

SUMMARY

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*Sea Voyages of the Baltic Students  
in the 17th–18th Century*

Until the reopening of the University of Tartu in 1802, travels to Germany or the Netherlands were a natural part of students' lives in Estonia, Livonia and Courland. Only in 1632–1656 and 1690–1710 could tertiary education be acquired in the local university. For the Baltic area, Germany and the Netherlands were accessible by sea and across land. The article explores sea travel through the medium of travelogues, travellers' diaries or their reviews and reports of travel expenses.

Sea traffic between the Baltic provinces and German port towns at the time could be considered relatively regular. A boat travelled from Riga and Tallinn to Lübeck at least once a week, sometimes on a daily basis. The connection with Warnemünde (Rostock) was much less frequent, and it was particularly difficult to travel from Tallinn to Königsberg or Gdansk, which had similar export and import structures and - thus - rather infrequent water traffic. Also, the ports of Courland (Liepāja, Ventspils) had far more infrequent sea traffic to Germany than those of Estonia or Livonia.

As a rule, while sailing on the Baltic Sea, the coast was always within sight. Travellers from Travemünde to the Baltics used the island of Bornholm as the first important landmark. The 162 m high Rytterknaegten hill, towering over the Rønne port, was visible from afar. The next landmarks were Södra Udde on the southern point of Öland and the 40 m high Gotska Sandö which remained north of Gotland en route to Tallinn. The western coast of Saaremaa Island (Ösel) which was notorious for its dangerous reefs near Sörve and Vilsandi, and the coast of Hiiumaa Island (Dagö) between Ristna and Tahkuna was avoided: here the sea route passed the dangerous Tahkuna point towards the island of Osmussaar and behind the Pakri Islands to the Tallinn roadstead. From there a route ran towards the east behind the islands of Naissaar, Prangli and Mohni to the Narva roadstead, and another route led to the island of Hogland, from where it split to Vyborg and the Neva mouth. The seaway to Riga ran from Gotland towards Ventspils and along the Courland coast en route to the Irben Strait, which was considered particularly dangerous because of its numerous reefs, near the Ruhnu Island from where the route was chosen to Riga or Pärnu. The route to Riga could have also been taken along the Prussian coast.

The navigation seasons in Baltic ports usually lasted from the end of April until the end of November; if winter was milder already from March until December. The speed of the voyage still depended on the

weather and winds. On average, travelling from Travemünde to Riga or Tallinn took two weeks, and three weeks from Amsterdam. Owing to the mostly westerly winds on the Baltic Sea, the voyage from Germany to the Baltic countries was faster than in the opposite direction. The shortest journey from Travemünde to Daugavgrīva lasted for five days. A trip from Tallinn to Lübeck might have lasted over a month. The voyage from Tallinn to Stockholm may have taken four days, but sometimes lasted nearly a month. The distance between the Island of Saaremaa and Copenhagen was usually covered in less than a week.

Passengers were allowed to eat their own food on board. However, it was considered more practical to eat the food offered on the boat, as people might have run out of it if the journey took longer. A boat ticket from the Baltic area to Germany cost six riksdalers, and extra two dalers for a week's food. The most inexpensive way to travel was to pay three or four dalers for a place on the deck, sleep in the forecastle and take along one's own food. In comparison: in the 1780s, a private teacher's annual income in the Baltic countries amounted to 200 riksdalers and free lodging.

Comparing the advantages and disadvantages of travelling by sea or by land, there was little difference in the time spent travelling, but a sea voyage cost nearly half the price of a land journey. Even a poor youngster who could spend money only on the most necessary things could pay less than ten dalers for a trip from Tartu to Jena.