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**WHO ARE
LATVIANS
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ANSWERED BY P. EDWARDS, ETHNOLOGIST

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WHO ARE LATVIANS?

(Past and Present)

By P. Edwards

5000 Years At The Baltic Coast

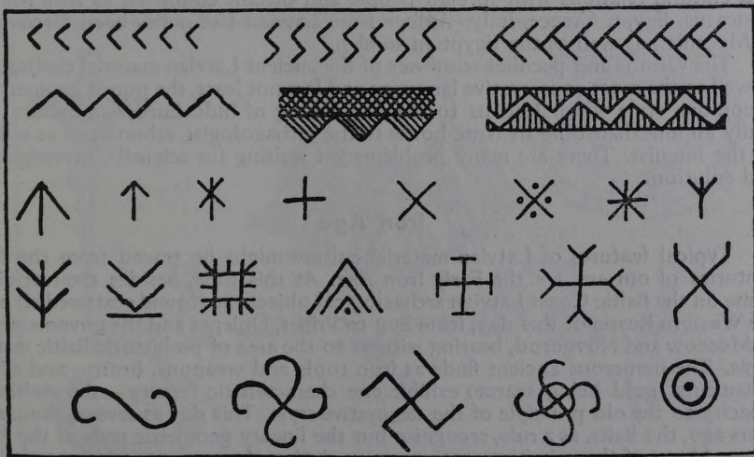
Latvians (or Letts) are neither Germans nor Slavs. They form a family of their own akin to ancient Greeks and Illyrians. It is now universally accepted that the ancestors of Latvians called by the Roman historian Tacitus „Aestiorum Gentes” inhabited the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea from the Neolithic Period, i. e. at least 5000 years. Of the many tribes mentioned by the history, only Latvians and their kinsmen Lithuanians about six millions altogether have been happy enough to build their own democratic states thanks to the moral and material assistance of USA and Great Britain while the rest was annihilated in the interminable contests with their aggressive neighbors or swallowed up by German and Slavic oceans, one by one.

Latvian Language Older Than Sanskrit

The languages spoken by Latvians and Lithuanians being the only idioms left of the great Baltic linguistic family, are justly considered as the oldest or most conservative of all Indo-European languages, older than Latin, Greek or even the Sanskrit, thus presenting the linguists a valuable stuff of scientific investigation.

Archaeology Matching Troy

The age of the Baltic material civilization matches that of the language and is not of a later date than the finds excavated at the prehistoric Troy. It is generally assumed that in the Bronze Age the once ample family of Balts had not yet differentiated into separate tribes, and the archaeological discoveries made on the Eastern Coast of the Baltic Sea bear evidence to the character and level of the common Baltic civilization. The objects found in mounds, graves, hoards, castle-hills, as pottery, works of stone, clay, metal, and amber throw light on nature of Baltic ancient funeral rites, social and cultural life and popular arts, attesting a considerable skill in the art of working metal. The manifold tools and implements such as bronze axes, knives, daggers, swords, spears, hammers, earthenware, hoes, sickles throw light on pursuits of Baltic ancestors. Adding to the archaeological evidence some linguistic dates one easily can see that in the Bronze Age, Latvian forefathers mainly lived on agriculture as do their offsprings to-day. More than 3000 years ago, they used to plough and harrow their fields, grow corn, grind it with a handmill, raise cows, oxen, sheep, pigs, goats. Of course, they also kept the oldest and truest friend of mankind, the dog. The ox usually tugged the plough while the noblest domestic animal, the horse, as a rule, was used for riding. This dearest, almost pet animal had a suitable dress of glittering bridle-bits, stirrups, halters, different ornaments or pendants. As early as in the Bronze Age, Latvian ancestors already built their most attractive and important of the rural buildings, the "klets", a kind of storehouse also used for dwelling purposes. According to the statement of some scholars, this building might be regarded as prototype to Greek temples. In that period too, Balts had their castles ("pils"-Greek "polis", Sanskrit "pura") and villages built ("kaimas, ciems", English "home").



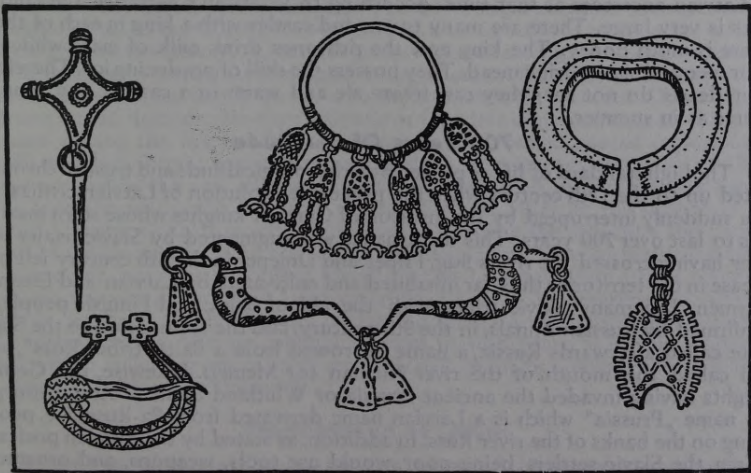
TROJAN DECORATIVE DESIGN STILL MET WITH IN THE
LATVIAN POPULAR ARTS

Agricultural products, besides amber, furs, honey, beewax, induced commercial and cultural relations with foreign people and distant countries, as Asia Minor, Caucasus, Egypt, Greece, Italy. Amber from Latvian Coast has been discovered in Mycenaean as well as the Egyptian tombs.

The various and peculiar witnesses of the ancient Latvian material civilization as well as the most conservative language and last not least, the purest geometrical decorative style which lead us to the very spring of Indo-European culture, are really an inexhaustible treasure-house to the archaeologist, ethnologist as well as to the linguist. There are many problems yet waiting for scientific investigation and solution.

Iron Age

Typical features of Latvian material culture might be traced from the first centuries of our era, i. e. the Early Iron Age. At this time, besides their original home on the Baltic Coast Latvian archaeological objects are found scattered all over the Western Russia of this day, from Bug to Pripet, Dnieper and the governments of Moscow and Novgorod, bearing witness to the area of prehistoric Baltic settlement. The numerous ancient finds as iron tools and weapons, bronze and silver ornaments (gold being scarce) exhibit one characteristic feature — the stubborn tenacity to the old principle of the decorative style. This day as several thousand years ago, the Balts, as a rule, recognise but the lineary geometric style of the first water. Many of the primitive motives, as symbols of sun, moon, stars, as well as swastika, cross, zigzag, most of which bearing magic sense, identical to primitive Greek decorative elements, still decorate metal bracelets, rings, pendants and remnants of woollen clothing found in the graves.



LATVIAN PREHISTORIC ORNAMENTS

At this time of prosperity, namely in the 9th century, the Anglo-Saxon traveller Wulfstan makes a call on "Whitland", the land of Aests or ancient Prussia, inhabited by Latvian ancestors at that time. According to Wulfstan's narrative, the land of Balts is very large. There are many towns and castles with a king in each of them. There is much honey. The king and the rich ones drink milk of mare while the poor men and slaves drink mead. They possess the skill of producing ice. Therefore, their deads do not rot; they can freeze ale and water in a cask at any time, in winter as in summer.

700 Years Of Servitude

The high standard of life as proved by archaeological finds and trustful chronists lasted up to the 12th century when the peaceable evolution of Latvian civilization was suddenly interrupted by the invasion of German knights whose stern mastery was to last over 700 years. This disturbance was augmented by Slavic rivalry who after having crossed the rivers Bug, Pripet and Dnieper in the 8th century felt now at ease in the territories thus far inhabited and cultivated by Latvian and Estonian kinsmen. The many Slavic tribes with the aid of Baltic and Finnish people, as confirmed by Russian Annals, in the 9th century, laid the foundation to the Slavic state called afterwards Russia, a name borrowed from a Baltic tribe „Russ“, as is still called the mouth of the river Nieman (or Memel). Likewise, the German knights having invaded the ancient Prussia or Whitland (land of Aests) usurped the name „Prussia“ which is a Latvian name derivated from Pa-Russ, i. e. people living on the banks of the river Russ. In addition, as stated by the Russian professor Spizin, the Slavic settlers, being poor, would use tools, weapons, and ornaments of Latvian making until the 10th century. Up from the 13th century, there were but short intervals of peace while quarrels and mutual engagements claimed most

time to the detriment of real cultural progress. The main point of the wrangle being the competition of two mighty races, German and Slavic, while the territory of the third, the Baltic, served as arena. The most tragic situation for a peaceable population such as the Balts! The invaders had no interest in promoting the welfare and progress of the country. Centuries go by without leaving any notable specimen of local monument worth mentioning of, though handicraft and folklore being limited to domestic needs and family life strive to continue the old traditions. Occasionally, Latvians would demonstrate their aspirations for a free democratic state. Such was the case during the first world war when Latvians formed special regiments of Tirailleurs which fought against Germans, with notable success, at the side of Allies, to the end, while the new Russian government betrayed their associates having made separate peace with Germany at Brest-Litovsk, 1918. At the session of the Russian Constitutional Assembly in Petrograd, January the 5th, 1918, the Latvian Deputy J. Goldmanis declared literally (by the stenogram): "Latvian nation is longing for peace not less than any other, for all that we Latvians deem a base action to conclude a separate peace with Germany at Brest-Litovsk by deserting our Allies — America, England, and France and by leaving them on the battle-field alone to fight with Germany. We are looking forward to such peace as will do justice to every nation including our country, and this will be made possible by the victory of America, England and France."

Proclamation of Latvia

At last, the Russian revolution, 1917/18, presented the longed for opportunity, and the establishment of free democratic Latvia was proclaimed on November 18th, 1918, and on the 26th of January, 1921, the sovereignty of the new state was

recognized de jure by most states of the world. Latvia thanks her resurrection mainly to the democratic and human spirit as well as to the very substantial aid of the great democratic states, Great Britain, USA and France.

Territory And Agriculture

Latvia covers 66.000 sq km (or 25.400 sq miles), thus having the 21st place among the 36 European states while her 2 million inhabitants outdo 11 sovereign units. Latvia is an agricultural land, mainly, 70 per cent of inhabitants being farmers or engaged in rural labour. For this reason the first task of the new government was to mend the vast damages caused by war, thousands of farm buildings having been reduced to ashes or destroyed by bombshells. Besides, there was necessity of splitting up big estates which did not answer the spirit of the post-war time. This measure as well as the amelioration of marshy soil augmented the area of arable land by 22 per cent. In addition to the renewed buildings in the space of time from 1920 to 1937, 441.000 new rural buildings were erected, worth 730 million lats (a lat — 20 cents). The rapid flourishing of the rural life is well illustrated by the increase of imported agricultural machines, tools, and artificial manure, by 350 per cent. A new branch of agriculture was started by the culture of sugar-beets which proved successful and evoked the necessity of building three big factories which produced sufficient sugar for home use. This pleasing result of enterprise spared much money to enable the import of foreign goods. The number of fruit-trees in orchards planted during the same period increased by 340 per cent, the crop of corn by 50, potatoes 150, milk 150, meat by 90 per cent, as compared with pre-war Russian-German period. In 1938, the export of butter attained 23.457 tons while during the Russian epoch Baltic Provinces did not export butter at all. The difference in farming



LATVIAN PREHISTORIC CASTLE

between the democratic Latvia based on private initiative and the collective farming method, is clearly shown by the following parallel, bearing in mind that Russian soil is richer by 20 per cent. In the space of time from 1933 to 1937, yearly on an average, the ha yielded in quintals (100 kg)

	Latvia	Soviet Russia
corn	12,3	9,1
potatoes	138,5	92
sugar-beets	200	138
In 1938 there were per 100 inhabitants		
	Latvia	Soviet Russia
horses	20	10
cattle	61	37
pigs	41	18
sheep and goats	68	60
Milk production per cow 1900 kg		1100 kg
butter per inhabitant	15 kg	1,2 kg

Agriculture being the main root of the Latvian economical life, electrification of rural house-keeping was forseen and partly realized by erecting a powerful hydro-generator at Kegums, on the Daugava. A couple of smaller ones were built on smaller streams. Just before the outbreak of the war, they began to give light and power to the nearest farms.

Social Life

Pacing with the prospering of the farmers' house-keeping, the spiritual and social life in town and country thrived likewise.



LATVIAN ANCIENT STOREHOUSE (KLĒTS)

A number of new modern school-houses was erected, and public schools were free to every nationality either Latvian, Jew, Pole or Russian, while the state paid the teachers. There were even an Anglo-American College and a French Lyceum maintained by the Latvian government. All citizens, without exception, enjoyed equal rights and liberties accorded by model democratic states to their respective subjects. An exception was made with national-socialists of German brand. In view of the pernicious doctrine, their literature (including the famous Hitler's "Mein Kampf") as well as organizations and propaganda of their ideas in general, were strictly forbidden in Latvia, since 1934. Latvian's disgust to every kind of despotism was also exhibited by active participation in the Control-Commission against the fascistic Italy, on the part of League of Nations. Consequently Latvians are neither fascists nor nazists, they are democrats of the first water.

The Soviet Occupation

The quiet, happy, and industrious life was disturbed in 1939, when the huge Soviet Russia imposed military bases upon Latvia, as well as Estonia and Lithuania, with quiet assent of Hitler. This compulsory act was followed by sudden invasion of the Baltic States by the Soviet military forces in June 1940, regardless of the Non-Agression Agreement concluded between Latvia and Soviet Russia, some months ago. The occupation was followed by series of decrees ordering the transformation into state-property of all and everything, the quick and the dead. In the end of this expropriation, all well-to-do citizens were turned into downright proletarians, owning but the rather insecure private property, one's own soul. There followed deportation of 35.000 Latvian inhabitants to forced labour by the Soviets, in June 1941.

Germans Turn Out Russians

In July 1941, Russians were forced to leave the Baltic States, and instead German forces marched in, creating the most tragic situation for the native population, the existence of which was now menaced by two hostile dogmatists, from East and West. The change of rulers did not improve the fate of the country, as some were apt to believe, at first. Movable and immovable remained expropriated as before except that all inhabitants from 16-65 years were being registered to be sent either to forced labour in Germany or to the front, as the masters pleased. The opposers were sent to concentration camps. Many a young man joined the Resistance-Detachment of General Kurelis, who fought against German army.

Russians Push Out Germans

In 1944, orders were given compelling Latvians to leave their native country and ship for German. Soviet army occupied Latvia once more.

Latvia still exists though occupied by hostile military forces. By their behaviour during both world wars, as well as by the way of managing the state affairs Latvians have given proof of their sympathies toward democracy. This fact no doubt, will be put on scale and adequately estimated, in proper time and place. The Baltic instance shall test world's conscience — either it will tread the bright path of true democratism, humanity and mutual friendship, or it will choose the gloomy subway which leads to despotism, reciprocal jealousy, and, finally, to bloody war. Latvia hopes the noble principles as declared by the President of USA and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, known as the Atlantic Charter, will prevail and all nations of the world, big and small, will unite in friendly cooperation, mutual esteem and goodwill cementing it.

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

Declaration of Principles, known as the Atlantic Charter,
by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister
of the United Kingdom. August 14, 1941

JOINT DECLARATION of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes to a better future for the world.

FIRST, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

SECOND, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

THIRD, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;

FOURTH, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity;

FIFTH, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security;

SIXTH, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

SEVENTH, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance;

EIGHTH, they believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers. They believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.

August 14, 1941

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

WHO ARE LATVIANS?

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