History and Society: Integrating social, political and economic sciences

Lifeworlds of Baltic Germans

Psychography in Social Context

Enno von Fircks

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Lifeworlds of Baltic Germans

Psychography in Social Context

By

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2026

Cover photo: TNQ Tech

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80592-119-6 (Print hardback)
ISBN: 978-1-80592-121-9 (Print paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-80592-118-9 and 978-1-80592-120-2 (Ebooks)

Typeset by TNQ Tech
Cover design by TNQ Tech

It was refreshing to walk through the falling snow, past the snow-covered cottages; a pale evening glow lingered in the sky, and crows flew black and hurried through the silent, white descent.

—Eduard von Keyserling in Feiertagskinder

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Enno von Fircks is a Cultural Psychologist whose work bridges Cultural Psychology, Philosophy, and Developmental Psychology. As a Gestalt practitioner, lecturer, and tennis instructor in Germany, he integrates theoretical insights with practical, real-world applications, refining his ideas in dynamic, hands-on settings. He has authored over 50 articles and chapters spanning clinical, educational, organizational, and general psychology. Among his published works is a monograph in the *SpringerBriefs* series, edited by Jaan Valsiner and Pina Marsico, titled *Conservativism: A Cultural-Psychological Synthesis*. In 2024, he published a second monograph, *Learning with William Stern: Personology for the Future*, exploring William Stern's Critical Personology and its transformative potential for holistic psychology, released by IAP. His ongoing projects include two edited volumes on Goethian science and its implications for psychology, as well as a French-language volume dedicated to cultural-psychological theories and methodologies for the francophone community.

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SERIES EDITOR PREFACE

LIFE DRAMAS: THE PERSON AS A SELFWRITER

This is a book about lifeworlds. We live our lives—and reflect upon them. Some of us write down what they think of themselves. Others—write up what they think of themselves by creating fictional—yet very real—characters. These others write novels and short stories. They are psychologists of the deepest kinds—with no need to submit the construction plans of their characters to and Institutional Review Boards or "Human Ethics Committees"[1] that has become mandatory in contemporary psychological research with human research participants.

Eduard von Keyserling had no censorship committees to worry about—yet his whole societal background operated in carrying out their function. Based on a rumored "indecent event" attributed to his life he was blacklisted by his powerful Baltic German as community. He decided to leave his beloved surroundings in Curland and seek an emotional and literary refugee status in Munich. In his novels he returns to his home lands giving us a glimpse of the Baltic German society of the end of the 19th century.

The history of the Baltic German society shares the fate of many other emigree societies in the World—once functioning in its established societal context, followed by political upheavals that lead to its exodus and re-establishment in the immigration contexts elsewhere. The Baltic Germans have one distinguishing feature—their lives in the geographical areas of nowadays Baltic States were from the outset those of landowners—and direct land managers. From the 13th century until the beginning of the 20th this specific social layer developed a social system of highly integrated kind which resulted in strong social normativity of the ways of local aristocratic living. The need for local land management tasks—done with workforce of non-German origin—led to need for careful negotiation of intermarriages to maintain the economic functions of the widely dispersed agricultural production places. At the same time the higher class life style prescribed

the construction of elaborate living spaces—the manors built over centuries in the forests of today's Baltic States demonstrate the architectural ingenuity of the pragmatic land managers of aristocratic background. All this ended—at around the First World War the newly independent Baltic States introduced legal conditions that eliminated the centuries-long ownership of land and property of the Baltic Germans, leading them to emigrate to Germany and other countries in Western Europe in the years before World War II.

Over the last century the emigree Baltic Germans have become landless landowners—keeping up their social cohesion of their society in the emigration context that has become permanent. The generations born already in the new places of resettlement maintain the social networks of their historical families, maintain their personal identities while being ordinary members of European societies. The present book—written by a member of one of the prominent Baltic German family and dedicated to the analysis of a creative but socially excommunicated member of another family (von Keyserling) who lived more than a century ago—is a testimony of the maintenance of the personal identities of Baltic German families.

Why is the Eduard von Keyserling case important for our contemporary psychology? First of all—it is an application of the method of psychography, introduced by William Stern in the beginning of 20th century personology—on a person whose life course is of interest within the study of the whole of human life course (Zittoun et al., 2013). Life course is difficult to study as it is still in progress—hence retrospective analyses of existing documents becomes the target of analysis. This is in live with turning literature into a data source in psychology—a bold move that Svend Brinkmann (2009) has suggested. The author who writes fiction is necessarily writing oneself into the text—he or she is a self-writer. The intimate connection of the deep psychological relations of the author with one's created fictional character that authors describe while writing is a proof of that self-writing.

The case of Eduard von Keyserling is particularly fitted for new—cultural—form of psychography that is introduced in this book. He was not only a young man navigating his personal relations with his Baltic German context of Curland, but also as he became a writer of novels depicting in fictional forms the general cultural life contexts of Baltic German life realities. Analysis of the characters in these novels gives us new knowledge about the social normativity in the society at the times. Umberto Eco (2009) has raised the critical question—why do we read novels and come back to the psychological features of the fully fictional characters made up by the author? The novel—intuitively for the reader—feeds into the latter's psychological understanding of fellow human beings (and of oneself). Textbooks of scientific psychology fail to fulfill that need.

Jaan Valsiner
Jogjakarta, September 2024

NOTE

1. These institutional committees continue the centuries-long tradition of censoring communicative messages by various censorship systems. Only the framing of the reasons of censorship is in our century turned into irresistibly humanity based—protection of the rights of the participants.

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PREFACE

THE VALUE OF PSYCHOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

This book came into existence rather serendipitously. Throughout my youth and early adulthood, I was drawn to a particular political figure—Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, an East Prussian countess who lost her homeland and had to rebuild her life. During World War II, she was known for her involvement in the aristocratic resistance against Hitler's Germany. She narrowly escaped arrest and execution by chance. My teacher, mentor, and friend, Jaan Valsiner—who also wrote the editor's preface for this book—encouraged me to write about this individual who had profoundly impacted me, and to examine her psychologically. This endeavor resulted in an interesting contribution that I was fortunate enough to publish, allowing me to not only analyze the life of Marion Gräfin Dönhoff but also to contribute to theory and research on this basis (von Fircks, 2023d). This personal experience motivated me to view lived life and theory not as opposing forces but as symbiotically intertwined. The core of the following work, which includes the overarching concept of Psychography in its title, involves both the lived experience and the methodological contribution of how such analysis can be conducted and what implications arise from it.

When I intended to submit a second article on the topic—Psychography and Cultural Psychogram—my teacher and friend, Jaan Valsiner, encouraged me to embed this work into a larger project. "Why not write a book on this subject?" he asked. I could not think of any significant counterarguments. I had just completed two projects; I had studied and read extensively on the subject, and I was confronted with unresolved questions that I was eager to address. These are all excellent prerequisites for embarking on such a project. Thus, I summoned the courage to dedicate myself to this topic. Having already explored the life of Countess Dönhoff in the previous article, I chose to investigate another fascinating life, that of the Baltic author and poet Eduard von Keyserling. Biographical sources on this author are rather scarce, posing a significant challenge to the creation

of a psychogram. Nevertheless, I believe we have succeeded in crafting an intriguing portrait of the author that goes beyond certain biographical studies (see Homscheid, 2009; Urvater, 2016) and brings to light new facets of the author. Further, dwelling on Eduard von Keyserling allowed to depict some general German-Baltic experience—which was also shown through the comparison of Eduard von Keyserling's life with that of a German-Baltic physician.

The purpose of this book can be explained through three main objectives. First, I aimed to characterize the life of the German-Baltic author in its entirety and make it accessible to the reader, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of Eduard von Keyserling's lived experience. Second, it was important to me to provide interested readers with a foundation for how psychographic research can be conducted systematically and rigorously, encouraging other researchers to pursue psychographic work as well. Third, and finally, our psychographic research allowed us to advance existing theory and uncover certain psychological principles that may have previously been overlooked. This methodological tripartite approach aligns with a specific research tradition that I want to name synthothetic research operating between nomothetic (lawfulness-guided research) and idiographic (cultural-historical understanding research).

In writing this book, I was particularly intrigued by the work of Marion Gräfin Dönhoff. The grande dame of German journalism authored a compelling dissertation with Edgar Salin on the cultural and economic conditions of Castle Friedrichstein (Dönhoff, 1936), the ancestral estate of the Dönhoff family. Essentially, Dönhoff examined how the family was able to sustain itself on the estate and the measures they took in response to historical changes. I found this work fascinating, as Dönhoff successfully merged her academic pursuits with personal interests—a balance I find myself constantly striving to achieve. Although I do not possess an economic background and this book does not adopt an economic framework, my aim is to explore how German-Baltic individuals were able to survive psychologically in the face of the challenges they encountered.

Furthermore, this book revives a research tradition that has long been forgotten and is often overlooked in William Stern's general research overview. Experts in the history of psychology are typically familiar with Stern's Differential Psychology (1911), his contributions to the intelligence quotient, and his work on correlation and covariance research. A few scholars, such as Lamiell (2006, 2010, 2012) and Valsiner (2021a), recognize and utilize his philosophical work—Critical Personalism (Stern, 1906, 1923, 1924). However, even fewer have written about Stern's psychographic research or how it can be integrated into his broader body of work, as well as how it can contribute to the advancement of general psychology. This book is particularly dedicated to the latter question, offering interested readers

an opportunity to become acquainted with and appreciate this somewhat exotic research tradition, which aims to understand and systematically explain lived life. I hope the general reader feels encouraged not only to consider their own life from a psychographic perspective but also to apply this approach to the lives of their role models, friends, and acquaintances. Ultimately, research is about examining a subject from a broader perspective and enriching that perspective. By doing so, we help the community perceive a subject differently and interact with it in new ways. May this book serve as a catalyst for that process.

The book is organized as follows: I begin with a historical overview of the Baltic Germans to immerse the reader in their cultural and historical traditions, allowing them to experience the atmosphere of this specific minority group. With this foundational knowledge, the second chapter introduces the reader to the life of the Baltic German author Eduard von Keyserling and his siblings, Marie and Henriette. This chapter distills the life themes of Eduard von Keyserling, which were also faced by the majority of the noble Baltic German population in Courland and Livland. This sets the stage for the next chapter, where a psychograph—a personality interpretation of Eduard von Keyserling—is developed and subsequently compared historically in the following chapter. This concludes the first part of the work and transitions to the second part, which is theoretical. This section elaborates on, analyzes, and systematizes the method of psychography, presenting a psychographic schema based on cultural psychology to facilitate future research in this area. Finally, we assess how these findings contribute to psychological theory and open new avenues for research, culminating in a brief summary of the overall picture.

In particular, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Jaan Valsiner for just being himself and supporting me over the last couple of years. It has been extremely rewarding for me as a person to work with him on many different projects. My gratitude also belongs to Jim Lamiell who helped me to understand the historical notion of idiographic and nomothetic research. Also, I want to thank Anna Ghazi giving me the freedom to work on this project and covering my back. Lastly, this book is dedicated to my already deceased grandparents—both of them needing to flee from their home.

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PART I

GERMAN-BALTS IN THEIR LIFEWORLDS

For our life story is by no means solely our own creation, but rather the product of two factors: the sequence of events and the series of our decisions, which continuously intertwine and modify one another. (Arthur Schopenhauer, 1890)

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CHAPTER 1

THE CULTURAL-HISTORICAL NICHE: THE COMPLEX HISTORY OF BALTIC-GERMANS

This chapter explores the complex historical trajectory of the Baltic Germans in the lands which now belong to Estonia and Latvia from their early settlement in the Baltic region through their eventual decline by the mid-20th century. Initially arriving with the Hanseatic League[1] from the 13th Century onwards, the Baltic Germans established themselves as the dominant economic, political, and cultural elite. Their influence persisted despite changing regional powers, including the Livonian and Teutonic Orders, and later Danish, Swedish, and Russian rule. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of Estonian and Latvian national movements, leading to the decline of German-Baltic hegemony and the implementation of radical land reforms. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 precipitated further upheaval, leading to forced repatriation and eventual displacement as the Soviet Union reasserted control. This historical narrative underscores the significant impact of socio-political changes on the Baltic German identity and their eventual marginalization (Figure 1.1).

The Baltic Germans were people with an elevated cultural status in what is now Estonia and Latvia (formerly Estonia, Livonia and Courland) and

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doi:10.1108/978-1-80592-118-920251001

belonged to the elite in these regions for a long time (Maier, 2012). As a result, they significantly shaped politics, culture, and the economy. The history of the Baltic Germans primarily begins in the mid to late Middle Ages and extends until the "Resettlement of the Baltic Germans," a process of relocating them "back to the Reich" after Hitler and Stalin negotiated the so-called Non-Aggression Pact.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BALTIC GERMANS IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

Historians date the origins of the Baltic German history differently. Selart (2018) cites the Hanseatic League as a key factor in the establishment of the Baltic German presence, highlighting economic reasons that led German merchants to the Baltics (12th century). For the purpose of trade, the arriving merchants introduced a legal framework, which also, from today's perspective, established them as the cultural and political elite. Dorpat (now Tartu), Reval (now Tallinn), and Riga became the centers of the Hanseatic League and enjoyed a correspondingly stronger economic position than other parts of the Baltics,[2] as reflected, among other things, in their population numbers. Selart (2018) describes the North German influence, which was also driven by economic law, as follows:

> In the cities, a typical North German urban life developed, characterized by magistrates, guilds, and craft associations. A significant portion of the urban population was made up of indigenous ethnic groups. The major merchants and wealthy craftsmen were of German origin and culture, while the 'common' people were predominantly Estonian or Latvian. The latter were referred to as 'non-Germans' in Livonia. However, there were also mixed social classes, as not all Livonian Germans were wealthy or of noble descent. (p. 29)

Already in the Late Middle Ages (13th century), the present-day Baltic regions of Estonia and Latvia (Livonia then) were socially unstable due to shifting rulers and wars. The influence of old Russian principalities must also be noted, as they laid claims to what later became the Courland, Estonian, and Livonian territories. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the emerging German upper class was slowly elevated to the nobility. That happened because German people were rewarded when fighting for their respective kings and conquered lands for them.

An example of the emerging nobility is the *Harrisch-Wierische* Knighthood, which was established under King Valdemar II of Denmark and

fought in his wars. In return, he granted his knights land and estates, for which they had to contribute to the administration of the respective territories. The origins of the noble families Fircks (Wierland), Hahn (Wenden), and Uexküll (Talsen) can be traced back to this period (see Figure 1.1). The common people had to pay taxes or were engaged in the peasantry. In Baltic history, there were both free peasants and serfs, who respectively took on tasks for the manorial estates of the noble upper class (Selart, 2018).

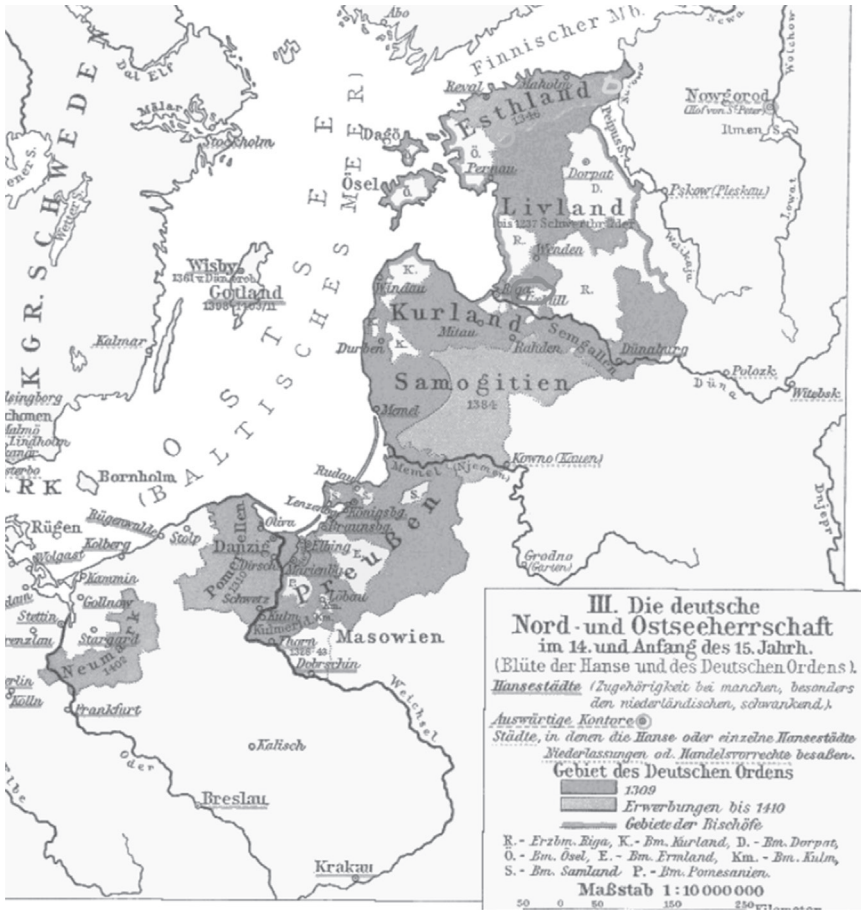

Figure 1.1 The loosely arranged state of the Teutonic Order (The circles within the figure mark the beginnings of the Fircks, Hahn and Üxkuell families).

THE ROLE OF THE ORDER FOR THE BALTIC-GERMANS

Nevertheless, it is also essential to mention the religiously motivated beginnings of Baltic German history, which started with the Order of the Brothers of the Sword (1202–1237) and the Teutonic Order. Eventually, The Teutonic Order built a loose state that existed from 1230–1561, yet

> The peaceful missionization of the region proved unsuccessful, leading Bishop Albert of Buxhoevden at the beginning of the 13th century to call for a crusade, which resulted in the German conquest and the introduction of the feudal system. With the assistance of the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, the Livonians and Latvians were Christianized, Russian power along the Daugava River (Latvian: Daugava, Russian: Dvina) was pushed back, and, after more than 20 years of conflict, the Estonians in the north were subdued by 1227—largely with the help of the Danish King Valdemar II. However, the Teutonic Order, as the successor to the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, was unable to continue its eastward expansion after its defeat by the Novgorod Russians under Alexander Nevsky in 1242. (Maier, 2012, p. 37)

The Order of the Brothers of the Sword, as the precursor to the Teutonic Order, was established in response to the diminishing success of Crusades in Palestine (Jerusalem fell in 1244. This shift in focus led to the missionization of "pagan" populations in the Baltic region. Selart (2018) argues that the Teutonic Order was able to establish an effective administration in Livonia and also pursued expansion to the east and south. Livonia was thus divided among various religious authorities, including bishops, archbishops, and knightly orders. In other words, the Teutonic Order's goals extended beyond mere missionization to include the consolidation and expansion of their power across different territories in Livonia. The knightly orders acted in their own interests. Such ambitions inevitably led to conflicts such as with the Russian principalities.

> After the defeat at the *Battle on the Ice* in 1242, the Teutonic Order ceased further eastward expansion. The border with the Russian principalities remained unchanged for several generations. Instead, the Order focused on expanding southward, subduing the Curonians and claiming two-thirds of their land. However, a land bridge to Memel was neither established nor was it effective for any significant period. (Militzer, 2018, p. 38)

The Teutonic Order repeatedly had to defend itself, including against the Lithuanians and the Curonians, as well as against the Semgallians and the Lettgalians, quelling emerging resistance with military force. This was linked with the specific populational contrast that was present in the Baltic lands. Unlike in Prussia (Dönhoff, 2010), there was no significant influx of peasant families into Livonia; the land continued to be inhabited by the

local population (Militzer, 2018). The administration was managed by the nobility who were eager to expand and preserve their privileges. Some of the noble families such as the Keyserlings or the Plettenbergs entered the Teutonic Order and were involved in their mission—to rule the Orderly State (Ordenstaat) and to manage its administration. As a consequence, different families relocated from German duchies to the Baltic region. The local population—which was Christianized—was made to serve the aristocratic families. Hence, most noble families re-located to the lands to Livonia in order to get involved and rewarded by the Teutonic Order. These people were organized in different knighthoods.

THE TEUTONIC ORDER UNDER PRESSURE OF POLAND-LITHUANA

The Battle of Tannenberg took place in July 1410 in the Teutonic State of Prussia, near the villages of Tannenberg and Grünfelde. The forces of the Teutonic Order, led by Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, along with the Prussian estates and an unknown number of mercenaries and knights from Western and Central Europe, faced the united forces of the Kingdom of Poland under King Władysław II Jagiełło and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania under Grand Duke Vytautas.

This battle marked the culmination of the Teutonic Order's wars with the Lithuanians, which had been ongoing since 1303, and the simmering rivalry between the Order and the Kingdom of Poland, which had been in personal union with Lithuania since 1386. The severe defeat of the Order's forces signaled the beginning of the decline of the Order's rule in Prussia and the rise of the Polish-Lithuanian Union as a major European power. As a consequence of the defeat, the Grand Master in Prussia (Marienburg) was no longer allowed to appoint the Master in Livonia; instead, the Master of the Livonian branch was elected by the brothers of the Livonian Order themselves (Militzer, 2018).

> Wolter von Plettenberg (1494–1535) is regarded as one of the most significant Masters of Livonia. He expanded his residence in Wenden and frequently convened the council there. However, it was not only the "inner council" on which he relied; he also sought advice from other commanders and bailiffs. Plettenberg made efforts to sever the remaining ties with Prussia and the Grand Master. The election of a Master by the brethren themselves was confirmed, and he also purchased Harrien and Wierland from the Grand Master in 1525. The following year, he was recognized as a Reich prince. However, he failed in his attempt to bring the Grand Master's office to Livonia after Prussia's withdrawal from the Order. Overall, his efforts to maintain the unity of the Order are evident. Plettenberg prevented the introduction of

> the Reformation within the Order, as initiated by Albrecht of Brandenburg-Ansbach in Prussia, but allowed the Reformation to take hold in the Livonian cities and countryside. Through a victory over a Russian contingent, he also secured a period of peace from the Orthodox rulers in Moscow, a tranquility that lasted beyond his death. The end of the Teutonic Order as a territorial ruler in Livonia came in the second half of the 16th century. The Order could no longer withstand the further Russian attacks initiated by Tsar Ivan IV, "the Terrible" (1547–1584), and was militarily defeated. Subsequently, the land was divided among the Russians, Swedes, and the Polish king, who received the largest share. (Militzer, 2018, p. 43)

GERMAN-BALTIC AND BALTIC HISTORY WITHIN THE FRÜHE NEUZEIT

During the *Early Modern* period (16th century), the Teutonic Order increasingly faced conflicts with neighboring countries such as Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, and the Grand Duchy of Moscow (Tuchtenhagen, 2018). The Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, attacked the Livonian city of Narva, leading to the *First Northern War*. The neighboring countries, including Denmark, Sweden, and Poland-Lithuania, soon became interested in claiming territories in Livonia. Poland-Lithuania and Denmark largely dominated the Livonian territories, with brief interruptions of Russian or Swedish control.

The Livonian territories had entered into an agreement with the Polish crown under the last Master of the Order, Kettler, wherein the Order and the Master were to formally submit to the crown in exchange for two duchies (Courland and Semigallia). However, other powers such as the Grand Duchy of Moscow continued to exert pressure on Livonian territories, which led to their seeking protection under Sweden.

The peace treaties between Moscow and Sweden, as well as Moscow and Poland, resulted in the division of Livonia among various ruling powers (with the southern regions going to Poland-Lithuania and the areas previously under Swedish protection becoming Swedish (1655–1661). Despite these treaties, conflicts did not cease, and further disputes continued between the Baltic states.

> The Second Northern War (also known as the Lesser Northern War, the Second Polish-Swedish War, or the Carl Gustav Wars, 1655–1660/61) was fundamentally a military conflict among the Baltic Sea states over dominance in the Baltic region, which resulted in numerous territorial changes and involved the Livonian territories. During this war, Livonian regions were temporarily occupied by Moscow troops. However, the Treaty of Oliva (1660), which was crucial for the Livonian territories, restored Swedish control over Estonia, Livonia, and the island of Ösel. The status of the parts of Livonia under Polish-Lithuanian control remained unchanged (Treaty of Andrusovo, 1661).