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From Methodological Nationalism to Regional and Comparative Perspectives: Histories of Latvian Literature in Twentieth and Twenty – First Centuries

The first histories of Latvian literature that could be named professional only appeared in the early decades of the twentieth century. They were stimulated by swift transformations of national culture and marked an attempt to create a literary system of one's own that would match those already established in larger cultures. The proclamation of an independent state was a further boost in this process while institutionalizing cultural practices and taking care of national art. Thus the rise of Latvian literary histories had been linked, on the one hand, to the internationalization of cultural activities, while, on the other, it also included an obvious effort to draw borders and underline the importance of literature in vernacular. The tension between poetics and politics remained vital for literary history writing during the Soviet regime in the second half of the twentieth century as well as at the turn of the twenty – first. The thirty years of independence have, once again, been characterized by tensions between methodological nationalism that underlines the role of culture in the nation building and preservation of cultural memory, on the one hand, while also trying to live up to the obvious intellectual need to open up to the world in order to evaluate national culture in regional and comparative perspectives, on the other. A detailed inspection of these tensions is the main goal of the proposed paper, while at the same time putting the specific observations in a broader context of the possibilities, aims and role of small cultures in forming part of the world literary system.