

YSTEEL

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Magazine for history and culture
between the Saru Sea and Asura Ocean

In this issue:

- The role of the media in the republican revolution
- Environmentalism and nature romanticism
- History of Gfiewish and Lufasan political institutions
- South Jutean culture throughout time
- Et cetera



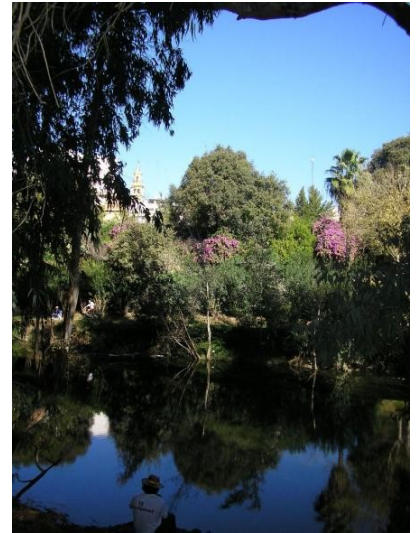
Foreword

Ystel is a continent rich in culture and history, but has often been overlooked in discussions and literature covering those, and is often even underrated by inhabitants of the continent itself.

This magazine endeavors to help change that, starting with various articles on South Jute, Lufasa and Gfiewistan, three countries located alongside the Ersaj River, the most important waterway of Ystel.

More than a dozen stories cover a diverse amount of topics relating to these historically deeply interconnected countries, either specific to one of the three or comparing two or all three with each other.

Among these topics are e.g. the political role of mass media in political change, religious, cultural and political dimension of environmentalism, development of political institutions and much more.



Impressions from Gfiewistan (Hatariew state), Lufasa (near Hoszsorwoez) and South Jute (Laina, Balak district)

*You So Tremendously, Enormously Lonely
Yet Strangely Tantalizing Enchanting Land*

*You Sweet Tranquil Emerald Light
Yielding Softly Thrilling Energetic Life*

—The beginning of Ode to Ystel

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The role of media in the republican revolution

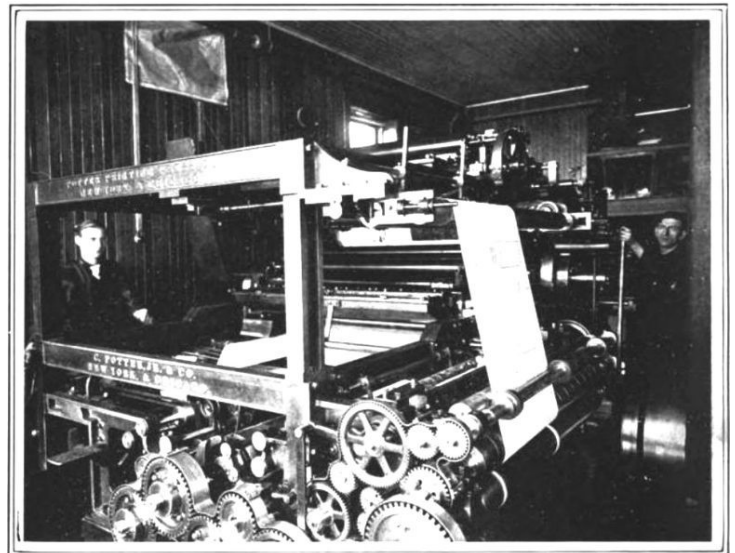
While media in Gfiewistan is largely free nowadays, it took very long to get to that point, and the struggle for this media freedom was intimately tied to the movement for a republican government in Gfiewistan.

After all Gfiewish chiefdoms were unified in 1572 under the banner of a new religion brought in by missionaries by the chief of Slakkariew, priests in local temples all over the country were granted the sole authority to educate people publicly, which also entailed a monopoly on printing books and newsletters.

This was not challenged until after the second university was founded in 1762 in the city of Hatariew in the far north on the River Ersaj, far away from the royal capital of Slakkariew located in the southwest at the bay with the same name. The distance made enforcing the monopoly more difficult, and a culture of independent research could begin. Soon, critical students and researchers at the university were openly challenging royal policy, first the inefficient quasi-feudal system of land use, later on expanding to other topics until the political system was attacked directly.

While the royal court tried to ban and suppress the burgeoning diversity of independent presses in Hatariew, the local nobility eventually sided with the university and put it under their protection. Some time later, regulations on education and media were loosened for the first time, although temples still enjoyed preferential treatment, support by royal funds and both censorship and outside of Hatariew self-censorship. Most outlets continued to glorify the political and religious establishment, and printed very conservative educational material and the occasional newsletter, officially sanctioned. However, books from abroad started being imported in large amounts and were widely read, especially books on scientific topics.

Anti-clerical sentiment and criticism of the royal court remained banned in print, but with growing political and social problems became more numerous in secretly



printed magazines nonetheless. This culminated in the revolution of 1852 that established a republic and finally overturned the ban, however, the temples remained powerful, and in complete control of education until 1975, when the first secular and publicly funded schools were opened to much criticism from conservative political groups. The media was also further liberalized at that point, radio broadcasting that had been another exclusive domain of priests and monks was now also opened to private companies and individuals, and TV was introduced as well. Prior to that, films and video reports were only shown in cinemas.

Today, Gfiewistan is home to a diverse media landscape. All states have several private radio stations, and on top of this there is local and national “temple radio” broadcasting religious programs and music, now relying on donations from the public and support by the religious establishment rather than receiving public funds. TV stations are receivable in all parts of the country and provide the main source of information for most people, although the internet has started to rival it.

Local newspapers, in the 70s still the most influential media, have lost ground due to the increasing competition, but many remain profitable due to a reorientation to either long-form or investigative reporting, specialization, or emphasis of local identity

and support of local events. Most national newspapers have however nowadays disappeared, with some local newspapers such as the Hatariew Herald taking their position and with issues sold across the country.

* * *

Developments in the neighboring land of Lufasa were similar. For the longest time it also had, as a part of the Kingdom of Gfiewistan, a tightly regulated media landscape subject to widespread censorship, albeit bilingual.

And again similarly to Gfiewish-majority areas, change came at the end of the 18th century, when media control was started to be relaxed under the pressure of university students and researchers in Hatariew, and later also local nobles. While this had not much of an effect in other chiefdoms, where censorship was often merely replaced by self-censorship, Lufasa's capital Aušaj is only a short distance and a river crossing away from the city of Hatariew and so had always been very influenced by it, politically, economically, and culturally. As a result, the reach of the royal court in Slakkariew was mostly very limited and Lufasan media similarly began to liberalize and become more critical and diverse.

Many of the same factors that drove support for republicanism in the country overall also were existent in Lufasa, such as social and political problems, widespread corruption, and a governing system increasingly perceived as oppressive and out of touch with the needs and values of the people. Over the course of the first half of the 19th century this ultimately led local writers and reporters to not just to challenge government policy, but also the very existence of the royal court, as in Hatariew first secretly, as criticism of the court itself was still outlawed, but as resentment and the republican movement grew, also more and more openly.

While anti-clerical sentiment was less common as Iovist missionaries never managed to fully convert the land and instead syncretic faiths had prevailed, the liberalization of media was crucial for another reason, as it allowed for a rebirth of local cultures in Lufasa, as

it became possible to easily share new and old folklore, songs, poems and more. For the first time in centuries local patriotism could be also openly expressed having previously been quietly suppressed under suspicions of insufficient loyalty to the court in Slakkariew.

Eventually, what had begun with printings of simple folk songs and texts on the simple appreciation of the natural landscape and farming traditions led to a growingly confident belief in the value and importance of a distinct Lufasan culture and finally culminated in assertions of the existence and need of a separate identity. Like republicanism, this Lufasan nationalism only was able to gather widespread support and consequently succeed in its goal thanks to the hard-won media freedom that invigorated the printing business and made it possible to share ideas and creative works supporting them quicker than ever before.

After gaining independence in 1852 as a separate republic, censorship was formally abolished and many more newspapers are founded. Regulation of media becomes responsibility of the newly elected national assembly, which decides to fund a public press to publish educational material to fully break the dominance of the temples in this regard, and subsidize the existence of libraries and post offices with newsstands across the country. For a lot of local newspapers, this remains an important way to reach their audience and has prevented consolidation on the print media market. It also helped them fend off competition from first national newspapers and later TV and internet newsportals.

Radio was introduced in the 1940s. Among the first stations was also a public one founded by the assembly, first for educational purposes and to transmit assembly meetings, after a period of public skepticism also for traditional, and later, modern music.

Unlike in Gfiewistan, private and community radio stations were allowed to operate from the beginning on, leading Lufasa to develop a large radio culture and so



Lufasa

Rivers – who will save the “nourishing mothers” of Lufasans?

The large rivers running through most parts of Lufasa, commonly called the natural, nourishing mothers of the country, are threatened.

Nearly all population centers are located near them, as they provided easy irrigation for fields. They are also where most industrial activity exists and crucial for trade, even if slightly less than in past centuries. But this often caused severe pollution in several spots and clean-up activities are regularly needed. These are organized by local activists and local governments, but this is proving insufficient. Pressure on the latter is therefore growing to enforce tougher regulations and spend more on conservation, but progress has been slow. Disagreements in parliament and between interest groups are too common and have not been resolved yet.

But aside from work the rivers are also needed for local recreation. Fishing, swimming, boat trips all happen on or in the river, and festivals commonly take place on the shore. In many villages and town districts there are

still have a bigger variety of radio programming than Gfiewistan despite its much smaller size. Both AM and FM stations continue to be widely popular and many more smaller local stations, usually founded by local newspapers or volunteers, are available than in the large neighboring country. With a typically hyperlocal focus on news, events, discussions and more relevant to particular communities they have kept much of their popularity over the years.

There are however even now only few TV stations, due to slow public acceptance and lack of initial interest. One of the biggest drawbacks generally cited at the time was the lack of portability, making it no alternative for people working on farms, commerce or in jobs requiring longer commutes. This only began to change as TV devices started getting cheaper and new, more varied programming started drawing viewers. Nonetheless, it remains more of a niche medium than a truly mainstream one.



social events that happen weekly or monthly during the warmer months, while the capital Aušaj holds a boat parade as well as boat races every year at the last day of summer. In winter ice fishing, ice skating and winter markets are popular.

Conservationists and governments will need to find a way to make sustainable future uses possible.

Lufasa

Traditional Lufasan environmentalism, its origin and historical importance

Environmentalism has a long tradition in Lufasa, with its roots going back to the time before the emergence of Lufasans as a distinct culture and ethnicity.

It is commonly seen as inheritance from the Jutic culture that Lufasan culture descends from, an aspect of the ancient Jutic religion of Saandism that became a part of the profane culture and so survived the conversions to first the ancient native religion of the Gfiewish chiefdoms as well as the later attempts by the Slakkariew-led Gfiewish kingdom to introduce a new, scriptural religion. However, as both of these religions, especially the former one, can have environmentalist streaks, this is not uncontested.

What is not contested is that according to oral tradition already in medieval times preservation of forests and rivers wasn't just religiously driven, but also seen as culturally important and often even just prosaically as necessary for economic reasons, as the basis of human life in the material world. Whether one motivation lead to the other or whether all appeared independently is impossible to say for sure.

Concern for the preservation of the soil and surface of fields and their natural biodiversity might also have originally derived from religious beliefs, either the desire for a harmonious relationship with nature of Saandism or the belief in the need to care for the environment as if it were one's own body of the local Ystelian religion. But in either case it seems to have lost its sacred component fast, with no records, traditions or stories indicating a religious or spiritual connection. The general assumption is hence that care was applied to not exhaust the soil and avoid monocultures mostly to ensure good harvests in the following years, an early example of sustainable economic behavior.



An alternate theory is that this behavior arose from, or was at least reinforced by encounters with Gfiewish officials or farmers less concerned about soil health and the protection of local ecosystems demanding or using farming methods that caused recurrent harvest problems. In either case, it later became the subject of folk songs and poems, but only once the traditions had been firmly established and became a marker of identity.

This allowed environmentalism to develop a new dynamic, as it came to be seen increasingly as one of the crucial differences that set Gfiewish people and Lufasans apart after centuries of Gfiewish cultural dominance that had led to an increasing amount of assimilation, and as such became a key theme in many nationalist works and a motivation for seeking independence.

Gfiewistan

The countryside as a place of desire

Both in Gfiewish media and the popular imagination the countryside is frequently portrayed as the location where life is more authentic, more meaningful and therefore more desirable.



As a result, despite being having a majority urban population, with only 15 % living in settlements with less than 1,000 people, the countryside still has a huge cultural influence on life in Gfiewistan. It is the most popular place for vacations, with many temples and sacred forests a place for spirituality, and the most common setting of local films, TV shows and novels.

This has a long history. Forests as places of religious importance go back to prehistoric times, and with the introduction of a state religion in the 16th century many temples were built in the countryside to allow priests and visitors contemplate life and loneliness better. Hermits were seen as better equipped to deal with spiritual questions.

Soon after a royal court developed, and later the first merchant elites, the first vacationing in the countryside began. The air, open landscapes with vast greens, remarkable flowers and clean rivers drew their attention and became a common subject of poetry, usually alliterative, the now well-known *bhe boklds bomgo* (structural pattern creative writing). Early sagas and later novels would never fail to contrast the perceived or real pristine countryside with the messy city, even if

some would on occasion describe city life as equally livable in a different way.

However, it was during the development of romantic nationalism that works centering the countryside, aside from written works now increasingly paintings and songs as well, that would look not just to forest and meadows as places of beauty, but inherent virtue in comparison to the corruption at the royal court in the capital and the abuses of the garrisons in other towns. The countryside, that was where people made a honest living with no dirty tricks or schemes, it was where liberty rather than coercion reigned, a place where no one was entitled to social privileges by birth alone. These themes were key in developing the new national identity that was no longer tied to any king or queen and that would lead to the republican revolution in the mid-19th century.

As industrialization progressed, and with it cities would get wealthier, but often also dirtier, the desire for the countryside grew anew, and whoever could afford it would now take vacations far away from urban areas, just like the royal court and rich merchants had done it already centuries before. Cheap holiday cottages were built in large numbers, or farm houses converted into one, and a domestic tourism industry begun to emerge.

By the late 20th century, almost everyone was able to afford at least day trips to a nearby river village, or to a retreat in the hills. Subcultures and movements that tried to bring the countryside into the city emerged, and became especially popular with academics and writers in Slakkariew, the old royal residence town. At the same time, many urban inhabitants would try to move to less densely populated states to start a new life as shepherd or farmer, often with all too many illusions that would have them go back to town soon enough. Even today, magazines and self-help books for people interested in farm life remain huge popular.

South Jute

Gardening as an expression of environmentalism

Similar to Lufasa, in South Jute environmentalism is considered part of a shared Jutic heritage as well, although it has undergone changes owing to historical reasons and local differences in ecology.



Photo: Aurora lemos from Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Over the centuries of life far away from their ancestral homelands, including under foreign rule, South Juteans have been careful to maintain their cultural heritage from the tropical island of Jute, adapted to suit the differences in climate and local ecology where needed.

One major part of this heritage is the religion of Saandism, which aside from encouraging research into and discussions about math and astronomy as well as philosophical, self-reflective deliberations about the world, society and one's place in it also places an emphasis on living in harmony with nature.

This harmony does not entail any glorification or deification, but rather a peaceful co-existence based on respect for both the bounty of nature as well as the dangers lurking in it, as a source of life as well as a possible threat to it. Attempts to banish or suppress nature would be equally as disastrous as careless, naive underestimating the power and possible ruthlessness of nature. In modern terms this could be termed a type of proto-environmentalism.

With South Jute being significantly more urban, the need for green spaces alongside streets developed to demonstrate such a healthy relationship with nature

with the appropriate balance between the two extremes. They were also needed as communal meeting places where people could meet to discuss e.g. philosophy, mathematics and religion. Beaches, the traditional meeting place in tropical Jute were too far away from Laina and many neighborhoods also too far away from river banks.

With the heightened need of agriculture in South Jute in comparison to Jute that could rely mostly on gathering wild fruits and small-scale forest gardening came increased knowledge of planting and growing crops, trees and flowers that could be applied to horticulture and the creation of parks that were constructed around town. Thus, harmony with nature and later environmentalism more generally was understood to be

expressed above all in gardening, not just preserving nature, but also helping it grow and form it in the process.

This also influenced the culture more generally, impacting among other things for example philosophical views about nature as something to be ideally maintained by humans rather than left to its own devices, although with growing awareness of ecological knowledge this has been somewhat diminished. It also added to the already widespread idea of the city as the more desirable place, where nature was tamed and under control, existing in harmony with humans, as opposed to the rougher, often dangerous wilderness outside of it.

South Jute

Laina as the cultural heart of South Jute

Unlike in Gfiewistan and Lufasa, in South Jute it is the city life that is treated as the most desirable.



Photo: Mike McBey on Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0)

It is not the countryside that is culturally valued as the better, more authentic place to live or seen as the stronghold of national culture that preserved local traditions and values the most, but Laina, the capital of the country, containing the overwhelming amount of the

population. 90 % of the South Jutean population (not counting people who have Mermelian citizenship) lives in Laina, and immigration from the countryside is steady. Most people moving also do so voluntarily, as soon as possible, rather than reluctantly, out of

economic necessity alone. This is also a large contrast to Jute with its village culture which even residents of larger cities generally attempt to uphold.

The cultural reasons for this are manifold, and can be traced back to various historical causes and developments. According to oral tradition, already during the initial arrival of Juteans to what would become South Jute there was a pervasive sense that for the sake of collective safety and welfare it would be best to always stick together in one settlement. It is said that for a long time few people ever left the growing village that would become Laina voluntarily, instead most only did due to banishment.

On top of that, living together rather than spread apart was seen as a better way to preserve and nurture their cultural and religious heritage, especially in a foreign environment with a very different climate. Knowledge of practices, experiences, activities, rites and stories could be shared and built upon more easily. With more people to keep it all alive it would not be lost as easily in case the often harsher weather and work started preoccupying e.g. those farming more than it had on the tropical island. And so the division of labor in a town allowing some people to dedicate themselves to cultural and religious work became important, as their religion encouraged the time-intensive study of mathematics and other more academic pursuits for which many people now had much less time.

There were exceptions, with some traveling further up the Ersaj River Laina was located on, to the lands of modern-day Lufasa, although it remains unclear why this initially happened. Lufasan oral tradition and stories give no indication, it might have been due to disagreements, as it was common on the island of Jute where they had all come from, but it might also simply have been the hope for better land with more space.

A disastrous double epidemic in about 475 AD that saw a large number of the population of Laina infected, a subsequent huge fire that destroyed most of the town and many of the survivors fleeing up the river to the early Lufasan settlements is said to have done little to change the minds of those remaining South Juteans. Their culture once again threatened with extinction, they saw little more reason in dispersing themselves

than before, or in abandoning a convenient settlement site that had also become culturally significant to them.

Thus, Laina was built up again, and few other villages found outside of it, mostly again by banished people. In fact, the association of the countryside with outcasts will have become gradually stronger over time, further reinforcing the cultural preference of more urban living.

The huge emigration back towards the island of Jute that began after word that the ancestral tropical homelands were free once again had reached Laina in the 11th century and saw many emigrate was another event that further reinforced a collective sense of needing to stay together among the remaining inhabitants.

With the beginning of colonization by an overseas empire in the 18th century, many Juteans were forcibly brought back to Laina to work on construction sites around the town with which the town was gradually turned into a trade hub and military base.

While it was a hard time for any town dweller, the situation in the countryside was arguably worse, as South Jutean villagers were forced to work much, or in many cases also all of their time on larger estates, often isolated from their community and having to endure attempts to be assimilated to the new culture of the colonizers. In Laina, workers were often living together in collective quarters and could also spend time together with their cultural relatives, which helped both get through the hard times, and once the language barrier was broken down, e.g. stories could be exchanged and religious topics discussed.

Additionally, the new buildings in the city did make it look more appealing to both locals and those living in the countryside, further increasing the draw Laina had on villagers. The fact that South Juteans viewed themselves as largely having done the construction themselves, even if involuntarily and with little to no recognition by the colonial government, also filled many with pride. The increased trade as well as the many other new institutions also provided welcome alternatives to farm labor.

After the end of the colonial regime in the late 19th century, when South Juteans could take ownership of

the port, trade companies and the many representative buildings such as town hall, opera hall and temples, the attractiveness of the city was further increased, as a shining city, full of life, culture and economic opportunities. Many young people, either born in Laina or moved in from the countryside, founded new trade or other companies, seeking to get rich, or at least live comfortably enough to be able to enjoy all that the city had to offer.

With the help of overseas capital, both trade and urban cultural institutions were soon having a new golden age, with new neighborhoods appearing where business owners and workers lived, while life in the countryside was only slow to improve, with the introduction of labor-saving industrialization only happening gradually starting in the 1900s.

With the regaining of independence the tradition of community assemblies was revived and soon reformed into a representative democracy that managed to limit excesses, prevent corruption and exploitation from becoming widespread and build up inclusive institutions and regulations that gave workers, traders and investors all a guaranteed minimum of safety, which further

boosted the desirability of Laina as a place for work and trade and helped sustain growth, both of the population and the economy.

Until the 1970s, with the signing of the treaty that established co-sovereignty between Laina and Mermelia regarding the lands of South Jute outside of the capital and its harbor, recurrent clashes and conflicts with Mermelian settlers and officials were another major factor that made South Jutean villagers often desire moving to the free and safe capital.

As a result of all these factors, even today many young inhabitants of the countryside leave their home as soon as possible, often leaving the older generation behind and the economy of the villages undeveloped. Only recently, with the treaty having restored peace in the countryside, has there has been a growing movement for newcomers to Laina to not cut ties and to keep regularly visiting and helping out in their home villages. Gradually, they are learning to appreciate village culture as being equally valuable, and as a great source of inspiration for new kinds of art and technology that is proving popular in the city as well.



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Author: Alexey Komarov (CC BY 2.0)

Infobox Laina

<i>Founded:</i>	~100 AD	<i>Getting in:</i>	Ferry lines from Lahan, Jute and Mermelia, railway from Mermelia, Lufasa or Gfiewistan,
<i>Population:</i>	997,643		flights landing at Laina International Airport
<i>Languages:</i>	South Jutean, Jutean, Neviran, other	<i>Getting around:</i>	The tram network is extensive, and bicycle taxis or rented bicycles are the best options for everything else.
<i>Religions:</i>	Saandism, Quorosism, Aroism, Iovism		
<i>More information:</i>	http://southjute.top		

South Jute

Sports, music, literature: Boats in South Jutean culture



South Jutean culture is primarily defined by the sea. This is reflected in how the country refers to itself a “Maritime Republic”, but also in such areas as sport: water sports, such as swimming, windsurfing and boat racing are the most popular. Clubs dedicated to them exist all over the land, and it is especially for people in the countryside common to be part of at least one such club and train and compete regularly. But there are also many among inhabitants of Laina who participate in trainings and competitions.

While many view it as a hobby, there are also many serious, professional competitors who alone or in teams

organize themselves in leagues and during a season hold many large-scale events to determine the best. These tend to draw large crowds, especially the highlight of the boat racing leagues, the Laina Race that starts in the harbor of Laina and have depending on the type of boat various lengths. The longest cross the entire bay and return then to the starting point, and often see competitors from other countries, such as Lufasa or Gfiewistan as well.

This enthusiasm for sports is also noticeable in the culture more generally. Both traditional and modern stories and literature tend to have the river or the sea as a focal point, where the action mostly takes place.

Additionally, “sazejeca pekemeli” (boat-rock, or literally “rocking of the wave-riders”) or sazepeke is one of the most popular music genres in South Jute, characterized by uptempo dancing music, featuring traditional or more frequently electronic instruments, vibrating staccato beats and shouted, repetitive lyrics about the sea, boats, freedom and love. Originating as sailor and nautical work songs, it has since evolved into party music that is often blasted at competitions, but is also popular during recreational boat trips, or as background music for films.

Notable sazepeke albums



Ekulisi
(*‘Pursuit’*)
Ka Pame (1989)



Sakupe Nae Kupi
(*‘Yearning for Saltwater Life’*)
Kelasi (1997)



Leetapi Lamake
(*‘The Search for Danger’*)
Akelake (1991)

Lufasa

Gfelkt hahelesgjios, Temple for the Neighbor: Between intentions and reality

Built as a symbol of unification between Gfiewish people and Lufasans, it only served to make the differences more visible

The Gfelkt hahelesgjios (IPA: /gʷɛlkt hɛhəɭəsɟɪɔsɟ/, Gfiewish for ‘Temple for the neighbor’) is the biggest temple of Aušaj, the capital and biggest city of Lufasa. It is the biggest temple in Lufasa and one of the biggest temples in all of Ystel. Built by Gfiewish missionaries and their contractors in the beginning of the 17th century, it was supposed to help with spreading the state religion of the newly united Kingdom of Gfiewistan to Lufasa which at the time was part of a recently annexed Gfiewish chiefdom.

From the Gfiewish point of view, the name references the location of Lufasa and Aušaj in particular as “neighbor” of Gfiewistan, who were hoped would start using the temple eagerly, sooner or later.

From the Lufasan point of view, it reflects instead how the temple was built not really for themselves or their benefit, but instead how it was really constructed for the benefit of their neighbor, the Gfiewish people and the foreign religion these neighbors were trying to introduce, increasingly forcefully.

It has the typical dome architecture common in early modern Gfiewish religious buildings. Right below the open dome stands an eternal flame that can be used to create smaller lights, symbolic guides for you or another person. There are large circular windows on all four sides and circles engraved in the floor and walls.

Visitors have to wear a face veil covering their eyes or the entire face to not be blinded by the sunlight, although in modern times many prefer sunglasses. Some devout Iovists prefer a combination.

An additional reason for the veil is increased privacy and anonymity during community gatherings, celebrations or even simple visits to a temple, to ask for advice or for individual prayers. The Temple for the neighbor has for this purpose several smaller rooms in the corners for solitary rites or private meetings. They are connected with underground paths to form a poorly lightened maze-like structure which represent the chaos inherent to life, complementing the many circles of the bright main structure representing order.

However, due to the general lack of success missionaries had in converting people to the state religion of the Kingdom of Gfiewistan, the temple was used by far less people than anticipated and was for centuries usually very empty, with native Lufasans avoiding it as a symbol of foreign suppression of their own religion and culture, and ethnic Gfiewish people preferring

smaller temples with a more established and tight-knit community. Only after Lufasan independence in 1852 did this begin to change, with the temple now being a pan-religious house of worship open to everyone.



The dome of Gfelkt hahelesgjios

Photo: dksesh from London, United Kingdom, on Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Lufasa

Silent giants of the landscape: Industrial ruins near Aušaj and other towns

Origin of modern urban mythological stories and beliefs

Industrialization reached Lufasa only late, in the 1930s when the manufacturing sector began to become big enough to start using mechanization, automatization and motorization and on the other side demand for consumer goods was on the rise. But the change was all the more swift, and with the help of foreign capital, both regional and overseas, many new factories, mines, and other gigantic structures appeared almost overnight across the country.

The northwest of the capital and alongside several nearby tributary rivers were particularly popular locations due to good transport connections via water and the possibility to install hydro-electric power plant.

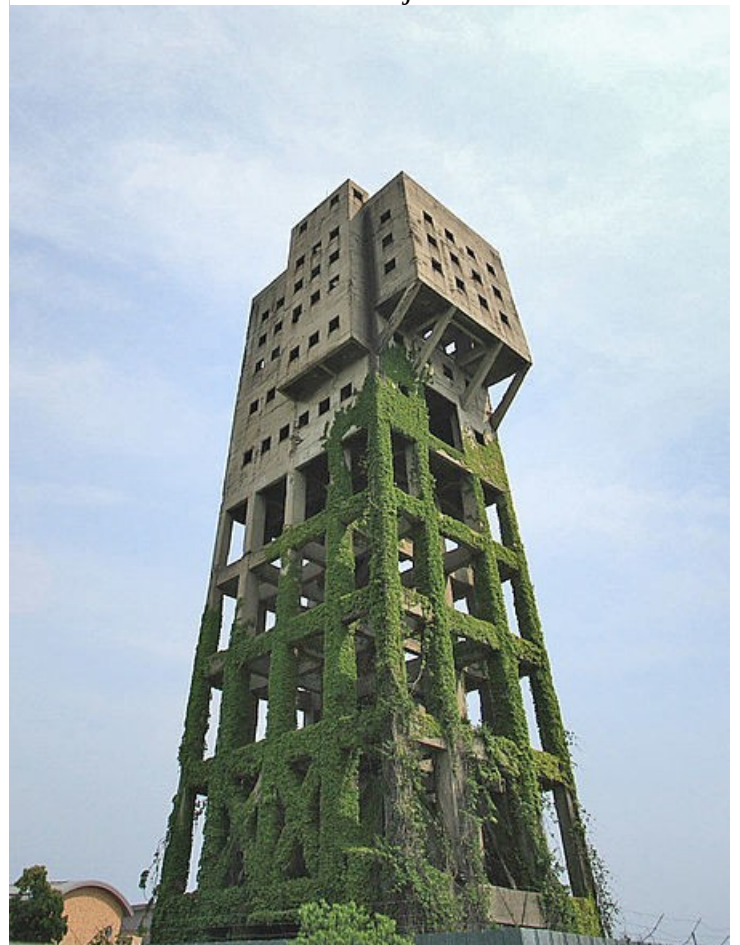
Many locals tried to profit from the building boom and and a lot of construction companies were founded. However, while a few companies managed to attain sustainable growth, the boom was overall short-lived, as many of the new foreign-funded enterprises and projects failed to be profitable due to various reasons, or ran out of money half-way through construction.

As a result, there are many industrial ruins across various sites in the country, often popular with urban explorers and treasure hunters who believe various urban legends that files with old trade secrets, vaults with valuable metals and other raw materials or even devices and other artifacts granting superhuman strength can be found in some of the buildings as a number of factories had top secret research and development facilities.

Many modern treasure maps promising the way to these things float around, in popular “dark stores” specializing in the occult, the paranormal or the conspiratorialist, but recently they have increasingly shown up online as well. Most of the maps can easily be identified as fake, while the origin of other ones is often more complicated to pin down.



Abandoned storehouse in Aušaj



Abandoned tower at the site of a coal mine near Krawzejwòz.

Photo: Solitary Crow on Wikimedia Commons, (CC BY-SA 3.0)

From royal security to protection of the constitution

The Department of Security: History of the oldest governmental department



The Department of Security, as the oldest of the six departments of the government of Gfiewistan, is shredded in mystery. It was founded soon after Gfiewish unification in 1572 to help maintain the power of the new king in all of Gfiewistan and Lufasa and has over time amassed wide-ranging responsibilities. These include for example defense and national security, intelligence gathering, internal security, law enforcement, prison management, consumer and workplace safety, aviation and general traffic safety and immigration control.

As a part of the royal court, the department was above all used to attempt to infiltrate the governments of neighboring countries while exposing foreign spies. This was also used as a pretext to suppress dissent more generally, leaving government advisors and writers only one way to express disagreement: dressing it up as a praise of the king and his abilities and claim that in his intelligence and foresight will surely already have discovered and considered their ideas and that it shall not be long before they are implemented, bringing further glory to the kingdom.

In some cases the king did adopt the ideas as his own, however in other cases, when the sarcasm was too obvious, the writer or advisor would be forced to be enlisted in the royal army or do degrading work, such as cleaning the palace. In more extreme cases the person in

question would be declared a Royal Enemy and be exiled, imprisonment being seen as insufficiently safe and too costly. Often the suggestions were simply met by empty promises or completely ignored.

After the republican revolution in 1852 the role of the department changed and it turned from an institution that repressed dissent to one that manufactured consent. Now with the mission statement of protecting the new constitution, it not only watched out for foreign spies as before, but also kept an eye on reactionary rebels trying to bring back the monarchy, and revolutionary radicals that demanded more fundamental change such as land redistribution and direct democracy.

But the old tools of repression were seen as a mark of the royalty and incompatible with the new state and its values. Outside of their dealings with actual spies and proven violent individuals and groups, the department therefore maintained a strict policy of non-violence that was only sometimes bent, a kind of “technical pacifism”.

Instead, the “consent factory”, as it later came to be known, sought to undermine both groupings with clandestine operations that would publicly expose and ridicule them, as well as compromise their operational security by infiltrating their ranks, among many other operations, not few nonetheless of questionable legality or ethicality.

With the advent of industrialization in the 20th century and after several high-profile scandals new governments added consumer and workplace safety as well as aviation and general traffic safety to the responsibilities of the department, under objections of most of its workers that saw it as beneath them and as something that should be the duty of other departments. Regardless, work in those areas started soon after and greatly helped reduce workplace and traffic accidents as well as product safety, and nowadays the department enjoys a lot of public support.

Gfiewistan

Where defendants are treated like nobility

The drama that are Gfiewish trials

Gfiewish courts, like the parliament, adhere to a lot of arcane procedures, rituals and traditions that take up a decent part of law school. Many of them were originally adopted to ensure a successful trial that allows both sides to retain their honor and agree to the final settlement.

One example is how every person, regardless of their status as judge, lawyer, defendant or mere spectator is required to wear robes, hats and a badge showing their position in court. For those unable or unwilling to afford them, they can be borrowed in the court. This originated from the desire of the nobility to not want to face the embarrassment of having to argue and justify themselves in front of people that were clearly from other parts of society, so for the duration of the trial they were to be treated as nobility, creating a warped kind of egalitarianism in trials.

This also involves being appointed a special court name modeled after a typical name of a nobleperson that is to be kept in a special registry as well as in any files of the trial. To help keep up the pretense, defendants and suitors are supposed to let their lawyer do most of the talking, although a pro se defense with no lawyer is legal, just heavily discouraged, as being found to be in contempt of court is likely.

Archaic language is commonly used in many phrases, and language in general in the entire trial is very regulated to the point of it resembling a play with different actors and storylines.

This court system has its origins in the medieval courts of the various chiefs that ruled over parts of Gfiewistan. The most dominant influence has been from the courts of the chiefdom that forcibly unified Gfiewistan for the first time in the 16th century, and to a lesser extent from Hatariew courts after the republican revolution in 1852.

The local courts of many other states retain various regional differences, although due to past attempts uniformization of the codes of procedure they are more



City court of Hatariew

often mostly limited to formalities, aesthetics of robes and courtrooms and several other minor issues to ensure federal law is judged consistently across the country.

On top of having to effectively be actors in addition to knowing how to practice law, lawyers often also take over the role of detectives or leaders of a private investigation, as in the past there was either no official investigation, or one often deemed to be incompetent, corrupt, or otherwise compromised. Lawyers may often work together with detectives working in official positions, but this is always depending on the willingness of the detective in question to collaborate. Evidence found by lawyers acting as detectives may also only be presented at the trial if it has been registered in the local court record before, and accepted by the judge heading the trial in question.

Where tropical traditions still shape politics

South Jute and Lufasa both share a Jutic heritage of local self-government via community assemblies. However, in the former a process of centralization has reduced their power significantly.

During pre-colonial times, South Jute was according to oral tradition governed similarly to pre-colonial Jute, with neighborhood or village community meetings deliberating weekly on issues, and larger scale assemblies happening more rarely. As a result, even in the town of Laina, the different neighborhoods were largely independent and only agreed to have common policies when needed. Any kind of centralized institution, much less a central government simply did not exist at all.

This extremely decentralized form of early direct democracy was then suppressed and ended by the begin of the colonial era, and self-government was only restored at the end of the 19th century. However, Laina had by that point become a modern town and a major trading hub that could no longer be governed by neighborhood assemblies alone.

With all the wealth and opportunities this was bringing in, there was no desire among the population to revert this and return to the pre-colonial lifestyle generally associated with hardship and poverty. So there was a need to have unified trade, economic and labor policies to

enable trading to continue smoothly and avoid exploitation of any workers or the country as a whole.

The fast-paced of a modern economy also required the existence of institutions that could react quickly to new developments, so the workings of a direct democracy where every person needed to be able to give input and vote on all issues increasingly seemed infeasible.

As a result, during the constitutional assemblies following independence a new governing model of a representative democracy incorporating traditional Jutic elements and those of presidential republics such as Lufasa and Gfiewistan was agreed upon. In this model, the neighborhood meetings remain, but have no power to make their own laws, and have to elect representatives to a regional assembly dealing with non-local issues every year. Inhabitants of every region also are tasked with electing representatives for the Republican Parliament that exclusively was to obtain legislative powers, and additionally elects nine members to form an executive council that collectively leads the country.



One of the regional assemblies of South Jute in the 1920s.



Courtyard of the Republican Parliament of South Jute in Laina.

Photo: Mohatatou on Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

In Lufasa, where the culture put an emphasis on traditional life in the countryside, most political powers were devolved to community assemblies after independence.

While Lufasa inherited most of the political institutions of the federation after its independence from Gfiewistan in 1852 owing to its prior status as a federal subject, its Jutic heritage of local collective decision-making (village democracy) also had influenced the independence movement significantly and so there are major differences to both the political system in modern-day Gfiewistan as well as in South Jute.

Unlike Gfiewistan, Lufasa is a unitary state, which is a result of it being effectively a federal state that achieved full independence.

Nonetheless, unlike in South Jute, power was not entirely centralized, and instead devolved to local community assemblies that can be attended by any citizen, reviving the Jutic tradition of village democracy.

The head of state, the president of Lufasa, also has similarities to republican Gfiewistan and is a more ceremo-

nial office with little power. They are appointed by the national parliament, which is elected every four years.

Another difference is that parties are not formally banned in Lufasa the way they are on the other side of the Ersaj River, however, they have remained largely unpopular due to the importance of village- and neighborhood-level politics.

Local issues and personal relations are therefore more salient than organization along ideological lines for political collaboration and voting on decisions or for representatives for the higher levels of administration (regional and national). The ability of local community assemblies to largely set their own laws where a law on the national level does not exist or allows for a certain amount of leeway. This contrasts with South Jute, where the local assemblies do not have any legislative powers.



National parliament of Lufasa in Aušaj



House of the Lufasan President.

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Gfiewistan

Wiftalne – a small place with a large history

Despite only having few permanent residents these days, Wiftalne remains important as a starting point for recreational and scientific trips to the sea as well as a center of archeology and historical research.



The harbor of modern-day Wiftalne

In prehistoric times, in 10th and 11th centuries, Wiftalne was the second biggest trading port in the region, after Slakkariew. Located right at the outer coast, rather than a bay like what was then the seat of the chiefdom, it was much closer to the neighboring chiefdoms in modern-day Mermelia, and was furthermore conveniently on a north-south route that led to Atruozan lands. As a result, it was frequently visited by ships and merchants, leading residents to become relatively affluent and accumulating a great deal of knowledge on boat-building and weapon-making.

This was used to develop boats and ships that could withstand the often far rougher waves and weather of the Dark Sea much better than the type that was common in Slakkariew, which was mostly used for short-distance traveling across the bay and in coastal waters

in general. While not confirmed, various theories propose that inhabitants of Wiftalne managed to reach remote islands to the south and west, if not even the mainland on the other side of the Dark Sea. In any case, these boats further increased the volume of trade in the town further and the riches soon began to rival even those of the Slakkariewian chief.

It wasn't long before the residents began to be subject to ever increasing taxes and other payments, which were used among other things to build what is now known as the Bay Castle as well as many more buildings in the old town of Slakkariew. But the traders in Wiftalne soon began to evade the tribute and tolls imposed on them, by leaving the harbor at night and returning one of the following nights, and then hiding their goods in hidden basements of their houses,

tunnels, or simply holes in the earth covered with a few stones. The largest and most elaborate ones also were places of clandestine trade. Open markets continued to take place in broad daylight, but those were mostly for show and those foreign merchants not aware of the night-time trading.

However, after some years, the secret of the town was discovered by tax officials on a visit, possibly when they mistakenly entered the wrong building after a long night at a local tavern. The chief was notified and soon warriors of Slakkariew laid siege to the town that was still refusing to pay taxes. After several weeks and a blockade of the port, Wiftalne surrendered and much of the population was arrested for rebellion or simply smuggling. Ships and remaining goods were confiscated and brought to the seat of the chiefdom.

With a decimated population, little to offer and stuck on land (a ban on shipbuilding was enforced by a garrison) trade declined and the town lost its importance.



Ruins of Wiftalne

Lufasa

The rise and fall of “mail rail” in Lufasa

Lufasa’s railway network was much more expansive in the past, similar to Gfiewistan. As all towns and larger villages in the country had a state-subsidized post office, “mail rail” supplying them ran on tracks covering almost every corner of the country. Sometimes these were minor narrow-gauge branch railways with infrequent or irregular use, but most offered passenger service several times daily.

Before the advent of automated sorting, mail was sorted on the train to save time in a dedicated railway car. Passengers were also allowed to give post workers additional mail to deliver, or could get stamps onboard. Economically, mail rail provided employment for many underdeveloped regions. However, with the widespread adoption of cars and the construction of highways as well as the use of sorting machines, it became uneconomical to use and almost all railway lines were given up, with only the lines servicing large towns in the southern part of the country and international connection to neighboring towns remaining. Other ones were replaced by bus lines or in some cases given up entirely.



Most of the tracks are still in existence and used by recreational vehicles, and many old railway stations have become small museums, but there is also an ongoing effort by interest groups to revive many of them and make travel in Lufasa less dependent on the car, as the buses in use now provide less comfort, are generally less reliable and take more time, especially when stuck in traffic.

Gfiewistan

Trams and trolleybuses in Hatariew and Slakkariew

Transit networks in Gfiewistan is known to be very limited, and only exist in the five biggest towns. The capital Hatariew has the sole commuter rail, sharing tracks with the national rail network, and in addition has a bus network, as do Slakkariew, the old royal residence town, Weishriew (home to the oldest train station of the country), Tanlariewis and Dillariewis. Other towns are only served by country buses that tend to have several stops in a town, but some also lack this.

Hatariew and Slakkariew are known for using trolley buses in addition to normal diesel buses. They were introduced the 1920s, when the two cities had grown large enough that an expansion of a transit network was necessary. Heavy or light rail branches were not

considered due to financial reasons and the lack of space in most districts for the necessary infrastructure.

Originally trams were instead meant to fill the gap, but during test runs tram tracks proved hazardous to bicycles and carriages, especially after rain, and after a series of incidents were publicly opposed. Furthermore, costs were spiraling out of control.

To at least be able to keep using the overhead wires and with the intention of keeping noise and air pollution low and saving diesel costs trolleybuses were bought in the end and have since been running on the streets. Aside from their quietness and cleanliness their reliability has made them very popular with the local population and the traffic authorities, as trolleys usually need to be replaced less often than regular buses.



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Contributions and letters are welcome.

Contact: 6 Azalea Street, 1007 Aušaj, Lufasa.

E-Mail: jute@posteo.de, Discord: Jute#7137



Windmill in Krawcejwòz, Lufasa