

Literary History
and Popular
Enlightenment
in Latvian Culture

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By

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IEGULDĪJUMS TAVĀ NĀKOTNĒ

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Enlightenment of peasants, an 18th-century phenomenon that originated from an interest in common people and ideas of about the emancipation of the lower classes, had a crucial impact on creating new literary cultures in Eastern Europe. The focus of this research is on cultural history of Latvia—one of the Baltic countries, belonging to tsarist Russia at the time, whose inhabitants were regarded as serfs, but who transformed themselves over the course of fifty odd years into a European nation. This book follows the process during which the Enlightenment of peasants mobilized local Baltic German elites to launch a literary culture in Latvian and to build the preconditions for Latvian emancipation in the 19th century. By exploring Latvian cultural history as a case study, the book contributes to the discussions about peasant history in the age of Enlightenment.

Within the wider context of European literary history, the Latvian example adds significantly to debates about the Enlightenment, peasants and emancipation. So far, this topic has been approached mainly as an agrarian question about the abolishment of serfdom and other political reforms. Less attention has been paid to the attempts to “civilise the indigenous people”. In Latvian literary history, the texts composed by the Baltic German elite to educate and improve the socially limited Latvian serfs were always part and parcel of the “colonial upbringing” of Latvians and a stimulus for the rise of Latvian secular literature and 19th-century national culture. The question of how to consolidate a single Latvian Enlightenment project by unifying its emancipating tendencies with its more restrictive ones has mostly remained either unanswered or ignored.

Scholars of the 18-century cultural history of the Baltic region typically have paid more attention to the texts published in German, while the texts in indigenous languages written by the bilingual Baltic German authors often have been left unexplored. This book offers an alternative reading and provides a closer look at books written to peasants and their content demonstrating the attempts to change the peasant society in the 18th-century Latvia. Literature composed in Latvian is interpreted in this book in comparison to the *Volksaufklärung*, German Popular Enlightenment.

The term “Popular Enlightenment” has emerged relatively recently in German literary theory, primarily since the 1970s. Interest in the topic of

popular culture was inspired by German literary and cultural historian Rudolf Schenda's *Volk ohne Buch* (*People without the Book*, 1970) and by Heinz Otto Lichtenberg's *Unterhaltsame Bauernaufklärung* (*Entertaining Peasant Enlightenment*, 1970). The dissertation by German literary historian Reinhart Siegert, namely his *Aufklärung und Volkslektüre* (*Enlightenment and Popular Reading*, 1978), marked the most notable turning point by reinforcing the term *Volksaufklärung* in Germany and initiating further research on the topic. From 1990 until 2016, a large-scale research project on the publication history of books about the Popular Enlightenment was carried out by Reinhart Siegert and Holger Böning and published in three volumes entitled *Volksaufklärung: Biobibliographisches Handbuch zur Popularisierung aufklärerischen Denkens im deutschen Sprachraum von den Anfängen bis 1850* (*Popular Enlightenment: A Biobibliographical Handbook on the Popularisation of Enlightenment Thought in the German-speaking Area from Its Beginnings until 1850*).

Currently, studies of the Popular Enlightenment have expanded as a broad interdisciplinary sphere of research in literature, culture and media history. They not only analyse and interpret texts and the contexts of their creation, but also demonstrate how ideas about emancipation, tolerance and power, reinforced during the Enlightenment era, have affected the thinking paradigms of modern society. The influence of the Popular Enlightenment on the publication of East European literature is of equal importance.

The connection between Popular Enlightenment ideas in Germany and the emergence of 18th-century secular books in Latvian has only recently been acknowledged. Studies published during the last ten years by Māra Grudule and Thomas Taterka among others have demonstrated that Popular Enlightenment texts in German were the ones most often chosen for translation into Latvian, thus making it reasonable to hypothesise that Latvian secular literary culture initiated by the Baltic Germans can be viewed as a localization (or adaptation) of German Popular Enlightenment ideas. This book contributes to the mapping of the international network of Popular Enlightenment ideas as they crossed the borders between Western and Eastern Europe.

The book consists of five chapters. In the first chapter I characterize the 18th-century interest in common people, peasant education and the problems associated with emancipation as well as the import of these ideas into the Baltic provinces. The second chapter outlines an overview of the literary history of the Popular Enlightenment in Latvian, focusing on the most significant books, themes and foreign influences. The characteristics of the Popular Enlightenment's literary practice and communication are

analysed in the third chapter. The last two chapters turn to the literary works written by Baltic German authors for Latvian peasant readers. By analysing literary works by the Baltic German Lutheran pastors Gotthard Friedrich Stender, Johann Friedrich Rosenberger, Gustav von Bergmann, Alexander Johann Stender and Karl Gotthard Elferfeld, I trace the depiction of various images of Latvian peasants and attempt to uncover both the liberating and restraining sides of the Popular Enlightenment in the Baltics. In the fourth chapter I explore the idealization of the peasant based on bourgeois virtues, sensibilities and Germanisation. In the fifth chapter I analyse issues related to the ideology of the Enlightenment, including such topics as serfdom, patriotism and history.

I am very grateful to Reinhart Siegert, Professor of Freiburg University, for his advice and tremendous help with German sources of Popular Enlightenment during the initial stage of my research. Also, I would like to express gratitude for the support from scholars of the Baltic German culture in Tallinn and Tartu: Ulrike Plath, Liina Lukas and Jaan Undusk. Most of all, I would like to thank my colleagues at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art affiliated with the University of Latvia and the Faculty of Humanities as well as those at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the University of Latvia and at the National Library of Latvia, especially Māra Grudule, Thomas Taterka, Aiga Šemeta, Gvido Straube, Gustavs Strenga, Benedikts Kalnačs, Eva Eglāja-Kristsone and Dace Bula for their encouragement and inspiration as well as their careful comments and critique.

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I am grateful to *Cambridge Scholars Publishing* and to the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia for permission to use my earlier study, *Apgaismība un kultūrpārnesē (Enlightenment and Cultural Transfer)*, published in Latvian in 2013), in a revised form for this book. Parts of chapters 1 and 5 have appeared previously in the journals *Interlitteraria* and *Nordic Theatre Studies*.

CHAPTER ONE

PEASANTS AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BALTIC PROVINCES

In the middle of the 18th century, indigenous peasants under serfdom were put under the spotlight of interest of the educated elite in the Baltic provinces. This focus on Baltic peasants arose from the interest in the “common people” throughout Europe, where they gradually came into the public eye of educated society, in some respects even becoming a “central dilemma”¹ for those enlighteners who wished to expand the borders of Enlightenment thought. Peasants were simultaneously seen as “embodiments of unreason”, “producers of essential products” and “victims of neglect”.² In the Baltic Sea provinces of the Russian Empire,³ their otherness was strengthened by their distinctive language, customs and ethnicity. The “common people” in the Baltics referred both to a social class and an ethnic group, and the concept of a “peasant” acquired ethnic connotations. Ethnic boundaries in Baltics were identical to social ones—to be an Estonian in Estonia and Northern Livonia, or a Latvian in Courland and Southern Livonia, was to be a peasant.⁴

¹ Harry Payne, “The People,” in: *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Alan Charles Kors, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 260.

² *Ibid.*, 260.

³ The Baltic Sea provinces of the Russian Empire comprised the common denomination for three governorates: Estonia, Livonia (both since 1721) and Courland (after 1796; part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth throughout most of the 18th century). Ethnic Latvians inhabited Courland and southern Livonia—which, along with Lettgallia (part of Vitebsk Governorate), constitute the territory of Latvia today—while northern Livonia and Estonia were inhabited by ethnic Estonians. In Estonia, Livonia and Courland, the minority Baltic German upper class dominated and the evolution of the peasant Enlightenment was similar to that in the Estonian and Latvian parts of these provinces. Until 1817 in Courland and 1819 in Livonia, when serfdom was abolished, the majority of the Latvian population consisted of serfs.

⁴ Cf.: Edgars Dunsdorfs, *Latvijas vēsture: 1710 – 1800* (Sundbyberg: Daugava, 1973), 290.

The Discovery of the People

Baltic Germans often saw themselves as colonisers—descendants of the Middle Age crusaders who settled on the shores of the Baltic Sea in the 13th century.⁵ In the 18th century, as during previous centuries, the political and cultural power of the Baltic provinces of Russia was more or less concentrated in the hands of the Baltic German elite. The century of Enlightenment made Baltic Germans aware of their cultural mission regarding the indigenous populations—Latvians and Estonians. Influenced by the ideas of Popular Enlightenment in German-speaking countries, the members of the Baltic German upper-class started to study peasant languages, analyse their social and intellectual problems and ultimately carried out the project of peasant education and emancipation.⁶

The undertakings of the Baltic German enlighteners have been characterised as the “discovery” of Latvians, highlighting the works of Baltic German pastor Gotthard Friedrich Stender (1714–1796):

It can be said that Old Stender had “discovered” Latvians in the same way that Christopher Columbus had discovered America during his time. Germans had been living side by side with Latvians for centuries without noticing them, except as inferior beings.⁷

Similarly to peasants throughout Western Europe, the Latvians were seen simultaneously as the “true source of the wealth of nations” and as “morally incapable” or even, to use Voltaire’s wording, those who were “between man and beast”.⁸ Discovery of the Latvians mirrored the process in Western Europe which has been named the “discovery of people”.⁹

⁵ Cf.: Piret Peiker, “Postcolonial Change. Power, Peru and Estonian Literature,” in: *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. by Viloeta Kelertas (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 111.

⁶ On Baltic German and Latvian historical relationship, see further: Heinrich Schaudinn, *Deutsche Bildungsarbeit am lettischen Volkstum des 18. Jahrhundert* (München: Reinhardt, 1937); Detlef Henning, “Letten und Deutsche. Aspekte einer schwierigen Nachbarschaft,” *Nordost-Archiv (Neue Folge)*, 5 (1996): 249–273.

⁷ Vilis Plūdons, “Laicīgās rakstniecības sākums,” in: *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*, sast. Ludis Bērziņš, 2. sēj. (Rīga: Literatūra, 1935), 105. Here and further my translation from Latvian, unless otherwise noted. On similar developments in Estonian-speaking areas, see: Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebenswelten, Kolonialphantasien. 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 163–173.

⁸ Payne, “The People”, 260. Cf. also: “But once philosophers decided to be useful to society, they had to face the people. [...] The people were not hard to see, but they were hard to see clearly and sympathetically.” (Harry Payne, *The*

The discovery of the people can be approached in terms of its social meaning during its initial stages which were closely connected with an interest in agriculture and physiocratic ideas about the peasant as the source of wealth. In the minds of the 18th century social elites, the peasants became “the most essential and important [class], because everything and everyone living on each is fed and sustained by it and could not survive without it”.¹⁰ The economic theories of cameralists and physiocrats in Europe gradually led to a new conception of the importance and place of the peasant class in society, thus shifting its location from the periphery to the centre, and simultaneously increasing the importance of the natural sciences in the modernisation of agriculture.¹¹

Moreover, agricultural innovations stimulated the impulse to modernise peasant society itself by proposing new social relationships and new approaches to the education of peasants. A social initiative that chronologically preceded the economic theories of Adam Smith (1723–1790), physiocracy assembled a circle of French scholars that included François Quesnay (1694–1774), Robert Jacques Turgot (1727–1781) and the Marquis de Mirabeau (1749–1791), all of whom had tried to solve the economic problems that had overwhelmed France following the Seven Years War (1756–1763). Their studies suggested that France’s neglect of agriculture, in contrast to England, was the primary reason for its defeat. The ideas the physiocrats proposed led to the concept of agriculture as the

Philosophers and the People (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976), 3.)

⁹ See further: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 23–48; Holger Böning, “Die Entdeckung des “Volkes” in der deutschen Aufklärung: Ausgewöhnliche Bauern und ihre Bedeutung für die Volksaufklärung,” in: *Johann Ludewig. Der gelehrte Bauer. Neudruck der 1. Ausgabe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1992), 253–282. The discovery of the people took on a Herderian understanding that viewed “the people” as a community united by language, tradition, and culture. This conceptualization embodied the potential for creating Latvian national identity and ushering in a national awakening in the middle of the 19th century, but it had no impact on the secularization of Latvian literary culture until the first half of the 19th century, when Baltic German pastors compiled the first Latvian folk song collections.

¹⁰ Johann Georg Krünitz, *Ökonomisch–technologische Encyclopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats-, Stadt, Haus- und Landwirthschaft, wie auch der Erdbeschreibung, Kunst- und Naturgeschichte: in alphabetischer Ordnung*, Bd. 3 (Berlin: Joachim Pauli, 1782), 766. Here and further my translation from German, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ John G. Gagliardo, *From Pariah to Patriot. The Changing Image of the German Peasant. 1770–1840* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1969), 32–44.

foundation for a nation's prosperity because, unlike trade and manufacturing, only agriculture produced crops. Thus a new understanding of farming as the most venerable of professions was developed.¹²

It contrasted with peasants' actual living conditions and outlook. "So, a peasant class is a happy class because God ordained it so before The Flood?" a surprised Swiss peasant asks the pastor in the mid-18th century dialogue. The pastor answers that the Bible holds agriculture in high regard, and then eclectically quotes from ancient authors—like Ovid and Virgil—to prove the "honourable status" of the peasant. The peasant responds by casting his conclusion about what is considered to be of particular importance to the peasants in a question, "So, as I hear you say, our class is not only a laudable and happy class, but also an important and necessary one?"¹³ Both educated elites and peasants themselves had to be convinced of this concept.

One of the most characteristic Baltic examples of the synthesis of Christian egalitarianism and the physiocratic movement appeared in the 1772 calendar article by local physician Karl Ferdinand Hummius (1724–1788) to introduce Latvian readers to a series of articles on medicine in the Courland calendar:

Dear friends! Dear brothers! That is how I imagine you, stimulated and captured by my very own heart. For both you and I have but *one father* and *Creator*. For the same reason you as well as I have been saved from the dominium of the devil with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. [...] I therefore love you as my brothers for whom God places a slice of bread into our hands. But I also love you as my true friends and benefactors. Through your sweat, God gives me his blessing every year and every day. When you cultivate the fields so I have bread and beer; when you reap the hay that I feed to my horses and cattle; when you sheer the lambs and sheep and weave the wool that warms my body; when your dear wives labour to raise the chicks, ducklings, goslings and turkeys, so I can sleep soundly on feathers and down and feast on their meat; when you toil in the winter forest to cut and chop firewood so I can heat my stove and sit in a warm room: how do you suppose I could answer to God or to you if I did not love you with all my heart? And, if you believe me, you really should trust that everything I am teaching and illustrating with this [calendar] and—if God grants me more years to live—with many more secular books,

¹² John Shovlin, "Physiocrats and Physiocracy," in: *Europe. 1450 to 1789. Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*, ed. by Jonathan Dewald, Vol. 4 (New York: Thomson/Gale, 2004), 473–475.

¹³ Johann Caspar Nägeli, *Des lehnsbegierigen und andächtigen Landmanns getreuer Wegweiser* (Zürich: Heidegger, 1738), 23, 25.

I do as a tribute to you because of my love for you. You should also thus believe in the truth of everything I am saying.¹⁴

The direct references to Christian egalitarianism, as well as the use of religious language in this text rendered its Enlightenment ideas, namely, that all men are born equal and are entitled to the pursuit of happiness. During the first half of the 18th century, such a concept was not at all self-evident in European society. Thus, the claim that the peasants were the central source of a nation's wealth meant that their actual conditions in the mid-18th century had to be problematized, creating "a space for empathy and concern".¹⁵

While the term "common man" conventionally denoted those without social status or wealth, the Enlightenment redefined "the people" in terms of education. The people thus embodied the part of society that was uneducated and those who therefore displayed a different mentality.¹⁶ Physiocrats were concerned themselves with "an education for the people which would teach it polity; which would place before its eyes a summary of its duties in a form that is clear and easy to practice".¹⁷ Hence, the question of education was brought forward, initially reflecting on a "certain kind of practical Enlightenment for the masses, focused on the most elementary forms of literacy and numeracy for the better propagation of enlightened agriculture and elements of morality."¹⁸ The introduction of education as a category for defining "people" was important because it acknowledged the capacity of the people to be educated. To share something of the wider world with the people, as Reinhart Siegert asserts, became an "honourable duty" of the educated members of society.¹⁹

"Common people" had become a fashionable word in public discussions.²⁰ Initiating a reform program for peasants in an era dominated

¹⁴ [Karl Ferdinand Hummius,] "Mihļi Draugi! mihļi Brahļi!" in: *Jauna un wezza Latweeschu Laiku-Grahmata us to 1773. Gaddu* (Jelgawâ: Steffenhagen, [1772]), [5–9].

¹⁵ Payne, "The People," 260

¹⁶ Reinhart Siegert, "Der Volksbegriff in der deutschen Spätaufklärung," in: *Pädagogische Volksaufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert im europäischen Kontext: Rochow und Pestalozzi im Vergleich*, hg. von Hanno Schmitt, Rebekka Horlacher, Daniel Tröhler (Bern/Stuttgart/Wien: Haupt, 2007), 37.

¹⁷ Payne, "The People," 261.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Siegert, "Der Volksbegriff in der deutschen Spätaufklärung," 37–38.

²⁰ Cf. the article "Etwas über das Modewort Volk" ("Something on the Fashionable Word 'the People'", published in the *Neues Hannoverisches Magazin*, 2 (1792): 1547.

by class divisions was an innovation of the Popular Enlightenment, one grounded in the attempt to regard peasants as worthy individuals whose mental capacity was not dependent on social standing. Emerging from the sensibility and sociability of the era, Enlightenment philanthropy set goals to help “people to escape permanently from the affliction of poverty” that “went well beyond conventional poor relief”: “The poor and the disadvantaged were to be taught to help themselves, freed from the ignorance, superstition and hopelessness that drove them to crime and left them in poverty.”²¹ Interest in peasants also had another dimension, one arising from ethnographical and anthropologic concerns. Peasants were not only uneducated, but also exotic:

Many Enlightenment reformers approached the rural population in a way, which reminds us of the way missionaries in the following century would regard indigenous peoples. They saw peasants as beings living almost in a different world, incapable of understanding the Enlightenment and buried instead in incomprehensible folk superstitions, irrational traditions and religious loyalties.²²

Furthermore, the countryside came to be associated with nature, while its inhabitants were regarded as natural people, and the sentimental return to nature can thus be perceived as a parallel to peasant edification.²³ Gradually, the interest in the people acquired Herderian understanding of the *Volk* that was the result of the nostalgic desire to return to the natural state:

Whether these writers cast the people as untainted by affection and artificiality or compulsively crude and superstitious, a cultural divide separated them. The people had become exotic, a race apart, equivalent in some instances to the colonial “other”.²⁴

The new interpretations of colonial discoveries manifested themselves in a greater ethnographic and anthropological interest in the exotic peoples in the oversea colonies, and as a result prompted a sense of responsibility

²¹ David Garrioch, “Making a Better World: Enlightenment and Philanthropy,” in: *The Enlightenment World*, ed. by Martin Fitzpatrick et al. (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 489.

²² Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26.

²³ Gottfried Weissert, *Das Mildheimische Liederbuch: Studien zur volkspädagogischen Literatur der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Tübingen Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1966), 68.

²⁴ Nicholas Rogers, “Popular Culture,” in: *The Enlightenment World*, ed. by Martin Fitzpatrick et al. (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 402.

and a missionary zeal. This interest led to one of the most controversial cultural phenomena of 18th century Europe, which expressed itself simultaneously as an idealisation of primitive cultures seen to embody specific human qualities European societies had lost (chiefly connected to ideas about a “return to nature” and the “noble savage”) and a desire to civilise and enlighten the same cultures:

This view, coupled with philanthropic sympathy with a disadvantaged social stratum (later also with Rousseau-esque enthusiasm for the ‘noble savage’ in one’s own country), led to the first attempts to address Enlightenment thoughts directly at “the people” and to change their mindset, thus on the one hand giving the disadvantaged the possibility of further developing their personality and its natural human potential, while on the other contributing through changes of attitude to the solution of burning contemporary problems (especially how to cope with shortages of food and energy caused by a population explosion).²⁵

In both cases, the ethnographic and anthropological attention sharpened the awareness of “the other”, which was understood primarily as an opposition between civilisation and nature. No less important was the fact that the debates about the serfdom were linked to those about slavery in the New World and its legitimacy.²⁶

German Popular Enlightenment

These changes in perception of the lower social classes marked the beginning of the Popular Enlightenment in the German-speaking lands. Reinhart Siegert and Holger Böning have defined the Popular Enlightenment as a movement that, rather than having political aims, was

²⁵ Reinhart Siegert, “The Popular Enlightenment at its height and the break caused by the French Revolution,” in: *Volksaufklärung: Biobibliographisches Handbuch zur Popularisierung aufklärerischen Denkens im deutschen Sprachraum von den Anfängen bis 1850*, Band 2, Teilband 2.1, hg. von Holger Böning und Reinhart Siegert (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2001), xlvii. Cf. also similar trend in France: “...to concentrate on the savage within instead of outside national boundaries was potentially to put into question conceptions of the supremacy of French civilization and the nation’s progress.” (Amy S. Wyngaard, *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of Peasant in the French Enlightenment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 16.)

²⁶ Consider the rhetorical “parallels between African slaves in Virginia, East European serfs, Protestant “galley slaves” held by Catholic nations, and Christian slaves held by Muslims.” (George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 100.)

characterised by the “attempts by sympathetic single persons, societies and authorities concerned with public welfare to pass on Enlightenment ideas to “the common man”” and directed itself at affecting change in peasants’ outlook:

More important here than the supply of positive knowledge or concepts (for example, in natural law) was a change of mentality: a rejection of the untested adoption of traditions, which were regarded as a mental characteristic of the unenlightened “people”. In this sense, those texts are enlightening which attempt to motivate less-educated people to engage with new things through insight.²⁷

In German-speaking countries, Popular Enlightenment became an influential and widespread project that demonstrated the potential for emancipating the social masses and reducing class prejudices. Over the course of several generations, and as a regionally diverse political structure, Popular Enlightenment in Germany developed as a “polyphonic discourse” (“not a monolithic phenomenon”).²⁸ Its diverse tendencies were united by the presumption that any “Enlightenment that enlightens only the already enlightened but leaves [...] a majority of people in the dark has not earned the name of Enlightenment”.²⁹

In its early stages, the focus of the Popular Enlightenment reformers was on the practical needs of the people; namely, on economic reforms that sought to improve conditions for peasants by acquainting them with the latest discoveries in natural science which included agriculture modernisation, medicine and would benefit their class.³⁰ Enlightenment thus descended “from above”. If the initial aims of the German-speaking Popular Enlightenment were practical, then its horizon gradually expanded

²⁷ Reinhart Siegert, “Enlightenment in the 19th century – “Overcoming” or Diffusion?” in: *Volksaufklärung: Biobibliographisches Handbuch zur Popularisierung aufklärerischen Denkens im deutschen Sprachraum von den Anfängen bis 1850*, hg. von Holger Böning und Reinhart Siegert, Band 3 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2016), lxxx.

²⁸ Annegret Völpel, *Der Literarisierungsprozeß der Volksaufklärung des späten 18. und frühen 19. Jhs. Dargestellt anhand der Volksschriften von Schlosser, Rochow, Becker, Salzmann und Hebel* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 23.

²⁹ Bonifaz Martin Schnappinger, *Ueber Erziehung, Aufklärung, und Zeitgeist, zugleich auch über Philosophie, Christenthum, und Kirche: für alle Classen gebildeter und nachdenkender Leser* (Augsburg: Kranzfelder, 1818), 154.

³⁰ See further: Holger Böning, “Entgrenzte Aufklärung – Die Entwicklung der Volksaufklärung von der ökonomischen Reform- zur Emanzipationsbewegung,” in: *Volksaufklärung. Eine praktische Reformbewegung des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, hg. von Holger Böning, Hanno Schmitt, Reinhart Siegert (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2007), 13–50.

to include the moral education of peasants, which proved to be an important process for the secularisation of peasant reading matter, a development that German literary historian Annegret Völpel has called “the literarization of the Popular Enlightenment”.³¹ Therefore, the initial intent to modernise agriculture gradually evolved into a plan to modernise individuals belonging to the peasant social class. An educated lower strata was considered to be in the interest of all classes, if for no reason other than the pragmatic goal of increasing productivity.³²

Popular Enlightenment differed from bourgeois Enlightenment not only with regard to the addressee but also in its didactical principles and imposed limitations related to the concepts of freedom and education.³³ Popular Enlightenment signalled a significant perceptual change by strengthening the notion that intellectual ability of the common people was not determined by their belonging to a certain class.³⁴ The idea that mental and physical activities were not mutually interrelated derived from the concept of *tabula rasa*, which proposed that knowledge was not innate, but was gained through experience (thus revising popular attitudes that held sway up to the 18th century about the significance of factors such as religion, moral standards, lifestyle, economic structures and social structures). The aim was to improve secular wellbeing and contentment with God and the world, which meant that Popular Enlightenment, according to this program, sought to improve conditions both practically and intellectually while remaining apolitical—a stance that relegated social class reform to an “unimaginable and unspecific utopia”.³⁵ To popular enlighteners, the progress could best be achieved in an evolutionary, not revolutionary, manner.

Versuch über die Aufklärung des Landmannes (Plan for the Enlightenment of a Peasant) published in 1785 by German writer Rudolph Zacharias

³¹ Völpel, *Der Literarisierungsprozeß der Volksaufklärung*, 22–26.

³² Christian Brockhusen, “Ein Wort über die bisherigen Schulanstalten für die Letten, und einige Vorschläge zu deren Verbesserung,” *Nordisches Archiv*, 8 (1803): 82.

³³ Volker Wehrmann, “Volksaufklärung,” in: ‘*Das pädagogische Jahrhundert*’: *Volksaufklärung und Erziehung zur Armut im 18. Jahrhundert in Deutschland*, hg. von Ulrich Hermann (Weinheim: Beltz, 1981), 144; Wolfgang Ruppert, “Volksaufklärung im späten 18. Jahrhundert,” in: *Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution: 1680–1789*, hg. von Rolf Grimminger (München: Hanser, 1980), 353.

³⁴ “The liberation of the German peasant involved much more than institutional and legal changes; it involved freedom from the tyranny and oppression of a hostile and contemptuous public opinion.” (Gagliardo, *From Pariah to Patriot*, x.)

³⁵ Ruppert, “Volksaufklärung,” 346–347.

Becker (1752–1822), “the most prominent author of the Popular Enlightenment in Germany,”³⁶ outlined a strategy for targeting the peasant class and became one of the most authoritative works in the German-speaking Popular Enlightenment.³⁷ It contained a detailed program of how the people’s book should be written including not only considerations about the content of such a book, but also plans for its distribution and accessibility. Becker’s *Noth- und Hilfsbüchlein für Bauersleute* (*Emergency Advice Booklet for Peasants*, 1788) was written according to these principles, became a bestseller, and went on to be a model for the people’s book.³⁸

Rural pastors were usually the primary enlighteners who were seeking not only to encourage the spread of knowledge, but also to change traditional ways of thinking.³⁹ The Popular Enlightenment did not always meet with the general approval of its audience and could become subject of suspicion on two accounts. On the one hand, the upper classes had to be convinced of the necessity of educating the people, and that doing so would be in their own best interests; on the other hand, the peasant classes, immersed as they were in traditional ways, had to be convinced of the same thing.⁴⁰

Addressing the “common people” in both German-speaking lands and Baltic provinces (let alone declaring that they too deserve to be enlightened) was not just pioneering; it was also regarded as risky, especially after the French Revolution raised concerns about the usefulness of Popular Enlightenment. This situation created the basis for various discussions of the limits of the Popular Enlightenment that intensified at the turn of the 19th century. When contemporaries in German-speaking countries discussed these issues, they recognised that just as “religious or political doubt can do harm”,⁴¹ too much culture and

³⁶ Siegert, “The Popular Enlightenment”, li.

³⁷ Rudolf Zacharias Becker, *Versuch über die Aufklärung des Landmannes* (Dessau/Leipzig: Göschen, 1785).

³⁸ See further: Reinhart Siegert, “Aufklärung und Volkslektüre. Exemplarisch dargestellt an Rudolph Zacharias Becker und seinem ‘Noth- und Hilfsbüchlein’. Mit einer Bibliographie zum Gesamtthema,” *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens*, 19 (1978): 565–1344.

³⁹ Cf.: Regula Wyss, *Pfarrer als Vermittler ökonomischen Wissens? Die Rolle der Pfarrer in der Oekonomischen Gesellschaft Bern im 18. Jahrhundert* (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2007), 134–145.

⁴⁰ Völpel, *Der Literarisierungsprozeß der Volksaufklärung*, 24.

⁴¹ Johann Ludwig Ewald, *Über Volksaufklärung, ihre Gränzen und Vortheile* (Berlin: Unger, 1790), 4.

refinement can lead to a “false Enlightenment”.⁴² This led to the idea of “dosing” of Enlightenment.⁴³ One of the central questions concerned limits, as summed up in this question posed by Karlsruhe theologian Johan Ludwig Ewald (1748–1822): “What are the boundaries of a purposeful Popular Enlightenment?”⁴⁴ Quite characteristic were comments by Adolf von Knigge (1752–1796):

But to give them [peasants] access to all sorts of books, stories and fables, to accustom them to living in the world of ideas, to open their eyes to the fact that their circumstances cannot be improved quickly, to [make] them discontent because of too much Enlightenment, to turn them into philosophers is really inappropriate.⁴⁵

Similarly, in Prussia, in 1779, Frederick the Great (1712–1786) wrote that:

..in the countryside it is enough if [peasants] learn to read and write a little; if they know too much, they rush to cities and aspire to become clerks and the like; therefore rural education should be organised so they learn only what is essential, what is important for their education, so they do not leave the villages, but are willing to stay put.⁴⁶

The project of Popular Enlightenment always remained tied to class, though not necessarily in an unduly restraining sense. “Every [peasant] should cultivate his intellect to the extent that he is able to reflect on what is important for him in his particular circumstances,” stated Ewald.⁴⁷ This calculation, however, encompassed one additional aspect: too much light could prove harmful for a peasant living in the “dark”. The conclusion that became especially popular during the French revolution was that “unlimited Enlightenment was not [intended] for everyone”.⁴⁸ Discussions turned to the notion that a peasant who became “too enlightened” could prove dangerous, and thus the experience of the French Revolution dealt a serious blow to the optimism of Popular Enlightenment.

It should be added that the question of limits was already central among the French physiocrats, for example, in Turgot’s claim that deism

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Wehrmann, “Volksaufklärung,” 144.

⁴⁴ Ewald, *Über Volksaufklärung*, 16.

⁴⁵ As quoted in: Helmuth Kiesel, Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert: Voraussetzungen und Entstehung des literarischen Markts in Deutschland* (München: Beck, 1977), 163.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ewald, *Über Volksaufklärung*, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

or indifference to religion could create chaos among the common people: because peasants were unable to grasp morality intellectually, it was thought, they needed religious ritual and symbolism.⁴⁹ What is more, as soon as education came to be associated with “common people”, it could no longer be treated separately: around the middle of the century, deliberations about a practical kind of Enlightenment for the masses, one that focused on elementary writing and math skills that would effectively spread enlightened agriculture and morality, were put into practice. Debates about such an education invariably included discussions about the role of the church: physiocrats, for example, regarded the church as an opportunity to realise their aims of secular education. The prevailing view held that peasant education, in contrast to education for elites, should be catechetical rather than analytical.⁵⁰

While the reception of French Revolution played a crucial role in strengthening the limits of the Popular Enlightenment, it did not downplay the liberating potential of the movement:

[Popular Enlightenment] attempted to give to “the common man” precisely that knowledge and those mental capabilities which are the essential starting-point for a functioning modern democratic society. For the most part without democracy being named, it hoped to enable “the common man” to take his first steps towards becoming a mature citizen and a modern individual. This component is what Kant had in mind when he spoke of self-Enlightenment by the public and saw participation in the process, even by “the masses”, as a way to his “sapere aude”.⁵¹

The process of cultural transfer from the German-speaking countries to the Baltic provinces remains to be researched in greater detail. The circulation of books and the close personal and professional contacts between members of the educated middle class in the German-speaking countries and the Baltic provinces played a crucial role in the rapid development of the Baltic Popular Enlightenment, which followed the German model both in general assumptions and forms of implementation.⁵² In

⁴⁹ Payne, “The People,” 260.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 261–262.

⁵¹ Siegert, “The Popular Enlightenment,” li.

⁵² For example, in the 1788 article on the culture of Livonian peasants, the references to reforms in German-speaking countries were provided: “The German academies often give prize competitions that are concerned not only on the enlightenment for the learned, but also on economic improvement of the common man. And why not the latter? One is confident there that the culture of land management and factories is the safest means of the prosperity of the country.” (Wilhelm Christian Friebe, “Erster Anfang zur Cultur der liefländischen Bauern,”

the Baltics, however, the enlighteners were confronted with a peasant class that spoke a different language and belonged to a different ethnicity—commonly known as “non-Germans”.

Germans and Non-Germans in the Baltic Provinces

The interest in common people and ideas of German Popular Enlightenment shaped the changes in attitude towards indigenous Latvian peasants in the German provinces of Russia. The situation was significantly different here because the peasants were not of the same ethnicity as the educated elite. Latvian national and cultural identity was embodied in the status of a serf,⁵³ with the result that what was a social and agrarian issue in Germany, absorbed ethnic and colonial connotations in the Baltic region.⁵⁴ With relationships among upper and lower classes being also relationships among different ethnic groups in the Baltics, local peasants’ otherness was incorporated in the Baltic concept of “non-Germans”:

The enserfment of the Latvian- and Estonian-speaking populations had taken place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As a result, during subsequent centuries the terms *Leibeigener*, *erbuntertänig*, *Bauer*, and *undeutsch* became interchangeable, an identity also recognised by the

Nordische Miscellaneen, 18/19 (1788): 525.) See further: Aiga Šemeta, “Die andere Aufklärung. Volksaufklärung im Baltikum im Spiegel livländischen und kurländischen Periodika der 2. Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in: *Am Rande im Zentrum. Beiträge des VII. Nordischen Germanistentreffens*, hg. von Thomas Taterka, Dzintra Lele-Rozentāle, Silvija Pavīdis (Berlin: Saxa Verlag, 2009), 32–42.

⁵³ Andrew James Blumbergs, *The Nationalization of Latvians and the Issue of Serfdom: The Baltic German Literary Contribution in the 1780s and 1790s* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008), 28. Consider the widespread view from the 17th-century according to which “Latvians and Estonians by their nature are not equal to Germans, but have lower status; Germans are created to rule Latvians and Estonians, but Latvians and Estonians—to serve them and to be their slaves.” (Jānis Bērziņš, “No vācu un latviešu attiecību vēstures,” *Burtņieks*, 1 (1935): 37.) On history of Baltic serfdom, see further: Christoph Schmidt, *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum: Versuch einer Typologie* (Köln: Böhlau, 1997).

⁵⁴ On agrarian conditions in the Baltic area, see further: Heinrihs Strods, *Die agrarwirtschaftliche Struktur Lettlands am Ausgang des 18. und in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988); Heinrihs Strods, “Latvijas agrārā struktūra XVIII gs. beigās un XIX gs. pirmajā pusē,” *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 404 (1981): 37–57.

peasant oral tradition, which habitually understood Latvian speakers to make up the bottom layer of Baltic society.⁵⁵

Since the mid-18th century, the “non-Germans” became the subject of public discussion and various activities in the German provinces of the Russian Empire. “Non-Germans” was a specific term coined in the 16th century, designating the indigenous populations. This divide meant that the notion of “Germans” also had social connotations, as noticed in 1774 by Livonian enlightener and pastor August Wilhelm Hupel (1737–1819):

Not counting the different classes, the inhabitants of the land are divided in two main classes, Germans and non-Germans. By the latter all country folk, or in the one word the peasants are understood. Who is not a peasant, is called a German, even if he can't speak German, e.g., the Russians, the Englishmen etc. To this class belong the nobility, scholars, burghers, officials, free-born servants, even the freed [serfs], as far as they change their clothing to the German.⁵⁶

While during the 18th century Baltic provinces gradually became a part of the Russian Empire, the Baltic German minority, considering themselves descendants of the 12th century Teutonic crusaders,⁵⁷ kept the local political influence and cultural elite status. “In the population of each province, the German speakers seldom exceeded about 8 percent of the total, yet they dominated high culture, political leadership, and economic life,” historian Andrejs Plakans notes.⁵⁸ During the entire 18th century, Baltic German nobility's political privileges, as well as serfdom (established in the 16th century) remained largely unchanged. The Baltic

⁵⁵ Andrejs Plakans, “Peasants, Intellectuals, and Nationalism in the Russian Baltic Provinces, 1820–90,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 46/3 (1974): 449.

⁵⁶ August Wilhelm Hupel, *Topographische Nachrichten von Lief- und Ehtland*, Bd. 1 (Riga: Hartknoch, 1774), 140. Cf. also: August Wilhelm Hupel, *Idiotikon der deutschen Sprache in Lief- und Ehtland: nebst eingestreueten Winken für Liebhaber* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1795), 244. More about the genesis of the term “non-Germans”: Wilhelm Lenz, “Undeutsch. Bemerkungen zu einem besonderen Begriff der baltischen Geschichte,” in: *Aus der Geschichte Alt-Livlands. Festschrift für Heinz von zur Mühlen zum 90. Geburtstag*, hg. von Bernhart Jähmig und Klaus Militzer (Münster: LIT, 2004), 169–184; Tiina Kala, “Gab es eine ‘nationale Frage’ im mittelalterlichen Reval?” *Forschungen zur Baltischen Geschichte*, 7 (2012): 11–34. On Hupel, see further: Erich Donnert, “Das russische Imperium im Urteil des deutsch-baltischen Aufklärungsschriftstellers August Wilhelm Hupel im 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhundert,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 15/2–3 (1984): 91–97.

⁵⁷ Cf. also: Bērziņš, “No vācu un latviešu attiecību vēstures,” 37.

⁵⁸ Plakans, “Peasants, Intellectuals, and Nationalism,” 448.

provinces were a colony without a metropolis; while politically it belonged to Russian Empire, culturally it remained a German colony.⁵⁹ The ties with German-speaking countries were mostly cultural; members of the Baltic intellectual elite studied in German universities. In spreading Enlightenment ideas, studies abroad, as well as the role of newcomers to the Baltic provinces from German-speaking countries were equally important:

From the end of the eighteenth century, the Baltic German *literati* essentially formed their own social stratum, the roots of which were in the extensive immigration of university students and graduates to the Baltic region from Germany. In turn, local youths (generally from noble and merchant families) seeking higher education studied abroad in German universities.⁶⁰

Latvians were seen by the Baltic German elite as a rather homogenous peasant class with its own distinctive heathen customs. Until the turn of the 19th century, intellectuals did not always see Latvians in terms of *Volk*.⁶¹ Even concepts such as *Nationalen*, employed to describe Latvians along with Estonians, were mostly used without national or ethnic connotations, whereas the concept of “non-Germans” bore more social than ethnic connotations. Changes in attitude towards Latvians were influenced mainly by economic discussions about serfdom and privileges of local aristocracy, in which national arguments began to be used during the second half of the 18th century.⁶² Hence, economic concerns about the

⁵⁹ See further: Kristina Jõekalda, “Baltic Identity via German Heritage? Seeking Baltic German Art in the Nineteenth Century,” *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi. Special Issue: Debating German Heritage: Art History and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century*, 23/3–4 (2014): 79–110. Jõekalda notes that the “term *Kolonie* had multiple parallel meanings in German, ranging from the neutral, resilient, entrepreneurial sense (‘mastery over nature’) to the imperial sense of an economically etc. exploited territory. It is therefore essential to differentiate between material (including political, economic and cultural) colonisation, and ‘discursive colonisation’.” (Ibid., 102.)

⁶⁰ Ea Jansen, “Summary. Estonians in a Changing World: From Estate Society to Civil Society,” in: Ea Jansen, *Eestlande muutuvas ajas: Seisusühiskonnast kodanikuühiskonda* (Tartu: Kirjastus Eesti Ajaloarhiiv, 2007), 471. See further: Gvido Straube, “Garlība Merķeļa priekšgaitnieki,” *Karogs*, 10 (1987): 149–153.

⁶¹ See further: Horst Garve, *Konfession und Nationalität: Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Gesellschaft in Livland im 19. Jahrhundert* (Marburg/Lahn: Johann-Gottfried-Herder-Institut, 1978), 28.

⁶² Blumbergs, *The Nationalization of Latvians*, 227–237; Irene Neander, “Die Aufklärung in den Ostseeprovinzen,” in: *Baltische Kirchengeschichte*, hg. von Reinhart Wittram (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 133–134.

wellbeing of a lower class merged with ethnographical interest in a distinctive, and previously unrecognised ethnic group.

The difficulty in separating the concepts “Latvians” and “peasants” can be gleaned in this statement by a Baltic German pastor, where the readers of Courland calendar are addressed, and notions of ethnic and social identity are used interchangeably:

It is the care for land and house, dear Latvians, a work, given to you by God; and it is known to everybody that this good and fruitful work cannot be done without understanding and wise mind. Therefore, teach your children and youngsters to do this work properly. If there is any social class needed and good in the world, it is the peasant or land workers' class: you and your children are put by God in this class and to do this work.⁶³

Changes during the 18th century were closely connected with a growing awareness that it might be possible to describe ethnic encounters in Courland and Livonia, at least metaphorically, in a colonial way. The colonial metaphors and the representations of colonial relationships determined by serfdom facilitated the fusion of views about Latvians as an ethnic group and simultaneously as a social class. The use of colonial metaphors was not an invention of Baltic intellectuals: colonial discoveries had provided a suitable language in which to talk about peasants in Europe, as seen, for instance, in James Boswell's (1740–1795) accounts of his travel to the Hebrides in Scotland which was “much the same as being with a tribe of Indians [...] There was great diversity in the faces of the circle around us; some were as black and wild in their appearance as any American savages whatever”.⁶⁴

In engaging in this perspective, it might be productive to analyse Popular Enlightenment project in the Baltics within the context of Baltic colonial fantasies.⁶⁵ The opponents of Baltic serfdom appealed to colonial

⁶³ [Gotthard Christoph Brandt,] “Mihļi Draugi!” in: *Jauna un Wezza Laiku-Grahmata uz to 1785tu Gaddu* (Jelgawā: Steffenhagen, [1784]), [37].

⁶⁴ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson: Including Their Tour to the Hebrides* (London: John Murray, 1851), 309–310. Larry Wolff notes the stereotyping of East European serfdom in a different context which could be attributed also to the Baltic case: “The whole vocabulary in which the issues of Eastern Europe were defined was that of the eighteenth century: barbarism and civilization, wildness and the frontier, the picturesque and the instructive, and finally an ingenious note of surprise that the people were actually white.” (Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 366.)

⁶⁵ Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebenswelten, Kolonialphantasien. 1750–1850*

metaphors, in order to demonstrate the misery of the social system, while the advocates of serfdom identified the social order of the 18th century as established along with the colonization of the Baltics in the 12th century. In 1796, Garlieb Merkel (1769–1850) wrote: “In the age, when even the proud Briton tries hard to give freedom and civic rights to his black slaves [*Negersklaven*], there are entire nations in Europe, which have been acknowledged as incapable to enjoy individual freedom.”⁶⁶ Equating serfdom with slavery was metaphorical and was not based on the historical reality. However, these metaphors were fundamental for positioning the socio-ethnic relationships in the Baltics in a colonial framework:

In the 18th and 19th centuries, German reflections about interethnic relations in the Baltic provinces of Russia were closely connected with colonial discourses or colonial fantasies. [...] In colonial narratives, as in historiography, comparisons with the Native Americans prevailed in order to stress the parallels between the discovery of the New World and the discovery (“Aufsegelung”) of the Baltic Provinces in the Middle Ages [...]. Only a few critics of the Enlightenment wilderness narrative emphasized the possible danger of exoticizing dichotomizing, and essentializing autochthonic cultures as “others” in colonial contexts.⁶⁷

Therefore, it might be argued that “noticing” Latvians and identifying them in the age of Enlightenment (which was manifested in relation to the plead for reforms in the system of serfdom, and in relation to turning

(Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 263–281. On the necessity to include the Baltic experience in the postcolonial debate, see further: Karl Jirgens, “Fusions of Discourse: Postcolonial/Postmodern Horizons in Baltic Culture,” in: *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. by Viloeta Kelertas (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 45–47, 67–69; Maruta Lietiņa Ray, “Recovering the Voice of the Oppressed: Master, Slave, and Serf in the Baltic Provinces,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 34/1 (2003): 1–21;

⁶⁶ Garlieb Merkel, *Die Letten, vorzüglich in Liefland am Ende des philosophischen Jahrhunderts. Zweite, verbesserte Auflage* (Leipzig: Gräff, 1800), 3. At the beginning of the 19th century, Johann Georg Kohl wrote about Latvians and Lithuanians: “Lonely and unconnected with any of the surrounding nations, they occupy their little nook of northern land, evidently unsimilar and unrelated to any European nation, and bear affinity only to the tribes that inhabit the Far East, at the foot of Dawalagiri, or on the shores of the Ganges.” (Johann Georg Kohl, *Russia. St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kharkoff, Riga, Odessa, the German Provinces on the Baltic, the Steppes, the Crimea, and the Interior of the Empire* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844), 371.)

⁶⁷ Ulrike Plath, “Euroopa viimased metslased: eestlased saksa koloniaaldiskursis 1770–1870,” in: *Rahvuskultuur ja tema teised*, ed. by Rein Undusk (Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 2008), 65–66.

Latvians into the objects of enlightenment and education) developed as part of the Baltic colonial discourse. Latvians were stereotyped as the ‘other’, namely, as the indigenous, and it was signalled by the colonial metaphors evident in the Baltic German agrarian debates. The ‘otherness’ of Latvians was primarily understood as ‘savageness’.⁶⁸ Echoing with the ideology of German Enlightenment, savageness was interpreted as necessary origins of any nation, as well as the origins of a man in his cultural and personal development. The colonial rhetoric, on the one hand, was stereotyped; on the other, it helped to overcome prejudices towards Latvians (and Estonians) and to problematise their conditions.

Early Reform Projects in the Baltic Provinces

The first efforts of Popular Enlightenment for Latvian peasants emerged in the 1750s and 1760s, the very decades when the questions about the usefulness of serfdom began to be raised. This was not a coincidence, but rather a simultaneous reaction to problems that had evolved by the mid-18th century—the time when a combination of circumstances (new wave of educated newcomers from German-speaking countries to the Baltic provinces, generational change, recovery from the social and demographic catastrophes of the first half of the 18th century (including the Great Northern War (1700–1721) and the plague epidemics), political changes in the Russian Empire) prompted a review of the prevailing attitudes toward peasants and spurred the beginning of reforms:

The amazing capacity of the Baltic German population to turn away all threats to its hegemony has been documented elsewhere in great detail. The incorporation of the Baltic littoral into a larger political unit whose rulers were showing an increasing interest in such matters as the abolition of serfdom, rationalization of administration, and codification of law meant, however, that particularism would not go unchecked in the future. [...] A growing *Literatenstand* inevitably brought into Baltic higher culture

⁶⁸ Cf.: Kohl, *Russia*, 363. Rather similar to the Baltic descriptions were views on the 19th-century French peasants, as outlined by Eugene Weber. Weber uses the term “rural savagery” and writes that the peasants were regarded as “uncivilized, that is, unintegrated into, unassimilated to French civilization: poor, backward, ignorant, savage, barbarous, wild, living like beasts with their beasts. They had to be taught manners, morals, literacy. [...] ..the peasants were ‘intellectually several centuries behind the enlightened part of the country’.” (Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France. 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 4–5.)

rationalist viewpoints and represented as a class potential threat to noble control of local politics.⁶⁹

In the 1750s, various activities in the Livonian German public sphere were initiated by Lutheran pastor Johan Georg Eisen (1717–1779), whose attention was caught by local “non-German” peasants, and whose interest about them can be explained mainly by the experience and education he gained outside the Baltic provinces. One of the earliest popular enlighteners in the region and pioneer of the debate on serfdom reform, Eisen engaged practically in farming while working at the Torma Estonian congregation and wrote a book with instructions on gardening, in Estonian, for peasants. Moreover, as early as the 1750s he actively developed a smallpox vaccination on his own initiative. Besides the practical Enlightenment work, Eisen wrote several essays on the disadvantages of the serfdom system and the abolition of serfdom, which turned out to be significant in shaping public opinion over the succeeding decades.⁷⁰

The debate on the legal status of serfdom intensified when Russian Empress Catherine the Great (1729–1796) attempted to limit the political dominance of Baltic Germans.⁷¹ Not wishing to aggravate conflicts with the nobility she, however, developed moderate projects of reform; therefore, in the 1760s the topic of serfdom reforms became increasingly relevant, and initial projects for its “improvement” were submitted, without yet turning against the social system itself.⁷²

⁶⁹ Plakans, “Peasants, Intellectuals, and Nationalism,” 448. See further: Nicolai Wihksninsch, *Die Aufklärung und die Agrarfrage in Livland* (Riga: Valters un Rapa, 1933).

⁷⁰ Cf.: Marģers Stepermanis, *J. G. Eizens un viņa darbi par dzimtbūšanas atcelšanu Vidzemē* (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures skoloģtāju biedrība, 1934). See further: Erich Donnert, *Johann Georg Eisen 1717–1779: Ein Vorkämpfer der Bauernbefreiung in Rußland* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1978); Roger Bartlett, “Russia’s First Abolitionist: The Political Philosophy of J. G. Eisen,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 39 (1991): 161–176; Roger Bartlett, “‘Land without Freedom’: Some Notes on J. G. Eisen and the Peasant Policies of Empress Catherine II in the 1760s,” in: *Gesellschaft und Kultur Mittel-, Ost und Südosteuropas im 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhunderts: Festschrift für Erich Donnert zum 65. Geburtstag*, Band 11, hg. von Helmut Reinalter (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1994), 155–165.

⁷¹ See further: Hubertus Neuschäffer, “Katharina II. und die Aufklärung in den baltischen Provinzen,” in: *Aufklärung in den baltischen Provinzen Rußlands*, hg. von Otto-Heinrich Elias (Köln: Böhlau, 1996), 27–42.

⁷² Cf.: Marģers Stepermanis, “Latviešu stāvoklis XVII un XVIII gadsimtā un apgaismotāju kustība Latvijā,” in: *Latviešu literātūras vēsture*, 2. sēj., sast. Ludis

In 1764 Eisen published his essay *Eines Liefländischen Patrioten Beschreibung der Leibeigenschaft, wie solche in Liefland über die Bauern eingeführt ist* (*A Patriot's Description of Serfdom as It is Instituted over the Peasants in Livonia*). He combined the critique of serfdom with an invitation to implement reforms gradually, and this was an opinion that went on to dominate during the 1760s. Characteristically also for further 18th century serfdom critics, Eisen framed his argument in colonial metaphors (including a comparison of Livonian serfs with African slaves) and dubious historical constructs (a direct connection of Baltic Christianisation and serfdom). In 1764 the landowner of Aizkraukle/Ascheraden, Karl Friedrich Schoultz (1720–1782), developed a peasant rights project for his estate, which foresaw the expansion of serfs' rights by forming labour records and including rights to movable property, but it did not turn against serfdom as such, appealing mainly to the peasant mentality. "It would have been very dangerous to immediately a release crude and undeveloped nation, which by freedom understands only unlimited arbitrariness from chains, and to leave it on its own," emphasised Schoultz, by continuing the thought with the necessity for schools and education that would improve peasants' mentality and would eventually make radical reform more realistic; in the educational sphere Schoultz counted on pastors.⁷³

The moderate reform project developed by Schoultz met with resistance in the Livonian provincial assembly (and a year after its publication, was withdrawn, and the copies of the project distributed to the peasants retrieved⁷⁴), and the system of serfdom remained unchanged until the beginning of the 19th century. Nevertheless, attitudes were changing: the project proposed by Schoultz had injected a greater sense of liberty into the social discussion.

Among other projects, a work by Livonian Chivalry Secretary Erich Johann von Meck (?–1771) from a competition announced in 1766 by the St. Petersburg Free Economic Society should be taken into consideration. When responding to the question "Is it more advantageous for the State if

Bērziņš (Rīga: Literatūra, 1935), 77–82; Roger Bartlett, "The Question of Serfdom: Catherine II, the Russian Debate and the View from the Baltic Periphery (J. G. Eisen and G. H. Merkel)," in: *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment: Essays for Isabel de Madariaga*, ed. by Roger Bartlett and Janet M. Hartley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 142–166.

⁷³ Stepermanis, "Latviešu stāvoklis," 77–78. See further: Heinrihs Strods, "Dzimtbūšana un īpašums," *Latvijas Vēsture*, 2 (1995): 55–60; Andrejs Johansons, *Latvijas kultūras vēsture. 1710–1800* (Stokholma: Daugava, 1975), 40.

⁷⁴ Aleksejs Apīnis, *Grāmata un latviešu sabiedrība līdz 19. gadsimta vidum* (Rīga: Liesma, 1991), 119.