

FOREWORD

From 19–20 September 2008, there was an international conference on “The history of communication in the Baltic Sea region from 16th to 19th century”, organized by the Institute of History and Archeology of Tartu University and the Academic History Society in Tartu and funded by the Estonian Science Foundation. All in all, fourteen speakers from six countries took part in the conference. The event commemorated the 370th anniversary of the extension of the postal service of the Swedish state into Estonia (in 1638 Narva and Tallinn were included in the Swedish postal system via Finland).

The organizers are very pleased that as many as half of the participants used the opportunity to publish their research findings in this journal. In addition, many other historians working on the history of communication have helped expand the thematic, geographic, and chronological scope of this special issue. The articles of Tapio Salminen, Magnus Olsson, Heiko Droste, Carl Christian Wahrmann, and Mati Laur are based on their conference theses; the papers of Enn Küng and Örjan Simonson, however, deal with somewhat different topics. Marek Tamm, Irina Gerasimova, Pärsla Pētersone, Kersti Lust, and Hartmut Rüß belong to the circle of those historians who have been asked to contribute to the journal later on.

This special issue of the Estonian Historical Journal deals with the history of communication in the Baltic Sea region. The richness of topics and sources, as well as the variety of perspectives, reflect the diversity of the national and academic backgrounds of the authors. The volume includes the works by German, Swedish, Finnish, Russian, Latvian, and Estonian historians; among them Ph.D. students who find themselves in the early stage of their research careers but also academics with rich publishing experience. Most of the papers are based on original research with novel sources; there are also some articles that are more general in scope and mostly rely on the works of other scholars. Just as the conference had two working languages, English and German, the journal is also in these two languages, the *linguae francae* of modern academic communication among historians in Northern Europe.

The opening article of the volume by M. Tamm (Tallinn) focuses on how information about the conquest and christianization of Livonia reached Western Europe via the Cistercian Order. T. Salminen (Tampere) writes about the essence and meaning of public roads in the Finnish laws of the

fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. I. Gerasimova's (St. Petersburg) article dwells on the flight of the citizens of Vilnius before Russian troops to Prussia in 1655. She shows the extent to which the private and commercial relations between the former fellow citizens survived, despite the wars that dispersed them. Ö. Simonson (Södertörn) looks at the development of the state post service and the channels and intensity of correspondence in Sweden in the seventeenth century. M. Olsson (Södertörn) demonstrates how links were maintained from Sweden to Europe in 1716, when merchants came out to help forward letters from the besieged Sweden. How handwritten newspapers served as a medium of information in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the topic of H. Droste's (Södertörn/Greifswald) paper. C. C. Wahrmann (Rostock) describes the impact of plague rumors on the behaviour of city magistrates from 1708–1713, taking five German coastal cities as examples. P. Pētersone (Riga) illuminates the development of the post service from an architectural perspective, by the example of a post terminal in Straupe. H. Rüß (Münster) has analyzed in detail the description of travel to Livonia and Russia from 1811–1818 by Franziska Amelung, who visited her relatives living there; the reader gets a thorough survey of the travel and living conditions in those countries.

Three research papers (M. Laur, E. Küng, and K. Lust) have been written within the framework of research grant No. 6945 of the Estonian Science Foundation, "The movements of communication and information in Estonia and Livonia in 17th–19th century" (2007–10). The objective of the project is to shed light on the lesser known aspects of the history of communication and information. E. Küng approaches the matter from the vantage point of economic history, reminding the reader of a forgotten project – the building of a waterway from Pärnu to Tartu during Swedish rule. M. Laur analyzes the administrative communication in the Baltic provinces: how state decrees issued in St. Petersburg reached Riga and Tallinn and how these decrees, together with the decrees of the authorities of the province, eventually reached the residents of the country. K. Lust examines the means of communication that the state peasants of Livonia could use to deliver their desires and requests to the authorities, and estimates the effectiveness of this communication from the peasants' perspective from the abolishing of serfdom (1819) until the enforcement of a new system for running the state estates (1841).