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# "Only a single cadence of a few notes"? Johann Georg Hamann's Religious Contact With the Baltic Region

KNUT MARTIN STÜNKEL
*Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany*

**ABSTRACT** In his early years as a tutor, unorthodox Lutheran thinker Johann Georg Hamann travelled the Baltic countries. In his own work, in particular in the *Aesthetica in nuce*, he interpreted the folk songs of the Latvian peasants as an authentic expression of religiosity unspoiled by philosophical sophistication. As a radical critic of enlightenment thought, Hamann portrayed the Latvian peasants as religiously complete individuals characterized by their particular locality. Thus, they would not gain anything by generalisation, suggested by proponents of popular enlightenment, such as Gotthard Friedrich Stender (1714-1796). Thus, Hamann posits a contact between universal (crypto-)religion of enlightenment ideology and individually localised religious conscience, exemplified in the Latvian peasant.

**KEYWORDS** Popular Enlightenment, language, Latvian poetry, Dainas, Riga, Mitau, Johann Georg Hamann, Gotthard Friedrich Stender

> *In fact, it would be difficult to find a people in Europe that deserves the name of a land of poetry as much as the Latvian people and the land of the Latvians. (Johann Georg Kohl)*[1]

## Introduction: Local and Individual Nodes[2]

In many regards, the following lines are a marginal contribution to the general subject of religious contacts in the Baltic region in early modern times. This is in particular because of their main protagonist and his intellectual position and geographical place. The following is an examination of the case of contact between religious traditions that mainly took place in [1]

1 "In der That möchte jetzt schwerlich ein Volk in Europa zu finden sein, das so sehr den Namen eines Landes der Dichtung verdiente, als das lettische Völkchen und das Land der Letten." All translations from German by the author unless indicated otherwise. (Original quote from the title: "[…] nichts als eine Cadenz von wenig Tönen […].")

2 The author wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their contructive critique.

an intellectual sphere centred in the city of Königsberg, and more precisely within the works of a particular individual who, during a certain period of his lifetime, had lived in Courland and Livonia, in Riga, in Mitau (present-day Jelgava), and in several manors in the Baltic countryside. To the present subject of study, this particular *locality* (*Lokalität*) is of foremost importance.

[2] In order to describe the particular setting of this situation of contact, we first turn to Königsberg. A cursory look at maps of early modern Germany show the city depicted at their very eastern margin. If, on the other hand, one is to examine the Baltic Region, the city would appear on its southern and western margin. The marginality of the city, however, is dependent on the cartographer's, or rather, the viewer's perspective. Around the year 1750, with about 55,000 inhabitants (garrison included), Königsberg was among the biggest German cities, maintaining the largest river port of the German speaking world. However, as Joseph Kohnen, the eminent scholar of Königsberg, put it, the city never truly overcame its insularity; a fact that had two main results: first, it suffered from a collective feeling of independent socio-political self-reference, and second—as is often the case with islands—it enjoyed a general openness to the world (Kohnen 1996, 335). Particularly suitable for commerce, in fact, Königsberg maintained close ties to the northern and eastern countries by acting as a transfer point between east and west. The city can be described as trilingual, including German, Polish/Masurian, and Lithuanian inhabitants, and furthermore exhibiting a strong Yiddish element (Schröder 2022, 101).[3]

[3] This special position had effects on the locality of the city, not least on its localization within the religious field. As such, Königsberg was a particularly dynamic place in the history of religions, namely as a node or a hub, permanently mediating western and eastern influences. In the introductory remarks to the edited volume on *Locating Religions*, Reinhold Glei and Nikolas Jaspert describe nodes and hubs in their function as catalysts in the history of religions as follows: "Transmission and transformation processes, not least the spread of religions, are based on such nodes of interaction that are interconnected by capillary routes. These dynamic points of confluence where religious traditions meet, interact and mutually influence each other deserve our attention" (Glei and Jaspert 2017, 3). This is not least true in the particular case of Königsberg. Moreover, as a node or hub of religious traditions, the city became a major representative and prime example for the Baltic region in general. The Baltic region worked as a specific node mediating Scandinavian, Russian, South-Eastern European, and "Western" influences—not to forget particular chthonic elements—that all made the Baltic region a special case in the dynamics of the history of religions (see Luven 2001, XV-XVI).

[4] The same, one could say, also holds true for the main protagonist of this contribution: Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), a radical Königsberg citizen (*Radikalbürger Königsbergs*), as one author characterized him (Manthey 2005, 184–85). Hamann in some degree epitomizes the particular locality of his hometown. Not only can he be described as a Königsberg patriot, but also as someone who elevated his individual locality to a personal *Weltanschauung* and made it a hub of intellectual discourse. In most works on German intellectual history, Hamann appears as a kind of strange curiosity: as the *Magus in Norden* (magus in north) and as a striking and somehow anachronistic contrast to his lifelong friend and philosophical op-

3 Schröder summarizes the linguistic situation in Königsberg as follows: "Das Königsberger Sprachenkaleidoskop lässt zunächst einmal die Bedeutsamkeit der Nachbarsprachen Polnisch und Litauisch erkennen, Sprachen, die man lernte, um einen Alltag zu meistern, in dem ein hohes Maß an gesellschaftlicher und individueller Mehrsprachigkeit gegeben war und der damit weniger monolithisch deutsch ablief, als es der deutsche Nationalismus des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts später wahrhaben wollte" (Schröder 2022, 113).

ponent Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). All this has made him a marginal figure in the eyes of the afterworld. Hamann opposes the intellectual mainstream of his own time, the "Enlightenment Project" (Sparling 2011), by means of obscure, complicated, condensed, and therefore almost unreadable writings. These writings were not conceived as general considerations on overarching topics. Rather, they were casual works that had an immediate concrete cause to which Hamann felt personally challenged to react. The often obscure context that triggered his texts and his particular style of writing gained him the reputation of being the founding father of "German irrationalism" (Isaiah Berlin). But nothing could be more misleading than that. What makes Hamann's writings a worthy object of study, not least in the present context, is his willingness to perceive, to absorb, to collect, to rethink, and to use all kinds of influences in his work, making him a *fundamentally contact-driven thinker*. His line of thought ultimately follows a religious aim, that is, to interpret the diversity of human utterances as a manifestation of God's presence in history, of his condescendence (*Kondeszendenz, Kenosis*).[4] God's presence in the individual sternly opposes all human attempts to establish general ideas that, according to Hamann, would destroy man's basic *individuality, personality,* and *locality*.

The quintessence of Hamann's philosophy of the individual can be found in some confessional lines that appear in a footnote from his work titled *Ein fliegender Brief*, in which he describes the house of his birth and the neighbourhood: [5]

> The most dilapidated treasury of the Altstadt, the barber-building situated between the rivers Pregel and Katzbach, once sold, was turned into an oil- and pearl-barley storehouse, the small garden and the sheds of my youth [having transformed] into a comfortable free passage from the wooden bridge to the Mönchshof, from the Altstadt into the Krumme Grube and Löbenicht. I cannot but oppose the general prattle and the pointing index finger of a political fellow traveler, conveniently pointing from far away, with the most precise locality, individuality, and personality, saying Quod petis HIC est or Hic niger est, HUNC [Quote from Horace, Epist. I, 11,29: What you desire is HERE and Satires 1, 4, 85: Here is the black (soul), THAT (you have to avoid)].[5] [6]

The focus is on the most precise individual and personal locality (*die genaueste Lokalität, Individualität und Personalität*), while at the same time avoiding generalization. For Hamann, however, this does not mean immovable fixation in a particular place. In another significant opposition to Immanuel Kant, who, in his book on anthropology, famously considered staying in Königsberg to be the proper way of procuring knowledge of the world,[6] Hamann was [7]

4 On the key concept of condescendence in Hamann's thinking, see Gründer (1958, 85–86).

5 N III, 350, 36-40 and 352, 23-28: "Das am Pregel und Katzbach gelegene höchstbaufällige Kämmereygebäude der Altstädtschen Badstube, ist nach dem Verkaufe nunmehr in eine Öl- und Graupenniederlage, das Gärtchen und Luftbüdchen meiner Kindheit und Jugend in einen bequemen freyen Durchgang von der Holzbrücke nach dem Mönchenhofe, aus der Altstadt in die krumme Grube und Löbenicht, verwandelt worden. Ich weiß dem allgemeinen Geschwätze und schön aus der Ferne her, in die weite Welt hinein zielenden Zeigefinger eines politischen Mitlauters nichts bessers als die genaueste Lokalität, Individualität und Personalität entgegen zu setzen, mit einem—quod petis HIC est oder Hic niger est, HUNC."

6 "Eine große Stadt, der Mittelpunkt eines Reiches, in welchem sich die Landescollegia der Regierung desselben befinden, die eine Universität (zur Kultur der Wissenschaften) und dabei noch die Lage zum Seehandel hat, welche durch Flüsse aus dem Inneren der Landes sowohl, als auch mit angrenzenden, entlegenen Ländern von verschiedenen Sprachen und Sitten, einen Verkehr begünstigt,—eine solche Stadt, wie etwa Königsberg am Pregelflusse, kann schon für sich einen schicklichen Platz zu Erweiterung sowohl der Menschenkenntnis als auch der Weltkenntnis genommen werden; wo diese, auch ohne zu reisen, erworben werden kann" (Kant 1983, 400).

comparatively far-travelled. He journeyed to Berlin, Frankfurt/Main, and Basel, and even performed a secret mission to London. Repeatedly, he visited and even had his place of residence in different locations in the Baltic area, above all in Riga and in Mitau. Hamann died on his last journey, which led him to the circle of Princess Gallitzin in Münster in Western Germany, where he is buried. Moreover, he was interested in all kinds of intellectual adventurous endeavours, devouring books on any subject imaginable and taking great interest in cultures and languages. Kant, in turn, conveniently let the world come to him and replaced journeys and most other intellectual areas by reading travel reports.

As an intellectual hub in his own right, Hamann served as a catalyst of diverse ideas, religious and intellectual currents, many of which were not among the most popular during his lifetime nor, in fact, in later times. As such, his writings provide a particular space of contact that caused important effects on how readers perceived the diverse participants of contact situations in this space. This holds especially true for the inhabitants of the Baltic region and their religiosity. [8]

## Hamann's Sojourns in the Baltic Region in the Years 1752–1759 and 1765–1767

Hamann himself described his scholarly education as a preparation for travels and adventures—at least intellectual ones.[7] He was born in Königsberg, but to a non-local family. His father, son of a Lutheran pastor, was a non-academic, a *Bader* and *Wundarzt* (barber-surgeon). Hamann took great pride in his father's profession and repeatedly used it in his self-descriptions. He joined the university of Königsberg in 1746, studying various subjects, from theology to natural sciences. As such, his studies were clearly not aimed at a particular profession. As a student, he co-edited a journal, *Daphne*, which followed the ideas of popular enlightenment philosophy. His fellow students and co-editors of the journal, above all the Riga patrician Johann Christoph Berens (1729–1792), later played an important role in his life and intellectual development. Without taking exams, Hamann left the university in 1752. As his career opportunities were limited and in order to follow his desire to travel, Hamann went to Livonia as a private tutor, relying on the habit of the Baltic nobility to recruit their tutors from Königsberg University.[8] However, his own later judgement of this period of his life is strict and gloomy: [9]

> With as little skill as good fortune I spent some years in Livonia and Courland as a tutor of noble youth.[9] [10]

Hamann's later self-evaluation notwithstanding, to contemporary academics and non-academics in general, the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire, including the semi-independent Duchy of Courland, provided "a land of unlimited possibilities," not least with [11]

7 In a letter to his father from November 1752 Hamann writes: "Ich habe diesem Triebe zu reisen gemäs mein Studium eingerichtet, v mich daher nicht so wohl auf eine besondere Wißenschaft, die mir zum Handwerk dienen könnte, sondern vielmehr auf einen guten Geschmack in der Gelehrsamkeit überhaupt gelegt" (1955–1979, I:9).

8 See, on Hamann's time as a private tutor, Graubner (2011).

9 "Mit eben so wenig Geschick als Glück habe ich einige Jahre in Liefland und Kurland vom Hofmeister adelicher Jugend zugebracht" (Hamann 1999, III:333). On Hamann's nevertheless considerable pedagogical talents and achievements as opposed to the enlightenment attitude, manifested in the ideas of his friend Kant, see Graubner (1990).

regard to their potential function as mediators of enlightenment thought (Bosse 1996, 176). They were, however, commonly perceived as barren and unattractive: in travel reports of the time they are associated with mere indifferent emptiness (apart from the few cities), Riga being the sole focus of attention and, thus, *pars pro toto* associated with the experience of the Baltic region (Griep 2001, 286).[10]

[12] The void was to be filled by academic newcomers with theological and didactic enthusiasm. Some material aspects also may have played a role, as country pastors were better off in the Baltic region than those in Germany proper, enjoying bigger houses, many servants and even equipages to cover the vast distances in their parish (Lenz 1956, 115). In most cases, the private tutor counted among the strata of the nobility and was provided with ample servants. No wonder then that (German) academics, either as pastors or as private tutors, considered Livonia as a place to stay (*Livland* becoming *Blivland*), just as in medieval times (von Pistohlkors 1994, 299; Tischer 2022, 59). Statistics show that at least half of Livonia's clerics in the eighteenth century had migrated there (Bosse 1996, 190). Königsberg provided the prime place of education for the clergy of the Duchy of Courland.[11]

[13] This special relationship between Königsberg and the Baltic lands proves to be significant, in particular regarding the situation of religious contact. The Baltic German elite in this region ensured that the prodigy would retain their intellectual and spiritual level. Because of the variety of languages spoken in the region, linguistics were developed and thinking on language became a prominent issue. The clergy took on an important mediating function by learning the spoken vernaculars and translating between them and German (Sproģe 2015). It is not by chance, then, that language as a medium became the main focus of the situation of contact that is represented in Hamann's writings. He shared this focus on linguistic matters, not only with regard to his sojourn in the Baltic lands.

[14] According to an autobiographical account, Hamann had a very positive opinion on Livonia and the Livonian way of life. This, however, obviously refers to the way of life of his German friends who lived there.[12] On the other hand, there were also a considerable number of Germans who betrayed his positive opinions.[13] His first position, in the northern Livonian manor house Kegeln (Kieģeļmuiža) near Rubene, with the Baroness Barbara Helena von Budberg (1716–1781), was an utter disappointment, as Hamann was confronted with the epitome of rudeness, arrogance, and stupidity among contemporary Baltic nobility in the person of the Baron and, in particular, the Baroness, "a coarse, brutal and ignorant mother"—*eine unschlachtige, rohe v unwissende Mutter* (Hamann 1993a, 325), who were not as interested in the education of their son as an academic would expect. Within half a year, Hamann left this unsatisfactory post and lived in Riga for some time until he found a new job with the Courlandian general Count Witten at Grünau, who had established a household inspired by French culture. Here he stayed—though often traveling the country to the other estates of the family[14]—until 1755, leaving for Riga due to struggles and depression. In Riga, he stayed

10 On Hamann's ambiguous relation to Riga, see Graubner (1994).

11 Up to the 1780s, 60% of the clergy in Courland had an academic background in Konigsberg (see Tering 1998, 132).

12 „[…] da ich ohnedem ein sehr günstig Vorurtheil vor Liefland v die Lebensart der Liefländer weg[en] einiger Freunde, die ich unter denselb[en] hatte, hegte" (Hamann 1993a, 324).

13 On Hamann's contacts with the Baltic nobility, see Graubner (Graubner 2012, 315).

14 His biographer Josef Nadler characterizes Hamann's situation as follows: "Grünhof hatte mehr als eine Fakultät. Man wechselte mit der Familie den Aufenthalt auf den Gütern. Man war in Mitau und Riga. Soviel Bewegung am Ort hat Hamann in seinem ganzen Leben nicht mehr gehabt. Sein Körper und sein Geist hätten beinahe auf ihre Milzsucht vergessen, wenn nicht doch der Briefwechsel mit dem väterlichen Bader das Gespräch immer wieder auf Befunde, Ratschläge und Rezepte gebracht hätte" (Nadler 1949, 51).

with his friend Johann Georg Lindner (1729–1776), and with the family of Johann Christian Berens, who later involuntarily laid the ground for the decisive experience of Hamann's life.

[15] For the future author and religious thinker he would become, Hamann's stay in Courland and Livonia had important intellectual results. Here he wrote what Josef Nadler has called the great outline of philosophy of culture that grounded his life's work (Nadler 1949, 67). Hamann translated a French work on economics, the *Remarques sur les Avantages et les Desavantages de la France et de la Grand Bretange par rapport au commerce et aux autres sources de la puissance des Etats* by Plumard de Dangeuil, and added an essay of his own. In the so-called *Dangeuil-Beylage* (see Meineke 2012) by means of a "liberal-commercial utopia," he decidedly turned common evaluation of the classes of society upside down and degraded nobility in favour of merchants whom he praises as the true nobility of mankind. To him, trade—and not war—is the truly ennobling human activity, as it connects peoples and countries to mutual profit and understanding. The merchant, therefore, is the decisive motor of progress (Graubner 1994, 522). This is well in accord with reports of the time on the social situation in Riga. To the amazement of the contemporaries, the city had impressively turned the usual feudal order upside down by letting the exchange of products decide social status (Griep 2001, 288). Riga, thus, pointed towards a possible opposition to the absolutistic order of the state that Hamann encountered at home in Königsberg.[15] Situations of contact inaugurated by trade, thus, were of great importance to Hamann—not only regarding economic, but also intellectual and, ultimately, religious and irenic profit.

[16] As Raivis Bičevskis has put it, it was in Riga that Hamann experienced his "Seelenmanumission"—a life-changing process of transcending one's self-reflection in order to see oneself and the world in a different perspective (2012, 355). To elaborate on his later religious position, one must consider Hamann's intellectual career up to this point. In his case, the biographical context is of superior importance, but not only as an indispensable context of the emergence of his philosophical and theological work. Rather, it also serves as a particular method of argumentation (*Lokalität, Individualität, Personalität*) that Hamann employed to set himself apart from the supposedly a-historical, a-linguistic and non-experience based thinking of contemporary Enlightenment philosophy in its French and German version. In a nutshell, Hamann juxtaposes the idolized ideal of the Enlightenment as a generally acceptable human being following universal rules of logical and ethical conduct with the prevailing concrete, contingent individual with a unique personal background—i.e., a locality—and persistently argues for the latter.

[17] In the year 1757/1758 Hamann dwelt in London on a mission that still largely remains a mystery to posterity and became a mystical experience of clarity for Hamann himself. He was sent there by his friend Johann Christoph Berens from, and most likely on behalf of, Riga.[16] As a wealthy merchant and head of an important trading company, Berens wished to accomplish aims of his own, that is, most probably to negotiate a treaty of "armed neutrality" for the Baltic cities and their trading fleet in times of the Seven Years War 1756–1763 (Fischer 2012, 166–69). At the same time, he also intended to patronize his friend into finding a place in life, something the student without a degree had not achieved yet.[17] Above all, he wished

15 On Hamann's relation to Riga in general, see Fischer (2012); on Riga as a republican 'alternative' to Konigsberg, Fischer (2012, 157).

16 On Berens' political struggles against Russian officials and the Baltic nobility, see Graubner (2012, 316–17).

17 "Berens hatte offenbar vor, ihn [i.e. Hamann, KMS] zu einer Art handelspolitischen Vordenker und Hof-Schreiber seines Hauses zu machen" (Graubner 1994, 521).

his home city to gain a special status that would allow both to continue commerce and to mediate in political conflicts (Bičevskis/Taimiņa 2013, 129).[18]

[18] Berens was a devout follower of the Enlightenment movement and, in that capacity, to a good part responsible for making Riga an important station on the "road of enlightenment", leading from the German intellectual centres to St. Petersburg and Moscow (Angermann and Brüggemann 2018, 177). In the Baltic region, the rise of the Enlightenment, as Heinrich Bosse has put it, was less connected to print media but rather to personal relations and constellations (1996, 200), and Berens was willing to use the circle of his Königsberg student friends to establish new forms of thinking in his hometown by providing them with rewarding jobs and good positions. However, his good-willed help had effects on Hamann's intellectual development he could not be too happy with. Unwillingly, he had provided Hamann with the biographical presupposition for his embrace of religion in the form of Lutheran Christianity.[19] Hamann, though deeply interested in commerce and economic theory, failed his mission in London and, additionally, got off the straight and narrow, wasting his money and health there. As he found himself close to rock bottom he decided to turn around, and started an intensive re-lecture of the Bible. Here, he experienced what he later described as a "descent into the hell of self-recognition" (*Höllenfahrt der Selbsterkenntnis*), which ultimately led to his conversion experience. This particular experience is dated to March 31, 1758 and is intensely described in his papers.

[19] Hamann's conversion took the form of a pietistic self-exploration in the shape of a confessional autobiography and a documentation of his Scripture readings as a personal commentary of biblical verses which follow the order of the biblical books themselves. This is far from unusual at his time, but his findings and, above all, the way he applies them make him an exceptional figure and the source of some annoyance for his contemporaries.

[20] Now, admittedly, this story so far seems to indicate a subsequent history that can only be described as boring; it seems to prepare for some edifying, saintly, and eventless life without intellectual and physical excesses. However, this was clearly not the case with Hamann. From his conversion experience as described in the London writings, he drew conclusions that are far from ascetic and are very likely to embarrass those people whose form of narration he used to describe his own conversion. For Hamann, embracing Christianity meant embracing the body in all its functions—because of theological reasons (see Stünkel 2019).[20] As W. N. Alexander has put it:

> [21] As a Christian, Hamann repudiates a strong tradition within Christianity, the Greek-Christian suspicion of the physicality—in effect, sexuality—of man, the tradition which even from the New Testament cultivated a non-sexual origin of Jesus, recommended a non-sexual Christian life, and exalted a non-sexual clergy. It was a natural reaction to the Dionysian divinization of sex which gripped the Roman world into which Christianity was born, and which was itself a cult born of a reaction to an over-rationalistic Apollonian divinization of reason. Hamann's view of man places a radical question mark over these conceptions of man and removes

18 On Berens's influence on Hamann's philosophical-cameralistic ideas providing a "far-reaching perspective of a commercial city and an enlightened society […] in fragments," see Bičevskis (2022, 150).

19 As Hans Graubner put it, Hamann's new perspective allowed him to remain close friends with Berens and other proponents of the enlightenment movement in the Baltic region and to fight them uncompromisingly at the same time (Graubner 2012, 321).

20 Thus, Hamann would have appreciated the manifold sexual allusions in the Latvian folksongs (see Huelmann 1996, 65).

> all basis for moralizing by reaction, however justified otherwise. (Alexander 1979, 87)

[22] Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, Hamann came to the conclusion that the Enlightenment movement is far from enlightened about its own aims and therefore in severe danger of becoming a "hybrid usurpation of God's position" (Graubner 1994, 524). As a consequence, it visibly turns into a hypocrite religion with priests, dogmas, rituals, holy scriptures, and false idols.

[23] Apart from the commercial city of Riga, Hamann also got to know the other important educational centre of the Latvian country, the city of Mitau (Jelgava) that was characterized by the nobility (Schröder 2022, 115). After his conversion experience he returned to Riga where he planned to marry Berens' sister but was not given permission by her brother. Hamann came back to Königsberg, where he wrote his first writings in the complicated and allusive *Cento*-style that became notorious to contemporaries and posterity alike. However, in order to make a living, he once again returned to the Baltic Lands. Hamann took up a secretarial position attached to the office of the *Hofrat* and lawyer Christoph Anton Tottien (1721–1790) at the court of the Duke of Courland in Mitau—and intensely used the latter's large library for his own studies. He stayed in the Baltic region from 1765 to 1767, interrupted by a five-month sojourn in Warsaw. In this time, starting from autumn 1766, he also edited a journal devoted to popular enlightenment, the German speaking first Mitau newspaper, the *Mitauische Nachrichten von Staats-, Gelehrten- und Einheimischen Sachen*.[21] Frustrated, either by boredom or surfeit, he returned to Königsberg in January 1767 to remain there until his final journey to Münster in 1787/88.

## Hamann as an Exponent of Situations of Contact

[24] Throughout his life, Hamann was immersed in situations of religious contact, or rather, struggles. Opposing premature identification or covering of differences, Hamann argued from a decidedly biblical position (von Lüpke 2012, 180). Most prominent are his struggles with Pietism, Lutheran Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Freemasonry, and the *Haskalah* (above all, in person of its main proponent, Moses Mendelssohn). In these struggles, he looked for unusual allies.[22] To him, however, the most important arena that shaped his religious position was the struggle with his sovereign and employer, the *Salomon de Prusse*, Frederick the Great (1712–1786). To Hamann, the king was a *menetekel* of the enlightenment project in general. Whereas Frederick seemed to have taken no notice of his intellectually unruly subject and civil servant, the *roi philosophe* cast a superior shadow on Hamann's intellectual life, forcing him to withstand at almost any cost. In this struggle against the Enlightenment, which, to his mind, had become a theocratic religion, Hamann mobilized possible allies that were likely to withstand the generalizing ideas of the ruler and his philosophical helpers, above all, his major propagandist, prophet and high priest (in Hamann's eyes)—Voltaire (1694–1778) (von Lüpke 2012, 176).

[25] The Baltic lands and peoples were part of this struggle. Hamann was well beyond the idea

21 Jørgensen dryly remarks on Hamann's activities in Mitau: "Hamann […] ging im Juni 1765 nach Mitau zu Tottien, wobei aus den Briefen nicht zu erschließen ist, welche Aufgaben er anderthalb Jahre in diesem Haus erfüllte, nur, daß er immer noch ein Opfer seiner ‚Launen' war" (1976, 63–64).

22 Hamann's occupation with Islam and the Arab language in the context of his philological crusades, mainly aimed at the Enlightenment movement, has been recently analyzed by Natalie Chamat (2020).

of interpreting the situation in the Baltic states as a mere contact, or even a clash between east and west. Rather, he tended to interpret the topological situations of the Baltic countries as a hub of diverse ideas, each one locally contributing to the prevailing individuality and personality of peoples, individuals, and places. Fittingly, Raivis Bičevskis and Aija Taimiņa have situated the emergence of Hamann's thinking "within the northern European topographical triangle of Konigsberg, Riga and London" (2013, 128).

[26] The history of the Baltic region cannot be written without regarding the manifold influences that penetrated the region from all sides. This also holds true for the individuals intellectually dealing with the area in terms of their basic aims and motivations. To many, the Baltic lands became *a sign of a certain possibility* in an overarching struggle of opinions and ideas. It is well known that Hamann much preferred English and Scottish philosophy, in particular the writings of David Hume,[23] being based on empirical observation and common reason, rather than French or German rationalistic thinking. His preference for the seafaring and trading nations thus met with the status of the Baltic major cities, such as Riga, as centres of trade.

[27] There is, however, also another major influence on the Baltic region and, likewise, possibly on Hamann's thinking that opposes the French and German impact. Thus, Russia might have provided an enticing option for Hamann throughout his life. Apart from the opportunity to work in the Baltic provinces as a private tutor, there were others, such as Berens' plan to send Hamann to St. Petersburg on behalf of his trading company (Nadler 1949, 57). Moreover, when Hamann had his life-changing religious experience in London, his home country of East Prussia was, in fact, a Russian province, as Tsarina Elisabeth II had annexed the (at least not overtly reluctant) country in optimistic anticipation of the peace treaty following the expected defeat of Prussia in the Third Silesian War. The later Seven Years War ended, in fact, with a different result, but the time of the Russian occupation from 1758 to 1762 had a strong impact on the country, its capital, and its inhabitants. Not least, the Great King, annoyed by the infidelity of his East Prussian subjects, who had sworn loyalty to the Tsarina (on his birthday, of all times…), never again honoured the region with his enlightened presence after the war was finally over. Somehow, thus, the Russians proved to be instrumental in getting rid of the presence of the king and the ideas he stood for, at least for his opponents, such as the civil servant Johann Georg Hamann.[24] Perhaps motivated by this experience, Hamann dealt intensely with the land, the history and the peoples of Russia.[25] If Joseph Kohnen is right in arguing that the East Prussians habitually met their neighbours (Poles, Latvians, and Lithua-

23 See, on Hume's impact on Hamann's writings from his Baltic period, Graubner (2011, 95).

24 See Kohnen (1996, 336): "Ja, das nur allzu spürbare Gefühl politischer Vernachlässigung durch die Zentralgewalt im fernen Berlin und kulturellen Vergessenseins im weltmännischen Westeuropa veranlaßte viele Ostpreußen, nach dem weitgehend noch unbekannten Osten zu blicken und die Zukunft des östlichen Europa in verschwommener Ahnung von dieser Seite zu erwarten."

25 Hamann's interest in Russia was well shared by the most important protagonist of popular enlightenment, August Wilhelm Hupel, not least with regard to the thought of the common Russian people (see von Pistohlkors 1994, 303). However, as Hans Graubner points out, Hamann did not share Herder's positive view of Peter the Great; rather, he described him as an example of human hybris that does not take the essential locality of human existence into account: "Er [Hamann, KMS] nahm das Rigaer Wort von Peter als 'Schöpfer Rußlands' auf und zeigte in ironischer Polemik gegen die Vorstellung von Peter als 'Gott seines Volks' oder als 'Schöpfer seines Volkes', was es heißt, wenn der Mensch sich als Schöpfer aufspielt. Sein begrenztes, zeitgebundenes Bild von den westlichen Errungenschaften definierte Peter als 'richtig', aber er musste es rücksichtslos und menschenverachtend durchsetzen, indem er Alternativen ausschloss, Traditionen abbrach, Landschaften wie Livland verwüstete und—wie Hamann an Peters Ukas zum gewaltsamen Abscheren der Bärte deutlich macht—sein Volk nicht aus Eigenem wachsen ließ. Peter I. war für Hamann deshalb nicht ein Schöpfer, sondern ein Zerstörer seines Volks" (Graubner 2022, 63–64).

nians) with some contempt[26] and the Russians with sympathy, the Baltic lands might have served Hamann in their capacity as Russian provinces and as a token of another possibility or orientation apart from Berlin, and, ultimately, Paris.[27] The official alliance between Prussia und Russia from 1764, into which Frederick entered out of necessity, further opened the East to the province of East Prussia.

[28] Therefore, the east displayed some deeper attraction on Hamann. His bible-centrism was the main source and reason for his deep interest in oriental languages and literature, as Hamann regarded it both as the Word of God and the most poetic of books (see O'Flaherty 1968, 85), serving as a collection of model forms (*Formulare*) to all kind of human expression (see Stünkel 2018, 179–202). To Hamann, Oriental languages and Oriental poetry ought to be studied to fully understand the Bible, as they possess a magical quality as "a genuine attempt to see life steadily and to see it whole, and to avoid the disastrous separation of the 'architectures of things natural and civil,' that is, of the separation of man from nature, which is encouraged by an excessive emphasis on the theoretical aspect of cognition" (O'Flaherty 1968, 87). In his *Aesthetica in nuce,* Hamann famously accused the enlightenment philosophers of having "pushed nature aside" by means of their "murderous and lying philosophy":

> [29] Your murderous and lying philosophy has removed nature—and why do you claim, then, that we have to imitate it?—Because you could be able, then, to renew the pleasure to become murderers of the students of nature as well. (Hamann 1993b, 113)[28]

[30] Thus, nature—or rather, natural expression—was something to be cared about, not least for the intellectual observing his particular environment.

## Religious Contact Via Poetry: Hamann and the Latvian Songs

> *Every Latvian is a born poet.* (Johann Georg Kohl)[29]

[31] Given his perpetual interest in finding potential allies for his intellectual struggles, the Baltic lands should and could have provided Hamann with valuable support. Surprisingly, however, in the letters of young Hamann during his time as a private tutor, either addressed to his parents or to his friends, there is little consideration of the situation of the Latvian people. Though he claimed in his later *Dangueil-Beylage* that the academic scholar should be the confidant or

26 See Kohnen (1996, 336): "Es ist immerhin für unsere von westlicher Geschichtstradition geprägte Mentalität erstaunlich, wieso durchs ganze Jahrhundert hindurch den Russen mit ihrem militärisch und wirtschaftlich noch schlafenden Riesenreich und ihrem unausschöpflichen Menschenpotential in Ostpreußen grundsätzlich verhaltene Sympathien entgegengebracht wurden, während man den unmittelbaren Nachbarn, den Litauern Kurländern und Polen, aus unterschiedlichen Gründen oft mit Abneigung begegnete."

27 With regard to the milieu of the Baltic Germans under Russian rule von Taube, Thomson, and Garleff stress the opposition of their way of life to that of the Prussian subjects: "Aus der Abwehrhaltung gegenüber möglichen Eingriffen des andersnationalen Staates in die gesellschaftliche Sphäre bildeten die baltischen Deutschen Kräfte der nationalen Selbsthilfe aus und wiesen der Gesellschaft Funktionen zu, die anderswo staatlichen Organen zukamen. Man könnte von einer fruchtbaren Antithese zum Preußentum sprechen, ohne damit ein Werturteil zu verbinden" (von Taube, Thomson, and Garleff 1995, 59).

28 "Eure mordlügernische Philosophie hat die Natur aus dem Wege geräumt, und warum fordert ihr, daß wir selbige nachahmen sollen?—Damit ihr das Vergnügen erneuern könnt, an den Schülern der Natur auch Mörder zu werden."

29 "Jeder Lette ist ein geborener Poet."

even a pupil of the peasant (*ein Schüler, ein Vertrauter des Bauren*),[30] during his time as a private tutor he was mainly concerned with a somewhat personal matter, namely the Baltic nobility and its struggle against academics[31] and the urban patriciate, prominently manifested in his friend Johann Christoph Berens. Later on, after his London conversion experience, Hamann focused on the self-contradictory attitude of the Baltic Enlightenment regarding the tension between the proposed general love of humanity and the love of privilege and the reverence of an absolutistic ruler.[32] However, he did realize the indentured condition of the Latvian peasants,[33] as can be concluded from the fact that the only article of the famous *Encyclopédie* he considered worthy of translation was the one on *Corvée* (that is: on serf-labor/*Fronarbeit*). The author of this article, as Hamann writes in a letter to Immanuel Kant on July 27, 1759, shows compassion with the serfs, and the article would be instrumental to sensible people in their aim to improve the situation of serfs (Graubner 2011, 84).[34] Proponents of the Enlightenment in the Baltic lands, on the other hand, such as August Wilhelm Hupel and, above all, Johann Christian Eisen (1717–1779)[35] and Garlieb Merkel (1769–1850), were more prolific in their criticism of the social and political conditions of the peasants and their suppression by the manor lords (see Angermann and Brüggemann 2018, 179).

Hamann's interest in Latvia and the Latvian people was not primarily motivated by so- [32]
cial or political considerations. It was not triggered by expressions of religiosity he might have encountered during his sojourn in the Baltic region either. The eighteenth century was more interested in collecting curiosities of folklore than despising and violently abolishing expressions of popular 'paganism'—though even the more enlightened minds among the clergy reportedly still had to cut down sacrificial trees (Neander 1956, 140; cp. Luven 2001, 286). Hamann could have encountered and registered religious customs that contradicted official theological teachings. He could even have entertained Eliade's famous idea that the Baltic peoples had preserved their old pre-Christian heritage and thus would provide an exceptional

30 N IV, 232: "Die Philosophie ist keine Bildhauerkunst mehr. Der Gelehrte ist aus den spanischen Schlössern der intellektualistischen Welt und aus dem Schatten der Büchersäle auf den großen Schauplatz der Natur und ihrer Begebenheiten, der lebenden Kunst und ihrer Werkzeuge, der gesellschaftlichen Geschäfte und ihrer Triebfedern zurückgerufen; er ist ein aufmerksamer Zuschauer, ein Schüler, ein Vertrauter des Bauren, des Handwerkers, des Kaufmanns, und durch gemeinnützige Beobachtungen und Untersuchungen sein Gehülfe und Lehrer geworden."

31 Graubner characterizes Hamann's exchange of letters with his first employers as a private tutor as follows: "Diese beiden Briefe stellen eindrucksvolle Dokumente dar für den unvermittelten Zusammenprall des Bildungsstrebens als Aufstiegsmittel des Bürgers mit der noch herrschenden standesbewußt-souveränen Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber solcher Bildungsauffassung beim eingesessenen baltischen Landadel" (Graubner 2011, 91).

32 See Graubner (1994, 525): "Für Livland aber zeigte das Akzeptieren und dann die Ablehnung Hamanns, wo die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der von allgemeiner Menschenliebe diktierten ökonomisch-politischen Aufklärung Rigas, eingeklemmt zwischen Privilegienliebe und Absolutismusverehrung, lagen."

33 The population of the Duchy of Courland in 1750 is estimated at about 160 000 to 180 000 people, the Latvians holding the overwhelming majority of about 90% but having no rights of their own and sustaining the political and economic power of the Duke, the nobility and the urban citizens, who were mostly Germans (see Oberländer 2001, 229). As Oberländer stresses, the distrust between Germans and non-Germans was mutual (2001, 231).

34 See Hamann (1955–1979, I:374): "Es ist angenehm und nützlich, eine Seite des Pope zu übersetzen […] Eitelkeit und Fluch hingegen einen Teil der Encyclopedie durchzublättern. […] Der Artikel über das Schöne ist ein Geschwätz und Auszug von Hutchinson. […] Bliebe also noch einziger übrig, der würklich eine Uebersetzung verdiente. Er handelt von der Schaarwerk und Gehorcharbeitern. Jeder verständige Leser meines Heldenbriefes wird die Mühe derjenigen aus der Erfahrung kennen, über solche Leute gesetzt zu sein, aber auch das Mitleiden mit allen Gehorcharbeitern haben, was der Verfaßer meines Artikels mit ihnen hat, und die Mißbräuche zu verbeßern suchen, wodurch es ihnen unmöglich gemacht wird gute Gehorcharbeiter zu sein" (also compare Hamann 1999, IV:232).

35 On Eisen's reform work in particular, see Blumbergs (2008, 87–88).

source for the study of traditional religion (Eliade 2002, 3:36).[36] Moreover, the pietist *Herrnhut* movement (Moravian Brethren) had considerably impacted the region since a visit of the Count Zinzendorf in Livonia and Estonia in 1736.[37] It had gained special importance for the Estonian and Latvian population of the area, allowing for active participation in the life of the Christian communities and, thus, strengthening their self-confidence and leading towards a national awakening (von Taube, Thomson, and Garleff 1995, 1995, 61; Angermann and Brüggemann 2018, 174–75; see the contribution of Gvido Straube in this special issue, 2023). However, in Courland, as the main place of Hamann's activities in the Baltic lands, the influence of Pietism was only marginal (Tering 1998, 137). This fact, though, had greatly influenced Hamann's perspective on the Latvian people. The Lutheran orthodoxy, less challenged than in other parts of the region, was less obliged to adapt to the spiritual needs of the Latvian population, leaving them and their particular forms of expression (for example, the folk songs) alone. In contrast, Hallensian Pietism caused a kind of "social revolution" in Livonia, where, due to the Pietist efforts, the peasants counted among the most educated in Europe (Kreslins 1998, 151). Perhaps pietist education thus allowed for the spread of enlightenment ideas with the effect that traditional elements were neglected.

Strangely, there are almost no references to the religious ideas and practices of the Baltic people to be found in Hamann's work. However, his silence on Latvian religiosity does not render him irrelevant for an examination of a situation of religious contact. This is mainly because of his thoughts on language. To Hamann, language is the basis and the most important perspective allowing for an insight into and an acknowledgment of another culture. Ultimately, he does not talk about language as such, but rather about *language as a religious matter*. During his time in Mitau, he at least made some serious, though self-sceptical, efforts to learn the Latvian language,[38] perhaps motivated by the example and the visit of his most famous pupil, Johann Gottfried Herder.[39] In a letter to Herder from June 30th, 1765, Hamann writes: [33]

> I like your intention to learn the Latvian language, dearest friend; I myself have chosen pastor Stendter's grammar for that purpose as well, though I doubt that I, except for extraordinary reasons, will get very far with it.[40] [34]

Hamann's choice of material for studying the Latvian language is significant. Pastor [35]

36 On the particular inertia of Latvian religiosity, see Muižnieks (2018, 599): "Die relativ späte Christianisierung dieser Region (im Laufe des 13. Jahrhunderts), das eigenartige Ständesystem, wo die wichtigste Rolle Ausländer und ihre Nachkommen spielten, sowie der Mangel an Geistlichen, die die christliche Lehre in einer verständlichen Sprache erklären konnten, verursachten die Formung einer synkretistischen Weltanschauung, die die Kirchenpraxis und ältere Traditionen kombinierte. Das spiegelte sich sowohl in Familienfesten (Taufen, Hochzeiten, Beerdigungen) als auch in den Festen im Jahreslauf (Weihnachten, Ostern, Johannisfest und anderen Gedenktagen) wider. Das Beharrungsvermögen der synkretistischen Weltanschauung ist sogar bis in die Neuzeit hinein zu beobachten. Das beweist, dass die Letten nach den Veränderungen des 16. Jahrhunderts nicht sofort für eine andere Art des religiösen Lebens bereit waren. Die im Zeitalter der Reformation und Gegenreformation entstandenen Formen protestantischer und katholischer Religiosität begannen sich im Bewusstsein der Letten erst im Laufe des 18. Jahrhunderts durchzusetzen."

37 On the Herrnhut mission in the Baltic Countries after 1736, see Webermann (1956, 158).

38 See, on the Latvian language in Mitau in Hamann's times, Schröder (2022, 123–26).

39 See Herder's letter to Hamann from May 21, 1765 (Hamann 1955–1979, II:336): "Wohl! aber will ich mich aufs Lettische legen, ohngeachtet ich mich etwas davor ziere […]." On the dangers of interpreting Hamann as a mere predecessor regarding the Latvian Poetry of Herder compare Bičevskis (2012, 351 and 353).

40 "Ihr Vorsatz die lettische Sprache zu lernen, liebster Freund, gefällt mir; ich habe mir gleichfalls des Pastor Stendters Sprachlehre dazu ausgesucht, zweifele aber daß [ich] außer besondern Veranlaßungen weit darinn kommen werde" (Hamann 1955–1979, II:339).

Stendter's *Sprachlehre*, through its author, provides a significant combination of religiosity and enlightenment. The self-proclaimed Latvian (Daija and Briežkalne 2015, 163) Gothards Frīdrihs Stenders (Gotthard Friedrich Stender) (1714–1796), was a scholar and parish priest, and is credited as the founder of Latvian written language. He was a member of Berens' enlightenment-circle in Riga (Sproģe 2015, 544) and "one of the most peculiar disseminators and adepts of Western European thought in the Baltics" (Grudule 2021, 395). In 1765 and 1766, Stender lived in Mitau as well, and Hamann might have had the opportunity to meet him in person. His influence on the future Latvian literature was paramount, offering the Latvian peasants "a new type of reading" (Daija 2017, 38) in the sense of a popular enlightenment (*Volksaufklärung*) (see Blumbergs 2008, 85–87).[41] Stender's writings themselves became folklore, although his approach was basically patriarchal and somewhat top-down.[42] Nevertheless, his popular works were intended to strengthen the peasant loyalty (Daija 2017, 38). Hamann's reluctance to learn from Stender's enlightened didactics could have arisen from uneasiness, as the Latvians did not have their own voice in this particular grammar of their language. A special reason (*besondere Veranlassung*) to start learning, however, was the "desperation" he felt waiting and longing for Herder's visit; a longing that even his beloved books could not allay:

> I rummage in a number of books, but I do not find anything that satisfies my desire. Out of desperation, since Easter, I also started with Latvian; so, we can mutually test each other in Stender's fables.[43] [36]

Perhaps Stender's preface to his fables also made some impression on Hamann and Herder, for it argues for fraternal love to the Latvians and the need to lead them to a higher level, and [37]

41 Ineta Balode summarizes Stender's achievements as follows: "Gotthard Friedrich Stender stellt eine der herausragenden Persönlichkeiten der lettischen Kulturgeschichte der Aufklärungszeit dar. Zu seinen Verdiensten zählt auch die Tatsache, dass er die fortschrittlichen pädagogischen Ideen seiner Zeit aufgriff, den lokalen baltischen Verhältnissen und vor allem den aktuellen Bedürfnissen der lettischen Bauern anpasste und somit eine qualitativ neue Etappe im Prozess der Volksbildung einleitete" (2015, 131).

42 "Die frühe lettische, maßgeblich von Stender geschaffene Literatur entstand nicht auf Nachfrage der Letten selbst hin, in keinem Fall spiegelte sie deren Geschmack wieder, aber unbestreitbar beeinflußte sie wesentlich die künftigen in lettischer Sprache geschriebenen Werke, denn im großen und ganzen wurde diese Dichtung vom Volke angenommen, sogar folklorisiert und nachgeahmt. Die Autoren standen im engen Kontakt mit der deutschen Literatur. Sie sammelten ihre Erfahrung hauptsächlich in Deutschland und kamen zu der Überzeugung, daß sentimental-rationalistische Werke notwendig seien, um das lettische Volk für Bücher zu interessieren. An Zerstreuung wurde wenig gedacht, hauptsächlich sollten die Gedanken der Aufklärung verbreitet und die Menschen erzogen werden, daß sie besonnener würden und ihr Leben besser gestalten könnten" (Frīde 2001, 222–23). Also see on Stender's enlightenment attitude towards his flock Kreslins (1998, 153).

43 "Ich wühle unter einer Menge von Büchern, ohne etwas zu finden, daß meinem Verlangen angemessen wäre. Aus Verzweifelung habe ich das Lettsche auch angefangen seit Ostern; wir werden uns also die Stenderschen Fabeln überhören können" (Hamann 1955–1979, II:366).

ultimately 'to lead them from darkness to the light of God.'[44] It is uncertain, however, if this impression was an entirely positive one.

In any case, in order to support his studies in Latvian, Hamann ordered and read the Lat- [38]
vian Bible, as his biographer put it, so as to "hear how God's word sounds in this elemental and unspoiled language" (Nadler 1949, 164). However, for Hamann, all human language, elemental as it may be, is characterized by refractions and reversals that is, human language is never a pure and unspoiled medium. The more obvious reason, therefore, was Hamann's aim to learn the language expressly on the basis of the *biblical text*. To him, learning the language by reading the Bible in the language in question was a religiously significant enterprise. It was the very fact that it provided a translation of the Word of God that made the Latvian Bible important to Hamann. In a letter to his father from May 15, 1766 Hamann asked:

> If you would be so kind as to bring me a Latvian or Courish Bible from Zeise's book- [39]
> shop, bound in black leather with a golden trimmed edge but without clausura, then it could perhaps be helpful to me in order to learn this language, in which I've made a slow start. […] At least, this translation of the bible is that praised that I—even if I have no further profit from my idea—may be content with that.[45]

If the Latvian Bible did not enable him to learn the Latvian language (due to Hamann's [40]
own failure), it was nevertheless a remarkable translation of God's word that as such satisfies Hamann's idea of the religious importance of the diversity of languages and the intellectual effort of *translation*. To Hamann, after the tower of Babel recounted in the Bible,[46] translation is nothing less than a theological necessity. As a consequence, the (religious) situation of contact that is manifested in the process of translation plays a significant role in Hamann's theological considerations.

His father had provided Hamann with the books he had asked for, as an expression of grat- [41]
itude in his letter from August 10, 1766 shows, although he admits that he did not use them very often. However, as his situation allowed for much leisure, he expressed his hope that the initial attempts in the study of language were not futile—he even stressed his determination to continue his work. In a significant addition, he also referred to his plan of trusting divine providence, regarding himself as a "ball that only lives due to the power of its [i.e. provi-

44 In his preface to his collection of fables Stender writes that "we have to love the Latvians as brothers" and "sie aus Finsternis zum Lichte Gottes zu führen uns eifrigst bestreben. Dahin gehen unsere Bemühungen, und eine höhere Stufe in der zukünftigen Verklärung wird der Lohn unserer Treue sein" (Stender 1766, XXX). Daija and Briežkalne (2015, 166) comment on the importance of Stender's book:"The main reason for the significance of Stender's book was that it was intended for Latvian peasant readers. A string of secular texts written in Latvian existed before Stender, but they were addressed to Latvian speaking Baltic Germans instead of Latvian peasant readers, and the Latvian language there had more exotic than communicative functions (for instance, devotional poetry which was meant to be used exclusively in the circles of the upper class). By speaking directly to peasants in his book and enjoying success later and inspiring several generations of followers, Stender was the first to change the literary communication system, to create preconditions for the emergence of secular reading public and thereby the first generation of Latvian peasant intelligentsia at the beginning of the 19th century."

45 "Wenn Sie so gütig seyn wollten mir eine lettische oder kursche Bibel aus dem Zeiseschen Buchladen in schwartz Leder mit goldnen Schnitt eingebunden aber ohne Clausuren zu besorgen; so würde es mir zur Erlernung dieser Sprache, in der ich einen langsamen Anfang gemacht, vielleicht behülflich seyn. […] Diese Übersetzung der Bibel wird wenigstens so gelobt, daß, wenn ich auch niemals mehr als einigen Vorteil hierinn von meinem Einfall habe, ich damit zufrieden seyn kann" (Hamann 1955–1979, II:369).

46 On the Tower of Babel as a key narrative in Hamann's understanding of both reason and God, see von Lüpke (2012, 180–83).

dence's] hands."[47] Concerning the Latvian language, one could say that Hamann was willing to hear if God's voice had been audible to him via this particular medium.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Latvian language had much to offer to Hamann in this regard, [42]
in particular concerning poetry. Hamann's attempts at the Latvian language were not only a way of passing the time in Courland, but rather made him attentive to its particular features as a medium of expression of a particular individuality that emerged from a certain locality.

Accordingly, Hamann's earlier experiences had some long-term effects in his writings. At [43]
a conspicuous place in his most famous work, the *Aesthetica in Nuce* (1762), later to be published in his collection of essays titled *Kreuzzüge des Philologen* ("Crusades of the philologist"), Hamann famously referred to his Livonian experiences. The collection title already suggests the religious aims and implications of Hamann's philological efforts. Within the *Aesthetica*, Hamann referred to his sojourns in the Baltic region in a significant context, relating literary form to the individuality of a people. Closing his discussion in the main text, Hamann includes the songs of the common Latvian people into a discussion on Homer and the 'German' Pindar, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. The salient passage, simultaneously instrumentalized in identity politics, solidified, and mythologized even within Latvian national culture" (Bičevskis 2022, 151), is worth quoting in length:

> Homer's monotonous metre ought to strike us with at least as much paradox as the [44]
> free rhythms of our German Pindar. My surprise at our ignorance of the causes for the Greek poet's use of the same metric throughout was moderated during a journey through Courland and Livland. In these regions, there are certain areas where one always hears the Latvians or non-Germans ('Undeutsche') singing during their work, singing only a single cadence of a few notes, which greatly resembles a poetic metre. If a poet was to emerge from among them, it would be quite natural for him to tailor all his lines to the metre of their voices. It would take too much time to illuminate this small fact (pleasing those of misguided taste – who want to make it [the things written] frizzy with their curling iron), to compare it with several other phenomena, to scrutinize the reasons for it, and to elaborate on the fertile consequences. (Hamann 1993b, 143–45)[48]

It should be stressed that regarding his interest in Latvian songs, Hamann by no means [45]

47 "Für die curschen Bücher statte [ich] Ihnen meinen herzlichsten Dank ab. Aus meiner Vergeßenheit deßselben, liebster Vater, können Sie leicht erachten, daß ich selbige noch wenig gebraucht habe. Ich denke aber noch hier so viel Zeit und Gemächlichkeit zu haben, daß ich diesen Anfang nicht umsonst gemacht, sondern gehörig werde fortsetzen können. Umstände du Verdruß sind an diesem unterbrochenen Unternehmen schuld; ich werde selbiges aber nicht aufgeben. Meine Flucht in diese Gegenden, bey den betrübten Umständen meines Vaterlandes, wird ohnehin nicht so bald endigen, und nicht ohne Abwechselung seyn. Ich überlasse alles der Göttl. Vorsehung, und sehe mich als ihren Ball an, der durch nicht anders als die Kraft ihrer Hände lebt" (Hamann 1955–1979, II:376).

48 "Homers monotonisches Metrum sollte uns wenigstens eben so paradox vorkommen, als die Ungebundenheit des deutschen Pindars. Meine Bewunderung oder Unwissenheit von der Ursache eines durchgängigen Sylbenmaaßes in dem griechischen Dichter ist bey einer Reise durch Curland und Liefland gemäßigt worden. Es giebt in angeführten Gegenden gewisse Striche, wo man das lettische oder undeutsche Volk bey aller ihrer Arbeit singen hört, aber nichts als eine Cadenz von wenig Tönen, die mit einem Metro viel Ähnlichkeit hat. Sollte ein Dichter unter ihnen aufstehen: so wäre es ganz natürlich, daß alle seine Verse nach diesem eingeführten Maasstab ihrer Stimmen zugeschnitten seyn würden. Es würde zu viel Zeit erfordern, diesen kleinen Umstand (ineptis gratum fortasse—qui volunt illa calamistris inuere) in sein gehöriges Licht zu setzen, mit mehreren Phänomenen zu vergleichen, den Gründen davon nachzuspüren, und die fruchtbaren Folgen zu entwickeln." The Latin quote is taken from Cicero's *Brutus*:"…pleasing those of misguided taste—who want to make it [the things written] frizzy with their curling iron."

devoted himself to a marginal issue of the indigenous culture. Quantitatively as well as qualitatively, the Latvian folk songs are a unique phenomenon in European cultural history, presenting a tradition of about 1.5 million variants of partly very archaic motives (Luven 2001, 27).[49] However, despite their eminence as a historical source regarding their content, Hamann was mainly interested in a particular formal aspect of them, the simple, laconic musical metre (*eine Cadenz von wenig Tönen*) and its possible desirable effects on the content of the future Latvian poetry. To him, as Raivis Bičevskis put it, monotony did not unify and universalize, but rather stresses distinction and individualization (Bičevskis 2022, 149). Latvian songs were the extensive product of an oral tradition dating far back in time. As the four-line songs were first documented in 1584 and first printed in 1632, scholars assume that the songs were quite commonly sung among the Latvian population (see Oberländer 2001, 233). Part of the songs, Oberländer suggests, served to strengthen the self-esteem and self-confidence of the Latvians as something that was not shared with the German elite and the official church (2001, 236–37). This aim for authenticity is also present in Hamann's considerations on the Latvian songs.[50]

[46] Latvian songs of work have been intensely analyzed by Magdalene Huelmann, who stresses the rhythmic function of the song that is used to structure the working process (Huelmann 1996, 14). Accordingly, the songs Hamann heard emerged from a concrete situation in reality and were strongly connected to their origin in the process of work. Here, ploughing is of particular significance, that is, the farmer's work with the soil (1996, 29 and 33).[51] Collective work (*talka*, see Grudule 2021, 399) and its particular mode of communication holds a central position in the songs (Huelmann 1996, 104 and 123). Latvian songs display an impression of concreteness to the hearer, a display of a particular *religious* perspective on reality[52] in which mythological figures are included (1996, 205). Most prominently, in the songs, the human and the divine sphere are communicatively interconnected (1996, 292). All these elements strongly resonate with Hamann's thinking. Moreover, the formal elements of the Latvian songs, most of them alliterative and unrhymed four-liners in trochees or dactyls, were in his time under polemical attack by philologists influenced by enlightenment ideas. One of them was Stender, who aimed at abolishing these songs, which were, to his mind, 'useless songs,' instead replacing them with something more fitting to his—and thereby to enlightenment's—poetological ideas (1996, 283).

[47] Hamann's few lines therefore deserve some closer consideration. They allow portraying him as a proto-dainologist (Bičevskis 2012, 352). As was usual in his writing practice, Hamann's text is full of hidden quotations and intertextual allusions. This also holds true for the seemingly insignificant or perhaps even excluding word *undeutsch* (non-German) that is used to characterize the people singing during work.[53] The contrast *Deutsche-Undeutsche* already ap-

49 On the salient role of singing in the process of confessionalization in Latvia, see Grudule (2018).

50 On the possible subversive effect of the songs with regard to official church discipline, see Neander (1956, 144).

51 On the importance of soil and earth to Hamann's thinking, see Stünkel (2018, 158).

52 "Die lettischen Volkslieder, und die hier untersuchten Arbeitslieder […] sind darüberhinaus in ihrer Gesamtheit intensiv mit mythologischen Vorstellungen durchwoben; religiöse Vorstellungen durch ziehen jeden Lebens- und damit Liedbereich. […] In den lettischen Liedern ist häufig das Bewußtsein spürbar, daß der Mensch Teil eines größeren Prinzips ist. Göttliche Figuren, Feen, Hexen und Geister greifen in das Geschick des Menschen ein; von ihrem Wohlwollen ist der Mensch abhängig, unter ihrer Mißgunst leidet er" (Huelmann 1996, 291).

53 On the kind of work Hamann might have witnessed see Jaremko-Porter (2008, 106): "In this famous narrative account of field laborers in Kurland Hamann did not specify which agricultural tasks were at hand, although it is probable that he would have heard melodic formulas that accompany straw making,

pears in medieval Livonian sources (Lele-Rozentāle 2001, 212). According to August Wilhelm Hupel, the term refers exclusively to the peasants (see Tischer 2022, 55–56).[54] However, in this context, the contrast does not primarily refer to social realities[55] and their possible critique (see Lele-Rozentāle 2012, 215), but rather to poetological considerations of the time. Hamann alludes to the title of a German book on Latvian poetry, "benevolently" written by Johann Wischmann (1650?–before 1703), that was published in Riga in 1697, titled *Der unteutsche Opitz oder kurtze Anleitung zur lettischen Dichtkunst wohlmeinend abgefaßt von Johann Wischmann Pastor zu Dondangen*. Wischmann was part of a movement ultimately resulting in the establishment of Latvian literature, mainly conducted by German pastors (von Wilpert 2005, 86). Hamann was well acquainted with the efforts of these literary pioneers.[56] He took notes of Wischmann's book in his notebook. He explicitly noted the titles of the chapters, explicitly also the title of the fourth chapter *Von der Art lettische Verse zu machen.*[57] Wischmann, parish pastor in Dondangen, put his theory in practice by actually writing Latvian hymns. Here, he took issue against using non-Latvian words, in particular against borrowings from the German language (Vanags 2022, 173).[58] He also paralleled his work to the most important German textbook on poetry of his time, Martin Opitz' *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* (1624).[59] As the editor of the modern edition of his work remarks, Wischmann makes the brave attempt to mediate two different cultures, though 'with asymmetric force' (see Wis-

muck spreading, or flax, potato, and rye picking. These prescribed seasonal tasks differentiate the practice of customs, dances, and songs in specific regions."

54 "Ohne auf die verschiedenen Stände zu sehen, theilt man des Landes Einwohner in zwo Hauptklassen, in Deutsche und in Undeutsche. Unter den lezten versteht man alle Erbleute, oder mit einem Wort die Bauern. Wer nicht Bauer ist, heißt ein Deutscher, wenn er auch kein deutsches Wort sprechen kann, z.B. Russen, Engländer […] Zu dieser Klasse gehören der Adel, die Gelehrten, Bürger, Amtleute, freygebohrene Bedienten, auch sogar Freygelassene, sobald sie ihre vorige Kleidung mit der deutschen verwechseln." (Hupel 1774, 215 f.). Compare Grudule 2013, 159: "This often-cited judgement seems inadequate to me. As already stated, the term Latvian is predominant in the titles of books at an early time, such as the above mentioned Mancelius (1638). To my mind Hupel with Unteutsche means the usage of the term in everyday communication and not in printed texts dealing with the investigation of Latvian and Estonian culture and language."

55 See Tischer (2022, 56): "Die besondere regionale Verwendung der Begriffe bedeutete, dass ein Bauer per Definition kein Deutscher war, eine Gleichsetzung, die in Livland weitgehend zutreffend gewesen sein dürfte, mit der Begriffsverwendung vor allem in Deutschland selbst aber natürlich nicht übereinstimmte. Die besondere regionale Verwendung von ‚deutsch' und ‚undeutsch' bedeutete per Definition zugleich, dass Letten und Esten als Bauern galten, als nicht privilegiert und als unzivilisiert. Höhere Bildung und sozialer Aufstieg machten sie per Definition zu Deutschen. Es gab also nicht nur den sozialen Druck, sich der kulturellen und politischen Elite der ‚Deutschen' anzupassen, sondern auch Definitionen und Wahrnehmungskategorien, die Aufsteigern kaum eine andere Möglichkeit als die der Germanisierung ließen."

56 In his notebook notice on Wischmann's book, Hamann also mentions the famous "ungerman" poet Füreccerus, who actually was the pioneer of Latvian Language and poetry Christoph Fürecker (around 1615–1680). He was married to a Latvian woman and lived among free Latvian farmers. With his Latvian hymns, Fürecker became the founding father of Latvian artistic poetry. As Vanags (2022, 169) puts it, Fürecker created a system of writing for the Latvian language, thus emancipating it from the German orthography and, as a consequence, representing its individuality as a autonomous language—an attempt at individuality that Hamann must have appreciated.

57 *The art of making Latvian verses* N V, 247 (10-22).

58 "Man soll sich für fremden Un = Lettischen Wörtern in VERßen hüten […] ich verstehe durch die fremden Wörter etliche abgeschmackte neue NOMINA und VERBA, die einige gantz aus dem Teutschen nehmen/ da sie die doch gnug Unteutsch geben könten […]"

59 On the relation of Wischmann's work to Opitz' book, see Grudule (2013, 156–57 and 163): "Der *Unteutsche Opitz* is Wischmann's attempt to adapt German poetry theory and criticism to the qualities of Latvian language. Opitz in his theoretical discourse appealed to the use of pure German language, whereas Wischmann is much more involved in this issue and devotes a separate chapter to the process of text adaption for Latvian, where he first of all mentions the pure Latvian language and then introduces Latvian proper names, Latvian traits, and cultural realia. This discussion, however, seems to be purely decorative, and he stays a

chmann 2008, XXX). Ultimately, the German language displayed a considerable influence on written Latvian, though not on spoken Latvian (see Vanags 2019, 292 and 297).[60] However, the book, and Hamann's reference to it, is an object-language document of a situation of contact. In Hamann's case, moreover, the reference also introduced the particular *poetry* of the Latvian people into a discussion of poetry that may earlier have disregarded it as a suitable participant.

[48] Furthermore, the passage taps into the contemporary discussion on literature as it reacts to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's remark about the poetic quality of songs of the Baltic peoples in the 33rd of his *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend* (Jørgensen 1993, 189). Here, Lessing reports about his delight in the rare "naivety of wit" and the "stimulating simplicity" of the "Dainos" sung by the common maidens of the country, and quotes two of them in length. Lessing concludes somehow condescendingly that poets can be found everywhere and that vivid sentiment is not a privilege of so-called civilized (*gesittet*) peoples.[61] In any case, for Lessing as well as for Hamann, locality is no obstacle for poetic excellence.

[49] Now, what was Hamann's poetic and linguistic point with this passage in the *Aesthetica*? Above all, the sound of the Latvian songs most clearly represents the particular context from which they emerge. Christina Jaremko-Porter has put it in corresponding poetical terms: "Hamann's reminiscence evokes a landscape of continuous and repetitive sounds—of sowing, haying, or mowing in Kurish farmlands" (2008, 102–3). Poetry thus corresponds to *locality*. Content-wise, Latvian folk and working songs furthermore cover a variety of actions, of *individual* concrete parts of rural work that are put into song (Huelmann 1996, 10). Moreover, in Hamann's presentation, it turns out that Greek 'continuing metre' (*durchgängiges Sylbenmaaß*) is not as unique as he himself—and also many of his educated contemporaries—had previously thought. On a trip through the country (Courland and Livland), perhaps in his capacity as a private tutor, Hamann had the opportunity to witness an astoundingly concordant phenomenon: the Latvian peasants singing in a cadence consisting of few notes, that appeared to him to be strikingly similar to an orderly metre. A poet emerging here in this context and among these people, Hamann concluded, surely would elaborate his verses using this metre suiting the voices of his people. Poetry, thus, was for Hamann dependent on local history and language, that is, on *contingent individualities*. It is not dependent on general content or mandatory form, but rather on personal expression.

[50] This insight had some important theological consequences that Hamann was not reluctant to draw: In his book *Aesthetica in nuce,* Hamann claimed that *poetry is the mother tongue of the human race* ("Poesie ist die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts"). The original language is poetry—in more than one sense: The Creator himself became a poet in the first place (*Da Er Selbst ein Schriftsteller geworden*, Hamann 1993b, 25); Creation itself is a speech to creature through creature (*eine Rede an die Kreatur durch die Kreatur*, Hamann 1993b, 87). *God an author!* ("Gott ein Schriftsteller!") is Hamann's famous insight guiding his London con-

stranger to the spiritual world of the Latvians. On the whole, many pages of the book appear to be just a game and reveal the colonial system existing in the Baltic areas of that time in its entirety."

60 "German influence, of course, was felt not only in religious texts but also in the Latvian language in general. This strong influence contributed to the fact that the religious written language was rather different from the spoken Latvian" (Wischmann 2008, 297).

61 "Sie würden auch daraus lernen, daß unter jedem Himmelsstriche Dichter geboren werden, und daß lebhafte Empfindungen kein Vorrecht gesitteter Völker sind. Es ist nicht lange, daß ich in *Ruhigs Litauischem Wörterbuche* blätterte, und am Ende der vorläufigen Betrachtungen über diese Sprache, eine hierher gehörige Seltenheit antraf, die mich unendlich vergnügte. Einige Litauische *Dainos* oder Liederchen, nämlich, wie sie die gemeinen Mädchen daselbst singen. Welch ein naiver Witz! Welche reizende Einfalt!" (Lessing 1996, 106)

version experience.[62] As a consequence, the contingent and concrete individuality of Latvian oral poetry is not simply a remarkable (or neglectable) historical fact, but rather a genuine and authentic sign and repetition of God's presence and actions in the world.[63] Accordingly, the contact with Latvian oral poetry, the working songs heard by Hamann, not only triggered a significant poetological insight that was important in the contemporary discussion of his time, but they even manifested or revealed a religious truth that was likely to repudiate any idea of general poetic rules supposedly valid for any place at all times. Individual language is the medium of the divine. This holds true not least regarding the enlightenment idea (i.e., in particular, Gotthard Friedrich Stender's) that future Latvian literature and poetry had to be formed after the image of sentimental-rationalistic Enlightenment models (see Schmid 2003, 227–28). In Stender's fables, for instance, though he commented topical social issues in Courland, the locality, i.e., the Latvian world, occupied only a peripheral place, the space being either mythically abstract or related to historical or exotic narratives (Daija 2017, 39). To Hamann, another road had to be taken, strengthening the individual aspect of the Latvian poetry.

It should be mentioned that at the end of the lines quoted from the *Aesthetica in nuce*, [51]
Hamann seems to open up a perspective that may be of interest for scholars interested in issues of comparison. According to this perspective, the observation relating to the songs of the Latvian people could well be developed into an extensive research programme. This would include the methodological steps of contextualizing the phenomenon, of scrutinizing the reasons for the emergence of the phenomenon, of comparing the findings to other phenomena, and finally of drawing conclusions regarding the emergence of poetry and literature within the different peoples in question. Thus, Jørgensen's remark about Hamann's disinterest in the matter (Jørgensen 1993, 189) must be subject to doubt. It becomes even more questionable when one considers the fact that the four-step programme itself is precisely the way a proponent of the enlightenment would approach the phenomenon, that is: putting it in a light considered adequate (*in sein gehöriges Licht zu setzen*), subsuming it under certain criteria in order to compare it with others (*mit mehreren Phänomenen zu vergleichen*), adapting it to the principle of the sufficient reason (*den Gründen davon nachzuspüren*), and including it under the useful principle of cause and error (*und die fruchtbaren Folgen zu entwickeln*). Thus, in his opposition to the enlightenment project, the matter must be of preeminent interest to Hamann. In contrast to this attempt to make the phenomenon frizzy with a curling iron, to him, every phenomenon has to be examined in its God-directed originality[64] as an expression of individuality, personality, and locality.

## Conclusion

Hamann spent an important period of his life in the Baltic region and, as a citizen of Königs- [52]
berg, remained in its vicinity and scarcely moved very far away. The sojourns in Courland left many important traces in his later writings. Admittedly, on the surface, there is only little material documenting situations of religious contact in or with the Baltic region in Hamann's

62 Hamann's writings from his London period start with the text *Über die Auslegung der heil.[igen] Schrift* and with the words *Gott ein Schriftsteller!* (1993a, 59).

63 "In Hamann […], this simplicity becomes originality, closeness to the origin, not naive, but God-centered" (Bičevskis 2022, 154).

64 On the relationship of originality and monotony as the tonality of origin in the case of the Latvian songs, see Bičevskis (2022, 155).

work. To a certain degree, however, this is also not to be expected in the case of the *Magus,* who usually composed and wrote his complicated texts in a rather idiosyncratic style. Nevertheless, the contact with the Baltic region in many regards did have some importance in his work as well as in the thought of later intellectuals referring to his work, most famously his pupil, Johann Gottfried Herder.

To Hamann himself, the decisive contact he experienced in the Baltic lands was the struggle [53] between the nobility on the one side and the urban patriciate and academics on the other. This was no less than a struggle between Enlightenment and the feudal *hinterwelt.* In hindsight, however, the contact with the Baltic peasants was more important, and even religiously significant.[65] Their authentic poetry served Hamann as a philosophical-theological argument in a struggle that he considered to be characterized by crypto-religious elements. Poetry in succession of the Creator's poetical action is local, individual, and personal, but not general and all-compassing—such poetry would be idolatry. It is no surprise, then, that this claim to individuality (see von Lüpke 2004, 10–11)[66] was Hamann's main point in his famous metacritical polemics against Kant: reason, if viewed as the overall judge and lawgiver, is bound to become pope-like or 'catholic.' The fact that even the seemingly enlightened circle around Berens in Riga took part in the apology and divinization of the 'enlightened' absolutistic rulers[67] (in this case, of Catherine the Great)[68] very likely strengthened Hamann's suspicion against the Enlightenment project as a dogmatic religion.[69]

Hamann's writings manifest the contact of religious (and crypto-religious) tradition via the [54] *medium* of language as a *tertium comparationis*. Hamann was exposed to chthonic Latvian poetry and, after his London conversion, used this experience in his continuing agonal contact as a Lutheran Christian opposing the crypto-religion of the Enlightenment movement. In this context, to Hamann, the genuine Latvian language with its specific kind of poetry, characterized by a particular metre, became a prime medium for spreading God's Word and an important example for the fundamental idea of God being the author or poet of the world. Compared to the sophisticated language of the Enlightenment, this grounded, personal, individual, and local language was more likely to provide insight into the book of nature and the basic actions of its author. While others, mostly parts of the clergy, thought language to be the suitable main medium for the spread of Enlightenment's generalizing ideas (Angermann

65 This might be part of the answer to the research question posed by Raivis Bičevskis on what Riga, Mitau and other places in Courland and Livland meant to Hamann (Bičevskis 2012, 358).

66 "Gegenüber einer 'allgemeine[n] Menschenvernunft', die sich selbst 'vergöttert', indem sie von ihrer Geschichtlichkeit, Wandelbarkeit und Leibgebundenheit abstrahiert, insistiert Hamann auf der Individualität der Vernunft. Dabei ist seine Hochschätzung der Individualität theologisch begründet […] Eben der so verstandene Gott unterscheidet sich von den Idolen der menschlichen Vernunft dadurch, dass er als Schöpfer jeden Menschen als Individuum ins Sein ruft und durch seine »individuelle Vorsehung« im Sein erhält."

67 See Tischer (2022, 62): "Die Kritik an der Leibeigenschaft ist durch die Schriften und Aktivitäten von Johann Georg Eisen oder Garlieb Merkel besonders präsent, aber tatsächlich war sie nicht prägend für die baltische Aufklärung. Die Literaten und namentlich die evangelischen Geistlichen waren in ihrer Funktion systemstabilisierend, nicht systemkritisch. Kritik war nicht karriereförderlich […]."

68 See, on Hamann's attitude towards Catharine's predecessor, Peter the Great, who followed corresponding aims, Graubner (2022, 63–64).

69 Von Pistohlkors comments on the relation of the Enlightenment movement to the rulers: "Diese weitgereisten, mit den Themen der Zeit eng verbundenen ‚jungen Leute' um 1765 glaubten unter Katharina II. in der besten aller Welten zu leben und waren sich nicht zu schade, entsprechende Jubelgedichte zu verfassen oder in Auftrag zu geben. Daß der Selbstherrscher als Herrschaftsträger im ‚System der Republik der Gelehrten' (Herder) ein Fremdkörper war und sein mußte, ist von den Zeitgenossen mit Ausnahme von Johann Georg Hamann nicht erkannt worden. […] Die Herrscher-Vergötterung ist im Kreis um die Brüder Berens gang und gäbe" (1994, 297).

and Brüggemann 2018, 179), Hamann insisted on the locality of the Latvian language as a medium of religious truth. To him, the hybris of Enlightenment thought became manifest in Stender's claim to reform the Latvian folk songs following external ideas concerning form and content.[70] As Daija and Briežkalne put it (2015, 172): "Stender was more than skeptical towards traditions and ethnographic habits proposing a more cosmopolitan life model instead. For Stender's vision, the past—either mythical, or historical—was to be abandoned, in order to create a new man, a new generation led by ethnically unspecified values." To Hamann, this kind of enlightened upbringing necessarily turns into a dictatorship upbringing (Daija 2014, 357).

Poetic language as a medium is of salient importance for religion and, thus, an important source for scholarship. After all, it is not by accident that the classical historian of Baltic/Latvian religiosity, Haralds Biezais, in accordance with Hamann's practice, based his pathbreaking research mainly on the songs of the Latvian people (*dainas*) (Luven 2001, XVI and 53). Accordingly, the situation of contact that manifested itself in Johann Georg Hamann's writings concerning the Baltic lands and its peoples is less about a *religious* encounter, and more about the contact with the mere existence, actions, and habits of the Baltic people interpreted *religiously*. In Hamann's view, the unique poetry of the Latvian peasants thus became a visible sign for the philosophical and theological idea of individuality, personality, and locality that indicate God's presence in the world.[71] Thus, the writings of the magus in north are an example of the religious struggle between Enlightenment's generalizations and (Hamann's) enlightening Lutheranism, triggered and motivated by the example of the Latvian people—whereas their 'visible' or surface religiosity hardly played a role in his considerations. [55]

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70 As Pauls Daija has pointed out, Stender aimed at 'civilizing' some of the more explicit content of Latvian songs and giving them a more sentimental and emotional erotic meaning (2017, 86)—a prudishness Hamann could not agree on. Māra Grudule, thus, characterizes Stender's aim as building a path "for Latvian peasants to approach the German *bürgerliche* Gesellschaft or to build a civic society with appropriate cultural expressions of personal relationships and leisure opportunities" (Grudule 2021, 408). To Hamann, this is yet another attempt at idolatrical violation (*bildende Vergewaltigung*) of others (Graubner 2022, 69).

71 To Bičevskis, Hamann stresses the "perpetual monotony of the contractions from the origin in all that is said. A monotony then also shows up in the verses of Homer and folk songs of the Latvian peasants. […] Hamann's monotony is paradoxical: the unity of the world is linked to the diversity of the world's sounds and colors, languages, and times: the world itself is a paradoxical monotony" (Bičevskis 2022, 155).

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