The cultural diversity and migration as a subject of contemporary research

When researching autobiographical experience from the standpoint of migration or cultural diversity, attention has been mainly paid to events that happened in the recent past or in the present day.

See e.g. the thematic issues of Ethnology and Folkloristics journals

How these aspects are revealed in texts depicting earlier periods?

The aim of this presentation is to observe the Baltic Germans’ life in a culturally diverse environment and transnational family in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century.

Baltic Germans are a population group inhabiting the territories of Estonia and Latvia from the 12th century to the beginning of World War II, when they moved to Germany. The percentage of Baltic Germans in the population of Estonia never increased above 10%, but as they belonged to the elite, they had a prominent role in the history of Estonia.

Although the history of Baltic Germans dates back to the 12th century, the formation of Baltic Germans as a unified group, including the title ‘Baltic German’, is associated with political and social changes that took place in the 19th century.

The Baltic Germans’ identity concentrated around home and family values – the individual is on the foreground in the Estonian transnational family today.

The topic of a mediated space of communication and development of technology also existed in the 19th century.

Territories, states and borders in the Baltic Germans’ texts

The letters written by Georg Julius von Schultz (1808–1875) between the years 1833–1875: 120 letters to his mother, 20 to other family members, three letters to himself and two letters to relatives were published on the initiative of von Schultz’s daughter, and edited by Johannes Werner in 1934, in a book titled ‘Briefe eines baltischen Idealisten an seine Mutter 1833–1875’ (in Estonian: Schultz-Bertram 2004).

Georg Julius von Schultz worked as a doctor, civil servant and writer, and his pen name Bertram results from the latter occupation. The modern Estonian reader primarily knows him as an Estophile. He was one of the Baltic Germans who contributed to collecting Estonian folklore and compiling the national epic ‘Kalevipoeg’.

Schultz-Bertram as an observer of cultures:

“The German language represents the level of refined conversation in Finland. It has a similar status to that of French in Russia; this also determines the character of the Finnish: in Russia they love the brilliant and smooth surface, while the Finns prefer the deeper essence’ (Schultz-Bertram 2004: 19).

Traumatic experiences?

In his letters of 1860s–1870s Schultz-Bertram more and more frequently discusses the role of the Baltic nobility in both Russia and Central Europe.

In addition to disagreements arising from military conflicts, one can see the emergence of questions about borders between classes and ethnical-cultural groups, incl. Baltic Germans.