

LATVIJAS ARHĪVI

HISTORY

Vita Zelče

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY ACTIVITIES OF THE WEEKLY “MĀJAS VIESIS” IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 1850s.

A DECLARATION OF LATVIAN NATIONALISM

Last year marked 150 years since the establishment of the newspaper “*Mājas Viesis*”. The appearance of the newspaper has been declared to be the beginning of Latvian national newspapers for two reasons – for the first time an ethnic Latvian served as the editor of a Latvian newspaper, and the newspaper published articles that were of importance to the Latvian community in terms of social, cultural and language issues. Among those who wrote for the newspaper were Latvian schoolteachers, scribes, authors and students from Tartu University – men and women who were the first to make public announcements about the fact that they were Latvians.

The historical literature is dominated by the idea that the positive role played by “*Mājas Viesis*” in Latvian history is that it expressed the ideas of the so-called “new Latvians” in the latter half of the 1850s. The staff of the newspaper have also, however, earned opprobrium for having yielded before the pressure of the Baltic German nobility and clergy of the era and stopped the publication of articles with frankly stated nationalism or social criticism. This was particularly true of the editor of “*Mājas Viesis*”, Ansis Leitāns.

The establishment of “*Mājas Viesis*” and its first years of activity must be evaluated in the context of modernisation processes, the emergence of the movement of Latvian nationalism, the emancipation of Latvians, and the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in Latvia.

Keywords: The weekly “*Mājas Viesis*”, New Latvians, Ansis Leitāns, Latvian students at Tartu (Dorpat) University, nationalism, Latvian emancipation.

The year of 1856 is seen as a turning point in Latvian history, as the year in which Latvian nationalism, the movement of “New Latvians” and the first national renaissance all began. There are three major reasons why 1856 in specific has been defined as the year when all of this took place. First of all, Juris Alunāns published the first collection of modern poetry in Latvian,

“Dziesmiņas” (Little Songs). (An informal group of Latvian students was established at Tartu University. And the weekly newspaper *“Mājas Viesis”* (Home Guest) was first published in Rīga.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the importance of *“Mājas Viesis”* in the context of the social situation, economic situation and level of Latvian nationalism which prevailed at that time.

The history of newspapers is usually recorded as the history of change, with scholars focusing on those periods in time and those periodicals which represent innovation.¹ This approach dominates in reviews of the history of the press in Latvia, as well, and that is why much attention has been devoted in the literature to the establishment and early days of the newspaper *“Mājas Viesis”*. Indeed, when it comes to the various periods of Latvian press history, specialists believe that the appearance of *“Mājas Viesis”* marked the launch of a new period of time, one that is described as the “era of nationalism”.² This particular publication has usually been analysed and considered in the context of the history of Latvian literature,³ of the biographies and work of the New Latvians,⁴ as well as of other subjects in history. The historical literature is dominated by the idea that the positive role played by *“Mājas Viesis”* in Latvian history is that it expressed the ideas of the so-called “new Latvians” in the latter half of the 1850s. The staff of the newspaper have also, however, earned opprobrium for having yielded before the pressure of the Baltic German nobility and clergy of the era and stopped the publication of articles with frankly stated nationalism or social criticism. In terms of Latvia’s history, authors have also argued that a positive fact about *“Mājas Viesis”* is that it published works by the most important New Latvians of the day – Krišjānis Valdemārs, Juris Alunāns and Krišjānis Barons, all of whom were students at Tartu (Dorpat) University at the time. In the historical literature, however, there is scarce information about *“Mājas Viesis”*, its editors, its employees, the news that it published, literary compositions which it published, its readership, its circulation, etc. These are all issues that are of interest when it comes to the history of the mass media.

History

The weekly newspaper *“Mājas Viesis”* was established by a book publisher in Rīga who was called Ludwig Hartung. His business plans included the publishing of a profitable newspaper which would publish the latest information about the Crimean War. The plan was hatched when

In the Russian Empire, would-be newspaper publishers had to deal with a whole series of formalities before they were granted a publishing concession. Tsar Alexander II signed the document which authorised the publishing of *Mājas Viesis* on January 15, 1856.⁵ Press laws in the empire had been amended in the mid-1850s. Alexander II ascended to the Russian throne in 1855, and he lifted many of the instructions which had been issued by his predecessor, Nikolai I. The former emperor had sought to limit the freedoms of the press and to enhance censorship. This liberalisation of press laws had an effect on "*Mājas Viesis*", too. Authorisation was given for the newspaper to publish political news – something that had always been prohibited in the Russian Empire for newspapers that were read by the lower classes in society.⁶

The officially approved programme for "*Mājas Viesis*" said that the newspaper would publish (1) information about events both at home and abroad; (2) articles that would enhance morality; (3) news of an economic nature, including articles about agriculture, medicine and veterinary medicine; (4) news and reports about churches, schools, the life of farmers, and newly published books; and (5) all instructions and laws issued by the government.⁷

The first issue of the newspaper was released on July 2, 1856, while the last was published on December 29, 1910.⁸ In 1858, the publisher of the newspaper changed, and it was thereafter published by a company that was owned by one Ernests Platess. After the death of Ansis Leitāns in 1874, Platess became the official editor of "*Mājas Viesis*", although in fact the job was handled by an author called Indriķis Laube.

The most important changes in the publication of "*Mājas Viesis*" began in 1887, when the philosopher Arnolds Platess became publisher and editor. He reorganised the operations of the newspaper, inviting Pēteris Zālīte to become its editor. Like Platess, Zālīte held a doctorate in philosophy which he had earned in Germany. He turned the newspaper into a quality publication. During the first decade of the 20th century, the publisher had to deal with failures in content and financing. In 1910, the newspaper was transformed into a weekly magazine, but it was too late. The publication folded in the same year.⁹ "*Mājas Viesis*" had survived for 54 years, and it is one of the best known publications in Latvian media history. From time



Editor Ansis Leitāns.

to time, other publications have been named "*Mājas Viesis*". A literary magazine of that name was published in Rīga in 1926, but it folded after only two issues. A supplement to one of the leading newspapers in Latvia today, "*Latvijas Avīze*", has been called "*Mājas Viesis*" since 1998.

Time and place

“Mājas Viesis”, in fact, was the second press publication to be published in the Latvian language in Rīga. The first was a weekly newspaper called *“Tas Latviešu Laužu Draugs”* (Friend of the Latvian People), which was published by a Lutheran clergyman of Baltic German Origin, Hermann Trey, from 1832 until 1846. When the newspaper began to criticise Lutherans who were converting to Russian Orthodoxy, it was banned.

During the first half of the 19th century, German was the dominant language in Rīga, both in terms of the local government and in terms of economic and cultural life. There were German language press publications, and the most influential of these was the daily newspaper *“Rigasche Zeitung”* (Rīga Newspaper).¹⁰

It can be said that in the mid-19th century, Rīga lagged behind other European cities in terms of technologies, trade and industry. The same could be said of the entire Russian Empire. After Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War and the death of Tsar Nikolai I, the government of the new tsar, Alexander II, launched social, economic and administrative reforms. The powers of the tsar were by no means reduced through this process, but the aim was to ensure economic and social modernisation. This opened up new windows of opportunity for Rīga. The city was hooked up to the Russian rail network, the local port was expanded, and new industries were established. In 1857, the city’s Medieval walls were torn down, and modern buildings were put up instead, complete with the necessary infrastructure. By the early 20th century, Rīga was the most important industrial and trade centre in the West of the Russian Empire.¹¹

In the mid-19th century, Rīga had somewhat more than 60,000 residents – double the number of residents at the beginning of the century. The population was dominated by Germans (some 44% of the population), while Latvians made up around 20% of the population. The political and social environment in Rīga in the first half of the 19th century can be said to have been comparatively peaceful. The major political upheavals of continental Europe did not affect events, and only a few echoes of these events reached the people of Rīga. During this period, a fairly extensive network of social, scientific, charity and interest-based associations and clubs emerged in German Rīga. It is, to a

certain extent, difficult to know what Jürgen Habermas was considering when he wrote about a "bourgeois public sphere" in Rīga at that time – an open arena or forum for public debate in which public thought was formed and in which an important role was played by mass communications, the flow of information and the circulation of printed works. Habermas writes about literary clubs and salons, political journals and political debates, as well as their interaction with what was taking place in 18th century Europe. Within the public sphere, individuals could develop themselves and become involved in rational debates about the development of society.¹²

The weakness of the public sphere in Rīga in the mid-19th century was dictated by the weakness of modern economic sectors, by the authoritarian form of government which existed, by the absence of civic freedoms, and by the vast social gap which existed between the elite and the majority of the population. The situation was made all the more fraught by the fact that on an everyday basis, there was a dichotomy of language between the German elite and the non-German population. The middle class was small in numbers and weak in political and social terms.

Still, in the 1850s we can observe the first major elements in the modernisation of society. These had to do with changes in the population of the city. Rural residents from the Vidzeme and Kurzeme provinces flooded into Rīga – former farmers who hoped for a better life. These new urban residents changed their social group, and more than people in the previous decades, they preserved their ethnic identity, refusing to meld into the German population. There were also much more dynamic processes of vertical mobility, and the number of people who could be seen as a part of the bourgeoisie increased in number and importance. The proportion of ethnic Latvians increased significantly during the latter half of the 19th century, achieving a level of 40% of the population in 1897 to make them the largest ethnic group in the city.¹³ Nationalism became more important after the middle part of the century, and it became a cornerstone of unity and identity for a modern community.

There is a scarcity of information about the public life of ethnic Latvians in the mid-19th century. Augusts Deglavs, in a book about the emergence of the Latvian community of Rīga, reports that a public centre for Latvians was

established around 1853 at a factory owned by one Georg Adolf Tilo. There was a school, a Sunday school, a sports club, a library and facilities where evenings of singing could be held. The leader of the group was a teacher called Juris Caunītis, and the names of more than ten public activists from the club are known even today.¹⁴

The next important impulse in the evolution of the Latvian community of Rīga was the newspaper "*Mājas Viesis*". It is thanks to this publication that we can speak about much more extensive public spheres in which the Latvian language was spoken. The newspaper provided a virtual world in which important subjects could be discussed. Public opinion began to emerge.

The operations of "*Mājas Viesis*" also allow us to identify public opinion leaders in Latvian society in the 1850s. The first generation of Latvian intellectuals in the area of literature has been described very well by the literary historian Aleksejs Apīnis: "Latvian writers were not an elite which stood above the rest of society. They had close personal links with the people, they lived under the same burden of everyday concerns about housework and fieldwork as was faced by any Latvian farmer or city resident, they remained members of their class, their environment and their social group. The way in which the intelligentsia differed from other residents lies in the forms of bourgeois life and manners that appeared in these circles, in the social prestige of education, and particularly in the fact that education allowed those who had only recently been indentured servants and their sons to achieve a deeper understanding of truly human values and respect."¹⁵

Latvian writers came from the circles of low-level bureaucrats, parish and baronial estate officials, teachers, church organists and assistants to clergymen. Many of them were self-taught, while others had obtained an education at teachers' seminaries. Very few had a proper high school or university education. Of course, a proper education in those days pretty much automatically meant that the recipient of the education stopped thinking of himself as a Latvian and became Germanised instead.

In the context of "*Mājas Viesis*", we must particularly speak of the editor, Ansis Leitāns. He was a member of the first generation of Latvian intellectuals. Leitāns was born in 1815 to a family of servants at a baronial estate in Piņķi, not far from Rīga. As a child, the future editor was often

quite sick. His body became crippled to the point where he could not do farm work. Instead, the boy found himself interested in books and other printed works, and that allowed him to pursue a different career. He taught himself, and this self-training was enough to get him a job as a scribe. Leitāns began to write poetry and articles which were submitted to "*Tas Latviešu Ļaužu Draugs*". In the 1840s, he helped to popularise the work of certain German authors, particularly Kristof Schmid. In 1845, a translated version of Schmid's "Geonoveve, Grand Mother of the Duke" became the most widely read book of the 19th century among Latvians, and Leitāns was the translator. "Genoveve", like other popular books of the day, was dramatic, highly emotional, and full of courageous individuals who confronted their surrounding environment. This fully satisfied the feelings of the emerging Latvian bourgeoisie. Thanks to his translations, Leitāns quickly became the most popular Latvian writer of all. He understood the psychology and needs of the contemporary Latvian reader, and this helped in ensuring that the newspaper "*Mājas Viesis*" would also become widely read and popular. One can commend Leitāns for his skill in editing the newspaper and in selecting the materials – news in particular – that would be published. Leitāns emerged as a man who, in the 1850s, could bring together the old and the new generation of Latvian intellectuals. Young intellectuals, it has to be said, thought that Leitāns was too humble, cowardly and God-fearing.¹⁶

The establishment of "*Mājas Viesis*" served to break down a very important principle of the social order in the Baltic provinces of the Russian empire – the absolute control which the Baltic German nobility and clergy had over the intellectual, cultural and public life of Latvians.¹⁷ A situation in which Baltic German clergymen published and edited press publications for ethnic Latvians had been seen as completely normal. Clergymen saw "*Mājas Viesis*" as a threat against their own positions, and they began to write complaints to all kinds of government authorities, criticise "*Mājas Viesis*" in the German press, speak against it in church, and oppress anyone who was employed by the paper (this was particularly true of schoolteachers, who were very much dependent on their local pastor).¹⁸ This only served to consolidate and strengthen the staff and readers of "*Mājas Viesis*". The newspaper achieved a higher level of quality and social significance.

Employees and contributors

Latvian intellectuals who published in *“Mājas Viesis”* in the latter half of the 1850s can be divided up into several groups in terms of education, life experience and belonging to certain groups of confederates.

First of all there was the group of Latvians who were brought together by the aforementioned Juris Caunītis. These people maintained close and tight relations with editor Leitāns. There are reports to suggest that when the editor was sick, Caunītis edited and laid out some issues of *“Mājas Viesis”*. He worked together with a man called Bernhards Dīriķis to select news for each issue of the weekly.¹⁹ Others from this group who published in *“Mājas Viesis”* included the schoolteachers Kaspars Biezbārdis, Miķelis Cīrītis, Jānis Kaktiņš and Jānis Rātminders, as well as the aforementioned Dīriķis, who was a civil servant. Caunītis himself was the most productive author – 91 publications in all before he died in 1861. The authors from Rīga wrote about all kinds of things. Mostly they published popular articles about science, as well as stories, poems, aphorisms and anecdotes.

Next we must speak of a group of Latvian students at Tartu University. Theirs was the first generation during which students openly called themselves Latvians, thus denying the dominant viewpoint – that Latvians were all peasants. Latvian students in the 1850s did come from farm families, and they had to overcome social, financial and bias-related barriers. This did not keep them from obtaining their education and developing their social standing.

Students at Tartu gathered in the evening to discuss the strategy and tactics for forming the Latvian ethnos and nation. There were several patriotic groups with members who were linked in organisational terms. Often they were good friends. During the early years of *“Mājas Viesis”* they had weak personal contacts with the newspaper’s editors and, for that matter, with the Latvians in Rīga. The students felt that enlightenment of the Latvian nation would be one of their most important duties. Among those to publish in *“Mājas Viesis”* were Indriķis Alunāns, Juris Alunāns, Krišjānis Barons, Krišjānis Valdemārs, and Jānis Zakranovičs. Of the articles which these men published, 23.6% had to do with the natural sciences, 19.9% dealt with geography, climate studies and ethnography, 13.7% were

poetry, anecdotes and information about the latest books. Two-thirds of all of the publications to come from Tartu University were the work of Juris Alunāns. He was the most distinguished author among the young Latvian intellectuals, and he was also a notable linguist. The students wrote about complicated issues in Latvian, and this can be seen as a challenge to the well educated Baltic German clergy.

The third group of "*Mājas Viesis*" contributors was made up of Latvian authors who lived outside of Rīga. There are two subgroups here – one made up of older authors who, in the first half of the 19th century, had contributed to the Latvian newspapers which were published by the Baltic German clergy. Most were self-taught men who taught at rural parish schools or served as parish scribes. When "*Mājas Viesis*" appeared on the scene, these men were between 40 and 60 years old, in most cases. Important figures included Ernests Dinsbergs, Ansis Līventāls, Jānis Ruģēns, Pēteris Ulpe and Matīss Vītiņš (Fitiņš). All of them published in Leitāns' newspaper.

The younger generation of Latvians who did not live in Rīga was made up mostly of schoolteachers who had been trained at the Cimze Teachers Seminary. This was a prestigious and important educational institution, one which trained staff for lower-level educational institutions. The authors who contributed to "*Mājas Viesis*" at its inception were between 25 and 40 years old, on average, and most were social and intellectual leaders in their local communities of Latvians. The teachers often conducted choirs and organised cultural and entertainment events in their area. Miroslav Hroch, who is a student of the ethnic movements of small nationalities, has particularly emphasised the role of rural schoolteachers in the national renaissance and in patriotism.²⁰ This group of "*Mājas Viesis*" contributors was represented by Jānis Bankins, Juris Dauge, Ādams Tērauds and Jēkabs Zvaigznīte. Dauge was most active of all. He was a private teacher at a baronial estate and then, later, a schoolteacher in the Sauka Parish. Between 1856 and 1861, "*Mājas Viesis*" published no fewer than 132 of his articles – accessible writings about history, about historical figures such as Christopher Columbus, Constantine the Great and Alexander Suvorov, and about far-off nations, cities and regions (Siberia, the deserts of Arabia, etc.). Dauge also published practical advice, short stories, poetry and fairy tales.²¹ Latvian authors who

did not live in Rīga did not have daily contacts with other Latvian authors or nationalist confederates.

"*Mājas Viesis*" helped Latvian intellectuals to consolidate and to establish networks of communications. The newspaper allowed them to break free of their local environment, to start understanding the need for social activism in dealing with national problems. As Peter Alter has emphasised, those who "awakened" the process of national renaissance in Europe played a decisive role.²² If we look at the activities of "*Mājas Viesis*" employees, their writings, and their innovation in terms of the subjects that they discussed, the forms of expression that they used and the language which they developed – all of this confirms a thesis that has been proposed by Benedict Anderson – that the era of nationalist movements was also a time when there was a philological and lexicological revolution. It was a time for professions which worked with the word.²³ From the very beginning, the newspaper helped to expand the boundaries of issues that were discussed in public by Latvians, the sum of knowledge and the vocabulary which people could accumulate.

News

In the first half of the 1850s, the Crimean War led to significantly increased interest among Latvians in what was happening elsewhere in the world. The newspaper "*Latviešu Avīzes*" carried news about the war, descriptions of battles and explanations of the international situation which prevailed. The paper's circulation increased significantly during the war, which makes it clear that the information was highly in demand. "*Latviešu Avīzes*" was edited by a clergyman, Rudolf Schulz, and he published the latest news in the format of religiously didactic articles. He read German newspapers and then selected those bits of information which he believed would be of the greatest use to Latvian readers – mostly farmers. He supplemented these writings with religious texts and his own ideas. This is what he saw as "news."

The very first issue of the new "*Mājas Viesis*", by contrast, made it clear that news would be absolutely secular. A separate paragraph was devoted to each bit of news, and each paragraph was introduced with a statement of place and time. As was mentioned previously, "*Mājas Viesis*" was the first newspaper to be addressed to ethnic Latvians which was allowed to print

publish news (but only, of course, from the official perspective of the Russian Empire's government). In 1856, political news made up 36% of all news in the newspaper, and in 1857, the percentage rose to 55%. Political news helped readers to get a better understanding of such issues as the way in which public life is organised, the state and its functions, power and application of power, governance, international relations, etc. Much was written about the Russian tsar and the other crowned heads of Europe – their lives, the continuity of their power, etc. In writing about the politics of the world, much attention was devoted to the colonial policies of the European powers. In the latter half of the 1850s, "*Mājas Viesis*" particularly focused on the activities of Great Britain and France in China and India.

A comparatively small but important segment of the news dealt with technological innovations during the era in question. There were reports, for instance, about the installation of Russia's rail network and about the establishment of a telegraph link between Europe and the United States. In 1857, information about the latest aspects of technology and science made up 6% of content.

Quite often the news reports had to do with sensationalist events – natural disasters, robberies, thefts, misunderstandings involving someone's death, surprising escapes from the clutches of wild animals, accidents, peculiar events, etc. In 1856, such articles made up fully 56% of all news reports (32% in 1857).

The world which was covered by "*Mājas Viesis*" was a big one. In 1858, 11.11% of reports were local – they reported on events in Rīga and in the Vidzeme and Kurzeme provinces. A total of 13.19% of information focused on events in St Petersburg, the imperial capital, as well as in the other provinces of the empire. The most important issues to be discussed included the activities of high-ranking officials, reforms aimed at liberating indentured servants, policies in the Caucasus, etc. Among foreign countries to be discussed on the pages of the newspaper, there were England (11.98%), France (9.55%), German countries (16.49%), Italian countries (6.42%), Greece (1.74%), Montenegro (1.22%), Portugal (1.22%), Switzerland (0.87%), and other European countries (6.42%). From other continents, the countries to be discussed most often were in Asia (16.15%), with few reports from other parts of the world – North America (2.26%), Africa (0.69%), Latin American (0.52%), Australia and Oceania (0.17%).

Most of the news in "*Mājas Viesis*" came from local German publications. A weekly format was not really appropriate for up-to-the-moment news. Readers usually read about events that were at least two weeks old.

At the same time, however, the newspaper did allow readers to get a new sense of the flow of events in the world. Each story, as mentioned previously, was preceded by a statement of time and place, and this clearly created the impression that the flow of news is uninterrupted, that there is continuity in events. A new understanding of time, space and their dimensions began to emerge. According to the historian Thomas Nipperdey, newspapers ensured that people would have regular and "continual contact with the universal, with the Hegelian 'world spirit'". People developed new relations with time and their daily routine, thus adopting a new relationship with modernity.²⁴

The national agenda

The views of the New Latvians about nationalism have been analysed by a number of researchers, particularly Ernests Blanks, Georgs Libermanis, Arveds Švābe, Andrejs Plakans and Gints Apals.²⁵ As Apinis has noted, the ideas of nationalism had been expressed before the emergence of the new Latvians, but only in a fragmentary, unclear and inconsistent way.²⁶ The New Latvians felt that the way of socialising individuals was to create ethnic communities so that each individual could find a role in the community and make an investment in his nation's development.

Apals notes that the period of "*Mājas Viesis*" was one during which the concept of the nation was adapted to the needs of the New Latvian movement. In their writings, they proposed basic elements of the concept of the nation. They created symbols that are needed for people to identify themselves in the context of the idea of the nation.²⁷ Of particular importance in designing the concept of the national concept was Juris Alunāns and his publications in "*Mājas Viesis*". He proposed a number of fundamental symbols and myths that were aimed at forming a sense of national self-understanding among Latvians. Alunāns also helped to find new words to describe the territory in which Latvians lived – he proposed *Lātava* or *Latva* as a "land in which people live in harmony".²⁸ The name which eventually stuck – *Latvija* – first appeared in the writings of the New Latvians in 1862, and then in a different newspaper – "*Pēterburgas Avīzes*" (1862–1865).

The writings of Juris Alunāns created the basic elements of Latvia's historical narrative. He created the story of the beginning of Latvian history, reporting that Latvians entered a territory where "there was endless destruction. Not a sign of tilled fields or crops. Swamps instead of meadows. They could search for days and days for any homes, and yet find none. Swamps and forests covered all the land, and wild animals and very fierce people lived there". Latvians, Alunāns went on, were the ones who "began to chop down the forests, to clear the fields, to dig the ditches, to drain the lakes and swamps, to create new beds for the rivers, to tend to their pastures and meadows, to create homes and villages and to raise livestock".²⁹ In these stories, Latvians were the true owners of the land, they were the ones who took care of it.

In another article Alunāns wrote that Latvians, "after the Greeks and the Romans, were the first nation in Europe which cleared fields and engaged in agriculture".³⁰ The author went to considerable pains to emphasise that Latvians were not a nation with no history, as Baltic German authors had been insisting in their own historical tractates. These claimed that before the arrival of the Germans, Latvians "were dark and pitiful pagans who lived in the forest and killed one another, similarly to the peoples who are obviously dying out in Australia".³¹ Alunāns continued to develop ideas that had first been proposed in the writings of the Baltic German journalist Garlieb Merkel – that the ancient Latvians led happy lives until the German conquerors spoiled everything. If the Germans had not interrupted the natural development of the Latvians, wrote Alunāns, they would have become one of the world's most highly developed nations.

Alunāns' narrative about Latvian history also emphasised that Latvians and Lithuanians form a close-knit community, that the two languages have Indo-European roots,³² and that the two nations engaged in heroic battles against the Vikings, found ancient trade routes and introduced early forms of money.³³ In his historical tractates, Alunāns discussed the deities of the ancient Latvians – a pantheon of gods and goddesses which allowed him to compare Latvians to the ancient Greeks, Indians, Persians and Romans. He argued that the polytheistic nature of the ancient Latvians made it clear that "contrary to frequent claims, the Latvians were not an unlearned people, because the thing is that no matter whether they were pagans or not, the ones

who had learned the matters of faith could never be weak when it came to other knowledge and wisdom".³⁴ By coming up with an historical narrative of the ancient and absolutely positive role of Latvians in the development of their land, Alunāns constructed Latvians as the true owners of the land. Anthony Smith has emphasised that nationalism is an issue of "land" – both as property and as renaissance, as the "fatherland" that is marked out by cultural history, as belonging to the territory in which the nation's ancients once lived. In subjective terms, the location of a nation depends on the way in which its ethnic history is read – history which speaks to the links between specific historical communities of individuals and the land upon which this community lives. Also of importance is the historical destiny of that particular territory.³⁵

"*Mājas Viesis*", in this sense, created an historical construct of the land of the Latvians which violated the administrative boundaries of the Kurzeme and Vidzeme provinces of the Russian Empire. The newspaper served to create an historical, national and territorial community, one with cultural and psychological links to the lands of the ancient Latvians. The New Latvians produced texts about an ideal and attractive ethnic past, and these served the function of awakening nationalist emotion – something which was supposed to help a weak and unclear ethnic community in becoming a modern political nation.

In "*Mājas Viesis*", Alunāns frequently wrote about the idea that Latvians, as a nation, had the same rights as any other nation, that its belonging among the developed nations of the world could not be questioned. These articles had two separate functions: (1) To raise the self-esteem and pride of Latvians in terms of being Latvians; (2) To dispute the views which had long been cultivated by Baltic German nobility and clergy – that Latvians were unable to exist independently or to take decisions, that the Latvian nation would sooner or later wither away. In their own texts, New Latvians constructed Latvians as a modern nation which was legitimately, naturally and inevitably returning to the community of the world's developed nations.

Alunāns wrote in "*Mājas Viesis*" that the cornerstone of unity for Latvians must be language. It was the duty of Latvians to honour and to respect their language, not to question its complexity or to refuse to speak it on

an everyday basis. Alunāns wrote sarcastically about the attitudes of Baltic German nobles and intellectuals vis-à-vis the Latvian language: “These men thought and thought and finally thought up the idea that Latvian is the language of fieldworkers. Then they went on to decide that the Latvian language must die out. How wise, how wise are these men!!! The only problem is that the evidence which they wished to confirm as prophets proves to be so wonderful for us – it has been grabbed from the clear blue sky. They try to tell us that Latvians are the fruit of unready flesh and must die out!”³⁶

Alunāns felt that the Latvian language would become richer and richer, that new words would be created which would describe important issues and discoveries. In “*Mājas Viesis*”, he often proposed new words that he had thought up himself, explaining how others could follow suit.³⁷

Alunāns and other authors used the newspaper to discuss issues of Latvian literature, arguing that literature of a high level of quality must be written in Latvian. They called for a greater number of press publications, adding that each should be of a different nature.

On the agenda of the New Latvian movement, national issues merged with social problems. Hroch considers Latvians to be one of the “belated nations” – a nation which lacked modern social structures of a complete spectrum. The emergence of a modern society began with the repeal of indentured servitude in Kurzeme and Vidzeme in 1817 and 1819 respectively. Indentured servants were set free and became permanent citizens of the Russian Empire. They had to find their own place in an entirely new social scheme. The community had to produce landowners, farmers, businessmen, intellectuals, civil servants, etc. Initially there were few former indentured servants who dared to live lives that had nothing to do with farming, but by the middle of the century it was entirely clear that the processes of social differentiation would occur much more quickly thereafter. In “*Mājas Viesis*”, Alunāns argued that as the Latvians became more and more educated, “the fairy tale which says that absolutely every Latvian has to be a farmer will finally disappear”.³⁸ He noted that there were already gentlemen who were Latvians, but added that in the future there would be many more of them. The newspaper went to great lengths to emphasise that not all Latvians are identical.



The newspaper "Mājas Viesis" performed an important role in the emergence of the Latvian public sphere. New subjects were discussed, and public debates occurred about the future. It has been suggested that the

circulation of “*Mājas Viesis*” was around 4,000 copies. Press reading habits and newspaper formats back then meant that each copy of the newspaper was read by quite a few people – five to 10 people in a single household or as many as 100 people when several households gathered together for a subscription. The articles of the New Latvians that were published in “*Mājas Viesis*” first and foremost spoke of the emancipation of Latvians that was necessary as modernisation of the Baltic provinces began. The New Latvians argued that the foundations for Latvian emancipation were (1) education, (2) a concept of nation, (3) a modern Latvian culture, (4) a Latvian nation with a complete social structure, (5) information about the events of the world, (6) and development and universal use of the Latvian language. In the 1860s, these ideas would be developed more completely in other periodicals that were published by the New Latvians – an almanac called “*Sēta, Daba, Pasaule*” (Farm, Nature, World) (1860) and the weekly newspaper “*Pēterburgas Avīzes*” (1862–1865).

REFERENCES

- ¹ Conboy, M. *Journalism: A Critical History*. London: Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 2004. P. 5.
- ² See Zelče, V. 19. gadsimta latviešu preses pētniecība: Rezultāti un dažas izpētes problēmas. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*. 1994. 2:31.
- ³ See, e.g., Klaustiņš, R. *Latviešu rakstniecības vēsture*. Rīga: J. Zihmanis, 1907. P. 129, 130. Also Zeiferts, T. *Latviešu rakstniecības vēsture*. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1922/1993. P. 269–271. Also Unams, Ž. Avīžniecības nodibināšanās un tautiskā laikmeta avīžniecība. In: Bērziņš, L. *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*. Rīga: Literatūra, 1935. P. 140–144. Also Sokols, E. (ed.). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*. 2. sēj.: *Latviešu nacionālās literatūras sākuma periods (no 19. gs. 50. gadu vidus līdz 80. gadu vidum)*. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas izdevniecība, 1963. P. 69–74. Also Čakars, O., Grigulis, A. and M. Losberga. *Latviešu literatūras vēsture no pirmsākumiem līdz XIX gadsimta 80. gadiem*. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1990. P. 207–213. Also Hausmanis, V. (ed.). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*. 1. sēj.: *No rakstītā vārda sākumiem līdz 1918. gadam*. Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1998. P. 98, 102–104; et al.
- ⁴ See, e.g., Birkerts, A. *Krišjānis Valdemārs un viņa centieni: Biogrāfiski-kritiska studija*. Rīga: A. Raņķa grāmatu tirgotava, 1925. P. 124–126. Also Libermanis, G. *Jaunlatvieši: No latviešu ekonomiskās domas vēstures*. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1957. P. 51–55. Also Baumanis, A. *Krišjānis Barons. Dzīve un darbi*. New York: Grāmatu draugs, 1984. P. 96–106. Also Viese, S. *Mūža raksts: Krišjāņa Barona dzīvesstāsts*. Rīga: Liesma, 1985. P. 3033; et al.
- ⁵ The original of the document is found at the Russian State History Archive (St Petersburg), f. 772, op. 1, d. 3736, 1. 10, 11.
- ⁶ For more on the press laws of the Russian Empire and the relationship between the Latvian media and the institutions of administration and censorship at that time, see Zelče, V. Ieskats latviešu avīžniecības un cariskās Krievijas administrācijas attiecībās: 19. gs. 20.–60. gadi. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls* 1993. 2: 32–45.
- ⁷ Russian State Historical Archive, f. 772, op. 1, d. 3736, 1. 7.
- ⁸ For data about the issues of “*Mājas Viesis*” that were published, see Egle, K., Lūkina, V., Brempele, Ā. and V. Jaugiēts. *Latviešu periodika*. 1. sēj.: 1768–1919. Rīga: Zinātne, 1977. P. 229–231.

- ⁹ See Grigulis, A. and R. Treijs. *Latviešu žurnālistikas vēsture no pirmsākumiem līdz Pirmajam pasaules karam*. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1992. P. 30–42, 108–115.
- ¹⁰ For more about the newspaper, see Duhanovs, M. *Rigasche Zeitung – avots Baltijas vācu liberāļu XIX gs. vidus politiskā kursa pētniecībai*. *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 1975. 2: 61–65.
- ¹¹ See Oberlenders, E. Rīgas izaugsme par daudz nacionālu ekonomisko metropoli". In Volfarte, K. and E. Oberlenders (eds.). *Katram sava Rīga: Daudznacionālās pilsētas portrets no 1857. līdz 1914. gadam*. Rīga: Jumava, 2004. P. 11–30.
- ¹² See Habermas, J. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. London: Polity Press, 1989.
- ¹³ See Zeids, T. (ed.). *Feodālā Rīga*. Rīga: Zinātne, 1978. P. 328–331. Also Krastiņš, J. (ed.). *Rīga: 1860–1917*. Rīga: Zinātne, 1978. P. 24.
- ¹⁴ Deglavs, A. *Latviešu attīstības solis no 1848. līdz 1875. g.* Rīga: M. Jakobsons, 1893. P. 37–47.
- ¹⁵ Apinis, A. Agrienā (Inteliģences loma latviešu sabiedrības lasīšanas vēsturē 19. gadsimta 30.–50. gados). *Karogs*, 1982. 8: 142.
- ¹⁶ For more about Leitāns: *Ans Leitāna dzīve, darbi un miršana*. Rīga: E. Platess, 1875. Also Goba, A. Ansis Leitāns – pirmais latvju redaktors. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 1924. 11: 494–497. Also Goba, A. Veci vīri jaunā gaismā. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*. 1930. 4: 365–374.
- ¹⁷ For more about the role of the Baltic German clergy, see Zelče, V. Auf dem Wege zu einer lettischen Nation. Deutschbaltische Pastoren in den sozialen und nationalen Prozessen von der ersten Hälfte bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. *Nordost-Archiv*, 1998. 7(2): 417–442.
- ¹⁸ See Ārons, M. *Latviešu Literāriskā (Latviešu draugu) biedrība savā simts gadu darbā*. Rīga: A. Gulbis, 1929. P. 182–184.
- ¹⁹ See Ambrainis, V. Juris Caunītis. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 1936. 12: 690.
- ²⁰ Hroch, M. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. P. 82.
- ²¹ For more about Dauge, see Kiršentāle, I. Juris Dauge un viņa "Turaidas jumprava". In: Dauge, J. *Turaidas jumprava*. Rīga: Liesma, 1987. P. 47–81.
- ²² Alter, P. *Nationalism*. London: Edward Arnold, 1989. P. 57, 58.
- ²³ Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed. London, New York: Verso, 1991. P. 77, 78.
- ²⁴ Nipperday, T. *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck: 1800–1866*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. P. 522.
- ²⁵ Blanks, E. Latvju tautiskā kustība. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1994(1927). P. 17–116. Also Libermanis, G. *Jaunlatvieši: No latviešu ekonomiskās domas vēstures*. P. 51–77. Also Švābe, A. *Latvijas vēsture: 1800-1914*. Stockholm: Daugava, 1958. P. 362–399. Also Plakans, A. Peasants, Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Russian Baltic Provinces, 1820–1890. *Journal of Modern History*, 1974. XLVI: 445–475. Also Plakans, A. The Latvians. In Thaden, E. C. (ed.). *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. P. 207–226. Also Apals, G. Jaunlatviešu kustības organizatoriskā attīstība 19. gs. 50. un 60. gados. *Latvijas Arhīvi*. 1997. 3: 37–45. Also Apals, G. Jaunlatviešu iespaids uz latviešu nācijas tapšanas procesu. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, 1998. 2: 23–30.
- ²⁶ Apinis, A. Agrienā (Inteliģences loma latviešu sabiedrības lasīšanas vēsturē 19. gadsimta 30.–50. gados). P. 153.
- ²⁷ Apals, G. *Jaunlatviešu kustības raksturs 19. gadsimta 50. un 60. gados*. Rīga: Latvian Institute of History, 1993. P. 17, 18.
- ²⁸ Alunāns, J. Ko tas vārds 'latvietis' apzīmē. *Mājas Viesis*. 1857. No. 40.
- ²⁹ Alunāns, J. Kāds veco latviešu stāsts. *Mājas Viesis*, 1856. No. 22.
- ³⁰ Alunāns, J. Ko tas vārds 'latvietis' apzīmē.
- ³¹ Alunāns, J. Kāds veco latviešu stāsts.
- ³² Alunāns, J. Ko tas vārds 'latvietis' apzīmē.
- ³³ Alunāns, J. Leiši. *Mājas Viesis*. 1858. No. 25, 27, 29, 31, 33 and 34.

³⁴ Alunāns, J. Precība jeb andele pie veciem latviešiem. *Mājas Viesis*. 1858.

³⁵ Smith, A. D. *National Identity*. 2nd ed. Reno: Nevada University Press, 1993. P. 68–70.

³⁶ Alunāns, J. Latviešu valoda. *Mājas Viesis*, 1858. No. 19.

³⁷ See, e.g. Alunāns, J. Īsa pamācīšana, kā tautu vārdi pa latviski jāraksta. *Mājas Viesis*, 1857. No. 20; Alunāns, J. Par jauniem latviešu valodā taisāmiem vārdiem. *Mājas Viesis*. 1857. No. 25. For more about Alunāns' contributions toward the Latvian language, see Blese, E. Jura Alunāna loma mūsu literārās valodas izveidošanā. In: Alunāns, J. *Kopotī raksti*. Rīga, 1933. Vol. 3. P. 5–434.

³⁸ Alunāns, J. Latviešu valoda.

Žurnāla redakcija pateicas Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Reto grāmatu un rokrakstu nodaļas vadītājai Inārai Klekerei par palīdzību ilustratīvā materiāla sagatavošanā.

Vita Zelče

LAIKRAKSTA “MĀJAS VIESIS” IZVEIDE UN DARBĪBAS PIRMIE GADI (19. GS. 50. GADU OTRĀ PUSE). LATVIEŠU NACIONĀLISMA PIETEIKUMS

2006. gadā apritēja 150 gadi kopš laikraksta “Mājas Viesis” izveides. 1856. gadu Latvijas vēsturē mēdz uzskatīt par pavērsiena gadu, proti, to dēvē par latviešu nacionālisma, jaunlatviešu kustības un pirmās nacionālās atmodas sākuma punktu. Šo procesu datējumu tieši ar 1856. gadu nosaka trīs īpašas nozīmes vēstures fakti – togad tika izdots pirmais modernās dzejas krājums latviešu valodā Jura Alunāna “Dziesmiņas”, Tērbatas Universitātē izveidojās neformāls latviešu studentu pulciņš un Rīgā sāka iznākt nedēļas laikraksts “Mājas Viesis”.

Šā raksts uzdevums ir izvērtēt laikraksta “Mājas Viesis” izveides nozīmi sava laika sociālās situācijas, saimnieciskās un latviešu nacionālisma dzimšanas kontekstā. Laikrakstu vēsture pārsvarā tiek rakstīta kā pārmaiņu vēsture, aplūkojot tos posmus un izdevumus, kurus raksturo jauninājumi. Šāda pieeja ir dominējoša arī Latvijas preses vēstures apskatos, tādēļ arī laikraksta “Mājas Viesis” nodibināšanai un darbības pirmajam posmam vēstures literatūrā ir veltīta samērā liela vērība.

Nedēļas laikraksta “Mājas Viesis” faktiskais dibinātājs bija Rīgas grāmatizdevējs Ludvigs Hartungs, kura komerciālās darbības plānā ietilpa izveidot peļņu nesošu laikrakstu, kas publicē jaunāko informāciju par Krimas kara notikumiem. Šis plāns radās, vērojot Jelgavā latviešu valodā izdotā nedēļas laikraksta “Latviešu Avīzes” tirāžas straujo pieaugumu. 1855. gadā

šim izdevumam bija 4100 abonentu, kas bija rekordskaitlis tālaika Baltijā. Par jaundibināmā laikraksta "Mājas Viesis" redaktoru tika uzaicināts populārais latviešu literāts Ansis Leitāns.

Lai iegūtu "Mājas Viesis" izdošanas koncesiju, saskaņā ar Krievijas impērijas likumiem bija nepieciešams nokārtot virkni formalitāšu. 1856. gada 15. janvārī Krievijas ķeizars Aleksandrs II parakstīja dokumentu par laikraksta "Mājas Viesis" izdošanas atļauju. 19. gs. 50. gadu vidū tika mainīta preses likumdošana. Impērijas tronī 1855. gadā nākot jaunam cāram Aleksandram II, tika atcelti daudzi iepriekšējā cara Nikolaja I izdotie rīkojumi par preses darbības ierobežojumiem un cenzūras pastiprināšanu. Preses darbības liberalizācija ietekmēja arī jaundibināmo laikrakstu "Mājas Viesis". Tam tika atļauts publicēt politiska satura ziņas, agrāk Krievijas impērijā izdotajiem preses izdevumiem, kuru lasītāji piederēja zemākajai kārtai, tas bija liegts.

Rīgas 19. gs. vidus publiskās sfēras vājumu noteica moderno saimniecisko nozaru toreizējais vājums, kā arī autokrātiskā pārvalde, pilsonisko brīvību neesamība, lielā sociālā plaisa starp eliti un iedzīvotāju vairākumu (ko pastiprināja arī ikdienas valodas lietojuma dihotomija starp vācu eliti un pārējiem – nevāciem), skaitliski mazais, politiski un sociāli vājais vidusslānis. Tomēr 50. gados ir vērojamas sabiedrības modernizācijas pirmās nozīmīgās iezīmes. Tās saistītas ar pilsētas iedzīvotāju sastāva maiņu, Rīgā ieplūda aizvien vairāk Vidzemes un Kurzemes guberņu lauku iedzīvotāji, agrākie zemnieki, kuri cerēja pilsēta atrast labāku dzīvi. Jaunie pilsētnieki, mainot savu sociālo grupu, vairāk nekā iepriekšējās desmitgadēs paturēja savu nacionālo identitāti un neieplūda vāciešos. Iezīmējās arī daudz dinamiskāki vertikālās mobilitātes procesi, buržuāzijai pieskaitāmā grupa palika aizvien lielāka un nozīmīgāka pilsētas dzīvē. Gadsimta otrajā pusē Rīgā būtiski pieauga latviešu īpatsvars. "Mājas Viesis" darbība ļauj arī identificēt 50. gadu latviešu sabiedrības viedokļu līderus. Laikraksta panākumu kaldināšanā īpaša loma bija tā redaktoram Ansim Leitānam.

Laikraksta "Mājas Viesis" nodibināšana lauza ļoti svarīgu Baltijas sociālās kārtības principu, proti, baltvācu muižniecības un garīdzniecības absolūto patronāžu pār latviešu intelektuālo, kultūras un sabiedrisko dzīvi. Līdz tam par dabisku lietu kārtību tika uzskatīts tas, ka baltvācu mācītāji izdod un veido latviešiem domātu presi. "Mājas Viesis" izveidošanu garīdzniecības aprindas uztvēra kā draudu savām pozīcijām un ietekmei un uzsāka pretdarbību, rakstot sūdzības varas iestādēm, kritizējot šo izdevumu vācu presē, nosodot to baznīcās, represējot tā līdzstrādniekus (īpaši skolotājus,

kas bija atkarīgi no vietējās draudzes mācītāja). Šī pretdarbība vienlaikus arī saliedēja un darīja stiprākus "Mājas Viesa" līdzstrādniekus un lasītājus, bet pašu izdevumu – kvalitatīvāku un sociāli nozīmīgāku.

Latviešu intelektuāļus, kas 19. gs. 50. gadu otrajā pusē "Mājas Viesī" publicēja savus sacerējumus, pēc viņu izglītības, dzīves pieredzes un piederības noteiktām domubiedru kopām var iedalīt vairākās grupās. Pirmo pārstāv jau minētais Jura Caunītes Rīgas latviešu pulciņš (K. Biezbārdis, M. Cirītis, J. Kaktiņš, J. Rātminders, B. Dīriķis). Nākamo "Mājas Viesa" līdzstrādnieku grupu pārstāv Tērbatas Universitātes latviešu studenti (J. Alunāns, I. Alunāns, K. Barons, K. Valdemārs, J. Zakranovičs), trešo " grupu veidoja latviešu literāti, kas dzīvoja ārpus Rīgas (J. Dauge, E. Dinsbergs, A. Līventāls, J. Ruģēns, P. Ulpe, M. Vītiņš (Fītiņš), J. Bankins, Ā. Tērauds, J. Zvaigznīte). "Mājas Viesis" veicināja latviešu intelektuāļu saliedēšanos, komunikācijas tīklu veidošanos. Laikraksts sekmēja viņu izlaušanos no savas lokālās vides, sociālo aktivitāti un vispār nacionālo problēmu apzināšanos.

Laikrakstam "Mājas Viesis" bija nozīmīga loma latviešu publiskās sfēras izveidē un jaunu tēmu ieviešanā tās aprītē, publisko debašu iniciēšanu par nākotni. Tiek lēsts, ka "Mājas Viesa" tirāža bija ap 4000 eksemplāru. Tālaika preses lasīšanas paradumi un formāts noteica to, ka ar viena eksemplāra saturu iepazinās visai liels cilvēku skaits – no apmēram 5–10 (vienā mājsaimniecībā dzīvojošie) līdz pat simtam (gadījumos, kad laikrakstu abonēja kopā vairākās mājsaimniecībās dzīvojošie). "Mājas Viesī" publicētie jaunlatviešu raksti ietvēra latviešu emancipācijas programmu, kas bija nepieciešama, uzsākoties modernizācijas procesam Baltijas gubernās. Jaunlatviešu publikācijās latviešu emancipācijas pamats bija (1) izglītība; (2) nācijas koncepcijas radīšana; (2) modernas latviešu kultūras radīšana; (3) latviešu nācija ar pilnu sociālu struktūru; (4) informētība par pasaules notikumiem; (4) latviešu valodas attīstība un lietošana visās dzīves sfērās. Šīs nostādnes 19. gs. 60. gados detalizētāk tika izstrādātas jaunlatviešu periodiskajos izdevumos – almanahā "Sēta, Daba, Pasaule" (1860) un nedēļas laikrakstā "Pēterburgas Avīzes" (1862–1865).

Atslēgvārdi: nedēļas laikraksts "Mājas Viesis", jaunlatvieši, Ansis Leitāns, Tērbatas Universitātes latviešu studenti, nacionālisms, latviešu emancipācija.