

The Baltic: A History.

By MICHAEL NORTH. Translated by Kenneth Kronenberg. Pp. 427. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 2015. £25.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9780674744103.

This is the English translation and updated version of Michael North's *Geschichte der Ostsee: Handel und Kulturen* [History of the Baltic Sea: Trade and Cultures] (C.H. Beck, 2011), following the Estonian translation published earlier this year. The omission of the maritime reference in the English-language title is somewhat misleading and might lead to the monograph being placed on bookshelves next to Andreas Kasekamp's *A History of the Baltic States* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and Andrejs Plakans' *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). Yet North has grander ambitions. He presents readers with a sweeping Braudelian-style narrative of how the Baltic Sea functioned as a place of exchange and encounter for all the territories around its shores, from present-day Denmark and the Netherlands in the west, Poland and northern Germany in the south, Norway, Sweden and Finland in the north, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania along the northwest shore and Russia, or rather St Petersburg (former Ingria) in the east. *The Baltic: A History* explores the contacts and transfers of peoples, goods, and culture to trace the history of how the idea of a coherent Baltic region was imagined and constituted over the last millennia.

The monograph is organized into ten chronological chapters, each with an overarching theme. Chapter 1 begins by examining the early seafaring contacts between Vikings, Slavs, and Balts. The consolidation of these connections are subsequently traced through the spread of Christianity, the activities of the Hanseatic League, and relations between the monarchical states of Denmark, Sweden, the Republic of Novgorod, England and the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Chapters 4 and 7 focus on cultural contacts during the Reformation, Northern Renaissance and Nordic Romanticism of the nineteenth century, while Chapter 5 and 6 chart the growing importance of Sweden as a regional power, the Dutch trade monopoly, and the foundation of St Petersburg. The final three chapters place a stronger emphasis on politics. Chapter 8, on revolutions and new states, spans the period from 1905 to World War II, while Chapter 9 juxtaposes Sovietisation and welfare states.

It is in the final chapter on transformation and EU integration that the genesis of the monograph itself can be understood, situated within wider political, economic and intellectual efforts to strengthen the concept of a Baltic Sea Region. North, himself director of the graduate programme 'Contact Area Mare Balticum' and interdisciplinary training group 'Baltic Borderlands' at the University of Greifswald, is heavily involved in the intellectual dimension of this project. His monograph lays out the historical backdrop for present-day transnational development and cooperation by portraying trade and cultural links as the glue that has historically bound the region together.

North presents us with a fresh perspective on the regional history of the Baltic Sea shores, but unfortunately falls short of many of his promises. His monograph reads more as a synthesis of national histories rather than a truly transnational account of the region's past. Moreover, North's determination to show the exchanges and transfers connecting the region leaves readers with an artificially harmonious view of the region's history, which was more often characterised by conflict, strife and competition. There are also numerous small slips when it comes to specific details. For example, North explains that 'song festivals have been a regular fixture celebrating national sentiment in Estonia since 1869 and in Livonia since 1873' (p. 198), when 'Estonia' did not exist in 1869 and the 1869 song festival was in Dorpat (Tartu) in the Russian Livland [Livonian] governorate. Each chapter begins with a map, yet the choice of city names

to display is inconsistent and on the map of 1923, the borders between Estonia, Latvia and the Soviet Union are erroneous. There are also inconsistencies in the use of historical and contemporary names, such as the abovementioned 'Estonia' and 'Livonia' (p. 198) and 'White Russia and the Ukraine' (p. 225), perhaps the result of translation by a non-specialist. The logic determining the languages in which place names are listed in the appended gazetteer is also befuddling, not least the mixing up of the Estonian/Finnish and Latvian/Lithuanian names for Cēsis/Võnnu/Verkiāi (p. 336).

The Baltic: A History constitutes a solid benchmark in the writing of a regional history of the territories surrounding Baltic Sea. It is an engaging and accessible read for a general audience, but one can question how much it has to offer to scholars already familiar with the subject. It is nonetheless hoped that the monograph will inspire further engagement with this burgeoning field of research.

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