

“The history of the world is best observed from the frontier” — Pierre Vilar



# Estonia as an Observatory Upon the World

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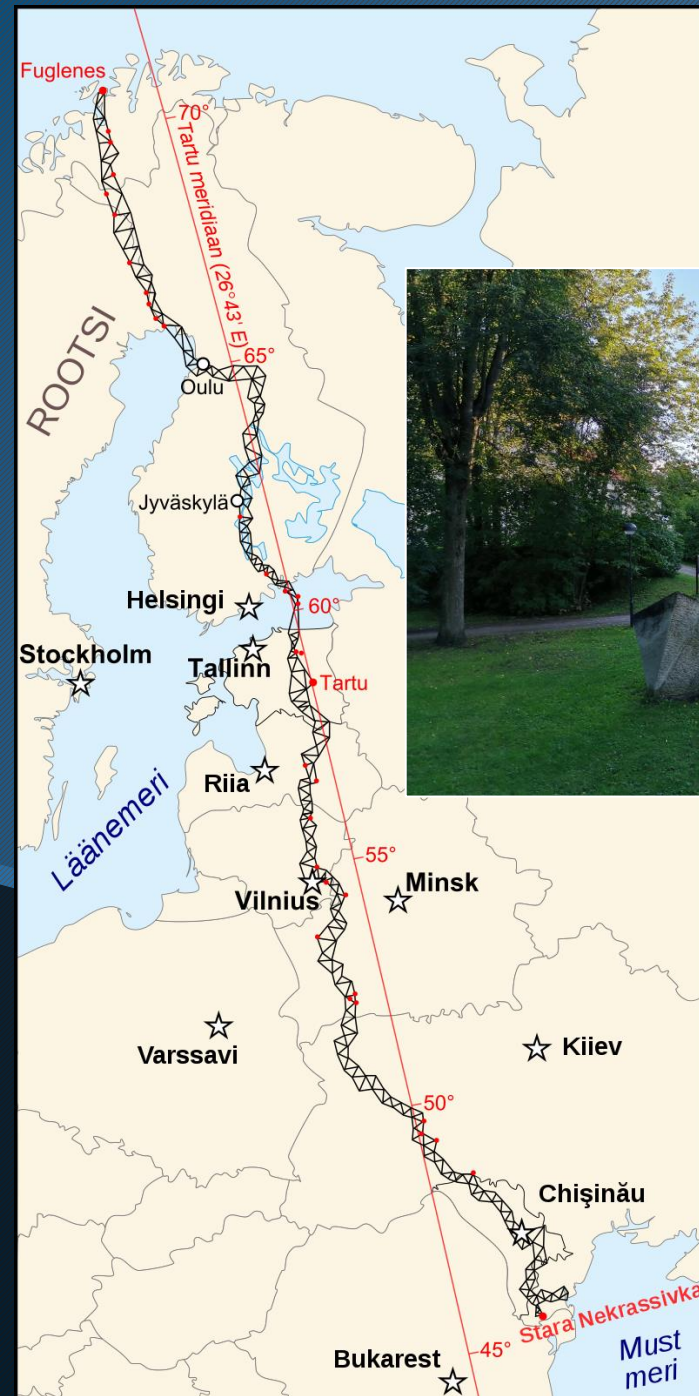
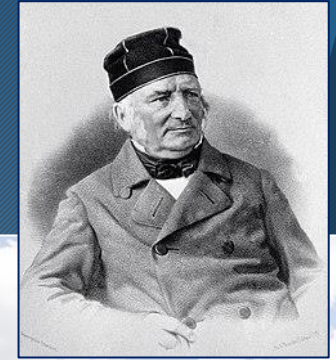
P2EC.00.090: Europe & Russia Since 1700

Thursdays, 14:15-15:45 (Lossi 36-214)

31. August 2023



❖ 1824: world's most powerful telescope brought to UT by **Georg Wilhelm von Struve**



❖ 1816-1855: Struve's "**Geodetic Arc**" = 1st accurate measurement of the size & shape of planet earth is a Tartu project

1. Why small places in multilingual borderlands make the best observatories?
2. How can Estonia help us see the world?
3. Silent Estonians?

*In order to see out, we must first see in...*



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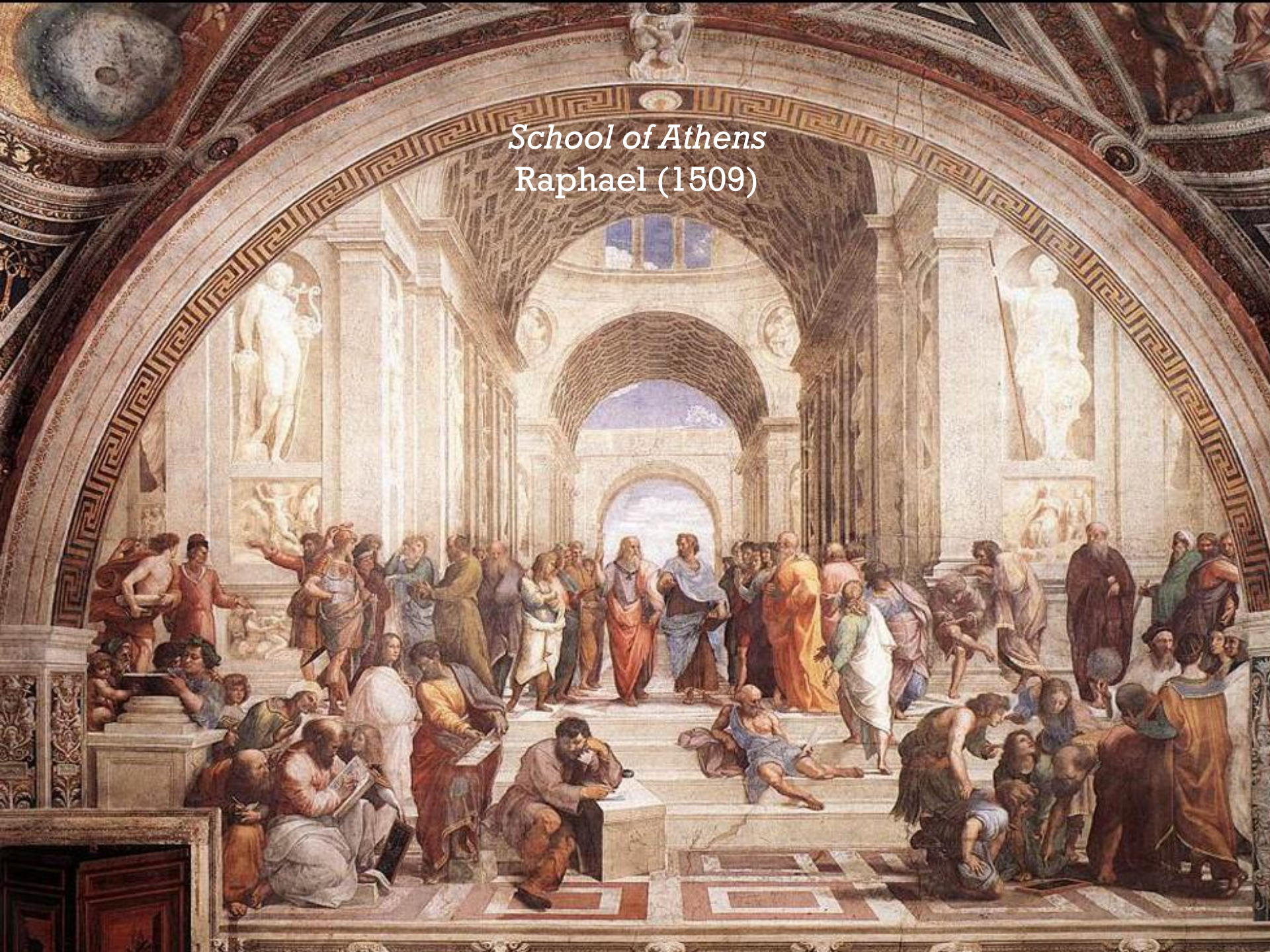
# I. Why small places in multilingual borderlands make the best observatories?



- misfits, unassimilated diversity, and “unseasonable ideas” *hidden in plain view*
- proportions are off; challenge our perspective
- caught “**in between**” dominant powers and narratives
- question of language and translation is always central!



*School of Athens*  
Raphael (1509)





19<sup>th</sup>-century Tartu =  
“The Athens of the Ema River”



1509—Raphael, *The School of Athens*



1982—Pöldroos, *Universitas Tartuensis*



1632–1710: Swedish Imperial University  
1802–1917: Russian Imperial University  
1919–1941: Estonian National University  
1942–1944: Nazi University  
1944–1991: Soviet University  
1991–now: ????



## II. How Can Estonia Help Us See the World?

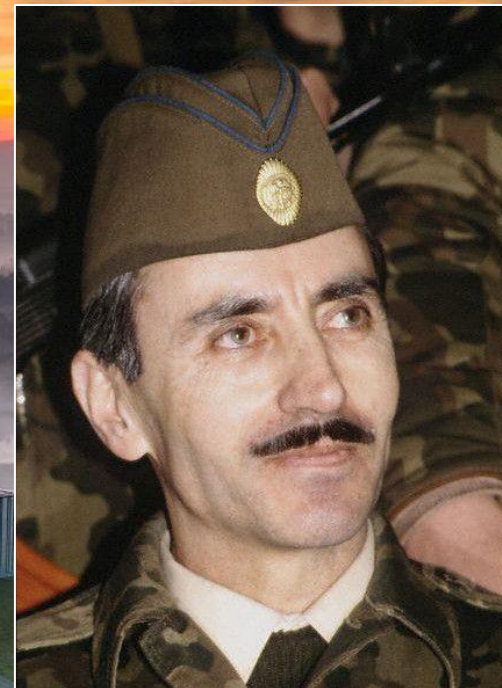
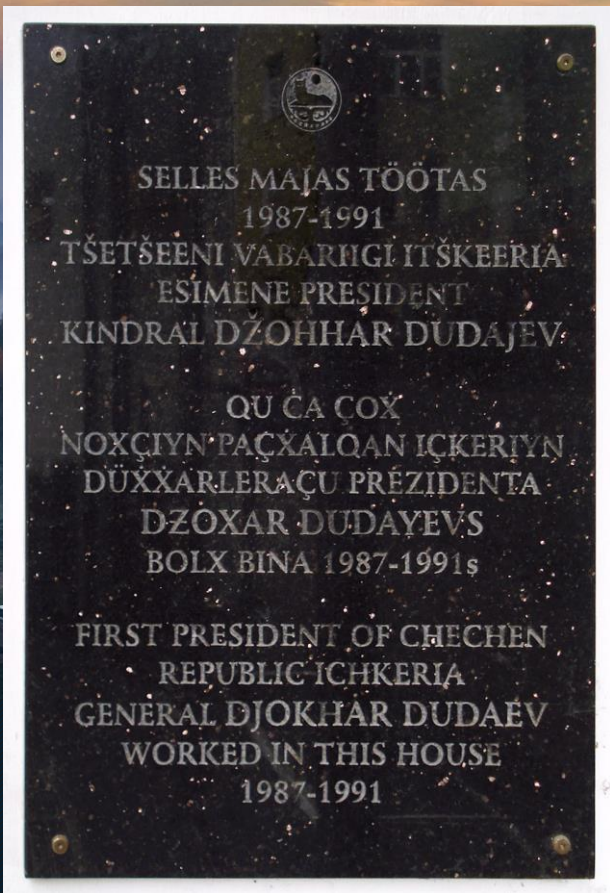


Estonian Chess Grandmaster  
**Paul Keres**

1242 Battle on the  
Ice of Lake Peipus

### 1) BATTLEGROUND





Dzhokhar Dudayev

Barclay de Tolly  
Square and Hotel

# 1) BATTLEGROUND

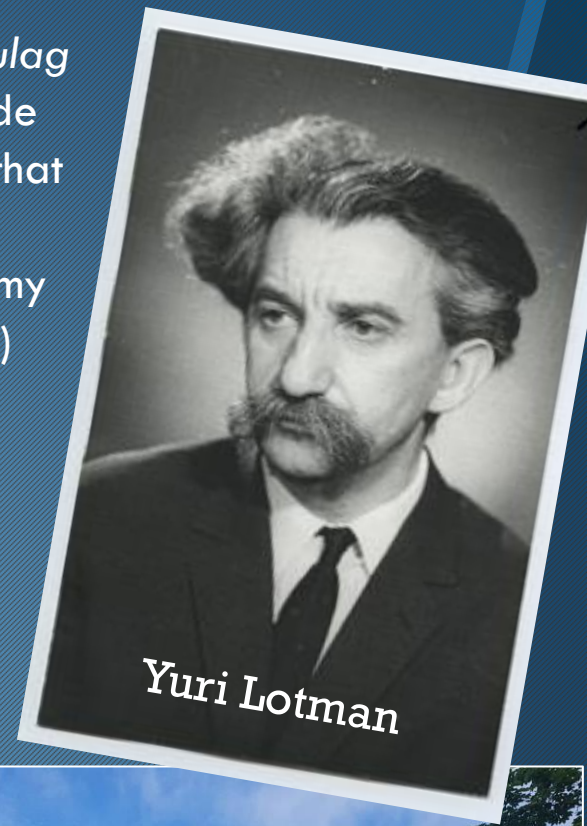




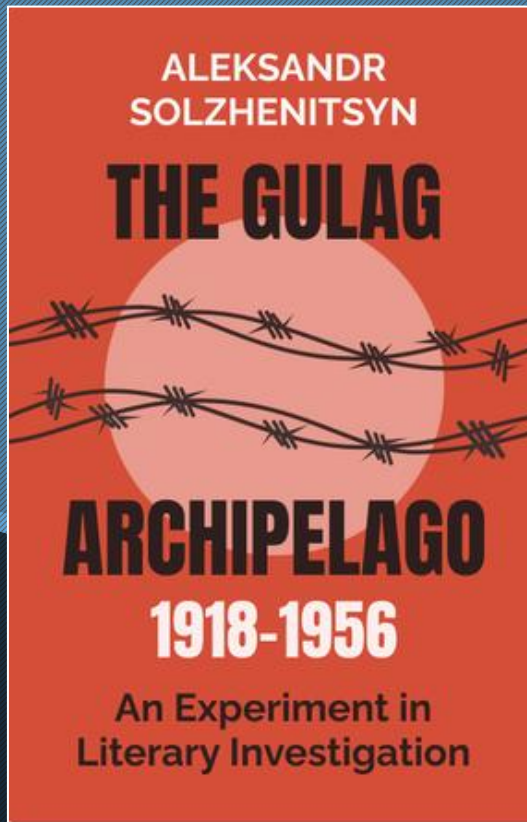
Lazar Gulkowitch

“The overall **structure** of the complete *Gulag Archipelago* was conceived on this hillside near **Võru**, along with the methodology that allowed me, in an orderly fashion, to incorporate all the **chaotic** materials in my possession...” — *Invisible Allies* (1995)

Alexander Solzheynitsyn



Yuri Lotman



- Old Believers (17<sup>th</sup> century)
- “White” emigrés (1920s)

## 2) REFUGE



# estx

Your Estonian Connection



Maxim Gorky

H.G. Wells

Moura Ignatjevna  
Zakrevskaja-Benckendorff-  
Budberg

## 3) CONNECTING LINK

- Skype
- Transferwise





wifi ee  
Area of wireless Internet  
Traadip Interneti serviti

ST • VEIN

OSCAR 1854-1942  
**WILDE**  
1861-1900 EDWARD



## Estonian Proverbs & Jokes

- “speech is silver, silence is gold”
- “Once there was an Estonian who loved his wife so much that he almost told her”
- “What’s the difference between an Estonian introvert and an Estonian extrovert?”



## III. Silent Estonians?

Culture is born in Conversation

- Identity is always a relationship
- “Self” & “Other”



# Russian Imperial Perspectives

Julian Simashko, *Russian Fauna, or Description of Animals in the Russian Empire* (1851)

- Estonian & Latvian

Введеніе.

Табл. 52.



1. ЭСТОНЕЦЪ (ЭСТОНЕЦЪ) 2. ЛАТВИНЪ.



“Why should anyone take seriously the political aspirations of a people whose favorite pastime is “kiikumine”/swinging ... ?”

—late 19<sup>th</sup>-century writings on the “Nations of the Russian Empire”



# Baltic German Perspectives

Karl Ernst von Baer  
1799-1876



“Their low spiritual culture is the reason which accounts for their inability to describe their state of being exactly. With their **phlegmatic** nature and deep indifference, which only grows with their various sicknesses, they don’t keep account of themselves, and don’t even bother to tell the doctor precisely what is wrong with them, all the more because they don’t trust medical science and don’t really care about death...”

— 1814 Tartu Dissertation: “On Diseases Endemic to the Estonians”



# From the State of Nature to a Digital Republic?



LETTER FROM TALLINN

## ESTONIA, THE DIGITAL REPUBLIC

*Its government is virtual, borderless, blockchained, and secure.  
Has this tiny post-Soviet nation found the way of the future?*

By Nathan Heller

December 11, 2017

*The New Yorker*

Ööd Houses





# “Edward von Lõngus”: Socially Critical Street Artist



- Vaikus = Silence/Quiet
- Vaikimine = Being/Becoming Quiet