

## ESSAY

**Tõnu Viik. The Impossible Concept of Estonian Culture**

While in our everyday life we take the existence of what is called Estonian culture to be a self-evident truism, it is very difficult to define the concept of Estonian culture with philosophical rigour. This is because we are used to conceptualising it by means of the notion of national culture derived from Herder's *Volkgeist*, which is heavily criticised in post-modern theory as an imaginary identity performing a mostly political function as a nationalist ideology. The essay outlines a constructivist critique of Estonian culture and comes to the conclusion that if Estonian culture is viewed as a means for creating the political self-consciousness of Estonian nationals, then its critique as a nationalist ideology is justified. The second part of the essay analyses Estonian critical theorists who have attempted to define Estonian culture from the position of its constructivist criticism – Hasso Krull, Tiit Hennoste, Marek Tamm, Peeter Torop and Rein Veidemann – and offers an alternative view, according to which Estonian culture should not be seen as a set of (retroactively created) meanings that define a common “way of life”, a common worldview, a common model of self-description, or a common “basic vocabulary”, but as a horizontal structure that allows the formation of any type of meaning without giving its products any unifying characteristics. In other words, the essay argues that Estonian culture should be seen as a “stage” for meaning-formation processes, rather than a particular result of such processes.

## ARTICLES

**Kersti Markus. Who Actually Built the Convent of St. Birgitta?**

The founding of a Birgittine convent has ordinarily been the personal action of a specific individual but in the case of the Convent of St. Birgitta at Pirita, an extensive circle of founders has been pointed out in earlier historiography: Hanseatic League merchants, the local nobility and the master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. The fact that the motherhouse in Vadstena knew nothing about preparatory work being done at the mouth of the Pirita River in Tallinn is also remarkable. It is apparent from the entry of 5 May 1407 in the *Diarium Vadstenense* that two men arrived at the convent and provided an overview of plans to establish a convent near Tallinn. All preparatory work had been completed. All they wanted was relics and the music notes and lyrics of the *Cantus Sororum*. This was also the first entry concerning the Convent of St. Birgitta at Pirita in the *Diarium Vadstenense*. This led the author of this article to the question of where the

founders of the Convent of St. Birgitta obtained their knowledge of Birgittine convents. The usual practice was that a request for assistance was submitted to Vadstena Convent first of all and only then did planning begin for founding the new convent.

The founding of a Birgittine convent in Gdansk is exceptional in this context. Grand Master of the Teutonic Order Konrad von Jungingen founded the convent. It was only after a letter of confirmation concerning the founding of the convent was received from Rome that the Abbess of Vadstena was requested to provide relics. There is, however, no information whatsoever concerning the convent in Gdansk in the *Diarium Vadstenense*.

Regardless of his office, Konrad von Jungingen was a very devout man. The Prussian peasant woman Dorothea saw visions and considered St. Birgitta to be her great example. Von Jungingen held her in great esteem. Konrad attempted in Rome from 1407 onward to have Dorothea declared a saint. During his era, particular attention was devoted in Marienburg to piety and caring for the poor, generous support was given for building churches and convents and for providing them with works of art.

Birgittine convents were subordinate to local bishops. For this reason, the appointment of the new Bishop of Tallinn in 1405 is a decisive factor in the context of the founding of the Convent of St. Birgitta at Pirita. Johannes III Ochmann (Aken) was the chaplain and chancellor of the Teutonic Order's Grand Master as of 1402. The post of chaplain was the highest among clerical brothers of the order. He accompanied the Grand Master on all his trips and was his adviser in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters. Since he was continually in the Grand Master's entourage, the chaplain had significant influence on his lord. It is a noteworthy fact that the Grand Master so eagerly supported the election of his chaplain as Bishop of Tallinn at the papal curia that it severely tested the patience of the Order's proctor.

The work of Hinrich Swalbart as the man who actually built up the convent also demonstrates a definite orientation to the Teutonic Order's Grand Master. Sources reveal the surprising fact that in critical situations, Swalbart does not heed advice from Vadstena Convent but rather looks to the Teutonic Order's Grand Master, who always makes all decisions in favour of the convent.

This article arrives at the conclusion that the initial impulse for founding the Convent of St. Birgitta at Pirita could have come from Konrad von Jungingen. The reason for his disappearance from the scene was his unexpected sudden demise in the very early stages of the establishment of the convent, that is in March of 1407. Yet this influential patron left his mark in the self-awareness of the convent's residents that in the view of Vadstena could manifest itself as irritating self-confidence and sporadic obstinacy, and the architectural expression of which can still be seen today.

**Marten Seppel. The Limits of Violence in Serf Relations in the Provinces of Estonia and Livonia in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

There has been a tendency in historical literature to characterise serfdom through cases where landlords have displayed extraordinary cruelty towards peasants. It is questionable if and to what extent such isolated examples of sadistic violence on the part of landlords reveal the actual legal framework of serfdom. A distinction should be made between legal violence (e.g. ordinary domestic discipline) and illegal violence that was considered criminal by society and the state already during the period of serfdom. One cannot speak of the limitless right of landlords to mete out corporal punishment in the provinces of Estonia and Livonia in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Besides, the most notorious acts of cruelty have become famous only because of official criminal investigations. On the other hand, this does not mean that systematic illegal violence did not play a role in the formation of relations between the manor and the peasantry.

In the historiography so far, domestic discipline on the manor and cruel violence towards the peasantry in the provinces of Estonia and Livonia have attracted a great deal of attention. However, the actual role of violence in a *Gutsherrschaft* society still needs to be clarified. The aim of this article is to offer a clearer frame of reference for the position of ordinary and extraordinary violence in serf relations in Estonia and Livonia based on the example of 17<sup>th</sup> century sources. What were the nobility's arguments to justify both ordinary and extraordinary violence? Which cases of violence carried out by landlords were considered "ordinary" or normal and which were declared illegal and unacceptable? In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the clearest legal restriction that applied to landlords in relation to their serfs (compared to Roman law) was that they did not have the right to kill. Therefore, the last part of the article closely examines court material from the 17<sup>th</sup> century in order to provide a deeper and more systematic analysis of cases where peasants were beaten to death. The court material provides the sources that form the basis for this article. Moreover, the written complaints by peasants from the 17<sup>th</sup> century provide a significant contribution that allows us to capture the thoughts of the peasants on manor violence as well.

The physical disciplining and punishing of peasants was clearly one means of communication between the manor and the peasantry. However, the landlord had the right to apply domestic discipline and mete out punishment only for minor misdemeanours. According to 17<sup>th</sup> century source material, one cannot speak of the absolute power of private landlords (not to mention the leaseholders of crown manors) over peasants in the provinces of Estonia and Livonia. There is abundant court material to prove that both legal and social rules were in place to view exaggerations of domestic discipline ("tyranny") as

something forbidden. This definitely included the killing of peasants. Also, stabbing a peasant with a sword or wounding him with pistol (even in cases of minor scuffles) were always considered criminal offences. However, landlords were rarely convicted for the outright killing of their peasants. The responsibility for excess violence was more often placed on overseers, bailiffs and others whose tasks included the disciplining and punishing of peasants. However, sources indicate the existence of a clear right of appeal for peasants in cases of exaggerated corporate punishment. These appeals were accepted and given due process both by the provincial government and the courts throughout the century. This meant that the state and the courts repeatedly intervened in relations between the manor and the peasantry in terms of the question of the limits of violence and also made landlords responsible for their actions. This definitely had an impact on serf relations.

**Liivi Aarma: The Involvement of Friedrich Nikolai Russow and Wilhelm Friedrich Tuglas in Publishing the Handbook *Põllumehhe nõuandja* (The Farmer's Adviser)**

It was customary in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and during the subsequent decade to publish literature in the Estonian language and about Estonia without indicating the author or to identify the author by combinations of single letters, that is by using pseudonyms. To this day, it is not entirely clear who the authors were of two works published in the 1860's – *Põllumehhe nõuandja* published in Estonian and *Eestlane ja tema isand* (The Estonian and his Master) published in German. This study is dedicated to considering this problem.

**Meelis Maripuu. The Restoration of Estonia's Domestic Administrative Authority under the Conditions of the War between the Soviet Union and Germany**

As Germany made its plans to attack the Soviet Union, it prepared for the future annexation of the eastern territories that were to be conquered to the territory of the German state itself, yet by virtue of its operative plans, it proved to be possible to formally restore functional local governments based on the laws of the Republic of Estonia and to attract personnel from the era of independence. The primary interest of the German military authorities in the rear area was to secure elementary administrative authority and to maintain public order. The heads of the *Omakaitse* (Home Guard) units were assigned an important role in achieving this objective, including harnessing local governments, yet the legal basis for their activity remains unclear. The German military authorities on their own part appointed all the leaders to their posts, even those who were already operating. The proper functioning of local governments was even more important than the functioning

of the central authorities for assuring administrative capability and elementary public order. The German occupying authorities did not envision the restoration of local governments, yet in isolated cases, local governments that were starting to function nevertheless convened local government councils. In most cases, the grounds for this could be that the head of the previous local government was no longer available to continue his previous work. The higher authorities nevertheless put a stop to the further functioning of the local government councils and local government authorities were turned into representatives of the executive power of the occupying regime.

Regardless of the fact that the occupying regime demonstratively declared that the Regional Municipal, Municipal and County Act of the Republic of Estonia was in effect as before (along with restrictions effected by the occupying regime), it is obvious that local governments did not have the actual power inherent to local governments and that the local administrative apparatus began to be harmonised with the system in effect in Germany.

**Indrek Paavle. How to Prevent the “Unpunished Departure of Anti-Soviet Elements” from the Territory of the ESSR? Regulation and Control of the Border Regimen in the Estonian SSR**

This article examines the state border of the Soviet Union according to the example of the Estonian SSR, which along with the passport regimen was part of a system that was used to control the movement and location of residents in the territory of the state. This study focuses on regulations of the border regimen, through which changes in the system and the effect of these changes on the population are traced.

The implementation of restrictions on living and movement in areas along the border began in 1929 in the Soviet Union. The border regimen was tightened in the 1930's by successive acts of legislation and violation of this regimen was made a criminal offence. The border zone along with the special rules that applied in it existed in Estonia for practically the entire period of Soviet occupation. The border regimen was partially established in the autumn of 1940 and was put fully into effect within a few years after the war. It remained in effect thereafter almost unchanged until 1988. Its main thrust lay in the simple method of allowing as few people as possible into the vicinity of the state border and to check those few people with excessive thoroughness. At the same time, the system was continually being refined and perfected. The acts of legislation and instructions describing the elements of the regimen became more detailed from year to year and the system became more and more strict. More and more new restrictions were implemented, especially concerning seafaring, culminating in 1967 with the implementation of border regimen rules on the part of the coastline that was not within

the border zone. Punishments were made harsher even in the mid-1980's.

At the same time, the opposite tendencies emerged – access to the border zone became slightly easier. The number of settlements, public beaches and recreation areas in the border zone with unrestricted access increased and the procedure for admission to these areas was eased. Ever more border zone permits were issued from year to year. The number of permits issued after the Stalinist era grew to nearly 7 times the number issued during Stalin's rule. By the end of the 1950's, the rules for access to the sea had been sufficiently tightened, control of seafaring crafts and the crews of ships had become sufficiently diligent, and the sea itself had been placed under such tight control that it had become practically impossible to secretly cross the sea. Since people could not cross the sea, the regime could be more conciliatory in terms of allowing people access to the seashore.

DOCUMENTS AND COMMENTARY

**Kristina Tiideberg. Header Illustration of the *Tarto maa rahwa Näddali-Leht* (Tartu Weekly for Rural Folk, 1806)**

The oldest Estonian-language newspaper was the *Tarto Maa rahwa Näddali-Leht* that was published in Tartu from March of 1806 until January of 1807 by Pastor Gustaph Adolph Oldekop (1755–1838) from Põlva, Pastor Johann Philipp von Roth (1754–1818) from Kanepi, and his brother Karl August von Roth (1756–1835), who served as a syndic and school district inspector in Võru.

According to historian Tõnu Tannberg, the *Tarto Maa rahwa Näddali-Leht* was one of the very first newspapers in the world published especially for farmers. The weekly newspaper could be published for only a short period and as much of the entire print-run that the authorities could find was destroyed. It was not until 1995 that Tõnu Tannberg found ten issues of the newspaper in the Russian State History Archives in St. Petersburg.

While not a single fragment or copy of this newspaper itself is known to exist to this day in Estonia, the header illustration of the first Estonian-language newspaper in its original graphic art is preserved in the University of Tartu Library as probably the only one of its kind and thus a true rarity. This small woodcut engraving has made its way to the library from the collections of the University of Tartu Museum of Art, where the director, Professor Karl Morgenstern (1770–1852), likely acquired it directly from the printer Grenzius in 1806. This work is included under the name *A Small Livonian Landscape (Eine kleine Livländische Landschaft)* in the list of engravings belonging to the art museum that was drawn up by Morgenstern in 1806.

**Tiit Noormets. “according to this order of the day, all commanding officers of the Republic’s companies and other analogous military units must keep war diaries of their actions – as historical recordal”. War Diaries of Estonian Army Units as a Source for the History of the Estonian War of Independence**

The flow of information recorded and transmitted in war in today’s information society is unexpectedly large, yet one of the main reporting and informative documents, and as such also a source for researching war history, remains the military unit’s war diary. The tradition of keeping war diaries began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century already. This is a document that is kept during wartime in all military units. In addition to the unit’s operational information, it contains a variety of other information (information concerning the enemy, losses and reinforcements, the unit’s administrative work, even weather data, it could contain maps, photographs and sketches as appendices) recorded as daily entries.

Combat action war diaries have naturally been used by military historians in researching the history of Estonia’s War of Independence (1918–1920), yet very few of the actual texts of these war diaries have been published as sources. Here we publish two excerpts of the war diary of the 14<sup>th</sup> Company (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company according to numeration adopted later) of the Estonian Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment from the beginning of the company’s combat action and from the end of the war. The war diary of one subunit, the lowest level, has been selected here as a sample since war diaries at this level are the most thorough and detailed. Depending on the clerk who kept the diary, they can be quite lively and enjoyable descriptions.

**Arti Hilpus. On the Question of the Restoration of Estonia’s Independence in Relations between Finland and Germany in 1942–1943**

After war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union in June of 1941, many people in both Estonia and Finland hoped that the Germans would permit Estonia’s independence to be restored in some form. It soon became clear, however, that this was not part of the plans of the leadership of Greater Germany. In the ensuing situation, some circles began propagating the idea that Estonia should at least be permitted actual autonomy or be allowed to join Finland in the form of a dual state. Generally speaking, the attitude of Finns towards Estonia during the Second World War was one of understanding and sympathy, yet on the level of national policy and official relations, providing support was not so simple. In spite of their kindred relations to Estonians, Finland had to take the opinion of its ally Germany into account along with other circumstances of realistic policy. It was in Finland’s strategic interest to prevent the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland from falling into the hands of the Red Army

for as long as possible because Finland would not have been capable of continuing its war against the Soviet Union for long if Estonia were lost. Thus the Finnish government’s pragmatic considerations also have to be seen when the topic of Estonia’s increased local government was raised in communications with Berlin. The Finns hoped that a change in the German occupation policy in Estonia and concessions concerning the question of independence would help to increase the will of Estonians to defend themselves and their ability to fight on the Eastern Front. The documents published here are from the Estonian file of the State Chancellor’s Bureau of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts* = PA AA, file R 29577) and they reflect an episode in Finnish-German relations from 1942–1943 when the Finns used diplomatic contacts to raise the question of granting greater autonomy or independence to Estonia. Ambassador Toivo Kivimäki in Berlin and General Hugo Österman in Helsinki represented the Finnish side, and the latter likely acted in the name of Commander-in-Chief Carl Gustaf Mannerheim. Minister of Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop gave a categorically negative response to these proposals on behalf of Germany. The published documents provide affirmation that during the Second World War, Finland’s national representatives at quite a high level repeatedly expressed their concerns to the Germans about the future of the Baltic peoples and especially that of the Estonians. The German leadership, however, steadfastly maintained its inflexible ideological position to the end and did not allow itself to be influenced in the direction of political changes.

**Estonian Film Archives. The Estonian Red Cross in the Estonian War of Independence**

CULTURAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

**Janika Kronberg. Karl Ast’s Letter to the President**

Writer, journalist and politician Karl Ast Rumor worked in Stockholm in 1939–1940 at the end of Estonia’s era of independence as the Estonian Embassy’s press attaché. This document and its commentary consists of the letter that Karl Ast sent to President Konstantin Päts on 3 May 1940 and in background. Ast’s letter to the president discusses Estonia’s prospects in the war that had just broken out but its probable objective was to have himself sent to Japan as Estonia’s representative. Estonia has no embassy in Japan at that time. At the same time, the establishment of an Estonian foreign mission in both Washington and the Far East was on the agenda in Estonia’s national defence circles – unfortunately neither plan was realised. The letter’s foreword outlines the biographical background of Karl Ast’s interest in Japan and points out his more important work during those years.