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Chapter Author(s): Mārtiņš Mintauris

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Perspectives of the Cultural History in Latvia: The 20th century and beyond

MĀRTIŅŠ MINTAURS

In the course of the 20th century history-writing has been frequently discussed in public debate on related political and ideological issues as well as within the profession itself representing a wide spectrum of concepts and methodological approaches across the field.¹ Thus, when dealing with the writing of cultural history regarded as a specific part of historiography, one has to be aware and take into account a few indispensable aspects.

First of all, it is a given that the very notions of both *culture* and *history* have been changing recurrently² since the turn of the 20th century thus allowing talk of several *turns* in writing cultural history.³ Another aspect to mention is that also cultural history has been placed at a point where different theoretical concepts had been intersecting with the local situation in the social, political and academic domain of particular societies.⁴ Moreover, considering the variety of themes and research topics linked with the label of *cultural history* it is, perhaps, even more exposed to identity-making practice⁵ and related issues having a certain feedback effect upon historiography.

The subject of this paper is the writing of cultural history in Latvia during the 20th century with a particular focus on its conceptual framework applied by the authors investigating socio-cultural aspects of the past. Despite the fact that cultural history of present-day Latvia has been an *ad hoc* subject since the late

1 IGGERS, 1997, p. 8-16.

2 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 489-515.

3 See: ULBRICHT, 2003.

4 DANIEL, 2006, p. 195-219.

5 KASCHUBA, 2001, p. 19-42.

19th century onwards, one could hardly find a single work reflecting the structure or contents of such studies nor the concepts applied in publications.⁶

Therefore, the intention here is to provide a historiography survey of the field while the limited space here only permits the outlining of the main trends and the mentioning of major actors of the field. For this reason we consider it useful to focus mainly on the works published in Latvia due to the direct impact they had on history-writing in Latvia compared to the studies issued abroad during the period of Soviet occupation from 1944 to 1991, when the access to such publications was very limited.

There are four distinctive stages in the historiography of Latvia in the 20th century⁷ speaking both for the conceptual and institutional level, of which we should provide a brief characterization before turning to a more detailed insight into development of cultural history-writing. In fact, as it has already been noted by historian Andrejs Plakans, the shift from one stage to another “more often than not took the form of *replacement* [emph.i.o.] rather than *transition* [emph.i.o.] and contained far more discontinuity than continuity”.⁸

- (1) The Baltic-German tradition of history-writing activities in the present-day Latvia and Estonia dates back to the late 17th and early 18th century, marking the end of chronicle-writing practice of the mediaeval period. This tradition was closely linked to the awareness of specific conditions of the Baltic Provinces like Kurland (a Duchy *de iure* subjected to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1561-1795, then Russia), Livland and Estland both being the provinces of Sweden (1621-1721) and the Russian Empire (1721-1918) subsequently.
- (2) The second tradition, one might call the Latvian national historiography, emerged in the Republic of Latvia during the inter-war period (1918-1940), positioning itself as a clear opposite to the Baltic-German in many aspects, including the issues of cultural history.
- (3) The Soviet-Latvian historiography, intended to replace both the Baltic-German and the Latvian national tradition, was set in the second half of the 1940s along with the re-establishment of the Soviet political control over the Baltic states shared some characteristics of history-writing in the Soviet

6 The comprehensive article by Helēna Šimkuva should be mentioned here although dealing primarily with the attitude towards the cultural heritage of the Baltic German community in Latvia describing briefly the concepts used in writing cultural history, see: ŠIMKUVA, 2001, p. 405-426.

7 See for details: ZELČE, 2000, p. 40-42.

8 PLAKANS, 1999, p. 293.

Union in general. It was enduring *pro forma* up to the year 1991 while starting to collapse as early as the late 1980s.

- (4) The historiography of Latvia during the Post-Soviet period (approximately twenty years from regaining independence in 1991 or, if still considering the terms of formal political periodization, conditionally up to the year 2004), when the Republic of Latvia became a member state of the European Union.

In the following, an attempt has been made to provide a provisional insight into developments of cultural history-writing at each stage of the Latvian historiography mentioned above, giving some reflections on the institutional level of the field as well as on themes and concepts shared by distinct authors.

I

The contents of the Baltic-German historiography have been previously analyzed in an anthology⁹ as well as in numerous case studies, while the local traditions of writing cultural history is a subject less reflected on so far. This is probably due to the fact that the amount of publications in a way corresponding to cultural history is impressive considering the lack of standard works in this area.

In order to comprehend the situation during which the first attempts to write regional cultural history had emerged, one should look at the last two decades of the 19th century. The Baltic German historiography was strongly connected with a specific identity of the community, finding itself placed under dual pressure from the Latvian resp. Estonian community as well as the Russian administration at this period of time.¹⁰ Therefore the Baltic-German historians were mostly concerned with the agrarian history and history of law having a certain political context regarding the actual issues¹¹ wherewith becoming remarkably ethnocentric even in the eyes of their contemporaries.¹²

9 See: GARLEFF, 1986 and HEHN, 1986.

10 PISTOHLKORS, 1995.

11 PISTOHLKORS, 1986.

12 See: KEYSERLING, 1881 speaking of distinct interpretation of history among the Estonians, and compare to: GARLEFF, 1986, p. 270 about the general opinion in the Baltic German historiography around the outbreak of the World War I.

At the academic level history in the Baltic Provinces was represented at the University of Dorpat/Tartu (reopened in 1804)¹³ yet political factors came into force here in the second half of the 19th century. With the unification policy becoming more intensive especially since 1883, a permanent tension between the Baltic-German community and the Imperial Government set in because the hitherto German-dominated local educational and administration system was gradually taken over by the Russian officials.¹⁴

At the turn of the 20th century the impact of historical school of jurisprudence upon the Baltic German historiography intended to confirm the *historical rights* of the Baltic Germans¹⁵ seems quite obvious. By that time the historical school of jurisprudence developed a specific form of cultural history, particularly dealing with legal culture believed to represent the *national spirit* of community¹⁶. This should also be taken into account in order to understand why for most of the Baltic German authors the investigation of regional history had turned into a representation of their ethnic and cultural identity.¹⁷

However, there is no need to exaggerate the significance of political context attributed to the Baltic-German historiography, as these activities, though constantly supported by local nobility corporations both in terms of research management and financing, could also be inspired by scientific interests of historians and other investigators, aware of the value inherent to historical materials they were dealing with.

During the late 19th and early 20th century the development of historical studies in the Baltic Provinces was left to rely on associations like the *Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst* (1815-1939) located in Mitau and the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands* in Riga (1834-1939), as described above. These organizations became the only institutions to perform a systematic historical research in the region and also contributed to the investigation of the cultural history.¹⁸

Around the last decades of the 19th century the shift in historiography was evident: the collecting of textual and archaeological materials turned into the first systematic accounts of cultural history. At first, the activities carried out by

13 GARLEFF, 1978, p. 349.

14 THADEN, 1984, p. 221-226.

15 LAZDIŅŠ, 2006, p. 36.

16 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 498.

17 See: LENZ, 1986, p. 214-215 and compare to: HIRSCHHAUSEN, 2006, p. 345-349.

18 HACKMANN, 2001, p. 21-22.

local history museums¹⁹ manifested a kind of pragmatic or even didactic understanding of this task resulting in two remarkable exhibitions devoted to cultural history of the Baltic Provinces Livland and Kurland, established in Riga (1883) and in Mitau (1886) respectively.²⁰ Nevertheless, this approach was still somewhere in between the passing tradition of antiquarianism and the possibility for a synthesis of historical materials with *cultural significance*.

When speaking about the origins of writing cultural history in the Baltic Provinces, the name of Hermann Freiherr von Bruiningk (1849-1927) needs to be mentioned. Bruiningk was known mostly for his various activities, such as holding the office of secretary of the nobility corporation *Livländische Ritterschaft*, president of the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* and the organizer of historical source editions *Livländische Güterurkunden* (I-II, 1908-1923) at various times in his life, yet he should also be remembered for his ca. 160 publications devoted to cultural history themes.²¹

In 1882 von Bruinigk published an essay which was to become a cornerstone for development of professional cultural history studies in the Baltic Provinces.²² It was the first attempt to outline parameters for the local history of high-culture production in the sense common for the Victorian age,²³ including activities in crafts and fine arts, particularly in architecture, sculpture and design.

This approach was later sustained in the works of architect and art historian Wilhelm Neumann (1849-1919)²⁴ emphasizing the same apparently *impartial* issues as seen from a perspective of the Russian administration. However, the turn towards cultural history was explained by von Bruiningk himself in 1906 as a reaction to current political situation demanding additional steps to protect the Baltic German culture: “*Heute redet man nur noch von der Erhaltung unserer Kultur, und so hat die Geschichte selbst der Geschichtsforschung neue Aufgaben gestellt.*”²⁵

19 See: BUCHHOLTZ, 1887 and NEANDER, 1894.

20 NEUMANN, 1914, p. 286.

21 GARLEFF, 1978, p. 347-348.

22 BRUININGK, 1882.

23 BURKE, 2004, p. 32. Apropos, von Bruiningk’s personal connection to the English culture mentioned by his contemporaries (HOLLANDER, 1933, p. 9) could also be of some importance here.

24 See, for instance: NEUMANN, 1913, p. 14-54.

25 Quoted after: HOLLANDER, 1933, p. 20.

One particular subject of cultural history von Bruiningk was most successful at was the history of Livonian Church; he became the only historian of the Baltic Provinces to be prized for his work devoted to late mediaeval practice of worships in Riga.²⁶ The book was recognized as a significant case study on an international level by a connoisseur Albert von Poncelet (Brussels) in 1905 because of its complex approach integrating an essay about the universal meaning of the Roman-Catholic liturgy and the thorough reconstruction of its use in the specific conditions of Livonia.²⁷

However, the interest in the latest concepts of history-writing in Baltic German historiography at the beginning of the 20th century was altogether modest, as most of the authors preferred the academic tradition of historicism as represented by Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) and Georg Waitz (1813-1886).²⁸ The evidence to the contrary seems to be everything but occasional, including a publication titled *Moderne Geschichtswissenschaft* appearing in the proceedings of the *Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst* in 1909.²⁹ Written by Georg Wiedemann (1857-1927), a history teacher in a province gymnasium,³⁰ this article provided an introduction to ideas of Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915) as explained in his book published a year before that. This score is significant for the local historiography itself, as it is the first text pertaining to notable problems of the craft.

It would obviously be an overstatement to claim that this was how the Baltic-German historiography participated in the methodological discussion called the *Lamprechtstreit*³¹, because the purpose of Wiedemann's publication was in fact to inform the local audience about the possibility for a new interpretation of history based less on political circumstances and individual characters of its actors, but pointing to the role of geographical factors and social psychology. According to the author quoting Lamprecht, this approach obviously has to include the history of ideas reflecting different aspects of human cultural activity typical for a certain period of time.

It is hard to estimate the relevance of this arrangement towards the new concept of history for the Baltic-German historiography, if any. In fact, the once notorious standard work in history of the Baltic Provinces compiled by another

26 BRUININGK, 1904, p. 45-272.

27 HOLLANDER, 1933, p. 21-22.

28 WITTRAM, 1936, p. 7.

29 WIEDEMANN, 1910, p. 10-20.

30 LENZ, 1970, p. 865.

31 DANIEL, 2006, p. 210-216.

prominent historian of the day, Leonid Arbusow, Jr. (1882-1951), was set very much in the previous positivistic tradition, while some brief characteristics of geographical and ethnographical milieu were present here as well.³² One could also presume that the tradition of *Landesgeschichte* inherent to the Baltic-German historiography of the 19th and the 20th century in general still provided at least a theoretical perspective for a more complex view on the issues of cultural history, although not without certain ethnic and political bias.

The Baltic-German historiography continued after the World War I in the new-born nation-states, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Estonia. In the case of Latvia the Baltic-German historians again found themselves in a situation believing in the need to underline the *German factor* in the local history of political events and social life to cultural aspects; they recurrently opposed the views shared by representatives of the Latvian national historiography.³³ Yet the inter-war period proved to be too short to write a comprehensive study in cultural history.

After the displacement of the Baltic-German community to Western Europe in the course of the World War II and due to the *Iron Curtain* afterwards, this tradition of history-writing up to the 1970s had little chance of influencing the developments of historical science in Latvia apart from exclusions such as the history of art and exact sciences³⁴ but on the empiric level alone, while any theoretical concepts of non-Soviet origin incurred critique.

II

The second stage of the history-writing process in Latvia during the 20th century is related to the inter-war period and the establishment of the Latvian national historiography. The Republic of Latvia founded in 1918 set up its cultural policy according to concepts of political nationalism, which was common for every newly created nation state in the Central and Eastern Europe in their own particular way.³⁵

32 ARBUSOW, 1918, p. 288-313.

33 HEHN, 1986, p. 377.

34 ŠIMKŪVA, 2001, p. 414-415.

35 STRADIŅŠ, 1998, p. 47-48.

In September 1919, while the country was still engaged in the Independence War (1918-1920), the University of Latvia was founded in Riga including the Department of History at the Faculty of Philology. At the same time the Latvian National Archive was founded³⁶ gathering historical documents from the early 13th century onwards, today preserving one of the major collections in Europe.

While some of the Baltic-German academic professionals were initially represented at the University, ethno-political contradictions of the day³⁷ led to a split in the academic community in the course of time: one example was the case of Arbusow³⁸, who was blamed for a biased misinterpretation of the Latvian history and thus forced to leave the University in 1935.

Indeed, one could hardly speak of any continuity in the traditions founded by the Baltic-German authors regarding the contents of national historiography: instead of the previous trend towards the somewhat regional approach of the *Landesgeschichte*, a different concept of *Volksgeschichte* stating the history of Latvians became the main priority for all kinds of historical investigations.³⁹

The interest among the Latvian intellectuals concerned with the issues of nation-building activities around 1900 in their native history was until then mostly evident in the field of recurrent ethnographical studies of folklore and material culture objects.⁴⁰ Now, as the national state was founded, the first contemplations to write history for the future surfaced in the early 1920s. Especially the efforts of historian Augusts Tentelis (1876-1942), later holding key positions at the University and other institutions relevant for the craft,⁴¹ should be mentioned among others, for he was the first to formulate essential concepts of how Latvian historians ought to create a new interpretation of history.

In 1923 Tentelis published a declaration considering “the nearest tasks for Latvian historians”⁴² requesting a comprehensive approach of history while placing an emphasis on themes and subjects connected in particular to the Latvians and their historical impact seen in the European context. In other words, the new-born history of Latvia should not merely represent *national science* for

36 PLAKANS, 1999, p. 293. Today: Latvian National History Archive.

37 See: KAUSE, 1995, p. 113-120.

38 As presented in detail by Prof. Ilgvars Misāns in his study *Leonid Arbusow d. J. und die lettische Geschichtsschreibung* (2007), a manuscript.

39 PLAKANS, 1999, p. 303.

40 PRIEDĪTE, 1999, p. 4-17. Compare to: WOHLFART, 2006, p. 215-261.

41 For A. Tentelis' professional and administrative activities see: ŠNE, 2009, p. 53-71.

42 TENTELIS, 1926, p. 38-44. The text was published three years after presentation in a scholar workshop.

some political or ideological reason, but rather because every kind of historical explanation requires a certain subjectivity -stemming from the national (i.e. ethnic) identity or professional disposition of the author.⁴³

It should also be noted that Tentelis was quite critical towards the state of affairs in national historiography taking shape in front of his own eyes, pointing at what he called “a dilettantish romanticism” of attempts to reconstruct the structure and forms of social life attributed to prehistoric society,⁴⁴ in fact, a subject of bitter methodological discussions among Latvian historians and ethnologists soon after. Tentelis also found it necessary to pay tribute to the Baltic-German historians for their activities in the field of the *Landesgeschichte* while admitting that “oversight” of the native inhabitants has been a typical feature elsewhere, related to ethnic and class prejudices of the ruling elite.⁴⁵

The claim to “rediscover the true Latvian history” was to remain a wishful and yet current issue throughout the twenty years of independence as showed by statements of Arveds Švābe (1888-1959), the most prominent Latvian historian of the inter-war period. In fact, it was as late as in 1940 when Švābe was still reminding Latvian historians of their duty to achieve this new paradigm in (and for) the history of Latvia in order to provide a comprehensive picture for the coming generations: “[...] for it is the basic theses in present-day historiography that researching history must rely on the investigation of the natives and their land [...] and this certainly has to be observed also for the history of Latvia”.⁴⁶

The development of Latvian national historiography in the inter-war period was also influenced by the transformation of the political system after *coup d'état* in May 15, 1934 from a liberal democracy to the dictatorship of Kārlis Ulmanis (1877-1942) lasting till June of 1940. In 1936 the Institute for the History of Latvia was established under the guidance of Tentelis as a state-promoted organizational centre for history studies on an academic level. Besides, the Chair for History of Latvia was established at the University led by Arveds Švābe. The official aim for the Institute, also reflecting the expectations of authoritarian regime regarding history-writing practice, was “to research the history [...] according to the spirit of nationalism and truth”.⁴⁷

43 ID., p. 41.

44 ID., p. 38, 43.

45 ID., p. 39.

46 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 53.

47 ZEIDS, 1939, p. 8.

It's effect on history-writing obviously becoming ethnocentric, looked quaint when in 1939 Tentelis explained that it has never been the true intention of the Latvian conception of history to replace the old (i.e. the Baltic-German historiography) for its own sake, just to change the old biased perspectives.⁴⁸ However, it did not take long for Švābe to explanation contrary opinion of the same aims including *inter alia* "the work of *gradual verification i.e. deconstruction* of historiography created by the Baltic [German] nobility and burghers in order to construct a new history of the nation".⁴⁹ As noted before, this task was later successfully taken over by the Soviet historiography.

On the other hand, when becoming an important element in the ideology of Ulmanis' authoritarian regime,⁵⁰ historiography also profited from this protectionism leading to institutional changes as well as the possibility to obtain remarkable funding now available from the state.⁵¹ For example, it has been stated, with some naivety, that the Institute provided a chance to activate history *research* per se while historians at the University were mainly engaged in history *teaching*.⁵² It was also during this time that the first academic periodicals devoted to history appeared in Latvian. Along with the publication series, which started already in the 1920s by the University of Latvia and the Latvian National Archive,⁵³ there were two more academic journals issued up to the year 1940 being the quarterly *Journal* of the Institute published since 1937 (resumed in 1991) and another periodical magazine concerned with history named *Antiquities and Arts (Senatne un Māksla)* issued by the Ministry of Education since 1936.

Although there was a certain progress regarding the institutionalization of history studies and crafts in general, constraints were nonetheless placed on the contents of history. At an official level the spirit of nationalism mentioned above was explained as the duty of historians to demonstrate a continuity of the Latvian nation as if it had prevailed since the 13th century⁵⁴ in order to maintain legitimacy of the present authoritarian Latvian state in general and its political system in particular. As the matter of fact, no institutions existed with the purpose to take care of the issues of cultural history in particular, although one could

48 TENTELIS, 1939, p. 20.

49 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 58.

50 HEHN, 1986, p. 388.

51 FELDMANIS, 1995, p. 133-138.

52 ŠTERNS, 1981, p. 3-9.

53 See: PLAKANS, 1999, p. 295-296.

54 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 112-113.

indeed speak of a kind of *Kulturkampf* being carried out during the 1930s as to *Latvianize* the current social and cultural milieu of Latvia.⁵⁵

However, Andrejs Plakans has argued for a different assessment of the tendency towards writing an exclusively national history at that time. He also observed that the methodological consequences pointed at similar calls for “history from the bottom up” in Western historiography since the 1960s, advancing into studies of particular social groups carried out by the authors themselves belonging to these communities, e.g. in the case of history of women or the Native Americans.⁵⁶ If it is not regarded as an example of “reading history backwards”⁵⁷, this statement indeed has a certain point; yet one should also keep in mind that the Latvian national historiography obviously tended to emphasize every possible contrast between the Latvian and the Baltic-German culture taken for granted, to say the least.⁵⁸

Latvian nationalism was the leading paradigm for cultural history-writing as seen from the works devoted to the Duchy of Kurland, a favorite research topic of that time. A conclusive analyses recently performed by Imants Lancmanis⁵⁹ asserts that it was yet another way for the authoritarian regime to gain a kind of historical substantiation by using associations with the idealized image of Duke Jacob Kettler (1610-1682) compared to the one of Ulmanis as the new *pater patriae*. Curiously enough, the fact that it was a state ruled by the Baltic-German nobility and that the heir apparent of the mediaeval Livonia was far less popular in traditional history interpretations of the inter-war period, actually played no considerable role here.

Another aspect of interest inherent to the Latvian historiography of the inter-war period was that the historical school of jurisprudence remained in its place, but had a different vector: for now efforts were made to substantiate the *historical equity* for the Latvians. Besides, the prevalence of so-called *inner history* over other aspects of past human investigation⁶⁰ also speaks for a typical feature inherited along with this concept.⁶¹

55 BLEIERE, 2006, p. 153-155.

56 PLAKANS, 1999, p. 304.

57 DAVIES, 1997, p. 1000.

58 ŠIMKUVA, 2001, p. 409.

59 LANCMANIS, 2005, p. 89-95.

60 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 63.

61 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 498.

Arveds Švābe, with the history of law being a centerpiece of his professional interests, was just the person to maintain this continuity of concepts⁶² based on condition that law and legal culture in a given society are phenomena arising from the special “community of social life” shared by a particular nation.⁶³ This conception, obviously adopted from Numa Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), was used in Švābe’s work *The Latvian Legal History* approaching the development of legal institutions as a part of social history including historical mentality of the native population from the Viking Age to the second half of the 19th century.⁶⁴

This leads us to the key question of this paper, as legal history was actually one of the core elements in the historiography of Latvia in the inter-war period. As for the conceptual frame of cultural history, we start with a general explanation of the term available in the first national encyclopedia of Latvia issued during the inter-war period and edited by Švābe, including two different aspects in its definition.⁶⁵

On the one hand, a close connection was noted between the domain of cultural history, believed to differ from the routine studies of political and military events of the past, as well as of sociology and ethnology, the latter including research of both material culture items and folklore materials representing the *mental culture* of the nation. In this way, the concept of cultural history in question here actually reflected the ideas of Lamprecht⁶⁶ although the author was not quoted directly in the text pointing at Kurt Breysig’s (1866-1940) “attempt to find the laws for the development of culture” instead.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the definition of the subject was constructed to compound the Neo-Kantian perspective and concepts of the *Geisteswissenschaften* alike, explaining that

“[...] cultural history, though investigating individual facts representing certain epochs and regions, is not a discipline of its own: it is just a constituent part of historical science in general, dealing with the specific contents of religion, philosophy, economics, law and other spheres of human activities”.⁶⁸

62 LAZDIŅŠ, 2006, p. 22-23.

63 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 76.

64 ŠVĀBE, 1934-1935, col. 22115-22116.

65 Kultūras vēsture, 1933-1934, col. 18882.

66 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 501.

67 Kultūras vēsture, 1933-1934, col. 18882.

68 ID.

At this point it is possible to assert that a general connection to the German tradition in the philosophy of history remained the most evident in Latvia during the inter-war period, as seen from the works quoted in contemporary publications. A particular interest in the epistemology theory of Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) was shared by philosopher Teodors Celms (1893-1989), actually concerned with the Husserlian phenomenology and cultural critic.⁶⁹ In relation to history Celms emphasized Rickert's concept of *theoretische Wertbeziehung* concluding that "it is not the task of a historian to judge the events of the past, rather to establish their significance in accordance to some cultural value of an overall importance - be it science, art, morality etc."⁷⁰

This was an opinion similar to the principles of history-writing proposed by Augusts Tentelis⁷¹ speaking of the necessity to understand the author of a historical text describing a world of his own (although not using the word *mentality* directly⁷²) thus allowing the historian to reveal facts related to cultural history to an extent greater than before.

The problem whether an objective estimation according to cultural history events was possible or not was picked up by Švābe in his conceptual essay devoted to tasks of the Latvian historians.⁷³ However, his answer was a strict refusal, looking upon cultural history as precisely distinguished by its immanent subjectivity. To confirm this statement, Švābe turned to the thesis produced by Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) about history as a science of a somewhat spiritual form inherent to a certain culture.⁷⁴ Therefore, history on the whole and especially cultural history in particular can only be understood by representatives of the culture in question which in turn makes explanatory contradictions inevitable considering the variety of appraisal criteria and the force of irrational factors.

Another way of negotiating the specific objectives of cultural history and the possible directions documentation was represented by historian Robert Vipper (1859-1954), who in 1924 decided to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Latvia,

69 For the biography and works of T. Celms see: KŪLE, 2002, p. 9-33.

70 CELMS, 1939, p. 109.

71 TENTELIS, 1926, p. 42.

72 Compare to a remark of Plakans saying that the Latvian inter-war period historiography seemed to know "nothing of Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and the *Annales* School [...]"; see: PLAKANS, 1999, p. 304.

73 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 89-90.

74 Quoting the German version of J. Huizinga's work: *Wege der Kulturgeschichte* (1930), Id., p.90.

where he stayed for the next sixteen years. As a professor at the University of Latvia from 1927 to 1938, Vipper lectured on the modern history and was also interested in the issues concerning philosophy and methodology of history. His book *The Great Problems of History* published in 1940 provided a brief survey of theories from Vico (1668-1744) to the discussions of the early 20th century.

Following the Neo-Kantian distinction between the exact and humanitarian sciences, Vipper pointed out the subjectivity of all history explanations⁷⁵ while concentrating on the German Historical School of Economics and in particular on Werner Sombart's (1863-1941) concept of *erklärende Wissenschaft*, which he believed constituted a new paradigm of historical methodology.⁷⁶ However, according to his definition, this approach turned out to be merely a description of *cultural development* without any distinct borders.

In his theoretical contemplations Vipper used to agree with Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) to maintain the idea about cultural history as a complex subject.⁷⁷ Vipper also noted that his perspective was different from that of Spengler while Vipper himself was less interested in, as he stated, the aesthetical and philosophical issues of history attributed to Spengler's approach rather than in the events responding to "the social way of life, political changes and wars as well as the destiny shared by theories of a religious, moral, social and political origin".⁷⁸

In 1936 Vipper published a preposition for new periodization of the "social and cultural evolution" in Europe as follows: 1) The Age of Barbarism from the 6th to the 10th century; 2) The Age of Ecclesiastical Culture from the 10th to the end of the 13th century; 3) The Age of Urban Culture from the 13th century to the 1560s; 4) The Age of Aristocratic and Monarchical Culture from the 1560s to 1789; 5) The Age of Bourgeois or Democratic Culture from 1789 to the 20th century included.⁷⁹

This system was clearly inspired by Spengler's ideas as seen from Vipper's perspective, speaking of a period covering three or four centuries and characterized by a particular complex of ideas and the associated *Weltanschauung* as the core of this periodization.⁸⁰ Although the very notion of culture was not explicated by Vipper in any particular detail, it is evident from the context that it

75 VIPERS, 1940, p. 29.

76 ID., p. 137.

77 ID., p. 117.

78 VIPERS, 1940, p. 120.

79 VIPERS, 1936, p. 9-10.

80 ID., p. 9.

was the history of ideas and social institutions to constitute the evolution process mentioned above. Once again, nearly every aspect of human history was to be included, e.g. agriculture and industry, science and art, administration, finances as well as the foundations of customs, family and social structure of society.⁸¹

When dealing with the theoretical issues of cultural history another Russian emigrant, Vasilii Sinaisky (1876-1949), a professor of civil law at the University of Latvia from 1922 to 1944,⁸² should be mentioned regarding his theory about the origins of culture and law. Interpretation of culture as “the manifestation of religious spirit” offered by Sinaisky⁸³ resembles the ideas of Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), yet it could be more fascinating to look at some of Sinaisky’s thoughts on the role of writing in ancient cultures, e.g. hieroglyphs, expressing either a technical or secular and sacral meaning in ancient religious rites, jurisprudence, philosophy and architecture,⁸⁴ actually responding to far more recent conceptions to that point.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the studies of V. Sinaisky could be compared to those of Švābe, considering their common intention to link the history of law and the history of culture in general. Here also the sociology of culture as developed by Alfred Weber (1868-1958) might be regarded as another aspect shaping the context of their works according to a similar understanding of culture being created by particular society.⁸⁶ A more distinct parallel between Švābe and Sinaisky was the perception of culture and civilization as two opposite concepts shared by both authors.

Considering the definition quoted above, culture for Sinaisky was a representation of the universal world order and regularity. Thus culture consists of values and meanings elaborated by man in his communication with the world created by God, while civilization is to be only a form for the substance of culture subordinated to the latter in its ontological status. The spirit of particular culture, in turn, is conditioned to *the spirit of the age*, a *Zeitgeist* indeed, to work as the moving power for human creativity.⁸⁷ Therefore, in order to understand a certain culture in a way sufficient for a meaningful investigation, one has to turn towards the historical context for the period of time in question.

81 ID., p. 11.

82 See: PACHMUSS, 1988, p. 45-50.

83 SINAISKIS, 1937, p. 79.

84 SINAISKY, 1939, p. 9-27.

85 See: ASSMANN, 2007, p. 48-65 and p. 87-129.

86 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 503-504.

87 SINAISKIS, 1937, p. 77-80.

Arveds Švābe was altogether less original regarding the contents of culture and civilization than to follow the current trend in depicting civilization as the cosmopolitan element of human life, also related to the universal standards and ways of social perception contrary to that of culture with a strong national foundation expressed in common mentality, origin, language, and also usually a common destiny. Thus civilization is for the most part represented by urban environment opposed to rural milieu as the cradle of national culture.⁸⁸

The works of Arveds Švābe are of particular interest in the context of this paper considering the role he had in the establishment of cultural history discipline within the Latvian national historiography. According to his autobiography, Švābe started his studies in 1912 at the private A. L. Shan'avsky University in Moscow, at first in biology, then in history as he became interested in Latvian ethnology and culture.⁸⁹ In 1921 Švābe published a book *The History of Latvian Culture* attempting to reconstruct the cultural and social life of the Latvians starting with the prehistoric age and the subsequent period of mediaeval Livonia. This project was never concluded in the form the author intended, yet it was the beginning for A. Švābe to come forward with a theory of cultural history.

In this regard, Švābe's book was marked by two basic statements typical for the understanding of tasks and methods of cultural history-writing in Latvia since then. Firstly there was a thematic explanation of political origin stating that the main task of the book will be the illustration of the struggle of the Latvians to retain and develop their culture under disadvantageous circumstances. Secondly, the methodological part of the issue explained the meaning of cultural history: a complex of investigations related to the material, social, and spiritual culture of the nation. This complex included a number of particular subjects concerning also the sexual, religious, scientific and aesthetic aspects of social life.⁹⁰

The didactic part of this concept concerning objectives of the Latvian culture history was later adjusted according to the common spirit of the authoritarian regime, explained in the prescribed definition of main tasks, to study the cultural influences coming from abroad, to extract the national specific of Latvian culture and to investigate the reception, absorption and fusion of different cultural elements and, last but not least, to evaluate positive and negative consequences

88 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 92.

89 During studies A. Švābe acquainted himself to the works of Wilhelm Wundt (1831-1920), John Fraser (1834-1904), Lucien Levi-Brule (1857-1939), and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), see: ŠVĀBE, 1947, p. 217-219.

90 ŠVĀBE, 1921, p. 1.

of any kind of exterior impact historically present in the Latvian culture.⁹¹ Since this approach was manifested not only in the works of Švābe alone, it was rather a trend described by Šimkuva as the monologist tradition⁹² characteristic for cultural history-writing practice in Latvia.

In 1939 the structural issues composing the cultural history were subsequently further explicated in a program drafted by Švābe for the forthcoming study about the history of Latvian culture, this time prepared by the State Council of Culture, intended to coordinate and control professional institutions engaged in all kinds of activities regarding the *cultural life* under guidance of the authoritarian regime. The program outlined seven paragraphs consisting of several subjects, to mention just the major topics: (1) history of settlements i.e. historical demography including topography and types of settlements; (2) economic history; (3) social history; (4) history of municipalities and domestic policy; (5) history of the Church and its denominations; (6) history of spiritual culture including the history of ideas; (7) history of the material culture in the ethnographic sense of the term.⁹³

This concept of cultural history was in fact one of a *total history* propagated by Lamprecht at the turn of the 20th century and intended to cover nearly every single item of human activities apart from military events and diplomacy altogether characteristic for the inter-war period in general.⁹⁴

Although Švābe decided to narrow down this concept afterwards, two kinds of subject definitions were still proposed. The first, for an operation on a larger scale, was described above, while the second interpretation of cultural history followed a somewhat “older and limited understanding”, which Švābe preferred most, still derived from the *Geisteswissenschaften* of the 19th century and speaking of “the manifestations of the national spirit in folklore, literature, art, religion, customs and in the material appearances of social life”.⁹⁵

A methodological problem emerged in regard to cultural history as *national science*. The importance of folklore, notably the Latvian folk songs for it and the possibility to use them as a historical source was discussed in two different approaches in the 1920s-1930s from a socio-cultural or historical perspective. Švābe’s book *History of the Latvian Culture* caused a discussion and received

91 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 91.

92 ŠIMKUVA, 2001, p. 411.

93 STRAUTIŅŠ, 1939, p. 87-88.

94 See: ULBRICHT, 2003, p. 58.

95 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 88.

critical reviews.⁹⁶ Švābe considered the folk songs to be sociologic material to study the structure of society and social relationships preserved in some, as he believed, documentary relicts of the legal culture.⁹⁷

Linguist and ethnologist Pēteris Šmits (1869-1938) agreed with Švābe that all written mediaeval sources are biased by nature because they are composed by non-Latvian authors and should therefore be pitted against the Latvian folk songs⁹⁸ as being closer to the initial ethnic culture when compared to folk tales and legends sharing motifs of a more international character.⁹⁹ This opinion was supported by another ethnologist Kārlis Straubergs (1890-1962) recognizing the folk songs to be a historical source of extraordinary value.¹⁰⁰

However, the main problem with the Latvian folk songs being treated as a kind of historical source arises from the impossibility to determine an exact chronology for them even in the terms of centuries. Arveds Švābe was also aware of this obstacle as well as the threat to perceive “such disseminate fragments from the past [...] as the relicts of a cultural system that actually never existed in this form constructed by ethnologists thereafter”,¹⁰¹ as his critics noticed. For example, Augusts Tentelis was among the first to point out the problematic chronology of folklore, concluding that folk songs should not be treated as historical facts but rather as material for ethnic psychology studies.¹⁰²

Logical arguments against the somewhat romantic and biased belief in the exclusive historical value of folk songs were also mooted in 1925 by Jānis Bērziņš (1883-1940), a historian and director of the Latvian National Archive, who noted the fact that this *source* was actually constructed in its textual form, with some exceptions, in the second half of the 19th century only and had been exposed as such to the political requirements of the Latvian national movement.¹⁰³

96 BALODIS, 1938, p. 378.

97 ŠVĀBE, 1921, p. 6.

98 ŠMITS, 1937, p. 321-338. Compare to: ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 88.

99 ŠMITS, 1936, p. 243.

100 STRAUBERGS, 1938, p. 564-565.

101 ŠVĀBE, 1940, p. 89.

102 TENTELIS, 1926, p. 43.

103 BĒRZIŅŠ, 2003, p. 48.

Moreover, Bērziņš performed a strict examination of folk songs according to the prescribed principles for critique of sources divided into relicts (*Überreste*) and narrative texts (*Tradition*)¹⁰⁴, coming to the conclusion¹⁰⁵ that the Latvian folk songs include elements of both types, yet having neither theoretical grounds nor factual evidence to be considered more objective than the traditional written sources historians ought to deal with.

The socio-cultural approach to the use of folklore materials as historical sources represented by Švābe, Šmits and Straubergs in the 1930s was determined very much by the concept of social ethnography developed by Wilhelm Heinrich [von] Riehl (1823-1887) in the middle of the 19th century, especially in regard to its “associative and intuitive” methodology.¹⁰⁶ Yet this approach could seem perhaps a little less out-dated when considering a similar trend in the German *Volkskunde* of the early 1920s attempting to identify the nation’s forms of life in the past along with their whys and wherefores.¹⁰⁷

Thus the Latvian national school of historiography of the inter-war period shows two particular trends regarding cultural history: one of searching for new themes and subjects to investigate and the other concerned with the adaptation of different concepts taken from Western Europe, especially following the German tradition of the *Geistes-* and *Kulturwissenschaften*. As rare as it was, cultural history nevertheless shaped an actual trend in the development of the national historiography, while at the same time leaving us guessing what could have been the outcome of these initial attempts if the course of political events had taken another path.

The tradition of the inter-war period Latvian national historiography developed and slightly rectified itself in exile after 1944. As for the cultural history, it was presented in a book published by essayist and literature critic Andrejs Johansons (1922-1983) in Stockholm and devoted to the cultural history of Latvia in the 18th century.¹⁰⁸ This merely descriptive book offers a cluster of factual evidence yet still not catching the latest epistemology issues and it has remained the sole attempt to create a systematic survey of the local cultural history.

104 See: BRANDT, 2003, p. 61 for terminology.

105 BĒRZIŅŠ, 2003, p. 59-64.

106 KASCHUBA, 2006, p. 42-54.

107 ID., p. 61.

108 See: JOHANSONS, 1976, p. 7-68.

III

World War II and subsequent years of Soviet occupation (1940-1941/1944-1991) profoundly changed the circumstances for history-writing in Latvia. After the displacement of the Baltic-Germans in 1939-1940, the next surge of emigration followed in 1944; this time majority of the Latvian intellectuals left country to avoid expected oppressions of the returning Soviet regime. Although most of the pre-war historians continued professional activities in exile at a surprising extent, they were mainly concerned with the history of politics and economics, in some particular cases turning also to accounts that fell somewhere into the wide field of social history.¹⁰⁹

In the course of Latvia's Russification after the World War II the historical science had to undergo substantial changes in both institutional and personal issues. The Latvian Institute of History was reorganized in 1946 and integrated in the new system of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, created according to Soviet standards; in fact, the word *Latvia* was carefully removed from its title. Until 1959, according to common practice in the USSR, it was called the Institute of History and Material Culture, the latter part standing for ethnography as a component of historical research, while later on the title became shorter: the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences.

The history studies remained *pro forma* a significant component in terms of higher education as well as research of the past. In the years known as the Soviet period an increasing amount of historians had institutional bases in both the Latvian State University and the Academy of Sciences while at the same time lacking the opportunity of a diversified reconstruction of the past, for priority was given to political and economic issues of the recent history.

The works published on the Soviet Latvian historiography reveal to have no references to the very notion of cultural history at all while including sections devoted to ethnography and publications describing educational and cultural activities in the second half of the 19th century.¹¹⁰ The situation was quite similar in the early 1980s to mention, in fact, a new field of historiography being established concerning the "Investigation of Development of the Latvian Socialist Culture"¹¹¹ dealing with works on the Soviet cultural policy in Latvia after the World War II. Thus the situation in Latvia during the Soviet period could be

109 ANDERSONS, 1981, p. 57-76.

110 See: BIRON/DOROSHENKO, 1970, p. 151-169 and p. 221-225 respectively.

111 VIKSNA, 1983, p. 192-208.

compared to that in the German Democratic Republic¹¹², where the works either devoted to the history of ideas or the history of culture had to be stopped on the level of *official historiography* actually being the only possible one.

The Soviet political regime also set new conditions for historians to retain a monopoly during the whole period in question and resulting in (1) a rigorous ideological control over the profession, (2) the obligatory use of historical materialism as the basic concept, and (3) accepting priority for subjects of political and economic history. Besides, research of the cultural aspects of history was to follow the custom of not *overestimating* the Western impact on the Baltic Region now being a part of the Soviet Union.¹¹³ The new state of affairs in historiography started with radical critics of previous conceptions, for instance, against the impact of Neo-Kantian tradition for the reason that such concepts are contradictory to the causal explanation of history in the sense of the Marxist theory as interpreted by the Soviet ideology.¹¹⁴

The second political demand to history-writing affected personalities, as most of the historians of the inter-war period was considered to be anti-Soviet by nature and therefore unwelcome even if they no longer resided in Latvia. In fact, Robert Vipper, who spent the last years of his life (1941-1954) as a Soviet academic in Moscow, was the only person allowed to represent previous tradition in historiography explicitly, although he was also criticized for his “idealistic conceptions”.¹¹⁵ Obviously, it was difficult for the Soviet officials to accuse him of being a *Latvian bourgeois nationalist*, a cliché often used to mark *persona non grata* for the regime, which was the case for both Arveds Švābe and Augusts Tentelis.

Another problem typical for historians of the Soviet period was an overall limited influence from abroad, yet with some exclusion in regard to member states of the Warsaw Pact.¹¹⁶ This restriction was indeed ideological, deriving from the fact that particularly the so-called Baltic Republics were considered unreliable in terms of loyalty to Soviet Union because of the national independence being kept alive in the social memory of the local population.¹¹⁷

112 SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 504.

113 IVANOV, 2005, p. 256-270.

114 ZUTIS, 1947, p. 60 quoting two articles by TENTELIS and ŠVĀBE in this regard.

115 LŪSIS, 1982, p. 227.

116 For example, the book by TOPOLSKI available in Latvia during the Soviet period (TOPOLSKI 1976).

117 BENNICH-BJÖRKMANN, 2007, p. 54.

Nevertheless, there is no need to speak of a kind of *isolation* from the outside world of history-writing, for there were also remarkable attempts to catch the spirit of the age by authors such as Vasilii Doroshenko (1924-1992), a historian of economics noted on international level for researching the issues of trade and agriculture in the early modern age Livonia. His monograph *The Estate and the Market* published in 1973 in Russian should be mentioned¹¹⁸ dealing with economy of the Jesuit Collegiums situated near Riga at the turn of the 17th century. Here the quantitative data of production and trade was used to represent the ground level of history while the main task for Doroshenko was to demonstrate how the cultural context formed economic activities of the age dependent on the mentality shared by members of the Jesuit community as social actors.

In the Soviet period the writing of cultural history in Latvia drifted almost completely to the domain of ethnography and art history (including the history of literature), and was perceived as merely a marginal research object, consequently leading to provincialism. This was noted by historian Alnis Svelpis (1928-1990) in the interdisciplinary conference of historians, sociologists, philosophers and linguists named *Cultural Traditions and Cultural Milieu* held at the Academy of Sciences in the spring of 1988.¹¹⁹ Yet another problem arising from this was the lack of theoretical foundations comparable to the experience of the West in the second half of the 20th century¹²⁰, which could be used to take up the writing of cultural history in the proper sense of the word. This can also be illustrated by the fact that, until the late 1980s, there were no attempts in Latvia to adopt the semiotic theory of culture¹²¹ developed by Yuri Lotman (1922-1993) which was well-known at that time.

The ideological frame of the Soviet historiography, emphasizing the class war relationships as the dominant driving force in society, caused a dual attitude towards cultural history: the material part of historical heritage, i.e. the cultural monuments like buildings and works of art, were still regarded as objects worth evaluating and studying contrary to the historical context of these objects.¹²²

118 DOROSHENKO, 1973, p. 123-140.

119 Kultūras tradīcija, 1989, p. 133.

120 ID., p. 137 to quote the paper of Prof. Rihards Kūlis presented at the conference.

121 ŠUVAJEVS, 1995, p. 43-45.

122 LANCMANIS, 2000, p. 183.

However, there were also some advantages in the study of art history as indicated by the book of Imants Lancmanis about Liepāja, first published in 1983¹²³ and hardly ever influenced by demands of the Soviet ideology. Instead, it presented a wide spectrum of events and actions reaching far more than just a historical account of architectural and sculptural items preserved in the town. Here again the approach was to reconstruct the correlation between the epoch as a social frame and the actions of individuals and groups in the course of history creating its contents and sometimes changing the borders of the parameters.

This means that in both cases of Doroshenko and Lancmanis one could point to some influence by Fernand Braudel's (1902-1985) ideas representing the second generation of the *Annales* School because of a similar intention to reconstruct the interplay between the *static elements* and the *dynamics* of history as represented on different *levels of events* taking place in certain space and time. Moreover, Braudel's interpretation of history with the accentuation of economic processes was also more suitable for Soviet historians trained in accordance to the Marxist methodology, especially in regard to bonding material conditions or *civilization* with particular human activities usually marked as the manifestation of *culture*.¹²⁴

There were also some other patterns regarding the history of science as well as the history of book-publication in Latvia, which should be considered when speaking of the investigation of the cultural history in the Soviet period. As noted before, there was a limited possibility to publish texts on cultural history issues attributed to the *legacy* (sic!) of the Baltic German community from the 1970s onwards.¹²⁵

This direction was especially promoted by academic Jānis Stradiņš developing the history of exact sciences in Latvia since the late 1950s while touching also the issues of cultural history.¹²⁶ Although, following the classic tradition of biographical essays about individual scientists or institutions more or less related to a particular historical context,¹²⁷ Stradiņš' publications represented

123 Here the reference is provided to an extended version of the book published recently in German, see: LANCMANIS, 2007.

124 IGGERS, 1997, p. 51-64.

125 ŠIMKŪVA, 2001, p. 414-418.

126 STRADIŅŠ, 1982, p. 282-296.

127 DANIEL, 2006, p. 361.

the most prominent and, perhaps, also the most popular way of writing cultural history in the Soviet Latvia.¹²⁸

On the other hand, somewhat less popular but certainly not less important was the research direction one might include into the trend in the West labeled the history or reading.¹²⁹ Here a detailed investigations taking decades were undertaken by librarian and bibliographer Aleksejs Apīnis (1926-2004), resulting in his three monographs on the history of the Latvian book publication and its impact upon the social and cultural processes in Latvia from the early 16th to the late 19th century¹³⁰ as well as in the research devoted to manuscript literature of the Latvian pietists (*Herrnhuter*) in the 18th and 19th century.¹³¹

Aside from the overall positivistic and descriptive disposition of these works related *inter alia* to their trail-blazing role in the research field, there was a publication in 1991¹³² worth mentioning in regard to the methodological principles Apīnis relied on to deal with the culture of reading in Latvia. These principles reflect the influence of concepts common for the history of ideas while the periodization of Mediaeval, Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment culture actually reminds of the *typology of culture* practiced since the second half of the 19th century, here denoted by the author as the “universal stages of the spiritual life”¹³³ of a given society.

However, Apīnis also used the concept of culture divided into sectors of institutionalized or systematized activities of high-culture and those attributed to “the primordial forces of folk-culture” presuming that the history of reading will provide a new perspective on the interplay of these aspects.¹³⁴ On the whole, this essay can be regarded as an envoy for the possible directions yet to emerge in cultural history research in the future.

128 This research project was completed recently with a work titled *The Beginnings of Science and Higher Education in Latvia*, see: STRADIŅŠ, 2009, p. 557-570.

129 BURKE, 2004, p. 60-61.

130 See: APĪNIS, 1977, p. 15-333 and APĪNIS, 1991, p. 195-214.

131 APĪNIS, 1987, p. 199-217.

132 Reprinted in and hence quoted after: APĪNIS, 2000, p. 7-27.

133 ID., p. 8.

134 ID., p. 23.

IV

In conclusion, some words should be said about the most recent developments in the historiography of cultural history of Latvia. Although the twenty years spent after the restoration of the independent state are somehow comparable to the inter-war period observed above, it is nevertheless a very recent history indeed. The post-Soviet era has marked a new stage in the historiography of Latvia affecting many aspects.

Although there still is no single institution particularly engaged in cultural history research, the Latvian State Historical Archives has turned into a centre of historical investigations, to mention the quarterly periodical *Latvijas Arhīvi/ Archives of Latvia* issued since 1994 and the document edition series named *Sources of History* published since 1999.¹³⁵

Another editorial project related to cultural history starting the Academy of Sciences on an intentional level in the 1970s was finished recently in 2007 when the four volumes representing Johann Christoph Brotze's (1742-1823) collection albums named *Zeichnungen und deren Beschreibungen* were published including subjects of social and cultural history of the late 18th and early 19th century as the descriptions and images of building constructions, ethnographic items and customs of social estates as well as historical landscape of the age in general.¹³⁶

New institutions such as the Academy of Culture founded in 1990 and engaged mainly in the cultural theory issues¹³⁷ have been created. In fact, this has been an actual trend in Latvia since the 1990s because historiography here did not experience the established discussion taking place in 1960s-1980s in the West between authors supporting the Anglo-American trend of *Cultural Studies* and that of cultural history or the *Kulturwissenschaften* attributed to the German tradition.¹³⁸

While the collapse of the Soviet political and ideological control system provided an opportunity for advancing investigations considering any possible subject of cultural history, the actual situation of regained national independence is once more proving to have priority over political history. This resulted in statements being inherited from the 1930s, such as that "the history of Latvia is

135 See: <http://www.arhivi.lv/index.php?&302>, 20.07.2010.

136 BROTZE, 1992-2007.

137 <http://www.lka.edu.lv/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=index&topic=71>, 20.07.2010.

138 ASSMANN, 2006, p. 16-25.

first and foremost the history of Latvian nation¹³⁹ including also cultural history of the Latvians as one of its subdivisions.¹⁴⁰

However, at the same time a different trend has become evident, attempting to change the very perspective applied to the cultural history of Latvia. This new approach is more related to that shared in historical anthropology bringing out the particulars rather than the imagined inner coherence of culture present at every society or social group.¹⁴¹ This confirms the opinion that the “Latvian culture is, in fact, the result of the interaction of different cultures historically bound to the territory of present-day Latvia”¹⁴²; standing therefore for a *multicultural reality*, one should observe the cultural history of Latvia in its very basic principles. In fact, the synthesis of different perspectives typical of an age in their particular historical context could be illustrated by the book about coexistence and confrontation among the inhabitants of Riga in the late 19th and early 20th century.¹⁴³

Since the early 1990s there was a trend to acquire theoretical concepts of the *Annales* School¹⁴⁴ as well as cultural history, to mention Ute Daniel’s article *Kultur und Gesellschaft. Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte* (1993) published in Latvian to start a discussion of the issue.¹⁴⁵ However, the concepts related to gender history¹⁴⁶ and the social anthropology¹⁴⁷ have been most influential; to be mentioned here is the monograph by Vita Zelče concerned with the Latvian newspapers as media for building an intellectual frame for the public space of the emerging Latvian nation in the 19th century¹⁴⁸, reflecting the impact of social sciences also evident in the latest historiography of Latvia.

139 BĒRZIŅŠ, 2000, p. 9.

140 ID., p. 43.

141 ULBRICHT, 2003, p. 78.

142 ŠIMKUVA, 2001, p. 406.

143 See: OBERLÄNDER/WOHLFART, 2004, p. 11-31.

144 In 1993 François Ewald’s interviews with representatives of the *Annales* School was published in Latvian, see: ŠUVAJEVS, 1993, p. 9-121.

145 DANIELA, 1993, p. 115-132. Reference to the original publication at: SCHORN-SCHÜTTE, 2001, p. 512.

146 This trend was introduced by an anthology on various aspects of feminism, see: NOVIKOVA, 2001, p. 203-230.

147 ҶILIS, 1998, p. 98-138.

148 ZELČE, 2009, p. 484-487.

Finally, a particular perspective for cultural history research could be noticed relating to the field of oral history also promoted since the 1990s by the Institution of Sociology and Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences with the project of *National Oral History: The Resource for the Analyze of Cultural, Social and Identity-Building Processes*.¹⁴⁹ Yet once again, a parallel to the former German Democratic Republic could be observed there in regard to the concept of experience in the oral history becoming so popular,¹⁵⁰ perhaps, as an imaginary way to compensate the compulsory loss of social memory during the years of the Soviet political rule.

Thus some aspects of the new cultural history are evident in the recent historiography of Latvia in a sense of understanding culture not as a complex of institutional bodies or *objects*, which was criticized in the late 1980s,¹⁵¹ but rather in terms of culture as the frame of different activities shaping the context for historical explanations.¹⁵² Considering there are notable works reflecting the impact of interdisciplinary approach along with new source materials published, it is also quite evident now that the cultural history of Latvia in the proper sense of the word is yet to be expected.

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