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Conference Report: Zeitenwende im Baltikum und in der Baltistik (Turning Times in the Baltics and in Baltic Studies)*

For a few years now, public interest in the Baltics has been increasing sharply. The main reason for this is the current geopolitical situation after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the important role that the Baltic States play as a political as well as military frontier against Russia and Belarus. At the same time, knowledge about the peoples, languages, culture and history of the Baltics still remains limited among the general public. As an academic field that comprises a wide range of disciplines in the humanities pertaining to the Baltics in particular, Baltic Studies (*Baltistik*) has the genuine duty to preserve and cultivate this knowledge.

However, as the perception of the Baltics changes, so does the role that Baltic Studies plays in the scientific community and the public. In light of this, the symposium *Zeitenwende im Baltikum und in der Baltistik (Turning Times in the Baltics and in Baltic Studies*) was held on 26 and 27 September 2024 in Berlin, jointly organised by Simon Moll (Humboldt University of Berlin, Free University of Berlin), Henrik Hornecker (Humboldt University of Berlin), Simon Fries (University of Cologne) and Johannes Schütz (Humboldt University of Berlin) under the auspices of the Gesellschaft für Baltische Studien e. V. and the Humboldt University of Berlin with financial support from the Humboldt-Universitäts-Gesellschaft e. V. It provided a forum

 The authors wish to express their gratitude to all the participants in the symposium for their interesting contributions and fruitful discussions, and also to thank Christiane Schiller, Birutė Triškaitė and Giedrius Subačius for their kind offer to include this conference report in the current issue of the *Archivum Lithuanicum*.

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for junior researchers with a focus on the Baltics to discuss and reflect upon the changing role of their discipline, exchange their scientific insights and establish as well as maintain professional networks in order to promote and facilitate cooperation beyond national and institutional borders.

The Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Germany kindly hosted the opening event, an evening reception at the embassy, with introductory speeches by His Excellency Giedrius Puodžiūnas, the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Germany, Dr Christiane Schiller, the president of the Gesellschaft für Baltische Studien e. V., and Simon Moll on behalf of the organisers.

The reception provided a worthy setting for the keynote presentation of the evening given by Professor Joachim TAUBER (former head of the Nordost-Institut – Institut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen in Nordosteuropa e. V., Lüneburg) on 'Ringen um Freiheit. Litauen zwischen Deutschland und Russland, 1914 bis 2024' ('The Struggle for Freedom. Lithuania between Germany and Russia, 1914 to 2024'). With a focus on the current geopolitical situation, Professor Tauber presented a concentrated outline of the recent history of Lithuania since the beginning of the First World War and the eventful periods of transformation that the Lithuanian society (and on a more general level the Baltic societies as a whole) underwent in the course of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century until now in order to establish and secure its independence.

The main programme took place on the second day of the conference at the Institut für deutsche Sprache und Linguistik of the Humboldt University of Berlin. It featured 13 talks by junior researchers from ten universities and research institutions representing five countries, and was structured into five panels with a different focus divided by three coffee breaks and a lunch break for discussion and recreation.

Following a few welcoming introductory remarks by the organisers and Professor Theresa Roth, professor of Historical-Comparative Linguistics and Indo-European Studies at the Institut für deutsche Sprache und Linguistik, the first panel comprised three talks revolving around the philological study of Old Lithuanian and Old Latvian sources. The first talk given by Henrik HORNECKER (Humboldt University of Berlin), focused on 'The (digital) Altlitauisches Quellenverzeichnis (ALQ): A Glimpse on the Pre-Alpha Version'. It introduced and provided a first impression of the Altlitauisches Quellenverzeichnis and its digital version. The ALQ is intended as the first comprehensive bibliographical catalogue of all Old Lithuanian sources dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, containing a comprehensive description of each Old Lithuanian source text and information on where and how it can be accessed. The Altlitauisches Quellenverzeichnis, in both its analogue and digital versions, is currently under development, and it is to be hoped that it will soon be accessible to the general public and researchers interested in Old Lithuanian.

In the second talk of the panel, Jonathan BEYER (University of Mainz) raised the question 'Ist der Wal real? Altlitauische Tierbezeichnungen und der "Velbliūdas"

('Does the Whale fail? Old Lithuanian Animal Terminology and the *velbliūdas*'). He conducted a thorough survey of the Old Lithuanian attestations of the word *velbliūdas*, which is usually glossed with the three meanings 'camel', 'elephant' and 'whale', but has been used so broadly only by Jonas Bretkūnas. Beyer showed how difficult it is to establish the historical meaning(s) of scarcely attested words. He concluded that the meaning 'whale' is spurious, and ultimately reflects the terminological confusion of terms for exotic animals unknown to occidental translators of the Holy Bible.

The third and last talk of the first panel was given by Johannes SCHÜTZ (Humboldt University of Berlin) and treated 'Die Orthographie in Georg Elgers Evangelien und Episteln' ('The Orthography of Georg Elger's Gospels and Epistles'). Through a systematic survey of Georg Elger's Old Latvian translations of the gospels and epistles, he demonstrated that alleged irregularities in Elger's spelling and orthography are neither true irregularities nor the result of phonological change, but that they rather reflect the analogical over-generalisation of inflectional patterns that Elger identified in the language, most notably in the inflection of the feminine \bar{a} - and \bar{e} -stems.

Following the first coffee break, the second panel was devoted to the linguistic study of the contemporary languages of the Baltics. In the first presentation of the panel, Agnė BARONIENĖ (Klaipėda University) talked about a pilot project on 'Names of Body Parts in Latvian Dialects'. She compared somatonyms, i.e. body terminology, as featured in southern varieties of the Latvian Kurzeme dialect (Curonian) to the corresponding somatonyms featured in the neighbouring Lithuanian dialects, establishing the lexical commonalities and differences between the Latvian and Lithuanian dialects in this regard.

The second talk of the panel was presented jointly by Laura Paula JANSONE and Odrija REISNERE (Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia), and dealt with 'Strategies of Creating Modern Latvian Neologisms'. Drawing on the classification of particular lexical items as neologisms provided in the *Dictionary of the Contemporary Latvian Language*, they described the morphological strategies that the modern standard Latvian language employs in integrating foreign lexical items (mainly English words) into its grammatical system, e. g. through direct borrowing or through the creation of calques. These strategies remain consistent even in cases of loanwords, and rely on linguistic resources inherent to Latvian (such as the masculine *a*-stems as the morphological class into which loanwords are most frequently integrated).

In the third and final talk of the second panel before the lunch break, Maximilian ARNDT (University of Frankfurt) presented his recent findings on the 'Acoustic Analysis of Lithuanian Acute and Circumflex Tones in Diphthongs: Beyond Tonal Pitch Changes'. His analysis of speech samples, using experimental phonetics, indicates that it is not purely pitch that marks the phonological difference between acute and circumflex diphthongs in Lithuanian, but that this is also marked by intensity and duration, and especially by vowel quality. Thus, conventional pitch-centric views are challenged, while the effect of multiple acoustic parameters is emphasised.

The presentations in the third panel took a more sociolinguistic view. In the first presentation, Indrė NUGARAITĖ (University of Stockholm) talked about the 'Vasario 16-osios Gimnazija in its Own Eyes: Sociolinguistic Analysis of the School's Yearbooks'. The Vasario 16-osios Gimnazija (Privates Litauisches Gymnasium) is the only Lithuanian gymnasium (grammar school) in Germany offering bilingual Lithuanian-German instruction. Launched as a Saturday school for Lithuanian refugee children, today it is one of the most important centres for Lithuanian language and culture in Europe outside Lithuania. Based on a sociolinguistic survey of the school's yearbooks of the past 32 years, Nugaraitė described how the self-perception of the school community evolved over time, and how this was influenced by external political, cultural and social changes since the foundation of the school.

In the second talk of the third panel, Adelīna SKERŠKĀNE (University of Greifswald) addressed the topic 'Die prekäre Situation des Lettgallischen: ein Blick in die Vergangenheit und die Lage heute' ('The precarious Situation of Latgalian: Taking a Look into the Past and the Present-Day Situation'). Latgalian, which is spoken in the eponymous Latgale, is often regarded as the easternmost variety of Latvian. However, its status as an independent language is the subject of ongoing debate. Drawing on data from different sources (especially online forums, newspaper articles from the interwar period, and other public resources), Skerškāne compared the status and sociolinguistic situation of Latgalian over time. She outlined how negative attitudes towards Latgalians are grounded in persistent *topoi*, and how Latgalian has constantly struggled for recognition alongside the standard (Curonian) variety spoken in all other parts of Latvia.

The third and final talk of the third panel was on 'Kurisch-lettische Gemeinschaften und ihr Kulturerbe zwischen Danzig und Rutzau: Forschungsobjekt, Forschungsstand und Forschungsmöglichkeiten' ('Curonian-Latvian Communities and Their Cultural Heritage between Danzig and Rutzau: Their Status as a Research Object, the Current State of Affairs, and Further Research Opportunities'), presented by Krišs KAPENIEKS (University of Latvia). He provided an overview of the history and recent developments in the research of Latvian-speaking communities scattered along the Curonian coast, extending from the Memelland in the north, over the Curonian Spit and the coastal area around the Curonian Lagoon, towards Danzig in the south, thus including speakers of the Curonian variety of Latvian commonly referred to as Nehrungskurisch. He also offered an outlook for possibilities for future research in this broad and interdisciplinary field.

After the second coffee break, the two talks of the fourth panel had a historiographical focus. Gintarė LUKOŠEVIČIŪTĖ (Lithuanian Institute of History) talked about 'The Ethno-Cultural Revival of the Lithuanian Tatars at the End of the 20th Century and its Significance in the Contemporary Context'. Based on archival data and material gathered during her field research, such as visual documentation and interviews with contemporary witnesses, she described how at the close of the 20th

century (and especially from the 1980s onwards) the Lithuanian Tatars, followers of Islam who settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th and 15th centuries and are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in present-day Lithuania, undertook measures to revive their cultural life, which is characterised by unique (religious) traditions. Her study also highlighted the favourable political conditions for the ethno-cultural revival of the Tatar minority persisting at the close of the 20th century as well as challenges to the preservation of the Tatar identity in contemporary Lithuania, such as globalisation and migration.

Lydia BURNAUTZKI (Humboldt University of Berlin) spoke about 'Zwangsarbeitskräfte aus Litauen in NS-Deutschland' ('Forced Labourers from Lithuania in National-Socialist Germany'). No research has yet been conducted on the fate of forced labourers from Lithuania in National-Socialist Germany. Based on her own pioneering survey of archival material, Burnautzki provided an overview of how many forced labourers from Lithuania were brought to Germany by the political authorities during the Second World War, where they came from, where they were taken, what tasks they were forced to perform, and how they were treated by officials. She also argued that the general assumption of collaboration by ethnic Lithuanians during the National-Socialist occupation, as a legacy of Soviet historical policy, had an impact on compensation payments.

The fifth and last panel of the symposium followed after the third coffee break and had a literary focus. In the first talk of the panel, Valentina HOFFREN (Tampere University) spoke about 'The Role of Food and Clothing in *Stalin's Cows* by Sofi Oksanen'. She argued that in the novel *Stalin's Cows* by the contemporary Finnish writer Sofi Oksanen, which is set in Finland during the Soviet era and depicts the lives of three generations of exiled Estonian women, diet and clothing are expressions of the characters' minds, illustrating the destructive and exploitative influence of the totalitarian regime and the marginalised social status of Estonian women in society. Hoffren also discussed the narrative strategies used in this context.

The second talk of the fifth panel, and thus the final presentation of the symposium, was given by Amanda BESER (University of Potsdam) on 'Ein baltisches Jagdrätsel und seine kriminologische Narration: Siegfried von Vegesack *Der Pastoratshase* (1957)' ('A Baltic *Jagdrätsel* and Its Criminological Narration: Siegfried von Vegesack's *Der Pastoratshase*'). She analysed the novella *Der Pastoratshase* by the Baltic German author Siegfried von Vegesack according to particular syncategories, applying French structuralist theory. The novella revolves around the dispute between a pastor and a landowner about hare hunting in a fictitious Livonian idyll. The exaggerated use of legal and moral terminology is employed as a narrative technique to create an atmosphere of iniquity, which is also expressed through other narrative means, such as connections, coalescences and disruptions in the narration.

After an intense but fruitful day full of interesting presentations and discussions, the symposium was then ultimately closed by the organisers with a few words of recapitulation and prospect, and it was generally agreed that it would be desirable to organise similar events on a regular basis, because such events would not only allow for maintaining the personal and professional networks established on the occasion of the symposium in Berlin, but would also serve to show that Baltic Studies is a field with a vibrant and active community which, just as it looks back to a venerable past, also looks forward to a promising future.

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