



## Images and notions of Baltic German *Ostforschung* concerning Baltic history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Gert von Pistohlkors

To cite this article: Gert von Pistohlkors (1999) Images and notions of Baltic German *Ostforschung* concerning Baltic history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Journal of Baltic Studies, 30:4, 307-321, DOI: [10.1080/01629779900000141](https://doi.org/10.1080/01629779900000141)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629779900000141>



Published online: 28 Feb 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 66



View related articles [↗](#)

## IMAGES AND NOTIONS OF BALTIC GERMAN OSTFORSCHUNG CONCERNING BALTIC HISTORY OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

*Gert von Pistohlkors, University of Göttingen*

Before the 1920s, research on Baltic history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had always been a matter for Baltic historians themselves, not their Reichs-German colleagues.<sup>1</sup> Since the eighteenth century, with names like Friedrich Konrad Gadebusch (1719-1788), there has always been a genuine academic field of Baltic History in the Baltic Provinces and in the Baltic States since 1918 (Rauch 65-67 and passim). It is doubtful, however, whether there ever existed a Baltic German element worth mentioning in Reichs-German *Osteuropaforschung* before all the German inhabitants of Estonia and Latvia left their homelands after the Hitler-Stalin-Pact of 1939, and before their academic resettlement in Posen in 1940.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, individual Reichs-German historians had certainly had the opportunity to get involved in Baltic History before 1933. In a retrospective article published in 1943 on historical research dealing with Baltic History, Reinhard Wittram willfully even exaggerated the academic interest in the Baltic field of study, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when he pointed to names like Heinrich Schaudinn, Werner Conze and Konrad Hoffmann. By then he did not see fit to mention either Hans Rothfels of the University of Königsberg, who had initially stimulated this special interest in Baltic History, or the Baltic States, whose names were instead altered to “the Baltic lands” (*Baltische Lande*) (Wittram, *Geschichtsforschung* 447-60, esp. 454). As shall be pointed out in the first part of this paper, the Rothfels school was right at the centre of reinterpretations of Baltic History throughout the inter-war period in Germany. Nothing else equalled it in importance.

It is true that the first Professor of East-European History at the University of Berlin, Theodor Schiemann (1847-1921), had lived in Courland and Estland during the first forty years of his life before he moved to Berlin and finally became a professor of East-European History in Germany and at the same time a leading advisor and publicist on questions of policy towards Russia under Wilhelm II (Meyer). His research on Russian history mainly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and of the age of Nicholas I, however, belonged to an early period of German writing on East-European History. Schiemann's death

immediately after World War I opened the field of East-European, especially of Russian, studies for a new generation of historians. Baltic Germans, as was said before, played only a minor role in the study of Russian and East-European History at German universities between 1919 and 1939.

In his recent publication on the history and historiography of Eastern Europe, Erwin Oberländer offered a valuable distinction between *Osteuropaforschung*, which was devoted to scholarly work on Russian and East-European History, and *Ostforschung*, which was primarily concerned with present-day politics directed towards and against different states in Eastern Europe, especially towards the Soviet Union (Oberländer). It is among Reichs-German scholars from the universities of Berlin, Hamburg, Breslau and Leipzig that differentiation between scholars of Russian and East-European History and protagonists of *Ostforschung* becomes necessary: as Michael Burleigh put it for the period after 1933: "if relations between *Osteuropaforschung* and regime resulted in a grinding clash, *Ostforschung* fitted relatively smoothly into the machinery of Party and State" (32 f).

Contemporary publications, it is true, demonstrate that historians of Baltic German origin like Ernst Seraphim (1862-1945), a resident of Königsberg, and Arved Freiherr von Taube (1905-1978), by then a citizen of Estonia, wrote articles on Russian-German relations in the Middle Ages that cast a negative light on the alleged "Asian" quality of Russian policy and thus fit better into the pattern of *Ostforschung*. In an article of 1938, Michael Freiherr von Taube, a former native of St. Petersburg of Baltic German descent and professor in Paris, even arrived at the conclusion that Russia had already left the *res publica christiana* in the thirteenth century (Camphausen 264-69). He pretended to be as objective as possible and yet drew a direct line to the contemporary situation in Russia, as he saw it: "The Third Rome of the Dukes of Moscow has finally become a field of experiments for the Third International" (Camphausen 268 f). On the whole, however, between 1918 and 1945, Baltic German contributions to publications on Russian History remained few and far between and were not at all convincing.

As we know from recent studies on *Ostforschung*, especially from Burleigh and Camphausen, a greater number of Baltic Germans contributed regularly to the activities of the *Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and the *Publikationsstelle* Berlin-Dahlem in the 1930s. Their influence on matters of *Ostforschung*, however, especially on those institutions that were right at the centre of *Ostforschung*, like the *Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* in Berlin, remained marginal throughout the period. Apparently they were regarded merely

as useful interpreters of Baltic History. Baltic issues certainly had always been present in publications like *Jomsburg* (1937-1942), *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums* (1933-1938) and *Deutsche Ostforschung* (1943). But the contributions on Baltic History in these publications were almost all sent in from the Baltic States, mainly from Riga, Reval (Tallinn) and Dorpat (Tartu), "Ludwig Karstens, Hamburg", being a fictitious name for Jürgen von Hehn, Riga, who as a Latvian citizen dared not publish too many controversial Baltic studies in Reichs-German journals under his own name (Bosse, "Jürgen von Hehn" 19-23, esp. 19).

In fact, Baltic German historians who took pride in publishing articles on Baltic History outside Estonia or Latvia simply played the part of contributors and cannot be made responsible for Reichs-German activities, either in *Osteuropaforschung* at German universities or in *Ostforschung* before 1940. They defended their genuine field of research as a matter of particular interest for them in the newly-founded Baltic States, and in this connection looked for support in Germany.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that this search for support also had a financial dimension. In Latvia a monthly income of more than 200 Lat, which equalled not more than 200 Reichsmark, used to be regarded as very comfortable.

The greatest internal difficulty for Baltic German historians in Estonia and Latvia was in finding a new self-image and identity under totally different circumstances after the radical agrarian reforms of 1919 in both countries and after the loss of more than thirty thousand fellow Baltic Germans who had emigrated, mostly in 1918-1919, to the newly-established Weimar Republic of Germany.<sup>4</sup> Both areas of former identification -- the Russian Empire and the German Kaiserreich -- had disappeared. Contacts with Estonian and Latvian historians could not be safely established during the entire interwar period. There were no Estonian and Latvian guests even at the regular annual meetings of Baltic German historians in Tartu (Dorpat) and Tallinn (Reval) as well as in Riga during the 1930s and earlier. The congresses of Estonian and Latvian historians of the same period took place, as far as we know, without any representatives at least of the younger generation of the Baltic German minorities. New interpretations of Baltic History were worked out without proper institutional contacts between the different groups.

There was an atmosphere of national exclusiveness among the titular nations (*Mehrheitsvölker*) and a sense of arrogant historicism among the conceited "former cultural elite" of the legal minority which simply could not adjust itself to new circumstances. Indrek Jürjo, a historian from Tallinn (Reval), has obtained the minutes of the meeting of German

historians in Tallinn in April 1933. The younger generation of that time - - Heinrich Schaudinn as a guest from Germany, Helmut Speer, Georg von Rauch, Arved Baron Taube and Heinrich Laakmann -- presented papers. Taube's paper was fairly critical of the political attitudes of the *Estländische Ritterschaft* (noble corporation of Estland) during the second half of the nineteenth century, characterizing their policies as apologetic and stubborn. Russification in his view had served the *Ritterschaft* mainly as an excuse for not developing any reform policy, and the activities of the Estonian national movement since the 1870s had given excuses and arguments for petrifying the local political system. Participation of Estonian representatives even at the parish level was hindered and finally prohibited. No Estonian representatives at all were permitted in district institutions. Finally Taube stated that he needed advice as to whether he should publish these results or publicize them in any way. He feared that criticizing the policies of the *Ritterschaft* would provide Estonian colleagues and politicians with weapons to attack the interests of the German minority in Estonia on a national basis and for political reasons (Jürjo).

It was within this framework of unease that Reichs-German research on Baltic History, centred in Königsberg, gradually acquired a more important role within Baltic German historiography. In 1926 Hans Rothfels (1891-1976), Dr. habil. of Modern History and born in Kassel into a family with a partly Jewish background, a war hero who had lost a leg in World War I, had obtained a chair at the University of Königsberg.<sup>5</sup> In 1983 Werner Conze (1910-1986), his most important pupil in Königsberg, gave a vivid description of what Königsberg had meant to Rothfels' research during the period of his tenure, almost a decade (Conze). Meeting the East, the periphery of the German Reich, in Königsberg, Rothfels first tried to develop a fuller picture of Bismarck and his times. Königsberg, the capital of Eastern Prussia and cut off from Germany by the Polish corridor, had become a symbol of self-respect for German historians and their national aspirations in the 1920s and 1930s. Because of historical divisions in West and East, German history had developed a special Eastern pattern in Europe, a "tragic rhythm", as Rothfels said in a public presentation of 1927, that was based on reactive responses. Public opinion in Eastern Prussia had repeatedly striven to contribute to the restitution of the wholeness of Germany. Rothfels stressed the pre-national role of Eastern Prussia, reminding his pupils of the events of 1807 to 1815, especially the Convention of Tauroggen, Freiherr von York and Wartenburg as well as the Prussian reforms of Freiherr von Stein and others.<sup>6</sup>

It was through his studies of Eastern Prussia's place in German

history and in the East that Rothfels became interested in Baltic history. Gradually he became the most important figure and partner in Germany for Baltic German historians and their historiography in the Baltic. For him the Baltic region had become a link and at the same time a barrier between East and West, especially during the nineteenth century, a symbol of a pre-national social order and yet an area of tensions between Russia and Europe. Russification of the Baltic Provinces had run parallel to the growth of national aspirations in Russia. Resistance to Russification in Russia's Baltic Provinces in the nineteenth century had set an example even for the present day (Neugebauer 358 f).

This approach, however, could only be accepted if the whole concept of central nationalization and suppression of small ethnic German groups in the East was to be rejected. Rothfels distinguished firmly between unification and uniformity and defended long-established pre-national concepts of Reich political architecture, as well as regional arrangements based on corporate structures, as a more humane concept of government. In a comparative approach he tried to deal with the "species of corporate society" -- *genossenschaftlicher Spezialtypus* -- to be found in the peripheries of Europe, in England, Scandinavia, East Germany, Bohemia and in the Baltic area, always with characteristic deviations from each other. In 1932, Rothfels gave the key-note speech at the Convention of German Historians (*Deutscher Historikertag*) in Göttingen on "Bismarck und der Osten". At the heart of this presentation lay a defence of the old order of conservative, pre-national overarching Reich political architecture against modern concepts of centralism, national liberalism and democracy.

It was Rothfels' abhorrence of mass movements and social atomization that especially attracted Baltic German historians in Estonia and Latvia. As Reinhard Wittram put it in his retrospective article of 1943, the newly-founded Baltic States that had been erected according to the will of the Western powers had attained "a certain amount of state power". What they had achieved, he stated, they directed against the supposed inner enemy, the Baltic Germans. After they had destroyed their economic position, they started trying to suppress and destroy the Baltic German concept of Baltic history, speaking for instance of a "pre-German Riga" and of a "previously Latvian dukedom of Courland".<sup>7</sup> For Wittram a nation-state was a hostile concept. History became an argument for the estate-based past of the Baltic region and acquired the quality of a proof of retrospective superiority. New institutions like the *Institut für wissenschaftliche Heimatforschung* in Dorpat and *Herder-Institut* in Riga, founded in 1921, served the purpose of opposing official historical approaches that, according to Wittram, gave rise to historical

distortions which were the opposite of historical truth. The Baltic German historians certainly felt that they were being pushed onto the defensive.

A number of Baltic German students moved to Königsberg during the 1930s, among them supporters of Nazi ideology as they understood it, and also traditionally conservative German inhabitants of Latvia and Estonia without definite political goals. A number of doctoral dissertations in history, supervised by Rothfels and dealing with Baltic history, concentrated on Baltic German political history of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, praising regional and corporate autonomy. In their retrospectives, Jürgen von Hehn and Werner Conze mention the most important ones: Heinrich Schaudinn, *Das baltische Deutschtum und Bismarcks Reichsgründung* (1932), again Schaudinn, *Deutsche Bildungsarbeit am lettischen Volkstum des 18. Jahrhunderts* (1937); Werner Conze, *Hirschenhof. Die Geschichte einer deutschen Sprachinsel in Livland* (1934); Heinrich Thimme, *Kirche und nationale Frage in Livland während der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1938); Jürgen von Hehn, *Die lettisch-literarische Gesellschaft und das Lettentum* (1938); Konrad Hoffmann, *Volkstum und ständische Ordnung in Livland. Die Tätigkeit des Generalsuperintendenten Sonntag zur Zeit der ersten Bauernreformen* (1939); Karl Christoph von Stritzky; *Garlieb Merkel und 'Die Letten am Ende des philosophischen Jahrhunderts'* (1939).<sup>8</sup>

*Volkstum* was a central notion in these dissertations. Eastern Prussia seemed to be encircled by alien *Volkstum*. This, in parallel, was part of the self-assessment of Baltic Germans after 1919. Rothfels and his school also stressed the notion of *Vorposten* (outpost), describing it as a special battle-front situation. His basic thoughts on the general importance of Baltic corporate history of the nineteenth century are to be found in his study of 1930, republished in 1935 -- shortly after Rothfels had lost his chair because of his Jewish family background: *Reich, Staat und Nation im deutschbaltischen Denken*. In this article he examined thoroughly the notions mentioned in the title. He analyzed what they could have meant to members of the Baltic German upper class during the nineteenth century.

In 1966 Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Privatdozent* at Berlin and a recent member of the *Baltische Historische Kommission*, wrote a most convincing study on Rothfels, stressing the high quality of the dissertations mentioned above. In Rothfels' collection of articles *Ostraum, Preußentum und Reichsgedanke*, published as late as 1935, the author explained in his introduction that for him -- and for his pupils -- the experience of World War I had been extremely influential. All

Germans had regained a feeling of solidarity and togetherness beyond all bourgeois cravings for security, as he put it. Furthermore, in Rothfels' view as expressed in the 1930s, the foundation of new states lacking any tradition and the new ordering of the European East according to French notions of the nation-state had been a mistake. History had been deeply violated, the special roots of the East in Europe had not in the least been respected. *Das Volkstum*, the inner strength of the ethnic units living in the East, was to be mobilized to start a policy of revision. This was meant to end in a re-examination of general outlooks (*Gesinnungen*) -- and apparently also of state borders -- by peaceful means. At first sight, of course, this was directed only against the territorial claims of Poland after World War I. Rothfels' main point, however, was that in the East there could never exist a clear division into nation-states without this causing harm to Europe.

In his view, the future of Eastern Europe would depend on the question whether Germany -- right in the centre of Europe -- was strong enough to keep the balance in the eastern agrarian part of Europe, with mixed populations in non-nation-states (Neugebauer 346 ff). As Neugebauer rightly stated, there was a certain claim to German superiority in Rothfels' notion of Eastern Europe and of mixed populations. But he was in favour of a special role for Eastern Europe on the continent and felt that the East had to develop a sense of the historical quality and cultural identity of different groups as a basis for statehood, not merely an abstract notion of the nation-state. This area, furthermore, had to serve as a *limes* against "Asia". According to Rothfels, the East in a historical sense -- west of Russia -- had not been backward at all; on the contrary, this area had had the strength to contribute a great deal to Europe. Historically, he referred to the corporate responsibility of groups and individuals within a well-defined region, acting conjointly. These views, incidentally, had no affinity to fascism at all, because they lacked any confidence in a positive role of the masses or mass revolution and rested on conservative hopes of restoring a strong Reich within Central Europe.<sup>9</sup>

From 1928-1929 onwards there existed a regular "Baltic Workshop" in Königsberg. As Neugebauer put it, there predominated a certain interest in the "Eastern Libertas-Culture". Corporate autonomy versus national liberal egalitarianism lay at the heart of hopes for historical renewal. Rothfels and his school remained focused on Baltic German historical examples. Rothfels was also in favour of the national Kataster Law which became part of Estonian legislation on minorities in 1925. He was interested in new approaches to the coexistence of majorities and minorities, as they were developed in North-East Europe, especially in



Estonia. But the German minorities, he felt, ought to reestablish a certain leading role by developing new models of minority legislation and culture. Rothfels apparently saw in the Baltic Germans a greater maturity, derived from their 750-year history, than in other minorities. In the Latvian press, some of Rothfels' contributions caused a certain irritation and unease, so that the Curator of Königsberg University had to respond and offer explanatory comments on his professor's activities and publications.<sup>10</sup>

After his emigration to Great Britain and finally to the United States, Rothfels' view of western egalitarianism became less critical and he omitted his emphasis on German minorities and their predominant role in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, he still defended the special historical role of the Baltic Germans and the special quality of their political attitudes.

As was said before, Rothfels had a number of Baltic German pupils in Königsberg, and furthermore he travelled frequently to Riga and Tartu (Dorpat), giving lectures on nineteenth-century topics in the *Herder-Institut*, the private Baltic German university in Riga founded in 1921, and in Tartu's *Institut für wissenschaftliche Heimatforschung*. Summing up what *Baltikumforschung* in Königsberg meant to Baltic German historians, there is no doubt that the standards Rothfels had set on Baltic research served as an example for Baltic German efforts to regain an independent and respected status within the newly-founded nation-states Estonia and Latvia, at least until 1934.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole, recent German historiography on *Ostforschung* has too easily included Baltic German historians of that generation in *Ostforschung* of the new type. The specific Baltic German living conditions after 1918 have to be taken into account. Among members of the *Landeswehr* in Latvia and *Baltenregiment* in Estonia who had fought against the Soviet troops between 1918 and 1920 the view predominated that, together with Reichs-German troops of the "Iron Division," they had manned the main front against the Red Guards and that as a reward for this commitment the majority of Latvian and Estonian politicians in Parliament had imposed on them and their families an aggressive land reform unprecedented in Europe.<sup>12</sup> Baltic German historiography of the years between 1918 and 1934 had its aggressive undertones; nevertheless, before the nazification of Germany it served as a defensive conception of history.<sup>13</sup>

After 1933-1934 the "historical" response to the changes in Germany produced a thorough re-examination of the inner consolidation of German corporate groups in Livland during the nineteenth century. Reinhard Wittram, for example, had published in 1931 a weighty study

on Baltic German Literati and the Sources of their Liberal Concepts in which he argued that they had formed a well-established group side by side with the corporate *Ritterschaften* of the nobility, and that they had remained important members of the Baltic German upper classes even when liberalism had finally faded away under the pressure of Russification and National Awakening (Wittram, *Liberalismus*). Wittram was convinced that inner consolidation of the Baltic Germans had been important not only for the group itself but for the whole region, which would have suffered much more if resistance to Imperial Russian administrative and cultural Russification had not been so strongly based among the self-conscious Germans of the upper classes.

Before 1934, Baltic German historians had stressed very much their own colonial history, from the perspective of *Aufsegelung* and *Landesgeschichte*. They probably wanted to be regarded as *Auslandsdeutsche* only in a purely cultural sense. In his famous programmatic article *Wendung zur Volksgeschichte* of 1935, however, Reinhard Wittram laid great emphasis on the deficiencies of that concept altogether and objected strongly to the title of the *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutstums*, stating that contents and title resulted in *Erlebnisferne* (distance from real experience) and *Geschichtsfremdheit* (alienation from history). This title, in his view, reflected abstract thinking and bookish dullness and could not explain why the Germans of the Baltic region had maintained an important and leading role during seven hundred years of history. He wanted to show that history was in itself a *Kraftgefüge* (matrix of power), a basis for perseverance and strength. According to his opinion, other German groups in the East, like the German villagers of the Banat and Volhynia, had never reached the maturity required to fulfill a regional role -- they had lived rather on a purely local basis. They were *geschichtslos*, without history, as he put it: they had not reached the point of historical relevance (Wittram, *Wendung* 97).<sup>14</sup> Werner Bergengruen (1892-1964), the well-known Baltic German novelist and poet, expressed a similar view. In an undated -- and maybe naive -- political statement he said: "The years 1918-1919 tore our old Baltic region to pieces, including the provinces Estland, Livland and Courland. The ownership of land, wealth, privileges, the dominant historical role, had been taken away from us. But worse than that was the fact that we had lost our historically well-established position as Germans and were reduced to the ranks of 'Auslandsdeutsche, Volksdeutsche, Grenzdeutsche' [...]" (24).

Although Bergengruen expressed no sympathy with the Baltic German minority status in Estonia and Latvia, his argument was mainly directed against a new interpretation of Baltic Germans as

*Auslandsdeutsche*. Reinhard Wittram, in contrast to Bergengruen, discussed Baltic history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a different approach. His jubilee contribution to the centenary of the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde zu Riga* consisted of an important and well-researched book under the title *Meinungskämpfe im baltischen Deutschtum während der Reformepoche des 19. Jahrhunderts*, dealing with political controversies among the Baltic German upper classes in the 1870s and 1880s. In his introduction, he objected in general terms to existing concepts of Baltic German historiography and criticized the traditional *Landesgeschichte*. In opposition to this he argued for a completely new perspective and outlook: "While fighting for our political survival under changing circumstances, we lost our knowledge and grasp of our own group and regarded each other as if we were strangers" (Wittram, *Meinungskämpfe* VIII f). His goals were now more aggressive. "The turning of our tide (*Zeitenwende*) is a total one", he wrote in the same introduction of 1934, and he stated in 1940:

Our young people were confronted with the question of whether there was a future for them in the Baltic, because their *Lebensraum* had continually diminished. If there was anything positive in their lives, then it was to be found in the fact that life based on national (German) communication (*völkisches Gemeinschaftsleben*) had become intensified. Our ethnic group, however, came to the conclusion that an adjustment to the majority state -- the Latvian state -- would have weakened our own strength, according to our fading political power, and that our own historical attitudes towards *Landespolitik* and regional policy had lost their basis in an age of nation-states. (Wittram, *Livland* 90)

After 1934 *Ostforschung* studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries therefore had a special meaning for the group of Baltic Germans living in Latvia and Estonia, especially for the younger generation of historians and their readers. As Wittram put it in his little book *Livland, Schicksal und Erbe der baltischen Deutschen*, written in 1940 and published again in 1943, Baltic History had become part of German History: "We are nothing, the German nation is everything". For the exodus of the Baltic Germans in 1939 -- rather euphemistically called *Umsiedlung* (trans- or re-settlement) in German -- he found even stronger words. Only the *Führer* had had the right to end the diaspora situation of the Baltic Germans in the Baltic States (90). In his book of 1943, Wittram had pleaded for methodological exactness on the one hand, and on the other for a clear political decision against any adjustment to minority laws and minority situations in Estonia and Latvia. In 1942,

however, all German History of the Baltic region seemed to have found its final goal and its end as part of Reichs-History and of *Ostarbeit* (work in the East) (Wittram, *Meinungskämpfe* VIII f and *Livland* 9).

*Ostforschung's* logical conclusion was a plea for an ethnic amalgamation of all Germans -- *seelische Verwandtschaft aller Deutschen* (the spiritual affinity of all Germans) -- reflecting allegedly one political will and a common spiritual and emotional disposition inside and outside the Reich. *Volksgeschichte* was meant to be a credo especially for Baltic Germans. The protagonists of *Volksgeschichte* and *Ostforschung* espoused an antiliberal, antidemocratic, anti-rational outlook. Feelings of racial superiority as a frame of reference were obvious, although antisemitism, on the whole, seems not to have been as central in Baltic German historical thinking as in Reichs-German publications during the period in question. There is no doubt, however, that, as among other ethnic groups in the Baltic, there existed more than one political philosophy for the whole minority group. But certainly Baltic Germans had a concept of their uniqueness in History that could be exploited for political goals.

As other writers have pointed out, quite a number of Baltic German historians of the formerly younger generation found their way back to *Landesgeschichte* after 1945. Wittram's *Geschichte der baltischen Deutschen* of 1939 was modified in some detail and was published in 1954 under the title: *Baltische Geschichte. Die Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180-1918. Grundzüge und Durchblicke*.<sup>15</sup> With regard to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the explanatory concepts used to interpret the history of the Baltic Germans changed a great deal. Wittram alluded to this when he stated that historians must reflect with the utmost care upon the concepts which they employ. Conceptual formulations are absolutely central to our work, he stated; it was essential to know exactly what was meant by those who speak about Volk, Reich, State, Culture, or Nation (Wittram, "Maßstäbe" 70f).

Most striking in this respect is a controversial correspondence about changing standards in Baltic History, which has not previously been mentioned in the literature. Erhard Kroeger (1905-1988), the leader of the German Nazi movement in Latvia, and Reinhard Wittram, the leading Baltic German historian at least of the nineteenth century, were close friends until 1945. Wittram even dedicated his book *Livland, Schicksal und Erbe* to Kroeger. After 1945, Kroeger had to hide from legal prosecution for more than two decades and lived for years in Italy, leaving his family behind in Germany. Wittram managed to start a new career in Göttingen in 1947 and became Full Professor of East-European History in Göttingen in 1955. Almost two decades after the end of World

War II, in January 1965, Kroeger started a correspondence in which he objected strongly to Wittram's recent re-examinations of Baltic History.

Kroeger wrote from Meran fiercely objecting to Wittram's obituary of Wolfgang Wachsmuth (1876-1964), a leading but fairly modest Baltic German minority politician in Riga in the 1930s, published in *Baltische Briefe* in 1964.<sup>16</sup> Wittram had stated that Wachsmuth had not been a supporter of the "mass-orientated Hitler Movement". Kroeger's argumentation against this was sharp by any standard. He claimed that all political movements of the twentieth century had been mass-orientated. In Wittram's usage this characterization seemed only useful to humiliate those who, like himself, had been committed and active during the 1930s in the Nazi movement. Wittram, Kroeger stated, was not in a position to give out "Antifa medals". In Kroeger's view his generation had not lived a life of moral insanity. Certainly Wittram was as free as anybody else to alter his views, but not at the expense of his former friends. Wittram's new morality, Kroeger thought, had its origins in the Nuremberg trials. This accusation, of course, means that in Kroeger's view Wittram had adjusted himself to the requirements of a new strong political power, western democracy, a power that demanded opportunism from its adherents.

In an immediate answer Wittram tried patiently to explain his point of view. Wachsmuth's philosophy in the 1930s, he stated, had been based far more on philosophical idealism than Wittram's and Kroeger's, whose political goals had been much more subject to a *völkisch*-orientated group collectivism. Wittram admitted that formerly he had subordinated any philosophy of human rights to his political goals in serving National Socialism. Nowadays he had a better understanding of what his attitudes of the 1930s and his historical perspectives had been like. Kroeger's reply was short and abrupt. He claimed to be astonished and hurt that Wittram, formerly a close friend, had found his way to the group of people "to whom you should not belong because of tradition, your name and your personality -- to those who stick to re-education".

*Ostforschung* in the Baltic German sense and dealing with Baltic History from a German point of view, especially from 1933 to 1945, was primarily based on an aggressive historicism. What members of the Baltic German upper classes had learned as a leading group in the historical process should be exported to Germany as precious historical experience for the whole German *Volk*, especially when facing the East. Ideology was considered a contrary notion to *Gesinnung*. For Baltic Germans ideology always had negative connotations. *Gesinnung*, on the contrary, had been considered something to be proud of. Dealing with History, however, always has political implications. There is no doubt

that many of the historians of the Baltic region, including the most prominent Baltic German historian of the time, Reinhard Wittram, learned some lessons after 1945.

### Notes

1. See the bibliographies by Winkelmann and Blumfeldt and Loone.
2. The best recent overview of *Osteuropaforschung* is *Geschichte Osteuropas*, ed. by Erwin Oberländer, esp. 12-38.
3. Jürgen von Hehn and Heinz von zur Mühlen each wrote an article on "Die deutschbaltische Geschichtsschreibung 1918-1939/40" in von Rauch 339-70, 371-98 stressing that point.
4. The most recent overview: Garleff, *Die Deutschbalten*.
5. In 1963 Rothfels became an Honorary Member of the *Baltische Historische Kommission*. For data on his life see Kaegbein and Lenz, *50 Jahre baltische Geschichtsforschung* 155 ff.
6. The recent reevaluation of Rothfels' attitudes towards German History by Neugebauer is indispensable.
7. For this and the following cf. Wittram, *Die deutsche Geschichtsforschung* 450-51.
8. Thimme, von Hehn, and Hoffmann were published in *Schriften der Albertus-Universität, Geisteswissenschaftliche Reihe* Nr. 19, 21, 23; Schaudinn's work opened a new series entitled *Königsberger Historische Forschungen*, ed. Friedrich Baethgen and Hans Rothfels, 1932 ff.
9. Conze's recollections of the early thirties in Königsberg and Rothfels' teaching of German and East-European History parallel Neugebauer's account to a very large extent: see Conze 324 ff.
10. Neugebauer 372 and passim. Latvian objections to Rothfels' argumentation: 376.
11. Jürjo mentions the greetings which Rothfels had sent to the meeting of Baltic German historians in Tallinn in April 1933, see 172.
12. Wittram spoke of a *Trümmerfeld* -- a field covered with ruins -- and used the term *totale Zeitenwende* -- total turn of the tide -- to describe the consequences of the expropriation of the Baltic German estate owners, see "Deutschbalten und baltische Lande." *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*. Vol. II. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1936. 199.
13. This is the general conclusion of Jürgen von Hehn and Heinz von zur Mühlen in their articles on "Deutschbaltische Geschichtsschreibung" (note 3) passim.
14. Cf. also von Pistohlkors and the important doctoral dissertation by Oberkrome.

15. Wittram, *Geschichte der baltischen Deutschen*. A second edition, entitled *Geschichte der Ostseelände*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of 1954, *Baltische Geschichte*, became the leading German publication on Baltic History for more than four decades. For a more detailed comparison of the three editions see the contribution by Muehle in this volume.
16. *Baltische Briefe* 17.12 (1964): 6f. Kroeger's letter and Wittram's answer exist as type-written copies in private hands.

### Works Cited

- “Deutschbalten und baltische Lande.” *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*. Vol. II. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1936. 199.
- Bergengruen, Werner. “Die Bezeichnung ‘Balten’ . Von Riga nach anderwo oder Stationen eines Lebens.” Hackelsberger, N. Luise, ed. *Bücher, Reisen, Begegnungen*. Zürich, 1992.
- Blumfeldt and Loone. *Bibliotheca Estoniae Historica 1877-1917*. Tartu: Loodus, 1933-1939. Reprint, ed. by Paul Kaegbein. (Quellen und Studien zur baltischen Geschichte 10). Köln: Böhlau, 1987.
- Bosse, Heinrich . “Jürgen von Hehn. Pro memoria.” *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* XXXI, 1984 (1983): 19-22.
- Burleigh, Michael. *Germany Turns Eastwards. A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Camphausen, Gabriele. *Die wissenschaftliche historische Rußlandforschung im Dritten Reich 1933-1945*. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1990.
- Conze, Werner. “Hans Rothfels.” *Historische Zeitschrift* 237 (1983): 311-60.
- Garleff, Michael. “Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit in den unabhängigen Staaten Estland und Lettland.” Pistohlkors, Gert von, ed. *Baltische Länder*. (Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas). Berlin: Siedler, 1994. 452-550.
- Jürjo, Indrek. “Die Versammlung deutscher Historiker in Reval/Tallinn am 10. und 11. April 1933 -- Ergebnis und Wirkungen.” Garleff, Michael, ed. *Zwischen Konfrontation und Kompromiß*. Oldenburger Symposium: “Interethnische Beziehungen in Ostmitteleuropa als historiographisches Problem der 1930er/1940er Jahre.” München: Oldenbourg, 1995. 171-83.
- Kaegbein, Paul, and Wilhelm Lenz, eds. *50 Jahre baltische Geschichtsforschung*. Köln: Mare Balticum, 1997.
- Meyer, Klaus. *Theodor Schiemann als politischer Publizist*. Frankfurt/M., Hamburg: Rütten & Loening, 1956.
- Neugebauer, Wolfgang. “Hans Rothfels’ Weg zur vergleichenden Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas, besonders im Übergang von früher Neuzeit zur Moderne.” *Berliner Jahrbuch für osteuropäische Geschichte* 1(1996): 334-78.

- Oberkrome, Willi. "Volksgeschichte." *Methodische Innovation und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1918-1945*. (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 101). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993.
- Oberländer, Erwin, ed. *Geschichte Osteuropas. Zur Entwicklung einer historischen Disziplin in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz 1945-1990*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992.
- Pistohlkors, Gert von. "Ethnos und Geschichtsschreibung der dreißiger und vierziger Jahre in Deutschland und Ostmitteleuropa. Einführende Bemerkungen." Garleff, Michael, ed. *Zwischen Konfrontation und Kompromiß*. Oldenburger Symposium: "Interethnische Beziehungen in Ostmitteleuropa als historiographisches Problem der 1930er/1940er Jahre." München: Oldenbourg, 1995. 11-24.
- Rauch, Georg von, ed. *Geschichte der deutschbaltischen Geschichtsschreibung*. (Ostmitteleuropa in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart 20). Köln: Böhlau, 1986.
- Winkelmann, Eduard. *Bibliotheca Livoniae Historica*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1878. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969.
- Wittram, Reinhard. *Liberalismus baltischer Literaten. Zur Entstehung der baltischen politischen Presse*. Riga: G. Löffler, 1931.
- . *Meinungskämpfe im baltischen Deutschtum während der Reformepoche des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Riga: E. Bruhns, 1934.
- . "Die Wendung zur Volksgeschichte." *Volkstum und Forschung. Festschrift für Wilhelm Klumberg*. Riga: Ernst Plates, 1936. 94-99.
- . *Geschichte der baltischen Deutschen. Grundzüge und Durchblicke*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1939.
- . "Die deutsche Geschichtsforschung in den baltischen Landen. Wandlungen, Ergebnisse, Aufgaben." *Deutsche Ostforschung. Ergebnisse und Aufgaben seit dem ersten Weltkrieg*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1943. 447-60.
- . *Livland. Schicksal und Erbe der baltischen Deutschen*. Berlin: Volk und Reich, 1943.
- . *Geschichte der Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180-1918. Umriss und Querschnitte*. München, Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1945.
- . "Über Maßstäbe und Urteile in der Geschichtsschreibung Ostmitteleuropas." Wittram, Reinhard. *Das Nationale als europäisches Problem. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalitätsprinzips vornehmlich im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954. 51-75.
- . *Baltische Geschichte. Die Ostseelände Livland, Estland, Kurland 1180-1918. Grundzüge und Durchblicke*. München: Oldenbourg, 1954.