

Autumn 2025
Annual Bulletin

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the advancement
of baltic studies



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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MESSAGE FROM THE AABS PRESIDENT

JÖRG HACKMANN, PRESIDENT

UNCERTAINTY, INSTABILITY, AND DISRUPTION are not only perceptions of the current global political situation, but also topics of recent scholarly conferences that include the Baltic region. Today, the security of Europe depends on the fate of Ukraine, but tomorrow the turn might be to the states and societies on the eastern Baltic. The rising awareness of this situation has been reflected in an increasing interest in Baltic Studies, with more than 500 participants at the last Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE) at Cambridge in April, and also in continued high AABS membership figures.

The growing interest in Baltic Studies is also reflected in the development of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*. During the eight years of Matthew Kott's tenure as editor-in-chief, before he stepped down in spring, the journal significantly raised the number of published articles and more than doubled the number of downloaded articles. The editorial tasks are now taken over by a team of two co-editors, Mike Loader and Ammon Cheskin, who are editing the journal from University of Glasgow.

Furthermore, during the last grant application period, AABS received many very interesting and high-quality applications for the various AABS grants, whose recipients are presented on the website, on social media and in this Bulletin. For the first time, AABS launched an Academic Events

and Projects Grant in order to support the growing number of smaller-scale Baltic Studies events and initiatives.

Last but not least, AABS organized several webinars on Baltic-Ukrainian topics in the beginning of 2025 against the background of upheaval in European collective security. And the *Baltic Ways* podcast continued with new episodes, focusing on the relevance of Baltic issues in recent political and social developments.

The success of CBSE at Cambridge, which was organized by the Center for Geopolitics with its Baltic Geopolitics Programme, fits into a broader picture of the development of

Baltic Studies: Since its beginnings in the Cold War, Baltic Studies has always been shaped by scholarly entanglements and networks across the Baltic and the Atlantic. Meanwhile, many of the activities of AABS, not least the editorial work of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, take place in Europe.

Starting already with CBSE in Turku in 2003, Baltic Studies has increasingly broadened its scope towards the wider Baltic Sea Region based on the insight that the three Baltic states and societies form an important node in a wider network. This is still and even more accurate under the current geopolitical turmoil, which has led to a securitizational turn in Baltic Studies. It that respect Baltic Studies has received global relevance.

Seen from this viewpoint, why shouldn't we lean back in

Today, the security of Europe depends on the fate of Ukraine, but tomorrow the turn might be to the states and societies on the eastern Baltic.

our armchairs and feel satisfied with these achievements and the current state of Baltic Studies? The mental state, however, is different, not only due to global political tensions. For some time already, the *JBS* editors have been struggling with a rising amount of submissions that are presumably based on LLM-generated texts. Maintaining scholarly integrity and the high standards of the journal thus requires additional editorial work in filtering out those texts. Furthermore, those many scholars whose expertise lies outside the field of contemporary geopolitics and security might feel pushed aside with their not less interesting and relevant topics against the demand of answers on the current hot political issues.

Thus, additional efforts are necessary to show the multidisciplinary and multidimensional character of Baltic Studies to the academic world. Making the messages of Baltic Studies better heard is a challenge for all scholars in the field. This is evident, when looking at statements within East European and Russian Studies that address the “injustice” of “epistemic smallness” and the need to decolonize and decentralize their field. Here, one may reply that Baltic Studies has been aware of these issues already for a long time. There is, however, as we all know, a structural deficit of smaller area studies, which demands to promote more actively the relevance of our expertise, to increase networking, and to connect it to the political, social, and educational demands of the current situation, bearing Rein Taagepera’s warning words in mind: “Remaining too narrowly in our area of highest expertise guarantees us against mistakes — and against relevance.”

So, what we should do is look for “converging paths” (as this year’s Baltic Studies conference title suggested). This brings us to the next Baltic Studies Conferences in Northern America and Europe, which are already in the pipeline: The 30th AABS Conference will be organized by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on May 28-31, 2026. The conference topic on “Diasporas” offers ample possibilities to prove the global relevance of Baltic Studies. The Call for Papers is already on the AABS website, so please spread the word and consider participating.

The following CBSE Conference will be organized by the University of Tartu in spring 2027 in connection with their annual conference on East European studies.

AABS is also interested in continuing cooperation with the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study and is looking forward to organizing the next joint conference in 2028. In addition, AABS will hold another Baltic panel at the upcoming ASEEES Conference in Washington, DC, in November, and is planning a joint workshop with the Baltic Historical Commission in Germany in 2026. Besides the conferences and the journal, AABS will also keep up its continuous digital presence with webinars and podcasts and plans to involve AABS members more actively.

As scholars we all presumably long for a time when we can focus on our genuine academic interests. In times shaped by uncertainty, instability and disruption in the Baltic region, in Europe, and globally, however, we should continue in our efforts to make the relevant answers of Baltic Studies to be heard in a wider scholarly world and beyond.

The End of the Liberal World Order
 What Comes Next for the Baltic States?



Volodymyr Dubovyk
Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University

Una Berzina-Cerenkova
Riga Stradiņš University

Andres Kasekamp
University of Toronto

May 5
12 pm ET


Webinar: The End of the Liberal World Order: What Comes Next for the Baltic States?

April 18, 2025

The Fate of Europe
 Ukraine, the Baltic Region, and Collective Security



Hanna Shelest
Foreign Policy Council Ukrainian Prism

Marko Lehti
Tampere Peace Research Institute

Ginta Palubinskas
West Virginia State University

March 10
12 pm ET


Webinar: The Fate of Europe: Ukraine, the Baltic Region, and Collective Security

March 1, 2025

Confronting the Truth



Dovilė Budrytė
Georgia Gwinnett College, Vilnius University

Matthew Kott
Uppsala University

Neringa Klumbytė
Miami University

January 28
12 pm ET


Webinar: Confronting the Truth: Pursuit of Historical Justice in the Baltic States and Beyond

December 23, 2024

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

STRENGTHENING STUDENTS & NETWORKS

DAINA EGLĪTIS, PRESIDENT-ELECT, INTERVIEWED BY INDRA EKMANIS, ANNUAL BULLETIN EDITOR

DAINA EGLĪTIS, associate professor of sociology and international affairs at George Washington University, remembers her first brush with AABS as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, when she attended her first Baltic Studies conference in Baltimore. She later served as the vice president for conferences, organizing AABS' biennial gathering in 2006 at her current institution, GWU in Washington, D.C. Eglītis took on a new role in 2024, beginning her tenure as president-elect and preparing to lead the organization in 2026. "I was asked three times if I might like to return to the board," she noted with a laugh, "and after the third time I couldn't say no."

Eglītis' research interests have always been intertwined with the Baltic Sea Region. Her dissertation focused on the sociological characteristics of post-communist transformations in Latvia and Eastern Europe more broadly, including economics, politics, gender, and land restitution politics and practices. More recently, Eglītis has shifted toward women's experiences during World War II and the Holocaust in Latvia and the broader region. She is currently working on a book examining women's experiences during this historical period in Eastern Europe.

Looking ahead to her presidency, Eglītis has identified several key priorities for the association. Strong support for young scholars and graduate students is foremost. The robust student participation at the recent AABS conference at Yale and the CBSE conference at Cambridge University has been encouraging, as has AABS' focus on enabling student participation. "One of the things that we know many students don't have is a lot of money to travel to conferences, so to be able to maintain some robust support in terms of conference participation I think is very important," she said.

Beyond financial support, Eglītis is enthusiastic about developing a mentorship program — an idea that has emerged in board discussions recently. Many graduate students who develop interests in Baltic Studies often find themselves at institutions where no faculty members specialize in or even have much interest in the region, Eglītis noted, adding that she had also experienced this situation. "I think it would be very valuable to create some sort of mentorship system."

Another goal involves building scholarly networks that would facilitate greater collaboration between researchers. "We don't see as much collaboration between scholars who have common inter-



ests as we could," she said. Such networks could operate virtually as listservs, in person at conferences, or through other mechanisms. While mutually beneficial, these collaborative opportunities could be particularly valuable for younger scholars seeking to build their profiles and work with more established colleagues in the field.

Eglītis is also interested in continuing AABS's public-facing initiatives, including the webinar series and the *Baltic Ways* podcast. While recent attention to Baltic Studies has come from unfortunate circumstances — not least Russia's war on Ukraine and regional security threats — the Baltic states offer interesting comparisons to other parts of the world, she noted. They are examples of small countries managing economies, governance, and security relatively well, and have the potential to offer lessons beyond the region. "There are a lot of good things happening that don't draw as much attention," Eglītis said, suggesting this could be fertile ground for future scholarship and public engagement.

The coming years will also bring opportunity for the association to expand. Eglītis noted the excitement that comes from seeing scholars beyond Europe and North America, and those without direct ties to the Baltic countries, becoming involved: "People who are simply drawn because of the interest and challenges and the empty pages that need filling in terms of history or political science or sociology or cultural studies. ... To see scholars from other regions of the world who are also interested in Baltic Studies and doing comparisons between the Baltic case and their own home regions — I think that's a delightful development." From a disciplinary lens, there are areas of global concern that could benefit from Baltic perspectives, for example, climate science and policy research. "It hasn't seemed like AABS' remit is to bring in the natural sciences or the physical sciences or the medical sciences," she noted. "But I wonder if there's some space for it, because there are scholars in those fields that also do socially oriented or policy-oriented research, and maybe there is some room to appeal to them to be part of this enterprise as well."

Eglītis' vision for AABS builds on the association's current work to ensure Baltic Studies scholars remain connected and grow networks. "The more AABS can, in various ways, through public-facing programs or podcasts, through financial support for students, but also maybe even more advanced scholars — the more that AABS can use the tools that it has to facilitate that, the more robust the organization will be going into the future," she said. "AABS is well positioned, but there are always concerns in any small organization with membership, with finances, with the robustness of the organization and people's willingness to participate. And I think the more we can diversify the pool of people who are interested, the better off AABS will be."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OVERVIEW OF AABS ACTIVITIES

AABS BOARD, COMPILED BY LIISI ESSE, ADMINISTRATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMBERSHIP

AS OF AUG. 20, 2025, AABS has 413 members. Our membership numbers have continued to increase, thanks to the increasing number of AABS and CBSE conference attendees and our closer collaboration with organizers of the CBSE. Our membership fees have remained the same for the past several years and the board is not planning to raise them for the next fiscal year.

AABS has made a change to the Baltic membership category. The Baltic membership is available to persons whose current primary affiliation is at an academic institution in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) or in Ukraine. Previously, it was available to those with affiliations in the Baltic states, Russia, and CIS member states.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

The AABS grants and fellowships program continued to thrive in 2025, with submissions reaching a record high. This growth likely reflects the increasing visibility and impact of our support for Baltic Studies.

We received an especially high number of applications for the Emerging Scholars Grant — 24 in total, doubling the previous record set in 2024. While the numbers have been steadily rising in recent years, this year's surge is particularly encouraging. The volume and quality of submissions underscore the importance of this grant in sustaining early-career researchers. Credit is also due to Ben Gardner-Gill, our Assistant Director of Outreach and Engagement, for his excellent work in reaching out to potential candidates.

We have continued to face challenges in generating stronger interest in the grants reserved exclusively for Latvian citizens. These include the Saltups Fellowship, which offers up to \$10,000 for short-term study or research in the United States, the Jānis Grundmanis Fellowship, which provides \$20,000 annually for graduate or postgraduate studies in the U.S., and the

Aina Birnitis Dissertation-Completion Fellowship in the Humanities for Latvia, which offers \$21,000 stipend for Latvian graduate students. This year, we were able to only award the Birnitis and Grundmanis fellowships; the Saltups fellowship was not granted. The AABS Board has been actively discussing the challenges associated with these grants.

In 2025, AABS formally launched the Academic Events and Projects Grant, transitioning from informal support to a structured, competitive process. We received nine applications, reflecting promising engagement from the community. The first recipients of this new grant are:

- Ramuné Bleizienė, for organizing the international conference “Local Feminisms in the Baltic Region (Late 19th-Early 20th Century): Parallels, Differences, and Influences.”
- Elīza Dāldere, for the conference “Multiple Baltics: Reimagining Social, Cultural and Spatial Dimensions of History,” organized as part of the Young Historians’ Days in Latvia.

The overall quality of applications remains high, and we continue to support a wide range of promising research and creative projects. AABS stands out as an organization dedicated to advancing Baltic Studies through both academic and creative avenues.

AABS INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

As of July 31, 2025, the AABS account had a total value of \$4,023,961.36, up from \$3,893,725.00 on July 31, 2024, and reported a 7% return over the past 10 years. The portfolio is allocated 52.8% to stocks (\$2.12M), 46.4% to fixed income (\$1.87M), and 0.8% to short-term reserves (\$33.8K). This is close to our 50% stock and 50% bonds goal. However, this gap is growing because of strong performance of the stock market. The account generated \$48,031 in taxable income over the past year, primarily from dividends. Most income was reinvested automatically. Membership fees and the return on this fund was sufficient to finance grants and other AABS related activities.

AABS GRANT APPLICATIONS & AWARDS

Grant	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd	Appl	Awd
Baumanis	16	1	12	3	17	5	-	-	9	3	7	3	12	3
Birnitis	2	1	6	1	6	1	5	1	3	1	4	1	5	1
Dissertation	3	2	8	3	26	4	11	5	20	4	7	4	18	4
Emerging Scholar	5	3	8	2	11	4	5	3	11	4	12	4	24	4
Grundmanis	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	1	3	1	1	1
Saltups	0	0	3	1	1	0	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	0
Events													9	2
Total	27	8	38	11	62	15	28	11	47	14	34	14	70	15

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PUBLICIZING BALTIC STUDIES: WHAT AABS HAS LEARNED SINCE 2022

BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

ON FEB. 24, 2022, THE AABS BOARD was faced with a choice. Russia had launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and many on the Board felt a moral imperative to condemn the wanton act of aggression.

At the same time, Board members recognized that AABS had never before made a political statement as an organization, conscious of its role and the potential pitfalls of politicizing academia. But this time was different.

In short order, the Board decided to break with decades of precedence and issue a simple, direct statement:

"THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF BALTIC STUDIES CONDEMS RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE AND CALLS ON PRESIDENT PUTIN TO IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAW ALL RUSSIAN FORCES FROM UKRAINE."

Over three years later, with war still raging on the European continent, what does it mean to promote research and scholarship about the Baltic states and Baltic Sea region? Through a webinar series, grant funding, podcasts, events, and more, AABS has taken steps beyond a Board statement to grapple with this question and support our Ukrainian colleagues. Several of those initiatives are highlighted elsewhere in this bulletin in greater detail. What have we since learned from these combined efforts?

The first lesson is to know your audience. As much as AABS's Ukraine-related programming has been driven by the Board, it is equally a response to audience demand. Our members were, and still are, asking questions: How will the war affect the Baltic states? What does this mean for Baltic Studies? AABS was in the position to answer both questions, inviting expert analysis on the former and providing a path forward on the latter.

Not all audiences, though, know that they are your audience. Outside of the broader Baltic Studies community, interest in the Baltic states spiked sharply: What were these countries and why were they such ardent supporters of Ukraine?

As much as we would like it if it were the case, the first

instinct for most people isn't to go find the small learned society that supports academic inquiry into the region in question. AABS had to make this audience aware that we existed, and we had to do it in a way that met them where they were; they weren't coming to us.

So where was this audience? As has been the trend for nearly two decades now, they were in the domain of new media: social media, podcasts, and the webinar, a format boosted by the pandemic that seems to have considerable staying power. Remaining closely in tune with our audience has led AABS to join the LinkedIn and Bluesky social media platforms and to offer a digital-only option for several of our publications, including this bulletin.

These formats, each unique, allow for direct connection with audience members on their terms: varyingly casual, informational, serious, short-form, long-form.

This leads to the second lesson, which is authenticity. We have to be humble, and we have to be true: Here's what we do, here's what we stand for. Nothing more, nothing less. We are experts in our domain.

This guides what we do in the promotional realm: Our "brand voice" is that of an approachable expert. Our editing philosophy, for podcasts, videos, and the written word, is to keep things digestible and informative. Diving too quickly into abstract concepts drives viewers away, but so too does keeping things surface-level: People engage with AABS because we can provide that deeper level of expertise.

What we could not have known in February 2022 was that the Board statement condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a critical inflection point in how AABS presents itself to the outside world. Our philosophy has become more proactive and more forward-leaning while never losing sight of our advantage: The expertise we can bring to bear.

We have learned that this ultimately benefits Baltic Studies. More people consume and utilize the scholarship that our members produce. Our members are in turn driven to explore new paths for research and collaboration, and the cycle repeats. By engaging authentically with audiences new and old, we've opened a new chapter in the public life of our corner of the academic world.

FIND THE LATEST NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE ASSOCIATION AT AABS-BALTICSTUDIES.ORG

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

SOLIDARITY & SCHOLARSHIP: 3 YEARS AND COUNTING OF BALTIC-UKRAINE WEBINARS

DOVILĖ BUDRYTĖ, DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE, INTERVIEWED BY BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

LAUNCHED FOLLOWING THE FULL-SCALE RUSSIAN INVASION of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, AABS's Baltic-Ukraine webinar series has brought together Baltic, Ukrainian, and international experts to discuss issues of mutual importance.

The webinars are a vehicle to both materially support Ukrainian scholars and to bring their scholarship to wider audiences. The webinars have also proven to be academically invigorating for the Baltic Studies community, as new topics and new modes of inquiry arise constantly over the course of our discussions.

In the last year, AABS hosted four webinars in the series, two each on the topics of international affairs and memory. In September 2024, "Gender, War and Memory: The Baltic States and Ukraine," challenged the trend of studying women primarily as the victims of war, and instead asked what is gained from viewing them as agentic actors. The conversation was particularly gripping; attendees heard stories of Ukrainian women's experiences in war, and each of the panelists contributed an unvarnished look at the realities of modern conflict.

In January 2025, "Confronting the Truth: Pursuit of Historical Justice in the Baltic States and Beyond" explored the concept of a "right to truth" in the Baltic states, particularly with regard to the Holocaust. The panelists examined how the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has affected memory discourses in the Baltic states and what the long-term consequences might be.

In March and May, AABS hosted a pair of international affairs-focused webinars looking at the future of the transatlantic relationship, European security, and how the Baltic states will position themselves in the forthcoming reorganization of the world order. In the May event, we took a slightly different approach, leaving most of the time open to audience questions.

The resulting discussion was such a success that AABS is now inviting our members and the Baltic Studies community to submit proposals for future webinars. To submit your proposal, please go to <http://bit.ly/4mm5rHF>.

AS WE LOOK BACK ON THE LAST YEAR'S LINEUP and look forward to exciting events, it seemed appropriate to reflect on the series with the woman who has been the driving

force behind the webinars: AABS Director-at-Large Dovilė Budrytė.

AABS: Dovilė, it's been over three years since we started the webinar series. Can you believe it? How are you feeling about it?

DB: No, I can't believe it! But looking back now, I think it's definitely one of the most successful projects of AABS when it comes to community outreach.

When I was first thinking about what I would like to do during my term as AABS President, from 2022 to 2024, I wanted to get the community engaged. But then, right around when I was voted in as President-elect in 2020, COVID hit. The pandemic reshaped many of our ideas — what we could do, what we could not do. Then, two years later, I remember very well when Russia's war against Ukraine broke out, Laura Dean, who was AABS Vice President for Conferences at the time, was the one who suggested that, in order to help Ukrainian scholars, we could have these webinars. It was a very good idea because as we were thinking what to do, how to help out, there were some people who said, well, we're a Baltic Studies organization, not a Ukrainian Studies organization. I think we've stayed true to who we are and those concerns aren't present anymore.

Ultimately, the webinars have been a very successful means of community outreach. We have a few dozen people join live each time, then more watch later. In my own case, I know that some of my students also join the webinars and, even though they have nothing to do with Baltic Studies, they listen. I know some of my colleagues attend as well, and then they want to hear more, so to speak.

The second thing is that webinars could be used even more in the future to try to get students, other community members who have nothing to do with Baltic Studies, to be interested in Baltic Studies.

AABS: Absolutely, it's both internal and external engagement. And going back to your point about those initial concerns: What is AABS's role? What can we really do as a Baltic Studies academic organization? It's been a novel approach for AABS to draw these ties between the Baltic region and a place that is indisputably not Baltic: Ukraine. In

drawing those ties, I think we've discovered a lot of similarities, and there's been a lot of academic value in the series. Can you speak a little bit about that?

DB: Many Baltic scholars, myself included, found ourselves in 2022 in the midst of learning about Ukraine and finding all of these connections with our Ukrainian colleagues. For Baltic societies, it's become a "vicarious war" that's been fought in its own way in the Baltic states. The consequence is that we've seen many people write about these trends and these identity shifts, both within societies but also in scholarly communities.

I know so many Baltic scholars who started doing work on topics related to Ukrainian and Ukrainians: for example, Ineta Dabašinskienė's work on Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania. Neringa Klumbytė just spent a month in Ukraine for her work as an anthropologist. So I know personally quite a few Baltic scholars who became scholars of Ukraine as well. I would not yet call myself a scholar of Ukraine, but definitely some Ukrainian themes have become integrated into my own work, as well.

I think the webinars might be a reflection of the trend we're seeing in Baltic Studies to expand and integrate Ukraine. If you look at the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, there are works about the war, how it's felt in the Baltic states, and how people deal with it. We didn't intend for the webinars to tap into this trend, but that's how it turned out very naturally.

We were thinking about the same topics: How do we think about the war? What does it mean for the Baltic states? Because it was such a profound experience, it became an integral part of Baltic Studies, I think. It's exciting to see this new development in the field because it shows that Baltic Studies are alive and well, and they are able to adapt to these new developments in global affairs.

AABS: We've seen it outside of webinars as well, this growth of interest in Baltic Studies since February 2022. I want to go back to what you said about the war affecting the work of Baltic scholars, and you referenced Neringa Klumbytė, whom you've worked with, and with whom you were on a webinar panel early in 2025. You were able to take the role of guest expert and not just organizer. What was it like after nearly three years, at that point, to be on the other side?

DB: I think to be honest with you, I feel like I'm so engaged

with every webinar when they're taking place, in part because so much work goes into organizing them and I'm invested in their success. It might surprise you, but I don't remember that particular webinar being fundamentally different.

That said, it's obviously a little bit more pressure when you are part of the webinar and have to come up with a five minute summary of all your research. It's always very challenging to do that.

I think the webinars might be a reflection of the trend we're seeing in Baltic Studies to expand and integrate Ukraine. If you look at the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, there are works about the war, how it's felt in the Baltic states, and how people deal with it. We didn't intend for the webinars to tap into this trend, but that's how it turned out very naturally.

AABS: I'd like to pivot to the future and where the series goes from here. Russia is still occupying Ukraine. There is still an appetite and a need to highlight the work that Ukrainian scholars are doing and explore those ties between Ukraine and the Baltic states. The webinar series is going to continue, but one new thing that we're doing is inviting people to submit their ideas or even full panels. Can you talk a little bit about the impetus for that idea and what you're hoping to see?

DB: In part it's inspired by other academic associations, and I know that the Memory Studies Association in particular adopted this approach, I think from the beginning. Instead of organizing webinars themselves, like we do, many other organizations rely on the members to come up with ideas. I think it's a really good way to engage the members.

It might take time to get a good stream of proposals and for this approach to work, because we're not a big organization, but regardless, I think it's a good idea. We're showing to members and the community that we want to highlight the work they're doing and promote them as scholars. The webinar format is a great way to do that because it gives people a voice and a platform directly. I'm eager to see what proposals our members will submit!

AABS: I am as well! I have to imagine we'll receive ideas we would have never thought of otherwise. Dovilė, thanks so much for your work on the webinars, and I look forward to seeing what's next.

JBS WELCOMES NEW LEADERSHIP

BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

AABS IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE the new leadership of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*: Ammon Cheskin and Mike Loader, both of the University of Glasgow, will serve as co-editors. Cheskin and Loader assumed their roles on May 1 after Matthew Kott stepped down following eight years of distinguished service as *JBS* editor-in-chief. *JBS* is a peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary journal published on a quarterly basis that aims to progress and disseminate knowledge about the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the Baltic Sea Region.

“I’m delighted to step into the role of editor,” said Cheskin. “I sincerely hope to make a small contribution, even if it is technical, to Baltic Studies, a field that I have already seen flourish impressively in my academic lifetime.”

JBS experienced substantial growth under Kott’s leadership, moving from publishing 24-28 articles each year to 40, more than doubling annual downloads, and building a permanent, professional editorial staff. Those investments in staff have paid dividends: Loader started as an editorial assistant in 2018 and was promoted to assistant editor and finally editor before assuming his new role.

“I have a long-term perspective on the journal’s operations,” Loader said. “The continuing focus for me will be on professionalization — our bread and butter of maintaining our high language and editing standards and training our staff.”

Such a focus is required to maintain the standard quality of publications that *JBS* readers have come to expect, especially at a higher volume and in light of new challenges facing academic publishing. Chief among those challenges, said Kott, is the rising use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the field.

“The team at *JBS* will need strength and endurance in order to weather this coming storm and to keep the journal’s scholarly integrity intact,” said Kott. “Knowing the people

who work for *JBS*, I have every confidence that they are the right people for the job.”

Kott’s work has placed the *JBS* in a strong position to take on these challenges. AABS President Jörg Hackmann described Kott’s tenure as impressive, and the AABS Board voted in spring 2025 to grant Kott complimentary AABS membership for the next 10 years.

Hackmann remarked that the new challenge of AI will intertwine with the constant challenge for area studies to be seen as relevant: “Baltic Studies should link regional expertise and the description of regional issues with wider phenomena, and address the broader relevance of the research.”

Part of this effort is to publish more articles open access; nearly 10 percent of *JBS* articles have been published open access in the last couple years, a notable increase from the mid-single-digits norm of years prior. Hackmann noted that this is in line with industry trends, as online journal articles have risen in relevance compared to the traditional monograph.

In addition to his long-standing focus on professionalization, Loader anticipates that he will also focus on streamlining the submission process, making it easier both for authors and editors in an effort to maintain the robust reputation of *JBS* while decreasing the time-to-publish. Loader also drew a contrast between himself as a long-tenured *JBS* staffer and Cheskin as a first-timer. The balance, Loader suggested, will be a positive one: He brings institutional expertise, and Cheskin “has great and fresh ideas for the future, and I look forward to exploring them.”

Cheskin has taken this charge to heart. “My first academic paper came out in *JBS*, and I remember well the thrill of having my manuscript accepted, and then published,” he said. “I’m an enthusiastic advocate of area studies and get a thrill out of supervising and reading other people’s research.”



JBS STAFF: MICHAEL LOADER (CO-EDITOR), AMMON CHESKIN (CO-EDITOR), SIOBHÁN HEARNE (TECHNICAL COORDINATOR), HARRY MERRITT (EDITORIAL ASST.)

CO-EDITORS REFLECT ON CHANGES AT JBS

MICHAEL LOADER & AMMON CHESKIN, JBS CO-EDITORS

THIS YEAR HAS BEEN ONE OF CONSIDERABLE CHANGE for the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, foremost in terms of staff turnover. Matthew Kott stepped down as editor-in-chief after eight years at the helm. We thanked Matthew for his diligent work to reform *JBS* since 2017 with the presentation of personal and official AABS gifts and a speech from President Jörg Hackmann at the *JBS* Breakfast at the CBSE Conference in Cambridge in late April 2025. Matthew leaves the journal in a strong state, publishing 10 articles per issue, and with the solid foundations of a built-out, trained staff, going from just him and a book reviews editor to two editors, a technical co-ordinator, four editorial assistants, and a book reviews editor.

As Matthew departs, we moved to a dual editorship structure with editor Mike Loader stepping into the role joined by new hire Ammon Cheskin in April 2025. As Ammon and Mike are colleagues at the department of Central and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow, this marks the journal's return to Glasgow after a generation away. (*JBS* was previously based at the University of Glasgow when David Smith was editor between 2005 and 2009.) We feel the new official co-editor structure allows us to balance the duties of editorship effectively and to work to our respective strengths.

We also welcome to the team Siobhán Hearne (University of Manchester), who replaced Catherine Gibson as technical co-ordinator in January. Donatas Kupčiūnas (University of Cambridge), the organiser of this year's CBSE conference, takes the place of Liisi Esse as book reviews editor as Liisi stepped down from the role at the beginning of the year. (We are very grateful for Liisi's many years of service as book reviews editor).

JBS continues to move from strength to strength, with our article downloads reaching a new height of 43,000 in 2024, and 2025 promising to be an even better year with

remarkable Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 growth of 24.2% and 29.5%, respectively, against 2024. This demonstrates the voracious appetite for the cutting-edge research in Baltic Studies that we are publishing.

In his last act as editor-in-chief, Matthew Kott revisited the journal's International Advisory Board, gratefully thanking outgoing members for their service and appointing a range of new members. As it becomes harder to secure reviewers for manuscripts these days, we intend to call upon the depth of expertise represented by the 17-member Advisory Board to help adjudicate articles in their field where we need another opinion. This year we will be continuing our professionalization plan by maintaining our high language and editing standards and training our new staff. We will be working to continue to clear our stubborn backlog of around 20 articles and reduce waiting times from acceptance to publication online, currently around eight months. We have also begun work on our long-term goal to redesign and streamline our style guide to make the editorial process smoother for both authors and editorial staff.

Lastly, subject to final AABS Board and budgetary approval, we plan to offer an exciting new grant opportunity directly through *JBS* in 2026. Designed by Mike Loader, the *JBS* Publication Development Grant hopes to be another way for our journal to positively contribute to the academic environment in our field by supporting the research for an academic publication for a postdoc or early career scholar on a short-term contract. More details about the conditions and how to apply will be announced pending approval and when the competition will open in early 2026.

To read the latest issue, visit <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbal20/current>. To submit an article, visit <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rbal>.



JOSH HODIL (EDITORIAL ASST.), JAMES MONTGOMERY BAXENFIELD (EDITORIAL ASST.), SANDRA HAGELIN (EDITORIAL ASST.), DONATAS KUPČIŪNAS (REVIEWS EDITOR)

PUBLICATION STATISTICS FROM JBS

MADELEINE MARKEY, TAYLOR & FRANCIS

THE *JOURNAL OF BALTIC STUDIES* continues to publish high quality research that is well-read and widely cited by the Baltic Studies community and by researchers working in related fields and disciplines.

Usage increased by 7% from 2023 to 2024, with over 43,000 downloads in 2024 by readers across 134 countries worldwide. To mid-August 2025 there have been over 31,000 downloads by readers from over 127 nations. The top downloaded article in 2024 was 'The covert ties that bind: US-Baltic intelligence relations' by Andris Banka (55.3, 2024). The article with the most downloads to mid-August 2025 is 'Revisionist national narratives in the memoirs of Estonian and Latvian Waffen-SS Legionnaires' by Karl Stuklis (55.1, 2024). Beginning January 2025, the *JBS* homepage on Taylor Francis Online displays additional metrics at the article level, showing views and citations by month since publication, and a map of reader geography, with downloadable data.

The top downloading countries are consistently the U.S., U.K., the Baltic states and other northern European countries. Engagement from researchers in China continues to expand, with China being the sixth highest downloading country of *JBS* content over the 19 months from January 2024 to June 2024. Looking at usage by referrer, the AABS website was the eighth highest referrer during 2024; over 200 downloads can be attributed to readers who came through to the journal homepage from the AABS website.

Authors submitting to *JBS* receive a post-review decision, on average, 61 days after submitting, with an acceptance rate of 39%. The journal published 42 articles and 19 book reviews in the 2024 volume, while the first three issues of the 2025 volume have included 29 articles and 11 book reviews. *JBS*

corresponding authors published in 2024 and 2025 to date have been based in 17 different countries.

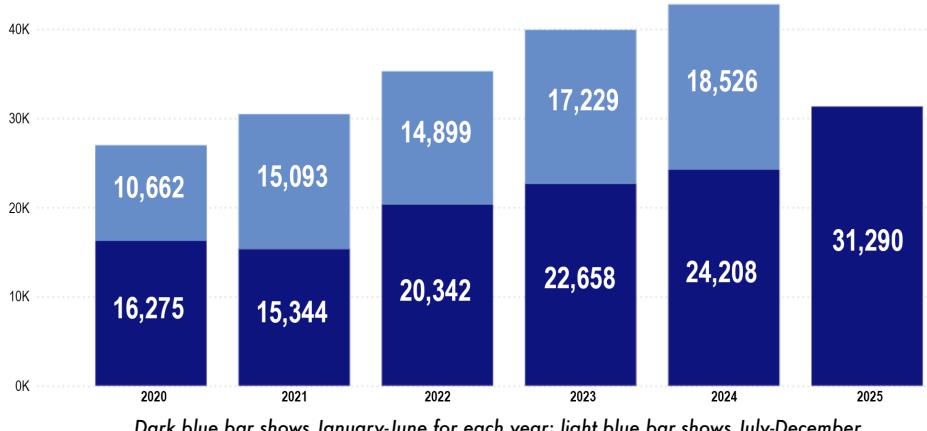
As the Open Access (OA) landscape changes globally and more scholars receive funding to publish their research OA, a growing number of OA articles are being published within the pages of *JBS*, meaning that they are freely accessible online in perpetuity. Five articles were published OA in the 2024 volume, with a further nine articles in 2025 to date, comprising 8% and 31% of research content, respectively. OA articles typically receive five times more downloads than non-OA articles* and, looking at usage of the articles published in the journal over the last three years, all of the top 10 articles downloaded over the past 12 months were OA.

JBS is indexed in the Area Studies category of the Social Sciences Citation Index and received an Impact Factor of 0.5 in the 2024 Journal Citation Reports (JCR), released at the end of June 2025. 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 43 citations in 2024 to 87 citable items published in *JBS* in 2022 and 2023. 32% of citable items received at least one citation, with 38 different citing sources last year.

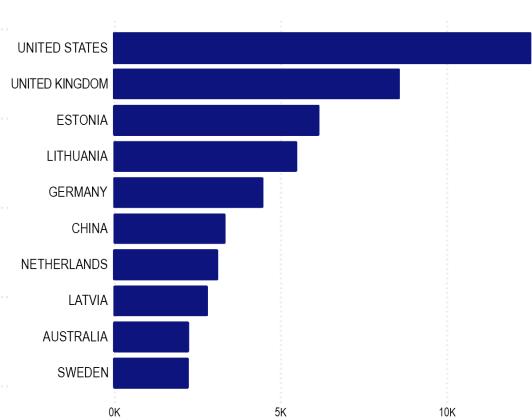
JBS also has a current CiteScore of 1.5. CiteScore is a metric produced by Scopus and is calculated by looking at citations over the most recent four calendar years to articles, reviews, conference papers and data papers published in those same four years. That the metric over this longer citation window is higher supports our understanding that *JBS* content continues to be read and cited many years after initial publication.

*Usage in 2021-2023 for articles published in 2019-2023.

JBS Usage Comparison 2020-2025

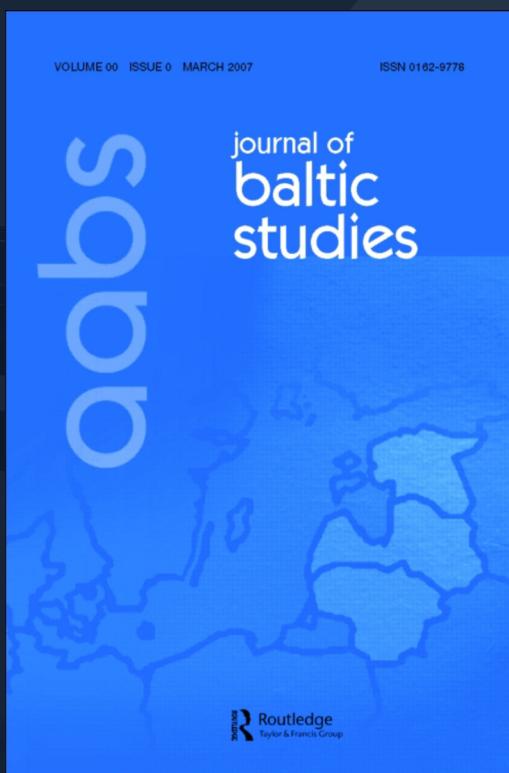


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JOURNAL OF BALTIC STUDIES

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BROADCASTING BALTIC STUDIES: RECENT BALTIC WAYS PODCAST EPISODES

BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

RUNNING CONCURRENTLY WITH the academic year, the *Baltic Ways* podcast brings listeners news and stories from the world of Baltic Studies. A co-production of AABS and the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), *Baltic Ways* aims to reach a broader audience who may not have much familiarity with academic work. Hosts Indra Ekmanis and Ben Gardner-Gill connect cutting-edge scholarship with real-world impacts. The 2024-2025 season of *Baltic Ways* was no different, with six new episodes, plus a bonus crossover, bringing unique insight to thousands of listeners — that's right, thousands! *Baltic Ways* ranks among the top six percent of podcasts in the United States as measured by downloads in the week following a new episode's publication.

The biggest story of the year was the November 2024 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the subsequent shift of American foreign policy. In late September and then again in mid-March, international relations experts Margarita Šešelgytė (Vilnius University), Daunis Auers (University of Latvia), and Andres Kasekamp (University of Toronto) joined the podcast for roundtable discussions. In the pre-election Episode 24, guests assessed the possible effects of a Kamala Harris or Donald Trump victory for the Baltic states, and they agreed that a second Trump administration would bring greater uncertainty for European security as a whole.

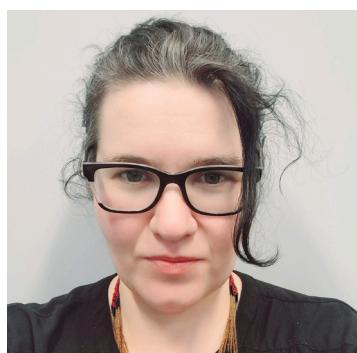
Indeed, at the two month mark of the second Trump presidency, the reconvened panel came to the conclusion in Episode 27 they had predicted: The future of Baltic and European security was in greater doubt than ever before. The Baltic states would have to consider a future world in which the United States was no longer the guarantor of their security. The implications for each Baltic state's policy, and their posture as a whole,

remain murky, but discussants shone some light on potential paths forward, keeping in mind that anything could change at a moment's notice with the new reality of U.S. foreign policy.

The Baltic link to Ukraine was the subject of Episode 28, in which Gražina Bielousova (Vilnius University/Vytautas Magnus University) discussed her research examining how Ukrainian leftist feminists advocate for their causes at home and abroad, facing distinct sets of challenges as they attempt to defend their country. Bielousova explained how the Ukrainian case is distinct from Latvia and Lithuania, where organizing takes on different shapes for the same cause.

It has been widely hypothesized that the strong solidarity of the Baltic states with Ukraine is driven by a sense of shared historical memory: Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians have suffered in similar ways and at the same hands. Political scientist Dovilė Budrytė (Georgia Gwinnett College/Vytautas Magnus University) and anthropologist Neringa Klumbytė (Miami University) explained in Episode 26 that since restoring their independence, the Baltic states have focused on pursuing historical justice related to Soviet crimes, which included widespread repressions and mass deportations. Budrytė and Klumbytė discussed their interdisciplinary approach to tackling a new aspect of historical justice in the Baltic states, the Holocaust, and how by mixing disciplinary approaches, they have made new findings and produced cutting-edge scholarship.

Justice was also the main theme of this season's bonus episode. AABS grantee Agnieška Avin was interviewed on the EUROPAST Podcast about her research on the Roma community in Lithuania and the intense stigmatization the Roma people face. Avin drew from her varied background as a



Top to bottom: Margarita Šešelgytė, Daunis Auers, Andres Kasekamp, Gražina Bielousova

PhD candidate, an activist, and an educator to shine light on this “forgotten” community.

Similarly blending academic and professional experience, technologist Joel Burke explained “What E-Estonia Can Teach the US,” in Episode 29. How has Estonia become a world leader in e-government despite its size, and what does its experience reveal for other countries in a moment of global disruption? Burke pulled a few lessons out of his time in Estonia and suggested that the U.S. has a lot to learn from its ally.

Just as there are opportunities for transatlantic knowledge sharing, so too are there new points of friction. In Episode 25, political scientist Andžej Pukšo (Vytautas Magnus University) previewed the tasks ahead of two senior Baltic politicians taking on European Union roles. For both Kaja Kallas, the former Estonian prime minister now serving as the E.U.’s chief diplomat, and Andrius Kubilius, the former Lithuanian prime minister now serving as the E.U.’s first ever defense commissioner, Pukšo forecast difficulties in uniting the 27 different E.U. governments to provide a unified European voice on key issues. Recorded shortly before the Commission took office in December 2024, the episode now provides a prescient prediction of the challenges that both commissioners have faced in the intervening months, as well as insight into what they could still do to overcome the obstacles they face.

*For more leading scholarship, stay tuned! A new season of *Baltic Ways* is coming in the 2025-2026 academic year, with the first episodes slated for this fall. Submit your ideas for episodes at iekmanis@fpri.org or aabs@uw.edu.*



Subscribe to *Baltic Ways* with hosts Indra Ekmanis & Ben Gardner-Gill wherever you get your podcasts or listen online at aabs-balticstudies.org/podcast



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THE LARGEST-EVER BALTIC STUDIES CONFERENCE.

It's true — nearly 550 people attended the 16th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe in April 2025, hosted by the Centre for Geopolitics at the University of Cambridge. Scholars came from four continents and over 15 countries. Together, they participated in well over 100 panels, workshops, and round-tables, attended two plenaries, a special museum excursion, and capped it off with a gala dinner in picturesque King's College.

"I think it went really well," reflected conference chair Donatas Kupčiūnas, Baltic Fellow at the Centre for Geopolitics. This is high praise coming from Kupčiūnas, a master of British understatement. Nothing major went wrong, "just some technical stuff, which you can never avoid and which we dealt with," and most importantly, participants came away happy.

A major challenge of any Baltic Studies conference is just that: By definition, the conference incorporates many disciplines, so how can a conference organizer ensure that the historians, the linguists, the economists, etc., do not silo themselves? To some extent, area studies have an inherently interdisciplinary spirit, and Baltic Studies is no different, but this needs to be maintained.

Kupčiūnas was conscious of this challenge from the start. Two parts of the solution worked hand in hand. First, keep different tracks of the conference moving between buildings,

and second, have multiple different tracks in each building. That way, no one track or discipline can fortify their niche, and scholars from all backgrounds can flow easily between panels. Indeed, for visitors not familiar with the twisting and winding Cambridge geography built over centuries, sometimes one needed to enter an unfamiliar room after getting lost.

Many more, though, chose to literally step outside of their regular haunts. "I saw a lot of people going to panels well outside of their field, just to broaden their outlook about the Baltic region," said Kupčiūnas.

Presenters were not the only ones adding to the academic output of the event. A large number of Cambridge scholars were recruited to serve as chairs and discussants, another purposeful move by Kupčiūnas and his team to broaden the aperture of exchange. "For some of them," Kupčiūnas noted, "it was their first encounter with anything Baltic or Baltic Studies." They brought in their own expertise instead: A researcher of Italian opera, for example, could serve as a chair for a panel on Baltic operatic tradition, and everyone would benefit.

By gently forcing people out of their comfort zones, CBSE 2025 organizers ensured that the sheer size of the conference produced a commensurate amount of academic output. There were countless connections made, new ideas for papers, and pieces of feedback that changed the course of a research project.

It is no small task to assemble panels (and social settings) that can produce these outcomes.

While panels are the core of the conference, plenary sessions also serve a critical role. At a minimum, they bring conference participants together to catch up, but at their best, they can help set the tone of discussion and introduce new ideas. Brendan Simms, founder and director of the Centre for Geopolitics, did just that with his opening remarks.

Simms addressed the elephant in the room: the rapidly shifting and uncertain geopolitical situation. It's challenging, Simms acknowledged, but there is "precedent for hope." We can rightly hope for a peaceful future if we apply firm resolve and we commit ourselves to that future. He urged participants to bring their work to the present moment, to that end, and that theme resonated throughout the rest of the conference: How can we apply our academic work? How can we bring it to the societies we call home?

In a way, the question was juxtaposed with the venue of the conference. This was the first CBSE to be held outside of the Baltic Sea region; the conference was inaugurated in Riga in 1995.

But then again, maybe 2025 was the perfect time to bring the conference to the U.K. With long-standing alliances and norms in question, what better time to emphasize the ties that bind the Baltic states to the rest of Europe?

In his plenary remarks closing out the first day of the conference, the Rt. Hon. Nick Thomas-Symonds, minister for U.K.-E.U. relations, emphasized the shared values and priorities of the U.K. and the Baltic States: "The future of Europe has a home in the Baltic."

Then, on Friday evening, many conference participants

boarded coaches to go to the Imperial War Museum Duxford, where they were treated to a guided tour of the former Royal Air Force base and a lecture by Air Marshal Edward Stringer on the role of the RAF in the Baltic Sea region over the years. Stringer, like Thomas-Symonds, was careful to elaborate that these ties were not new, but decades old, borne out of shared values and interests that remain to this day.

In the third plenary, on Saturday, Patrick Salmon, chief historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, focused on British foreign policy regarding the Baltic. Like his counterparts, Salmon too honed in on the common theme running through the years: There is a deeper connection between the U.K. and the Baltic states than may meet the eye.

All three of the plenaries, plus several panel discussions held in the Cambridge Guildhall, were recorded and are available in their entirety on the Centre for Geopolitics YouTube channel, which is accessible at www.youtube.com/@CentreforGeopolitics. Photos are available at www.cfg.cam.ac.uk/news/cbse-2025-cambridge-converging-paths-the-baltic-between-east-and-west/.

This being Cambridge, there were two inevitabilities: serious discussion of topical issues, and a breathtaking gala dinner in King's College to cap off the conference. With his back to a priceless tapestry and speaking out into the very hall that inspired the Harry Potter films, Kupčiūnas thanked the conference participants: Without them, none of this was possible.

Truly, the people make the conference. Reflecting in July after some well-deserved rest, Kupčiūnas concluded that really only three things were needed to make a conference work: people, a venue, and something to drink. The rest, he said, would take care of itself.





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IN LESS THAN A YEAR, the University of Illinois Library will host the 30th Biennial AABS Conference. The University of Illinois Chicago had the privilege to host the conference in the past, but it will be the first time that Urbana-Champaign will be welcoming Baltic Studies students, scholars, and representatives from around the world to our campus. Despite widespread disruption and uncertainty over funding for academic programs, we hope to create a welcoming space for engaging discussions, fruitful collaborations, and networking opportunities. The conference program will be designed with graduate students, early-career scholars, and first-time attendees in mind and there would be something for everyone.

The University of Illinois is a unique place that embodies both tradition and innovation. It has a long tradition of hosting inclusive, multidisciplinary conferences. Furthermore, the University Library's preeminent research collections and services will be an exciting destination for conference participants to continue their research.

Being just a couple of hours away from Chicago (home to one of the largest Baltic diaspora communities in the world), we thought it would be fitting to invite everyone to Urbana-Champaign to reflect on the social, political, and cultural contributions of Baltic diaspora communities worldwide as we explore the conference theme "Diasporas: Building Bridges Across Nations." To showcase some of these contributions, the conference will start with the Illinois diaspora community-sourced exhibition curated by

the largest scholarly archive and book publisher outside of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Research Center. Exhibition curators and Center's directors will provide exhibition opening remarks and present the exhibition highlights.

Inta Mierina (professor, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences and Director, Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research, University of Latvia) will deliver a keynote address. To comment on current affairs and global challenges, we are planning a roundtable discussion, "A Changed Landscape: Perspectives on Foreign Policy, Migration, and Global Security," with distinguished scholars and policy researchers. After a long day of academic discussions, everyone is invited to attend the concert featuring Lithuanian Choral Ensemble DAINAVA. A special guest mentioned on the pages of the current Bulletin will share their artistic talents at AABS 2026.

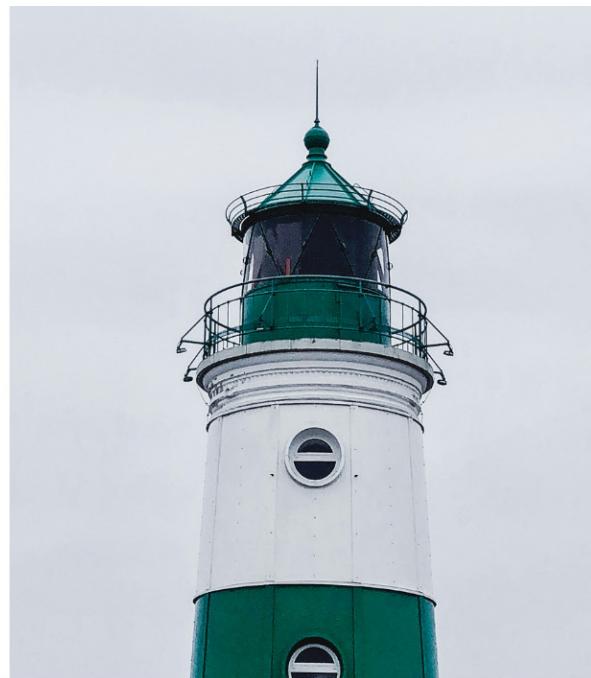
Last but not least, if you are a graduate student or an early career scholar, we have planned a couple of things for you. To ease into the conference, join us for a meet and greet event on day one of the conference. We will also have a traditional luncheon where we hope to answer your questions about funding, publishing, and alternative career paths. If you are in the early stages of your research, please consider submitting a poster proposal to AABS 2026.

We hope you will be able to join us as we are looking forward to welcoming you to Illinois. Visit www.aabs-balticstudies.org/aabs-2026-at-uiuc/ for more and please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions, ideas or suggestions at aabs2026illinois@gmail.com.

AABS 2026

at the University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign

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Conference Theme:

DIASPORAS: BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS NATIONS

AABS-BALTICSTUDIES.ORG/AABS-2026-AT-UIUC/



NEW GRANT, NEW POSSIBILITIES: AABS AWARDS FIRST ACADEMIC EVENTS & PROJECTS GRANTS

ELĪZA DĀLDERE, INTERVIEWED BY BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

AABS LAUNCHED THE Academic Events and Projects Grant in the 2025 grant cycle, offering up to \$5,000 for any academic event or scholarly project that promotes Baltic Studies. The AABS Board initiated the grant based on observations about the growing number of smaller-scale Baltic Studies events and initiatives that could benefit from funding.

“The Baltic Studies community is thriving, and proof of that is the increasing number of events and projects in the field,” said Jörg Hackmann, AABS president. “The new grant seeks to support existing efforts and encourage a new, diverse range of proposals.”

Two submissions were awarded the grant this year. Ramunė Bleizgienė, senior researcher at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, received the grant for her proposal to organize an international, interdisciplinary conference entitled “Local Feminisms in the Baltic Region (Late 19th-Early 20th Century): Parallels, Differences, and Influences.” Bleizgienė hopes that the interdisciplinary approach will provide an opportunity for new theoretical perspectives of feminist research, allowing for a new appreciation of women’s contributions to literature, art, culture and social processes.

The second submission went to Elīza Dāldere, an incoming graduate student at the University of Helsinki. AABS sat down with Dāldere to learn more about her proposal for an International History Students Association (ISHA) winter seminar entitled “Multiple Baltics: Reimagining Social, Cultural and Spatial Dimensions of History.”

AABS: Elīza, congratulations on the grant! Could you give us an overview of “Multiple Baltics”? How did you come to be involved with putting it together and what do you hope to do with it?

ED: I started thinking about this idea in the fall of 2024, when I had the opportunity to participate in two events run by ISHA, one in Łódź, Poland, and the other in Malta. I was really impressed by their open, collaborative, and international environment; historians from all over Europe came together to share their research and discuss their challenges.

Afterwards, I spoke with the president of ISHA about organizing an event in the Baltics, since there hadn’t been one there before. I wanted Baltic students to have access to



Elīza Dāldere

the same kind of international, eye-opening experience I had. I also wanted to offer a Baltic Sea region perspective on the field of history.

One of my inspirations was the idea from historian Michael North’s monograph *The Baltic: A History*, where he emphasized the thought: “There is no such thing as a single Baltic. Rather, there are many Baltics, which, from Adam of Bremen to Björn Engholm and the Baltic Sea strategy of the E.U., have been constantly reinvented and reconstituted by trade and cultures and by the merchants and artists who have embodied these historical trends.” I wanted to invite seminar participants to explore and analyze the construction and meaning of the “many Baltics” on different scales — including micro and macro historical approaches — across time and space.

I presented the main concept to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Latvia, and they were very receptive to the idea. So now we have this event, co-sponsored by AABS, the faculty, and the University of Latvia's Student Council grant for academic events. I believe it will attract young historians from diverse backgrounds and academic interests. Most importantly, this won't just be another seminar. We'll have a very interactive format, including workshops and round-table discussions, and students will have an opportunity to visit academic collections in Riga that hold historical sources significant on a Northern European scale.

AABS: That sounds like a fantastic idea! From your perspective, what sort of things are helpful for students at conferences? What sorts of things can conferences provide that help students get the most out of one of these gatherings? Tell me more about some of the more interactive pieces like the workshops.

ED: I believe workshops are especially important. Workshops in small groups of 10-15 students are designed for active participation, open discussion, collaborative idea generation, and hands-on practice of new academic or digital skills. Within this supportive environment, students can ask questions and receive personalized feedback, which facilitates a deeper understanding of the learning process.

At the seminar, we'll offer three parallel sessions for participants to choose from: "Digital History: Spatial and Social Aspects of the Baltic History," "Critical Cultural Heritage: Narratives, Conflicts, and Transformations in the Context of the Baltics," and a PhD workshop. The workshop leaders come from diverse countries and academic backgrounds.

For example, one of the digital humanities workshops will be hosted in collaboration with a research team from the Faculty of Humanities. Another workshop will be a collaboration with the Latvian State Historical Archives, which will provide an opportunity to study Hansa documentary heritage, a collection nominated for the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. Additionally, the research team from the EU-funded project "Critical History Tours" will introduce participants to their newly created concepts, which are designed to facilitate academic research and public history.

Beyond the workshops, we'll have other interactive formats, including city tours guided by local researchers. These

tours will feature medieval, social, and Art Nouveau heritage within Riga's urban landscape.

AABS: This sounds wonderful; it's such a great diversity of programming. With regards to the AABS Academic Events and Projects Grant, this was the first time we offered it, and that was because we got a demand signal from the community that this kind of funding was needed. Could you say a bit about how the grant is going to help with organizing the conference?

ED: The grant will be incredibly helpful. We're going to use it to cover accommodation and meal expenses for our participants. This is a four-day student seminar, so that support is essential to ensure people can attend and fully engage. The Faculty of Humanities and the Student Council of the University of Latvia will also help with funding some of the expenses.

The AABS grant truly made our dream a reality; it allows us to organize the ISHA seminar and bring this community together. I'm very grateful for the AABS initiative to establish this grant, and I hope it will continue to support researchers, especially the younger generation, in the Baltic states and beyond.

AABS: I'm really glad to hear that, and that gets to one of AABS's main priorities with our funding: to support students and early career scholars. They're the ones who need the funding, disproportionately, and they're the future of the field. Speaking of the future, you have this conference coming up in early December. Beyond that, what's next for you? Are there particular results that you want to see coming out of the conference?

ED: I'd really like to see ISHA expand into the Baltic states by creating new sections in each Baltic country. I also think the ISHA Winter Seminar could be the beginning of a long-term collaboration between ISHA and Latvian institutions and organizations.

Beyond that, the co-organizers and ISHA are planning to apply for a European-level grant. We're in the early planning phase for that, focused on building our infrastructure and strengthening our collaboration. This grant could secure funding for two or three years, which would allow us to accomplish so much more.

AABS: That sounds like a great goal to have. Good luck with the conference!

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LIBERATION THROUGH MUSIC: STUDYING SACRED COMPOSITIONS IN TALLINN

OKSANA NESTERENKO, INTERVIEWED BY BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

OKSANA NESTERENKO IS A 2025 RECIPIENT of an AABS Research Grant for Emerging Scholars, an annual award to scholars who have completed their doctoral dissertation within the last ten years. Oksana earned her PhD in Music History and Theory from Stony Brook University and currently teaches at Union County College in New Jersey. We spoke with her about her book project, *A Forbidden Fruit? Sacred Music in the USSR Before its Fall*, for which she conducted research using the AABS grant.

AABS: Oksana, thanks so much for joining us. You received the AABS Research Grant for Emerging Scholars earlier this year, and you've already completed your research. Tell us a bit about it and the book you're working on!

ON: My book is about religious revival in the Soviet Union from the 1960s to the collapse of the Soviet Union, specifically focusing on musical works. I examine how sacred music was composed in an atheist state, and I compare different places across the Soviet Union: Estonia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Russia. All of these countries are Christian, but they're of different confessions, and of course they're culturally and geographically disparate. One of my goals with the book is to challenge this conception of Soviet music as just Russian music. I want to show how all of these different places produce different music.

AABS: That sounds like an admirable goal. It seems like it fits into something that's been particularly present in Baltic Studies in recent years: the idea of decolonization. How do we think about studying the Baltic states and the Baltic Sea region outside of the imperial context? Could you speak to that trend? Are there some preliminary conclusions you have from your work as you're comparing these countries?

ON: Definitely. First of all, I think we should study the former Soviet republics not as peripheries, but as cultural centers. I see it a lot in my research, especially in Tallinn. Tallinn was really a cultural capital in the Soviet Union: There were more performances of avant-garde music than elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and the Soviets themselves thought of Tallinn as a center of Western culture.

My research shows in more detail which specific works were performed, and I noticed definite differences in censor-



Oksana Nesterenko

ship when comparing my cases. There's censorship both of the style of music and of religious topics, so sacred music was particularly intriguing.

On this scale, I think Tallinn was more free, in a way, because it was so close to the West. Estonians were listening to Finnish radio, for example, and the borders between Western and Estonian culture were more frequently crossed.

But at the same time, there was more pressure from Moscow, both overt and implied, some of which was historically based dating back to when the Soviet Union deported tens of thousands of Estonians in the 1940s. Estonian cultural elites were still very cautious and afraid of doing the "wrong thing" throughout the whole existence of Soviet Estonia.

For example, with respect to the sacred music that I study, Arvo Pärt, who is the most famous Estonian composer and one of the best known contemporary composers in the world, composed a sacred work called "Credo" in the 1960s. It was allowed to be performed, at first, because the censors didn't notice it, but after they did, there was a huge scandal and shutdown.

One of my interviewees told me about how when she was at music school in the 1980s, she studied sacred music by for-

eign composers, but the students were not allowed to compose masses by themselves.

No sacred music by Estonian composers was publicly performed, and many refrained from even composing sacred music in private, until the late 1980s when things began to open up with Gorbachev's glasnost policy. This idea of self-censorship I think really speaks to decolonization studies.

The final chapter of my book discusses the changes in the states that have just restored their independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. A big part of that is how composers experienced and exercised freedom by really focusing on the national culture and being proud of cultural achievements.

AABS: The pre- and post-fall comparisons are always a fertile ground for study. Could you speak a bit about the impact that the AABS Emerging Scholars Grant had on your research? I know it helped facilitate some of your research in Tallinn.

ON: Yes, absolutely. This book is adapted from my doctoral dissertation, and while I did have a chapter in my dissertation about Tallinn, I decided to make significant changes for the book. I had discovered new musical works after I finished my dissertation, and I wanted to study those more closely. The biggest change for the book, then, is that I write about composers who were perhaps less well known, whereas I had just briefly mentioned them in my dissertation.

I discovered after my dissertation research that five Estonian composers wrote Catholic masses in 1989. And if you think about Estonia as a very small nation, about 1.5 million people at the time, and there were maybe 20 significant composers. Five of them, one quarter, wrote Catholic masses in the same year, choral works in the Western classical tradition.

I thought this was a really interesting phenomenon and I wanted to describe why it happened. I examined all five works and did more archival research on them. I went to the Estonian Theater and Music Museum and I looked at concert programs from the era to see what was performed and what composers were writing in the programs notes about those pieces. That information is not available online.

That said, one great thing about research in Estonia is that most major periodicals are digitized, so before going to Tallinn, I was able to research via these periodicals and see some of what was written about some of these works. But sometimes a performance can happen and there is no response in the press, so you have to go to the archives.

I also went to the National Archives of Estonia, where I looked at things like meeting minutes from the composers' union and TV scripts, some of which were never actually shown. I could see what was discussed, what people were planning. I also did interviews with eyewitnesses and talked to scholars at the Estonian Music Academy. That's really something important, when you can have that personal conversa-

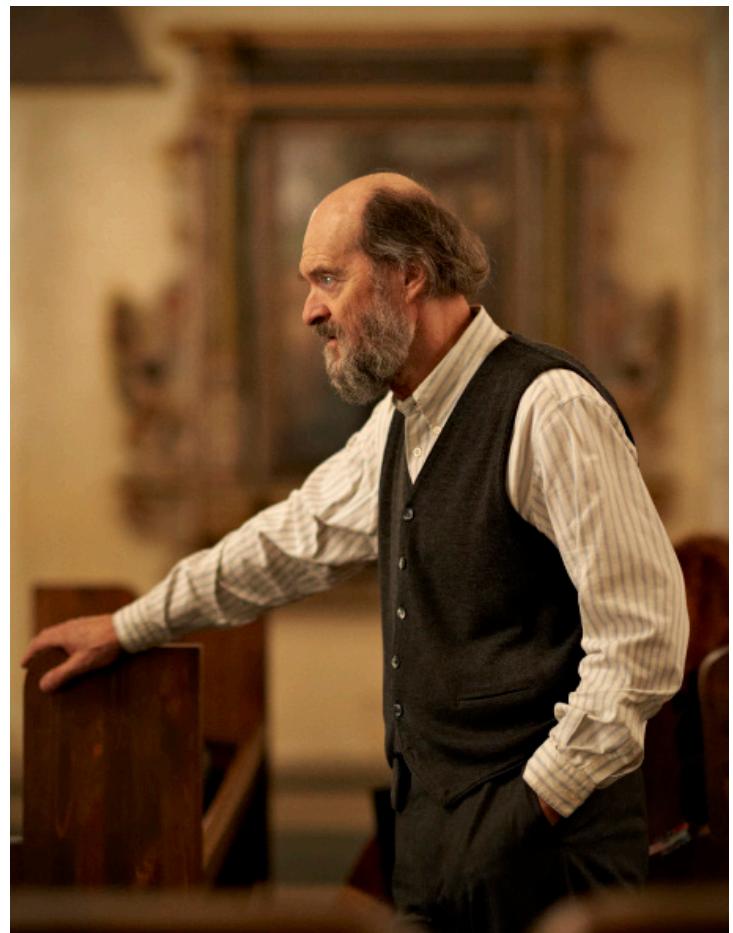
tion and you can just connect with someone.

Across all this research, I saw that almost everyone was describing the trends of the time in almost the same way: Sacred music in Estonia was a manifestation of liberation. Composers felt that they could finally compose sacred music, and for them, this meant freedom.

Another thing I will add: These travel grants for research are very important, because you have to visit the place to understand it. I talked to a lot of scholars who said, "Oh, religion in Estonia is very complicated because it's the most secular country in Europe." But that doesn't quite do it justice, because there is such lively religious life in Estonia.

On a Sunday, I went to the center of Tallinn and attended a portion of five different services at different churches: some Catholic, some Protestant, all different denominations. Some were very traditional, and some were very contemporary. Being able to experience each of them and see the venues allowed me to really connect with the stories I'm writing.

AABS: I completely agree about the importance of travel, and I'm glad that AABS was able to help facilitate that experience and your research. We look forward to seeing your book — good luck!



Composer Arvo Pärt | Photo by Kaupo Kikkas, Arvo Pärt Centre

LATVIAN SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR II: NATIONAL UNITS IN OCCUPYING ARMIES

HARRY MERRITT, INTERVIEWED BY BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

EACH YEAR, AABS AWARDS TWO Book Publication Subventions (BPS) of up to \$5,000 for individually authored books, edited volumes, and multiple-authored books in English that make a substantial scholarly contribution to Baltic Studies. Priority is given to a single author's first monograph. Applications, which must be from publishers, are accepted on a rolling basis year-round.

The most recent BPS went to Oxford University Press (OUP) for publishing *Latvian Soldiers of World War II: Fighting for the Homeland in Nazi and Soviet Service*, by Harry Merritt. OUP will use the BPS award to fund the inclusion of graphics in the book, including an original map and copyrighted images. We sat down with Merritt, a multiple-time AABS grantee, to discuss the book, which is forthcoming in 2026.

AABS: Harry, thanks so much for taking the time to chat about your book, *Latvian Soldiers of World War II*. Previously, you received the AABS Emerging Scholars Grant, just two years ago for similar research. Could you tell us a little bit about the book to start? What is it about and how did you get to the topic?

HM: Thanks for having me! The book is an evolution of my PhD dissertation, which I completed at Brown University. I was interested in looking at the topic of soldiers from Latvia in World War II, because there are national formations created by both of the occupying powers, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union: the Waffen-SS Latvian Legion and the Red Army's Latvian Rifle Corps. Those national formations were roughly equal in size, about two combat divisions each.

This equivalence prompted me to ask the initial guiding question of this research: What does it mean to be in a national unit when you're serving in the army of an occupying power?

How does nationalism work here? How can occupiers motivate people? What agency do Latvians have, in an occupied territory, to make this their own cause? How much wiggle room do they have to operate under this framework?

There's another set of questions about memory and historiography, which has become bifurcated. In Soviet Latvia, they really only looked at the Latvian soldiers in the Red Army and celebrated them as heroes. Occasionally they would also vilify the Latvians on the German side. Then, among the Latvian diaspora, they would generally celebrate those in the

Latvian Legion and vilify or ignore those on the Soviet side. This has continued even after the restoration of Latvian independence in 1991, between the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities in Latvia, and I wanted to bring it all together.

It's not a case study or a collection of case studies. It is a unified history that juxtaposes the military formations, considers the common context, and considers convergences over time.

AABS: That's a great overview, thanks. It certainly sounds like the sort of breadth that deserves monograph treatment, which gets into the origin of this work. As is the case with a lot of high quality history dissertations, they get turned into a first book. What was that process like of converting the dissertation into a book?

HM: I think it's different for everyone. My dissertation committee, especially my advisor Omer Bartov, told me to try to write this like a book, and not like a stereotypical dissertation which can be overly filled with jargon and very historiographical. Dissertations can also be very defensive because PhD candidates are just entering the world of academia and can feel that they have not mastered the subject. In a way, you're looking at two different genres.

One thing that was very helpful was to have a dissertation that I could set aside. It's something that generally someone has intensively worked on for years, and at some point you can no longer see possible areas to edit. Setting it aside for a little while and coming back to it I think was helpful for me specifically.

At my defense and beyond, in conference presentations and other venues, I came to think that there was more to the story than I told in the dissertation. My dissertation focused on the war years themselves and incorporated more historical background. I changed this in the book manuscript: Both works are six chapters, but I radically compressed and moved the first chapter from the dissertation, and I added a new chapter about the post-war thinking about veterans and their activities. It's not just that they are people who had served, but they are also memory actors in their own right. They are political actors who have shaped this process in different ways across time, both in the Latvian SSR and in the Western diaspora, and then in Latvia since 1991.

That change required me to do a little bit more research, and that's where the AABS Emerging Scholars Grant was really helpful for me. I was able to go back to archives in Latvia and research some collections that dealt with the end of the war and the post-war years, looking in particular at diaspora and veterans organizations.

I also did further research through my postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Vermont, in particular at the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University. I had actually completely overlooked the Hoover Archives previously, because I was not aware of the collections that they held. I only fully grasped it when I arrived there, and it was very useful for me, not only in adding more to the post-war story, but adding more to the wartime story.

I think it's a problem for many Baltic history topics and Baltic historians: The archives are scattered, and there's an imperial dimension. You'll find some archival records in places like Moscow, or for me, also Freiburg, Germany, where the German military archives are. There's also archival collections in the U.S., of course, so it's a lot of tracking down what you need.

Take the Latvian Legion Archives, for example: You'll find a little bit in Riga, you'll find a little bit in Freiburg. You'll find a little bit in Stanford. You'll find a little bit in Moscow and Podolsk, Russia. It's just all over the place. The AABS Emerging Scholars Grant helped me to really complete this post-dissertation research, and I think the book is a much stronger and more comprehensive work for that.

AABS: That's great to hear. I think it's a similar story with a lot of post-dissertation books: There's more that you find you can do, and you don't have to be worried in the same way as you might with a dissertation. So what comes next? You've got this book slated for publication; what else are you working on at the moment?

HM: As with many book projects, there are some loose ends to tie up, and there's another article or two I'd like to submit this summer to get something else out of this. I was able to publish an article during my postdoc about what I termed the "lost cause mythology of the Latvian Legion veterans." I published that in the *Journal of Modern European History*, and it was an attempt to try to use this frame of reference from American history about the memory of the Civil War. I thought it applied very well in a way that no one had thought to do. There's also the "liberation," which you always have to put in quotation marks with the Baltic states because when the Red

Army returns in 1944-45, they frame it as a liberation, but it's understood in the legal sense, and I think in the generally in the sense of memory sense, in Latvia as an occupation, either as a third occupation or the restoration of Soviet occupation. I used the sources to think through that.

Beyond that, I've also been thinking about World War II Latvian soldiers who then entered service in Western armies. I gave a conference presentation at the most recent AABS conference, and I'd like to do something with that. So there's other threads to pursue there.

My postdoc at the University of Vermont was a dual appointment in History and Holocaust Studies, and that's a topic that I've become more interested in over time. It was always a

part of the story as I was writing the dissertation, always an interest of mine, and certainly I worked with a PhD advisor for whom that was a central topic. That has me moving in this direction of thinking about the Holocaust in Latvia and its aftermath. In particular, I have two book chapters in the making. One is about Latvian Jewish identity over time, based on something I presented at a conference earlier this year.

The other is on the memory of the Holocaust and related topics of controversy in Latvia. This is a bigger

project that I see coming together in the future. I gave an initial talk at the University of Vermont this spring which I titled "Dueling Diasporas," because I was thinking about the ways in which memory was carried forward after the war by two distinct groups.

One was Latvian Jewish Holocaust survivors, and the other was ethnic Latvian refugees. Each of them thinks a great deal about occupation and atrocity in Latvia. What I found interesting is the ways in which different groups, different refugee diaspora networks, were trying to narrate this and tell this story, and the ways in which they also sometimes were talking past one another or coming into direct conflict with one another. The work is all related in some way!

AABS: It's a fascinating mix of topics that you've got on your plate, and I'm excited to see what comes of these projects. Good luck!

Harry Merritt speaks more about his research in his 2022 interview on the Baltic Ways podcast: <https://aabs-balticstudies.org/podcast/>.

Learn more and apply for the AABS Book Publication Subvention at <https://aabs-balticstudies.org/aabs-book-publication-subvention/>.

'RUN, RUN, JUMP': INTEGRATING IN ESTONIA THROUGH ART

PARKER WATT, INTERVIEWED BY BEN GARDNER-GILL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

EACH YEAR, AABS AWARDS the Baumanis Grant for Creative Projects in Baltic Studies to creative projects that promote Baltic Studies. The Baumanis Grant is an award made to honor Velta Marija Baumanis of Mount Brydges, Ontario, who left a generous bequest to AABS at the end of her career as an architect, and awards a sum of up to \$7,000. The flexibility of the grant welcomes a wide range of proposals, and 2025 was no exception. Three grants were ultimately awarded.

Peter Dajevskis received the Baumanis Grant for his project about Latvian immigration to Philadelphia. Dajevskis, a longtime leader in the Latvian-American community, will draw on extensive archival material, paired with secondary sources, to produce a short narrative film about the Latvian immigration experience.

Ingmar Kiviloo was awarded the Baumanis Grant for his project "Laulu võim" (The Power of Song). Kiviloo, an Estonian multi-instrumentalist and composer, will create an interactive virtual book that explores the cultural and historical significance of song festivals across Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, as well as in their diaspora communities and among exiles in Siberia.

Finally, Parker Watt received the Baumanis Grant for his documentary film project about Ukrainian artists living in Estonia.



Parker Watt

AABS: Parker, thanks for joining me, especially as I know you're due to head back to Estonia shortly. Before we get into the details of the project, I want to know how you got interested in Baltic Studies. We have a similar background in that we don't have any Baltic roots, then came to Stanford University as undergrads, four years apart, and discovered the field. Where did it start for you?

PW: My journey to the Baltics started at Stanford. I was an International Relations major, and the language I took was Russian. However, as I was learning the language and understanding the history surrounding it more, I ultimately came to understand its geopolitical complexities, and I became more intrigued with the Baltics' history and culture. This began to shift my focus, and I first ended up going to Latvia.

During my time in Latvia, I kept being told, "Oh, you have to go to Estonia." I then found an internship through

Stanford at the Johann Skytte Institute at the University of Tartu, and the rest is history. I fell in love with Estonia, with Tartu, with the university, the whole place.

I returned to Stanford after the internship, but was thinking about how I could get back there after graduating. While I was on the internship, we were in the process of helping set up the Ukraine Center at the University of Tartu, to promote interest in Ukraine as well as an opportunity for scholars to study Ukraine. Through that, I met some of the Ukrainian community there. Another side of this as well is that I wanted to figure out how to incorporate my non-academic, but perhaps equally important, interest in filmmaking.

As I started talking to people, the idea of culture kept coming up. Culture as something that lasts beyond the current moment. That's particularly true right now with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine still going on, and even



Parker Watt participates with his folk dance group in XXI Tantsupidu in Tallinn in July 2025.

then, culture will outlast it. I thought it would be interesting to see how people are continuing culture, and ultimately I landed on the practice of art as one form of cultural practice. Through iterations, over the year, I landed on my format, which is 12 independent short films on Ukrainian artists in Estonia across song, dance, and visual arts. Each film focuses on an individual artist discussing how their art form is helping them continue their sense of national identity, but also how it's a form of healing and how it is helping them integrate into their new Estonian community.

AABS: Fantastic! It sounds like it's a project that really came together from natural impulses. Where are you in the production sequence right now?

PW: I'm post-production for all 12 films, doing editing. I've spoken to many more individuals, of course, but these 12 are the ones that we've landed on. I'm looking forward to having them shown at the end of September at the Vabamu Museum in Tallinn thanks to the AABS Baumanis Grant.

It's been a really special experience. When I was going into this, I knew of Estonia's support for Ukraine, and I knew that that was an angle I wanted to talk about. I was also interested in learning more about Ukrainian culture. It's been amazing to work with dance groups and musicians, to learn about traditional Ukrainian instruments and dance, and to hear about how those Ukrainians see a lot of their own identity, or similarities, with the Estonian dance and the Estonian music that

they're also learning. It's been cool to be an outsider in some ways, but also to be welcomed into both of these communities and actually given the room to ask these questions.

AABS: Speaking of song and dance, Laulupidu and Tantsupidu (the Estonian Song and Dance Festival, held every five years) was very recent. Were you able to be there?

PW: I was actually in Tantsupidu.

AABS: You were in Tantsupidu! Oh, tell me about that. What was that like?

PW: I knew that these two events were happening this year, and when I first got to Estonia, I knew that I wanted to get involved in some way, shape, or form. Dance is obviously a physical thing, and I thought that would be fun to continue through the winter, as it got dark, so that I could stay active. But I was told, "Oh, since you're new to Estonia and you don't speak Estonian fluently, it's going to be very difficult to get into one of these groups, because everyone wants to do it this year."

I thought, "Oh well, that's a shame," and then I was walking out of a cafe and saw on the wall that someone was looking for a dance partner. I literally pulled off a ticket, texted the number, and said, "Hey, I'm an American. I just got here. I want to learn more about Estonian culture and dance. Would you be willing to let me dance with you?"

And she said, "Yeah, come on." Then everyone in the dance group was like, "What's this American doing here?" It was all in Estonian and it definitely helped my vocabulary, at least the very niche vocabulary of dance. But there I was. We rehearsed for nine months and auditioned and it was phenomenal.

AABS: I have to ask: Do you have a favorite term or phrase?

PW: Oh, that's a great question. Well, this isn't very specific, but I have my trainer's voice stuck in my head saying, "Jookse! Jookse! Hüppa!" which is "Run! Run! Jump!"

AABS: I imagine that will be stuck for some time. Now, I've been to Laulupidu, but just as an audience member. What was it like for you coming in as an outsider and performing?

PW: I'm happy to hear that you actually have been there, so you know what the experience is, because it's very difficult to really explain the magnitude of it. Regarding outsiders, international groups which come to Tantsupidu are considered in their own region, so they all have their own specific dance that they do, and then obviously they're also a part of the finale where all 11,000 dancers are dancing together, which is absolutely insane.

But I was just one person in a local dance group from Southern Estonia. That experience was very uncomfortable at first. How do I keep up? And in dance classes there were always snickers as they would say, "tagasi," going backwards, and I would still go forward and bump into another person. I acclimated, though. The experience of being in that group was one of my favorite parts of the year, and it was actually one of the things that I looked forward to the most, because that group really did accept me. They were very kind. It truly did become a close group of friends.

Then the actual week of Tantsupidu was really emotional for me, just because I had been anticipating it this whole year. It was funny to see how whereas now my group was so familiar with helping me as a non-native speaker through all these things, there were now hundreds of other groups who were confused: What does this person do? Why aren't they doing what we're doing? I had to rely on my group, but also experience what it was like to be just in the mass of Estonians.

I got emotional when I came down into the stadium for the finale, and my group was one of the last ones in, so you see all these people there. This whole experience got me energized creatively for the summer, and that's where we get to my project. Tying into my Tantsupidu experience, two things come to mind.

First of all, I've been really fortunate to be able to do some of the artwork with the Ukrainian artists whom I've

interviewed. I think that has allowed me to feel, to understand, when people talk about their own artwork being meditative or it creating a place that brings people together. I've experienced that in those communities.

Similarly, I think that being in this other community, the Estonian community as an outsider, gives me a bit of a perspective to be able to relate to those that I'm speaking with on what it's like to be an outsider in Estonia, and what it's like to try to integrate. That has been a talking point and I think that a lot of Ukrainians talk about those similarities. I'm able to discuss that with them, and I think it's been really helpful to understand some level of the psychology. It's also really helpful to just say, "I'm here, I'm open, I'm here to learn."

AABS: I'm sure that goes a long way. Tell me more about your Ukrainian interviewees. Why artists, one? And how did you go about finding them?

PW: Why artists? That goes back to my thinking before coming to Estonia, questioning how I could take on "culture," which is just huge and very difficult to define. I knew I didn't want to go with a political slant, because so many people were already talking about that, and I felt like art was something pretty tangible for the most part.

Art is both a representation of the artist's experience of their current moment, their expression, but also has a lineage to traditions, or a certain connection to their homeland, and in that way one can feel like they're also connecting to the future.

I felt like with this model of a past, present, and future, I could deal with that framework and work with it. There were a lot of angles I could have taken, because I grew up doing theater, I had some ideas for projects at Stanford that didn't come to fruition, and I'm interested in other forms of art, but this was the approach that worked.

So I have this idea, and now I have to find these people. As I said, I already knew some people. When I first was on my internship through Stanford, I met people that were involved in Ukraina Maja, which is the Ukrainian House, a culture center, in Tartu. That was the first point of entry: talking with people in that community, just going to those events, and becoming interested in learning about their culture. It was cool because I was there as an outsider as well, alongside the Estonians who were also trying to learn about Ukrainian culture.

After a few months, I had maybe two or three artists whom I had really built a relationship and friendship with. They were the first people to say yes, and I worked with them. After we worked together, they then gave me a few connections.

Also, the Association of Ukrainian Organizations in Estonia, which is based in Tallinn, was very helpful in con-

necting me with people as well. I would reach out to them, talk about my project, and try to build a bit of a relationship with them first to make sure they know who I am and I know who they are.

There have been a few one-offs where I get a recommendation to contact a specific person, like in Viljandi or Pärnu for example, and so then I would reach out to them and if they were interested, we would do an interview.

AABS: I'm interested in two things in particular from what you just said. First, the process of building up trust and rapport with an interviewee. What was that like? Second, you mention Viljandi and Pärnu. Those are not necessarily easy places for a refugee: They're welcoming communities, but they're not large. A refugee is not going to find a pre-existing community for themselves there. What is that like for those artists?

PW: Yeah, absolutely. To your first point about putting people on camera, that was something I worked on very closely with my advisor at the University of Tartu, Piret Ehin. We were very diligent in making sure we were taking the right steps and following the best practices, because refugees are a very vulnerable community.

To your question about the smaller cities, I think in particular the woman in Viljandi was maybe the only Ukrainian there. She did have a small community that she was welcomed into, and her daughter integrated very quickly, learning English and Estonian. For my subject, watching that occur was I think very joyful for her, even though she obviously felt this loss of what she did once have. The crux of our conversation was about how her art has allowed her to connect with the local community. She has this small group of artists, and that's her community. She did describe it as difficult, though. Viljandi is a very Estonian city, with not many foreigners.

I discussed this with the woman in Pärnu as well. I think that there are times where it's more difficult to connect in those smaller communities, Estonians are very welcoming of these individuals and they do want to help. It's just a question of does that person find those other people that they connect with? I would say overall, people feel a positive experience. It just might be that they're going through a very hard time as well.

AABS: That's good to hear, and knowing Estonian society, it's not surprising to me. Let's zoom out a bit and talk about the experience of Ukrainian artists in Estonia writ large. Painting with a broad brush, to pardon the pun, what would you say that experience is?

PW: My initial instinct is to speak about how for pretty much every person I talk to, there is this idea of a shared

sense of common past, of understanding what it's like, how Estonians understand Ukrainians on a deeper level because they both have this Soviet past, the tragedies they've had to go through and overcome as a nation.

In both cases, art was a big part of the national re-awakening with the fall of communism. I think that Ukrainians not only feel that support, but also oftentimes identify with that past and seek to connect themselves to it. This is especially true as creatives who may feel like their artwork is their way of fighting, or their way of defending Ukraine. There is a shared sense of past, art's place in the past, and a dream for the future.

Another thing I would point to is healing. I have talked with individuals who have used art as a way of finding normalcy in their life. It can help them define their own past and set their own future. I've worked with artists who have specifically engaged in therapeutic work, via art, to actually walk other Ukrainians through this healing process.

A third aspect I'd point to is discovery and education. There are a lot of individuals who I've spoken to who are from Eastern Ukraine and lived in areas that were more russified. They spoke about how they wanted to educate themselves, to figure out what they wanted to push away, whatever that influence was in their previous lives, and what they wanted to define for themselves as Ukrainian. That's an inward-facing experience in the diaspora community. They meet other Ukrainians, learn about other parts of the country, and find mutual healing and identity through that.

AABS: These are insights that clearly come from a lot of deep engagement with the community, so thank you for sharing. The interview process is its own beast, though, beyond getting integrated into a community. What is something you learned from the interviews specifically that you think you might not have gotten otherwise? Something that came from putting someone in front of a camera.

PW: Two things come to mind. Interviews, by their nature, allow me to ask these more poignant questions, how do you feel about this? Or, what is your motivation right now? What was this particular experience like? At first, there were certain topics that I had to learn to discuss. These individuals have been through very difficult times, but over time, I grew a rapport with them and then they felt comfortable with me asking certain questions.

They also know that this is how their voice is going to be heard and how they're going to be shown to an external audience, and so they also are thoughtful with the words that they're saying. Now, that also means that maybe there are times where someone presents themselves how they want to be seen, but I really do feel I got better answers than if I were just some random guy.



Parker Watt captures film for his documentary film project about Ukrainian artists living in Estonia.

The second thing comes from the fact that these videos are not just sit-down interviews. I'm also videoing these people's artistic practice and making stories about their life. It has been fascinating whenever you have someone maybe painting, or in the process, and their subconscious is what's talking to you. That's where emotions really come out and you see the human side.

AABS: I know it's a bit meta of me to ask a question about interviewing while interviewing you, but I really appreciate the insight, and it gets to one of the core reasons we go with this format: We can learn more about you as Parker. Now as we're wrapping up, could you tell us a bit more about the Vabamu premiere and whether you have other screenings planned? Where can people see the films if they can't make it to a screening?

PW: First of all, the Vabamu premiere is made possible by the AABS Baumanis Grant, so thank you for that. That event will be on Sept. 24 of this year. I'm really thankful for

the grant, because it will permit us to have a bigger event that will allow the artists and other friends to have a moment where they can come together in the same room. Some of the people I've worked with haven't met each other, and I'm very excited to introduce them. Hopefully, it's a night that people learn something from, and if they're not already familiar with the Ukrainian community in Estonia, it sparks an interest. The Baumanis Grant will also allow me to have a screen at Vabamu where visitors can watch these videos after the screening as well.

I will have a website for this project where people can view the videos. The working title, which I think will be the final title, is "Resilient Expression: Ukrainian Artists in Estonia," so you can search for that online. I'm talking with a few other places about doing screenings as well, and I'm excited to potentially have a few other events.

AABS: That sounds wonderful. Good luck with the rest of the editing, and good luck with the premiere!

BALSSI 2025: PREPARING A NEW GENERATION OF BALTIC STUDIES SCHOLARS & PROFESSIONALS

KATHLEEN EVANS, DIRECTOR OF THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE WORKSHOP

THE BALTIC STUDIES SUMMER INSTITUTE (BALSSI) 2025 provided eight weeks of intensive online instruction in elementary Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian through Indiana University's Language Workshop. The program served 15 students from around the world across the three languages with support from institutional and governmental partners.

BALSSI 2025 recorded a 100% increase in application rates compared to 2024, with 36 applications. The program ultimately enrolled nine students in Estonian, three in Latvian, and three in Lithuanian. Key to the increased interest was host Indiana University's addition of a BALSSI coordinator to manage recruitment and outreach specifically for the BALSSI programs.

BALSSI 2025 was led by returning instructors Piibi-Kai Kivik (Estonian), Jura Avizienis (Lithuanian), and Solvita Burr (Latvian). Together with the BALSSI coordinator, they expanded and reshaped BALSSI 2025's cocurricular programming by resurrecting lapsed partnerships and forging new ones with embassies, consulates, and private enterprises.

To build upon the success of these efforts, the BALSSI 2026 team is working to (re-)introduce for-credit Baltic Studies minicourses to supplement language instruction and rebalance BALSSI's content, which has leaned heavily toward language in recent years.

BALSSI 2025 was funded by the member institutions of the Baltic Studies Consortium and by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. Indiana provides tuition remissions and direct support to lower the cost of BALSSI and increase the program's accessibility.

The termination and suspension of federal funding programs upon which BALSSI has relied presents novel challenges for BALSSI 2026. The Department of State's Title VIII program for Training in Eastern Europe, which has long provided fellowships for BALSSI attendees (almost \$45,000 in 2025, funding eight of the 15 students in the program), will not be available in 2026. The status of the Department of Education's Title VI program, which contributed roughly a third of the 2025 BALSSI budget, was unclear as of the writing of this article.

Indiana University is responding to the anticipated loss of BALSSI funding by: (1) working to reduce program costs wherever possible; (2) by adding Baltic Studies minicourses in English that may be taken with or without the corresponding BALSSI language courses; (3) by expanding the BALSSI Coordinator position to expand outreach, recruiting, and non-

federal fundraising. Hopefully, these efforts will allow BALSSI to maintain program continuity during a summer when non-AABS support for language study is wholly or entirely absent.

Indiana University and the BALSSI team would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies and the member institutions of the Baltic Studies Consortium, whose contributions have supported the program for many years, and whose continued support will be more important than ever in 2026.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON ESTONIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING

“The 2025 Summer Course of Intensive Introductory Estonian [...] has been the most productive and successful language programs that I have ever been a part of. Although the workload was very heavy, and the course very fast paced, I never felt so overwhelmed to where I felt I wasn't rapidly improving. I had tried for over a year to utilize self-study materials for the instruction of Estonian, but none of them ever succeeded in introducing me into the practical grammar, real life usage, and logic of Estonian like Piibi-Kai Kivik was able to as a language instructor. As I return to some of the self-study materials now, I am 100% more cognizant and capable of interacting with them, thanks entirely to this course.”

“Every week brought at least a dozen things that felt like progress towards my ultimate goal. Every day I could form several new sentences that I had never been able to utter before. I can't wait until I can use my ability to read to further my study into what has been written about Estonian history in the Estonian language that has never exited the country. This year I was very fortunate to hear about the history of Livonian and Lutsi languages from the leading expert in the field. I hope I can eventually tap into more Estonian language academic works on folklore and the iron age past.”

“Now that the course is over, I can confirm that Estonian would be a very hard language to master, but learning the basics is much less intimidating than people make it out to be. In relatively little time I've learned how to talk about my interests, my family, my home, my hobbies, and my work.”

For more information about BALSSI or to support Baltic language education, contact the IU Language Workshop or visit aabs-balticstudies.org/.

WINGATE UNIVERSITY CONTINUES BALTIC STUDIES OFFERINGS

JOSEPH M. ELLIS, WINGATE UNIVERSITY

The Baltic Studies Reading Room at Wingate University has grown to more than 7,000 titles covering all things Baltic Studies. This summer, Inga Harpley, a local student from Waxhaw, North Carolina, helped to curate and catalog our Lithuanian collection.

Harpley, who will attend Drake University in the fall, and her mother, Irma Harpley, a native of Lithuania, have been instrumental in organizing the Lithuanian materials. Inga said she loved the job so much that she will come back after college to continue the project. Inga's work was supported in part by an AABS grant.

AABS was happy to support a recent lecture by Adam Lenton (Wake Forest University) as part of the Wingate University Baltic Studies Speaker's Series. Over 170 students attended to learn about Russia's war in Ukraine, ethnic mobilization, and how a post-Putin future might look.



Inga Harpley



Creating Leaders of the Baltic States for more than a decade!

Continuing a longstanding American commitment to the Baltic region, the Baltic-American Freedom Foundation (BAFF) mission is to deepen the ties between and among Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States through programs of education and exchange centering on economic growth and democratic values.

Upcoming deadlines for Baltic-American Freedom Foundation scholarship opportunities:

- ◆ The Professional Internship Program for university students and recent graduates.
- ◆ The Research Scholarship Program for professors and others in academia.

Find out more: www.BalticAmericanFreedomFoundation.org about our work and BAFF Alumni



BALSSI 2026

The **Baltic Studies Summer Institute** offers intensive Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian language courses, as well as courses in English on Baltic history and culture and cultural enhancement programs. BALSSI is a cooperative project of the Baltic Languages Consortium, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, and Indiana University.



WHY STUDY WITH BALSSI ?

- Develop functional language proficiency in only 8 weeks
- Distinguish yourself on the job market and in your area of study with knowledge of a rarely studied language
- Excellent preparation for study abroad, travel, and internship/externship opportunities in the Baltic states

ABOUT BALSSI COURSES

- 2 semesters of intensive online Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian
- Online courses in Baltic Studies
- In-state tuition for ALL students, including non-US citizens

BALSSI FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Foreign Language and Area Studies fellows
 - Full tuition + stipend
 - Eligibility: Undergraduate students
- AABS Scholarship
 - Variable amounts
 - Eligibility: All applicants
- Women Engaging Globally Scholarship
 - Variable amounts, up to full tuition
 - Eligibility: Undergraduate women

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Priority Deadline - December 5

Questions? Contact languageworkshop@iu.edu

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