

Administrative and Social Structure of Estonia Under Russian Rule (The 18th and 19th Centuries)

Rus İdaresi Altında Estonya'nın İdari ve Sosyal Yapısı (18. ve 19. Yüzyıllar)

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Abstract

Estonia, a small Baltic state, lived under the rule of various powers before being an independent state in 1918. Estonians are one of the oldest inhabitants of the Baltic region and they lived for centuries in interaction with other people of the region by preserving their tribal organization in history. Although Estonians had met with Christianity earlier times, they began to be Christianized vastly since the 13th century because of the crusades. Then they were ruled by Denmark, Catholic bishops, and German nobles for several centuries. Sweden was the influential power in the region in the 16th century and established a strong control in Baltic in the 17th century. Later, Russia which aimed to reach the Baltic Sea for political and economic concerns, became a significant power in the region. Peter I established a superiority over Sweden, and so Estland and Livonia, which constituted present-day Estonia, accepted the Russian administration in the 18th century. In this article, firstly, the general political structures of Estonia before the Russian rule will be explained. Then the continuity and change in the administrative practices of the region after the implementation of Russian rule will be discussed. The administrative reforms of the Russian government, the participation of German nobility in the Russian administrative mechanism, and the social condition of Estonians under the Russian rule will be evaluated.

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Finally, the reforms implemented on the Estonian peasantry by Russia, and cultural and national aspirations among Estonians will be discussed.

Keywords: Estonia, Russia, Baltic, Peasantry, Reform

Özet

Küçük bir Baltık devleti olan Estonya 1918 yılında ilk defa kendi adıyla bağımsız bir devlet olmadan önce tarih boyunca farklı devletlerin yönetimleri altında yaşadı. Baltık bölgesinin en eski milletlerinden birisi olan Estonlar bin yıllar boyunca kabile yapılarını devam ettirerek tarih boyunca bölgenin diğer milletleriyle etkileşim içinde yaşadılar. Her ne kadar daha önceki dönemle Hristiyanlıkla tanışsalar da büyük ölçüde 13. yüzyılda haçlı seferleri ile Hristiyanlaşmaya başladılar. Önce Danimarka'nın, Papalık temsilcilerinin ve Alman asillerin yönetimine giren Estonlar üzerinde hâkimiyet kurdular ve bu yüzyıllar boyu devam etti. 16. yüzyıldan itibaren ise Baltık'ın kıyı bölgelerinde İsveç'in egemenliği ortaya çıktı. Daha sonraki dönemde ise siyasi ve ekonomik kaygılarla Baltık Denizi'ne ulaşmak isteyen Rusya bölgede kendini gösterdi. Çar Petro'nun Kuzey Savaşlarında İsveç'e üstünlük sağlaması ile 18. yüzyılda Estonya'yı içine alan Estland ve Livonya bölgeleri Rusya'nın yönetimine girdi. Bu makalede, öncelikle Rus yönetimi öncesinde Estonya'nın genel siyasi yapısı açıklanacaktır. Sonrasında, bölgenin Rusya yönetimine girmesiyle birlikte idari anlamada yaşanan değişim süreci ele alınacaktır. Burada Rusya'nın bölgede gerçekleştirdiği idari reformlar, Alman asillerin Rus sistemine katılımı ve halkın Rus yönetimindeki konumları açıklanacaktır. Son olarak, 19. yüzyılda Rusya'nın Eston köylüler hakkında yaptığı reformlar ve Estonlar arasında ortaya çıkan ulusal bilinçlenme konuları tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Estonya, Rusya, Baltık, Köylüler, Reform

Introduction

In historical usage, the name of Estonia as a sovereign state has not been seen until the modern times. Although the proto-Estonians inhabited in the Baltic Region thousands of years ago, an independent Estonian state could only be established in 1918 after the fall of the Russian Empire. The short-lived independence ended with the Soviet invasion during the World War II. The final and permanent independence of Estonia happened in 1991. Thus, it is quite problematic to identify the history of Estonians under the title of the history of Estonia before 1918. However, it is still possible to survey such a history by focusing on the regions where Estonians widely inhabited throughout history.

During the medieval ages, Estonians lived in the regions of Estland and Livonia, also called as Livland. In the age of the Northern Crusades, Denmark invaded the northern part of present-day Estonia, including Tallinn, in 1219 and the Duchy of Estland was created. Southern part of Estonia was invaded by the Teutonic Knights, and the region became a part of Livonia, which also included the present-day Latvia. Denmark had to give up its rights and sell Estland to the Teutonic Knights because of a series of peasant revolts in the middle of the 14th century. Thus, the Estonian territories were merged by the Knights.¹ However, the masters, administrative structures, and borders of the region subsequently changed in the following centuries. When the Russian control was secured in the 18th century, the provinces of Estland, Livonia, and later Kurland were created in the Baltic domains. The population of Estland was predominantly composed of ethnic Estonians. The province of Livonia included the territories inhabited by ethnic Latvians and Estonians. The population of Kurland was mostly composed of Latvians and some other Baltic people, and there was no significant Estonian presence. Thus, the provinces of Estland and Livonia should be taken into consideration to study the history of Estonia and Estonians under the Russian rule.

Estonians, one of the oldest inhabitants of the Baltic region, settled in the region around 3000-2500 B.C.² They belong to the Finno-Ugric language family. In this respect, Estonians differ from the other Baltic people like Lithuanians, Latvians, and Prussians, who speak Indo-European languages, and arrived in the region around 2200 B.C.³ Thereafter, Estonians lived under the tribal political organization and were occupied with hunting, fishing, and agriculture as main economic activities. For many centuries, they never experienced a certain political unity. In terms of religion, Estonians like other Baltic people remained pagan for a long time. Christianization of Estonians largely occurred in the 13th century. In this sense, they were one of the latest converts to Christianity in Europe.

Motivated by both the acquiring new lands and ‘missionary zeal’ the German knights had turned to the pagan people of the Baltic region.⁴ This motivation was fostered by Pope

¹ Kyllike Sillaste, “Conquest and Survival: An Outline of Estonian History”, *World Affairs* 157, no. 3 (1995): 119.

² The name of Estonians has been derived from *Aestii* which was firstly used by Roman historian Tacitus in the first century B.C. Because he could not distinguish the Baltic people he “calls all the Balts *Aestii* or *Astyorum Gentes*, who dwelt on the right i.e. the eastern shores of the *Mare Suevicum* (the Baltic Sea). It was only later that the name came to apply to Estonia (*Eesti*) alone”. Kaarel R. Pusta, “The National Revival of the Baltic People in the XIX and XX Centuries”, *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America*, 2, no. 2 (1944): 372.

³ Kevin O’Connor, *The History of the Baltic States* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 9-10. And also see: Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 2nd Edition (California: Hoover Press, 1991), 7-8.

⁴ According to Bilmanis, the main “aim of the first German Bishops Meinhard, Berthold, and particularly Albert, beside “baptizing” was to develop trade between Hanseatic cities and the baptized lands...the obvious aim of German colonizers and crusaders was to exploit to the highest possible degree the newly converted Baltic

Innocent III and the Northern Crusades were launched against the Baltic people in the early 13th century. The leader of the first crusade was Albert von Buxhoevden, the Bishop of Livonia (1199-1229). He was accompanied by the Order of the Knights of Christ (the Brothers of the Sword), which was a crusader order founded in 1202 and confirmed by the Pope in 1204.⁵

The campaign lasted for many years. As it was expressed by Henry of Livonia, the Baltic people were reluctant to compromise with the newcomers. They resisted against the crusaders for a long time. The Balts occasionally approved to be baptized but they changed their decision when they got the chance to do so.⁶ Consequently, the crusades against the Baltic people dramatically changed the social and political structures in the region.

Livonians and Selonians, the weakest Baltic tribes, were easily conquered or became allies of the Sword Brothers and Bishop Albert. They began to be ruled by the conquerors. Then Lattgalians made an alliance with the Brotherhood. Thus, the way for the campaign to northern Estonian lands opened. The conquest of the Estonian lands happened in 1227.⁷ These lands were distributed among the bishops, the Brotherhood, and the German landlords. The Brotherhood also tried to conquer the Lithuanian territories, but it was defeated by Lithuanians in 1236 at Saule. Then, the Brotherhood had to be unified with the Teutonic Order of Prussia and it became the Livonian Order of the Teutonic Knights. Another lost war in 1260 against Lithuanians determined the borders of medieval Livonia.⁸

From the 13th century, the Baltic people “were assimilated to the Christian world that was governed by Holy Roman Emperor and the pope, and whose military arm in the region was the Livonian Order”.⁹ Surviving native upper classes were completely Germanized. The enserfed peasantry remained as the sole preservers of languages and customs.¹⁰ Thus, the feudal structure

peoples, and they pursued this aim so brutally...” Alfred Bilmanis, “Grandeur and Decline of the German Balts”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 3, no. 4 (1944): 53.

⁵ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 15. The so-called Northern Crusades were somehow related to the Fourth Crusade. When Pope Innocent III called a new crusade to recapture Jerusalem, which did not happen and the crusaders invaded Constantinople in 1204, the German bishops and knights took advantage of the missionary spirit to fully Christianize and rule all of Livonia. See. Marek Taam, “How to Justify a Crusade? The Conquest of Livonia and New Crusade Rhetoric in the Early Thirteen Century”, *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 4 (2013): 431-455.

⁶ *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, trans. James A. Brundage (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

⁷ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 13.

⁸ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 17. Although the German knights and the Sword Brothers were in collaboration with the Catholic Church in the crusade campaign, they were not in an undisputed harmony. Soon after they invaded the region, the Germans knights and nobility quarreled with the bishops in Livonia for political and economic supremacy. See. Richard Spence, “Pope Gregory IX and the Crusade on the Baltic”, *The Catholic Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1983): 1-19.

⁹ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 14.

¹⁰ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 14.

of the Medieval Ages was established in the region and this structure survived for hundreds of years despite many other power struggles.

Estonians like Latvians were subjected to the control of the German nobility. Most Estonians became serfs in the lands of the German nobility, whether worldly or spiritual masters, and the burden over the peasantry increased in time. In addition to the landlords, a new class of burgers emerged in newly established towns. The burgers were mostly German merchants, and they controlled all trades in the Baltic region. Later, all Estonian towns, except Narva, joined to the German Hanseatic League and became important trade centers. These towns were important in the mediation of eastern trade.¹¹

The existing social and political order in Estland and Livonia generally remained stable for nearly 250 years. Then, the region again became a battleground for the powers. There were mainly two significant developments in the region in the 16th century. The first one was the expansion of Lutheranism and the second one was the increasing tension among the big powers for supremacy. Lutheranism emerged in Germany in 1517 and rooted in the 1520s, and the new religion arrived in Estland and Livonia thanks to the German merchants, priests, and landlords. The new confession suddenly became the leading religion because of political, social, and economic reasons. The native people had very little choice and they also converted to Lutheranism in time. Thus, a crucial change occurred in the social and cultural life of people.

Through the middle of the 16th century, the Baltic region became a scene of competition among the powers. Russia, Sweden, and Poland were parts of the competition. Russia had begun to appear as a big power and it turned its attention to the Baltic region during the reign of Ivan IV, who was especially insisted on acquiring the region to the Russian Empire. Russia was successful for a while and achieved to capture the Estonian towns of Narva and Tartu by defeating the Teutonic Knights.¹² However, the Russian expansion was regarded dangerous by the kingdoms of Sweden and Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth, and they severely struggled against Russia. Starting from 1560s, the continuous wars lasted until 1584, when Ivan IV signed treaties with Sweden and Poland-Lithuania just before his death. Thus, Estland and Livonia was shared among Sweden, Denmark and Poland-Lithuania, and Russia were alienated from the region for a while.

¹¹ Evald Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People* (London: Boreas Publishing, 1952), 51. In order to stress importance of trade in the Estonian towns, Uustalu reads “Since 1346, Tallinn had enjoyed the inestimable advantage of having the right of acting as an entrepot for Eastern trade. This meant that all goods going to or coming from Russia had to be reloaded there on to other vehicles. This arrangement naturally swelled the revenues of the town to a greater extend”.

¹² Sillaste, *An Outline of Estonian History*, 119.

The struggles between Sweden and Poland continued and influenced all the Baltic region during the following decades. The Peace of Altmark in 1629 “finally established de facto Swedish control of the entire continental Baltic area north of the Daugava River”.¹³ The Thirty-Years’ War (1618-1648) also sealed the Swedish hegemony in the region. However, all these wars of the 16th and 17th centuries deeply devastated the social and economic life in the region.

Under the Swedish rule, the northern districts of Virumaa, Harjumaa, Jarvamaa and Laanemaa were combined to the Swedish Duchy of Estland in 1584. The nobility of these districts formed a single cooperation called *Ritterschaft*, which received an extensive autonomy from the Kingdom of Sweden. Along with their previous rights like “full control over their estates and judicial and police rights over the peasantry, the nobility acquired the exclusive right to be presented at the duchy’s Diet (*Landtag*)”.¹⁴ These exclusive rights of the German nobility were approved by almost all Swedish monarchs, and they continued to be the true rulers of the region in following years. Moreover, the Livonian Wars cleared the bishops and the Teutonic Knights from the region, and this was also very favorable for the German nobility.

From the Livonian Wars to the Great Northern Wars, the Estonian lands remained in the hands of the kingdoms of Sweden and Poland. The disappearances of the bishops and the Teutonic Knights enabled the German nobility to increase their position as the major political and economic rulers of the region in this period. On the other hand, when the situation of the Estonian peasantry is considered, they faced with increasing weights of bonds of serfdom. The tax burden on them clearly reveals the unfavorable condition of peasants. At the end of the Swedish rule in the early 18th century, a peasant household had to pay an amount between 50 and 80 percent of its output as tax, of which the landlord and the state received 80 and 20 percent respectively.¹⁵ Moreover, the Estonian peasantry suffered from demographic declines resulting from wars, epidemics, and famine.

The cultural life of Estonians became more colorful in respect to previous times by the beginning of the 16th century. The Jesuits opened a gymnasium (1583) and a college (1595) in Tartu. In the 17th century, many schools in different parts of Estonia were opened. The Tartu gymnasium was raised to the level of university (*Academia Gustaviana*) by King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in 1632.¹⁶ Most of the students were Swedes, Germans, and Finns; it is unknown if any Estonian students attended the university in the 17th century. Another important

¹³ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 28.

¹⁴ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 28-29.

¹⁵ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 30.

¹⁶ Academia Gustaviana “existed until 1656, was renewed in 1690, transferred to Parnu in 1699, and finally dispersed in 1710”. F.W. Pick, “Tartu. The History of an Estonian University”, *The American Slavic and East European Review* 5, no. 3/4 (1946): 150.

cultural development in the 17th century was the increasing number of publications in the Estonian language. However, the publishers were not Estonian. The demand of clergy to give service in Estonian had motivated publications.¹⁷

1. The Great Northern War (1700-1721)

The Kingdom of Sweden was one of the most powerful states in Northern Europe in the 17th century. Thus, the supremacy of Sweden in the Baltic region was seemingly unthreatened for a while. However, the death of King of Sweden Charles XI in 1697 and the accession of 15 years old Charles XII to the throne encouraged the rival states to challenge the strength of Sweden. Especially rising Russia under Peter I emerged as the greatest rival to the Swedish hegemony in the Baltic region. Russia enabled to obtain the alliances of Denmark, Poland, and Saxony against Sweden. The war broke out in 1700 and Sweden effectively defeated all the enemies in the first phase of the war.

Peter I was strong-willed to expand to the west. His desire to make Russia a European power was a well-known fact. To achieve his aims, he founded the city of St. Petersburg in 1703 and made it one of the capitals of Russia with Moscow. Thus, he had a “secure base for realizing his ambitions in the Baltic”.¹⁸ Then, Peter I initiated a new campaign towards the Baltic and Russia gained the Estonian towns of Narva and Tartu by 1704. The tension between Sweden and Russia highly increased in the following years. Finally, the enemies fought in 1709 at Poltava, in Ukraine. The Swedish army was crushed by the Russian army and King Charles XII had to take refuge in the Ottoman Empire. For Russia, Poltava was a “turning point in the war and thrust Russia forward as a major European power”.¹⁹

Russia's defeat at the Prut War against the Ottoman Empire in 1711 prevented Russia for a while from furthering its gains in the Baltic. Charles XII was also able to return to Sweden in 1714 and ruled his kingdom until 1718, the year of his death. Struggles between Sweden and Russia continued until the setting of final peace at Nystad in 1721, which guaranteed the Russian gains in the Baltic region. With the Nystad Treaty, Russia gained a vast territory including Ingria, Estonia, Livonia, and South-east Finland. The rest of the Baltic lands remained under the Polish rule until 1795, when Poland was partitioned by Russia, Austria, and Prussia. In this partitioning Russia acquired the lands of Lithuania, Kurland and Latgale.²⁰

¹⁷ O'connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 28-29; Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 32-33.

¹⁸ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 92.

¹⁹ Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia*, volume I, 2nd edition (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 233.

²⁰ O'connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 33.

The acquisition of these new lands was significant for Russia from several perspectives. First, Russia was able to establish the security in its new capital of St. Petersburg and all Eastern borders by making the Baltic region a buffer zone. Secondly, Russia possessed very important ports like Tallinn and Riga in the Baltic Sea.²¹ Thus, Russia got the chance of playing the more effective role on the seas in terms of economy and military. Thirdly, Russia met with the western style political, economic, and social structures in the Baltic region. This structure and the Baltic German nobility would play an important role in the modernization efforts of Russia in the following centuries.

2. Russian Rule in Livonia and Estland Between 1710-1801

After defeating Sweden at Poltava, Russia began the negotiations with Livonians in Riga to determine the conditions of surrender. Peter I ordered his commander-in-chief Boris Shremetyev to accept all demands of Livonians. The conditions of surrender (capitulations) determined at the end of negotiations were highly favorable for Livonia. According to the agreement, the privileges of the German nobility were reapproved and even expanded. The self-government of the aristocracy was restored, and the confiscated manors of the aristocracy were returned. All these terms were approved by the letter of Peter I.²²

Before looking at details of the conditions of capitulations, the early organization of Russia in Livonia should be considered. Following the Swedish administrative system, Russia constituted Livonia and Estland provinces (gubernia in Russian). These provinces were autonomous which meant that the governors of the provinces were to be directly responsible to the emperor. The other provinces of Russia were subordinated to the Senate. The governors of the Estland and Livonia provinces were appointed among the German nobility.

According to capitulations given to the provinces, the previous privileges of the German nobility were expanded. Under the Swedish rule, the nobility had their organization called *Ritterschaften* in four Baltic provinces and the Diets (*Landgate*) of Estland, Livonia, Ösel, and Kurland in the 16th century. In Estland, the executive branch of administration was the Chancery of the Nobility (*Ritterschaftskanzlei*) and in Livonia the Council of the Diet (*Landratskollegium*). Having extensive rights to conduct police, court, and church services, the nobility effectively controlled the Estonian and Latvian peasants and forced them to obey economic, social, and political organizations imposed by itself.²³

²¹ Arvids Ziedonis, Jr. et.al., editors, *Baltic History* (Columbus: Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, 1973), 71-72.

²² Ursula Vent & Indrek Kiverik, eds, *The History of the Baltic Countries* (Tallinn: Avita, 1999), 87.

²³ Edward C. Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands 1710-1870* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 6.

In the last decades of Swedish rule, there were several arrangements that violated some privileges of the nobility. Sweden had attempted to introduce its laws, institutions, and social practices in Estland and Livonia. This was a threat to the existing social and political order. The Swedish peasants were free men, and they had the right to participate in local government and this was contradictory to the practices in two provinces. Sweden furthered the reform intentions by improving the situation of the peasantry. Thus, Sweden introduced some reforms in the 1680s and 1690s and claimed big shares of land in Estland and Livonia as the Crown lands. This meant that the nobility could not claim any right over these lands. The amount of the Crown lands was one-third of nobility land in Estland and fifth-six of nobility land in Livonia. This regulation was called as reduction (*reduktion*). This attempt was resisted by the nobility of Livonia. As a response to the resistance, Sweden abolished the Council of the Diet, and the post of Marshal of the nobility.²⁴

As it was previously mentioned Peter I ordered guaranteeing of all the privileges to the nobility in negotiations for surrender. In accordance with negotiations, the rights, and the privileges of Estland and Livonia were confirmed by the capitulation agreements and the letters of privileges were sent to the institutions of nobility. According to these capitulations Russia:

1. guaranteed the rights of the Lutheran Church
2. returned to the landowners the land that had reverted to the Swedish Crown in the 1680s and 1690s
3. restored *Landratskollegium* and the post of Marshal of the nobility in Livland
4. confirmed German as the language of the courts and administration
5. left local government and police and the administration of the courts and the church in the hands of town councils or of the Diets, councils of nobility, and other autonomous bodies controlled by the *Ritterschaften*.²⁵

According to the capitulations, the privileges granted to the nobility were based on the royal favor (*clausula majestatis*) and valid through the present empire or empress's reign. Thus, the nobility had to wait for the renewal of their privileges by the new ruler. All Russian rulers followed the practice of Peter I and they "confirmed the special rights and privileges of the Baltic towns and *Ritterschaften* at the beginning of each new reign up to the ascension of Alexander III to the throne in 1881".²⁶

²⁴ Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands*, 6-7.

²⁵ Thaden, *Russia's Western Borderlands*, 7-8.

²⁶ Edward C. Thaden, "Estland, Livland, and the Ukraine: Reflection on Eighteenth-Century Regional Autonomy", *Journal of Baltic Studies* 12, no. 4 (1981): 316.

The reason behind Peter's bestowment an extensive autonomy to the Baltic provinces is generally attributed to his insistence on imitating political institutions existing here. Peter I was an enthusiastic applicant for westernization. He formed a regular and large western-style army, initiated the formation of an effective bureaucracy, and reduced the place of the Orthodox Church on state affairs. To pursue all his westernization attempts Peter I needed both a proper sample in his lands and able statesmen and bureaucrats. Estland and Livonia had experienced the German and Swedish administrative models that Russia would imitate. And the German nobility would offer a necessary source for westernization of the Russian bureaucracy. The German nobles could also meet the Russian need for reliable and eligible representatives in foreign affairs. Finally, the German language was the lingua franca in a vast region, and Russia would benefit from the Baltic Germans in economic and political fields.²⁷ These were the main causes of the extensive privileges granted to the Baltic provinces, and the German population. However, Peter's sympathy to Germans was not limited to those in the Baltic region. He "invited German tradesmen, officers and scientists to Russia, and initiated the Romanov policy of German marriages".²⁸

The situation in the Baltic provinces generally remained stable through the reign of Peter I. When he died in 1725 Russia faced with some accession problems. From 1725 to 1762, three empresses and three emperors ruled the Russian Empire. In this period, the German nobility continued to enjoy its autonomy and strengthened its control over the peasants. They also played important role in military and civil bureaucracy thanks to their knowledge of Western ways. When "new central government offices were created to deal with Estland and Livland in the late 1720s, the government counted primarily on Baltic Germans to run and stuff them".²⁹ Moreover, the number of the Baltic Germans among the army officers was so high that the number reached to almost one-quarter of whole officers in 1730s. Many German diplomats were also appointed to the Russia's foreign offices.³⁰

In the period between 1710 and 1762, the native people of Livonia and Estland did not benefit from favorable conditions like the nobility. The non-German people (*Undeutsche*) were alienated from urban professions, and they faced with many other restrictions. Conditions of the peasantry were especially very unfavorable. Having had a great level of autonomy, the nobility was able to continue a high degree of exploitation over the peasantry. There was not any significant attempt from the Russian government to improve their condition. Moreover, the

²⁷ Thaden, *Estland, Livland and Ukraine*, 312-315.

²⁸ Terry Martin, "The German Question in Russia, 1848-1896", *Russian History* 18, no. 4 (1991): 373.

²⁹ Moss, *A History of Russia*, 264.

³⁰ O'connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 36.

complete enserfment of the Estonian peasantry occurred in this period. The Rosen Declaration of 1739-40, prepared by O.F. Rosen, set the seigniorial rights over the serfs and it “led to official sanction of the enserfed status of the Baltic peasantry by the central government”.³¹ However, the accession of Empress Catherine II to the throne in 1762 heralded some changes on the behalf of the peasantry in Estland and Livonia.

In 1764, Catherine II made an extensive journey through her Baltic provinces and saw for herself the plight of peasants. In the following year, she instructed her Governor-General in Livonia, Count Browne, to propose to the Diet of Nobles the removal of the worst injustices. Despite strong opposition, Count Browne persuaded the Diet to agree to the following concessions³²:

1. Peasants were granted the right to own their goods and chattels, but they were liable to distraint for debt and incompletely performed services.
2. All landlords were obliged to communicate to the Corporation of Nobles details of the services they exacted.
3. The peasants must be fully informed of the limits of their duties.
4. The maximum flogging sentence was to be three strokes, each from twenty sticks.
5. The peasants could proceed against their masters by word of mouth in the police courts, but those who complained groundlessly would be punished.
6. The sale of Baltic peasants outside their own provinces was forbidden.

These regulations were announced in all Livonian churches, but they had little or no practical effect. Catherine II again put a strong pressure on the Baltic nobles to accept more reforms. This led to the Estonian diet to adopt in 1796 a declaration that no peasant should be compelled to provide more services than specified in the Tax and Work Registers (*Wackenbücher*). However, the declaration was never promulgated, and the nobles were bound to it only by their word of honor, and it remained mainly a reform on paper.³³

The regulations related to the conditions of the peasantry were just a small part of Catherine’s policies on the Baltic provinces. Catherine II insisted on making the Baltic provinces an integral part of the Russian Empire. To realize this purpose, the Empress introduced some new policies and laws. First, the authority for determining hereditary and personal noble status was taken from *Ritterschaften* and from the Estland and Livonia Diets, and the noble status was

³¹ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 42. As it was stressed by Raun, enserfment of the peasantry was not a spontaneous fact but it was a result of historical process. Thus, the Rosen Declaration should not be regarded as the cause of enserfment of the peasantry.

³² Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 100.

³³ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 101.

given according to the Russian Table of Ranks and the Charter of Nobility. This change was very significant because noble status was a precondition for occupying an official position. The expectation from this change was that while the authority of the local aristocracy decreased, the central authority would increase. Moreover, new German officials from other provinces took the place of old and local servants of the noble corporations. These new men “no longer viewed all matters from the narrow perspective of closed corporations of the nobility and ancient Baltic rights and privileges, and, where there was a conflict, they were expected to act according to the law of the empire, not according to local customary law.”³⁴

Although Catherine II was mostly respectful to the traditional privileges and rights of the German nobility, she introduced some regulations for the integration of the Baltic region to the Russian state system. First, the tariff barrier that separated Estland and Livonia provinces from the rest of Russia was abolished in 1782. Then, a provincial reform was declared in 1783. Another significant policy introduced by Catherine II was “the Charter of the Towns in Estland and Livonia” issued in 1785. The main aim of the Charter was to develop trade in the provinces and to increase the share of the government and the Russian merchants by ending the monopoly of the German merchants, and restrictions of the German guilds on handcrafts and industrial production. With the reforms, “the economic and administrative unification of the Baltic towns with the rest of Russia” was completed.³⁵ Although these regulations were very important on paper their practical influence was limited. There was no significant change in the social and economic life of the towns, and the German nobility remained as the real power in the Baltic towns during the remaining years of Catherine’s reign. Their significant presence also continued in the 19th century.³⁶

Owing to a lack of continuity in the state administration, limitations introduced by Catherine II on the rights of the nobility were abolished by the new Emperor, Paul I (1796-1801). During the short reign of Paul I there was no significant change in the social, political, and economic life of the Baltic provinces.

³⁴ Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands*, 28.

³⁵ Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands*, 29.

³⁶ John A. Armstrong, “Acculturation to the Russian Bureaucratic Elite: The Case of the Baltic Germans”, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 15, no. 2/3, Special Issue (Summer-Fall 1984): 120. Here, Armstrong emphasizes that “German Balts were, during the early part of the nineteenth century, a small but completely dominant minority. Under such circumstances, it is understandable that a majority of the group adopted the conservative strategy of preserving local privileges by appealing to traditional regional rights”.

3. Russian Rule in Estland and Livonia Between 1801 and 1880s

The Social Reforms and the Situation of the Peasantry

The reign of Alexander I (1801-1825) showed greater changes on the behalf of the peasantry. Alexander I is generally portrayed as an enlightened emperor having liberal ideas, especially in the first years of his reign. According to some interpretations, he intended to use the Baltic provinces as a model for his reform attempts for the rest of Russia. In the beginning, Alexander I attempted to improve the conditions of the peasantry and ordered to *Landtag* to make reforms on the behalf of peasants. However, it was not able to make necessary regulations and the task was taken up by the government. The Livonia Peasant Law of 1804 was the first regulation in Alexander's reign to improve the conditions of the peasantry. The Law did not abolish serfdom, but it gave hereditary land tenure to the peasants. However, the Law was never properly implemented.³⁷ One Estonian peasant presumably said about the unchanging situation as follow: "the new order is still the same old horse with but new saddle".³⁸

The Napoleonic Wars (1804-1815) delayed any further concern about the peasantry until 1815. Then important regulations were made in the Baltic provinces. The emancipation of serfs happened in Estland in 1816. This process was followed by the emancipation of serfs in Kurland, 1817, and in Livonia, 1819.³⁹

The basic principle of emancipation was that the peasant would have personal freedom and the nobility would have all the lands. Because the peasants were not granted any land, they were not economically independent. Moreover, the peasants in Estland were restricted from leaving countryside to find a job in the towns until the male population here had reached to 120,000, and they would not also leave Estland until the male population had reached to 140,000. At that time, the male population of Estland was nearly 99,000. The peasants were not allowed to leave the province or to move to the towns without the official permission.⁴⁰ The peasants were also not granted self-government rights and they remained under the guardianship of police appointed by the landowners and under judicial control.

The nobility had taken all the necessary precautions to maintain the existing social and economic structures. Although the peasantry had legally received its freedom it practically remained dependent on the nobility. Moreover, the nobility was able to avoid its social and economic responsibilities over the peasantry with emancipation. Under these circumstances, the conditions of most peasants worsened. Some peasants tried to get land by exploiting forests and

³⁷ O'connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 41.

³⁸ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 103.

³⁹ Pusta, *The National Revival of the Baltic Peoples*, 380.

⁴⁰ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 103.

some flee to towns or other parts of Russia to find better living conditions. However, the peasants generally stayed and began to work for the landlords as tenant farmers. The peasants generally paid their rents by service. In time, most peasants became indebted to the landowners because of bad harvests and other misfortunes. The situation turned into ‘rent slavery’. The Estonian peasants regarded this period as the old serfdom with a new face and called it “the serfdom of the *corvee*”.⁴¹

The 1840s witnessed the increasing tension among the peasantry who had been completely unsatisfied with the existing social and economic conditions, especially from the serfdom of the *corvee*. The peasants had understood that the nobility would never give any land to them, and they began to join to the Orthodox Church with the hope that the Czar would give them land if they shared the same religion with him. Especially the rumors about Czar’s intention to give land to the Baltic peasants in Central Russia became so widespread. Thus, many people converted to Orthodoxy. Although these rumors were insistently rejected by the Russian officials the peasants continued to change religion. The discontent of the peasants resulted in some revolts in different parts of Estland and the riots were brutally punished by the military forces. Increasing tension and discontent were realized by the Russian government. Czar Nicholas I did not want to see so many disturbances in his empire and he ordered a restoration of order in the Baltic provinces. Thus, a committee called “Committee for the Regulation of Living Conditions of Livonian Peasants” was set up in St. Petersburg.⁴²

The Committee prepared a draft for new agrarian law and the Bill was approved by the Livonia Diet of 1847 under the pressure of the Governor-General. The Bill came into force in 1849 for a six-year provisional term. According to Bill, firstly, all lands were divided into two categories as estate lands and farmlands.⁴³ The landowners were given one-sixth of farmlands on the condition of not violating the rest. Secondly, money rent was made a normal practice and rent by service was limited according to the norms determined by the laws of 1804. A peasant rent bank was to be founded to give credits and finance in the process of transition to money rent and purchase of farms.⁴⁴ The Bill of 1849 served as a model for Estland and a very similar law was issued in 1856, and the Bill also renewed in Livonia in 1860.⁴⁵

Drastic administrative reforms all around the Russian Empire were mainly motivated by a heavy defeat in the Crimean War (1853-56). Alexander II (1855-1881) followed Nicholas I on

⁴¹ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 105-106.

⁴² Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 107-108.

⁴³ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 108. However, according to Raun, the land was divided into three parts by the Bill as “estate land (Hofsländ); peasant land (bauerland); and so-called quota land, which was one-sixth of the land formerly at peasant disposal”. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 49.

⁴⁴ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 108-109.

⁴⁵ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 49.

the throne and he realized the inescapable necessity of reform. Economic backwardness of the Russian Empire was regarded as the main reason for its defeat in the Crimean War by Alexander II. Thus, he initiated a radical social and political transformation. In this framework, the Baltic peasantry got the right of free movement in 1863 and the landowners' jurisdiction right over their estates was abolished in 1866.⁴⁶

The peasantry was given the right of self-government and whose access to land was facilitated in the 1860s. These were mainly caused by “pressure on the German nobility to abolish labor rent and make more land available to peasants. Money rent began replacing labor rent in much of the region, and rural properties increasingly came under peasant ownership”.⁴⁷ The phenomena of independent peasantry gradually developed through the following decades and more lands were owned by the peasantry. However, the economic, and social influences of the German nobility over the peasantry remained very strong until the years of World War I in the Baltic provinces.

Cultural Developments and National Awakening of Estonians

The Lutheran Church had been able to maintain its privileged position in the Baltic in Estland and Livonia after the Great Northern War. The privileges of Church like the nobility, had been guaranteed by the capitulations. Most of the Estonian peasants had remained in the Lutheran confession. With the end of Swedish rule, the Baltic region had met with a religious movement of pietism in the 1720s. In the first wave of pietism, the German pastors from the city of Halle arrived in Estonia and occupied the vacant positions in churches and schools. They offered a simpler religious life compared to the complicated practices of Lutheranism. They also completed translation of the Bible so that believers could read the Bible themselves.

Despite the efforts of German pastors, the first wave of pietist movement was not fruitful among the peasants. However, the movement of Moravianism, a branch of pietism, became more influential among the peasants. The Moravian Church was founded by a German religious called Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1769). The Moravian Church strongly encouraged missionary activities. Estonia was one of the regions that the Moravian brethren pursued proselytizing. However, the Russian administration forbade their activities in 1743. This ban continued until the reign of Empress Catherina II who, in 1764, allowed the members of Moravian Church to “freely colonize in any part of the Russian Empire”, and granted them “complete liberty of conscience and religion”.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 110.

⁴⁷ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 42. O’connor writes that 40 percent of agricultural areas was owned by the peasantry in Livland, in 1877. The rate was lower in Estland.

⁴⁸ J. Taylor Hamilton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem: Times Publishing Company, 1900), 210.

In a certain extent, the Estonian peasantry was introduced with a new lifestyle and culture. The concepts favored by the Moravian movement like ‘humility, morality, and equality’ played an important role in the development of the peasantry’s self-consciousness. In the early 19th century, there were more than 66,000 followers of the Moravian Church in the Baltic region.⁴⁹

Although the Russian administration did not directly violate the privileges of the Lutheran Church it tried to favor the Orthodox faith, the official religion of the state. The state laws ordered that the children from mixed marriages must be baptized as Orthodox. And the Lutheran pastors were prohibited to accept converts from the Orthodox subjects of the state. An Orthodox bishopric was founded in Riga in 1836. Nevertheless, there was no serious attempt by the state for mass conversion. However, the peasants began to convert to the Orthodox Church in the 1840s. As it was previously mentioned the conversions were motivated by the materialistic expectations rather than a religious concern. The peasants hoped to obtain land by converting to the czar’s religion. According to the official registration of the Orthodox bishopric in Riga, the number of the Estonian converts had reached to 65,683 by 1848.⁵⁰ Although these converts were accepted by the church, they were not warmly welcomed by the government because they were not enthusiastic believers and would be harmful to social order. Later some of them converted to their former religions or let their children convert to Lutheranism.⁵¹

As a significant development in the field of education, the Tartu University, which had been closed during the Great Northern War, was reopened in 1802 as the *Universitas Dorpatensis*. German was the language of instruction at the university.⁵² Professors and students at the university were overwhelmingly Germans of the Baltic region. There were also students from Russia, Finland, Poland, and Sweden. Then few Estonian students from the families who held offices on the estates and so were able to get a recommendation from the landowners were able to attend to the university.⁵³ As an important development at the university, the Estonian language began to be thought in 1842 and Kristian Jaak Peterson was appointed as the instructor. Although the number of formal schools remained low, the rate of literacy among Estonians was

⁴⁹ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 43. On the other hand, Raun writes about Moravianism as follow: “The Moravian impact on Estonian culture was mixed. Although they clearly promoted literacy, choral music, and temperance, the Moravians also had a destructive effect on traditional Estonian folk culture”. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 53.

⁵⁰ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 53.

⁵¹ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 118.

⁵² Pusta, *The National Revival of the Baltic Peoples*, 380.

⁵³ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 120.

very high. By 1850, nearly “90 percent of the Estonian population over ten years of age in Estland and Livland could read”.⁵⁴

During the 19th century, the number of literary works in Estonian significantly increased. The total number of publications in Estonian in the 18th century was 220. However, this number reached to 1,047 in 1860. And more than 60 percent of them were published between 1840 and 1860.⁵⁵ Increasing education and literary works also accelerated the national consciousness among Estonians.

F.R. Faehlman, a doctor and lecturer at the Tartu Medical Faculty, organized a few Estophiles and Estonians at the university into ‘Estonian Learned Society’ (*Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft*). The Society published the annual calendars and scientific books. The members also aimed to create a ‘national epic poem’ like *Kalevela* of Finns by gathering the Estonian folksongs.⁵⁶ Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald educated at the German schools made a great contribution to the Estonian national awakening by compiling the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (Son of Kalev) which was published in 1857-1861.⁵⁷

Leppik emphasizes the publication of both *Kalevipoeg* and the newspaper *Perno Postimees* in Estonian language in 1857 as the beginning of Estonian national movement. The journalist Johann Voldemar Jannsen (1819-1890) was defined as the leader of movement. The peak of the national awakening was the Estonian Song Festival in 1869.⁵⁸ Similarly, Raun describes the period between the beginning of the 1860s and the mid-1880s as the time of ‘national awakening’. In this period, a growing number of activists consciously agitated people to show “the merits of a modern Estonian nation and culture”.⁵⁹ However there was no uniformity or common objective among the activists. Some intellectuals like Carl Robert Jacobson and Johann Köler had “Russophile opinions” and they favored Russification in the Baltic provinces at the expense of German influence. On the other hand, there were some other intellectuals like Jakob Hurt who defended ‘a conciliatory relationship’ between Estonians and Germans, and they also urged the acceptance of German political leadership.⁶⁰

When the general peculiarities of the Estonian national awakening are considered until the 1880s, there was no strong nationalist movement among Estonians. They did not stress any intention for independence, and they did not even stress political rights. The intellectuals mainly

⁵⁴Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 55.

⁵⁵ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 55.

⁵⁶ Uustalu, *The History of Estonian People*, 121.

⁵⁷ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 50; Pusta, *The National Revival of the Baltic Peoples*, 381-382.

⁵⁸ Lea Leppik, “Social Mobility and Career Patterns of Estonian Intellectuals in the Russian Empire”, *Historical Social Research* 33, no. 3 (2008), 45.

⁵⁹ Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 57.

⁶⁰ O’connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 51.

focused on social and mostly cultural aspects. However, the ideas were still immature. The intellectuals generally chose between German and Russian influence, and they did not stress much about the independent cultural and social world. However, when social, economic, and political past of Estonians is considered, difficulties are very understandable. Despite all these difficulties, Estonians were able to develop very strong intellectual and nationalist aspirations through the following decades.⁶¹

Since the middle of the 1880s, a policy of Russification was followed in Estonia and Livonia under the rule of Alexander III (1881-1894). Czar Alexander III was against the liberal and nationalist ideas and assumed an autocratic rule. He fostered the Orthodox faith and the Russian language in the Russian Empire. As a result of this understanding, he issued an imperial edict (*ukaz*) in 1885 and the use of the Russian language in the Baltic governorates became compulsory. The policy of Russification “aimed as much at the German as at the native population”.⁶²

The Russian administration decided to impose the Russian language “as the sole language in schools and state offices” with the aim of creating “stronger ties between Russia and its provinces by curbing local power and encouraging Russian nationalism”.⁶³ In 1887, German was replaced by Russian “as the language of instruction” at all the state schools and Tartu University (*Universitas Dorpatensis*), which was also renamed Yuryev in 1893.⁶⁴ Although the Russian policies seemed radical, they had limited impact on Estonians. The Russification policy did not last too long and ended in the Baltic governorates in the beginning of the 20th century. In this period, the Estonian national and cultural awakening continued to develop, and ended with the foundation of independent Estonia in 1918 after the collapse of the Russian Empire.

Conclusion

When trade began to develop in the Northern Europe since 12th century the Eastern shores of the Baltic Sea also became an important part of the trade routes. In the region, the German, Scandinavian, Russian merchants as well as native people were active. Since the late 12th and early 13th century, the fate of Baltic region deeply changed because of the Christian advancement in the region. Although Christianity was not unknown in the region the native peoples had mostly remained pagan. Christianization was widely completed in 13th century.

⁶¹ For changing patterns among the Estonian see: Toivo U. Raun, “Modernization and the Estonians, 1860-1914”, *Baltic History*, eds. Arvids Ziedonis, et al (Columbus: Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies, 1973). 135-141.

⁶² Pusta, *The National Revival of the Baltic Peoples*, 385.

⁶³ Sillaste, *An Outline of Estonian History*, 120-121.

⁶⁴ Pick, *Tartu*, 159.

Along with the propagation of Christianity, the region underwent a deep economic and administrative changes. The German bishops, priests, knights, nobles, and merchants established a strong dominance over the people of the region. The German influence highly increased in the Baltic thanks to the Hanseatic League. The region became an important and integral part of the Hanseatic League that highly contributed to the development of trade. The German influence in the region in terms of administration, religion, language, culture as well as economy was very significant.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Sweden was successful in the conquest of Estland and a big part of Livonia. Under the Swedish rule, the administrative and economic privileges of the German nobility remained mostly intact, and no radical changes were applied. The Swedish rule in the region was continuously tested by Russia since 16th century but the efforts were vain until the early 18th century, when Peter I of Russia energetically focused on the capture of the region. He had two great ambitions; to have navies in the Baltic and Black seas. Peter's intention was to make Russia a great European power, and he knew that Russia had to be sea power to achieve this aim. After long lasting and disastrous battles of the Great Northern Wars, Russia defeated Sweden and captured all Estland and Livonian territories with the Nystad Treaty in 1721.

Peter I firstly created two provinces of Estland and Livonia in the Baltic region. Peter I approved the former privileges of the region and the German nobility. The governors of the provinces, with very few exceptions, were appointed from Germans, and the local assemblies enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in the decision-making processes. The cultural and religious structures of the region were also respected by the Russian administration. Although some economic and administrative reforms were applied to increase the Russian influence in the region during the last decades of 18th century, they made a little impact.

Estland and Livonia witnessed more radical administrative, economic, and social reforms in 19th century. First, the need for social and economic reforms for the Estonian peasantry was taken into consideration. The land slavery status of peasants was abolished in Estland, in 1816 and Livonia, in 1819. There were some attempts to distribute lands to peasants who were also given the right of self-governance in the 1860s. These reforms aimed to reduce the influence of German nobility as well as pleasing peasantry.

Estonians largely remained in the Lutheran faith during the Russian rule and there was no religious pressure on them to convert Orthodox faith. However, the Orthodox bishoprics were created in the Baltic towns since the 1830s. Some peasants converted to the Orthodox faith with the hope of receiving land from the Russian government. Although the religious

tolerance of Russia over Estonians was strong, an increasing Russian cultural influence on them could be observed in time. Estonians were under the influence of two culture: German and Russian. Until the last decades of the 19th century, the German language was the lingua-franca of the Baltic region. The language of instruction in the state schools in Estland and Livonia was German. The Tartu University, the most prestigious educational institution in the region, was overwhelmingly a German institution since its reopening in 1802.

In the 1880s, a movement of Russification began to be implemented in the Baltic region by the Russian administration during the reign of Alexander III. Although the traditional administrative practices were not radically changed, the cultural and social hegemony of the German minority in the Estonian regions were targeted by the Russian administration. The Russian language was introduced as the language of state offices and schools in 1887. These reforms increased in a certain degree the visibility of the Russian administration, culture, and language in the region, but their impact on the Estonian cultural and social life was limited.

A national awakening had already begun to rise among the Estonian intellectuals in the middle of the 19th century. The literary, cultural, and educational movements were fostering the national consciousness of Estonians in the expense of both German and Russian influence. Estonians were not strong enough to bear a political stand or to start a movement of independence against Russia. However, the cultural and nationalist awakening in the second half of the 19th century prepared Estonians for an independent nation state in 1918.

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