

in diesem Aufsatz die Stereotype über die Letten als rückständiges Volk wieder aufgegriffen und durch die Geschichte gerechtfertigt.

Die Mentalitäten in Kurland hatten sich somit noch nicht wesentlich geändert, wenn man von dem relativ kleinen Kreis der Literaten und des gebildeten Adels absieht. Die aufgeklärte Geschichtsschreibung blieb im Hinblick auf die Darstellung der sozialen Verhältnisse insgesamt recht konservativ. Trotzdem kann die Zeit der Aufklärung als Umbruchphase für die deutsch-lettischen Beziehungen bezeichnet werden, da die deutschsprachigen gebildeten Kreise den Letten neuerdings wachsende Aufmerksamkeit widmeten.

SUMMARY

“The Silent Merit of a Patriotic Scholar?” Early Historians in Enlightened Courland

Although research into the past became a generally appreciated activity in 18th century Europe, local historiography in the duchy of Courland developed only after many difficulties had been overcome. The initiative belonged to a number of literati who joined Karl August Kütner, then Professor at the new Academia Petrina in Mitau. In this circle, Friedrich Konrad Gadebusch's work about Livonian historians (1772) was received as a model for a renewal of local historiography. During those years enlightened scholars in Mitau and Riga often worked closely together, yet their rivalry remained. Many literati who immigrated only recently wondered how difficult it was to gain access to the sources. Recent publications were rare, old chronicles practically unreadable.

Carl Christoph Ziegenhorn's *Staatsrecht* (state law) raised a lively debate over the political dualism between the Duke and the nobility. Basically, however, history was not an object of lively critical interest since native *Kurländer* (German inhabitants of Courland) observed every undertaking sceptically, not the least because respect demonstrated for the ancestors was an essential factor of local identity. How would it be possible to write history without being received as polemical by established families? Essentially, enlightened history required critique, but even more necessary was the examination of written tradition. Therefore, old sources were reprinted in the local journal *Mitauische Monatsschrift* (1784–1785). The authors committed to this publication formulated a methodology to avoid “inherited errors” and were led by pedagogical and enlightened considerations. They tried to transfer some aspects of the contemporary scholarly discussions in Europe to Courland. On the one hand they wanted to spread knowledge

about the past and on the other hand they wanted the German speaking elite to become more inclined towards the Latvian population. The articles about the past focused on regional history that was treated in a rather antiquarian way. The readers learned about the life of important Couronian personalities and politicians who themselves had been inclined towards history and poetry. This information should illustrate the virtues associated with “patriotism”.

However, in Courland the historical orientation was the main approach while the second idea of questioning the present relations between Germans and Latvians was more weaker developed than in Livonia. The whole project was moderately received by the public. Nevertheless, in 1824 Carl Eduard Napiersky could claim in his *Fortgesetzte Abhandlung von livländischen Geschichtsschreibernk* (Continued Treatise on the Writing of Livonian History) that writings dealing with regional history had strongly increased during the last fifty years.