

VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO UNIVERSITETAS



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Cover & conference photos: Vytautas Petronis



THESE ARE EXCITING TIMES FOR BALTIC STUDIES as the Baltic region is the center of attention for those who study international security, international relations, and related issues. The NATO Summit that took place in Vilnius in July 2023 put one of the Baltic states — Lithuania — in the international spotlight. Although the decision not to provide Ukraine with a specific timeline to join NATO disappointed many — including the hosts of the Summit — its other decisions, including the green light for Sweden’s NATO membership, were truly positive developments for the Baltic states, which welcomed the news of the Baltic Sea becoming a “NATO lake.”

Regional security issues, including the ongoing war in Ukraine, also featured prominently in the 15th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe, which took place in Kaunas in June 2023. Impeccably organized by Ineta Dabašinskienė (Vytautas Magnus University) and her team, the conference attracted a record number (448) of participants from many countries, including the United States, Canada, Germany, France, England, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Japan, and

... the Baltic states have created a shared identity with Ukraine, and started waging war at home by engaging in acts of decolonization.

Australia. The number of participants and their geographic locations attest to the truly global reach and amazing vitality of Baltic Studies.

Mobilized around the theme “Turning Points: Values and Conflicting Futures in the Baltics,” the conference participants discussed ongoing Baltic identification and solidarity with Ukraine, the implications of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine for Baltic security, the future of transatlantic relations and European strategic autonomy, among other issues related to international security. Since the outbreak of the full-scale genocidal war waged by Russia against Ukraine, it has become clear that the Baltic states — both societies and governments — fully identify

with the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian government. Their emotional identification has gone beyond delivering help (although they have delivered an enormous amount of help, including significant military support). It is possible to argue, as I did in my plenary speech “A Decolonizing Moment: Vicarious Identification with Ukraine in the Baltic States and Beyond,” that the Baltic states have created

a shared identity with Ukraine, and started waging war at home by engaging in acts of decolonization. These acts include attempts to get rid of Russian influence and the removal of monuments associated with the so-called “Great Patriotic War,” Russia’s pride. In his plenary speech, Arūnas Gelūnas, Director of the Lithuanian National Museum, gave many examples demonstrating how the Lithuanian National Museum of Art has adopted new roles and new activities to help Ukraine in every possible way — from saving works of art to humanitarian aid.

The theme of decolonization emerged clearly in several other presentations, including a talk by Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois from Vytautas Magnus University. In her innovative research, Pundziūtė-Gallois related the concept of decolonization to diplomacy, arguing that the study of diplomacy could be transformed by bringing the experiences of the Baltic states into so-called “Post-Soviet studies.” Diplomacy efforts led by the Baltic states have tended to pay attention to the spread of democracy and the empowerment of other countries in the territories previously occupied by the

Diplomacy efforts led by the Baltic states have tended to pay attention to the spread of democracy and the empowerment of other countries in the territories previously occupied by the Soviet Union ...

Soviet Union (including, of course, Ukraine). In the words of Pundziūtė-Gallois, such attempts at decolonization can be described as “an expressed effort of emancipation” and can definitely demonstrate how “small” states (such as the Baltic states) play an important role in international relations.

Although talks on regional security and related issues were some of the highlights of the conference, it included

panels, roundtables, book presentations and exhibits on a variety of issues in multiple fields — religion, history, sociology, linguistics, communication, literature, art, and cultural studies — to mention just a few. These events attest to the continued strength of Baltic Studies — its natural ability to cross disciplinary boundaries. As in the

past, the CBSE empowered Baltic scholars to get inspiration and new ideas in disciplinary fields different from their own. This energy created by the conference will continue to inspire conversations and collaboration as we are starting to prepare for other Baltic Studies events, including the Baltic Research Forum online in October 2023 and the next AABS conference at Yale in June 2023.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OVERVIEW OF AABS ACTIVITIES

COMPILED BY LIISI ESSE, ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Grants and Awards

Kaarel Piirimäe, Vice President for Professional Development

IT IS ONLY MY FIRST YEAR IN THIS JOB as Vice President for Professional Development, so it is too early to come to any far-reaching conclusions about trends in AABS grants and awards. Nevertheless, if we compare this year's results to earlier numbers, it is fair to say that AABS is continuing to do a terrific job. The plaudits do not go to one or two individuals, but to the present board and administration as a whole.

Thanks to the great work of previous boards since 1968, AABS is the main institution supporting research in Baltic Studies, particularly research with a pan-Baltic reach. It is especially strong in supporting young and emerging scholars in the field of Baltic Studies. It is doing a really unique job and we should all be proud of what AABS has accomplished in the past and continues to achieve.

As we can see from the table below, there are no significant ups or downs in the present year compared to the previous two years (although the trend since 2019 is for the better). For example, applications for Dissertation Grants did go up from 11 last year to 20 this year, but in 2021 the number was 26, so I don't think there is a trend upwards or downwards. Perhaps one can observe that 2022 was a slightly weaker year between the stronger years of 2021 and 2023. Certainly, we will see changes in the number of applications in the future.

Over the years we have had difficulty attracting candidates for Latvian-only grants (Birnitis, Saltups, Grundmanis)

and have even discussed if those grants should be opened also to candidates without Latvian citizenship (which would probably involve changing the statutes of those grants). The problem of weak competition remains, but the situation is not all too bad. There have been two to three candidates for each grant, and the candidates have been strong enough for the Committee to make the award. To my mind, there is no immediate reason to return to the question of opening those grants to wider competition.

Naturally, AABS should not rest on its laurels but should work hard to increase its endowment to be able to expand its grant and award programs. Its great record of managing the endowment over the decades should be encouraging for new benefactors. Also, the fair and effective system of selecting the best awardees should be highlighted. I think there should be interest for donating to AABS especially among the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian new businesses that have been doing really well. Isn't it time for AABS to move on from resting on the achievements and sacrifices of the diaspora Balts and to start taking advantage of the success of the independent homelands?

Status of AABS Investment Portfolio

Uģis Sprūdžs, CFA, Treasurer

AS REPORTED AT THE JUNE 17, 2023 AABS BOARD MEETING, the value of the Association's investment portfolio increased by 1.7% over the period from July 1, 2022 to June 12, 2023. In dollar terms, the net asset value changed from \$3,831,706.75

AABS Grants and Awards

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards
Baumanis	16	1	12	3	17	5	6	3	9	3
Birnitis	2	1	6	1	6	1	5	1	3	1
Dissertation	3	2	8	3	26	4	11	5	20	4
Emerging Scholars	5	3	8	2	11	4	5	3	11	4
Grundmanis	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	1
Total	27	8	38	11	62	15	34	14	47	14



to \$3,897,210.52 — an increase of \$65,503.77. This is the net result of portfolio income combined with unrealized gains and losses, as well as a total \$206,000 of withdrawals to fund the Association's operations.

Over this time period, the portion of the portfolio invested in equities was reduced in value by approximately 6%, where most of the decline is due to withdrawals. If the withdrawals amount is added back to the ending value, the percentage change computes to approximately -1.3%.

The portion of the portfolio invested in cash, medium-term conventional and inflation-protected bonds grew in value by approximately 10% on a net basis and 16% after adding back the withdrawal amounts.

Equities account for 48% of the portfolio as of June 12, 2023, while cash and bonds account for 52%.

Global financial markets remain exposed to volatility in the current environment, as investor sentiment incorporates dynamically changing expectations of inflation and recession. Nevertheless, financial markets in the US have in recent months displayed a bias to the upside, suggesting the potential of sustained positive returns in the future.

As noted previously, the AABS investment portfolio has over the last several years developed a substantial buffer of unrealized capital gains that can be tapped to finance ongoing operations in the case of unexpected adverse market developments.

Membership

Liisi Esse, Administrative Executive Director

As of August 23, 2023, AABS has 292 members. This is a

non-conference year, so the anticipated number of members is a little bit lower than in the past years, but compared with last non-conference years, we are doing quite well. Being much more visible on social media and through various events and activities, as well as offering a discount registration rate for AABS members at the CBSE conferences has helped.

Our membership fees have remained the same for the past couple of years and AABS is not planning to raise them for next fiscal year.

As approved by the board in November 2021, AABS membership years run from January 1 through December 31.

Outreach

Ben Gardner-Gill, Assistant Director of Outreach and Engagement

AABS HAS EXPANDED ITS SOCIAL MEDIA presence over the past year, resulting in an over 80% increase in the reach of our Facebook page and performance on Twitter/X — well above industry standards.

Our social media plays a critical role in raising the profile of Baltic Studies and scholars, our members first and foremost. If you haven't already, like our Facebook page (AABS) and follow us on Twitter/X @balticstudies! If you have something to share, please email aabs@uw.edu.

We improved search engine optimization (SEO) on our website (aabs-balticstudies.org), leading to a healthy 4.5% increase in traffic from search. This means more people are able to find what they want more quickly.



AABS PUBLICATIONS

NEWS FROM JOURNAL OF BALTIC STUDIES

THE JOURNAL OF BALTIC STUDIES continues to go from strength to strength under the editorship of Matthew Kott and his team.

Usage increased by 16% from 2021 to 2022, with over 35,000 downloads in 2022 by readers across 134 countries worldwide. To mid-August 2023, there have been over 22,000 downloads by readers from 120 nations. The top downloaded article in 2022 was “Political dejection in a divided society: A challenge for Latvia’s democracy?” (52.4, 2021) by Timofey Agarin and Ryo Nakai. To date this year, the top accessed article has been “The Helsinki Convention’s agricultural nutrient governance: How domestic institutions matter” (54.3, 2023) by M.S. Andersen et al.

The top downloading countries are consistently the US, UK, the Baltic states and other northern European countries, but we are also seeing increased engagement from researchers in China, with more than 1,000 downloads from readers within China in 2022.

Authors submitting to *JBS* receive a post-review decision, on average, 51 days after submitting, with an acceptance rate of 38% (NB: including book reviews). The journal published 26 articles, one forum and 11 book reviews in the 2022 volume, while the first three issues of the 2023 volume have included 29 articles, two fora and 13 book reviews. *JBS* lead authors published in 2022 and 2023 to date have been based in 15 different countries.

As the open access (OA) landscape changes globally and an increasing number of scholars receive funding to publish

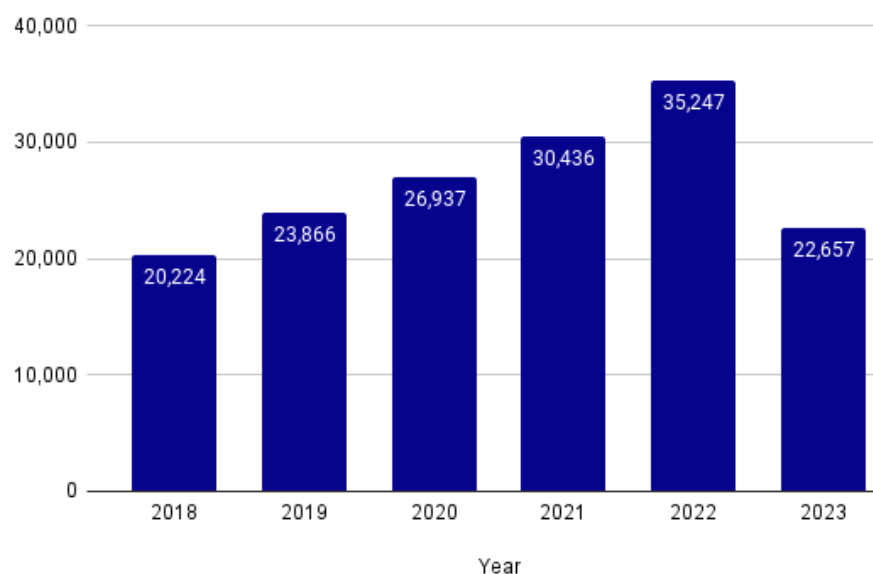
their research OA, this is starting to reflect within the pages of *JBS*. To date in 2023, six articles have been published OA, meaning that they are freely accessible online in perpetuity. OA articles typically receive seven times more downloads than non-OA articles*, and the top downloaded *JBS* articles mentioned above are both OA.

JBS is indexed in the Area Studies category of the Social Sciences Citation Index and received an Impact Factor of 0.4 in the 2022 Journal Citation Reports (JCR), released at the end of June 2023. The Impact Factor is a metric produced by Clarivate and looks at citations in a particular year to content published online in the preceding two years, with 27 citations in 2022 to 72 citable items published in *JBS* in 2020 and 2021. Citations to *JBS* are steady and reach across disciplines, with recent *JBS* articles being cited by research spanning fields including Area Studies, History, Sociology, Political Science and Environmental Sciences.

JBS also has a current CiteScore of 1.1. CiteScore is a metric produced by Scopus and is calculated by looking at citations over the most recent four calendar years to articles, reviews, conference papers and data papers published in those same four years. That the metric over this longer citation window is higher continues to support our understanding that *JBS* content continues to be read and cited many years after initial publication.

*Usage in 2018-2020 for articles published in 2016-2020.

Article Downloads - Taylor & Francis Online Usage



16%
% Change 2021-2022



BEN GARDNER-GILL (AABS): We're going to talk about your new role on the AABS Board, as well as your role as AABS's delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), but could you start by telling us how you got into Baltic Studies and what's kept you here for all these years?

ANDRES KASEKAMP: I've been very fortunate. I was an undergraduate in History at the University of Toronto in the second half of the 1980s, and that's when the endowed Chair of Estonian Studies was set up. We had a series of visiting professors, and I was able to partake in those courses. It was a wonderful opportunity for me, because I was always interested in doing something involving Estonia, being an Estonian Canadian. The fact that I was able to take courses and get credit for it at the University of Toronto was amazing. History had always interested me, but in particular there were two visiting professors who inspired me. The first was Hain Rebas, a Swedish Estonian from Kiel, Germany, and second, Toivo Raun from Bloomington, Indiana. I took both of their courses, wrote papers for them, etc.

I got into Baltic Studies more directly in 1988 thanks to Prof. Rebas. He put together a little reward, prize money, for the best paper in his undergraduate course on Baltic history. Surprise, surprise, I was the winner — but he didn't give it as an award. Instead, he said, this is going to pay for your trip to the AABS conference, which was held at the University of Maryland, College Park in 1988.

This was obviously very daunting for an undergraduate. How could I possibly be amongst these great professors and academics, me, a lowly undergraduate? But there was a separate panel for student presentations that year. Prof. Rebas's motivation was to encourage young people and show them there's nothing to be scared of. His encouragement paid off; I was in

the presence of amazing scholars whose works I had read, and I've been attending AABS conferences ever since.

Then later I moved to Estonia, after having defended my PhD in the UK in the mid-'90s. The president of AABS at that time, Thomas Salumets, was looking for a new editor for the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, and he approached me. That was the first time that the journal had moved out of North America, so it was quite a radical step at the time. I became the journal editor, and that naturally got me much more involved: Subsequently being on the board as Vice President for Professional Development, President-Elect, President, Director-at-Large, and now being asked to come back in with a new position, Counsel to the Board.

I've always been interested in Estonian history, which made me quite unusual amongst my peers in Toronto at the time, but also growing up in a multicultural city like Toronto, we were always together, and organizing activities with the Canadian Latvians. A bit less so with the Lithuanians. But this idea of Baltic cooperation — Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians doing things together — was very natural for me right from the beginning. And then as a historian, being a comparativist, it makes sense to look at things from a wider Baltic angle rather than just a simple national perspective as scholars tend to do.

AABS: You were asked to come back as Counsel to provide your wisdom and expertise. Could you share some of your thoughts about the position? Perhaps what you hope you might be able to do and what you're looking forward to with AABS as a whole.

AK: I was feeling a little bit empty, I guess, having been heavily engaged for six years and then being finished! That emp-

tininess was soon filled, first by becoming the AABS delegate to ACLS. I participated in their conference for the first time this spring in Philadelphia. It was a learning experience for me. Shortly afterwards, this idea came that the Board would like to keep me engaged. As I understand it, it's partially because the Board has a unique setup with a couple non-voting members who are scholars of great standing and experience in Baltic Studies, Olavi Arens and Guntis Šmidchens. They have been doing their jobs on the board, voluntarily as non-voting members, for a very long time, and the Board wanted to distribute the workload a bit more. I will be complementing some of what they have been doing thus far; one of the roles is providing a sort of institutional memory. Olavi is a cofounder of AABS who has been around since the beginning, and he's still going very strong. So to be considered in the same category, when I still consider myself middle-aged and not really amongst the elders yet, is quite something. It's a great honor, and also somewhat disturbing to be put into this category of institutional memory at a relatively young age!

AABS: It's a great honor, don't read too much into it!

AK: (Laughs) I'll also say that not only do I have this experience on the Board, but another thing I can help with is the transcontinental ties. I grew up in North America and recently returned to take up the endowed Chair in Estonian Studies at the University of Toronto, where I started my journey in Baltic Studies, but spent pretty much my whole adult life and career in the Baltic states at the University of Tartu. Hopefully I can be a person who can bridge Europe and North America.

The other thing is a pet subject of mine which I've been banging on about for years, ever since I was the editor of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, which is to expand the meaning of what we consider to be Baltic Studies to be the wider Baltic Sea region. The traditional Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania trio would remain the core, of course, but also to look a bit broader, as is the case in the region. For people in those three countries, their social, cultural, political, business connections are generally the ones in the wider Baltic Sea world. And looking at contemporary political events with Finland and Sweden joining NATO, that's even more the case. That's something I've always been trying to promote, and particularly with regards to our sister conference, the Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE). I've been one of the driving forces in seeing CBSE expand — the conference in Gdańsk, Poland, a few years ago took CBSE outside of the traditional countries that have hosted in the past to a country hosting for the first time. I pushed for that vigorously, and it's a good example of expanding that regional approach, which I think has been very fruitful.

AABS: We can see some of the fruits of that approach with the most recent CBSE conference in Kaunas earlier this year. It

was incredibly successful, and one thing that showed up time and time again in the proceedings was the interconnectedness of the Baltic Sea region.

AK: Absolutely. And also, of course, it was a move to cement an institutional connection, which is something I've been in favor of for a long time. The conferences in Europe have been ad-hoc, with no organizing structure behind them, as there is with our conferences here in North America. It seems to be the case that having AABS as a co-sponsor, helping to ensure continuity, has been useful and hopefully valuable for everyone.

AABS: We worked really well with the CBSE team this year, indeed. Could you say a bit more about your role as AABS's delegate to ACLS? Were there things that struck you or lessons that you took away from attending for the first time?

AK: I've been learning a lot about how ACLS works. As I said, it was my first time going to their conference earlier this year, and I met a lot of different people from different places. It was quite fascinating, but it was also just dipping my toes in the water for the first time. I expect that when I attend next year, I'll already know some of the people, know the format, know what to expect, and it will be more productive.

Being at a Canadian university, not an American university like almost everyone else at the conference, perhaps put me in a different position. There was a lot of talk about what's happening on US campuses, including bills that certain states are passing, which are very worrisome for academic freedom. Fortunately that's not the case yet in Canada, but it tends to be that things that happen in the US reverberate elsewhere.

Of course, the general concern within ACLS, as most of the societies involved are from the humanities and social sciences, is how STEM subjects have been prioritized by governments and funding bodies for the last several years. My own discipline of History seems to be on the decline in terms of enrollment, at least in North America. Up to now people have been talking about the need for more engineers, and now we have Chat GPT, various AI tools, etc., and it seems that maybe, well, we don't need all those engineers. Maybe we need people who know something about ethics, morals, philosophy, history, to complement the engineers who are coming up with algorithms that contain all sorts of unconscious biases that need to be addressed. You can even look to how Elon Musk's control of Twitter/X has influenced the discourse around Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It's a clear example of how someone who is otherwise a genius in some respects can be misinformed about very basic historical facts, and the impact that has.

AABS: It's certainly a fascinating discussion for all of us at the moment, and it's not going away anytime soon. Andres, thank you for your time, and welcome back to the Board!

THE FUTURE OF AABS AND BALTIC STUDIES

JÖRG HACKMANN, PRESIDENT-ELECT

SOME OF THE ABRUPT AND UNEXPECTED CHANGES that the world has seen in the last few years also affect the field of Baltic Studies. Although one can hardly overestimate the shock-waves of Feb. 24, 2022, it seems that the impact on Baltic Studies differs from East European or Russian Studies. Even if one follows the assertion of a *Zeitenwende*, one should be reluctant to transfer the claim of decolonizing the research on Eastern Europe as another turn in the humanities and social sciences to the Baltic region. There are also few convincing arguments that lend credence to warnings of a looming fall-back in methodological nationalism. One reason behind this is that Baltic Studies was confronted with unpredicted changes in the focus region several decades ago. Another reason lies in the fact that postulates of decolonizing and differentiating the post-Soviet space have been addressed in the Baltic region much earlier than in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, there has been a substantial self-reflection about the object, scope, and research strategies of Baltic Studies, with diverging arguments stimulating intensive discussion.

Such a picture shall not reject the fact that we currently see ground-breaking changes in the Baltic Sea region, but some of these tendencies have been seen before. We can think of the Bronze Soldier relocation in Tallinn in 2007, which resulted not only in controversies about memory politics, but also in Russian cyberattacks on Estonia. Suggestions for the future of Baltic Studies, therefore, should start with a brief review of recent trends, and then address perspectives and challenges.

The first major trend is a slow but continuous process of merging different regional research traditions. For some decades already, Baltic Studies is no longer confined exclusively to the three Baltic nations or a Baltic German research focus. Instead, there are increasing transnational and transregional research interests that address Baltic topics as being at the crossroads of North, East, and Central European history and culture, as well as in close contact with the political West.

The second trend is an increasing internationalization in scholarly contacts, not least through easier connectivity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. AABS in its scholarly outreach has for a long time transcended North America and the three Baltic nations, and regularly includes scholars from other parts of Europe and beyond. In addition, since the 2019 Conference on Baltic Studies (CBSE) in Europe, held in Gdańsk, AABS has become more engaged in the European conferences and has taken over organizational and financial commitments, guaranteeing continuity in the organization of CBSE.

The high numbers of participants in the last two Bal-



tic Studies conferences, in Seattle in 2022 and in Kaunas in 2023, reveal a surging interest in personal exchange at conferences. This seems to be not only a post-pandemic phenomenon, because the scope of Baltic Studies has changed, too.

The previous cooperation of AABS with the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study (SASS) in having joint conferences in the US in 2010 and 2014 shall be renewed within the next years and reveals an interest in establishing a broader focus on the Baltic region, in the sense of the Baltic Sea area. No matter what the practical difficulties are of organizing joint Baltic-Scandinavian conferences in North America, one may currently notice more research approaches that address the wider Baltic Sea region (for instance in Germany, Poland, or the United Kingdom). It comes as no surprise that these broader Baltic initiatives have so far been launched from the Baltic corner and less from the Nordic or Scandinavian side. As a historian, I would argue that this is a *déjà-vu* of the early 20th century, but there is nothing bad in such renewed approaches, if they lead to new research perspectives.

In a similar way, one might also argue for a closer cooperation of Baltic with East European Studies, as many, if not most of the scholars in Baltic Studies do in their everyday work. There is, however, a big difference compared to a cooperation with Scandinavian or Nordic Studies; in the context of East European or Russian Studies, Baltic contributions are

still often perceived as being peripheral and of minor interest.

And there is another *déjà-vu* in Baltic Studies — the returning relevance of security and securitization as research perspectives, which goes along with a renewed interest in Baltic geopolitics. This of course has to be seen against the background of political discourses, as security has been a core element of discourse in the three Baltic states since their independence in 1918. In the post-Cold War years, however, diverging approaches prevailed — on the one side there were intensive attempts in Germany and Northern Europe to strengthen ties with Russia, following the ideas of *Wandel durch Annäherung* and reconciliation with Russia. Here, strategies of soft security played an important role. On the other side, not least in the Baltic states, there has been a broad consensus that only NATO membership prevents them from being treated as another Russian “near abroad.”

Putting Baltic Studies in a larger regional setting and focusing on various aspects of security are tendencies that emerged well before February 24, but they are at the same time enhanced by the *Zeitenwende*. The Baltic-Ukrainian webinars organized by AABS have turned out to be very fruitful and revealed many common issues, comparisons, and entanglements and should be thus continued in some form or another. Depending on the political situation, similar formats could also be introduced with Belarusian and Russian scholars, underlining the relevance of Baltic Studies in a wider setting. So far, Baltic Studies has been successful in decentralizing research perspectives on Eastern Europe as well as in applying perspectives that transcend boundaries. And in the current situation, the three Baltic states may even serve as appropriate places to address topics that refer to Eastern Europe in general.

Having said this, Baltic Studies and AABS face again a rising international interest and will benefit from a broadening of its geographical scope towards the whole Baltic Sea region, as discussed. Furthermore, they should also take on issues in a global perspective, where Baltic research strategies and cooperation may serve as models or inspiration for other regions, be it on security, memory politics, border studies, debates about colonialism, discussions about historical conflicts, etc.

To address yet another issue, AABS will also benefit from putting more emphasis on integrating early-career scholars into Baltic Studies through workshops and seminars, both in Northern America and Europe, in the latter ideally in cooperation with universities or other institutions in the Baltic Sea Region.

Such a broadening of the scope of activities, however, does not come without challenges. First, expanding the activities beyond the three Baltic states should not lead to neglecting linguistic and cultural competences of the area as a precondition for excellent research. Second, such a reorientation should be coordinated with the editorial policy of the *Journal of Baltic Studies* and possible further publication series connected to AABS. Third, AABS as an American learned society is largely relying on voluntary commitments of its members and has a tradition of also being supported from donations from Baltic communities in North America.

Since Baltic Studies has always been shaped by its diversity, I am convinced that these challenges are no major obstacles. As we seem to face another window of opportunity for the Baltic region in the new global attractiveness of Baltic Studies, AABS and Baltic Studies have a bright future ahead of us.



AABS ON THE AIR: A FRUITFUL YEAR FOR THE *BALTIC WAYS* PODCAST

BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

AABS LAUNCHED THE *BALTIC WAYS* PODCAST in 2021 in partnership with the Baltic Initiative at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Pioneered by Indra Ekmanis, Editor of FPRI's Baltic Bulletin, *Baltic Ways* covers the past, present, and future of the Baltic States, applying the same interdisciplinary curiosity that AABS and its members value so greatly.

In the latter part of 2022 and 2023, we accelerated the recording and publication schedule for the podcast, responding to positive feedback on the first handful of shows, as well as the need to learn more about the war in Ukraine. What follows is a summary of the past year-plus of this initiative.

In August 2022, the podcast interviewed Volodymyr Dubovyk, (Odessa I. Mechnikov National University) an expert in US-Ukraine relations. He implored listeners to encourage their institutions to expand support.

Next came two interviews with an historical lens and another on contemporary society. In episode nine, Ekmanis spoke with Harry Merritt (U. of Vermont, then Brown U.) about Latvian units in the Second World War. In episode 10, Martiņš Kaprāns (U. of Latvia), discussed Latvian diaspora communities and Russia speakers in Latvia, including experiences since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. In episode 11, Marek Tamm (Tallinn U.) brought listeners insights about redefining the notion of time and what it means for how we understand the writing of history.

During Ekmanis' maternity leave, Ben Gardner-Gill, AABS's Assistant Director of Outreach and Engagement, came on as guest host with episode 12, in which Agnia Grigas (Atlantic Council) covered Europe's green transition and how it has been affected by the war in Ukraine.

Episode 13 featured Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova

(Rīga Stradiņš U.), who dove into the nexus between Europe, Russia, and China and the unique role that the Baltic states will play in the multilateral relationship moving forward.

In episode 14, Una Bergmane (U. of Helsinki) previewed her new book on the collapse of the Soviet Union, *The Politics of Uncertainty: The United States, the Baltic Question, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, and surmised that there were some (limited) parallels we could draw between that time and today.

Episode 15, featuring Tomass Pildegovičs, (U. of Cambridge), covered the role of the Baltic states in NATO and how their voices have been amplified following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In episode 16, Liisi Veski (U. of Tartu) explored the how and why of the erosion of Estonian democracy in the 1930s, and stressed the importance of political rhetoric both then and now.

Concluding this busy year of episodes was episode 17 with James Montgomery Baxenfield (Tallinn U.), recorded in person in a Kaunas park on the eve of the Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe. He discussed his research on Latvian-Lithuanian connections through history, from the medieval Queen Morta to modern proposals for a unified state.

Rest assured, there's plenty more in the works! As with the past year of episodes, we'll continue to strike a balance of time periods, subjects, and disciplines.

**Have a suggestion for an episode,
or a guest to recommend?**

Email aabs@uw.edu

BALTIC
WAYS
podcast



AABS INITIATIVES

CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN SCHOLARS

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S Feb. 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the AABS Board of Directors issued a statement condemning the illegal act and calling for Russia to immediately withdraw its forces.

As an academic society, AABS believes it has two key duties in the context of the war. First — in keeping with our core mission — to promote research and education in Baltic Studies vis-a-vis Ukraine. Second, to support our Ukrainian colleagues.

To these ends, the AABS board started a webinar series featuring Ukrainian and Baltic scholars, with honoraria for Ukrainian participants. There were three installments in the first few months of the war, and as the conflict continues, the series has as well.

In January 2023, AABS hosted “Imagining Postwar Ukraine and its Place in Europe,” with panelists Yuliya Bidenko (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University), Denys Kuzmin (Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University), and Piret Ehin (University of Tartu). Panelists discussed the current state of the war in Ukraine, but the focus was the future, its challenges, and its opportunities. What pressing issues will Ukraine have to address after the war? What will postwar justice look like? Why are these developments important for the Baltic states?

Panelists emphasized the importance of civil society in Ukraine's reconstruction, both to rebuild communities and to provide a check on the government. From education and cultural preservation to judicial reform and decentralization, Ukrainian civil society's role in the country's significant progress in the pre-war 21st century will serve as an important base upon which the country can rebuild after victory.

The Baltic states will have an important role to play in Ukraine's postwar development. Just as the Baltic states have been among the most ardent supporters of Ukraine in the last 18 months, so too will they have to be its biggest advocates after the war. Both in terms of organizational memberships (i.e. European Union and NATO) and multilateral assistance, the Baltic states and their citizens will have a significant opportunity to contribute to the welfare of the Ukrainian people.

The NATO discussion during the January webinar was particularly lively, so the focus of our next event was NATO and the security architecture of postwar Europe. “A Stronger Alliance: NATO and the War in Ukraine,” featured Yevgeniya Gaber (Atlantic Council), Marko Lehti (Tampere Peace Research Institute), and Kaarel Piirimäe (University of Tartu/University of Helsinki). Held in May 2023, shortly after Finland's accession to the alliance, the event was notable for the quality of the conversation not only between the panelists, but also with an active audience.

Panelists concurred that Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine was a turning point in European security: There will be a before and after, and there is no returning to the prewar status quo ante.

Instead, Europe and its allies will have to face head-on the reality of the modern Russian Federation and react accordingly.

Numerous participants in the event advocated for Ukraine's membership in NATO, though there was not a consensus on timeline or what, if any, intermediate steps there might be. In this way among others, the event reflected the vibrant transatlantic debate that both existed at the time and continues to this day.

AABS is committed to supporting Ukraine and Ukrainian scholars. The webinar series continued with the next installment focusing on decolonization. Find more details on our website, aabs-balticstudies.org, and our social media, @balticstudies on X/Twitter, and AABS on Facebook. Recordings of all five completed webinars on Ukraine are available on the website as well.



Imagining Postwar Ukraine and its Place in Europe

January 18, 12pm ET

Yuliya Bidenko
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University

Piret Ehin
University of Tartu

Denys Kuzmin
Odesa I.I. Mechnikov National University

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A Stronger Alliance: NATO and the War in Ukraine

May 11, 12pm ET

Yevgeniya Gaber
Atlantic Council

Marko Lehti
Tampere Peace Research Institute

Kaarel Piirimäe
University of Tartu

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THE 15TH CONFERENCE ON BALTIC STUDIES IN EUROPE (CBSE) “Turning Points: Values and Conflicting Futures in the Baltics” took place on June 15-17, 2023, at Vytautas Magnus University. The conference attracted the attention of many scholars worldwide: 448 participants traveled to Kaunas from Australia, Canada, Estonia, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, and the US.

CBSE brought together scholars from all disciplines and stages in their careers who share an interest in exploring the Baltic region from multiple perspectives and fields of research. Especially inspiring was the fact that the conference was attended and enjoyed by many young researchers.

A three-day intensive program featured over 100 panels, eight roundtable discussions, nine book presentations, and four exhibitions on a broad range of topics. As in previous years, the conference covered various themes and disciplines, each demonstrating and promoting the achievements of Baltic Studies.

It is customary that topics for conferences on Baltic Studies are very broad because such conferences are supposed to be interdisciplinary in general. Therefore, the participants presented

their recent research from a wide area of humanities, arts, social sciences, and environmental sciences.

Many presentations focused on the war in Ukraine, as this theme received most of the attention in different disciplines of scholarship. The conference also included numerous additional events, including keynote talks, evening receptions, exhibitions, and a film screening with discussion (*Mariupol 2*, by Mantas Kvedaravičius).

In addition to the scholarly and intellectual benefits of participants, this conference witnessed another important development: The community of Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE) acquired an official co-organizer — AABS. The well-rooted practice for European scholars to attend AABS conferences in the US or Canada and vice versa is now firmly established, being accompanied by the newly introduced CBSE logo designed by the conference organizers.

We are very appreciative and excited by the highly positive evaluation of the conference itself in all its aspects and strongly believe that the experience of this scholarly gathering will stimulate and advance professional collaboration in many ways.





THE FIRST DAY OF THE 15TH CONFERENCE on Baltic Studies in Europe concluded with the first plenary of the conference, featuring AABS President Dovilė Budrytė as the speaker. CBSE 2023 chair Ineta Dabašinskienė welcomed attendees, noting the establishment of an official collaboration between CBSE and AABS for European conferences, and emphasizing the criticality of the Ukrainian struggle for everyone in the room, both as academics studying the region and as concerned citizens.

Following Dabašinskienė was Vilma Bijeikienė, Vice-Rector for Communication at Vytautas Magnus University, who provided her welcome and the background of the university as a longtime hub for European collaboration. An ambition for VMU going forward, she said, would be to reach into the Lithuanian diaspora around the world, working on language preservation, promoting the study of Lithuanian more generally, and building a network of scholars and community members. With many such diaspora members in attendance, her remarks were particularly relevant.

Budrytė took the podium to present her plenary address: “A Decolonizing Moment: Vicarious Identification with Ukraine in the Baltic States and Beyond.” She began by setting the main context for the discussion: Russia’s war is an imperial war. With this backdrop, her thesis was that Baltic and Central and Eastern European (CEE) actions to speak out and to get rid of Russian influence are decolonizing actions. These processes assert distinct CEE perspectives that are linked at their core to a shared historical memory.

Budrytė laid out four focuses over the course of her talk: First, CEE as a memory region. It is a conceptual space, yet also clearly distinguished from Western Europe by the particular experience of mass violence in the 20th century.

Second, “uneasy sovereignty.” Sovereignty in the region

is recurring and temporary, especially for the Baltic states. Budrytė compared the 2014 Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea as a game-changing historical event with the 2022 invasion as an engine of entirely new discourses and identities, something impactful in a new way.

Third, “vicarious identification.” States can create collective identities on the basis of previous trauma. It’s infrequent, Budrytė observed, but it’s what is happening right now with CEE and Ukraine — going beyond protests and weapons to rhetoric about expressions of mutual identification and solidarity. Historical memory is a linchpin of this shift in discourse.

Fourth, the implications of these identity shifts for domestic, European, and global politics. Budrytė covered new policies regarding Russian language in Baltic schools, the potential for Ukraine’s entry into NATO and/or the EU, and a renewed hope for transatlantic cooperation. That said, she also noted the global lines of division. Would this war just be a CEE war? How does the Global South factor in?

Budrytė’s proposal is for more scholarship on the history of colonialism as it relates to the Baltic states and CEE, including its relations to vicarious identification and the newfound centrality of so-called “weak actors” in global affairs.

Plenary talks at their best both engage the audience and advance the field of study. Budrytė’s was both, and in true AABS fashion, the interdisciplinary approach to her question attracted discussion from a wide variety of attendees. Her speech was informed by, and in turn helped fuel, a fast-growing interest in decolonization within the context of Baltic Studies. And perhaps it too contributed to the vicarious identification she spoke about: With so many nationalities represented in the room, it’s hard not to think about the impact of a communal experience.

THE FRIDAY NIGHT PLENARY SPEAKER was Arūnas Gelūnas, Director General of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art and former Lithuanian Minister of Culture. His talk was titled, “Museums at War, Museums Near War: Memory Institutions as Humanitarian and Diplomatic Agents in the Event of Armed Conflicts.”

Gelūnas proclaimed the war in Ukraine to be a war not just for territory, but for history, for culture, and for memory. He set the context by showing pictures of Russia’s destruction and theft of Ukrainian cultural heritage, and with the institutional background of his museum system. What then, he asked, is the role of memory institutions like his in the war?

For Gelūnas and his team, speed was of the essence. They sent packing and protection materials to Ukraine in the first weeks of the war, and proceeded to evacuate and safeguard a few dozen works.

Since February 2022, that number has risen to more than 800 works, largely paintings and prints. From that repository, the museum has put on 13 spontaneous exhibitions.

Gelūnas concluded his prepared remarks and moved into a discussion format with two moderators, Jurgita Staniškytė and Ignas Kalpokas, both of VMU.

In a throughline with Budrytė’s plenary talk, Gelūnas spoke of the collective memory in the region. Lithuanians, he observed, have had their culture stolen by Russia as well, and that shared trauma has built a bond. Relatedly, when the origin of that trauma is political, then culture must be political as well. It may be painful to politicize, Gelūnas conceded, but it is necessary.

The discussion proceeded with the role of the museum in modern society. Gelūnas views the museum as a universi-



ty, challenged with education and being out in public. That has required him and his staff to be proactive and challenge themselves, a spirit which has only been strengthened in their efforts to assist Ukraine.

Gelūnas concluded with his thoughts on the role of digital communications in shaping museums and memory. He was firm in stating his belief that technological advancements and social media are central to the future of memory and memory institutions. Every person is a broadcaster. One can stimulate immense volunteer support and also be exposed to information operations, and both can happen incredibly quickly.

Gelūnas’s presentation exemplified the whole-of-society effort that the Baltic states have put into aiding Ukraine since February 2022. Most importantly, it was a clear-eyed reminder that cultural properties are fragile and must be protected vigorously.



CBSE 2023

CBSE PARTICIPANTS SHARE EXPERIENCES

BEN GARDNER-GILL INTERVIEWS JOGILĖ ULINSKAITĖ AND MARIJA NORKŪNAITĖ

On the first day of CBSE 2023, AABS sat down with Jogilė Ulinskaitė (Vilnius University) and Marija Norkūnaitė (University of Oxford) over lunch to chat about their work, the first morning of the conference, and what they were looking forward to.

AABS: Jogilė, could you start off by introducing yourself, what brings you here, and what you're presenting on?

JOGILĖ ULINSKAITĖ: I'm Jogilė Ulinskaitė, now based at Vilnius University. Last year I was presenting on behalf of Yale, so I'm back at my home university. I was presenting about narratives on post-communist transformation last year, and based on that, a team of my colleagues and students and I collected interviews with people about how they remember post-communist transformation. That's the part I'll be presenting.

I'm interested in how during the complicated time of transformation, people started re-evaluating what's important or what's of value. I focus on how they narrate their achievement, what they achieved in the state of transition. Lots of research about post-communist transformation is about a huge recession and feeling of loss in people stories. But even if the transformation has been very difficult, in many cases people talk about endurance. So I think we can overlook the fact that people are also proud of their experience. Therefore, I'm shifting that perspective and saying: What did they achieve and what are they proud of? It doesn't necessarily have to be huge wealth, and usually it's a relatively small but important thing.

What I try to do is to compare two groups of people: those who worked in industry and enterprises that had their peaks of successes during the communist era, who continued working there in the transformation period, and then a group of people who started their own private businesses in the transformation period. The idea is that the former group was successful during the communist period, so what are they proud of during transformation, if anything? And what about the other group, who were newly successful people? What are the differences? What are their narratives? What sorts of cultural scripts do they use to talk about what's of value? When I say, "what's of value," it can be what brings value to a specific achievement. For some of them, the achievement is that they attended a course and they learned new skills. I ask how they understand that experience and how they consider that an achievement: Is it because of self-improvement? Is it because it's important for their work?

AABS: As you say, so much of the focus on the post-communist transformation, especially if you look at the early- and



mid-'90s, is just so bleak and doom and emigration and all of that. And obviously, not everyone was having a horrible time for the entire decade.

JU: When you talk to people, you see it's not necessarily sunny or bright. It was hard. But at the same time, the way they talk about it, they don't talk about themselves as victims. Because they managed, they endured, and with effort, they achieved something, and that's what's important: They survived.

AABS: And sometimes that's the success: They made it through, made it out to the other side. Some people especially would experience trauma from that, especially if they had really massive changes in their manner of life. Managing trauma is itself a success.

JU: Right, it is. And the whole discourse about trauma is complicated, as well as the discourse of winners and losers. Sometimes these dichotomies are too simplistic. So when I analyze interviews, I see that even those who could be considered successful because they opened a business and achieved what they wanted — built houses for example, because it was important to have a house in the '90s, it was a sign of success — they do not necessarily boast about it or consider it a success.

Whereas those who worked in factories that were in decline, and who then went bankrupt, they often at the same

time have achievements that they're proud of. For example, they may have used those skills that they learned in the factory: Those skills were valued and transferred to other places, and they still managed to adapt. I, as many scientists do, make everything more complicated.

AABS: That's what happens! I think it's a commonality between all the disciplines here at the conference, it's the "No, we're not going to give you an easy answer to your question" spirit. And that's part of what we all love about it, I'd say.

Speaking of the conference, we have 11 different divisions. Already on this first day, we've attended a few different sessions between us. Is there anything that's particularly stood out to you so far? Anything you're looking forward to over the next couple days?

JU: One thing is that I'm meeting friends! It's one of the conferences where you actually feel part of the community. It's the same people who come again and again, and you get acquainted, and I love it. Also spontaneously in the first panel, I moderated a discussion about the presentation — I got involved.

I also really liked the panel we went to together, "Soviet Period in the Baltics." Because I analyze post-communist transformations, it's inseparable from the community experience. Listening to people talk about that in Estonia and Latvia is beneficial for my own understanding. I was thinking: "Should we do this? Should we do that?" It was really inspiring.

AABS: What about you, Marija? Could you introduce yourself and what you're working on?

MARIJA NORKŪNAITĒ: I'm now a DPhil at the University of Oxford, working on a comparative ethnographic study on the Baltic states. In fact, the AABS has supported my research by awarding me a Dissertation Grant a couple of years ago. Immediately after I returned from fieldwork, the COVID-19 pandemic began, so there have been no conferences for two years, or they took place online. This is my first time presenting at the Baltic Studies conference. It's really nice to have so many people working on the region gather in one place. I really enjoyed the book presentation by Rasa Navickaitė (*Marija Gimbutas: Transnational Biography, Feminist Reception, and the Controversy of Goddess Archaeology*). It was fascinating — both the book and the discussion.

Also, I was just at a panel focused on political economy and political science. My background is in political science, but throughout the years I have shifted to social anthropology. The panel was very interesting and I really enjoyed it. The questions the scholars were asking were rather similar to what I do, but from a different perspective.

JU: In what sense different?

MN: Even if we're speaking about the same thing, the language is slightly different. Maybe the theories we use are slightly different. But that's the benefit of the conference — it covers so many disciplines. You get to actually meet people and talk with them, people who do a similar thing to you but from a different perspective. That's really, really beneficial.

AABS: It really is, especially because there's so much overlap that we don't necessarily think about in our day-to-day research. Sometimes we're just trying to get through what we're doing. Marija, I wanted to ask: Now that the pandemic is over, you are able to go out and pursue things again. Could you say a bit more about where you're headed with your work?

MN: I've just finished my dissertation; I haven't defended it yet. I'm starting to think about what to do next, but I'm also still quite immersed in the current study. The paper I am presenting at this conference has not yet been presented at any other conference. I'm quite excited, because like Jogilė, I come with my initial insights, and I'm very interested in the experiences of other scholars, the conversation that follows the presentations, and the comments and advice I might receive.

I'll be talking about silence. The question that I am going to ask is why people do not protest or, rather, why they say they would not protest even if they had a chance. Also, why people may not want to talk to a researcher. I examine different reasons why this might be the case. I'm interested if other researchers encountered a similar thing — that is, people unwilling to engage — in other Baltic countries. I did my fieldwork before the pandemic. Maybe scholars who have done their fieldwork more recently have different experiences? Finally, what does it say about the state-society relationship if there is a part of the population, however small, that does not want to express their opinion?

AABS: What does it say for the political culture if there's a portion of people who just say, "I'm not going to get involved"?

MN: Or maybe they want to, but they feel they can't. I'd like to hear other researchers' thoughts on this; to have a conversation. I think area studies is all about the conversation.

AABS: Exactly, I think that's the wonderful thing about it. It's very purposeful: You're not only not getting siloed, you're breaking out of the silo. I think you've raised some fascinating questions, and I'm sure you'll get good feedback at the conference. Jogilė, same to you — both of you have a great rest of your conference!

CSBE 2023

CONFERENCE MOMENTS CAPTURED

PHOTOS BY VYTAUTAS PETRONIS













EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP

BROADENING THE FIELD OF CYBERMUSEOLOGY

Elina Vikmane is the recipient of the 2023-2024 Aina Birnitis Dissertation-Completion Fellowship in the Humanities for Latvia. Her study, "Advancing cybermuseology: Digital innovation diffusion in Latvia's museum sector," expands the research field of cybermuseology, offering broader definition of cybermuseology and pushes its research boundaries, demonstrating how digital innovation research fits into scope of theoretical museology.

AABS: How did you arrive at your dissertation topic? How has your work shifted over the course of conducting research?

ELĪNA VIKMANE: When I began my PhD studies, I already knew that I would focus my research on the social role of museums and explore how new ideas and practices spread among them. This interest stemmed from both my professional experience and scholarly pursuits.

First, I was involved in conceptualizing and working on the development of Latvia's first contemporary art museum. Such a brand new institution, devoid of historical traditions, presents an opportunity to develop operations free from colonial or traditional constraints, which motivated me to investigate the latest trends in museology.

Second, Latvia is a rare and beneficial research case where the state accreditation system distinguishes 111 museums from all other memory and heritage institutions and keeps an extensive database which is almost crying to be used in research.

During the course of my PhD program, I became increasingly aware how broad the field is and how many tensions and issues can be explored, as you might guess. I focused on studying the diffusion of digital innovations — how new digital ideas and practices spread among museums and how these changes relate to the understanding of fulfilling the core functions of museums. I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Anda Laķe, for her wise, sensitive, and empathetic approach, which allowed me to follow my instincts, to travel to different destinations until I found my path. Concepts such as diffusion of innovation, digital divide, and innovation champions came together at the right time. Furthermore, I gradually became convinced that I had sufficient arguments to offer a broader perspective to the theoretical framework of cybermuseology. I felt that previous efforts focusing on either digital technologies, digital heritage, or the internet had unjustly limited the scope of investigation.

Then the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. These were truly terrible times for people, but in a way, it created a vibrant study field for me. As museums were forced to close their doors for an extended period, they had to introduce new digital ideas and rethink their relationships with visitors in order to serve society, which lies at the core of the definition of a museum. The pace of change accelerated



beyond what is typically observed. It also revealed the growing digital divide within the sector, differentiating museums that quickly adapted and embraced digital platforms from those that did not. My research questions became even more relevant, and it became clear that discussions on the subject of cybermuseology as the research field of theoretical and critical investigation of digital innovation in the museum field, would be timely.

AABS: What role does the Birnitis Fellowship have in your dissertation work?

EV: First and foremost, I am deeply honored and humbled to have been chosen for the Aina Birnitis Fellowship. It not only provides tremendous financial support for my academic journey, but also validates my passion and dedication to my field of study. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the AABS community.

The fellowship has allowed me to prioritize my thesis work over other professional commitments. I have already exceeded the timeline I submitted to AABS and have been working at full speed throughout the summer.

After having a few months to fully grasp the news, I have come to realize that this fellowship also has an enormous psychological impact, instilling a sense of confidence in me. This boost in confidence extends not only to the topic I have chosen, but also to my abilities as an emerging scholar. For example, I overcame fear and agreed to give a lecture to a group of international students in Germany, and I feel that I develop bolder reasoning in the article I am working on right now.

It is highly encouraging to continue pursuing an academic and scientific path and to spread the word about this opportunity among fellow PhD students and colleagues, making them aware that such a wonderful outcome, which I considered almost a miracle, is possible.

AABS: What do you hope to do after your dissertation? Where will your work lead you?

EV: I consider myself very fortunate. Our team of researchers has secured funding through a highly competitive process for a three-year research project in Latvia aimed at exploring participatory practices in museums. Only 7.5% proposals received funding — can you imagine? This opportunity allows me to utilize the data and knowledge from my thesis while also delving into an uncharted field — post-qualitative research and participatory methods. The unknown aspect of this endeavor fills me with excitement, as I thoroughly enjoy the process of putting the puzzle together.

As for my future plans, it is not customary in our culture — and might even seem presumptuous — to discuss the future before defending my thesis. In Latvia, the process involves five reviewers, and to be honest, it makes me nervous.

Nevertheless, my aspirations and intentions for the future are to continue growing as Latvian researcher. I am particularly interested in the study of digitally born heritage, which is an emerging issue in Latvia. Hence, I hope to find opportunities for mobility and international guidance through the funding of our postdoc scheme. Questions such as what Latvians consider important and worth preserving, 21st century digitally born heritage from the postdigital perspective, why, and whose heritage it is, whom and how represents, who can be considered collectors and what are power asymmetries, intrigue me. I believe that these initial thoughts will turn into something else during the process and it excites me and brings me joy. As we say in Latvia, when talking about the future we are sending a message to the universe, so now I have to keep my antennae alert not to miss the opportunities.

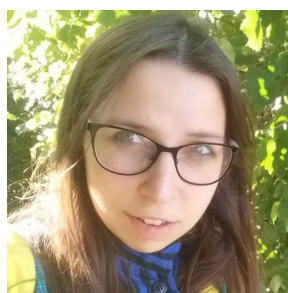
JĀNIS GRUNDMANIS FELLOWSHIP FOR STUDY IN THE U.S.



Helēna Šania Volbeta
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MFA Summer Film Project –
a satire, focused on artificial
fertility complexities

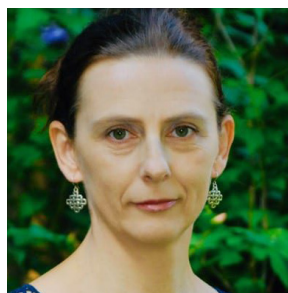
MUDĪTE I. ZĪLĒTE SALTUPS FELLOWSHIP



Anne Sauka
UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA

Ontogenealogies in process:
Baltic mythologies as
knowledge sources in
environmental contexts

BAUMANIS GRANT FOR CREATIVE PROJECTS IN BALTIC STUDIES



Aušra Park
SIENNA COLLEGE

Symbolic and substantive gender
representation effects of the first
women presidents in post-
communist Europe



Megija Milberga
THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

The relationship between
landscape and Soviet
architecture in the Baltic states



Robert Fleitz
SIBELIUS ACADEMY

“The Silent Voice” – newly com-
missioned solo piano works from
Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP

ON DISCOURSES OF AGING AND EMPTINESS

BEN GARDNER-GILL INTERVIEWS ANNA ŽABICKA

Anna Žabicka is a 2023-2024 recipient of the AABS Dissertation Grant for Graduate Students. With the support of the grant, Žabicka will join the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society as a visiting academic in fall 2023, where she will continue her dissertation work. Žabicka will also use the AABS Dissertation Grant for English language editing of her current and upcoming thesis chapters.

AABS: Could you tell us about your dissertation and how you came to the subject?

ANNA ŽABICKA: I've been working in the field of aging, specifically in Latvia, for at least 10 years now. My first master's thesis was about living and dying in nursing homes, focused on an urban nursing home. It's taken a while to get to a PhD program, and this time I wanted to switch to the countryside because the demographic situation is way more pronounced there. It goes together with out-migration, aging and dying, and so on; there are processes of emptying in rural locations. So, why rural sites, emptying, aging, in Latvia specifically? Latvia, like many European countries, is experiencing a rapidly aging society. On one hand, it's not just a Latvian problem. This commonality will contribute to my work because I'll be able to make the argument that, yes, my work here is about Latvia, but it can have broader effects outside Latvia. However, Latvia is not just an aging society, but it is also a small country to begin with with a unique historical and political position as a post-Soviet country. There's also a certain romanticized nationalism that contributes to a very specific, imagined endangerment of Latvians and Latvian-ness, or what supposedly constitutes Latvians. That makes it ethnographically rich for me to trace the specific state policies on aging that affect current and future older adults. So, it's this mix of a political-historical position and this very romanticized view of what Latvians are, that combine to affect older adults.

In my research, I argue that aging has, for many years, been seen as a national endangerment of both the state and Latvian-ness, whatever that is, and thus it shapes Latvia's rural emptiness specifically as a generational problem — places are deemed empty not because people aren't there, but because young people aren't there. I'm building on this idea of emptiness that several authors have written about; in Latvia's case, it's Prof. Dace Dzenovska. I analyze how this discourse of aging as an emptiness and national endangerment affects the experiences of aging and older adults, and also how these discourses affect the way of life of the employees who work at this rural nursing home where I did my research.

AABS: It's a fascinating confluence of disciplines and topics here, to get a natural cross-section of so many things.



AŽ: Yeah, I'm hoping for that. I also look through lenses of care. I have several chapters on care relations on different levels, both within the nursing home and outside its walls: How public discourses of aging affect late-life care, how people experience aging, how the nursing home becomes central for sustaining social life and so on. One of the arguments I build throughout my thesis is that nursing homes are politically seen as the core of the nation's emptiness, seen as a place of personal decline, and in Latvia's case, the end of Latvia: This is where the nation dies, this is where we end.

AABS: This is the place for the end of life of individuals, but also for the nation as a whole.

AŽ: Exactly. What's interesting, and what I saw, is that the nursing home actually becomes a focal point of publicly and politically unrecognized continuity of social reproduction and liveliness. This rural nursing home is not dead or dying — there's so much life! It's a core institution in these rural communities, both for social reproduction, but also the formal and informal economy. It actually sustains life, includ-



ing certain rural lifestyles that publicly and politically are seen as something very Latvian that has to be preserved. For example, individual farmsteads and smallholder farms with grandmas and their dairy cattle. I argue that this nursing home actually helps to sustain that romanticized view of the countryside and of Latvia. It's not just decline and death, there's social and cultural continuity there.

AABS: I want to follow up on that and ask about what that means about the ties between "Latvian-ness" and "rural-ness." As you just said, this sense of the farmstead, the countryside, and so on. I think it's present in a lot of countries.

AŽ: Absolutely. There are lots of ethnographically and historically specific things going on in this fieldwork, but it's my hope that it can allow us to rethink how we approach marginality, emptiness, and the role of people and sites deemed marginal, empty, and dying. This could allow us to rethink late life care, and to understand that these people and rural communities become central to the nation and the state.

AABS: What role is the AABS Dissertation Grant going to play in your research?

AŽ: It's crucial. I received a scholarship last year, the Marietta-Blau Grant from Austria's government, that allowed me to go to Iowa for six months to write up my thesis. That grant will also partially cover my next stay at the University of Oxford, but not fully. The AABS grant contributes to allowing me to stay for at least three months at Oxford. I will work with Dace Dzenovska, whom I previously mentioned, who works on emptiness. I'll also work with colleagues who work on migration, and that's crucial as well.

The rest of the AABS grant will go to language editing. For me as an anthropologist, and I think it depends on the field, it's crucial to write beautifully. There isn't much that I can give back to the people I write about, who have contributed to this research, so I've always thought that beautiful writing, beautiful ethnography, is what I need. English is my second language, and I do think I write well, but every dissertation needs professional language editing. This will allow me to hire a person, whom I already have in mind, who will do the very important part of going through all my chapters and making it more smooth. I do hope that eventually this will turn into a monograph, which is a whole different process, but regardless, I need this to be a good, solid dissertation with beautiful language. I'm very grateful for the grant.

AABS: We're delighted to support you! Best of luck with your time at Oxford and the rest of your research.

EMERGING SCHOLARS RESEARCH GRANTS



Irina Nicorici
NEW EUROPE COLLEGE

Defining Soviet Latvian Citizenship,
1953-1990



Jokubas Salyga
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

Political economy of Baltic
post-communist transformations



Harry Merritt
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

Origins, wartime experiences, and
legacies of Latvian national units
during World War II



Stanislav Budnitsky
WILSON CENTER

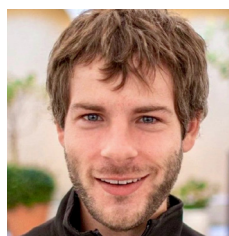
Estonia's rise as a recognized
digital innovator and policymaker

DISSERTATION COMPLETION GRANTS



Emma Friedlander
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Popular culture of alternative
spirituality in the Soviet Union
from 1975-2000



Kevin Axe
FREE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

Intellectual roots of Estonia's
market reforms



**James Montgomery
Baxenfield**
TALLINN UNIVERSITY

The idea to establish a
Latvian-Lithuanian state

EXCELLENCE IN PUBLICATIONS

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITY OF MARIJA GIMBUTAS

INTERVIEW WITH BEN GARDNER-GILL

The AABS Book Publication Subvention was awarded to Routledge for publishing *Marija Gimbutas: Transnational Biography, Feminist Reception, and the Controversy of Goddess Archaeology*. The book, authored by Rasa Navickaitė, is a biography and reception history of the Lithuanian–American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994). It presents the first transnational account of Gimbutas’ life based on historical research, and an original examination of the impact of her ideas in various feminist contexts, both academic and popular.

AABS: Could you tell us how you came to your research on Marija Gimbutas?

RASA NAVICKAITĖ: My book on Marija Gimbutas is based on my dissertation research. I came up with the idea to write about Gimbutas because I was initially interested in Lithuanian feminism and the women’s movement in post-socialist Lithuania. When I started researching that, I realized just how important Gimbutas was as a reference point for women in the '90s in Lithuania, and for Lithuanian society in general. She was a prominent person, very well known. That made me really curious about her as a personality, and I immediately realized that what we know in Lithuania about Gimbutas is very different from what people might know about her in the United States. Our knowledge is limited. In Lithuania we see one side of her, as a researcher of the Balts, of pagan culture and spirituality, of prehistory, as an archaeologist. But we’re very afraid of topics like gender in her work: What about her unorthodox approach to gender in understanding prehistory? What about her role in feminist thought and the development of feminist philosophy in second-wave feminism? What about her role in the women’s movement? It was important for me to take those different aspects of why Gimbutas is well known, for very different reasons in different places, and try to put them together in one book.

AABS: It’s a fascinating book and interesting project. The origin story will be familiar to other people — you’re in the middle of research, already in a field of study, and you find something and you ask: Why is nobody talking about this?

RN: Yes, exactly. What’s interesting to me about Gimbutas is that she’s talked about, but, I thought, it was limited how we choose to understand her. It’s crucial to show her from different perspectives and to show her as a very complicated historical figure. That was the main point for me. Also, it was important to me to see Gimbutas as a woman in history, and think how I could write about her from a feminist perspective. That’s unfortunately rarely done, including in Baltic Studies. I think that a gender-based approach, feminist approach, has to become stronger in our field of study.



AABS: Could you speak to the role of the AABS Book Publication Subvention in that process and the publication of your book?

RN: I’m very grateful for all the support that AABS has given to this project. AABS supported the earlier research. I received a Dissertation Grant which funded my visit to the United States, which otherwise would not have been possible. I was able to go to Gimbutas’ archives close to Santa Barbara. Previously, I had done research in Vilnius at the Vilnius University library. That’s what I was able to reach in Lithuania, but without AABS support, I would never have been able to spend a few weeks in Gimbutas’s archive at the OPUS Archives and Research Center close to Santa Barbara. Her documents from her office in UCLA had been transported there after her death. That was a very important part of my research, also because I could get in touch and meet in person some of her relatives and people from the Goddess spirituality movement who knew her. I really felt the support and that the Association believed, and still believes, in the project.

AABS also supported me in coming to the Stanford conference in 2018 to talk about my project. And finally, quite unexpected for

me, I also received the Book Publication Subvention this spring. I published my book with Routledge, and the publishing process was rather quick in comparison to many other academic publishers. I received the news about the publication subvention after the book had already been published, so what we decided to do was to make a part of the book open access. That's really great — you know how the prices are for academic books nowadays! Of course, I'm always glad to share my dissertation with people or drafts of my book, but this is another level. I chose the more analytical chapters in the second part of the book for the open access version.

AABS: To go back to what you've learned from this research and from Gimbutas, and from applying a transnational approach, it seems as though there were gaps in knowledge in different places and you were able to bring them together. That's a remarkable thing to be able to do, and I imagine it also prompts lifelong questioning in some ways: Where else might there be connections?

RN: First, what you said is correct: I was kind of the perfect person to write this book, without boasting too much! I was in this particular situation where I was a Lithuanian, obviously, with native Lithuanian language and basic knowledge of our history, our folklore, etc. I knew Gimbutas from that side already. And then I'm also someone who went abroad to Western Europe to study gender studies. At Utrecht University, I studied with some well-known feminist scholars and got to know feminist theory firsthand. I learned the history of Western feminism, which not many people from a Lithuanian background have had an opportunity to do. So I could also see Gimbutas from that side: How would a Western feminist approach Gimbutas? I knew about the internal theoretical debates, and I immediately saw what a special position she had as someone who was associated with this more, let's say, radical feminist strand, a cultural feminist strand. I could position her as a person who influenced a particular strand of feminism instead of a person who was formed by feminism. I could see those aspects of her biography and her work.

On the other hand, I also knew, and I had the opportunity to learn more, about the intricacies of the context and the era she came from. For example, interwar Vilnius and Kaunas, the Nazi and the Soviet occupations, the complexities of 20th century Lithuanian history, and how that could have affected her thinking as a diaspora intellectual, as someone who was educated in Lithuania and then in postwar Germany, and who then became a star in the American academic environment. I felt like I could see her from different sides, and thus was in a good position for me to write the book.

I was surprised when I started learning about Gimbutas that there was not a monograph-length publication about her. Many people have been interested in her — there are many essays, many debates about her, especially in archaeology and with feminist archaeologists. She has also been very important for the feminist spirituality movement, and there's been a lot written

about that, some of it even hagiographic. And, of course, there's also been a lot written about her in Lithuania. I felt that I could really put it together. I know that trying to be objective is always a bit of an illusion, but I tried not to take sides, portraying her neither as a feminist heroine nor as a national superstar, nor, on the other hand, as a bad feminist or as “a naïve patriot.” I tried to portray all those different stances and perspectives, and I hope that it will be inspiring for other people to take some particular aspects of her ideas, work, and biography, and go deeper. Her life is incredibly rich. She was a prolific scholar, a prolific thinker, very original, super hardworking. I definitely did not go through the whole of her oeuvre in writing this book.

I really hope that more people will see the potential in writing about her and debating with her, getting to know what her ideas were really about. Especially in Lithuania, there are so many potential BA, MA, and PhD theses there! Just to look at how she talks about Baltic folklore, or her ideas on gender — I just scratched the surface, because it's so rich. I hope it will be inspiring in some way.

AABS: Where is this research headed next for you? Or are you moving on to other projects?

RN: I've moved onto a completely different project, working on the history of LGBTQ people in Soviet Lithuania, a history of homophobia, and a history of recovering the agency of LGBTQ people. This is a very different kind of project, of course, but it's still coming from my interest in issues of gender and sexuality, and the history of those issues.

I also realized after publishing the book that I probably won't be able to really leave Gimbutas and not touch that topic ever again. It's come back to me in different ways, and I feel that after some break, I myself might be able to return to the topic. I will have an opportunity to do that soon, actually, because there's a Lithuanian translation coming up. A Lithuanian publisher, Kitos Knogos, bought the rights to the book from Routledge, and the translation is almost finalized. I haven't read it yet, but I've been in conversation with the translator, Rima Bertašavičiūtė who has experience working with feminist texts, and I'm really excited that the book is also going to be in Lithuanian. I will have an opportunity to come back to the topic of Gimbutas when writing the forward to the Lithuanian edition.

AABS: Both of these paths are exciting — best of luck!

**Book Publication Subvention applications
are open and accepting submissions!**

To learn more, go to: aabs-balticstudies.org/grants-fellowships/aabs-book-publication-subvention/



REPORT FROM THE BALTIC STUDIES SUMMER INSTITUTE (BALSSI) AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

BALSSI was founded in 1994 and is a cooperative project of the Baltic Languages Consortium and the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, offering intensive Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian language courses. At Indiana University, BALSSI is held in conjunction with the Language Workshop's summer courses and benefits from the Workshop's long experience as a leader in intensive summer language instruction and programming. The Workshop has been offering intensive language training at the Bloomington campus of Indiana University since 1950. Students complete the equivalent of one year of academic instruction in the program and earn six to eight credits, which can be transferred to other institutions. A full range of cultural and linguistic extracurricular activities complement classroom instruction for every language.

BALSSI 2023, hosted by the Indiana University Language Workshop, offered eight weeks of intensive online instruction in Latvian and Lithuanian.

With support from the Baltic Studies Consortium partners, AABS, and the US Department of State's Title VIII program, BALSSI 2023 trained three students of Elementary Latvian and six students of Elementary Lithuanian. A fourth student of Latvian completed the first half of the course only. An additional five students applied for Latvian but did not ultimately attend. An additional four students applied for Lithuanian but did not attend. These are typical admissions rates. No students applied for Estonian, which is unusual.

Indiana does not expect the enrollment pattern of 2023 to repeat, and if it does not, AABS funds will fill critical gaps, helping pay for instructor salaries and financial aid for students who do not have funding from other sources, and making it possible to continue to offer BALSSI in future summers.

Indiana University is honored to have been able to host BALSSI for the past eight years and thanks its Consortium partners for their financial and institutional support. We are

particularly grateful to AABS for its generous contributions and for its ongoing support for summer instruction in Baltic languages, especially during the difficulties and uncertainties of the last four years.

AABS is proud to support BALSSI and was heartened to read positive student evaluations, particularly about the quality of instruction. A student in the Latvian class wrote of their instructor, Solvita Burr, "Solvita is a great, effective, and welcoming language teacher who is very good at teaching a comprehensive course in the language. I have taken other summer language intensive courses but my skills probably improved the most in this one."

Students of Jura Avizienis's Lithuanian class were similar in their praise. One wrote that she was "very kind and always willing to help her students and answer questions." Another concurred, "She clearly demonstrated care and a desire for her students to learn and improve."

Many thanks from AABS to Dr. Burr, Dr. Avizienis, and the whole BALSSI team!



NEWS & EVENTS

WINGATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OPENS BALTIC READING ROOM

BEN GARDNER-GILL INTERVIEWS JOSEPH ELLIS | PHOTOS BY ASHER LAUDERDALE

In March 2023, Wingate University celebrated the opening of its Baltic Studies Reading Room. This initiative from Joseph Ellis, professor of Political Science, heralds the first such collection in the American South and aims to draw in interested students, locals and scholars in the region.

AABS: Could you give us a bit of background as to how you came to Wingate, and how you came up with the idea of a Baltic Studies Reading Room?

JOSEPH ELLIS: I'm someone of no Baltic heritage — none of my family is from the Baltic region. In my case, I didn't have any linkage until I started studying the Baltic states, particularly Estonia, in graduate school. The impetus for this project is that I wanted to do for others what had happened to me. We're in an area where there aren't many people of Baltic heritage. There's a small-ish Lithuanian population, but practically no Latvians or Estonians. I wanted to have a place where (a) someone could be exposed to the Baltic states and have the same sort of rewarding and enriching experience that I did, and (b) we could have a homebase of sorts for Baltic Studies in the region. There are certainly institutions throughout the South that have excellent Baltic scholars; our current President of AABS Dovilė Budrytė is in Georgia, for example. But there's no University of Washington, or Indiana, or Stanford, that exists in the South where people say, "Hey, you have to go to this institution to do Baltic Studies." Think of someone who has an interest but who can't make that trip to the New York City Public Library, or to UW, and they're a graduate student like I was. Maybe the closest thing they can manage is to come to our research room here at Wingate and find what they need to get started. That's where it started: To make Wingate a place for Baltic Studies in the South, and to expose the community — our students, locals, and in the long term, scholars in the region — to the Baltic states and Baltic Studies.

AABS: It's an admirable goal and it's really exciting to see where it's going to go. Could you talk a bit about how you built up the collection and what you've focused on, especially given that you're just getting started? What has the reception been like, including from the local community given there's not much of a Baltic presence?

JE: Let's go a step further back. Our library is on a small liberal arts campus — not a research library. We don't have the kind of collection that UW or UNC-Chapel Hill has. But our library director, Keith Lassiter, wanted to make our library a destination for people when they visited campus. What's something that can draw community members and tour groups into the library? He was constantly thinking of ways to do that, and so I said to him, "You know, I have this crazy idea. What if we could dedicate a small space in the library to Baltic research, and slowly build a collection of materials that could attract students from the University of South Carolina, or UNC-Chapel Hill, or Duke? They've exhausted what their universities have to offer and can't get to the Baltic states; we can offer them resources." And he said, "That's a great idea." Little did I know that he was going to have an entire space with bookshelves, a reading desk, reading lamps, etc. We speculated that we could fit 5,000 volumes in this space, and if we did that, then it would put us as a top five collection in the country! After we got to talking and confirmed we were going ahead, we started with a small call for donations.

The first person I spoke with was Liisi Esse [Administrative Executive Director, AABS, and Curator for Estonian and Baltic Studies at Stanford]. I asked her if she ever got

donations that Stanford couldn't take, and told her we'd take anything she could offer while we're building up the collection. I learned about all these library terms like "duplicates," for duplicates, other terms I'd never heard before. Liisi said Stanford couldn't take everything; they're selective in some ways and have lots of duplicates and triplicates of books. She sent us some things to get us started.

Then, we did a public call at the AABS conference in Seattle, where I stood up in front of a room of librarians and explained what we were trying to do at Wingate. Ramunė Kubilius, who's at Northwestern University, said she could help. Liisi and Ramunė, with their institutions, are the two biggest donors to the project.

And that's what it is right now: It's pretty much all donations. Wingate has ordered one or two books. So, donations of duplicates and triplicates, donations of materials that for whatever reason people couldn't keep anymore. Imagine someone is retiring and they don't want to keep all the stuff that they have. We've had some other project donors as well. Our first donor was a woman named Marta MacKenzie, who sent in a private collection of mostly Latvian materials. I said if you get it to us, we'll accept it, and we'll gladly put it in the collection. That was the first bit: from a private donor, maybe a box or two of books. And then we get like 26 boxes of books from Stanford.

At that point Keith, the library director, tasked someone in the library with doing the proper things librarians do, like catalog and make sense of the collection. Again, my vision was initially just for a little alcove in the library where we had some books and reference materials, a desk, a lamp, a little space. It's become so much more than that. We have 1,600 volumes now, including things that there are one of in the United States. For example, publishers that don't exist anymore. We have materials here that would be very, very attractive to someone who, depending on what their research was, needed that only physical copy of this particular Lithuanian novel, let's say, that's out of print. You can come to Wingate and access the collection.

One other quick story. We have a new faculty member on campus who's Estonian. Her mother came to visit for three or four weeks, speaks limited English, and ran out of things to read. This was before we'd built the collection. The professor came to look at the collection and said, "The next time my mom comes, she's going to hang out in the reading room. Here's all this Estonian literature for you." That was really heartwarming.

One key for us is that we want students to access the collection. About 50% of the materials are in English, so accessible for our students, and the other 50% in a Baltic language.

AABS: You're already at 1,600 volumes, and you have the space to accommodate 5,000. Are there particular items you're looking to add to the collection, or particular things you'd be excited to have, even if you don't know if you could get them?

JE: There are a couple of things that could excite us. Our Latvian collection is probably the one that we have the least of at the moment. So anything Latvia-related, we're happy to take. We'll take all of them! Only about 15% of the collection at the moment is Latvian; the rest is either Estonian, Lithuanian, or comparative.

Second, given our students and faculty here, and given that many early researchers don't have language skills yet, English language materials about the Baltic states are really helpful. For example, we have 90% of a particular collection of Estonian literature that a Swedish publisher put together. If you know Estonian, it's great, but if you don't, it's going to be harder. So that's the second thing: more volumes in the English language, especially for people who are just starting out in Baltic Studies.

The third thing is newer texts. Given that almost everything in the collection has been donated, it's dated in terms of new literature about political science, sociology, and so on. A work of Lithuanian literature that was written in 1910? We might have that. But if it was written in 2010, we might not have that. Anything that is new-ish, we'd be excited about.



Jolie Riopelle, Political Science junior (Wingate University)



Kory Paulus, Collection Management Librarian (EKS Library)



AABS: I like the impetus of giving back: You’ve come to this field just out of pure curiosity, and you want to have that opportunity opened up for someone else. Have you run into students, faculty, or folks in the community for whom that light may have started to flicker on a little bit?

JE: Yes, absolutely. We’re a small liberal arts school, about 2,800-3,000 undergraduate students and a small graduate program. Everyone knows me as the Baltic Studies person or the Estonia person on campus. I’ve been fortunate to have students come through here who will see that I’m passionate about this, and I want to share it, and that makes them impassioned as well.

We had one student in particular who, when we had the workshop and the opening of the reading room, came to every session. She was so excited and said, “I think this is what I want to do. I want to be a professor and do research in the Baltic states.” That’s music to my ears. I think it’s true with anything: If you really love baseball, let’s say, and you’re passionate about it, even if someone hates baseball, they can admire that you have a passion about it. It doesn’t really matter what it is. In this particular case, with my research interest in the Baltic states, the students know that I care about this, and it makes them curious: What would drive someone to devote their entire professional career to this particular thing? And that’s not unique to the Baltic states — it could be any research area. Seeing this all come together with the workshop, when Dovilė was here, and Ramunė was here, and all these folks who do Baltic Studies, it showed that you can make a living studying Estonia — that’s a real thing you can do. That was the lightbulb moment for this particular student, and for others as well.

AABS: It’s wonderful when you get all these scholars together, from all different backgrounds — teaching professors, researchers, librarians — it shows the full breadth of what’s possible.

JE: Absolutely true. And one more thing, in favor of AABS.

We’ve both been to all sorts of conferences, workshops, and similar, and not every experience I’ve had at a conference has been great. But the first time I went to an AABS conference in 2008, I felt that people were really warm, and it made me want to go back. I think that for our organization, if people can go to one AABS conference or event, even if they’re not Baltic scholars per se, they can feel that warmth and welcome. At my first AABS conference, I was a nobody, and people treated me like I was a full scholar — and I didn’t know anything! I think we do a good job as an organization doing that.

AABS: I both appreciate and echo that: It’s critical for this organization. It would be critical even if we were an organization that focused on a larger region of the world or received more regular attention in the news, the last year plus notwithstanding. It’s critical as scholars and educators to have that intellectual community be really vibrant and thriving. Any final thoughts?

JE: Yes: We can get to 5,000. Anyone out there who wants to send their one book in, or they wrote a book and we don’t know it exists, or whatever, send it in. We will take whatever you have, process it, and take good care of it. We are not trashing anything. If something comes in in terrible condition, we do our best to preserve it as best we can, and/or digitize it. People can trust that we are going to take good care of whatever they donate to us.

Joseph Ellis and Wingate University are eager to receive your donations! Please address materials to:

Isaac Meadows, Interim Library Director
Attn: Joseph Ellis, Baltic Reading Room
110 Church Street
EKS Library at Wingate University
Wingate, NC 28174

JAAN KÜNNAP | WIKIMEDIA

AABS 2024 AT YALE

THE 29TH BIENNIAL AABS CONFERENCE

'THE BALTIC WAY: UNITY AND GIVING AID'

JUNE 13-16 | NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

ESTONIA, LATVIA, AND LITHUANIA have for over the past century shown the benefits of shared action and solidarity. The three states sought recognition of their independence following World War I, and following World War II — through the years of Soviet occupation — they maintained that recognition through collaborative efforts.

In recent decades the joint efforts of their peoples were seen in the peaceful Baltic Way demonstration in August 1989 when Balts joined hands from Tallinn to Vilnius across a distance of 600 kilometers, and in the three countries' together joining NATO in 2004. Today, the three Baltic countries are leading the world in per capita aid to Ukraine after Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Gathering at the 29th biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), to be held on the campus of Yale University on June 14-16, 2024,

will be hundreds of people dedicated to the study of the peoples and lands around the Baltic Sea. Welcome are paper proposals from all fields of the humanities and social sciences, education, and technology. We particularly welcome paper proposals focusing on issues of transnational security, safety, and well-being. We encourage proposals that draw attention to the larger shared space throughout the Baltic Sea region as well as to the role the peoples of the Baltic are playing on an all-European and global scale.

The conference program will feature scholarly panels and roundtable discussions, film screenings, other cultural events, as well as exhibitions of Yale University's various Baltic collections.

AABS 2024

Yale MACMILLAN CENTER
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The 29th Biennial AABS Conference

"The Baltic Way: Unity and Giving Aid"

Yale University, New Haven, CT

June 13-16, 2024



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Celebrating 25 years of philanthropic work focused on education, KFF congratulates the University of Washington for the discovery, preservation, and transmission of fundamental knowledge about the language, literature, history, politics, and culture of the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia)