

Nach der Wiedererlangung der Unabhängigkeit waren die meisten Konfrontationen auf dem Feld der Erinnerungen, d.h. zwischen dem kommunikativen Gedächtnis und den Repräsentationen der Vergangenheit, auf den Zweiten Weltkrieg fixiert. Andere Erinnerungsorte blieben daher im Schatten. Da die Geschichte der Schützen eng mit der Entstehung Lettlands verbunden ist, bieten die vielen Projekte und Veranstaltungen, die dem hundertsten Jubiläum der Staatsgründung gewidmet sein werden, eine Gelegenheit zu einer Neuinterpretation.

Zweifellos haben die lettischen Schützen im lettischen kollektiven Gedächtnis periodisch eine wesentliche Rolle gespielt. Ihre Instrumentalisierung wirft nicht nur ein Schlaglicht auf die Genese der Auffassungen von der Geschichte in Lettland, sondern auch auf die Manipulationen der Vergangenheit durch eigene und fremde Eliten. Der vorliegende Aufsatz hat sich nur darum bemüht, die Problematik des Schützenmythos und, damit verbunden, die des Ersten Weltkriegs in groben Umrissen nachzuzeichnen. Unberührt bleiben einstweilen die Erinnerungen an die Schützen außerhalb Lettlands – in Zwischenkriegszeit in der UdSSR und nach 1945 im lettischen Exil. Diese Erinnerungen haben zwar wenig Einfluss auf das kollektive Gedächtnis in Lettland, doch stellen sie trotzdem einen interessanten Forschungsgegenstand dar.

Als bruchstückhaft können die wenigen bisherigen Versuche bewertet werden, die Entstehung der mit den Schützen verbundenen Gedenkorte zu untersuchen; wichtig wäre es auch, sich einmal ihre diversen Repräsentationen in Literatur, Film oder Theater näher anzusehen. Ebenso bruchstückhaft – wie das kollektive Gedächtnis Lettlands insgesamt – ist zumindest vorläufig auch die Behandlung der Schützen in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Zweifellos trägt jedoch auch der Historiker, wenn er sich all diesen Fragen in wissenschaftlicher Absicht widmet, zur Formung des kollektiven Gedächtnisses bei.

SUMMARY

World War I and the Latvian Riflemen in the Collective Memory of the Latvians

This article deals with the image of the men on active service in the Latvian Riflemen's battalions organized during World War I, and the reflection on this image in Latvian collective memory. It analyses the making of this image during the years of Latvia's independence in the 1920s and

1930s, during the years of Soviet occupation and after the restoration of independence

After World War I and the following War of Independence (1918–1920), the political memory of the Republic of Latvia was shaped. The new political and military elite had to create a particular representation of the past that would not only substantiate and strengthen the legitimacy of the regime and its elite but also would consolidate society. Concerning the Latvian riflemen, the attitude of the new state at first was quite reserved because of the degree of Bolshevization among them. Many riflemen had decided to serve further in the Red Army and many had taken part in the campaign against the Republic of Latvia in the ranks of Peter Stuchka's Soviet Latvian army.

The attempts to actualize and to strengthen the role of the Latvian riflemen in the social memory of the new state and to include this factor also in the political memory can be explained with the following arguments. First, the task of memory, as is generally known, is to secure the continuity of history and the connection of society with its past and future. Therefore, the new elites experienced the need to integrate into the collective memory also the events of World War I in Latvia and in particular a certain image of the Latvian riflemen. Second, the elites did not want to allow the division of Latvian society into separate antagonistic groups in terms of memory. Since according to the established political memory the principal enemies were Germans, this image was therefore ascribed to the *Baltische Landeswehr* and the other imperial German units, but not to those Latvian riflemen who fought on the side of the Bolsheviks. Whereas military service in the *Landeswehr* was regarded as high treason, service in the Red army was looked upon as a kind of irony of fate. Third, the new elites needed to substantiate their own merits in the fight “for Latvia's freedom”.

The introduction of the tradition to commemorate the Latvian riflemen on a special day as well as the activities of the various Riflemen societies helped to convince the political elite that it is necessary to transfer the social memory of the riflemen to the political memory. The battle places of World War I on the so-called Death Island (Nāves sala) and in the Tīreļa marshes were turned into unique places of commemoration of national heroes already in the 1920s and 1930s. The Brethren Cemetery in Riga, initially a place of burial for Latvian riflemen who were killed on the Riga front, later became a burial ground also for those killed in the War of Independence (1918–1920), thus spatially creating a socio-political myth according to which the Latvian riflemen in the tsarist army and the soldiers of the Latvian army had fought for the same goal, i.e. independent Latvia.

This policy regarding the unification of the memory of the riflemen with that of the soldiers who fought in the War of Independence was also demonstrated in the construction of local monuments and can be observed in patriotic rituals during national holidays. The highest military award of

the Republic of Latvia, the War Order of Lāčplēsis, was also conferred on riflemen who had been in active service during World War I.

Thus, in the years after 1920, the memory of a rather small social group, the Latvian riflemen, became an important part of the collective memory of the republic, strengthening also its political and cultural memory. The Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940 interrupted this development in Latvian memory culture, and the topic of the riflemen initially became a taboo until the mid-1950s. From 1959 onwards, when Latvian so-called national communists were defeated, the image of the veterans of the Latvian division of the Red Army from the World War II became politically ambiguous because of the relation of those “national communists” with this division. Therefore, those in power strengthened the myth about the Latvian Red Riflemen from the First World War, and in the course of time this group became the central object in terms of political memory of Soviet Latvia.

Starting in the second half of the 1980s, re-writing and understanding of the past touched also upon the collective memory concerning the Latvian riflemen. Already at this time, a validation of the elements of cultural memory and their use marked a kind of department of collective memory from communicative memory. After the restoration of Latvian independence, however, the principal conflicts between communicative memory and the representation of the past are focused almost exclusively on the events of World War II, thus overshadowing other elements of memory.