Germanizing Universities and Imperial Knowledge:
Theodor Schiemann, *Ostforschung*, and the University of Dorpat at the End of the First World War

Theodor Schiemann, historian of Russia and founder of the Seminar for the Study of Eastern Europe (*Ostforschung*) at the University of Berlin, returned to the Baltic in 1918 as the rector of the Germanized University of Dorpat. Schiemann had been educated at the University decades before, but had fled to Berlin in the 1880s as a result of Russification policies on academics in the Baltic States of the Russian Empire. In the interim, the University had been renamed the University of Yuryev (today’s University of Tartu in Estonia) and Russian history and language dominated instruction. Thus, Schiemann, a Baltic-German émigré and refugee from one state-enforced nationalization policy, returned on behalf of the expanding German Empire in Eastern Europe to solidify his career as a proponent of a historical and contemporary narrative of German dominance in and expertise about the region. The University was to be at the forefront of a German imperial landscape that sought to spread *Kultur*, denigrate Slavic and Russian influence and history, and often relegated local Baltic populations to minor roles in the historical development and contemporary politics of the region.

My presentation explores the colonial dimensions of the use and abuse of history in this, as Schiemann saw it, push-and-pull between German and Russian influence within East Central European history. Instrumental for Schiemann, his like-minded colleagues, and many Baltic Germans, was for the history and institutions of the region to be written and spoken in German and to, accordingly, offer a story of the German ‘civilizing mission’. An academic refugee from Russification, Schiemann, with direct backing from Kaiser Wilhelm II, countered with a violently Russophobic discourse and institutionalization of Germanization. This presentation examines colonial knowledge production, constructed historical and racial narratives, and the role that empire has played in moving, defining, and controlling local and outside populations in East Central Europe.

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