

LITERACY IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY: THE STRIKING CASE OF THE BALTIC PROVINCES

Toivo U. RAUN

Department of Central Eurasian Studies, School of Global and International Studies, Indiana University, 355 N. Jordan Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405-1105, USA; raunt@indiana.edu

This article focuses on the unique position of the Baltic Provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland in terms of literacy rates in the Russian Empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The modern censuses that began to appear by the 1860s revealed reading rates that were triple the all-Russian average in 1897, especially among the mainly Protestant nationalities (the Germans, Estonians, and Latvians). In contrast to the all-Russian situation where the cities and males were much more advanced in literacy skills, the Baltic Provinces also showed a striking equality among urban and rural areas as well as the two genders. The roots of the Baltic region evolving into this outlier position must be sought in certain key historical factors, including the Reformation and the onset of Lutheranism, the aggressive promotion of literacy by the Swedish state, the role of German pietism and the Moravian Brethren, and the early emphasis placed on at least a minimal education for all elements of the population.

One of the major failings in the historiography of the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire (Estland, Livland, and Kurland) has been the tendency to focus too narrowly on a given nationality – typically, the Germans, Estonians, or Latvians – and to view its development in isolation from the multiethnic and multicultural context of the region. The cultural interaction of the nationalities most represented in the Baltic region is all too often ignored, and the role of the smaller-numbered ethnic groups – such as the Russians (as distinguished from the Russian government and its officialdom) and Jews – is virtually invisible in the usual picture of Baltic society before World War I.¹ The study of literacy, as a key component of both social and cultural history, offers an especially useful

¹ A good illustration of this cultural interaction is provided by **Kobolt, E.** *Die deutsche Sprache in Estland am Beispiel der Stadt Pernau*. Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, Lüneburg, 1990, which documents the strikingly large number of words on Russian and Estonian origin in the Baltic German idiom.

vehicle for assessing the interplay among the various nationalities in Estland, Livland, and Kurland and can serve as a means to encourage a more multicultural and broadly based approach to the Baltic past than the prevailing one noted above. Making use of census materials from the last decades of the nineteenth century, this article offers a range of comparative perspectives on the evolution of literacy among the major nationalities in the Baltic Provinces, paying special attention to the following variables: region, ethnicity and religion, the urban-rural dimension, age, and gender.

The high levels of literacy that prevailed only in Estland, Livland, and Kurland at the end of the nineteenth century present an especially striking contrast to the situation in the rest of the Russian Empire with the exception of Finland. In 1897, according to the only tsarist-era census in the empire as a whole, only 28 percent of the total population ten years of age and older had attained the ability to read, and only two sub-regions achieved slightly higher levels than this overall average: 30 percent for the fifty provinces of European Russia, and 41 percent for the Polish provinces.² However, the 1897 figures for the Baltic Provinces – 95 percent for Estland, 92 percent for Livland, and 85 percent for Kurland – tell an entirely different story. The Baltic region clearly forms a separate category within the empire as a whole with its closest individual competitor, St. Petersburg province, trailing far behind at 62 percent.³ Although the exceptional situation of the Baltic Provinces with regard to literacy is generally known, it has not been studied in sufficient detail, in part because of shifting political borders in the twentieth century. In the larger European context, developments in Estland, Livland, and Kurland can be viewed as paralleling those in parts of Western Europe such as the Nordic lands, Scotland, and Switzerland, i.e., economically underdeveloped regions which achieved nearly universal reading skills *before* the onset of modernization and industrialization.⁴

The origins of the high literacy rates in the Baltic Provinces must be sought, first of all, in the Protestant Reformation and its lasting success in the region. In the second quarter of the sixteenth century Lutheranism was embraced by the ruling German elites in the Baltic towns as well as the countryside, and it gradually spread to the Estonian and Latvian peasantry and urban dwellers as well. Above all, Lutheranism was a religion of the book that stressed the crucial role of each believer's individual connection with God through the reading of the Bible and other religious literature. The impact of the Reformation on the spread of literacy was enhanced by the role of the printing revolution that had only

² The 1897 census in the Russian Empire did not query the population on its ability to write.

³ **Богданов И. М.** Грамотность и образование в дореволюционной России и в СССР. Статистика, Москва, 1964, 58–62. The contrast between the Baltic Provinces and neighboring Pskov province, where only 20 percent of the population ten years of age and older could read, is particularly noteworthy.

⁴ **Vincent, D.** *The Rise of Mass Literacy. Reading and Writing Modern Europe.* Polity, Cambridge, 2000, 8; **Houston, R.** *Literacy and society in the west, 1500–1800.* – *Social History*, 1963, 8, 275.

recently begun in the mid-fifteenth century, and it should be remembered that copies of printed material often had multiple readers.⁵ Although the second half of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth were dominated by destructive wars over the legacy of medieval Livonia, consolidated and largely peaceful Swedish rule in Estland and Livland in the last seven decades of the seventeenth century provided a receptive environment for the initial rise of literacy on a mass basis. This period coincided with an aggressive “literacy campaign” undertaken by the political and religious authorities in Sweden proper, culminating in the Church Law of 1686, which was extended to Estland and Livland in the early 1690s.⁶ Although the Baltic region was only temporarily part of the Swedish state and remained on its periphery, the connection had a lasting and crucial impact on the rise of literacy in the two northern Baltic Provinces. As in Sweden itself, a strong tradition of home instruction developed, permitting the spread of reading skills without the necessity for formal instruction in schools, which were only in the process of formation.⁷

Despite the demographic catastrophe that resulted from famine in the late 1690s and especially from plague during the Great Northern War that appears to have drastically reduced the number of people in the Estonian lands to the same level as in 1200, the population roughly tripled in the eighteenth century,⁸ and the reading tradition survived and was further enhanced by the nurturing influence of German pietism and the Moravian Brethren. Peter the Great was favourably inclined toward the pietists, and numerous Halle-based pastors immigrated and filled the vacancies created by the Great Northern War. Although the extent and nature of the impact of the Moravians on the mental world of the Latvian and Estonian peasantry continues to be debated, there is little doubt that their compelling emphasis on active participation by the individual believer provided a

⁵ **Houston, R. A.** Literacy in Early Modern Europe. Culture and Education 1500–1800. Longman, London, 1988, 155–156; **Schofield, R. S.** The measurement of literacy in pre-industrial England. – In: Literacy in Traditional Societies. Ed. J. Goody. Cambridge University Press, 1968, 314–315.

⁶ **Johansson, E.** Literacy campaigns in Sweden. – In: National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. Eds R. F. Arnove et al. Plenum Press, New York, 1987, 68; **Naber, J.** Swedish Government authorities and school education in Estonia. – In: Die schwedischen Ostsee-provinzen Estland und Livland im 16.–18. Jahrhundert. Eds A. Loit et al. Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala, 1993, 356.

⁷ **Johansson, E.** Literacy campaigns in Sweden, 73; **Naber, J.** Swedish Government authorities and school education in Estonia, 356–357. See also **Noodla, K.** Eesti raamatu lugeja XVIII sajandi lõpul ja XIX sajandi algul. (Paar sammukest eesti kirjanduse uurimise teed, 11.) Tallinn, 1986, 10, who notes that instruction at home continued to play a major role for the Estonian peasantry until the mid-nineteenth century, i.e. until the time when an extensive network of schools had been established.

⁸ **Palli, H.** Miks eestlased jäid püsima? – Keel ja Kirjandus, 1995, 38, 479–482. For further detail on the earlier demographic history of Estonia, see Palli’s two fundamental works: Eesti rahvastiku ajalugu aastani 1712. Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, Tallinn, 1996; Eesti rahvastiku ajalugu 1712–1799. Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, Tallinn, 1997.

significant boost to reading – and for the first time, writing – skills among the common folk.⁹ The eighteenth century also witnessed a substantial expansion in the publication of books in the Baltic vernaculars, including the first examples of secular works, e.g. calendar almanacs.¹⁰ Although the available evidence, mainly in the form of visitation protocols, remains fragmentary and not necessarily reliable, for the last decades of the eighteenth century there is considerable documentation that at least half and perhaps as many as two-thirds of adult peasants in Estland and Livland were able to read.¹¹ Thus, despite the continued existence of the institution of serfdom and the enormous gulf in society resulting from it, literacy levels in the Baltic region around 1800 already compared favourably with those in more developed parts of Europe. For the early decades of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the era of peasant emancipation in the Baltic Provinces (1816–1819), it is possible to utilize data from later censuses. For example, those born in 1810 or earlier in Tallinn showed a reading rate of 80 percent (fourteen years of age or older) according to the city's first census in 1871, while of those born in 1821 or earlier in Livland, 84 percent were able to read according to the 1881 census (also fourteen years of age or older). Further documentation of the consolidation of the spread of the ability to read as well as increasing advances in the ability to write among male Estonians is provided by Liivi Aarma in her monograph using military recruitment records from the first three-fourths of the nineteenth century.¹²

A key factor in the Baltic Provinces that differentiated this region from the rest of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century was the establishment of a wide network of rural and urban elementary schools. As noted above, the stage was set for this process by the early emancipation of the Estonian and Latvian serfs, more than four decades before this event occurred in the empire as a whole. In the Lutheran tradition the Baltic German elites – the clergy and the landed nobility – generally accepted the notion that even the Baltic peasantry needed to obtain a minimal reading ability in order to pave the road to salvation. However,

⁹ **Webermann, O. A.** Pietismus und Brüdergemeinde. – In: *Baltische Kirchengeschichte*. Ed. R. Wittram. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1956, 151–152, 165; **Philipp, G.** Die Wirksamkeit der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde unter den Esten und Letten zur Zeit der Bauernbefreiung. Böhlau, Cologne, 1974; **Kahk, J.** Aufklärung und nationale Identität. – In: **Elias, O.-H.** Aufklärung in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Eds O.-H. Elias et al. Böhlau, Cologne, 1996, 43–56.

¹⁰ On the evolution of the Estonian calendar almanacs, which date from 1720, see **Annus, E.** Eesti kalendrikirjandus 1720–1900. Eesti Akadeemiline Raamatukogu, Tallinn, 2000.

¹¹ **Plakans, A.** The Latvians: A Short History. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1995, 68; **Naber, J.** Volksbildung und Schulen der Esten in Est- und Livland im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. – In: **Elias, O.-H.** Aufklärung in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands, 89–93. Naber argues that since they were evaluated at least in part on the reading ability of their peasant congregations, Lutheran pastors may have had a tendency to inflate the actual numbers.

¹² **Raun, T. U.** The development of Estonian literacy in the 18th and 19th centuries. – *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1979, 10, 119; **Aarma, L.** Kirjaoskus Eestis 18. sajandi lõpust 1880. aastateni (nekrutinimekirjade andmeil). Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, Tallinn, 1990.

the Baltic Germans also assumed that in time all Latvians and Estonians would inevitably assimilate to the more advanced German linguistic and cultural world, especially as modernization proceeded. On the other hand, the emerging Estonian and Latvian intelligentsia increasingly saw the logic and the need for education in mother tongue, beginning at the elementary level, but also gradually continuing at higher levels to the point where a *Kultursprache* for each of these nationalities could evolve. During the national awakening era two early contemporaries, Jakob Hurt (1839–1907) for the Estonians and Atis Kronvalds (1837–1875) for the Latvians, were the outstanding advocates for education using the Baltic vernaculars, and the views they expressed were endorsed and reinforced by later Baltic thinkers. Although the struggle for native-language education during tsarist times was only partially successful in the end, the principle of virtually universal elementary education – in whatever language – became more and more firmly entrenched in the course of the nineteenth century.¹³

Let us now turn to the censuses of the last third of the nineteenth century as a source for the study of literacy. As in the Russian Empire in general, in the provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland the reign of Alexander II brought a marked quickening of the pace of life and the first serious steps toward the modernization of society. Following the humiliating defeat in the Crimean War the central government recognized the need for better information about the society it ruled over, and tsarist Russia quickly became an enthusiastic supporter of statistical collection. However, the administrative challenges facing a far-flung land empire that was just beginning to move toward modernity are illustrated by the fact that the first all-Russian census, initially planned for 1875, was only carried out in actual fact more than two decades later in 1897.¹⁴ In the Baltic Provinces as well, ambitious early goals often had to be scaled back, e.g. planned provincial censuses in the late 1860s in Livland and Estland were actually limited only to the urban areas.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the relatively advanced level of development in the Baltic region in the all-Russian context is indicated by their ability to successfully complete a general and simultaneous census for all three provinces already in December 1881.¹⁶

¹³ **Elango, A. et al.** Eesti kooli ajalugu, II: 1860. aastaist 1917. aastani. Teaduste Akadeemia Kirjastus, Tallinn, 2010, 107–112, 120–136, 341–344, 478–490; **Plakans, A.** The Latvians. – In: Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914. Ed. E. C. Thaden. Princeton University Press, 1981, 222–224.

¹⁴ **Brasche, O.** Die Rigaer Volkszählung von 3. März 1867. – Baltische Monatsschrift, 1870, 19, 533–534.

¹⁵ **Jordan, P.** Die Resultate der Volkszählung der Stadt Reval am 16. November 1871. Kluge & Ströhm, Tallinn, 1874, 2.

¹⁶ However, it should be noted that the 1881 census announcement displayed the need to reassure the population that the count had nothing to do with taxes or military service. See Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (EAA), f 3349, n 1, s 198, l 25, 41. In addition, rumors circulated about the alleged re-establishment of the dominant role of the landed nobility, even to the point of restoration of serfdom, and some resistance to the execution of the census took place in certain rural areas. See **Tannberg, E., Tannberg, T.** Rahvaloenduste algusaastatest Eestis. – Kleio, 1989, 2, 33;

Indeed there is no doubt that, beginning in the 1860s, the Baltic Provinces led the way in introducing the most modern available approaches and techniques for counting the population of the Russian Empire, as demonstrated, for example, by Kurland's carrying out the first provincial census in the entire country as early as 1863. It is important to bear in mind that historically the Baltic Provinces had had close ties with the German lands to the west as well as a distinctive awareness of developments in the more advanced parts of Europe. Thus, it is not surprising that the Baltic region was open to experimenting with new approaches to collecting population statistics and served as a model for the rest of the empire.¹⁷ It also appears that the quality of these early censuses was probably the best in the entire country. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Baltic Provinces produced several of the leading and most innovative statisticians in the Russian Empire, e.g. Paul Jordan in Estland and Friedrich von Jung-Stilling in Livland. Jordan, who attained an international reputation for his work, served as secretary of the Estland Statistical Committee for three decades from 1865 until his death in 1894. Probably his most important innovation in contributing to the accuracy of counting the population was his proposal in 1868 to have the province of Estland move to the use of individual census cards and its actual implementation under his direction in the successful Tallinn urban census of 1871.¹⁸

At first glance, the availability of census materials for the years 1863–1871, 1881, and 1897 would seem to suggest a wealth of statistical data that could readily be used for comparative purposes. There are, however, certain factors that limit their usefulness, especially for the study of literacy. First of all, these censuses were conducted by a considerable range of authorities with differing interests and concerns. Among the early ones, only the 1871 count for Tallinn queried the population on literacy. In 1881 separate control commissions were established to oversee the administration of the census in Estland, Livland, and Kurland, and there were no overall guidelines for the process. On the other hand, as might be expected, the all-Russian census of 1897 emphasized a centralized approach that sought to minimize the distinctiveness of the borderlands, including the Baltic region.¹⁹ Second, there is the problem of comparability over time. In fact, the issue of literacy in the two major censuses of 1881 and 1897 was treated in totally different ways. In the Baltic Provinces in 1881, the population was asked about its ability to both read and write, as was common all over Europe at the time. However, in the 1897 all-Russian census the queries only focused on reading skills and excluded the issue of writing, presumably reflecting the per-

Jordan, P. Die Resultate der ehstländischen Volkszählung vom 29. December 1881 in textlicher Beleuchtung. Lindfors' Erben, Tallinn, 1886, 9–15.

¹⁷ **Must, A.** Eestlaste perekonnaloos allikad. Kleio, Tartu, 2000, 159.

¹⁸ **Tannberg, E., Tannberg, T.** Rahvaloenduste algusaastatest Eestis, 29–30, 33.

¹⁹ **Raun, T. U.** Social change in Estland and Northern Livland, 1871–1897: The limits and uses of census data. – In: Population Shifts and Social Change in Russia's Baltic Provinces 1855–1914. Eds G. von Pistohlkors et al. Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, Lüneburg, 1995, 85–86.

ceived low level of education and communicative skills in the empire as a whole.²⁰

Despite these shortcomings the censuses of the late nineteenth century do provide a useful basis for an initial assessment of the cultural development of the inhabitants of the Baltic Provinces in the last decades of the tsarist era. In first of all taking a look at the Baltic era from a regional perspective, it is clear that the reading rates are distinctively high in all three provinces, but a definite difference is noticeable when moving from north to south. As cited above, it is noteworthy that Kurland's rate of 85.0 percent for those ten and older clearly lagged behind both Estland (95.3 percent) and Livland (92.0 percent). The explanation for this situation must be sought in the contrasting experiences in previous historical development. Although historically Lutheran, Kurland was not under Swedish rule in the seventeenth century and, importantly, did not experience the systematic literacy campaign that Estland and Livland did. Furthermore, the activity of the Moravian Brethren, a major factor in encouraging literacy among the common folk, as we have seen, hardly touched Kurland. Fragmentary sources from the eighteenth century suggest that reading rates in Kurland already trailed behind those in Livland and Estland. Where the Moravians did have an impact, i.e. the two northern Baltic Provinces, their influence was more notable in the traditional Estonian areas (Estland and northern Livland) than in the Latvian ones (southern Livland).²¹

With regard to the relationship between literacy and ethnicity similar patterns prevailed in all three provinces. As seen in Table 1, according to the 1897 census the Germans generally led the way in regard to reading ability (topping out on the provincial level in Estland at 99.0 percent for those ten and older), closely followed by the Estonians (also highest in Estland at 96.6 percent) and the Latvians (highest rate in Livland at 93.6 percent). Next came the Poles (78.1 percent in Estland), and further down the list were the Jews (76.7 percent in Estland, 62.3 percent in Kurland) and the Russians (73.9 percent in Estland, but only 54.2 percent in Kurland). The stratification that emerges here clearly had a religious basis as well: the Protestants were at the top, the Catholics and Jews were in the middle, and the Orthodox trailed somewhat further behind, as was the case among Christians of various types and Jews across the Russian Empire as a whole. In this regard it is striking, but not surprising, that the reading levels among Lutheran Latvians in the Baltic Provinces (93.6 percent in Livland, 90.4 percent in Kurland) proved to be much higher than among Catholic Latvians in neighbouring Vitebsk province, i.e., the Latgale region (57.7 percent) (Table 1).

²⁰ **Hausmann, G.** Bildung/Alphabetisierung. – In: Die Nationalitäten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszählung von 1897, 2 vols. Eds H. Bauer et al. Franz Steiner, Stuttgart, 1991, I, 366.

²¹ **Webermann, O. A.** Pietismus und Brüdergemeinde, 158; **Philipp, G.** Die Wirksamkeit der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde unter den Esten und Letten zur Zeit der Bauernbefreiung, 53, 205–223; **Салминь А. Я.** О грамотности крестьян Лифляндской и Курляндской губерний в XVIII в. – История СССР, 1969, 13, 6, 136–140.

Table 1. Partial literacy (reading only) in the Baltic provinces by nationality (%), 1897

Nationality	Estland	Livland	Kurland
Germans	99.0	96.2	91.8
Estonians	96.6	95.8	93.2
Latvians	89.7	93.6	90.4
Poles	78.1	75.3	70.6
Jews	76.7	69.6	62.3
Russians	73.9	61.9	54.2

Population ten years of age and older.

Source: Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи, 1897 г. Т. I-LXXXIX. Центральный Статистический Комитет, Санкт-Петербург, 1899–1905. XIX, 102, 105; XXI, 100, 103; XLIX, 46, 49.

The regional distinction cited above between Estland and Kurland was also evident among the various ethnic groups. With the minor exception of the Latvians all major nationalities had a considerably higher literacy rate in the northernmost Baltic Province. In the case of the ethnic Russian population the difference was as high as 20 percentage points. Thus, for whatever reason (and this issue certainly deserves more study), the environment for fostering at least partial literacy in Estland was considerably more favourable than in Kurland, with Livland falling somewhere in between. In the all-Russian context the Baltic Provinces stand out as a region where all the major nationalities living there achieved higher reading rates than their co-nationals anywhere else in the empire. If the literacy rates in 1897 for Estonians and Latvians in Estland, Livland, and Kurland were only slightly higher than their average for the empire as a whole (96.1 percent vs. 94.1 percent in the Estonian case, 92.1 percent vs. 85.0 percent in the Latvian one), those for the Russians (62.4 percent in the Baltic Provinces vs. 20.3 percent in the empire as a whole), Poles (72.9 percent vs. 41.8 percent), Germans (95.2 percent vs. 78.5 percent), and Jews (65.4 percent vs. 50.1 percent) differed substantially.²² Indeed in the case of the Russians and Poles the differential – over 30 percentage points in each case – was especially noteworthy.

If we now turn to the urban-rural dimension of literacy, it is clear that in this regard as well the Baltic Provinces diverged markedly from the overall trends in the Russian Empire in the late tsarist era. In 1897, on the all-Russian level for all nationalities there was a great disparity between urban and rural reading rates: 48.9 percent in the cities, but only 19.0 percent in the countryside. In striking contrast, the Baltic provinces displayed virtual equality between urban and rural partial literacy levels. In the case of the Russians across the empire various scholars have noted the key role of relatively high urban literacy as a major factor in preparing the way for a revolutionary situation in 1905. In 1897, Moscow's

²² Die Nationalitäten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszählung von 1897, 2 vols. Eds H. Bauer et al. Franz Steiner, Stuttgart, 1991, II, 231–232, 235.

population five years of age and older showed a rapidly rising reading rate of 60.7 percent, and in 1900, in St. Petersburg the comparable figure for those six years of age and older was already 70.5 percent.²³ Nevertheless, the urban areas in the Baltic Provinces easily surpassed these levels. In 1897, the major cities in Estland, Livland, and Kurland had the following reading rates (ten years of age and older): Tallinn – 93.0 percent, Riga – 83.1 percent, and Liepāja (Ger. Libau) – 84.3 percent. Riga’s relatively poor results were probably occasioned by its role as the leading and continually expanding industrial centre in the Baltic region and thus the city with proportionally the largest underclass engaged in manual labour. On the other hand, Tartu, located in northern Livland and the Baltic area’s only university town during the tsarist period, most likely had the highest urban literacy rate in the entire Russian Empire (excluding Finland) at 94.8 percent for the population as whole with the local Germans (99.2 percent) and Estonians (96.6 percent) leading the way.

The one aspect of literacy at the end of the nineteenth century in which the Baltic Provinces followed the overall pattern that prevailed in the Russian Empire quite closely was with regard to the variable of age. Without question, the younger the age cohort, the more literate it was, reflecting the growing impact of a more widespread and demanding school system and expanding modernization. For the Protestant groups in Estland, Livland, and Kurland, who had already attained high levels of reading ability by the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was little evidence of change in the various censuses. Older cohorts were already so literate that the younger ones only surpassed them marginally. With regard to writing ability, however, there was a marked difference among age groups for certain nationalities in the available data for Tallinn in 1871 and for Estland and Livland in 1881. As the elite of local society, the Germans in Tallinn had already achieved nearly complete literacy, not just in reading, but also in writing. The difference between all German age groups in Tallinn in 1871 was small, ranging from 97.5 percent for ages 14–21 to 88.0 percent for those 62 years of age and older. In striking contrast, the same age groups in 1871 among the Estonian population displayed a yawning gap in the range of abilities: 64.5 percent full literacy for ages 14–21, but only 12.2 percent for those 62 and older. Among the rural population fourteen years of age and older in Livland in 1881 the German rate for full literacy (87.2 percent) was about double that for Estonians (44.6 percent) and Latvians (39.8 percent).²⁴ These data clearly indicate

²³ **Богданов И. М.** Грамотность и образование в дореволюционной России и в СССР, 28–29, 179. On the revolutionary significance of rising urban literacy, see **Guroff, G., Starr, S. F.** A note on urban literacy in Russia, 1890–1914. – *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 1971, 19, 520–531.

²⁴ **Jordan, P.** Die Resultate der ehstländischen Volkszählung vom 29. December 1881 in textlicher Beleuchtung, 142–143; **Jung-Stilling, F. von, Anders, W.** Ergebnisse der livländischen Volkszählung, III, part 2: Die Zählung auf dem flachen Lande. Stahl’sche Buchdruckerei, Riga, 1885, Table 20.

that the Estonians and Latvians were only in the process of learning to write on a mass basis during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The final factor to be considered in this overview is gender. Here again, the Baltic Provinces showed results that diverged sharply from the all-Russian pattern. In the empire as a whole in 1897, males (38.6 percent) were more than twice as literate – again, only considering the ability to read – as females (17.0 percent) for the population ten years of age and older. The gender gap was especially wide among the Orthodox East Slavs and the non-Christian peoples.²⁵ In the Baltic Provinces, however, the reading ability for the two genders was essentially equal by the end of the nineteenth century, and in Estland girls and women were even slightly more literate than boys and men (95.7 percent vs. 94.7 percent). For the Estonian population in both 1881 and 1897 it is noteworthy that reading rates for females were always higher than those for males in the rural districts of Estland and Livland. In the cities, however, this situation was usually reversed. For the non-Protestant nationalities whose main place of residence was elsewhere in the Russian Empire, female literacy in 1897 was much higher in the Baltic Provinces than their overall all-Russian average, especially in Estland where there was a huge disparity between the rates for Russians (65.0 percent in Estland vs. 14.7 percent in the empire as a whole), Poles (88.3 percent vs. 38.9 percent), and Jews (72.3 percent vs. 36.6 percent).²⁶ With regard to writing ability males were significantly more advanced than females for most nationalities, and urban women had generally developed this skill more than rural ones, clearly because of a more modernized urban environment that increasingly encouraged and even required the ability to write.

Despite the various limitations noted above there is no doubt that there is a wealth of quantitative information on literacy in the late-nineteenth century censuses in the Baltic Provinces and the Russian Empire. The raw numbers, however, are silent about the qualitative level of reading and writing abilities alleged to exist, and we must seek other means to approach this important question. In their analysis of the 1897 census in the city of Tartu Veiko Berendsen and Margus Maiste rightly call for a skeptical view of the literacy rates recorded for young subjects. A figure of 45.6 percent for 5-to-9 year-olds allegedly possessing the ability to read suggests a very minimal standard for that skill.²⁷ The near absence of the inability to read among both Estonians and Germans in Estland and Livland in 1897 could easily be construed to mean that the cultural development of the two nationalities was at about the same level, but such an interpretation would clearly be erroneous. Fortunately for later observers, the section on literacy in the 1897 census did uniquely include a question on whether the

²⁵ **Kappeler, A.** *Russland also Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall.* C. H. Beck, Munich, 1992, 332.

²⁶ **Kappeler, A.** *Russland also Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, 332.

²⁷ **Berendsen, V., Maiste, M.** *Esimene ülevenemaaline rahvaloendus Tartus 28. jaanuaril 1897.* Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, Tartu, 1999, 258.

population had obtained any education above the elementary level, and the answers could be revealing. For example, in Estland a significant proportion of Germans aged ten and older (29.5 percent) had acquired more than a primary education, but only a minuscule fraction of Estonians of the same age had done so (0.4 percent). In the two southern provinces of the Baltic region, the Germans interestingly proved to be considerably less educated (20.8 percent with more than an elementary education in Livland and only 12.0 percent in Kurland) while the Estonians (0.6 percent in Livland) and Latvians (0.8 percent in Livland, 0.6 percent in Kurland) lagged far behind here as well. It is also characteristic that for the Latvians and Estonians there was a significant historical gap between major advances in reading and writing rates whereas among the German population – at least as seen in the earliest available Baltic area census in 1871 – no such gap existed. The public debate on female education in the Baltic Provinces in the last fifty years of the tsarist regime also suggests that the educational opportunities open to girls and women remained severely limited, and the similarity of Baltic German and Estonian male views on this issue, i.e. that the need for female learning beyond a very minimal level remained marginal, was striking.²⁸

In conclusion, this article has stressed the unique position of the Baltic Provinces in the Russian Empire with regard to the evolution of literacy. The key historical factors that shaped this distinctiveness were the dominant position of Lutheranism (with its emphasis on reading the Word of God by the individual believer) in the region since the Reformation, the activist role in promoting reading ability by the Swedish authorities during their period of hegemony, and influence of German pietism and the Moravian Brethren. When modern censuses measuring literacy began to appear in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Estland, Livland, and Kurland stood apart from the rest of the empire according to several important variables. These three provinces had by far the highest overall rate of literacy, and all nationalities residing in the Baltic region displayed stronger reading skills there than they did anywhere else in the empire, suggesting an environment especially conducive to the spread of literacy. Furthermore, in contrast to the all-Russian pattern, urban and rural reading rates as well as male and female ones were either equal or very nearly so in the Baltic case. Unfortunately, census data on writing ability are only available on a fragmentary basis for parts of the Baltic Provinces in 1871 and 1881 and to a limited extent on educational achievement in 1897, but they clearly show that if one moves beyond an elementary reading ability in the assessment of literacy skills, important differences in levels of cultural development were evident in the region, as the

²⁸ **Whelan, H.** The debate on women's education in the Baltic provinces, 1850–1905. – In: *Population Shifts and Social Change in Russia's Baltic Provinces 1855–1914*. Eds G. von Pistohlkors et al. Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, Lüneburg, 1995, 163–180; **Kivimäe, S.** *Estnische Frauenbildung in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. – Nordost Archiv, Neue Folge, 1992, 1, 281–308.

Baltic German elites had much greater access to educational opportunities. Overall, the censuses also suggest that cultural interaction most likely played a significant role in encouraging the rise of literacy levels among all ethnic groups in the Baltic Provinces. Although the Baltic Germans never accepted the Estonians and Latvians as their cultural equals during the tsarist era, there is no longer any doubt that they certainly helped to nurture the rise of modern cultures among the Baltic natives and to foster among them a synthesis of traditional practices and a European-style written culture that fully mature in the twentieth century.²⁹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication costs of this article were covered by the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of History, Archaeology and Art History of Tallinn University.

KIRJAOSKUS VENE IMPEERIUMIS 19. SAJANDI LÕPUL: BALTI PROVINTSIDE SILMATORKAV JUHTUM

Toivo U. RAUN

Artiklis on käsitletud kirjaoskuse arengut Balti provintssides (Eestimaa, Liivimaa, Kuramaa) ülevenemaalises kontekstis 19. sajandi lõpukümnendite rahvaloenduste põhjal. 1897. aasta rahvaloenduses torkab eriti silma, et lugemisoskus Eestimaal (95% rahvastikust: kümme aastat ja vanemad), Liivimaal (92%) ja Kuramaal (85%) oli mitu korda kõrgem kui Vene impeeriumis (28%). Üle-euroopaliselt saab paralleele tõmmata ainult väheste aladega, nagu Skandinaavia, Šotimaa ja Šveits, st majanduslikult vähe arenenud regioonid, kus üldine lugemisoskus tekkis *enne* moderniseerimise algust. Tulevase Eesti ja Läti ala varajase kirjaoskuse areng oli mõjutatud reformatsioonist ning luterlusest, kus rõhutati usukirjanduse lugemise tähtsust. Rootsi võimu ajal 17. sajandil levitati kirjaoskust ja saksa pietistid ning hernhuutlased rõhutasid samuti lugemisoskuse tähtsust Baltikumis. Seetõttu võib öelda, et 18. sajandi lõpuks oskas umbes pool kuni kaks kolmandikku Balti provintside talupoegadest lugeda. 19. sajandi esimesel poolel ja sajandi keskel aitasid lugemisoskuse levikule kaasa süstemaatilise koolivõrgu asutamine ning eesti ja läti rahvusliku liikumise keskendumine just koolihariduse tähtsusele.

Baltisaksa statistikud, näiteks Paul Jordan Eestimaal ja Friedrich von Jung-Stilling Liivimaal, olid eesrindlikud kogu Venemaal ning aitasid edukalt esimesi rahvaloendusi korraldada: 1871. aastal Tallinnas ja 1881. aastal kolmes Balti pro-

²⁹ Jansen, E. 'Baltlus', baltisakslased, eestlased. – Tuna, 2005, 8, 3, 42.

vintsis. Siin käsitletud rahvaloenduste andmed annavad mõningaid olulisi tulemusi. Kuramaa, mis oli kogu impeeriumis olulisel kohal, jäi kahe teise provintsi võrreldes lugemisoskuses suhteliselt maha, väga tõenäoliselt Rootsi ja hernhuutlaste vähese mõju tõttu. Etnilisus ja usk on omavahel kahtlemata seotud ning 1897. aastal olid protestandid – sakslased, eestlased ja lätlased – lugemisoskuse poolest selgelt esikohal, katoliiklased ning juudid olid keskmise oskusega ja õigeusklike lugemisoskus oli veelgi halvem. Kui vaadelda rahvastiku vanusegruppe, siis Eesti-, Liivi- ja Kuramaa jälgisid samasuguseid trende nagu kogu Vene impeerium: mida noorem vanuserühm, seda parem oli ta lugemis- ning kirjutamisoskus. Aga kaht teist tegurit arvestades olid Balti provintsid silmapaistval kohal kogu riigis. 1897. aastal oli lugemisoskus Baltikumis linnades ja maal praktiliselt võrdne, samuti meeste ja naiste osas, kuid ülevenemaalisel olid need näitajad linnade ning meeste osas enam kui kaks korda suuremad. On selge, et elementaarne lugemisoskus oli 19. sajandi lõpuks väga hea nii sakslastel, eestlastel kui ka lätlastel, aga kui arvestada hariduse omandamist kõrgemal kui algtasemel, siis jäid Baltikumi põlisrahvad baltisakslastest ikkagi kaugele maha.