[29]

The 1569 Union of Lublin turned the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth into the Polish Republic [*Rzeczpospolita Polska*]. In the early 17th century, Poland was so powerful that its troops could invade Russia and nearly put their own candidate on the Kremlin throne.

Apparently strong abroad, Poland was not fit at home. Few Polish nobles adjusted creatively to complex challenges at home or abroad. The nobles' greatest experiment in self-rule, the *liberum veto*—adopted in 1652—came just as Poland was overrun simultaneously by Russians, Swedes, Prussians, and Cossacks and while the peasants revolted against their landlords. The new rule provided that any noble could veto any law and that his veto would dissolve the parliament. Poland became paralyzed—defenseless against incursions by its powerful neighbors. The *liberum veto* prevented the decisions needed to prevent the partitions that, in the late 18th century, parceled out Poland and Lithuania to the Prussian, Russian, and Austrian empires.[30]

Poland's nobles took self-organization to an absurd extreme. The country's problem was not order, but chaos—effected in the name of equal rights for each noble. For most of the second millennium, the elites of Lithuania and Poland claimed values more than they labored to create them—with their own peoples or with neighbors.

In 1920, an independent Lithuania and an independent Poland emerged from the ruins of three empires, whereupon Poland invaded Lithuania and took Vilnius, Lithuania's historic capital. The unresolved conflict prevented effective cooperation between Poland and Lithuania against threats from the east and the west. After 1945, however, Poles and Lithuanians again found themselves on the same side as they opposed Soviet rule. Poles stepped forward boldly in the 1970s and early 1980s; Lithuanian did so in the late 1980s, having learned something about nonviolent resistance from the pathbreaking example of *Solidarność*—a model in self-organization in a popular movement against repression.

Swedish Absolutism

In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, Sweden filled the vacuum left by the collapse of the German knightly orders before Russia could do so. Starting in 1561, Sweden dominated large reaches of the Baltic's southern and eastern shores, until driven back by Peter the Great in 1710-1721.

Swedish kings understood that the Baltic provinces were very important to them: The provinces would be a granary for Sweden; a source of revenue and of manufactures; and a barrier to Russian expansion. Dominion over the Baltic provinces would permit Sweden to control trade between Europe and Eurasia.[31]

Swedish rule on the Amber Coast sharply qualifies the thesis that self-organization is more effective than autocracy. The Swedish kings were modernizers: They did much to break feudal restraints and give greater power to government bureaucrats and to the rising bourgeoisie. Absolutist kings promoted a modern state with an educated population. Sweden required all its subjects to become literate. In the language of complexity theory, the Swedish monarchy sought to upgrade the fitness of its subjects, at home and abroad (including New Sweden in America) and create values generally—not just claim values for royal enrichment. Its doctrine was "cameralism"—the idea that a ruler must be strong to protect the interests of all its subjects. In Tallinn, for example, Swedish King Charles XI in 1687 abolished the city council and autonomous guilds and gave full powers to a trusted mayor.[32]

An authoritarian ruler aims to provide stability against the forces of chaos. But an enlightened authoritarianism, oriented to creating new values, does more: It can relegate a decrepit order to the dust bin of history. The Swedish kings tried to do so, though their actions often fell short of their aspirations.

Enlightened absolutism is not self-organization. Indeed, the Swedish kings labored to weaken the self-organization of feudal lords.[33] But Swedish absolutism opened the way to self-rule at a later stage.[34] This was the sort of enlightened despotism Malinovskii dreamed of a century later in St. Petersburg, but did not get.

In the 1680s, King Charles XI imposed the „Great Reduction. " He took back more than half the lands controlled by the German lords in Estonia and Latvia. The king declared that the peasants on his estates were no longer the personal property of the landlords, but the subjects of the king. Sweden increased grain levies, thus creating more burdens for peasants, but loosened the bonds of serfdom in its Baltic provinces. Most important, Sweden initiated schooling in the local languages for peasant Estonian and Latvian children and reopened the University of Dorpat (Tartu) in 1690.

Swedish rule was far from ideal for Baits, and Swedish aspiration often exceeded Swedish action. Still, Swedish governance was far more progressive than what went before and came after Peter the Great obtained Russia's "window on the west."

The Patrimonial Russias and Baltic Independence

The principalities of Russia—from the 9th to the 16th centuries—were patrimonies. Unlike tribes, a patrimony has a fairly strong, centralized government, some social differentiation, but less communal loyalty than is typical in tribal life. The princes of a patrimony view the state as their personal property. The Russian princes' "my-patrimony-above-yours" attitudes made it difficult to mobilize strategic cooperation against better organized invaders who, for centuries, swept onto the Russian steppe. Hence, Kyiv and other Russian patrimonies were vulnerable to Mongols and other outsiders with fewer material assets.

Beginning in the 16th century, however, the principality of "Moskva" became the heart of an expanding Russian empire. But even the empire was a veritable patrimony—the property of the tsar or tsarina whose formal powers, at least till the first Duma, were nearly unlimited.

Tsarist rule in the Baltic, like Swedish, was absolutist— autocratic and top-down—as elsewhere in the empire. In the 18th century, St. Petersburg chose to restore the unlimited powers of the Baltic barons over the peasantry. A closed corporation of 324 families enjoyed a monopoly of landholding. Then, in 1818, St. Petersburg abolished serfdom in its Estonian and Latvian provinces, long before ending it throughout the empire in 1861. Former serfs were legally free, but had no land.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Tsarist Empire mounted several campaigns aimed at russifying its western reaches, where Germans, Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and others still spoke their own languages, and where some were experiencing a nationalist awakening.

The tsarist and provisional governments disappeared in 1917, but the patrimonial tradition lingered. Communist leaders, especially Stalin, viewed all humans and land under their control as their possessions. They traded off the Baltic and other borderlands to obtain Soviet security in the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In negotiations with Germany in August 1939, Stalin claimed Estonia and Latvia, but left Lithuania to Hitler. A short time later, however, he got Lithuania as well in exchange for concessions further south. Stalin, bowing to Franklin Roosevelt's request, promised a show of democracy in the Baltic lands, but clearly assumed that these lands too were again part of the Russian patrimony.[35] Treating the Baltic as part of the Russian patrimony, Stalin and his successors flooded the region with Slavic settlers, sharply altering the ethnic balance in Estonia and Latvia.

At the end of the millennium, Russia continued to oscillate between order and anarchy—lacking the fitness that copes effectively with complex challenges. Post-Soviet Russia, of course, had pockets of creative enterprise such as Novgorod—in the 1990s, as in Hanseatic times, an outpost of commerce and relatively stable self-rule.

The Baltic Republics

In 1905, popular assemblies—1, 000 delegates in Riga, 800 in Tartu, 2, 000 in Vilnius—demanded autonomy for the Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian regions of Russia. In 1917-1918, Baits again demanded autonomy and then—as Imperial German troops invaded—independence. By 1920, the German troops (Baltic as well as Imperial) and the Soviet Red Army had retreated. The three Baltic republics, along with Finland and Poland, emerged as the first nation-states on the eastern and southeastern shores of the Baltic.

Considering that they were arising from centuries of autocratic repression, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania made a good start toward self-organized fitness in the 1920s.[36] But circumstances were not favorable. Democracy in the new republics was aborted by a weak democratic political culture, political inexperience, the world depression, the rise of authoritarian regimes in most of Europe, by the Stalin-Hitler partition of Eastern Europe, by Soviet occupation, and by World War II.

It is difficult for a single society to be fit—especially a relatively small one—if its neighbors are unfit, or if the overall international system conduces either to despotic order or to anarchy.

Narrow Self-Seeking versus Self-Organization for Mutual Gain

By A. D. 2000, none of the great Baltic empires remained. The expansive realms of Vikings, Danish and Swedish kings, Lithuanian and Polish kings, Hanseatic merchants, Germanic knights and kaisers, tsars, a Fuhrer, and various commissars were gone. Why?

Exploitation backfired. Narrow self-seeking kept most Baltic peoples from combining their strengths against external threats. Unlike Estonians and Latvians, Lithuanians managed to unite—only to overreach. Allied with Poland, they sought to dominate even Russia. In time, the *liberum veto* undermined Poland from within and helped Russia to advance. Swedish kings also suffered imperial overstretch as they fought to rule the Baltic littoral as well as all northern Europe. A

late-comer based in Brandenburg-Prussia, imperial Germany also went too far—its imperial expansions defeated in 1918 and 1945.

Tsarist Russia and Soviet Russia outreached the other overreachers. They ruled one-sixth of the earth's surface, but antagonized many of their own subjects and most of their neighbors. The Soviet Union practiced exploitation far more than mutual gain. Lenin's system offered a kind of Social arwinism. He taught that the question of politics is *kto kovo*, "who will destroy whom?" Such a system could not prosper. Too late did Soviet reformers perceive that true fitness must come from self-organization—not centralized commands. Even when Mikhail S. Gorbachev sought to "restructure" Soviet life, he wanted all parameters to be set by the center— the Kremlin.

The near absence of self-organized democracy before 1920 helps explain why most actors on the Amber Coast sought one-sided rather than mutual gain. Political and economic life on the Baltic shores seldom integrated material power with efficient self-organization. The least efficient were the Russian and Soviet empires—autocratic masters of vast resources which they used poorly. The most successful were the Hansas which, with few material assets, prospered thanks to self-organization.

The indigenous Baltic peoples—Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians—generally lacked both material power *and* a capacity for self-organization. Their double weakness helped foreigners to pillage the Amber Coast for most of the second millennium. Baits self-organized briefly in the 1920s and 1930s, but not optimally. Only in the last fifteen years of the second millennium did native Baits begin to organize— within each state, regionally, and with the rest of Europe—in ways that effectively leveraged their limited material assets. Of all peoples in the USSR, Baits had the most recent memories of self-rule. Not by accident, they played David to the Soviet Goliath.

* This essay derives from the author's book, The Baltic Miracle: Complexity Theory and European Security (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield), forthcoming.

1 On early work at the Santa Fe Institute, see Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Macmillan, 1992). One of the major exponents of complexity theory is Stuart Kauffman. See his *The Origins of Order; Self-Organization and Selection: in Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *At Home in the Universe: The Search for Laws of Self-Organizafion and complexity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a skeptical view of complexity theory, see John Hogan, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1996), chaps. 5-9. For a more balanced appraisal, see the "Edge of Chaos" and many relevant entries in Ian Marshall and Danah Zohar, *Who's Afraid of Schrödinger's Cat: All the Science Ideas You Need to Keep Up with the New Thinking* (New York: Morrow, 1997).

2 For a synthesis of these theories and its application in case studies, see Walter C. Clemens, Jr., *Dynamics of international Relations: Conflict and Mutual Gain in an Era of Global Interdependence* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) and Clemens, *America in the World, 1898-2025; Achievements, Failures, Alternative Futures* (New York: St. Martin's, forthcoming).

3 See Clemens, *The Baltic Miracle: Complexity Theory and European Security* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming).

4 V. Stanley Vardys and Judith B. Sedaitis, *Lithuania: The Rebel Nation* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1997), p. 6; Rokas M. Tracevskis, "Lithuanians abroad saluted in Vilnius, " *The Baltic Times*, September 23-29, 1999, p. 2.

5 By 1200 Estonia had a population of 150, 000; in 1550, about 250, 000; in the 1990s, about a million Estonian speakers in Estonia and more abroad. See Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1993), pp. 6, 14, 19.

6 Joachim Herrmann et al., *Wikinger und Slawen: Zur Frühgeschichte der Ostseevölker* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1982).

7 From the account of Henry of Livonia quoted in William Urban, *The Baltic Crusade* (DeKalb, Il.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1975), pp. 21-22.

8 On tribes and patrimonies, see Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 130-33.

9 Heinz von zur Mühlen, "Erober, Stammbevölkerung und Nachbarn Livlands bis 1651," in Wildried Schlau, ed., *Tausend Jahre Nachbarschaft: Die Völker des baltischen Raumes und die Deutschen* (Munich: F. Bruckman, 1995), pp. 39-46 and 42-43.

10 For analysis and a summary of the literature, see William L. Urban, "Victims of the Baltic Crusade," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 29, 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 195-212.

11 The Grand Master was aided by a Supreme Bailiff (*Grosskomtur*), below whom were grouped *Landmeisters*, under whom *Hauskomturs* ruled their *Komturei,* the groups of at least twelve knights who acted as seigneurs over their peasants. S. E. Finer, *The History of Government From the Earnest Times* (3 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1, 51.

12 Expertise by Eric Weise, Chief Keeper of the Archives (ret.) in *Two Expertises relating to the Archives of the Teutonic Order and the Ancient Prussian Duchy* (Göttingen: Academy of Sciences [mimeograph] 1949).

13 Alfred Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 93.

14 Von zur Mühlen, "Erober, Stammbevölkung und Nachbarn Livlands bis 1561."

15 Speaking from Rome a short time later, the arbiter announced Ms judgment: The D.O. could call a conference only once a year in Riga, attended by no more than 50 delegates. But the Bishop of Riga, representing the town council, rejected the ruling. He complained that the knights forced local bishops and lower prelates to attend such conferences "or lose everything they owned. "

16 The February 25, 1304 meeting [*Versammlung*] of the Latvian and Estonian Assemblies [*liv- und estländischer Stände*] was attended by the bishops and church vassals from Tartu and Saaremaa, the Land Marshal and twelve representatives of the D.O. in Livland, a representative of Lund, and vassals of the Danish king in Estonia [*Estland*]. See documents and commentary in Oskar Stavenhagen, ed., *Akten und Recesse der Livländischen Ständetage* (Riga: J. Deubner, 1907), Vol. 1 [1304-1460], pp. 1-10.

17 In 1309 and in 1313 delegates form Tallinn (representing the bishop, town council, and vassals of the Danish king) and from Saaremaa delivered ultimata to Riga and to the D.O.: Make peace with each other and make common cause against the Lithuanians. Whoever refuses must fight the forces of Tallinn and Saaremaa. Submission was to be signified by sacred oaths, delivery of hostages, and official seals. The documents implied that not only the D.O., but also the citizens of Riga were subjects of international law. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

18 Martin Luther addressed a letter: "An die Herren Deutschen Ordens."

19 Perhaps exaggerating, the Cologne Chronicle asserted that such a ship carried some 1, 500 crusaders and their provisions from Cologne to Palestine in 1188. Archaeologists found a *Kogge* 23 meters long—not longer than some Viking ships, but higher (4 meters at midships) and wider (7. 8 meters). Its single mast was 24 meters; its four-cornered sail, 160 square meters. It could carry a cargo of 120 tons and had a crew of 15. Uwe Ziegler, *Die Hanse; Aufsteig, Blüutezeit und Niedergang der ersten europäischen Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft* (Bern: Schwerz, 1997), pp. 304-308.

20 The German-speaking Hansas knew Tallinn as Reval; Tartu as Dorpat; Klaipėda as Memel; Gdansk as Danzig.

21 First recorded usage: a sermon in A. D. 370; later, in *Beowulf;* but it was not applied to traveling German merchants until the 12th century. See Klaus Friedland, *Die Hanse* (Stuttgart; Kohl-hammer, 1991), p. 21.
22 Nathan Rosenberg and L. E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 78, 135.
23 Finer, *History of Government* 2, 954.
24 From a population of 13, 000 Tallinn formed a militia of 732 men. Tallinn's mayor told the ruling Swedish king that the *Undeutschen* were undependable. The highest placed *Undeutschen* ranked no higher than gang foreman [*Rottmeister*]. Heinz von zur Mühlen, ed., *Die Revaler Munster-Rolle Anno 1688; Ein Verzeichnis der Bürger und Einwohner* (Lüneburg: Verlag Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1992), pp. 3-11, 18, 30, 36.
25 The 1370 Treaty of Stralsund ending the Hansas' war with Denmark was negotiated by twenty-three Hanseatic city-states reaching from Tartu, Tallinn, and Riga to Hamburg and ten Netherlands towns. Denmark was represented by two bishops and a spokesman from Rügen. Heinz Stoob, *Die Hanse* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1995), p. 183.
26 The Hansa monopoly was facilitated by the fact that herring spawned off the coast of Scania and was preserved using salt supplies controlled by Lübeck and its allies. See Archibald R. Lewis and Timothy J. Runyan, *European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 128-30.
27 Philippe Dollinger, *The German Hansa* (London: Macmillan, 1970 [from French original, 1964], pp. 202-203.
28 Courland was long ruled by the Kettle dynasty as vassals of Poland. Many noble families from Courland acquired estates in Lithuania. There was heavy trading across the border. The Russo-Polish upper class in Lithuania resembled that of the Baltic German upper class in Estonia, Livonia, and Courland.
29 Nonetheless there were points of contact. For example, following the dissolution of the Teutonic Order, first Livonia and then Riga swore allegiance to the Polish crown and, for more than sixty years, belonged to the Lithuanian part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. When Livonia was conquered by Sweden, however, Livonia's eastern region of Latgale (sometimes called "Polish Latvia") remained part of the Union until Poland was partitioned. Most of its people remained Catholic. Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence, 1917-1940* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 4-5.
30 Finer, *History of Government,* 3, 1369-72.
31 See essays by Aleksander Loit and twenty-four other scholars in Loit and Helmut Piirimäe, eds., *Die schwedischen Ostsee-provinzen Estland und Livland im 16. -18. Jahrhundert,* Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 11 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Inter-national, 1993); for bibliography, Stig Appelgren, comp., *Est-lands Svenskar och Svenskbygd; Bibliografi Sammanställd* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1997). The lag between Swedish aspiration and action is emphasized in Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1991).
32 This was the origin of the military census of 1688. See Von zu Mühlen, *Die Revaler Munster-Rolle*, p. 9.
33 Determined to integrate the north German as well as the eastern shores of the Baltic into the Swedish empire [*rik*], King Charles X assured German nobles that their privileges would remain intact under Sweden. In time, however, Swedish kings sought to reduce the German nobility's voice by weakening the Holy Roman imperial diet [*Reichstag*], the provincial estates [*Provinzstände*], and town assemblies [*Stadträte*].
34 The approach anticipated the path taken in Taiwan from the 1950s into the 1990s: absolutism—> mass education —> economic growth —> self-rule.
35 For documentation, see Walter C. Clemens, Jr. *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), pp. 296-98.
36 Unsure of Latvians' capacity for self-rule, a Latvian diplomat in November 1918 sounded out the French Embassy in London about installing a Frenchman as King of Latvia. Huges Jean de Dianoux, "Un roi francais pour la Lettonie en 1918, " in Eberhard Demm et al., eds., *Independence of the Baltic States: Origins, Causes, and Consequences.. A Comparison of the Crucial Years 1918-1919 and 1990-1991* (Chicago, Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1996), pp. 75-81.