

schreiben wollte, war gezwungen, diese angesichts mehrerer ethnischer Gruppen (Liven, Letten), Religionen (Luthertum, Katholizismus) und im Hinblick auf die politische Geschichte (Schwedenzeit, polnische Zeit etc.) zu definieren. Die Probleme, die sich daher bei der Schaffung einer lettischen nationalen Meistererzählung stellten, gehörten zu den kompliziertesten in der Ostseeregion.

Die lettische Historiografie bemühte sich um die Wende von 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert um die Kreation eines nationalen Narrativs der Vergangenheit. Im Vergleich zu anderen kleineren Völkern fällt jedoch auf, dass in lettischen historischen Texten kaum einmal Kritik an der russischen Herrschaft geäußert wird. Die Autoren konzentrieren sich meist auf das „goldene Zeitalter“ vor der Ankunft der Kreuzfahrer, weil der früheren Generation der lettischen Literaten die Narrativierung dieses Zeitalters nicht gelungen war. Allerdings wurde die Geschichtsschreibung der Jahrhundertwende schon vom Positivismus beeinflusst, so dass sich im lettischen Kontext kein Textkorpus herausbilden konnte, der dem Stil nach mit der nationalromantischen Historiografie vergleichbar gewesen wäre. In der Zeit des Nationalstaats gelangen lettische Autoren jedoch rasch zu einem einheitlichen Narrativ, welches den Meistererzählungen anderer Nationen mit einem neu begründeten unabhängigen Staat ähnelte.

Die heutige Forschungsrichtung der Historiografefgeschichte weist jeder noch so kleinen Region und jedem Textkorpus eine unerwartet wichtige Rolle zu. Im lettischen Fall ist nicht nur die „Amnesie“ des 19. Jahrhunderts bemerkenswert, sondern auch der geringe Einfluss, den dieses Vergessen auf die spätere nationalstaatliche Historiografie hatte.

SUMMARY

*An Even Worse Case of Amnesia?
Latvian National History-Writing from
the 19th Century until World War II
in a Comparative Perspective*

The purpose of this article is to outline the Latvian national interpretation of history between the 1870s until the 1930s. The primary focus is on the 19th century and the notion encountered in academic writing that 19th-century Latvian nationalism never arrived at an interpretation of national history. Thus, it raises the question, why did Latvian nationalism suffer from “amnesia” specifically in history-writing, whereas the rest of the nationalist movement was never “late” compared to the neighbouring countries.

The article presents various 19th-century history texts whose authors have nevertheless tried to interpret Latvian history in a national context. Why these texts have hitherto gone unnoticed could probably be explained by their somewhat primitive interpretation, which did not meet the expectations of the nationalists of the following generations. However, it is worth noting that the texts do express rather well the difficulty of creating a Latvian national historical identity. Compared to the closest neighbours, the history of Latvia was more multifaceted, therefore making it more difficult to sift out the “inherently Latvian” parts. Hence it was necessary to amalgamate the national history of Latvia from the histories of various ethnic groups (Livonians, Latvians), religions (Lutheranism, Catholicism), and political entities (Germany, Poland, Livonia under the Swedish and Russian rule, the independent Courland, and Semigallia with its Lithuanian background). The texts that the article refers to move in different directions without forming a unified Latvian national history narrative during this phase of history-writing. Therefore, one of the reasons for the above-mentioned amnesia could have been a higher difficulty of the narrativisation of national history compared to most other European small nations.

The texts of Janis Krodznieks, the best-known representative of the next-generation history-writing, who rose to prominence at the turn of the century, are considerably more nationalistic. Of all the possible histories, he chooses as the backbone for Latvian national history that of Northern Latvia, and the focus shifts – but fairly late, compared to the rest of Europe – to a nationalist interpretation of Latvia’s “Golden Age”. Influenced by the period’s generally positivist tendencies the interpretation remains rather impartial in style. Moreover, in Latvia there was a weaker presence of anti-Russian sentiment, which at the time was already having a profound influence on the history-writing of its neighbouring countries.

While the Latvian interpretation of history remained chronologically a step behind its neighbours until the achievement of independence, this “lag” was very quickly compensated with the conditions of sovereignty. The interpretation of history began to centre on the birth of nationhood as the final destination of a national history. An increasing focus was put on mononationalism, i.e., giving historically more prominence to Latvians while letting Livonians, Baltic Germans, and others fade more and more into background. Furthermore, a growing emphasis was put on the military aspect of history, and the events in the 14th-century Semigallia were to become a symbol of Ancient Latvia’s struggle for freedom.