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

Estonia as a Global Observatory

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Fall 2026 - P2EC.00.090
History of Russia & Europe Since 1700 (6 ECTS)
Mondays, 10:15-11:45 (Lossi 36-305)
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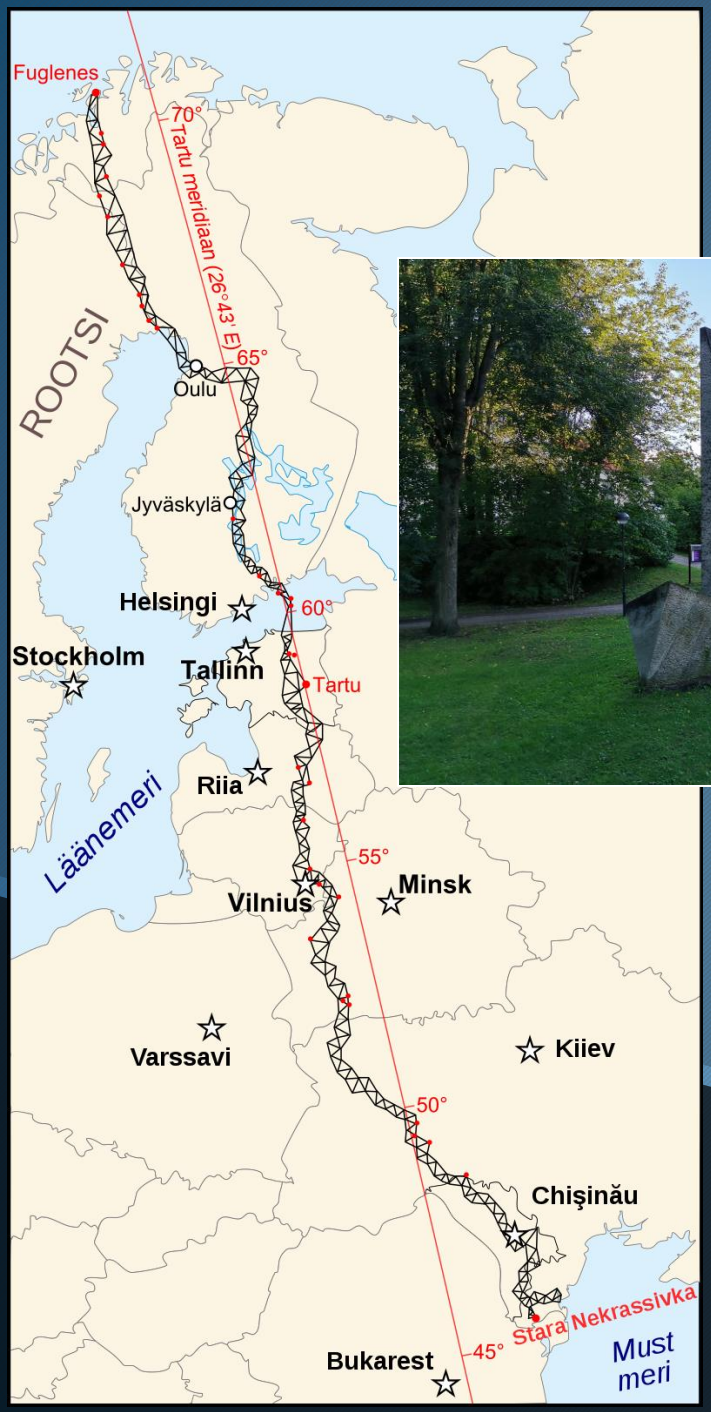
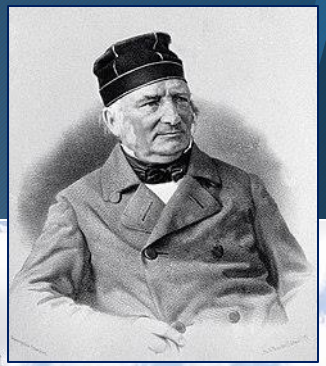


- 1824: world's most powerful telescope brought to UT by **Georg Wilhelm von Struve**



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

I. LOOKING IN
II. LOOKING OUT
III. HOW ESTONIA CAN HELP YOU SEE THE WORLD

In order to see <u>out</u>, we must first see <u>in</u>...

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

- **Vaikus** = Silence/Quiet
- **Vaikima** = 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?"

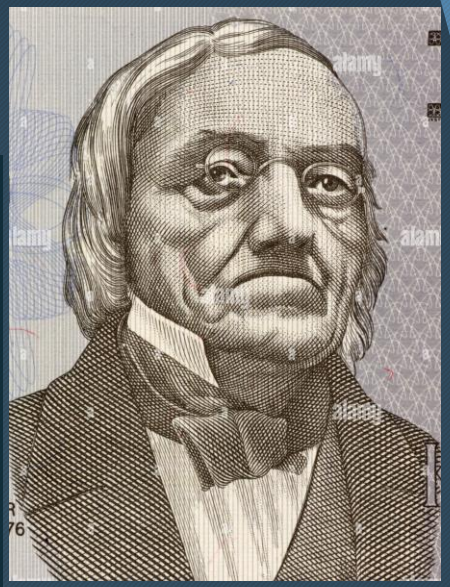
I. LOOKING IN

Slow & Silent Estonians

- identity is born in conversation
- history of the world is a story of encounters between "**Self**" & "**Other**

Baltic German Perspectives

Karl Ernst von Baer
1799-1876

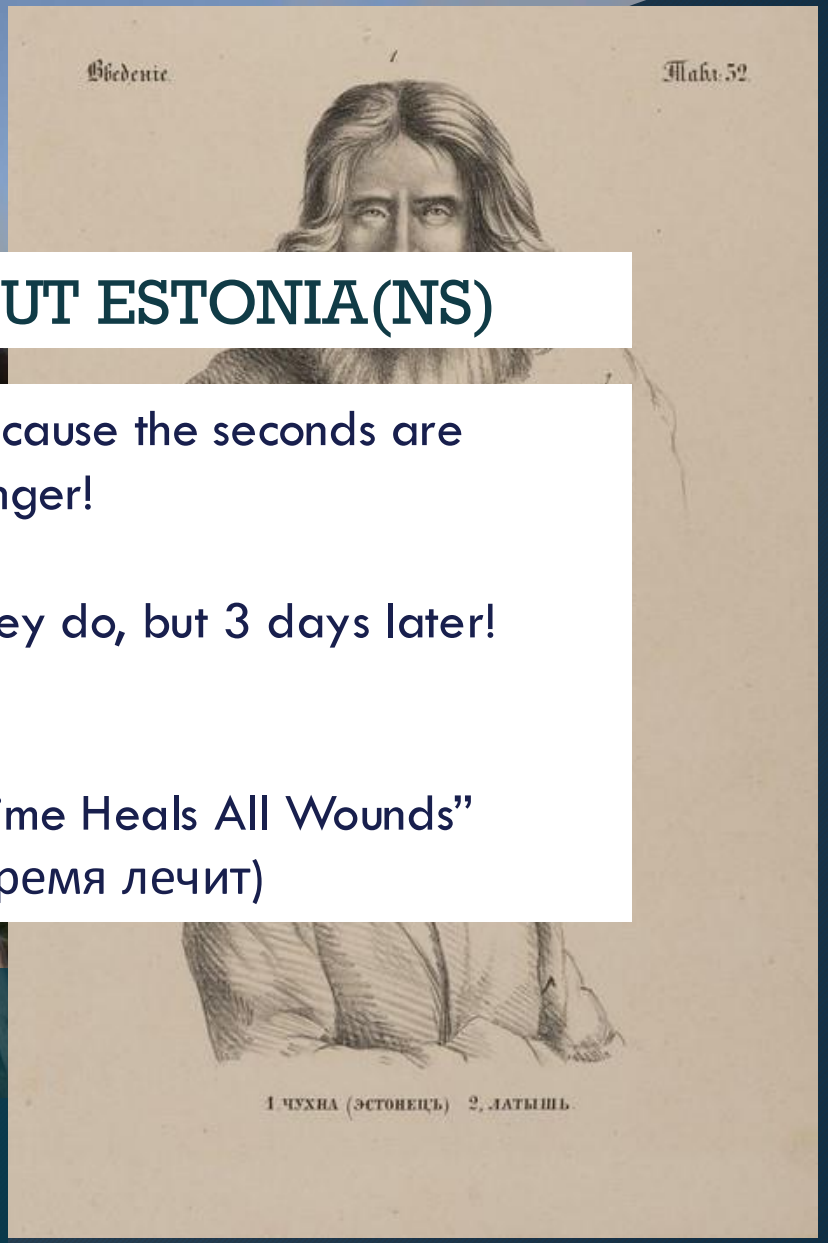


"Their low spiritual culture is the reason which accounts for their inability to describe their state of being exactly. With their **phlegmatic** nature and deep indifference, which only grows with their various sicknesses, they don't keep account of themselves, and don't even bother to tell the doctor 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 Perspectives

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



POST-SOVIET JOKES ABOUT ESTONIA(NS)

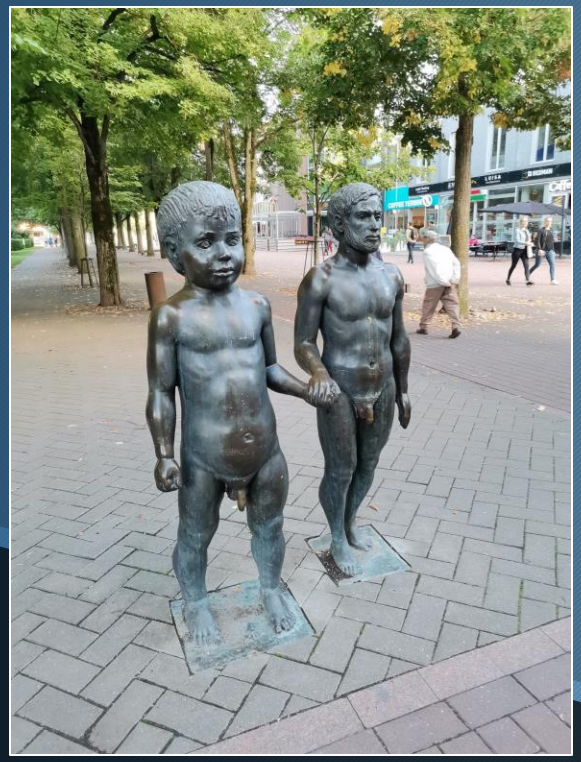
- **Why is the internet so fast in Estonia?**
- **Why don't Estonians have hangovers?**
- **Estonian Ambulance Slogan**

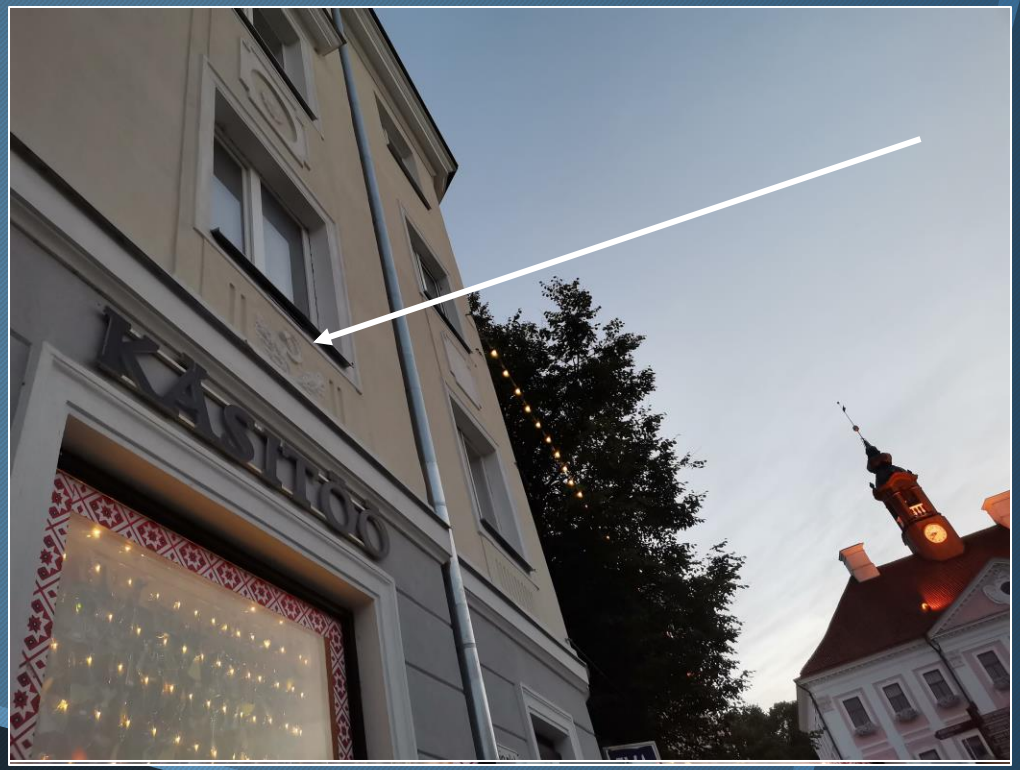
- Because the seconds are longer!
- They do, but 3 days later!
- "Time Heals All Wounds" (Время лечит)

"Why should anyone take seriously the political aspirations of a people whose favorite pastime is "kiikumine"/swinging ... ?"
—late 19th-century Russian writings on the "Nations of the Russian Empire"

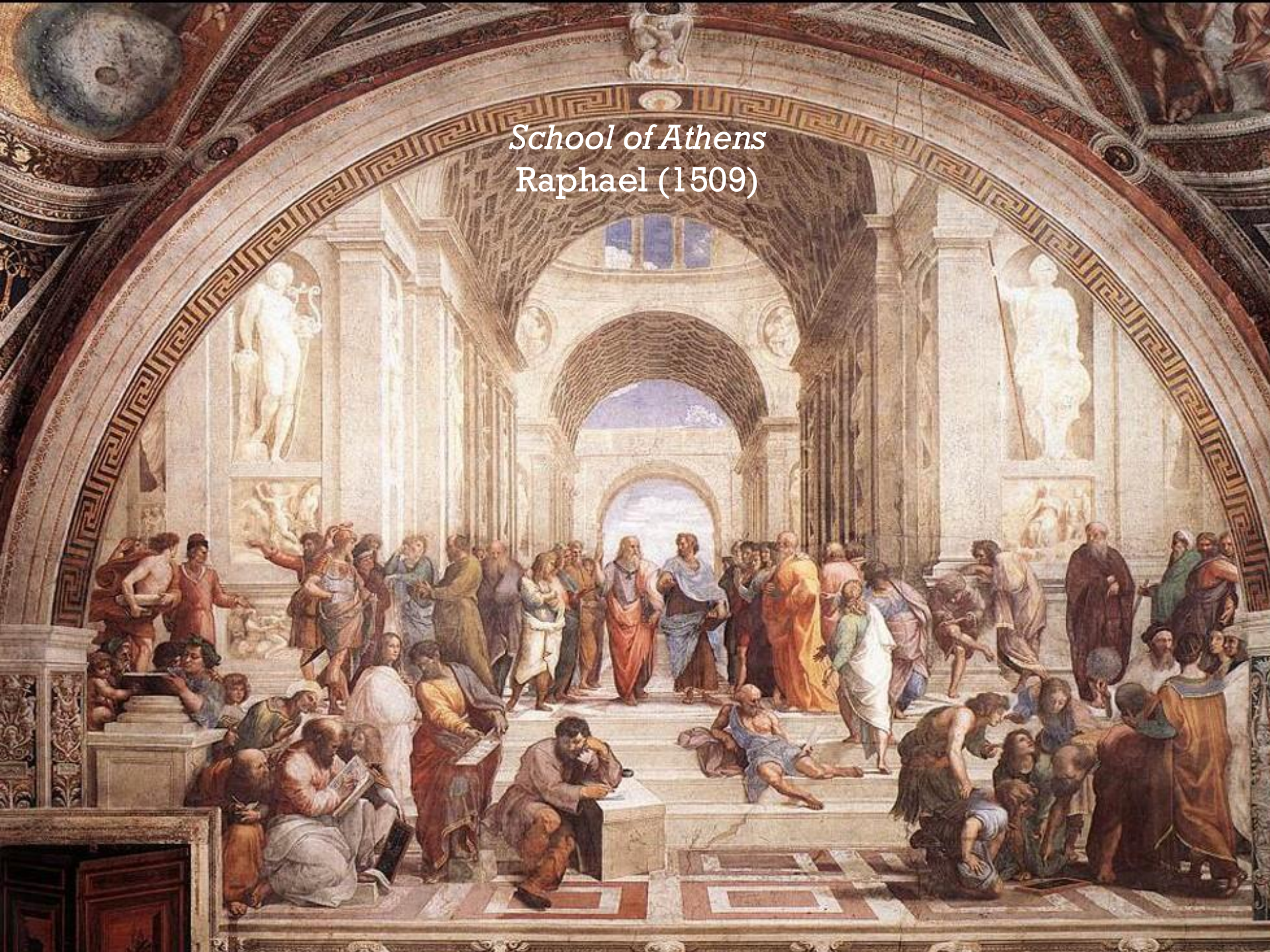
II. LOOKING OUT

Why Small Places in Multilingual Borderlands Make the Best Observatories





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


School of Athens
Raphael (1509)

19th-century Tartu =
"The Athens of the Ema River"

1509—Raphael, *The School of Athens*

1982—Põldroos, *Universitas Tartuensis*

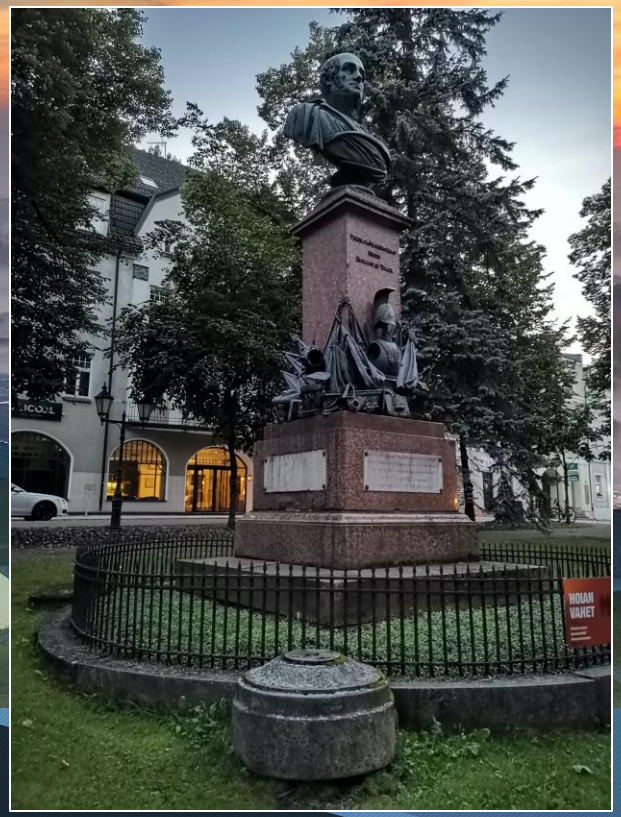
1632–1710: Swedish Imperial University
1802–1917: Russian Imperial University
1919–1941: Estonian National University
1942–1944: Nazi (Imperial?) University
1944–1991: Soviet (Imperial?) University
1991–: Now what?

III. How Estonia Can Help You See the World

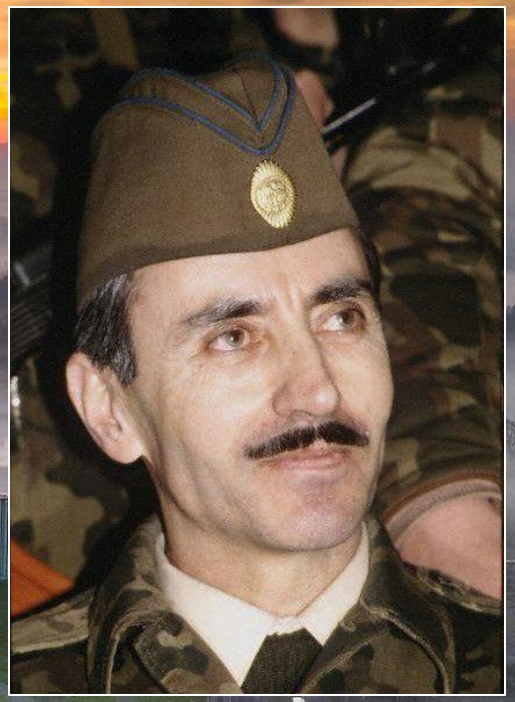
1198: Pope Innocent III's Livonian Crusade

1242 Battle on the Ice of Lake Peipus

1) BATTLEGROUND



Barclay de Tolly
Square and Hotel



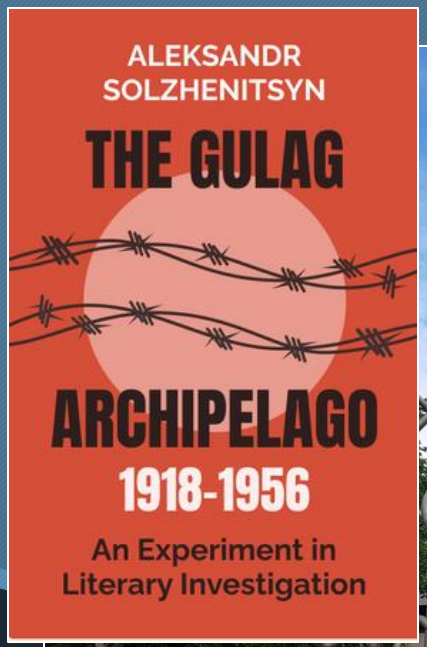
Dzhokhar Dudayev
(1944-1996)

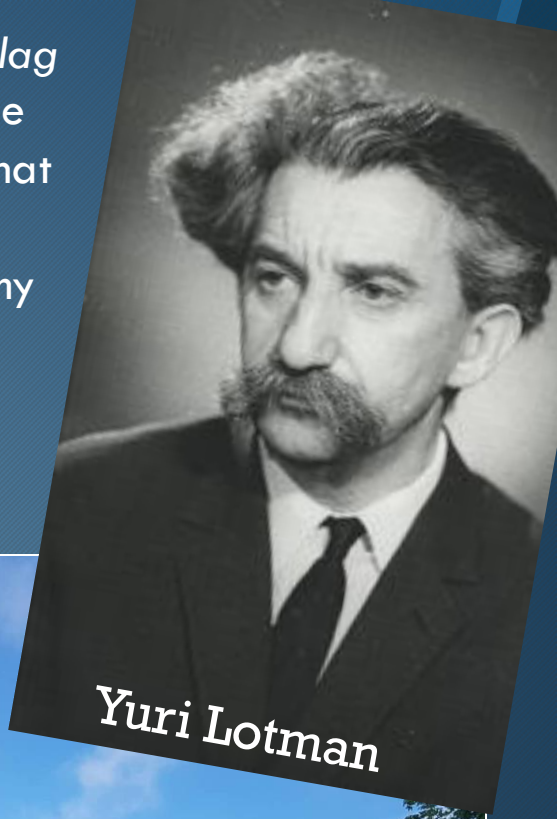
1) BATTLEGROUND

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)

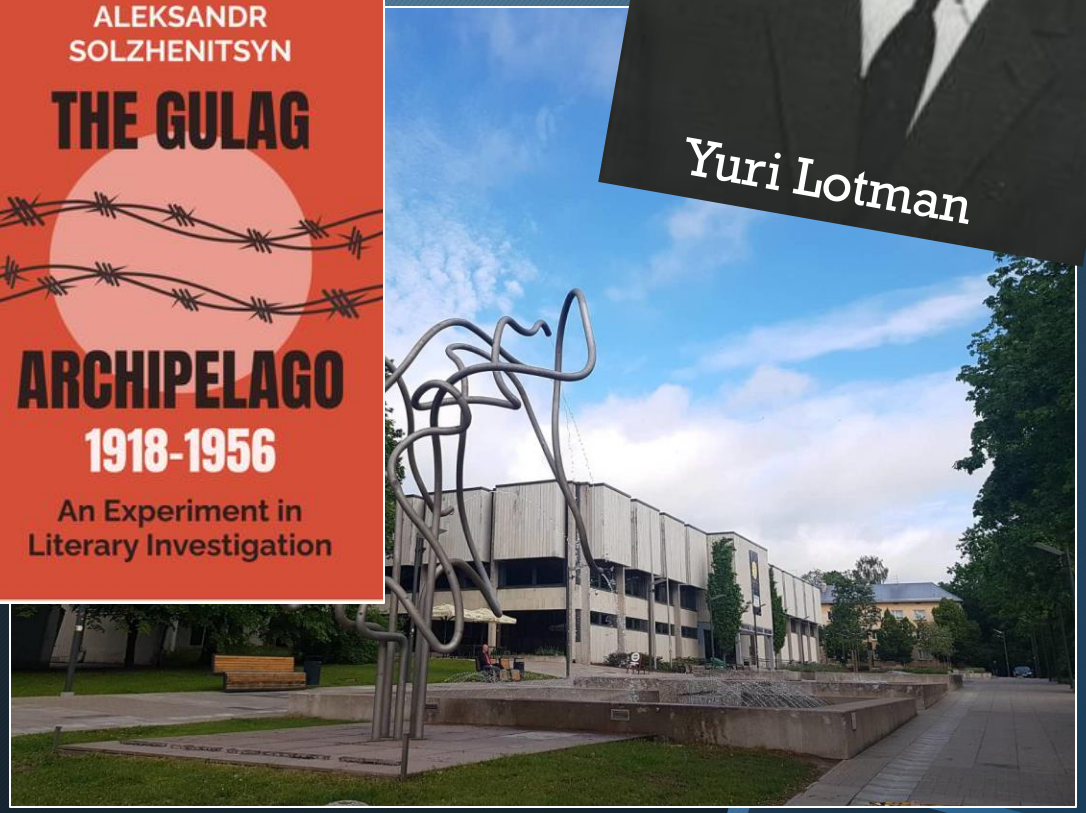
Alexander Solzehnitsyn





Yuri Lotman

- Old Believers (17th century)
- "White" émigrés (1920s)



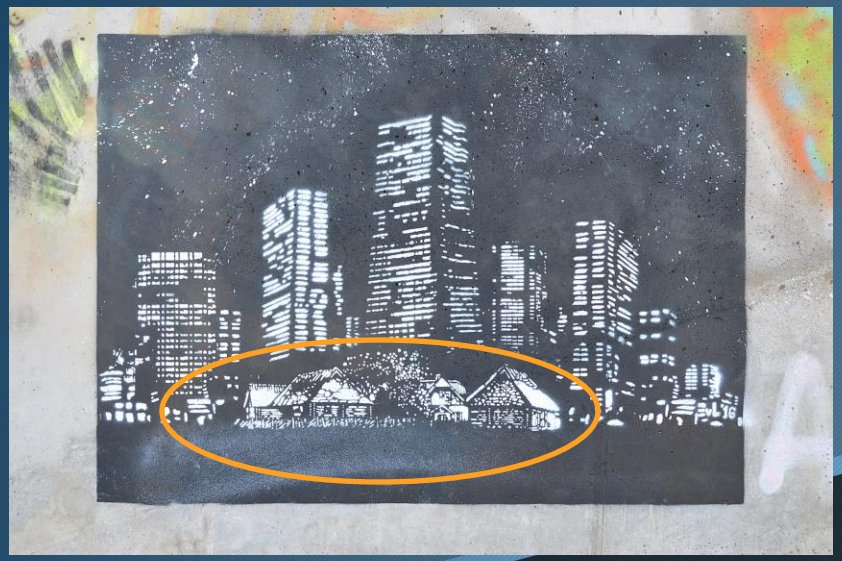
2) REFUGE

- 1842—Pianist **Franz Liszt** performs at Tartu University on his way from **Berlin** to **Saint Petersburg**

- Skype
- TransferWise
- Bolt

3) CONNECTING LINK

Between the State of Nature & the Digital State



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

3) CONNECTING LINK

Ööd Mirror Houses

Estonian Marshlands (Viru Raba)

Anton H. Tammsaare, *Truth & Justice* (1926-1933)