

# LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 36, No.4 - Winter 1990

Editor of this issue: Violeta Kelertas

ISSN 0024-5089

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Regional Identity under Soviet Rule: The Case of the Baltic States.**

Editors: Dietrich André Loeber, University of Kiel; V. Stanley Vardys, University of Oklahoma; and Laurence P. A. Kitching, Simon Fraser University. Published for the Institute for the Study of Law, Politics and Society of Socialist States, University of Kiel, with the support of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. Hackettstown, New Jersey, 1990, xxii, 470 pp. Cloth U.S. \$50.00; AABS members \$37.00.

This volume is a collection of interdisciplinary essays based on papers and discussions by forty-two scholars from eight countries in a conference on Baltic regional identity, held at the University of Kiel in June 1987. Some papers were updated and prepublished in the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 18 (1987) Nos. 2-4 and Vol. 19 (1988) Nos. 1-3. The book consists of thirty-two scholarly articles presenting a well-documented overview of the three Baltic republics in areas including culture, history, demography, economy, politics, religion, sociolinguistics, and law. The multi-faceted subject matter is presented in six clusters: regionalism as it relates to political integration; social, cultural and economic development; regionalism under comparative law aspects; and international dimensions of regionalism. There is appended a collection of "Twelve Samizdat Documents from the Period 1969-1987" and a bibliography of selected Soviet Baltic publications from 1956 to 1986, mainly in Russian.

In his introductory remarks on Baltic regional identity, Dietrich André Loeber (convener of the conference) points out that the subject has received scant scholarly attention, but that current events in the Soviet Union add to its importance. In seeking to define Baltic regional identity, he first proposes to view it on the basis of Soviet sources—hence the selected Soviet Baltic bibliography with which the conference participants were provided in advance. Nevertheless, he concludes that this approach is ambiguous because it operates from above (in the areas of economics, administration, and the military), and from below (in the areas of culture and science). He points out that Baltic regionalism is apolitical, neutralized, and centrally controlled. In addition to this objective side, Loeber calls attention to the importance of the subjective belief in regional identity, not only by Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians themselves, but by other Soviet citizens as well, who refer to the Baltic region as "our foreign country" (*nasha zagranitsa*), or "the Soviet West," thereby reinforcing the perception of the distinctiveness of the region.

Gert von Pistohlkors (University of Gottingen) carries the introduction further by probing regionalism as a concept of Baltic historiography.

But Hain Rebas (Christian Albrechts-University, Kiel) questions the very premise of Baltic regionalism, recalling that the concept originated in the 19th century with oligarchic Baltic-German groups, and that the consciousness of forming a community or, belonging to a Baltic region is as recent as the mid-1980s. During the period of independence the three Baltic States had developed some community of purpose and collaboration with the Pact of 1934, but each had acted independently in their struggle for statehood and in resisting the Red Army in 1919. A regionally conscious community had always been flawed by the fact that Estonia had long had closer ties with Finland and Sweden than with the other two Baltic States. Differences in religion—Protestant and Catholic—also provided and impediment to complete fraternity.

Since the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, the policy has been, first, to control, and then to integrate the population and territories. Control was directed from Moscow and was imposed through mass deportations and elimination of political and cultural leaders, and even farmers. Indigenous communists were put to use as available. Schools were re-oriented, publications controlled, churches were closed or converted to other use, and Russian was imposed as the official language. Russification via language, education, media, and migration of other nationalities into the

area was standard practice. Various industries were introduced which depend on the Soviet Union for both supplies and markets, providing a means of economic integration. Naval and military establishments were created in the area as essential elements of Soviet defense. The three Baltic republics thus became integral parts in the administration of defense, transportation, energy, agricultural machinery, and chemical industries.

In discussing "Soviet control over the Balts," Sergei Zamascikov (Rand Corporation) concludes that while political control, economic policies, and Russification are "effective from the regime's point of view, they are also the source of major dissatisfaction among the population."

Similarly, Gerhard Simon (Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, Köln) claims that imposition of the Russian language and sovietization in general have helped to develop communication between the Baltic republics, and hence to intensify regional consciousness.

Regional unity also derives from shared Christian religions, which, scorned and maltreated by Soviet authorities, have nevertheless remained crucially important in the Baltic republics. In a summation of the role of churches in these republics V. Stanley Vardys (University of Oklahoma) observes that having survived extreme conditions and great losses, over 50 percent of the Baltic population remains organized in a Christian religion, thus fostering a regional closeness.

Isabelle T. Kreindler (University of Haifa) approaches Baltic regionalism from a sociolinguistic perspective. While Estonian differs from Latvian and Lithuanian in its Finno-Ugric origin, their common Western orientation is grounded in religion and is "graphically manifested in the Latin script." In Lithuania, where the tsarist regime imposed the Cyrillic alphabet as a means of Russification (1864-1904), the Latin alphabet became symbolic of a seminal national movement. The Communist regime imposed its own destructive methods of Russification in the Baltic republics, but the people are resisting: "... a large corps of concerned linguists [are] carrying out sophisticated studies of the languages and their dialects . . . they are vigilantly on guard against anything that may impoverish or impair the language." The author concludes that the Baltic languages, "given the history of their struggle, their prestige and the language loyalty of their speakers . . . are well-endowed to compete with Russian in most spheres of human endeavor."

In discussing the sensitive subject of Jewish minorities, Zvi Segal (Tel-Aviv) correctly points out that during the years of independence "the Baltic Jews enjoyed the legal protection of laws designed to ensure the cultural autonomy of minorities in every aspect of religious, social, and educational life." However, he fails to make clear that since 1940 the Baltic people experienced three successive and extremely savage occupations by the USSR, Nazi Germany, and again the USSR. The inferred anti-semitism of the Baltic people should be placed in this perspective. Many Jews held key positions of the Soviet regime in Lithuania during the first Russian occupation. The fact that Jews were little affected in the mass deportation by the Soviet NKVD on June 14, 1941, spread the suspicion that Jews were in collusion with the Soviet perpetrators. A shocked and enraged people rose against the Communist regime. The uprising lasted a couple of days, and among those killed were Jewish and non-Jewish Communists.

There is, perhaps, an attempt at fairness when the author acknowledges that during the German occupation Baltic nationals did save Jewish lives—at the risk of their own, one should add—but it is inexcusable for a scholar on the subject to withhold the well-documented information that the Lithuanian Provisional Government made repeated protests to the occupying Nazi German authorities against the latter's persecution of Jews.

Segal indicates that some few thousand Jews, having joined the Soviet Red Army "played a considerable part in the conquest and liberation of their homeland." The oxymoronic "conquest and liberation"—in reality, invasion and subjugation—of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union, begs for clarification. The conquest is true; but the term "liberation" belies much of the subsequent discussion which focuses on the Baltic Jewish loss of cultural and religious freedom since the area's incorporation into the USSR.

There are other ambiguities and inaccuracies, e.g. the statement that "in practice, the Baltic Jews in the postwar years were denied access to government posts and positions in the [Communist] Party."

One acknowledges the difficulty in treating the Jewish minority problem dispassionately, particularly within the context of the tortured landscape of the Second World War and its equally devastating aftermath in the occupied Baltic States. The local perception was that some Jews joined forces with the Soviet Communist oppressors, while the Jews accused some Baltic nationals of collaborating with German Nazis. In fact, the Baltic people and the Jewish—and other—minorities were all victims, with a legacy of blaming each other for the crimes committed against them by Hitler and Stalin.

Nevertheless, it bears noting that this is a cursory article and does not meet scholarly standards, as reflected in its incomplete-ness of presentation and lack of documentation. No doubt, with the ongoing exposure of truth about the Communist epoch, future historians will succeed in presenting a more accurate account of the time and events.

Regrettably, because of limited space, this review cannot discuss other contributions to this volume depicting Baltic regionalism in the areas of Soviet school reform, economic growth and living standards, local legislation, criminal codes, nationalism and internationalism, Western radio broadcasts in the Baltic republics, or Soviet concern with Western non-recognition of the annexation of the Baltic States. All contain a wealth of data and merit attention by those concerned with

the extraordinary developments in both the Baltic republics and the Soviet Union. Each author's annotated bibliography is invaluable.

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