On May 19 and 20, 1994, the Centre for North, East, and Central European Studies (NOMES) at the University of Groningen hosted its first international conference, "The Baltic: Languages and Cultures in Interaction", devoted to aspects of the languages, literatures, and history of that area. It was one of the scholarly and scientific manifestations organized that year in celebration of the 380th anniversary of University.

The NOMES Centre was originally set up in 1990 for the purpose of promoting joint research projects involving the departments of History, Fenno-Ugristics, Germanic, Scandinavistics and Old Germanics, Phonetics, Regional and Agronomical Historical Studies, and Slavistics, and the Arctic Centre of the Groningen Faculty of Arts. This has resulted, among other things, in a number of publications focussed on the NOMES-area. The initiative of the Baltic conference provided a good occasion for NOMES to present itself as an organization, and also to act as an international forum for multidisciplinary scholarly discussion and the exchange of ideas. It is the intention of NOMES to continue on this course and to organize comparable multidisciplinary, area-oriented conferences in future.

Papers were presented and discussed by scholars from Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the USA.

This issue of the Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek contains almost all of the papers presented at the conference. The papers of the three sections appear in the following order, linguistics, literature, and history, preceded by the texts of the plenary session papers.

The plenary sessions are devoted to general topics concerning the cultures, history, and languages of the people around the Baltic.

**VAN BAAK** (Groningen) raises questions regarding the notion of 'the North' as a cultural concept in general, and discusses a number of possible interpretations. Central to his argument is the thesis that 'Northerness',
in the cultures involved, is not just a geographical characteristic, but represents a diverse and complex range of cultural values and concepts. These can furthermore be described and interpreted in their historic development and in terms of cultural identity or mentality. To illustrate these arguments, the paper presents the outline of a semiotic and structuralist analysis of the theme of the North in Russian literature in particular.

ISRAEL (London) sketches the rise and fall of the Dutch economic, political, and cultural presence in the Baltic from the 1450's to the 1750's. He observes that before 1590 the Netherlands played a relatively insignificant role, trading mostly in bulk goods. Although the trade with Narva had increased substantially since the sixties, there was a fundamental change in the Dutch trade in terms of scale and diversity; Israel calls it a 'second Dutch conquest' of the Baltic. Amsterdam outstripped Lübeck and Hamburg. After the resumption of the war in 1621 between the Republic and Spain, there was a distinct regression: Denmark even launched a competing East India Company. According to Israel the political cooperation with Denmark accounts for the fact that the Republic had no adequate response to Sweden's downfall after the battle at Poltava, nor to Russia's growing influence in the Baltic.

VAN KÖNINGSBRÜGGE (Groningen) describes the Republic's diplomatic efforts to thwart Sweden's growing power in the second half of the 17th century. Out of self-interest, Holland tried to let the principle of "the sea accessible to all" prevail. Emphasis is placed on the role of Amsterdam in these efforts.

STURE URELAND (Mannheim) writes about contact zones between North Germanic and Finno-Ugrian, and states that the geographical distribution of speakers of North Germanic and Finno-Ugrian languages north of 62° is the outcome of ethnic contacts after the Middle Ages. The changing political, ethnic and linguistic borders between 800 and 1700 A.D. are illustrated by maps. He also describes the linguistic situation in the 17th century. He concludes that socio-political changes have resulted in language decay, language shift and language death in the northern and eastern Baltic Sea areas and a similar process has taken place in the case of Swedish in Finland and Estonia.
In the linguistics section, three papers address the following topics.

HOFSTRA (Groningen) discusses the contacts between Germanic and Balto-Finnic before the Hansa period. Contacts between the Germanic population, especially Scandinavians, and Finno-Ugrians started in the Bronze Age. These contacts led and still lead to a large Germanic influence on the Balto-Finnic lexicon. Dating the loanwords is possible, partly on the basis of developments within (Lapp (Sami) and) Balto-Finnic, partly on the basis of developments within Germanic, partly on the basis of external evidence. Germanic borrowings earlier than the Late Middle Ages can be divided in various layers, beginning with Proto-Germanic loanwords common to both Lapp and Balto-Finnic, and ending with Middle Low German, and loanwords difficult to date.

LAINIO (Stockholm) discusses the sociofunctional position of Finnish in Sweden. Finns have settled in Sweden since the eleventh century AD. The author centres on Tornedalian Finnish and on Swedish Finnish. Tornedalian Finnish was separated from Finland Finnish by a new political border along the River Torneå in 1809; now it is a minority language even in the Tornedal region. Swedish Finnish is the Finnish language spoken by those Finns who after World War II came to the industrial centres of Sweden. The author describes the position of Finnish as a minority language in Sweden. In Tornedal an earlier diglossic situation was under hard pressure during the 1940's and 1950's and Finnish was giving way to Swedish, but recently Tornedalian Finnish has increasingly been used not only in private but also in public formal situations. The Finnish immigrants of the 1960's and earlier passed Swedish as a home language to their children. In the 1980's, however, two thirds of the Finnish-speaking pupils participated in educational programmes with some portion of Finnish. Influences from Finland are still continuing. As to Tornedalian Finnish, the situation is still alarming. The prestige of Swedish Finnish has received a push upward thanks to the free school system and the mother tongue classes in municipality run schools; the generation of competent speakers of Finnish now growing up may succeed in securing Finnish for the next generation.

WICHERKIEWICZ (Poznań) writes about the German minority group in post-war Poland. After World War II the Polish borders shifted to the west and about 3.2 million Germans were expelled. Most members of the German minority live in Silesia. Full political rights were granted to the
German minority as late as 1990. The linguistic situation of the German minority is intricate and heterogeneous. In Silesia, a key factor of regional identity is the Silesian dialect of German. In Upper Silesia, among the indigenous population, a language shift from bi- or trilinguism through Polish monolinguism towards bi- or trilinguism in German, Silesian, and Polish is taking place. Inquiries made since 1988 show that the Silesian dialect is still a core value of the regional and ethnic identity of the indigenous population in Silesia, and that the degree of identification between Silesians and the German language and culture is increasing.

The three papers in the literature section are devoted to aspects of northern modernism.

**NOLIN** (Göteborg) assesses the role of the influential Danish literary critic, Georg Brandes, in the break-through of modern literature in the Baltic area (Denmark, Poland, Latvia, Finland, Sweden in particular). This critical survey presents Brandes as a literary inspiration and mediator between the Baltic states and the rest of Europe.

**SCHÖNAU** (Groningen) discusses the special feelings of Thomas Mann toward Scandinavia and Nordic cultures in general. In Mann's perception the axis North - South acquires an individual evaluative significance. The North functions as a positive cultural stereotype and plays an important role in his development as a novelist. The article discusses Mann's evaluations of the literatures of the Scandinavian countries.

**TÖRNQVIST** (Amsterdam) portrays Strindberg as the influential and polemical, and even scandalous, critic of his fellow countrymen, and as a champion of European culture. His opinions about the relationship between Europe and Sweden are shown to be often contradictory, but still surprisingly relevant.

**VALKONEN** (Helsinki) summarizes the major artists and events of the period of co-operation between modernist artists in Finland and St. Petersburg around the turn of the century.

The papers on Baltic history cover the following topics.

Using maps drawn up by seamen, **OKHUIZEN** (Utrecht) illustrates the development of the Dutch presence in the Baltic. The initial emphasis on the Dutch presence in the Southern Baltic is reflected in the cartographical production between 1532 and 1623.
RODING’s (Leiden) article deals with the Dutch cultural influence in the Baltic area. On the basis of her research on the practical role of architects and engineers, she establishes that many Dutchmen were active in Danzig, and elsewhere between c. 1550 and 1650 in land reclamation, dyke and mill building, fortification, and town planning.

On the basis of extensive archive research, VELUWENKAMP (Groningen) describes the development of the Dutch merchant colony in St. Petersburg in the 18th century. Between 1720 and 1750, there were approximately thirty Dutch merchants in the Russian capital. They formed an independent Reformed community, but from 1749 to 1770 the Dutch merchants did not have their own vicar. From that time onwards the community faced a decline. The Dutch language fell into abeyance after a couple of generations, but after 1770 a revival took place partly due to the activities of merchants from Vriezenveen.

The realization of this conference, and the publication of the papers would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and determination of a number of people. First of all we thank Mr. Adriaan van der Hoeven, who coordinated the organisation of the conference, as well as the publication of the papers from beginning to end. We thank the contributors to the conference for their effort and their willingness to prepare the article versions of their papers. We also thank the following special referents who commented on the papers during the conference: dr. Szuszanna Björn Andersen from Copenhagen (Nolin), dr. Tjeerd de Graaf of Groningen University (Rannut - not in this volume), Fil.lis. Paula Havaste of Helsinki University (Toompere - not in this volume), Prof. dr. Pim Kooij of Groningen University (Israel), and Prof. dr. Hermann Niebaum of Groningen University (Van Koningsbrugge).

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Prof. dr Joost van Baak
Chairman of the board of NOMES