

**Pride of Place: Interethnic Relations and
Urban Space in Riga 1918-1939**

by

Adam Michael Brode

Bachelors of Arts, Washington and Jefferson College, 2008

Master of Arts, University of Minnesota, 2011

Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2014

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This dissertation was presented

by

Adam Michael Brode

It was defended on

September 27, 2019

and approved by

Christopher Drew Armstrong, Associate Professor, Department of History of Art and
Architecture

William Chase, Professor Emeritus, Department of History

Irina Livezeanu, Associate Professor, Department of History

Thesis Advisor/Dissertation Director: Gregor Thum, Associate Professor, History

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Adam Michael Brode, PhD

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This dissertation examines the physical and symbolic transformation of the city of Riga, Latvia during the period 1918-1940. The creation of an independent Latvian state triggered processes of ethnic reversal in politics, economics, culture, and civil society that manifested themselves in and through urban public spaces in the capital of the new Republic of Latvia. What was already a profoundly multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan Northern European trading city in 1914 was “given a Latvian face” by national activists over the course of two decades. This process was shaped by, and often contested between, the ethnic Latvian majority and the city’s ethnic minority populations, with urban spaces figuring prominently in the political discourse of the period as bargaining chips and symbolic battlefields. The dissertation engages with questions of spatial belonging, collective memory, and urban ethnicity that remain crucial in contemporary Europe. The dissertation argues that rather than merely being an arena in which an already-achieved ethnic coup belatedly manifested itself, the unique historical and ethno-symbolic qualities of various prominent urban spaces in Riga dictated the course taken by the decades-long process of ethnic reversal. In analyzing the role of spaces and their attendant institutions in shaping interethnic relations in interwar Riga, the dissertation also highlights the persistence of pre-WWI traditions of peaceful cultural competition (in theater, architecture, and city government) into the interwar period. This illustrates the extent to which the new national states of 1918 disrupted previously developed paradigms for ethnic coexistence, ones which took multi-ethnicity as a permanent state of affairs. In focusing on the role of urban spaces in shaping new ethnic hierarchies, the

dissertation both illuminates the functional mechanics of ethnic reversal in East Central Europe after the First World War and highlights previously understudied instances of interethnic cooperation, presenting a more nuanced picture that complicates more simplistic narratives of ethnic antagonism in the interwar period.

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Preface

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Unless otherwise noted, all images included in this dissertation were obtained from the open access online digital photo archive hosted by the National Library of Latvia at <https://zudusilatvija.lv/>, and are reproduced here for non-commercial purposes only as per the requirements of the National Library of Latvia. The source of other images, typically from archival collections elsewhere, is indicated by a footnote appended to their text caption. The maps proceeding each chapter were created by the author from an image which has lapsed into the public domain. The place names in use during the interwar period are used when not given in translation, with historical names employed only occasionally where the context requires reference to them. Place names are usually given in both Latvian and German, though one or the other may be employed after a term has been introduced depending on the ethnicity of the persons being discussed. Newspaper article titles have been translated into English. The Latvian and German orthographies and phonemic tendencies are divergent enough to allow readers to distinguish the language in which a given periodical was issued without the need to decipher the semantic content of its name (but see the bibliography for such translations); for this reason also, the few Russian-language periodicals cited have not been transliterated, as they might otherwise not be easily

distinguishable from Latvian to a reader unfamiliar with either language, and will scarcely be rendered the more intelligible to such a reader for having been presented in Latin script. The names of individuals have been presented using the orthographic conventions which they themselves choose to employ during their lifetimes – an example of agency not without significance to the student of interethnic relations.

1.0 Introduction

“That Riga did not ‘remain German’ after the World War came as a completely unexpected bolt of lightning from blue skies [to many Baltic Germans]”¹

In 1918, the ancient city of Riga entered into a new and unprecedented phase in its history. Following the declaration of an independent Latvian state on November 18th, 1918, Riga became the *de facto* capital of what would for some time be only a *de jure* republic. Although border security and internal stability for the new country were not fully attained for another two years, the character and identity of the city, both to its Latvian-speaking population and to all of the other groups inhabiting it, were changed forever. We tend to think of the important changes which shape a city as being ones which unfold in the physical plane, as buildings rise and fall, the built environment expands or contracts, and a city, though raised from utterly lifeless materials, grows or withers like a living thing. Yet cities can be transformed forever without the razing of a single building, or the laying of a single cornerstone. Those transformations, unfolding in the ideational sphere, among imagined communities, can shape the destinies of nations, peoples, regions, even continents. Such transformations are central to the arc of European history in the 20th century, as two world wars swept the continent, ultimately leaving dozens of metropolitan areas, most of them centuries old, in the hands of different ethnic groups. This dissertation examines the processes by which Riga was reshaped from a multiethnic trading metropolis on the Baltic, one of the most important centers of commerce and industry in the vast Russian Empire, into the capital of a relatively small nation-state. It does so by using urban space as a lens and focusing device to explore interethnic relations during the interwar period.

¹ Baron Eduard von Rosenberg, *Für Deutschtum und Fortschritt in Lettland. Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen* (Riga: Salamandra AS, 1928), 165.

Social hierarchies are almost invariably reflected in the built environment, perhaps most obviously in urban settings, which feature a dense concentration of population, wealth, and public institutions. How do societies undergoing a process of ethnic reversal, in which formerly subordinated ethnic groups become politically dominant, and former elites become subordinate coalition partners, negotiate the discrepancies between the new order and an arrangement of the built environment reflective of realities that no longer pertain? Every such discrepancy between past and present, every spatial incongruity of the formerly powerful with the currently powerless, presents an opportunity for a multiethnic society to forge a new *modus vivendi*, to establish new patterns of behavior between groups, new models for cooperation or exclusion, and to write a new map of the ethno-symbolic topography of the cityscape - which may remain more or less physically constant. A handful of significant new projects, helping to recast Riga as an ethnically Latvian city, were launched in the interwar years, but the city's transformation from a multiethnic and cosmopolitan trading metropolis into the ethnically homogenous capital of a small nation-state was more generally characterized by the symbolic transformation of its built environment, rather than one unfolding accompanied by physical destruction or creation.

This dissertation charts that transformation through phases of cooperation and coexistence (in years of prosperity and democracy) and into years of conflict and exclusion (in years of economic depression and authoritarian dictatorship). That charting reveals much about the nature of interethnic relations in Riga and in the wider Baltic region - the potential for harmonious coexistence, and the deep constraints imposed upon interethnic harmony by the prevalence of toxic public narratives of history, ones which manifested nearly everywhere in the built environment of the central city. The challenges faced by the young Latvian republic and its new capital city at the onset of the interwar period were paralleled by similar ones in most of the new states of East

Central Europe – the successor states to the Habsburg Empire and the Baltic States (including Finland, as the term did during the interwar period). Although government strategies of reshaping the symbolic topography of the cityscape during the 1930s were lamentably congruent with those pursued elsewhere in the region, the 1920s were a period of great possibility – an era in which Latvia was – albeit briefly and, in part, whimsically – termed a “Switzerland on the Baltic”, with Riga, perhaps, as its Geneva or Zürich. In pursuing its analysis, this work suggests strategies worth pursuing more intensively, as well as mistakes made which set multiethnic societies down unsustainable paths, providing important insights into problems still facing Europe in the 21st century.

Before sense can be made of the deep-seated historical narratives with which Riga’s most prominent urban spaces were so often so deeply imbued, however, a rough understanding of the city’s history is necessary. Riga has been home to different ethnic groups for literally the entirety of its 800-year existence, and thus has been the locus of competing claims of ethnic belonging and symbolic significance, many of which during the interwar period were (and which continue to be) deeply rooted in the history of the Baltic region and of the city itself.

Founded in 1201 by German-speaking Catholic clergy, crusaders, and Hanseatic tradesmen, Riga had quickly grown into the most important economic and cultural center along the northern Baltic coast, in a part of the world that came to be called Livonia by Western Europeans, after a Finno-Ugric people, the Livs, who inhabited its coastal regions.² German Hanseatic merchants flocked to the region, founding and populating towns in today’s Latvia and Estonia, of which Riga and Reval (today’s Tallinn) were the largest. Most of these towns maintained a majority ethnic German population into the 18th century and often beyond, though in

² Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 15-17

a pre-modern society in which the stratifications between social classes and ethnic groups were one and the same, innumerable Latvians had become Germanized (sometimes in a single lifespan, more often across several generations) as the peasantry sought opportunities in the towns and cities.³

The German-speaking burghers of the region were complemented by a German nobility, the so-called *Ritterschaften* or knightships, which held the Latvian (and in northern Livonia and all of Estonia, Estonian) peasantry in feudal bondage as serfs. These knights had come to the region as part of the crusades against northern pagans declared by Pope Alexander III in 1172, first as an offshoot of the better-known Teutonic Order, and later as the Livonian Order. This nobility, mostly styled as barons (this trope will emerge later in our text), owned virtually all of the arable land in the three provinces from the mid-14th century until the mid-19th, and retained a considerable majority of it until the end of the First World War and the ensuing agrarian reforms in Latvia and Estonia.⁴ This stratification along ethno-social lines – with approximately nine-tenths of the population non-German serfs, most of the remaining tenth German townspeople, and the slight remainder consisting of the German nobility and their retainers in the countryside – persisted until the abolition of serfdom in the region in the years immediately following the end of the Napoleonic Wars.⁵ Thereafter, social and economic change, marching hand in hand, wrought a fundamental transformation on Baltic demography and interethnic relations alike.

Through all of the intervening centuries, Riga was the largest and most important city in the region, comparable in population and volume of trade to other large Hanseatic towns with

³ Plakans, 29

⁴ Michael Garleff, “Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit in den unabhängigen Staaten Estland und Lettland” in Gert von Pistohlkors, ed., *Baltische Länder* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1994) 489-490

⁵ Plakans 81-82

German-speaking hinterlands such as Königsberg or Danzig. Across the middle ages and early modern period, the prosperous trading town was a prize warred over repeatedly as various states and empires battled for supremacy on the eastern shore of the Baltic. Over the centuries the city passed from the control of the medieval, German-speaking Livonian Order, to that of Poland-Lithuania, to Sweden, to Peter the Great's expanding Russian Empire in the 18th century. Its lucrative position in this East-West trade had made Riga a plum for the rulers of neighboring kingdoms and empires for centuries. Across most of these changes, Riga's fundamental characteristics as an urban unit did not change. Although its population was multi-ethnic from the very beginning, German-speaking burghers dominated demographically, economically, and politically in a trading town whose livelihood was based on a brisk trade between the markets of Western and Central Europe and those of the vast Eurasian interior, into which the mighty river Daugava, near the mouth of which the city is located, penetrates deeply. Although demographic data from the pre-modern period is impossible to obtain, it seems reasonable to assume that people who spoke German natively constituted a sizeable majority of the population during these centuries; certainly German-speakers controlled the city's governance and commerce.

The ethnic composition of the city's population, like that of so many towns across East Central Europe, began to change at a fundamental level only in the 19th century, as the industrial revolution came to the Baltic region and wrought far-reaching changes on economic and social structures in Riga and its hinterland. What had for centuries been principally a German-speaking merchant town became increasingly ethnically pluralistic across the course of the century.⁶

⁶ Ethnic Germans fell below 50% of the city's population for the first time in its history only in the middle of the 19th century, and the upper and middle social strata of the town were almost exclusively German-speaking for centuries. Cf. Erwin Oberländer, "Rigas Aufstieg zur multinationalen Metropole" in Kristina Wohlfahrt and Erwin Oberländer eds., *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt des Zarenreiches 1857-1914* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2004), 28

Latvian-speaking peasants from the neighboring Baltic provinces of Courland and Livonia flocked to Riga to find work in the factories, sawmills, and other industrial enterprises that began to proliferate in Riga from the 1850s onward. With them came Lithuanian, Polish, Estonian, and especially Russian workers from farther afield, furthering altering the city's demographic balance. By the close of the 19th century, in a city without an ethnic majority, Latvians had become an ethnic plurality at around 40% of the population. The majority were laborers, but a sizeable and increasingly affluent Latvian middle-class had sprung into existence alongside them, quickly becoming the torch-bearers of Latvian nationalism, agitating for increased political representation in city government and equal civic support for their cultural institutions.

The city had also long been home to a Russian-speaking population of Old Believer merchants and Russian Orthodox imperial officials, soldiers, and bureaucrats, whose ranks were newly swelled by workers from the Russian-speaking interior. Some of the city's wealthiest and most influential denizens were ethnic Russians, as were many of its poorest and least secure laborers, people with an inherited connection neither to the city nor to its immediate surroundings. Of the city's major ethnic groups, this was in many ways the most socially diverse and politically fractured by the time of the outbreak of the First World War, with Social Democracy and Bolshevism, relatively aggressive Russian nationalism, and a relatively nationally indifferent Tsarist conservatism all finding significant expression among the city's ethnic Russians.

The local Baltic German population came through the 19th century to find itself considerably transformed in social and economic terms, and demographically diminished, yet still politically ascendant. Baltic Germans had fallen from 42.9% of the city's population in 1867 to 25.5% in 1897, and had witnessed the abolition of the corporative principles of city government, inherited from the medieval period, which had prevailed through the mid-19th century into the

1870s.⁷ These practices, focused around the city's three ancient guilds, had de facto guaranteed Baltic German dominance of city government, since for the most part, German ethnicity was requisite for guild membership. The political consequences of Russification in the Baltic, stretching from the 1870s until 1905, did much to undermine the old pillars of Baltic German dominance, but canny investments, extensive commercial networks abroad, and a general flexibility to changing economic times allowed the city's old Baltic German patriciate to transform itself into a modern capitalist bourgeoisie. Doing so allowed Riga's Baltic Germans to hold onto political as well as economic power, due to city electoral laws which linked the franchise to property ownership and payment of taxes. The extensive violence of the Russian Revolution of 1905 in the Baltic effectively ended Russification measures in the region, facilitating a reconciliation between local Baltic German and Imperial Russian elites, centered on maintain the socio-economic status quo.

Thus just prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, Riga was a cosmopolitan city, lacking an unambiguous ethnic valence. While many visitors commented on the city's outward German appearance in terms of its architecture, layout, and public works, characterizing the city straightforwardly as such would be difficult.⁸ Although German was widely spoken, far fewer Rigans claimed it as their native tongue than did Latvian or Russian. Symbols of Imperial Russia and its history were not lacking in the city center, manifested in a range of public monuments and memorials as well as street names and public institutions. From the 1870s onward, the traditional autonomy of the Baltic Provinces within the Russian Empire had been curtailed, with Russian

⁷ Michael F. Hamm, "Riga's 1913 City Election: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics" in: *Russian Review*, vol. 39, no. 4 (October 1980), 443-444

⁸ Cf. *Düna-Zeitung* 10.10.1898, as cited in Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit: Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006), 35, for the wide prevalence of such characterizations of Riga along ethnic lines, as a city thoroughly German in its appearance - based on a congruence of aesthetic styles and urban planning sensibilities between Riga and cities in northern Germany, specifically.

administration and schooling playing an increasingly important role. At the same time, the expansion of railway, and with them trade, networks across the empire made knowledge of Russian more important in commerce than ever before.⁹ Thus, by the late 19th-century, Russian was even more widely spoken as a second language than German.

At the same time, the most widely-spoken native language in the city was unquestionably Latvian, though it played a less prominent visual role in the built environment, with Latvian-language street signs added to the existing Russian and German only in 1901, and most shops seemingly only advertising in Russian and German, one or both of which most ethnic Latvian city dwellers would have spoken, given that their own native tongue lacked representation in higher education, administration, or the legal system until 1918. The city's Jewish population (6.5% in 1897) up until 1914 was dominated by German-aculturated Jews from Courland, who, although suffering from legal restrictions common across the Russian Empire, were widely tolerated and typically prosperous.¹⁰ The years 1914-1919 brought an influx of Russian and Yiddish-speaking Jews from elsewhere in the empire, producing an interwar Jewish population in Riga splintered along socio-economic and linguistic lines.

This brief overview of the ethnic situation just prior to the epoch-ending events of the summer of 1914 should make clear that a transformation into the national capital of the Republic of Latvia could be anything but straightforward and unproblematic. The new powers-that-be in Riga after the dust had settled, so to speak, in 1919, both the city and national governments, faced a dauntingly complex ethnic situation that had only been further complicated by the vagaries of

⁹ Heinz von zur Mühlen, "Das Ostbaltikum unter Herrschaft und Einfluß der Nachbarmächte (1561-1710/1795)", in Gert von Pistohlkors, ed., *Baltische Länder* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1994), 397

¹⁰ Mendel Bobe, "Riga," in Mendel Bobe, ed. *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, 1971), 244-248; population statistics from Hamm, "Riga's City Election of 1913," 445 (reproduced there from Imperial Russian sources).

war, evacuation, massive shifts in population, and byzantine political intrigue. Tensions between Riga's ethnic groups were in many ways more pronounced than ever before, yet both the city and the country remained profoundly multi-ethnic in composition, presenting the new city and national governments alike with challenges in how to transform Riga into a national capital without alienating non-Latvian ethnic groups. As others have noted and this dissertation shows, these considerations produced an intense debate across the 1920s in interwar Latvia on the nature of the new state and its ethnic character, and whether civic values could serve as a viable substitute through which to bind the citizenry in allegiance to the fledgling republic.¹¹ The ultimate triumph of ethnic over civic nationalism in the 1930s, even before the coup-d'etat of Karlis Ulmanis in 1934, has tended to color historians' treatment of the issue, but in the years leading up to the economic crisis of 1930, the question remained an open one, the complexities of which were most readily apparent in the ancient trading city at the mouth of the Daugava river, now thrust into a new role as national capital that its medieval founders could never have anticipated.

1.1 The Multiethnic City as an Object of Scholarly Inquiry

Historians of East Central Europe have long understood cities to be among the most important sites of interethnic coexistence, as well as the locus of nation-building efforts, in the 19th and 20th centuries in the region.¹² Historians concerned with the Habsburg Empire and its successor states in particular have devoted considerable attention in the last 40 years to ethnic transformations in the cities and towns of the former Empire. More recent work, especially in the

¹¹ For more on the tension between civic and ethnic nationalism in interwar Latvia, cf. Marina Germane, „Civic or Ethnic Nation? Two Competing Concepts in interwar Latvia” in *Nations and Nationalism* 18 (3), 2012, 439–460

¹² For examples of influential studies of urban ethnicity centered on the Czech lands, cf. Gary F. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and more recently Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). For a more general treatment focused on the urban environment, cf. Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867-1993* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

German-speaking world, has begun to move forward chronologically from the imperial period to include the successor states of the interwar period, all of which encompassed multiethnic populations but which were themselves national states.¹³ Roughly concurrent with this chronological progression has been a turn towards spatial history and, sometimes, towards a new assessment of the role played by the built environment in shaping processes of ethnic and national identification, especially in newly-created national capitals.¹⁴ Some historians of the region have even advanced this blend of ethnic and urban history forward into the post-1945 period, an approach that is only too sensible in light of the wholesale population transfers that accompanied the end of the Second World War.¹⁵

Until recently, the principal focus of this work in the English-language academy has been on the territory of the (former) Habsburg Empire. The centrality of Vienna to architectural developments across much of the European continent - arguably, across much of the globe - in the *fin-de-siecle* era make such a focus natural. With Vienna as the central hub, a network of industrial metropolises sprung up across Habsburg East Central Europe, most of them forming around the nucleus of a medieval old town, and many of them facing roughly similar problems in their expansion, of urban planning, population growth, and logistics. In a dynamic era, flush with the new wealth brought by industrialization, new problems were met with innovative architectural solutions, by the birth of new schools of aesthetics and the emergence of a new spatio-symbolic

¹³ Cf., for example, Iris Engemann, *Die Slowakisierung Bratislavas: Universität, Theater und Kultusgemeinden, 1918–1948* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2012), and Anna Moskal, *Die Polonisierung der Stadt Posen nach 1918 und 1945: Im Spannungsfeld von Region und Nation* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2013)

¹⁴ Cf. Michaela Marek, *Kunst und "Identitätspolitik": Zur Rolle von Architektur und Bildkünsten im Prozeß der tschechischen Nationsbildung* (Köln: Böhlau, 2004)

¹⁵ Cf. Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011) for a study that explicitly addresses the interaction between the built environment and national modes of identification in an urban context. Cf. also: Jan Musekamp, *Zwischen Stettin und Szczecin: Metamorphosen einer Stadt von 1945 bis 2005* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2010), and Jacek Friedrich, *Neue Stadt in altem Glanz: Der Wiederaufbau Danzigs 1945-1960*. (Köln: Böhlau, 2009).

order, in which the new status quo found its reflection, as did unease with an increasingly urban mode of existence for the general population. In an era of growing nationalist sentiment - contained largely within non-national political structures - national identity found (often aspirational) expression in architecture, in urban space above all else. Foundational works such as *Shaping the Great City* (1999) have charted the growth of the East Central European metropolis in the fifty-odd years leading up to the First World War, identifying common threads as well as divergent tendencies from Brno to Lviv.¹⁶

The emphasis of much scholarly work on the city in East Central Europe in recent years has lain on conceptions of modernity, however loosely defined or regionally differentiated, as they emerged in the second half of the 19th century and in the period just prior to the First World War.¹⁷ These concepts can be readily linked to interwar discourses on modernity, nationally specific but nearly ubiquitous across the region, in which national activists sought to link ethnic identification with one of the newly independent titular nationalities. The aesthetics, style, and sensibilities of the past were rhetorically associated with the dominant ethnic groups of the fallen empires (Hohenzollern, Habsburg, and Romanov), and innovations in style (however similar across the continent) with associated with the vibrancy and purported youth of the titular peoples of the new national states.¹⁸

The paradigms that hold good for scholarship on multiethnic urban existence in a narrow, Habsburg-defined East Central Europe also apply to a wider region, one including the Baltic states (inclusive of Finland, as the term was originally applied) which also gained their independence in

¹⁶ Eve Blau and Monika Platzer, eds. *Shaping the Great City : Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1999)

¹⁷ Cf. Egbert Klautke, "Urban History and Modernity in Central Europe", in: *The Historical Journal*, vol. 53, no. 1 (March 2010)

¹⁸ Pauls Kundzinš, "Jaunā tiesu pils" Sējējs, Nr. 11 1936/1158, as quoted in Jānis Krastiņš, *Latvijas Republikas Būvmāksla (The Architecture of the Republic of Latvia)*, (Riga: Zinātne, 1992), 46

the chaotic period accompanying the end of the First World War. The work of historians of the former Habsburg lands, and particularly those focused on the study of the region's cities, has irrevocably called older stereotypes about the cultural origins and geographic manifestations of (largely urban) modernity into question, helping to overcome outdated and oversimplified paradigms in which the continent's eastern half is locked in a Sisyphean quest to "catch up" to the western half.¹⁹ A new wave of scholarship on cities in the (former) Russian empire has helped to break down such preconceptions, siting modernity in cities like St. Petersburg, Odessa, Magnitogorsk and Minsk, both before and after the First World War and highlighting the vibrancy of both late Imperial Russian metropolises and of Soviet urban experimentation.²⁰ But where does all of this renewed interest in the cities of East Europe leave Riga? Where exactly, in a historical developmental continuum spanning between Bohemia and Belarus, does Latvia fall?

The three Imperial Russian Baltic Russian provinces (Courland, Livonia, and Estonia) out of which the two independent republics of Latvia and Estonia emerged in the autumn of 1918, were in fact well-developed and highly industrialized, not merely in comparison to the rest of the Russian Empire, but also when held to a wider European standard.²¹ The cities and towns of the region were centers of intense industrial activity, a concentration of institutions of higher education, commerce, and trade, with Riga taking the foremost place among them in terms of its

¹⁹ For one example, cf. Nathaniel Wood, *Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Cf., for example, Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013); Anthony Cross, ed., *St. Petersburg 1703-1825* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Julie A. Buckler, *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Thomas M. Bohn, *Minsk - Musterstadt des Sozialismus: Stadtplanung und Urbanisierung in der Sowjetunion nach 1945* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008); and Tanja Pentter, *Odessa 1917: Revolution an der Peripherie* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), all appearing in the last 20 years, and most in the last fifteen.

²¹ For example, literacy rates in the Imperial Baltic provinces (today's Latvia and Estonia) in 1897 were on par with that of highly-industrialized Belgium in 1900. Richard Sylla, Gianni Toniolo, eds., *Patterns of European Industrialization: The Nineteenth Century* (Routledge, 1992) 252

population, volume of trade, and industrial output. Indeed, in the decades leading up to 1914, Riga had steadily moved from commanding an appreciable, to a dominant position in its share of Russia's total foreign trade, reaching 1st place in total foreign trade, with the most export trade and second only to St. Petersburg in the volume of import trade, just prior to the First World War.²² As we shall see, the city was not merely active in industry and commerce, but was also widely regarded as well-run and efficiently administered, constituting something of a model modern metropolis within the Russian Empire.²³ The success of this thriving urban center, soon to be met with the calamities of an incredibly destructive war, was achieved in spite of the city having, in at least some senses, as ethnically fractured a population as any comparably-sized city in the Russian Empire.²⁴ Riga prior to 1914 was a city with no ethnic majority, administered and economically dominated by Baltic Germans, ruled over by Russian officials and populated by Old Believers and Russian-speaking factory worker, home to a socially and linguistically fractured Jewish population, and to a plurality of increasingly prosperous Latvians who also populated the city's hinterland. Riga before 1914 was thus simultaneously many cities, and one city.

Although Riga was, for a time, considerably neglected by the Western academy relative to many East Central European cities – especially national capitals - further south and west (in large part due to its location in the Soviet Union), the Latvian capital has attracted recent scholarly attention, above all from the German-speaking academy, and particularly in regard to its profoundly multi-ethnic past. These scholars were able to draw upon the initial wave of post-1945 German-language scholarship on Riga, Latvia, and the Baltic states (exclusive of Lithuania),

²² *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsen-Komitees im Jahre 1928* (Riga: Buchdruckerei von W.F. Häcker, 1929), p. 1

²³ Hamm, 447.

²⁴ While the empire as a whole was home to many multi-ethnic cities, only one other metropolis in the same tier as Riga regarding population or economic importance, Odessa, lacked an ethnic majority at the turn of the 20th century, and even here, a majority of inhabitants spoke Russian natively.

written largely by Baltic Germans and their descendants living in West Germany.²⁵ While not entirely inattentive to the question of interethnic relations, the work of older Baltic German historians nonetheless tended to focus on the history of the ethnic German community within the Baltic homeland, rather than adopting a comprehensive approach.²⁶ In some senses the economic and political dominance of the Baltic German elite have tended to legitimate such an approach, although as a general rule, the more recent the scholarship, the more attention paid to the history of non-German Rigans has been.²⁷

The same can largely be said of the scholarship undertaken since 1991 by Latvian scholars, who were in many ways starting from a similar historiographic moment as their German contemporaries from the 1950s, given the restrictions of the Soviet period, which discouraged any but the most orthodox Marxist appraisals of the country's brief period of independence - wherein ethnic distinctions were always subsumed to those of class. A welcome development has been the interest of Latvian scholars in the history of the country's former Baltic German population, a marked contrast from the scholarly animosities of the interwar period, in which Latvian historians generally sought to cast Baltic Germans in as unfavorable a light as possible, and to delegitimize their ethnic group's presence in the region.²⁸

²⁵ This group of scholars, though now almost entirely deceased, were highly productive in their time, working to further develop the historiography of their former homeland not only for scientific purposes, but also to spread awareness of it among a West German population with little knowledge of it. Cf. Jürgen von Hehn, *Lettland zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur: zur Geschichte des lettländischen Staatsstreichs vom 15. Mai 1934*. (München: Isar Verlag, 1957), Gert von Pistohlkors, *Die Unabhängigkeit der baltischen Länder: Geschichte, Probleme, Perspektiven* (Marburg: Verlag des Herder-Instituts 1993) and Reinhard Wittram, *Zur Geschichte Rigas: Schicksale und Probleme im Rückblick auf 750 Jahre Stadtgeschichte 1201-1951* (Bovenden: Baltischer Verlag, 1951); these three scholars in particular have been particularly prolific, with many valuable contributions to Baltic, and specifically Baltic German, historiography to their names.

²⁶ Tensions as well as cooperative efforts between ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans are noted with some pride in both Reinhard Wittram's *Zur Geschichte Rigas* (Bovenden: Baltischer Verlag, 1951) and Jürgen von Hehn's Cold War polemic *Riga: Bollwerk des Abendlandes am baltischen Meer* (Kitzingen am Main: Hozner-Verlag, 1954).

²⁷ Cf. Wilhelm Lenz's foundational and highly informative study of Riga's industrialization from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, *Die Entwicklung Rigas zur Großstadt* (Kitzingen am Main: Hozner-Verlag, 1954), which stresses the leadership role of the Baltic German city government in modernizing the city, while still taking care not to represent the city as anything less than an ethnically diverse metropolis.

²⁸ Cf., for example, *Vācu Kultūra Latvijā: Ieskats vācu-latviešu novadu kultūras un vācu biedrības vēsturē* [*German Culture in Latvia: Insights into German-Latvian Regional Cultural and German Organizational History*] (Ilze Krokša, Aina Balaško, eds.

Although a number of useful shorter studies of the situation of the Baltic German population within the framework of the Latvian state have been written, a comprehensive approach to interethnic relations within Riga specifically is nonetheless lacking.²⁹ English-language scholarship on Riga, Latvia, and the Baltic has likewise been heavily influenced by the scholarship of émigré historians principally concerned with writing the history of their own ethnic group, placing the ethnic group squarely at the center of analysis even in a profoundly multi-ethnic setting.³⁰

Recent decades have however seen a turn towards an approach that seeks to place the region's ethnic diversity at the center of analysis, and multi-ethnic Riga has figured prominently in those efforts. Christine Wohlfahrt and Edwin Oberländer have produced an edited volume in 2004 on Riga during its period of industrialization and intense growth which in some ways represented a leap forward for the city's historiography.³¹ The volume adopts a kind of kaleidoscopic approach, investigating the "Riga of the Germans", then the "Riga of the Russians", the "Riga of the Latvians", "Riga of the Jews", and so on, with a different expert authoring each

Riga: Viris, 2009) as a representative example; see also "Vācbaltieši, Rīga und Latvija" in *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* nr. 1, 1993 for a sense of the profound re-appraisal of the Baltic German role in Latvian history following the re-establishment of an independent Latvia.

²⁹ Cf. the work of Inesis Feldmanis and Raimonds Cerūzis on Latvia's Baltic Germans, especially in *Riga im Prozess der Modernisierung: Studien zum Wandel einer Ostseemetropole im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2004) for Latvian studies of the city's Baltic German population. Leo Dribins has perhaps been the single scholar to most thoroughly treat the question of interethnic relations as a whole in interwar Latvia, but his analysis takes place at the scale of the nation, rather than the city. Cf. Leo Dribins, *Nacionālais Jautājums Latvijā 1850-1950: historiogrāfisks apskats, latviešu autori* [*The National Question in Latvia 1850-1950: A Historiographic Overview of Latvian Authors*] (Riga: Macību Apgads, 1997) and an overview of the topic's historiography in „Latvijas minoritāšu politikas historiogrāfija 1920-1940 un 1990-2010” [“The Historiography of Latvia's Minority Politics 1920-1940 and 1990-2010”] in *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* [*Journal of the Latvian Institute of History*] 2011 no. 3, among many others by Dribins.

³⁰ Cf. Andrejs Plakans' *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), an admirable work which nonetheless illustrates in its title the difficulties that the (international) academy has typically had in conceiving of Latvian or indeed of Baltic history in pan-ethnic terms, at least in the 20th century. Anders Henriksson's studies of the Baltic German communities in Riga (*The Tsar's Loyal Germans: The Riga German Community, Social Change, and the Nationality Question 1855-1905*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983) and in the wider Baltic Provinces (*Vassals and Citizens: The Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia 1905-1914*, Marburg: Herder-Verlag, 2009) both represent modern, fairly comprehensive treatments of the Baltic German population in question, though paving the way for multi-ethnic analysis rather than engaging in it themselves.

³¹ Kristina Wohlfahrt and Erwin Oberländer eds., *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt des Zarenreiches 1857-1914* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2004)

chapter. While this approach has much to commend it, it also suffers from its own strengths, in that it is easy to extract an image of a fractured metropolis, of urban societies living in parallel, from the pages of this book. While such an approach is indubitably valuable in understanding the history of this diverse city, its over-emphasis can cost a historian insight into other aspects of urban life. The connections between different groups often serve to bring them more closely together, but also as boundaries between them, reiterating what it is that makes one distinct from the other. Shared life and constant interaction with ethnic Others were in a very real sense what allowed the city's different ethnicities to reconstitute themselves as groups on a daily basis.³² Denying the importance or fundamental reality of ethnically-organized groupness in the modern history of Riga would be foolhardy in the extreme, but an approach that does not also pay adequate heed to both the boundaries between groups, and to the factors which helped to bind all of the city's groups together in a shared civic life is all too likely to miss the essence of the city's history in the modern era.³³

Ulrike von Hirschhausen's monograph *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit: Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1867-1914 (The Borders of Commonality: Germans, Latvians, Russians and Jews in Riga 1860-1914)* (2006) is in many ways the spiritual predecessor of this dissertation, in great part because of the emphasis placed on the processes by which group identity is constructed only through engagement with other, different groups. In Hirschhausen's analysis, much heed is paid to the processes by which ethnicity is constituted, along with those modes of

³² Cf. among many others: Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (New York: Little Brown, 1969) for two examples of scholarship in this vein influential to historians.

³³ For another edited volume which both advances scholarship while at least partially presenting a fragmented city to the reader, cf. *Riga im Prozess der Modernisierung: Studien zum Wandel einer Ostseemetropole im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2004).

identification that stand above or below it – loyalties to region, dynasty, empire, homeland.³⁴ Hirschhausen seeks to rehabilitate multiethnic urbanity as a European historical norm, rather than as an exceptional state; in doing so, she also stresses the importance of non-ethnic modes of identification in city life, including the value accorded to the principle of communal welfare.³⁵ Among other things, she seeks to demonstrate the role played by concerns for the common welfare of the city in civic life, as different ethnic groups competed in advancing the interests of the city, particularly in the realms of technology, industry, and civic administration.³⁶ In her magisterial study, Hirschhausen concludes that “the challenges of multi-ethnicity led to an extremely progressive local politics in Riga...” as Baltic German politicians sought to allay the social concerns of working and middle-class Latvians.³⁷ According to Hirschhausen, “the German elite of Riga followed the socio-political experiments in Switzerland, in Germany, and in England with close attention and sought to transfer them to the Northwest of the Tsardom.”³⁸ Von Hirschhausen’s entangled history devotes as much of its text to discussing the barriers and boundaries separating ethnic groups in Riga as it does to examining the arenas of daily life where ethnic distinctions blurred, or to institutions, organizations, and social mechanisms that promoted interethnic cooperation; her very choice of title indicates this (“The Borders of Commonality”).³⁹ But her emphasis on the progressive nature of municipal politics in late 19th-century Riga highlights one of the principal mechanisms for (competitive) interethnic cooperation during that period, one that would bear fruit during the far more democratic interwar period, when Latvian municipal politicians, unlike their counterparts at the national level, were able to draw on a

³⁴ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 16-17

³⁵ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit* 13

³⁶ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit* 19

³⁷ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 373

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hirschhausen, 21

decades-long legacy of working with the ethnic Other in a shared political framework.⁴⁰ Hirschhausen laments the ways in which history-writing on Riga has suffered from narrowly national historiographies, and seeks to overcome this in her own work by writing a kind of “entangled history” which refuses to compartmentalize the city’s major ethnic groups away from one another. While Hirschhausen’s study does account for the ways in which the city’s major ethnic groups together formed a coherent and functioning civic community despite their cleavages, her analysis also tends to take ethnic identity as a given and to leave liminal ethnic “amphibians” of the kind that have attracted increasing attention in the context of the Czech lands out of her analysis entirely.⁴¹

The most recent major contribution to the historiography of Riga in the modern era is undoubtedly Mark R. Hatlie’s *Riga at War: War and Wartime Experience in a Multi-ethnic City 1914-1919* (2014). In very general terms, Hatlie’s monograph can be seen as advancing Riga’s multiethnic historiography further, through the next epochal shift, with the leaving-off point of Hirschhausen as his own point of departure. Like Hirschhausen, Hatlie places great emphasis on lived experience and “everyday history”⁴² (German *Alltagsgeschichte*).⁴³ Hatlie’s approach towards interethnic relations in Riga is a marked departure from Hirschhausen’s, however. He praises her application of “entangled history” but only partially embraces the approach himself,

⁴⁰ Cf. Adam Brode, “Ethnicity, Class, and Local Patriotism: Change and Continuity in Riga City Government before and after the First World War” in *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2016 nr. 4. 101.

⁴¹ Cf. Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) for works dealing far more explicitly with national indifference and the question of ethnic “amphibians”; Gary Cohen’s much older study, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) also engages with this topic, albeit only tangentially.

⁴² Mark R. Hatlie, *Riga at War 1914-1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multiethnic Metropolis* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2014), 6

⁴³ Cf. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte. Zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot 1994), and Paul Steege, Andrew Stuart Bergerson, Maureen Healy and Pamela E. Swett, “The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter” in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 80, no. 2 (June 2008)

tending instead towards an approach that treats ethnicity largely as a given.⁴⁴ His methodology instead draws its main inspiration instead from the approach of Oberländer and Wohlfahrt in producing a more compartmentalized view of the existence of each of the city's major ethnic groups.⁴⁵ Hatlie is aware of the dangers of such an approach, citing the risks of a "...kind of methodological nationalism, a nationalism which has been the central category in the historiography of the Baltic region for decades and which has not abated in recent years", but insists at the same time (and not without justification) that this same ethnic nationalism defined the historical actors themselves, implying that its absence from the equation will produce undesirable distortions in the work of historians.⁴⁶ Like Hirschhausen, Hatlie has at least partially set out to write an entangled history, embracing all of the city's major ethnic groups and paying due heed to their relations with one another, though he is more skeptical of this methodology's possibility of success.⁴⁷ Unlike her, his need to dwell on cooperation and coexistence is enormously alleviated by his period; the First World War and subsequent Latvian War of Independence were years of overt ethnic animosity and strife, with little in the way of power-sharing or cooperation between the city's major ethnic groups.⁴⁸ Fortuitously for this dissertation, Hatlie devotes considerable attention both to urban space in Riga, and to questions of civic identity and various ethnic groups attachment to and conception of the city.⁴⁹ Hatlie argues that only

⁴⁴ Hatlie, 9-10

⁴⁵ Unlike Hirschhausen, Hatlie does not devote explicit sections to the city's Jewish population, although their role in Riga is dealt with intermittently throughout the book.

⁴⁶ Hatlie, 7

⁴⁷ Hatlie, *Riga at War*, 9-10

⁴⁸ A strained cooperation prevailed between the largely Baltic German city government and the Russian military authorities for the first phase of the war, up until the evacuation of the city in the summer of 1915; thereafter, active and productive cooperation between Baltic Germans and Russians became much scarcer, while cooperation between Russians and Latvians increased as St. Petersburg mooted and eventually approved the creation of Latvian military units, the so-called Latvian Riflemen, which would prove crucial in shaping the outcome not only of the Latvian War of Independence, but of the Russian Civil War itself. Cf. Hatlie, 231-235 for more on the Latvian Riflemen.

⁴⁹ Cf. Part II: Wartime Experience, Section 3: "Riga's Russians and the War" and the epilogue in particular. Hatlie pays due heed to the importance of ethnic control of prominent buildings and spaces throughout his text, however.

during the First World War did Latvians come to view Riga as truly *theirs*; the demographic and political transformations of the war, the declaration of independence with Riga as capital of an independent Latvia, and most of all, the fighting to defend the city from the so-called adventurists of Count Bermond-Avalov in November 1919 served to transform Latvian attitudes towards Riga.⁵⁰

While there is much merit in Hatlie's arguments in this regard, this dissertation has offered a more tempered version of his thesis as its own starting point: that these events, and the shifts in Latvian attitudes towards Riga that they engendered, were merely the *catalysts* for the ultimate transformation of the city in the eyes of the Latvian public - both those resident in Riga, and across the country. Across the interwar period, through the events outlined in each of this dissertation's chapters, the necessary changes to Riga's urban space were rendered one by one - its topography of memory, its symbolic landscape, and its physical appearance were all altered in terms of their ethnic valence and the historical narratives attached to them. Many of these changes were brought about at the hands of Latvian national activists, either directly or through the pressure they brought to bear on more centrist politicians; others were the result of sustained cooperative efforts in city government or in other multiethnic institutions undergoing ethnic reversal after 1919.

While Hatlie is right to note that "the war itself served to further define membership and divide groups from each other" in Riga, and while no one familiar with the period could deny the power and obvious reality of ethnic identification and nationalism, such an approach nonetheless has a tendency to elide important historical processes by placing emphasis on the groups themselves rather than on the means by which they identified and defined themselves. As Rogers Brubaker summarized the argument of his groundbreaking work, *Ethnicity without Groups*

⁵⁰ Hatlie, 274-284

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), scholars "...unwittingly adopt the language of participants in such struggles, and contribute to the reification of ethnic groups." This work examines the processual nature of the creation and maintenance of urban space as a means to avoid the overdue reification of ethnic groups, although it – like all of its historiographic predecessors and, one dares to venture, its successors in the near future – is unable to avoid the use of a lexicon that takes the existence of the ethnic group as a given. Brubaker's admonition serves as an ideal rather than as a realistic scholarly measuring stick.

Taking ethnic nationalism as one's main focus means not only often covering tired ground, given the main impetus of the bulk of the existing historiography, but also means concretizing ethnic groups in such a way that they are inevitably arranged in opposition to one another, eliding countervailing trends and sentiments more or less completely. Ethnic nationalism was ultimately triumphant across interwar East Central Europe, but this does not mean that persons, movements, ideologies, and phenomena of diverse sorts in multiethnic societies that cannot be characterized as ethnically chauvinistic are inconsequential to historians. Indeed, in a modern Europe facing many of the same challenges of multi-ethnic coexistence as those with which interwar Riga was presented, from the presence of large numbers of migrants and refugees across Europe, to interethnic tensions between ethnic Russians and Latvians in Riga today, the careful study such phenomena should be prioritized perhaps more than ever before.

One virtue of *Riga at War* is its emphasis on urban space. Hatlie makes no major methodological commitment to an analysis of the role played by space in shaping experience or interethnic relations during the wartime period 1914-1919, other than to note the importance of churches, theaters, schools, and other civic building in his introduction.⁵¹ But his analysis,

⁵¹ Hatlie, 10-11

especially that of the later chapters, tends frequently to revolve around urban space, a reflection of what he rightly notes as the “competition over and concern for cultural institutions in Riga”.⁵² As this dissertation too will make clear, comprehensive analysis of the role played by cultural institutions in shaping civic life demands with it an accounting of the role that space plays in shaping those institutions and the ways in which they are perceived, a role the prominence of which is only heightened in multi-ethnic settings.

The historiography of the city of Riga has advanced remarkably in recent years. Studies of high quality, informed by the most recent methodology, have recently been authored regarding the period of industrialization and expansion 1860-1914, and covering the tumultuous events of the period of the First World War and Latvian Independence. The interwar period in Riga, however, lacks a comprehensive social, cultural, and even political history, given the continuing fragmentation of the historiography along ethnic lines. What work there is that has sought to overcome narrow ethnic perspectives has tended almost exclusively to take Latvia as a whole as its scope of analysis, treating Riga in essence exclusively as the capital of a nation-state, rather than as a city in its own right, one with an organic connection to its long, thoroughly multi-ethnic past.⁵³ In these analyses, that long, multiethnic past – comprising the vast majority of the city’s history – serves as mere prelude to a terminal teleological phase in which the city becomes the capital of the nation-state of Latvia. The legacy of multiethnicity, its implications for the present, as well as for the eras intervening between today and the First World War, tend to be glossed over or elided.

⁵² Hatlie, 8

⁵³ Such literature is, of course, often invaluable for a more narrowly-focused study such as this one; for example, Michael Garleff’s *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen. Die parlamentarische Tätigkeit der deutschbaltischen Parteien in Lettland und Estland (Baltic German Politics Between the World Wars: The Parliamentary Activity of the Baltic German Parties in Latvia and Estonia)* (Bonn: Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1976), while handling political history in both Latvia and Estonia, nonetheless constitutes an indispensable source for an urban history of the capital of the former republic.

Given the contrast between these phases in the city's history, it is clear that the interwar period was one of radical change in the history of Riga. The city, long preponderant as a regional center of trade, industry, and population, became for the first time a national capital, something that profoundly shapes both the symbolic significance and urban landscape of any city. Riga, long known for its cosmopolitanism, became more Latvian than ever before, in both demographic and symbolic terms. Yet the city also retained a heritage, both physical and ideological, that spoke to its long past as a city dominated by the local Baltic German population, and home as well to a sizeable Russian population, which similarly had left its imprint on the cityscape, not least in a number of prominent Orthodox cathedrals scattered about the city. Although these ethnic groups were demographically diminished by the war and its consequences, they continued to call the city home, and to prize the local manifestations of their ethnic heritage. In attempting to reimagine and represent Riga – both to the Latvian population and to the outside world - as an ethnically Latvian city (something that was initially approached largely with ambivalence) both the national and the municipal governments were forced to navigate what amounted to a policy labyrinth, one complicated by ethnic identity politics, economic and commercial concerns, questions of city planning and architectural heritage, and deep social cleavages in an era characterized by a deep-seated fear of Bolshevism.

In such a context, it is easy to see what might attract a historian to objects of analysis traditionally left to the purview of art historians: urban spaces. Prominent public and private buildings, churches and synagogues, plazas, squares, statues, and parks, street signs and names, all of these serve as focal points for processes of group identity-formation, whether defined by ethnicity, by civic values, or other paradigms. Following the proclamation of the Latvian state on November 18, 1918, and especially following its consolidation across the winter of 1919-1920,

many of these sorts of spaces in Riga underwent, to varying degrees, transformations in their symbolic meaning, in terms of both projection and perception. What had before been the House of the Livonian Knighthood became home to Latvia's parliament, the *Saeima*; what had been the residence of the Imperial Russian Governor-General of the Baltic Provinces became the home of the President of the Republic of Latvia; what had been the Boulevard of the Heir to the Throne (*Troņmantnieka bulvāris/Thronfolgerboulevard/Наследника Бульвар*) became Rainis Boulevard (*Raiņa bulvāris*), named after the (then still-living) Latvian national poet Rainis; churches changed hands between religions or entered state control; statues were removed or erected, and so on. Many of these changes did not involve significant physical transformation, but instead a deep-seated transformation in the symbolic connotations attached to particular building or space, despite it maintaining essentially the same physical appearance.

This sort of symbolic transformation was typical of Riga's transformation into a national capital in the 1920s, whereas the 1930s brought most of the interwar period's large-scale building projects, especially following Karlis Ulmanis' seizure of power in a coup-d'etat on May 15, 1934. Andreas Fülberth has charted the history of the Ulmanis regime's attempts to transform the face of Riga in aesthetic terms, and thus implicitly also in ethnic ones, in the book *Riga-Tallinn-Kaunas: Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten 1920-1940 (Riga-Tallinn-Kaunas: Their Development into Modern Capital Cities 1920-1940)* (2005). As the title indicates, however, Fülberth's monograph focuses on construction projects, realized and unrealized, although in the case of Riga he does devote considerable space to the ethnically-charged debates in the Riga press regarding the city's architectural heritage, largely inherited from its Baltic German population.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. Andreas Fülberth, *Tallinn-Riga-Kaunas. Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten 1920-1940* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2005) and in a more chronologically wide-ranging and art-historical vein, Steven A. Mansbach, *Riga's Capital Modernism* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2013)

Like much of the German-language historiography completed since 1991, however, Füllberth emphasizes the discord of the 1930s rather than the cooperation of the 1920s, although his analysis of architectural and aesthetic debates does underscore how deeply entangled the Baltic German and Latvian professional and artistic spheres of interwar Riga were. His work thus illuminates only one half of the arc of the trajectory of interethnic relations in interwar Riga, namely, the descent into conflict and ethnic hatred to which the 1930s bore witness across Europe. This dissertation seeks to both sketch out the first (ascendant) half of that arc, as mechanisms of cooperation and coexistence were explored in the 1920s with some success, and to more fully flesh out the process of ethnic reversal in the sphere of urban space with which his book engage.

Likewise, in her monograph *Arts and a Nation: The Role of Visual Arts and Artists in the Making of the Latvian Identity 1905-1940* (2015), Susanne Pourchier-Plasseraud has provided a new assessment of the role played by the visual arts in shaping Latvian national identity during the 20th century, without, however, assessing the impact of such efforts on the non-Latvian population.⁵⁵ Pourchier-Plasseraud's work makes abundantly clear how important a role artistic creation was in the formation and maturation of a Latvian national identity in the first half of the 20th century, but – as with Füllberth's work – her analysis exists in something approaching an ethnic vacuum, in which the already-existing art, architecture, and aesthetics of other groups are not reckoned with – though Latvian artistic production was occurring in profound reaction to Baltic German and Russian culture. Here, again, this dissertation provides fuller context, hopefully helping to enrich the works which have informed it.

⁵⁵ Cf. also Per Bolin's *Between Academic and National Agendas: Ethnic Policies and 'National Disciplines' at the University of Latvia 1919-1940* (Stockholm: Södertörns högskola, 2012) for more on the tension between Latvianization and multi-ethnicity in the interwar period.

Although the turn towards the interwar period and its gradual Latvianization of public life (greatly accelerated after 1934) is encouraging, little work has yet been done on the urban transformations of the 1920s, which in many ways were more profound than the more visually striking projects of the Ulmanis era, or upon the impact that either of these two phases in the development of the city had on interethnic relations.

This dissertation seeks to further develop an expanding historiography on interethnic relations in Riga, building on recent accomplishments in this field and advancing the field of inquiry into an era strikingly similar to our own. The parallels between the interwar period and today are overt and myriad. The relative fragility of democratic institutions across much of the European continent, the tenuous recovery from economic depression, the rising tide of nationalist populism, the presence of a widely scattered ethnic minority population purportedly championed by one of the continent's strongest traditional military powers; all of these congruences make the study of interethnic coexistence in the 1920s and 1930s particularly relevant, even pressing, for scholars of modern Europe working today.⁵⁶

This dissertation seeks to contribute to that endeavor by tracing the potentials and pitfalls, promises and perils of interethnic coexistence along the lines of one particular thread - that of urban space, which in multiethnic cities is virtually by definition shared space. It will do so by drawing on a historiography of the period that is well-developed in terms of tracing national political history, but which is in need of further refinement at the level of urban history. While, as with virtually any serious work of history, this project would be inconceivable without a rich foundation of secondary literature to draw upon, it also benefits from the more comprehensive and

⁵⁶ The allusion, of course, is to the rough congruence between the position of interwar Germany vis-à-vis its ethnic German minority abroad and that of the Russian Federation and its own, both situations having arisen in the aftermath of the loss of territorial hegemony.

methodologically nuanced approaches to multi-ethnic history which have recently emerged in the historiography. In drawing on the latest methodological approaches to the study of multi-ethnicity in urban settings in central Europe, a field that has seen robust development in recent decades, this project in particular takes its cue from a relatively recent trend towards re-evaluating the role of the built environment in shaping interethnic relations.

The justifications for this approach regarding interwar Riga are rooted in two distinct concerns. The first is the desire to avoid the seemingly inescapable pitfall that has plagued the historiography up until now, despite historians such as Hirschhausen's commitment to concepts such as entangled history and to a mutable ethnicity defined by borders and not by content. Even the most nuanced work on interethnic relations remains plagued by the reification and concretization of ethnic groups as monolithic actors in and of their own right, something which our lexicon itself leaves us ill-equipped to avoid without resorting to cumbersome, inelegant phrasings, full of qualifications and elaborations.

Regarding ethnicity, this dissertation would like to have its theoretical cake and eat it too – to hold that the group does exist, must be acknowledged as such, and that generalizations can be drawn about its nature, even its behavior; but also to insist that it exists only as a group, a collection of individuals with only fuzzy boundaries delineating itself from other groups, and one which is locked in a continual process of defining and redefining itself in comparison and contrast to other groups. No scholar begins their labors unburdened by inflexible preconceptions, or with a historiographic *tabula rasa*; all of us are simultaneously thrust forward and held back by the thought of those who have gone before us in our field, whose writing has shaped our own views and those of our likely audience as well. The dominance of ethnicity as a virtually unquestioned category of analysis until relatively recently in the previous historiography not only of the Baltic,

but indeed of all of Europe, the near-universal permeation of nationalist thought in the modern world, indicates that balance can best be achieved by an approach which seeks to highlight the processional and constructive nature of group identity.

Emphasizing the changes (and also the continuities) in the use, appearance, and perception of Riga's most prominent urban spaces lends itself to such an approach, since these symbolically-charged spaces were (and remain) fundamental in shaping the narratives that ethnic groups construct about themselves. The size, purported beauty, historical heritage, aesthetics and style, and function of urban spaces are all imbued with social content, indeed are themselves socially constructed as spaces for specific social purposes, an insight articulated in detail by Henri Lefebvre decades ago, but one which historians of East Central Europe have only begun to fully incorporate into their analytical approaches in recent years.⁵⁷

In a multi-ethnic urban setting, Lefebvre's characterization of space as socially constructed is lent additional utility through the fundamental reality that in a city such as Riga, the ethnic Other is indeed encountered in space, as well as ideationally. Public spaces are for the most part shared, sites of daily interaction between different groups, and thus they can serve an admirable role in shifting focus away from the conceptual "center" of an ethnic group, towards the fuzzy boundary lines where groups meet and mingle, and in doing so define themselves. Thus in the first instance, an emphasis on urban space in a multi-ethnic setting helps to shift perspective in such a way as to emphasize interaction between groups, even in cases where a nationalization of space occurs. The roles of squares, courthouses, theater buildings, universities, statuary, boulevards, and nearly every other manifestation of architecture or urban planning in shaping national identity, ethnic animosities, and nationalist aspirations have begun to be explored in greater depth, with an

⁵⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991). Note the still fairly recent date of publication in English.

acknowledgement of the influence that space can have on identity, as well as vice-versa, coming into the foreground for the first time in recent years.⁵⁸

The second principal reason for placing such strong emphasis on urban space is that it allows the city itself to retain a more central role in the analysis. Historical sea-changes in urban demographics, especially fairly abrupt ones, might lead us to believe that cities have re-invented or reconstituted themselves anew, but in most cases, and certainly in that of interwar Riga, the traces of continuity with the city's past stretch far forward into whatever new era has dawned. Civic tradition and heritage are surprisingly enduring values even in cases where ethnic reversal has taken place.⁵⁹ For Riga, given that the major ethnic groups had long been resident in the city, and active in municipal politics (albeit in various roles), it should come as no surprise that civic traditions inherited from the 19th century, and a sense of continuity in city government, lasted well into the interwar period.

These observations should help to make clear that historians studying multiethnic cities ought to view cities as more than the simple sum total of various ethnic population components, but function also as organic (even if not as harmonious or unified) wholes, with a sense of civic identity rooted in history and capable of spanning ethnic divides. We will see that for as much as Riga's long history of stark ethnic cleavages was used by national activists to rouse ethnic passions and animosities, more positive aspects of its communal history nonetheless played a role in shaping municipal government in the interwar period, and in shaping relations between ethnic groups more

⁵⁸ For a sample of representative literature, cf. Nancy Wingfield *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, October 2007); Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ The term ethnic reversal, borrowed in its specific usage in a Latvian context from Per Bolin's *Between National and Academic Agendas*, in this dissertation refers to the process by which the dominant role in politics and administration in Riga switched hands between local Baltic German and ethnic Latvian elites, leaving both to continue on in a cooperative but asymmetrical relationship to one another, a rough inversion of the pre-war status quo.

generally. Emphasizing urban space in a broad sense (incorporating existing spaces, as opposed to only focusing on new building projects) allows a historian to highlight continuity and preservation, as well as change and rupture, in the social and cultural fabric of a city. This promotes a conception of urban history rooted in the past and on connections and interaction between different groups.

It also necessitates a project located at the intersection of many different kinds of history. Thus this dissertation is simultaneously an ethnic, cultural, social, political, economic, and architectural history of interwar Riga, though in relation to some of these aspects it serves as only a very incomplete one. Its research sources, like its inspirations, are diverse. A synthesis of the data and conclusions of the historiography on interwar Latvia as they pertain to Riga is supplemented by original research conducted at archives in Riga, Latvia, and Marburg, Lüneburg, and Berlin, Germany. These archival sources are linguistically and functionally diverse, including the records of the city and national governments, the records and correspondence of civil society organizations, personal memoirs and correspondence published and unpublished, and a wide range of periodical publications in German, Latvian, and Russian. Taken together, and combined with the secondary research already written, they present the historian with a wealth of information on both interethnic relations and urban space in interwar Riga, with both topics often appearing entangled in one and the same document. This dissertation uses these sources to write a history of interethnic relations in interwar Riga, one which uses a focus on the built environment – *urbs* – to anchor its view of competing visions of what it meant to be a citizen of Riga – *civitas* – in the spaces, literal and figural, where those visions met.⁶⁰ Urban space and its attendant symbology,

⁶⁰ For an concise elaboration of the distinction between *urbs* and *civitas*, see Richard L. Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793* (New Haven, 2000)

often heavily ethnicized, constitutes one of the focal points of power relations in modern society. Analyzing not just their creation, but also how changes in control of symbolically-charged urban spaces were carried out and perceived can provide insight into interethnic relations that might be missed in studies focusing on a place's political and social history.

The dissertation will follow a rough chronological schema, beginning with the process of ethnic reversal in terms of political space from the summer of 1919 through roughly 1925, following an addendum to the conclusion which quickly summarizes developments in Riga, and in the wider region where necessary, from 1914-1919. Chapter 2 deals with economic spaces - the city's market and stock exchange, and their regulation as sites of multiethnic interaction crucial to the city's welfare. Chapter 3 deals with educational institutions in the city, particularly with the issue of ethnic control of various pre-existing school buildings. Chapter 4 is concerned with public and memorial spaces. The public spaces in question here are the city's squares, plazas, streets, and bridges, with special attention paid to the renaming frenzy that took place in two rough waves across the interwar period, at the beginning of the 1920s and again in the early 1930s. The memorial spaces include statutes, plaques, and monuments located in or near the city center, and the city's cemeteries and graveyards, which also underwent a process of nationalization. Chapter 5 deals with sacred space and the various ethnic disputes and compromises over the city's Lutheran, Orthodox, and Catholic churches and its synagogues. Chapter 6 deals with cultural spaces other than the educational, looking principally at theater life in interwar Riga and at various civil society organizations, fractured along ethnic lines, and their control (and loss thereof) over some of the city's most prominent historic buildings. The conclusion outlines the parameters of the departure of the Baltic Germans from Latvia in the autumn of 1939, highlighting some of the consequences of this for Riga's architectural heritage and civic identity.

1.2 Riga at the Start of the First World War

The First World War shook Riga as it did few other large cities on the European continent, and its violent aftermath - first the Latvian War of Independence, and then the short-lived but destructive Bermondts Affair (see below) witnessed not merely the birth of a nation, but the overthrow of regional ethnic hierarchies which had been in place for the better part of a millennium. Riga itself was evacuated, depopulated, and passed as a prize between the hands of a half-dozen successive regimes in the span of a few short years. The continual political upheaval of the years 1914-1919, combined with mass migration, demographic collapse, and economic chaos, left the city without much of a political status quo to be maintained after 1919, facilitating its transformation in the years to come.

The fighting brought devastation and transformation to the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire from nearly the first days of the war onward. The province of Courland served as a battleground for the German and Russian Imperial armies early in the war, bringing widespread destruction and the evacuation of the larger part of the population. The front quickly stabilized along the Daugava River, roughly bisecting the Latvian-speaking territories.⁶¹ The effects of the conflict on life in the Baltic region were profound - in material terms, lives lost, and in regard to social and political transformation.⁶² During the conflict against Imperial Germany alone, thousands were slain in the fighting in Courland or fled the region permanently.⁶³ Property damage or loss through evacuation was enormous, and the balance of power between the region's ethnic groups was irrevocably altered by the political consequences of the Russian Revolution and

⁶¹ Garleff, "Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit", 452

⁶² Wilfried Schlau, *Die Deutschbalten (Vertreibungsgebiete und vertriebene Deutsche)* (Langen Müller, 1995), 83-84

⁶³ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 277

subsequent capitulation via the treaty of Brest-Litovsk.⁶⁴ The sweeping away of the tsarist imperial order, and with it, ethnic Russian dominance, left in its wake multiple competing visions for the future of the empire's former Baltic provinces. Among them were those of the Latvian and Estonian national movements, the Baltic German nobility, Baltic German liberals, and the forces of Imperial Germany and Bolshevism as well.⁶⁵ The Imperial German army held the city for more than a year, from September 1917 to January 1919, but retreated from the Baltic following the November Revolution in Germany itself, leaving the region to decide its own fate.

Confronted with an ensuing power vacuum, the territory of the former Baltic provinces became a theater in the broader Red-White conflict sparked by the October Revolution in Petrograd. Bolshevism initially found wide support among the Latvian populace, and Latvian Bolsheviks under Pēteris Stučka attempted to establish a Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, occupying Riga and eastern Latvia during the winter and early spring of 1919.⁶⁶ A loose multiethnic alliance of regional counter-revolutionary groups under Baltic German leadership defeated these Bolshevik forces by late spring of that year, with the Baltic German *Landeswehr* (a volunteer army consisting mostly of local Baltic German men) capturing Riga on 22 May 1919.⁶⁷ The *Landeswehr*, which was to enjoy a long life in the Baltic German collective consciousness, had rejected its shaky alliance with the incipient Latvian government led by the leading Latvian politician Karlis Ulmanis, declared in Riga on November 18th, 1918, and had instead moved to

⁶⁴ Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs. *Latvia: The Challenges of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 14

⁶⁵ Leo Dribins, "Die Deutschbalten und die Idee vom nationallettischen Staat", in: *Nordost-Archiv*, vol. 5, issue 2 (1996), 277

⁶⁶ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 118

⁶⁷ Heinrihs Strods, "Drei Alternativen der Staatlichkeit Lettlands in den Jahren 1917-1920" in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, *Presentations from the Conference L'indépendance des Pays Baltes, Origines, Causes et Conséquences*, University of Paris - Val de Marne, 23-25 October, 1992 (Summer 1994), 178-180

install a Latvian puppet government headed by the Germanophile Latvian pastor Andrievs Niedra.⁶⁸

The *Landeswehr*'s acme came and went swiftly, lasting less than a month. After the defeat of the Latvian Bolsheviks, the struggle between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries transformed into one between the Baltic German forces and those of the Latvian national movement led by Karlis Ulmanis, both of them staunchly anti-communist, but only one of them nationalist in its aspirations. With the extension of considered support from the Entente, and with the indispensable aid of Estonian forces, the provisional government led by Karlis Ulmanis succeeded in defeating the *Landeswehr* in the battle of Cēsis in June of 1919. With this victory, the future of an independent Latvian national state was secured. Though the Baltic German *Landeswehr* had played an important role in the defeat of pro-Bolshevik forces, its subsequent opposition to Ulmanis' government would cast a long shadow over relations between Baltic Germans and Latvians during the interwar period.⁶⁹

The final episode of the fighting came in November of 1919, when a Russian "White" adventurer (and seemingly, a general scoundrel) by the name of Pavel Bermond-Avalov launched an attempt to conquer Riga from the east with a force comprised principally of former Imperial German units, deeply anti-Bolshevik in sentiment and organized into so-called *Freikorps*, leavened with ethnic Russian refugees.⁷⁰ The Bermondists' push on Riga was repelled by the forces of the provisional government in early November after a siege of several days, with the local Baltic

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Cf. Raimonds Cerūzis, "Die deutsche Minderheit in Riga und ihr Verhältnis zum Staat, 1918-1939: das Prinzip des korporativen Lebens", in: Eduard Mühle and Norbert Angermann, eds. *Riga im Prozess der Modernisierung: Studien zum Wandel einer Ostseemetropole im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2004), throughout.

⁷⁰ Charles L. Sullivan, "German Freecorps in the Baltic 1918-1919" in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Summer 1976), 127-128

Germans officially taking no part in the conflict.⁷¹ From November 11th, 1919 onward, Riga was a city at peace, and the process of rebuilding could finally begin in earnest.⁷²

1.3 Riga at the Start of the Interwar Period

The entire city was harmed enormously by the war, in nearly every way imaginable, but the conflicts of 1914-1919 proved especially devastating to the Baltic Germans, inflicting devastating losses of capital, population, and prestige.⁷³ The upheavals forever altered the social composition of the city, in terms of both class and ethnicity. Russian authorities had forbidden the publication of printed material in the German language within months of mobilization in 1914, and in 1915 Russian authorities had made the speaking of German in public punishable by law.⁷⁴ Bolshevik reprisals - ostensibly on the basis of class - against Baltic Germans had been particularly harsh, with hundreds of extralegal murders occurring from January-May 1919.⁷⁵ Because Baltic Germans constituted the wealthiest and most influential group of entrepreneurs and industrialists in the city before the war, the violence from 1914 onward did inestimable financial damage not only to individuals but to the wider Baltic German community of the city as well, which was to some extent reliant upon the largesse of a cadre of wealthy men. All of these developments weakened the political, economic, and demographic standing of the Baltic German community, in ways which it would prove highly difficult to repair.

⁷¹ Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik*, 27

⁷² Hatlie, 150

⁷³ The capital invested, in particular, was almost impossible to recover, as much of it had been invested in Russian banks and had been seized by the Bolsheviks, or was lost in the unfavorable conversion of former Imperial Russian rubles to Latvian ones in 1922.

⁷⁴ Paul Schiemann, *Zwischen zwei Zeitaltern: Erinnerungen 1903-1919* (Lüneburg: Verlag Nordland-Druck, 1979), 32. At the same time, the Imperial Russian authorities were removing Baltic German public officials from office and closing German-language schools. Baltic German men were being called up for service in the Russian army, where a high percentage served as officers. Denunciations of Baltic Germans for supposed treasonous activity were common, both at home and in the field, and as the eastern front moved closer and closer to Riga, the frequency of such denunciations increased apace.

⁷⁵ Jānis Siliņš, "Rīgas cietumi un lielnieku terors, 1919. gadajanvāris - maijs" in: *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2009 no. 3, 127-128

Other minority groups had fared poorly, too; Russian Riga had nearly disappeared over the course of the war, though it was to be reinvigorated by a surge of emigres from the east following the consolidation of Bolshevik power. The city's Jewish population experienced a similar ebb and flow, with increased migration to the new capital from other parts of the country after 1919, particularly from Latgale province, formerly within the Pale of Settlement.⁷⁶ Both groups also experienced almost irreparable losses of capital, in particular, which were only painstakingly made up through the 1920s.⁷⁷ Yet neither Russians nor Jews had ever exerted the same force on the very shape and form of Riga as had Baltic Germans; their groups' representation in wood and stone, their manifestations in the built environment, were meager compared to the latter group, which had financed, designed, and supervised the construction of the vast majority of the largest and most prominent structures and spaces in the city for centuries. Although all of the city's major ethnic groups were concerned in some way with questions of urban space and interethnic relations during the interwar period, the main struggles for control of the built environment would be waged between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians.

By 1930, with a population of 44,105, the former group constituted 11.5% of the population of Riga.⁷⁸ In 1913, they had formed 16.4% of the city's population, and in 1897, 25.5%.⁷⁹ Latvians made up 38.8% of Riga's population in 1913, but by 1930 they were at nearly 60%, with the rest comprised of ethnic minorities.⁸⁰ The Riga population made up over half of the total

⁷⁶ Bobe, "Riga", 244-245

⁷⁷ Helena Šimkuva, "Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940" in Detlef Henning, ed. *Nationale Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit: Neun Beiträge zum 16. Baltischen Seminar 2004* (Lüneburg: Verlag Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2009) 181-185

⁷⁸ Out of a total population of over 375,000. Third Population and Housing Census in Latvia in 1930 (Latvian and French)." *Latvijas Statistika*. Web. 23 March 2014.

⁷⁹ Michael F. Hamm, "Riga's 1913 City Election: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics" in: *Russian Review*, vol. 39, no. 4 (October 1980), 444

⁸⁰ M. Skujenieks, ed. *Trešā Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. gadā/Troisième Recensement de la population en Lettonie 1930* (Riga: 1931) 72

population of Baltic Germans in Latvia, whereas Baltic Germans comprised just over 4.5% of the national population. This relatively small group continued to wield economic and hence political influence out of proportion to their numbers, despite the hardships and setbacks of the World War One era.⁸¹ This contributed to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, in which the Baltic Germans at large were polemically characterized as “Barons,” “former overlords,” and the like, with such tropes drawing on the medieval and agricultural past, despite the largely bourgeois character of Baltic Germandom in the 20th century.⁸² Whether accurate or not, such characterizations found a powerful echo among the Latvian populace throughout the interwar period.

As the interwar era of Latvian independence opened, tensions between the Latvian majority and the country's ethnic minorities still ran high, despite the cessation of open hostilities and the (often strained) cooperation of all ethnic groups in the country's constitutional assembly. As 1919 turned to 1920, the provisional government became an increasingly permanent thing, with various ministries coalescing, taking on employees, and establishing permanent headquarters. The city government held new elections and resumed functioning, the school system revived, and in general, the bureaucratic - as well as the social, economic, and artistic - life of the city began to take on new life. The establishment of new institutions and the resumption of the activity of old ones alike called for the settling of newly pressing questions of space - its control, distribution, ownership, and in some cases, its new establishment. Places long imbued with historic significance suddenly found themselves anachronisms - as in the case of the House of the Knighthood, a body which had *de facto* ceased to exist during the years of war, and which was

⁸¹ Cerūzis, "Die deutsche Minderheit", 194

⁸² Ilgvars Butulis, "Die Deutschbalten in der lettischen Presse in den Jahren 1930-1934" in: *Nordost-Archiv Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte*, vol. 5 (1996), issue 2, 301-324

soon to be *de jure* abolished.⁸³ Others, drawing on traditions no less deep, continued to serve the institutions that they had for decades or centuries, but those institutions were now multiethnic in character, and invariably dominated by Latvians, who nonetheless strove to preserve a continuity of traditions that transcended ethnic identity. Other spaces fell between these extremes; some were created anew, others destroyed, some renamed, others reshaped. Riga in the interwar years was a city in flux, an older identity, organically developed over the centuries, cast from it by a new set of political circumstances, and struggling to reconcile itself to a new one one which acknowledged its role as the capital of an independent Latvian state, while simultaneously embracing multiethnicity and forging new modes of interethnic cooperation in a city which was barely half Latvian at the outset of the interwar period.⁸⁴

This dissertation tells the story of that transformation, related through the lens of urban space. In telling what was gained, it also tells what was lost; in showing how coexistence failed, it also shows how it might very likely have succeeded. Each space examined captures unique aspects of the shared existence, and the shared histories, of Riga's major ethnic groups, highlighting how the story of the city that was - as told in cornerstones and parapets, in statuary and the names of boulevards - influenced visions of what the city might be. Likewise, national activists' visions of a future Riga, of an ethnically homogenous capital with the purported spirit of the Latvian people stamped more plainly upon it, deeply influenced what ordinary people felt about the cityscape around them, helping to imbue edifices constructed decades or centuries prior with an ethnic valence that was immediate and real. Urban spaces were thus the sites not in, but rather over which the struggle to determine the fate of multiethnic coexistence in Riga was fought, and

⁸³ Cf. Chapter 1: Ethnic Reversal and Political Space

⁸⁴ In 1919, Riga was just 51.5% Latvian. Cf. Skujenieks, 63, 72

each such site - each *lieu-de-mémoire* - was invested with a particular history, narrative, ethnic character and set of associations which colored the nature of any debate over the control and use of it.⁸⁵ Society produces spaces, and spaces in turn help to produce society. At key turning points in history, spaces - even, and perhaps especially, venerated historical spaces - can play crucial roles in creating societies more tolerant and inclusive than their predecessors - or more intolerant and more exclusive. Both potentialities are captured in abundance in this study of urban space and interethnic relations in interwar Riga.

⁸⁵ For more on the concept of “sites of memory”, cf. Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire” in *Representations*, no. 26 *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-memory* (Spring 1989), along with much of the large body of literature engendered by this seminal article.

2.0 Ethnic Reversal and Political Space: *Saeima*, Castle, and City Hall

“I understand that Rigans and the citizens of northern Latvia don’t wish to think fondly of working together with the Germans of the Baltic. But life always moves more quickly than political combinations. Therefore what are needed are lasting attempts to end the difficult conditions in the country and to establish order once more...”⁸⁶

The provisional government led by Kārlis Ulmanis returned to Riga on July 8th 1919, though the attack on Riga that November by the “White” Russian adventurer Pavel Bermond-Avalov and his reactionary German *Freikorps* volunteers (see Introduction) meant that a full return to normalcy in urban life did not take place until the tail end of the year.⁸⁷ The decisive battles of 1919 had left the new Latvian state more or less secure by late autumn of the year, though fighting against the Red Army continued until August 1920 in the east, mostly in the easternmost province of Latgale.⁸⁸ The resumption of conditions more or less approximating peacetime, along with the presence of a stable government eager to establish its authority over the length and breadth of its territory, but most especially in the capital, meant that the process of re-establishing a durable political *modus vivendi* in Riga could begin in earnest.

The restructuring of political life in Riga took place on two distinctive levels, as is the case in any capital; both the local civic administration and the national government headquartered in Riga were dominated by the numerically dominant ethnic Latvians following the implementation of universal adult suffrage in 1919. Otherwise, though, the contrast between change and continuity

⁸⁶ From a speech given by Karlis Ulmanis, leader of the provisional government, upon his return to Riga in the summer of 1919. “Par pagaidu valdības stāvokli” *Baltijas Vēstnesis* July 9th 1919.

⁸⁷ *Baltijas Vēstnesis* 9.VII.1919 “Latvijas Pagaidu Valdības atgriešanās no Liepājas Rīgā”; for return to normalcy, cf. Wolfgang Wachtsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland 1918-1934, Band 3: Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934* (Köln, Comel Verlag, 1953) 258

⁸⁸ Hatlie 150

at these two levels is striking. The national government, embodied first in the constitutional assembly, later in the parliament or *Saeima*, was in essence a wholly new entity with few or no precursors. However, city government, though undergoing considerable changes, continued to function as recognizably the same entity, drawing legitimacy and cohesion from past experience. The relationships of the two government entities with both each other and the population around them manifested itself in the built environment and their dealings with it, most dramatically in the case of the *Saeima* and national government, more subtly and diffusely in the case of municipal government.

The new legislature was the most potent manifestation of the democratic principle of governance in the new state, a symbol of both the modernity and the sovereignty of the Latvian people (as opposed to the people of Latvia), and was typically presented in the press as an achievement of the Latvian people *ex nihilo*. Despite the presence of ethnic minority deputies in the legislature throughout its existence, the *Saeima* – and thus its representative space – largely became associated in the press with ethnic Latvian identity. On the other hand, the Latvian takeover of city government, though an ethnic coup of sorts, could not be represented in quite the same way, due both to political reasons stemming from the immediate circumstances, and due to decades of common experience in municipal government shared between the city's major ethnic groups.

The contrast between these two institutions – national and civic government – is deeply emblematic of the divide between the two competing conceptions of nationalism in interwar Latvia, one inclining towards an ethnic nationalism, the other towards a more inclusive civic nationalism. While the historiography of interwar Latvia has addressed the tension present between these two iterations of national belonging, the role played by Riga's municipal

government in fostering a civic identity transcending ethnicity has remained almost wholly unaddressed in the literature. The need to examine Riga city hall as well as the *Saeima* during the interwar period is underscored all the more by the extent to which the civic orientation of the former represents a marked counterpoint to the ethnic nationalism more characteristic of the latter.⁸⁹ The imperative is all the more urgent given that among both ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans, some of the most important politicians served both in city hall and at the national level, whether sequentially or simultaneously.⁹⁰ While research on national politics – and interethnic relations within that arena - has been far more robust, here too the effects of a muted but significant civic nationalism have often been underplayed or ignored.⁹¹

The immediate precursor to this work, Mark R. Hatlie's *Riga at War 1914-1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multiethnic Metropolis*, sets the stage for the starting point of this dissertation, but cannot provide an analogous precedent owing to the very nature of wartime governance; the elected city government, still controlled by Baltic Germans, was suspended by the summer of 1915, and with this suspension, the available political mechanisms for interethnic cooperation (or even for controlled antagonism) were eliminated, leaving the years 1915-1919 as

⁸⁹ Cf. Marina Germane, "Civic or Ethnic Nationalism? Two Competing Concepts in interwar Latvia" in: *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 18 issue 3, 2012. The existing historiography (almost entirely Latvian-language) pertaining to interwar Riga's municipal government is largely technical and factographic in nature, paying virtually no heed whatsoever to ethnicity or interethnic relations.

⁹⁰ Among them the Baltic German Paul Schiemann, who for a time led the Baltic German fractions in both the city parliament and in the *Saeima*, and the Latvian Hugo Celmiņš, who served both as prime minister and mayor of Riga.

⁹¹ The German-language historiography has tended either to concentrate on points of ethnic conflict without acknowledging cooperation as well, and the Latvian-language historiography has either suffered from the same faults, or often elided the subject of interethnic relations more or less entirely, despite the considerable influence of the minority bloc in the *Saeima*. More recent treatments have devoted far more attention to interethnic relations and cast them in a far more positive light, but typically these have consisted of general treatments rather than case studies, with a handful of exceptions. Cf. Michael Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen. Die parlamentarische Tätigkeit der deutschbaltischen Parteien in Lettland und Estland* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv, 1976) and Adolfs Šilde, *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1940. Valsts tapšana un suverēnā valsts* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1976); for a recent general treatment of interethnic relations, cf. Leo Dribins, *Mazākumtautības Latvijā. Vēsture un Tagadne* (Minority Ethnicities in Latvia: History and Present Day) (Riga: Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2007).

a blank space in the narrative of multiethnic politics begun during the industrial expansion of the city from the mid-19th century onwards.

Instead, the work of Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Dzīdra Ozoliņa serves as the historiographic basis for an examination of interethnic relations in Riga city politics during the interwar period (there being virtually no precedent for interethnic cooperation within electoral political structures at the “national” level prior to 1919).⁹² Von Hirschhausen’s study of interethnic relations in 19th-century Riga concludes, in its section on city politics, that the era witnessed a profound polarization, in which nationality largely came to define political behavior.⁹³ Yet this trend was not entirely uniform, but was countered by the phenomenon of Baltic German liberals, due to their ethnicity’s lack of demographic weight, being forced to rely on an anational approach that emphasized shared civic values and the communal welfare above narrow sectional interests.⁹⁴ It was precisely this political rhetoric, well-established and with considerable success (in terms of elections and public works alike), that provided Baltic Germans with a useful basis to move forward with in the interwar period, engaging sympathetic Latvian voters along with their own co-ethnicists. Ozoliņa’s studies of municipal politics in Riga during the late 19th century is less attuned to questions of interethnic relations, but, owing to the increasing ethnic polarization described by Hirschhausen, cannot but help to engage with them implicitly. Her work paints a convincing portrait of upper-middle-class Latvian politicians (the franchise in Imperial Russian municipal elections being severely restricted based on property ownership) forced to thread their

⁹² The regional *Zemstvos* convened after the Revolution of 1905 represent the only exception to this, but their authority and influence were limited in the extreme compared to that of the Baltic German nobility’s legislature, the *Landtag*, let alone to that of the Russian Governors-General of the Baltic Provinces. Cf. Cf. Jānis Bērziņš (2014). “Latviešu deputātu darbība provinciālpodomēs zemstes pašvaldības reformas projekta sagatavošanā (1905–1907)” in: *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 3, 57–92.

⁹³ Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 165-166

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195-197

way between adopting Latvian nationalist rhetorical postures on the one hand, and not alienating the socio-cultural sensibilities of their electorate on the other, which shared much in common with the Baltic German urban elite, with which it overlapped heavily in terms of occupational structure and social position.⁹⁵ This chapter builds on the basis of these two researchers' work to explore how municipal – and national – politics unfolded between Riga's major ethnic groups in the new, democratic era which dawned in 1919.

In seeking to provide a fuller picture of the interplay between ethnicity and politics in interwar Riga, this chapter revolves around three prominent political spaces in central Riga, using them as focal points to examine the relationship between politics and ethnicity in Latvia's capital city during the interwar period. The analysis is a bifurcated one, dealing separately with national and municipal politics, which each had their own distinct interethnic dynamic. Beginning with the *Saeima* building, then moving to Riga Castle, and finally to the seat of city government, this chapter highlights the tension between civic and ethno-national ideology at play in interwar Riga.

⁹⁵ Cf. Dzidra Ozoliņa, *Rīgas pilsētas tēvi un viņu komunālā politika: 1877-1913* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1976); published in Soviet Latvia, this is the only work on communal politics in Riga in the 19th century published between 1945 and 1991, and is impressively objective in its analysis, given the constraints under which the author must have labored (In English: *Riga's City Fathers and their Communal Politics: 1877-1913*). Ozoliņa also published some of the only writing in any language on municipal politics in interwar Riga, which has served as a useful factographic basis for this work (it is quite devoid of interethnic analysis, however); cf. Dzidra Ozoliņa (2001) "1918.–1934. gads Latvijas pilsētu pašvaldību dzīvē" *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 1, 84-108 (in English: "The years 1918-1934 in Public Life in the Cities of Latvia").

2.1 Democracy, Ethnicity and Political Space: The *Saeima* Building

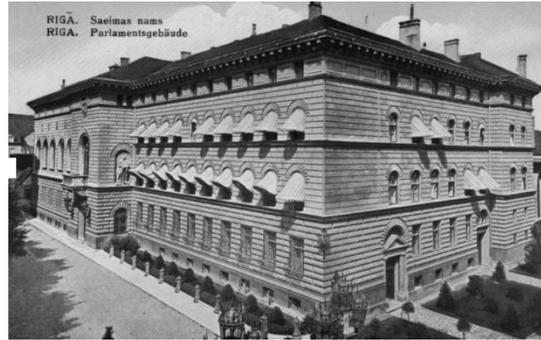


Figure 1. Saeima building, interwar period.

The legislative bodies of the new republic, first the Constituent Assembly and later the *Saeima*, quickly appropriated Riga's oldest and most prestigious legislative space, the former House of the Livonian Knighthood, for their needs. The Livonian Knighthood (*Ritterschaften* in German), comprised almost entirely of Baltic German noblemen, had functioned as the legislative body of the Imperial Baltic Province of Livonia since the area's annexation at the hands of Peter the Great in 1711.⁹⁶ The rich traditions and abundant symbols of this defunct, soon to be disbanded body sometimes produced moments of irony (more acute to some observers than to others) which also illustrated the difficulty of breaking from the past, even one which the ruling Latvian political class had built its identity in opposition to:

“[President] Čakste loved pathos. On that evening, in a lengthy speech, he emphasized the great significance of the church “in a time in which things have gone so far that one no longer distinguishes between mine and yours.” It was not long after the Latvian government had carried out the expropriation of the landed estates without compensation, and we sat in the House of the Knighthood at a table covered by a tablecloth decorated with the Livonian griffin. The coat of arms of the Livonian Knighthood likewise adorned the porcelain from which we ate.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Its counterparts in Courland and Estonia/Ösel (the Estonian island of Saaremaa) performed the same function in their respective provinces. Cf. Gert von Pistohlkors, *Baltische Länder*, 228-234

⁹⁷ Wilhelm von Rüdiger, *Aus dem letzten Kapitel deutsch-baltischer Geschichte in Lettland 1919-1945* (Gern bei Eggenfeld, Bayern, self-published, 1954), p.21; von Rüdiger recounts here his experience at a state dinner held in the *Saeima* building celebrating the ordainment of the country's two new bishops (one Latvian, one Baltic German) at the hands of their Swedish

This wry observation by Wilhelm von Rüdiger, a prominent Baltic German lawyer and church leader, in reference to a state dinner in 1922, captures much of the political dynamic of Latvia in the 1920s. A new state had inherited the symbolic trappings of an earlier era, and struggled with the contradictions their use presented. The young Republic, the long-term viability of which was widely derided abroad, needed to project its authority and legitimacy by whatever means possible, including by placing itself in the context of the region's political history. Yet casting the Republic of Latvia as a successor to previous sovereign powers in the region meant deploying the histories of states which had been largely inimical to ethnic Latvian interests in support of the new Latvian national state. This would ultimately entail a reshaping of the symbols of the past, and a concomitant re-interpretation of history, rather than their replacement with a wholly new set of symbols. These policies manifested themselves in Riga's built environment already in the 1920s before entering a more intensive phase in the second half of the 1930s.

By July of 1919, the struggle for an independent Latvia was essentially decided for the near future, though there would be one last storm to weather in the autumn of that year. The defeat of the *Landeswehr* near Cēsis meant a permanent end to Baltic German aspirations towards a Baltic state dominated by their ethnic group. Participation in the National Council became vastly more attractive than before, given that the only other realistic alternative was complete exclusion from political life in the new state.⁹⁸ The triumphant Latvians were, understandably enough, initially not inclined to so quickly forgive their former opponents and invite them into government, but pressure was exerted on the young government by the Entente to arrive as quickly as possible at a

counterpart Nathan Soederblom in 1922. The quote also highlights the two fault-lines of politics in interwar Latvia, socialism and ethnicity.

⁹⁸ Garleff, 24-25

workable *modus vivendi* with the country's national minorities, above all with the Baltic Germans.⁹⁹ This stemmed overwhelmingly from Western anxieties over the potential spread of Bolshevism in the region, likely enhanced by the fact that months of Latvian bourgeois inaction in the face of an initially popular Bolshevik regime stood in stark contrast to the successful campaign of the Baltic German *Landeswehr* in the spring of 1919 to repel Bolshevik forces from Courland and Riga.¹⁰⁰ Allied pressure, combined with the weighty practical demands of forming an effective government, resulted in partial political reconciliation between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians following a change in the leadership of the former.¹⁰¹

In July 1919, the two Latvian Baltic Germans who dominated their ethnic group's political life throughout the democratic period, Paul Schiemann (representing a liberal viewpoint) and Wilhelm Baron von Fircks (representing a conservative one), came to leading positions in the Baltic German National Committee, which since November 1918 had served as the unified organ representing all major Baltic German political parties.¹⁰² The liberal Schiemann, head of the Baltic German Democratic Party, was counterbalanced by the conservative Fircks, head of the Baltic German People's Party; both were able to ascend to a joint political leadership largely because their lack of participation in the intrigues of the previous year and more.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Although such pressures from the Entente eased or disappeared entirely as the bolshevik threat lessened, they were replaced in the early 1920s by similar demands from the newly-established League of Nations. Cf. Max Lasersons, "Das Verfassungsrecht Lettlands" in: *Jahrbuch des öffentlichen Rechts der Gegenwart. Bd. XII*, 1923/24, 263

¹⁰⁰ Leo Dribins and Ojārs Spārītis, *Vācieši Latvijā* (Rīga, Latvijas Universitātes filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, Etnisko pētījumu centrs, 2000) 64-65

¹⁰¹ Igors Vārpa, *Ceļš uz Latvijas valsti 1914-1922* (Rīga, Jumava, 2012), 301; Cf. Hiden p. 48, Garleff page 25 for role of Entente influence.

¹⁰² Dribins and Spārītis 66; for more on Firck's acceptability to Latvian circles despite being an aristocrat, cf. John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann 1876-1944* (London, Hurst and Company, 2004) 48-49. For the role of the National Committee (*National-Ausschuss*) cf. Garleff 20

¹⁰³ Hiden, 49; for party affiliation, cf. Garleff 56, 64

The change represented the transfer of leadership within Baltic Germandom from the nobility to the urban bourgeoisie, Fircks' (soon merely formal) title of nobility notwithstanding.¹⁰⁴ Though Fircks' role was not unimportant, the classically liberal Schiemann was the deciding voice in Baltic German politics, and he moved decisively towards cooperation with the new Latvian state, recognizing this as the best – indeed, the only – way to defend Baltic German interests.¹⁰⁵ Schiemann's conception of the state as guarantor of cultural autonomy for (loyal) ethnic minorities interfaced well with older Baltic German conceptions of their group's relationship to the tsarist state, helping his ideas find purchase in Baltic German society.¹⁰⁶ Paul Schiemann's political leadership among Latvian Baltic Germans and thinking on the problem of minority rights during the interwar period have attracted considerable scholarly attention, most notably in John Hiden's monograph *Paul Schiemann: Defender of Minorities 1876-1944* (2004), which re-assesses the impact of Schiemann's thinking on politics in both Latvia and wider interwar Europe.¹⁰⁷ Schiemann was a fairly important political thinker and activist on the behalf of ethnic minorities – not only of ethnic Germans - in interwar Europe, but his thought was largely forgotten in the 20th century, rendered invisible by the long, dark shadow of interethnic violence and genocide during the Second World War. Hiden's recent work on Schiemann underscores the contemporary potential of his politics – in Latvia and the wider Baltic region more than anywhere else – along with their progressive nature, highlighting their continuing relevance in the multiethnic societies of today.

¹⁰⁴ Dribins and Spārītis, 66

¹⁰⁵ Hiden p. 51; Cf. Paul Schiemann, *Rigasche Rundschau* July 28th 1919 "Mitarbeit" for one of many editorials by Schiemann espousing this viewpoint.

¹⁰⁶ For more on older Baltic German conceptions of a contractual relationship between their ethnic group as a corporation and the state power, cf. Anders Henriksson, *Vassals and Citizens: The Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia 1905-1914* (Marburg, Verlag Herder-Institut, 2009) throughout; cf. also the famous older text, foundational for Baltic German society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Carl Schirren's *Livländische Antwort an Herrn Juri Samarin* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1869), throughout, but especially Section V.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. John Hiden, *Paul Schiemann: Defender of Minorities 1876-1944* (London: Hurst and Company, 2004)

With Baltic German recognition of the legitimacy of the new Latvian state and promises of support came political plums: Ulmanis moved to appoint two Baltic Germans into the cabinet of the temporary government, Edwin Magnus as Justice Minister and Robert Erhard as Minister of Finance.¹⁰⁸ The Baltic German political leadership had a general policy of leaving favorable developments unmentioned in order to focus on unmet demands, in order to produce a better bargaining position.¹⁰⁹ Despite the resulting generally gloomy prognosis, Baron Fircks later admitted that the group's political position in the summer of 1919 had not been unfavorable, claiming that in addition to the two Baltic German ministers, the Minister of Trade and Industry, Jānis Seebergs, "though a born Latvian, cleaves to us, as does the State Comptroller [Mintz] ...".¹¹⁰

The Baltic German *Landeswehr* was withdrawn from among the ranks of Imperial German troops in late summer of 1919 and deployed alongside ethnic Latvian units fighting against the Red Army in the eastern province of Latgale.¹¹¹ Baron von Fircks himself visited the troops at the front during the so-called Bermondts Venture, urging them to remain at their posts despite any sympathies they might have for the enterprise.¹¹² Despite these steps, the defeat of the Bermondts left the Baltic German position considerably weakened, both because of the active participation of Baltic in the undertaking despite Firck's best efforts, and because the final removal of hostile troops from Courland left the Ulmanis government in a far more secure position, with less need to compromise with the national minorities.¹¹³ Facing increasing opposition from Latvian

¹⁰⁸ Dribins and Spārītis, 66

¹⁰⁹ Garleff, 8

¹¹⁰ As quoted in Garleff, p. 25. Seeberg was an important figure among Riga's economic elite and played a key role in bridging the gap between ethnic Latvian and Baltic German circles in the Riga Stock Exchange. Cf. Chapter 2: Finding Common Ground in Commerce. Paul Mintz, a respected doctor of jurisprudence, was the only Jew to serve in the upper echelons of Latvian government in the interwar period. He was a long-time member of the *Saeima* and worked closely with Paul Schiemann on legislation regarding the linguistic and cultural rights of the country's ethnic minorities throughout the democratic period.

¹¹¹ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934*, 99

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Garleff, 28

coalition partners, both Baltic German ministers had left office by March of 1920, though not without achieving progress in their respective fields.¹¹⁴ Several other Baltic Germans would hold ministerial positions throughout the 1920s, however, most notably as ministers of justice.¹¹⁵

Despite these setbacks, Baltic German participation and cooperation in the National Council, Constituent Assembly, and eventually in the parliament or *Saeima* continued uninterrupted from summer 1919 until 1934, producing valuable legislation, including early but important laws on citizenship and education in the new state.¹¹⁶ Recent contributions to the history of the interwar period have begun to explore and partially re-evaluate the role of Baltic Germans in interwar Latvian society.¹¹⁷ This has sometimes produced a greater emphasis on positive contributions and successful collaboration between Baltic Germans and Latvians, something long overshadowed in the historiography by the conflicts and mistrust between the two groups. However, the interplay between this collaborative work – in terms of both its perception and the opportunity for it - and the rise and ebb of interethnic animosity, especially in multiethnic Riga, has only begun to be fully explored.

Anti-German sentiment, always present in ethnic Latvian society, had been stirred up first by the Libau (Liepāja) Putsch of April 1919 and the ensuing conflict between the Baltic German Landeswehr and Latvian national forces, then again by the Bermondts Venture, despite Baltic German attempts to distance themselves from it.¹¹⁸ As the 1920s rolled on, these tensions slowly

¹¹⁴ Ibid. for the Baltic German E. Magnus's accomplishments in the Ministry of Justice.

¹¹⁵ Dribins and Spārītis, 69

¹¹⁶ Dribins and Spārītis, 66

¹¹⁷ Cf. Raimonds Cerūzis, *Vācu Faktors Latvijā 1918-1939: Politiskie un starpnacionālie Aspekti (The German Factor in Latvia 1918-1939: Political and International Aspects)* (Rīga: LU akadēmiskais apgads, 2004), and the volume by Dribins and Spārītis cited above, notable for its positive evaluation. Cerūzis, Dribins, and Inesis Feldmanis, among others, have also published related articles in Latvian and German too numerous to mention here, providing a basis for a re-evaluation of relations between ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans during the interwar period.

¹¹⁸ Leo Dribins, ed., *Mazākumtautības Latvijā: Vēsture un tagadne* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, 2007) 153; in a speech in the Constituent Assembly on December 9th, Schiemann hailed the victory over the Bermondtsists as a victory over the forces of imperialism.

subsided without ever entirely disappearing. By early 1920 national politics in the capital had settled into a tense but sustainable cooperation between the ethnic Latvian majority and the minorities in the Constituent Assembly. Resentment of Baltic German political maneuvering in the past year lingered in Riga as elsewhere in the country, and anti-Semitism was worsened by wide-ranging geographic shifts in the country's Jewish population as Jews from Daugavpils and Latgale, many with an incomplete command of Latvian, moved to Riga.¹¹⁹ These groups contrasted considerably with the city's former resident Jewish population, which was mostly German-aculturated, well-educated, well-off, and well-integrated.¹²⁰ The presence of refugees from Bolshevik Russia, along with the historical legacies of empire and the bitterness of the recent war, left the country's Russian minority in hardly better favor among ethnic Latvians.¹²¹

Yet all of these impulses were tempered by the democratic idealism which had swept Europe after the fall of a trinity of Empires in 1918. Latvia was to be a democracy along the Western model, and this meant according equal rights to the country's ethnic minorities. At this early and more optimistic stage of the development of the new Republic, little opposition was voiced to this notion, and democratic governance was overwhelmingly seen as the framework in which interethnic cooperation was to be pursued. While the presence of ethnic minorities is usually cited as a factor in weakening democratic institutions during the turn towards authoritarianism and fascism in the 1930s, the inverse side of the question – what role ethnic minorities deeply invested in the state can have in preserving democratic institutions – has rarely been asked. Although the ultimate turn in Latvia towards authoritarianism in the 1930s would seem to lump the country in

¹¹⁹ Mendel Bobe, "Four Hundred Years of the Jews in Latvia (A Historical Survey)" in Mendel Bobe, ed. *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, 1971) 54

¹²⁰ Max M. Laserson, "The Jewish Minorities in the Baltic Studies" in: *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 3 No. 3 (July 1941) 273-274; Leo Dribins, *Ebreji Latvijā* (Riga: Elpa, 2002), 68 – a dated account, but a first-hand one, as Laserson, a professor at the University of Latvia, was one of the leading citizen's of Riga's Jewish community.

¹²¹ "Das herrschende Volk und die Minoritäten," *Rigasche Rundschau* 2.XI.1921

with most of the continent, analysis of the integration of ethnic minorities via democratic structures during the country's parliamentary period – above all in multi-ethnic Riga – sheds light on aspects of the period's history too long overshadowed by the authoritarian years of the 1930s, in Latvia and across the continent.¹²² In terms of Riga's centrally-located, symbolically potent spaces, the pursuit of cooperation from the ethnic minorities also meant approaching the Latvianization of political space in the capital with tact, balancing the powerful demands of Latvian national activism with those of a more inclusive civic nationalism. The blending of these two principles can be seen in the strategies adopted to transform one of Riga's most potent symbols of Baltic German power into a symbol both of the people of Latvia, and of the Latvian people.



Figure 2. House of the Livonian Knighthood, early 20th century.

¹²² The interwar period has – understandably enough – usually been greatly overshadowed by the conflicts that bookend it, and the expansion of democracy across much of the continent in the 1920s by the rise of the authoritarian dictatorships of the 1930s. Some of the most prominent recent works in the historiography of 20th-century Europe reflect this concentration of attention in their very titles: Mark Mazower's acclaimed *Dark Continent: Europe's 20th Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000) and Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), for example.

With the return of Ulmanis' provisional government to Riga on July 8th, the permanent Latvianization of political space in the capital could begin. The need for a space in which the National Council, as the embodiment of the democratic principle in the new government, could conduct its session was urgent. Of the buildings suited to such a purpose, one stood out above all others in the Baltic metropolis. Completed in 1867 on the basis of a design submitted jointly by the Baltic German Robert Pflug and the Latvian Jānis Baumanis, the House of the Livonian Knighthood was built in the style of a Renaissance Florentine palace.¹²³ The building was centrally located at the edge of the old town, and one of the city's most imposing edifices – according to an article from 1922, it was one of the city's "most splendid" structures.¹²⁴ The building hosted the renewed sessions of the National Council in July of 1919, and those of all of the national legislative bodies following it until the end of the democratic period in Latvia in 1934, when it was converted to house the offices of the administrative services of the state president Kārlis Ulmanis.¹²⁵

Riga was a city in flux in late 1919 and early 1920, as various newly-created ministries and organs of government sought to establish themselves and consolidate authority in their various jurisdictions, securing headquarters for themselves in the capital.¹²⁶ At the same time, the provisional nature of the government left many political questions undetermined until the conclusion of the work of the Constituent Assembly, which until May of 1920 had not even begun its deliberations.¹²⁷ Most of the decisions regarding the long-term future of the former House of the Livonian Knighthood (*Haus der Livländischen Ritterschaft/Vidzemes Bruņniecības nams*) were reached during this chaotic period, largely without controversy and in a manner somewhat

¹²³ Inta Pujate, ed., *Saeimas Nams: The House of the Latvian Parliament* (Riga, Chancellery of the Republic of Latvia, 1998) 15

¹²⁴ "Saeimas Nams", *Nēdēļa* 11.XI.1922

¹²⁵ http://www.saeima.lv/Informacija/ekas_vesture_izdr.html

¹²⁶ Roberts Liepiņš (mayor of Riga) "Riga's achievements in 20 years", *Sējējs*, 1.XI.1938

¹²⁷ A. Šilde, *Latvijas Vēsture* (Stockholm, Daugava, 1976), 348

surprising in its respect for the property rights of the former owners, despite the widespread perception (especially in the countryside) of the Baltic German “barons” as enemies of the Latvian people.¹²⁸ Due largely to the collapse of order in the city in the past year, the country’s new leaders were able to execute a symbolic takeover of one of Riga’s most politically significant spaces largely without having to appear chauvinistic or to appropriate private property in a legally dubious manner.

By the spring of 1920, the remaining representatives of the Livonian Nobility were willing to acknowledge political reality. On April 5th, 1920, the remaining representatives convened in a special gathering of their now-defunct body, expressly permitted by the Latvian Ministry of the Interior, in the same hallowed halls which had hosted the assemblies of their ancestors for several generations.¹²⁹ In light of recent and more distant history, the fact that this meeting was not only permitted to take place but was allowed to be held in the House of the Nobility which now hosted the National Assembly was a sign of considerable generosity and good faith on the part of the nascent Latvian government. If the new Latvian authorities had hoped for any admission of wrongdoing or expression of contrition from the nobility in its defeat, they were likely disappointed by the proceedings, which, though not hostile to the new state, were apologetic in the extreme. The assembled body did acknowledge the legality of the proceedings through which it had been stripped of legislative powers, beginning with the reforms implemented in 1917, from which duly followed the formation of the National Assembly (*Lettländische Volksrat*).¹³⁰ This

¹²⁸ The title “baron” was typically applied to all of the Baltic German aristocracy, although in reality the group was rather more diverse in noble rank and title. For more information on the metonyms of Baltic Barons, cf. Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History*, 124, and Detlef Henning, “From Kangars to Rubiks. The Long Line of Traitors in the Historical Political Culture of Latvia” in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, *Special Issue: Foreign Rule and Collaboration in the Baltic Countries, 1860-1920: New Directions in Research* (Summer 2006), 183; the Latvian-language political discourse of the period as recorded in newspapers and magazines is rife with the use of this term, typically applied as a metonym for Baltic Germandom as a whole

¹²⁹ DSHI 530 LRA 87 (1920), page 1

¹³⁰ DSHI 530 LRA 87 (1920), page 2

admission alone, which acknowledged both the reduction of the *Ritterschaft* to a ceremonial body and the full legality of the new Latvian state, was probably sufficient to justify the decision on the part of the Ministry of the Interior to allow the meeting to take place, removing what might otherwise have been a juridical annoyance.

The address that immediately followed these acknowledgements, however, does much to illustrate the chasm in perception between ethnic Latvians and the Baltic German nobility which until recently had ruled over them. In the speech given that day, the degree to which the Baltic German nobility were out of touch with the needs, concerns, and perceptions of ethnic Latvians is starkly demonstrated. Blame for any and all of the country's ills is consistently attributed to the interference of the Imperial government in St. Petersburg and various social and economic injustices are either elided completely or grossly misrepresented:

“Has the *Landtag* always made proper use of these, its rights and duties? At this turning point in our history we must ask ourselves this question. We can affirm it proudly....the compulsory Russification of the country enacted in the last decades of the previous century, and the lack of understanding and the malevolence that we were met with by the Russian bureaucracy are to blame for it that all of these efforts came to naught.”¹³¹

Achievements in raising the general standard of living in the Baltic provinces to a level higher than that found in much of the rest of the Empire were credited to the foresighted policies of the *Landtag*, with no acknowledgement of the hard work and diligence of the overwhelmingly ethnic Latvian populace – acknowledgements of which are, in contrast, not at all lacking in the memoirs of urban bourgeois Baltic Germans who dwelt and worked alongside ethnic Latvians.¹³²

¹³¹ DSHI 530 LRA 87 (1920), page 2-5

¹³² *Ibid.*

In addition to this spirited, if quite subjective, defense of its past legislative record, the assembly of April 5th insisted also on its right to continue to participate in the public life of the country, envisaging a future role for itself as a private body of influential citizens. The newly convened Constituent Assembly (*satversmes sapulce*) of Latvia moved however to completely abolish the two historic noble corporations active on Latvian soil, that of Courland and that of Livonia. Though their political rights and privileges had already been stripped from them, these continued to exist *de jure* as organizations.¹³³ The question of abolition was thus largely a symbolic one in terms of political power, though important given the legacies of history ancient and recent, all brought to bear by one side or another in the debate in the Constitutional Assembly.¹³⁴ Baltic German opposition to the abolishment was spirited, but largely *pro forma*. Baron Fircks pointed out the arrangement arrived at in nearby Finland regarding its own noble corporations, and that as their current functions were confined to maintaining their genealogical rolls and administering the corporation's shared financial assets, their continued existence was by no means incompatible with democracy.¹³⁵ However, given the deep-seated historical animosity between the rural ethnic Latvian population and the Baltic German estate owners, the dissolution of the corporations was more or less a foregone conclusion, paving the way legally for the first steps of the wide-ranging agrarian reform of September 1920.¹³⁶ The Constituent Assembly approved a law abolishing the corporations on June 29, 1920, under which their property would be placed under the jurisdiction of the courts.¹³⁷

¹³³ "Lettland", *Libausche Zeitung* 28.II.1920

¹³⁴ "The Constituent Assembly", *Libausche Zeitung* 2.VII.1920

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ The dissolution of the Noble Corporations brought considerable amounts of land (that of fled nobles) under state control in of itself.

¹³⁷ *Valdības Vēstnesis* 1.VII.1920, 8.VII.1920 reproduces the text of this law in its exact form. Cf. also Wilhelm von Rüdiger, *Aus dem Letzten Kapitel deutschbaltischer Geschichte in Lettland* (Gern bei Eggenfelden/Bay, Germany: Self-published, 1954) 46.

The abolition of the noble corporations left practical questions regarding the disposition of their property, both that belonging to individual members (many of whom had fled the country permanently, and still others of which were guilty of treason against the new state) and that belonging to the corporation as a whole. The most obvious example of the latter was of course the building which by the summer of 1920 had become the most potent representative space for the new Latvian democracy, the former House of the Livonian Knighthood and new seat of its highest legislative. The building came under the control of the Latvian state following in the summer of 1919, and although there was little question that it would be put to use by the state for the immediate future, legal questions remained to be resolved regarding its ownership, ones only partially resolved by the abolition of the Livonian Knighthood in the summer of 1920.

The new Latvian state had benefited considerably from the benevolence of the Entente Powers, to a limited extent in terms of material aid and to a far greater extent in terms of diplomacy, especially vis-à-vis Germany, which maintained large numbers of troops in the region at the behest of the Western Allies, which feared any potential spread of communism in the region.¹³⁸ Ongoing fears in Paris, London, and Washington about the progress made by the Bolshevik cause in Russia meant that the maintenance of law and order in the new Latvian and Estonian states was of especial significance in the newly created states. Entente recognition of the administrative talents of the Baltic Germans – of which the young state stood in considerable need - contributed to an inclusive and legally diligent transfer of power in the region.¹³⁹ As well as illuminating the guiding principles behind Baltic German politics in Latvia 1919-1933, John Hiden's work on Paul Schiemann has also shown the considerable role of the Entente representatives in Latvia in

¹³⁸ Vārpa 298

¹³⁹ Hiden 48

fostering (sometimes forcing) cooperation between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians in 1919.¹⁴⁰ While the new state was undoubtedly mindful of the need to appease the desires of the powerful benefactors to which it looked for protection in the international arena, its leaders also recognized that the efforts of the ethnic minority communities towards stabilizing the government and economy were indispensable. This further contributed to the impulse to abide by recognized legal and social norms in shaping power relations in Latvia.¹⁴¹ In a speech given upon his return to Riga on July 8th 1919, Ulmanis urged his listeners to put past enmities aside, giving justifications for his government's close cooperation with the local Baltic Germans in building the new state and urging patience and restraint.¹⁴²

All of these considerations put pressure on the provisional government to remain within the bounds of established law as it acquired property and representational space for itself in the capital. Following the decision of the Riga district probate court to transfer of the various properties of the Livonian Knighthood into the control of the ministry of agriculture in 1920, a curatorship was created to meticulously catalogue, assess, and sell or lease the property (real and otherwise) according to the needs of the state.¹⁴³ The court appointed an inspector of the ministry of agriculture, Peteris Plostiņš, and his task was not an enviable one, given the destruction and chaos that nearly six years of warfare with successive occupations had wrought on Latvia.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Cf. also John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 67-68

¹⁴¹ Hiden 42

¹⁴² Ulmanis alluded to Baltic German services fighting the Bolsheviks as partial justification for the granting of three cabinet positions, and also pointed out the need for Baltic German expertise in the days ahead; on the other hand, he also counseled his listeners that the political combinations of the day would not always be necessary. "Par pagaidu valdības stāvokli", *Baltijas Vēstnesis* July 9th 1919.

¹⁴³ This was unconnected to the pending agrarian reform. LVVA 6504-1-182-33. The noble corporations of Livland and Kurland had each created a respective "*Gemeinnütziger Verband*" (common use association) in 1920 to serve as the legal inheritors of their property in the event of their dissolution, but these were only partly successful in that aim; much property ultimately reverted to the state, especially the larger urban buildings (including the house of the knighthood in Jelgāva). LVVA 214-1-222-2, 3, 37; Cf. von Rüdiger 44-48 for the Courland Knighthood.

¹⁴⁴ LVVA 6405-1-182-1

Pending a final resolution of the question of legal ownership of the space, Plostiņš, acting as administrator of the properties of the Knighthood (and in contact with at least some of its members), rented the properties in question to the Minister of Justice for the time being. To this end, a lease for five years was drafted between Plostiņš in his capacity as curator and the Minister in early 1921, approved by the district court of Riga as fully legal despite the unusual circumstances, and applied from October 1st, 1920.¹⁴⁵

At a rate of 75,000 Latvian rubles per year, the rent was far from merely symbolic, and the lease also included strict provisions barring any modifications to the interior or exterior of the property without the curator's approval.¹⁴⁶ The furniture inside the building, the great majority of it inherited from the former nobility, was also rented under similarly strict conditions of usage.¹⁴⁷ There is evidence that despite the courts' confirmation of the legality of the arrangement, Plostiņš had difficulty in enforcing the particulars of his lease, writing more than once to the economic commission and presidium of the Constituent Assembly with complaints regarding the non-payment of rent due on the building.¹⁴⁸ Be that as it may, the establishment of the curatorship and signing of the lease resolved the immediate legal difficulties of using the property, allowing it to continue to serve as the physical focal point of the democratic process in the fledgling Republic without controversy – domestic or international -regarding the nature of its acquisition. Thus officially stripped of its name, the former House of the Knighthood was ready for a symbolic transformation into a new kind of space, one reflective of the new political realities of the land: democracy and equality before the law, on the one hand, and the political dominance of ethnic

¹⁴⁵ LVVA 6405-1-182-5

¹⁴⁶ LVVA 6405-1-182-5

¹⁴⁷ LVVA 6405-1-182-1

¹⁴⁸ LVVA 6405-1-182-51

Latvians, on the other.¹⁴⁹ As it turned out, this transformation took the shape of a baptism by fire, quite literally.

On the evening of October 17th, 1921, well over a year into the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly which it housed, the roof and upper stories of the imposing legislative building at Jēkaba Street 11 were found in flame. Despite the speedy appearance of a fire-fighting brigade, it took several hours to bring the blaze under control.¹⁵⁰ Since the fire had erupted shortly before diplomatic guests from Finland, including members of its parliament, were slated to arrive for a reception, the house was quite full, resulting in pandemonium, but thankfully no loss of life. President Čakste and his family, who lived in official apartments in the building, were luckily absent from the premises that evening, fittingly enough attending a performance of the Latvian national poet Rainis' magnum opus for the stage "Fire and Night" in the nearby national opera hall.¹⁵¹

Although the building was saved from complete destruction, the damage was severe. The police, along with a special commission investigating the site in the following days, determined that the fire had most likely been the result of arson.¹⁵² A few arrests were made in the immediate aftermath of the blaze, but the ultimate culprit was not apprehended until February 1922. The building's doorman, Kārlis Putraims, was convicted on April 22nd, 1922 of having started the fire, allegedly due to his convictions as a communist, and was sentenced to fifteen years' hard labor.¹⁵³ The Finnish guests were to have taken part in a banquet on the premises that evening, and the doorman's intent was alleged to have been to burn the parliamentarians of both countries alive as

¹⁴⁹ These are both reflected in the state's founding document, in the creation of which no national minority representatives took place.

¹⁵⁰ "Fire in the Constituent Assembly Building" *Valdības Vēstnesis* 18.X.1921

¹⁵¹ "Yesterday's Fire Damage," *Rigasche Rundschau* 19.X.1921

¹⁵² "Latvia," *Rigasche Rundschau* 24.X.1921

¹⁵³ "The Verdict in the Arson Trial," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.IV.1922,

they feasted.¹⁵⁴ Although these diabolical plans may seem a bit overblown to the modern reader, the willingness to ascribe them to an alleged Bolshevik is indicative of the powerful role played by fears of communism in the public imaginary of the 1920s. Such fears were by no means unique to Riga or to Latvia in the 1920s, but instead were prevalent across East Central Europe. Throughout the region, the years of fighting 1914-1920 and the establishment of the new national states had produced social and economic upheaval. Anti-Bolshevik, bourgeois elites from the fledgling states' ethnic majority groups sat atop a new social order that was in many ways precarious, and deep-seated apprehensions about the appeal of leftism among the general population were widespread. In Latvia, shared fear of communism was the single strongest link binding the Latvian majority together in common political purpose with the Baltic German minority. During the 1920s, such considerations likely played a role in shaping interethnic relations not only in Riga, but in capitals across the region.



Figure 3. Assembly hall of the *Saeima* shortly after the fire.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ “Arson Trial” *Rigasche Rundschau* 21.IV.1922

¹⁵⁵ “The Renovated *Saeima* Building,” *Nedēļa* 11.XI.1922

Though the city's ethnic minorities seem to have been spared from direct accusations of having started the fire even before Putraims' arrest (or at least from ones made in the public sphere), the blaze only enhanced the interethnic tensions sharpened by the tumultuous political events of the past few years. The capital's largest Latvian-language daily, *Jaunākas Zinas* ("The Latest News", often the target of Baltic German accusations of rabble-rousing and populism) did not scruple to publish accounts of *Schadenfreude* on the part of Baltic Germans and Jews witnessing the blaze:

"The behavior of our "loyal" minorities during the fire was of great interest. It was as if the shadows of all the old knights and the leftover riff-raff of an oriental people appeared on the street as if with the wave of a magic wand, in order to amuse themselves in the glow of the fire. A number of Jews unabashedly jeered, "Look, the Latvian poor-house is burning!" [...] The behavior of several respectably dressed Germans, to whom it seemed as if a festive occasion was taking place, was also especially odd. A citizen asked another: "What then? You haven't come in a frock coat?" At the same spot a Jew hurried to snidely observe: "They'll make us pay for this firework yet". The Latvian public and soldiers, who were in the crowd in smaller numbers, found it difficult to listen to this commentary, but they comported themselves, as usual, very correctly."¹⁵⁶

This wry polemic indicates the extent to which the *Saeima* building, so recently a symbol of Baltic German aristocratic power, had already become a symbol of the new state in the minds of the ethnic Latvian population. In this narrative, it is the Latvians who are the victims, ones whose misfortune is not shared by the ethnic Others, which instead comport themselves with malicious glee at the setback. The reversal of roles in this narrative – regardless of its accuracy – is striking when one considers what sort of reaction an ethnic Latvian crowd would likely have greeted the same event with had it occurred a decade prior. A sense of ownership – literal and

¹⁵⁶ How our 'loyal' minorities behaved at the fire", *Libausche Zeitung* 24.X.1921 (translation and quotation of text from Latvian for benefit of Baltic German readership)

figurative – of Riga’s political space had already been transferred from one group to another in just a few short years. The cavalier attitude of the Baltic German citizen in the anecdote above conveys not only ambivalence towards the new state, but an outright desire for it to fail – hyperbolic, but reflective of public perception all the same. Baltic German skepticism about the ability of the Latvians to create a functioning state apparatus had been undeniably deep-seated, and despite cooperative efforts to stabilize the new state militarily, economically, and politically, the perception that Baltic Germans were not invested in the success of the Republic was widespread in the early 1920s, even as the group’s leaders actively campaigned against this stereotype.¹⁵⁷ Although attitudes towards the young republic seem to have changed quickly for the better among Baltic Germans, especially after Schiemann’s return and the modest legislative and political victories for their group in 1919, overcoming this perception remained one of the main tasks facing the group across the next ten years.

The chief obstacle in doing so was the close association of the entire ethnic group with the landed nobility in the interwar Latvian press, especially in the more nationalistic papers. The most obvious and potent example of this reduction of the ethnic group to its most resented aspect was the widespread use of the term “the black knight” (*melnais bruņinieks*), which functioned in nationalist discourse as a metonym for Baltic Germandom. Despite the wild anachronism of the term, it had potent currency in interwar society due to its echoing of the mythos of the popular *Lačplēsis* (The Bear-Slayer) Latvian national epic, in which the Latvian hero faces down a Baltic German “black knight” in the dramatic but inconclusive show-down at the epos’ finale.¹⁵⁸ The

¹⁵⁷ On the attitude of Baltic Germans towards new State, cf. Garleff 4, and Leo Dribins, “Die Deutschbalten und die Idee vom nationallettischen Staat (1918-1934) in: Nordost-Archiv, Band V 1996 (Heft 2) 280-283; for information on Schiemann’s struggles to combat these suspicions, cf. Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*, chapters 3-8 throughout.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Andrejs Pumpurs, *Lāčplēsis, latvju tautas varonis: tautas epus* (Rīga, B. Diriks Apgads, 1888)

massive influx of rural-born Latvian workers into Riga in the second half of the 19th century, combined with continuing familial and economic connections to the metropolis' Latvian-speaking hinterland, meant that the rural stereotype (a not wholly inaccurate one) of a privileged and greedy Baltic German landlord ruling over a hard-working, oppressed Latvian peasant retained widespread currency in interwar Riga.¹⁵⁹

Even in the metropolitan conditions of interwar Riga, the equation of all Baltic Germans with the much-hated aristocracy was typical, despite the fact the nobility comprised only a tiny fraction of the overall Baltic German population, especially in the urban centers. City-dwelling Baltic Germans were overwhelmingly employed in white-collar jobs in trade, industry, and the free professions, meaning that their own economic interests were by no means congruent with those of the landed aristocracy, before or after the First World War.¹⁶⁰ Although Baltic history is replete with examples of the region's (mostly German-speaking) towns and cities being pitted against the Livonian Order, the increasing cohesion of the rural and urban elements of Baltic German society after 1905, combined with the failure of most Baltic Germans to reject the politics of the aristocracy in 1918 and 1919, left the group as a whole vulnerable to being tarred with this "black" brush.¹⁶¹

More nationalist or populist Latvian-language papers were quick to seize upon any indications of sympathy among the country's Baltic German population for the former nobility. The symbolic power that resides the name of a building is perhaps even more potent than that in its exterior appearance, as a quarrel in the press over the name of the legislature's quarters in Old

¹⁵⁹ Wilhelm Lenz, *Die Entwicklung Rigas zur Großstadt* (Kitzingen am Main, Holzner-Verlag, 1954) 18

¹⁶⁰ For information on the economic structure of Baltic German society, cf. Erik von Sivers, „Volksgruppe und Berufsschichtung“ in *Baltische Monatsheft* 59. Jahrgang (1928), Heft 12, p. 702-711

¹⁶¹ For greater cohesion of Baltic German society after 1905, cf. Henrik Andersson's *Vassals and Citizens: The Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia, 1905-1914* (Verlag Herder-Institut, Marburg, 2009) 65-94

Riga goes to show. The ethnic Latvian public and press were eager to embrace the building's new role at the center of the process of shaping democracy in the new Republic; from the summer of 1920 on, the name "former House of the Knighthood" appears in the Latvian-language press less and less frequently, and typically only as an aside to less informed readers. Instead, the name "Constituent Assembly Building" (*satversmes sapulces nams*) appears most frequently, to be replaced with "Saeima building" (*Saeimas nams*) as the implementation of the new constitution approached. To national activists, what's in a name is often of great substance indeed, and the laggardly fashion in which the country's two major German-language newspapers had embraced the building's new label led to the accusation of disloyalty towards the state in the wake of the fire of 1921:

"The entire press is reporting and writing about the fire in the House of the Constituent Assembly, except for the *Rigasche Rundschau* and the *Libausche Zeitung*. But why not? Aren't their readers interested in a fire which has brought the state a loss of 20 million rubles? Certainly they are interested. These German papers have in fact composed very comprehensive reports on the fire in the *House of the Knights [Ritterhaus]*, apparently in the belief that the Constituent Assembly will only be abiding temporarily in the 'strong castle' of the German knighthood, and that a time will come when the representatives of the blue-blooded Balts' building will be returned to them. How does such disregard for the purpose of the building accord with the loyalty of the Germans? A small, but characteristic move [...] It seems that many a Junker's heart beat faster at the sight of the fire, but simultaneously a sigh escaped his breast, because the strong castle of the knighthood was destroyed by fire."¹⁶²

The negative image of the Baltic German nobility, and its transferability to the rest of the Baltic German population, had also been powerfully reinforced by recent events, since the putsch against Ulmanis' provisional government and the move against Latvian nationalist forces near

¹⁶² "How Our 'Loyal' Minorities Behaved at the Fire", *Libausche Zeitung* 24.X.1921

Cēsis had been political maneuvers organized principally, though not solely, by the nobility.¹⁶³ In reality, the Baltic German political leadership had not been united in its approval of these measures, and the *Landeswehr* campaign to retake Courland and Riga had been more motivated by anti-Bolshevik sentiment than by an anti-Latvian animus.¹⁶⁴ In the press and popular imagination of ethnic Latvian society, the fact that Baltic German support for the putsch had not been universal, and that conservative ethnic Latvian circles had both participated in the putsch and contributed forces to fight alongside the *Landeswehr* in its march on Riga typically went conveniently forgotten.¹⁶⁵ In great part this was due to the political complications of dealing with the recent history of ethnic Latvian involvement in the Red Army's seizure of Riga in January 1919, which had been welcomed by wide segments of the city's Latvian population.¹⁶⁶ Reducing the complexity of the political situation of 1919 to a polar model pitting one ethnic group against another (with Russians and Jews mostly being removed from the narrative) removed the need to confront a large part of the ethnic Latvian population about its potential complicity in the Bolshevik takeover of most of the country in the first half of that year.¹⁶⁷

At the same time that all Latvian parties to the right of the Social Democrats (the single largest party in both the city and the national government throughout the interwar period) embraced an amnesiac strategy towards dealing with certain elements of the recent past, they also missed few chances to portray present communist sympathies as more or less diabolical, and a

¹⁶³ Hiden 43-44, Garleff 20-24

¹⁶⁴ Eduard, Baron von Rosenberg, *Für Fortschritt und Deutschum in Lettland: Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen* (Riga, Salamandra, 1928) 77, and this volume (Rosenberg's memoirs) more generally for a sharply critical evaluation of Baltic German political strategy 1914-1928; cf. also Dribins and Spārītis 65 for Baltic German motivations in capturing Riga.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Chapter 4: The Topography of Memory for more on this theme.

¹⁶⁶ Hatlie, 11

¹⁶⁷ The establishment of a Soviet Republic of Latvia in January of 1919 had taken place at the hands of a cadre of overwhelmingly ethnic Latvian Bolsheviks supported by Moscow, backed by chiefly ethnic Latvian Red Army units and enjoying widespread ethnic Latvian support, making it difficult to cast the events of the first half of that year as a product of Russian interference. Cf. Hatlie 103-110; A. Drīzulis, *Rīga socialismā laikmetā 1917-1975 (Riga in the Age of Socialism 1917-1975)* (Riga: Zinātne, 1980) 35-38 (The section on Latvian Soviet Republic of 1919).

clear threat to independent Latvia. This was an approach which, in contrast to the simplified interpretation of events 1917-1919, helped provided common ground with the staunchly anti-communist minority blocs in city government and the *Saeima*.¹⁶⁸ Thus the eventual arrest, trial, and conviction of the communist-sympathizing doorman Putraims helped to dispel any interethnic tension elicited by the fire. This episode encapsulates much of the course of politics in Latvia 1918-1934, where anti-minority sentiment was often dampened or tempered by a much greater fear of communism and the political left. The genuine conditions of economic crisis in the early 1930s ultimately turned this calculus on its head, when the imperative to find a scapegoat for popular frustrations outweighed considerations of the ethnic minorities' usefulness as allies against socialism.

With the fire came the question of what sort of phoenix ought to arise from the ashes. Although after the fire the notion of building an entirely new parliament building, one in a more open and accessible location, was bandied about, it was quickly decided due to budget constraints to simply renovate the existing structure, with the Constituent Assembly meeting instead in Riga Castle for the time being.¹⁶⁹ The damage to the building was so extensive that a complete restoration of the main interior spaces was necessary, which also presented a chance to remove many of the reminders of the building's close historical association with the ethnic Other.

The state's most favored architect during the interwar period, Eižens Laube, was tasked with supervising the restoration efforts. His plans for the renovation of the building were quickly approved by Riga's Construction Board on December 1st, 1921.¹⁷⁰ These included practical as well

¹⁶⁸ It should be noted that the Jewish *Bund* caucused with the Latvian Social Democrats in city government.

¹⁶⁹ "Yesterday's Fire Damage," *Rigasche Rundschau* 19.X.1921; in "The Question of the Saeima Building," *Vienots Spēks* 12.XI.1921, it was suggested that the current building could serve as a national museum.

¹⁷⁰ Pujate, 25

as symbolic improvements. The hall was equipped with desks for each deputy of the new parliament, where they could write and store necessary papers, but simultaneously, the coats of arms of the various noble families which had previously adorned the walls of the hall, damaged in the fire, were removed, to be replaced by a large version of the state coat of arms in relief, the first two article of the constitution, and “the symbol of Latvia – the sun” (*saulīte*). Where before various portraits of (non-Latvian) historical figures such as the Grand Master of the Livonian Order Walter von Plettenberg, Peter the Great, and the Baltic German-Russian Field Marshall and Minister of War Barclay de Tolly had adorned the walls of the main hall, these had been mostly been left blank by Laube, with the intention that they would later be hung with paintings depicting scenes from the history of independent Latvia.¹⁷¹

The building’s exterior appearance changed only slightly, but in highly symbolic ways. The opportunity was taken to replace the engraved former crest of the Livonian Knighthood on the façade of the building with the new coat of arms adopted by the Latvian state (the latter in fact incorporating elements of the former in its design). The only other change was a swapping of statues; one of former master of the medieval Livonian Order Walter von Plettenberg had decorated the exterior of the building, but following the fire it was replaced in its niche by a statue of the Latvian folk-hero *Lačplēsis*.¹⁷² The symbolism of the switch was overt, all the more so since Lačplēsis’ arch-enemy, the German ‘Black Knight’ was a figure for whom the historical von Plettenberg could serve as a stand-in with little difficulty. Though the figure stood triumphant over a dragon, rather than a human adversary, the imagery was presented to the public as an allegory of

¹⁷¹ “Arson Trial,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 21.IV.1922

¹⁷² “The *Saeima* Building,” *Nēdēja* 11.XI.1922; literally, “the Bear-Render”

the Latvian people's victory over their "enslavers" – a barbed reference to Baltic Germans and Russians.¹⁷³

The dual characteristics of the period's political transformations, ethnic reversal and democratization, manifested themselves in the Saeima building's interior and exterior transformation. The replacement of decorative elements oriented towards the Livonian Knighthood and its past with ones invoking ethnic Latvian culture and history is clearly emblematic of the political ethnic reversal that unfolded in the Baltic provinces following 1919. The degree to which the second tendency, democratization, manifested itself in the built environment is less readily discernible, but traces are present nonetheless. Measures were taken to present the renovated building as a shift away from the elitism which had formerly characterized the space. Whereas in the old *Landtag* the barons had met "in all secrecy, only the noblemen amongst themselves, to decide the fate of the whole country", the newly restored hall featured viewing spaces for the public, helping to further establish the symbolic contrast between the building's past and its future.¹⁷⁴ On the wall behind the presidium hung a plaque with the text "the sovereign power of the Latvian state belongs to the people of Latvia", a formulation that included the country's ethnic minorities.¹⁷⁵

The contrast drawn here between the secrecy of the (Baltic German) past and the openness of the (Latvian) future fits in with stereotypes current in the interwar Latvian-language press, especially regarding architecture and architectural heritage.¹⁷⁶ In this common trope, Baltic German-ness is associated with the past, and thus with feudalism, a corporative social order,

¹⁷³ *Valdības Vēstnesis* 7.IX.1922

¹⁷⁴ "The Saeima Building" *Nēdēļa* 11.XI.1922

¹⁷⁵ "The Presidium of the Saeima," *Ilustrēts Žurnāls* 1.XII.1922

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Andreas Fülberth, "Die Modernisierung Rigas und ihre Rückwirkung auf das Klima zwischen Letten und Deutschen während der 1930er Jahre" in Michael Jaumann and Klaus Schenk, eds., *Erinnerungsmetropole Riga: Deutschsprachige Literatur- und Kulturvielfalt im Vergleich* (Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2010) 169-175

oligarchy, retrograde attitudes and ideological backwardness in general. Latvian-ness is associated with the future, modernity, progress, democracy and modern governance, etc. The deployment of this trope was of exceptionally wide utility to Latvian national activists in all manner of architectural questions, but in the case of the arson of October 1921, it allowed what the German-language *Rigasche Rundschau* proclaimed the next day as a “catastrophic fire” to be spun as a welcome chance to reshape urban political space. Not only did the extensive renovations transform the *Saeima* building from a Baltic German into a Latvian space in terms of ethnic symbology, heraldry, etc., they also allowed the government and press to present the new political space as a transformation away from outdated and repressive institution, to a modern, just, and democratic one. The guarantee of democratic rights and representation for all, regardless of ethnicity, was the new Republic’s only real mechanism for securing the loyalty of its non-Latvian population. Subsuming the overt Latvian nationalism responsible for bringing about the state within the ideology of democracy allowed the transformation of this prominent political space to work effectively on non-Latvians as well, making the obvious political triumph of the Latvian people more palatable to non-Latvians.

By the time the first *Saeima* convened on November 7, 1922, the population of Riga, ethnic Latvians and national minorities alike, seemed to have adjusted to the new role that the building would play in public life. The opening session of the *Saeima* was celebrated in lengthy pieces in a number of journals, some replete with photographic essays describing and depicting the new renovated spaces with pride.¹⁷⁷ The symbolic transformation of this space in the course of a few brief years, approximately 1919-1923, was as radical as that of any of Riga’s public spaces, undergoing an almost complete reversal in its ethnic valence. A long-standing symbol of the power

¹⁷⁷ “The Presidium of the *Saeima*,” *Ilustrēts Žurnāls* 1.XII.1922; “The *Saeima* Building” *Nēdēļa* 11.XI.1922

of the ancient landed nobility of the country, the “strong castle” (*feste Burg*) of the German knights had instead become a symbol of representative democracy, and of ethnic Latvian nationalism within that democratic framework.¹⁷⁸ These changes in the building’s political significance were manifested in the built environment following the fire of October 17, 1921. This helped to drive home the reality of the political transformation that this building lay at the heart of, not only to those members of the public who visited its halls on visits and tours, but also to a much larger public that read of these changes as they were enthusiastically reported in the press. The building’s renovation, politically facilitated by the fire, was in of itself of symbolic value to the new state, and that renovation and repurposing was undertaken by packaging and presenting the triumph of Latvian nationalism together with a more inclusive image of democracy. After the renovations, the retention of a much older building already laden with historical significance could be presented much less problematically, allowing the state to highlight both the political victory over a historical foe and the contrast between the politics of the past and the present. The transformation of the House of the Livonian Knighthood into the home of the Saeima was the most powerful representation in Riga’s built environment of the ethnic Latvian victory over their nation’s perceived historical arch-enemy, the “foreign” Baltic German knighthood as it existed in the early 20th century.

¹⁷⁸ The phrase is drawn from the hymn “Our God is a Strong Castle”, an apparent favorite of the Riga Baltic German community, to judge from the frequency with which it is mentioned in Baltic German memoirs.

2.2 Sovereign Power and Political Space: Riga Castle



Figure 4. Riga Castle, postcard, watercolor, 1930s.

“I feel a deep joy, that today, here in Riga castle, I can congratulate you, the representatives of those states which have recently recognized Latvia, in this hall, which previously was called the imperial hall, and in which, while this strong castle was still a symbol of the ruling power, everything connected with the fate of this land acquired its official confirmation.”¹⁷⁹

This quote, from a speech given by Kārlis Ulmanis in his capacity as Prime Minister following the international recognition of Latvia by Britain, France, and other Entente powers at the end of January 1921, indicates the symbolic significance of Riga Castle to the early Latvian state, a significance which only grew as time went on. In part due to its highly visible position at the riverbank, in part due to its size and history, Riga Castle was and is one of the city’s most prominent sovereign spaces.¹⁸⁰ The historical narrative and mythos surrounding the castle placed it at the center of interwar Latvian society’s understanding of their ethnic group’s history, giving its symbolic Latvianization particular importance in representing the new state as a victorious and powerful entity.

¹⁷⁹ *Latvijas Sargs* February 11th 1921

¹⁸⁰ The definition of sovereign space used here is drawn (and adapted) from Spiro Kostof’s *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History* (Boston: Little Brown, 1992), where Kostof describes the function and symbolic importance of what he terms “sovereign districts” (in the case of Riga, more diffused sites, though still concentrated in the city center) in urban space. Cf. pages 74-81.

Even prior to its official designation as the residence of the state president in 1922, the castle had already become a symbol of the power of the sovereign Latvian state – a role well in line with that it had played both as residence of the Imperial Russian Governor-Generals, first of all three Baltic Provinces, later only of Livonia.¹⁸¹ Before the incorporation of the Baltic provinces into the Russian Empire, Riga castle had served as an administrative and military center for the previous Swedish and Polish ruling powers, and prior to that for the German Livonian Order, which had first raised the structure in 1330.¹⁸² Thus the castle's long history as a symbol of sovereign power in the region made it not just a useful, but indeed a necessary space for the new Latvian state to control and deploy on a symbolic level.



Figure 5. Riga Castle in the 1920s.

The role played by Riga castle as the site representing the sovereignty of the new state was an important one in rituals of legitimation, as seen above. Even nationalistic publications like the newspaper *Latvijas Sargs* (*Defender of Latvia*) could deploy Riga's multi-ethnic history to help

¹⁸¹ From 1801 onwards, the governor-generalships of all three Baltic provinces (Estonia, Livonia, Courland) had been combined into one office with its seat in Riga. In 1876, the administration of the three provinces was divided once more, with Riga castle continuing to serve as the seat of the Governor-General of Livonia. Erik Amburger, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 387-388.

¹⁸² Māra Caune, *Rīgas Pils senā un mainīgā* (Rīga, Jumava 2004) 197-201

confer legitimacy on the new state when it suited their ends. A procession bearing the flags of the city's ancient guilds to the castle, where they were dipped low before representatives of the new government in a ritual unaltered since medieval times, met with something even approaching gratitude from the typically anti-minority paper:

“If on Thursday the principal participants in the celebratory demonstrations [following international recognition] were the army and the youth, the new and Latvian Riga, so on Sunday the old and German Riga did so...this circumstance lends great significance to the demonstration... On Sunday, six hundred years of Riga's history set off to greet the new age, and old Riga confessed itself once and for all and *de jure* as the capital of the new state of Latvia.”¹⁸³

The newspaper took care to note that this ritual had been performed in offering fealty successively to German, Polish, Swedish, and Russian rulers. Rhetorically situating the Republic of Latvia as the last item in this series implicitly confirmed further legitimacy on it, the kind of legitimacy that only history and historical precedent can bestow. Latvian conceptions of their ethnic group's history from at least the mid-19th century onward almost invariably revolved around the idea that their people's normal growth and development had been tragically interrupted by the arrival of medieval German crusaders around the year 1200.¹⁸⁴ These foreign invaders had conquered and enslaved (enserfed) the Latvian people, and the main task facing modern Latvians was to complete the reversal of this act and to restore ethnic Latvians to mastery over life in their own country. No physical space could be more emblematic of that reversal and restoration than Riga Castle.

¹⁸³ *Latvijas Sargs* 30.I.1921

¹⁸⁴ Cf., for instance: A. Pommers, *Latvijas Vēsture: Vidusskolas kurss* (Riga, Valters un Rapa, 1930) – a volume intended for high school students that explicitly makes this claim in its introduction. Other works of history published during the interwar period – especially during the 1930s – express this viewpoint implicitly, in part by emphasizing new archaeological findings in an attempt to emphasize the high degree of cultural sophistication attained by the local tribes – sometimes erroneously referred to as Latvians, in a projection of nationality backwards in time – before the arrival of German crusaders.

The castle's symbolic weight, though derived largely from medieval history, was only compounded and enhanced by the role that the castle had played in the centuries of Tsarist rule, when it had served as the official residence and seat of power of the Governor-Generals.¹⁸⁵ The continuity was overt. In the minds of nationalists, the military origins of the building drove home the nature of the relationship between Latvians and the country's Baltic Germans and Russians, one of antagonism, conflict, and conquest, rather than of voluntary mutual association or constructive cooperation.¹⁸⁶

By the 20th century, though, Baltic German views of the castle were not necessarily diametrically opposed to Latvian ones. The castle had passed out of the direct control of the Livonian Order already in the 17th century, serving as an administrative center for governments based in Warsaw, Stockholm, and St. Petersburg. Thus, for generations of Baltic Germans prior to Latvian independence, the castle had also served as a symbol of their homeland's incorporation into larger political entities dominated by non-Latvians. Whereas the rhetoric surrounding the castle in the ethnic Latvian press was typically intensely concerned with history and historical processes, Baltic German treatments of the space tended to focus much more exclusively on art and architectural history and the restoration of the space to its historical form – a tendency at least partly explained by the impulse to emphasize their own ethnic group's role in the region's history.

In both of the quotes provided above, the invocation of the past in order to confirm further legitimacy on the contemporary political order is overt, while at the same time the contrast being drawn between the castle's past and present ethnic valence is crucial. Just as the castle's transfer from German, to Polish, to Swedish, to Russian control each marked the beginning of an important

¹⁸⁵ Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā*, 200

¹⁸⁶ Fricis Balodis, ed., *Rīgas pils: Latvijas Valsts Prezidenta Mītne* (Rīga, Pieminekļu valdes un valsts papīru spiestuves un naudas kaltuves izdevums, 1938) i-ii

new epoch in the region's history, Latvian control of the castle also marked the dawn of a new age, fundamentally distinct from those preceding it.¹⁸⁷ By making the castle – far more so than the *Saeima* building, which was rather a symbol of the *demos* – into a metonym for the state, leading ethnic Latvian politicians also obligated themselves to repair, restore, redecorate, and refurbish the building in fitting style. The history represented by the castle, and embedding present events into the narrative framework it provided, was important for a young Latvian state still actively seeking to legitimate itself in the eyes of its population and of the wider world.

The new government received the building in exceedingly poor shape, with considerable wartime damage (worsened further by fire taken that November during the Bermondts Venture). The Baltic German *Landeswehr* had taken control of the building for a few brief months that summer, but evacuated the premises following the conclusion of the Peace of Stralsund on July 3rd, 1919, which ended hostilities between the *Landeswehr* and Latvian provisional government.¹⁸⁸ When the state took over the premises in the summer of 1919, the roof leaked, many windows were shattered, and the plumbing was non-functional.¹⁸⁹ In July, the daily *Jaunākās Ziņas* described the condition of the castle:

“Now, after the departure of the Germans, many of the rooms find themselves in sad shape, and show the signs of destruction. The holy images and other church objects have been taken from the churches, two large and three chandeliers were taken from the rooms of the Tsar. The fabric and leather is ripped on the soft upholstered furniture, the tables stand bare. Some of the furniture is broken, some of it burned. Some mirrors are broken, some of the cars have been taken to Jelgāva[...] The rooms of the lower floor of the castle were converted to horse stalls. All of the castle's rooms are littered with straw, everywhere lies trash and filth, therefore it will take a long time to clean the castle and bring it into proper order.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ In Latvian and German, the terms *zeme* and *Land* are used, which lack any exact equivalent in modern English, although the archaic use of “land” (in the sense of “country, realm, region”) in English corresponds quite closely.

¹⁸⁸ Māra Caune, *Rīgas Pils* (Rīga, Zinātne, 2001) 115

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 120

¹⁹⁰ *Jaunākās Ziņas* 15.VII.1919

A memorandum from July of 1921 confirmed the sad state that the building as a whole was in after seven years of neglect; though the building remained overall structurally intact, the list of suggested repair work was extensive. Dozens of spots on the exterior walls needed new masonry or stucco, the roofs were riddled with holes, new gutters and drainage pipes were needed, new walkways, pavement, and so in an exhaustive list of necessary interior and exterior repairs.¹⁹¹ Regarding the need for an improvement of the castle and its grounds, opinions voiced in the *Rigasche Rundschau* seem to have been in agreement with the Latvian drive to modernize and beautify; one editorial from the early 1920s described “our honorable castle” as “disfigured by architectural growths” (referring to various wings and annexes on the Daugava side of the original building), declaring that “[board for the] preservation of historical monuments must intervene”.¹⁹² Despite these problems, the space was quickly given over to the use of a number of state agencies and institutions, as well as for the reception and accreditation of foreign diplomats.¹⁹³ These included the state typography, mainly responsible for producing the governmental flyer *Valdības Vēstnesis*, the state chancellery, the office of the state comptroller, the state telegraph agency, the state museums of history and of art, the secretary of the state president, and the state archive, among others.

Shortly following the first repairs in late 1921, the building was officially designated as the residence and office of the state president (at that time, Jānis Čakste) in 1922, though only a portion of its spacious quarters (most of the northern wing) were to be devoted to this purpose.¹⁹⁴ For decades, the castle had contained quarters held in waiting only for the eventual visits of the

¹⁹¹ LVVA 1301-1-1014 page 15

¹⁹² “Along the Daugava,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 14.VII.1923

¹⁹³ Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā* 200, *Rīgas pils* 116

¹⁹⁴ Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā* 200

Tsars, and otherwise unused. Čakste chose to use the former office (cabinet) of the Tsar as his personal office, a decision rich in symbolism. The room was later turned into a conference chamber, dubbed the „Room of the Old Rulers”, decorated with historical furniture from the residence of the Dukes of Courland and registered with the monuments board. “Imaginative” paintings were commissioned from the artist L. Līberts of Latvian leaders of the 13th century (when crusaders from Western Europe had first arrived), indicating an urge to project the ethnically Latvian medieval past onto a medieval structure.¹⁹⁵ Quasi-mythological chieftains such as Viesturs, purported to have rallied the Baltic tribes against the German invaders, were depicted, along with their opponents and early bishops of the territory.¹⁹⁶

Čakste wished to transform the hall adjoining the cabinet into a space representing Latvian folk culture. A competition was held for the interior decoration of the hall in 1923, with the artist Ansis Cirulis emerging as the victor with his design, tellingly entitled “The Rebirth”. The work was begun under the artist’s supervision six years later, already two years after Čakste’s death in 1927. Cirulis painted the ceiling himself in a tableau featuring the ancient Latvian heathen pantheon and a variety of figures arrayed in traditional folk costume. Not just the paintings, but the carpets and furniture of the hall were also designed by Cirulis and contained common patterns and symbols found in Latvian folk art, effectively re-inventing the hall as a fundamentally Latvian space. Further Latvianization of interior spaces took place during the period of democratic rule as well. Prior to the visit of the Swedish King Gustav V in 1929, the so-called „Red Hall” was renovated and renamed as the “Hall of Heraldry”. Later the artist J. Kuga painted three ceiling paintings: Riga (the capital), Jelgāva (former seat of the Duchy of Courland and site of the lavish

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 211

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Rundale Palace), and St. John's Night (Latvian *Jāņi*) –the latter being the most important holiday in Latvian folk culture.¹⁹⁷

Various repair works and improvement projects continued throughout the period of democratic rule, sometimes charged with ethnic symbolism, sometimes ethnically neutral in aesthetic terms. This first period of renovations in the castle was largely focused on a transformation –i.e., the Latvianization - of the interior spaces. The Baltic German response in the press to most of this work was muted, characterized by matter-of-fact reporting that conveyed neither approval nor disapproval. The phrasing “our castle” crops up from time to time, but the sense is clearly that of “we Rigans” rather than “we Germans”. In comparison, the renewed renovations launched in the late 1930s under the Ulmanis dictatorship attracted greater interest, from Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians alike.



Figure 6. Riga Castle from the air, 1930s.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Jēlgava was historically the country's second most important center of political power, having been the seat of the Dukes of Courland for some centuries.

The intensified ethnic nationalism characterizing the Ulmanis regime of 1934-1940 manifested itself also in Riga castle. On May 15th, 1934, then Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis, the foremost politician in Latvia since the declaration of independence in November 1918, initiated a coup d'etat with the backing of the army and the quick acquiescence of the organs of state.¹⁹⁸ Ulmanis presented his actions, both to Latvia and to the outside world, as necessary to head off an impending seizure of power from either the political left (the Social Democrats and Communists) or from the far-right, fascistic paramilitary organizations (the *Perkonkrusts* or Thundercross movement most specifically).¹⁹⁹ Ulmanis portrayed himself as a nationalist centrist, a man of reason with respect for the rule of law and eager to avoid the worst excesses of the groups mentioned above.²⁰⁰ In comparison to contemporary dictatorships in Europe, Ulmanis' rule was mild; there were no executions in the coup d'etat, and though political opponents were briefly imprisoned, the vast majority were quickly released, and though Ulmanis moved to curtail the legally enshrined rights of the country's ethnic minorities (particularly to educational autonomy), he also sought to curtail the worst impulses of Latvian nationalists towards the country's Baltic German, Russians, and Jews.²⁰¹ Nonetheless, the installation of the Ulmanis regime meant the beginning of policies directed toward creating a "Latvia for the Latvians", a slogan which Ulmanis embraced, using Latvian resentment towards the country's ethnic minorities – above all, towards the Baltic Germans – to buoy his own popularity.²⁰² It was under Ulmanis that the most sweeping transformations to inner Riga's urban spaces would occur, seizing control of Baltic German-held

¹⁹⁸ Plakans ; for a more detailed investigation of the coup d'etat, cf. Valters Ščerbinskis and Ēriks Jēkabsons, eds.,

1.0 *Apvērsums: 1934. gada 15. maija notikumi avotos un pētījumos (Coup d'etat: The Events of the 15th of May 1934 in Historical Sources and Research)* (Rīga: Latvijas nacionālais arhīvs, 2012), throughout.

¹⁹⁹ Valters Ščerbinskis, "The Coup d'etat of 15 May 1934: Causes of the Coup, its Course and Consequences" in Ščerbinskis and Jēkabsons, 569 (see footnote 109).

²⁰⁰ Daina Bleiere, *History of Latvia: The 20th Century* (Rīga: Jumava, 2006), 168-177

²⁰¹ Leo Dribins, *Nacionālais jautājums Latvijā 1850-1940: historiogrāfisks apskats* (Rīga: Macības apgads, 1997) 183-186

²⁰² *Ibid.*

spaces and initiating new construction projects alike, the latter invariably presented as part of a modernization program.²⁰³ The ancient castle of Riga figured into the latter campaign, but as a sort of hybrid project, in which innovation and renewal was balanced by respect for tradition and the aesthetics of a bygone era.

In June of 1938, the 20th year of Latvian independence, the secretary of state president Ulmanis J. Grandaus held a press conference stating the government's intention to conduct extensive improvements on the castle:

“The individual parts of the castle were built in different times, and each epoch has left its traces in the form of the main building or in the wings. It is to be noted that they were constructed by men of foreign lands for their own needs, needs which in no way were in agreement with the interests of the Latvian people and are far from the purposes which the castle now serves... We live however in an age of new building methods, and this age cannot pass over the old castle, since at least a portion of it is to bear the name of palace of the state president. Finally, after long years since our entry into the castle, the time has come in which the often before raised questions will be happily resolved, so that the castle can also follow into the new age”²⁰⁴

Despite the harshness in tone, the implication was not that the castle as such was fundamentally unsuitable to state purposes, but rather that it had not been well managed or preserved in the past, with the task falling to the purportedly forward-thinking Ulmanis regime to usher this architectonic symbol of power into the new age along with the rest of the nation. The contrast here was simultaneously with both the previous democratic government – widely

²⁰³ For more on this subject, see Deniss Hanovs and Valdis Tēraudkalns, *Laiks, Telpa, Vadonis: autoritārisma kultūra Latvijā, 1934-1940* (Rīga : Zinātne, 2012) – entitled, *Time, Space, Leader: The Culture of Authoritarianism in Latvia 1934-1940*, this work also deals with the transformation of urban space in Riga during the interwar period, although it focuses almost exclusively on new construction projects initiated by the Ulmanis regime, coming to similar conclusions as to the regime's ideological necessity of stamping Riga with a distinctively Latvian imprimatur, and serving as a useful complement to this work, which focuses principally on the period of democratic rule 1919-1934.

²⁰⁴ *Rigasche Rundschau* July 1st 1938

perceived as ineffective – and with the “foreign” rulers who had preceded it.²⁰⁵ Their mutual failure to adapt the castle to modern needs was now to be corrected by the Ulmanis regime. Thus, just as the democratic government 1918-1934 had deployed the castle as a symbol of state power, so too did Ulmanis redeploy the space once more, in spite of an apparent personal antipathy for the building – he only began using its office space in 1936, and lived in the castle for less than a year, starting in November 1939.²⁰⁶ The castle was further emphasized as a symbol of the nation, but also of the Ulmanis regime and its ability to simultaneously steward Latvia’s historical heritage and modernize the country.

The planned repairs were extensive, involving a new banquet hall and the addition of a balcony on the side of the castle facing a public square, assumably from which Ulmanis could give speeches. The state’s favored architect of the interwar period, the venerable Professor Eižens Laube, was tasked with overseeing all of the improvements. He designed the new hall, intended for 700-800 people, monumental in its proportions and ethnically Latvian in decoration. Fourteen never-finished paintings by well-known artists were to adorn the ceiling, showing the most important historical events in the history of Latvia. The end wall was to be decorated with „a large painting depicting a patriotic theme”. A number of unsightly, ramshackle additions on the side of the castle facing the river, referred to as “architectural tumors [which] disfigure our honorable castle” by a critical Baltic German fifteen years earlier, were removed in an effort to clarify the building’s silhouette and restore it to something closer to its original state.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Plakans 133; for more on the crisis of democracy in Latvia, cf. Ieva Zake, “Latvian Nationalist Intellectuals and the Crisis of Democracy in the Inter-war Period” in *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 33, no. 1 (March 2005).

²⁰⁶ Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā*, 119

²⁰⁷ “Along the Daugava,” *Rīgasche Rundschau* 14.VII.1923

In addition to these efforts at restoration, a major addition was implemented as well, the so-called Three-Star Tower.²⁰⁸ The symbolic significance of the building is made clear in the speech delivered at the new tower (still under construction) by Ulmanis on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the declaration of Latvian Independence: “Many have built up Riga Castle in the most various of times, and today we for our part have also added a piece to Riga Castle, symbolizing the fact that we are now masters in our homeland.”²⁰⁹ Ulmanis went on to express his hopes that the tower would endure as a testament to the works and labours of the current generation of Latvians, situating the Latvian state (and his regime) firmly in the series of powers which had ruled over, expanded, and improved upon the physical space of Riga Castle. Eižens Laube, the Latvian architect responsible for the design of the new tower, was attuned to the prevailing sensibilities regarding the preservation of historic monuments, and had designed a tower in harmony with the rest of the castle’s aesthetic, with the National Monuments Board having approved his design in 1937.²¹⁰

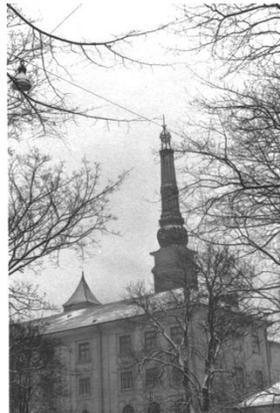


Figure 7. Three-Star Tower, circa 1938.

²⁰⁸ “Festivities in Riga Castle,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 19.XI.1938

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ “Reconstruction in the Castle,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 1.VII.1938

All of the refurbishment and redecorations mentioned above, and more – too many to enumerate here - were manifestations of an impulse to thoroughly Latvianize the castle, and in doing so to ethno-symbolically “conquer” the space. This theme of ethnic conquest and triumph pervades the interwar period’s most comprehensive literary guide to the castle in Latvian, published in 1938 to accompany the 20th anniversary of statehood and infused with the nationalistic and propagandistic ethos of the era:

“...Our state’s highest seat of power, and along with it, a holy site of our patriotism: Here the Latvian, and only he, is today lord and master, and it is to here that during state celebrations and on days of national achievement the people [*tauta*] joyously directs its demonstrations, confirming their faith in the state and its leader.”²¹¹

While the ebullient tone smacks of compliance with the authoritarian state’s nationalist ideology, the radical transformation of the symbolic value of the castle over the twenty years 1918-1938 is nonetheless remarkable, almost startling: from a symbol of foreign domination, Riga castle has instead become “a holy site of [Latvian] patriotism”. The association between the castle and sovereign power in Latvia is more palpable than ever, but now it is accompanied by authoritarian and fascistic overtones.

In this work, which is largely a re-packaging, and a partial distortion, of the castle’s history to Latvian readers, an intrinsic historical connection between the Latvian people and the castle is referenced, with the author noting that the castle is mentioned in Latvian folk songs as “a mighty and kingly building, which the Latvian people has always wanted to acquire for itself, to rule over and [in which] to see better powers’ incarnation”. The castle is said to have been built by Latvian efforts, and made rich with Latvian wealth (due to the feudal exploitation of the Latvian peasantry by their Baltic German lords), and the language used to describe the accreditation of ambassadors

²¹¹ Balodis, *Rīgas Pils Valsts Prezidenta Mītne*, ii

in the castle's 'white hall' who "laying down their authority, depart" keeps with this theme, subtly casting Ulmanis as a feudal lord receiving homage from foreign dignitaries.²¹²

A common trope and accusation from interwar debates on architecture and urban space in the Latvian-language press surfaces also in regard to the castle: that its former masters (here Russians are also lumped in with the Baltic Germans) were poor custodians, "like bad renters, rather than owners who care for the maintenance and decoration of their property".²¹³ The Latvian state, on the other hand, is contrasted as a responsible and caring steward of this historic space, one also attuned to the need to modernize it to suit the needs of the times – a small addendum, but an important one, given the consistent impulse throughout the interwar among Latvian national activists to associate Latvian-ness with modernity.²¹⁴ The repair and improvement work, much of it less than innovative or exciting, was also characterized as modern and in keeping with the national (ethnic Latvian) spirit of the times: "In the renewed Latvia, along with uncountable other things, the grey castle of Riga has also felt the new spirit of construction." The fundamentally ethnic Latvian character of all of the castle's new decorations, furnishings, etc. was emphasized time and time again in descriptions of the various repair works, both those undertaken in the early 1920s and those of the following decade.

Interestingly, although in the familiar role of medieval „Black Knights” the Baltic Germans figure also here as the implicit historical enemy of the Latvian people, explicit criticism is generally reserved for the period of Russian overlordship: "The castle's historical and valuable medieval characteristics suffered the most precisely under Russian rule". Even less typical was the treatment of that darling of the Baltic German nobility, Walter von Plettenberg, a 16th-century statue of whom

²¹² Ibid., 1-2

²¹³ Ibid., 2

²¹⁴ Ibid., 2, 3

adorned the courtyard of the castle (and the removal of whose image in stone had constituted the sole meaningful modification to the exterior of the *Saeima* building). This historical statue, dating from the early 16th century, was somewhat surprisingly left untouched, in fitting with Latvian self-representations as responsible stewards of the country's cultural heritage.²¹⁵ More surprising still is the way in which Plettenberg's role as a defender of the region is positively evaluated, perhaps in order to symbolically position Ulmanis in a lineage of successful defenders of Baltic independence from its powerful Eastern neighbor, given the growing threat of Soviet intervention in Latvian affairs.²¹⁶ This tactic illustrates the degrees to which different historical legacies associated with certain spaces were engaged with and deployed differently in order to achieve different political ends. On the whole, however, the deference given here to Plettenberg's image and legacy represents the exception, and not the rule. Rather than being presented as an accommodation with or re-evaluation of the past, Riga Castle was portrayed as being ethnic Latvians' triumph over it, with that triumph's manifestation in the built environment serving as tangible proof of what was presented as a people's conquest of its own history.

Though most of the spaces without any ethnic Latvian valence that the new state inherited in 1919 were re-imagined as Latvian ones to some extent, the degree to which this took place in Riga castle is virtually unparalleled. Why the consistent, intensive efforts to ethnically recast this space? Part of the explanation lies in the psychological role played by Riga castle in Latvian folk culture. Many folk songs make mention of Riga's "gray castle", depicting it as a mighty fortress,

²¹⁵ The latter half of the 1930s were witness to protracted debates between the Latvian and Baltic German press (the latter represented by the *Rigasche Rundschau*) about the stewardship of the country's architectural heritage, with the latter accusing Baltic Germans both of not having constructed many architectural monuments worth keeping, and of not properly maintaining those it had constructed. Cf. Andreas Fülberth, „Die Modernisierung Rigas und ihre Rückwirkung auf das Klima zwischen Letten und Deutschen während der 1930er Jahre“ in *Erinnerungsmetropole Riga: Deutschsprachige Literatur- und Kulturvielfalt im Vergleich* (Michael Jaumann and Klaus Schenk, eds., Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2010) 169-175, and Andreas Fülberth, *Tallinn-Kaunas-Riga: Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten 1920-1940* (Köln, Böhlau, 2005) 183-286 (Section on Riga)

²¹⁶ Plettenberg was a successful general in the Livonian Order's war with an expansionist Muscovy in the early 15th century, helping to preserve Livonian "independence" from foreign powers until the order's collapse in 1561.

impressive in size and strength, and one of the principal landmarks of the city, making it familiar, though simultaneously foreign.²¹⁷ The castle's long existence and the central role any such site of seigneurial power played in feudal life help to explain its prominent role in folk consciousness, up until the 20th century. In addition, the fact that the new Russian rulers of the 18th century had transformed it into the seat of their own power had made the castle into more than just a symbol of the crusading German invaders of the 13th century; instead, this space had become a kind of talisman of sovereign power in the land.²¹⁸

Ownership of Riga castle extended beyond responsibility for the historical heritage of the space, or the right to use it as an administrative center; it implicitly symbolized a change in political mastery over the territory of old Livonia, in a way that the *Saeima* building – though not unimportant in its own way – never could. The historical legacies attached to each space determined the symbolic use that it was put to in the new republic. The far deeper historical roots of Riga castle predestined it as a nationalist symbol for the righting of historical wrongs and the culmination of national fate, precisely because more than any other space in the city, it functioned as a representation of sovereign political power.

The castle's medieval origins and function as a representation of sovereign power led to an appropriation and (re)presentation of this space that differed significantly from that of the *Saeima* building. Whereas the *Saeima* building's aesthetic symbolism and presentation in the Latvian press tended to deal with the building's past in order to emphasize the break with it – contrasting the old Baltic German feudal order with the new Latvian democratic one – the rhetoric and symbolism surrounding Riga castle tended to engage much more often and fully with perceptions of both the

²¹⁷ Balodis, *Rīgas Pils*, 1

²¹⁸ On Russian takeover of the castle, cf. Māra Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā* (Rīga: Jumava, 2004) 137-140

recent and the medieval past, in order to highlight the triumph of the Latvian people over their “foreign” enemies. While the renovated *Saeima* building contained ethnic Latvian themes and motifs, these were relatively modest and understated. Not so the changes made to the interior of Riga castle in the 1920s and 1930s, where the representation of Latvian ethnicity in interior decoration was put on full display. In addition to the numerous allusions to ethnic Latvian history mentioned above, the castle featured a room solely dedicated to the presentation of Latvian folk culture. An artistic competition for the interior decoration of this room was held in 1923 and won by the artist A. Cirulis with his design “The Rebirth”, featuring Latvian heathen gods and figures in distinctive folk costumes from the four provinces of Latvia.²¹⁹ As the space’s aesthetic transformation outlined above makes clear, Riga castle represented the triumph of Latvian nationalism over the political power of other “foreign” ethnic groups perhaps more than any other space until the erection of the Freedom Monument in 1935. This tendency, already noticeable in the 1920s, became greatly more pronounced in second half of the 1930s following Ulmanis’ seizure of power.

2.3 Local Patriotism and City Hall: Municipal Government in Interwar Riga

“[The city council chamber] was soberly furnished, and only a pair of pictures decorated the walls, portraits of two German mayors: L.W. Kerkovius, who after Russification had once more normalized relations with the government, and George Armistead...the pictures of Armitstead and Kerkovius went into the art museum in 1934 as well, their memory no longer being agreeable to the Latvian majority of city councilors at that time.”²²⁰

Helmut Stegmann, a Baltic German city councilor in the 1920s, made mention of these two portraits in his memoirs chiefly in order to emphasize, with a measure of bitterness, their ultimate

²¹⁹ Caune, *Rīgas pils senā un mainīgā*, 211

²²⁰ Helmut Stegman (1960), “Aus meinen Erinnerungen. I. Stadtverordneter in Riga 1920-1933” in *Baltische Hefte* 7. Jahrgang (1960/61), 93

removal in 1934, the year of the overthrow of democratic governance in Latvia. But while their consignment to the art museum in that fateful year was predictable enough to contemporaries, and comes as no surprise at all to the historian, the fact that they remained in an honored place for the first 15 years of independent Latvia's existence says a great deal about Riga city government during the period 1919 to 1934 and how it contrasted with governance at the national level.

Unlike the wholly new national government that established itself in Riga during the 1920s, Riga city government in the interwar period was the continuation of a form of government stretching back to the 1870s, with roots reaching still further back into the city's history.²²¹ Although the creation of the Republic of Latvia and the concomitant spread of democratic norms brought changes to the constellation of ethnic power in the city council, no fundamental reinvention of the city government took place during the democratic period 1918-1934. Riga's interwar city government was thus able to draw on historical precedents and civic traditions in managing interethnic tension and promoting civic identification among Rigans as the political center of gravity shifted from Baltic German to ethnic Latvian circles. Though in collective terms, Baltic German municipal politicians and officials moved into a subordinate position relative to their Latvian counterparts, their role in city council and administration remained considerable, wielding influence and returning a delegation of city councilors out of proportion to their percentage of the city's population.²²² This was not wholly opposed – at least not privately – by bourgeois Latvian politicians, since, though there had been a sizeable minority of ethnic Latvian city councilors in Riga during the closing decades of the long 19th century, these had almost perpetually in the political opposition and largely lacked the depth of practical experience running

²²¹ Dzīdra Ozoliņa, "1918-1934. Gads Latvijas pilsētu pašvaldību dzīvē (No vēlēšanu prakses)" in: *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2001, Issue 1, 88-90

²²² Stegmann, 95

the city government enjoyed by their Baltic German counterparts.²²³ As a result, Latvian and Baltic German cooperation in city government and administration was wide-ranging and productive, much less characterized by rancor, intransigence, and chauvinism than politics at the national level, though of course not without the occasional conflict. While several factors, economic, political, and social, contributed to this more harmonious relationship, the role of history – not merely the events, but their presentation and perception among the interwar public – was considerable, as was to be expected in a city continuously inhabited for more than 700 years.

Whereas Latvian writers during the interwar period characterized Latvian and Baltic history chiefly in terms of an ethnic struggle between their own ethnicity and Baltic Germans, (with Russians playing a lesser role as antagonists), treatments of the history of Riga published during the interwar period differed markedly. Here, the profound emphasis on ethnicity was largely absent.²²⁴ Though most medieval and early modern burghers would have identified as German (at least in a linguistic sense) in these works the burghers are described in ethnically ambiguous terms, with the citizenry of the town cast as the narrative's protagonist against the machinations and oppression of the Livonian Order.²²⁵ Historic institutions such as the Greater and Lesser Guild, which easily could have been characterized as instruments of oppression and exclusion wielded by Germans against Latvians, were instead often portrayed in a positive light, with their civic

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Usually, where ethnicity was engaged with regarding medieval or early modern Riga, it was to assert that Latvians too had played an important role in urban life. These arguments were used especially during the 1930s in an attempt to nullify claims that the Baltic Germans had founded and built Riga.

²²⁵ T. Līventāls and W. Sadowsky, eds., *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta* (Rīga, Rīgas Pilsētas Valdes Izdevums, 1932) p. 189-195; regarding the demographics of medieval Riga, although naturally no reliable statistics exist, there is little doubt that a heavy majority of those resident within the city walls during the medieval period were native speakers of German, leavened by a sizeable minority of Latvian-speakers (many of whom would also have become fluent in German in order to earn a living within the city). This paradigm holds good for the medieval period, with a slowly increasing proportion of Latvian-speakers during the early modern period; only in the middle of the 19th century did Latvian speakers finally outnumber Germans in Riga. Cf. Plakans, *The Latvians*, 25 regarding medieval ethnic demography.

rather than ethnic dimensions emphasized.²²⁶ Riga city government published an encyclopedic volume about the city in 1930, *Rīga kā Latvijas galvaspilsēta (Riga as the Capital City of Latvia)*. Along with an appraisal of the medieval period virtually devoid of any mention of ethnicity at all, the work also treats the city's 19th-century history in similar fashion, though ethnicity had been of considerable concern to voters at the time.²²⁷ Portraits of the Baltic German mayors from 1878 through the First World War are presented in the work's pages without being identified by ethnicity, figuring only as unexceptional elements in the visual representation of legitimate political power that continues through the date of publication in the book's pages, passing without comment from Baltic German to ethnic Latvian administrations.²²⁸ The enmity between ethnic groups that dominated Latvian historical writing is notably absent. Whether this was because of a conscious attempt to cultivate a sense of belonging, of ownership of the city's history among ethnic Latvians, whether it stemmed from just such a sense that already existed, or both at once, is difficult to say for certain. What is certain is that this work, and others like it, sought to present Riga's history as a source of pride to interwar readers, emphasizing a non-national form of belonging to a collective entity that, like the nation, was on a narrative journey through history. Space also figured into that sense of belonging, as the inclusion of descriptions and images of some of the city's most prominent and historical structures makes clear.²²⁹

Riga city government in the interwar period was in a sense both simultaneously absent, and omnipresent in its relationship to the built environment. Unlike the new national institutions, the city government in of itself had no single symbolic manifestation in the built environment; the

²²⁶ Cf. Jānis Straubergs, *Rīgas Vēsture* (Riga, Gramatu Draugs, 1936) p. 218-220

²²⁷ Cf. Michael F. Hamm (1980). Riga's 1913 City Elections: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics. *Russian Review*, 4 (39); for a general overview of the interface between socio-economic status and ethnicity in municipal politics before WWI, cf. Dzīdra Ozoliņa, *Rīgas pilsētas tēvi un viņu komunāla politika 1877-1913* (Riga, Zinātne, 1976)

²²⁸ T. Līventāls and W. Sadowsky, *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta* 237-261 (for image sequence)

²²⁹ T. Līventāls and W. Sadowsky, 205, 209, 213

town hall proper had long since been given over to other purposes, housing a municipal library, a discount bank, and the orphans' court, and seems to have been widely regarded as a rather ramshackle and dilapidated structure by the turn of the 20th century.²³⁰ The hall that Stegmann was referring to in the citation above is one that he described as “old, over-crowded, and not very imposing”, a former private house purchased by the city in 1884 and tucked away on a narrow street in the city's old town.²³¹ Yet at the same time, the city had a say in virtually every aspect of the construction, maintenance, and management of urban space, as well as owning and administering extensive gardens, housing and commercial properties, business enterprises, schools, and public utilities. The interwar city government inherited a sophisticated and wide-ranging bureaucratic apparatus for the management of urban space from the detail-oriented Baltic German administrations of the pre-war decades, and its powers only expanded to encompass new areas of life during the interwar period.²³² As we have seen in Chapter 1, along with many plans for the city's expansion and improvement, the basis for interethnic cooperation (and competition) in the interwar period between Baltic Germans, Latvians, and Russians were laid in the thirty-odd years prior to 1914.²³³ This cooperation continued during the interwar period, albeit with the shoe on the other foot, as it were. Ethnic Latvian control of city hall was assured by their status as a plurality, later majority of the city population, but municipal politics in an era in which fears of Bolshevism and the political left in general were at a high-water mark necessitated close cooperation between the city's ethnic groups during the interwar period. An assessment of the extent of interethnic cooperation in city government will allow us to return to urban space in the

²³⁰ Jānis Krastiņš, *Rīgas Rātslaukums: Pagatne, tagadne, nākotne* (Riga: Madris, 2000), 6

²³¹ Heinz Pirang, “About a new City Hall,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 3.XII.1932

²³² Most notably regarding the use of automobiles and movie theaters; the question of taxation on the latter especially occupied city hall during the interwar period.

²³³ Riga's Jewish population were vastly underrepresented, indeed almost entirely absent, in city government until after 1918.

1930s with an examination of the newly invigorated but long-running debate on how, where, and when to build a new city office building –a debate which, like so many projects of the interwar period, had its origins in the years of Riga’s explosive growth prior to the First World War.

The first communal elections in Riga after the First World War, and the first truly democratic ones in the city’s history during peacetime, took place on January 18, 1920.²³⁴ The election returns produced a city council with 30 city council members from the Latvian bourgeois parties, 28 from the ethnic minorities, and 32 from the socialists. The Latvian bourgeois parties ranged from deeply conservative to centrist, and were essentially united by their commitment to the current political system and property rights regime, and by a shared, explicitly articulated, and often chauvinistic Latvian nationalism. The ethnic minority parties – German, Russian, Jewish, and Polish – resembled the Latvian bourgeois parties, with the Jewish vote being splintered between a multitude of parties on the right half of the political spectrum (which nonetheless typically voted as a bloc) and a sizeable contingent from the Jewish Bund, which as a rule voted with the Latvian Social Democrats. The few Polish city councilors returned were Social Democrats, unsurprising given that the vast majority of the few Poles in the city were employed as manual laborers.²³⁵

The proportions between these three groups – Latvian bourgeois, ethnic minorities, and socialists - remained much the same for the duration of the period of democratic governance in Riga. Despite the clear preponderance of ethnic Latvians among city council members, this fact was of limited significance in pragmatic terms. As the years passed, the tendency for city politicians to group themselves by political and economic interests rather than by ethnicity only

²³⁴ Celmiņa, 176

²³⁵ Stegmann, 102

increased, and there is much to indication that even at the onset of this new chapter in Riga's history, other political fault lines were at least as important as ethnicity.²³⁶ Politicians in the Latvian-dominated but ethnically diverse centrist and center-right parties may not have been “indifferent” to nationality – all attached themselves closely to perceived national and especially linguistic questions at various points – but for most of the democratic period, the shared values of a vehement anti-communism and an orientation towards Western European norms of culture and politics, along with shared socio-economic interests, brought the Baltic German, Russian, and Jewish fractions in city politics into close cooperation with their Latvian counterparts.²³⁷

In comparison to the city's Russian and Jewish communities, the role played by Baltic Germans in Riga city government in the 1920s and early 1930s stands out due to their dominant role prior to 1914, but also due to their elevated socio-economic status, even after the war's devastating effect on the ethnic group's financial condition.²³⁸ Baltic German property-owners in the cities continued to enjoy less debt on their properties and greater access to capital, contributing to the preservation of their status.²³⁹ In terms of their professional status, the Riga Baltic German community was a group that a successful city government could hardly ignore. Even by 1930, Baltic Germans in Riga still had the highest percentage of their population in the free professions and white-collar positions, and they generally had the lowest percentage of manual workers, the highest literacy rate at 99% , and the highest percentage of bureaucrats and officials, with nearly 23% of the city total in 1925.²⁴⁰ Although Baltic Germans owned far fewer businesses overall than

²³⁶ For the observation that political orientation become more, rather than less important with the passage of time, cf. Celmiņa 179; this is also reflected in Stegmann's memoirs.

²³⁷ The Jewish delegation to city hall, as in the *Saeima*, was splintered by the socialist Jewish Bund, helping to secure a dominant position among the minorities for the Baltic Germans, despite being outnumbered by Russians and Jews alike in Riga.

²³⁸ Wachsmuth claims that in 1920, “Das Baltentum stand ruiniert da” – Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934*, 5.

²³⁹ P. Schiemann, “Die Nationale Vermögensumschichtung in Lettland: Eine Bilanz von Dr. Paul Schiemann” *Jahrbuch und Kalender des Deutschtums in Lettland 1925*, 20

²⁴⁰ T. Līventāls and W. Sadowsky, *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta* 181-186

ethnic Latvians, the ones they did own were among the largest in the country.²⁴¹ Given the Republic of Latvia's commitment to private property *and* minority rights in the 1920s, successful governance in Riga – let alone a successful economic recovery from wartime devastation – demanded cooperation between ethnic Latvian and Baltic German elites, in city council as in other spheres.²⁴² This imperative towards cooperation was only heightened by the bourgeois representatives of both groups shared hostility towards socialism in general and the Social Democratic Party of Latvia in particular.

The city's ethnic minorities formed a bloc in the city council, and Baltic German politicians depended on the votes of their Russian and Jewish political allies, but there seems to have been little doubt as to which group stood in the leadership role of the bloc. The leader of the Baltic German fraction (until 1925 Paul Schiemann, simultaneously the leader of the Baltic German delegation in the *Saeima*) was also the leader of the minority bloc, rather than there being a rotating leadership, and German was the general language of discourse in the minority bloc's meetings, although Russian was also commonly spoken, as most Baltic German politicians spoke it fluently due to its preferred status in administration and commerce before the war.²⁴³ Although the municipal minority bloc's solidarity was not always guaranteed, the community of interest was generally strong enough for it to function effectively, and the other groups seem to have felt that

²⁴¹ Helena Šimkuva, „Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940“ in Detlef Henning, ed. *Nationale Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit: Neun Beiträge zum 16. Baltischen Seminar 2004* (Lüneburg: Verlag Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2009) 185

²⁴² For an insightful view into Latvia's commitment to minority rights, cf. Hiden 54-57. League membership was of paramount importance for the young, still-vulnerable state, and the desire to gain it played an important role in the state's willingness to accept the League's conditions regarding the adoption of an acceptable minority rights regime. Cf. Caroline Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection 1878-1938* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 267-73, 278.

²⁴³ Stegmann, 101. The author avers that all of the Baltic German city councillors spoke Russian; he himself spoke fluent Latvian, and praises Sadowsky's complete mastery of the language, though emphasizing that in even in general city council sessions, the Baltic German delegation always spoke German as a matter of principal – though in smaller committee meetings, Russian or Latvian were often spoken by the German delegates.

Baltic German leadership was the best option available for securing the non-Latvian groups' collective interests, which naturally overlapped to a considerable extent – especially for Baltic Germans and the more affluent section of the Jewish population, who occupied very similar socio-economic niches.²⁴⁴

One reason for this political deference was the fact that Riga's Baltic Germans collectively possessed deep and wide-ranging knowledge and experience of communal affairs surpassing any of the city's other ethnic groups. In addition, the fact that Baltic Germans had formerly dominated the city bureaucracy (and still maintained a healthy share of officials) was crucial, since Riga city government in the interwar period was a relatively organic continuation of its former self. Indeed, the changes to the electoral law beginning in 1920 can fairly be considered to be the largest changes made in Riga city government up until 1934, since pre-existing departments, properties, employees, debts, obligations, facilities, and the pre-existing structure of city government were all assumed more or less seamlessly by the new city government, though department heads and new hires both tended to be Latvians.²⁴⁵

The outward face of city government changed somewhat as the language of administration shifted, but there were no large-scale reorganizations of existing departments.²⁴⁶ The introduction of compulsory examinations for city officials in the state language – Latvian – was met with stiff resistance from the Baltic German public and politicians, with several prominent Baltic German city politicians resigning in protest, and public demonstrations against the measure in the streets in 1919.²⁴⁷ In 1922 Paul Schiemann, then head of the Baltic German fraction in city parliament

²⁴⁴ Šimkuva, 188-189, 195-196

²⁴⁵ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934*, 272

²⁴⁶ Celmiņa, 177; the language used for city business had shifted from German prior to the war, to (officially) Russian during the war, and now to Latvian from 1919 onward. Bilingualism and even trilingualism were not uncommon among city officials, though Baltic Germans tended to have a mastery of Russian but not of Latvian at the opening of the independence period.

²⁴⁷ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934*, 269

as well as the *Saeima*, held that the primary motivation for the language examinations was the desire to free up positions in the city bureaucracy for patronage appointments, rather than any strict practical necessity, though this charge was adamantly denied by the Latvian mayor Alfrēds Andersons.²⁴⁸

The sharp outcry against the language exams in 1919 succeeded in producing their deferment for two years, until 1921, providing much-needed time for city officials to prepare. When the examinations finally did take place, their effect on the Baltic German contingent of the city bureaucracy was fairly mild. Of an estimated 800 total bureaucrats, only around 550 were required to take the exams, with numerous exemptions granted for officials deemed irreplaceable (the city archivist and city librarian, both Baltic Germans, are the two most prominent examples), and various other officials allowed to defer or re-take the exams.²⁴⁹ Of the examinees, only approximately 80 were removed from their positions due to inadequate language skills, leaving an overwhelming majority of Baltic German city officials – roughly 720 out of 800 – weathering the initial storm of Latvianization.²⁵⁰

Thus, in the opening years of the 1920s, the sheer numbers of Baltic German city officials, along with their longer experience and deeper familiarity with city business made Baltic German cooperation virtually indispensable to the Latvian politicians with whom the balance of political power rested. A return to normality and bringing city services back into smooth operation was urgently needed, and the Baltic Germans were the group most essential to effecting this. City government in the interwar period inherited a vast array of laws, regulations, strictures and

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 270

²⁴⁹ Feuereisen, born in Moscow, was technically “Russlandsdeutsch”, but by the turn of the 20th century he was by all indications well-assimilated into Riga Baltic German society – a process no doubt aided by his education in Dorpat. Cf. Wilhem Lenz, ed., *Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon 1710-1960* (Köln, Böhlau 1970), 213

²⁵⁰ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Period 1918-1934*, 271

ordinances reaching into every facet of economic life in the city. There were regulations in force for every kiosk selling fruit, flowers, or newspapers on every city corner, exhaustive building regulations, strict rules for the opening and closing hours of shops of every sort, the establishment of city-owned businesses in order to combat speculation, and so on almost ad infinitum, in a meticulous system of regulation of economic activity and civic space.²⁵¹ All of these necessitated extensive contact and cooperation with older city officials familiar with the pre-existing statutes.

Not only these older regulations necessitated interethnic collaboration; new projects, and the continuation of ones interrupted by the war, also required it. The city of Riga embarked upon ambitious programs to expand and de-privatize the streetcar network, pave city streets, provide electric street lighting, introduce a city bus service, a new and modern central market facility, and perhaps most importantly, to expand the sewage and water network. Most of these projects could be traced back entirely or in part to efforts undertaken in the decade before the First World War, and a familiarity with older city plans was necessary to efficiently carry these projects forward.²⁵² Maintaining modern, relatively recently established institutions, such as city financial institutions, required a similar familiarity.²⁵³ Thus, in large measure, the sweeping modernization measures undertaken by city government under Baltic German mayor George Armitstead, and the need to continue and expand them during the interwar period, helped insure an influential role for Baltic German experts and politicians in interwar city government.

²⁵¹For examples, cf. minutes of the executive board of the Riga City Council (Rīgas pilsētas valdes sedes protokoli) LVVA-2927-1-728-572 (regulations for the hours of barbers and hairdressers) or LVVA 2927-1-723-781 – debate on allocation of and rental fees for spots in the central market. These are only a pair of representative examples from a vast number of such regulations.

²⁵² For information on the extent and foresight of city-planning and improvement projects prior to the First World War, cf. Wilhelm Lenz, *Die Entwicklung Rigas zur Großstadt*, throughout.

²⁵³ Such as the city's discount bank (*Diskonto banka*), pensions for the workers of which are discussed in the executive board's minutes for 6.III.1931; cf. LVVA 2927-1-61-1030

The fact that many improvement projects were undertaken through credit from foreign lending institutions, even into the 1930s, further strengthened the Baltic German position in city government.²⁵⁴ Riga city government's pressing need for credit abroad during the interwar period was one of the reasons that the assumption of the city's debt from before the war was unavoidable, and why maintaining existing relationships with foreign creditors continued to be crucial, despite the fact that the pre-war debt obligations weighed heavily on the city's budget.²⁵⁵ Baltic German connections to creditors and sources of capital abroad, not only in Germany but also in England, were often long-standing and sometimes personal in nature, whereas in 1919, ethnic Latvian relationships with foreign investors were still generally in their infancy.²⁵⁶ Given the lack of post-war native capital, these connections were crucial, and foreign capital investment, especially from Germany, proved crucial in reviving the city's economy.²⁵⁷ Here, the Baltic German position was strengthened not only by ethnic affiliation, but also by the historical legacy of a web of commercial contacts abroad, one that could not be replaced easily or quickly by the new city government.

The long-term nature of the city's various building projects, often first planned before the war, helps to explain why the prominent role of Baltic Germans in city government lasted not only for the first few years following the end of hostilities in and around Riga, but across much of the 1920s and into the early 1930s. Baltic German representation on the executive board of the city council (*pilsētas valdes sede/Stadtrat*) throughout the period 1919-1934 was out of proportion to

²⁵⁴ LVVA 2927-1-48-793; LVVA 2927-1-51-1892 for dissatisfaction with crediting ratings abroad (specifically from Lazard Brothers, London/Paris).

²⁵⁵ LVVA 2927-1-51-1934

²⁵⁶ Cf. Wilhelm von Bulmerincq, *Lebenserinnerungen des letzten deutschen Stadthauptes (Oberbürgermeister) von Riga Wilhelm von Bulmerincq* (Wolfenbüttel, Ernst Fischer Verlag, 1952), where Bulmerincq notes that the loan taken out from Lazard Brothers of London – some 12 million gold rubles – was procured largely due to the fact that the bank manager was a Baltic German raised in the city orphanage who retained a fond connection to his hometown (!), 42.

²⁵⁷ J. Skolis, *Rīga. Apcerējumi par pilsētas vēsturi* (Rīga, Latvijas Valsts Izdevniecība, 1965), 171

their numbers in city council.²⁵⁸ Two Baltic Germans in particular played outsize roles in city government in the interwar period; Walter Sadowsky was in charge of managing the city's finances for many years, and Georg Ullmann headed the department of commerce.²⁵⁹ Whereas on the national level, interethnic cooperation was mostly a case of politics making for strange bedfellows, the work of Sadowsky, Ullmann, and others like them in city government seems to have been part of a close and functional cooperation. Latvian skepticism of Baltic German loyalty to the state persisted throughout the interwar period, but few Latvian municipal politicians would have doubted the dedication of their Baltic German counterparts to the welfare of their *Vaterstadt*.²⁶⁰

The composition of city government appointments and offices in the 1920s and early 1930s make it clear that many bourgeois politicians of various ethnic backgrounds found it less distasteful to work with one another than to enter into political alliances with the Social Democratic faction, which, although not particularly radical from an objective standpoint, was permanently tainted in the minds of much of the public by an association with communism and social upheaval, one begun by its role in the unrest of 1905 and only worsened by the negative experience of Bolshevik rule in 1919. Writing in the 1950s, Wachtsmuth commented that Riga in the 1920s was not a chauvinistic city, and in the interwar Latvian press of that decade, there is certainly far greater

²⁵⁸At times, Baltic Germans constituted two out of eight total members sitting, but more typically 2 of 10 members, since attendance varied considerably; cf. minutes of Riga City Government Executive Board 1928-1933 in general, and specifically those of 5.2.1932, cf. LVVA 2927-1-728-514. Although some members of the Executive Board were also city councilors, others were simply long-term city bureaucrats – the heads of their respective departments, who convened to form the executive board along with the mayor and the head of the review commission.

²⁵⁹Regarding Sadowsky, cf. Stegman, “Aus meinen Erinnerungen“, p. 97. Regarding Ullmann, cf. Stegman p. 97-98, and also Riga City Government Executive Board Minutes from 7.2.1930 LVVA 2927-1-48-485; Ullmann was asked to serve as Riga's representative in the organizational committee for Latvian products propaganda week in 1930, a request indicative of the breadth of his responsibilities and competency. Speaking generally, his name appears among the members of the city council's executive board perhaps more consistently than any other in the years 1919-1934, and the board's minutes show frequent questions posed to Ullmann on city financial matters from the period before 1914.

²⁶⁰“Father City”, roughly corresponding to English “hometown”, but with a stronger bond implied.

attention paid to the threat posed to Latvian society by bolshevism and socialism than to anti-ethnic minority rhetoric, though the latter also appeared even in mainstream newspapers.²⁶¹

The distribution of seats in city council, with roughly a third held by center and center-right ethnic Latvian parties, a third held by the social democrats (mostly Latvians, but including the Jewish Bund), and a third held by the (generally center-right) ethnic minorities, meant that bourgeois ethnic Latvian politicians had little choice but to work with the ethnic minority bloc, led by the Baltic Germans. The relatively weak position of Riga's ethnic minorities meant that deft politicking was sometimes necessary, however, especially when issues of culture and language – where the minorities lacked common ground with bourgeois Latvians – were at stake. Thus, their generally conservative stance did not prevent the minority bloc from cooperating with the Social Democrats when it suited their interest, as these were perceived to be more tolerant regarding the linguistic and cultural questions that had recently become of such importance to the city's ethnic minorities.²⁶² However, this cooperation met with considerable internal resistance in the Baltic German fraction. The members of the so-called *Landeswehr* generation, who had fought in the campaigns against the Red Army in 1919 and 1920, were violently anti-communist, to the point that the Social Democrats were viewed as little more than proxy agents of Moscow.²⁶³ The economic agreement concluded between the Soviet Union and Latvia in 1927, backed by Schieman and pushed for vigorously by the Baltic German-dominated Riga Factory Owners' Association, had been bitterly opposed by this sector of Baltic German society, leading to political

²⁶¹ Based on study of government-published indices of all periodical articles published in Latvia during the interwar period, grouped by subject matter. Through the 1920s, the number of articles dealing with socialism in the mainstream Latvian papers far outnumber those concerned with ethnic issues –which typically dealt with what was often referred to as “the language question.” There is however a veritable explosion in the amount of writing on the country's ethnic minorities starting in 1930. Cf. the series of bibliographic aids published by the Latvian State Library *Latvijas Zinātne un Literatūra* (Science and Literature of Latvia) for the years 1922-1931.

²⁶² Stegmann, 93

²⁶³ Stegmann, 106-107

stress within the group. Such deal-making with the devil, so to speak, declined sharply with the departure of Paul Schiemann from the leadership of the Baltic German fraction in 1925.²⁶⁴

The perceived threat of socialism contributed to cooperative tendencies between the ethnic minorities and Latvian bourgeois parties more than any other single factor, at the civic as well as the national level. The experience of communist rule in Riga for nearly six months in 1919 had brought suffering to many ethnic Latvians (especially the more well-to-do classes typically wielding the greatest political influence) as well as to Baltic Germans, and the ongoing threat to the social order from the left attracted an enormous amount of comment in the press.²⁶⁵ Nearly 19,000 workers took part in May Day demonstrations in 1928, and on October 18th, 1929 nearly 32,000 workers struck, including thousands of city employees.²⁶⁶ Confrontations between demonstrators and the police took place in the streets repeatedly in the late 1920s. Prior the economic crisis that reached Latvia in the second half of 1930, Baltic German and bourgeois ethnic Latvian politicians readily found common cause in maintaining the existing property relations and social order, even if this cooperation functioned as a tacit understanding rather than as any sort of political rallying cry.²⁶⁷ Occasional conflicts over linguistic or cultural questions in the 1920s were hard-fought when they arose, but these conflicts did not fundamentally call the city council's governing multiethnic alliance against leftism into question.

In seeking legitimacy beyond their own community, Baltic Germans in city council drew deeply on past political traditions in shaping the self-image that it presented to voters and to the

²⁶⁴Stegmann, 99

²⁶⁵ Cf. footnote 132

²⁶⁶ Alexandrs Drīzulis, *Rīga Sociālisma Laikmetā 1917-1975*, 105, 108; cross-referencing this figure with data given on page 185 of *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta*, this would have been approximately 1/3 of all blue-collar workers in the city.

²⁶⁷ The Agrarian Reform of 1920, a bitter blow to the Baltic German community at the national level, actually had if anything a positive effect on relations within city hall, since the city of Riga owned a considerable number of properties adversely affected by the reforms, providing a community of interest between Baltic German and Latvian city councillors. Cf. Teodors Līventals, *Rīgas pilsēta un agrarareforma* (Riga: E. Pipmaņa un J. Upmaņa drukātava, 1924) 3-4

ethnic Other in city government. The position presented by Baltic German communal politicians in the decades before the First World War continued to exist as the core of the new political outlook of the Baltic German community during the interwar period: the common good of the city, irrespective of ethnicity. The Baltic German leadership held this to be the only way to secure lasting influence in city government, while (perhaps somewhat cynically) admitting that it did not preclude a robust defense of Baltic German interests.²⁶⁸ This was all the more true in cases where private property or tax dollars were at stake, since the economic interests of an influential section of the Latvian middle-class overlapped with those of the relatively affluent Baltic German community.²⁶⁹ In general, given the profound urbanization of Latvia's Baltic German population following the First World War, and their extensive interests in industry and trade, the economic health of Riga was indeed largely synonymous with that of Baltic Germandom in Latvia. A similar logic applies to the Russian and Jewish minorities in the country who were likewise concentrated in Riga.²⁷⁰

Continued Baltic German representation in city government out of proportion to the group's demographic significance in Riga rested on some combination of two factors: that of a reliance on deep experience combined with a collusion of socio-economic interests across ethnic lines. The Baltic German political leadership considered its importance in city government to exceed its numbers on the city council, and even the number of councilors itself was slightly disproportionate to the number of Baltic German voters. An already tight electoral discipline among Baltic German voters in the pre-war era became nearly legendary, allowing for an adroit

²⁶⁸ Drīzulis 95

²⁶⁹The group was widely perceived as being affluent, but its economic fortunes in the aggregate declined sharply after the First World War; although some of the country's richest and most powerful businessmen were Baltic Germans during the interwar period, the majority of Baltic Germans were not wealthy, though overwhelmingly white-collar in terms of profession.

²⁷⁰ It should be noted that both of these groups existed in considerable numbers in the eastern region of Latgale, unlike the Baltic Germans, who were concentrated in Riga particularly, and in the western part of the country more generally.

exploitation of the proportional voting system. Beyond this maximization of their own ethnic group's votes, non-Germans also voted for the Baltic German fraction in meaningful numbers, the so-called "Deutschgesinnte".²⁷¹ This surprising phenomenon is best explained by the prestige enjoyed by the Baltic Germans in communal affairs, resting on their community's long experience and tradition as well as considerable successes in urban planning and management in the years before 1914.²⁷²

Beyond party politics, Helmut Stegmann's memoirs of his time in city government display a deep personal attachment to and affection for Riga, and an equally deep pride in the tradition of public service on its behalf, a pride that he clearly was not unique in feeling among Baltic German politicians. Along with Stegmann, other Baltic Germans in city government had a family history of managing the affairs of the city, sometimes stretching back centuries.²⁷³ The creation of an independent Latvian state had initially been viewed negatively by most Baltic Germans, and the ethnic group's relationship with the national government and titular majority remained problematic throughout the interwar government. In contrast to this, a continuing identification with their age-old *Vaterstadt* was less problematic, even as the face of the city changed to reflect its new status as capital. The democratic form of government in Riga allowed Baltic Germans the ability to carry forward older traditions of political responsibility that had long been wellsprings of pride for their community in the productive years of recovery in the 1920s.²⁷⁴ This work helped to cement bonds of place that had been loosened by the cataclysmic events of 1914-1919, ones which would be further loosened by the political discrimination and ethnic chauvinism of the 1930s.

²⁷¹ *Rīga kā Latvijas galvas pilsēta*, 262

²⁷² Stegmann, 95

²⁷³ Eugen Schwarz, for instance, who was active in the Great Guild and an ancestor of whose had been mayor of the city during the reign of Catherine II – Stegmann, 101

²⁷⁴ Hehn, 25-26

Shared governance of Riga between the so-called “bourgeois” Latvian parties and the ethnic minorities came to an end with the coup-d’etat of May 15th, 1934. Already on the day after the coup, the minister of the interior forbade the convening of the city council until further notice. This was followed by legislation on May 25th permanently transferring the powers of the city council to the executive board and greatly expanding the powers of the mayor. The existing executive board (including members of the ethnic minorities) was dissolved in its old composition on June 1st.²⁷⁵ Henceforth the executive board would be selected by the minister of the interior, with the mayor of the city nominated by the minister of the interior and approved by the cabinet of ministers. The legal autonomy of the city was considerably restricted, putting it further under the control of the ministry of the interior.²⁷⁶ These measures brought an end to democratic self-government in Riga during the interwar period, closing an era which, in addition to the much-publicized public fights over linguistic and cultural questions, also witnessed a wide measure of quiet but effective cooperation.

²⁷⁵ Celmiņa, 181

²⁷⁶ Celmiņa, 181

3.0 Finding Common Ground in Commerce: The Bourse and Central Market

The interwar period witnessed a fundamental reinvention of economic life in Riga, and with it a considerable – though gradual and, until 1939, incomplete – restructuring of the economic elite along ethnic lines. Commerce and industry in the capital were radically transformed due to the vastly altered international political situation. Riga was now almost wholly cut off from the vast hinterland of the Russian Empire, from which it had extracted raw materials for its industry and which it had also supplied with finished industrial goods.²⁷⁷ The World War and Latvian War of Independence had devastated the country's economy, producing a lack of raw materials, equipment, capital investment, even a shortage of reliable electricity. The initial years of recovery were characterized by free market liberalism combined with moderate protectionism, as existing economic institutions were largely given a free hand to revive commerce and expand production. The country's ethnic minorities, particularly the Baltic German and Jewish populations played an important role in these processes, particularly during the 1920s.²⁷⁸

The interwar period saw a major re-orientation of trade, with both imports and exports flowing principally to and from Western European markets.²⁷⁹ Trade with Russia, now the pariah Soviet Union, was at first non-existent, and, despite high hopes invested in a Latvian-Soviet trade agreement in 1927, never assumed anything approaching its former importance as a market for goods produced in Riga or its hinterland during the interwar period.²⁸⁰ Great Britain and Germany were both the principal markets for Latvian agricultural and forestry products, along with France,

²⁷⁷ Wilhelm Lenz, *Die Entwicklung Rigas zur Grosstadt*, 35

²⁷⁸ Helena Šimkuva, "Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940" in Detlef Henning, ed. *Nationale Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit: Neun Beiträge zum 16. Baltischen Seminar 2004* (Lüneburg: Verlag Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2009), 179

²⁷⁹ Jānis Aizsilnieks, *Latvijas saimniecības vēsture 1914-1945* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1968), 203-205

²⁸⁰ Edgar Anderson, "The USSR Trades with Latvia: the Treaty of 1927" in *Slavic Review*, vol. 21, no. 2 (June 1962), 318-321

Belgium, and the Netherlands. Germany and Great Britain were also the chief sources of imported industrial goods, with the former gradually hedging out the latter in this trade as the interwar period wore on.²⁸¹

Attempts to re-invigorate local industry, devastated by evacuations undertaken during the war, were only partially successful. The country's principal exports throughout the interwar period remained agricultural products and raw materials. Following these in importance was the production of light industrial goods, with heavy industry reviving only to a very limited extent.²⁸² Riga played a central role in re-invigorating the economy of the entire nation, both as the nexus of domestic trade and industry, and by serving as what was far and away the country's most important import and export center.²⁸³ This double role of the city – as both the central node of the country's internal trade network, and the principal portal to international trade- was reflected in many institutions and organizations headquartered in the city, some centered on domestic industry, others on international trade, and some with a dual role.²⁸⁴ Although the decline of heavy industry and its replacement with the product of portable goods (radios, bicycles, etc.) contributed to the decline of the local Baltic German economic elite, the group nonetheless retained considerable economic importance in the city throughout the interwar period, well out of proportion to its numbers. The Riga Jewish community also played an extremely active role in local commerce, industry, and banking, expanding its role considerably relative to the pre-war years.

Both groups played outsize roles in the financial life of the country, headquartered in Riga. A majority of foreign capital investment in Latvia during the interwar period flowed into Baltic

²⁸¹ John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 67-70

²⁸² A. Drīzulis, *Rīga sociālisma laikmetā 1917-1975*, 67-69

²⁸³ The two ports of Ventspils/Windau and Liepāja/Libau were the only urban areas in the country to exercise a genuine economic independence from Riga.

²⁸⁴ Including but not limited to the Society of Latvian Merchants, the Riga Bourse Society, and the Riga Factory Owners' Association, all active in Riga and playing both a domestic and international role.

German and Jewish-owned banks.²⁸⁵ Reich German capital moved typically to Baltic German-led institutions, and Jewish enterprises received loans and investments from co-religionists across Europe, along with considerable investment from the United States.²⁸⁶ In this way, pre-war business and financial networks based on ethnicity worked heavily to the advantage of these two groups, and to the relative disadvantage of ethnic Latvians, who faced more difficulty in acquiring capital from abroad. Legal requirements that a majority of the ownership of joint stock corporations rest in the hands of citizens left Baltic Germans and Jews similarly aided Baltic Germans and Jews, as these groups were able to attract more foreign capital, and on more attractive terms, than their Latvian competitors, who generally lacked extensive business connections abroad.²⁸⁷ Banking in Latvia was dominated by the two groups as well. In 1928, there were 20 active credit banks in Latvia, of which 7 were controlled by Baltic German capital, six by Jewish capital, one by Russian capital, and the remaining six by Latvian capital.²⁸⁸ An additional eight major banks were controlled by foreign capital.²⁸⁹ Along with this commanding position in finance, the two groups (lumped together) also enjoyed near-monopolies in several industries, among them brewing and pharmaceuticals.²⁹⁰ Overall, ethnic Latvians constituted a far smaller share of the number of active merchants and industrialists in the country than their share of the population, whereas the situation of Baltic Germans and Jews was inverted.²⁹¹ Both of these groups were concentrated in Riga – the Baltic Germans almost overwhelmingly so.²⁹²

²⁸⁵ Šimkuva, “Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940,” 183

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 182

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 186-187

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 183

²⁸⁹ Aizsilnieks, 318

²⁹⁰ Šimkuva, “Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940,” 187

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 188

²⁹² In 1930, nearly two in every three Baltic Germans in Latvia (63%) lived in Riga; in the same year, nearly half of the country’s Jewish population (45%) lived in the capital. Calculated from data given in M. Skujenieks, ed. *Trešā tautas skaitīšana Latvijā 1930. gadā* (Rīga: Valsts statistika pārvalde, 1930) 63, 72.

Although a considerable historiography has arisen on Riga in the era of its industrial and commercial heyday since roughly the 1980s (with a major surge in the 1990s), the focus of much of this literature has been on social and cultural transformation, with the city's newfound prosperity treated only cursorily, as a backdrop, as it were; cf. Erwin Oberländer and Kristina Wohlfahrt's volume on interethnic relations in this era, *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857-1914*, and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit: Letten, Deutsche, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860-1914*, both of which deal with economic transformation in qualitative, rather than quantitative terms. Scholars interested in charting the economic transformation of the city before and after the First World War are forced to rely on literature either quite general, or which is divided in its focus.²⁹³ John Hiden's *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik* (Cambridge, 1987) does an admirable job of situating Latvia's foreign trade in international context, something not unimportant for this study, which situates and evaluates actors based in part on their access to transnational commercial networks. Though few works are devoted solely to the city's economic development either before or after the First World War, the socio-economic underpinnings of the social, cultural, and ethnic changes which historians have been more eager to chart are fundamental enough that a fairly robust picture of the city's rapid growth, decline, and faltering recovery in the course of the first half of the twentieth century has emerged in the historiography nonetheless.

Drawing on these sources, along with archival materials and literature devoted to the study of interethnic relations in the Baltic, this chapter examines the interplay between economic spaces,

²⁹³ For the general, cf., for example, James Mavor's somewhat dated but still magisterial *Economic History of Russia, Vol. 2* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965); for an example of divided focus, cf. Stephen Corrsin, "Urbanization and the Baltic Peoples: Riga and Tallinn before the First World War," *East European Quarterly* 12 (1978), which, as its title indicates, does not focus solely on economics.

their corresponding institutions, the development of Riga's economy, and interethnic relations in the interwar period. This is an unexplored vein in historiographic terms, since the interwar period represented a profound rupture with the past. In the era documented in Ulrike von Hirschhausen's study of interethnic relations in 19th-century Riga, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit* (The Limits of Commonality) and Erwin Oberländer and Kristina Wohlfahrt's important edited volume *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt* (Riga: Portrait of a Multiethnic City), genuine mechanisms and institutions for interethnic economic cooperation essentially did not exist; unlike in city government, where city councilmen of all ethnicities could rub elbows, Baltic German merchants retained close control over the city's principal economic organizations until the end of the First World War.²⁹⁴ Hirschhausen's theses regarding the formation of relatively insular ethnic milieus and the nationalization of communal politics during the late 19th century are at least somewhat moderated by the findings of this chapter, which highlights the porous nature of ethnic boundaries among the city's socio-economic elite and the role that the blurring of ethnic boundaries – and the heavy overlap in class interest – played in fostering a process of “soft” ethnic reversal in which institutions shifted their ethnic character gradually and without marked conflict. This is a story which has largely been effaced from the historiography, by national activists, by the authorship of narrow ethnic histories, and by a focus until now on an era marked by ethnic polarization, social transformation, and economic competition.

As in every sphere of life in interwar Riga, the tumult of economic existence in the city can be analyzed through an examination of some of its most prominent spaces. Although the lines

²⁹⁴ Of these, the Riga Bourse Society and Bourse Committee were far and away the most important, with the Great Guild having long since assumed a largely social and cultural character, though their memberships did overlap considerably. As for Mark R. Hatlie's recent monograph on interethnic relations in Riga 1914-1919, that work by its very nature excludes the sort of economic analysis pursued here, since Riga's economy had functionally collapsed after the evacuation of 1915.

between civil society and economic life are often blurry, and a city of interwar Riga's size and importance had myriad economic spaces to choose from – harbors, factories, railyards, innumerable shops, a number of prominent city market halls, etc. – this chapter limits itself to examining just two in depth, with limited treatment of a third, highly symbolic in nature but less far-ranging in its significance for the city's economic existence. The two spaces in question are the Riga Bourse (German *Börse*, Latvian *birža*, from French *bourse*, meaning stock exchange) and the city's new Central Market.

The first was a symbol of international commerce and local large-scale industry both. Dominated by Baltic Germans from its founding in the early 19th century through the First World War, the Riga Bourse Committee had shifted to nominal Latvian control by the early 1920s. Enconced in its resplendent building in the heart of old Riga, the Bourse functioned as a cosmopolitan institution, emblematic to Latvian national activists of the continuing dominance of “foreigners” over the new republic's foreign trade.²⁹⁵ The Bourse was the epicenter of economic life in Riga, the central node in a web of commerce and industry reaching deep into the Russian interior and across the Baltic and North Seas to Germany, Scandinavia, Great Britain, and beyond. The Riga Bourse during the interwar period, especially during the years 1919-1934, can largely be seen as a symbol of continuity with the preceding era, when Riga was one of the most important trading and industrial hubs in the Russian Empire and consequently in all of Europe. The ethnic diversity of the Bourse Committee's members – before and after the First World War – reflects the state of interethnic relations among Riga's economic elite during the interwar period, just as

²⁹⁵ This attitude was present but not necessarily mainstream at the opening of the 1920s; little mention is made of the role of “foreigners” (“*svešnieki*”, in actuality, Latvian citizens of Baltic German or Jewish heritage) on the Bourse Committee in the period 1923-1938. Cf. *Latvis* 25.VII.1921

descriptions of the Bourse and its activity in the press reflect attitudes towards the ethnic Other in economic life.

The second space, the city's new Central Market, though in reality playing a vastly less significant role in the city and country's economic life, nonetheless occupied a highly visible and highly symbolic role in urban life. The project, long-planned and one of the few major building accomplishments completed in Riga prior to the coup d'état of 1934, was widely reported on and celebrated as a modern technical achievement in the press, both Latvian and German. Unlike later large-scale architectural projects in the capital, the new central market was mostly framed in ethnically neutral terms as a civic, rather than a national (i.e., ethnic Latvian) accomplishment. At the same time, unlike the Bourse, in which Baltic German and Jewish merchants, bankers, and industrialists wielded an influence vastly out of proportion to their share of the city's population, the central market was largely – though not exclusively – an ethnic Latvian space, in which local, ordinary people plied their wares in new, modern facilities designed to their benefit.

Thus the two spaces contrast neatly with one another. The Bourse was cosmopolitan, deeply multiethnic, oriented towards foreign trade, and representative of continuity with older economic traditions, trade networks, and financial connections. The Central Market was local, familiar, an institution for the ordinary man, its design and construction led by ethnic Latvians. It was portrayed during and after its construction as a symbol of progress, advancing the sophistication and quality of economic life for ordinary citizens in Riga. Examining each of these spaces in turn as the focal point for their respective spheres of economic life in Riga is an effective way of charting the course of interethnic relations in Riga among both elites and ordinary citizens during the interwar period.

3.1 The Riga Bourse



Figure 8. The Riga Bourse, circa 1910.

In the years leading up to the First World War, Riga was above all else a city of trade and industry.²⁹⁶ The wide districts of resplendent Art Nouveau buildings that still constitute one of the city's principal tourist attractions were constructed in the thirty years leading up to 1914, when vast amounts of wealth were generated in Riga, both from long-distance trade and from local industry, which commanded a market reaching far beyond the Baltic.²⁹⁷ Situated near the mouth of the broad and wide Daugava river, which reached deep into the Russian interior, the city was also connected by rail to a vast hinterland since 1861.²⁹⁸ As Finance Minister Sergei Witte's plans

²⁹⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Lenz, *Die Entwicklung Rigas zur Grosstadt*, which contains a considerable amount of quantitative data drawn from archival or other primary sources. Jānis Aizsilnieks' *Latvijas saimniecības vēsture 1914-1945 (Economic History of Latvia 1914-1945)* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1968) remains the first authority on the economic history of the interwar period in the Latvian-language literature, and also includes quantitative data from before and after the First World War, though the pioneering work of Helena Šimkuva uses archival sources to build on Aizsilnieks' work and paint a more comprehensive economic portrait of each of Riga's major ethnicities during the interwar period than any scholarship conducted before or since. More recent general treatments include Zenonas Norkas, "The economic output growth of Baltic countries in 1913–1938: a quantitative cross-country comparison" (*Journal of Baltic Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2018.1492945>) and Juhan Kahk and Enn Tarvel, *An Economic History of the Baltic Countries* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1997) both of which devote regrettably little space to Riga. For quantitative data for the period 1857-1914, archival materials remain the most valuable source of economic information, whether obtained directly or reproduced in the works of other authors; for example, Michael F. Hamm's reproduction of such figures in the opening pages of his "Riga's 1913 Election: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics" has proven exceedingly useful for this study, as have the data preserved and published by the Bourse Committee itself, which kept meticulous records regarding the transit of commerce through Riga's port and rail stations. On the whole, though, a comprehensive economic history of Riga during its industrial heyday remains to be written, though Katja Wezel's recent article on Riga's Baltic German Entrepreneurs (see footnote 20 below) has made some progress towards filling this lacuna.

²⁹⁷ Jānis Krastiņš, *Jugendstils Rīgas Arhitektūrā* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1980), 28-29

²⁹⁸ Anders Henrikson, *The Tsar's Loyal Germans. The Riga German Community: Social Change and the Nationality Question 1855-1905* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983), 65. The Riga Bourse Committee had been instrumental in bringing about the construction of the railroad; cf. Katja Wezel, "Transcending Boundaries: Riga's Baltic German Entrepreneurs in an era of Nationalism, Revolution, and War" in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2016 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2016.1269434>), 3

to industrialize the Russian Empire bore fruit in the closing decades of the 19th century and the opening ones of the 20th, Riga was in perhaps a better position to benefit than any other large city in the empire.²⁹⁹ Its location on the Baltic and long history as a trading town meant that the city had access to a sprawling trade network reaching across much of northern Europe, diligently formed across centuries by the local Baltic German mercantile class. By 1913, Riga had assumed first place among cities in the Russian Empire in terms of total volume of trade.³⁰⁰ It had the highest volume of export trade, and was exceeded only by St. Petersburg in the total volume of imports.³⁰¹ Timber, flax, dairy products, and raw materials of every sort from across the empire passed through Riga on their way to Western European markets, whence flowed in return finished industrial goods and those raw materials which the Russian Empire lacked.³⁰²

Manufacturing flourished in Riga during this time as well. The economic tide was generally one that lifted all ethnic boats, as Latvian, Russian, and Jewish factory owners established themselves and prospered, moving into the city's upper classes alongside Baltic Germans. No other ethnic group was as adroit at capitalizing on the shift to an industrial economy as the Baltic Germans, however, who were particularly well-positioned to do so. In the fifty-odd years from the middle of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War, the Baltic German mercantile elite were successful in transforming themselves into a class of capitalists and industrialists that continued to exercise a dominant role in the local economy, even as their share of the population in the city and the region continued to shrink.³⁰³ At the turn of the 20th century, a dominant proportion of Riga's large-scale industrial enterprises were owned or run by Baltic

²⁹⁹ Hamm, 442-443

³⁰⁰ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1928*, Riga, 1929, Buchdruckerei von W.F. Häcker, Riga, 1

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Especially raw rubber from the tropics— the rubber company “Provodnik” employed over 6,000 workers at its height, producing up to 40,000 pairs of rubber boots a day, most destined for the Imperial Russian market. Lenz, 63

³⁰³ Henriksson 79-81, 107

Germans, with Reich German capital investment playing a significant role.³⁰⁴ Some of these enterprises were among the most important in the empire, such as the rubber concern “Provodnik” and the train car production companies “Russian-Baltic Traincar” and “Phoenix”.³⁰⁵ In the retrospective words of the Bourse Committee, in the years before the catastrophe of 1914, Riga’s industry had attained a “high blossoming”. Much of this growth, especially at the levels of high finance, large-scale industry, and international trade, had been overseen by the Riga Bourse Committee.



Figure 9. Riga Bourse, east façade, 1938.

The prosperity of the pre-war years, resulting in a construction boom, a rapid growth in population, and rising living standards across the population (despite intermittent strikes and worker unrest), was virtually annihilated in the course of the fighting 1914-1919. In a brief review of the work of the past ten years published in 1928, the Bourse Committee lamented that “through

³⁰⁴ Cf. “Appendix I: A Survey of Major Industrial Enterprises in Riga at the Beginning of the 20th Century” in Henriksson, *The Tsar’s Loyal Germans*, pp. 117-142. The survey depicts Riga industry as dominated first and foremost by Baltic Germans (largely natives of Riga) where management and private ownership is concerned, and by Reich German, Baltic German, Imperial Russian, and British capital in terms of investment and stock ownership. Jewish proprietors also outnumbered Latvian ones by a considerable margin.

³⁰⁵ Lenz, 63. *Phoenix* was resurrected with the aid of Reich German capital in the 1920s, though never returning to its former scale of production or importance. Ultimately it was nationalized under the Ulmanis regime and renamed *Vairogs* (“Shield”). Šimkuva, “Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940,” 183-184, 192

the outbreak of the war, this whole proud structure fell into rubble”. Over 3,000 railroad cars laden with industrial machinery and equipment were removed from the city between 1915 and 1917, with virtually none ever returning.³⁰⁶ The city was cut off from trade, resulting in the virtual ruin of the Riga mercantile community. Only following the defeat of the Bermondists in the autumn of 1919 could normal economic life resume, under vastly different circumstances.³⁰⁷ The Riga Bourse Committee had played a central role in encouraging international trade in Riga in the decades before 1914, fostering foreign investment and seeking out new markets for locally produced goods. Following the return of peacetime conditions in 1919, the Bourse Committee turned to the task of re-invigorating the local economy by all the means at its disposal.

The Bourse was able to draw on a long history and deep roots among Riga’s mercantile community in its attempts to enliven local trade and industry. It had first been established in 1814 with the encouragement of Governor General Paulucci, beginning operations in 1816.³⁰⁸ For the first few decades of its existence, the stock exchange had occupied quarters in the town hall, but these quarters eventually proved to be cramped (as related in Chapter 1: Ethnic Reversal and Political Space, the old town hall building housed a number of other institutions as well).³⁰⁹ The Riga Stock Exchange Society (Rigaer Börsengesellschaft), already thriving and possessed of ample funds, opted in 1851 to purchase four lots in the northern section of Riga’s old town, near to the cathedral, the castle, and the *Landtag* building – the architectonic symbols of the power of the Lutheran Church, the Imperial Russian authorities, and the *Ritterschaften*, respectively. The laying of the cornerstone of a new, grandiose space here in 1852 represented the inclusion of a new force in the

³⁰⁶ Arnolds Švabe, *Agrarā reforma // Latvija 20. gados* (Rīga, 1938), 199-228

³⁰⁷ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1928* (Riga: W.F. Häcker 1929), 1

³⁰⁸ Daiga Upeniece and Liesma Markova, *Mākslas Muzejs Rīgas Birža* (Riga: Jumava, 2001), 18

³⁰⁹ *Riga und Seine Bauten* (Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1903), 240

old established triumvirate, that of the modern, industrial economy. The creation of this new building symbolized the economic transformation of the city in spatial terms as well, existing as it did alongside the ancient guild halls of Riga's merchants, which increasingly came to assume social and cultural, rather than economic functions.³¹⁰

The building, finished in 1855, was constructed in the sumptuous style of a Venetian Palace, its walls constructed of brick with a plaster façade and its interior of grey marble imported from Scotland.³¹¹ Measuring roughly 150 feet on each of its street-facing facades, it was designed by the Baltic German professor and architect Harald Bosse, then an instructor at the Imperial Academy of the Arts in St. Petersburg, whose father was a noted painter from Riga – indicating both the imperial dimension of the Bourse Society's social and commercial networks and a tendency to rely on local, ethnic patronage networks.³¹² Bosse created a structure that reflected the economic importance and social prestige of its commissioners, creating on the ground floor a hall supported by columns of gray marble and featuring elaborate decoration. This large hall was used for the business of the stock exchange, and the upper story of the building was occupied by the executive offices of the Bourse Committee and other administrative spaces.³¹³

³¹⁰ Cf. Chapter 6: Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage for more on this subject.

³¹¹ *Riga und seine Bauten*, 241

³¹² *Riga und seine Bauten*, 240

³¹³ *Riga und seine Bauten*, 241



Figure 10. The main hall of the Bourse, circa 1903.³¹⁴

It was the first neo-renaissance structure in Riga, denoting a desire on the part of its builders to remain current with general European aesthetic trends. Its role as the nerve center of the Riga's economy lent it a close association with the mercantile and industrial elite of Riga, then overwhelmingly Baltic German.³¹⁵ That elite grew in numbers in the lead-up to the First World War, with ethnic Latvians (and a handful of Russians) steadily joining the ranks of the city's well-connected capitalists, merchants, and financiers who were members of the Bourse society, though remaining in the minority through 1914.³¹⁶ Although the Riga Bourse Committee continued to be dominated by Baltic Germans, it was an ethnically open organization, oriented far more towards a civic identity centered on Riga and a spatial identity focused on the local Baltic region (i.e., Imperial Russia's Baltic Provinces).³¹⁷ In the decades of prosperity before the First World War, Russian, Jewish, and foreign merchants— particularly from Great Britain – also regularly frequented the spacious quarters of the Bourse to trade in stocks, currency, and information. For Riga's large-scale trade and industry, the Bourse was the brain located at the center of the entire

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Upeniece and Markova, 21-24

³¹⁶ For upward social mobility of Latvians prior to WWI, cf. Lenz, pp. 43-45; for composition of Bourse Committee prior to 1919, cf. LVVA 3143-1-114-37, LVVA 3143-1-1035-29.

³¹⁷ Wezel, 4, 7, 12

Baltic region's commercial nervous system, playing a crucial role in receiving, categorizing, and re-distributing vital economic information. It was a place largely reserved for the economic elite and its representatives, playing a fundamental role in shaping the fate and fortunes of many thousands of the city's inhabitants, from the wealthiest merchant trading in thousands of tons of grain, to the lowliest factory work laid off due to a drop in demand in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, or London.

All of this was presided over by the Riga Bourse Committee (*Börsencomitee*), elected from among the ranks of the Bourse Society (*Börsenverein*).³¹⁸ The Bourse Society was comprised of representatives of several hundred of the largest commercial enterprises in the city, electing from among its members an executive committee, a small group of fifteen individuals who exercised an enormous amount of influence over the economic life of the city.³¹⁹ Typically the members of the committee were among the wealthiest men in the city, directors and board members of banks, shipping magnates, wealthy industrialists, and other members of the economic elite. It is difficult to extract hard and fast information regarding ethnicity from these membership rolls; in this case, it is probably best to rely upon one's general impression of that minority of names which are ethnically unambiguous. There is little or no consistency in the naming conventions used, complicated all the more by the prevalence during the early 1920s of the older Latvian orthography, based heavily on that of German. In the Bourse Society and Bourse Committee's membership rolls, names are sometimes given first in Latvian, then in German, sometimes the reverse, or more rarely in one language and not the other. The heavy overlap in the common stock of both first and last names between ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans complicates matters

³¹⁸ *Der* [sic] *Börsencomitee*.

³¹⁹ Lenz, 74

greatly, making it virtually impossible to determine the ethnic affiliation of many members for whom detailed biographical information is unavailable. As we will see, this ambiguity was in all probability no clerical error; many of these men would have found it useful to move seamlessly between Baltic German and Latvian society, and not to be marked overtly in ethnic terms by their names.

In addition to the enormous resources and influence that the committee's members were able to muster, the Bourse Committee itself wielded considerable power, both through its official functions and through the properties it owned and the services it provided to the city and national government. Along with the Bourse Bank, which financed the committee's activities, the Bourse owned a sizeable fleet of ships devoted to maintaining and repairing Riga harbor, including a number of dredging vessels and ice-breakers needed to keep the port open year-round.³²⁰ The Bourse was co-owner of the city's grain elevator along with the city government, and operated a winter harbor and a number of commercial properties, including warehouses, loading cranes, and lumber treating facilities, on or near the edge of the river.³²¹ Beyond its ownership of these assets, the Bourse played an important official role in Riga's economic life at the highest levels, standing for over a century in lieu of an official chamber of commerce for the city.³²²

The Bourse, as a space and as an institution, managed to survive the war years 1914-1919 more or less intact (though not unscathed), given the strangulation of trade and the multiple occupations of the city. While the Russian authorities had evacuated most of the Bourse's fleet to locations in Finland, Estonia, and St. Petersburg, this property was largely recovered in the years

³²⁰ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1928*, 6, 11

³²¹ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1928*, 12-16

³²² The city government did maintain a department of trade, which however did not concern itself with foreign trade, but rather with the management of intra-city commerce (market halls, hours of operation for businesses, etc.). For more information on the important role of the Bourse Committee and the breadth of its activities prior to the First World War, cf. Katja Wezel, esp. p. 3

immediately after the war.³²³ Despite being a Baltic German-dominated institution during a period of intense anti-German sentiment beginning in 1914, most of the harm was inflicted during the Bolshevik occupation in the first half of 1919. The seizure of over 250,000 silver rubles in cash by the Bolsheviks was more damaging, resulting in a huge operating deficit, but convening in August of 1919, the Bourse Society resolved to procure loans for its immediate operation, on the basis of its considerable real assets in and around Riga.³²⁴ Other property nationalized or given over to other purposes – the building itself was used as a club for harbor workers during the Bolshevik occupation – was returned or retrieved, allowing the institution to re-establish itself fairly quickly.³²⁵ The most long-term impact was the flight of considerable numbers of Germans serving on the Bourse Committee in 1919, many of whom ultimately never returned to Riga. Their absence helped set the stage for the ethnic transformation of the Bourse in the following years.

The Bourse's survival as an institution by and large intact was fortunate for the city on the whole, given the desperate need to revive trade in the early postwar years. Despite the completely altered political climate, not only domestically but internationally – the city was now cut off from the lucrative trade with the Russian interior which had constituted its lifeblood for centuries – the Riga Bourse Committee continued to play a fundamental role in the rebuilding of the local and national economies. Following the establishment of an independent Latvia, the national government worked in close cooperation with the Bourse Committee in establishing fiscal, trade, and general economic policy, though not without initial frictions.³²⁶ Given the pre-eminence of the

³²³ LVVA 3143-1-1621-13; *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1923* (Riga: W.F. Häcker, 1929), 11

³²⁴ LVVA 3143-1-1114-21

³²⁵ LVVA 3143-1-1114-14

³²⁶ The ministry of finance seems to have followed a more independent course following the resignation of the Baltic German minister of finance Robert Erhard in 1919, only to return to close consultation following a lack of initial success and a litany of complaints regarding trade policy from not only the Bourse Committee, but also from many other economic organizations, regardless of their ethnic composition. Cf. LVVA 3143-1-1588-154, 161, 163

institution and the vast range of its activities and oversight, which extended quite literally to every branch of the local and regional economies, the newly-created Latvian ministries of finance and of trade and industry were hardly in a position to do otherwise. Though trade had flowed to less than a trickle and industry had almost completely vanished, leaving its individual members impoverished, the Bourse was still the only institution in the capital with the knowledge and depth of experience to advise the government sensibly on issues like fiscal policy and currency management, as well as one of the bodies best able to formulate effective plans for re-establishing the economy on a new footing.

The Bourse Committee wasted little time in getting back to work, informing the ministers of finance and of trade and industry that, barring any objections from them, the stock exchange would open for trading on July 19th, 1919, just a few weeks after the return of the provisional government to the capital.³²⁷ One of the first problems confronting the new government was the currency situation, and the Bourse's help was quickly enlisted in dealing with it. A jumble of competing currencies were in circulation by 1919, among them the Russian ruble, the German-issued Ostruble and Ostmark, money issued by the Kerensky government, and currency issued both by the provisional government of Latvia – the Latvian ruble –and by various municipalities.³²⁸ By late autumn, the government was enlisting the services of the bourse in removing the process of money-changing from the streets – where it was likely to be a chaotic, swindle-prone affair – into the halls of the Bourse, where proper oversight could be executed.³²⁹ This speaks to the degree of trust placed in the Bourse as an institution by the city's commercial class and the government

³²⁷ LVVA 3143-1-7 - 26, 30, 31; The Baltic German Finance Minister Erhard issued his reply in both languages, the second minister only in Latvian.

³²⁸ Ilona Celmiņa, *Rīgas pārvalde astoņos gadsimtos* (Rīga, SIA Rīgas nami, 2000), 173-175, and “The Flucations in Latvia's Money,” *Latvijas Sargs* 9.VIII.1919 detailing the exchange rates between the Latvian ruble, the Ostruble, the German mark, and the former Russian ruble.

³²⁹ *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.I.1920

alike. In fulfilling the request of the government, the Bourse appointed three brokers to supervise the process whose ethnicity was carefully (and atypically) noted in the document – one German, one Latvian, and one Jew.³³⁰

The introduction of the Latvian Lat as the country's new currency in August of 1922 was intended as a permanent solution to the currency situation, one that necessitated the cooperation of the Bourse Committee. In discussions of what value at which to peg the Lat relative to the former Russian ruble, the Bourse Committee was closely consulted.³³¹ In February of 1922, a half a year prior to the final promulgation of the law on currency, the Bourse Committee was meeting with representatives of the ministries of trade and finance and advising them closely on the currency question.³³² Throughout 1922, the Bourse Committee remained in close contact with the government on the currency question as with many other economic matters, clearly aware of its considerable leverage and making use of it to press for hard-line fiscal conservatism; in March of 1922, the committee demanded an elimination of the deficit and the attainment of a positive balance of foreign trade, warning ominously of the economic consequences should this advice be ignored.³³³

Although the Bourse Committee and the provisional government had taken cooperative action to bring stability to the capital's currency markets, other problems were resolved less quickly, plagued by considerable differences of opinion between the government and the Bourse Committee. Where the former often did not scruple to directly intervene in the management of the economy, especially in the first few years of independence, the Bourse Committee actively

³³⁰ LVVA 3143-1-7-38

³³¹ The need to equate post-war prices to pre-war evaluations of property value in gold rubles meant that the new currency's relationship to the ruble was of overriding importance.

³³² LVVA 3143-1-8-18

³³³ Ibid.

campaigning for a *laissez-faire* approach to economic policy, emphasizing that the government's only role was to create stable conditions for trade. Correspondence between the Bourse Committee and the government in 1920, particularly in the first half of the year, betrays a deep frustration on the part of the committee with the promulgation of laws that it considered ill-advised; the committee repeatedly petitioned that its experts be consulted before new laws were issued.³³⁴ The provisional government's initial reluctance to consult the Bourse Committee, perhaps moderated by its lack of immediate success in re-invigorating the economy, eventually gave way to a more cooperative approach, and the Bourse, along with its close ally, the Riga Factory Owners' Association, eventually worked closely with the government on fiscal and economic policy through most of the 1920s and 1930s. Despite occasional disagreements, the Bourse Committee was a necessary partner for a young state both desperate to revive trade and eager to establish credentials for itself as credible player in the capitalist world order.³³⁵ By aiding the Bourse Committee in its work, the national government would also benefit from improved economic conditions, brought about not least by the Bourse's commitment to infrastructure maintenance and improvement, especially in Riga harbor.³³⁶

Although the interwar Bourse never regained the same degree of financial means it had enjoyed before the calamity of 1914, it nonetheless set about helping to revitalize commercial networks and industry, overseeing management of the city's harbor as well as taking active part in

³³⁴ LVVA 3143-1-1588-123, 154, 161. #123 is a lengthy and detailed letter addressed to the Minister-President (Kārlis Ulmanis at that time) criticizing government trade policy with a long list of signatory bodies, headed by the Riga Bourse Committee but also including the Riga Factory Owners' Association, the Association of Latvian Industrialists and Craftsmen; the Society of Latvian Merchants; the Bourse Committee of Liepāja/Libau; the Libau Factory Owners' Association, and the Organization for the Protection of Retail Trade. Some of these were Baltic German-dominated organizations, others Latvian-controlled, but all seemingly united in common cause against the national trade policy at this time.

³³⁵ As, for example, when the government pressured the Bourse to peg the Lat to the ruble at a rate of 50 to 1, not wishing for this decision to emanate from the government directly, likely due to credibility concerns. LVVA 3143-1-8-18

³³⁶ The national government eventually granted the Bourse Committee a loan towards the modernization of port and shipping facilities. Wezel, 13

the construction of new bridges, canals and other infrastructure.³³⁷ The net cast by the Bourse across the economic affairs of the city was a wide one, reaching into countless aspects of local and international economic existence alike. By 1923, following repairs to its opulent façade and renovations to the interior, the Bourse building had once again become a symbol of the active commercial life of the city.³³⁸ Centrally located in the heart of the old town near the harbor, grandiose in size and conception, the Riga Bourse of the 1920s was again a lively place, bustling with activity and abuzz with the exchange of information. The uncertainty of the first few years following Latvian independence eventually gave way to a Bourse Committee back in its central role in shaping the economic life of the city and country, maintaining close ties to the national government while retaining its autonomy.³³⁹

A return to something approaching its former vitality did not leave the Bourse unchanged, of course. The Bourse Committee underwent considerable ethnic change after 1919, without that change necessarily bringing any upheaval, outrage, or meaningful changes in the purpose or practices of the institution. An increasing number of Latvians had been appointed to positions within the committee in the autumn of 1920 and the summer of 1921, the positions they filled having been rendered vacant by the failure of a number of Baltic Germans, fled to Germany during the war, to return to Riga.³⁴⁰ The shift to a Latvian-dominated Bourse Committee came in November of 1921, when the Bourse Committee, newly bolstered by the recent ethnic Latvian additions, formally proposed to amend its by-laws to require a Latvian majority on the committee.

³³⁷ Numerous such projects are listed in the yearly *Reports on the Activity of the Riga Bourse Committee (Berichte über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees)* published during the interwar period (Cf. bibliography), much of it done with little public fanfare, but the Bourse also occasionally received credit for these efforts in the press; cf. "Opening of the Boldeera Canal," *Rigasche Rundschau* 9.X.1926.

³³⁸ Upeniece and Markova, 27

³³⁹ Wezel, 13

³⁴⁰ LVVA 3143-1-1114-37, 48

The measure succeeding, the committee resigned en masse (including ethnic Latvian members) to allow for the immediate election of a new committee in accordance with the new stipulation. The result was a committee that was three-fifths Latvian, with an ethnic Latvian, Jānis Seebergs, acceding to the position of chair for the first time in the committee's history.

This was retrospectively characterized in the Latvian press as a victory along ethnic lines, and in some senses it surely was. However, the attainment of a Latvian majority and election of Seebergs as chair were less than a hostile takeover of the institution, coming as they did from long-standing members elected almost unanimously to their positions. It is plausible that at least some Baltic German committee members also voted in favor of the proposed change in the statutes. Given the importance of the Bourse Committee and its increasingly close cooperation with the national government, along with the presence of numerous Latvians in its ranks already, a Latvian majority on the committee may have seemed like a foregone conclusion to many. Reaching the decision to enshrine that majority in the by-laws could have been seen as a pre-emptive move to preserve the Bourse's independence and privileges against interference on the part of the national government, especially at a time when ethnic tensions exacerbated by the World War were still raw.

The new statutes for the Bourse Committee, drafted in 1923 and approved by the finance minister in 1924, stipulated that 2/3 of the members must be Latvian citizens *of Latvian nationality*, but set no conditions for who might hold what office, leaving Baltic Germans in control of about 1/3 of the seats, with representation in most of the Bourse's subcommittees and many of its higher offices. The Baltic German Eugen Schwartz, vice-chair of the Bourse Committee since 1911, continued in that position until 1937, enjoying wide authority and respect.³⁴¹ Baltic Germans were

³⁴¹ "25 years in the service of Riga," *Rigasche Rundschau* 23.III.1929

especially well-represented in the small group of five “Bourse Elders” who were entrusted with most of the committee’s day-to-day responsibilities.³⁴² The membership lists for the much larger Bourse Society, comprised of several hundred of the city’s wealthiest businessmen, for the years 1924-1933 reveal a fairly even mix between ethnic Latvians and Baltic Germans, peppered here and there with Jewish surnames as well.³⁴³

The ethnic reversal in the Bourse Committee in 1921 is probably as mild an example of the process as can be found for interwar Riga. Although they might have preferred for the Baltic German Wilhelm Kerkovius to continue on in the position, Seebergs’ election as chair was most likely not unpalatable to Baltic German committee members. This had much to do with Seeberg’s biography and personality. This was the same Seebergs who, serving as minister of trade and industry in 1919, Baron von Fircks had characterized as “cleaving to us” (the Baltic Germans) despite being an ethnic Latvian. Seebergs had been educated in German throughout his life, first at the *Realschule* in Jelgāva (then Mitau) and later at the Polytechnical in Riga.³⁴⁴ He had made his career and fortune at the Baltic German shipping company Helmsing & Grimm, moving up the ranks from clerk in 1894 to eventual co-owner in 1924. While Seeberg’s ethnicity was important for symbolic purposes – especially vis-à-vis the government – his apparently quite casual attitude towards it, along with his close connections with the German-speaking world (in Riga and around the Baltic), made him a candidate whom the Baltic German economic elite could rely upon to serve

³⁴² Two out of five seats in most years.

³⁴³ As noted above, it is often difficult to make determinations of ethnicity based solely on an individual’s name as listed in these registers, even between Baltic Germans and Latvians; the overlap in surnames between Baltic Germans and Courland Jews was also not insignificant, further complicating any efforts at demographic tabulation.

³⁴⁴ “Johann Seeberg,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 5.IX.1927; Seebergs would have graduated from the polytechnical just a few years prior to the introduction of Russian-language instruction in 1896. Clara Redlich, “Das Rigaer Polytechnikum 1862-1918” in: *Quellen und Studien zur baltischen Geschichte 9: Die Universitäten Dorpat/Tartu, Riga und Wilna/Vilnius 1579-1979* (von Pistohlkors, Raun, and Kaegbein eds., Köln: Böhlau, 1987) 251

as a bulwark against ethnic chauvinism in the Bourse Committee.³⁴⁵ He was, in short, very nearly one of their own, ethnic Latvian or no.

When Seeberg died in 1927 in the course of an operation in Berlin, all of Riga's major papers ran lengthy obituaries and coverage of his funeral, universally noting his lack of ethnic chauvinism or prejudice and the fact that his funeral was well-attended by both the Latvian and the Baltic German elite.³⁴⁶ The paper *Latvis*, typically overtly nationalistic in tone, even offered praise for Seeberg's work in overcoming possible ethnic divisions at the Bourse:

“Himself being free of any prejudices of chauvinistic character, he was able to introduce friendly relations between Latvian and Baltic German financial workers, which before than had still been entirely unformed, and in all cases of disagreement, he smoothed over and harmonized the points of view of both nationalities.”³⁴⁷

It is clear from this obituary and the one published in the *Rigasche Rundschau* in September 1927, expressing similar sentiments, that Seeberg was a well-liked and respected figure among Baltic Germans as well as Latvians.³⁴⁸ Seeberg's funeral proceedings vividly captured the ways in which the city's economic elite lived a different reality vis-à-vis the ethnic Other than did most ordinary citizens, one more characterized by indifference towards ethnicity. The widow Seebergs sent the same set of invitations to all of the funeral's attendees, the text appearing first in Latvian, then in equal size in German. The same was true of the leaflets bearing the words of the hymns to be sung at the grave. The Baltic German Eugen Schwartz, vice-chair of the Bourse Committee since 1911, gave a speech, first in Latvian and then in German, in the chambers of the Bourse Building before the funeral procession departed from there to the city's Forest Cemetery,

³⁴⁵ It seems clear that Seebergs spoke excellent German; the telegram expressing condolences sent by the Chamber of Commerce of Stettin upon his death gratefully recalled the warmth and humor with which he had personally entertained their delegation. LVVA 3143-1-27-263

³⁴⁶ *Latvijas Sargs* Nr. 148, 12.IX.1927; *Rigasche Rundschau* 12.IX.1927

³⁴⁷ *Latvis* 6.IX.1927

³⁴⁸ *Rigasche Rundschau* 12.IX.1927

accompanied by large numbers of Baltic Germans and Latvians alike. The minister-president at the time, Mārgers Skujenieks, accompanied the procession, as did the minister of finance; both spoke at the graveside thanking Seeberg for his services on behalf of the state in its first years and laying wreaths in the name of the government. Two pastors acquainted with Seebergs, one Latvian and one Baltic German, spoke at the grave.³⁴⁹ Eugen Schwartz spoke again in eulogy of the departed, as did Walter Sadowsky, one of the most important Baltic Germans in city government.³⁵⁰

Clearly this was a man that both Latvians and Baltic Germans were happy enough to count as one of their own, one whose life contradicted the simplistic us-vs-them narrative of national activists. Seebergs was not the only such example, nor were they only to be found among partially Germanized Latvians (though these were more common); in its obituary of the Baltic German Bourse Committee member Woldemar Heydemann, the Latvian paper *Latvis* wrote that Heydemann was “a German by nationality, but in life he did not distinguish between Latvians and Baltic Germans...he knew our language well and spoke it gladly.” The paper noted that a large number of Latvians as well as Germans attended his funeral.³⁵¹ Among the economic elite of interwar Riga, the crass narrative dichotomies of oppressed/oppressor, native/foreign, us/them used by national activists largely broke down, revealing instead a social stratum vastly more united by class interests, education, and social distinction than it was divided by language barriers or competing ethnic affiliations.

³⁴⁹ LVVA 3143-1-27-204

³⁵⁰ What language they gave their addresses in is not recorded; it may well have been in Latvian, as both spoke it, Sadowsky apparently almost at a native level. Stegmann notes that both men were Courlanders rather than native Rigans, making it quite possible that either or both acquired a good command of the language in childhood if they grew up in rural areas or in smaller towns. Cf. Helmut Stegman, “Aus meinen Erinnerungen. I. Stadtverordneter in Riga 1920–1933” in *Baltische Hefte*, 7. Jahrgang (1960/61), 101; See Lenz, 73 for the observation that most Germans who spoke fluent Latvian prior to 1914 had spent some time in the (Latvian-speaking) countryside.

³⁵¹ *Latvis* 13.III.1925

Of all Riga's social strata, it is among this one, the economic elite, where the boundaries between Baltic German and ethnic Latvian were blurriest – still extant, but neither so rigid nor so sharply defined as in other walks of life. The interwar Bourse Committee as an institution encapsulates the dual ethnic nature of this group. From around 1920 onward, virtually all paperwork composed and filed by the Bourse Committee existed in both Latvian and German.³⁵² Protocols and minutes were composed in both languages, and various technical and legal documents issued in Latvian were translated for the benefit of the Baltic German members.³⁵³ The institution maintained stationary and letterhead in each language, as was the practice with many of the banks located in Riga. Essentially the Bourse functioned as a fully dual-language entity from the early 1920s through the mid-1930s, one in which Latvian had the upper hand in legalistic terms, but German had the advantage in practical ones, since German still served as the principal *lingua franca* in commerce and diplomacy across much of Eastern Europe throughout the interwar period. Most incoming correspondence to the Bourse from abroad was addressed in German, much more rarely in English or French.³⁵⁴ Most of the Latvian members of the Bourse Committee would have spoken passable German, and many among the older generation would have obtained their education in Germany or at German-language institutions in the Baltic region.³⁵⁵ More than a few of the Latvian *nouveau-riche* of their generation and the one immediately preceding it had married

³⁵² Cf. Wezel, 12 on gradual of gradual shift to Latvian in the institution's documents.

³⁵³ Wezel 1

³⁵⁴ This is an impression formed from a survey of around one dozen folders of materials relating to the Riga Bourse Committee, grouped in the Latvian State Historical Archive (LVVA) under Fonds 3143. See chapter bibliography.

³⁵⁵ Jānis/Johans Brauns is an emblematic and intriguing example, along with Seebergs. Though unequivocally a Latvian, his sense of nationality seems at odds with that of younger generations. Brauns received his higher education in Germany, making it likely that he received most of his schooling in life in that language as well, and upon his return to his homeland after graduation, he founded a successful matchstick factory which he chose to give a fabricated German, rather than a Latvian (or a Russian) name, *Schwannendorf*. Moving to Riga and succeeding in various business ventures, he became the longtime chairman of the influential Riga Factory Owners' Association, an organization that was more or less thoroughly German in character both before and after the First World War (Šimkuva, "Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940," 180). Though a member of the board of the Riga Latvian Society for many years, he was also a prodigious donor towards the construction of churches for Lutheran parishes in Russia proper, most of them comprised of ethnic Germans. Cf. *Latvis* 27.VIII.1929 for Brauns' biography.

well-educated Baltic German women, meaning that a considerable portion of the Latvian businessmen of the Bourse Committee likely had German-speaking wives or mothers, not to mention more distant relations.³⁵⁶ On the Baltic German side, the rise of an ethnic Latvian middle and upper class in the second half of the 19th century had been met with grudging respect more than anything else, albeit paired with social and cultural anxieties about their group's ability to maintain its elite status in a changing world.³⁵⁷ Though tensions undoubtedly existed between the two groups' middle classes, overt ethnic antagonism from Baltic Germans was mostly reserved for the Latvian lower and working classes, especially following the Revolution of 1905 and the violence it brought to Riga as well as the surrounding countryside.³⁵⁸

This should not be taken to suggest that ethnicity did not play any role in the thinking of the Bourse Committee's leadership; clearly it did, as the change in the statutes in 1921 and other incidents make clear. A few months prior to the death of Seebergs, another committee member had passed away, Samuel Sachs, a Jewish member of the board of directors of the venerable Northern Bank of Riga. Following Sachs' death, the committee's vice chair Eugen Schwartz dashed off a brief telegram to Leon Lewstein of the International Bank of Riga, then sojourning at the Hotel Fürstenhof in Bad Wildungen in Germany, requesting permission to nominate him to the Bourse Committee in Sachs' place (to which Lewstein agreed).³⁵⁹ Rather than seeking to preserve

³⁵⁶ Wezel, 9

³⁵⁷ Cf. von Hirschhausen, 57-61 and 195-209 for the Baltic Germans' grudging acceptance of middle and upper-class Latvian voters into the electorate, and the attempts of the former to construct political appeals based on class interests rather than ethnic identity.

³⁵⁸ Henriksson notes that one of the chief sources of Baltic German hostility to Latvian nationalism was the suspicion that it was a "false front for social radicalism" - *The Tsar's Loyal Germans*, 107

³⁵⁹ Schwartz's note: LVVA 3143-1-27-170; reply (in German) LVVA 3143-1-27-190; Lewstein's position LVVA 3143-1-27-192. Lewstein's choice of Bad Wildungen as a vacation spot is likely a result of German-language cultural assimilation, as he also had studied in Germany and spoke German fluently, perhaps natively.

the equilibrium between the various *banks* represented on the committee, Schwartz was moving to maintain its ethnic composition (Lewstein also being Jewish).³⁶⁰

The Bourse seems not to have been much plagued by anti-Semitism; numerous Jewish-owned banks and credit organizations found representation there on equitable terms, though usually only one member of the Bourse Committee itself was Jewish. The details surrounding Sachs' funeral and its attendance would indicate that the man was far from *persona non grata* in gentile circles. The Baltic German and German-acclimated Jewish communities in Riga (largely middle and upper class) had moved closer together in the new Latvian state, where they shared common political interests as ethnic minorities, as well as being united by a common language. The Riga Jewish population was divided into two main components, one largely German-speaking and largely German-acclimated, the second Russian-speaking and oriented more towards Russian culture (with Yiddish being spoken at home by a majority, though not all). Although after WWI the second group was by far the larger, the economic importance and overall influence of the German-speaking Jews remained at least as great as that of the more numerous Russian-speaking Jews. Among the latter, the use of Yiddish seems to have been far more common than among the former.³⁶¹ On the part of the Baltic Germans, overt anti-Semitic rhetoric is conspicuously lacking in the interwar Baltic German press prior to 1933, somewhat in contrast to the Latvian-language press of the same time.

Schwartz could not, of course, fully preserve the ethnic composition of the Bourse across the years. As time went on, Baltic German numbers were gradually eroded, with retiring or

³⁶⁰ *Firmenregister der Stadt Riga*, Riga, Müllersche Buckdruckerei, 1903, 155; this lists ethnicity/nationality of owners; Lewstein was co-owner in his family's company while a graduate student of law.

³⁶¹ In his memoir on growing up in interwar Riga, Max Michelson recalls the reverence in which his relatively affluent Jewish family held German culture and the German language (and their relative disdain for Yiddish). Cf. Max Michelson, *City of Life, City of Death: Memories of Riga* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001) 11-12, 49, 71

deceased Baltic German members of the Bourse Committee more likely than not to be replaced by ethnic Latvians, but this was a passive and lengthy process.³⁶² Baltic Germans were not necessarily passed over for promotions and assignments within the Bourse Committee even in the years of sharp interethnic tension in the 1930s.³⁶³ Even in positions requiring government confirmation – the Bourse Committee maintained a number of sub-committees which worked in consultation with the ministries of finance and of trade and industry – Baltic German nominees proposed by the Bourse Committee were speedily approved by the national government.³⁶⁴

The coup-d'état of 1934, which brought far-reaching changes to so many aspects of interethnic relations in Riga, also brought changes to the Bourse Committee within a few years. Through 1934 and 1935, the Bourse continued to function much as before, though the increased concentration of power in the hands of the national government meant a diminishment of its influence, much of which had previously been exercised via consultation with various legislative committees in the *Saiema*. The promulgation of a series of laws in December 1935, concerning the establishment of four bodies intended to supervise and regulate most economic activity in the country, established a national Chamber of Industry and Commerce, robbing the Bourse of an important role that it had fulfilled in Riga for over a century.³⁶⁵ The creation of the various chambers was ostensibly intended to “bring the interests of the state and private enterprise into

³⁶² One which also largely paralleled the replacement of Baltic German officials in city government in the period 1919-1934.

³⁶³ LVVA 3143-1-27-369, 370 for representative examples; Baltic Germans and Jews were in a minority relative to Latvians on the Bourse Committee overall, but Baltic Germans held many of the more important positions in various sub-committees etc. Jews were relatively less well-represented, though not excluded entirely.

³⁶⁴ LVVA 3143-1-27-349; letter from the Bourse Committee to the minister of finance from 28.XI.1929 suggesting the appointment of Heinrich Gaabe, a Baltic German, to the board of the Bank of Latvia to replace a departing member (also Baltic German). From the perspective of a government bent on Latvianization, this would have been an easy opportunity to alter the ethnic composition of the council by insisting on a Latvian replacement, but instead Gaabe's appointment was immediately approved in a cabinet meeting without objection – indicating the government's willingness to abide by the norms of ethnic pluralism in financial affairs established at the beginning of the decade. Confirmation of appointment in LVVA 3143-1-27-351 and *Valdības Vēstnesis* 30.XI.1929 Nr. 272; note that this was still prior to the effects of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and ensuing world economic crisis hitting Latvia.

³⁶⁵ *Rītis* 5.VII.1939

harmony”, which it may well have done; one of the principal effects, however, was to increase state control over the economy. From this point, the Bourse Committee lost some of its special status and influence beyond that of a normal stock exchange, and its former functions were given over to bodies under exclusive ethnic Latvian control. The composition of the Bourse Committee changed very little in ethnic terms, however, with the committee elected in 1937, for example, having precisely the same ethnic composition as that of 1924 – thirteen Latvians, six Baltic Germans, and one Jew.³⁶⁶

The ultimate end of the Bourse Committee came about in the summer of 1939, with a law promulgated on July 4th which dissolved the committee and provided for its replacement with a new board of directors. Coming at a time when the state was progressively gathering more and more power into its own hands, the public justification for the law was the complaint that too few merchants were being permitted membership in the Bourse Society; the reforms would correct this, allowing for a much wider representation. The old Bourse statutes approved in 1924 were abolished. The Latvian-language press, as was typical under the authoritarian regime 1934-1940, took advantage of the opportunity to praise the changes from an ethnic perspective, declaring that the Bourse would henceforth „become more Latvian” and „acquire a Latvian face” - this despite the 2/3 majority on the Bourse Committee guaranteed by the organization’s own statutes.³⁶⁷

In effect, the measures taken in July 1939 reduced the Bourse to an organ of the ministry of finance, technically still a non-governmental body but firmly under the control of the regime. The necessity of having a functioning stock exchange for the country remained, as did the need for expertise in running it, but Ulmanis’ position had apparently evolved to one of little tolerance

³⁶⁶ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees* 1936, p. 96, and *Bericht...1923*, p. 60

³⁶⁷ *Brīvā Zeme* 27.VII.1939 and *Latvijas Kareivis* 20.XII.1939 – this last after the departure of most Baltic Germans, but the implication that it previously lacked a Latvian face still holds.

for any independence from the Bourse Committee, a far cry from the early 1920s, when the Bourse Committee did not scruple to privately berate the government – inclusive of Ulmanis in his recurrent role as Minister-President prior to 1934- in numerous missives on economic and fiscal policy.³⁶⁸ Although one might expect this move to have resulted in a new board of directors consisting of new, exclusively ethnic Latvian appointees, this was not the case - of eight members, two were Baltic Germans, one with lengthy experience on the Bourse Committee, Heinrich Gaabe, and the other a former minister of finance under Ulmanis from 1919-1920 and chair of the Riga Factory-owners' Association, Dr. Robert Erhardt. Leon Lewstein likewise continued on as a member of the committee.³⁶⁹ Despite repeated government inroads against ethnic minority (i.e., Baltic German and Jewish) industry and capital in the form of numerous nationalizations along with state favoritism for ethnic Latvian-owned firms, the Baltic German and Jewish positions in the national economy remained extremely important.³⁷⁰

The story of the Riga Bourse during the interwar period is one of “soft” ethnic reversal, in which existing institutions were maintained while undergoing a change in leadership rather than re-invented or radically transformed. As ethnic Latvians assumed direct control of the Bourse Committee, Baltic Germans were largely left in their posts, and they continued to play a crucial role in guiding the institution throughout the entirety of its remaining existence. The interwar history of the Bourse Society and Bourse Committee stand out from other examples of such soft transitions – most notably, that in Riga city government – in the degree of accommodation between ethnicities and the ways in which ethnic animosities were blunted and ethnic identities even

³⁶⁸ LVVA 3143-1-1588-123, 154

³⁶⁹ *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1938*, ii; Wilhelm Lenz, ed., *Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon 1710-1960* (Köln: Böhlau, 1970) 199

³⁷⁰ Šimkuva, “Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940,” 191-193

somewhat blurred. Although the role of the stock exchange building in the heart of old Riga as the nerve center of the city's economic existence gradually diminished in the 1930s, the Bourse continued to play a prominent role in the lives of the city's economic elite, as an institution emblematic of the city rather than any one of its ethnic groups. Unlike other landmarks, which were Latvianized at the stroke of a pen – such as the cathedral of St. Mary or the *Saeima* building – the Bourse slowly shifted from being a Baltic German to a Latvian-dominated space and institution, a transformation with no fixed date or abrupt turning point that allowed the Bourse as an institution to maintain a fundamental identity and self-conception rooted in tradition and history.

3.2 The Central Market

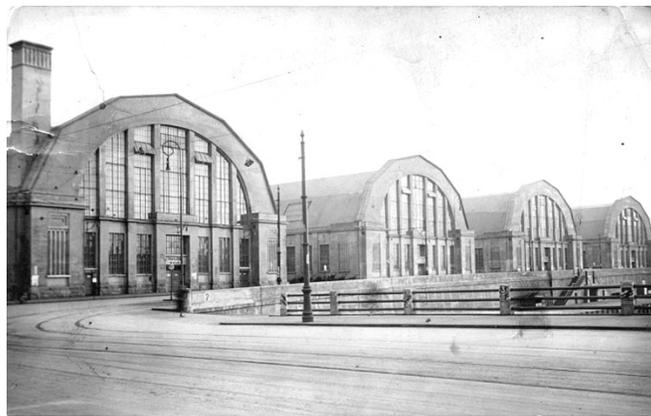


Figure 11. Riga's central market circa 1930.

If the Riga Bourse functioned as the nerve center – the “brain” of economic life in the city, then the city's new central market, completed in 1930, would be its “stomach”, as it indeed was fondly referred to in interwar newspapers. The central market and the bourse contrast with one another, both as spaces and institutions, in a number of ways. The bourse building had been built long before the outbreak of war in 1914, and underwent only very minor changes in appearance during the interwar period. The bourse functioned as a space for elites, the purview of powerful men with wide-reaching influence over the affairs of the city and its cultural as well as economic

life. The central market, in contrast, was a new construction project for the era, although one with roots in the pre-war period as well; it was probably the most significant new building project in the entire country to be finished prior to 1934, and certainly the most important in Riga.³⁷¹ It was also a space of the common man, intended for a diverse clientele ranging from the working class up to the elite (whether these did their shopping on their own or through hired help). Whereas the Bourse usually received little attention in the press beyond the notation of exchange rates and other economic data, the local periodicals, Latvian, German, and Russian, all lavished journalistic attention on the central market during the period of its construction, making it a focus of popular interest in the 1920s. An analysis both of the process of building the central market – undertaken by the city government with financial assistance from the Bank of Latvia – and its representation in the city’s major newspapers is of particular value because of the contrast between this project and the large-scale, often monumental, undertakings of the Ulmanis regime after 1934, most of which were accompanied by a bombastic nationalist rhetoric in official statements and press reports, one that was almost wholly absent from writing on the new central market. In addition to being the only construction project on a massive scale in interwar Riga not closely identified either with the national government or with the Latvian people in ethnic terms, the central market was also the result of interethnic cooperation within city government, since a number of persons playing a central role in the market’s construction were not ethnic Latvians.

Like most of interwar Riga’s major construction projects, the plans for the central market had their roots in the decades before the First World War. The need for a new market to replace the long-outdated facilities along the bank of the Daugava near the town hall had long been recognized by the public and city government alike. Plans had been made in city government for

³⁷¹ Jānis Krastiņš, *Latvijas Republikas Būvmāksla* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1993), 108

a relocation of the Daugava market to essentially the same location ultimately chosen for the central market in 1909-1910, in a section of land between the Daugava, one terminus of the city canal, the railroad line (not far from the central station) and a group of 19th-century storage buildings invariably termed the “Red Warehouses” due to the color of the brick used in their construction.³⁷² Nothing had come of these plans, however, due to financial considerations, bureaucratic complications, and then the outbreak of war.³⁷³ With the return of more or less normal economic conditions in the city in the early 1920s, the need for a new market became increasingly pressing once more.³⁷⁴ The old market on the Daugava, though thriving in terms of volume of business – it had a higher turnover in goods than all of the city’s other markets combined - was regarded by seemingly everyone as an eyesore, with numerous press articles in Latvian and German alike lamenting the fact that it was the first sight glimpsed by travelers arriving in Riga by ship.³⁷⁵ Beyond the aesthetic considerations, considerable effort was expended in the press on bemoaning the sanitary conditions of the crowded market on the Daugava, invariably disparaged as “appalling”, “disgusting”, etc.³⁷⁶

The city government had already reached the decision to build a new market and relocate the old one by 1922.³⁷⁷ The project moved slowly from there, gathering pace as technical details were sorted out. A special committee was established to oversee the construction of the new market, led by a Latvian, Jānis Jagars, head of the city building office, with a Baltic German, Georg Ullmann, head of the city trade office, and a Russian, P. Ladigin as the other two members. The

³⁷² Jānis Jagars, “Centrāltirgus būve” in: W. Sadowsky and T. Līventāls, eds. *Rīga kā Latvijas galvas pilsēta* (Rīga: Rīgas pilsētas valdes izdevniecība, 1932), 387

³⁷³ *Brīvā Tēvija* 13.XI.1926

³⁷⁴ Jagars, 387

³⁷⁵ Jagars, 387; regarding initial impression on visitors, cf. *Rīgas Ziņas* 26.IX.1925 and *Sociāldemokrāts* 22.VII.1925

³⁷⁶ *Rīgasche Rundschau* 20.X.1931; *Brīvā Tēvija* 13.XI.1926; *Pēdējā Brīdī* 15.XI.1930; *Sociāldemokrāts* 31.X.1930.

³⁷⁷ *Sociāldemokrāts* 22.VII.1925 – “Jaunā Rīgas Centrāltirgus būve”

engineer Vasilijs Isajevs was in charge of producing the final design for the market, assisted by architect P. Pavlovs and G. Tolstojs.³⁷⁸

The project began to move forward with an architectural competition held by the city in 1923, in which foreign as well as local firms competed.³⁷⁹ The terms of the competition were determined by Jānis Jagars, head of the city building department, and Georg Ullmann, long-time head of the city trade department.³⁸⁰ Jagars, an ethnic Latvian, and Ullmann, a Baltic German, were the two high-ranking city officials most closely involved with the central market over the course of its construction, with the former having final say on questions regarding the construction of the market, and the latter on those regarding its administration. Though P. Ladigin was part of the triumvirate comprising the committee officially tasked with the building of the new market, he seems to have played far less involved a role than the other two members, both of whose ordinary positions in city government would have brought them into close contact with the new project in any event.

The desire to construct the most modern and efficient market possible – effectively, the most impressive one – was clear from the outset. Following the declaration of the architectural competition, the city decided to send a few members of the executive board to Germany for three weeks to inspect the techniques of market design and management in use there.³⁸¹ Although the press and city government almost invariably wrote of ‘Western Europe’ as the location of the modern facilities that the city wished to emulate, Germany in particular was the most common point of reference – unsurprising given how widely German was still spoken by ethnic Latvians in

³⁷⁸ Although at first glance their surnames would indicate an ethnic Russian identity for all three individuals, in reality their personal or legal ethnic identity is impossible to determine without more complete biographic material.

³⁷⁹ “The Construction of the New Central Market,” *Sociāldemokrāts* 22.VII.1925

³⁸⁰ LVVA 2894-4-1094-684

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

the interwar period compared to other foreign languages.³⁸² Most of the foreign submissions for the market designs originated in Germany, and some German experts were relied upon when local technical knowledge proved insufficient.³⁸³

The decision to use two massive zeppelin hangars located near the town of Vainode (Wainoden) had already been reached before the competition was declared, with the use of the curved metal bars from these hangars in the roofing of the market halls figuring as a requisite for all designs submitted.³⁸⁴ Erected by the Imperial German military during its occupation of Courland to house dirigibles used for sorties over the eastern front, these structures had fallen under the control of the national government, which in turn had sold them to the city of Riga at a discounted price.³⁸⁵ The city government had determined to use them for the construction of large, high-ceilinged market halls for the planned new facilities, a plan that ultimately came to fruition, albeit not without difficulties, complications, and alterations. With no single design deemed suitable to the city's needs, Isajevs picked and chose the best elements from the submissions. After much back-and-forth between Ullmann in the trade department and the merchants in the old market, a design involving five separate market halls was eventually settled upon, with one devoted to wholesale trade and the rest given over to more modest merchants, mostly selling foodstuffs for home consumption.³⁸⁶ This was in part because it had been determined that the two hangars at Vainode were too tall for the needs of the market, wasting space and potentially causing

³⁸² Russian would perhaps have been even more commonly known in interwar Latvia, but the pariah status of the USSR left German as a language of far greater utility during the interwar period. The replacement of German with French as the preferred foreign language in Latvia took place only slowly and inconclusively prior to 1940.

³⁸³ LVVA 2894-4-1094-674, 678, 655

³⁸⁴ Krastiņš, *Latvijas Republikas Būvmāksla*, 110

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ LVVA 2894-4-1094-636, 639; the city was in favor of building second-story galleries within the high-ceilinged hangars in order to more efficiently use the space, however, the merchants were adamantly opposed to this, apparently fearing that sellers located in the galleries would see less foot traffic than their earth-bound competition. Thus plans for three hangars became plans for four, to Ullmann's apparent exasperation.

heating and circulation problems.³⁸⁷ Instead, the iron framework from the two massive hangars would be reconfigured to produce a larger number of smaller (though still impressive) market halls. Ultimately, all of the steel used in the central market's construction was procured from the Vainode site.³⁸⁸

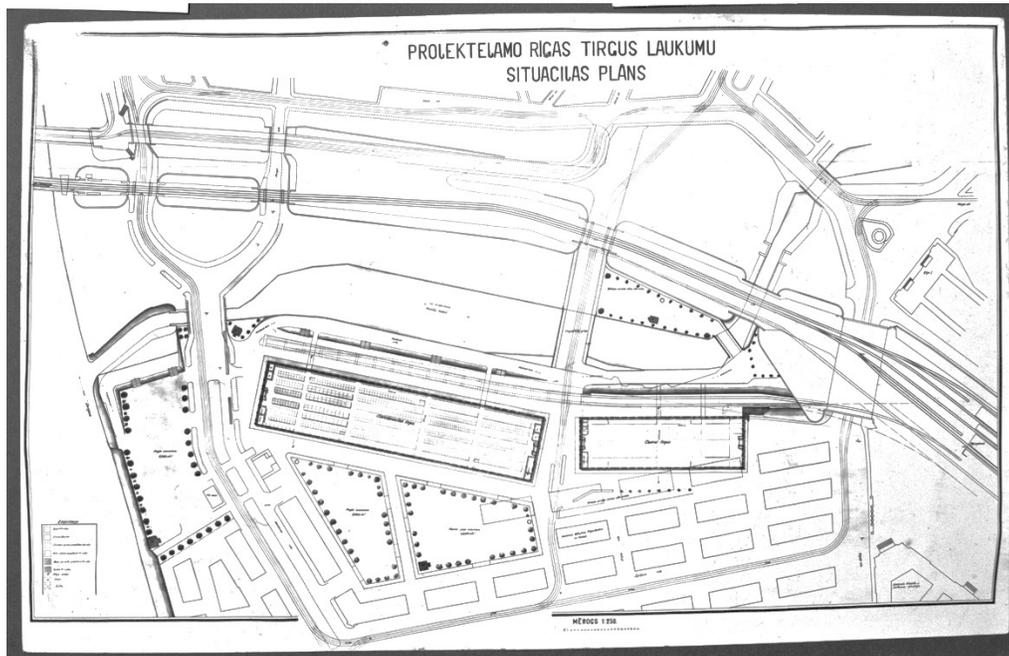


Figure 12. Projected map of the new central market, circa 1927.

The transfer of the hangars from Vainode to Riga began in the spring of 1925 and continued for most of the year, wrapping up around Christmas.³⁸⁹ As the work continued apace in Riga, press interest continued unabated, intensifying if anything as the project encountered numerous financial hurdles. The city's finances were in a less than ideal state throughout the 1920s, and all of the large-scale construction projects of the decade had to be financed through loans, either from domestic or foreign sources. Since the central market project, at 5.35 million lats, was far and away the costliest project underway during the years 1924-1930, the question of its financing attracted

³⁸⁷ Jagars, 387

³⁸⁸ Jagars, 387

³⁸⁹ *Latvijas Kareivis* 4.XI.1925

considerable attention the press, and various measures were considered and adopted (or abandoned) as the project moved forward. Numerous interruptions in the construction took place as funds were depleted, with construction lurching forward once more after the acquisition of new loans or allocations from the city's so-called extraordinary budget.³⁹⁰



Figure 13. One of the market halls near the end of construction.

In the end, the city financed the market's construction through a mixture of allocations from the budget and loans, considering loans in the sum of four million lats from various banks in Germany before ultimately procuring a loan from the Bank of Latvia for two million lats at the end of 1927, all of it to be used to finance the next year's construction.³⁹¹ And additional loan from the Mortgage Bank of Riga in the sum of 400,000 Lats was also procured for the market in the late 1920s.³⁹² These interruptions due to financial difficulties – the longest occurring in 1927 - delayed the construction of the market by about one year.³⁹³

Throughout the entire period of engagement with the central market question, from 1922 to the completion of the market in 1930, the city government's executive board was closely involved with the project, discussing and debating virtually every aspect of the project from the

³⁹⁰ *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.XII.1925; *Latvijas Vēstnesis* 9.XII.1925; *Rigasche Rundschau* 5.II.1930

³⁹¹ "How Will the New Central Market Look? Interview with Chief Engineer Issajev," *Riga am Sonntag* 4.III.1928; cf. *Rigasche Rundschau* 31.XII.1927 regarding periods of expenditure.

³⁹² LVVA 2894-4-1094-576

³⁹³ Jagars, 388

broadest strokes to the smallest details, and holding the final authority on any and all decisions reached. Given the multi-ethnic nature of this body, it would be difficult not to view the central market as a product of close cooperation between the city's major ethnic groups.³⁹⁴ The executive board of city government in the 1920s was usually around 10 people depending on attendance, among them two Germans and one Jew. These three served on the executive board continually throughout the 1920s, whereas the Latvian names appearing tended to fluctuate somewhat more.³⁹⁵ The abiding necessity of procuring the support of the ethnic minorities in order to form a Latvian-led governing coalition in city government likely produced this result, in which the numerous non-socialist ethnic Latvian political parties experienced more dramatic changes in electoral fortune than did the ethnic minorities, which consistently rallied their shares of the population behind them in municipal elections, and which enjoyed clear and obvious principles of organization - the protection of their communities' interests.

Not only did the multi-ethnic executive board a very active part in managing the construction of the new market (to the point that one wonders whether anyone was actually saved any work by the creation of the committee intended to supervise the project), its Baltic German members played roles of particular importance for the market. As head of the city's financial department, Walter Sadowsky was of crucial importance in making arrangements for the funding of the project, a process beset by continual difficulties, as we have seen. As the other Baltic German

³⁹⁴ LVVA Folder 2894-4-1094 is a collection of documents relating to the central market, mostly comprised of protocols from sessions of Rīgas Pilsētas Valde, the executive board of city government that made most of the day-to-day decisions involved in governing. Consisting of 8-12 members including the mayor and two sub-mayors (*pilsētas galvas biedri/Stadtglieder*, of whom one was the Baltic German Sadowsky), the two German and one Jewish members of this body were among the most regular attendees, with the former being also among the most active participants in deliberations regarding the central market. More than any other entity, it was this body which through its deliberations and decisions brought the central market into being, and in its composition and power-sharing structure (Sadowsky outranked his Latvian counterpart and would sometimes serve as acting mayor) it reflected the ethnic pluralism that characterized city government in the period 1919-1934.

³⁹⁵ The ethnic minorities generally had more loyal voters and tended to return the same candidates year after year, whereas the bourgeois Latvian parties experienced considerable shifts in fortune relative to one another across the 1920s.

regularly serving on the executive board, Georg Ullmann played an even more central role. Although architects and engineers under their supervision did most of the actual work of designing and overseeing the construction of the new market, and these same men received the lion's share of praise in the press, the central market project as a whole was in large part the brain child of just two individuals, Jānis Jagars and Georg Ullmann. The latter in particular did much of the work of shepherding the project through the tangled thicket of city regulations and the myriad unanswered questions regarding its construction and administration. Ullmann, who "enjoyed the trust of wide circles" in city government, had arguably the more difficult task in dealing with the many merchants in the old market on the east bank of the Daugava, whose petitions, requests, and complaints were numerous – all the more so since, unlike Jagars, his work did not end with the opening of the new market in 1930.³⁹⁶ Although concrete evidence as to fluency is difficult to find, it seems difficult to imagine that Ullmann spoke less than fluent Latvian, given the demands of his position and the lack of other Germans serving under him in the trade department.³⁹⁷ His role in the creation of the market was certainly a central one, though very little credit was given to either him or to Jagars in the press.

During the entire time of its construction, progress (and sometimes a lack thereof) was avidly reported on in all Riga's major newspapers, with stories providing complicated technical details and statistics, energetic justifications for the necessity of the new market, and clear expressions of pride at the quality and size of the facilities. Few topics were more regularly reported on in the Riga press of the 1920s, and this enthusiasm for the new market seems to have spanned the political spectrum and included all ethnic groups; although criticism of various aspects

³⁹⁶ Stegmann 97; Ullmann was coincidentally also an engineer by training.

³⁹⁷ LVVA 2894-4-1094-3; in this, and many other protocols from sessions of the city trade department's executive committee, Ullmann is the only Baltic German listed.

of the construction or the backlog in funding were not necessarily infrequent, direct opposition to the project seems not to have existed, or at least to have no voice whatsoever in the press. Judging from the tone and quantity of the reporting, it seems likely that the new central market was the most widely popular building project in interwar Latvia (before or after 1934) with the exception of the Freedom Monument, which was paid for by popular subscriptions, though a vastly smaller endeavour in cost and scale.

The rhetoric in the press surrounding the central market is striking when compared to what was written in the Latvian press about the various monumental (and not so monumental) projects launched by the Ulmanis regime in the second half of the 1930s. The deliberate ethnicization of even wholly civic building projects, and the profound engagement with popular understandings of history and historical legacies which are so common in press articles and speeches regarding post-1934 construction projects in general essentially have no analogue in the case of the central market. Instead, the market was presented – even in more nationalistic papers - in civic terms as an achievement of the city of Riga, without that city being characterized in ethnic terms at all, typically. While much was made of the size, grandeur, and especially the modernity of the new facilities, these were not presented as proof of the virtue of the Latvian people specifically (as was common with projects after 1934), but rather as welcome measures that would help Riga to regain its footing (and hence, its pride) relative to other European cities – especially those in Western, as opposed to Eastern, Europe. As the leftist paper *Sociāldemokrāts* put it in 1925, „all of the cities of western Europe, however large, have erected modern market halls and pavilions.”³⁹⁸ Although it was typical in interwar East Central Europe for city-planners to look to the continent’s West for models and inspiration, in interwar Riga there was a widespread practice not just of using Western

³⁹⁸ “The Construction of the New Central Market,” *Sociāldemokrāts* 22.VII.1925

European cities as models, but also of direct comparing Riga to them, on the assumption that the city would not necessarily fall far short. This orientation is well-attested in the period immediately before the First World War, when Riga's Baltic German City Fathers worked to provide the city with infrastructure and amenities comparable to those found in cities in Germany proper.³⁹⁹ The concern throughout the latter half of the 1920s with providing the central market with the most technologically sophisticated, most spacious, and most efficient facilities is reflective not just of a concern with meeting the needs of local commerce, but also of a concern with Riga's perceived position relative to other European cities.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, upon their completion, the facilities were among the most modern and largest in Europe, and hence no small source of pride for the city.⁴⁰¹

The ceremony celebrating the laying of the foundation stone for the facility, held on September 25th 1925, was attended by officials from the city government, including Baltic Germans and Russians, and although the state president and members of the *Saeima* (including ethnic minority members) also attended the opening ceremony on November 1st, 1930 the chief symbolic act was the ritual passing of the key to the market from the Mayor, the Latvian Ādams Krieviņš, to the Baltic German Georg Ullmann, head of the city trade department.⁴⁰² This was fitting, since Ullmann had continually been personally involved with the construction of the market since 1922, during which time several mayors of Riga had come and gone.

The market was a mostly ethnically neutral project, easily the largest such completed in Riga during the interwar period. Rhetoric on the central market, both that emanating from the city

³⁹⁹ An orientation towards and comparison of Riga with large cities in Germany is apparent in many documents surviving from the period just before the First World War; for one example of a comparison of Riga with large German cities, cf. *Hefte der Gesellschaft für kommunale Sozialpolitik in Riga, 1. Jahrgang 1907/1908, enthaltend Heft No. 1-9*. (No. 1: Speech given to the society by Mayor George Armitstead on 19.11.1907), p. 14

⁴⁰⁰ "Life in the New Central Market," *Pēdējā Brīdī* 15.XI.1930 – this article cites the facilities for food preservation as modeled on the best examples of Western Europe.

⁴⁰¹ Krastiņš, *Latvijas Republikas Būvmāksla*, 29

⁴⁰² Note the declination of Ullmann's name; "Cornerstone for the Central Market," *Rīgas Ziņas* 26.IX.1925; *Latvijas Sargs* 3.XI.1930

government and the Riga press, tended to use ethnically neutral language, presenting Riga in a pan-European framework without characterizing it as a Latvian city. It would of course be a mistake to void the central market's construction of all ethnic content; the completion of such an achievement under Latvian political leadership undoubtedly served as a source of pride for many ethnic Latvians. Yet the public presentation of the central market was not characterized in ethnic terms, but in civic ones; the progress made was not that of the *tauta* (the Latvian people) but primarily that of the city of Riga, which at the time boasted only a slender majority of Latvian inhabitants. Unlike most of the transformations of urban space in interwar Riga, the construction of the central market was an example (in rhetoric and presentation, at least) of social progress uncoupled from the idea of the nation.

Such a tact would become virtually unthinkable just a few years later. The other major new projects pursued in the second half of the 1930s were invariably bound up with conceptions not just of the past and the future – omnipresent in city building across the world – but with those of the (Latvian) nation and its journey through time as well. The construction of Riga's other major new commercial installation during the interwar period, the Army Economic Store (a government-owned discount department store and food market), serves as an illustrative counterpoint to that of the central market. The construction of new premises for the extremely successful Army Economic Store in the second half of the 1930s was not an overtly ethnicized undertaking relative to many other contemporary projects. The consistent emphasis on modernity, size, and efficiency in reporting on the new store largely parallels the rhetoric surrounding the construction of the central market roughly ten years before. Yet unlike the Central Market, a genuinely multi-ethnic undertaking involving administrators, officials, and technicians of all the city's major ethnic groups, only ethnic Latvians were involved in planning and building the new

Army Economic Store. Although rhetoric regarding Riga and this newest feather in its proverbial cap abounded in the press (as it had with the central market), the city and its improvement were ethnicized in a way they had generally not been ten years prior.

From humble beginnings in 1919, the Army Economic Store had grown at a breakneck pace, instantly proving popular with all manner of Rigans.⁴⁰³ Selling goods obtained through the military's extensive supply network at only very modest mark-ups, the store's wares were at first available exclusively to soldiers and their families, but access was expanded to the general public in 1928, with discounts offered for members of the military.⁴⁰⁴ Business expanded steadily throughout the 1920s, with profits growing from under 2,000 Lats in 1921 to nearly 800,000 Lats in 1931.⁴⁰⁵ A considerable portion of the proceeds went towards funding cultural amenities for the army, with an additional 10% diverted into the general state coffers.⁴⁰⁶ Many contemporary sources cited the important role played by the AEV (from the Latvian *Armijas Ekonomiskais Veikals*) in regulating prices in Riga, especially for foodstuffs. Doubtless its low prices contributed to the store's enduring popularity among the general public, although its competitive advantages engendered feelings less warm among local merchants and vendors.⁴⁰⁷

After a brief stint at quarters on Krišjaņa Barona street in the city center outside of the old town, the store had moved to its permanent location on the southern edge of Riga's old town, a central location that left it close to both the old Daugava and the new central markets, as well as to many of the city's more affluent neighborhoods on both sides of the river.⁴⁰⁸ The continual

⁴⁰³ *Latvijas Kareivis* 28.XI.1929; *Valdības Vēstnesis* 21.XI.1932

⁴⁰⁴ *Armijas Ekonomiskais Veikals – Rakstu Krājums*. Writings collected and edited by Jānis Mūzis, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada 1984 (housed in Latvian National Library), 11

⁴⁰⁵ *Armijas Ekonomiskais Veikals – Rakstu Krājums*, 12

⁴⁰⁶ *Armijas Ekonomiskais Veikals – Rakstu Krājums*, 11

⁴⁰⁷ *Rigasche Rundschau* 30.I.1933, "Kaufleute gegen Armeewarenhaus"

⁴⁰⁸ *Armijas Ekonomiskais Veikals – Rakstu Krājums*, 7

growth in sales necessitated the expansion of the facilities by the mid-1930s, and the project was retrospectively dubbed „one of the first tasks in the field of architecture following the 15th of May, 1934” by the Latvian Society of Architects.⁴⁰⁹ An architectural competition for the design of the new facility was declared on January 20th, 1936, and the excavations began that spring, with the project entirely under the control of the army – even the head architect, Artūrs Galindoms, was an active-duty colonel.⁴¹⁰ Since the army had long since become the exclusive purview of ethnic Latvians, this put the project in the control of one of Latvian society’s most nationally activist groups – a stark contrast with the central market project.

The strong emphasis on modernity and technological sophistication, as well as sheer size, in reporting on the new building echoed that regarding the central market’s construction in the late 1920s. Whereas the central market was often presented as a rival to even the finest markets of Western Europe, comparisons with the (often far larger) department stores in the capitals of western Europe were lacking in press reports on the new AEV building, with press reports instead making frequent mention of firsts for Latvia – the building boasted the country’s first escalator, first central air system, and the first deployment of a number of machines and devices used throughout the facility for storage, food production, etc.⁴¹¹ The emphasis on progress had shifted from situating Latvia in a wider European context to using a single facility as an embodiment of the technological strides that the Ulmanis regime was taking to usher the whole nation forward into the future.

This rhetorical tact was a common one used by the regime (and its loyal press), often cannily coupled with an acute awareness of the past, at least as it existed in (ethnic Latvian) public

⁴⁰⁹ “Armijas ekonomiskā veikala ēka Rīgā,” *Latvijas Arhitektūra 1940* (5)

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ “The Army Economic Store – The Most Modern Commercial Building in Latvia,” *Valdības Vēstnesis* 3.II.1938

memory. Thus the government paper *Valdības Vēstnesis* confidently proclaimed the new AEV building “the only modern commercial building in our land” (quite ignoring the much-lauded facilities at the central market, finished not ten years prior), a project that “[gave] the best testament to what Latvian enterprise, diligence, and know-how have been able to achieve in 20 years in their free and independent country.”⁴¹² Other publications had similar praise for the new building, placing it among a plethora of new projects invested with national pride: “This edifice’s overall architectonic impression...provides the best testament to the great age of construction in which we now live.” Another paper wrote in even stronger terms: “All of the new Army Economic Store’s Construction Work is so imposing, that after its completion our capital city will have once again become richer by one more monument of a heroic age.” The “great age of construction” and “heroic age” would have implicitly been understood to have begun on May 15th, 1934, the scale and sophistication of the central market project notwithstanding.

The ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone of the new building, on September 26th, 1936, like that for the opening of the central market in November of 1930, betrays much about the process of creating the new space and the role it was intended to play in Riga’s symbolic landscape. Whereas the main ritual during the opening of the central market had transpired between agents of the city government (albeit attended by national politicians as well), the participation of Ulmanis himself, along with the war minister Balodis, occupied far and away the most important role during the AEV ceremony in September 1936. Much of the dynamic at work between the regime and the city’s ethnic minorities during the years 1934-1940 is evident in Ulmanis’ speech. Ulmanis spoke proudly of the demographic transformation of Riga, which had recently become fully two-thirds Latvian in population, while also noting that there were many

⁴¹² Ibid.

among the remaining one-third (i.e., the city's ethnic minorities) who were also happy to welcome the progress represented by the new building. Ulmanis generously noted that some among that one-third had deep experience in raising a city (i.e., the Baltic Germans), while devolving into an extended metaphor which compared the old building's foundations of sand and water to its new ones, "a boulder."⁴¹³ While all of this was quite literally true, the implications regarding the past and future of Riga would not have been lost upon an attentive audience – while the ethnic minorities would continue to be tolerated in Riga, and their historical contributions acknowledged, their architectural legacy was inadequate and was destined to be eclipsed by the grander and more enduring efforts of the Latvians.⁴¹⁴

These two key economic institutions and spaces during the interwar period, the Riga Bourse and the central market, both serve as examples of "soft" ethnic reversal within institutions, albeit in starkly contrasting ways. The Riga Bourse is largely an example of continuity within existing forms; though the building remained central to elite economic activity in the city, it underwent only minor exterior repairs and renovations during the period. It continued to function symbolically along much the same lines as it had before the First World War, albeit with an altered ethnic valence. Ethnic Latvians might indeed, when strolling past the imposing Bourse building, have felt a sense of ethnic pride at their takeover of a venerable institution once characterized by Baltic German domination. Yet it seems unlikely that Riga's Baltic German elite would have felt wholly alienated from the institution, given their abiding and prominent influence in the Bourse Society and Bourse Committee, along with the institution's wide-ranging accommodations for

⁴¹³ *Latvijas Kareivis* 27.IX.1936

⁴¹⁴ For more on Latvian concerns with overcoming the city's previous (Baltic German) architectural legacy through new, monumental construction projects, cf. Andreas Fülberth *Tallinn-Riga-Kaunas. Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten 1920-1940*, 271-275, and particularly Andreas Fülberth, "Die Modernisierung Rigas und ihre Rückwirkungen auf das Klima zwischen Letten und Deutschen während der 1930er Jahre" in: Michael Jaumann, Klaus Schenk (Hrsg.): *Erinnerungsmetropole Riga. Deutsche Literatur- und Kulturvielfalt im Vergleich* (Würzburg: Königshaus und Neumann, 2010) pp. 169-175

their ethnicity. The closely shared socio-economic interests of all Bourse members regardless of ethnicity, in a time of pronounced anti-Bolshevism, combined with close historical connections between the ethnic Latvian and Baltic German elites, further helped to defuse potential tensions on the Bourse Committee. The Bourse continued to engage in the same fields of activity fostering local and international trade as it had before 1914, seemingly not without effect.⁴¹⁵ Thus, despite undergoing institutional ethnic reversal, the Riga Bourse largely represented continuity with the city's mercantile past. Only after the institution of the aggressively nationalist Ulmanis regime did the Bourse experience major institutional change, resulting in a sharp reduction of its sphere of activity and influence. The continuing presence of Baltic Germans on the reformed Bourse Committee even after these changes, all the way through their departure in 1939, speaks to the important role played by the group in local commerce and industry. All of this makes the Riga Bourse Committee one of the best examples of successful integration of ethnic minorities into newly Latvianized administrative structures during the interwar period.

Riga city government is another such example, albeit one more characterized by conflict and friction existing alongside productive cooperation, especially in the early 1920s. Despite ethnic tensions (gradually subduing across the 1920s), a city government characterized in large part by ethnic pluralism also exerted profound influence on economic life in Riga during the interwar period, through the construction of the city's new central market. As an undertaking on a grand scale destined to transform Riga's urban landscape considerably, the central market serves to some extent as a counterpoint to the institutional continuity represented by the Riga Bourse. Disregarding daily stock reports, the central market (during and after construction) attracted vastly

⁴¹⁵ Looking back at the last ten years, the Bourse Committee noted that the total volume of foreign trade in Latvia had steadily increased, rising from a net of 103 million Lats in 1921 to 566 million in 1928 for a more than 500% increase. *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Börsenkomitees 1928* (Riga: W.F. Häcker, 1929), 2

more attention and interest in the popular press than did the Bourse. The project, though plagued by funding problems, was an opportunity for the city to improve its image, one successfully seized. Through an abiding emphasis on superlatives – the newest, most modern, most efficient, largest, etc. equipment and facilities – in the planning, the project attracted keen interest in the press and among the public. Reporting on the central market was characterized by an emphasis on the city of Riga and its civic identity in a wider European context, with characterizations of ethnic achievement etc. surfacing only rarely. This contrasts starkly with much of the rhetoric surrounding the new Army Economic Store constructed in the latter half of the 1930s, underscoring the degree to which the coup-d’etat of 1934 transformed the relationship between urban space and ethnic identity in interwar Riga.

In the democratic period, Riga’s role as capital of the Republic of Latvia had existed alongside a much older civic identity anchored in its past as an important, cosmopolitan northern European port city. The design and construction of the central market, along with its attendant treatment in the city press, show an ethnic Latvian administration in Riga city government that to some degree saw itself as the heir of the latter civic tradition and identity. As we shall see with other building projects of the second half of the 1930s, the authoritarian period brought with it the tendency to emphasize Riga’s identity as capital of Latvia far more strongly, at the cost of undermining more ethnically neutral civic modes of identification. Despite these later developments, the Riga Bourse and the city’s new central market were largely success stories, indicating the ability of a multi-ethnic population to transform existing institutions from within along ethnic lines while still preserving their fundamental character and allowing them to succeed in their missions – here, one and the same, of invigorating economic life in the city.

4.0 Ethnic Prestige and Education: The School of Commerce and Herder Institute

“...Latvian behavior towards the Baltic Germans varied: it was determined by the political and economic circumstances of the time, by the ruling political parties and the leading men.”⁴¹⁶

Educational space in central Riga was, like so many other arenas of social activity, drastically transformed by the creation of an independent Latvian Republic in 1918-1919. As the city's four major ethnic groups each sought to establish or reestablish schooling systems in their respective languages, space was at a premium, and its eventual disposition reflected the ethnic political and economic hierarchy of the day. The Latvian state naturally laid claim to the most prestigious spaces in Riga for Latvian-language schooling, as well as embarking upon an ambitious program of school construction in the capital and across the country. However, the state - and the city government - initially made considerable allowances for the maintenance of Baltic German schools, in great part because of the prestige enjoyed by German-language education across the Baltic Sea region. These allowances far outweighed those accorded to the Russian and Jewish minorities of Riga, or of the country. As the interwar period wore on, however, the increasingly sure footing of Latvian-language academia, coupled with the rising tide of nationalism, served to undermine the rights and privileges initially established by the Baltic German minority in particular, and by the country's ethnic minorities more generally, through their participation in Latvian democracy, particularly in its crucial early stages 1919-1923.⁴¹⁷ Though the coup-d'état

⁴¹⁶ Wolfgang Wachtsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland 1918-1934: Eine Tätigkeitsbericht, Band 2: Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934* (Köln: Comel, 1952), 407

Wachtsmuth served for many years as an administrator in the Baltic German school system in Latvia (*Deutschbaltische Schulverwaltung*), eventually become its head from 1929-1934, giving this work of scholarship something of the nature of a memoir, though one well-supplemented by Wachtsmuth's extensive personal records.

⁴¹⁷ Gaston Lacombe, "Nationalism and Education in Latvia 1918-1940" in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 28, no., 4, (Winter 1997), 310-311; Baltic German leadership of an ethnic minority coalition in both the Constitutional Assembly and the national legislature

of 1934 did not do away entirely with minority schooling in Latvia, it did cripple its ability to effectively compete with Latvian-language education, and degraded its symbolic position to that of a mere concession, rather than a core principle of interethnic coexistence in a democratic society.⁴¹⁸ As with so much else in society and politics in interwar Latvia, these changes were reflected in spatial relationships in central Riga.

Conflicts over educational space differed from others rooted in the spatial environment during the interwar period insofar as interethnic wrangling over buildings and institutions in Riga had a long and fairly tumultuous history, stretching back to the beginning of Russification efforts in the educational sphere starting in the 1880s.⁴¹⁹ With the accession of the Alexander III, a man of strong national feelings, to the throne in 1881, ministers and ministries in St. Petersburg sought to end Baltic exceptionalism and bring the Imperial Baltic Provinces into line with the administrative structures and regulations pertaining to the rest of the vast Russian empire.⁴²⁰ Although (perhaps due in part to Tsar Alexander's deep social conservatism) the Baltic German nobility retained its political power in the region, the educational system, hitherto dominated by the German language, became *de jure* Russian-language only in the period 1887-1891.⁴²¹ By 1888, however, instruction in Riga's gymnasia was exclusively in Russian, with the Riga Polytechnic Institute following in 1893.⁴²² Although the prohibition on teaching in languages other than Russian was eased after the Revolution of 1905, this concession was limited to private

(the Saecima) was crucial in establishing Latvia's quite liberal minority rights regime, though the need to satisfy the demands of entry into the League of Nations naturally also played an indispensable role in shaping this outcome.

⁴¹⁸ Helena Šimkuva, "Die Probleme des lettischen Schulwesens in der Republik Lettland (1919-1939) - Ergebnisse und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung" in: *Nordost-Archiv*, Band I: 1992, Heft 2, p. 364

⁴¹⁹ A. Vičs, *Latviešu skolu vēsture, ceturtā grāmata. Pārkreivošanas laikmets no 1885.-1905. gadam* (Rīga: RLB Derīgu Grāmatu Nodaļas Apgāds, 1939), 1-3

⁴²⁰ Heinz von zur Mühlen, "Das Ostbaltikum unter Herrschaft und Einfluß der Nachbarmächte (1561-1710/1795)" in Gert von Pistohlkors, ed., *Baltische Länder* (Berlin: Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag, 1994), 397

⁴²¹ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934* 5

⁴²² *Ibid.*

educational establishments, leaving the city's (and the wider region's) premier educational establishments in Russian hands through the First World War.⁴²³

Thus, Baltic German control over Riga's most prominent educational institutions - from its celebrated gymnasia to the regionally important Riga Polytechnic Institute - had, to varying degrees, already been surrendered in decades prior, as the centralizing Russian state had brought local, German-dominated educational establishments under its direct control, introducing mandatory Russian-language instruction as it did so.⁴²⁴ Although the Russian-Baltic German detente following the failed Revolution of 1905 made schooling in German (and Latvian) legal once more, only private schools were permitted, leaving the prominent, centrally located state and city gymnasia, the Riga Polytechnic Institute, and other educational institutions with a thoroughly Russian character.⁴²⁵ This sapped much of the intensity from what otherwise would surely have been bitter fights over some of the city's most centrally located and architecturally prominent school buildings, as these came under the control of the incipient Latvian state in 1919 without conflict or controversy.⁴²⁶ Nonetheless, a handful of interesting controversies and accommodations stand out, and indicate much about the nature of interethnic relations during the interwar period that does not elsewhere come to light.

Scholars studying East Central Europe in the period between the world wars have long noted the central role played by educational institutions in the new national states' efforts to nationalize their heterogeneous populations, whether differentiated by language and ethnicity,

⁴²³ Ibid., 11-12

⁴²⁴ Vičs, 5

⁴²⁵ Though Baltic Germans still remained prominent among teaching staff for many years; cf. *Album Academicum, Polytechnicum zu Riga 1862-1912* (Riga: Verlag Jonck & Poliewsky, 1912), throughout for comprehensive lists of graduates and instructors.

⁴²⁶ Alfrēds Staris, *Skolas un izglītība Rīgā no sendienām līdz 1944. gadam* (Rīga: Lielvards, 2000), 119-129

religion, or simply a different developmental history.⁴²⁷ As well as pursuing nationalization, political elites of the dominant ethnic groups across the region sought to modernize their economies, mostly agrarian in nature, by means of comprehensive education systems that would both raise the educational level of the populace as a whole, and foster the emergence of a new academic and professional elite from the peasantry - in nearly every case, a group synonymous with the newly politically dominant ethnicity.⁴²⁸ Of particular urgency was the replacement of ethnic minority academicians, engineers, educated professionals and other socio-economic elites with “home-grown” specialists of the titular nationality. Germans, Jews, and Hungarians were the three groups most widely represented in such roles across East Central Europe; none of the three gained a new national state in 1918.⁴²⁹ Politicians and bureaucrats in the new national states typically viewed education in the former Imperial languages of German (typically the household language of the Jewish socio-economic elite) and Hungarian as a threat to the success of their own newly-minted educational systems. Across most of the region, this produced monolithic national education systems which provided for minority-language schooling to varying extents, with an eye toward the eventual nationalization and assimilation of minority populations.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the World Wars* (University of Washington Press, 1974) 383-385; the role of educational systems – in a word, schools – in promoting nationalizing agendas has long been emphasized with scholars of post-Imperial spaces, with a considerable and constantly expanding literature existing on the Habsburg successor states; for recent examples, cf. Tara Zahr, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), throughout; Stephanie Zloch, *Polnischer Nationalismus: Politik und Gesellschaft zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), which devotes a chapter to the nationalizing school; and Pieter M. Judson, “Nationalizing Rural Landscapes in Cisleithania 1880-1914” in Nancy Wingfield, ed., *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003). For the Baltic, little such work has been undertaken in recent decades; Helena Šimkuva’s “Die Probleme des lettischen Schulwesens in der Republik Lettland (1919-1939) - Ergebnisse und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung” (cf. footnote 3) constitutes one of the latest contributions, though published in 1992.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-building, and Ethnic Struggle 1918-1930* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1995) for the profound emphasis laid by the Romanian state on the creation of new elites from among the (largely peasant) ethnic Romanian population in the country’s newly-acquired territories following the First World War.

⁴²⁹ Hungary’s transformation from an expansive kingdom to a truncated republic notwithstanding.

⁴³⁰ Gaston Lacombe, “Nationalism and Education in Latvia 1918-1940” in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 310-316

While many of the qualities of the general scenario outlined above pertain also to Latvia, the liberality of its minority rights regime in regard to education stands out. Latvia's voluntary embrace of an educational system which provided for parallel school administrations for each major ethnic group, all funded on a per capita basis by the state and local municipalities, set it apart from the general European trend of the era. Only after the coup d'état of 1934 did Latvia's educational policy move more into line with regional trends, though even then, it retained substantial provisions for ethnic minority education, albeit imbuing minority curricula with a great deal of nationalizing content.⁴³¹ Thus, as in so many other areas, Latvia both fits within the general model for the region, and simultaneously bucks it in crucial aspects. An examination of conflicts over educational space in interwar Riga can provide case studies illuminating both what is particular about the Latvian case, and what general truths about interwar East Central Europe it reveals. The case study provided is illuminating both due to the variance in governmental policies - Latvia's minority rights regime 1919-1934 being strikingly liberal in pan-European comparison - and due to the particularity of the Baltic German position, given their long-held status as socio-economic and educational elites in the region, their language accorded a lingering deference and their culture a certain grudging respect by Latvians not necessarily granted to other ethnic Germans across the region.⁴³² Wachsmuth, intimately involved with the management of the Baltic German schooling system in Latvia during the interwar period, claimed – perhaps somewhat simplistically – that:

“The Latvians bothered the least with the German schools, since the culture sophistication of the Germans was acknowledged on the Latvian side, and the Latvian educational authorities were therefore

⁴³¹Lacombe, 315

⁴³² Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 59

reluctant to intervene in German cultural questions, and instead mostly practiced a tactful restraint.”⁴³³

The explicit acknowledgement of differences in the titular majority’s perception of various minority ethnic groups in polyethnic settings, and of the differing statuses of various groups of ethnic Germans across the East Central Europe, can help to variegate and complicate an otherwise often monolithic understanding of the relationship between states, schooling, and ethnic minorities in interwar Europe. The politics of ethnic minority schooling – domestic and international – as examined in this chapter illustrate the utility of Rogers Brubaker’s concept of a “triadic nexus” existing between national (ethnic) minorities, newly nationalizing states, and the external national “homelands” which lay claim to a status as their protector.⁴³⁴ As we will see, the role of this triadic nexus, initially fairly weak, became ever more prominent in shaping questions of Baltic German education in Latvia as the interwar period wore on.

The immediate historiographic precedents to this study, Ulrike von Hirschhausen’s *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit* and Mark R. Hatlie’s *Riga at War*, each devote modest space to the question of schooling. Hatlie describes the effects of the war on public education in Riga in broad terms, and particular the activity of the American-sponsored relief in food and clothing which was disbursed to Riga’s school children through the school system, but does not investigate the schools either as ideological or political instruments, sensibly enough given the fact that schools in Riga were barely able to remain in operation 1915-1919 and were unable to effectively implement

⁴³³ Although this characterization should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt, other sources do bear out the claim that the Latvian Ministry of Education generally adopted a benevolent attitude towards the German schooling system until the accession of Mārgers Skujenieks to the post of prime minister in 1931 and the appointment of the national activist Atis Keniņš as Minister of Education; cf. Reinhard Wittram, “Die Schulautonomie in Lettland” in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung*, 1/1-4 (1952), 260-261

⁴³⁴ Cf. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), introduction and thence throughout.

changes in curricula due to the frequency with which the city passed from the control of one power to another.⁴³⁵

Hirschhausen, on the other hand, examines the context which presents the institutional precedent to that of the interwar period, investigating the process of Russification in Riga's schools during the late 19th century. She concludes that Russification, perceived as a direct on Baltic German socio-cultural pre-eminence in the region by Baltic Germans and Latvians alike, drove Baltic Germans together into a more closely-knit educational and intellectual community than ever before, as attested by the organization of numerous illegal private schools.⁴³⁶ This experience formed the basis for the adroit efforts at self-organization launched in 1919.⁴³⁷ Latvians, on the other hand, evaluated Russification positively initially, especially as the inclusion of russophile ethnic Latvians in the school administrations allowed for greater agency than arrangements under the Baltic German authorities ever had. As time passed, however, the necessity of receiving education in Russian rather than in pupils' native Latvian became an ever-greater cause for discontent, with open agitation for Latvian-language schooling emerging briefly in 1905.⁴³⁸ Though their experience of Russification diverged greatly, this era each ethnic group formed a basis of experience during this era which would later be utilized in building up what essentially amounted to parallel school systems during the interwar era, when many of the seemingly idealistic demands of the national activists of the late 19th-century were functionally implemented.

It should be noted that this chapter will not examine the process of establishing the University of Latvia from the ashes of the Riga Polytechnic Institute, for the very good reason that

⁴³⁵ Hatlie, *Riga at War*, 136-139 and throughout.

⁴³⁶ Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 281-287

⁴³⁷ Wachtmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 18-19

⁴³⁸ Hirschhausen, 294-295

Per Bolin's excellent monograph on ethnic tensions at the newly-established University of Latvia, *Between National and Academic Agendas*, has already investigated the ethnic dimensions of the establishment and evolution of the University of Latvia (see page 14 below); thus developments at the University will only be referred to in passing, as needed to establish the wider context of schooling in interwar Latvia.⁴³⁹ The chapter opens with a brief overview of the establishment of minority school systems, first informally from 1919, then formally with the promulgation of the School Autonomy Law of 1923; much of the focus here will be on the Riga Baltic German community, not only due to the availability of source material, but also because Baltic German schools were unique in their ability to attract non-German pupils (Latvians, Russians, and Jews alike) and thus "punched above their weight" in terms of their overall role in the city's educational system.⁴⁴⁰ From here, the chapter examines the fate of the School of Commerce of the Riga Bourse, a building which was the site of an ethnically-charged dispossession and minor controversy in 1919 and again in 1934. The chapter closes with a section describing in brief the role of the private (but state-recognized) German-language Herder Institute in the academic life of interwar Latvia and the Baltic Sea region more generally.

4.1 Establishing School Autonomy

"This tacit recognition of the high cultural and social position of the Baltic Germans by the Latvians was one of the few inheritances preserved from the time before the war."⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Per Bolin, *Between National and Academic Agendas: Ethnic Politics and "National Disciplines" at the University of Latvia 1919-1940* (Södertörns högskola, 2012)

⁴⁴⁰ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 49 - language of family use, rather than census-based nationality, was ultimately adopted as the characteristic determining which (ethnic) schools children would be able to attend, due to pressure from Latvian and Jewish families wishing to send their children to Baltic German schools. Although Wachsmuth notes that the Baltic German community in 1919 was in favor of nationality as the determining criterion, the implementation of such a policy under the authoritarian Ulmanis regime was to have a severely detrimental effect on the funding available to the Baltic German school system.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 59

The process of establishing school autonomy for Latvia's ethnic minorities was an arduous one, and rendered more so by the chaotic state of affairs prevailing across the country, and particularly in Riga, at the opening of the interwar period in the summer of 1919. The intertwined conflicts that had raged across the previous five years had yielded twists and turns for local education, both in linguistic and ideological terms.⁴⁴² The banning of the public use of the German language in 1915 had robbed the Baltic German population of even the private schools conceded to them in 1905, and increasing censorship had also affected the few private Latvian-language schools which remained open.⁴⁴³ Conscription and rationing had introduced hardship in Riga city schools from early on in the war, and these challenges only grew greater as the war went on, with much of the city facing the prospect of starvation by the winter of 1918-1919.⁴⁴⁴

To compound these already considerable difficulties, shifts in the political control of the city over the course of the fighting introduced great changes in the educational system. The first such shift occurred in September of 1917, when Imperial German forces occupied the city, re-establishing the local educational system with German as the language of instruction, but on the Prussian educational model - to the dismay even of Baltic Germans steeped in local tradition.⁴⁴⁵ These changes, instituted across the public educational system regardless of the ethnicity of pupils, endured only until early 1919, when the city fell to Bolshevik forces under the leadership of Pēteris Stučka. The short-lived Bolshevik regime was more moderate than its predecessors in linguistic terms, instituting schooling in the native language of pupils regardless of ethnicity, but was far less tolerant in terms of retaining experienced teaching staff, instead conducting periodic ideological

⁴⁴² Hatlie, 194

⁴⁴³ Staris, 114

⁴⁴⁴ Hatlie, 198

⁴⁴⁵ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 30-31

purges of educators.⁴⁴⁶ This situation lasted only until May 22nd, 1919, when forces under Baltic German leadership retook the city, a situation which allowed at least for the reinstatement of expelled teachers, but otherwise wrought few major changes. Little more than a month later, the Ulmanis government's triumphant entry into Riga brought a return to political (and with it, educational) stability, albeit on what were initially uncertain terms. Though it was clear from the outset that Latvian-language schooling would be the priority of the new government, the exact status of German and Russian-language instruction in the to-be-established educational system of the new state was an open question in the summer of 1919. Over the years, schooling in Hebrew took on increasing importance for the country's Jewish population, but was of negligible political importance in 1919 - Yiddish was a language of primary education only, and many Jewish parents chose to send their children to German, Latvian, or Russian schools, an option ultimately closed to them after the end of democratic rule in 1934.⁴⁴⁷

The Baltic German political leadership undertook the project of drafting legislation on school autonomy immediately, laying the groundwork for their legislative efforts even before the first meetings of the nation-wide Constitutional Assembly that summer. Friedrich Demme, a well-connected Baltic German educator and politician, had been tasked by the Imperial German occupation forces with drafting a plan for German-language education in the Baltic Provinces in 1918, and his work served as the basis for renewed Baltic German efforts to establish educational autonomy in 1919 and beyond.⁴⁴⁸ This process ultimately lasted until 1923, with the country's ethnic minorities politically united (albeit fragily) behind Baltic German leadership on the

⁴⁴⁶ Staris 117-118; Wachtsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 33-36

⁴⁴⁷ Z. Michaeli, "The Cultural Autonomy and Jewish School Systems", in: M. Bobe, S. Levenberg, I. Maor, Z. Michaeli, eds. *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: D. Ben-Nun Press, 1971), 191-192

⁴⁴⁸ Wachtsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 41-42

question. A general law on schooling and one regarding the educational rights of ethnic minorities, both viewed favorably by Latvia's Baltic Germans, were passed on the 8th of December, 1919 by the Constitutional Assembly; these served as the foundation for the school autonomy law of 1923, which remained in effect until obviated by new legislation issued by diktat in the summer of 1934.⁴⁴⁹

In practice, the school autonomy law of 1923 merely codified practices and projects embarked upon already in the summer of 1919, as the country's Baltic German community began organizing its own school system with relatively little oversight from Latvian officials.⁴⁵⁰ This laissez-faire attitude on the part of the Latvian ministry of education can be explained in part from the desire of the Latvian state to project a minority-friendly attitude during its bid to gain entry into the League of Nations, and in part because the ministry was preoccupied with its own feverish efforts to build up a Latvian-language school system, from an even more meager basis than the Baltic Germans were beginning with, and on a much wider scale.⁴⁵¹ The Minority Protections Treaties of 1919 were multilateral agreements which bound Poland (the first, which served as the model for those to follow), Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Greece, and Romania to clearly defined obligations regarding their ethnic minorities, with educational autonomy looming large among their stipulations.⁴⁵² The acceptance of these obligations – through the signing of such treaties - on the part of many of the new national states of East Central

⁴⁴⁹ Šimkuva, "Die Probleme des lettischen Schulwesens in der Republik Lettland (1919-1939) - Ergebnisse und Aufgaben der historischen Forschung," 365

⁴⁵⁰ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 49

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 50, 52, 59; Wachsmuth also attributes a role to the great respect Latvians still had for "the higher German culture" in shaping attitudes, claiming Latvians were initially reluctant to "take direct control" of the Baltic German educational system for this reason.

⁴⁵² For general information on the minority treaties, cf. Caroline Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection 1878-1938* (Cambridge University Press 2004); cf. also Erwin Viehhaus, *Die Minderheitenfrage und die Entstehung der Minderheitenschutzverträge auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919* (Würzburg: Holzner, 1960); Latvia's involvement in this is rather more tangential, as a party influenced by the urgency of the treaties, but able to pursue a course which obviated directed participation in them.

Europe proved a sticking point for their entry into the League of Nations. Though Latvia was never beholden to any such international agreement, the liberality of its minority rights regime – including provisions embedded in its constitution – can be seen as *de facto* participation in their covenants, particularly since Latvian statesmen were keenly aware of the need to conform to these standards in order to secure international recognition for their new state – recognition which was gained *de jure* with Latvia’s admission to the League of Nations in September of 1921.⁴⁵³

1923’s educational legislation institutionalized a system in which each of the country’s three principle minority groups - Germans, Russians, and Jews - enjoyed relative autonomy in running its schools, overseen with a light hand and sometimes a blind eye by the Latvian ministry of education. The three heads of these departments were nominated by the parliamentary fractions of the minorities, and confirmed by the cabinet of ministers directly (rather than by the minister of education, whom they ranked immediately below). State support of elementary schools were guaranteed to the ethnic minorities with a quorum of thirty pupils, and middle (grammar) schools at a ratio determined by local population statistics.⁴⁵⁴ Although the Latvian state insisted on relatively stringent standards for Latvian-language instruction in minority schools, and insisted also on a minimum of Latvia-specific content in students’ history and geography classes in their native languages, the minority school departments were otherwise free to set their own curricula and schedules, choose their own teachers, and otherwise conduct their affairs as they saw fit.⁴⁵⁵ A German Pedagogical Institute was also established in 1919, its graduates eventually enjoying the

⁴⁵³ Edgars Andersons, *Latvijas vēsture. Ārpolitika I. 1920-1940* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1982), 25-26

⁴⁵⁴ Wachtsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 52

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53; Wachtsmuth notes that “Persons of German background were also primarily hired as teachers of the Latvian language, so that these hours could not also be used for Latvian propaganda” - laying bare the tensions coexisting with interethnic cooperation, especially those created by a newly-ardent Latvian national activism.

same rights as those of the Latvian State Pedagogical Institute.⁴⁵⁶ All in all, the minority school system in democratic interwar Latvia was one of exemplary liberality, with wide-ranging freedoms granted to the ethnic minorities, in which parallel school systems coexisted peacefully side by side, also in densely populated Riga. Baltic Germans in particular enjoyed a degree of freedom in choosing curricula and teachers exceeding that granted to the country's other ethnic minorities, a legacy of their status as the former socio-economic elite, and of the considerable respect still accorded to German culture by many Latvians.⁴⁵⁷ A desire to maintain good diplomatic and trade relations with Germany, already one of Latvia's most important trading partners by the late 1920s, likely played a role as well.⁴⁵⁸

The other two major ethnic minority school systems, however, the Jewish and Russian, also fared reasonably well under this minority rights regime. The latter in particular thrived during the period of democratic rule in Latvia. The formerly privileged status of Russian as the state language and the sole language of instruction in higher education presented many advantages to Latvia's Russian-speakers in attracting pupils and prestige to their ethnic group's schools, though the difficult legacies of the past had also to be overcome. In an edited volume published by the editorial board of the popular and widely disseminated Riga Russian-language daily *Сегодня/Севодня* ("Today") entitled simply "Russians in Latvia", the anonymous author felt it necessary to address the injustices of the past, admitting that the privileged position granted the Russian language by state Russification efforts had an effect of "displacing and weakening the culture of other nationalities", going on to claim that this had "cast a shadow on Russian culture,

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 58; formerly, much teacher training had taken place at Dorpat University, now located in another country, Estonia, at local seminaries, or at Russian state institutions.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 60

⁴⁵⁸ Hiden, 187-189

on its internal attractive force. The seal of bureaucracy seemed to cover the beautiful face of the spiritual values of the Russian people.”⁴⁵⁹ The author claimed that in the period of an independent Latvia, this shadow had been removed, allowing the “attractive force” of Russian culture to make itself felt among the wider population. This was manifested in terms of the readership of the paper *Sevodnya* itself, in attendance of Russian-language artistic and cultural events, and in the attendance of ethnically non-Russian pupils in Russian-language schools.⁴⁶⁰ The obvious fact that, given the size and proximity of the adjacent Soviet Union, Russian would continue to be a language of some international utility in the future doubtless also strengthened the position of the language in educational establishments across the country, as tactfully alluded to by the author.⁴⁶¹ This suggestion was made in spite of the editorial board’s strongly anti-Soviet politics, influenced as they were by the presence in Riga of a sizeable and intellectually lively community of Russian emigrés from the Soviet Union. This emigré community was home to some of Imperial Russia’s former artistic and academic elite, the sort of persons perhaps best able to proselytize on behalf of the “attractive force” of their language and culture.⁴⁶²

Like German schools, Russian schools were bolstered in their enrollments by ethnically Jewish pupils in large numbers, to an even greater extent in the latter case than in the former. It is likely that the social and cultural bifurcation of Riga’s Jewish population persisted here as in many other areas, with the long-established, relatively wealthy, and German-aculturated Jewish population most often opting to send their children to Baltic German schools, and more recently

⁴⁵⁹ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I. (Russians in Latvia, Part I)* (A.S. Maikapor: Riga, 1933), 47

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 50

⁴⁶² Cf., among others, Temira Pachmuss, “Russian Culture in the Baltic States and Finland 1920-1940” in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 16 no. 4 (Winter 1985), throughout; Jurij I. Abyzov, “Riga: Der lettische Zweig der russischen Emigration” in Karl Schlögel, *Der grosse Exodus: Die Russische Emigration und ihre Zentren 1917-1941* (München: C.H. Beck, 1994); the extensive list of émigré intellectuals, artists, and academics from pages 119-128 bears witness to the erudition and creativity of the new additions to the ranks of Riga’s ethnic Russian community. Cf. also Mark Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 22-23, 40, 66, 140

arrived, typically less well-off (but more numerous) Russian-speaking Jews opting for Russian-language schools. Although Yiddish was widely spoken among Riga's interwar Jewish population (though somewhat looked down upon by the German-aculturated segment),⁴⁶³ many households used either German or Russian as their language of daily use, with the latter predominating.⁴⁶⁴ According to the authors of *Russians in Latvia*, there were a "fairly large number of schools attended almost exclusively by Jews where the language of instruction is Russian" at the time of writing in 1933; presumably most of them located in either Riga or Daugavpils (Dvinsk), the two urban centers where the country's Jewish population was concentrated.⁴⁶⁵

The Russian school system benefitted indirectly from the continuing popularity of Russian literature among ethnic Latvians, Germans, and others during the interwar period, as the publication of Russian-language works also facilitated the publication of textbooks for use in the local Russian school system - a challenge otherwise not easily surmounted, given the lack of communication across the Soviet border and the ideological divide represented by the *cordon sanitaire*.⁴⁶⁶ Although the Russian school system expanded and arguably thrived during the period of democratic rule in Latvia, its demands on space were negligible - the group was too small and its political clout too meager for it to secure control of the city's more prominent education buildings, and it seems to have actively avoided any such controversy through the interwar period, contenting itself with more modest premises at a somewhat further remove from the city center.

The school system of the Jewish minority in Latvia, meanwhile, suffered from divisions not seen in their German or Russian counterparts. These divisions were simultaneously linguistic,

⁴⁶³ Max Michelson, *City of Life, City of Death: Memories of Riga* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2004), 25-27

⁴⁶⁴ Josifs Šteimanis, *History of Latvian Jews* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2002), 184-185

⁴⁶⁵ *Russian in Latvia, Part 1*, 52

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 56

religious, and political in nature, and led to a fragmented educational system with no unified language of instruction. Max Lasersons, who was principal of one of Riga's two Hebrew-speaking Jewish secondary schools from 1923-1934, characterizes the internal politics of the Jewish Department of the Ministry of Education as riven between three factions: the Yiddishists, the Zionists, and the Assimilationists.⁴⁶⁷ The first preferred Yiddish as the language spoken, or at least known, by nearly all of Latvia's Jews; the second, Hebrew, which was as yet in a stage of its resurrection from a dead language which left it rather ill-suited for certain fields and disciplines; and the latter, preferred instruction in Russian or German (only very rarely in Latvian) as being more pragmatic, and reflecting the languages of daily use of most of Riga's Jewish population.⁴⁶⁸

Through the interwar period, schools giving instruction in all four of these languages were maintained by Latvia's Jewish community, though the Zionist position gradually became predominant, in part because of the personal friendship between Mordechai Dubin, leader of the deeply conservative Jewish political party "Agudas Israel" and Latvian dictator Kārlis Ulmanis.⁴⁶⁹ This linguistic fragmentation led to a weakening of the Jewish school system, insofar as it complicated the creation of a unified curriculum, the procurement of textbooks, and the presentation of a united political front. The relative impracticality of education in Yiddish or Hebrew in comparison to German or Russian also produced a considerable percentage of parents choosing to send their children to non-Jewish schools; in the 1922-1923 school year, over 20% of Jewish pupils were enrolled in non-Jewish schools, with that number sinking to 14% for the 1928-1929 school year.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly to the Russian minority, Jewish influence in both the city

⁴⁶⁷ Z. Michaeli, "Jewish Cultural Autonomy and Jewish School Systems" in Mendel Bobe, ed., *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: 1971), 192-193

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Aivars Stranga, *Ebreji un diktatūras Baltijā 1926 - 1940* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Jūdaiks studiju centrs, 2002), 200

⁴⁷⁰ Michaeli, 210

parliament and the Saeima was too weak, their ethnic groups' political front too fractured, to allow for serious competition over the city's most prized education facilities, located in the city blocks surrounding the centrally-located Wohrmann Park and the grounds of the Esplanade. The Jewish Department of the Ministry of Education was successful in retaining control of several fairly well-appointed buildings located just outside the city center which had been Jewish schools prior to the First World War, and its control of these spaces seems to have been left uncontested through the Soviet occupation of 1940.

Thus, in the realm of schooling, as in so many other areas of interethnic coexistence in interwar Latvia, the relationship of the country's Baltic German minority retained a character different from that of the titular majority to other ethnic minorities, one charged with tension by popular perceptions of national history. As in other facets of communal life, educational space became an arena for ethnic conflict between these two groups during the interwar period.

4.2 The Riga Bourse School of Commerce

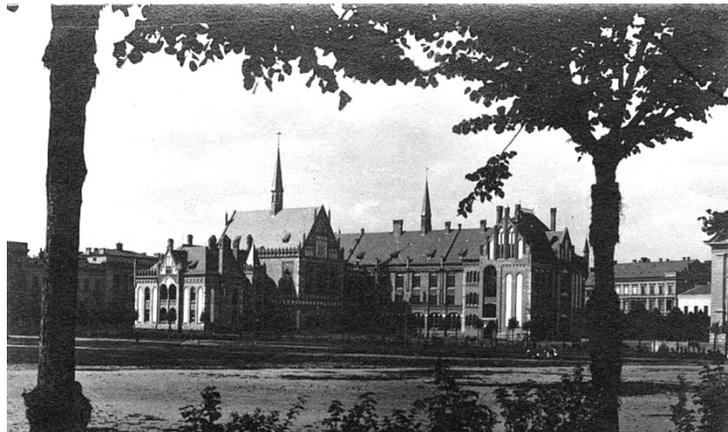


Figure 14. The Riga Bourse School of Commerce, late 19th century.

“One of Riga's most beautiful buildings is the Bourse School of Commerce...the city of Riga will now use this building once again

for the purpose for which it was built - for the needs of the city's school of commerce.”⁴⁷¹

Central Riga in 1919 was host to four educational buildings of outstanding size, notable geographic placement, and architectural grandeur - two gymnasia (known as “Nikolai” and “Alexander”), the Polytechnic Institute, and the Riga Bourse School of Commerce (*Rigaer Börsenkommerzschule*). All of these were located in the city center, along streets facing Riga’s two largest central parks, the Wohrmann Park and the Esplanade; of these four buildings, the first three were converted into Latvian-language institutions in 1919. The story of the two gymnasia is a relatively dull one from an interethnic perspective, devoid of either interethnic conflict or cooperation. The institutions associated with the spaces had already ceased to be German in character decades before, during the era of Russification, leaving few wrinkles to be ironed over in regard to a transformation of their ethnic valence; with most former teaching staff fled, the replacement of Russian with Latvian as language of instruction was a straightforward and uncontroversial affair, attracting little comment in the press or in parliament.⁴⁷²

Regarding the Riga Polytechnic Institute, Per Bolin has written extensively on language and ethnic conflicts in the University of Latvia, which grew from the remnants of the former Polytechnic. Bolin's choice of title, *Between National and Academic Agendas*, aptly captures his central thesis, namely that the administrators of the new university found themselves somewhat between a rock and a hard place in terms of their need to both advance the reputation of the University of Latvia as an internationally relevant institution, and to imprint a specifically ethnic Latvian character upon it. The university was heavily reliant on German- and Russian-speaking

⁴⁷¹ “The Most Beautiful School Building in Riga is in Latvian Hands,” *Pedeja Bridi* 22.VIII.1934

⁴⁷² The archival sources pertaining to these buildings and contemporary press reports, at the least, make no mention of any controversies surrounding them.

professors (particularly the former) during its early years, with a large portion of instruction taking place in these languages until 1925, and in some cases much later.⁴⁷³ Fulfilling ethno-national goals – in particular, fostering Latvian as a language of higher education – more often than not seemed to conflict with the goal of furnishing the state with a prestigious, internationally recognized institution of higher learning.⁴⁷⁴ Much of Bolin’s book is consumed in charting the battles of administrative bodies over hiring decisions, with a ‘national’ faction campaigning both for the hiring of ethnic Latvians (regardless of their qualifications) and against the hiring of Baltic Germans, Reichsdeutsche, and ethnic Russians in particular. Opposing them were those who advocated for hiring individuals whose intellectual abilities and academic standing would enhance the international prestige of the university and the quality of education there, regardless of ethnic or linguistic affiliation. Ultimately, Bolin contends, the first group – the nationalists – won out. The university was never able to rely on a fully ethnic Latvian teaching staff or on instruction entirely in Latvian, but as successive generations of scholars educated in Latvian came of age, the constraints that prevented the hiring of ethnic Latvians gradually eased. This model of change over time conforms precisely to that charted out in the chapters of this dissertation, in which initial reliance upon Baltic German (and sometimes Russian) expertise, or a long-standing respect for the achievements of the ethnic Others is gradually replaced by an increasing sense of self-reliance upon the part of the ethnic Latvian majority, and a concomitant lack of regard for the Other.

The narrative related in this section is another such story, one of an initial compromise (albeit one born of conflict, as all compromise must be) eventually undermined by rising ethnic tensions and an increasing self-confidence on the part of the Latvian political elite. Of Central

⁴⁷³ Bolin, 119-122

⁴⁷⁴ Bolin, 117

Riga's most prominent educational spaces, it is the Riga Bourse School of Commerce, which was the site of considerable controversy during the interwar period. The building was one of the most architecturally prominent buildings in all of the city, featured frequently on postcards and city memorabilia from the time of its completion in 1905.⁴⁷⁵ A Latvian paper writing in 1934 labeled it “the loveliest school building in Riga”, a sentiment that found echo among much of the city's population then and now.⁴⁷⁶ A few years following the issuance of a special dispensation for the construction of a school of commerce in Riga in 1899, in response to the petition of the Riga Bourse Committee, ground was broken on the site of the future School of Commerce building in 1902.



Figure 15. Postcard featuring the Bourse School of Commerce, early 20th century.

The site was an auspicious one, consisting of approximately 2700 square meters ceded by the city government to the Bourse Committee expressly for this purpose and located at the corner of the city's Esplanade Park, which had been created by the demolition of the city walls in 1857.⁴⁷⁷ The real estate was undoubtedly some of the most valuable in the city, and the willingness of Riga's

⁴⁷⁵ Daina Lāce, *The Building of the Latvian Academy of Art* (Riga: Institute of Art History of the Latvian Academy of Art & Art History Research Support Foundation, 2011), 3

⁴⁷⁶ “The Most Beautiful School Building in Riga is in Latvian Hands,” *Pedeja Bredi* 22.VIII.1934

⁴⁷⁷ P. Kerkovius, *Riga und seine Bauten* (Riga: Technischer Verein zu Riga, 1903), 306, 229

municipal government to bestow it upon the Bourse Committee - even for the erection of an institution of higher learning - is illustrative of the close connections between these two important bodies, political and economic respectively. Architectural and aesthetic considerations may also have played a role in the decision, as Riga's Esplanade and Canal Gardens were increasingly becoming surrounded by elegant apartment houses; inserting public buildings into this area may have been considered desirable, in parallel with developments in other Central European cities engaged in the construction of public buildings in or adjacent to spaces freed up by the removal of ancient city walls.⁴⁷⁸ The construction of the city art museum would follow close on the heels of the Bourse School of Commerce, beginning in 1903 and finishing in 1905 at a site directly adjacent to that of the city's newest educational edifice.⁴⁷⁹

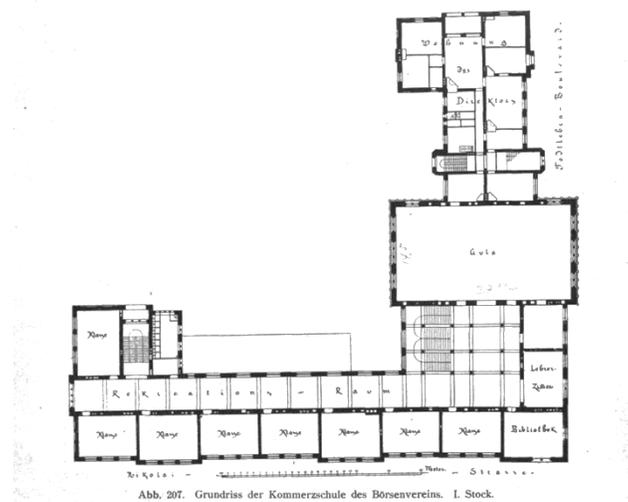


Figure 16. Plan of the Riga Bourse School of Commerce, 1903.480

The building raised here was nothing short of sumptuous, constructed in a red brick neo-gothic style with a roof of imported blue-grey slate from Thuringia. Three stories high, consisting

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1980) Chapter 2: The *Ringstrasse*, its Critics and the Birth of Urban Modernism (24-115).

⁴⁷⁹ Jānis Krastiņš, "Eklektizismus und Jugendstil im Stadtbild Rigas", in *Nordost-Archiv*, Band XI/2002, 123-124

⁴⁸⁰ Image taken from *Riga und seine Bauten*, 229

of two unequal wings, with tall windows crowned by Gothic arches, high ceilings, and elaborate facilities expressly designed for the needs of an institution of higher learning - including laboratory space, lecture halls, garderobes, and a gymnasium - the structure evoked the appearance of the city's medieval churches while far exceeding them in the elaborateness of its ornaments. The decision to pursue a design in brick neo-gothic had not merely historical but also ethnic overtones, since Riga's brick gothic churches were a distinctly German legacy, with similar structures to be found peppered across the southern shores of the Baltic Sea wherever former Hanseatic trading towns were to be found.⁴⁸¹

Designed by architect Wilhelm Bockslaff (1858-1945), future grand old man of the Baltic German architectural world and then a practicing architect at the height of his powers, the building conveyed the wealth, prestige, and influence of the organization which had commissioned it. The Riga Bourse Committee in the opening years of the 20th century was an institution at its acme, overseeing the stupendous flow of wealth passing through Riga's bustling port and profiting enormously thereby.⁴⁸² The construction of the building - with a free grant of land from the city government - had cost 417,000 gold rubles, a sum equivalent to roughly 5.7 million dollars in today's currency, and does not seem to have unduly strained the finances of the Bourse Committee at the time.⁴⁸³ Although the devastation of the First World War, along with the permanent diminishment of overseas trade that followed in its wake, would leave the Bourse Committee a pale shadow of its former self, the committee was nonetheless initially powerful enough in the early years of peace to enforce its continued control of the space.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 123

⁴⁸² Cf. Chapter 2: Finding Common Ground in Commerce

⁴⁸³ *Riga und seine Bauten*, 228

The Riga Bourse School of Commerce, established in 1899 by the Riga Bourse Committee, had functioned according to its intended purpose through the outbreak of the First World War. The disruptions of the war ceased its activities permanently, however, as the Bourse was in no position to financially support the school after the cessation of fighting in 1919.⁴⁸⁴ This left a prized educational space potentially open for a variety of uses, and the autumn of 1919 witnessed considerable wrangling along ethnic lines over the fate of this structure, one of Riga's most iconic. The story of this particular building is emblematic of the wider tale of Latvian-Baltic German tolerance and rivalry in terms of cultural and educational coexistence in the interwar period, in which an initial respect eventually gives way before chauvinism and a certain spatial covetousness.

The opening shots of the initial skirmish were fired by the ministry of education, who wrote to the Bourse Committee on September 10, 1919 with a request that:

“...the Stock Exchange Committee hand over the commercial school building to the control of the ministry of education for the organization of an academy of the arts. The academic W. Purvits [sic] is to be consulted regarding the immediate procedures.”⁴⁸⁵

The attempt to establish a Latvian Academy of the Arts was reflective of a long-simmering desire on the part of many Latvian artists to wrest control of the local artistic scene from Baltic German control, though in some ways this desire had already become an anachronism, reflective of social conditions that no longer pertained in the post-war period. As nearly always in human affairs, however, perception lagged behind reality, and shaped the future to suit an already-obviated past. A letter from a group of Latvian artists - among them some of the most prominent painters of their generation, including at least one future professor at the Latvian Art Academy -

⁴⁸⁴LVVA 3143-1-114-21, 32

⁴⁸⁵ LVVA 1632-2-960-56, Letter from the Ministry of Education dated 10.9.1919 to the Riga Bourse Committee. W. Purvitis was the most prominent Latvian painter of his generation, by then settled into a comfortable middle age as doyen of the world of Latvian visual arts.

to the ministry of education in the summer of 1919 is reflective of Latvian sentiments of cultural rivalry:

“Local artistic life has been dominated up until now by a dilettante Germandom; now things are to be done differently. Our old painters, who have remained far from contemporary achievements in painting, cannot lead us to our art's proper setting.”⁴⁸⁶

The subtext here is easy enough to read, and although the agents are atypical for the period - artists on the political left - the dynamic here closely parallels that present in so many of the disputes over control of Riga's prominent spaces during the interwar period. In art as in politics and the economy, the ethnic reversal sought by leading Latvians was to be manifested in the built environment, in such fashion as to make a bold symbolic statement. The Riga Bourse School of Commerce building was indeed ideally suited to the purpose at hand, not merely due to the handsome and elegant figure it cut, but also due to more practical considerations, such as its orientation towards the sun, the overall area (by dint of great height) of its neo-Gothic windows, and the large number of rooms suitable for conversion to studio space.⁴⁸⁷ Further adding to the attractions of the School of Commerce was its location directly adjacent to the Riga City Art Museum, an imposing structure in the eclectic style (cf. insert) which had, along with all of the city's public institutions, come under ethnic Latvian control in 1919. For an educational institution concerned with training painters and sculptors, the location could hardly be a more auspicious one. Given these considerations, the ability of the Riga Bourse Committee to retain control of the space is all the more surprising.

⁴⁸⁶ LVVA 1632-2-960-9: Letter to the expected ministry of education from (J or I Kazaks, R. Sutta), Rigā 24.7.1919; among the signatories - the prominent placement of their names indicates their importance within the group - were Aleksandrs Dreviņš, Ģederts Eliass, and Jāzeps Grosvalds, all important Latvian painters in the period after the First World War. Although Dreviņš pursued a successful artistic career in Soviet Russia before meeting an untimely end in the Great Purge of 1938, he remained in contact with Latvian contacts for much of his life. Ģederts Eliass became head of the figural painting workshop at the art academy; though Jāzeps Grosvalds died of Spanish influenza in 1920, he had been an influential figure among his peers.

⁴⁸⁷ LVVA 1632-2-960-141

The reaction of the Bourse Committee to the Ministry of Education's request was stiffly resistant, and tinged in its own way with anachronism, or at least with a certain failure to recognize how firmly the shoe was now upon the other foot in terms of ethnic power. Not only was the response given somewhat imperious in tone, it was composed entirely in German, from the letterhead on down, despite the ease with which the Bourse might have had a translation produced. Apologizing politely for their inability to comply with the request, the Bourse Committee (at this point still dominated by Baltic Germans) explained that two weeks prior, a request had been submitted to the Riga City School Council for the building to serve as a German Gymnasium:

“The committee does not see itself in a position to fulfil the wishes of the ministry regarding the transfer of the building, particularly since the intended purpose of the building, which the Riga Bourse committee built, established, and maintained at great cost, would thus be lost.”⁴⁸⁸

The Bourse Committee's refusal is reflective of their failure to comprehend the sea change in ethnic power in Riga then in full swing. The Bourse Committee had formerly been one of (if not the single most) powerful institutions in Riga. Though rendered essentially impotent by the ravages of war and the ongoing dearth of international commerce transacting through Riga, the deeply ingrained, pre-war attitudes of its members - regarding both the significance of their own institution, and that of the newly-minted ministry of education - shaped and colored its resistance on this issue.

In the short term, the bluff worked - the building and grounds of the former Riga Bourse School of Commerce remained in Baltic German hands for the duration of the 1920s, serving a dual function as German-language elementary school and high school (gymnasium).⁴⁸⁹ This likely

⁴⁸⁸ LVVA 1632-2-960-57

⁴⁸⁹ “The German Gymnasium,” *Riga am Sonntag* Nr. 405 26.VIII.1934

had more to do with the influence still wielded by the Bourse Committee (cf. Chapter 2: Finding Common Ground in Commerce) than with consideration for the educational autonomy of the Baltic German minority, since the structures through which the country's ethnic minorities would enjoy that autonomy were as yet indeterminate in 1919.

Beyond its continuing role as a German-language school, the building - sizeable, with appropriate lecture halls and galleries - functioned as a focal point for German culture in Riga more generally, hosting numerous exhibitions, performances, recitals and the like over the years of democratic rule in Latvia cut short in 1934.⁴⁹⁰ Though the ethnic composition of the Riga Bourse Committee shifted dramatically in favor of Latvians already in the early 1920s (cf. Chapter 2: Finding Common Ground in Commerce), the German-dominated committee of 1919 managed nonetheless to secure the transfer of the building to the control of the Baltic German educational administration (*Schulverwaltung*), whose disposition of the building seems not to have been called into question until 1934.⁴⁹¹

The archive leaves no record as to why the ministry of education - even in 1919 still a considerably more powerful institution than the Riga Bourse Committee - chose not to press the issue but instead acceded to the will of the committee. Judging from other cases, and from an assessment of Latvia's wider political situation at the time, a desire to both uphold the rule of law and to (by and large) preserve existing property relations surely loomed large in the decision-making calculus of the ministry.⁴⁹² Upholding the rule of law was an important task for a government seeking to establish its legitimacy and authority in a land suffering from five years of

⁴⁹⁰ Wachtsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, XXII

⁴⁹¹ LVVA 1632-2-960-141, 145

⁴⁹² The weight of such considerations must be understood within the context of the recently-concluded Latvian War of Independence, which pitted a shifting and fractious coalition of anti-Bolshevik forces (Baltic Germans, Latvians, Russians, and others) against a short-lived Latvian Bolshevik Republic. Much of the legitimacy of the new republic, both at home and abroad, was rooted in its anti-Bolshevik stances and concomitant commitment to capitalist property relations.

political upheaval and regime change. Beyond this, *seeming* to uphold the rule of law - and particularly to preserve the existing system of property relations, in light of the threat of Bolshevik expansion - was crucial for a fledgling state desperately seeking international recognition and a place in the new postwar world order.⁴⁹³ As alluded to above, Latvia's treatment of its minorities was perhaps most visible to international observers in the educational sphere, and the concession to Riga's Baltic German community in this matter may well have stemmed from a desire to project a spirit of magnanimity towards the country's ethnic minorities to observers in London, Paris, Geneva, etc.⁴⁹⁴ Additionally, Latvians had already gained control of all the rest of Riga's prominent educational spaces, taking much of the sting to ethnic pride out of continued Baltic German control of the school (the lamentations of artists and academics notwithstanding).⁴⁹⁵

As mentioned above, the space itself - well-appointed and richly decorated with a blend of Neo-Gothic and Art Nouveau influences - functioned as one of Riga's most important Baltic German cultural centers throughout the democratic period in Latvia, in part precisely because of its impressive architectural and artistic attributes.⁴⁹⁶ Faced with the loss of so many other grand spaces in Riga, continued control of this building was important to Baltic Germans' sense of self-representation, both to their neighbors in Riga and to visitors from abroad. Here, at least, was a space they could continue to call their own where something of the splendor, wealth, and refinement of the previous era could still be discerned; a space where the proud, once-elite Baltic Germans could feel that their community was adequately represented; a space where a self-

⁴⁹³ John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 13

⁴⁹⁴ The considerable lobbying influence of ethnic Germans in the Minority Congress (particularly the work of Paul Schiemann of Latvia and Ewald Ammende of Estonia) in Geneva, seat of the League of Nations, may have played an especially important role in the treatment accorded to Latvia's Baltic Germans. Cf. John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann 1876-1944* (London, C. Hurst & Co., 2004) and Mark Mazower, "Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe" in *Daedalus*, vol. 126, no. 2, Human Diversity (Spring 1997).

⁴⁹⁵ LVVA 1632-2-960-61, 86, 89

⁴⁹⁶ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, XXII

conception built up over long decades of prosperity and influence was not so jarringly contrasted with the group's relative poverty and lack of clout in the present.

The ethno-political upheaval of Karlis Ulmanis' seizure of power in 1934 put an end to this role for the space, however. In an ironic twist of fate, the reasoning of the Bourse Committee from 1919 in their rejection of plans to convert the space into an academy of the arts was used to facilitate the expropriation of the space for its original intended purpose: as a School of Commerce. Pursuant with reforms enacted by Ulmanis, in 1934 this formerly private school of commerce came into the administration of the city of Riga and was united with Riga City School of Commerce and the Riga City 4th Gymnasium's School of Commerce classes, thus becoming the City of Riga V. Olava School of Commerce.⁴⁹⁷ The vast majority of pupils in the new school came from the latter, Latvian institution, leaving the student body nearly entirely Latvian in terms of its ethnic composition, in contrast to the highly mixed student body that had prevailed at the old Bourse School of Commerce before 1914.⁴⁹⁸

The Latvian press celebrated the transfer in control, characterizing it in ethnic terms that avoided mention of the ethnicity of its builders, while also making note that the building would now be returned to its original purpose.⁴⁹⁹ The typically nationalistic *Pēdējā Brīdī* ran a headline declaring that "Riga's most beautiful school building is in Latvian hands", characterizing the transfer of ethnic control as a long-overdue measure. Administrators in the education department of Riga's city government were careful to stress the logistical necessity of the arrangements, citing

⁴⁹⁷ "The Reorganization of Secondary School Activities," *Latvijas Kareivis* Nr. 174, 8.VIII.1934

⁴⁹⁸ LVVA 5206-2-1; Staris 102, 117

⁴⁹⁹ "The Most Beautiful School Building in Riga is in Latvian Hands," *Pedeja Bridi* Nr. 203 22.VIII.1934

new and highly specific legislation on the minimum and maximum sizes of gymnasia promulgated since the coup-d'etat a few months prior.⁵⁰⁰

Baltic German protests against the transfer were surprisingly muted, particularly so when contrasted to other dispossessions coming later on during the era of authoritarian rule. Neither of the two major German-language papers printed in Riga at the time, the *Rigasche Rundschau* and *Riga am Sonntag*, made any real lament over the loss of the former Bourse School of Commerce building and grounds. Reporting on the transfer itself was objective, technically correct and matter-of-fact, with a positive emphasis laid on the size and modernity of the facilities into which the Riga City German Gymnasium and 13th German Elementary School would be moving: “it must be observed that the building on Gaisin Street is among the best in our city.”⁵⁰¹ Doubtless the promulgation of a new law on schooling in Latvia earlier in the summer had scrawled the writing on the wall clearly enough; *Riga am Sonntag* had declared a month earlier that “An era in the history of our schooling has come to an end, and a new era is beginning.”⁵⁰²

That new era was a short-lived but difficult one. The autonomy of the minority school systems was abolished, their constituent components folded together under the overarching administrative structure of the Latvian component.⁵⁰³ Funding for minority schools was sharply reduced, and the number of pupils necessary for communal maintenance of elementary schools was raised to 80 from 30 in an attempt to force the assimilation of non-Latvian children.⁵⁰⁴ Curricula were subject to sweeping revision and censorship, teachers were replaced, and on the whole, the former independent and distinctive character of the minority school systems - Baltic

⁵⁰⁰ “The German Gymnasium,” *Riga am Sonntag* Nr. 405 26.VIII.1934

⁵⁰¹ “The New German City Gymnasium,” *Rigasche Rundschau* Nr. 190, 23.VIII.1934

⁵⁰² “The German School According to the New Law,” *Riga am Sonntag* Nr. 400, 22.VII.1934

⁵⁰³ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 393

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 394

German, Jewish, and Russian - was heavily eroded.⁵⁰⁵ Baltic German schools were especially hard hit by the loss of pupils incurred by reforms which stipulated that legally registered nationality, rather than the family's language of daily use, would determine which school a child was able to attend; the school system lost nearly 20% of its pupils almost overnight.⁵⁰⁶ Although some of these changes came into immediate effect, the full extent of most only become apparent over the course of years, leaving the country's Baltic Germans apprehensive but not necessarily threatened in the summer of 1934, which may help to explain the mildness of Baltic German responses to their eviction from the prized School of Commerce building.

The fate of the Baltic German pupils and teachers evicted is emblematic of the general attitude of the Ulmanis regime toward the country's ethnic minorities; rather than being turned out on their ears, as it were, the premises vacated by the Riga City 4th Gymnasium's outgoing classes were duly given over for the needs of this group, a not inconsiderable concession, given that these facilities were more than adequate to the needs of their new tenants.⁵⁰⁷ This fact very likely worked as a potent salve on the wounded collective pride of Riga's Baltic German community, and contrasts starkly with nearly every other case of property transfer examined in this dissertation - in no other instance were Riga's Baltic Germans compensated for the loss of buildings wrought upon them by Latvian-led governments.⁵⁰⁸ As elsewhere in Riga city center, the Ulmanis regime adopted a conscious policy of removing prominent spaces from Baltic German control without entirely depriving the group of adequate facilities.⁵⁰⁹ The message was clear enough, here as elsewhere: While space would still be found in Latvia for its ethnic German inhabitants, her

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 392

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 403

⁵⁰⁷ "The New German City Gymnasium," *Rigasche Rundschau* Nr. 190, 23.VIII.1934

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Chapter 6: Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage and Chapter 5: Shared Faith and Sacred Space

⁵⁰⁹ See also the case of St. Mary's and St. Peter's Churches (Chapter 5).

grandest spaces would always go to ethnic Latvians. In achieving such ends, Latvian national activists deployed the past as a tool. In most instances, this meant adopting polarizing, highly partisan historical narratives about spaces in order to incite outrage and mobilize support, but in certain others - notably in the case of the Riga Bourse School of Commerce building - it meant erasing the ethnic connotations from institutional histories in order to buttress arguments about the ends to which spaces were intended to be put.

In reality, of course, the eviction of the Riga City German Gymnasium and 13th Elementary school from the premises of the former Bourse School of Commerce was never about relative numbers of pupils, suitability of spaces, or any other logistical consideration at all; there had been no significant demographic, administrative, or financial changes in the preceding years that would explain or justify the decision ultimately reached by the Ulmanis regime regarding the disposition of the space, which came about by explicit decree.⁵¹⁰ Baltic German dominance in the region had long rested on the group's superior level of education, and Latvian respect for German cultural and educational attainment lingered on long into the interwar period. Undermining the image and prestige of the German-language educational system in Latvia - without destroying or crippling it, for reasons domestic and international alike - served the nationalizing ends of the Ulmanis regime perfectly, as did proceeding with the piecemeal process of removing all of Riga's most prominent architectural monuments from Baltic German control. In the new era, contradictions between the political ethnic hierarchy and the ethnic valence of urban spaces, contradictions which had persisted throughout the period of democratic rule, would no longer be tolerated in the new Latvia for the Latvians, and this early move on the part of the

⁵¹⁰ *Valdības Vēstnesis* 9.VIII.1934

Ulmanis regime, coming in the first few months of its tenure, set the tone of interethnic relations for the following six years.

4.3 The Herder Institute



Figure 17. Herder Institute, main building, circa 1938.

“And so, through the mutual recognition of our institute by the German and Latvian governments, the foundation has been laid for a site of learning which has successfully served and will continue to serve the transformation of a young generation of academics into worthy members of their nationality and citizens of their state.”⁵¹¹

The Herder Institute is one of the more curious examples of ethnicized space to be examined in this dissertation, in part because it functions inversely to the others. Rather than losing a space held over from before the Great War, Riga’s Baltic German community gained one in the Herder Institute; rather than being noteworthy for its architectural prominence, it is notable for its subdued placement and relative banality. The unique history of this institution, at the intersection of local and international ethnic politics, provides a telling counterpoint to the story related just above. The story of the Riga Bourse School of Commerce is, at its core, one of Latvian measures to check the influence and diminish the prestige of German-language education in Riga, and by

⁵¹¹ Wilhelm Klumberg (Rector, Herder Institute) 1939, in: Anonymous, *Deutsche Herderhoschule zu Riga* (Lübeck 1938), 10

extension, across Latvia. The story of the Herder Institute shares a rough symmetry with that narrative, insofar as it represents German (Baltic and Reich) efforts to navigate a middle course between a desire to enhance the prestige of German culture in the region, and to promote better relations between Baltic Germandom and the ethnic Latvian majority. In practice, this often meant accommodating Latvian sensibilities and sensitivities, especially vis-a-vis the still-fledgling University of Latvia, located just blocks away from the Herder Institute. That these efforts were largely successful - the institute maintained its existence up to the departure of the Baltic Germans from Latvia in the autumn of 1939 and beyond - was due both to the tact with which questions of ethnic prestige were handled by the administrators of the Herder Institute, and due to its special position vis-a-vis the government in Berlin, for which the institute was an ongoing, though perennially problematic, concern.⁵¹²

The overall result was an institution of the highest academic calibre, one which attracted German-speaking scholars from across Europe as guest lecturers and visiting scholars. From 1923 to 1938, over 200 such scholars visited Riga, among them some of the most prominent names in their fields, among them the historian Friedrich Meinecke and the physicist Max Planck.⁵¹³ Such luminaries drew to their lectures not only Baltic Germans, but also local Jewish, Latvian, and Russian students and intellectuals.⁵¹⁴ In the words of Alfred Köster, longtime ambassador of the German Reich to Latvia, the Herder Institute functioned as “a Reich German item of cultural propaganda of the first rank.”⁵¹⁵ Though it was a crucial point for the Latvian government that degrees granted by the Herder Institute should *not* qualify their recipients for employment in Latvia

⁵¹² Cf. RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, throughout.

⁵¹³ Jürgen von Hehn, “Deutschbaltische Hochschulaktivität zwischen den Weltkriegen” in: Gert von Pistohlkors, Toivo U. Raun, and Paul Kaegbein, eds., *Die Universitäten Dorpat/Tartu, Riga, und Wilna/Vilnius 1579-1979* (Böhlau, 1987), 265

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

(in order to prevent the emergence of a direct competitor to the newly-founded University of Latvia), degrees granted by the institute were fully recognized in Germany proper, adding greatly to their utility and to the prestige of the institute.⁵¹⁶ Students were able to earn degrees in a wide variety of fields, ranging from the engineering to physics, to history and philosophy – comparable to and essentially congruent with those awarded by the University of Latvia. The only real guarantor of non-competitiveness with the university was the inability of degrees from the Herder Institute to qualify their recipients for employment in their fields of study in Latvia – thus, an engineering student at the Herder Institute would be unable to pursue such work in Latvia (though he *could* employ his degree in Germany), a medical student could not find work as a doctor in Latvia, etc. etc. This, along with the institute’s agreement not to seek financial support from the state in any form and its much smaller student body, made its existence tolerable to a Latvian state keen to foster the newly-established University of Latvia.⁵¹⁷

Although the student body was relatively small (never exceeding 400 in number)⁵¹⁸, the importance of the institute, both to the local Baltic German population and to the German Foreign Office in Berlin, exceeded the size of its student body by far. Although the tireless efforts of leading Baltic German Rigans were undoubtedly crucial in shaping the fate of the Herder Institute, the pouring in of funding from German organizations abroad, governmental, non-governmental, and in-between, was nonetheless a necessary precondition for the overall success of the institute. The story of the Herder Institute is thus a story of negotiation between local and national interests, and between civic and ethnic belonging.

⁵¹⁶ Naturally this only applied to occupations requiring official government certification - practice of medicine, law, and positions within government agencies and ministries.

⁵¹⁷ Hehn, 267-268

⁵¹⁸ Anonymous, *Deutsche Herderhochschule zu Riga* (Lübeck 1938), 18

The establishment of the Herder Institute was at first a local affair, initiated by members of Riga's Baltic German community in 1920. The head of the German School Administration, Karl Keller, contacted Riga's Great Guild on 14 February of that year asking for what amounted to their blanket support in the undertaking that would soon become the Herder Institute, writing that such an enterprise was necessary "...in order to build up and support the intellectual life of our city anew."⁵¹⁹ Many of the most important personages in Riga's Baltic German community threw their support behind the enterprise, including two of its most influential politicians, Paul Schiemann and Baron Wilhelm von Fircks.⁵²⁰ The Great Guild promised its unequivocal support, as did nearly all of the most important Baltic German civil society organizations to survive the war.⁵²¹ By October of 1920, concrete plans for "German Evening Courses for Trade and Industry" were in existence, from which humble seed would eventually grow the Herder Institute, an academic establishment of high repute still in existence today.⁵²² The first courses were offered mid-January of 1921 in the halls of the former Peter I Middle School (*Realschule*), through the beneficence of the Riga City School Administration.⁵²³ The stay in this building proved short-lived, however, with the courses soon transitioning to the hall of the Great Guild, where they remained until 1930.⁵²⁴

In 1921, members of the organizations listed above came together to form the Herder Society (*Herdergesellschaft*), which served as the basis for the establishment of the Herder Institute in the autumn of that year.⁵²⁵ In 1924, the Latvian Saeima preliminarily recognized the

⁵¹⁹ LVVA 223-1-17-1

⁵²⁰ LVVA 223-1-179-9

⁵²¹ Including also the Rigaer Kaufmännischer Verein, Kaufmannskammer, Rigaer Fabrikantenverein, Deutsch liv. Hilfsverein, Literarisch-Praktische Verbindung, Vereinigte Elternkomitee, and Rigaer Gewerbeverein. Cf. LVVA 223-1-179-13.

⁵²² LVVA 223-1-179-13

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ LVVA 223-1-179-13, 15, 27; Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 418

⁵²⁵ *Ostland: vom geistigen Leben der Auslandsdeutschen*, 1 (1926) 399

Herder institute as a legal entity, and passed a special law in 1927 as a “private German institute of higher education in the German language”.⁵²⁶ The founders of the institute were aware from the beginning of the fragility of their position, since Latvian authorities were inclined to look askance at any educational establishment which might challenge the predominance of the newly founded University of Latvia, still struggling to establish its reputation internationally.⁵²⁷ Recognition by the government of the Republic of Latvia was essential for the continued survival of the institute, but so was support from ethnic Germans abroad - both civil society organizations and from governments in Berlin. Naturally, here as elsewhere in the cultural sphere, the Foreign Office in Berlin - before and after 1933 - was keen to deploy the institute as a tool to enhance the prestige of German culture, science, and learning in the wider Baltic Sea region. Yet doing so too overtly would undoubtedly arouse the ire of the Latvian government. The solution was to walk a fine line between the two powers-that-be, achieved by embracing a rhetoric of interethnic cooperation.

The necessity of portraying the work of the institute as complementary to, rather than rivaling, the interests of the University of Latvia and of Latvian academia more widely was clear to the members of the Herder Society and to its supporters in the German Embassy in Riga alike.⁵²⁸ The very choice of name for the institute was intended to reflect a sensitivity to interethnic relations in the region, as the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Herder’s writing on nationality encouraged mutual tolerance and respect.⁵²⁹ Herder had lived and worked in Riga from 1764 to 1769, finding employment as a teacher at the *Domschule* attached to Riga’s cathedral. Herder was deeply

⁵²⁶ *Deutsche Herderhochschule zu Riga*, 12

⁵²⁷ Bolin, 107

⁵²⁸ RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, Diplomatic Communique from German Embassy in Riga to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, 14.II.1930

⁵²⁹ Cf. Royal J. Schmidt, “Cultural Nationalism in Herder” in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 17, no. 3 (June 1956).

influenced during this time by his observations on Latvian folk culture, particularly the ancient oral traditions communicated down through the ages by Latvian folk songs, making him a particularly appropriate and conciliatory personage to adopt as the honorary patron of the new institute.⁵³⁰ These views found echo in the words of one of the institute's directors, Dr. Ernst Klumberg, writing in 1938:

“The history of science is a great fugue, in which the voices of the nations are to be heard. From this perspective, and in the knowledge that one's own nationality finds recognition when understanding and respect are paid to foreign ones, it has been the mission of our institute since its establishment to bring about a rapprochement of the two cultures - the German and the Latvian.”⁵³¹

This standpoint was not merely politically palatable, it was absolutely necessary for the survival of the Herder Institute, which depended on the goodwill of governments in Riga and in Berlin alike. Time proved the strategy to be a winning one; not only was the Herder Institute able to survive through the entirety of the interwar period and beyond, it thrived, attracting lecturers and students from across Europe.⁵³² The advantages of serving as patron to the institute were not lost on Latvian officials, before or after the installation of Kārlis Ulmanis' authoritarian regime in 1934. Aside from the prestige of hosting the institute in of itself, its work brought definite material and immaterial advantages for the University of Latvia. The leadership of the institute, along with the German embassy in Riga, were careful to promote a synergetic relationship between the two institutions of higher learning, requiring guest lecturers and visiting professors at the Herder Institute to also give talks or offer courses at the university (where many courses continued to be

⁵³⁰ Ernest A. Menze, “Königsberg and Riga: Genesis and Significance of Herder's Historical Thought“ in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference: November 5-8, 1987, Stanford California* (New York: De Gruyter, 1990), 98-103

⁵³¹ *Deutsche Herderhochschule zu Riga* 10; these sentiments are not to be found in the archival materials related to the establishment of the Herder-Institut, which, although they betray no hostility towards the Latvian state or people, are much more expressly concerned with advancing the intellectual and cultural welfare of the local Baltic German population.

⁵³² Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 416-417

taught in German through the early 1930s).⁵³³ Civil society and the professional classes in Riga - regardless of ethnicity - also benefited from the institute's activities, as evidenced by the visit of a guest lecturer from the University of Jena in Germany in late summer of 1939. The lecture, given in German on communal politics, was attended by 113 city employees, a majority of them ethnic Latvians.⁵³⁴ This was by no means an isolated incident; the prevalence of German-language fluency among educated Latvians meant that lecturers of repute arriving from across Central Europe were regularly met with sizeable crowds, their numbers swelled by ethnic Latvian attendees.⁵³⁵ This reality underscores the cosmopolitan and multilingual nature of higher education in interwar Riga, aspects of multi-ethnic coexistence still lingering from the pre-war era that were to come under attack following the coup d'etat of 1934.

Aided greatly by ample support from ethnic German scholars and academic societies abroad, the institute was able to flourish despite considerable financial difficulties. The budget of the Herder Institute, though supported generously by the more affluent members of the local Baltic German commercial and industrial elite, could not in the long run be supported solely by local means.⁵³⁶

Its leadership were rarely able to achieve a balanced yearly budget, leaving the institute heavily dependent on subsidies from Germany proper, mostly managed and coordinated by the German Embassy in Riga, the staff of which were in the habit of referring to the institute as their “problem child”.⁵³⁷ The Herder Society was aided greatly by subventions from German academic societies, chief among them the “Society of Friends and Supporters of the Herder Institute in Riga”

⁵³³ LVVA 223-1-179-44, 52, 61

⁵³⁴ LVVA 2927-4-386-11

⁵³⁵ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 412

⁵³⁶ Hehn, 265

⁵³⁷ RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, diplomatic communique from German Embassy in Riga to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, 11.VI.1932

established in the German city of Lübeck, with branches across northern Germany “in nearly every former Hanseatic town.”⁵³⁸ In addition to such non-governmental spending, some of it presumably supplemented indirectly by governments in Berlin, the Foreign Office repeatedly provided direct financial assistance to the Herder Institute, totalling some twenty-five thousand Reichsmarks in 1930, and another twenty-four thousand in 1931.⁵³⁹ It should be noted that such payments took place despite their dubious legality, with the German ambassador in Riga noting with perhaps intentional vagueness in 1930 that the funds were to be disbursed to the Herder Institute “in what way seems most suitable.”⁵⁴⁰ Such payments continued through the 1930s unabated.⁵⁴¹ This funding increased in the years after 1933, given the wave of enthusiasm for supporting this “cultural outpost” in Northeast Europe, amply evidenced in the rhetoric of diplomatic missives from the years immediately following the *Machtergreifung* of 1933.⁵⁴²

Along with providing such direct payments and arranging for the Herder Institute to procure loans on the most favorable terms possible with German banks, the German embassy in Riga was heavily involved in providing auxiliary support for the institution, arranging for copies

⁵³⁸ Hehn, “Deutsche Hochschulaktivität in Riga und Dorpat zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen,” 265, 268

⁵³⁹ RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, Letter to Geheimrat Herr Terdenge, Berlin, Auswärtiges Amt, 9.I.1932, from Köster, and letter from unknown author to Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Riga, Nr. VI W 1278/31 Ang. I. Auf den Bericht vom 3. Januar d.J. Berlin, den 19. Februar 1931.

⁵⁴⁰ RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, letter from unknown author to Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Riga, Nr. VI W 1278/31 Ang. I. Auf den Bericht vom 3. Januar d.J. Berlin, den 19. Februar 1931.

⁵⁴¹ Karl-Heinz Grundmann, *Deutschumpolitik zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik: eine Studie am Beispiel der deutsch-baltischen Minderheit in Estland und Lettland* (Hannover-Döhren: Harro von Hirschheydt, 1977) 609-613

⁵⁴² RAV Riga, Po 10 b, Minderheiten in Lettland, Bände 1-3, Signatur 173, diplomatic communique from German Embassy in Riga to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, 15.VIII.1933; such payments for the support of German-language schools across East Central Europe were common throughout the interwar period, though in almost all cases, direct funding was illegal, with money instead being conveyed via back-channels, funneling through various civil society organizations, etc. in methods which were quasi-legal at best but to which the non-German states (most of which had come to depend on Germany as a trade partner) largely turned a blind eye. For more information, cf. Rexheuser, Rex, “Das Schulwesen nationaler Minderheiten in Estland, Lettland, Polen und der Tschechoslowakei zwischen den Weltkriegen” in: *Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1918–1939): Stärke und Schwäche der neuen Staaten, nationale Minderheiten*, edited by Hands Lemberg (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 1997), 283–312, and Norbert Krekeler, “Die deutsche Minderheit in Polen und die Revisionspolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1919-1933” In *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen: Ereignisse: Folgen*, edited by Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995) among others, though this subject has more frequently been bundled with other aspects of Weimar and Nazi foreign policy, rather than treated independently.

of dissertations published in Germany to be sent to the institute (and to the University of Latvia as well, out of political considerations), and drumming up extra funds in the late 1920s for the expansion of the institute's library.⁵⁴³ The Foreign Office in Berlin also exerted its considerable influence in convincing German academics to undertake semester or year-long tenures in Riga, and in securing first-rate researchers and lecturers for this purpose.⁵⁴⁴ All of these efforts were only intensified after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, with further financial support for the institute and incentives offered to Reich-German professors to accept visiting positions at the Herder Institute.⁵⁴⁵ Nazi administrators paid less heed to concerns that the Latvian government might perceive a threat in the institute, and embraced the objective of building it up as a sort of "University for Germans Abroad".⁵⁴⁶ All these efforts led to considerable success, so that already when writing to the head of Riga's Great Guild in 1926, Dr. Paul Sokolowski, then director of the institute, was able to boast that,

"From humble beginnings, the Herder Institute has developed into an indispensable cultural factor of Baltic Germandom, and it is known and respected far beyond the borders of our homeland as a place of serious study and research."⁵⁴⁷

Sokolowski bundled the concept of homeland together with German culture in a fashion typical of Baltic German rhetoric of the democratic period in Latvia, writing that the Herder Institute's mission was to "commonly work for our homeland and for German culture within it."⁵⁴⁸ Taking care to mention that these achievements would have been impossible without the aid of the Great Guild, Sokolowski opined that continued success necessitated acquiring new spaces for the

⁵⁴³ Ibid.; Cf. also RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, diplomatic communique from Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin to German Embassy in Riga, 19.III.1931

⁵⁴⁴ Hehn, 269

⁵⁴⁵ Hehn, 274

⁵⁴⁶ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 416

⁵⁴⁷ LVVA 223-1-179-27, letter from Dr. P Sokolowski to the Aeltermann from 12.II.1926

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

activities of the institute, outside of the shared confines of the guild hall, which simultaneously served numerous other social and cultural purposes.⁵⁴⁹ In fact, new premises had already been purchased in central Riga in 1925, though pecuniary difficulties necessitated a delay of five years before the institute could occupy them.⁵⁵⁰

Located at Elizabeth Street 29 in central Riga (cf. photos), the space acquired was modest, adequate to the needs of the institute without figuring very prominently in the city's architectural landscape. Comprised of three buildings with over a hundred rooms, the new premises were sizeable, but not large enough to possibly compete with the impressive facilities housing the University of Latvia, which occupied a grandiose building in the heart of the city. Although the cash-strapped situation of the Herder Institute largely dictated the nature of its new home, the relationship of the space to that of other educational establishments, such as the University of Latvia, the state or city gymnasia in central Riga, the conservatory, etc. is reflective of the political path trod by the Herder Institute's leadership, one of accomplishment and rigor without pomp or bombast. In this sense, the Herder Institute's spatial location reflected the order of interethnic relations more accurately than that of any other Baltic German institution during the interwar years, in that, having been newly established during the period, it suffered from none of the lingering anachronism afflicting other prominent spaces - invariably the sites of eventual ethnic conflict, as the disjuncture between ethno-political and spatial realities yawned ever-wider in a Riga filled with edifices raised by Baltic Germans, but controlled and populated by ethnic Latvians. This leaves the story of the Herder Institute - its institutional and spatial histories taken together - as an important counterpoint to the other narratives explored in this dissertation.

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Chapter 6: Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage

⁵⁵⁰ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 418

4.4 An End to Autonomy

“The Germans now saw themselves faced again and again with abrupt, binding decisions on the part of the government, ones in the formulation of which they not only had played no part, but of which they had previously had no notion at all. They were without influence; indeed, they had become defenseless.”⁵⁵¹

In comparing the two narratives explored in this chapter, the disparity in outcomes is striking. Whereas the installation of authoritarian rule under Kārlis Ulmanis led to an overall negative (though relatively palatable, in comparison to later reversals) outcome in one instance, the upheaval of 1934 exerted virtually no negative effects on the activities of the Herder Institute. The difference is to be found in transnational factors, in particular the adroitness with which the long-serving rector of the Herder Institute, Dr. Ernst Klumberg (1926-1939) established close connections not just to civil society organizations in Germany proper, but to the very highest channels of government, in the form of the Cultural Division of the Foreign Office in Berlin, and with successive German ambassadors in Riga proper.⁵⁵² These connections were established early enough, and strengthened enough by 1934, that Latvian action to curtail the activity of the institute could only be taken as a move against the expressed interests of Berlin, a step that Latvian authorities were largely unwilling to take. Although the schooling law of July 17, 1934 clearly had a pernicious effect on the Baltic German populace at large, *Reich*-German involvement in primary and secondary education in Latvia remained fairly minimal, limited largely to the procurement of textbooks, the content of which was at first regulated, and later outright censored,

⁵⁵¹ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 401; this is the retrospective commentary of a first-hand witness to the events described (Wachsmuth himself having served as Head of the Baltic German School Division within the Latvian Ministry of Education).

⁵⁵² RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, telegram from Ambassador Stieve to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, 9.V.1931; Letter from Auswärtiges Amt (signature illegible) to Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Riga, Nr. VI W 1278/31; Letter to Geheimrat Herr Terdenge, Berlin, Auswärtiges Amt, 9.I.1932, from Ambassador Stieve.

by the Latvian state.⁵⁵³ Initial requirements on hourly minimums of instruction in Latvian language, culture, and history instituted in the 1920s transformed into fairly intense oversight of content following the coup d'état of 1934.⁵⁵⁴ Any works deemed “hostile to the Latvian state or people” were forbidden, and what qualified as hostility to those entities was entirely at the discretion of the Ministry of Education.⁵⁵⁵ All of this meant that as a means of ideological input from Germany, the Baltic German school system was relatively ineffective, its principal propaganda value derived from maintaining its high quality and prestigious reputation among the region’s other ethnic groups.

The liberality and comprehensiveness of the School Autonomy law of 1923 had left minority schooling in Latvia an almost exclusively internal affair, with the country's ethnic minority populations - and the Baltic Germans' ostensible benefactors in Berlin - helpless to resist changes to the schooling regime imposed after 1934. The Herder Institute was operative outside of this framework, and reliant upon a heavy investment of *Reich*-German resources. The triadic nature of this relationship, along with the novelty and hence adaptiveness of the institution itself, and the spatial dimensions at play in one case but not the other, explain the disparity in outcomes between the two cases examined.

⁵⁵³ Wachsmuth, 2 *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 41-243

⁵⁵⁴ Wittram, 261

⁵⁵⁵ Wachsmuth, *Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934*, 405-407

5.0 The Topography of Memory: Streets, Cemeteries, and Monuments

“There is not a single city in Western Europe so poor in monuments, not a single city whose inhabitants are so apathetic towards their history, towards those to whom they owe a debt of gratitude.”⁵⁵⁶

This caustic criticism of Riga and its inhabitants, written by the prominent interwar politician Mārgers Skujenieks during the drive to construct the now-iconic Freedom Monument, captures both the physical and the ideological challenges in shaping a new landscape of collective memory in interwar Riga. In the 1920s, a newly-empowered Latvian citizenry found itself governing a city almost devoid of monuments of any kind. In order to combat apathy towards the city’s past, it was necessary to make Latvians feel that Riga not only was theirs now, but that it had also historically had been so. Monuments and memorials had a special role to play in this process. By binding the history of Latvians in Riga with the urban fabric itself via memorial spaces – literal sites of memory - the city and national governments sought to strengthen consciousness of Riga as a Latvian city in the past as well as the present.

Thus, Riga’s transformation into the capital of a Latvian national state brought a fundamental reworking of the relationship between public space and collective memory. This involved not only tangible changes in the built environment – the creation of new monuments, memorials, sculptures, and statues – but also a refashioning of the symbolic landscape through the bestowing of names upon spaces. A city almost entirely devoid of official place names or monuments with a connection to ethnic Latvian culture or history gained important sites of memory for the Latvian people in the 1920s and 1930s. Much of this work unfolded within a democratic framework prior to 1934, requiring practical cooperation between the city’s principal

⁵⁵⁶ M. Skujenieks, “Cels Darbs” in *Brīvības Pieminekļa Gadagrāmata 1933* (Rīga: Brīvības pieminekļa komiteja, 1933) 76

ethnic groups. This chapter investigates the reshaping of those parts of the built environment in Riga oriented towards collective memory, using a number of the city's most prominent sites of memory to illustrate the role played by ethnicity and interethnic relations in establishing a new hierarchy and topography of memory in Riga's streets, parks, and cemeteries.

Questions of public memory and urban space in Riga have attracted significant scholarly attention in the past thirty years. Researchers both Latvian and foreign have produced detailed scholarship on Riga's monuments, statues, memorials, and cemeteries. The 1990s and 2000s saw the re-dedication of older statuary deemed undesirable by the Soviet authorities, helping to fuel renewed interest in Riga's historical monuments among the general public.⁵⁵⁷ The renaming of streets after 1991 likewise generated interest in a past that had been quasi-forbidden for decades.⁵⁵⁸ While some of the publications in this vein have been intended for popular consumption, or as general reference works, other scholarship has been more in tune with the needs of today's academy. Some authors have been art-historical in their approach, situating developments in the plastic arts in Latvia in a transnational context of competing influences.⁵⁵⁹ Others have highlighted the important role played by the arts, and memorial culture, in shaping Latvian identity during the modern period.⁵⁶⁰ The most prominent public monuments of the interwar period, the iconic

⁵⁵⁷ Two volumes in particular stand out here, both by Latvian authors: Ojārs Spārītis, *Riga's Decorative Monuments and Sculptures* (Riga: Nacionālais apgāds, 2007), and Gunārs Kušķis and Pēteris Korsaks *Denkmäler der Liebe, den Siegen und Verlusten* (Riga: SIA Madris, 2004), both intended for general audiences but also of use for scholars.

⁵⁵⁸ A 3-volume Encyclopedia of Riga's streets was published 2001-2009, containing abundant information on the streets and prominent buildings lining them, but with very little on the process of changing street names, the rationale for changes, or the debates accompanying them. Cf. Raimonds Zalcmāns, ed., *Rīgas ielas: enciklopēdija, 1. sējums* (Rīga: Apgāds Priedaines, 2001), with volumes 2 and 3 following in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Cf. p. 55 of the first volume for a very brief assessment of the process of changing street names in the 1920s.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Laila Bremša's article, "Denkmäler des ersten Weltkrieges und der Freiheitskämpfe in Lettland aus den Jahren 1920-1940" in: *Nordost-Archiv*, Band VI/1997 Heft 1, pp. 185-204, which (along with others) places the Freedom Monument and Cemetery of the Brethren within the context of ethnic Latvian and interwar European artistic developments, without drawing the country's (or Riga's) ethnic minorities into its analysis.

⁵⁶⁰ Suzanne Pouchier-Plasseraud's *Arts and a Nation: The Role of Visual Arts and Artists in the Making of the Latvian Identity 1905-1940* (Boston and Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015) is the most thorough attempt to do so, although this work pays very short shrift to interethnic relations or the multi-ethnic character of the country's population.

Freedom Monument and Cemetery of the Brethren, have attracted much scholarly interest, with works on the process of their design, construction, and role in shaping national identity forthcoming since the 1980s.⁵⁶¹ As foundational as much of this research has been, the interethnic dimension has often been lacking.⁵⁶² While the relationship of the interwar period's culture of collective memory to the majority Latvian population has been explored, its effects on a multi-ethnic society – the potential to alienate or include, to reconcile or incite across ethnic lines – have yet to be fully addressed.

This leaves scholarship on Riga behind that of its region. In recent years, scholars of other parts of East Central Europe, especially the Habsburg lands, have emphasized the role played by memorial space – statues, sculptures, cemeteries, etc. – in promoting national narratives and shaping discourse on ethnic belonging.⁵⁶³ Latent ethnic tensions in urban societies can find powerful manifestation in carved stone, as objects of public reverence (or revilement) that become focal points for ethnic pride or grievances stretching back centuries. Similarly, streets and their names are often at the center of intense controversies of national identity and historical narrative, representing an entire hierarchical geography of their own that is inherently deeply political in

⁵⁶¹ Vaidelotis Apsītis' monographs on each have distinguished themselves in particular, in part through the thorough archival research informing them. Cf. Vaidelotis Apsītis, *Brāļu Kapi* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1982) and *Brīvības Pieminekļis* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1993).

⁵⁶² With some notable exceptions: a 1997 article by Ojārs Spārītis deals with the question of German-Russian competition in the sphere of urban space, including the erection of monuments and memorials, in the period between 1812 and 1914; cf. Ojārs Spārītis „Politisches Handeln und die Frage des nationalen Bewußtseins bei Denkmäler russischer und deutscher Herkunft in Riga” in *Nordost-Archiv* (Band VI, 1997, Heft 1) pp. 205-240, and Raimonds Cerūzis has recently published a Latvian-language article on Latvian and Baltic German approaches to the preservation of the country's historical monuments during the interwar period, with an emphasis on conflicts over certain monuments in Riga. Cf. Raimonds Cerūzis, „Latvieši und Vācbaltieši starpkaru periodā: No kopīgas kultūras identitātes līdz ‘Pieminekļu karam’” in: *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* (2015, Nr. 3) 64-99.

⁵⁶³ For a few representative volumes specifically on memorial space, cf.: Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Staging the Past Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Empire 1848 to the Present* (Purdue University Press, 2001); Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Indiana University Press, 2009); for works on urban space and national identity more generally, cf. Emily Gunzburger Makaš and Tanja Damljanovic Conley, eds., *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe* (Routledge, 2010); Alofsin, Anthony, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as language in the Habsburg Empire and its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago 2006); and Michaela Marek, *Kunst und Identitätspolitik. Architektur und Bildkünste im Prozess der tschechischen Nationsbildung* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2004) among many others.

nature.⁵⁶⁴ Scholarship on the built environment and collective memory in Riga prior to 1945 has admittedly advanced in recent years.⁵⁶⁵ Yet the interwar period still remains largely uncharted in comparison to previous eras. The monumental projects of the authoritarian Ulmanis regime launched during the second half of the 1930s have attracted the lion's share of what scholarly attention has been devoted to the era, with historians paying less heed to developments in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁵⁶⁶

This chapter examines the transformations of Riga's sites of memory in four sections. The first explains the general circumstances prevailing at the opening of the period. The second section deals with the process of renaming and Latvianizing Riga's streets during the 1920s. The third section focuses on two juxtaposed sites of memory, each with its own pairing of a concrete and an abstract element: the Cemetery of the Brethren (paired with November 11th, 1918 in ethnic Latvian memory) and the monument to the fallen soldiers of the *Landeswehr* in the city's Forest Cemetery (paired with May 22nd, 1919 in Baltic German memory).⁵⁶⁷ The final section examines a handful of interwar Riga's new monuments in the city center with an eye to their ability to unite or divide the citizenry along ethnic lines.

5.1 A City Without Statues

“The stone generals disappeared into the basements of museums...In those spots where they once were, granite blocks stand like premonitions. What, indeed, do they await?”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁴ For an exploration of the power dynamic inherent in the process, cf. Maoz Azaryahu, “The Power of Commemorative Street Names” in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (1996, vol. 14) 311-330.

⁵⁶⁵ Particularly with the publication of Michael Jaumann and Klaus Schenk, eds., *Erinnerungsmetropole Riga: Deutschsprachige Literatur- und Kulturvielfalt im Vergleich* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2011).

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Andreas Fülberth, *Riga, Tallinn, Kaunas: Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten* and Deniss Hanovs, Valdis Teraudkaulns, *Laiks, Telpa, Vadonis: Autoritārisma kultūra Latvijā 1934-1940*. This prioritization is natural, given the monumental scale of the building projects of the 1930s, which were contrasted mostly to changes in ownership, usage, association, etc. of pre-existing spaces in the 1920s – although the late 1920s witnessed the development of a considerable number of housing projects, public and private.

⁵⁶⁷ Hatlie's *Riga at War 1914-1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multi-ethnic Metropolis* (Marburg: Herder Verlag, 2014) contains a discussion of May 22nd as a site of memory for Latvia's Baltic German population during the interwar period (pp. 210-216), mostly on the basis of memoirs and other first-hand accounts; this chapter expands upon and further develops this theme while juxtaposing it with Latvian perceptions of the same date.

⁵⁶⁸ “Latvian Riga Awaits a Latvian Freedom Monument,” *Daile* Nr. 2, 1931 (1.1.1931)

Along with the removal of Riga's industrial capacity and much of its workforce, the evacuations of 1915 had an impact on the city's memorial space(s), with the Russian authorities removing dozens of exterior statues to the interior, as a means of protecting artistic and cultural monuments.⁵⁶⁹ The result was a city in which pedestals, plinths and columns sat bare for years, awaiting either their demolition or the restoration of the figures which had decorated them. In most cases the tsars, generals, and mythic figures never returned, or have found new iterations only in the last decade or so.⁵⁷⁰ This was partly due to practical difficulties, but also owing to the nature of the cultural reference points of the old statuary. Most of the removed monuments were representations of the triumph and glory of Imperial Russia or the Romanov dynasty, sometimes also with Baltic German overtones where these could buttress the exaltation of the tsarist state in relative harmony.⁵⁷¹ The re-establishment of most of these monuments was neither desirable to the city government, nor practicable in most cases.⁵⁷² The new authorities in Riga were thus presented with a more or less blank slate on which to write the new texts of Latvian collective memory in the capital.

The circumstances prevailing in Riga during the first few years of independence prevented any comprehensive attempts at re-shaping the city's public memorial space. Inflation, speculation, unemployment, and difficulties with taxation, investment, and trade all dictated that the status quo prevailing at the end of hostilities would continue for some time. Bare pedestals and columns

⁵⁶⁹ Hatlie, *Riga at War*, 44

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. Ojars Sparītis, *Riga's Monuments and Decorative Sculptures* for information on the post-1991 restoration of monuments from before 1914.

⁵⁷¹ The 1913 monument to the Napoleonic-era Imperial Russian General Barclay de Tolly, a Baltic German, is probably the best example of this intersection of ethnic and imperial historical remembrance. Cf. Ojars Sparītis "Politisches Handeln und die Frage des nationalen Bewußtseins bei Denkmälern russischer und deutscher Herkunft in Riga" in *Nordost-Archiv* Band VI/1997 Heft 1 *Das Denkmal im nordlichen Ostmitteleuropa im 20. Jahrhundert. Politischer Kontext und nationale Funktion*, 218, 224

⁵⁷² Cf. LVVA 2927-1-1930 – (Correspondence between Riga city government and the national monuments board) and LVVA 2927-4-781 (Monuments files from 24.IX.1923-28.VII.1929) for the city's engagement with the monuments question during the 1920s.

remained unadorned, covered sometimes in posters and placards, and the city continued to use the old tsarist-era street names until 1923, albeit with Latvian-only street signs in place of the older trilingual signs from 1920 onward.⁵⁷³ Though the city began to recover economically in the early 1920s, the question of what to do with the remaining monuments to the Imperial Russia past lingered into the 1930s. Most of the statues evacuated into the Russian interior were never returned by the Soviet government, but some were; for example, the bust of Johann Gottfried Herder, which had stood near the cathedral in the old town, was recovered in 1924 and re-installed in its old location in 1927 at the recommendation of the city department of education.⁵⁷⁴ Despite the decision of the Latvian-controlled city government to return the monument to its old location, it became the subject of controversy in the mid-1930s due its German character.⁵⁷⁵ The non-return of other monuments to German historical figures – such as the statue of Bishop Albert formerly ensconced on the side of St. Mary’s Cathedral - helped the city government to avoid further such controversy.⁵⁷⁶

The statues and memorials of a distinctly Imperial Russian character – those that remained in the city, in fragmentary or complete form, and those that were returned – were also problematic for the city government.⁵⁷⁷ Rather than any lingering attachment to the Romanov dynasty or its empire, a sensitivity to the treatment of artistic and historical monuments motivated the city government in preserving most of these monuments.⁵⁷⁸ Neither the ethnic Latvian, Baltic German,

⁵⁷³ Wolfgang Wachtsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland 1918–1934. Ein Tätigkeitsbericht. Materialien zur Geschichte des baltischen Deutschtums. Band 3: Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Periode* (Köln: Comel Verlag, 1953) 260

⁵⁷⁴ LVVA 2927-4-781-25, 26, 27 (city government correspondence and protocols 23.XI.1925-9.VII.1926)

⁵⁷⁵ Cerūzis, “Latvieši un vācbaltieši starpkaru periodā: no kopīgas kultūras identitātes līdz ‘pieminekļu karam,’” 85

⁵⁷⁶ This statue was added to the exterior of the church in 1897, evacuated in 1915 and lost at site, and finally restored in the form of a replica in 2001.

⁵⁷⁷ LVVA 2927-1-1930 contains many protocols of the city government’s largely inconclusive deliberations on what to do with the various recovered monuments.

⁵⁷⁸ The group probably most inclined to a personal attachment to the Romanovs (even more so than the socio-economically diverse Russian population), the Baltic Germans, had been fully alienated from their traditional dynastic loyalties by 1917, first by decades

or Jewish members of the city executive board seem to have had any qualms about removing Russian cultural monuments, and ethnic Russian representation in city government was too weak to have much influence on the question.⁵⁷⁹ The monuments' destruction or complete removal from the city would likely have created undesirable publicity, especially abroad, but their place in the new capital was questionable at best from an ideological standpoint.

The fate of one monument in particular is emblematic of the city government's ambivalence towards its imperial past. The colossal statue of Peter the Great that had once looked out over the city's main thoroughfare, erected in 1910 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the city's incorporation into the Russian Empire, was serendipitously returned to the city in 1934, after a nearly 20-year absence.⁵⁸⁰ Evacuated in 1915 by sea, the ship carrying it sank off the coast of the Estonian islands before reaching its destination.⁵⁸¹ The statue remained at the bottom of the Baltic Sea until 1934, when the Shipping Salvage Association of Estonia raised the wreck, recovering the statue along with the rest of the cargo. Placing themselves into contact with the city government, the association offered to sell the statue back for 15,000 Estonian crowns, declaring their intention only to recoup their costs in its recovery.⁵⁸² The city government agreed to purchase the statue back at the proposed price, citing its historical and artistic value.⁵⁸³ Although the intention had originally been to display it in the city art museum, this proved impracticable, leaving the city with yet another memorial from a bygone era with no clear function or place in the capital of the Republic of Latvia.⁵⁸⁴

of intermittent Russification efforts, then by the overt anti-German policies wielded against them during the First World War. For Latvian eagerness to show their nation as responsible stewards of the country's historical heritage, cf. *Pieminekļu Valdei - 90. Pieminekļu valdes mantojums* (Riga: Latvijas Nacionālā Vēstures Muzeja Krājumā, 2013) 9, 11, 17.

⁵⁷⁹ Stegmann 101

⁵⁸⁰ "Will 'Peter' return again?" *Rigasche Rundschau* 9.VII.1934

⁵⁸¹ "The Pedestal of the Monument to Peter the Great and Other City Questions," *Rigasche Rundschau* 18.IX.1928

⁵⁸² LVVA 2927-1-1930-36

⁵⁸³ LVVA 2927-1-1930-39, 40

⁵⁸⁴ LVVA 2927-101930-47

The solution proposed in the 1930s was the relocation of this statue and many other relics like it to one of the city's main parks, the former Emperor Park (*Keizara darzs/Kaisergarten*), along with a number of other historical relics, in order to create an open-air historical museum.⁵⁸⁵ Although discussions on this theme continued through 1940, this option was ultimately never realized, and most of the artifacts were never relocated to any public space. Peter the Great ended up in a city storeroom, a fate symbolic of the city's ambivalent attitude towards its Imperial Russian heritage both then and now.⁵⁸⁶ In the end, the evacuation of most city monuments during the First World War had the effect of leaving Riga with a blank slate on which to write a new conception of the city's history, one that would replace the empire with the nation. The most immediate medium in which to engrave the nation's past was not statuary, however, but the warp and weft of any city – its streets.

5.2 City Streets and the Topography of Memory

“...Thereby arose not only practical difficulties for all of the inhabitants and visitors of the city without any command of Latvian, but it also could only be seen as a coarse snub to all of the non-Latvian population which belongs to the old city of Riga and feels itself at home here.”⁵⁸⁷

The interwar period witnessed the renaming, and with it, the Latvianization of Riga's streets, squares, and parks.⁵⁸⁸ Two key questions confronted the city government in the early

⁵⁸⁵ LVVA 2927-1-1930-55; the process of creating the open-air Latvian Ethnographic Museum, on the city's outskirts, was in full swing at the time, and city government was undoubtedly influenced by the precedent thus set.

⁵⁸⁶ Gunārs Kušķis and Pēteris Korsaks, *Denkmäler der Liebe, den Siegen und Verlusten*, 71

⁵⁸⁷ Paul Schiemann, “Die Tätigkeit des Ausschusses der deutsch-baltischen Parteien in Lettland” *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums 1924*, (Riga: Jonck and Poliewitz, 1924) 22

⁵⁸⁸ Surprisingly little scholarly attention has been paid thus far to the process and its impact on interethnic relations in interwar Riga. For the best in-depth analysis yet published, Cf. Thomas Taterka, “Gedenken in Straßennamen. Rigas memoriale Toponymik und das nationale Gedächtnis der Letten” in: Michael Jaumann and Klaus Schenk, eds. *Erinnerungsmetropole Riga: Deutschsprachige Literatur- und Kulturvielfalt im Vergleich* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2010) pp. 83-104 for an erudite, Deridian expose of the symbolic role of streets named for (Baltic) Germans in the Latvian capital, albeit one devoid of political history or information on the actual process of renaming. Cf. also Wolfgang Wachsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland 1918-1934: Ein Tätigkeitsbericht. Materialien zur Geschichte des baltischen Deutschtums, Band 3: Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Periode*, pp. 254-261 for a discussion of the question of street signs in Riga; what is of concern to Wachsmuth is not the names themselves in terms of their semantic content (the issue is ignored

1920s: what names to bestow, and in what languages to display them. The former question elicited surprisingly little conflict between ethnic groups or political parties, though it was accompanied by a great deal of historical and philological debate. The latter question – whether to have street signs in German and Russian in addition to Latvian – was one of the most bitter conflicts between the ethnic minority bloc and the Latvian bourgeois parties in city government during the 1920s. The politics of the renaming process neatly encapsulate the new ethnic power dynamic within city government during the 1920s. They also demonstrate the ability for questions of spatial belonging to become distilled in intense, often bitter debates over the semantic and linguistic representation of urban space.⁵⁸⁹ As with other public memorial spaces, the renaming of streets constituted a rejection of the city’s Imperial Russian past, while the language question displays the fundamental conflict between Riga’s Baltic German and Russian inhabitants’ sense of place, belonging, and identity, and the aspirations of Latvian national activists to “give Riga a Latvian face”.⁵⁹⁰

Renaming took place in several waves beginning in the 1920s, with sporadic changes continuing throughout the end of the interwar period. Officially the city government (more specifically, the special commission which it created for this task) was responsible for all name changes prior to 1934, though the influence of the national government made itself felt on certain issues. The very first of Riga’s streets to be granted new names were some of the most prominent: the former Boulevard of the Heir to the Throne – renamed for the national poet Rainis – and Theater and Bastion Boulevards, now combined into one thoroughfare and named for the talented

entirely), but the renewed question of trilingual street signs in 1923. His treatment of the question is informative, but brief, and subsumed in a wider discussion of the role of the German language in official life in interwar Latvia.

⁵⁸⁹ The city’s Jewish population played little role in the debates of the 1920s beyond providing tactical support in the city parliament for the minority bloc; given its non-representation in the city’s topography of memory prior to the First World War, avoiding a political fight over street names in the interwar period constituted pragmatic politics.

⁵⁹⁰ This phrase – in reference to Riga’s spaces and institutions alike - occurs over and over again in the parlance of Latvian national activists of the interwar period, occurring with particular frequency in the period 1934-1940 but surfacing well before then.

poet, author, and playwright Aspazija, wife of Rainis, upon their return to Latvia from Swiss exile in the spring of 1920.⁵⁹¹ The honoring of living individuals with streets named for them indicated the pre-eminence of this literary couple, but the dire financial situation of the city and the young republic alike meant that funding for new monuments or memorials was out of the question in 1920.⁵⁹²

The commemoration of this most celebrated of couples aside, the vast majority of streets retained their old names, often Imperial Russian in character, for several years after independence. Prior to semantic renaming came linguistic Latvianization. The city's old trilingual signs – in Russian, German, and Latvian since a decision of the city parliament in 1905 – had remained in place until 1920, when a decree was put into effect by the ministry of the interior stipulating that only Latvian-language street signs should be used in Riga.⁵⁹³ This brought about much practical confusion across the next few years, since the Latvian-language names, given official status far more recently, were less well-documented than their more established German and Russian counterparts.⁵⁹⁴ The city fire department wrote to city hall repeatedly across 1921 and 1922 to complain that the uncertainty produced by irregular translations was greatly inhibiting its ability to perform its duties.⁵⁹⁵ At least some unsanctioned renaming took place in the first few years after 1919 as well; in 1921, unidentified “hooligans” affixed signs along much of the length of the city's principal boulevard proclaiming it “Victory Avenue”. The city government quickly removed the

⁵⁹¹ Rainis' given name was Jānis Pliekšāns, Aspazija's – Elza Rozenberga, but both were and are universally known by their pseudonyms. There exists no pair of Latvian authors more celebrated.

⁵⁹² Some objections were later raised to the notion of naming streets after persons still living, but these were ignored by the city government. Cf. “The Renaming of Riga's Streets,” *Latvis* 17.IV.1923.

⁵⁹³ Schiemann, “Die Tätigkeit des Ausschusses der deutsch-baltischen Parteien in Lettland” 22; for introduction of Latvian-language street signs in 1905, Kristine Wohlfahrt, “Das Riga der Letten” in Erwin Oberländer and Kristine Wohlfahrt, eds., *Riga. Portrait einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857-1914* (Paderborn Schöningh, 2004) 43

⁵⁹⁴ LVVA 3255-1-72-6, 10

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; the latter is a complaint from 2.VI.1922 that a house had burned entirely to the ground due to the fire department's inability to locate the address on any map or index in their possession.

impromptu signs, but the unpopularity of the older (imperial) Russian names was obvious – the street in question was still officially called Alexander Boulevard, after the Tsar Alexander II.⁵⁹⁶

Given these circumstances, renaming was not to be put off for long, and in autumn of 1922 the commission for the renaming of city streets was formed by Riga's city government.⁵⁹⁷ The committee was comprised of members of the city parliament, along with historical and linguistic experts from the University of Latvia, including the renowned Latvian linguist Jānis Endzeliņš and the widely respected Baltic German historian Leonid von Arbusow.⁵⁹⁸ The committee expanded its ranks in 1923 to include further academic experts and representatives from the authors' and journalists' unions.⁵⁹⁹ The commission's composition reflected that of the city parliament, meaning that the city's ethnic minorities also took active part in the process. The body had an ethnic Latvian majority, but its influence was lessened considerably by its irregular attendance and by the frequent cooperation of the Latvian Social Democratic representatives with the minority bloc.⁶⁰⁰ During the final deliberations in city parliament on the street renaming question in September 1923, some ethnic Latvian councilors complained that the German language had "had a preponderance" during the commission's sessions, discouraging ethnic Latvians from attending.⁶⁰¹ This perception also found echo in some of the Latvian popular press, as humorously depicted in a cartoon from the Latvian satirical magazine *Svāri* ("Scales") from April 6th, 1923, in which the commission was described as consisting of "one Germanized Latvian, three Germans, and a Russian".

⁵⁹⁶ LVVA 3255-1-72-7,9

⁵⁹⁷ "Riga Chronicle: The Renaming of the Streets," *Rigasche Rundschau* 15.II.1923

⁵⁹⁸ Arbusow's participation is mentioned in "Riga Chronicle: The Renaming of the Streets," *Rigasche Rundschau* 15.II.1923; Endzeliņš' role as consultant in LVVA 3255-1-72-43.

⁵⁹⁹ "Riga Chronicle: The Renaming of the Streets," *Rigasche Rundschau* 15.II.1923

⁶⁰⁰ "Riga Chronicle," *Rigasche Rundschau* 8.VI.1923

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.



Figure 18. Cartoon lampooning the street renaming commission.⁶⁰²

The comic portrayed the commission's members as bumbling and incompetent, asking a passing workman for his opinion in a comical pidgin Latvian peppered with German words (see insert).⁶⁰³ Despite such criticisms, a generally subdued stance on the part of the ethnic minorities, along with a thorough lack of organization vis-à-vis the naming question among the bourgeois Latvian parties, meant that the committee's proposals produced protracted debate, but no real ire within city hall through the conclusion of its work.⁶⁰⁴

The commission's approach was fundamentally conservative, operating on the principles of: renaming as few streets as possible, retaining historical names (those in use for multiple centuries) so long as these were not directly hostile to Latvia, immortalizing only the names of people who had done service to Latvia and the Latvian people, and removing street names with no connection to Riga. Additionally, street names of a non-Latvian origin must be in the minority, and busy commercial streets were to be renamed only with caution.⁶⁰⁵ Along with these rules, a certain pragmatic cleaning-up of names that had little to do with the new political circumstances

⁶⁰² *Svāri* Nr. 13, 6.IV.1923, cartoon by A. Kalniņš

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ "Riga Chronicle," *Rigasche Rundschau* 8.VI.1923; "LNK" (The Latvian National Club), *Students* #14, 17.I.1923,

⁶⁰⁵ "City Parliament Session of February 1st," *Rigasche Rundschau* 2.II.1923

also took place, where duplicate or overly similar names were altered, redundancies corrected, and streets without official names assigned ones.⁶⁰⁶

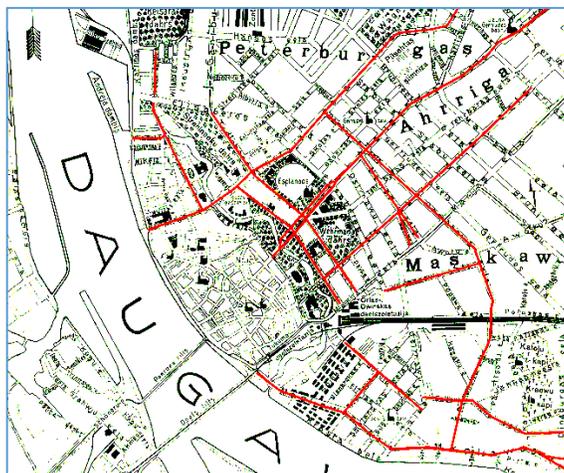


Figure 19. Map of central Riga showing streets renamed (red) in 1923.

Despite the apparent disinclination towards changes, these principles left the commission wide latitude in its work, particularly regarding the question of whether a given name had any “connection to Riga”. The first order of the day, and the objective which met with the most consensus among the commission and city parliament, was the virtual eradication of Imperial Russia from the city’s topography of memory. All of the major thoroughfares in the city center named after elements in the Imperial Russian state or dynastic hierarchy – for tsars, generals, governors-general, or titles like “heir to the throne” – were eliminated.⁶⁰⁷

While a general consensus prevailed among the public and in city government that these streets ought to be renamed for ethnic Latvians or for individuals who had done service to the Latvian people, considerable discord regarding who ought to be honored and who eliminated prevailed in the commission, in the city parliament, and among the general public. Most of those

⁶⁰⁶ LVVA 3255-1-72-42,43

⁶⁰⁷ There is no evidence of resistance to these changes on the part of the Russian faction in city parliament in either the archival record or in the summaries of debates in city parliament recorded in the Riga papers; this passiveness was likely born out of political pragmatism and perhaps partly out of ideological convictions.

up for review, so to speak, had ethnic Latvian supporters and detractors alike. The paper *Latvis* reported in mid-April 1923 that the Latvian representatives on the commission had not discussed their positions amongst themselves beforehand and instead spent much of that week's meeting arguing with one another, debating, for instance, whether the mid-19th century Governor-General of Riga and Russian military hero Alexander Suvorov had been a friend or an enemy of the Latvian people, or whether the Russian General Eduard Tottleben, of Baltic German origin, was a notable son of the homeland or a deplorable Russian imperialist.⁶⁰⁸ The ethnic minorities, on the other hand, presented a unified front and were able to consistently outvote the Latvians when necessary.⁶⁰⁹ However, when complaints about the number of older names remaining arose during a session of the city parliament in the spring of 1923, the Latvian Social Democratic representative on the commission, Tīfentāls, noted that the minority bloc had generally refrained from exploiting their advantageous position, pursuing compromise measures instead.⁶¹⁰

The ultimate results of the renaming process, published in the state gazetteer *Valdības Vēstnesis* on November 2nd, 1923, are indicative of that spirit of compromise. The most important streets in the city center shifted from honoring Imperial Russian to ethnic Latvian historical figures. Intellectuals from the Latvian National Awakening in the latter third of the 19th century were especially honored, with Krišjānis Barons, Atis Kronvalds, and Krišjānis Valdemars replacing the Russian Governor-General Suvorov, the author Alexander Pushkin, and the Tsar Nicholas I.⁶¹¹ The Latvian colonel Kalpaks, killed in 1919 in the War of Independence, replaced the Baltic German-Russian general Tottleben. Romanov street became Lāčplēša iela, named after the hero

⁶⁰⁸ "The Renaming of Riga's Streets," *Latvis* 17.IV.1923

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ "Riga Chronicle," *Rigasche Rundschau* 8.VI.1923

⁶¹¹ These men were all members of the "Young Latvians", intellectuals active primarily from the 1850s-1880s who laid the groundwork for 20th-century Latvian nationalism.

of the Latvian national epic – perhaps explaining the decision to retain Bruņinieku iela (Street of the Knights) into the 1930s as a kind of narrative counterweight.⁶¹²

Along with the creation of boulevards named for Rainis and Aspazija in 1920, the changes above amounted to the direct replacement of Imperial Russian with Latvian national symbology in the city center. This, however, did not go far enough. Beyond the level of state and dynastic symbolism, geographic references to the Russian Empire were also ruthlessly eliminated, with virtually every street named for a city or town in the territory of the former Russian Empire gaining a new name, typically that of a town or river in Latvia – most often in Latgale, the part of the country with the most tenuous cultural and economic connections to Riga.⁶¹³ This alone resulted in dozens of renamings, constituting the single largest category of altered street names.⁶¹⁴ The effect was to vastly shrink the geographic range of the city's topography of memory, confining it almost without exception to within Latvia's borders in a process that perfectly symbolized Riga's transformation from one of the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan cities of the Russian Empire to the capital of a new nation-state. The pariah status of the Soviet Union at the time undoubtedly played a role in such decisions, but there was also a powerful desire to segregate the Latvian present from the Imperial (Russian) past, and the city's ethnic minorities – including even the politically weak Russians – were able to unite with the Latvian majority on this question, at least when offered mitigating salves to ethnic pride.

Baltic German and ethnic Latvian unity as to the removal of nearly all of the city's Russian-oriented street names was a natural product of a shared resentment born of decades of forced

⁶¹² “The New Names of Streets and Squares of the City of Riga,” *Valdības Vēstnesis* 2.XI.1923; the knights implied by the name could only have been the Baltic German nobility or *Ritterschaften*.

⁶¹³ Cf. Andrejs Plakans, “Regional Identity in Latvia: The Case of Latgale” in Martyn Housden and David J. Smith, eds., *Forgotten Pages of Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion* (Rodopi 2011) 51-60 for information on Latgalian particularism and the separate historical development of Latgale in the late 19th century and interwar period.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. LVVA 3255-1-72 throughout.

Russification. While Latvian nationalists in the second half of the 19th century had generally greeted Russification as a blow to the dominance of the local Baltic German elite, by the turn of the 20th century, attitudes towards it had cooled considerably, particularly after the Revolution of 1905.⁶¹⁵ Though linguistic Russification generally failed to engender the same resentment among ethnic Latvians as among Baltic Germans, Latvia's political status within the Russian Empire had been the object of increasing dissatisfaction in the early 20th century, leaving both groups with a shared if absent enemy. In the debates on renaming, the artificiality of many of the street names oriented towards Russian culture and history prior to 1914 –the choices having been imposed by St. Petersburg, in essence - was openly cited as a justification for their wholesale removal.⁶¹⁶ In symbolic terms, the world simply ended at Latvia's eastern borders; the former Petersburg Chaussée became *Vidzemes Šoseja*, leading to one of Latvia's provinces (Vidzeme), but nowhere beyond. In interwar Riga, the Imperial Russian past was not even another country.

Despite some opposition within city government, a handful of Russian literary figures were honored in the renaming process of 1923 – a concession to the Russian fraction in city parliament and on the commission in return for their cooperation. These streets were confined to the city's traditional Russian quarter, the so-called Moscow Suburb. As one Latvian member of the city parliament put it, "A foreigner would receive a false impression of the national consciousness of the Latvians if he were to see that the Latvian national theater is located on Pushkin boulevard."⁶¹⁷ The logic of the point being perhaps undeniable, Pushkin boulevard became *Kronvalda bulvāris*,

⁶¹⁵ Andrejs Plakans, "Part Three: The Latvians" in Edward C. Thaden, ed. *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland 1855-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 253-262

⁶¹⁶ "City Parliament Session of February 1st," *Rigasche Rundschau* 2.II.1923

⁶¹⁷ "Riga Chronicle," *Rigasche Rundschau* 8.VI.1923; it should be noted that the Latvian National Theater building had been the city Russian Theater through 1917, explaining the older name.

after one of the giants of the National Awakening of the 19th century, with the poet gaining a less busy street in the Moscow Suburb in compensation.

Baltic German poets and authors experienced an analogous fate. Along with those bearing names referring to places in Russia, streets referring to locations in Germany were also targeted for change, though with a somewhat more conciliatory dynamic at play. Most of the streets with names referring to towns in Germany were in the *meža parks/Kaiserwald* neighborhood, an area developed around the turn of the century along the “garden city” model.⁶¹⁸ The neighborhood’s streets had been named according to a Hanseatic theme, leading to many replacements in 1923, on the grounds that such names no longer had “any connection to Riga,” in the phrasing of the renaming commission.⁶¹⁹ However, unlike the vast majority of streets formerly bearing geographically Russian names, a number of the new names bestowed were those of (Baltic) German literary figures – albeit only ones who had played a significant role in fostering the cultural development of the Latvian people.⁶²⁰

This tactic was fairly characteristic of Latvian politicians during the interwar period. The important role played by German-speakers and German culture in the history of the Latvian people and the wider Baltic region was acknowledged, typically along with Baltic Germans’ right to residence and citizenship based on their groups’ historical legacy. At the same time, the aspects of Baltic German history and culture that were singled out for praise were precisely those exceptions which proved the rule. Thus, the honoring of Baltic German literary figures such as the Lutheran pastors Gotthard Friedrich Stender and Johann Ernst Glück and the linguist and writer

⁶¹⁸ Irene Bakula, “Riga Garden Suburb” in *Planning History* vol. 17, no. 2 (1995), 6

⁶¹⁹ An interesting line of argumentation, given the city’s enthusiastic reception of a delegation from the chamber of commerce of the city of Stettin later in the decade, along with a more general interest in promoting regional trade.

⁶²⁰ Taterka, 88-94

Christoph Fürecker, who all received streets in their names in the vicinity of *meža parks/Kaiserwald*, was really a sort of backhanded compliment, at once an acknowledgement of Baltic Germans' historical significance in the region and a recrimination for historical injustices perpetrated by them. The renaming of one of the city center's major streets in honor of Garlieb Merkel, author of a fiery tract from the early 19th century denouncing the conditions of Latvian serfdom, is the case *par excellence* of this tendency to honor and simultaneously indict; honoring Merkel meant denouncing the same landed nobility that he had excoriated. A few existing streets and squares named for German figures were left unaltered; Gutenberg street retained its name, as did Albert Square, named for the founder of Riga, and Herder Square, with its bust of the philosopher, likewise kept its name.⁶²¹ Although the number of streets named for Baltic German figures had never been great, most of the rest were eliminated, with streets named after Walther von Plettenberg and the proselytizing German bishop Meinhard removed on the basis that their names were "not appropriate to contemporary Latvia."⁶²² Many street names containing the Latvian word *muiža* (German *hof*, meaning manor) were altered, since they invoked a Baltic German-dominated past.⁶²³

Along with the removal of most German and all Russian street names, the commission proceeded in accordance with another principal, less controversial, but telling nonetheless. Linguistic and grammatical correctness was prized by the commission, and this meant that its work involved a certain amount of "cleaning-up" of Latvian names on either a philological basis – in

⁶²¹ Appropriate given the role of Herder's thought in shaping Latvian nationalism in the 19th century and beyond; the philosopher had taught for a few years in the cathedral school at Riga in the 1760s, and was influenced by his encounters with Latvian folk culture. Cf. Christina Jaremko-Porter, "The Latvian Era of Folk Awakening: From Johann Gottfried Herder's Volkslieder to the Voice of an Emergent Nation" in Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin, eds., *Voice of the People: Writing the European Folk Revival 1760-1914* (Anthem Press, 2013) pp. 141-156

⁶²² LVVA 3255-1-72-44; the retention of the war-like but influential Albert and the dropping of the pacific but ineffectual Meinhard was a thorny point at the time, the logic of which remains somewhat dubious to the modern historian, be that as it may.

⁶²³ Efforts to replace these place-names were inconsistent, however, with a considerable number remaining in use through the late 1930s. LVVA 2927-1-1358-119, 136, 148, 155, 160.

consultation with Enzeliņš and other linguistic experts from the University of Latvia – or, somewhat more pragmatically, to bring the spelling of street names into line with local pronunciation.⁶²⁴ Part and parcel of this was the replacement of various Latvianized names of German origin with more purely Latvian equivalents – replacing *Āmura iela* (Hammer Street, from German *Hammerstrasse*) with *Vesera iela*, for example: both *āmurs* and *veseris* mean “hammer” in Latvian, but the former is a borrowing from Low German, the latter of more purely Baltic origin. Dozens of renamings were undertaken on a similar basis, noted in the documentation with a laconic “correct Latvian name” next to the new monikers.⁶²⁵ Latvian at the turn of the 20th century was rife with calques, loanwords, and other linguistic intrusions from German, and the process of removing them from the language was a painstaking one.⁶²⁶ More than the renaming of a small number of streets named after historical personages, this systematic campaign to eliminate the vestiges of German linguistic influence is indicative of interwar Latvian nationalism’s struggle to overcome the intertwined historical legacies of the two groups.

However, on the whole, the work of the renaming commission captures many of the aspects of cooperation in city hall between Baltic Germans and Latvians during the democratic period. Both groups worked productively towards a common end – removing the legacy of Riga’s Imperial Russian past from city streets. The minority bloc’s willingness to support moderate Latvian proposals gained them limited but meaningful concessions for their groups.⁶²⁷ Latvian numerical dominance on the commission, as in the city parliament, was balanced out by the considerable disunity of the Latvian bourgeois parties, the impressive organization and solidarity not just of the

⁶²⁴ LVVA 3255-1-72-42

⁶²⁵ LVVA 3255-1-72-42 through 50

⁶²⁶ Kristine Wohlfahrt “Das Riga der Letten” in Kristine Wohlfahrt and Erwin Oberländer, eds., *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857-1914* (Paderborn Schöningh, 2004) 42-43

⁶²⁷ It should be noted that although the Baltic German and Russian minorities were rewarded with a handful of streets named for members of their ethnicities, the city’s Jewish population received no such symbolic compensation for their cooperation.

Baltic German fraction, but of the entire ethnic minority bloc behind them, and the willingness of the Latvian Social Democratic party to work with the minorities and to adopt far more nationally ambivalent policies than their ethnic compatriots across the political divide. Bourgeois Latvian politicians and publicists were willing to acknowledge Baltic Germans' right to residence in the city and the region based on their important role in the history of both – a rhetorical concession typically not accorded to the city's Russian and Jewish minorities – but at the price of including barbs about past moral failings, intended to highlight Latvian moral superiority and to legitimate Latvian political dominance.

The politics of interethnic relations in the 1930s, on the other hand, are nearly equally well anticipated and encapsulated by the ugly side of the street renaming process in 1923. The proposed renaming of streets would naturally require the city to procure new street signs. The Baltic German fraction in the city parliament, led by Paul Schiemann, saw this as an opportunity to raise the question of instituting trilingual signs once more, and sought to connect the two issues legislatively, such that approval of the renaming would be contingent upon the resolution of the language question.⁶²⁸ This move met with a veritable firestorm of resistance from the bourgeois Latvian parties in the city parliament and most of the Latvian press in Riga.⁶²⁹ The result, along with various editorials in the major Riga papers on the matter, was several stormy sessions of the city parliament over the issue, with the bourgeois Latvian parties leaving the session of July 5th, 1923 en masse in protest.⁶³⁰ Prior to their departure, various Latvian city councillors remonstrated

⁶²⁸ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Periode*, 260-261

⁶²⁹ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Periode*, 259-260; Schiemann "Die Tätigkeit", 22

⁶³⁰ "Of the Day," *Rigasche Rundschau* 5.VII.1923 – specifically in protest over the two issues being tied together.

with the Baltic German councilor Woldemar Pussull, laying out various arguments against the measure.

Some warned that the new (German and Russian) signs would be vandalized. Many declared their certainty that veterans, the army, and the „national youth” would view trilingual signs as a provocation. Councilor Torgans argued that “a practical need for trilingual signs does not exist, since every citizen has command of the state language” – a patently false claim at that early date in the young republic’s existence. Torgans warned that the installation of trilingual signs would constitute “forcing citizens to illegal acts,” and implored Pussull to consider the impression made upon a visitor from the countryside who might think the “good old times” had come again were he to see German or Russian street signs in the capital. He counseled the minority fraction to wait, suggesting that they raise the issue again in three or four years’ time, when memory of the fighting and intrigue of 1919 had faded somewhat.⁶³¹

Pussull, was obdurate however, insisting that once decided upon, the change could be executed gradually – what was of essence was the principle. He declared the minorities’ intention not to be intimidated by “foolish threats”, and employed a common Baltic German political tactic – expressing confidence in the wisdom and generosity of the Latvian people:

“That the prestige of the majority is injured by trilingual street signs is a ridiculous notion, in which possibly an individual, such as the speaker before me, can believe, but not the Latvian people....”

He reminded the city parliament that the German-dominated city parliament had voted to add Latvian text to the street signs in 1905, adding that “We believe ourselves permitted to expect the same degree of accommodation from the Latvian majority now.” The Latvian councilor Kroders responded by attacking the practicality of the suggestion, asking why Yiddish ought not

⁶³¹ “City Parliament Session” *Rigasche Rundschau* 7.VII.1923

be present on the street signs as well, since the percentage of that population that was Jewish outnumbered both the Russians and the Germans.⁶³² Clearly, he held, the matter was not a practical one, but rather a matter of prestige – also for the Latvians.⁶³³

Other members of the non-leftist Latvian parties were even more blunt. Councilor Asars flatly told the Baltic Germans that if they wanted peace and cooperation in city hall, they should withdraw the petition for trilingual signs. He also dismissed Pussull's lofty rhetoric about the magnanimity of the Latvian people:

“I know the Latvian people better than you, and know that the national Latvian youth and the discharged soldiers will view it as a provocation. We are not afraid of war.”

Asars predicted (correctly, as it turned out) that even if the minorities were to get their way in city hall, the national government would not permit the installation of trilingual signs in the capital and would pass legislatively explicitly forbidding them if need be.⁶³⁴ He pointed out that the bilingual signs in Liepāja/Libau had had their German-language text scrawled over and defaced – did Pussulls wish to witness the same in Riga?⁶³⁵

Not all of the Latvians in city parliament were opposed to the trilingual signs; the Social Democrats (the single largest party) were actually in favor, along with a few smaller leftist Latvian factions. Between the minority bloc and these groups, there were enough councilors remaining in the hall after the exodus of the bourgeois Latvian parties to maintain a quorum and pass the

⁶³² This was in fact not the case in 1923, with Baltic Germans retaining a slight numerical advantage over Jews among the city population; cf. footnote #710 below.

⁶³³ “City Parliament Session,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 7.VII.1923

⁶³⁴ Asars was correct, with the ministry of the interior declaring its intention soon thereafter not to permit multilingual street signs, and to use all of the means at its disposal to prevent their erection, including the withdrawal of all state funding to the city of Riga. This also applied to towns in Latgale that wished to put up street signs featuring text in Yiddish. Cf. “Domestic Political Review,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.VII.1923.

⁶³⁵ “City Parliament Session,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 7.VII.1923

measure, but Pussull chose to table the proposal, stating a desire not to pass the measure behind the backs of the absent Latvian parties.⁶³⁶

A lengthy editorial in the next day's *Rigasche Rundschau* entitled "Latvia's Calling Card" addressed the issue, echoing and amplifying Pussull's line of argumentation. The piece maintained that the attitude of the proposal's Latvian opponents was not aligned with the sentiment of the general population, claiming that most Latvians' thinking resembled that of Tīfentāls, the Social Democratic leader who had maintained in the debate of July 5th that his party supported providing those rights for others for which they themselves had once striven.⁶³⁷ The author acidly compared the bourgeois Latvian stance to the anecdotal comment of a high-ranking Russian official in 1915: "Of course we have nothing against the Baltic Germans, but naturally they are not to be permitted to speak German." The editorial's author pointed out that Germans had left traces of their cultural work everywhere in Riga, and wished simply to be indicated in the second position on the national "calling card": "Is that a privilege that harms the state or diminishes its reputation?" The author claimed to find it astounding that the centrist and center-right parties, the backbone of support for the government, had so little confidence in the state that they could see a threat to it in multilingual street signs. "We have greater trust in Latvia", the author maintained, again deploying a canny rhetorical tactic that attempted to turn the common Latvian nationalist trope of Baltic German disloyalty on its head.⁶³⁸

The Latvian-language *Jaunākas Ziņas* responded to the *Rundschau* editorial a few days later with one of its own. The pseudonymous author dealt first with the question of Russian, then

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ S. von Maydell (guest contributor), "Latvia's Calling Card," *Rigasche Rundschau* 7.VII.1923

⁶³⁸ This trope – ubiquitous in Latvian nationalistic circles during the interwar period – was mostly founded in the events of the spring of 1919 and the Baltic German-orchestrated Niedra putsch, which temporarily overthrew the provisional government of Kārlis Ulmanis, though Baltic Germans' enthusiastic reception of the Imperial German army's occupation of Riga in September 1917 played a role as well.

of German language signs. The appearance of Russian text in the first position had been perfectly natural and cause for complaint for no one at the time, the author maintained, given that this was the state language – with the obvious inference being that the same deference was due to Latvian in the present day. Moving from here, the author rejected the notion of Russian-language signs out of hand, on the basis of Russians comprising less than 8% of the city population, producing such arguments as “...if we give every 1/20th of the population their own street signs, there will be 20 signs on each corner”. Beyond this facetious line of reasoning, the author rejected the Riga Russian community’s right to residence and belonging in the city in damning terms, labeling them as immigrants and colonists with no connection to the country or its history.⁶³⁹

The question of German-language signs, the author freely admitted, was more complicated, acknowledging the historical intertwining of the fates of the two peoples. “The Germans have been our opponents, but inhabitants of our land all the same.” Noting that they comprised between 15 and 16 percent of the city’s population at the time, the author granted that the request was not entirely unreasonable before offering grounds to reject it. The editorialist claimed that a majority of Germans spoke Latvian well, an assertion which seems dubious at best.⁶⁴⁰ Aside from the practical linguistic questions involved, the author of the editorial advanced a common ethno-political trump card as grounds for rejecting such a proposal: Baltic German disloyalty and ambivalence towards Latvia during the War of Independence:

⁶³⁹ “On City Street signs of Riga in Three Languages,” *Jaunākas Ziņas* 10.VII.1923

⁶⁴⁰ Wachsmuth, *Das politische Gesicht der deutschen Volksgruppe in Lettland in der parlamentarischen Periode*, 253-254; Wachsmuth notes that while Baltic German inhabitants of the countryside and smaller towns typically spoke Latvian from early childhood, the Baltic Germans of Riga most often understood little or no Latvian. However, it should also be noted that the interwar period witnessed a considerable influx of Baltic Germans from the countryside to Riga, producing a population with quite varying degrees of knowledge of Latvian. A good command of Russian was widespread among both Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians before the war.

“With these signs, we would want to say: Riga is not a Latvian-national city, it is ethnically mixed, and the Germans are also invested in Latvia’s fate. Would we not knowingly be lying?”⁶⁴¹

Despite Schiemann and the Baltic German political leadership’s best efforts to work productively on behalf of the new state, promote loyalty to it among Baltic Germans, and project that image in wider society, the perception of the Baltic German community as disinterested in the fate of Latvia persisted. In short, the legacy of 1919 continued to haunt the group. Schiemann’s own arguments for the official recognition of German revolved around the same criterion as those of the anonymous author in *Jaunākas Ziņas* for its rejection –loyalty to the state. Writing on the theme of “Language and Homeland” in the *Rigasche Rundschau* in 1921, Schiemann had emphasized that though all citizens must and would learn Latvian, the use of German (and Russian) should be not only permissible, but protected by law, in order to inculcate a “true and untroubled feeling of belonging in this land for each and every one of our co-ethnicists.”⁶⁴² Writing about the rejection of trilingual street signs in 1924, Schiemann was filled with a certain bitterness:

“The monopoly of the Latvian language for the naming of streets would have to lead to it in time that a coming German generation, in their conversations about their own hometown [*Vaterstadt*], would adopt foreign expressions, and not be able to name their own place of residence in their own language.”⁶⁴³

Completely antithetical to Schiemann’s stance, the author in *Jaunākas Ziņas* held that Latvia had done enough already for the Baltic Germans, giving them every right of citizens in a democratic society – mentioning that one even heard German speeches given in the *Saeima*. A right to German-language street signs went too far. Most of the Latvian press, political class, and

⁶⁴¹ “On City Street signs of Riga in Three Languages,” *Jaunākas Ziņas* 10.VII.1923

⁶⁴² “Language and Homeland,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 17.XII.1921

⁶⁴³ Paul Schiemann, “Die Tätigkeit des Ausschusses der deutsch-baltischen Parteien in Lettland” *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* 1924, (Riga: 1924) 22

much of the public took a similar line to the editorial board of *Jaunākas Ziņas*, with virtually no support for trilingual signs existing outside of socialist and ethnic minority circles.⁶⁴⁴ The ministry of the interior soon made known its intention to block the introduction of multilingual signs using all the means at its disposal, including the potential withdrawal of state funding to the city of Riga.⁶⁴⁵ The situation only deteriorated for the ethnic minorities as the summer progressed. At the Latvian Congress of Cities in late July, the congress – presided over by the mayor of Riga – declared its desire that only Latvian street names be permitted in Riga. A few days later, the city parliament agreed to the renaming commission’s proposals and resolved to have the new street signs prepared in time for the 5th anniversary of independence on November 18th, 1923, forcing the issue to a head in the next few months.⁶⁴⁶

During the session of city parliament on September 6th, 1923, the Baltic German councilor Pussull moved to put the question of trilingual signs on the agenda for the day. When the motion was rejected, he moved to defer the renaming issue as well; when this too was rejected, the minority bloc left the hall together in protest.⁶⁴⁷ In Schiemann’s words,

“... the petition of the minorities for trilingual street signs [had] aroused such a violent noise, so out of proportion to the importance of the matter, among all of the bourgeois Latvian parties, that the Social Democrats, who in the beginning had given voice to their agreement in principle, shied back from a practical realization of the project.”⁶⁴⁸

With the Social Democrats unwilling to back the minority bloc’s position and leave the hall with them, a quorum still remained, and the new street names were adopted unanimously and without debate, with the language question permanently tabled.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ “Domestic Political Review,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.VII.1923

⁶⁴⁶ “The Renaming of Riga’s Streets,” *Latvis* 27.VII.1923

⁶⁴⁷ “Riga,” *Latvijas Sargs* 7.IX.1923

⁶⁴⁸ Schiemann, “Die Tätigkeit”, 22

The result was a bifurcated transformation of Riga's memorial topography, the symbolic aspect taking place in interethnic agreement, the linguistic in discord. Over the next 17 years, dozens more city streets in Riga underwent changes in their names, most in the period 1934-1940.⁶⁴⁹ Many of these were nationally motivated. Some names referencing Russian persons or places not caught up in the general sweep of 1923 were altered in 1936 and 1938, and further terms of German origin were replaced with Latvian ones.⁶⁵⁰ The effect was a wholesale deletion of history, a drastic shrinking of the referential horizons of the city, which became almost completely confined to the borders of Latvia and of the Latvian language. Riga's profoundly multi-ethnic history and its centuries-old role as a regional trading hub had previously been written into the face of the city in the form of its street names, both semantically and in the form of multilingual street signs. Changing both represented one of the easiest methods of erasing a past with which Latvian national activists were uncomfortable, or which they rejected entirely; with the stroke of a pen, the cosmopolitan character of Riga's street names could be erased. Instead of a multi-faceted and multi-ethnic history, Riga's streets could be given a monolithic face. George Frost Kennan wrote in his memoirs that:

“The politically dominant Letts, becoming increasingly chauvinistic as the years of their independence transpired, were concerned to put an end as soon as possible to all this cosmopolitanism and eventually did succeed, by 1939, in depriving the city of much of its charm.”⁶⁵¹

Though this description might seem uncharitable to the Latvian authorities, there is much evidence to bear it out, as this chapter has shown. Sentiments in this vein were sometimes

⁶⁴⁹ “New Street Names,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 29.IV.1936, Erste Beilage, 5; also “New Street Names,” *Jaunākas Ziņas* 11.II.1938 and *Valdības Vēstnesis* 22.IV.1939.

⁶⁵⁰ LVVA 2927-1-1358-219, 235; in #219, a protocol from the session of the city executive board meeting about six weeks after the coup d'état of May 15th, 1934, “...member J. Vagners informs the board that Minister of War J. Balodis has expressed in conversation that some street names in the city of Riga do not strike Latvian ears kindly, and these streets would need to be renamed.”

⁶⁵¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 29

expressed unabashedly, even early on in the interwar period; the author of an editorial in *Jaunākās Ziņas* of July 10th, 1923 drove to the heart of the matter incisively in his final words: “Riga is not only a district of Latvia, it is Latvia’s capital city”, delivering a verdict that was perhaps still contentious at the time, but would come to be dogmatic by the 1930s: “...Should Riga show a Russian, German, Jewish, or Latvian face? ...Riga’s face is only permitted to be Latvian.”⁶⁵²

5.3 War and Memory



Figure 20. Gates to the Cemetery of the Brethren, 1930s.

“...We see in the 22nd of May not just a celebration of our Germanness, but rather much more a day which is of great importance for the course of the history of our entire country...an imperishable great event in the minds of all the honest and fair-minded fellow inhabitants of our homeland.”⁶⁵³

“The liberation of Riga was actually a tragedy of liberation, since the new masters were not much more honorable than those cast out.”⁶⁵⁴

Riga had suffered perhaps as much as any other city in Europe from the ravages of the First World War and its aftermath. The territory that was to become Latvia had been physically

⁶⁵² “On City Street signs of Riga in Three Languages,” *Jaunākās Ziņas* 10.VII.1923

⁶⁵³ “On the 22nd of May,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1928

⁶⁵⁴ “The 22nd of May,” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1931

devastated by the war, cut off from trade, stripped clean of wealth by evacuation and then occupation, its male population conscripted or transported to work in the Russian interior. In Riga, the Bolshevik occupation of the first half of 1919 was remembered with great bitterness by the city's Baltic Germans, but was also recalled as a time of suffering in more conservative Latvian circles, especially within the Lutheran church.⁶⁵⁵ Given the social imperative to try to make meaning of the deprivation, suffering, and loss of life, it is little wonder that military cemeteries and monuments played an important role in reshaping the topography of memory in interwar Riga, not only for the Latvian population, but for the ethnic minorities as well. Yet popular historical narratives surrounding recent events – especially those of the year 1919 – differed widely between the Baltic German and Latvian populations, producing what one scholar has called a “war of monuments”, culminating in a literal explosion in 1929.⁶⁵⁶

Latvians and Baltic Germans in the interwar period shaped their collective memory of the events of 1919 around two different sites of memory - in this case, two dates, each coupled with a physical site.⁶⁵⁷ For ethnic Latvians, the November 11th 1919, when Latvian forces successfully repulsed the Bermondist assault on the city, became “Lāčplēsis Day” (named for the hero of the national epic), celebrating the decisive victory which secured the fate of the young republic. This

⁶⁵⁵ For example, there was a Latvian-language memorial service on May 22nd, 1929 in the Dom, commemorating the liberation of Riga (Cf. “Latvian Memorial Service,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 23.V.1929) this sort of observance met with sharp criticism from some quarters of the Latvian press, which referred to the Latvian pastors in question as “handboys” of the Germans (“The ‘Liberators’ from whom Latvia had to be Liberated,” *Sociāldemokrāts* 23.V.1929).

⁶⁵⁶ For an in-depth exploration of this “war of monuments”, cf. Raimonds Cerūzis, “Latvieši un vācbaltieši starpkaru periodā: no kopīgas kultūras identitātes līdz ‘pieminekļu karam’” in *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* 2015 Nr. 3 (Issue 96). Cerūzis is the scholar who has written most extensively on the role of May 22nd in interwar Latvian Baltic German society, and on the relationship of Latvia’s Baltic Germans to national holidays in Latvia; cf. also ““Die deutschbaltische Minderheit und ihr Verhältnis zu den lettischen Nationalfeiertagen 1918-1939” in *Baltische Seminare*, Band 14 (2004): *Nationale und ethnische Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, Lüneburg, 2009). Cf. also Leo Dribins, “Die Deutschbalten und die Idee vom Nationallettischen Staat” and Ilgvars Butulis, “Die Deutschbalten in der lettischen Presse in den Jahren 1930-1934”, both in *Nordost-Archiv*, Band V (1996), Heft 2, for research which has informed this chapter.

⁶⁵⁷ Raimonds Cerūzis “Die deutschbaltische Minderheit und ihr Verhältnis zu den lettischen Nationalfeiertagen 1918-1939” in: *Baltische Seminare Band 14* (2004): *Nationale und ethnische Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, Lüneburg, 2009) 69; while Cerūzis’ article describes the role of May 22nd in Baltic German society during the interwar period, and the conflict it engendered, this analysis seeks to complement his work both by expanding upon its themes in somewhat greater detail, and by providing the comparative element hithertofore lacking.

was a date for celebrating Latvian heroism and sacrifice. For Baltic Germans, collective memory of 1919 was firmly centered upon May 22nd, the date that the Baltic German *Landeswehr* liberated Riga from Bolshevik control. This date became a quasi-official holiday for the country's Baltic German population in the interwar period, provoking ire from nationalistic circles in the Latvian press and public.⁶⁵⁸ Both of these *lieux-de-memoire* also found their incarnation in physical sites. In the Latvian case, this was in the monumental Cemetery of the Brethren (*Brāļu kapi*), begun during the war and officially completed in 1936.⁶⁵⁹ For Baltic Germans, the locus of memory for May 22nd 1919 was in the nearby Forest Cemetery (*meža kapi/Waldfriedhof*), ultimately embodied in a more modest monument to the fallen soldiers of the *Landeswehr*. The *Landeswehr* monument was unveiled in 1929, on the tenth anniversary of the capture of Riga. Latvian and Baltic German society invested these sites with emotionally-charged narratives about the events of that year, narratives that elided essential facts and reduced the political complexity of the events to more simplistic terms of protagonist and antagonist – in the Latvian case, along ethnic lines, in the Baltic German case, along political ones. These sites of memory help to illuminate the role played by the events of 1919 in shaping interethnic relations during the interwar years, along with the role of memorial space in shaping each group's self-conception during the same period.

⁶⁵⁸ Cerūzis "Die deutschbaltische Minderheit," 80

⁶⁵⁹ Vaidelotis Apsītis, *Brāļu Kapi* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1995) 19

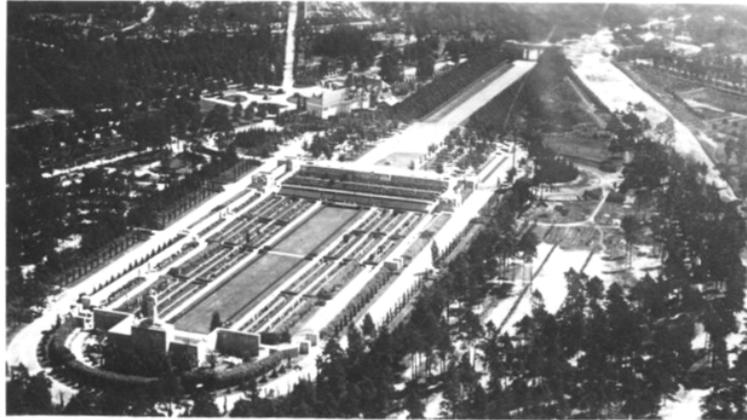


Figure 21. The Cemetery of the Brethren from the air, main ensemble, 1930s.

May 22nd 1919 quickly attained an almost sacred status among Latvia's Baltic Germans as a site of collective memory. The anniversary was essentially a public holiday for the Baltic German population, albeit an unofficial one.⁶⁶⁰ The occasion was marked by the appearance of editorials and retrospectives in the *Rigasche Rundschau* on the significance of the events of the day, by special observances in Baltic German schools, by ordinary Baltic Germans who stayed home from work on that day, and by ceremonies at gravesites.⁶⁶¹ Mark R. Hatlie has identified two main narrative components of Baltic German remembrance of May 22nd. The first concerns the martyrdom of those Baltic Germans, primarily pastors but including others as well, murdered by the Bolsheviks during their nearly half-year of rule in Riga. The second concerns the heroism and valor of the *Landeswehr* in the struggle to liberate Riga.⁶⁶² As time went on, the anti-communist overtones to Baltic German narratives surrounding May 22nd – strong to begin with – became even more pronounced.⁶⁶³ Emphasizing the ideological (and de-emphasizing the ethnic) dimensions of the struggle was a rhetorical tactic that strengthened Baltic German claims to legitimacy and

⁶⁶⁰ Cerūzis, "Die deutschbaltische Minderheit," 74

⁶⁶¹ Cerūzis, "Die deutschbaltische Minderheit," 72; for gravesite visits, cf. "On the 22nd of May," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1926

⁶⁶² Hatlie, 210

⁶⁶³ Hatlie, 213

belonging in Latvia. In Hatlie's words, "The myth thus became more inclusive - a German Balt contribution to a common, multi-ethnic homeland, or, later, a common struggle of all ethnicities against communism."⁶⁶⁴ Baltic German recollections of the day were tinged throughout with local or regional patriotism, sometimes alluding to the ways in which the liberation of Riga had made the creation of an independent Latvia possible, but more often referencing the city or the Baltic region, positioning the liberation of Riga in a succession of historical events in which the region's inhabitants had repelled invaders from the East:

"Two years since country and city were freed from a yoke of bloody domination which threatened to destroy everything spiritual and cultural that our city had produced across centuries of development."⁶⁶⁵

The same editorialist, though explicitly praising "German vigor and youthful self-sacrifice" also took pains to highlight the role of the "brave Latvian volunteer battalion" in the events of the day. Later pieces published in the *Rundschau* on May 22nd would expand upon this trend, attempting a balancing act between stressing the liberation as a German achievement and emphasizing the civilizational values at play, ones shared by the Latvian nationalist forces and Baltic Germans.⁶⁶⁶ Baltic German editorialists positioned the liberation of the city within this context of purported inter-civilizational conflict, sometimes inflating the significance of the events beyond what today's historians might attach to them:

"The capture of Riga belongs to history. And it will later be judged that with the fall of Bolshevik rule in Riga, the outcome was reached that the Bolshevik wave should not destroy European culture."⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁴ Hatlie, 213

⁶⁶⁵ "The 22nd of May: A Day of Reflection," *Rigache Rundschau* 21.V.1921

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. "On the 22nd of May," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1926; "On the 22nd of May," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1937; and "The 22nd of May: A Day of Reflection," *Rigache Rundschau* 21.V.1921, among many more.

⁶⁶⁷ W.E. Freiherr von Medem, "The Surprise Attack on Riga," *Rigasche Rundschau* #115 22.V.1924

Such narratives of May 22nd 1919 fit into the larger scheme of Baltic Germans' self-conception as a group, in which their ethnicity functioned both as representatives of Western European culture and as a gateway to that culture. Even the pragmatic Paul Schiemann did not hesitate to characterize Latvia as a key component in "Europe's bulwark against Asia", deploying rhetoric that most readers today would associate more readily with the NSDAP than with a staunch democrat like Schiemann.⁶⁶⁸ Schiemann saw the perils of celebrating May 22nd as the anniversary of exclusively Baltic German achievements, and, as editor of the *Rundschau*, sought to foster interethnic solidarity by crediting the ethnic Latvian units that fought alongside the *Landeswehr*, the "brave Latvian compatriots, who were loyal comrades-in-arms to us."⁶⁶⁹ Schiemann argued in 1925 that the holiday ought to be celebrated not only by the country's Baltic Germans, but by the entire population, since "the 22nd of May is of historical significance for the Latvian state, for which it created the first real basis for its coming into being."⁶⁷⁰

Initially, Latvian attitudes towards the 22nd of May – as expressed in the mainstream press – ranged from largely indifferent to openly hostile. The *Landeswehr* had freed the city from a rule under which much of the population, ethnic Latvians as well as Baltic Germans, had suffered, and which it had largely come to loathe.⁶⁷¹ Yet both the wider political context and specific events following the liberation prevented most Latvian papers from taking a positive stance towards the date. The campaign to recapture Riga from the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1919 had followed the Baltic German-led putsch that had temporarily ousted the Ulmanis government, making the *Landeswehr* the enemy of the provisional government of Latvia. Memory of the atrocities

⁶⁶⁸ Paul Schiemann, "Baltic-German Holiday," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1925

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; other authors also underscored the role of ethnic Russians, the so-called Lieven detachment.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ Hatlie, 125

committed by the *Landeswehr* against the proletarian population in the wake of the city's liberation also provided an alternative, conflicting historical narrative regarding May 22nd. The *Rigasche Rundschau* noted in 1922 that although a number of Latvian papers used May 22nd to attack the country's Baltic German population, others, among them some of the papers with the largest circulation, such as *Jaunākas Ziņas* and *Brīvā Zeme*, were fairly objective in their assessments of the events of the day, giving the Baltic Germans credit for a historic achievement vital to the future of Latvia, but lamenting the loss of innocent (Latvian) life.⁶⁷² At least one Latvian-language paper took a positive stance regarding the date; the Christian-National paper *Tautas Balss* held that "Riga was freed through the united forces of all the nations at home in Latvia", and lamented the fact that the day had not become a common holiday, but instead one inflected with hatred and jealousy.⁶⁷³ However, this stance was an outlier – most of the Latvian-language press treated the date with either ambivalence at best, or with animosity at worst, with attitudes only growing more negative as the 1920s wound on.⁶⁷⁴ Even so, some Baltic Germans were still optimistic that the Latvian majority would come around to their point of view regarding the significance of the date:

“...we believe that recognition of the historical events will make increasing headway, and make the day of the liberation of Riga come to life as an imperishable great event in the minds of all the honest and fair-minded fellow inhabitants of our homeland.”⁶⁷⁵

Such sentiments were typical in the pages of the *Rundschau* during the 1920s, and it is worth noting that these views did indeed accord well enough with the sentiments regarding May 22nd expressed in the country's largest Russian-language paper, *Segodnya (Today)*. Already in 1924, the paper ran an editorial on May 22nd recalling the events of that day in overwhelmingly

⁶⁷² “The 22nd of May in the Mirror of the Latvian Press,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 23.V.1922

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ Cerūzis, “Latvieši un vācbaltieši starpkaru periodā: no kopīgas kultūras identitātes līdz ‘pieminekļu karam’”, 81

⁶⁷⁵ “On the 22nd of May,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1928

positive terms, noting that the celebrations following the city's liberation were so joyous that "Rigans did not go to bed for a long time on this memorable night."⁶⁷⁶ Similar pieces followed in the paper across the 1920s, stressing the role played by the so-called Lieven detachment of Russian troops in the campaign to liberate Riga.⁶⁷⁷ In 1926, the editorial marking the anniversary made arguments very much in line with the views expressed in the *Rundschau*:

"The population sighed after the nightmare of Bolshevik domination, and was filled with the certainty that Bolshevism would not hang over Latvia, that another bright prospect of state and legal development would open up for the country. Therefore, the date of May 22nd is worthy of being valued in the annals of Latvia along with other important historical dates."⁶⁷⁸

Although much of ethnic Russian opinion in Latvia may have sympathized with the Baltic German position, ethnic Latvian opinion was of vastly greater importance in political terms, and the 1920s witnessed only a further divergence of opinion between the Latvian majority and the Baltic German and Russian populations regarding the meaning of May 22nd, the extent of which was not fully recognized at first among Baltic Germans. Even Paul Schiemann, by all accounts a hard-nosed and canny politician, failed to assess the extent of Latvian resentment towards May 22nd as a site of memory. In a speech marking the 10th anniversary of the liberation, he declared his hope that the day would also be celebrated when those who experienced it had passed away, and not just by the Baltic German community, but also "by the entire population of Latvia, in a time when the greater and lesser malevolencies of political party life are no longer in a condition to cast their shadows on this deed."⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁶ «22 мая 1919 года,» *сегодня* 22.V.1924

⁶⁷⁷ «Годовщина освобождения,» *сегодня* 22.V.1927

⁶⁷⁸ «семь лет,» *сегодня* 22.V.1926

⁶⁷⁹ "1919- May 22nd – 1929," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.V.1929

Schiemann's attribution of Latvian hostility towards May 22nd to party politics was wishful thinking at best; there is little doubt that wide swaths of the Latvian public viewed the anniversary with distaste or hostility, judging from the tone among popular centrist papers as well as leftist ones.⁶⁸⁰ Writing on the anniversary in 1932, the mainstream paper *Pēdējā Brīdī* captured the ambivalence mingled with distaste typical of Latvian attitudes towards May 22nd:

“On May 22nd, Latvian joy can only be a half-joy, since the final liberation of Riga from the shadows of the past took place only with the return of the provisional government and the Latvian northern division in early July.”⁶⁸¹

Only among the Latvian Lutheran clergy, which had suffered greatly at the hands of the Bolsheviks in the first half of 1919, was the date celebrated with any enthusiasm; among ordinary Latvians, apathy towards May 22nd seems to be the best that Baltic German leaders could realistically have hoped for.⁶⁸² The events to come in less than three weeks' time would make painfully clear how vast the gap in perception of May 22nd was between Baltic German and ethnic Latvian society truly was.

On May 22nd, 1929, the leaders of Latvia's Baltic German community, along with many ordinary Germans from across the country, unveiled a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the *Landeswehr* in Riga's Forest Cemetery.⁶⁸³ An obelisk of rough-hewn granite adorned only with an iron cross, the monument was imposing up close but far from grandiose, and had been paid for

⁶⁸⁰ For representative examples of attitudes in the mainstream press, cf.: “Information on the *Landeswehr* until the 22nd of May 1919,” *Jaunākās Ziņas* 6.IV.1929; “May 22nd – The Holiday of the *Landeswehr*,” *Pēdēja Brīdī* 20.V.1930; “The 22nd of May,” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1931; “The 22nd of May in Memory,” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1930; and “Today is the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Capture of Riga,” *Pēdēja Brīdī* 22.V.1932. For Baltic German assessments of the Latvian press' stances towards May 22nd, cf.: “The *Landeswehr* in the Judgement of the Higher Latvian Military,” *Rigasche Rundschau* #82 13.IV.1929 and “The 22nd of May in the Mirror of the Latvian Press,” *Rigasche Rundschau* #114 23.V.1922.

⁶⁸¹ “Today is the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Capture of Riga,” *Pēdēja Brīdī* 22.V.1932.

⁶⁸² The stance of the clergy towards May 22nd was harshly criticized by the press organ of the Social Democratic Party of Latvia (*Sociāldemokrāts*) in its number of 23.V.1929, “The ‘Liberators’ from whom Latvia had to be Liberated.” The paper dubbed the Latvian clergy “hand-boys” (*rokas puīši*) and singled them out as the only Latvians to celebrate the anniversary of May 22nd, which the paper characterized as a day of murder perpetrated against Latvians.

⁶⁸³ “The Unveiling of the Memorial Stone to the *Landeswehr*,” *Rigasche Rundschau*, 23.V.1929.

by donations raised from Baltic German individuals and civil society organizations over the preceding several years.⁶⁸⁴ At the time of the monument's unveiling, political tensions regarding the *Landeswehr* were at an all-time high, as legislation was being debated in the *Saeima* regarding whether Baltic German veterans of the *Landeswehr* ought to be eligible to receive land under the country's agrarian reform, as Latvian veterans were. The *Landeswehr* had fought as a component of the national army from the autumn of 1919 onward against the Bolsheviks in the eastern province of Latgale, but it had also fought against Latvian nationalist forces in the battle of Cēsis/Wenden on June 23rd, 1919, lending rationale to both sides of the dispute; ultimately, the members of the *Landeswehr* were denied allotments of land.⁶⁸⁵ Although Latvian officials had attended previous ceremonies commemorating the events of May 22nd, and would attend them later in the 1930s, tactical considerations on the part of the Baltic German political leadership dictated their absence in 1929 – a move which was to prove fateful.⁶⁸⁶



Figure 22. The Landeswehr monument (1929).

⁶⁸⁴ Cerūzis, 80

⁶⁸⁵ Bernhard Böttcher, *Gefallen für Volk und Heimat: Kriegerdenkmäler deutscher Minderheiten in Ostmitteleuropa während der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Böhlau, 2009) 123; cf. pages 108-123 for a more in-depth treatment of the political debate around this question across most of 1929.

⁶⁸⁶ "Commemoration," *Rigasche Rundschau* 1.VI.1929

Deep in the night of June 9th-10th, 1929, a powerful explosion shook the city's Forest Cemetery, rattling windows in the nearby Čiekurkalns/Schreienbusch neighborhood.⁶⁸⁷ Parties never apprehended had dynamited the new monument, blowing it to smithereens. The event attracted enormous attention in the press, constituting as it did "an unprecedented event in the region's history."⁶⁸⁸ The Baltic German reaction is perhaps best characterized as stunned indignation. As the *Rundschau* put it succinctly, "one heard everywhere the bitterest of words".⁶⁸⁹ The Latvian press typically shied from condoning the criminal act, though few lamented it, but some could not resist adopting a smug tone; far-right publications openly stated that the Baltic Germans had provoked the crime themselves, through their "disloyal performance" and "show of pot-valiance".⁶⁹⁰ The Riga prefecture promised a vigorous investigation, and the country's prime minister condemned the act, declaring the act "impermissible in a democratic state, regardless of political differences".⁶⁹¹ Though the state offered to restore the monument at public cost, the *Landeswehrverein* ultimately turned down the offer for fear of exacerbating tensions, raising the money instead from private sources and restoring the monument the following year.⁶⁹² Tensions over the monument were considerably defused in subsequent years, with Latvian government officials and military officers attending memorial observances, but no common narrative regarding the events of May 22nd 1919 was ever arrived at.⁶⁹³

For ethnic Latvian society, the closest analogue to May 22nd in the Baltic German community was November 11th, 1919. Falling on the better-known Western remembrance of

⁶⁸⁷ «на лесном кладбище взорван памятник ландесверистам,» *Сегодня* 10.VI.1929

⁶⁸⁸ Cerūzis, 82

⁶⁸⁹ "A Heinous Act: The Memorial Stone to the Fallen of the *Landeswehr* Dynamited!" *Rigasche Rundschau* 10.VI.1929

⁶⁹⁰ Cerūzis, 83

⁶⁹¹ "A Heinous Act: The Memorial Stone to the Fallen of the *Landeswehr* Dynamited!" *Rigasche Rundschau* # 127 10.VI.1929, and "Minister-President on the Grave Desecration," *Rigasche Rundschau* 10.VI.1929

⁶⁹² Böttcher, 123

⁶⁹³ Cerūzis, 86

Armistice Day quite by coincidence, this date was officially designated *Lāčplēša diena* (Lāčplēsis Day) in 1920. The date was chosen as the anniversary of the 1919 repulsion of the Bermondist attack on Riga, in which ethnic Latvian forces had held a line at the Daugava river against the invading forces, ostensibly “White” forces in the Russian Civil War, but comprised largely of Reich German *Freikorps* troops, the so-called Iron Division, and other adventurists. Mark R. Hatlie has written of how the act of defending Riga from foreign invasion helped spur Latvians to consider Riga as truly “theirs” for the first time.⁶⁹⁴ The pre-eminent status that November 11th held in the practice of collective remembrance among ethnic Latvian society during the interwar period speaks to the validity of that thesis, and to a deep-seated need to refer back to past heroic deeds and martial accomplishments in order to justify and legitimate current political dominance. November 11th quickly became the chief Latvian site of memory regarding the events of the tumultuous year 1919, the keystone in a narrative arc almost completely at odds with the Baltic German one outlined above.

November 11th contrasts with May 22nd as a site of memory in terms of physical location as well. A spatial location - the monument in the Forest Cemetery - was only belatedly attached to May 22nd, and was not particularly prominent in the city’s topography of memory. The vastly larger Cemetery of the Brethren (*Brāļu kapi*), on the other hand, quickly attained iconic status, due to both its grandiose design and its symbolic importance.⁶⁹⁵ Thus urban space was at the center of collective memory of November 11th, 1919 from the very beginning. The Cemetery of the Brethren, though located outside the city center, played a crucial role in transforming Latvian

⁶⁹⁴ Hatlie, 274-279

⁶⁹⁵ On the popularity of the cemetery, cf. Jānis Siliņš, *Brāļu Kapi* (Rīga: Brāļu Kapu Komiteja, 1935) 3-5

attitudes towards Riga, serving as the physical locus for narratives about national sacrifice, defense of hearth and home, and ethnic military prowess and valor.

By the 1930s, the Cemetery of the Brethren had already become one of Riga's signature landmarks.⁶⁹⁶ Within ethnic Latvian society, the cemetery quickly took on enormous personal importance for a population almost universally affected by the war, with authors in the 1920s already hailing it as a "holy site" of the Latvian nation.⁶⁹⁷ Though in use since 1915, the cemetery was consecrated on November 11th, 1935, in a grand ceremony presided over by State President (and *de facto* dictator) Kārlis Ulmanis. The origins of the cemetery, as with the vast majority of the major transformations of urban space in Riga, lay in the era prior to Latvian political dominance. In September of 1914, the Russian War Ministry had approached the city government – still dominated by Baltic Germans at that point – with the proposal to create a war cemetery, one with the specific purpose of reminding future generations of the conflict then taking place.⁶⁹⁸ In December of that year, the city council allotted a sizeable plot of land (about 7/10 of a square mile) at the southern end of the *Kaiserwald* park for this purpose.⁶⁹⁹

By early 1915, the planning of gravesites had begun, with the first bodies interred that summer. Initially only the remains of Lutheran soldiers were buried in the cemetery, meaning that most were Latvians, Estonians, or Baltic Germans.⁷⁰⁰ As the war continued, the cemetery increased in scale, reaching its final size in 1917; by this point, confession was no longer a criterion for interment, though the vast majority of those buried were ethnic Latvian soldiers, whether they fell

⁶⁹⁶ Lail Bremša, "Denkmäler des ersten Weltkrieges und der Freiheitskämpfe in Lettland aus den Jahren 1920-1940" in: *Nordost-Archiv*, Band VI/1997 Heft 1, 192

⁶⁹⁷ Bremša 192; Cf. *Latvijas Kareivis* 4.IX.1928 "Braļu kapos atklāta otra tēlnieciskā grupa" for an early use of this term, which became more common in the 1930s.

⁶⁹⁸ Apsītis, 22

⁶⁹⁹ Apsītis, 22

⁷⁰⁰ Hatlie, 235

in the service of the Red Army or during the struggle for independence 1919-1921.⁷⁰¹ With the conclusion of the Latvian War of Independence in August 1920, attention could be turned towards decorating the cemetery with appropriate sculptures and friezes. Three architectural competitions were held in the early 1920s, without success; a number of the better-known Latvian architects refrained from submitting designs.⁷⁰² The sculptor Karlis Zāle won the third competition, concluded on October 15th, 1923, and the realization of his designs occupied the remainder of the period until 1936.⁷⁰³ The final design incorporates a monumental gate adorned with martial sculptures of medieval Latvian warriors; a “heroes’ terrace”, hosting an eternal flame; and a sunken section of graves leading to a monumental frieze adorned with a statue of Mother Latvia. Thus, from inception to completion, the Cemetery of the Brethren transformed from a more or less ethnically neutral site to an overtly Latvian space, intended to honor and celebrate those who had fallen in the struggle to create an independent Latvia, rather than the dead of the Great War that had immediately preceded it.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Andreas Fülberth, *Tallinn, Riga, Kaunas: Ihr Ausbau zu modernen Hauptstädten 1920-1940* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), 217; Eižens Laube, Pauls Kundziņš, and Ernsts Štalbergs, probably the three most prominent Latvian architects who received their training prior to the First World War, all failed to submit designs.

⁷⁰³ By the end of the interwar period, Kārlis Zāle had emerged as the most significant talent in Latvian sculpture; he was also commissioned with the friezes and sculptural work for the Freedom Monument (1935 – see below)



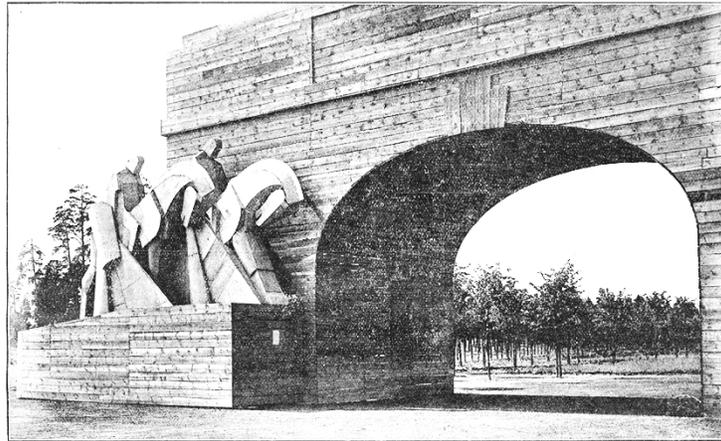
Figure 23. Mock-ups in clay of the gate decoration (left) and main procession (right) from Zāle's studio (1923).⁷⁰⁴

The Latvian-language press was quick to characterize the cemetery in terms of national heroism. Across the 1920s and 1930s, the mythos of national heroism associated with November 11th and the Cemetery of the Brethren seems to have only grown with each passing year, judging from the volume and intensity of rhetoric appearing in much of the Latvian-language press of Riga each November 11th. Just as May 22nd was marked in Riga's Baltic German press by remembrances, memorials, and exhortations to preserve the memory of the date, November 11th was similarly noted in the major Latvian-language periodicals published in the capital. While some Latvian papers did engage with the concept of May 22nd as a site of memory, typically to assail it, the attitude of the Baltic German press towards November 11th can probably best be characterized as a benign indifference; the holiday was noted, but hardly celebrated.⁷⁰⁵ For the mainstream Latvian press, however, the day was not to be overlooked, presenting an opportunity to celebrate the martial achievements of a people singularly lacking in them prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The resulting rhetoric mingled legend and myth with historical fact, a tendency encouraged by the creation of November 11th as *Lāčplēša Diena* (Lāčplēsis Day), named for the

⁷⁰⁴ Images from the collection of Paul Campe, held at the Herder Institute in Marburg (DSHI 100 Campe)

⁷⁰⁵ "Ten-Year Celebration of the Army," *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.XI.1929 – this article notes the date as marking the ten-year anniversary of the foundation of the Order of Lāčplēsis, which, while accurate, was undoubtedly overshadowed in the minds of most Latvians by the anniversary of the defeat of the Bermondists.

eponymous hero of the Latvian national epic. This was due to the creation of the Order of Lāčplēsis (*Lāčplēša ordenis*), Latvia's highest military award, in 1919, with the first awards bestowed on November 11th, 1920.⁷⁰⁶



Butaforija augstuma nofaibrošanai Brahtu tapu peemineta wāhrtem.

Figure 24. Zāle's design for the gates, under construction (late 1920s/early 1930s).

In the Cemetery of the Brethren the resentments of a largely imagined medieval past met with the unhealed wounds of recent years, adding to the strain on relations between Latvians and Baltic Germans. In the epic named for him, Lāčplēsis struggles to free medieval Latvia from the dominion of the German crusaders; in November 1919, Pavel Bermond-Avalov led a force comprised mostly of *Reich* German *Freikorps* units in his bid to seize Riga. Although the Baltic German *Landeswehr* remained loyal to the Latvian state, the fact that both local German-speakers and those from elsewhere were all typically referred to simply as *vacieši* (Germans), along with perceived Baltic German apathy regarding the Bermond attack, meant further strain on relations between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians. The conflation of medieval with modern enemies was expedient in rousing national feeling (and, incidentally, in selling papers), and many Latvian publications indulged in it. A piece in the popular daily *Pēdējā Brīdī* commemorating November

⁷⁰⁶ "The Celebrations of the Order of Lāčplēsis," *Lāčplēsis* Nr. 1, 11.11.1920

11th in 1927 featured a large illustration of Lāčplēsis in the act of tearing a bear apart by the jaws (his signature feat), and discussed the events of the epic in such a way that would easily lead an uneducated reader to believe that they had really occurred. The article explicitly paired the concluding battle of the epic, in which the hero is pitched into the waters of the Daugava river along with his mortal enemy, the German Black Knight, with the defeat of Bermondts in 1919: “the battle repeated itself eight years ago on the Daugava’s banks with the same knight.”⁷⁰⁷ The pernicious effect of such rhetoric on the future development of interethnic relations is all too obvious.

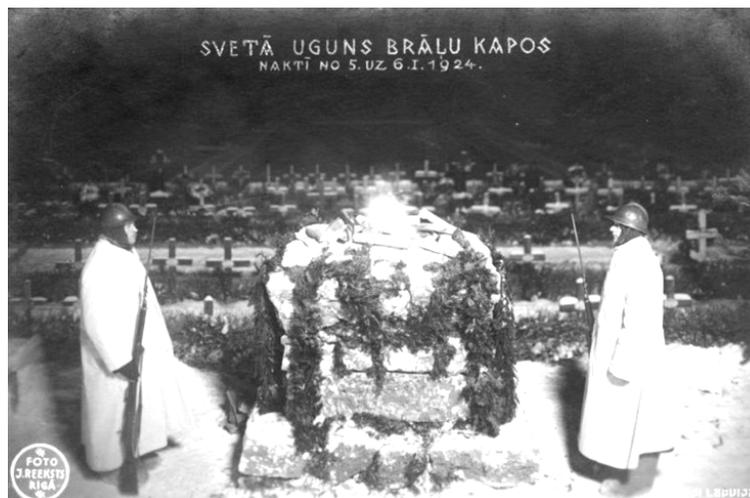


Figure 25. Two Latvian soldiers keeping ceremonial vigil over the cemetery’s sacred flame (1924).

Beyond its function of identifying ethnic enemies and positing certain antagonisms as inherent or traditional, the heroic narrative surrounding November 11th 1919 also helped ethnic Latvians to further solidify national sentiment among a population that had sometimes lacked much of a “useable past” in this regard. The result was rhetoric that, while undoubtedly sincere, was rather overblown. “Every year on the 11th of November we tarry in a past rich in struggle and

⁷⁰⁷ “At the Celebrations of Lāčplēsis,” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 11.XI.1927

victory” *Latvis* wrote characteristically in 1925.⁷⁰⁸ As time went on, such rhetoric only intensified, reaching a crescendo in 1936, when the cemetery, finally complete in all aspects (though open to the public already for years), was officially unveiled in a state ceremony on November 11th of that year. The aptly named journal *Lāčplēsis* declared that:

“The heroes of the past...attest to it that in the present, the inheritance of the ancient spirit lives; going from generation to generation that one thought has not been diluted; one holy promise, which connects the historic fate of the nation’s dead with the living.”

The one holy promise was that of nationalism, which reshaped all of history behind it according to its own teleology. The long centuries of subjugation, in which Latvians had fought only as soldiers in the armies of other states and nations, were elided, and instead a direct link with the medieval past was established – albeit a medieval past in the form of epic myth far more than historical fact. The desire to link the struggles of 1915-1920 with those of the 13th century was seemingly irresistible for Latvian national activists. The epic *Lāčplēsis* had captured much of the ethos of the Latvian National Awakening (*Atmoda*) of the second half of the 19th century, and the tale was widely familiar by the interwar period.⁷⁰⁹ Using it to legitimate and provide context to the struggles of 1919 was a natural tactic on the part of Latvian national activists, many of whom may have welcomed the friction that its adoption clearly presaged with the local Baltic German population.

⁷⁰⁸ “At the Celebrations of the Heroes,” *Latvis* 11.XI.1925

⁷⁰⁹ For commentary on ethnic Latvians’ nearly universal familiarity with the tale by the interwar period, cf. the foreword to the 1929 edition (Andrējs Pumpurs, *Lāčplēsis*, Riga: Jāņa Rozes Apgādība, 1929)



Figure 26. Sculptural decoration by Karlis Zāle along the main promenade of the Cemetery of the Brethren.

The holiday was a popular one among the Latvian population, albeit a somber occasion. Latvia had been as devastated by the First World War as any country in Europe, save perhaps Belgium, and most people would likely have known someone who perished in the fighting of 1919. *Brīvā Zeme* described the unveiling ceremony in 1936 in a way that made the importance of the cemetery and holiday alike unmistakable for readers:

“It is difficult to recognize our holy site of heroes and its surroundings. Flags are fluttering in all the streets, soldiers in closed columns march to the Cemetery of the Brethren. both sides of the street are lined with walls of people. Grey fathers are visible, mothers, participants in the struggles - veterans, strong men and the youth. All of them stream to one place.... the nation has congregated in the cemetery.”⁷¹⁰

The paper reported the next day that the processions of pilgrims visiting the cemetery had not abated until nearly midnight.⁷¹¹ These reports, and many like them from throughout the interwar period, make clear that unlike so much else of Riga, the Cemetery of the Brethren was a

⁷¹⁰ “The great holy moment at the nation’s shrine,” *Brīvā Zeme* 11.XI.1936

⁷¹¹ “To the Unforgettable Heroism of the Fallen,” *Brīvā Zeme* 12.XI.1936

space which Latvians felt to be truly theirs, one that had become a part of the ethnic identity of their generation with an astonishing rapidity. The Latvian term *tautas svētnīca*, “shrine of the nation” had become established by the 1920s, occurring again and again in reference to the cemetery, and the appellation seems to have been the result of a genuine groundswell of sentiment among the Latvian population, rather than any artifice of the press. As references to “pilgrims” from outside Riga make clear, the space had become an ethnic one, and one almost solely so, without historical roots or a history of usage in the city which surrounded it.⁷¹²

Although pride in and even somber affection for the space shine through in nearly all of the Latvian-language sources, how the country’s ethnic minorities felt about the Cemetery of the Brethren is more difficult to say. Their interactions with it were limited in comparison to those of the ethnic majority, since the overwhelming majority of those interred were Latvians.⁷¹³ Baltic German sources reported regularly on the construction of the cemetery, but typically in detached and matter-of-fact terms void of ideological content.⁷¹⁴ Reporting on ceremonies and the content of speeches was regular, but the kind of celebratory rhetoric so typical of May 22nd did not appear in the city’s German-language papers regarding November 11th.

⁷¹² Ibid.; Unknown author, *Latviešu Strēlnieki: vēsturiski materiāli un atmiņas. I. daļa*. (Rīga: Latviešu veco strēlnieku biedrības izdevums, 1929)

⁷¹³ Valdemārs Līkerts, *Brīvības un kritušo pieminēji* (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1938) 46

⁷¹⁴ Cf. “The Construction of the Cemetery of the Brethren,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 12.X.1929 for a representative example.



Figure 27. Soldiers of the Latvian Army on ceremonial parade in the Cemetery of the Brethren (1930s).

In 1929, on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the repulsion of the Bermondists, a parade organized by the city government marched from Riga Castle to the Cemetery of the Brethren.⁷¹⁵ Along with the city parliament, numerous civil society organizations and the representatives of various civic institutions marched to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the nation, with many members of the country's ethnic minorities among them, including one of the city's deputy mayors.⁷¹⁶ Such public displays give real clues about the values and attitudes of the institutions and people initiating them; so too does their reception. Such was the case with the parade of November 10th, 1929:

“After the conclusion of the official celebrations, a man whose name has not yet been determined pushed his way to the stands and gave a political speech with wild diatribes against the clergy and the *Landeswehr*...the mayor of Riga today expressed his regret over this entirely unplanned interlude to representatives of the clergy, the German fraction, and the Greater and Lesser Guilds.”⁷¹⁷

The city government, though not without its share of national activism, generally manifested a far more temperate and cooperative tone among its members than did either its national counterpart or the mainstream Latvian press. The higher percentage of minorities in the city population, along with the more intimate scale and the prevalence in particular of Baltic

⁷¹⁵ “The Commemoration of the Liberation of Riga from Bermondts,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.XI.1929

⁷¹⁶ The seemingly universally-esteemed Walter Sadowsky, deputy mayor 1920-1934.

⁷¹⁷ “The Commemoration of the Liberation of Riga from Bermondts,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.XI.1929

Germans in the city bureaucracy, undoubtedly contributed to this tendency.⁷¹⁸ The city government's impulse towards peaceful cooperation can be seen in its initiation of the parade mentioned above, and in its observance of November 11th the following day as well: the ethnically diverse city parliament held a ceremonial session commemorating the date, attended by the state president, president of the *Saeima*, and other dignitaries. The event concluded peaceably.⁷¹⁹



Figure 28. Cemetery of the Brethren, 1930s.

The incident of the unauthorized tirade, though of no real consequence in the affairs of the city, nonetheless illustrates a great deal about collective memory and opposed narratives of war and sacrifice in interwar Latvia – and about the tendency of symbolically charged urban space to serve the focal point of conflicts involving them. The clergy, ostensibly one of the forces best capable of facilitating ethnic reconciliation between Baltic Germans and Latvians given their shared Lutheran faith, was discredited in the eyes of much of the population through its long association with the Baltic German ruling elite. The *Landeswehr*, meanwhile, had actively waged war against the forces of the Latvian national army at the battle of Cēsis in June of 1919. For an ethnic Latvian who had lost a son or brother at Cēsis, the presence of Baltic Germans at a public

⁷¹⁸ In 1925, ethnic Latvians constituted only 59% of Riga's population; Baltic Germans about 13%, Jews about 12%, and ethnic Russians about 8%, with various other nationalities – mostly from within East Europe – making up the remainder. M. Skujenieks, ed. *Trešā tautas skaitīšana Latvijā (Third Census in Latvia)* (Riga: Valsts statistikas pārvalde, 1930)

⁷¹⁹ "The Commemoration of the Liberation of Riga from Bermondts," *Rigasche Rundschau* 11.XI.1929

ceremony commemorating Latvians fallen in the independence struggle might well have been galling. Yet multi-ethnic participation in such public rituals was undoubtedly necessary in promoting shared civic values and the identification with a mutual cause capable of transcending ethnic divisions. When mixed with widely-held, highly nationalized conceptions of the medieval past, the tumultuous events of 1919 proved a combination toxic to ethnic reconciliation. As with so many other prominent spaces in interwar Riga, the Cemetery of the Brethren and the nearby *Landeswehr* memorial proved to be veritable lodestones – or perhaps a lightning rod, in the latter case – in bringing the city’s ethnic groups together, whether in processes that promoted peaceful coexistence, or in those that eroded the potential for it.

5.4 Victory or Freedom?



Figure 29. Freedom Monument, Riga, circa 1935.

“Only Latvian sculptors and builders can be admitted to the competition [for the Freedom Monument’s design], because only these, animated by the national spirit, will be able to create a monument which the people will understand and love...Our art, and even Riga itself, are already too international – it is long since time to become more Latvian!”⁷²⁰

By the end of the 1920s the citizens of Riga had begun to turn to the question of erecting new monuments within the city center proper. Prior to this, economic conditions had been dire enough that funding such projects, whether through public or private means, was more or less out of the question. By the closing years of the decade, though, the economy was stable and living standards were rising.⁷²¹ Although the city government itself was not disposed towards making outlays for statues and memorials, it was willing to accommodate private organizations wishing to finance the construction of such monument by allotting sites and partial assistance from city departments.⁷²² In the second half of the 1920s, civil society organizations began to actively raise funds and take the first steps towards the creation of monuments on the city’s streets and in its

⁷²⁰ “The Erection of a Victory Monument,” *Latvijas Vēstnesis* 21.XI.1923

⁷²¹ Jānis Aizsilnieks, *Latvijas Saimniecība 1915-1945* (Stockholm: Daugava, 1968) 419-420

⁷²² LVVA 2927-4-781-3, 31, 33, 34, 75

parks.⁷²³ On the whole the number of new monuments created was not large, with the city center remaining particularly barren in this respect. Just two new monuments graced the innermost area of Riga during the interwar period. One was a modest statue of the popular Latvian novelist, poet, and playwright Rūdolfs Blaumanis, the other the iconic and imposing Freedom Monument.

The Freedom Monument was undoubtedly the most significant public memorial created in Riga during the interwar period.⁷²⁴ Its inception, design, and execution from 1921-1935 have been thoroughly researched by Latvian scholars and others, and will only be sketched out briefly here; what has gone unasked in the past is the question of the relationship between the Freedom Monument and the ethnic minorities of Riga and of Latvia. The Baltic Germans, Russians, Jews, and other minorities of Latvia not only witnessed the Freedom Monument's construction and unveiling, they also played a positive (albeit minor) role in its creation, as well as in the struggle for Latvian independence which had made it possible, despite the elisions and simplifications of popular conceptions of the War of Independence which cast these groups at best as apathetic bystanders, and at worst as active opponents of Latvian statehood.⁷²⁵

Despite the difficult economic circumstances of the early 1920s, efforts to construct a national Freedom Monument in Riga began soon after the end of fighting in Latgale in 1920.⁷²⁶ In 1921, a veterans' group had already proposed the notion, and in 1922, prime minister Meierovics proposed the creation of a memorial column to the fallen soldiers of the war of independence.⁷²⁷

⁷²³ Societies were created such as the "Colonel Briedis Fund" (LVVA 2927-4-781-3) or the "Rudolfs Blaumanis Fund" (LVVA 2927-4-781-34) which raised funds and negotiated with city government regarding the erection of monuments to the individual in question.

⁷²⁴ The only other genuine contender would be the Cemetery of the Brethren; the central location of the Freedom Monument however, along with its more prominent position in the public eye (see below) during the process of its creation and more enduring symbolic significance make it the more important of the two sites of memory.

⁷²⁵ This despite the fact that 54 Baltic Germans were promoted to the order of Lāčplēšis for their services in the struggle for independence. Leo Dribins, Ojārs Spāritis, *Vācieši Latvijā* (Riga, Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un Socioloģijas Institūts Etnisko Pētījumu Centrs, 2000) 67

⁷²⁶ "The Erection of a Victory Monument," *Latvijas Vēstnesis* 21.XI.1923

⁷²⁷ V. Likerts, *Brīvības un kritušo pieminēkli 1920-1938* (Rīga: 1938) 19

In 1920 civil society organizations and the national government together formed the official Freedom Monument Committee headquartered in Riga.⁷²⁸ This was the executive committee, tasked with planning the project, while later dozens of subordinate local committees in virtually every town in Latvia were created, responsible for raising local funds for the monument, mostly in the 1930s as the project approached its realization.⁷²⁹

Throughout most of the 1920s, extensive public debate – along with governmental discord – hindered progress on the monument. Despite three previous architectural competitions, the final design of the monument was not chosen until 1930. In great part, this was due to the lack of public consensus on the nature of the moment. Understandably in light of the difficult economic circumstances and the level of wartime damage in Riga, a majority of citizens favored the construction of some otherwise pragmatic structure, such as a bridge, railway station, or national library. The city government – quite understandably, given its interests – also favored such a project, bemoaning the impracticality of a purely decorative monument even in the late 1920s.⁷³⁰ Nonetheless, the idea of a more conventional monument was by no means unpopular, and Skujenieks’ exhortation to his fellow citizens to invest in the aesthetic beautification of their capital, rather than its infrastructural improvement, in the Freedom Monument Yearbook of 1933 seems not to have fallen on deaf ears.⁷³¹ Ultimately an obelisk adorned with a statue was chosen in the final design, at the site once home to the statue of Peter the Great unveiled only quite recently in 1910. The statue’s bare pedestal had remained in place through the late 1920s, attracting

⁷²⁸ Jānis Siliņš, *Brīvības Piemineklis: Tēvu Zemei un Brīvībai* (Rīgā: Brīvības pieminekļa komitejas izdevums, 1935) 7

⁷²⁹ “The Freedom Monument Belongs to the Nation,” *Lāčplēsis* no. 2, 11.11.1934

⁷³⁰ LVVA 2927-4-781-10, 48; Cf. also “We Shall Not Build a Bridge from the Freedom Monument, nor from a Bridge the Freedom Monument,” *Brīvā Zeme* 5.II.1930, indicating that although the city government had acquiesced to the notion of a purely decorative monument in 1928, public debate on the question continued as much as two years later.

⁷³¹ M. Skujenieks, “Cels Darbs” in *Brīvības Pieminekļa Gadagrāmata 1933* (Rīga: Brīvības pieminekļa komiteja, 1933) 76

complaints from private citizens and city officials alike, along with regular pastings of posters, advertisements, election flyers and the like before its removal in 1931.⁷³²



Figure 30. The bare pedestal of the former statue of Peter the Great, late 1920s.⁷³³

The details of the monument's form and location were a considerable bone of contention between Riga city government and the Freedom Monument committee for much of the interwar period. The city government complained of a lack of representation on the committee throughout its existence, and fairly severe coordination problems between the city government and the committee surfaced more than once.⁷³⁴ Though not opposed per se to the creation of the monument, members of the city government executive board (*valde*) were united in favor of the monument finding its incarnation in some sort of practical public project, going so far as to write to the committee in 1924 proposing to build an (urgently needed) bridge over the Daugava, incorporating decorative friezes in its sides.⁷³⁵ Difficulties in coordinating the activities and decisions of the committee with city government also persisted over years, especially after A. Andersons' replacement by A. Krieviņš as mayor in 1928; Andersons continued serving on the Freedom Monument committee, leaving Krieviņš to complain of being left out of the loop.⁷³⁶

⁷³² LVVA 2927-4-781-72

⁷³³ Image taken from the collection of Paul Campe, held at the Herder Institute in Marburg (DSHI 100 Campe).

⁷³⁴ LVVA 2927-4-781-8, 128, 129

⁷³⁵ LVVA 2927-4-781-10

⁷³⁶ LVVA 2927-4-781-129

The chief sticking point was the location, however; it is conceivable that if not for the protracted difficulties in settling this question, the monument might have been finished with the democratic period. The city government was reluctant to confirm the choice of the spot at the head of Brīvības bulvaris (Freedom Boulevard) due to objections about the impact on traffic; this was one of the city's busiest areas, with a tram line passing within yards and abundant motor vehicle traffic.⁷³⁷ After the city parliament voted to deny the use of the location in June 1928, the executive board suggested four additional locations: the site of the victory column adjacent to Riga castle, along the right bank of the Daugava near the old town, in Victory Park on the far side of the Daugava, and in the square in the Esplanade.⁷³⁸ Choosing the riverside location, the Freedom Monument committee was distressed when the city informed it of additional stipulations – *after* the committee had already proclaimed an architectural competition for the spot in the autumn of 1929.⁷³⁹ Ultimately, the original choice was confirmed by the city, though not without the repeated defiance of the city parliament.⁷⁴⁰ Difficulties also surfaced between the national monuments board and the city government in removing the pedestal of the statue to Peter I.⁷⁴¹ In some sense, at least, it would be fair to say that the Freedom Monument was erected *in spite of* Riga City government's participation, rather than due to it.

Despite these obstacles and the inauspicious timing of the mass fund-raising efforts – coinciding closely with the arrival of the economic crisis in the early 1930s – the foundation stones were laid in a formal ceremony on November 18th, 1935, with the state president and many dignitaries of the national government and of Riga participating. Four years later, state president

⁷³⁷ LVVA 2927-4-781-73

⁷³⁸ LVVA 2927-4-781-79

⁷³⁹ LVVA 2927-4-781-128

⁷⁴⁰ LVVA 2927-4-781-79, 86

⁷⁴¹ LVVA 2927-4-781-73

and de facto dictator Kārlis Ulmanis presided over the unveiling ceremony before thronging crowds, the crowning achievement of nearly 15 years of work on a national scale becoming indelibly associated not only with his person, but with his regime as well. In some sense, the realization of the Freedom Monument project over the years 1923-1935 is emblematic of the entire course of interethnic relations in Latvia during the same time period. The project initially held the potential for a certain equilibrium between civic and ethnic national values. The majority of ethnic Latvians undoubtedly considered the freedom being celebrated to be that of their own national group, embodied by its acquisition of a state of its own. Yet a celebration of the freedom of Latvia was vague enough in itself to potentially include a state patriotism embracing the other ethnic groups living within its borders. Baltic Germans and Jews had both also suffered under the yoke of Imperial Russian rule, especially during the years of Russification in the late 19th century. Given the wide latitude granted their ethnic groups under the liberal minority rights regime of the democratic period, the use of a rhetoric and symbolic language invoking their loyalty in the Freedom Monument was not unthinkable.

An article in the German-language weekly *Riga am Sonntag*, on the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone on November 18th, 1931, offers insight into the ways in which Riga's Baltic Germans were able to perceive their ethnic group as having contributed in deep and meaningful ways to the independence of Latvia. Baltic German ideology typical of the interwar period runs throughout the piece; the region's historical distinctness from the rest of the Russian empire and unbreakable bond with Western Europe are cited as self-evident, and although couched in vague terms, the implication that Baltic German governance allowed the region to attain the degree of development necessary for independence is clear. Beyond this general positive portrayal

of the region's history, the armed conflicts of 1919 are cited as well, again imprecisely, without the use of proper nouns or ethnic adjectives:

“...the generation that, in the year 1918, as the chaos that followed the world war burned all around the country, found the courage and the strength to stand up against the floods of destruction tearing everything down and to say, ‘This land is ours!’ – and to assert it.”⁷⁴²

The characterization is striking in its ambiguity, equally able to describe the actions of the Baltic German *Landeswehr* or the incipient Latvian national army – and excluding the Latvian riflemen engaged in fighting imperial Germany prior to 1918. Next to this article appeared a photograph of an early model of the monument. The sculptures decorating it are medieval, armed with swords, but otherwise unidentified – presumably the ancestors of the Latvians, but not arrayed against any foes. Specific struggles ancient or modern are not directly invoked and no enemies are depicted. *Riga am Sonntag*, in the rest of its article, urged readers to diligent work on behalf of their homeland, admonishing them to prize its freedom in part by invoking the ghost of what might have been had the anti-Bolshevik campaigns of 1919 and 1920 not been victorious.⁷⁴³ The author's conception of Latvian independence and the monument dedicated to it clearly allowed enough latitude for the two campaigns of the *Landeswehr* in 1919 – the first in the spring, culminating in the liberation of Riga on May 22nd, the second as part of the Latvian national army in the fighting against the Soviets in Latgale in 1920 – to be included as part of the struggle for independence. For many if not most ethnic Latvians, though, the first was an act of treason, the liberation of Riga mere serendipity along the way, and the latter circumstance a mere triviality, a necessity forced upon the *Landeswehr* by its defeat near Cēsis in June 1919.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴² *Riga am Sonntag* #234 18.XI.1931 „Grundsteinlegung zum 18. November”

⁷⁴³ *Riga am Sonntag* #234 18.XI.1931 „Grundsteinlegung zum 18. November”

⁷⁴⁴ Cf. *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1930 “22. Maija atcerei”; *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1931 “22. Maijs”; and *Pēdējā Brīdī* 22.V.1932 “Šodien Rīgas ieņemšanas 13 gadu diena” for one mainstream Latvian paper's negative assessment of the 22nd of May; for a more rounded,

The Freedom Monument in its final form embodied a conception of history that saw the Latvian nation as pitted in struggle against Baltic Germandom both in the medieval past and in the present day. In this view, the nation was formed and defined not through cultural progress or peaceful development, but through violence and war. The dominant themes in the sculpture are of war in two ages – in the mythicized medieval past conjured by the *Lāčplēsis* epic, and in the 20th century, as Latvians participate in the revolution of 1905 and Latvian soldiers defend Riga from the Bermondts attack.⁷⁴⁵ Several of the speeches given at the laying of the foundation stone explicitly linked the armed struggles of the middle ages with the victorious ones of the recent past.⁷⁴⁶ None mentioned the country's national minorities or their role – for ill or for good – in the struggle for independence, or in raising funds for the monument during the years of peace.⁷⁴⁷ The rhetoric surrounding the Freedom Monument was virtually identical to that linked to the Cemetery of the Brethren, despite the two memorials' ostensibly different objects of commemoration, indicating how deep the scars of war ran, and what sort of freedom was meant by the term – that of the nation, rather than the individual.

The adoption of the final design, invoking the *Lāčplēsis* epic and the struggles of the Latvian people against foreign (German) invaders in medieval times, took place at a time when Latvian public sentiment was turning decisively against the country's ethnic minorities, especially the Baltic Germans. Though it was conceived and planned during the democratic period, the monument's final unveiling on November 18th 1935 took place a year and a half after Kārlis Ulmanis' seizure of power.⁷⁴⁸ Prior to this, the ethnic minorities had been able to rely upon

but only slightly less negative, assessment of the depiction of the day in the Latvian press, cf. *Rigasche Rundschau* 23.V.1922 #114 “Der 22. Mai im Spiegel der lettischen Presse”

⁷⁴⁵ Bremša, 195

⁷⁴⁶ “The State President Speaks while Placing the Foundation Stone of the Freedom Monument,” *Latvijas Kareivis* 20.XI.1931

⁷⁴⁷ LVVA 4922-2-22-153 for the participation of at least one Baltic German civil society organization.

⁷⁴⁸ “The Spirit of Struggle has become a Spirit of Construction,” *Rīts* 19.XI.1935

educational autonomy, the parliamentary system, and the equality of all citizens before the law, but the coup-d'état of May 15th 1934 had effectively removed whatever cause they had had to celebrate Latvian independence. It is doubtful whether most members of Riga's Baltic German, Russian, or Jewish minorities – comprising a third of the city's population – took much joy in the day's festivities. Their future in Latvia had already become too uncertain.

6.0 Shared Faith and Sacred Space: Riga's Churches

“Homeland! Oh, you proud, strong word. Who has not recognized you in all your beauty, those who sat devoutly in the old, honorable churches, where our fathers also prayed!”⁷⁴⁹

6.1 Multi-Ethnicity and Multi-Confessionalism: Borders and Boundaries

The ethnic diversity of interwar Riga was matched by its religious heterogeneity. Four principal faiths coexisted in the city: Catholicism, Lutheranism, Judaism, and Orthodoxy. Each of these had a different historical relationship to Riga and its environs, and each embraced multiple linguistic and ethnic groups. Each, naturally, had its own houses of worship, often constructed on a grand scale and occupying prime real estate in or near the city center. Indeed, from medieval times through the middle of the twentieth century, the well-known silhouette the city's skyline when approached from the Bay of Riga - that is to say, when approached from the sea - was rendered distinctive by the lofty spires of the three ancient churches of her old town, each founded in the 13th century.⁷⁵⁰ Other houses of worship built during the 19th century, outside the confines of the old city walls, likewise dominated the neighborhoods in which they were built, serving as local architectural hallmarks. Early on during the interwar period, questions of ownership and control of some of these spaces came to the forefront of national political discourse, as the new ethnic hierarchy and the unfolding process of ethnic reversal altered the status quo of relationships between ethnicity, faith, and space.

No faith in Latvia was the monopoly of a single ethnicity, though some groups were preponderant in certain churches. Despite the social and ethnic cleavages sundering the two

⁷⁴⁹ From a (German-language) poem published in *Riga am Sonntag* 29.VII.1932, entitled “Heimat” (homeland).

⁷⁵⁰ This silhouette is something of a calling card of modern Riga, often featured on stickers, logos, websites, and much of the city's general assorted symbology in the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as on postcards and depictions of the city stretching back centuries prior. It is mentioned with some frequency in Baltic German memoirs, and Latvian folklore is replete with references to the “gray towers” of Riga.

groups, Latvians and Baltic Germans were at least ostensibly united by a shared faith: Lutheranism. Although a shared religious identity showed considerable potential for bridging the gap between the two ethnic groups, this same identity was also problematic, largely due to historical circumstances. Riga had adopted the Reformation early on, in 1522 and by the end of the Livonian War in 1583, that faith was widespread across the three Baltic Provinces of Courland, Livonia and Estonia. In future centuries it came to serve as a potent instrument of social control for the Baltic German nobility in the region.⁷⁵¹ This powerful Baltic German nobility was organized into corporations, called *Ritterschaften*, literally "knighthoods". In addition to owning most of the arable land and forming the legislatures of the three provinces, the *Ritterschaften* also retained control over the selection of pastors and the content of sermons.⁷⁵² This practice denied the Lutheran Church an independent voice in the Baltic, contributing to the Latvian-speaking population's perception of the church as a mechanism of social control employed by the German-speaking ruling elites, though the interests of urban Baltic Germans often conflicted with those of the *Ritterschaften* as well.⁷⁵³

The natural consequence of all this was that the Latvian (and Estonian) peasantry was likewise converted to Protestantism *en masse*, more or less permanently. Although the change of faith was unquestionably compulsory, it did offer attractions, in so far as that the Lutheran doctrine of *sola scriptura* led to the first translations of the Bible into Latvian. The necessity of preparing

⁷⁵¹ Erich von Schrenck, *Baltische Kirchengeschichte der Neuzeit* (Hannover-Döhren: Harro v. Hirschheydt, 1988) 108-112

⁷⁵² Anders Henriksson, *Vassals and Citizens: The Baltic Germans in Constitutional Russia 1905-1914* (Marburg: Herder Institute, 2009), 74; these corporations were formed by the descendants of the crusading German knights who had secured fiefdoms for themselves in the Baltic lands in the 13th century, and who had managed to retain many of their feudal privileges up until the outbreak of the First World War. The nobility of the island of Saaremaa/Ösel formed their own corporation (*Ritterschaft*) although these territories were administratively part of Estonia/Estland.

⁷⁵³ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 217; It is worth noting that many individual pastors were politically quite active, and often agitated for causes that earned them the enmity of the Baltic nobility – especially for the abolition of serfdom. (*Leibeigenschaft*) and the improvement of the lot of the Latvian and Estonian peasantry. Such individuals' activities were, however, not representative of the official standpoint of the Lutheran Church as an organized body.

German-speaking pastors to preach to their flocks in their own vernacular led directly to the compilation of the first Latvian dictionaries and grammars, and thus to the first steps in establishing Latvian as a literary language in its own right.⁷⁵⁴ Despite these steps, even after the introduction of vernacular services in the 16th century, church services were still widely conducted in German until the mid-18th century.⁷⁵⁵

Despite these (perhaps unintentional) national advancements, Latvians in general seem to have held a more lukewarm attitude towards their shared faith than did Baltic Germans, as the mass conversion of up to a hundred thousand Latvian and Estonian farmers to Orthodoxy in the 1840s would seem to attest (though widespread rumors that land would be granted to converts seems likely to have fueled the wave of conversions at least as much as genuine religiosity).⁷⁵⁶ Latvian resentment of socio-economic status quo maintained by the Baltic German aristocracy through the 19th century naturally carried over to the Lutheran Church, firmly under the thumb of that same aristocracy.⁷⁵⁷

Nonetheless, as Russification efforts intensified in the 1880s and 1890s, Latvian intellectuals began to perceive state-sponsored Orthodoxy as a tool which was being actively deployed by St. Petersburg in an attempt to de-nationalize and assimilate Latvians, and many turned back towards Lutheranism - doubtless aided by a creeping liberalization of local Lutheranism in ethnic terms, with ethnic Latvian clergy outnumbering Baltic Germans by the turn of the 20th century, typically preaching to their congregations only in Latvian (though typically

⁷⁵⁴ Schrenck, 17-18, 104

⁷⁵⁵ Ulrike Plath, *Esten Und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands: Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Kolonialphantasien und Lebenswelten 1750-1850*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009)182; although Plath's book deals with interactions between Estonians and Baltic Germans, her conclusions about the general course of religious developments in the Baltic can be applied to Latvia as well.

⁷⁵⁶ Wilhelm Kahle, *Die Begegnung des baltischen Protestantismus mit der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche* (Leiden/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1959), 107-112

⁷⁵⁷ Wilhelm Kahle, *Lutherische Begegnung im Ostseeraum* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1982), 109-111

enjoying a German-language education, acquired either locally or abroad).⁷⁵⁸ Broadly speaking, Latvian-speakers had been ascendant in the local Lutheran Church clergy throughout the nineteenth century, keeping in line with demographic trends in Latvia as a whole.⁷⁵⁹ At the outbreak of the First World War, despite the fact that the pre-modern order of social stratification according to ethnicity had been broken down nearly out of all recognition, an overwhelming majority of Latvians living in Riga were Lutherans, with an even higher percentage of Baltic Germans conforming to that faith. Overall, 65% of Riga's population were Lutheran in 1925, with around 60% of the city's population ethnic Latvian, and 13% Baltic German.⁷⁶⁰ The latter group was overwhelmingly Lutheran (95%), the former preponderantly so (72%) at the national level; if one discounts the Catholic Latvian population, itself overwhelmingly drawn from the historically distinctive (and geographically distant) Latgale province, Latvians were around 92% Lutheran.⁷⁶¹ Thus, at the opening of the interwar period, a shared faith was one of the few social bonds solidly binding Latvians and Baltic Germans together, and that bond was not inconsequential in its tenacity, though it too would ultimately break under the sway of that most modern of religions, nationalism.

Just as most of Riga Lutherans were Latvians, with a relatively small Baltic German minority of around ten percent, so most of the capital's Orthodox faithful were ethnic Russians, albeit with a large Latvian minority, which had its own priests, churches, and own services held in Latvian. Orthodoxy had first been introduced to the region in the Middle Ages, but had been of no real social or political significance until the three Baltic Provinces had been incorporated into

⁷⁵⁸ Roberts Feldmanis, *Latvijas baznīcas vēsture* (Riga: Luterisma mantojuma fonds, 2011), 312-313

⁷⁵⁹ Baltic Germans remained in control of the highest offices of the church, however, and despite an increasing proportion of ethnic Latvian clergy, political control was still exercised through the Baltic German aristocracy's control of all church appointments.

⁷⁶⁰ M. Skujenieks, ed., *Trešā Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. gadā/Troisième Recensement de la population en Lettonie 1930 1930* (Riga: 1931) 72

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 169

the Russian Empire in the early 18th century. Even then, the confirmation of the “privileges” of the Baltic German nobility at the hands of successive tsars from Peter the Great on down had meant that the provinces remained overwhelmingly Lutheran through the opening decades of the 19th century.⁷⁶² The relative autonomy of the Baltic Provinces within the Russian Empire had drawn considerable numbers of Old Believers to them, persecuted elsewhere in Russia proper, but left largely to their own devices in the Baltic. By the middle of the 18th century, a population of prosperous ethnic Russian Old Believer merchants had become well-established in Riga.⁷⁶³

It took the wave of conversions to Orthodoxy in the 1840s, inspired by social unrest among a land-hungry peasantry, newly liberated from serfdom but lacking in economic opportunity, to establish the Orthodox religion as one of the faiths of the land in practical terms. The conversion mania of that decade led directly to the establishment of an Orthodox diocese in Riga in 1850, and of a seminary in the following year.⁷⁶⁴ Despite the fact that the flood of conversions stemmed to a trickle by mid-century (after land for converts had failed to materialize), Orthodox faithful still constituted a significant minority among Riga church-goers throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷⁶⁵ Despite an influx of emigres from the territory of the emergent USSR, Orthodox congregants still only comprised 9% of Riga’s population in 1925, a number comparable to the percentage of ethnic Russians among Riga’s citizenry.⁷⁶⁶ Since 2.5% of the city’s population were Old Believers (and these were 95% ethnic Russian), it seems safe to assume that no more than a third of the city’s adherents to Orthodoxy were non-Russians, presumably the great bulk of them

⁷⁶² Kahle, *Die Begegnung des Baltischen Protestantismus mit der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche*, 79-80

⁷⁶³ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I* (Riga: Komiteta po ustroystvu “D.R.K.” v Rigye, 1933), 78

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

⁷⁶⁵ *Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. gadā*, 167; they were 9% of Riga's population in 1925, and 8% in 1930, despite considerable demographic losses among Great Russians in Riga from 1915 onwards, so it is reasonable to assume that the Orthodox percentage of the city population in the waning years of the 19th century was several percentage points higher than this.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 67, 72

ethnic Latvians.⁷⁶⁷

Despite the relatively meager success of Orthodoxy in garnering new converts in the latter half of the 19th century, the religion nonetheless served as an element in the Russification drives of the 1880s and 1890s, enjoying a privileged status vis-a-vis other religions: conversion to Orthodoxy was encouraged, whereas conversion from Orthodoxy was illegal; children born of a mixed union were automatically enrolled in the Orthodox Church; and many positions in the Imperial bureaucracy were open only to the Orthodox faithful.⁷⁶⁸ The ambition emanating from St. Petersburg to turn Riga, long regarded by Russians as the most “European” city in their empire, into a more properly Russian metropolis was manifested in terms of urban space with the construction of Riga’s Cathedral of the Nativity, begun in 1876 and completed in 1884.⁷⁶⁹

The cathedral occupies a prominent spot in Riga’s central Esplanade Park, surrounded by flat expanses of greenery which display its large gilded onion dome to good effect from a distance (see insert). Designed in tandem by the Russian architect Nikolai Chagin and the ethnic German Robert Pflug (cf. Chapter 1: Ethnic Reversal and Political Space), the church remains the largest Orthodox Church in the Baltic States to this day. Its spatial grandeur, the elegance of its design, and the opulence of its adornment make clear the significance with which the Russian State viewed its construction - not merely as a symbol of the glory of the Orthodox faith in of itself, but also as a symbol of the power of a state which derived no small part of its legitimacy from that faith.⁷⁷⁰

The Cathedral of the Nativity, completed at the onset of the most intense push towards

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 168

⁷⁶⁸ Kahle, *Die Begegnung des Baltischen Protestantismus mit der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche*, 157-159

⁷⁶⁹ *Riga und seine Bauten* (Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1903), 182

⁷⁷⁰ The Imperial Russian state was inextricably bound up, in ideological terms, with the Orthodox faith throughout the medieval and modern periods, with Orthodoxy serving also as a useful tool in more general Russification efforts in the latter half of the 19th century. See Robert L. Nichols and George Stavrou Theofanis, eds. *Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime* (University of Minnesota Press, 1978) among others.

Russification yet known in the Baltic Provinces, was a bald, if beautiful, statement about the relationship between St. Petersburg, the Orthodox Church, and this particular part of the imperial periphery. The architectural contrast between this building and the existing somber brick Lutheran churches scattered throughout the city center could scarcely have been more profound, and that contrast was undoubtedly purposeful, intended to serve political as well as aesthetic ends. Riga's identity, in religious as well as ethnic terms, was changing, and the imperial government in St. Petersburg sought to dictate that change via the city's architectonic landscape. The ultimate success of such attempts will be discussed below.

Catholics had been present in Riga in significant, though modest, numbers since the 19th century, when the industrial boom of the city had drawn workers from far and wide across the Russian Empire, including Lithuanians and Poles as well as Latgalians.⁷⁷¹ Although the upheavals of the First World War and Latvian War of Independence did not substantially alter the demography of Catholicism in Riga, the incorporation of the easternmost province of Latgale, a Latvian-speaking region with a distinctive political as well as cultural history, upended the political calculus between the state and the major religions. While Riga was the natural religious center for the other faiths in the region, connections to Latgale were far more tenuous. Riga's relative paucity of Catholic churches, and equally importantly, its initial lack of a Catholic diocesan infrastructure, left an obvious void in regard to the need to draw Latgale province closer to the economic and cultural life of the capital (and by extension, of the rest of the country).⁷⁷² As Latvians from all over the country were drawn to Riga, they were also pulled from the relatively undeveloped territory of Latgale, presumably in great enough numbers to raise the percentage of Riga's

⁷⁷¹ Ēriks Jēkobsons, "Das Riga der Polen" in *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreichs 1857-1914* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 191-193

⁷⁷² Jānis Broks, *Katoļu baznīcas loma Latgales kultūras attīstībā (līdz 1944. gadam)* (Riga: Preses Nāms, 1994) 110

population adherent to the Roman Catholic faith from 9% in 1925 to 11% in 1930, a not-inconsiderable increase in just five years.⁷⁷³ As we shall see, by the early 1920s, the need of the state to overcome the perceived dearth of Catholic institutions at the national level - accompanied by fears that the lack of a Catholic bishopric in Riga would draw Latgale back into its traditional Polish political and cultural orbit - led to the first prominent conflict over urban sacred space in interwar Riga, that of St. James' Church, in Riga's old town.

Judaism, the fourth major religion in interwar Riga, had been established in the city for centuries, beginning *de jure* (though likely not *de facto*, with Jewish settlement probably dating from the late Middle Ages) in 1638, when Riga was under Swedish rule.⁷⁷⁴ Prospering despite discrimination, this population grew rapidly in the second half of the 19th century, growing from around 600 in 1850, to 33,651 (6.5% of the city's population) just prior to the outbreak of the First World War.⁷⁷⁵ During this period of expansion, Jewish Riga tended to flourish, with schools, synagogues, mutual aid societies, and civil society organizations of every sort established, despite continuing discrimination, an unequal tax burden, *numeri clausi*, and numerous other impediments to Jewish advancement.⁷⁷⁶ Jews were barred from participation in government, both as voters and as office-holders, and needed to convert to Orthodoxy in order to hold virtually any position connected with the state, such as that of university professor, lawyer, etc.⁷⁷⁷ The removal of all such restrictions during the democratic period of Latvian independence (1919-1934) represented the first interval in the city's history during which its Jewish denizens enjoyed legal equality with

⁷⁷³ Skujenieks, *Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. Gadā*, 162

⁷⁷⁴ Josifs Šteinmanis and Edward Anders, *History of Latvian Jews* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2002), 28

⁷⁷⁵ Šteinmanis and Anders, 32; these numbers must be understood in the context of Riga's own demographic explosion in that time period.

⁷⁷⁶ Šteinmanis and Anders, 32-33

⁷⁷⁷ M. Bobe, "Four Hundred Years of the Jews in Latvia - A Historical Survey" in *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: D. Ben-Nun Press, 1971) 34-35

their neighbors, although cultural anti-Semitism remained deeply ingrained among much of the local population, particularly those recently emigrated from the countryside.⁷⁷⁸

Demographic changes wrought in the latter half of the 19th century, and particularly during the few brief years of warfare and upheaval 1914-1921, had altered the composition of the city's Jewish population considerably in comparison to the mid-19th century. Swelled by the influx of refugees from the Russian interior, Riga's Jewish population in 1925 was considerably larger, in relative terms, than before the war, moving from 6.5% in 1913 to 11.5% in 1925.⁷⁷⁹ With over 98% of Jews registering as of the "Faith of Moses" (according to the terminology of the Latvian *Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. gadā* of 1930), the overlap between ethnicity and faith was more or less complete.⁷⁸⁰ Unfortunately, the Latvian census of 1930 failed to capture data regarding the language of daily use in Jewish households, leaving the researcher to make educated guesses based on memoirs and other primary source accounts, buttressed by the secondary literature. It is clear that by 1925, Russian-aculturated Jews outnumbered the older, more established German-aculturated "Courland" Jewry by a heavy margin; yet the latter was by far the wealthier group, boasting factory owners, bankers, and owners of international shipping concerns, whereas most Russian-aculturated Jews were petit-bourgeois at best.⁷⁸¹ Yiddish, though its usage was frowned upon by the socio-economic elite of both groups, was widely understood, and served as *lingua franca* among the city's Jewish groups.⁷⁸² The entire gamut of Judaic faith was to be found in interwar Riga, ranging from the nearly secular elite of the Courland Jewry, visiting synagogue perhaps a few times a year, to the ultra-Orthodoxy of *Agudat Israel*. The general fragmentation of

⁷⁷⁸ Leo Dribins, *Antisemitisms un tā izpausme Latvijā* (Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds: 2001), 97-99

⁷⁷⁹ Skujenieks, *Latvijas tautas skaitīšana 1930. gadā of 1930*, 72

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 170

⁷⁸¹ M. Bobe, "Towns and People - Riga" in *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: D. Ben-Nun Press, 1971) 243-249

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*

the Jewish population - in terms of socio-economic position, sect, imperial acculturation, and languages of education and of daily use - weakened the political clout of the group considerably, necessitating cooperation between the more bourgeoisie Jewish parties and the Baltic German political leadership in the *Saeima*.⁷⁸³

Social and linguistic cleavages between German- and Russian-acculturated Jewish populations also manifested in the division of sacred space, with most of Riga's larger, more centrally-located synagogues in the hands of the former group.⁷⁸⁴ On the whole, this may have been auspicious, as the German-acculturated elite of Courland Jews generally enjoyed good relations with their Baltic German and Latvian counterparts - all three groups were united by a considerable community of interest regarding the city's commerce and industry.⁷⁸⁵ The city's traditional synagogues were maintained, without change in ownership or congregation, throughout the interwar period. The synagogue at Peitavas street, in the old town, is probably the best known, surviving the period of the Second World War unrazed due to its proximity to other buildings of historical value (see insert). In the nearby Moscow Suburb, just outside the city center, there was a large and impressive synagogue, called the "Great Synagogue" on Gogol Street, destroyed following the German occupation of the city in 1941.⁷⁸⁶ Although the story of Riga's synagogues across the 20th century is a tragic and even horrifying tale, the interwar period - even following the imposition of the Ulmanis dictatorship in 1934 - represents a period of relative tranquility vis-à-vis the non-Jewish Other.

⁷⁸³ Michael Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen. Die parlamentarische Tätigkeit der deutschbaltischen Parteien in Lettland und Estland* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv, 1976), 158-160

⁷⁸⁴ Abraham Godin "Jewish Traditional and Religious Life in the Latvian Communities" in *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: D. Ben-Nun Press, 1971), 219-221

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Chapter 2: Finding Common Ground in Commerce

⁷⁸⁶ Bernhard Press, *The Murder of the Jews in Latvia 1941-1945* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 45-46



Figure 31. The Great Synagogue on Gogol Street – date unknown, likely late 19th century.

Though the anti-Semitism that pervaded the region – and most of Europe, indeed the Western World – was certainly present in Latvia as well, the interwar republic’s Jewish inhabitants were by and large protected from the worst excesses of anti-Semitic prejudice, first by the liberality of the republic’s minority rights regime and the egalitarianism of its constitution, and later by the Ulmanis regime, which, at least in juridical terms, tended to treat the Jews on more or less equitable terms with the country’s other ethnic minorities.⁷⁸⁷ There were unofficial *numerus clausi* at the University of Latvia, but similar measures existed to check the influence of the country’s Baltic German and Russian minorities as well. At the cultural level, anti-Semitic prejudice was common (though again, so was anti-German and anti-Russian sentiment), but at the legal level, conditions in Latvia for Jewish life compared favorably to much of the region, even much of the continent. Baltic German-Jewish relations seem, on the surface, at least, to have been relatively good throughout the interwar period; despite the rhetoric emanating from Germany during the 1930s,

⁷⁸⁷ Josifs Šteinmanis, *History of Latvian Jews* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2002), 66-69; Dictator Kārlis Ulmanis’ steady friendship with the conservative Rabbi Mordecai Dubin probably played a role in his regime’s treatment of its Jewish denizens. As Šteinmanis notes, although economic and cultural measures were undertaken which were undoubtedly injurious to Jewish interests, these were paralleled by similar efforts against the country’s other ethnic minorities and were not motivated by anti-Semitism as such.

the two groups lacked a history of overt antagonism (beyond the legacy of anti-Semitism which any scholar of Early Modern Europe must recognize as universal), and their community of interest during the interwar period was very considerable as ethnic minorities in a country which was 75% ethnic Latvian.⁷⁸⁸

The influx of Eastern Jews from the former Pale of Settlement, speaking Yiddish and Russian, the greater part of them relatively poor and with little education (though some Russian-acclimated Jews were quite erudite and wealthy) probably posed at least as great a source of disruption and unease to Riga's Jewish community as relations with the country's other major ethnic groups. The established Jewish population of the city, springing from the so-called Courland Jewry, shared relatively little in common with the new arrivals in socio-economic or cultural terms. This contributed greatly to the almost complete political fragmentation of the Jewish electorate, both at the level of municipal politics and on the national stage. Thus, viewed inwardly, with an eye towards *intra*-Jewish relations, the interwar period was a time of significant cultural and political flux in Jewish Riga. However, viewed outwardly, with an eye towards *inter*-ethnic relations, the era was one of relative stability and – despite the looming catastrophe of the years following 1939 – even of progress, with a much improved legal status for citizens of Jewish ethnicity and little if any increase in anti-Semitism vis-à-vis the *status quo* prevailing before the collapse of the Russian Empire.⁷⁸⁹

Viewed in terms of urban space, the interwar era was one of calm and rebuilding, without

⁷⁸⁸ Naturally one does not wish to accord credit where it may not be due, or to paint the question of Baltic German-Jewish relations in too rosy a light, but the lack of anti-Semitic rhetoric in Baltic German publications from the interwar period prior to 1933 is nonetheless striking to the researcher. The *Rigasche Rundschau* and *Baltische Monatshefte*, the two most influential periodicals of the era with the widest readership (by no means limited to ethnic Germans) lacked virtually any trace of it prior to the *Machtergreifung* in Berlin, and even after 1933, overtly anti-Semitic rhetoric remained fairly rare. One Holocaust survivor, Zelda Rivka-Hait, from the small town of Goldingen, approximately 50 miles to the west of Riga in Courland, reflected in a video interview (1997) on the general good relations prevailing in the town between its Jewish and Baltic German population, and on the pronounced anti-Semitism of the local Latvian population. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGfSzuwYzVI>

⁷⁸⁹ Šteinmanis, 60-61

significant conflict over space, a narrative lacking both in tragedy or triumph as far as representation in the symbolic topography of the city is concerned. Each of the other major religions mentioned above was involved in a public dispute over sacred space in the city center at some point in the interwar period, but for Riga's Jews, this was the calm before the gathering storm, and a period in which they were left more or less to their own devices, to gather in their houses of worship undisturbed for a few more short years, while their gentile neighbors wrangled with increasing bitterness over ownership of the rest of the city's sacred spaces.⁷⁹⁰

As elsewhere in Baltic historiography, narrow ethnic lenses have tended to predominate in what has been written about the history of the religions treated above in the region. While works authored by an older school of Baltic German, Latvian, Russian, and Jewish historians on the ecclesiastical history of the separate churches and faiths undoubtedly serves as an indispensable foundation for further scholarship, reflections on the various faiths from an interethnic perspective tend to be rare.⁷⁹¹ Most treatments that do approach religious coexistence with a multiethnic lens do so through the one of interethnic struggle alone, with short shrift given to the mechanisms of

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. Bernhard Press, *The Murder of the Jews in Latvia 1941-1945* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2000), and Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941-1944—The Missing Center* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia (in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), 1996).

⁷⁹¹ For representative works on Baltic German Lutheranism, Cf. Reinhard Wittram, ed., *Baltische Kirchengeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Missionierung und der Reformation, der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirchen, und des Volkskirchentums in den baltischen Ländern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), Wilhelm Kahle, *Die Begegnung des baltischen Protestantismus mit der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche* (Leiden/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1959), Willhem Kahle, *Lutherische Begegnung im Ostseeraum* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1982), and Erich von Schrenck, *Baltische Kirchengeschichte der Neuzeit* (Hannover-Döhren: Harro v. Hirschheydt, 1988); The much more recent work of Rochus Johannes Bensch, *Neuere baltische Kirchenrechtsgeschichte: der kirchenverfassungsrechtliche Rahmen des eigenständigen deutschen Kirchenwesens in Lettland und Estland (1919 - 1939) und die Kirchenverfassungen der deutschen ev.-luth. Kirche Lettlands nach 1991* (Bautz 2004) is up to date in that it addresses the interwar period with rather more objectivity than the previously existing literature, but it pays scanty attention to questions of multiethnicity or interethnic relations. On Latvian Lutheranism, cf. Roberts Feldmanis' definitive *Latvijas baznīcas vēsture* (Latvian Church History; Rīga: Luterisma mantojuma fonds, 2011); on Catholicism in Latvia, Z. Balevics, *Katoļu baznīcas loma Latvijas sociālpolitiskajā vesture (The Role of the Catholic Church in Latvia's Socio-political History)* (Riga: Zinātne, 1978); on Judaism, M. Bobe, ed., *The Jews in Latvia* (Tel Aviv: D. Ben-Nun Press, 1971) for probably the most comprehensive publication to date (although much more work could still be done on this subject); on the Russian Orthodox Church in Latvia, cf. Z. Balevics, *Pareizticīgā baznīca Latvijā (The Orthodox Church in Latvia)* (Rīga: Zinatne 1987), and A.V. Gavrilin, *Pravoslavie v Latvij: istoricheskie ocherki (The Orthodox in Latvia: Historical Essays)*; Riga: Balto-Slavyanskoe obshestvo kulturnovo razvitya i sotrudnic, 1993), among others.

cooperation which made multiethnic confessionalism possible for so many decades and even centuries. The deepest insights into the ways in which shared religion provided opportunities for collaboration as well as conflict, for rapprochement as well as resentment, have tended to come from historians who lived through the interwar period itself.⁷⁹² Even these accounts, however, have been colored by a teleology of inevitable failure, perhaps understandably, given the personal involvement and attendant embittering of their authors. Some more recent scholarship has begun to compensate for this deficit, but much work remains to be done, especially given the ongoing salience of this issue in modern Latvia (and Estonia as well).⁷⁹³ Although it comprehends only a brief span of time, this chapter attempts to present a narrative that is both more ethnically holistic, and more focused on the period's potentials for sustainable cooperation and coexistence – without failing to face the full scale of its failures.

6.2 The Orthodox Church: Latvians, Russians, and The Cathedral of the Nativity

This sound advice, prosaic though it might seem, was not much heeded by those steering the ship of state in interwar Latvia. The first conflict over sacred space to rock

⁷⁹² Cf. Alexander Burchard and Gabriele von Mickwitz, "... alle deine Wunder": *Der letzte deutsche Propst in Riga erinnert sich (1872 - 1955)* (Lüneburg: Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2009), and Wilhelm von Ruediger, *Aus dem letzten Kapitel deutsch-baltischer Geschichte in Lettland 1919-1945* (Gern bei Eggenfeld/Bay: self-published, 1954) for examples of literature on Baltic German Lutheran history in the 20th century written by persons who experienced it firsthand.

⁷⁹³ Cf. Lore Poelchau, "Die evangelisch-lutherische Kirche in Lettland 1919-1939", in: *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Lettland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-lettischen Verhältnisses* (Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 2000) for a work rather more attuned to multiethnicity, also Jouku Talonen and Priit Rohtmets, "The Birth and Development of National Evangelical Lutheran Theology in the Baltics from 1918-1940" in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 45 (2014) issue 3.

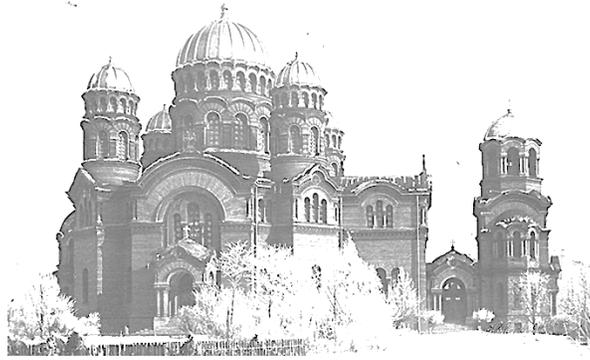


Figure 32. The Cathedral of the Nativity, circa 1913.

“Affairs of faith should not be related to politics. Let everyone believe in their God according to their own convictions; in particular, this should be remembered by persons standing at the helm of power.”⁷⁹⁴

interwar Riga occurred relatively early on during the period. Like others to follow, it was a result of the political consequences of the Latvian War of Independence, but unlike the others, it was a direct result of the circumstances of wartime conditions in Riga 1914-1919, during which the Russian Orthodox Church had largely abandoned the city, and with it, the various church properties within it.⁷⁹⁵ The outcome of the crisis over the Cathedral of the Nativity was largely shaped by the ability of Riga (and Latvia’s) Orthodox faithful to find a new mode of ethnic power-sharing within the ecclesiastical structures of their faith, a new *modus vivendi* between Orthodox Russians and Latvians. The ability of the new Orthodox Church of Latvia to overcome internal divisions and present a more or less united front to the world, fending off government attempts to dispose of church property, stands in stark contrast to the

⁷⁹⁴ *Jaunākās Ziņas* No. 179 of 1920, as quoted in *Сегодня* 80 9.IV.1920, “Латышская пресса о православном соборе” (The Latvian Press on the Orthodox Cathedral”); this comment is featured in a letter to the editor, published in that day’s edition, in reference to the controversy over the Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity in 1920.

⁷⁹⁵ Hatlie, *Riga at War*, 298-299

well-intentioned but ultimately doomed efforts of Baltic German (and some Latvian) Lutherans to stave off state intervention a decade later.

As the period of independence opened, the demographic as well as the political realities of Orthodoxy in the Baltic were drastically altered. The exigencies of war had affected the Russian population of Riga more profoundly than any other major ethnic group - Hatlie asserts that by 1919, "Russian Riga had demographically almost disappeared."⁷⁹⁶ Certainly the exodus was well underway by the time of the Imperial German occupation of the city on September 1st, 1917, with the city having long since been stripped bare of its industrial capacity, cultural goods, materiel, manpower, and valuable items of nearly every sort. With the trains departing Riga in the summer of 1915 went much of the city's ethnically Russian population, comprised largely of factory workers and civil servants as it was.⁷⁹⁷ With the evacuation, the Orthodox Church had also largely abandoned the city, withdrawing its bureaucratic infrastructure en masse to Nizhny-Novgorod in the Russian interior, though still servicing local parishes with priests dispatched to the city for that purpose.⁷⁹⁸ By the time that Imperial German forces entered the city on September 1st, 1917, the arm of the Russian Orthodox Church in Riga was scarcely palpable, contributing directly to the first crisis over the Cathedral of the Nativity, one which directly set the stage for that which followed.

⁷⁹⁶ Hatlie, 303

⁷⁹⁷ Arnolds Švabe, *Agrarā reforma // Latvija 20. Gados* (Riga: Zinatne, 1938), 199-228

⁷⁹⁸ Hatlie, 301



Figure 33. Interior of the Cathedral of the Nativity, 1930s.

The greatly weakened presence of the Orthodox Church in the city at the time of the Imperial German occupation doubtless played an important role in the decision in the German decision to convert the city's Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity to a Lutheran church. Centrally located, surrounded by open gardens, and resplendent in its brilliant colors and with its gilded onion dome, the Cathedral of the Nativity was vested with great symbolic significance merely as an architectural monument, but was even more significant as a cultural one - its colorful appearance contrasted so starkly with the somber brick of the city's Lutheran churches that the cathedral's very existence functioned as a statement about the power of Russian culture in the region, a statement that could - in the minds of the Imperial German authorities - be partially unsaid with the building's conversion to a space of Lutheran worship.

Rumors of the impending change spread quickly following the German occupation, and proved well-founded - the transfer was announced that November, though some months passed before its implementation.⁷⁹⁹ A petition submitted by the church's existing (though presumably much diminished) congregation appealing this decision was answered promptly by a declaration

⁷⁹⁹ Hatlie, 304

that the church was the property of the Imperial German War Ministry - a dictate that could seemingly be applied to the entire city by extension.⁸⁰⁰ This high-handedness was matched a few months later by similar deeds:

“On 5 January 1918, the church was surrounded by German soldiers during the blessing of holy water. The services were prevented and the congregation retreated to the Alexander Nevsky Church, which was not then in use, for the ceremony. The church being sealed, the congregation petitioned all the way up to Kaiser Wilhelm, but in April 1918 all efforts had failed and the church began to be transformed into a Lutheran place of worship. . . According to one account, the icons that the congregation could not remove in time were ‘desecrated,’ and crucifixes ‘thrown in the trash.’”⁸⁰¹

The apparent motives for this imperious behavior on the part of the occupiers are confirmed by statements from the Lutheran pastor who first preached in the Cathedral of the Nativity, in April of 1918. In his sermon, *Armee-Oberpfarrer* Ritschel characterized the construction of the cathedral as “...a conscious challenge of the Russian state church, a challenge directed at old, Protestant Riga.”⁸⁰² The German army used the church up until the day prior to their departure from Riga, holding their last service on New Year’s Day, 1919, as Bolshevik forces approaching Riga from the east drew perilously near. Despite the accusations of earlier desecration, and overt expressions of hostility, the German pastors saw to it that the church keys were returned to the Orthodox congregation council before their departure.⁸⁰³ The council took it upon itself to retake possession of the church without the Bolsheviks’ permission, surmising (doubtless correctly) that it would be futile to seek it.⁸⁰⁴ These efforts were ill-fated, however, and harassment of their faith in particular ensued during the months of Bolshevik rule in Riga.⁸⁰⁵ As Hatlie puts it, “Regular church services

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

⁸⁰² As quoted in Hatlie, 305

⁸⁰³ Hatlie, 305

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ *Русские в Латвии, Часть 1.*, 61

unfettered by communist interference could commence only after the liberation of the city in the middle of May.”⁸⁰⁶



Figure 34. The Cathedral of the Nativity, early 1920s.

For a time, Orthodox religious life in the cathedral, as in the rest of the city, was able to resume without interference, but when a final conclusion to the Latvian War of Independence finally came in November of 1919, religious strife soon followed in its wake. On February 15th 1920, the Riga City Deanery of the Orthodox Church convened. At their meeting, the chairman of the congregation of the Latvian Ascension Church, I.I. Davis, bemoaned the fact that the ethnically Latvian Orthodox faithful had but one church at their disposal in the city (the Ascension Church), located far from the city center, whereas all the rest, on both sides of the river, were in the hands of ethnic Russian congregations. On behalf of the Ascension congregation council, David proposed that his congregation be granted possession of the Cathedral of the Nativity, “for use only in the Latvian tongue.”⁸⁰⁷ As would be the case in the church disputes to follow, the form of religion was being imbued with the content of nationalism, a means employed towards the end of nationalizing the city’s sacred spaces. The specific debate over the Cathedral did not take place

⁸⁰⁶ Hatlie, 305

⁸⁰⁷ As quoted in Hatlie, 307

in a vacuum, but was the centerpiece in wider arguments among the Orthodox faithful in Latvia regarding the rightful relationship of their church, then still in a state of coalescence, with the patriarchate in Moscow - at that point in time, the capital of a pariah state opposed to all organized religion. While some (primarily but not exclusively ethnic Russians) represented the viewpoint that the Orthodox Church in Latvia ought to continue on in a position wholly subordinate to the Patriarch of Moscow, others argued that, given both the demands of national independence and the particular political conjuncture, the Orthodox Church of Latvia ought to function as an entirely autocephalic body.⁸⁰⁸ The debates about the Cathedral of the Nativity need to be understood in a context of deep-seated Latvian concern about continued, and in the eyes of many, undue Russian influence over their faith.

The bid on the part of Davis and his Ascension Congregation to gain control of Riga's most splendid Orthodox house of worship took the leadership of the Russian cathedral congregation unawares, but was initially met with accommodation.⁸⁰⁹ The Russian church leadership, cognizant of the new political reality at play, acknowledged the right of Latvian Orthodox faithful to worship in the cathedral - unquestionably the city's grandest Orthodox church - in their native tongue, but maintained that an arrangement could be reached whereby the existing Russian congregation's rights to the space could be maintained undisturbed. The sensible nature of this proposal presumably being undeniable, a compromise was hammered out in which services were to be held in different languages at different times of day.⁸¹⁰

This compromise, freely arrived at by the ethnic factions within the Orthodox Church in Latvia, was soon disrupted by the intervention of the Latvian state. In late February of 1920, the

⁸⁰⁸ "The Independence of the Orthodox Church in Latvia," *Сегодня* 5.III.1920

⁸⁰⁹ In this respect, the initial course of events precisely mirrors the similar case of 1931, that of the Lutheran Cathedral of St. Mary.

⁸¹⁰ Hatlie, 307

Minister of the Interior, Arveds Bergs, had the Riga police seal the church after a service, removing it from use for either congregation.⁸¹¹ Bergs, citing the purported “dispute” over the ownership of the church, declared that the Cathedral of the Nativity was to remain closed until his ministry was able to determine the legal owners of the property. The government’s position was that, the cathedral having been built with Russian state funds, the building was now the property of the Latvian state, which had laid direct claim to all the former property of the now-vanished Tsarist Empire on Latvian territory.⁸¹² The state’s claim to numerous other properties in central Riga rested on precisely this rationale, and its undermining in one instance might call much of the new spatial arrangement of the capital into question. The leadership of the ethnic Russian faction of the Orthodox, availing themselves of the prestigious (and widely-circulated) Russian-language Riga daily “*Segodnya*” (“*Today*”), countered this argument with the assertion that the provision of state funds had merely been in the form of a loan, with subscriptions from devout private individuals across the empire having eventually repaid the sum in its entirety.⁸¹³ The editorial board of *Segodnya* would prove to be a powerful ally for the church, as it was supported by some of interwar Riga’s wealthiest and most erudite Russians, many of them émigrés from Bolshevik Russia.⁸¹⁴ Many persons of modest means in émigré Russian circles were nonetheless possessed of considerable intellectual and literary gifts, talents which both *Segodnya* and the Russian political leadership in Riga were able to press into the service of Russian cultural causes more generally.⁸¹⁵

A meeting held between the local Russian leadership and Minister Bergs revealed some of the state’s ostensible motives in carrying out the dispossession: Bergs cited the lack of protest on

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² “A Right to the Cathedral,” *Сегодня* 13.IV.1920

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I*, 53-56

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

the part of the local Russian population when the Imperial German army had taken over the cathedral in 1918 (this claim being somewhat in error, as we have seen above), the failure of the congregation council to address itself to either the national or local authorities when resuming control of the cathedral in 1919, and the purported non-existence of the congregation itself, due to the undeniable demographic collapse of Russian Riga.⁸¹⁶ Bergs was moved by the petitions of the Russian Orthodox faithful (and doubtless by the to-do in the local press) enough to agree to defer the question to the nation-wide Constitutional Convention then assembled in Riga, with which rested ultimate authority on all legal questions at the time.⁸¹⁷ It was also revealed that, despite the apparent compromise reached between the Latvian Ascension and Russian Nativity congregations earlier, the former had been clandestinely lobbying the Ministry of the Interior to confer sole legal ownership of the Cathedral of the Nativity upon their congregation - a revelation which undoubtedly soured relations between the two congregations, and between these two segments of the Orthodox Church in Riga, considerably.⁸¹⁸

While the issue was awaiting decision in the Constitutional Convention - a period of several months - the Latvian Ascension congregation was permitted the occasional use of the cathedral, whereas the Russian Nativity congregation was initially denied use of the space for worship.⁸¹⁹ Public sentiment, even in a period of strident nationalism, seems to have been tipped rather against the position of the government, even if not vehemently so. The populist Latvian paper *Jaunākās Zinas* reported on the debate in fairly neutral terms, publishing opposing editorials and a multiplicity of viewpoints. A letter to the editor published in Nr. 179 of 1920 espoused sentiments

⁸¹⁶ Hatlie, 307

⁸¹⁷ Hatlie, 307-308

⁸¹⁸ Hatlie, 308

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

widely-held among the general public of all ethnicities:

“This property belongs not to the state, but to the Orthodox Church. If we take this property away from the Orthodox parish, then other confessions must be deprived of their property, too. Above the cathedral hovers the spirit not of the Russians, but of the Byzantines, and it is not proper for an intelligent person to be afraid of this spirit...by declaring the cathedral a state building, nothing is achieved. Affairs of faith should not be related to politics. Let everyone believe in their God according to their own convictions; in particular, this should be remembered by persons standing at the helm of power.”⁸²⁰

The attitude expressed here (presumably coming from the pen of a Latvian reader of the paper) though seemingly quite common-sensical, is noteworthy in that it does not pass judgement on the question of which congregation ought to have control of the cathedral, or in which language services ought to be held; it merely holds that the question is not one for the state to answer, but rather implicitly remains an internal affair of the Orthodox Church. Riga’s population had witnessed the extreme disruption of the practice of religion in the first half of 1919, including the murder of pastors and priests of all the city’s Christian sects, and those experiences likely informed the widespread sentiment that state intervention in religious matters was to be avoided.

The state yielded slightly to public pressure in the approach to Easter of 1920, agreeing to unseal the cathedral temporarily for use during the holiday.⁸²¹ This was met with praise, but with the renewal in the press of all the arguments against the closure, and appeals to allow the building to continue to be used by all the city’s Orthodox faithful (according to the compromise initially reached by the two congregations) until the matter could be settled once and for all:

“After lengthy intercessions and an ordeal, the Orthodox Cathedral was opened, to the great joy of the faithful. But in this cup of joy, however, there was a solid spoonful of bitterness, since the cathedral is to be closed again indefinitely on the evening of April 14th, and

⁸²⁰ *Jaunākās Ziņas* no. 179 of 1920, as quoted in “The Latvian Press on the Orthodox Cathedral,” *Сегодня* 9.IV.1920

⁸²¹ “In This Number of *Today*,” *Сегодня* No. 82, 11.IV.1920

the Orthodox population runs the risk of remaining without their own house of prayer for a long time...we agree to refer the question of the final fate of the cathedral to the decision of the Constituent Assembly, but we do not see grounds for a new sealing of the cathedral, especially since the Orthodox congregation agrees to alternate services with Orthodox Latvians.”⁸²²

The ongoing conflict over the question of ownership of the Cathedral of the Nativity was finally resolved in 1921, not by the Constitutional Assembly, but by the ministry of the interior. The government’s response to the situation was shaped largely by developments within the Orthodox Church in Latvia. The establishment of an effectively autonomous Orthodox Church of Latvia had assuaged governmental fears of undue Russian influence. At a synod on February 26th, 1920, comprised of representatives of Orthodox congregations from across Latvia, a vote of eighty-six to seven decided that:

“...The Orthodox Church of Latvia is independent and self-governing, and in diocesan terms, it maintains an ideological connection with its mother, the Russian Orthodox church and thus, in the canonical sense, the Orthodox Church of Latvia is subject to the decrees of the all-holy cathedral of the Orthodox Church.”⁸²³

Although a year elapsed between this decision and the ministry of the interior’s ultimate relinquishment of the Cathedral of the Nativity, that year had displayed the functional independence of the Orthodox Church of Latvia, made more obvious by the stabilization of Bolshevik rule in Russia, and with it, the correspondingly dimmer chances that the Patriarchate of Moscow would be able to assert any kind of meaningful political influence over any of its filial churches abroad.⁸²⁴ As church affairs within Latvia coalesced and ethnic Latvians, due simply to their demographic weight, were able to consolidate their control over the church’s ecclesiastical

⁸²² “A Right to the Cathedral,” *Сегодня* 13.IV.1920

⁸²³ “The Local Orthodox Cathedral,” *Сегодня* 28.II.1920

⁸²⁴ Alexander Cherney, *The Latvian Orthodox Church* (London: Stylite Publishing, 1985), 119

and bureaucratic structures, the more extreme voices clamoring for sole Latvian control of the cathedral were suppressed in favor of a workable compromise.



Figure 35. Celebrants outside the Cathedral, Easter 1920.

Given the demographic realities of interwar Latvia, the country's ethnic Russian Orthodox faithful, deprived of direct support from abroad, would be in a permanently subordinate position to ethnic Latvians in regard to intra-church politics. The government had hosted a meeting of Orthodox congregations in Latvia in August of 1920, but had denied admission to the representatives of the Russian Orthodox congregation of the Cathedral of the Nativity - a congregation the existence of which it had previously called into question.⁸²⁵ "Despite this, the meeting voted to recognize the existence of the congregation" - a prime example of a common bond other than ethnicity leading citizens to reject strident national activism, in this instance, principally that of the state itself.⁸²⁶

Faced with a united front on the part of the Orthodox Church of Latvia, the state had little choice but to give in on the question of the ownership of the Cathedral of the Nativity, with little or no public support for a position which would deny the ownership of that property to what had

⁸²⁵ "A Right to the Cathedral," *Сегодня* Nr. 83, 13.IV.1920

⁸²⁶ Hatlie, 308

become the national branch of Orthodoxy. In 1921, the government granted the synod of the Orthodox Church of Latvia the property “on the condition that services be held in both Latvian and Church Slavonic on alternating Sundays, with evening services - which Latvians did not hold - being exclusively in Church Slavonic.”⁸²⁷ In an attempt to avoid the squabbling between congregations which had helped to spark the dispute in the first place, the national government also stipulated that the cathedral be held directly of the Orthodox Church itself, and not devolve to any of the congregations using it, or to any less organization.⁸²⁸ Given that the Cathedral of the Nativity was the obvious and natural seat of the local Orthodox bishop, this clause was readily agreed to. A year after the troubled Easter of 1920, relative peace and harmony prevailed in the Cathedral of the Nativity, which hosted two congregations, one of each ethnicity, with no further conflict recorded through the remaining nineteen years of the interwar period.⁸²⁹

The result of this early crisis, pitting the bonds of interethnic religious unity against state-led national activism, stands in contrast to that of the next major dispute over religious space to rock interwar Riga, one in which state power, abetted by a rising tide of nationalism among ethnic Latvians, proved too much for the forces of civil society seeking compromise and the creation of new modes of interethnic cooperation and coexistence.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Hatlie, 308

6.3 The Lutheran Church: Latvians, Baltic Germans, and St. Mary's Cathedral



Figure 36. St. Mary's Cathedral (center), early 20th century.

“Even in the area of the church, lasting peace and trusting cooperation were not achieved. Not even the great unanimity of the spiritual representatives of the German and Latvian church in questions of their worldview were able to force ethnic antagonisms into retreat.”⁸³⁰

Just as questions of language and ethnicity were hotly debated in the years immediately following the establishment of Latvian independence in the Orthodox Church, so too did these issues constitute thorny points of in the traditional faith of the former Baltic Provinces, one practiced by a majority of Latvian citizens, and one of the few undeniable bonds held in common shared by the former Baltic German elite and the incomparably more numerous Latvian majority. Although the history of Lutheranism in Latvia was itself charged with ethnic animosities, the cooperation elicited from Baltic German and Latvian Lutherans alike on the basis of their shared faith speaks nearly as loudly to the potentials of the fragile interwar democratic order as the same groups' conflicts over sacred space in Riga do to the failures of that order. Although ethnic chauvinism ultimately won out over the mechanisms of coexistence, the *modus vivendi* temporarily achieved in the 1920s would come heartbreakingly close to bridging the gulf of ethnic animosity

⁸³⁰ Wilhelm von Ruediger, *Aus dem letzten Kapitel deutsch-baltischer Geschichte in Lettland 1919-1945* (Gern bei Eggenfeld/Bay: self-published, 1954), 9

which yawned ever-wider after the world economic crisis hit Latvia in 1930. The crisis over St. Mary's Cathedral which erupted in 1931 would bring long-running debates in interwar society about interethnic coexistence, state loyalty, and belonging to a head, in essence arriving at answers to these questions and setting the tone of a "Latvia for the Latvians" three years prior to the installation of the authoritarian dictatorship championing that motto.

Before events could prove it unworkable, however, the new *modus vivendi* had first to be forged. The breaking of the power of the *Ritterschaften* in 1919 left the Lutheran Church in Latvian territory in a highly disorganized state, with no mechanisms in place for the appointment of pastors, not to mention the utter logistical disarray left by five years of warfare.⁸³¹ While it was clear that the previous Baltic German dominance of church affairs could not continue, shutting Baltic Germans out of Lutheran affairs in Latvia entirely was also not a viable solution, given their administrative expertise, relative affluence, and extensive contacts with the wider Lutheran world. A new model for ethnic coexistence within the Lutheran Church was demanded by the change in circumstances.

To this end, a Latvia-wide Lutheran synod was convened on 23 February 1922. The proceedings of the synod were fractious, but ended up being dominated by two personalities, that of the Latvian Karlis Irbe and the Baltic German P. Harald Poelchau.⁸³² The arrangement arrived at allowed considerable autonomy to the Baltic German congregations while still providing for their administrative placement under the larger umbrella organization of the Lutheran church in Latvia. The synod concluded with the election of Irbe to the post of Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Latvia, with his first act being to request that Poelchau also be accorded the honorary title of

⁸³¹ Schrenck, 179-180

⁸³² Bensch, 203

bishop⁸³³

Initially, events reinforced rather than weakened the two groups' sense of religious solidarity. On January 10, 1923, the Latvian state concluded a concordat with the papacy of Pius XI that stipulated the transfer of one of Riga's primary Lutheran churches, St. James', from the control of the Lutheran to that of the Catholic Church.⁸³⁴ Contemporary non-Catholic observers in Latvia widely agreed that this had been done to remove the sizable Latvian Catholic population of the province of Latgale (which had not been a part of the Imperial Russian Baltic provinces) from the influence of the Polish episcopacy.⁸³⁵

The announced dispossession of St. James' in Riga was met with great dissatisfaction on the part of Lutherans in the Republic of Latvia, particularly among Baltic Germans but also among ethnic Latvians in the capital.⁸³⁶ A cathedral church law stipulating the details of the transfer of St. James' to Catholic control (and also guaranteeing the use of the cathedral for the Lutheran Church) was promulgated by the government as an emergency decree between sessions of parliament early in 1923. Both bishops, along with the entire high consistory of the Lutheran Church in Latvia, protested the dispossession vehemently, but to no avail.⁸³⁷

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, 203

⁸³⁴ Burchard, 339

⁸³⁵ Bensch, 215

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 217

⁸³⁷ *Ibid.*, 219



Figure 37. St. James' Cathedral, early 20th century.

The dispossession of St. James' left not one but two Lutheran parishes without a house of worship.⁸³⁸ Of the two newly homeless Lutheran parishes, the congregation of the nearby St. Peter's Church (Lutheran) took up the German-speaking one, and the Latvian Peace Congregation was granted the use of the Riga cathedral on a contractual basis for the purposes of their divine services. The contract between the two parishes reads innocuously; however, the fifth article contained the seed of the eventual dispossession of Riga's cathedral church. This stated that the Peace Congregation was permitted to share the rights established in the contract with the Garrison Congregation of Riga. Though ostensibly the congregation was formed from Lutheran members of the army units stationed in the capital, at the time there was only a preacher for the garrison who was attached to the Peace Congregation, and no independent Garrison Congregation as such. Thus this stipulation seemed of little weight for the time being, though it allowed for the introduction of a third congregation into the administration of the cathedral.⁸³⁹

This situation began to change only in 1926, when the parish council of the cathedral received notification that an independent Garrison Congregation, one composed of high-ranking

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216

⁸³⁹ Burchard, 340

army officers had formed, and would be seeking to avail itself of its rights to the cathedral. As officers in the Latvian army, the members of this congregation would likely have taken part in the fighting around Cesis/Wenden in the summer of 1919, when forces loyal to the nascent Latvian state defeated the Baltic German *Landeswehr* with the aid of Estonian units from the north. Few segments of Latvian society would have been less inclined to look favorably on Baltic German demands for autonomy.

The Cathedral Congregation and Peace Congregation refused the Garrison Congregation's demands, and it continued to use the cathedral on a provisional basis only.⁸⁴⁰ Though the issue lay dormant for some years more, on 29 January 1930 the Garrison Congregation bypassed the Cathedral Congregation and appealed directly to the high consistory of the Lutheran Church in Latvia for an alteration of its privileges in regard to the cathedral. It hoped to gain the right to co-administer the income and expenditures of the church and its associated properties.⁸⁴¹

In response, the high consistory required the three congregations to meet in two sessions of negotiations, on 16 October 1930 and 8 January 1931. Both the Peace and Cathedral Congregations declared themselves ready to grant the Garrison Congregation considerable concessions regarding the use of the church, but the latter was unwilling to surrender any control over the church's properties or income to the new congregation.⁸⁴² In the deliberations, the Garrison Congregation's representatives cited the prestige of the Latvian army as requiring a fitting church, though according to a statement issued by the Latvian Ministry of War at the behest of the Latvian Bishop Irbe, the Garrison Congregation was not empowered to speak on behalf of the army.⁸⁴³

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 342

⁸⁴¹ Burchard, 339

⁸⁴² Ibid., 342

⁸⁴³ Ibid., 342

Nonetheless, the martial composition of the Garrison Congregation played a vital role in advancing their claims on the cathedral. Though the members of the congregation were unable to convince the Ministry of War itself to take their side in the struggle for the cathedral, their positions as high-ranking officers lent both symbolic weight and political pull to their efforts to remove Baltic Germans from sole possession of the cathedral.⁸⁴⁴

As officers in the army, the Garrison Congregation were by default overtly nationalistic and well aware of the oscillation in Baltic German loyalties during the War of Independence. The group's sentiments and political connections were vital in catapulting the issue of the cathedral into the national spotlight, as was their willingness to disregard the decisions of church bodies regarding the cathedral. Considering the symbolic capital of the building and the influential membership of the Garrison Congregation, it was only a matter of time before the matter moved beyond the power of the Lutheran Church to control.

On 9 and 10 February 1931, the high consistory of the Lutheran Church in Latvia met once more. The consistory's decision left the previous state of affairs as permanent; the garrison would be required to unite with the Peace Congregation until a separate church could be found for it.⁸⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Baltic German leaders remained worried. A new law for the dispossession of the cathedral was introduced for debate in the *Saeima* just ten days after the high consistory's decision.⁸⁴⁶ The Baltic German bishop Poelchau anticipated that the support of Irbe could not be relied upon for long:

“...I am however very much afraid that the adoption of the law will cut the ground from under his [Irbe's] feet, so that we will have to reckon with the election of a new bishop at the April synod. What

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 341

⁸⁴⁵ Viktor Grüner "Zur Stellungnahme der deutschen Abteilung des ev.-luth. Oberkirchenrats in der Domfrage" in: *Baltische Monatschrift - Sonderheft* (Riga: Buchhandlung G. Löffler, 1931), 30

⁸⁴⁶ *Rigasche Rundschau* 20.II.1931

that means for us, you know quite well.”⁸⁴⁷

Poelchau’s fears were not wholly justified – the law was rejected and Irbe continued on as bishop for the time being – but they reflected Baltic German fears that the position of the Latvian moderates upon whose support they relied was weakening, both within the Lutheran Church and in the *Saeima*. The political constellation in interwar Latvia was always unstable. The center-right Latvian Farmers’ Union and the left-wing Social Democrats ranked as the two strongest parties throughout the period, but neither was able to form a government on its own. The Farmers’ Union was consistently the dominant party in the *Saeima*, providing twelve of the interwar period’s eighteen prime ministers.⁸⁴⁸ But the Farmer’s Union was heavily dependent on the parties spanning the political spectrum between it and the Social Democrats.



Figure 38. St. Mary’s, late 1920s .

The Baltic German community had relied upon the center-right Latvian parties, especially on the Latvian Farmers’ Union, for the support of mutual interests such as the maintenance of the

⁸⁴⁷ Letter from Poelchau to Rendtroff 21 February 1931, quoted in Bensch, *Neuere baltische Kirchenrechtgeschichte*, 243

⁸⁴⁸ Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: The Years of Independence: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania 1917-1940* (London: C. Hurst, 1974), 93

rule of law, upholding of the constitution, and the protection of private property. In a climate of grave political uncertainty engendered by the worldwide economic crisis, Latvian voters upset by the financial troubles were increasingly drawn to overtly nationalist positions. In response to these circumstances, the largest of the Latvian center-left parties, the Democratic Center, began to focus its political activity on anti-minority sentiment, much to the consternation of the Baltic German fraction in parliament.⁸⁴⁹ This intensified competition among the centrist parties, which were crucial for forming viable governments. Even for centrist Latvian politicians inclined favorably towards the Baltic German community, taking an unpopular stance on the cathedral issue was increasingly untenable given the political climate. In keeping with Poelchau's metaphor, the ground was rapidly vanishing beneath their feet as the scope and intensity of the controversy increased.

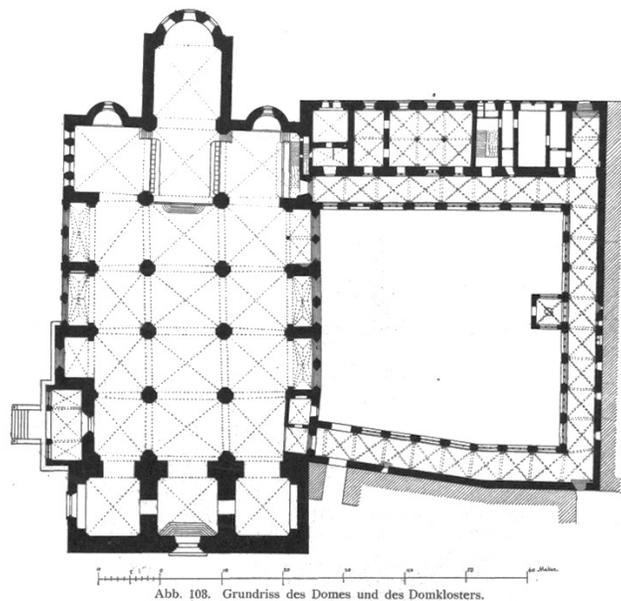


Figure 39. Blueprints of St. Mary's Cathedral and Cloister (1906).⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 93-95

⁸⁵⁰ This image is taken from *Riga und seine Bauten* (Riga: P. Kerkovius, 1903), 150

The Garrison Congregation used its contacts in the *Saeima* and press to bring the ‘cathedral question’ into the public eye following the decision of the high consistory in early February.⁸⁵¹ Initially, the German Fraction of the *Saeima* was able to work well with the moderate Latvian parties, incurring considerable sympathy from Latvian M.P.’s during parliamentary proceedings.⁸⁵² As deliberations over the cathedral question continued, however, that sympathy began to diminish. This was due not to new revelations about the cathedral affair - the arguments employed by both sides remained consistent throughout - but rather due to the growing conviction in parliament that public opinion was squarely against the Baltic German congregation, no matter how sound their arguments might be in principle. By the spring of 1931, the question of the cathedral had become the subject of an escalating debate in the press between the German-language daily *Rigasche Rundschau* and Latvian-language *Jaunakas Zinas*. Though illness prevented him from taking part in the debates in the *Saeima* in 1931, the Baltic German political leader Paul Schiemann continued to write editorials for the *Rigasche Rundschau* throughout the year regarding the so-called “cathedral question”, and his influence in constructing the Baltic German fraction’s rhetorical standpoint is obvious.

Though diverse in its editorial stances, *Jaunakas Zinas* was in part the mouthpiece of the Democratic Center, a center-left Latvian party founded in 1922 out of elements of the Latvian Workers’ Party and Latvian People’s Party.⁸⁵³ As the largest Latvian daily of the interwar period, *Jaunakas Zinas* exerted considerable opinion on public opinion among the Latvian electorate.⁸⁵⁴ The paper published a variety of editorial viewpoints, including some sympathetic to the Baltic

⁸⁵¹ Burchard, 341

⁸⁵² Garleff, 139

⁸⁵³ Clarence August Manning, *The Forgotten Republics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 112

⁸⁵⁴ Rauch, *The Baltic States*, 94

German community, though these were in the minority. Despite this diversity of opinion, the paper's wide readership combined with its frequent publication of editorials attacking Baltic German control of the cathedral made it a major factor in the dispossession campaign in the Latvian press.

The Democratic Center and the center-left Progressive Association, founded in 1929 by the former Social Democrat Margers Skujenieks, seized upon the cathedral question with particular enthusiasm.⁸⁵⁵ Skujenieks was one of the most prominent political figures of the interwar period in Latvia, serving as part of Latvia's delegation to the Versailles peace conference in 1919 before launching a successful career in the *Saeima* from 1922 onward. Skujenieks' politics became increasingly concentrated upon ethnic issues within Latvia, particularly following the worldwide economic crisis beginning in Latvia in 1930.⁸⁵⁶ On 20 February 1931, the Democratic Center, with the support of the Progressive Association, introduced a bill in parliament with the provision that the cathedral be transformed into property of the state and given over to the control of the Ministry of War.⁸⁵⁷ In the ensuing vote to determine whether the bill should advance to the next phase in the legislative process, the German fraction's position was resoundingly defeated, with 46 votes in favor against 19 opposed.⁸⁵⁸ The role of the Latvian Farmers' Union, the German fraction's erstwhile coalition partners, was crucial in securing this outcome, and resulted in the withdrawal of the fraction's support for the government.

The coalition thus collapsed on 3 March 1931, creating considerable political chaos in a time already fraught with tensions due to the grave situation engendered by the world economic

⁸⁵⁵ Bulutis, "Die Deutschbalten in der lettischen Presse", 303

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., 312

⁸⁵⁷ Garleff, 148

⁸⁵⁸ Garleff, 141

crisis.⁸⁵⁹ Latvian entrepreneurs suffered particularly from the economic crisis, since they lacked the extensive capital reserves of their Baltic German and Jewish counterparts.⁸⁶⁰ Latvians were also affected by unemployment to a much higher degree than Baltic Germans, leading to increased activity on the extremes of the political spectrum. In this political climate, normally moderate parties such as the Democratic Center and Progressive Association intensified their criticism of state policy towards the ethnic minorities.⁸⁶¹

The bill that aimed at the dispossession of the cathedral came under general debate in the *Saeima* on 23 March, 1931. Spectators packed the building.⁸⁶² Skujenieks championed the bill, referencing the honor and prestige of the Latvian nation and the supposedly deplorable treatment of the Garrison Congregation at the hands of the Cathedral Congregation.⁸⁶³ The Baltic German M.P. Woldemar Pussull made reference to the lack of historical precedent for the proposed dispossession⁸⁶⁴ and to its direct contradiction to multiple existing laws, all of which would, in strictly legal terms, have to be modified or abolished in order for the bill to become law.⁸⁶⁵ The positions adopted by these two M.P.'s are emblematic for the two sides of the broader debate. The viewpoint adopted in the press by Latvian nationalists, including many prominent writers, was that the disproportionate influence wielded by the country's national minorities, above all by the Baltic Germans, endangered the prosperity and security of the Latvian majority.⁸⁶⁶

In regard to the cathedral, the Baltic German congregation's ownership of the church was characteristically portrayed in the Latvian press as an undue privilege being exercised by a tiny

⁸⁵⁹ Garleff, 150

⁸⁶⁰ Dribins, 296

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 297

⁸⁶² Garleff, 154

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, 155

⁸⁶⁴ The transfer of St. James' to the Catholic Church in 1923 did not result that church becoming property of the state, but rather of the Catholic Church. Bensch, 217

⁸⁶⁵ Garleff, 155-156

⁸⁶⁶ Dribins, 293

minority whose powers over the Latvian majority had not yet been adequately checked.⁸⁶⁷ Thus for Latvian nationalists, the controversy over the cathedral became emblematic of the historical struggle against Baltic German oppression and showed that despite the establishment of the Republic of Latvia, the threat of that oppression remained.

From the Baltic German standpoint, arguments against state interference in the cathedral affair were straightforward - the matter was one to be regulated by the responsible bodies of the Lutheran Church, and interference would constitute nothing less than an unjustifiable breach in the rule of law, one which would establish a precedent dangerous not merely to the Baltic German community, but to all of Latvia's citizens. Arguments against the dispossession needed to appeal to a considerable portion of the Latvian-speaking electorate, however, and that appeal slowly evaporated in the climate of economic and political crisis that prevailed in Latvia from 1930 onwards.⁸⁶⁸

The final vote on the bill of March 23rd 1931 was a victory for the German Fraction in the *Saeima*, with 50 M.P.'s voting against and 28 for.⁸⁶⁹ The support of the Latvian Farmers' Union in rejecting the bill enabled the formation of another coalition government that included the German Fraction.⁸⁷⁰ Despite the victory, the very fact that the matter had come to a vote served as a warning to the German Fraction. Their Latvian allies in the *Saeima* had no qualms about warning the Baltic Germans to strive to their utmost to bridge the gap between the two ethnic groups: M.P. Ausejs of the National Union warned the Baltic German fraction that it was not "hatred of the other ethnicity as such" that motivated their opposition, but rather "still the hatred stemming from the

⁸⁶⁷ Butulis, 311-313

⁸⁶⁸ von Pistohlkors, *Baltische Länder*, 525-526

⁸⁶⁹ *Rigasche Rundschau* 24.III.1931

⁸⁷⁰ Garleff, 157

former social divide."⁸⁷¹ The Baltic Germans had “buckled down too much [in the fight for the cathedral] and widened the gap between themselves and the Latvians.”⁸⁷² Ausejs advised the Baltic German political leadership to attempt to overcome this divide through “the greatest possible accommodation” of the Latvian standpoint – great magnanimity would be necessary to sway public opinion.⁸⁷³ These social tensions are apparent in the rhetoric of the newspapers – the *Rigasche Rundschau* from 24 March quoted the Progressive Association M.P. Sterns’ argument as: “The cathedral only serves the German upper class, which still feels itself to be masters of the Latvians. It must be removed from them and given to the army.”⁸⁷⁴ This quote highlights class distinctions as much as ethnic ones, and is characteristic of the nationalist rhetoric of the Latvian press regarding the cathedral affair. The trope of Baltic Germans as former “barons” was typical. Though only a very small percentage of the Baltic Germany community were former aristocrats, the group as a whole was tarred with this brush, redirecting Latvian resentment towards the former landlords of the countryside against the urban bourgeois Baltic Germans.

The role of the "social divide" mentioned above in motivating Latvian voters is not to be underestimated. As the popularity of the Social Democrats indicates, many Latvian voters were sympathetic to socialist principles, and reference to class differences would have met with support among a broad swathe of the electorate. The intentional conflation of ethnicity with class was a savvy catch-all political strategy: leftist voters would be swayed by arguments rooted in class, while more centrist or right-wing voters could still be moved by rhetoric which framed the current conflict over the cathedral in terms of a historical struggle between opposed ethnic groups. By

⁸⁷¹*Rigasche Rundschau* from 24.III.1931

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*

⁸⁷³ Garleff, 145

⁸⁷⁴*Rigasche Rundschau* from 24.III.1931

describing Baltic German control of the cathedral as a privilege, Latvian nationalists cast a contemporary conflict in the paradigms of the past, portraying the campaign to secure Latvian control over the building as a redressing of historical grievances.

In the week following the rejection of Skujenieks' bill, the Peace and Cathedral Congregations met in negotiations. The contract that they arrived at established absolute parity between the two congregations. Both would elect an equal number of representatives to a committee established to administer the cathedral and all of its attendant properties. The chairmanship of this committee would alternate between a Latvian and a Baltic German from year to year.⁸⁷⁵ This contract was approved by the representatives of both congregations on March 30, 1931 and by the high consistory of the Lutheran Church Latvia on the following day.⁸⁷⁶

The apparent harmony between the Cathedral Congregation and Peace Congregation was short-lived. During a Latvia-wide synod of the Lutheran Church, on 8 April 1931, the representatives of the Peace Congregation proposed that room be made in the administrative arrangement of the cathedral for the Garrison congregation.⁸⁷⁷ Unsurprisingly, the representatives of the Cathedral Congregation resoundingly rejected the proposal. Burchard describes the synod of 8 April as tumultuous, nearly riotous.⁸⁷⁸ Both Baltic German and Latvian representatives were informed and affected by the nationalist ideology of their day, and such sentiments, however unchristian, were not always held in check:

“The Germans were accused yet again of a dearth of faith and love for not acceding to the demands of the Garrison Congregation. Few stepped up to bravely break a lance for justice, and these few were then simply shouted down. But this blind, exaggerated national fervor was directed not only against the Germans but also against all

⁸⁷⁵ Burchard, 341-342

⁸⁷⁶ Bensch, 237-238

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 238

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 343-344

of those at the synod whose behavior indicated that they were not inclined to participate in the intended perversion of justice.”⁸⁷⁹

Burchard paints rather a hostile picture, but the actual outcomes of the synod urge us to question its fundamental accuracy. One might conclude from the fact that multiple Latvian attendees argued against the cause of the Garrison Congregation that hopes for a shared solution to the problem were not entirely in vain. But even beyond this, the decisions of the synod themselves were favorable to the Baltic German cause. By the time of the April synod, with one bill for dispossession already only freshly defeated, it was clear that further conflict over the issue would be accompanied by an increasing likelihood that the state would intervene in Lutheran affairs – an eventuality that most of the synod’s members would have been unlikely to welcome, regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

In the event, the synod’s resolution was an unambiguous victory from the Baltic German point of view. The Garrison Congregation was required to unite with the Peace Congregation and abide by the terms of the latter’s contract with the Cathedral Congregation until a separate church could be built for it.⁸⁸⁰ The resolution also officially stated that the establishment of a fully entitled Latvian Cathedral Congregation constituted the achievement of a mutual understanding and rapprochement between Baltic Germans and Latvians.⁸⁸¹ Despite these decisions, the ultimate resolution of the cathedral affair had moved beyond the power of the Lutheran Church in Latvia to decide.

On 26 March, mere days after the bill for the dispossession of the cathedral had been defeated in the *Saeima*, Skujenieks had established a nation-wide initiative for the transformation

⁸⁷⁹ Burchard, 345

⁸⁸⁰ "Report on the progress of the offensive of the Garrison Congregation against the Cathedral Congregation" (internal document of the Baltic German division of the Lutheran Church in Latvia), from: EZA 200/1/5783 [GAW, Bestand 261 (1921)], p. 135, reproduced in Bensch, *Neuere baltische Kirchenrechtsgeschichte*, 240-241

⁸⁸¹ Bensch, 241

of the cathedral into property of the state. Over the following months, this initiative gained signatures, finally accruing a quorum by late June. On the 30th of that month, the initiative was introduced into the *Saeima* and transferred to committee for review without contestation.⁸⁸² The legislature was slated to vote on the provisions of the initiative on the 22nd of July, and although Schiemann expected that the measure would be defeated, the need to arrive at a final compromise was more pressing than ever.⁸⁸³ Bishop Poelchau's correspondence says much about Baltic German leaders' reading of the political climate:

“The people's psychosis has, however, advanced so far that the Latvians can no longer sound a retreat. The Latvian politicians are already pressing us as to how we wish to negotiate after the current draft law is rejected.”⁸⁸⁴

Though Schiemann and Fircks, along with leading Latvian politicians, seem not to have viewed this second bill as being likely to succeed, their confidence seems to have been misplaced. The final session of the third *Saeima* lasted seventeen hours, many of them devoted to the tumultuous debate on the initiative to dispossess the Cathedral Congregation of Riga's oldest and largest church. M.P. Pussul once again led the German Fraction's defense against dispossession, basing his case on arguments for the necessity of maintaining the rule of law: “The insecurity of justice and the clouding of the sense of justice will yield disastrous consequences for you as well, and seriously damage the reputation of the country here and abroad.”⁸⁸⁵ This warning was more than so many words; the prolonged controversy surrounding the cathedral had attracted attention in the international press, not only in Germany but in England, Sweden, and the United States.⁸⁸⁶

The Minority Bloc requested that the vote be conducted by secret ballot, indicating the

⁸⁸² *Rigasche Rundschau* 1.VII.1931

⁸⁸³ Garleff, 146-147

⁸⁸⁴ Letter from Poelchau to Rendtroff, 8.7.1931, quoted in Bensch, *Neuere baltische Kirchenrechtsgeschichte*, 245

⁸⁸⁵ Garleff, 149

⁸⁸⁶ Burchard, 348

sensitivity and divisiveness of the issue.⁸⁸⁷The final vote was as close as could be, with 41 votes for and 41 votes against.⁸⁸⁸In votes conducted by secret ballot, a tie counted as a rejection of the measure voted upon, allowing the German Fraction to deflect yet another attack on the cathedral by the narrowest of margins.⁸⁸⁹The constitution stipulated that in the event that the *Saeima* rejected an initiative, it would nonetheless proceed as a referendum at the national level, meaning that the challenge to the cathedral remained. The vote was scheduled to take place on 5 and 6 September, not long before national elections for the fourth *Saeima* on 3 and 4 October.

The narrow margin by which the Baltic German fraction of the *Saeima* was able to defeat the second bill indicates a sea change in opinion among the more moderate Latvian parties, itself informed by their perceptions of public opinion at large. The arguments of Latvian nationalists - rooted in narrow national interests, what we today might call identity politics - were proving effective in marshaling support for a change in the status quo of the cathedral, while those of the Baltic Germans, though invoking universal principles and the common good, seemed unable to mobilize non-German voters in their defense.

Over the rest of the summer, the debate over the dispossession raged unabated, with both sides continuing to publish editorials in major newspapers in the capital in support of their positions. The Baltic German position was champion in the *Rigasche Rundschau* by Paul Schiemann. Schiemann strove to portray the Baltic Germans as fellow citizens working actively to strengthen the Republic of Latvia.⁸⁹⁰ He also stressed the negative consequences that a breach of justice could have for all of society, echoing much of his thinking as a defender of minority

⁸⁸⁷ Garleff, 149

⁸⁸⁸ The remaining 18 M.P.'s of the *Saeima* did not take part in the vote, being either absent or unwilling to take a political stance; it should be noted that abstention qualified as a rejection of the measure, meaning that literal non-participation would be required in order to represent oneself as politically neutral.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 143

⁸⁹⁰ Paul Schiemann, "The Fate of Europe," *Rigasche Rundschau* from 18.VII.1931

rights in interwar Europe.⁸⁹¹ In stark contrast to the dominant mode of thought of his time, Schiemann actively questioned the values of nationalism, arguing for a supranational perspective:

"Thus we stand before the following, notable occurrence: nationalism is internationally acclaimed as a virtue in bourgeois Europe, but with the practical limitation, that each people and each state only affirms its own nationalism but denies that of others. This is based on a worldview which the M.P. Skujenieks lately put into words: 'Justice is that which is in accordance with the view of the majority.'"⁸⁹²

Casting the champion of the dispossession in the *Saeima* as a crude demagogue was vital for Schiemann precisely because public opinion was so unfavorable. Although wide sections of the Latvian populace seem to have been apathetic to the cathedral question, the vocal minority that the Democratic Center and Progressive Association were able to mobilize far outnumbered the Baltic German electorate, or that of all the country's ethnic minorities combined for that matter.

Mārgers Skujenieks of the Progressive Association was active as a journalist, with articles appearing in *Jaunakās Zinas* and other Latvian newspapers throughout the 1930s.⁸⁹³ The Latvian press engaged actively with the cathedral question, situating it in a lengthy chronology of injustices visited upon the Latvian people by the Baltic Germans. A distinction between events of the distant and recent past is often lacking in these editorials, so that the actions of the medieval German crusaders were compared to those of contemporary Baltic Germans.⁸⁹⁴ The standpoint for many anti-German editorials was informed by a mistrust of Baltic German loyalties to the state based on the events of 1919, in which the *Landeswehr* participated in an attempt to establish a rival government to the provisional government headed by Karlis Ulmanis.⁸⁹⁵ Baltic Germans were

⁸⁹¹ John Hiden, *The Baltic States*, 60-61

⁸⁹² Paul Schiemann, "The Virtue of Nationalism," *Rigasche Rundschau* 4.VII.1931

⁸⁹³ Butulis, 318

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 309

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 316-317

characterized as treacherous, and although more distant historical examples were also employed, the events of the recent past were what made such accusations ring true.⁸⁹⁶

The very fact that matters had gone as far as they had indicated that the loss of the church was merely a matter of time. The Baltic German Bishop Poelchau had been essentially correct in his assessment of the situation:parliamentary leaders in favor of the dispossession had gone too far, in terms of rhetoric and electoral tactics, to be willing to back down now. Poelchau had also predicted in late February that: "...We can assume with certainty that we will play the role of the whipping boy in the propaganda [for the upcoming elections]..."⁸⁹⁷ He had again not been wrong; the center-left Latvian parties portrayed the cathedral question as the culmination of a historical struggle between Baltic Germans and Latvians, casting themselves in the role of champion of the interests of the Latvian people. The language of one such piece is revealing:

"The criminal clique that neither wants to nor can live together with the people of Latvia must be placed outside the law. We demand that the German privileges be abolished, and that all public property that finds itself in German hands, and all German institutions and facilities, be given over to the administration of the state. We call upon all sons of the Latvian people to raise themselves up as one man and smash the black knight."⁸⁹⁸

Several elements of this vitriolic excerpt stand out. The Baltic German Cathedral Congregation is identified as 'criminal' and at the same time, it is acknowledged that it must be dealt with using extra-legal measures. In reality, Baltic German control of the cathedral was more a matter of circumstance than of any legal privileges. The call to arms is overtly nationalistic and antagonistic, directly linking the campaign to gain control of the cathedral to the struggle to establish a Latvian national state, and implying that the struggle was not over yet. Baltic Germans

⁸⁹⁶ Butulis, 310-311

⁸⁹⁷ Letter from Poelchau to Rendtroff, February 25th 1931, quoted in Bensch, *Neuere baltische Kirchenrechtsgeschichte*, 245

⁸⁹⁸ *Jaunākās Ziņas* 6.III.1931

are metonymically represented as the "black knight," a symbolic figure invoking the medieval crusaders and their descendants. The landed barons' economic power had been broken by the agrarian reforms of 1919, but this symbol still resonated powerfully with a generation of Latvian voters accustomed to seeing Baltic German dominance as the main impediment to the ambitions of the Latvian national movement.⁸⁹⁹ Yet this metaphor has little to do with the actual Cathedral Congregation, the majority of whose members were middle-class professionals and small business owners.⁹⁰⁰

The melodrama can be explained easily enough. The centrist parties perceived an opportunity to siphon votes away from the center-right Latvian Farmers' Union. Despite the actual heterogeneity of the Baltic German community in Latvia, Baltic Germans were so prominent in the financial life of the country - as bankers, investors, and entrepreneurs - that Latvian nationalists were convincingly able to cast the entire Baltic German community as a privileged minority which maintained itself by exploiting the Latvian majority. Such a model was in perfect agreement with deep-seated historical stereotypes about the Baltic Germans, though these had referred principally to the rural aristocracy.⁹⁰¹

The success of this strategy caused the Farmers' Union to reassess its policy of rapprochement and cooperation with the Baltic German minority. Facing impending elections, the Latvian Farmers' Union feared the ability of the Democratic Center and Progressive Association to siphon away more nationalistic voters. In light of these considerations, the continued support of the governing coalition seemed dubious at best. Put into the position of having to choose between abandoning the defense of the existing legal rights of the Cathedral Congregation or losing votes

⁸⁹⁹ Schlau, *Die Deutschbalten*, 253

⁹⁰⁰ Burchard, 310

⁹⁰¹ Plakans, *The Latvians*, 124-125

in what promised to be a close election, the ruling Latvian Farmers' Union was increasingly inclined towards the former course of action.

In the event, with 388,981 voters taking part, the referendum failed to achieve its goals.⁹⁰² Since a referendum required that at least half of all eligible voters participate in order to be valid (out of a voting population of circa 1.2 million), the total votes tallied fell well short of the required quorum. Thus the referendum was legally rejected, as announced by the president of the republic on 23 September.⁹⁰³ Skujenieks had already predicted that in the event of its failure, the government would be forced to dispossess the Baltic German congregation of the cathedral due to the pressure placed upon it by the upcoming elections.⁹⁰⁴ The referendum had mobilized enough voters in favor of the dispossession (31.26% of the electorate⁹⁰⁵) to show that any party that positioned itself even tacitly in defense of the rights of the Cathedral Congregation would be almost certain to face significant electoral losses in the future.



Figure 40. View down the nave of St. Mary's...

⁹⁰² Garleff, 150

⁹⁰³ *Rigasche Rundschau* 24.IX.1931

⁹⁰⁴ Garleff, 150

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 41. ...of the altar and apse...



Figure 42. ...and of the pews and decoration.⁹⁰⁶

On 4 September, the National Union Party had already introduced a bill which would turn control of the cathedral over to a council consisting of one representative of the Latvian Bishop, three nominated by the Commander of the Army, and three nominated by the Baltic German and

⁹⁰⁶ Digital Image Collection of the Herder Institute (DSHI 100) – Figures 40-42.

Latvian Cathedral Congregations each. Following the results of the referendum, this proposal became more attractive to the larger parties. It was clear that article 81 of the Latvian Constitution, which allowed the government to pass a law by emergency decree, would be employed to this effect rather than attempting to push the law through the *Saeima*, where its fate would be far from certain. On 28 September the cabinet of ministers voted to move advance the law in accordance with article 81.⁹⁰⁷ On the following day, the cabinet of ministers proclaimed the law with minor changes, permitting the Ministry of War one representative and the Garrison Congregation three. This arrangement left the Cathedral Congregation with three votes against a combined eight Latvian votes, an outcome deemed unacceptable by the Baltic German church and political leadership alike.⁹⁰⁸

The Cathedral Congregation performed its last service on 13 December 1931, and abandoned the church entirely a few weeks later.⁹⁰⁹ The congregations of St. Peter's and St. Gertrude's churches took up the members of the Cathedral Congregation for the duration of the decade. There was occasional talk of constructing a new church for the Cathedral Congregation, but nothing ever came of it. On 10 November 1931, Karlis Irbe convened a special synod in order to declare his resignation as bishop in protest against the interference of the state in the affairs of the Lutheran Church.⁹¹⁰ His successor, Teodors Grīnbergs, was less inclined to accommodate the Baltic German element of the church, and the two ethnic divisions of the church increasingly went their separate ways over the next nine years.⁹¹¹

What is perhaps most striking about the story of the Riga cathedral is how close Baltic

⁹⁰⁷ Garleff, 151

⁹⁰⁸ *Rigasche Rundschau* 30.IX.1931

⁹⁰⁹ Burchard, 350

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹¹ Lore Poelchau, "Die evangelisch-lutherische Kirche in Lettland 1919-1939", in: *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Lettland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-lettischen Verhältnisses* (Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 2000) 160-161

German leaders came to securing their goals. Two separate bills aimed at the dispossession of the cathedral were defeated in the Saeima with the assistance of Latvian moderates, who arrayed themselves against the bill out of a variety of motives. Some Latvians, such as the M.P. Beldavs of the Christian Union (the same party as the Garrison Congregation's pastor Teriņš) based their vote on principle – on the belief that the state had neither right nor cause to interfere in the affairs of the Lutheran Church:

“Any child can understand the law by which the Lutheran church's full autonomy is secured. *Ad materiam*, I can speak neither for nor against the present cathedral church law, since the parliament is not competent to interfere in this manner in the affairs of an autonomous church. I can only protest against the fact that the state involves itself in church affairs.”⁹¹²

Caution is to be exercised when drawing broad conclusions about the differing outcomes of the two cathedral disputes which absorbed the press and political class of Riga during the interwar period. Although the similarities between the two cases are undeniable at a superficial level, the historical role of Lutheranism vs. Orthodoxy in the region, and of the Baltic German vs. the local Russian population, make each case more unique than might be imagined at first glance.

As with many other spheres of activity, religion in the Baltic Provinces - after 1919, the Republics of Latvia and Estonia - had long been dominated by a numerically tiny Baltic German elite.⁹¹³ Russians were likewise dominant in the structures of the Orthodox Church in the region prior to the First World War, but Orthodoxy, though it came to be seen as a mechanism of Russification, was generally not viewed by Latvians as a mechanism of social control and oppression to the same degree that many national activists viewed the local branch of the Lutheran

⁹¹²*Rigasche Rundschau* 24.III.1931

⁹¹³ Feldmanis, 376-377

faith prior to the First World War.⁹¹⁴ The result was a struggle for ecclesiastical control along ethnic lines that was much less embittered in the case of Orthodoxy than in that of Lutheranism, with both faiths managing to forge a functioning multiethnic *modus vivendi* by the early 1920s.

Similarly, although anti-Russian feeling (often co-mingled with anti-Bolshevik sentiment) was by no means uncommon among much of the Latvian population during the interwar period, ethnic Russians simply did not occupy so villainous a role in the popular imaginary of the Latvian people as did the Baltic Germans, to say the least. While Baltic Germans could be metonymized as the “Black Knight”, foe of the epic hero Lačplēsis, Russians had been merely the latest in a series of foreign conquerors. Ethnic Russians maintained a relatively scanty demographic presence in the wider region - much depleted after the evacuation of Riga in 1915 - and Imperial Russian rule brought little change in the daily life of Latvians for nearly two centuries after the capitulation of Livonia in 1710. Even Russification itself, so bitterly resisted by Baltic Germandom, could hardly rouse comparable ire among the Latvian intelligentsia - a change from German to Russian as language of administration and education merely meant a switch between the language of one conqueror and another. In short, Latvian attitudes towards ethnic Russians during the interwar period were largely shaped by pragmatic political goals - ensuring ethnic Latvian control of administrative and bureaucratic structures. While Latvian attitudes towards Baltic Germans were certainly shaped by these same goals in great part, incidents like that of St. Mary's cathedral outlined above make clear the role that deep-seated historical narratives - especially revolving around concepts of justice, grievances, and vengeance operative at the national level - played in shaping the ambitions of Latvian national activists, and, it seems likely enough, in preventing more moderate ethnic Latvians from opposing radical national agendas

⁹¹⁴ Cherney, 98

directed against Baltic Germandom more strenuously.

The political dimensions of the two cathedral crises are asymmetrical as well, due in part to the state of political flux in which the first crisis took place, with only the Constitutional Assembly - gripped by many more pressing issues at the time - serving as the sole legislative body at the national level. The second crisis, that of St. Mary's cathedral, unfolded at what amounts to the functional peak of Latvian democracy, and was deeply shaped in its turns and final result by party-political considerations in ways which scarcely affected the earlier crisis at all. As far as the “cathedral question” is concerned, the political effectiveness of the Baltic German fraction in the Saeima was simultaneously a strength and a weakness to their ethnic group. Though there were only six Baltic German deputies out of a total of one hundred members of parliament, the extreme fragmentation of the *Saeima* meant that this was not a negligible amount of votes – the ruling Farmers’ Union had returned only sixteen deputies in the last elections by comparison. Additionally, in this as in most other issues, the Baltic German fraction was able to count on the support of the other minority parties, with the entire Minority Bloc having eighteen votes between them – more than Ulmanis’ party could muster on its own.⁹¹⁵ At the same time, the impression that a group of six was able to steer the decisions of a body of a hundred only played into long-standing and deeply resented stereotypes about the unjust rule of a tiny Baltic German elite, likely further hurting the image of Baltic Germandom in the eyes of many ordinary Latvians. None of these considerations had come into play regarding the dispute over control of the Cathedral of the Nativity, given the lack of any role played by parliamentary politics in shaping that conflict, and perhaps the outcome in that case - one where the religious body in question was able to forge a workable compromise predicated on shared use - was able to succeed precisely because higher

⁹¹⁵ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 18

powers declined to assert themselves in the matter.

In spite of all the considerations outlined above grounded in historical circumstances stretching back decades if not centuries, the role of the immediate political and cultural conjuncture cannot be underestimated. Just as the Orthodox Church of Latvia was blessed by circumstances in which no *Saeima* yet existed to intervene in its affairs, so the Lutheran Church of Latvia was cursed by a political climate in which populist sentiment was waxing rapidly. Large political gains presented themselves to any parties (pun intended) seeking to channel popular frustrations with the dismal (and still worsening) economic conditions towards the ethnic Other - with Baltic Germans serving as the ethnic Other *par excellence* in the local context. Latvian and Baltic German Lutherans had found a compromise regarding the use and ownership of St. Mary's Cathedral strikingly similar to the one reached between Riga's Latvian and Russian Orthodox faithful, yet this accord was doomed in the face of a national activism which was marching hand-in-hand with populist sentiment. That the champion of the dispossession, Mārgers Skujenieks, and his party were of the center-left underscores the point. In 1921, state-sponsored national activism and popular ethnic chauvinism were still tempered by a civil society that placed great value on common bonds other than the national.

Schiemann's views, ringing with an idealism that seems tragically misguided in hindsight, were still plausible in the years before the global economic crisis hit Latvia. Events such as the resolution of the conflict over the Cathedral of the Nativity and the united front presented by Latvian and Baltic German Lutherans regarding the state's dispossession of St. James' Church provide concrete evidence for the viability of these concepts, a viability which was eradicated by the crippling effects of the economic crisis arriving in 1930. Hindsight is of course 20/20, and it is all too easy to intellectually resign oneself to the interethnic conflicts of the 1930s as a historical

inevitability, given the animosities and acrimony of the decades and even centuries before them. Yet such a teleology, or too determined a fixation on it, at least, is profoundly mistaken. As this dissertation has tried to show, interwar Riga yielded ample evidence of contrary trends and inclinations, of the various ways in which a society undergoing ethnic reversal had begun to forge a viable *modus vivendi*, despite economic tumult, administrative upheaval, and general political instability. Led - sometimes driven - forward into a progressive vision of the future by the tenacity of Paul Schiemann, by the end of the 1920s, Latvia's Baltic Germans had clearly reached a turning point in their attitude towards the Latvian state, embracing it as both the political structure encompassing their beloved *Heimat*, and as the guarantor of their rights and liberties, which were not inappreciable in a pan-European or even global context. Likewise, the country's ethnic Russian population, and especially the bitterly anti-Bolshevik emigre society of Riga, seems to have been genuinely grateful to have found their new home, and to have been free to live there in peace with the same rights enjoyed by citizens of advanced Western democracies like Britain, France, or the United States. Likewise, though anti-Semitism was undoubtedly widespread, the country's Jewish population enjoyed official recognition as an ethnic and linguistic group, fully entitled to the same rights as the other ethnic minorities, and unhindered in their practice.

All of this progress was cut tragically short by the rising tide of nationalist populism which swept through the Latvian majority in the early 1930s, following in the wake of the economic pain inflicted by the global economic crisis. The long multiethnic history of Riga meant that the consequences of that sentiment would make themselves felt most prominently in terms of urban space, since so many spaces were deeply imbued with a sense of the ethnic history of the entire region - invariably distorted, often wildly inaccurate, but nonetheless very much active in the minds of the general public of all ethnicities. The dispossessions outlined in this chapter, coming

about during the era of democratic rule, foreshadowed a wave of property seizures to come following the coup d'état of 1934, as we shall see in the final chapter of this work. Yet precisely because the dispossession of St. Mary's occurred during the parliamentary period, the struggle for control of it represented the climax, rather than the rising action, of this narrative of dispossession. Later dispossessions were met with protest, but in an authoritarian state, the kind of protracted struggle outlined in the chapter above is impossible. Because of the duration and complexity of the political struggle over St. Mary's Cathedral, conducted within constitutional, democratic means, that incident more than any other exposes the full gamut of possibilities, potentialities, and pitfalls for interethnic coexistence in Latvia. By the time of the dispossessions under the Ulmanis regime, the fundamental political realities confronting Riga's Baltic German community had altered profoundly.

7.0 Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage: The Theaters and Guilds

“Riga had the advantage of a variegated and highly cosmopolitan cultural life...Riga was in many respects a minor edition of Petersburg. The old Petersburg was of course now dead... But Riga was still alive. It was one of those cases where the copy had survived the original. To live in Riga was thus in many respects to live in Tsarist Russia - it was, in fact, almost the only place where one could still live in Tsarist Russia.”⁹¹⁶

George Frost Kennan’s observations on cultural life in interwar Riga capture its spirit in the moderate prosperity of the 1920s without indicating the transformations of the interwar era. As Kennan's comments indicate, the city had boasted a lively associational life among all the major ethnic groups prior to 1914, with considerable efforts devoted to the performing arts, drama and to the theater in particular. That life continued after the upheavals of the years 1914-1919, even as it changed form and order radically. This chapter traces the development of multi-ethnic cultural life in interwar Riga through its most prestigious spaces of practice, relatively densely clustered in the city center. In doing so it charts the histories of cultural institutions, and of their relations with one another. The interwar period was a time in which older traditions of cultural coexistence, evolved over the decades of the long 19th century, came into conflict with the prerogatives of national activism even as their influence on the city's cultural life continued to be felt.

The upheavals of 1914-1919 and the establishment of an independent Latvia altered cultural life in Riga enormously, flipping the old ethnic cultural hierarchy on its head. Latvian culture, something of the plucky upstart in its strivings with German and Russian fine art, was now the culture of the titular majority and clearly in the dominant position. As the tumult of the First World War and the Latvian War of Independence subsided, questions arose about the new the relationship of the city's cultural spaces to the new ethnic hierarchy - above all, its theaters and

⁹¹⁶ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967) 29-30

concert halls. Spaces for cultural events occupied an especially coveted place in city's spatio-symbolic hierarchy. The process of ethnic reversal manifested itself in urban cultural space, through institutions inhabiting, managing, and sometimes sharing those spaces. Ethnic groups invested cultural spaces with deep meaning, and claiming ownership of them was an important element in the state's "performance" of ethnic reversal in the public sphere after 1918. The built environment's close identification with prior eras often makes it too symbolically potent to be ignored in political life; ethnic battles were fought in interwar Riga not *in* the city's spaces, but *over* them, in the press and in the courts. At the same time, the city's major ethnic groups vied with one another in more or less friendly artistic competition on the stage, sometimes even borrowing (or poaching) artists and workers from one another.⁹¹⁷ The transformations in Riga's cultural spaces from 1919 speak both to the bright potential for continuing on more pluralistic traditions inherited from the prior era, and of the desire of interwar national activists to establish control of the reins and venues of cultural production.

Not only Riga's theaters were bones of contention between the Latvian majority and the ethnic minorities. The spacious halls of the two guilds, located in the heart of Riga's old town, were in the second tier of cultural spaces in the interwar city, both hosting a wide array of cultural events, and far from only German ones.⁹¹⁸ These spaces too would become a symbolic battlefield in the bitter legal struggle over their seizure by the government in 1936. The process of redefining the relative relationships between the various ethnic groups in Riga and the city's most prominent cultural spaces unfolded in distinct phases, bookended by conflicts over spaces. These conflicts

⁹¹⁷ Georg Casperson, ed., *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel in Riga 1924-1934* (W.F. Häcker, Riga, 1934), 16; "Theater and Art," *Сегодня* 14.XII.1923

⁹¹⁸ Prior to 1914, however, the space seems to have been devoted more or less exclusively to ethnic German purposes. Cf. *Die Gilden zu Riga* (Sonderdruck der Rigaschen Rundschau, Riga: R. Ruetz & Co., 1936) 12-18.

represent turning points in the course of interethnic relations, when missed opportunities and crucial failures are most evident.

Like many aspects of interethnic coexistence in interwar Riga, theater and cultural life as it existed across and between ethnic groups has largely gone unexamined by historians. Narrow national historiography has once again tended to be the order of the day, especially regarding Latvian-language cultural life.⁹¹⁹ Russophone historians have done rather better in stressing the influence that Russian interwar writers and artists had on their Latvian contemporaries, but again, there are no major works that take a multi-ethnic perspective as their starting point.⁹²⁰ Baltic German theater life in this period, in contrast, has gone almost wholly unexamined at all, though the work of John Hiden has provided this analysis with a foundation from which to build in its examination of the role of Weimar-era governments in Berlin in fostering ethnic German cultural institutions in the Baltic region during the interwar period.⁹²¹ Recent German-language scholarship on the theater and cultural life of other ethnic German minority groups in East Central Europe serves partially as a model for this chapter, particularly regarding its transnational dimensions.⁹²² Nonetheless, a historiographic tendency towards ethnic particularism, along with

⁹¹⁹ Latvian-language scholarship on (Latvian) theater life and culture during the interwar period is fairly robust, but only just beginning to take a multi-ethnic turn, its development along these lines delayed by decades of Soviet academic control and censorship. Note the late date of publication of general works such as Ilze Konstante, ed., *Latvijas Kultura 1920-1940* (Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas Muzeju Apvienība, 1990), and recently, more focused works, such as Lipša, Ineta, *Seksualitāte un sociālā kontrole Latvijā, 1914-1939* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2014). Scholarship on ethnic Latvian theater life has not suffered from such a temporal delay, with works such as Kārlis Kundziņš, *Latviešu teātra vēsture 1. Daļa* (Rīga: Liesma, 1968), with lengthy sections on the interwar period, appearing relatively soon after the close of the era, but a comprehensive treatment of multiethnic theater life in interwar Riga is still lacking.

⁹²⁰ The revival of the interwar series *Russians in Latvia* (I.I. Ivanov, *Russkie v Latvii*, Vypusk II (Centr gumanitarnyh issledovanij i prosveshhenija “vedi” 1997) figures into this trend, as do works such as Il’ja Dimenshtejn, *Russkaja Riga (Russian Riga)* (Rīga: Holda, 2013).

⁹²¹ Cf. John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and *Defender of Minorities: Paul Schiemann 1876-1944* (London: Hurst, 2004); Cf. also Karl-Heinz Grundmann, *Deutschumpolitik zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik: eine Studie am Beispiel der deutsch-baltischen Minderheit in Estland und Lettland* (Hannover-Döhren: Harro von Hirschheydt, 1977) 621-645 for information on the interwar German theater in Riga.

⁹²² Cf. Katharina Wessely, *Theater der Identität: Das Brünner deutscher Theater der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011); for more work on the role of opera in constructing national identities in the 19th and early 20th centuries, cf. Philip Ther, *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation-building in 19th century Central Europe* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2014), especially chapters six, eight, ten, and eleven; Ther’s study focuses on Dresden and Prague, but many of his

the imperfect congruence of multi-ethnicity in Riga and in cities like Prague or Brno, make this study a novel contribution to the regional historiography, and one which speaks clearly to the ethno-political realities of Latvia today.⁹²³

This chapter investigates the transformation of cultural life in interwar Riga through its theaters and cultural spaces, examining the Latvian, Russian, and Baltic German theater organizations active during the period, their relationships to one another and to some of the city's most prized spaces. It begins by describing theater life in multiethnic Riga in the era before independence, then traces the establishment and evolution of the three main ethnic theater milieus before concluding with the Baltic German population's loss of its guild halls, highly prized and historic spaces used for a wide array of cultural events. In doing so, it follows the trajectory of the transformation of theater life in interwar Riga, in which the role of civil society steadily waned as the priorities of national activists and the policy goals of state actors increasingly came to the fore.

What historians today typically refer to as ‘civil society’ –a community of citizens linked by collective interest and common activity– has constituted one of the main avenues of research for scholars of multi-ethnic Riga in recent decades. Both of the major recent contributions to the multi-ethnic historiography of 19th-century Riga (Ulrike von Hirschhausen’s *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit* and the edited volume *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreichs*) have engaged extensively with just the kinds of associations, clubs, and societies that help to define the parameters of what can often seem an amorphous entity. For the authors writing in Oberländer and Wohlfahrt’s edited volume, civil society functions as an implicit condition, with

conclusions regarding the emergent Czech opera can be applied to Latvian nation-building efforts as well, though the theater rather than the opera was the favored medium in the latter case.

⁹²³ Although urban multi-ethnicity was common in interwar East Central Europe, cities with four major ethnic groups, as inhabited Riga (Latvians, Jews, Russians, and Baltic Germans) were a rarity, as were cities in which the largest ethnic group was in the majority by so narrow a margin - Riga was just barely more than 50% Latvian at the onset of the interwar period.

civil society organizations themselves receiving explicit description and analysis, especially in so far as they were used as agents of agitation by national activists.⁹²⁴ For Hirschhausen, civil society (*Zivilgesellschaft*) functions more explicitly as an object of an analysis, as her study is concerned with charting the fragmentation of what had, at the turn of the 19th century, been a relatively unified, German-speaking civil society in Riga into (at least) four distinctive ethnic milieus, operating in parallel to one another.⁹²⁵

While the role of the arts in formulating these milieus has attracted limited attention in the past, works explicitly devoted to the multiethnic world of theater in Riga – either in the 19th century or in the first half of the 20th – have been lacking, despite the unique potentials of such a medium to both define the boundaries separating ethnic groups, and to facilitate connections between them. This chapter moves through three distinct chronological phases – the cosmopolitan era, the era of national theater, and the era of the *nationalized* theater – to chart the role of the theater and performing arts in shaping interethnic relations in Riga between the world wars.

7.1 Imperial Cosmopolitanism, National Culture, and Urban Space

In the waning decades of the long nineteenth century, Riga's prosperity and status as a busy port brought a blossoming of the fine arts. Latvian had increasingly begun to emerge in this period as a literary and “cultural” language in its own right, taking a place alongside the city’s German- and Russian-language literary and artistic scenes in producing local works of prose, poetry, drama, sculpture, painting, and architecture.⁹²⁶ There was a sizeable theater-going public, and the city boasted several professional theater companies: German, Russian, and Latvian, yet only two city

⁹²⁴ Kristina Wohlfahrt deals with the emergence of a Latvian theater in Riga in the second half of the 19th century, but only in passing, as it were; her main focus is the Riga Latvian Association which sponsored it.

⁹²⁵ Hirschhausen, 19-24

⁹²⁶ Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians*, 95-104

theater buildings.⁹²⁷ These three ethnic theaters vied for cultural prestige in setting that was both transnational and multiethnic, characterized by both national passions and tolerance or respect for the ethnic Other. State involvement in theater life was minimal, playing a major role in the existence only in the Russian case, but transnational and interethnic social networks and intellectual connections were among the most important forces shaping artistic life in fin-de-siecle Riga. The tension between national feeling and cosmopolitanism in cultural life found some resolution in a civic pride that transcended ethnicity. Nonetheless, the presence of grand German and Russian theaters in the city center, and the absence of a Latvian one, symbolically mirrored the hegemonic positioning of the three groups.⁹²⁸

All three of Riga's major theater companies bore the stamp of this age, in which liberalism and capitalism flourished hand in hand. By the eve of the First World War, the city's main German and Latvian theaters were financed and run by wealthy and influential civil society organizations. The city's German theater was sponsored and run by the Great Guild, a corporative holdover from the city's Hanseatic past now transformed into a wealthy social club for the city's Baltic German elite.

Riga's principal Russian theater was supported both by St. Petersburg and the Ministry of National Education headquartered there, and by a society of wealthy local sponsors.⁹²⁹ The

⁹²⁷ There were a number of less prominent Latvian theater companies, but that maintained by the Riga Latvian Association was the most prestigious, staging productions at an expense and scale comparable to those of the city's German and Russian theaters; as the 19th century wore to a close, the Latvian-language New Theater of Riga (Rīgas Jaunais Teatris) came to vie with the theater sponsored by the Riga Latvian Association - in great part by staging avant-garde works by Rainis, Aspazija, and other Latvian national activist playwrights - but never quite eclipsed the older Latvian theater in audience or funding. Cf. Arturs Berziņš, *Latviešu teātra attīstības gaitas* (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1932) 23-27.

⁹²⁸ The absence of a local Jewish (Yiddish) theater able to compete in prestige with any of the three above is likewise indicative of the social hierarchy of the day, contributed to greatly by the inferior status in which Yiddish was held by the social elite of Riga, including its Jewish upper class. From the mid-19th century through the 1930s, the German-speaking Jewish elite of Riga largely considered themselves culturally German, especially prior to 1933, and a similar situation pertained among the (much smaller) population of affluent Russian-aculturated Jews in Riga. There were Jewish theater troupes performing in Yiddish in the late 19th century, but only in very small venues, with very limited budgets. Cf. Max Michelson, *City of Life, City of Death: Memories of Riga*, 11-12, 49, 71.

⁹²⁹ Tatjana Fejgmane, *Russkie v dovoennoj Latvii* (Riga: Baltic Russian Institute, 2000), 173

maintenance of a high-quality Russian theater company in Riga was part of the tsar's cultural policy in the Baltic Provinces, a policy in line with wider attempts to promote Russification in the Imperial Baltic Provinces.⁹³⁰ The German theater enjoyed the use of the first city theater of Riga, an imposing neo-classical building near the center of the city. The second city theater, scarcely less grand a structure than the first, was occupied by the city's Russian theater. Both Riga's first (unofficially: German) and second (unofficially: Russian) city theaters were large, architecturally sophisticated constructions, with spacious and opulent interiors befitting a city of Riga's size and wealth.⁹³¹

Latvian theater in Riga was confined to privately owned theater halls, although a third, Latvian city theater had been planned since 1908, but never constructed.⁹³² Both the German and Russian theaters in Riga were able to maintain high artistic standards through the importation of actors and theater workers from the wider German and Russian-speaking worlds.⁹³³ Whereas both of the aforementioned ethnic groups tended to draw upon the established and emerging repertoires of their co-ethnicists elsewhere on the European continent, Latvian writers of the period were forced to create a canon, aesthetic standards, and an independent theater tradition.⁹³⁴ Though dependent on a smaller population, the Latvians would seem to have benefitted from drawing the

⁹³⁰ Berziņš, *Latviešu teātra attīstības gaitas*, 42; Russification efforts in the Baltic during the late 19th century were extensive, reshaping administration and public education, but ultimately had little of the hoped-for impact on the general population, segments of which learned Russian as needed for employment or other practical reasons without “Russifying” in any meaningful sense. For more information, cf. Edward C. Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland 1855-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) and Karsten Brüggemann, “Als Land und Leute ‘russisch’ werden sollten. Zum Verständnis des Phänomens der ‘Russifizierung’ am Beispiel der Ostseeprovinzen des Zarenreichs”, in Zaur Gasimov, ed., *Kampf um Wort und Schrift. Russifizierung in Osteuropa im 19.– 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012) 27-49; Brüggemann draws a sharp distinction between the polemical and fraught use of the term “Russification” (German: Russifizierung) in post 1945-contexts (including in the Baltic) with the administrative and elite-oriented Russification policies of the Imperial Russian government in the late 19th century.

⁹³¹ Andris Caune, *Rīgas vēcpilsēta pirms 100 gadiem* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1994)

⁹³² Jürgen von Hehn, *Riga: Bollwerk des Abendlandes am baltischen Meer* (Kitzingen am Main: Holzner Verlag 1959), 22

⁹³³ Wagner lived and worked in Riga for a time in the 1840s, for example, and Riga seems to have been simply another node in the German-language theater world of the entire Baltic Sea region during the 19th century. Cf. Ādolfs Allunans, *Atmiņas par latviešu teātra izcelšanos* (Rīga: Tulkotāja izdevums, 1924), 9

⁹³⁴ This term is drawn from the work of Rogers Brubaker (“external national homeland”); cf. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), throughout.

best minds that speakers of their language could produce. Of the works for the stage first performed in Riga which date from this late imperial period, it is certainly the Latvian which have best survived into the present day. Latvian artists and writers also traveled and worked widely across the empire of the tsars, gaining both experience and inspiration from a Russia that was in many ways in the full flower of its cultural heyday.⁹³⁵ Latvian contemporaries involved in the building up of Latvian theater life in late 19th and early 20th-century Riga saw themselves as in direct conversation and competition with Baltic German and Russian culture, in a struggle to “prove” the worthiness, sophistication, beauty, etc. of the Latvian language vis-a-vis the two hegemonic cultural heavyweights of the region.

Though clearly each ethnic group tended to frequent its own theater most often, this was not necessarily to the exclusion of the others. The German and Russian theaters in particular enjoyed a prestige in the late 19th-century which to some extent drew their audiences to each other. Fluency in Russian had become common among Baltic Germans during the latter half of the 19th century, when economic success became increasingly tied up in one's ability to earn a living via the state language.⁹³⁶ No segment of Baltic German society was as affected by this as the urban bourgeoisie.⁹³⁷ Local Russians were somewhat less likely to speak German, but German culture and science were widely esteemed in late Imperial Russia, and the language enjoyed a preëminent status as a *lingua franca* across East Central Europe, meaning that some cross-cultural interaction in this direction would also have occurred. Middle or upper class Latvians in Riga tended to speak either Russian, German, or both.⁹³⁸ The Latvian social elite of late 19th-century Riga were largely

⁹³⁵ This was an era that witnessed the genius of Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and the Ballet Russes, and the early efforts of Shostakovich and Prokofiev in music, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy in literature, etc.

⁹³⁶ Anders Henriksson, *The Tsar's Loyal Germans* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983), 57

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁸ It should be noted that fluency in Latvian was uncommon among Baltic Germans and virtually non-existent among the Russian middle classes or elite.

educated in German and typically used it as their primary literary language; even Latvian national activists of this era tended to consume literature in German, however much they might orient their production of texts towards the further development of Latvian as a literary language.⁹³⁹ Yet national passions were very much active in the politics and public life of the city as well. Ethnicized understandings of history - and hence of the present - shaped intellectual life for all three groups mentioned above, and played an especially important role in the development of the Latvian stage. Probably the most celebrated work of Latvian drama, *Fire and Night* (1905), is in the vein of a medieval epic pitting a medieval Latvian folk hero against a German “Black Knight”, and serves as a pointed ethnic allegory.⁹⁴⁰

The intellectual climate in Riga in the era leading up to the First World War, the most prosperous the city had ever known, was characterized by the entangled coexistence of ethnic chauvinism and tolerance, national activism and national indifference, sometimes within one and the same individual. Among the city’s social elite able to appreciate and support the fine arts, ethnic animosity tended to be outweighed by an appreciation for the cultural products of the ethnic Other. Reporting in the various local papers on the theater life of other ethnic groups occurred regularly, especially for musical or operatic performances.⁹⁴¹ Although the stage was unquestionably an arena for interethnic competition, a manifestation and a performance of ethnic prestige, it was also part of a shared intellectual life that encompassed and transcended the

⁹³⁹ Kristine Wohlfart, “Das Riga der Letten” in E. Oberländer, K. Wohlfahrt, eds., *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreichs 1857-1914* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 40, 64, 67

⁹⁴⁰ Alfreds Straumanis, Jānis Rainis, *Fire and Night: Five Baltic Plays* (Waveland Press, 1986) 3-5; such ethnic historical allegories were not unique to Latvia. Cf. Henryk Sienkiewicz, *The Knights of the Cross* (Krakow: Wł. Anczyc & Co., 1900) which uses the Teutonic Order as an allegorical stand-in for what Sienkiewicz considered the repressive and anti-Polish policies of Prussia – a state which was arguably the direct political heir of the medieval Teutonic Order. <https://culture.pl/en/artist/henryk-sienkiewicz> (website of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute).

⁹⁴¹ See “Theater and Art,” *Сегодня* 30.X.1925; “Close of the Season in the Latvian National Theater,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 2.VI.1928; and “Art,” *Rīgas Ziņas* 9.I.1925 for representative examples, of which there are hundreds for the interwar period. Latvian-language press reports on German and Russian performances was somewhat less frequent and extensive than vice-versa, but quite common nonetheless.

individual ethnic groups active in the fine arts in pre-1914 Riga. This was a rules-based order, one managed by highly-educated, cosmopolitan intellectuals with a friendly respect for one another's work, regardless of ethnic boundary lines. Although Latvian culture functioned as something of the upstart or junior partner, lacking the long-established traditions or historical contributions to world literature, music, and art enjoyed by its Russian and German counterparts, interwar critics writing in the German-language *Rigasche Rundschau* and Russian-language *Segodnya* were careful to acknowledge the cultural achievements of Latvians from the late-19th century onward, often praising the work of Latvian playwrights, composers, sculptors and painters. At least some of this sentiment seems to have been genuine, although the political motivations for such rhetoric were obvious in a state politically dominated by ethnic Latvians. In this world of cultural appreciation, national sentiments and national pride were at play, but largely at the behest of individuals and organizations, not governments and states. The empowering of national activists - their assumption of the reins of state, in Latvia and abroad - would strain and ultimately undo this older order during the interwar period.

7.2 Trading Spaces: Ethnic Reversal and the Afterlife of Empire

“And it was merely a burning symbol of the new changes, when at the beginning of Bolshevik rule, on the 2nd of January, 1919, the German city theater burned, clearly visible from afar.”⁹⁴²

Between 1914 and 1919, ethnic control over the city's theater spaces fluctuated with the vagaries of the war. Riga's Baltic Germans lost the use of the first city theater to a Russian theater troupe in 1915, only to regain it with the arrival of the Imperial German army in the city in September 1917.⁹⁴³ The German army restored the first city theater to the Great Guild and gave

⁹⁴² *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel 1924-1934*, 11

⁹⁴³ Hatlie, *Riga at War*, 248

the second city theater over to the use of the Riga Latvian Society in spring 1918, on comparable terms, albeit under censorship.⁹⁴⁴ However, the Bolshevnik seizure of Riga in early January 1919 led to the effective ouster of the Great Guild and Latvian Society alike as many of their members fled the city.⁹⁴⁵ The first city theater was set ablaze by parties unknown in the night of the 2nd to the 3rd of January, suffering damage that it would take several years to repair.⁹⁴⁶ With the defeat of the Baltic German *Landeswehr* near Cēsis/Wenden in late June 1919, both spaces came under the control of the Latvian national army as it occupied Riga that summer.⁹⁴⁷ The quartermaster section of the staff of the First Courland Division of the Latvian National Army had moved into the theaters with the arrival of the provisional government in Riga in July 1919, and it remained there during the Battle of Riga in early November 1919.⁹⁴⁸ These frequent changes in ownership and ethnic valence primed the scene for the more enduring changes in the interwar period.

As civic life in Riga returned to normal, the old institutions of city government were revived along much the same lines as before the First World War, though with a vastly expanded franchise in accord with the liberal democratic national one.⁹⁴⁹ Demographically, ethnic Latvians constituted around 75% of the population of the country in 1919, but in Riga they maintained a slender majority at around 55%.⁹⁵⁰ Baltic Germans were 16%, Russians 7%, and Jews 14% of the city population in 1920, with all three populations swelled by the ranks of co-ethnic refugees and emigrants from across East Central Europe and beyond.⁹⁵¹ Despite an analogous return of ethnic

⁹⁴⁴ Hatlie, 250; censors attended non-German performances to report on any hostility or insult to the *Reich*.

⁹⁴⁵ Hatlie, 260 (regarding the flight of the German and Latvian bourgeoisie)

⁹⁴⁶ Hatlie, 196 regarding the fire; LVVA 3255-1-200-23, 26, 3, and LVVA 2927-4-716-1 regarding the repair of fire-damaged portions of the building, estimated at a costly 1.5 million Latvian rubles in 1921.

⁹⁴⁷ LVVA 2927-4-984-8, 12

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The army seems to have prolonged its occupation of the theater premises for the purposes of securing a seat at the bargaining table regarding the ultimate fate of the theaters.

⁹⁴⁹ Ilona Celmiņa, *Rīgas pārvalde astoņos gadsimtos* (Rīga: SIA Rīgas nami, 2000), 176

⁹⁵⁰ T. Līventāls and W. Sadowsky, eds., *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta* (Rīga, Rīgas Pilsētas Valdes Izdevums, 1932), 178

⁹⁵¹ *Rīga kā Latvijas galvas pilsēta*, 178

Latvians abroad, ethnic minorities nonetheless constituted around a third of the city's population through the interwar period.⁹⁵² Under Baltic German political leadership, the ethnic minority bloc was an influential faction in the city parliament and was almost uninterruptedly a key participant in the Latvian-led "bourgeois" (anti-socialist) governments of the democratic period ending in 1934. Even during the interim period between the end of the fighting in Riga and the first city elections, the city's ethnic minorities had found demographically generous representation on the un-elected, makeshift city parliament that had functioned in the meantime.⁹⁵³

All of this meant that the city government, rightful owner of the buildings, had to take the interest of the ethnic minorities into account in negotiations over the fate of the city's most prestigious cultural spaces - the two city theaters. Furthermore, the interwar city government was the successor of the pre-war city government not just in the shape of its institutions, but also in a strictly legal sense. This meant that its claims to ownership of virtually all city property rested on the legitimacy of the former city government, in which Latvians had figured largely as a sort of loyal opposition to Baltic German-Russian coalition governments in the decades before the war.⁹⁵⁴ The obvious veracity of the city government's claims on this basis of continuity was of limited avail, however, given its abject weakness vis-a-vis the new national bodies now making themselves at home in Riga. The army's ongoing and unnecessary occupation of both theater buildings was a clear - and undoubtedly an intentional - signal to the ethnic minorities in the city of the new ethno-political order of the day.

⁹⁵² Ibid.

⁹⁵³ Adam Brode, "Ethnicity, Class, and Local Patriotism: Change and Continuity in Riga City Government before and after the First World War" in *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2016 nr. 4 (101), 73-74

⁹⁵⁴ Dzīdra Ozoliņa, *Rīgas Pilsētas tēvi un viņa komunālpolitika* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1976), 99-103



Figure 43. The First (German) City Theater, early 20th century – later the Latvian National Opera; note the text in German above the portico.

That order was to be a mostly Latvian one as far as urban space is concerned. The four-party negotiations between the city government, direct representatives of the city's ethnic minorities (Baltic Germans, Jews, and Russians), the ministry of education and the army were protracted for years, with the newly established National Theater and Opera using the spaces while talks continued.⁹⁵⁵ The demands of the army ultimately proved quite minimal, merely the use of a certain number of boxes a certain number of times a month. The demands of the ministry of education, which became the new renter of the spaces from their owner, the city government, were more complicated to navigate. The city government had sought initially to preserve the second city theater for the use of the city's ethnic minorities, but had been forced to give up hope of this in the face the obstinacy of the ministry of education and army.⁹⁵⁶ Ultimately, the ministry of education

⁹⁵⁵ LVVA 3255-1-200-57, 81

⁹⁵⁶ LVVA 2927-4-984-16

refused to provide any explicit provision for the city's ethnic minorities at all, instead granting the city government the use of the theaters four days a month, to dispense with as it pleased, in a contract signed on January 5, 1923.⁹⁵⁷ The first city theater was to become home to the Latvian National Opera, the second to the Latvian National Theater.⁹⁵⁸

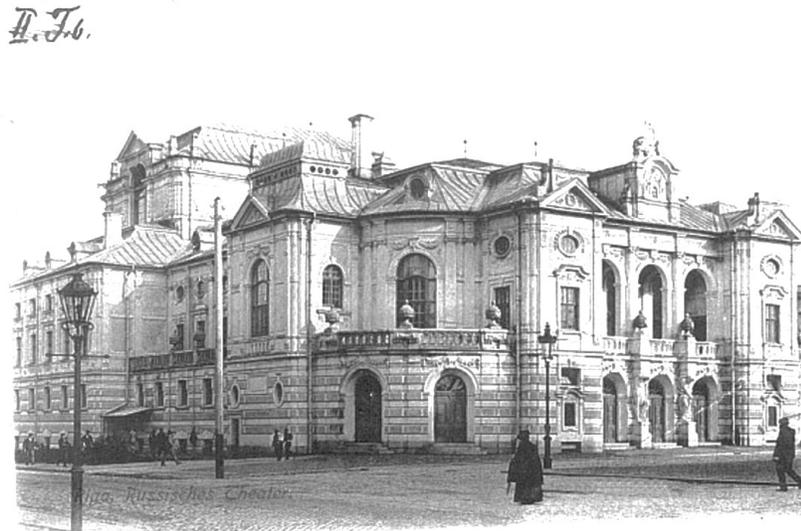


Figure 44. The Second (Russian) City Theater, early 20th century – later the Latvian National Theater.

This decision was a considerable blow for the city's ethnic minorities. The city government, for its part, undertook considerable responsibilities in the support of the minority theaters during the interwar years (intermittently assisted by the national government as well) but was unable to provide regular space for any of the city's ethnic minority theaters. The negotiations over the city theaters in the early 1920s unfolded within democratic structures and taken place within the confines of civil debate, but the bargaining positions were grossly asymmetrical, with the city government relatively fortunate to come away with continued ownership of the properties.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁷ LVVA 2927-4-984-156

⁹⁵⁸ LVVA 2927-4-984-147, 151, 154

⁹⁵⁹ The city ultimately yielded on virtually all points regarding provisions for the theater life of the ethnic minorities, initially having pressed for the national government to provide one of the two city theaters for their use, to provide funding, and - after it became clear that neither former city theater would be given over to them - for it to provide alternative space, none of which the national government was willing to agree to, though modest subsidies were provided starting in 1921. Cf. LVVA 2927-4-984-147, 151, 154 and LVVA 2927-4-984-62, 66, 69 for the sticking points of the negotiations.

Although the Latvian-led city government ultimately yielded the point to its counterpart at the national level, the fact that it had fought for the second city theater to be given over to the ethnic minorities is significant, indicating the different attitudes towards interethnic relations in Riga versus across the country at large. Similarly, the manner in which Riga's first city theater lost the German-language inscription featured in photo A in 1920 encapsulates the gulf between the multi-ethnic city government and the almost exclusively Latvian national army. The German-language text, which translates roughly as "from the city to the performing arts" had been a feature of the facade since 1863, and as peacetime conditions settled in upon Riga, it increasingly began to attract the ire of Latvian national activists. Matters came to a head during the autumn of 1920, when the general staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Latvian Army wrote collectively to the city government complaining of the presence of the text. The general staff - comprised of high-ranking officers - claimed that the inscription irritated Latvians and created the wrong impression among foreign visitors:

"Condemning our city government's unusual apathy in this question, we find that the directorship of the national opera has also remained too inert, not even considering the multiple protests in newspapers, and with its inertia, it is harming the prestige of the Latvian state and the honor of our people."⁹⁶⁰

The letter-writers went on to demand in a threatening tone that the German text be removed by November 18th, 1920, the second anniversary of the proclamation of Latvian independence. While such demands are less than surprising, the stance of the city government to them betrays a very different attitude, and not only among its non-Latvian members. Responding to this letter, the city government's multi-ethnic executive board discussed the matter of the inscription on

⁹⁶⁰ LVVA 2927-4-984-55

November 3rd, 1920.⁹⁶¹ The Latvian mayor Frīdenbergs noted that “a great number of people, of the most various circles, have connected themselves to the demand to remove the text.”⁹⁶² Frīdenbergs himself proposed to remove the German text and leave the space blank for the time being; another Latvian board member suggested replacing the inscription with an analogous text in Latin, and a third spoke in favor of removing the text, because “wide Latvian masses saw an insult to themselves in it.”⁹⁶³ All three are responses that conform well with our expectations for an abrupt ethnic reversal.

Yet there were other viewpoints on the executive board as well. Latvian member Jānis Aberbergs opined that the removal of the text would constitute unnecessary chauvinism; the German inscription belonged to the building style and was to be left as something of purely historical significance. Georg Ullmann, a Baltic German, mildly pointed out that even during the World War, when all public display of German had been banned, the text had been left alone, as the Russian government had considered it only of historic significance. After debate, the executive board voted six votes to four to leave the text as it was.⁹⁶⁴ This would prove a blunder.

On the night of November 16th, 1920, just two days prior to the second anniversary of the Republic of Latvia, the text above the first city theater was removed by persons unknown.⁹⁶⁵ The city police lacked any concrete information as to the perpetrators, but the responsible parties had scarcely deigned to mask their hand. An officer of the general staff, Upelnieks, had requisitioned a ladder from the city fire brigade, dispatching a handful of soldiers to tend to the business in the dark of night.⁹⁶⁶ The city government, essentially powerless in the face of its national counterpart,

⁹⁶¹ Ibid.

⁹⁶² Ibid.

⁹⁶³ LVVA 2927-4-984-56

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁵ LVVA 2927-4-984-62

⁹⁶⁶ LVVA 3255-1-200-31

was out-manuevered and essentially left with egg on its face regarding the whole incident.⁹⁶⁷ Once more, a moderate, ethnically tolerant city government had been overpowered by far more powerful, far more nationalistic state institutions. Even this last vestige of Baltic German cultural preeminence in Riga was not to be left as a reminder of the previous era; its removal signalled the transition to an era in which Latvians, and Latvians alone, would lay claim to Riga's most coveted cultural spaces. The nature of the eradication of this text, and its replacement with a Latvian one denoting the building as the national opera, also embodied the nature of that transition, as the more ethnically tolerant, culturally pluralistic traditions of the previous era were swept away before a wave of national activism that redefined Riga in terms of national rather than civic space.



Figure 45. The newly-created National Opera – note the new Latvian inscription.

The Latvian theater institutions established at this time did indeed flourish in their new homes, though never quite with the innovative brilliance of the fin-de-siecle period. Latvian artists, actors, and other theater workers who had fled into the Russian interior during the war began to return in late 1919, trickling back into Riga through the early 1920s.⁹⁶⁸ The establishment of a

⁹⁶⁷ LVVA 3255-1-200-34

⁹⁶⁸ Arturs Berziņš, *Latviešu Teātra attīstības gaitas* (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1932) 33

national theater was undertaken in the summer of 1919, under the auspices of the country's first minister of education, J. Kasparsons.⁹⁶⁹ The new national theater company, officially created by governmental decree on September 23, 1919, was able to perform for the first time only on November 30th, a few weeks after the end of fighting in and around Riga.⁹⁷⁰ As with many other state cultural institutions, the Riga Latvian Society played a crucial role in establishing the new national theater: “The Riga Latvian Society, evaluating the conditions, approached the new theater organization, offering to sell the theater inventory collected and preserved by the Riga Latvian Theater.”⁹⁷¹ Even with such assistance, challenges facing the new theater were considerable. As one of the theater's interwar directors recalled,

“The national theater also had to find a new theater-going public. The old theater-going public had been dispersed by war and revolution. The task of the theater now was to cultivate a new public; but the theater needed to prove its economic independence, which did not prove easy, as the number of Riga’s inhabitants had fallen sharply.”⁹⁷²

Despite such challenges, the theater grew relatively rapidly, its prestige enhanced by the bestowal of its directorship on the celebrated national poet Rainis from 1921-1925. The national theater soon succeeded in capturing audiences larger than those enjoyed by the Riga Latvian Society before 1914, aided by a wave of enhanced national feeling among Latvians and the prestige of the new premises.⁹⁷³ In many ways, Latvian cultural aspirations of the previous era seemed to have been realized:

“The old nations of Europe had attained a high level of cultural development, a broad and recommendable dramatic literature, gifted

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., 34

⁹⁷⁰ Appropriately enough, the piece was R. Blaumanis' *In Fire (Ugunī)*. Ibid., 34

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.

⁹⁷² Ibid., 34

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 36

actors, a perfected stage language, proven rules for methods in the plastic arts, etc.”⁹⁷⁴

Latvian desires to prove the legitimacy of their own culture alongside the “old nations of Europe” - in this context, Germany and Russia - had never quite been satisfied prior to the First World War, but by 1932, the director of the national theater felt able to write that,

“In sixty-three years, the Latvian theater has attained already so high a level of development, that both in content and in form it can worthily place itself beside the theaters of the great nations.”⁹⁷⁵

The new national theater had quickly become much the institution that its founders - and the young Latvian government - had hoped it would grow into, one showcasing the artistic and cultural potential of the Latvian nation while also remaining in touch with the currents of world theater, all while seated in a handsome venue that signaled Latvian political dominance.

However, despite its utilization for nationalistic goals, the national theater was a far less ethnically chauvinistic institution than one might assume. Although each ethnic group naturally remained concerned first and foremost with its own cultural and artistic life, the German and Russian press in Riga maintained a benevolent and engaged attitude towards the activities of the Latvian National Theater and National Opera, reporting regularly on their offerings, and the Latvian press reciprocated to an extent. The National Opera was noted in particular for its exceptional quality, boosted as it was by the arrival of top-notch talent that fled from communist Russia, able to work with little difficulty in this art form despite an incomplete mastery of Latvian.⁹⁷⁶ Ethnic German performers also took part, both in guest roles and as permanent

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 40

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., 41

⁹⁷⁶ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215. Letter from Ambassador Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), written in Riga, 9.I.1929

employees, and theater workers of every kind, from directors down to stagehands, circulated between the different theater companies.⁹⁷⁷

In 1928, on the tenth anniversary of Latvian independence, the German theater in Riga staged a play by the Latvian playwright Rudolfs Blaumanis under the guidance of the director of the Latvian National Theater Artūrs Bērziņš, repeating the performance the following year as part of a wider celebration of the author and his work.⁹⁷⁸ Blaumanis, though proud of his ethnic Latvian identity, had also maintained a close relationship with the German language throughout his life, translating most of his works from Latvian into German himself, and his anodyne comedies capturing rural life in the region had gained considerable popularity among Baltic Germans as well as Latvians across the preceding thirty years.⁹⁷⁹ Blaumanis came nearer to transcending ethnic cultural boundaries than perhaps any figure of his time, making his work a natural choice for this collaborative effort. The play was a success financially and critically, widely acknowledged as one of the best performances of the season.⁹⁸⁰ This homage to a Latvian figure like Blaumanis, an author whose works captured life in the region for all of its inhabitants, underscores the potential for art to unite even in multiethnic settings.

The tenor of relations between the theatrical communities in interwar Riga - their respective theater troupes and workers, supporting societies, critics, and theater-going publics - continued to be dictated for years by a model of coexistence worked out over the course of the long 19th century. In this model, ethnic pride and interethnic tensions were palpable, but competition was constrained within a civil society framework that helped to minimize conflict. The gradual erosion of this

⁹⁷⁷ For examples, cf.: "Theater and Art," *Сегодня* 14.XII.1923; *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel*, 16; for general information, cf.: Ilze Konstante, ed. *Latvijas kultūra 1920-1940* (Rīgā: Latvijas Mākslas muzeju apvienība, 1990), 59.

⁹⁷⁸ Including the dedication of a statute, one of the only new public monuments to an individual erected in central Riga during the interwar period.

⁹⁷⁹ "Rudolf Blaumann," *Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland* 17.I.1943

⁹⁸⁰ "The Past Season in the German Theater," *Rigasche Rundschau* 4.IX.1929

framework at the hands of state actors characterizes theater life during the interwar period, particularly after the economic and political disruptions of the early 1930s. Although governments in Berlin actively took part in this transformation, playing an ever-greater role in the management of the Riga German theater association, the decisions of the Latvian state regarding cultural policy vis-a-vis the country's principal ethnic minorities directly fueled a reliance on support from abroad, especially for the city's Baltic German community.

7.3 The Baltic German Theater

The beginning of the 1920s saw the two formerly dominant theater communities in Riga - Baltic German and Russian - homeless and nearly penniless. The pre-war wealth that had sustained these two theater societies had evaporated away, never to return, and both groups initially had larger concerns, first and foremost establishing educational systems in their respective languages.⁹⁸¹ The Great Guild, former patron of German theater in Riga, initially maintained some pretensions to its former role but was forced to abandon these early on due to a lack of funds. Although the German theater association of Riga in was founded in April of 1920, and the pre-war Russian Theatrical-Artistic Association resumed its activities in September 1921, some years would pass before either organization was actually able to stage plays.⁹⁸² With the gradual reinvigoration of the local economy, funds increasingly became available for theater, and both groups began to play a larger role once more in the cultural life of the capital. Although they share similarities, especially in their early years, the histories of the theater life of Baltic Germans and Russians in interwar Latvia are quite divergent, due largely to very different relationships with

⁹⁸¹John Hiden, "The Baltic Germans and German Policy Towards Latvia after 1918" in: *The Historical Journal*, volume 2, nr. 13 (June 1970), 305-307, 313, cf. also Carol L. Gottzmann and Petra Hörner, *Lexikon der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Baltikums und St. Petersburgs vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, (De Gruyter, 2007), 68

⁹⁸²Other than outdoor operette, usually comedic. For Russian theater, cf. LVVA 1714-1-686-43, for German theater, *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.XI.1923, "Auf dem Wege zum ständigen deutschen Theater", among others.

their ostensible “external national homelands”⁹⁸³ or kin states during the interwar period. Whereas governments in Berlin early on took pains to aid German-language theater in Riga, the antagonistic relationship between Latvia’s Russians and Moscow left the Russian theater wholly dependent on civil society - in essence, on the largesse of private individuals. Furthermore, governmental efforts emanating from Berlin to support the Baltic Germans in material and cultural terms were supplemented by numerous German civil society organizations, perhaps most famously the Association for Germandom Abroad (*Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*) – naturally, no such private organizations existed in Soviet Russia for the support of émigré culture abroad.⁹⁸⁴

Initially, however, both groups found themselves in situations of similar impotence. The Baltic German theater association (*Theaterverein*), headed by elder of the Great Guild Wilhelm Reimers, was able to do very little for German performing art until the autumn of 1923, when a scathing editorial by Paul Schiemann in the *Rigasche Rundschau* goaded the Baltic German Community into action.⁹⁸⁵ His editorial makes clear what he - and one may safely assume many others of like mind - considered to be the stakes of ethnic prestige involved:

“Serious people came to the paper with the demand to entirely drop the use of any aesthetic standards in one’s criticism, and to pay homage solely to function. This would naturally exercise a disastrous influence on the prestige of our culture in the old homeland. While Latvian and also Russian art would be in a position to further develop themselves ever further, German art would have to shamefacedly decline every attempt at competition, and satisfy

⁹⁸³ The phrase is Rogers Brubakers’, used in his description of the “triadic nexus” existing between nationalizing states, ethnic minority populations, and the countries that claim a status as the protectors of their co-ethnicists. Cf. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, introduction and throughout.

⁹⁸⁴ Christopher Kimmich, *German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945: A Guide to Current Research and Resources* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013) 8-12, wherein the author neatly encapsulates much of the situation pertaining in interwar Latvia in describing more general conditions across Germany’s near abroad. Cf. also Tammo Luther, *Volkstumspolitik des Deutschen Reiches : 1933-1938 : die Auslandsdeutschen im Spannungsfeld zwischen Traditionalisten und Nationalsozialisten* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004) 43-45; For more on the support of such organizations for Baltic German culture purposes, cf. John Hiden, “The Weimar Republic and the Problem of the Auslandsdeutsche” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 1977); John Hiden, “The Baltic Germans and German Policy towards Latvia after 1918” in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2 (June 1970); and Hans-Erich Volkmann, “Ökonomie und Machtpolitik. Lettland und Estland im politisch-ökonomischen Kalkül des Dritten Reiches 1933–1940” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2. Jahrg., H. 4, *Das nationalsozialistische Herrschaftssystem* (1976).

⁹⁸⁵ *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel*, 12

itself with being viewed over one's shoulder, as inferior, by the others. Here something would have to, here something must, happen."⁹⁸⁶

Something did happen, as was usually the case when Paul Schiemann set his mind to a cause. Indeed, Schiemann penned his impassioned editorial in October of 1923, soon after the German theater association had formally taken control of the German-language (comic) operette then operating on a seasonal basis at an outdoor theater in the city's oldest public park.⁹⁸⁷ Although the debt that this acquisition transferred to the association would prove a considerable onus, the move did provide the German theater association with a core ensemble, inventory, and director from which to expand.⁹⁸⁸ The Baltic German deputy mayor of Riga Walter Sadowsky also increasingly began to make the German theater his personal cause around this time, becoming its leading champion over the years.⁹⁸⁹ A man of wide-ranging social connections, with considerable influence in Latvian as well as Baltic German circles, Sadowsky's close involvement in the affairs of the German theater association across the next 15 years would prove crucial to its survival.⁹⁹⁰

The German theater association's fortunes improved considerably with the awarding of a city subvention in the for 1924, which enable the hiring of a handful of actors from Germany.⁹⁹¹ The national government also provided modest subsidies for the minority theaters (Jewish, Russian, and German) from the early 1920s onward.⁹⁹² This allowed the engagement of a handful

⁹⁸⁶ "On the Way to a Permanent German Theater," *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.XI.1923

⁹⁸⁷ *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel*, 13

⁹⁸⁸ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 3 1929-1930: undated memorandum from Stieve to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin

⁹⁸⁹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, "Schulden des Deutschen Theatervereins am 20. Februar 1931", budget from 20.II.1931; LVVA 2927-4-1015-60

⁹⁹⁰ Sadowsky's crucial role in supporting German theater is mentioned briefly in Helmut Stegmann, "Aus meiner Erinnerungen: I. Stadtverordneter in Riga 1920-1933" in *Baltische Hefte*, 7. Jahrgang (1960/61), 97; the frequent recurrence of his name (and that of his wife, Helena) in sources pertaining to the *Theaterverein*, the committee of which he was a permanent member, also makes his influence clear.

⁹⁹¹ *Zehn Jahre*, 13

⁹⁹² *Сегодня* nr. 19 23.I.1921 "50,000 for the Russian theater or for Amateurs?"

of actors from Germany, culminating in the opening performance of the German Theater (*Deutsches Schauspiel*) on February 7th, 1924, in the National Theater, formerly the city's second theater.⁹⁹³ The closure of the operette, which had been operating at a loss, freed up resources, and the German theater association was able to lure the Baltic German Oskar Ludwig Brandt away from his job as an artistic advisor at the Latvian Entertainment Theater (*Dailes Teatris*), installing him as first director of the German Theater in May 1925.⁹⁹⁴

In spite of a tripling of the number of theater visitors across the first year, the economic situation of the theater remained dire, heavily burdened by high levels of debt. "In order to keep [the theater] above water, a member of the theater committee sold real estate for 24,000 lats - and put the whole of the proceeds into the enterprise."⁹⁹⁵ This was far from an atypical occurrence, as the author of a ten-year retrospective from 1934 made clear:

"It must be mentioned here that it has always been just a bare handful of gentlemen from the committee who have leapt in with substantial sums whenever the drama fell into a critical situation."⁹⁹⁶

Along with insolvency, other difficulties also pressed: "...next to the so to speak chronic financial worries, there was yet another concern, which would not abate: the question of location."⁹⁹⁷ The German Theater (*Deutsches Schauspiel*) struggled with this question for much of its existence, eventually settling into a *modus vivendi* that left much to be desired. After a scant month in the hall of the Riga Trade Association (a Baltic German-dominated institution), the German Theater moved to the premises of the Riga Gymnastics Club (*Rigaer Turnverein*, equally German-dominated), where they performed in an athletic hall converted into a makeshift

⁹⁹³ This last through the agency of the city government, rather than the national one.

⁹⁹⁴ *Zehn Jahre*, 16

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17, also RAV Riga, K 5, Herder Institut, 1921-1931, Bände 1-4, Signatur 111, ordentliche Budget für 1930

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

auditorium for their purposes - hardly a venue likely to instill respect or convey prestige. The general change of status of the Baltic German community in Latvia was perfectly encapsulated by their change of theatrical fortune. From one of the largest and most imposing buildings in central Riga, a pillar and symbol of local German culture for decades, the group had been relegated to the status of impecunious renters of an ill-suited hall, obligated to coordinate their activities with those of local gymnasts. This situation endured for half a dozen years, but things at last took a turn for the better on January 5th, 1930, when the German Theater relocated to more appropriate quarters as the sole renters of the spacious hall of the Russian Club *Ulei* (*Улей/Beehive*).⁹⁹⁸ The general turn of fate still smarted though, and Baltic German dissatisfaction with the situation found emphatic expression in the ten-year retrospective of 1934:

“Ten years of German theater have at the same time been ten years of incessant planning among the committee members as to how the notion of a German House could be realized. The new stretch of path which now begins in the theater life of our people must bring the fulfillment of this long-cherished desire! If everyone pitches in, then we shall build our German House and dedicate the stateliest room in it - our theater - to German dramatic art.”⁹⁹⁹

Alas, such dreams were not to be. Ultimately, the constant money problems of the theater association were too great an obstacle to be overcome. Although the theater association enjoyed the use of the national theater twice a month from 1926 onwards, Riga’s German theater remained in the hall of the *Ulei* Club until the departure of the ethnic group from Latvia en masse in 1939.¹⁰⁰⁰ Financial problems plagued the theater association throughout its existence, despite an increasing

⁹⁹⁸ “The German Theater Relocates,” *Rigasche Rundschau* nr. 226, 5.X.1929

⁹⁹⁹ *Zehn Jahre Deutsches Schauspiel in Riga*, 18; it should be noted that the proposed “German House” would serve many cultural and communal purposes for the Baltic German population of Riga and of Latvia, with the theater figuring as one of the most prominent of these.

¹⁰⁰⁰ “Fifteen Years of German Drama,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 31.I.1939

level of involvement on the part of both the German Embassy in Riga, and various private organizations within Germany.¹⁰⁰¹

By the late 1920s, the German embassy in Riga was heavily involved in supporting the local German theater, with several successive ambassadors playing an outsized role in drumming up donations, both from local Germans (the expatriate community of ethnic Germans in Riga as well as Baltic Germans) and from a number of cultural organizations, businesses, and financiers in Germany proper.¹⁰⁰² Members of the German foreign service, from the ambassador in Riga on down, repeatedly interceded with exasperated creditors in Berlin on behalf of the theater association, helping to maintain some semblance of financial stability within the organization.¹⁰⁰³ The German ambassador also arranged for financial assistance from one of the chief official supports of the theater from abroad, the civil society group “East Prussian Society of Friends of the German Academy”, which sought to establish closer connections between Riga’s Germans and those of nearby East Prussia.¹⁰⁰⁴

The official role of the embassy in managing the affairs of the German theater association was minimal, confined to contributions towards debt service on loans from German banks.¹⁰⁰⁵ This was due to a keen awareness of the possibility for political fallout should the local German theater come to be perceived by the Latvian public as a mere organ of policy-makers in Berlin.

¹⁰⁰¹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, memorandum from Stieve to the Theaterverein on 19.Oktober 1931; report on financial status of theater, 3.VI.1932, sent to Stieve from Theaterverein (!); for increased involvement, RAV Riga Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, throughout (Bände 1-5)

¹⁰⁰² RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, Letter to embassy from Reisebüro der Hamburg-Amerika Linie from 8.11.1930; Letter to embassy from Erich Jürgens of Opel in Riga, Pulkveža Brieža ielā 17/19, from 22.XI.1930 regarding cost of showing films and of a car, respectively.

¹⁰⁰³ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932 Letter from Regierungsrat a. D. Krahmer-Möllenberg to Stieve, 14.X.1931; Letter from Stieve to Krahmer-Möllenberg, 27.V.1932; Memorandum from the embassy in Riga to Berlin AA, 30.X.1931. A-856, Inhalt: Deutsches Schauspiel in Riga.

¹⁰⁰⁴ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Band 2, 1.I.1927-3.III.1929: Letter from Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), written in Riga, den 16. November 1928; Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932: Letter from Stieve to Dr. Thierfelder, 27.V.1932

¹⁰⁰⁵ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 3 1929-1930: undated copy of a memorandum (telegraph) from Stieve to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin

Diplomatic records reveal little worry over the possibility of irritating the Latvian government by supporting the German theater association, but do show an overwhelming concern with Latvian popular opinion. To this extent, the imperative was to maintain a relationship - or the appearance of one - between Berlin and Latvia's Baltic Germandom in which a middle ground was maintained, wherein the ethnic kinship between Baltic and *Reich* Germans was emphasized without allowing the two groups to blur into one, at least in the short term.¹⁰⁰⁶ This would allow a strategic deployment of Baltic German institutions - economic and cultural - while also allowing Berlin to steer as far clear of local ethnic squabbles as possible. Thus, maintaining the public image of an independent German Theater in Riga was as important to Berlin as to the city's Baltic German population.

In reality, the theater was hopelessly dependent on assistance from Berlin, financially and otherwise. Along with its role in alleviating the constant financial pressures bearing on the German theater, the personal involvement of a succession of ambassadors was crucial in supporting the theater. Beginning with Dr. Adolf Köster (1923-1928), continuing to Dr. Friedrich Stieve (1928-1932), Dr. Georg Martius (1932-1934), and Dr. Eckhard von Schack (1934-1940), German diplomats in Riga were heavily involved in the affairs of the theater.¹⁰⁰⁷ These ambassadors served as unofficial representatives for the theater, ones with more prestige and social capital than any from the ranks of its own committee. As well as interceding with *Reich* German government and financial institutions on the theater's behalf, they solicited donations for the theater both from local individuals and from German firms doing business in Riga (usually goods and products for use in

¹⁰⁰⁶ John Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 36-41

¹⁰⁰⁷ To somewhat varying extents - Stieve seems to have made it very much his personal cause, and his predecessor Köster the same, though to a lesser extent. Subsequent ambassadors seem to have been engaged by theater business only in a purely professional capacity, but guiding its affairs nonetheless seems to have comprised a surprisingly significant part of their duties in Riga.

raffles and lotteries), invited donors to various social events at the embassy, and wrote personal thank-you's to donors of particular importance.¹⁰⁰⁸

In this regard, the maintenance of the theater in Riga was simply part and parcel of Berlin's policy towards ethnic German minorities in its near abroad. Due to the relatively high socio-economic status of the city's Baltic German community and the long traditions of German culture and learning in the city, the Riga theater was – overlooking its state of perpetual pecuniary peril – an soft-power investment with a good return, able to serve as an embassy of German culture in the northern Baltic and to help maintain the prestige and image of the local Baltic German community at the same time – something with which officials in Berlin were not unconcerned, given the centrality of this group to the Foreign Office's plans for economic expansion in the region.¹⁰⁰⁹

The close personal involvement of Berlin's ambassadors in the Riga German theater association is emblematic of the shift in the cultural life of the city's Baltic German population during the interwar period. Formerly affluent, well-educated, and cosmopolitan, Riga's Baltic Germans were increasingly dependent on Germany proper for the maintenance of their cultural identity, in the world of theater as in schooling and higher education.¹⁰¹⁰ Though some modicum of prosperity returned to their community by the mid-1920s, the committee of the theater association were unable to set their institution upon a firm financial foundation, leading

¹⁰⁰⁸ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932; Cf. Letter to embassy from Reisebüro der Hamburg-Amerika Linie (Königsberg Pr., Kantstrasse 2) from 8.11.1930; Letter to embassy from Erich Jürgens of Opel in Riga, Pulkveža Brieža ielā 17/19, from 22.XI.1930 regarding cost of showing films and car, respectively; Letter from Riga Gesandtschaftsrat to Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie, Berlin. W.10 Königin Augusta-Strasse 28 from 4.XII.1930.

¹⁰⁰⁹ For more on German revisionism and efforts to support ethnic Germans abroad during the interwar period, cf. Andreas Hillgruber "‘Revisionismus’: Kontinuität und Wandel in der Außenpolitik der Weimarer Republik" in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 237, H. 3 (Dec., 1983); Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., "Continuity in German Foreign Policy? The Case of Stresemann in *The International History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct., 1979); Kurt Düwell: *Deutschlands auswärtige Kulturpolitik* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1976); and Gottfried Niedhart, *Die Aussenpolitik der Weimarer Republik* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999) among many others, though it should be noted that John Hiden's work on Weimar Germany and the Baltic States (a monograph and several journal articles, referenced in this chapter and throughout the dissertation) remains the most thorough body of scholarship on German foreign policy and the Baltic States, certainly in English and perhaps in any language.

¹⁰¹⁰ Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 52-55

ambassador Stieve to comment in a letter from 1927 that for the foreseeable future, Latvia's Germans would simply be unable to support the theater without outside assistance.¹⁰¹¹ Although the norms and mores of multiethnic cultural life from before 1914 continued to guide assumptions and shape behavior, especially among artists and performers, Baltic German theater life - as with education - was increasingly a tool and stratagem deployed by Berlin, rather than a homegrown expression of cultural identity.¹⁰¹²

Among other things, this meant that theater performances were often targeted at local non-German audiences at least as much as they were at Baltic Germans.¹⁰¹³ This tendency became even more pronounced after the *coup d'état* of 1934, when ethnic Latvian opinions became the only ones of real consequence. The inheritance of a tradition of multiethnic art appreciation simultaneously eased and encumbered the task of promoting German culture through the theater. On the one hand, the Latvian elite was typically fluent in either Russian, German, or both, and admiration for the literary accomplishments of both cultures was common.¹⁰¹⁴ The artistic and critical worlds of speakers of the three languages in Riga were distinct but not insular, leaving room for open minds and appreciation of quality. On the other hand, the same circumstances that had shaped these traditions and attitudes had also produced rather stiff competition for German culture. Although the Latvian theater of the interwar period did not re-attain its creative heights of

¹⁰¹¹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Letter from Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), written in Riga, 16.XI.1928.

¹⁰¹² For insight into Berlin's strategic thinking in this regard, cf. Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 61, 169

¹⁰¹³ Stieve's memoranda to Berlin make clear that this was his primary understanding of the purpose of the "Deutsches Schauspiel" in Riga, and of its tours around the Baltic region. His successor Martius does not seem to have disagreed. Other organizations invested in supporting the Theaterverein felt similarly. Cf. Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933, Bemerkungen zum Deutschen Schauspiel in den baltischen Staaten, prepared by Ostpreussischer Freundeskreis der deutschen Akademie, sent to the Auswärtiges Amt, 13.VI.1933

¹⁰¹⁴ On fluency, cf. Kristine Wohlfahrt, "Das Riga der Letten" in E. Oberländer, K. Wohlfahrt, *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreichs 1857-1914* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 40-41; regarding Latvian appreciation of German and Russian (theatrical) culture, cf. Berzinš 37, 41-42, and Ādolfs Allunans, *Atmiņas par latviešu teātra izcelšanos* (Riga: Tulkotāja izdevums, 1924), 3-9

the *fin-de-siecle* period, it was nonetheless of a high quality, and the national opera was, in Ambassador Stieve's own words, "very good", as well as affordable.¹⁰¹⁵ The city's Russian-language theater was of an even better quality, with resident performers of the highest calibre, fled from St. Petersburg and Moscow to temporary refuge in interwar Riga.¹⁰¹⁶

Despite the obstacles, the Foreign Office in Berlin seems to have been determined to use the activities of the theater association to showcase German culture in the region. Largely at the insistence of Berlin, the Riga-based German-language theater troupe of the theater association conducted annual regional tours, visiting Tallinn/Reval, Jelgāva/Mitau and Liepāja/Libau, all home to small populations of Baltic Germans, and all undertaken at a financial loss.¹⁰¹⁷ Though in perpetual frustration with the profligacy and near-insolvency of the theater association, the Foreign Office was also rewarded with the occasional successes of its theater policy, as evidenced by a letter from Ambassador Stieve to the "Academy for Scientific Research and the Nurturement of Germandom" in Munich from early 1930:

"The skillful work of the administration and the notable performances of several actors and actresses engaged from Germany have succeeded in increasing interest in the theater's offerings considerably, and, as never before, in winning numerous members of non-German circles as friends of the theater. At several particularly successful performances a large contingent of Latvian, Russian, and Jewish audience members was to be detected."¹⁰¹⁸

Stieve's deep satisfaction in writing these lines is palpable, after years of worry and trouble attending to the needs of the theater. His satisfaction is that of a man pleased not just with a one-

¹⁰¹⁵ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Letter from Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), written in Riga, 9.I.1929.

¹⁰¹⁶ Temira Pachmuss, "Russian Culture in the Baltic States and Finland 1920-1940", in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 16, nr. 4 (Winter 1985), 383-385. Cf. also *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I.* (Riga: A.S. Maikapor, 1933) 59-60

¹⁰¹⁷ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, Letter from Stieve (Riga, den 4. November 1930) to Herr Doktor Thierfelder, München, Deutsche Akademie.

¹⁰¹⁸ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Memorandum from 19.I.1930, from ambassador to Akademie zur Wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums, München, Residenz.

off success, but with a patient policy that has begun to reap dividends. Perhaps encouraged by these successes, Stieve helped to arrange for the world-famous theater director Max Reinhardt to spend time in Riga as a guest director, strongly recommending that for political reasons he also direct at least one performance of the Latvian National Theater or Opera, despite the language barrier.¹⁰¹⁹ In March 1932, however, when these plans were finally realized in the performance of two pieces under Reinhardt's direction, by the Latvian National Opera and the German Theater association, the limitations of cultural policy became more apparent to the ambassador. The apathetic or negative response to Reinhardt's tour in Riga in much of the Latvian press (directing *Servant of Two Masters* in the German theater, and *Orpheus* in the Latvian National Opera) left him perhaps a bit bewildered, provoking speculation as to the cause:

“The insecurity of the upstart, strongly pronounced among Latvians, often transforms itself into condescension when it comes to the criticism of foreigners...In addition, the mood towards everything which comes out of Germany is quite unfriendly at the moment; national passions will have influenced the judgement of some critics...these factors, rooted in prejudice and narrow-mindedness, have worked together to regrettably lessen the success of Reinhardt's efforts.”

Despite these observations, Stieve nonetheless reckoned the tour a success, financially and in regard to foreign policy:

“The German press, as well as *Segodnya* [the largest Russian daily in Riga], have reported on this performance in very appreciative words...Reinhardt's productions denote a great success for our cultural-political goals. They have presented German performing art in brilliant fashion, and gained it the applause and admiration of many non-Germans as well.”¹⁰²⁰

¹⁰¹⁹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Letter to Professor Max Reinhardt, Berlin. 19.I.1931; Reinhardt's desire to procure a divorce under Latvia's comparatively liberal laws in this regard also factored into his decision to come to Riga for a time. His Jewish heritage is also not insignificant, highlighting the contrast between Weimar and NSDAP cultural diplomacy in the region; Stieve also surmised - likely correctly - that anti-Semitism also had to do with Reinhardt's less-than-warm reception by the Latvian elite.

¹⁰²⁰ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Memo from Stieve to Berlin, 15.III.1932.

The success of the Reinhardt tour was, however, something of a swan song for the collaboration between Berlin and the theater association. As the economic troubles of the early 1930s ground on, purse strings continued to be tightened the world over; the theater association, hopelessly dependent on largesse from abroad, found itself in correspondingly dire straits.¹⁰²¹ The theater limped through the next few years, forced to compete with the new and popular cinema at a time when far fewer consumers were spending on luxuries like the theater compared to five or ten years prior.¹⁰²²

The next major change came with the catalyst of political revolution not in Latvia, but in Germany. The installation of the Nazi state throughout Germany in early 1933 had a profound impact on the Riga German theater association. Financial and legal relations vis-a-vis the government in Berlin did not radically alter, but the willingness to preserve the theater association's autonomy that had characterized Weimar governments was replaced by an enthusiastic push to reorganize the Riga German theater, seen by the Nazi regime as a way to project what we today would call "soft power" in the region, capable of fulfilling National Socialist propaganda objectives. The Nazi state inherited the relationship between the German Foreign Office and the Riga German Theater Association shaped across the 1920s, and used it to pursue similar ends of cultural diplomacy far more aggressively than its Weimar counterpart.¹⁰²³

¹⁰²¹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, letter from Leiter des Theaterausschusses (signature illegible) of the Ostpreußischer Freundeskreis der deutschen Akademie to Stieve, July 25th 1932.

¹⁰²² RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 2: 1.I.1927-3.III.1929, letter from Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), 9.I.1929

¹⁰²³ For particularly telling examples, cf. Geh. 17_Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933, Letter from 17.V.1933, Hauptmann D.E. Munzinger (Vertrauensmann der NSDAP in Riga) writing to Dr. Weyrauch [capacity unknown] at the German embassy in Riga: "...dass Herr Lundt beauftragt ist, die Reorganisation des Deutschen Theaters für die kommende Saison entsprechend der Anweisungen und im Sinne der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung durchzuführen.", likewise a telegram from Martius to Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, dated 26.VI.1933, forbidding the Theaterverein from "employing any Jews or half-Jews in any capacity, and certainly not as actors."

After the spring of 1933, the theater participated in a sort of *Gleichschaltung* as the new government in Berlin took an active interest in directors, performers, and plays, with politics permeating all aspects of theater life. The committee of the theater association were in little position to refuse the assistance offered by Berlin if they wished to see their institution continue to exist; by 1933, it tottered at the brink of collapse, the available wealth of its committee long since sunk into it, and unable to meet the payments of interest on its debt, let alone to make good on the principle.¹⁰²⁴ The subvention from the city first received in 1924 had been halved in the summer of 1932, and the government subsidy granted from 1921 onwards had been eliminated entirely.¹⁰²⁵ Despite slashing its budget, the theater association was still missing more than a third of its budget for the upcoming 1932/1933 season.¹⁰²⁶ Ambassador Stieve had intervened successfully with the German theater association's creditors in Germany, arranging for an easing of payments, and managed somehow to keep the theater alive for the time being, but the outlook for the future was nonetheless grim.¹⁰²⁷ In such circumstances, the theater association's kowtowing to Nazi demands was its only viable path forward, even though this meant the surrender of its autonomy, something of which officials in Berlin were keenly aware. As an official of the German Foreign Office wrote in the summer of 1933, "...it can hardly be to be expected that the German Theater Society should disregard the stated intentions of the ministry."¹⁰²⁸ The theater

¹⁰²⁴RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 3 1929-1930, undated copy of a (telegraph) memorandum to Berlin from Stieve; the ambassador states this inability explicitly in order to convey the untenable nature of the Theaterverein's financial position.

¹⁰²⁵ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, Memorandum A-882, 7.XI.1931

¹⁰²⁶ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Band 4 IX.1930-IX.1932, report on status of theater sent to Stieve from Theaterverein, 3.VI.1932

¹⁰²⁷ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215. Letter from Stieve to Regierungsrat Krahrmer-Möllenberg, 27.V.1932.

¹⁰²⁸ Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933 13. Juni 1933 - Letter to Dr. Weyrauch, Herr Legationsrat at the embassy in Riga, from unknown correspondent in the Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin, urging that the *Theaterverein* dismiss its current director.

association's transformation from a local civil society organization into the mouthpiece of a foreign state actor was by now essentially complete.

That transformation brought changes in form and content for the German theater. From late spring 1933 onward, Dr. Georg Martius and his staff undertook to give the theater a “more German” character, leveling criticism at the number of pieces by non-German playwrights performed in previous seasons (these had typically constituted around a third of all performances through the 1920s, largely because they sold well).¹⁰²⁹ All Jewish actors or actors of suspected Jewish heritage were ordered released from employment, leading several members of the ensemble to vehemently protest the purported purity of their Aryan heritage.¹⁰³⁰ The Nazi government worked closely enough with representatives of the theater committee as to have them interviewed in Berlin in the course of their personal travel.¹⁰³¹

The NSDAP’s increased involvement in the Riga German theater in the 1930s brought complications with it. Nazi officials were sensitive to the perceptions of the Latvian government, the benevolence of which permitted support of the theater from Berlin. Writing in May 1933, Martius noted the sensitivity of the issue and the need for Latvian cooperation in maintaining the theater:

“...I wish especially to note that the activity of a *Reich* German theater director and *Reich* German actors is dependent upon the concession of the Latvian authorities, and that all measures which might give any impression that one wished to direct the local theater

¹⁰²⁹ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Band 3 1929-1930. “Deutsches Schauspiel” - Outline of plays to be performed 1929-1930. It should be noted that not all of the impetus in this direction came from abroad; Gottzmann and Hörner identify a homegrown turn towards a more nationalistic theater repertoire in Riga’s Deutsches Schauspiel already in the late 1920s (*Lexikon der deutschsprachigen Theater*, 70), but this process greatly intensified after 1933.

¹⁰³⁰ RAV Riga, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 216 Geh. 17, Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933. Telegram from 26.VI.1933, unsigned, presumably from Stieve to Berlin.

¹⁰³¹ RAV Riga Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933. Telegram from Embassy in Riga to Ministry in Berlin from 19.V.1933, signed Martius.

from Germany are the worst service one can render for the maintenance of this cultural institution.”¹⁰³²

Awareness of such complications predated national socialist rule, of course. Direction from Berlin prior to 1933 was given with a light hand, through the person of the ambassador and with some level of discretion, though the Latvian authorities were undoubtedly well aware of the role played by the embassy in managing the finances of the theater association. The theater association had nonetheless largely decided on its own ensemble, repertoire, direction, etc. through the period prior to 1933.¹⁰³³ An initial wariness of the Latvian government towards Hitler’s Germany was likely expressed in the difficulty the theater association experienced in procuring the nine work visas necessary for *Reich* German actors to come work in Riga for the upcoming season.¹⁰³⁴ Ambassador Martius noted that the deputy mayor (and member of the theater association committee) Walter Sadowsky’s influence had been decisive in eventually acquiring a positive decision from the Latvian government, a feat repeated in later years.¹⁰³⁵

After 1933, Riga’s German Theater operated with limited artistic independence, heeding dictates from Berlin and largely shunning works in translation.¹⁰³⁶ The Riga German theater association itself would seem not to have been in fundamental disagreement with Berlin regarding its mission in the region.¹⁰³⁷ In the course of thirty or so years, Riga’s German theater institutions shifted from being locally supported, employing actors transnationally, to a hybrid institution in

¹⁰³² RAV Riga Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933. Telegram from Embassy in Riga to Ministry in Berlin from 19.V.1933, signed Martius.

¹⁰³³ Stieve’s lengthy and detailed correspondence with the Baltic German *Theaterverein* preserved in the archives of the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) betrays not a single incident in which suggestions regarding repertoire, casting, or direction are mentioned, and Nazi dissatisfaction with the (somewhat Anglophile) past repertoire of the *Theaterverein* likewise strongly suggests that governments in Berlin prior to 1933 left such decisions up to the *Theaterverein*.

¹⁰³⁴ Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933, telegram to Berlin from the Gesandtschaft, 22.IX.1933, signed Martius.

¹⁰³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰³⁶ Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933, Bericht über das Spieljahr 1932/1933 des Deutschen Schauspiels (the report comments on the largely German repertoire from this season, noting that the ratio of original German to non-German works can be improved in coming years.

¹⁰³⁷ *Zehn Jahre*, 20

which local actors and a foreign government cooperated, to at last becoming little more than a pawn in the NSDAP's bid to propagate its conception of German culture abroad: "The theater is therefore not merely a purely internal Baltic [German] affair, but rather a common German one, and one not less significant than Reich German theaters in provincial capitals."¹⁰³⁸

Events in Riga German theater life reflected the underlying economic circumstances of the city's Baltic German minority, circumstances which figure prominently in this transformation. Though their standards of living rose in the 1920s, and many families continued to eke out a middle-class existence, the group continued to struggle economically, never regaining its former affluence.¹⁰³⁹ This, combined with a general dearth of state and city support, crippled the institution, leaving it vulnerable to outside influence, and all the more so after the economic crisis of 1930 and beyond. The natural consequence was that a more independent local Baltic German theater culture and tradition gave way to dictates from Berlin. Stronger local support, along with sustained domestic economic expansion, might however have produced a very different institution, and perhaps in turn, different domestic political outcomes.

7.4 The Russian Theater

Theater life among Riga's interwar Russian community presents an illustrative counterpoint to that of the city's Baltic Germans, having nearly the opposite relationship to its own purported "ethnic homeland" Interwar Finland, Latvia, and Estonia in particular had attracted large numbers of refugees from Bolshevik Russia.¹⁰⁴⁰ The attractiveness of the new Baltic States was natural, given their former status as imperial provinces, relative proximity to St. Petersburg and

¹⁰³⁸ Geh. 17_ Bd. 5 - Deutsches Theater und Theaterfonds 23.VIII.1932 - 31.XII.1933, Bemerkungen zum Deutschen Schauspiel in den baltischen Staaten, prepared by Ostpreussischer Freundeskreis der deutschen Akademie, sent to the Auswärtiges Amt, 13.VI.1933

¹⁰³⁹ Michael Garleff, "Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit in den unabhängigen Staaten Estland und Lettland" in Gert von Pistohlkors, *Baltische Länder* (Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas Schriftenreihe, Siedler Verlag, 1994) 489-493

¹⁰⁴⁰ Pachmuss, 383, 391

Moscow, and their cosmopolitan ports. Russian artists and intellectuals setting down new roots in Riga greatly nourished and enhanced the cultural life of local Russian communities.¹⁰⁴¹ Individuals attuned to the Europe-wide cultural transformations of the 1920s strove to give new form and expression to Russian culture. At the same time, a widespread rejection of Bolshevism among this class of individual fostered an attitude which emphasized the need to cherish the past glories of Russian culture, as a steward charged with keeping alive the embers of a sacred fire.¹⁰⁴² The glut of imported talent and the determination to preserve and advocate for a pre- and anti-Bolshevik conception of Russian culture combined to produce an environment in which Russian performing art in Riga flourished, outshining that of the Baltic German or Jewish minorities and rivaling the Latvian National Theater and National Opera.

Yet Riga's ethnic Russian community supported its theater - or rather theaters, for it typically maintained two separate companies - without government aid from abroad. The Russian equivalent to the Baltic German theater association, the Russian Theatrical-Artistic Society in Latvia (русское театральное-искусство общество в Латвии), was supported primarily by the donations of wealthy private members (local and foreign) and by receipts from performances, receiving the same modest subsidies from the city of Riga and the national governments as enjoyed by its Baltic German and Jewish counterparts.¹⁰⁴³

Unlike in the Baltic German case, this association had existed prior to 1914 and was able to survive and even thrive through the interwar period, and it is likely that the continuity of

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., cf. also *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I*. (Riga: A.C. Майкапар, 1933) 49-60 for cultural vibrancy, although an admission of the extent of Russian emigration in recent years is avoided here for political reasons.

¹⁰⁴² Pachmuss states this explicitly (383), and such an attitude is conveyed distinctly in both volumes of *Russkie v Latvii* (1933, 1934), as well as in political editorials from *сегодня* from throughout the interwar period.

¹⁰⁴³ LVVA 1747-1-123, Statutes of Russian Theater Association from 1932 (*Latvijas krievu teātra biedrība/Russkoe teatral'noe-iskustvo obschestvo v Latvii*)

personnel aided it in its mission.¹⁰⁴⁴ In any event, the society, well-staffed with enthusiastic theater veterans, was staging regular performances by 1921.¹⁰⁴⁵ The Theatrical-Artistic Society maintained the Russian Dramatic Theater of Riga, which played in the same hall of the Riga Russian Club, commonly called *Ulei*. This hall had witnessed the birth of the Riga Theater of Russian Drama in the 1880s, and would eventually host the Baltic German theater association from 1930 onwards.¹⁰⁴⁶ This was a respectable site, located in the heart of Old Riga, close to city hall, with a large and well-appointed theater.¹⁰⁴⁷ Moving to the larger, now-vacant hall of the Riga Latvian Society at the end of the 1920s, the Russian Dramatic Theater, like its German and Jewish equivalents, was limited to only a handful of performances per month in the national theater, but nonetheless enjoyed a prestigious reputation at home and across the region.¹⁰⁴⁸

The Russian Dramatic Theater soon gained a reputation for quality, bolstered by performances from “renowned Russian actors such as V. I. Lixačev, N. S. Barabanov, and M. A. Vedrinskaj”, and also including Mikhail Chekhov, renowned thespian and nephew of an even more famous uncle.¹⁰⁴⁹ Across the interwar years, a handful of other rival Russian theater companies (some of them also of a very high quality) came into existence, but only the Dramatic Theater endured throughout the period, retaining its status as the premier Russian theater company in

¹⁰⁴⁴ Comparing the statutes of the pre-war and post-war Russian theater associations based in Riga reveals that these were de facto the same institution. Cf. LVVA 1747-1-445 statutes of Russian Theater Association of Riga 1901-1914 with LVVA 1747-1-123, statutes of Russian Theater Association from 1932, cf. also “Theater and Art,” *Сегодня* 17.IX.1919 for information on the re-organization of the association.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I*, 58

¹⁰⁴⁶ Vladislavs Volkovs, “Das Riga der Russen” in: Erwin Oberländer, Kristine Wohlfahrt, eds., *Riga: Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857-1914* (Ferdinand Schöningh 2004), 129

¹⁰⁴⁷ RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215, Memorandum from 19.I.1930, from Ambassador Stieve to Akademie zur Wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums, München, Residenz. Stieve notes that the quarters are ample and appropriate, with ownership rather than aesthetics constituting the remaining problem.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I*, 59 for this explicit claim, which is well-corroborated by Reich German diplomatic sources and theater notices in the *Rigasche Rundschau*. Cf. *Rigasche Rundschau* nr. 71 28.III.1925, “Russisches Theater” for one of many representative examples - the considerable length of the (positive) review is noteworthy in itself.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Pachmuss, 394

interwar Riga.¹⁰⁵⁰ Cooperation between the Russian Dramatic Theater and the Latvian National Theater and Opera seems to have been particularly close, with the widely renowned Chekhov performing on the stage of the Latvian National Theater and even supervising Latvian theatrical youth classes.¹⁰⁵¹

Local Russian influence on artistic life in Riga in general was on the whole considerable, something that officials in the German Foreign Office reckoned with throughout the period, seeing the Russian stage as at least as important a rival as the Latvian one.¹⁰⁵² Writing in 1925 to celebrate the opening of a fourth consecutive dramatic season, the editorial board of *Segodnya* (“Today”) reflected on the evolution of Russian theatrical life in Riga across the past few years:

“Due to the variety of talents and roles this year, the troupe is such that it could comprise any first-class theater...Over the three years of its work, the Russian drama has gained strong sympathy in Riga...society and the press have treated the work of the theater with constant kindness.”¹⁰⁵³

Russian theater life in interwar Riga thrived perhaps more readily than that of any other ethnic group in the country, despite the material disadvantages facing it. Politics - domestic and international - had much to do with its success. The political rhetoric of Riga’s Russian community in the interwar years was consistently imbued with a deep-seated revulsion for the regime ruling from Moscow. The Russian community was seemingly driven by the need not only to differentiate itself from Soviet Russia, but to maintain - and, through performance, to demonstrate - that

¹⁰⁵⁰ Dr. E. von Bulmerincq, “Theater and Cinema 1921-1928,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 14.I.1930; The Russian Dramatic Theater in Riga in fact still exists to this day, making it one of the longest-existing Russian theaters outside of the borders of Russia.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast’ I*, 59

¹⁰⁵² RAV Riga, 17 geh. Theaterfonds, Deutsches Theater, Signatur 215 Letter from Stieve to Herr von Hassell, Landesgruppe Ostpreussen der Deutschen Akademie (Königsberg), written in Riga, 9.I.1929.

¹⁰⁵³ “Opening of the Russian Drama Season,” *Сегодня* 5.IX.1925

Bolshevism was the antithesis of Russian culture, the true essence of which was purportedly evidenced in the cultural achievements of the previous century.¹⁰⁵⁴

That the flight of artists and performers from St. Petersburg and Moscow westward was not mirrored by any exodus out of Berlin and Vienna helped to strengthen the footing of Russian culture in Riga vis-a-vis German, and the stage was probably this ethnic group's most potent tool in presenting a favorable image of itself to the wider society.¹⁰⁵⁵ Certainly the Russian Dramatic Theater in Riga was much more popular than its German equivalent, regularly attracting twice the audience through the 1920s.¹⁰⁵⁶ This feat is all the more impressive given that the two ethnic communities in Riga were of roughly similar sizes throughout the period, with the average Baltic German considerably better-off than the average Russian.¹⁰⁵⁷

The success and acclaim of Riga's interwar Russian theater - and by extension, of Russian intellectual life in the city more generally - illustrate the ways in which diaspora populations, if sufficiently energized, can shape intellectual life and by extension cultural diplomacy at a regional and perhaps even international level. Although the efforts of Riga's Russians to offer an alternative vision of their national culture to the world may seem futile and insignificant from today's perspective, they nonetheless powerfully shaped perceptions of their ethnic group within Latvia, the Baltic region, and to some extent across Europe. The relative uniqueness of their situation -

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Russkie v Latvii, Chast' I.*, 55-60; anti-Bolshevik sentiment and a lauding of Russian cultural achievements in the era bookended by 1914 are intermingled throughout.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Indeed, quite the reverse occurred regarding interwar Berlin and Vienna, as German emigres from East Central Europe - including the Baltic - moved into these metropolitan centers of German-language culture. Cf. Otto Busch and Wolfgang Haus, *Berlin als Hauptstadt der Weimarer Republik 1919-1933* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), and Norbert Leser, *Das Geistige Leben Wiens in der Zwischenkriegszeit: Ring-Vorlesung 19. Mai-20. Juni 1980 im Internationalen Kulturzentrum Wien* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1981)

¹⁰⁵⁶ Dr. E. von Bulmerincq, "Theater and Cinema 1921-1928," *Rigasche Rundschau* 14.I.1930

¹⁰⁵⁷ For the population figures, refer to footnote 28; for relative prosperity, cf. Helena Šimkuva, "Letten, Russen, Juden und Deutsche in der Wirtschaft Lettlands 1920-1940" in Detlef Henning, ed. *Nationale Konflikte in Lettland und Estland während der Zwischenkriegszeit: Neun Beiträge zum 16. Baltischen Seminar 2004* (Lüneburg: Verlag Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 2009) 187-188, 197.

alienated from the state ruling their ethnic homeland - lets this group serve as a counterpoint to developments in the cultural life of Latvians and Baltic Germans alike, among whom the role of nationalizing and nationalistic state actors grew ever greater as the period wore on, punctuated by a final transfer of ethnic ownership of urban space in 1936.

7.5 The Dispossession of the Guilds

In early 1936, two of Riga's most venerable spaces, the halls of its ancient guilds, were the subject of a heated controversy as the Latvian state took steps to seize control of the two guilds' property, dissolving them as bodies and absorbing their assets in the name of modernization and economic rationalization.¹⁰⁵⁸ This move was met with outrage by ethnic Germans in Latvia and abroad, and widely hailed among ethnic Latvians.¹⁰⁵⁹ In the Latvian press discourse on the guilds, a by-now familiar stereotype was deployed repeatedly, in which Baltic Germandom was equated with not only the wrongs, but also the inefficiencies of the past, and ethnic Latvian rule with rationality, modernity, and progress. Two of Riga's most famed sites thus became focal points for ethnicized understandings of history in interethnic conflicts that positioned those spaces as symbolic battlegrounds, tokens which, in changing hands, would decisively signal the new ethnic hierarchy established in 1934.

As a city thoroughly Hanseatic in character for centuries, Riga's guilds had long played a prominent role in its history.¹⁰⁶⁰ It was home to two guilds, the Great Guild and the Lesser Guild, along with a third, smaller guild-like institution, the Company of the Blackheads, all of which survived into the 20th century as private organizations.¹⁰⁶¹ The Great Guild was long the most

¹⁰⁵⁸ "Clamor of the German Press over the Guilds: Press Review of *Jaunākās Ziņas*," *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.I.1936

¹⁰⁵⁹ A claim made by the *Rundschau* (see footnote 1042), and clearly corroborated by even a cursory general review of Latvian press reporting on the dispossessions.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Die Gilden zu Riga* (Sonderdruck aus dem "Rigaschen Rundschau", Riga: R. Ruetz & Co., 1936), 3

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*

influential single institution in the city, representing the merchant patriciate of the Baltic trading town, and was a wealthy and powerful organization up to the point of the First World War.¹⁰⁶² Its former role in city government had been eliminated in 1878, but the guild had remained wealthy enough to continue financing the city's German theater and a number of other charitable activities.¹⁰⁶³ The Great Guild, like the Baltic German industrial and mercantile elite which composed it, was shattered by the events of 1914-1919. Wealthy members fled never to return, and those that remained headed companies and firms that were mere shadows of their former selves.¹⁰⁶⁴ Formerly a pillar of economic strength to the Baltic German community, after 1919 the finances of the Great Guild were in shambles.¹⁰⁶⁵ Foreign trade, once the lifeblood of the guild, had dwindled to a mere trickle, and the whirlwind of revolution in Russia had rendered the lion's share of the Great Guild's investments worthless. This left it unable to discharge even some of the more minor of its obligations, such as the payment of pensions for former theater workers. Entire endowments were dissolved, the meager capital remaining disbursed to beneficiaries on a one-time basis.¹⁰⁶⁶ The Great Guild did continue its charitable activities throughout the 1920s, but was able to support only a fraction of the persons and institutions that it once had.¹⁰⁶⁷

Despite these circumstances, the Great Guild of Riga survived for another 17 years, mostly by virtue of adaptation to the new circumstances. The guild now admitted new members, of more diverse professional backgrounds. Accelerating a process already begun before 1914, the Great Guild in the 1920s increasingly took on members from what Baltic Germans dubbed the

¹⁰⁶² Ibid., 12-13

¹⁰⁶³ Ibid., 12; on theater sponsorship, cf. Nikolai Carlberg, ed. *Der [sic] Stadt Riga. Verwaltung und Haushalt in den Jahren 1878-1900* (Riga: Müllerschen Buchdruckerei, 1901).

¹⁰⁶⁴ LVVA 223-1-582-3 gives explicit evidence of the relative collapse of the Guild's finances. It remained a prestigious and rather well-heeled organization, able to maintain its properties and provide modest support to Baltic German cultural institutions, but its total wealth was only ever a small fraction of what it had been before the war.

¹⁰⁶⁵ LVVA 223-1-407-7, 14, 19, 23

¹⁰⁶⁶ LVVA 223-1-407-14, 23

¹⁰⁶⁷ LVVA 223-1-20-49, 50, 51, 54

literati - educated professionals, churchmen, academics, and other white-collar workers.¹⁰⁶⁸ This altered its composition to reflect that of the new Baltic German elite in a Latvia devoid of a German-speaking nobility. The promulgation of a new law on the registration of private organizations in 1923 prompted the Great Guild to change its legal standing, transforming into a society listing as its first purpose “the advancement of every kind of cultural establishment and effort towards public benefit,” although its charter also mentions the goal of advancing local trade and industry - fairly natural given the many merchants and businessmen remaining among its ranks.¹⁰⁶⁹

From this legal evolution in 1923 until the end of 1935, the Great Guild essentially transformed itself into an institution for the support of the arts and higher education, serving as a central hub around which much of Baltic German cultural life took place.¹⁰⁷⁰ The guild’s chief source of income was now its impressive hall. Built in the heart of Old Riga on the site of a structure dating from the 14th century and renovated many times through the centuries, the hall had last been remodeled in 1857 in English gothic style.¹⁰⁷¹ A large, handsome, and well-equipped structure, the hall was much in demand for cultural activities of every sort - and not just from Baltic German quarters. Along with Baltic German groups, many interwar ethnic Latvian performers and organizations rented the hall for a wide variety of purposes.¹⁰⁷² Although concerts, dances, charity balls, lectures, and other cultural events in German, Latvian, and Russian were regularly held in the hall, it was most popular as a venue for conferences, regularly hosting all manner of

¹⁰⁶⁸ Helene Dopkewitsch “Die Grosse Gilde zu Riga” in: *Baltische Monatshefte* nr. 1 1936, 23

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁰ The central role played by the Great Guild in establishing and supporting the Baltic German Herder Institute of Riga is the most prominent example, as is the use of its hall by Riga’s Baltic Germans for cultural events of every sort. Cf. LVVA 223-1-179, throughout (Correspondence between Great Guild and Herder Institute)

¹⁰⁷¹ *Die Gilden zu Riga*, 15-19, with great detail on craftsmanship and aesthetic style provided.

¹⁰⁷² Russian organizations also occasionally rented the hall, but its schedule is mostly filled with the names of Baltic German and Latvian groups. Obviously Jewish organizations are notably lacking, likely due to anti-Semitism.

professional societies from across Latvia.¹⁰⁷³ The guild did a brisk business in renting out the hall during the 1920s, and records betray little evidence of ethnic chauvinism in the terms offered or parties accommodated. On the whole, though owned by the overtly German Great Guild and hosting more German-language speakers and events than any other sort, the hall nonetheless served as a multicultural and at least partially ethnically agnostic space, one also used regularly by ethnic Latvians and Russians. However, ownership, rather than usage, was the axial question around which ethnic politics revolved, as Riga's Baltic Germans were soon to discover.

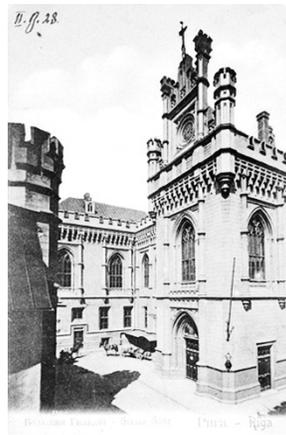


Figure 46. The Great Guild courtyard...

¹⁰⁷³ For example, the Great Guild hosted: an anti-social democratic rally organized by a Latvian city councilor in 1933 (Emile Karlsson Won't March," *Rigasche Rundschau* 29.IV.1933); in 1929, an international anti-alcohol conference ("Anti-alcohol Congress," *Rigasche Rundschau* 19.IX.1929); in 1930, an assembly of the union of city employees ("Protest Assembly," *Rigasche Rundschau* 1.II.1930); in 1932, a congress of the Agrarian Party of Latvia, the most important political party of the interwar period, headed by later-dictator Karlis Ulmanis ("Farmers' Union Congress," *Rigasche Rundschau* 16.IV.1932); in 1929, a ceremony inaugurating the incipient (ethnic Latvian) political bloc called the "economic center" ("Flag Consecration," *Rigasche Rundschau* 7.X.1929); in 1930, an assembly of the market merchants of Riga, mostly consisting of ethnic Latvians and Russians ("Two Assemblies," *Rigasche Rundschau* 8.X.1930); in 1931, a party held by the general staff of the Latvian army ("Drowned in the City Canal," *Rigasche Rundschau* 27.IV.1931); and in 1934, a jubilee celebration of the ethnic Latvian university corporation (fraternity) "Lettgallia" ("Jubilee of Lettgallia," *Rigasche Rundschau* 22.II.1934). The list given above is merely a representative sampling of such non-German events.



Figure 47. ...from Amatu street...



Figure 48. ... and its lower hall, circa 1940.

A decree issued by the cabinet of ministers on the last day of 1935 effected the dissolution of virtually all existing economic organizations in Latvia, stipulating the transfer of their property and assets - real and otherwise - to the control of newly created state bodies.¹⁰⁷⁴ The Ulmanis government intended for the so-called “New Year’s Eve Laws” (*Sylvestergesetze*) to effect a sweeping reorganization of economic life in Latvia. Though making no mention of the guilds or their prestigious halls, these laws stipulated the dissolution of virtually all previously existing economic organizations and the creation of a pair of new, national institutions to replace them:

¹⁰⁷⁴ Anonymous, *Die neuen Wirtschaftsgesetze Lettlands* (Riga: Ausgabe der Handels- und Industriekammer Lettlands, 1936) 3-4

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Latvia, and the Chamber of Craftsmen of Latvia.¹⁰⁷⁵ The responsibilities and properties of the Great Guild were to be absorbed by the former, those of the Lesser Guild by the latter body.¹⁰⁷⁶ These laws prompted much outcry among Baltic Germans, and elicited an indignant response in Germany as well.¹⁰⁷⁷ Although the Lesser Guild - a much more ethnically mixed institution than its mercantile counterpart - offered little resistance to the new legislation, the Great Guild maintained that the new laws did not apply to their organization. The Great Guild maintained that it had legally surrendered its historic role in the economic life of the country following its transformation into a private club in 1923, and it followed every legal recourse available to it, challenging the application of the law in Latvia's highest court, which ultimately dismissed its case in March 1936.¹⁰⁷⁸ Despite mounting this challenge, the Great Guild complied with the conditions of the new law from the beginning, immediately surrendering formal control of their organization and its finances to the commissioner appointed by the minister of finance under the new law, J. Kauliņš, a former minister of agriculture.¹⁰⁷⁹ While its ultimate fate was being decided in the courts, the commissioner moved forward with gathering the guild's financial records for eventual transfer to the state.¹⁰⁸⁰ In the meantime, virtually all decisions had to be approved by Kauliņš, who mostly permitted the guild to continue on with its charitable and cultural work through the spring of 1936.¹⁰⁸¹

During this time, Riga's newspapers and periodicals witnessed a flurry of writing on the guilds, with Baltic German and ethnic Latvian writers advancing very different narratives on the

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁶ "Liquidation of the Great Guild," *Rigasche Post* 29.III.1936

¹⁰⁷⁷ Po-9a, Enteignung der Gilden und Gewerbeverein, Band 1, 1936, Signatur 166, Auswärtiges Amt internal memorandum (undated), cf. also *Frankfurter Zeitung*, nr. 15-16, 9.I.1936, "Die Rigaschen Gilden"

¹⁰⁷⁸ "The Senate Declines the Petition of the Great Guild," *Rigasche Rundschau* 25.III.1936

¹⁰⁷⁹ LVVA 223-1-20-11, cf. also LVVA 1691-1-1341-4, 22

¹⁰⁸⁰ LVVA 223-1-20-6, 7, 8, 9

¹⁰⁸¹ LVVA 223-1-20-1, 49, 50, 54

institutions and their role in Riga life, past, present, and future. Coming relatively late in the interwar period, these public debates were in some sense the final act in the ethnic Latvian takeover of historical or symbolically important spaces formerly associated with Baltic Germans. It was perhaps no coincidence that these last spaces to change hands in the drawn-out process of ethnic reversal were also those most closely identified specifically with the city's historical Baltic German elite, rather than with the nobility, the Lutheran Church, or the region more generally. Throughout much of the interwar period, interethnic relations within Riga itself had a different tenor than at the national level, with greater interethnic cooperation and emphasis on political common ground between Baltic Germans and Latvians, especially in Riga city government.¹⁰⁸² Riga's Baltic German economic elite had managed to preserve and advance their economic and social interests vis-a-vis the new state vastly better than their counterparts in the nobility or the Lutheran church, but the tide of Latvian nationalist sentiment after 1934 ultimately overwhelmed the last vestiges of this sub-group's power and influence in the built environment as well.¹⁰⁸³

History infused and enlivened the debates between Latvians and Baltic Germans on the guilds, as writers on both sides advanced ethnically-charged narratives of the past, and of the future. The position of the Latvian government was focused on the latter; the dispossessions were a mere side effect of sweeping laws intended to rationalize and modernize the national economy by doing away with outmoded institutions:

“[the laws affected] a whole series of industrial and trade societies, the origins of which reach into the middle ages, and which have no role whatsoever to play in the modern economic era.”¹⁰⁸⁴

¹⁰⁸² Cf. footnote 941

¹⁰⁸³ On the transfer of political leadership of Baltic Germandom to the urban bourgeoisie, cf. Hiden, *The Baltic States and Weimar Ostpolitik*, 36-37

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Die neuen Wirtschaftsgesetze Lettlands*, 4

Such arguments had an undeniable element of truth to them, and Baltic German commentators were quick to protest that they in no way denied the necessity of a reorganization of the economic life of the country.¹⁰⁸⁵ Their contention remained, however, that the application of the law to the Great Guild was erroneous, leaving the general reasoning behind the laws of December 31, 1935 beside the point in Baltic German eyes.¹⁰⁸⁶



Figure 49. The Lesser Guild, from the courtyard of the Great Guild (left).



Figure 50. The Lesser Guild, foyer (right).

The appeal to rationality was only one aspect of Latvian rhetoric on the laws, however. An informational booklet published by the Latvian government in order to combat negative press on the new laws in Germany devoted most of its text to advancing arguments rooted in appeals to historical justice, rather than to modern rationality. Speaking shortly after the passage of the new legislation, *de facto* dictator Ulmanis characterized them in terms certain to elicit an emotional response from Latvian national activists:

¹⁰⁸⁵ "Political Chronical," *Baltische Monatsheft* nr. 2, 1.II.1936, cf. also Wilhelm Retlaw, "Die lettischen Sylvestergesetze" in: *Jomsburg: Völker und Staaten im Norden und Osten Europas*, Band 1, Heft 3, 394

¹⁰⁸⁶ The head of the Great Guild, Egon Schwarz, insisted this to be the case up to the very end, noting it politely but firmly after a tactless speech given to the guild members by the chairman of the new Chamber of Commerce and industry that April shortly before its effective dissolution. Cf. "The Last Hour of the Great Guild," *Rīts* nr. 94 3.IV.1936

“Thereby will it become possible to return these institutions of the common welfare, which came into existence as fruits of the labor of the public, to that public, and to take them out of the hands of a tiny group which manages, uses, and exploits them.”¹⁰⁸⁷

Ulmanis' appeal invoked the former subordinate status of Latvians vis-a-vis Baltic Germans, relying upon the simplistic - but politically expedient - dichotomy in which Baltic Germans figured as oppressors and exploiters, Latvians as oppressed and exploited. Arguments about economic rationalization were made to ring rather hollow by utterances from the state president such as: “And if one is to speak of injustice, so we will counter that at last justice has triumphed over injustice!”¹⁰⁸⁸ What Ulmanis had left largely implicit, the Latvian populist press made explicit. Many editorials on the Great Guild from this time were highly vitriolic, characterizing the guilds as historical instruments for the oppression of ethnic Latvians in Riga.¹⁰⁸⁹ Editorialists echoed the state president’s sentiments, with titles such as “The end of an anachronism of history: society takes back properties which originally belonged to it” being representative of this genre.¹⁰⁹⁰ This title and those of other articles like it (often with sensationalized headlines such as “The Last Hour of the Great Guild”¹⁰⁹¹) convey the powerful grip that populist nationalism held over the ethnic Latvian populace of the mid-1930s - *Pēdējā Brīdī* was a mainstream paper, and among the most popular Latvian-language interwar papers.¹⁰⁹² Other pieces in the Latvian press resurrected legal wranglings between the guilds and Riga city government in the 1880s and 1890s to buttress arguments regarding the guilds' misuse of public funds, power,

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Die neuen Wirtschaftsgesetze Lettlands*, 57

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*; this is an excerpt from a speech by state president (*de facto* dictator) Ulmanis at the opening of the tenth scientific congress of the agronomists of Latvia, January 4th, 1936.

¹⁰⁸⁹ For example: “The Attempts of the Guilds to Attack the Personal Freedom of Riga's Latvians,” *Rīts* 16.I.1936; “What Properties Belonged to the Guilds?” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 5.I.1936; and “Great Riches Given over to the Use of the Nation,” *Rīts* 4.I.1936.

¹⁰⁹⁰ “The End of A Historical Anachronism,” *Pēdējā Brīdī* 1.I.1936; the subtitle is “society takes back properties which originally belonged to it.”

¹⁰⁹¹ “The Last Hour of the Great Guild,” *Rīts* 3.IV.1936

¹⁰⁹² Rihards Treijs, *Latvijas Republikas Prese, 1918-1940* (Rīga: Zvaigznes ABC, 1996), 239

and trust, characterizing the Great Guild in particular as corrupt and exploitative.¹⁰⁹³ *Pēdējā Brīdī* had already disputed the legal control of the guilds' over their respective halls early in 1935 on this basis, anticipating their use by the then-prospective Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Latvia, which prompted changes in the statutes of the Great Guild intended to ward off precisely such a takeover.¹⁰⁹⁴ Latvian arguments for the illegitimacy of the Great Guild's ownership invariably treated the institution as wholly parasitic, without any right or title to the wealth generated by its members over the centuries. The deeply socialistic vein of this narrative - one which conflated class with ethnicity - would likely not have found wide purchase in the deeply anti-Communist climate prevailing among Latvia's governing parties prior to the coup d'état of 1934. Only after the imposition of a nationalist, authoritarian regime could such sentiments be deployed on behalf of the government without fear of uncontrollable repercussions.

More than any previous ethnicized conflict over urban space, the expropriation of the halls of Riga's ancient guilds elicited international attention, especially in Germany. A national socialist government actively promoting itself as the champion of ethnic Germans everywhere could hardly let such actions pass without comment, and public opinion in Germany was outraged by the New Year's Eve Laws.¹⁰⁹⁵ The *Völkische Beobachter*, the leading press organ of the Nazi party, ran a headline on January 10, 1936 entitled "Theft of German Cultural Goods", a title that was broadly reflective of public attitudes towards the expropriations, both among Baltic Germans and in Germany proper. The *Völkische Beobachter* explicitly situated the New Year's Eve Laws in a

¹⁰⁹³ For example: "Riga has Always Been a Latvian City," *Tēvijas Sargs* 14.II.1936; "How the Guilds Became a Hindrance to the Development of Trades," *Pēdējā Brīdī* 18.I.1936; and "Justice has Triumphed over Injustice," *Tēvijas Sargs* 10.I.1936.

¹⁰⁹⁴ "The Question of the Ownership of Riga's Great and Lesser Guild Halls: Spaces for the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and of Tradecraft," *Pēdējā Brīdī* 21.II.1935

¹⁰⁹⁵ Po-9a, Enteignung der Gilden und Gewerbevereine, Band 1, 1936, Signatur 166, Auswärtiges Amt telegram from embassy in Riga to Berlin, 8.I.1936, signature illegible, page 2. Cf. also "The German Press Speaks of a 'Heavy Blow' against Latvia's Germans," *Jaunākās Ziņas* 6.I.1936.

succession of events beginning with the Agrarian reform and continuing with the expropriations of the St. James' Church in 1923, then of the cathedral in 1931: "Put briefly, it is a representative image of the sorrowful path which the German ethnic group in Latvia has had to walk in the past fifteen years."¹⁰⁹⁶

The Latvian-language paper *Jaunākās Zinas*, the country's largest daily, published a hostile review of German press on the incident, accusing Latvia's Baltic Germans of wilfully sabotaging German-Latvian relations.¹⁰⁹⁷ In its response to the *Reich* German reaction to the New Year's Eve Laws, *Jaunākās Zinas* also reiterated the same arguments used domestically, ones rooted not in contemporary conceptions of the rule of law, but in a historical narrative of ethnic injustice and eventual comeuppance:

"The *Reich* German now maintains everywhere that German possessions in Latvia are to be expropriated without payment. We must pose the question: to whom is restitution actually due? To this small group of persons, who now consider these properties, erected and outfitted by all of the citizens of Riga, as their own?"¹⁰⁹⁸

Despite much acrimony and ethnic feuding in the press, the effects of the international incident were ultimately minor, producing tension and diplomatic unpleasantness but little else. With the German economy moving increasingly towards a wartime footing, imports of Latvian foodstuffs - especially butter - were apparently important enough to avoid a real rupture between Berlin and Riga, with diplomats agreeing that though relations between their countries would

¹⁰⁹⁶ "Theft of German Cultural Heritage," *Völkische Beobachter* 10.I.1936

¹⁰⁹⁷ "Clamor of the German Press over the Guilds: Press Review of *Jaunākās Zinas*," *Rigasche Rundschau* nr. 9 13.I.1936; Similar accusations were leveled at the executive committee (*Aeltestenbank*) of the Great Guild by the chairman of the newly-created Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry A. Berziņš (no relation to the director of the National Theater) in early April 1936, when he charged that the country's Baltic Germans had harmed Latvia's international reputation by actively working to publicize the issue in Germany. Cf. "The Last Hour of the Great Guild," *Rīts* 3.IV.1936.

¹⁰⁹⁸ "A Commentary from *Jaunākās Zinas*," *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.I.1936

remain “correct”, they could not remain “warm”, leaving matters tense, but hardly at a genuine impasse.¹⁰⁹⁹

The prevailing attitude towards the dissolution of the guilds and loss of the buildings among Baltic Germans seems to have been one of bitter resignation. A number of lengthy pieces on the guilds and their history were published in Baltic German papers and journals in early 1936, but these do not seem to have been primarily intended to combat the arguments leveled against the guilds' rights of ownership. Though arguments as to the legal rights of the guilds are present in these pieces, most of the articles read rather as nostalgic reflections on an ancient aspect of Riga's history that was now on the very cusp of slipping into the past. As the *Rigasche Rundschau* glumly concluded a few days after the publication of the New Year's Eve Laws, “The work of our fathers and distant forefathers is being replaced by a new work.”¹¹⁰⁰ This sentiment of helplessness in the face of change - of ethnic reversal - suffused Baltic German writing on the dispossession, even as the legal struggle to save the Great Guild and its hall continued *pro forma*.¹¹⁰¹

The dispossessions entailed by the New Year's Eve Law of 1935 brought the end of Baltic German control over two of Riga's most prized cultural spaces, and in a fashion that left little doubt as to just how coveted these spaces were. As one *Reich* German daily put it, “In the explanations of the liquidation of the guilds, the Latvian government has been very circumspect, but the press and public, in contrast, cannot delight enough in the acquisition of the handsome guild halls.”¹¹⁰² Indeed, on both sides of the debate over the Great Guild and its seat, much was made of the spaces themselves - their size, splendor, finery, and overall prestige. Latvian accounts stressed the opulent

¹⁰⁹⁹ Po 9 a, Enteignung, Gilden, Gewerbeverein usw., Band 1, 1936-1936, Signatur 166 (Gilden), copy of Auswärtiges Amt memorandum signed von Bülow from 4.II.1936, addressee not listed.

¹¹⁰⁰ “New Order,” *Rigasche Rundschau* nr. 2, 2.I.1936

¹¹⁰¹ For example, frustration mingled with a sense of helplessness and fatalism in Hans von Rimscha, “History is Called as the State Witness,” *Rigasche Post* 19.I.1936

¹¹⁰² “Clamor of the German Press over the Guilds: Press Review of *Jaunākās Ziņas*,” *Rigasche Rundschau* 13.I.1936

furnishings and decoration largely in order to portray the Baltic German owners as decadent, enjoying the lavish fruits of public labor.¹¹⁰³ Baltic German descriptions were more tender, describing cherished cultural artifacts reflective of the city's ancient Hanseatic past.¹¹⁰⁴ Even as they approached these spaces with diametrically opposed moral understandings of history, Latvian national activists and Baltic German leaders shared a common esteem for them as symbols. For Latvians, they were symbols of past injustices, to be conquered and transformed, but for Baltic Germans, they embodied a long history and ancient traditions, explaining and justifying their ethnic group's presence in the Baltic region. Once again, the symbolic value of spaces in interwar Riga had far outweighed their practical function, precipitating yet another conflict where ownership of the country's past - as manifested in the urban built environment - seemed requisite to control over its future.

The transformation of theater and cultural life in interwar Riga is emblematic of wider transformations in society, as older models of co-existence from the era of Europe's vast, multi-ethnic land empires were replaced by understandings of ethnicity structured not only by nationalist ideologies, but by nationalizing state actors operating outside of - and eventually above - the bounds of civil society. This pertains to both the Latvian government after 1934, and to the German one after 1933. Here, as in other aspects of politics, the economy, and daily life, some of the city's most prominent spaces served as the focal points of ethnic conflicts. Control over symbolic space was increasingly closely attached to (Latvian) ethnic prestige and thus to state legitimacy. The increasingly exclusive identification of the state with a single ethnic group rendered non-Latvian control of prestigious spaces like the halls of Riga's ancient guilds more and

¹¹⁰³ For example, "The Lesser or St. Johann's Guild in Riga," *Atpūta* 17.I.1936 and "What the Great or St. Mary's Guild in Riga Looks Like," *Atpūta* 16.I.1936.

¹¹⁰⁴ *Die Gilden zu Riga*, 17-18

more untenable. Such symbolic contradictions in ethnic ownership that might otherwise still have been surmountable were heavily burdened by deeply ethnicized understandings of history, in which spaces that housed - and thus represented - historic institutions functioned as symbols with starkly opposed valences for Latvians and Baltic Germans. In the case of the city theaters, resolved early on in the period, popular history and collective memory play much less overt a role, as Latvians generally did not resent the German and Russian theaters of the pre-war era - unkind words in this regard are scarcely to be found in the Latvian press of the era. In the case of the city's theaters, ethnic prestige as conveyed by simple spatial grandeur and desirable location played a much greater role in shaping outcomes than did popular understandings of local history.

The case of the guilds is somewhat different, though space, site, and prestige all played a role here as well. For ethnic Latvians, the very splendor of the guilds' architecture and furnishings increasingly came to represent the legal and economic injustices perpetrated along ethnic lines in the past, with the wealth of the guilds purportedly derived in proportion to the suffering of Latvian laborers. For Baltic Germans, the guild halls were invariably (and typically unreflectively) cast as symbols of the prosperity and culture that Baltic Germans believed their ethnic group to have brought to the Baltic region, and also as symbols of the industry of their ancestors. It is important to note that these popular understandings of these spaces were not immutable, and themselves evolved considerably across the interwar period, especially in the Latvian case, as national activists took increasingly polarizing and selective positions on the history of relations between the two groups, introducing many distortions and omitting much context. Ultimately, as with virtually all of the ethnic conflicts over space in interwar Riga, the struggles over control of cultural spaces are most valuable not simply for their ability to refine our understanding of interethnic relations during that era, but for their ability to speak to contemporary circumstances and provide a roadmap

towards a more harmonious multi-ethnic coexistence in both the near and distant future. Likewise, in studying the shift from an imperial cosmopolitan understanding of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism towards more exclusive, ethnically chauvinistic attitudes, we might better be able to posit what such transformations are possible or desirable in the 21st century.

8.0 Epilogue: Flight before the Storm and the End of a Baltic German *Heimat*

“We all loved our homeland passionately, and there was room there for all of us.”¹¹⁰⁵

“With this development the genial mingling of tongues and faiths that had once given Riga the proud title of “Paris of the Baltic” gave way all at once to the gray, dead shabbiness of isolation behind the impenetrable walls of Stalin’s Russia; and national chauvinism was punished in a degree beyond its greatest deserts.”¹¹⁰⁶

The dispossessions of New Year’s Eve 1935 were the last conflict over public space to trouble relations between Baltic Germans and Latvians during the interwar period, or to stir up discord between any of the country’s major ethnic groups. The transfer of the city’s ancient guild halls into ethnic Latvian control was the culminating move in the campaign to “give Riga a Latvian face”, begun long before the authoritarian Ulmanis regime made it an open priority. Although a handful of prominent urban spaces did remain in Baltic German control - most notably, St. Peter’s church in the old town - the Ulmanis regime and the ethnic Latvian population at large seem to have been content with the status quo established in early 1936. The next three years passed quietly in Latvia, both in terms of interethnic relations and regarding domestic politics more generally. The Ulmanis regime, authoritarian but mild in comparison to many of its counterparts across Europe, continued to consolidate its power at home, and attempted to shore up alliances abroad, to little avail.¹¹⁰⁷ Friendly relations with both the USSR and Nazi Germany were pursued, though not to much effect - the Baltic German question frustrated the achievement of close relations with

¹¹⁰⁵ Alfred Intelmann, *Aufzeichnungen über das letzte Arbeitsjahr der deutschbaltischen Volksgruppe in Lettland und ihre Umsiedlung* (Essen: Druckmeister, 1984) 107

¹¹⁰⁶ Kennan, *Memoirs 1925-1950*, 29

¹¹⁰⁷ Attempts at a so-called “Baltic Bloc” defensive pact – consisting of Poland, the three Baltic States, and Finland – consistently foundered on the issue of Polish-Lithuanian enmity regarding the city of Vilnius. Cf. Hugh I. Rodgers, *Search for Security: A Study in Baltic Diplomacy 1920-1934* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975).

the latter in particular.¹¹⁰⁸ The national economy continued to recover from the effects of the depression, with a modest growth in light industry and increase in exports, but without drastic change. Life continued much as it had since the coup d'état of 1934, tranquil enough on the surface but burdened by deep-seated unease.

That unease manifested among the population of Latvia in different ways. As the 1930s wore on, events outside the borders of their small country increasingly portended consequences for Latvians citizens of all ethnicities, and of the direst nature. Most threatening to the state and to the ethnic Latvian majority, of course, were the rhetoric of ethnic solidarity and protection for Germans abroad preached by Hitler and the Third Reich, punctuated powerfully by the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938.¹¹⁰⁹ Baltic German sources from this time period are largely silent on the question of an eventual German takeover of Latvia, a turn of events that surely could not have failed to cross the minds of most of the country's citizenry in those years. As we shall see, the ultimate course of events precluded any need to discuss such a scenario in memoirs and recollections of the era, and we are left to guess at the sentiments of the great bulk of Baltic Germandom. Many, doubtless, would have been heavily influenced by the increasing threat of annexation by the Soviet Union, an possibility that loomed increasingly large as Stalin pursued a modernization and expansion of the Red Army and a more aggressive foreign policy in the second half of the 1930s. The Latvian state had won its independence against two major foes in the field: right-wing ethnic Germans (the *Landeswehr* and the various Freikorps units under Bermond-Avalov) and left-radical Bolshevik revolutionaries, Latvian and Russian alike. What must have

¹¹⁰⁸ In contrast to the rhetoric of the Nazi state, which positioned itself as the protector of ethnic German populations outside its borders, the ethnic Russian minority in Latvia was heavily leavened with persons having fled the Bolsheviks after 1917, concomitantly staunchly anti-communist in their outlook. This, paired with the general lack of any ethnically-oriented political rhetoric emanating from interwar Moscow, left the Russian minority in Latvia in a mostly antagonistic state vis-à-vis the USSR.

¹¹⁰⁹ Garleff, "Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit," 528-533

seemed like the same forces in only slightly altered form now loomed large as the principal threats to Latvia's continued existence as a nation, a scant twenty years later.

The Baltic German threat to an independent Latvia - very real in the summer of 1919 - had, however, been extinguished for all time a mere decade later. By the mid-1930s, separatist or anti-state activity among Baltic Germans was practically non-existent, whatever opinions individuals may have harbored in private. While many may have continued to doubt the ability of the tiny country to survive amidst such powers as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the loyalist rhetoric of Paul Schiemann had produced undramatic but effective results over the course of nearly twenty years. Despite the expropriations of property, despite sometimes intense anti-German rhetoric, and despite the overthrow of democracy, Baltic Germans in Latvia, along with the country's two other major ethnic groups, had largely been left alone by the state. Though robbed of the symbolic fruits of their way of life in the Baltic - of their grandest church, of the city's opera houses and guild halls raised by their forefathers - the roots of that way of life remained intact, mostly undisturbed by the state. Although Latvians were favored in many spheres of life by numerous *clausi* and other legal mechanisms, the country's ethnic minorities were nonetheless able to own businesses, practice law and medicine, entertain their own cultural life, and perhaps most importantly of all, operate their own schools with relatively little oversight, even under the authoritarian Ulmanis regime. The *modus vivendi* thus reached was perhaps more durable than it has been credited with being - here, as nearly everywhere else in the history of Latvia, external events dictated the form and pace of developments within the country. Left alone, there is good reason to believe that an enduring mode of ethnic coexistence could have emerged in Latvia, particularly with a return to democracy.

The little nation was of course not left alone, but was swept up in the maelstrom of global events, in this case, in the ramifications of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939. Secret clauses in that famous agreement detailed the division of the Baltic Sea region into spheres of Nazi and Soviet influence, and included stipulations for the removal of the Baltic Germans from the territory of Latvia and Estonia (assigned to Moscow's sphere) prior to a Soviet annexation. This spared Hitler and the Nazi regime from the hypocrisy of allowing ethnic Germans abroad to come under Soviet rule, or from having to adopt any tortured rhetorical positions vis-a-vis their new allies.¹¹¹⁰ That this agreement was reached without the involvement of the Latvian or Estonian governments should indicate their relative impotence vis-a-vis the great powers.

In a speech given to the *Reichstag* and broadcast live on October 6th, 1939 – more than six weeks following the German and three after the Soviet invasion and *de facto* partitioning of Poland between them - Hitler announced the “resettlement” (*Umsiedlung*) of the Baltic Germans, part of the NSDAP's *heim ins Reich* policy.¹¹¹¹ This resettlement unfolded not only in the context of Nazi rhetoric regarding the protection of ethnic Germans abroad and the fundamental unity of all ethnic Germans; it also took place in a Europe which had experienced similar population transfers in recent years, and in which such transfers were not necessarily condemned.¹¹¹² The Turkish-Greek population exchanges of 1923, though rather chaotic and not without physical or financial harm to individuals, had been sanctioned (indeed, largely arranged) by the League of Nations.¹¹¹³ Though with war declared between Britain, France, and Germany, Hitler had vastly less need to

¹¹¹⁰ Jürgen von Hehn, *Die Umsiedlung der baltischen Deutschen - das letzte Kapitel baltischdeutscher Geschichte* (Marburg/Lahn: Herder-Institute, 1982) 81-82

¹¹¹¹ Literally, “home into the *Reich*”; this phrasing implicitly deployed common historical narratives regarding German settlement and expansion throughout Europe during the Middle Ages.

¹¹¹² Cf. Matthew James Frank, *Making Minorities History: Population Transfer in Twentieth-century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Prologue, for an engaging anecdote demonstrating the new hold that the concept of peaceable population transfers as a solution to Europe's ethnic ills had taken on the general public of the interwar period.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.* 73-81

satisfy world opinion, the purportedly “voluntary” nature of the transfer of the Baltic Germans placed it in a rough line of continuity with the convention signed between Greece and Turkey in Lausanne in 1923.¹¹¹⁴

The resettlement unfolded, in its initial phase, across a span of mere weeks to follow. The departing Baltic Germans were to be resettled in territory newly annexed from Poland, along the former eastern border of the *Reich*, in the so-called *Warthegau*.¹¹¹⁵ The deportees were allowed to take little of value with them, with the sale of most real property supervised by the German government and conducted subsequent to their departure.¹¹¹⁶ There is a considerable body of literature existing on this resettlement, its details, ramifications, and ultimate failure, but for this account, what is of essence is the psychology of departure itself, the sundering of bonds of place created over centuries, and the final dissolution of local identity in favor of ethnic belonging.¹¹¹⁷

The announcement came to Baltic Germandom as a shock. Most had hoped that pressure exerted by the Third Reich on the Ulmanis regime could help improve their group’s position in Latvia; some may have entertained annexationist fantasies, but few could have imagined that they would be asked to leave their homeland en masse. As Heinrich Lienz recalled,

¹¹¹⁴ This although the Greek-Turkish population exchanges were largely compulsory on the basis of religion. Cf. Michael Schwartz, *Ethnische "Säuberungen" in der Moderne: Globale Wechselwirkungen nationalistischer und rassistischer Gewaltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013) 467; Schwartz notes that the term “voluntary” is to be applied only in the most qualified manner, given the circumstances under which emigrating groups were typically presented with their choice – this very much applies to the Baltic German case.

¹¹¹⁵ They were to become farmers there, although as von Hehn notes, the occupational structure and average age of the Baltic German population left them, in his phrase “not particularly well-suited” to such a task. Von Hehn, 81

¹¹¹⁶ Lars Bosse, “Vom Baltikum in den Reichsgau Wartheland” in Michael Garleff, ed., *Deutschbalten, Weimarer Republik, und Drittes Reich* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2001) 305-306

¹¹¹⁷ For a representative sampling of the most recent work in this very broad body of literature (most of it in German), cf.: Dietrich A. Loeber, ed., *Diktierte Option. Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939-1941* (Neumünster, Germany: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1972); Michael Garleff, *Deutschbalten, Weimarer Republik, und Drittes Reich* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001); and “Umsiedlung der Deutschbalten aus Estland und Lettland 1939-1941,” published as part of the online series *Übersetzte Geschichte* (Translated History) by the Nord-Ost Institut in Lüneburg, Germany (<https://www.ikgn.de/cms/index.php/uebersetzte-geschichte/beitraege/umsiedlung-der-deutschbalten>). This dissertation has tended to rely (though not exclusively) on older works authored by persons who lived through the *Umsiedlung* (von Rimscha, von Hehn) because of its emphasis on perception, belonging, identity, and lived experience as perceived in spatial terms.

“I sat for a while there in the armchair as if rendered mute, still clad in my coat and hat, then I sprang up: one must do something, inform others, speak, demand answers, above all else protest, outright decline, refuse to let oneself become a pawn in a political game between dark and wicked powers. [...] Few of the German residents of Riga will have found rest in the following night. The morning paper brought the final confirmation.”¹¹¹⁸

As Lienz’s account makes clear, many were bitterly disappointed with the Führer’s announcement.¹¹¹⁹ Relatively few – the Nazi-leaning youth above all - were gladdened by the news, and the middle-aged and elderly in particular must have been daunted at the prospect of establishing a new life on what had until recently been foreign soil. The youth, less “anchored in the homeland”, in von Hehn’s phrase, were generally more enthusiastic about the prospect of departure.¹¹²⁰ On the whole, no genuine consensus of reaction could be found among the Baltic Germans of Latvia. Yet, in a mere matter of weeks, most had decided to depart. Wilfried Schlau calculated the figure at 93.6% of all Baltic Germans choosing to emigrate, noting that on paper, 104.7% left their old homeland — presented with the opportunity to flee the writing on the wall regarding Soviet annexation, a not inconsiderable number of persons who had claimed ethnic Latvian or Estonian identity throughout the interwar period found themselves warming to another side of their heritage that autumn.¹¹²¹ By early 1940, 51,000 Baltic Germans had departed Latvia, constituting about 80% of the total Baltic German population of the country.¹¹²² The overwhelming majority had chosen to leave - to abandon - their ancestral homeland in favor of a

¹¹¹⁸ Heinrich Lienz, *Erlebnisse eines Deutschbalten bei der Umsiedlung 1939-1945*, (Archiv der Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft in Lüneburg), 2

¹¹¹⁹ Maris Saagpakk, “Die Umsiedlung in deutschbaltischen Autobiographen” in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 2007 (2), 55

¹¹²⁰ Hehn, *Die Umsiedlung*, 100

¹¹²¹ Wilfried Schlau, *Sozialgeschichte der baltischen Deutschen* (Köln: Mare Balticum, 2000), 23

¹¹²² One person of note refusing to leave was Paul Schiemann, former Baltic German political doyen and editor-in-chief of the *Rigasche Rundschau*, who had been forced from his paper and position of political leadership by the rise to power of the Nazis in 1933 – Schiemann having been fiercely critical of the NSDAP for many years by then. Cf. Hans von Rimscha, *Die Umsiedlung der Deutschbalten aus Lettland im Jahre 1939 – Eine Betrachtung* (Hannover-Döhren: Harro von Hirschheydt, 1959) 34, 44

place few had ever seen before. The motives for departure went beyond the desires of the individual. As one emigre put it,

“A multitude of frightening slogans were put into circulation which had a sort of mass suggestibility as a consequence, and one heard that most had already decided to “follow the call of the Führer”, as it was said. One began to understand that in reality, remaining in our homeland was no longer possible for us.”¹¹²³

The decision to depart must be understood in the context of the looming Soviet annexation of Latvia, with Stalin already having begun aggressive overtures towards the Baltic States in late September of 1939, demanding permission to construct Soviet bases on Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian soil.¹¹²⁴ With the proverbial writing on the wall in regard to impending Soviet annexation, the escape route offered by the policy of *Umsiedlung* must have seemed the only logical choice left to most Baltic Germans.¹¹²⁵ When it comes to the decision to depart, too, the intensity of Baltic German persecution at the hands of Riga’s Bolshevik occupiers in the first half of 1919 too, and the centrality which anti-Communism had played in shaping group identity throughout the interwar period, cannot be underestimated.¹¹²⁶ Given these factors, given the relative size of Latvia relative to the now-united and militarily mighty Soviet Union, and, not least of all, given the often scornful treatment of their ethnic group at the hands of their ethnic Latvian countrymen, the decision of most Baltic Germans to depart their ancient homeland so abruptly in the autumn of 1939 is one that seems a foregone conclusion. As the former aristocrat Margarete

¹¹²³ Gahlnbäck as quoted in Saagpakk, 60

¹¹²⁴ Andreas Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2010) 114-115

¹¹²⁵ Hans von Rimscha states that many Baltic Germans, largely ambivalent towards Hitler and the Nazi regime, felt that Hitler’s own handling of international politics – particularly the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact – had left them no alternative but to “heed the call of the Führer” and accept resettlement. Cf. Von Rimscha, 44

¹¹²⁶ Cf. Chapter 4: The Topography of Memory

von Gersdorff put it in her memoirs, staying behind would have meant “death or Siberia”.¹¹²⁷

Hermann Grussendorf was equally blunt in his assessment of the decision to depart:

“In those October days of the year 1939, which had stirred the old Hanseatic city of Riga into an indescribable excitement and commotion, the question was not one of Baltic or German identity [*Baltentum oder Deutschtum*], but rather purely a question of existence: security in Germany or extinction in the face of the inevitable onslaught of the Bolshevik armies.”¹¹²⁸

Yet in spite of these considerations, far too pragmatic to be ignored, the decision was a painful, even a torturous one for many.¹¹²⁹ As Baltic German literature from the interwar period reveals, the group’s sense of personal connection to the region - to its landscape, climate, flora and fauna - was profound. The Baltic Germans of Latvia were a community deeply rooted in tradition and a sense of their group’s history in the region, both of which were intimately linked to conceptions of *Heimat*. Riga in particular played a powerful role in shaping its Baltic German residents’ sense of identity, as their beloved *Vaterstadt*, now to be given up.¹¹³⁰ Riga was home to many Baltic German cultural institutions of a high caliber – libraries, museums, a polytechnic institute, etc. - and was in some sense the “crown jewel” of German cultural achievement in the Baltic *Heimat*.

This sense of rootedness in place factored into the political calculus of the era. Interwar Baltic German political leaders had sought to adapt older Baltic German notions of *Heimat* and to deploy them in order to strengthen the political position of their group vis-à-vis the state. In

¹¹²⁷ As quoted in Saagpakk, 60

¹¹²⁸ Hermann Grussendorf, *Die letzten Jahre. Erinnerungen an Riga* (Archiv der Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft in Lüneburg), 13

¹¹²⁹ Von Rimscha, 45-46; the author comments on how many of the older generation felt compelled to depart their homeland, despite personal distaste for Hitler and the Nazi party, out of solidarity with their neighbors and ethnic community. This, of course, dovetails with the pragmatic considerations at play regarding a feared Soviet takeover in the near future.

¹¹³⁰ *Heimat* translates fairly closely to homeland in English, though with a bundle of cultural associations and a degree of importance to personal identity mostly absent from its somewhat archaic English equivalent. *Vaterstadt*, literally “Father-City”, likewise conveys the meaning of “hometown”, but with considerably greater intensity of attachment than its nearest English equivalent.

addition to political strategy, even more fundamental concerns had dictated an engagement with *Heimat*. Baltic German society in Latvia was in demographic crisis throughout the interwar period, and the group's continued existence depended on its ability to keep young people from emigrating to Germany proper, where greater economic opportunity awaited them.¹¹³¹ Numerous editorials in the *Rigasche Rundschau* through the interwar period invoked the concept of *Heimat* and service to it, implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) discouraging emigration.¹¹³² Poems on the subject of *Heimat* periodically appeared in both the *Rundschau* and the weekly paper *Riga am Sonntag* throughout the interwar period, often brimming with a saccharine but didactic message about the value, meaning, and irreplaceable nature of one's *Heimat*.¹¹³³ Now, all these seemingly heartfelt sentiments of devotion to one's homeland which had filled page after page of Baltic German periodicals throughout the interwar period seemed to ring hollow, to be nothing more than the empty rhetoric as which Latvian skeptics had always derided them.¹¹³⁴ Yet anguish, indecision, and soul-searching were by far the most common responses to the news of October 6th, 1939.

The short piece "Die ewige baltische Position" ("The Eternal Baltic Position") by Axel de Vries, published in *Baltische Monatshefte* in January 1933, expounds on the role of *Heimat* in shaping Baltic German identity across the centuries. For de Vries, Baltic Germandom had been shaped by two principal factors: nationality and *Heimat*. When these are in balance, all is well with the Baltic German, but when one factor too strongly outweighs the other, disaster can

¹¹³¹ David Feest, "Abgrenzung oder Assimilation: Überlegungen zur Wandel der deutschbaltischen Ideologien 1918-1939 anhand der „Baltischen Monatsschrift“ in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung* Bd. 45, Nr. 4 (1996) 531-533; cf. also Ernst von Bulmerincq, "Die natürlich Bevölkerungsbewegung des Deutschtums in Lettland in den Jahren 1932-1933" in *Baltische Monatshefte* Nr. 11-12 (1934) 540-543.

¹¹³² Paul Schiemann, "Homeland and Emigration," *Rigasche Rundschau* 3.IX.1921

¹¹³³ For two representative examples cf. Hans Jensen, "Homeland," *Riga am Sonntag* 24.VII.1933 and Else Schwartz, "Homeland," *Rigasche Rundschau* 19.III.1938.

¹¹³⁴ Interwar Latvian national activists were continually engaged in rhetorical exercises which labeled Baltic Germans as "foreigners" (*svešnieki*) and accused them of a dearth of loyalty to their homeland not only in the current era, but throughout their history. Cf. Jürgen von Hehn, *Die Umsiedlung*, 168-169 for an in-depth analysis of one Latvian author's editorializing on this topic following the announcement of the resettlement of the Baltic Germans.

result.¹¹³⁵ De Vries lays the more or less catastrophic consequences of Baltic German intrigues in Latvia in 1918 and 1919 at the door of a national enthusiasm grown out of all proportion to the group's attachment and obligations to its *Heimat*:

“Did not an excessive swell of national passion surge through Baltic Germandom, which began to suppress the concept of *Heimat*? Was not one of the hard fought-over questions that of whether the time had come when one could simply be German, and cast off the hybrid entity of the German Balt? And did not our politics, in so far as it rested on this exuberance, bring us only disaster?”¹¹³⁶

Latvia's Baltic German community surely must have thought that it was narrowly escaping disaster as it made its preparations to depart the country in late 1939. Yet given the steady disappearance of the Baltic German community within the Federal Republic of Germany since 1945, de Vries' prediction that the imbalance of the two defining facets of Baltic German self-conception – *Volkstum* and *Heimat* – would lead to the extinction of the group was all too accurate. The plan to resettle the Baltic Germans *en masse* in the Warthegau might have reassured the community that their coherence as a group would remain intact, but the ultimate course of events left the group scattered across the two Germanies and much of the Western world.¹¹³⁷ In these circumstances, the eventual dissolution of the group's identity became merely a question of time. Without a *Heimat*, Baltic Germandom would eventually cease to exist as such.

Thus it was that the particular Baltic German vision of *Heimat* disappeared into the world of nostalgia in the autumn of 1939 as Latvia's Baltic Germans boarded ship for the *Warthegau* in

¹¹³⁵ Axel de Vries, “Die ewige baltische Position” in *Baltische Monatsheft* Nr. 2, February 1933, 67-68

¹¹³⁶ de Vries 68

¹¹³⁷ The great majority of those to survive the war ended up in West Germany, with only scattered groups elsewhere. Arved Freiherr von Taube and Erik Thomson, *Die Deutschbalten. Schicksahl und Erbe einer eigenständigen Stammesgemeinschaft* (Lüneburg: Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, 1973), 69-75; von Rimscha, 57

newly-conquered Poland. The leader of the Baltic German *Volksgemeinschaft*¹¹³⁸ at the time, Alfred Intelmann, recalled the regret and sadness at the departure, writing that:

“It was very moving to observe the faces of the people leaving their old homeland. Many had tears running down their cheeks, and a loud sobbing could be heard. Most often, though, the face of those departing was inscribed by a deep inner movement...The last view of our native city, which lay wreathed in a winter fog, made the faces even of so many seasoned men tremble.”¹¹³⁹

Intelmänn’s recollection displays the bitterness and reluctance of a departure from a homeland of seven centuries, one that poignantly captures the complexity of Baltic German attitudes towards spatial and ethnic belonging in an era of shifting political realities. The impact of the expropriations and dispossessions of the interwar era on the mass decision to depart is impossible to assess, but it seems likely to have made the psychological break less jarring. Though different agents were involved, perhaps the loss of so many prized urban spaces in Riga anticipated the eventual loss of the city itself in the minds of its Baltic German inhabitants. In any event, as a final act the *Umsiedlung* certainly fits neatly into the trajectory of a historical narrative characterized by rootedness in place and by alienation, by belonging and by exclusion, by the conflict between a civic conception of citizenship rooted largely in space, and one grounded in the eternal and omnipresent fabric of the nation.

The departure of the Baltic Germans in late 1939 (concluded in early 1940) was met with mixed emotions by the country’s other residents.¹¹⁴⁰ The government welcomed the resettlement

¹¹³⁸ The Baltic German *Volksgemeinschaft* – literally, People’s Community – was an organization created during the interwar period with the intention that it would eventually become a de jure corporate entity recognized by the state as the legal representative of all Baltic Germans in Latvia, with powers of (mandatory) taxation. The necessary legislation never passing through the Saeima, it remained a civil society organization, albeit a fairly powerful one. Its role as representative of the Baltic German collective in Latvia grew considerably after the coup d’etat of 1934, although it remained relatively powerless vis-à-vis the authoritarian Ulmanis regime. Cf. Wilhelm Wachsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland: Ein Tätigkeitsbericht. Band 1: Die deutsch-baltische Volksgemeinschaft in Lettland: 1923 – 1934* (Köln: Comel Verlag, 1951).

¹¹³⁹ Intelmann, 102, 108

¹¹⁴⁰ Hehn, 163

as an opportunity to bring “clarity” to national property and help enact the program of building a “Latvia for the Latvians,” but the less chauvinistic of the Latvian population, doubtless joined by the Russian and Jewish minorities, viewed the development with an unease and misgiving that stood in contrast to the tone of the press.¹¹⁴¹ The Latvian press and Latvian national activists met the resettlement with what can probably best be described as an air of inflated bravado.¹¹⁴² The problem of Baltic German influence and purported privilege had been resolved at last, the German danger removed, the Black Knight was finally departing the scene. Many nationally-minded Latvians doubtless felt some satisfaction at such an outcome. Yet the real reasons for the *Umsiedlung* were apparent to anyone able to read between the lines of international politics; some Baltic Germans recalled that one of the reasons the actual motivation for leaving was so little discussed was due to the sensitivity of one’s Latvian and Estonian neighbors.¹¹⁴³ The country’s Jewish and Russian minorities must have viewed the departure of the Baltic Germans with even greater unease, faced with the loss of erstwhile political allies.

The storm that was gathering for all of these groups broke in the summer of 1940, when the Soviet Union annexed the Baltic States. Ethnic Latvians, Russians, and Jews all faced political persecution, typically accompanied by deportation to Siberia, less often by summary execution. The ethnic Russian community of Riga in particular was riddled with persons who had fled the Bolshevik seizure of power years before, and were no friends to communism in word or in deed. Many of these were faced with especially grim prospects of survival as the Soviet regime

¹¹⁴¹ Hehn, 165

¹¹⁴² According to many reports, departing Baltic Germans were taunted with cries of “uz neredzešanos” from chauvinistic Latvians – a linguistic joke, more or less impossible to translate, which takes the formula of “until our next meeting,” common in so many languages’ idioms of parting, and grammatically negates it, rendering a statement something like “may we never meet again.” Cf. Silvija Ģibiete, Lāsma Ģibiete: “Die auf ewig verlorene Heimat. Die Zwangsumsiedlung der Deutschbalten aus Lettland 1939–1941”, in: *Übersetzte Geschichte*, hrsg. vom Nordost-Institut, Lüneburg 2016, URL: <http://www.ikgn.de/cms/index.php/uebersetzte-geschichte/beitraege/umsiedlung-derdeutschbalten/gibiete-die-zwangsumsiedlung>.

¹¹⁴³ Saagpakk, 60

implemented itself. Along with outright fascists and outspoken anti-Communists, thousands of “bourgeois” Latvians – the wealthy capitalist elite, but also many in the free professions, academia, small business owners, and among the intellectual class more generally - were deported to Siberia in the tens of thousands from May 22-June 14, 1940, an event that is still commemorated annually in Latvia to this day.¹¹⁴⁴ The country’s Jews suffered at least as much under the initial Soviet occupation as their gentile neighbors, though these travails paled in comparison to the horrors that awaited them with the implementation of the Final Solution in Latvia following the German occupation of the city in July of 1941 in the wake of Operation Barbarossa and Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union. The maelstrom of violence and deprivation that washed over the country during the Second World War completely transformed the pre-existing constellation of ethnic groups. By 1945, a battered, divided, and war-weary Latvian populace was left to make what peace it could with an influx of Russian-speakers from the Soviet Union as a new interethnic hierarchy established itself, one which was once again unfavorable to ethnic Latvians.

With a handful of exceptions, most of the city of Riga’s most prominent structures generally survived the Second World War more or less intact, though few came through without any damage. Mostly, however, the city’s prewar architectural heritage survived the devastation of the Second World War, as it had survived that of the First. In the postwar era, Riga’s citizens - ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking alike - would be forced, by circumstance and eventually by political necessity, to establish a new relationship with the historic structures they had inherited from another people, inhabitants of what might well be called another city, in another time. As new narratives of civic and national identity were built up in the decades following 1945, old

¹¹⁴⁴ Katja Wezel, “The Unfinished Business of Perestroika: Latvia’s Memory Politics and its Quest for Acknowledgment of Victimhood in Europe”, *Nationalities Papers*, 44:4 (2016), 566

spaces changed in significance and in ethnic valence. The Baltic German architectural heritage which interwar Latvian critics had decried as alien to their national spirit gradually became a badge of Western identity, to be proudly displayed in defiance of a purported Soviet cultural other and helping to inform the rhetoric of dissident movements in the 1980s and early 1990s. What had been criticized was now praised, what had been shunned was now embraced, and what had belonged to the Other has become a badge of the Self.

9.0 Conclusion

What lessons are to be drawn from the narrative which has been laid out over the six preceding chapters? Is the story which has been told here merely a forgotten facet of the history of demographically tiny groups of people inhabiting an overlooked corner of Europe, or does it hold a deeper significance for the future of the continent, as well as for our understanding of its past? Is interwar Riga, Kennan's "Paris of the Baltic", an effective microcosm for urban multiethnicity in a broader setting, one spanning East Central Europe or perhaps the continent as whole? Or are its circumstances too idiosyncratic and its peculiarities too extreme to allow for broader comparison?

The answer is one that will have its cake and eat it, too, of course. As particular to Riga as many of the characteristics of multiethnicity in the interwar period may have been, the city's demographic breakdown and developmental history are congruent enough with other urban centers across East Central Europe that comparisons are not merely valid, but often strikingly insightful, particular as regards industrial development in the second half of the 19th century, and the impact this had on the urban fabric of the city.¹¹⁴⁵ While Riga's location in the Russian Empire might at first glance seem to render it more fit for comparison with Minsk than with Bratislava, its long history of administrative autonomy leave the Riga of the late 19th and early 20th centuries with far more in common with the urban industrial centers of the Habsburg Empire than with most cities

¹¹⁴⁵ Cf. Eve Blau and Monika Platzer, eds. *Shaping the Great City : Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1999); Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and its Aftermath 1867-1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), especially "Chapter 3: The Language of Rationalism"; M. Cerman, "Proto-industrialization in an urban environment: Vienna, 1750-1857" in *Continuity and Change* 8(2); Egbert Klautke, "Urban History and Modernity in Central Europe", in: *The Historical Journal*, vol. 53, no. 1 (March 2010); Markian Prokopovych, *Habsburg Lemberg: Architecture, Public Space, and Politics in the Galician Capital 1772-1914* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2009); and Nathaniel Wood, *Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

to its east. In this sense, Riga bridges a crucial gap between the historiographies of urban ethnicity of the two great modern empires of East Central Europe.

The greatest lessons for historians (and for the policy makers of today), though, lie in the particularities of interwar Riga - in the degree of multiethnicity, certainly, but above all else, in the relative generosity and liberality of its minority rights regime, one of the most progressive of the time. Interwar Riga was a profoundly multiethnic city (only 51% Latvia in 1919)¹¹⁴⁶ with strong traditions of self-government, a deep-seated civic identity, and universal suffrage for the first time in its history - in many ways an ideal laboratory for multiethnic coexistence in an urban setting in the new Europe created by the Treaty of Versailles. This dissertation has tried to highlight the successes and potentials of the new *modus vivendi* that began to be forged during this time among Riga's citizenry, attempting in doing so to escape the long teleological shadow cast by both the years of authoritarian rule in Latvia and by the population transfers, war, and genocide of the years 1939-1945. Interethnic relations (and their attendant historiography) are most obviously punctuated by notable conflicts, which make for rich fodder for the historian. Yet for each of the interethnic conflicts over urban space erupting into public debate during the interwar period, there were years of steady, quiet, unglamorous cooperation and power-sharing. That those efforts ultimately came to naught does not mean that they have nothing to teach us about the past, the present, or the future.

Riga today is as much in need of useful lessons on how to foster harmonious interethnic relations, and how public space can play a positive role in those relations, as it has ever been - and an attentive reader will realize that that is saying a great deal. Drawing those lessons from the

¹¹⁴⁶ V. Pakalniētis, "Rīgas iedzīvotāju kustība un sastāvs," in Teodors Līventāls and Walther Sadowsky, eds., *Rīga kā Latvijas Galvaspilsēta* (Rīga, Rīgas Pilsētas Valdes Izdevums, 1932), 178

modern multiethnic past - from an era that closely resembles the present ethnic and political conjuncture, in many ways - requires us to understand the multiethnicity of the interwar period not as an aberration, but as an essentially permanent quality of society in Riga and in the wider Baltic region. The distinction between this subregion of East Central Europe and the whole makes this imperative all the more pressing; though the multiethnicity which prevailed across East Central Europe for most of its history was largely undone elsewhere during and immediately following the Second World War, the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union and the importation of large populations of ethnic Russians into Latvia and Estonia have left the titular majorities in these countries in as demographically precarious a state vis-à-vis local ethnic minorities as ever before in their history. As noted in the introduction to this work, recent historiography on Riga has attempted to overcome the limitations of previous work, typically narrowly national in its outlook and scope, by positing multiethnicity as the normal condition of life in the city.¹¹⁴⁷

This dissertation has followed in that trend, and indeed could not fail to do otherwise; a state of multiethnicity is a given when seeking to chart and describe processes of ethnic reversal like the one which unfolded in the new capital of Latvia from the summer of 1919 through the departure of the Baltic Germans in the autumn of 1939. Chapter by chapter and year by year, this dissertation has charted that process of ethnic reversal as it applies to Riga's most prominent urban spaces, focusing on potentials for cooperation and harmonious coexistence and seeking persistently to avoid, or at least to mitigate, the aforementioned long teleological shadow of interethnic strife, chauvinism, deportation and genocide beginning in the 1930s and coming to a catastrophic climax by 1945.

¹¹⁴⁷ Cf. Introduction

The first chapter, “Ethnic Reversal and Political Space”, deals the most explicitly with a process that generally underlies the dissertation as whole, that of ethnic reversal. In examining the rhetoric surrounding the former House of the Livonian Knighthood, this chapter highlights both the barrier that ethnically polarized narratives of the past represented to the establishment of productive political relations, and the role that the rhetoric of democracy could play in reshaping places with a formerly pronounced ethnic valence into more inclusive spaces, even when re-imagined with a strong ethnic Latvian tinge in their decoration and symbolic content. The triumph of ethnic Latvians over their former Baltic German overlords (the Livonian Knighthood specifically) was paired with, and congruent to, the triumph of democracy over feudalism, an analog which dovetailed with Latvian self-conceptions of their group as the representers of modernity in the region, juxtaposed to a fundamentally conservative, even degenerate Baltic Germandom. Nonetheless, the past played an important symbolic role for Latvians in the performance of ethnic reversal, as the section on Riga Castle makes clear. The opening chapter also establishes a dichotomy that runs throughout the dissertation (one which remains relevant to Latvia today), in which a relatively cosmopolitan metropolis and now capital city is contrasted with a more parochial, less ethnically tolerant nation-state. Though Riga city government was certainly not without its degree of interethnic strife, the left-right political spectrum was often more important in shaping political alliances than mere ethnic belonging. As a result, power-sharing among the city’s major ethnic groups was the norm in city hall, with Russians, Baltic Germans, and to a lesser extent, Jews all typically sharing in the decision-making process – a claim with only sporadic veracity in regard to politicking in the national legislature.

Chapter 2, “Finding Common Ground in Commerce”, is one of the less conflict-oriented in the dissertation, dealing with institutional takeover and ethnic reversal manifesting in what I

have chosen to call its “soft” variety. The Riga Bourse Committee was reshaped from within through voluntary and gradual reforms, maintaining its quintessential character and traditions even as its ethnic composition altered drastically. The space of the Bourse itself was at the center of this narrative, as it remained one of the principal centers of Riga’s economic life, clothed in a prestige and a sort of bourgeois dignity acquired over the preceding half-century. The second half of the chapter is concerned with the construction of Riga’s central market, a project undertaken by the city government and undoubtedly the most significant building project of the interwar years which was the product of the collective efforts of the city’s major ethnic groups. Here, economic space served as a focal point for civic (rather than ethnic) pride, with the new and modern central market serving as the centerpiece in a rhetoric espoused by all of the city’s major ethnic groups which proudly placed Riga in a pan-European context, even in a sort of hierarchy of progress. The pairing of an old space and its attendant institution, transformed from within through “soft” ethnic reversal, with a newly-created space shaped through mechanisms of cooperation largely inherited from the pre-1914 era, display the multiplicity of mechanisms for the fostering of more inclusive visions of civic belonging and multiethnic coexistence during the interwar period, mechanisms the potentials of which are too often overlooked in the historiography of the era.

Chapter 3, “Ethnic Prestige and Education”, begins the transition towards the unfortunate dynamic of interethnic conflict in Latvia, and highlights the increasing role played by foreign actors in shaping domestic policy in the country. The ability of Baltic Germans to retain control over what was probably the city’s most widely-prized academic building up to Karlis Ulmanis’ seizure of power is indicative of the powerful influence which still remained to the Riga Bourse Committee (then still overwhelmingly Baltic German) at the start of the interwar period. Its seizure in 1934, on the thinnest of pretexts, illustrates the powerful imperative faced by the Ulmanis

regime to eliminate or reverse the ethnic valence of any and all remaining prominent urban spaces which remained in Baltic German hands. The story of the Herder Institute pairs with this to illustrate how just such conditions helped to drive the Baltic German community of Latvia increasingly into the arms of governments in Berlin, irrespective of their ideological character, as a means to hopefully secure what rights and privileges remained to their group. The Herder Institute was only able to remain solvent with the aid of both private and public organizations in Germany proper, and served as one of the German Foreign Office's principle means of wielding what we today would call "soft power" in northeastern Europe during the interwar period.

Chapter 4, "The Topography of Memory" highlights the importance of a city's topography of memory in shaping interethnic relations. This chapter examines both cooperation and dysfunction between the city's ethnic groups in regard to a single matter, the renaming of Riga's streets in 1923. The amity and discord over this question in 1923 show both how crucial the language question can be to ethnic groups – Latvian is the sole language of Riga's street signs today, with Russian having been purged from the signage in the 1990s – and how much room there can be for according different groups a positive role in those historical narratives which find reflection in a city's topography of memory. This chapter also highlights the pernicious effects that the recent past had on shaping interethnic relations between Baltic Germans and Latvians during the interwar period, and ultimately highlights the city and national governments' failure to use memorial space to promote ethnic reconciliation. The dynamiting of a much-resented Baltic German monument to the Landeswehr in 1929 offers a stark warning to observers of the current tensions in Riga surrounding ethnic Russian celebrations on May the 9th, and the second half of this chapter is in essence a story of missed opportunities, one with overt lessons for Riga and other interethnic cities burdened by the memory of recent interethnic conflict.

Chapter 5, “Shared Faith and Sacred Space”, captures the climax of the crisis of interethnic relations during Latvia’s period of democratic rule, and drives home the troubling realization that the ethnically chauvinistic and discriminatory policies of the authoritarian Ulmanis regime were unquestionably anticipated, arguably even brought into effect, by pre-existing popular opinion among the ethnic Latvian majority. The inability of religious commonality to overcome ethnic divides is made apparent in the narrative, but just as much insight into the realities of interethnic relations in the period are provided by the fact of just how tantalizingly close Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians within the Lutheran Church came to reaching a viable compromise regarding the ownership of the cathedral. Had such an accord as was arrived at in early 1931 been reached even just a few years previously, it seems likely that the expropriation – itself unquestionably politically driven, with autumn elections looming – would never have taken place. The importance of sacred space in shaping community’s sense of self-worth is underscored by this chapter, as is the urgent need for power-sharing mechanisms to come into being long prior to the emergence of the sort of crises of populism such as wracked interwar Latvia, and which are prone to appear whenever economic conditions worsen precipitously.

Chapter 6, “Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage” situates interwar Riga’s various cultural spaces and institutions firmly in a transnational context, analyzing them in much the same terms as contemporaries thought of them – as vehicles not only for cultural self-expression at the ethnic or national level, but as symbols of national prestige placed into direct competition with those of other nations. This attitude on the part of the Latvian state was mirrored by that of the German Foreign Office, which viewed the German theater in Riga as one of its principal tools for promoting German culture in the wider Baltic region, second only to the Herder Institute in importance. The disposition of Riga’s two most prominent theater buildings was much-wrangled

over in the years immediately following the cessation of fighting, and the assignment of both to the Latvian national theater and national opera is indicative of the importance that was attached both to the spaces themselves as symbols, and to the wider arena of cultural competition in which they figured as important sites of performance and display. The chapter concludes by analyzing the so-called New Year's Laws of December 31st, 1935, which mandated the dissolution of Riga's ancient guilds – one of them German-dominated, the other thoroughly mixed in ethnic terms – and the transfer of their spacious and richly decorated guild halls to the control of the state. The rhetoric surrounding these spaces in public discourse, Baltic German and Latvian alike, is utterly infused with a sense of history, or rather with widely divergent historical narratives. Regardless of the political, social, or economic realities of the day, it was in such spaces that the troubled ethnic history of the region lived on most visibly for Riga and Latvia's inhabitants. The hall of the Great Guild, rather than merely a structure in such-and-such a location, constructed at such-and-such a cost, with such-and-such dimensions and features, was instead a symbol – the most potent one remaining – to many Latvians, and certainly to Latvian national activists, of the ethno-social reality which had brought the Great Guild itself into existence in the first place, a fundamentally unjust reality of ethnic hierarchy and exclusion along cultural and linguistic lines. To Baltic Germans, it was no less important a symbol, but a positive one, of the glory days of the city in the heyday of the Hanseatic League, of a time when Riga had been truly theirs by dint of overwhelming weight of numbers, of the fulfilment of a civilizing mission to which their group still clung. For Latvian national activists, taking control of spaces so deeply invested with historical meaning was a means of, in effect, re-writing history, or at least of writing new endings to old stories and thus rendering them more fit for consumption by an ethnically homogenous population – the politically dominant Latvians who comprised 75% of the country's inhabitants.

Although much of the narrative retraced above has been framed by bitter conflict, it has also revealed that the democratic period in interwar Latvia bore witness to many attempts to resolve interethnic tensions, often precisely through urban space, which often served as the focal point of historical narratives deeply imbued with what I have chosen to call ethnic valence - a sense of ethnic belonging, ownership, or attachment used by the ethnic group to construct its identity in opposition to an ethnic Other. The shift in ethnic valence of some spaces was relatively free of conflict or resentment, as with the *Saeima* building and Riga Castle. Other spaces served as venues for almost unprecedented cooperation between the city's principal ethnic groups - here, city hall and the Riga Bourse are exemplary. Other episodes were more mixed in their results - while the semantic content of the city's new street names was on the whole something that the city's Baltic Germans and Russians could live with, with numerous nods at the roles of both groups in shaping the city's history, the question of the language in which they were displayed was a bitterly divisive one in which the profoundly multiethnic demography of the city was in essence simply ignored. This is merely illustrative of the fact that in virtually every aspect of social life, and certainly in every aspect of the public management of urban space, contrary trends and impulses were at work. Tendencies towards and against ethnic inclusion alike were to be found in the new ethos of national citizenship then evolving, one which was quickly coming to outweigh the older civic mode of identification centered on Riga. Space has served as the lens through which this dissertation examines these trends of conflict and cooperation for reasons both general and specific; the sheer number of conflicts examined in the course of this dissertation should make clear to the reader that such sites were the locus of interest not merely for ethnic groups vying for prestige in the new political order of the day, but were also functional as potent *lieux-de-memoire*, deeply invested with symbolic meaning and serving as crucial texts in shaping different groups'

understanding of their own identity, that of their neighbors, and that of the city as an abstract conception. At first, the rewriting of these texts was typically negotiated, the product of collaborative efforts across ethnic lines, or at least calculated to still allow for productive cooperation and reasonably good relations between the major ethnic groups.

As one moves further into the interwar period, however, the teleology of ethnic conflict and antagonism characteristic of the interwar period in East Central Europe more widely becomes inescapable here as well. The imposition of a nationally-minded dictatorship, however mild in its rule, in 1934 unquestionably heralded the beginning of a new epoch for Latvia's ethnic minorities, in which their educational autonomy would be increasingly eroded, funding for the educational needs cut, and their control of historic and symbolically significant spaces in the capital challenged and more often than not, usurped from them, as we saw in the previous chapter.¹¹⁴⁸ Such a narrative is in line with developments across East Central Europe during the same period, in its broad strokes and in many of its details. What is more telling, and more relevant to societies today - both in the Baltic, in Europe, and in the Western World more broadly - is the fact that the turn against Baltic Germans in particular, and against Latvia's ethnic minorities more generally, occurred well prior to the coup d'état of 1934. The world economic crisis hit Latvia in 1931 and exacerbated already-latent ethnic tensions enormously. The flames of interethnic hatred were fanned vigorously by populist politicians and national activists among the ethnic Latvian majority. These populists seized on a popular source of resentment, long-since distilled into an easily digestible, black-and-white historical narrative, in order to increase their own chances at the ballot

¹¹⁴⁸ Cf. Chapter 6: Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Heritage. Their relative influence in the *Saeima* and even more so in Riga City Parliament had proved, time and again, to be the Baltic Germans' best shield against the efforts of national activists to expropriate their group's property or curtail its cultural autonomy. The imposition of dictatorship meant the stripping of that shield, leaving their group essentially helpless before the whims of a dictator whose power was buoyed up by the slogan "Latvia for the Latvians".

box.¹¹⁴⁹ Disregarding the actual economic and demographic facts on the ground, national activists and opportunistic populist politicians advanced causes and embraced a rhetoric which did almost irreparable harm to the fragile mechanisms of interethnic coexistence which had been built up across the preceding years. The parallels between such a scenario and the political conjuncture in the West today are overt, and the lessons for the present are urgent.

For Latvia itself, the parallels are of course far more exact, given the presence of a large Russian minority and the looming menace of a newly resurgent Russian state on its eastern border, the leader of which is in the regular habit of making threatening comments regarding the status of Russian minorities abroad. As the final chapter of this work makes clear, the interwar period also presents a striking analog in this regard as well. Relatively close cultural, and to a lesser extent, financial connections had existed between the Baltic Germans and various civil society groups and institutions in Germany, as well as with the German government throughout the interwar period. These connections had always been tolerated by the Latvian government, and were generally viewed as non-threatening.¹¹⁵⁰ But as the state of interethnic relations in the country worsened, and particularly as the Latvian state began to adopt increasingly hostile policies towards their group, the Baltic Germans came to rely more and more on support and aid from Berlin, both before and after the Nazi *Machtergreifung* of 1933.¹¹⁵¹ The Latvian state had, in effect, squandered the fragile loyalty which Paul Schiemann and other Baltic German leaders had painstakingly built up over the preceding decade, realizing its own fears of a “foreign” fifth column far more than had

¹¹⁴⁹ Cf. Chapter 5: Shared Faith and Sacred Space. Not only did populists sense the viability of anti-minority rhetoric during the post-1930 election cycles, their results essentially bore out such postulations; Mārgers Skujenieks rode into power in the autumn of 1931 largely on the basis of his anti-German message, with the conflict over St. Mary’s Church serving as the centerpiece of his electoral propaganda.

¹¹⁵⁰ Wilhelm Wachsmuth, *Von deutscher Arbeit in Lettland 1918-1934: Eine Tätigkeitsbericht, Band 2: Die autonome deutsche Schule 1920-1934* (Köln: Comel, 1952), 149-154; cf. also Chapter 3: Ethnic Prestige and Education.

¹¹⁵¹ Garleff, “Die Deutschbalten als nationale Minderheit,” 519-521

any other agent. Here, of course, contemporary Latvian policy towards the Russian minority of today can learn much from the mistakes of the past, drawing insights that have implications not just for the security of that country, but for all of NATO and by extension, the world.

Even digging down another layer into the methodology and focus of this dissertation, the analog remains a close one. Urban centers, far and away the most common meeting point for different ethnic and cultural Others, play a uniquely crucial role in the formation of group identity, both at the national and the local level. Urban spaces were the focal points of so many controversies - and, more rarely, of collaborative efforts - in interwar Riga precisely for this reason. Local groups' self-conception was formed around spaces invested with historical significance, and, as a result, with ethnic valence - a sense of attachment, belonging, or proprietorship, viewed positively or negatively depending one's position within or without the ethnic group in question. These spaces were part of Baltic Germans', Latvians, and other performance of identity and local belonging. This is why the Cemetery of the Brethren and the Freedom Monument came to mean so much to Latvians so quickly, and why Baltic Germans attached such importance to their churches and guild halls. But group identities are burdened by histories, always, and in interwar Riga, those histories were long and troubled ones. The performance of Baltic German identity through urban space - through the simple possession and maintenance of ancient churches and halls - seemed to many Latvian national activists an affront, in that it served as a constant reminder of a past of domination and exploitation which had not psychologically been worked through. These *lieux-de-memoire* were sore spots in the Latvian national consciousness, at least for a considerable segment of the population. They were lingering contradictions between the old and new historical narratives of relations between Baltic Germans and Latvians, relations that had been

cast in terms of master and subordinate for centuries, a mold out of which it was psychologically difficult for all parties to break.

In political terms, the country's ethnic Latvian majority was triumphant, unquestionably dominant even during the era of democratic rule. In symbolic and psychological terms, however, the national grievances presented in popular conceptions of history - typified by the *Lačplēsis* epic - had not been avenged, the needs of national justice had not been met with the establishment of an egalitarian democracy in 1919. These historical narratives - facile and selective representations of the multiethnic past at best, outright fictions at worst - lingered in the ethnic consciousness of Latvians and Baltic Germans alike, as the chapters of this dissertation have shown. It was only by overcoming those histories that the text of Riga could be re-written; controlling urban space in the present became a potent way of controlling historical narratives. Taking control of spaces along ethnic lines became a way of writing new endings to stories that had, in reality, faded into obscurity with the passing of one epoch into the next, the social realities that engendered them having long since ceased to pertain.

This statement is no less true of Riga today than it was of Riga during the interwar period; old grievances and polarizing historical narratives from the period 1940-1991 still find their manifestation in monuments, plazas, squares, museums, churches, and other spaces across the city, with many surrounded by controversy, the focal points of interethnic resentment. Yearly parades held by the city's Russian population on Victory Day, the 9th of May, in front of the monument to Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War are an annual source of tension - that date having also marked the return of Latvia to involuntary annexation at the hands of the USSR. The mere existence, not to mention the prominent location, of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, which covers the entirety of the period 1940-1991, is a sore point for the city's Russians as well,

who are right to point out that such a narrative ignores the complexity of fifty years of socialist history. These spaces loom large in the public consciousness, and serve as focal points of ethnic identity, along with many of those treated in this dissertation.

So far, viable solutions to resolve the tensions surrounding these spaces have not been proposed; only the future can tell what measures will be taken in a period of heightened geopolitical tensions between Latvia and its vast neighbor to the east. Certainly the worst excesses of the past have not been repeated, but the city of Riga and the country alike face considerable challenges in the 21st century. Whether the city, and the Latvian state which finds its capital there, will be able to draw upon the lessons of the past in order to forge a sustainable mode of multiethnic coexistence, the likes of which eluded their interwar predecessors, remains to be seen.

10.0 Sources

10.1 Archival Collections

10.1.1 LVVA – Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs, Rīga, Latvia. State Historical Archive of Latvia.

Although these materials are in many instances grouped thematically, rather than exclusively by institution, a list of the major institutions responsible for the creation of the majority of the documents used in this dissertation follows.

Major contributing institutions and organizations:

- Riga City Government
- Ministries of the Latvian Government
- Chancellory of the Latvian government
- Riga German Theater Association
- Riga Russian Theater Association
- Great Guild of Riga
- Lesser Guild of Riga
- Company of the Blackheads of Riga
- Herder Institute of Riga
- *Arbeitszentrale* of the Baltic German *Volksgemeinschaft*
- National Board for the Protection of Monuments
- Riga City Archive, the City Art Museum
- Riga Bourse Society and Riga Bourse Committee
- Cotation Committee of the Riga Bourse Society
- Vilis Olavs School of Commerce of the City of Riga

10.1.2 DSHI – Dokumentensammlung des Herder Institutes, Marburg, Germany. Document Collection of the Herder Institute.

Minutes and correspondence from the Great Guild of Riga and from the final session of the Livonian *Landtag* were used in the dissertation; images from the photographic archive of Paul Campe/Pauls Kampe, Riga architect 1885-1960 were also used.

10.1.3 RAV – Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amts (Berlin) [Political Archive of the Foreign Office]

These sources consist exclusively of internal memoranda and communications of the

German Foreign Office during the interwar period, grouped thematically.

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10.4 Periodicals

<u>Name</u>	<u>English Translation</u>	<u>Language</u>
<i>Baltijas Vēstnesis</i>	<i>Baltic Herald</i>	Latvian
<i>Baltische Monatshefte</i>	<i>Baltic Monthly</i>	German
<i>Brīvā Tēvija</i>	<i>The Free Fatherland</i>	Latvian
<i>Brīvā Zeme</i>	<i>The Free Country</i>	Latvian
<i>Daile</i>	<i>Fine Art</i>	Latvian
<i>Ilustrēts Žurnāls</i>	<i>Illustrated Journal</i>	Latvian
<i>Jaunākās Ziņas</i>	<i>The Latest News</i>	Latvian
<i>Lāčplēsis</i>	<i>N/A (Proper Noun)</i>	Latvian
<i>Latvijas Kareivis</i>	<i>Soldier of Latvia</i>	Latvian
<i>Latvijas Sargs</i>	<i>Defender of Latvia</i>	Latvian
<i>Latvijas Vēstnesis</i>	<i>Herald of Latvia</i>	Latvian
<i>Latvis</i>	<i>The Latvian</i>	Latvian
<i>Libausche Zeitung</i>	<i>Libauer Newspaper</i>	German
<i>Nēdēļa</i>	<i>The Week</i>	Latvian
<i>Pēdējā Brīdī</i>	<i>In the Final Moment</i>	Latvian
<i>Rīga am Sonntag</i>	<i>Riga on Sunday</i>	German
<i>Rīgasche Rundschau</i>	<i>Riga Review</i>	German
<i>Rīts</i>	<i>The Morning</i>	Latvian
<i>Sējējs,</i>	<i>The Sower</i>	Latvian
<i>Sociāldemokrāts</i>	<i>The Social Democrat</i>	Latvian
<i>Svāri</i>	<i>The Scales</i>	Latvian
<i>Valdības Vestnesis</i>	<i>The Government Herald</i>	Latvian
<i>Vārpa</i>	<i>The Spear</i>	Latvian
<i>Vienots Spēks</i>	<i>United Strength</i>	Latvian
<i>Сегодня</i>	<i>Today</i>	Russian

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