

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



Estonia as an Observatory Upon the World

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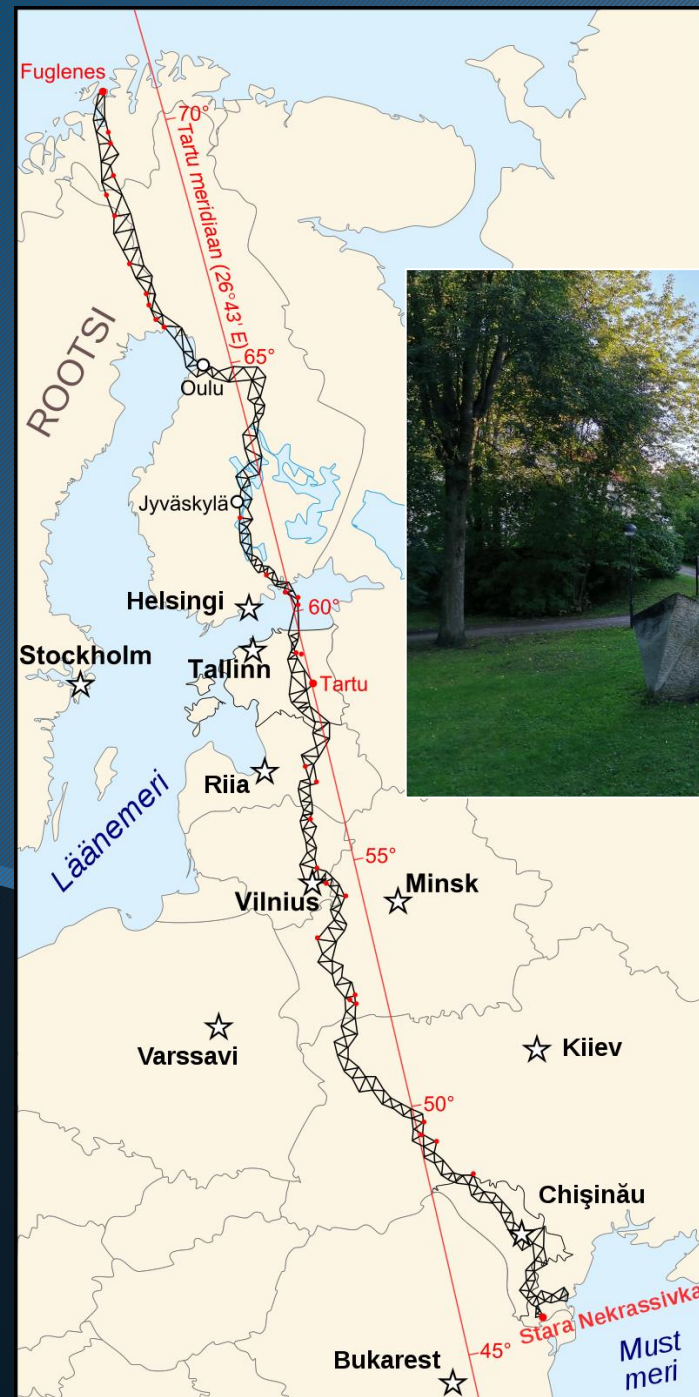
Johann Skytte Institute of Political Study

28. August 2024

Fall 2024 - **SVJS.00.026: Nations & Empires in a Globalizing World**

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

❖ 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

- I. Slow & Silent Estonians?
- II. Why Small Places in Multilingual Borderlands Make the Best Observatories?
- III. How Estonia Can Help Us See the world?

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

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



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?”

I. Slow & Silent Estonians?

Culture is born in Conversation

- identity is always a relationship
- history of the world is a story of encounters between “**Self**” & “**Other**”

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”

Russian Imperial & Soviet Perspectives

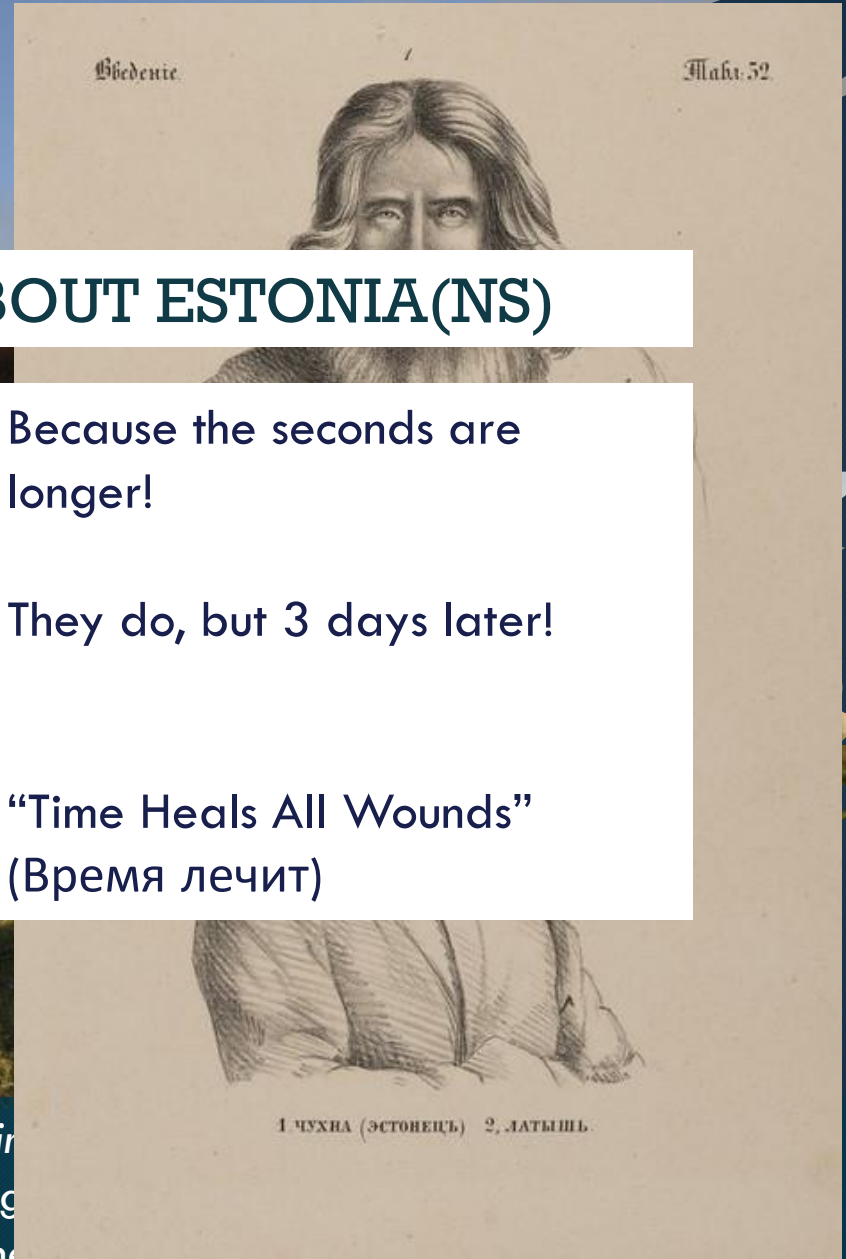
Julian Simashko, *Russian Fauna, or Description of Animals in the Russian Empire* (1851)

POST-SOVIET JOKES ABOUT ESTONIA(NS)

- **Why is the internet so fast in Estonia?**
- **Why don't Estonians have hangovers?**
 - **Estonian Ambulance Slogan**
- **Because the seconds are longer!**
- **They do, but 3 days later!**
- **"Time Heals All Wounds"**
(Время лечит)

"Why should anyone take seriously the political aspirations of the Estonians?"
"kiikumine"/swing

—late 19th-century Russian writings on the nations of the Russian Empire



II. 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)



19th-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 (Imperial?) University
1944–1991: Soviet (Imperial?) University
1991–now: ????

III. How Estonia Can Help Us See the World?

1198: Pope Innocent III's Livonian Crusade

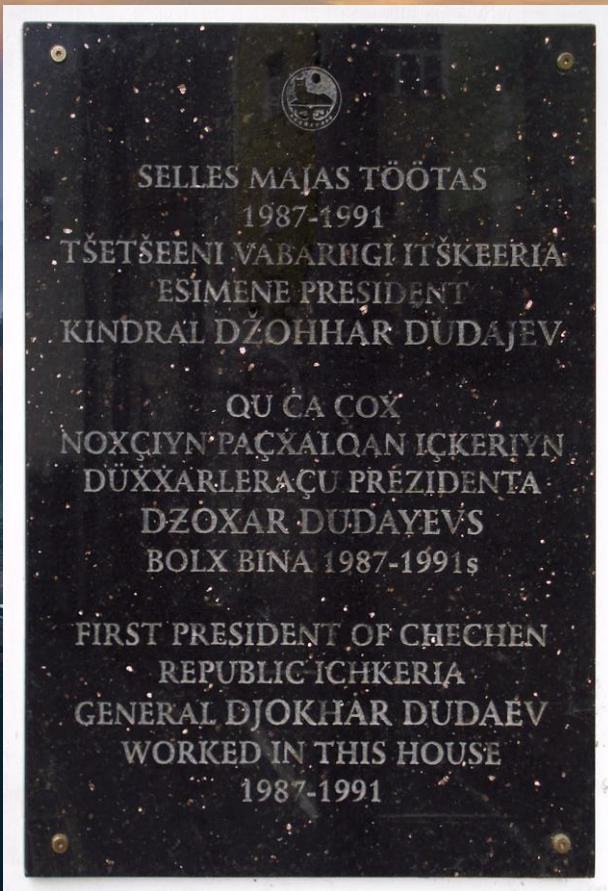


1242 Battle on the Ice of Lake Peipus

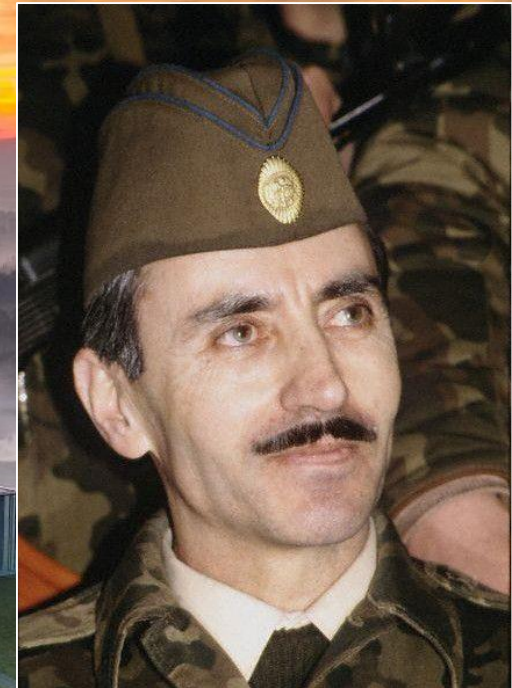


Estonian Chess Grandmaster
Paul Keres

1) BATTLEGROUND



Barclay de Tolly
Square and Hotel



Dzhokhar Dudayev

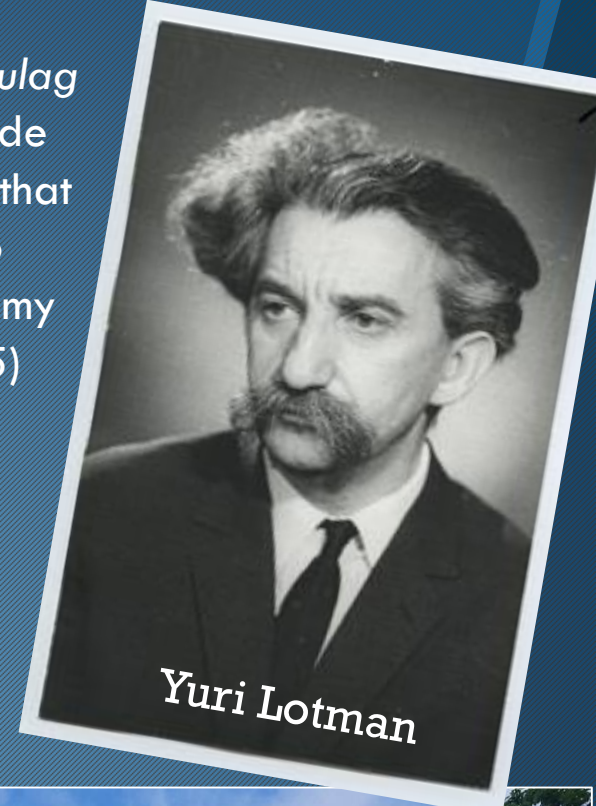
1) BATTLEGROUND



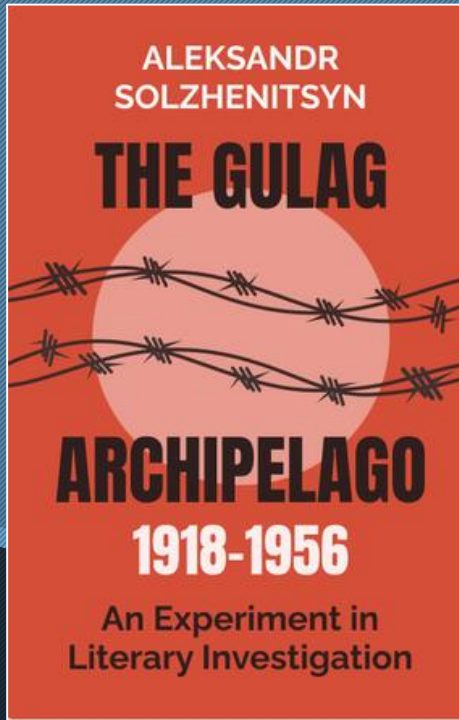
Lazar Gulkowitch

“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 Solzhehnitsyn



Yuri Lotman



- Old Believers (17th century)
- “White” emigrés (1920s)



2) REFUGE

estx

Your Estonian Connection

- Skype
- TransferWise
- Bolt



Maxim Gorky

H.G. Wells

Moura Ignatjevna
Zakrevskaja-Benckendorff-
Budberg



Ööd Houses

3) CONNECTING LINK

From the State of Nature to the Digital State



Edward von Lõngus:
socially critical street artist
(Estonian Banksy?)

