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Printed from ready-made materials delivered to Lodz University Press

Published by Lodz University Press

First Edition W.12182.26.0.C

Printing sheets 11,625

ISSN 3071-7779, e-ISSN: 3071-8597

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The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) in the Memory of the Christian West: Propaganda, Historiography, and Iconography of Victory

Summary: This article examines the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) not primarily as a military event, but as a dynamic construct of collective memory within the Christian West. Drawing on a wide range of Latin and Iberian sources — including papal correspondence, Cistercian narratives, and Castilian historiography — it analyses how the victory was interpreted, transmitted, and reconfigured across different ideological and cultural contexts. Particular attention is given to the contrasting perspectives of the papacy, which framed the battle as a universal crusading triumph, and Iberian authors such as Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, who emphasised the autonomy and providential role of the Spanish kingdoms.

The study further explores the processes of sacralisation and political appropriation of the victory, including its incorporation into royal memory, chancery practices, and symbolic culture. It also considers the role of material and visual media — such as war trophies, monastic foundations, heraldry, and iconography — in shaping and perpetuating the memory of the battle. Finally, the article traces the gradual transformation of crusading ideology in 13th and 14th century Castile, where it was increasingly absorbed into the local narrative of the Reconquista and used to legitimise monarchical authority and construct political identity.

By situating the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa within the broader framework of memory studies, the article demonstrates how medieval societies actively reinterpreted historical events to serve evolving religious, political, and cultural needs.

Keywords: Las Navas de Tolosa, crusade, collective memory, Reconquista, medieval Iberia

The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, fought on 16 July 1212, is widely regarded as one of the most significant events in the history of the Reconquista and a pivotal moment in the development of the crusading idea in Western Europe. Although formally it was a campaign initiated by Innocent III, its reception and remembrance varied significantly across different parts of Latin Christendom. This article seeks to analyse these diverse narratives — ranging from the curial and Cistercian to the Iberian — in order to demonstrate how the memory of the 1212 victory was embedded in local ideological, political, and cultural contexts.

The event's historical weight, its symbolic significance, and the richness of preserved source material make it one of the best-documented and most frequently studied military encounters of medieval Western Europe. Among the key primary sources concerning the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa are the letter of Arnald Amalric,¹ *De rebus Hispaniae* by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (1170–1247),² the *Chronicon Mundi* of Lucas de Tuy,³ and the account of Abbot Alberic of Trois-Fontaines.⁴ In recent decades, these and other testimonies have been subjected to intensive source-critical analysis, focusing on their propagandistic nature and their role in shaping collective memory.

Particular scholarly attention has been devoted to the narrative of Jiménez de Rada who, as both a participant and a witness of the battle, established a lasting interpretative framework centred on divine intervention and the transformative significance of the Christian victory.

Among the significant Latin texts is also the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, which presents models of royal authority and the ideology of warfare against Islam,⁵ as well as the *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla*, written within the circle of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, archbishop of Toledo and participant in the 1212 campaign. This narrative, one of the earliest testimonies to the events, foregrounds the Castilian perspective, emphasising the role of Alfonso VIII of Castile and the significance of the victory in strengthening the Castilian monarchy within the broader framework of the Reconquista.⁶

1 Alberic of Trois-Fontaines G.W. (ed.), 1698, 461; Alberico de Trois Fontaines. 1844, 224; also in: Ambrosio Huici Miranda. 2011, 216–220, 224.

2 Jiménez de Rada R. 1987.

3 Lucas de Tuy. 2003; also: Rodríguez de la Peña M.J. (ed.), 2009; Ambrosio Huici Miranda. 2011, 222–223.

4 Alberico de Trois Fontaines. 1783; Ambrosio Huici Miranda. 2011, 224.

5 *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, 1990, 109–248. The chronicle was composed within the circle of King Alfonso VII's court and constitutes a key testimony to the ideology of royal power and the early models of warfare against Islam on the Iberian Peninsula. Its narrative combines panegyric elements with the vision of the crusading mission of the Christian monarch, making it an essential context for later interpretations of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. On this source see: Reilly B.F. 2015, 56–72.

6 *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, 1984. Written in the milieu of Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, a direct participant in the campaign, it is regarded as one of the earliest and most reliable accounts of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Its narrative, emphasising the Castilian

The state of research on the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa is today characterized by a considerable diversity of methodological and thematic approaches. Foundational studies — notably the monographs by Francisco García Fitz⁷ and Miguel Álvira Cabrer⁸ — offer a synthetic account of the event, both in military and symbolic terms. These works draw on an extensive corpus of Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew sources, including chronicles as well as diplomatic documents. García Fitz interprets the battle as the culmination of a long military and political process on the Christian-Muslim frontier and, in his most recent work, as a *batalla del castigo* — an act of divine punishment and discipline directed against Islam. Álvira Cabrer, on the other hand, analyses the battle as an *actum liturgicum* — an event of ritual and symbolic significance, subordinated to the logic of the sacralisation of power and war, and at the same time a key element in the construction of the Christian West's collective memory.

An analysis of the course of the battle itself does not exhaust the complexity of the Las Navas de Tolosa campaign. Equally important are the tactical, organisational, and logistical dimensions, which shed light on the actual capabilities of Christian and Muslim armies and on how these forces were prepared and deployed. These aspects have been explored in numerous detailed studies by scholars such as Bernabé Jurado Gómez,⁹ Juan Eslava Galán,¹⁰ and Ángel Soler del Campo,¹¹ who reconstruct the structure of the Castilian army and allied forces, pointing to the growing importance of heavy cavalry and the crucial role of alliances with the kingdoms of Aragon and Navarre. At the same time, scholars attempt to reconstruct the broader mobilisation base of the campaign by performing analyses of the so-called *fonsadera* — the military obligation (either in terms of military service or a tax paid in its place).¹²

Detailed research by Damian J. Smith demonstrates that the campaign of 1212 was fully classified by Innocent III as a crusade, with an appropriate system of indulgences, mobilising documents, and crusade liturgy. This clearly illustrates the central role of papal propaganda in the spiritual and political preparation of the expedition,¹³ as well as in shaping its liturgical framework, spiritual mobilisation, and relations with the military orders.¹⁴ Of particular importance are Smith's studies on the role of Innocent III in defining the campaign as a crusade, as well as the analyses of Carlos

perspective and the role of Alfonso VIII, is interpreted both as a factual source and as a text with a strong dimension of dynastic propaganda. See: Reilly B.F. 2015, 56–72.

7 García Fitz F. 2005; García Fitz F. 2024.

8 Álvira Cabrer M. 2012.

9 Jurado Gómez B. 2012–2013, 12–13, 65–84.

10 Eslava Galán J. 1981, 39–53.

11 Soler del Campo Á. 2012, 67–70.

12 García Fitz F. 2005, 161–164.

13 Smith D.J. 2011, 157–178; Gómez M.D. 2011, 237–260.

14 Ayala Martínez C. 2007; Forey A.J. 1992.

de Ayala Martínez, which explore the participation of Iberian military orders and their integration into the structures of monarchical power. The issue of the participation of northern European knights — especially French and ultramontane forces („ultramontanes” were the foreign crusaders who came to the Iberian Peninsula from northern Europe), as well as Normans and Anglo-Normans — and their religious, financial, and political motivations has been examined in the context of broader research on the crusading movement in the 13th century. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the contribution of Norman and Anglo-Norman contingents to Iberian campaigns, which they increasingly perceived as part of a universal crusade. This interpretation is emphasised by Lucas Villegas-Aristizábal in his study of their participation in the Reconquista (c. 1018–1248).¹⁵

Research on the memory of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa also takes into account the broader cultural context related to the functioning of the idea of crusade in Iberian societies of the 13th and 14th centuries. In her chapter on the memory of crusades in the context of the Reconquista, Ana Rodríguez López analyses how the experience and narratives of crusading were transformed and adapted to meet the needs of local communities.¹⁶ She highlights the complex relationship between crusading ideology and narratives concerning Las Navas — both in their textual and symbolic dimensions. The battle of 1212 thus emerges not only as a military event but also as a component of the culture of memory, reshaped and reinterpreted in line with the political and religious needs of later generations.

The last decade has also witnessed a significant development in studies on the reception of the battle and its place in collective memory. Particularly relevant are works examining liturgical rituals, the construction of the “shepherd-guide” myth, and the sacred iconography of victory.¹⁷ Scholars emphasise that the narrative of Las Navas de Tolosa was not only a political and religious construct but also part of a broader symbolic culture, serving to legitimise monarchy, military orders, and the Church. An important complement to previous research is the commemorative collective volume *Las Navas de Tolosa 1212–2012. Miradas cruzadas*, edited by Patrice Cressier and Vicente Salvatierra.¹⁸ Published to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the battle, this volume comprises a broad range of interdisciplinary studies encompassing military history, archaeology, defensive architecture, iconography, written sources, and historical memory. Thanks to contributions from scholars representing various disciplines and research centres, this publication constitutes a key reference point for contemporary analyses of the battle, considering it not only as

¹⁵ Villegas-Aristizábal L. 2007.

¹⁶ Rodríguez López A. 2016, 202–215.

¹⁷ Peinado Santaella R.G. 2015, 439–454; Gómez M.D. 2011, 237–260.

¹⁸ Cressier P., Salvatierra V. (eds), 2014.

a military event but also as a phenomenon deeply rooted in the cultural, symbolic, and political landscape of medieval Spain.

Against this rich historiographical background, the present article adopts a complementary perspective: shifting the focus from reconstructing the event itself to its reception and reinterpretation, from the battlefield to the field of memory. Therefore, the analysis aims not only to answer the question of what happened at Las Navas de Tolosa in July 1212, but also to explore how this event was remembered, described and utilised in different historical contexts.

Particular attention will be paid to the diversity of these narratives: from the papal and monastic perspectives to the dynastic interests of Castile and León, as well as to local visions of heroism, holy war, and victory interpreted as a manifestation of divine intervention. The article will also reflect on the *longue durée* of these narratives, examining their presence in rituals of power and commemorative practices during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. It will also explore their role in the foundational myth of the Castilian monarchy and their representation in modern historiography, where the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa is often presented as a symbol of unity of the Christian West.

In this way, the article is situated within the current research on the culture of memory, the narrative character of historical sources, and the mechanisms of power legitimisation. The campaign of Las Navas de Tolosa will be presented not only as a major military event but above all as a dynamic construction of collective memory — subject to reinterpretation, ideological transformation, and enduring presence within the imaginary of the Christian West.

However, to better understand the significance attributed to this encounter in subsequent decades and centuries, it is first necessary to outline its basic course as well as the main forces and actors involved in the conflict.

Outline of the Battle

The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa represented the culmination of a crusading campaign against the Almohad Empire, which exercised dominion over the southern region of the Iberian Peninsula during the early 13th century. The Christian forces, under the command of Alfonso VIII of Castile, with the support of Sancho VII of Navarre and Peter II of Aragon, as well as contingents of knights from southern France, comprised approximately 12,000 to 15,000 men. The opposing army was that of Muhammad an-Nasir (known to Christian sources as *Miramamolín*). Contemporary sources and historians estimate the size of his army at between 20,000 and 30,000 soldiers. It was deployed in a strongly fortified position near the Despeñaperros pass.¹⁹

19 Gozalbes Cravioto C., Gozalbes Cravioto E. 2014.

The Almohads adopted a defensive stance on a hill reinforced with palisades, trenches, and a system of tents shielding the centre of their formation. The caliph himself was positioned at the epicentre, protected by an elite bodyguard composed of Black slave soldiers chained together — a symbolic element intended to emphasise the inviolability of the ruler's position. Following a strenuous march through the mountainous terrain of the Sierra Morena, under the guidance of local scouts, the Christian army launched a surprise assault employing three distinct divisions: a central force commanded by King Alfonso VIII, a left wing led by the Navarrese forces, and a right wing under the command of the Aragonese.

The breakthrough came following a frontal attack by Castilian forces, which disrupted the first defensive lines of the Almohads. Sancho VII's troops then executed a flanking manoeuvre, allowing them to break into the heart of the camp and destroy the caliph's personal guard. According to tradition, it was the Navarrese warriors who broke the chains surrounding the tent of the Almohad ruler — a scene that soon became one of the most recognisable motifs in the iconography and narratives of the victory.

The battle ended in a complete defeat for the Muslim army. The Almohad forces were routed, and the caliph fled the battlefield. The victory at Las Navas de Tolosa had decisive strategic significance: it undermined Almohad power in Al-Andalus and paved the way for the further advance of the Reconquista into the south of the peninsula. Even more important, however, were its symbolic and ideological consequences — the event was quickly interpreted as a triumph of Christianity and a sign of divine intervention.²⁰

The Papal Vision and the Universalist Ideology of Crusade

From the perspective of the papacy and Western European monastic circles, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was presented as a triumph of all Christendom — made possible through divine intervention and the spiritual leadership of the pope. In his congratulatory letter to Alfonso VIII of Castile, Pope Innocent III wrote: "This victory, without a doubt, was not the work of man but of God; and the sword of God, not of man — or rather, of the God-Man — has devoured the enemies of the Lord's Cross."²¹ This interpretation served to emphasise Rome's role as the centre of spiritual mobilisation,

²⁰ Alvira Cabrer M. 2012, 45–51.

²¹ "Ista enim victoria procul dubio non humani operis extitit, set divini; et gladius Dei, non hominis, immo verius Dei hominis inimicos crucis dominice devoravit." Innocent III, letter to Alfonso VIII, October 1212, Mansilla D. (ed.), 1955. No. 488, 520. See also: O'Callaghan J.F. 2003, 72. O'Callaghan presents Innocent III as the architect of crusading ideology, who saw Las Navas as evidence of divine intervention and a triumph of Christianity over Islam. He incorporated this victory into a broader plan of salvation, using it both to strengthen papal authority and to further mobilise support for papal aims. The letter to Alfonso VIII and its public reading were among the main acts of crusading propaganda of the age.

thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the crusade as an institution. In his letter, Innocent III consistently employed sacral language: the victory did not come *from human strength* (non humani operis), but was *without doubt the work of God (divini)*. This is a paradigmatic example of a theological interpretation of history, which prevailed in medieval assessments of political and military events: success was a sign of divine grace, while defeat was interpreted as a form of retribution for sin.

Of particular significance is the phrase *gladius Dei, non hominis, immo verius Dei hominis* — “the sword of God, not of man, but rather of the God-Man.” This construction reveals Innocent’s characteristic logic of combining a military metaphor with Christology: not only did God intervene, but Christ himself, as the God-Man (*Deus homo*), annihilated the enemies of the cross. This is no accidental formulation — *inimici crucis dominicae* is a phrase drawn from the New Testament (see: Philippians 3:18) and was used in reference to heretics and infidels. In this context, it denoted Muslims, especially the powerful Almohad Empire, which only a few decades earlier had achieved significant military successes (e.g. the battle of Alarcos, 1195).²²

The letter not only reinforced the position of Alfonso VIII as a *Christian prince* fighting in the name of faith but also served to sustain the authority of the papacy as a spiritual institution controlling the legitimation of war. Innocent III — as the architect of the concept of both internal and external crusade — established a linkage between the events occurring on the Iberian Peninsula and the idea of a universal struggle for the Cross, in a manner analogous to the crusades in the East and against the Albigensians.

This letter should thus be regarded as both an expression of the piety characteristic of the era and as a form of propagandistic crusade, inscribing the Reconquista into a similar conceptual framework as the expeditions to the Holy Land. In the perception of Innocent III, Castile and its allies were regarded as instrumental in a salvific mission, serving as instruments in God’s hands. The success of this mission was perceived as a confirmation of the justice of their war and their special election.

Cistercian and French Narratives — Miraculous and Apocalyptic Elements

In Cistercian and French accounts, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was situated within the broader context of the Church’s struggle against heresy and Islam. Arnaud Amalric,²³ archbishop of Narbonne, compared the battlefield called *Tolosa* to the city of Toulouse, suggesting that the same fate would befall the Albigensian heretics:

22 On this battle see: Alvira Cabrer M. 1996, 249–264; García Fitz F. 1996, 265–282.

23 Arnaud Amalric (also known as Arnaut Amaíric, Amaldric or Arnaldo Amalarico), a Cistercian from Catalonia, began his remarkable career at the Poblet Abbey. He soon became head of the Cistercian Order and, shortly thereafter, took command of the crusade against the Albigensians

Erat quippe quoddam castrum Maurorum quod Tolosa nuncupatur, quod nunc in potestate nostra per Dei gratiam est redactum, ut indignationem Dei timeant similiter, nisi poenituerint, haeretici Tolosani.²⁴

In the *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesarius z Heisterbach, it was even claimed that the Almohads had come from Africa at the request of the Albigensians to jointly conquer all of Europe:

He came from Africa [Muhammad an-Nasir, called Miramamolín by the Christians — A.N.] to Spain with an incredible multitude of people, hoping to seize the whole of Europe. He even ordered Pope Innocent to convert the portico of St Peter's Basilica into a stable for his horses and to hoist his banner on its summit.²⁵

Similar motifs of miraculous intervention and eschatological interpretation appear in the chronicles of the abbeys of Saint-Denis and Savigny, which mention a vision of Christ appearing to a knight during the battle.

Spanish Reinterpretation of the Victory — Autonomy and Proto-Nationalism

In the Iberian sources such as the *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla*²⁶ and *De rebus Hispaniae*²⁷ by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, emphasis was placed on the independence and agency of the Spanish kingdoms. Rodrigo wrote that after the departure of the ultramontane contingents: "Only the Spaniards, with a few from beyond

as papal legate in Occitania. Elected Archbishop of Narbonne in March 1212, he joined the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa crusade and played a significant role in it. He subsequently provided a detailed account of his experiences in a letter to the Cistercian General Chapter. This letter by Arnaud of Narbonne contributed to spreading the news of the battle through the "Cistercian channel." See: Gómez M.D. 2011, 45–61.

24 "...in a place called Navas de Tolosa, because nearby there was a Saracen castle named Tolosa, which now, by the grace of God, is in the hands of the Christians — to instil fear and serve as a warning to the heretics of Toulouse, should they fail to repent." Arnaud Amalric, letter to the Cistercian General Chapter, 1212, quoted in: Alvira J. 2010, 117; Huici Miranda A. 2011, 219.

25 "Qui de Affrica in Hispanias cum tam incredibili multitudine venit, ut totam Europam se obtinere posse speraret. Mandavit etiam Innocentio Papae, quia equos suos in porticu ecclesiae beati Petri deberet stabulare, et super illam vexillum suum figere." See: Caesarius Heisterbacensis. 1851, 303.

26 *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*. 1984. This anonymous Latin chronicle was written at the Castilian court between 1236 and 1239, most likely at the behest of factions associated with the royal administration of Ferdinand III of Castile. It covers the history of the Castilian monarchy, extending from the reign of Alfonso VI of Castile to the 1230s; a notable attention is given to Alfonso VIII of Castile and the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa.

27 Jiménez de Rada R. 1989. Also known as *Historia gothica*, this text is regarded as one of the most important historical works of medieval Spain. The author — Archbishop of Toledo, scholar, and advisor to Ferdinand III of Castile — presents the history of Spain from ancient times up to his own day (around 1240).

the mountains (i.e. beyond the Pyrenees), set out on the road that leads to the Lord's war."²⁸ In this statement, the author clearly underscores the exceptional role of the Spaniards in this "war of the Lord," portraying them as the only true participants in the holy war, accompanied by merely a handful of warriors from beyond the Pyrenees. In doing so, he deliberately understates the role of the wider European knight-hood, even though contingents from southern France, Languedoc, and other regions are known to have joined the campaign.

This rhetoric is far from accidental. Rodrigo constructs an image of Castile (and, more broadly, of Spain) as a people chosen by God, destined to liberate lands from Muslim rule. His use of the phrase *bellum Domini* ("the Lord's war") serves to reinforce the religious dimension of the entire enterprise, granting it the status of a crusade.²⁹

From the autumn of 1212 until the death of Alfonso VIII of Castile in October 1214, almost every document issued by his chancery was dated with reference to this triumph.³⁰ The formulas of these miniature written commemorations varied. At times, they were very direct and even boastful — for example, with an addition after the date of the document: "in the year in which I, the aforementioned King Alfonso, defeated Miramamolín, king of Carthage, on the battlefield."³¹ Over time, however, under papal influence, the language of these formulas became more humble: the victory was attributed to divine mercy and the support of vassals.³² This way of dating documents constituted not only a form of commemoration but also a propaganda tool designed to perpetuate the significance of the victory in collective memory and to present it as a turning point in the history of the Reconquista.

Not only the royal chancery but also other ecclesiastical and political institutions made reference to the triumph at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in their documents, often portraying it as the work of divine providence—a notion that manifested itself particularly in Castile. This form of narrative served both a political and ideological purpose. On the one hand, it legitimised the authority of the Castilian monarchs as instruments of God; on the other, it embedded the Reconquista within a universal salvific framework. In this perspective, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was commemorated not merely as a great military victory but as the moment when Spanish Christians became the foremost defenders of the faith — even more so than their brethren from northern Europe. As a participant and witness to these events, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada had both personal and ideological reasons to portray them in this way.

28 "soli Hispani, cum paucis ultramontanis, perrexerunt per viam quae ducit ad bellum Domini." Jiménez de Rada R. 1989, 266.

29 Kagay D.J. 2020, 131–142.

30 Gómez M. 2019, 143.

31 „eo videlicet anno quo ego predictus Aldefonsus rex Almiramomeninum regem Cartaginis camp-estri prelio superavi". Mansilla D. (ed.), 1955. III. No. 903, 580–581.

32 „non meis meritis set Dei misericordia et meorum auxilio vassalorum". Mansilla D. (ed.), 1955. III. doc. 905, 584–585.

The *Crónica Latina de los Reyes de Castilla* also states: “Wonderful are the works of God, who bestowed such great grace upon Spain, and especially Castile, that — the ultramontanes having departed — the glory of victory may rightly be ascribed to the Spaniards.”³³ This text reflects the emerging political consciousness and sense of Castilian distinctiveness, presenting the Reconquista as a mission with a national character. This is a representative example of a medieval providential interpretation of history, in which military victory is depicted as the direct result of divine intervention. This view is fully consistent with the theological conventions of the period.

At the same time, this passage illustrates the process of appropriation of the memory of the battle by local traditions and political discourse. The emphasis placed on the special distinction of Castile as the privileged recipient of divine grace reflects an effort to reinforce its role as the primary agent of the Reconquista. This perspective resulted in the marginalisation of the “ultramontanes” and to a symbolic shift in the meaning of the battle from the universalist idea of crusade to the glorification of Spanish arms.

The narrative of the *Crónica Latina* thus aligns with a broader trend of reinterpreting the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa of 1212 not as a triumph of the universal Christian community, but above all as a victory of “the Spaniards”. This is indicative of the growing need to consolidate the political and cultural identity of the individual Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula.

Ideologization of the Crusade and the Reinterpretation of Victory

In this process, the Iberian Christians fully assimilated the ideology of the crusade. If the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was the first event on the Iberian Peninsula to be explicitly described as a crusade, it was certainly not the last. The term *cruzada* — a noun denoting a specific form of holy war — in conjunction with the adjective *cruzado/a* and the corresponding verbal nouns, appears in the Castilian sources of the early 13th century as a relatively widespread concept. Although not yet ubiquitous, its use attests to the gradual internalisation of the crusading idea within the political and religious consciousness of the Iberian monarchies. This is confirmed by both chronicle accounts and early documentary as well as literary evidence. The earliest documented instances of the term *cruzada* are found in the *Annales Toledanos I* and *II*, where the expression *fazer cruzada* — “to make a crusade” — is recorded.³⁴ The last two occurrences in *Annales Toledanos I*, dated to 1218 and 1219 respectively, refer to military campaigns undertaken for religious reasons. The first entry relates to the joint

33 “Stupenda sunt opera Dei, qui tantam gratiam contulit Hispaniae, et specialiter Castellae, quod, relictis ultramontanis, victoriae gloria Hispaniis merito tribuatur.” *Crónica Latina*, 80–81.

34 Goñi Gaztambide J. 1958, 151; Ayala Martínez C. 2013, 77–93.

expedition of Castilian and Leonese warriors, members of the military orders, as well as forces from other realms — including the renowned knight from Poitou, Sauvary de Mauleón³⁵ — against the town of Cáceres (province of Cáceres). The siege, which lasted from mid-November until Christmas 1218, ended in failure due to heavy rainfall:

The crusade was undertaken by the brethren (of the military orders) from Spain together with the men of the king of Castile and the king of León, as well as from other realms, as many as wished to come; and also Savaric de Mallen with numerous men from Gascony. They marched to besiege Cáceres (province of Cáceres) and began the assault, but they did not capture the town, for such heavy rains fell that they could not remain there. This was in mid-November and lasted almost until Christmas, after which they withdrew. Year 1256 of the Spanish era (i.e. 1218 AD).³⁶

A year later, in 1219, Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada led his own crusading expedition in the Aragonese region, capturing three castles, although the siege of Requena (province of Valencia) ended in failure and heavy losses:

Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo undertook a crusade and gathered more than two hundred thousand infantry and cavalry. On the feast day of Saint Matthew the Evangelist, he entered Moorish lands from Aragon and captured three castles: Sierra, Serresuela, and Mira. Then, on the feast of Saint Michael, he laid siege to Requena (province of Valencia) — they fought with siege engines (*almajanequis*), armed assaults (*algarradas*), and bombardments (*delibra*), destroying towers and fortifications...³⁷

These references not only document the early use of the term *cruzada* in the context of religious warfare but also reveal its deep embedding in local practices of historical memory. In the chronicle narratives, these events are depicted as a direct continuation of the crusading idea inaugurated at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, thereby contributing to its consolidation as a specifically Castilian sacral-military legacy.

Moreover, by the late 13th century, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was already being referred to in these terms in the redactions of chronicles compiled at the court of Alfonso X the Wise, even though Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, upon whose

35 Runciman S. 1997, 158.

36 "Ficieron Cruzada los Freyres de España con las gientes del Rey de Castiella, e del Rey de Leon, e de los otros Regnos quantos quisieron venir y, e Savaric de Mallen con muchas gientes de Gascoña, e fueron cercar Cancies, e lidiaronla, e non la prisieron, que facia tan grandes aguas que non pudieron y durar. Esto fue mediado November, e duro hasta cerca de Navidad, e tornaronse ende, Era MCCLVI." *Annales Toledanos I*. 1993, 189.

37 "El Arzobispo D. Rodrigo de Toledo fizo Cruzada, e ayunto entre peones e Caballeros mas de ducentas veces mil, e entro en tierra de Moros de part de Aragon dia de S. Matheus Evangelista e priso tres Castiellos, Sierra, e Serresuela, e Mira. Despues cerco a Requena dia de S. Miguel, e lidiaronla con almajanequis, e con algarradas, e con delibera, e derrivaron..." *Annales Toledanos I*. 1993, 189–190.

testimony later accounts relied, never used the word *cruzada* in this context.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the *Crónica de Castilla* and *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*, the 1212 campaign was fully conceptualised as a crusade, as evidenced by the mention that Archbishop Rodrigo “left Spain to request the crusade” — which should be understood as a reference to his journey to the pope to seek the blessing and spiritual support for the expedition.³⁹

This process of reinterpretation and appropriation of the crusading idea by the emerging Iberian states was closely linked to the political legacy of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Although many of the combatants did not live to witness the fruits of their victory, their successors — Ferdinand III of Castile in Castile and James I of Aragon in Aragon — fully exploited the new balance of power that emerged from it. Following his capture of Córdoba (1236) and Seville (1248), Ferdinand III by 1252 had already secured his control over the entire Guadalquivir Valley.⁴⁰ During this period, the Muslim presence on the Iberian Peninsula was reduced to the residual emirate of the Kingdom of Granada, which from then on was a nominal vassal of Castile.

In Aragon, James I conquered Valencia (1238) and the Balearic Islands, transforming his kingdom into a major Mediterranean power.⁴¹ Barely forty years after Las Navas de Tolosa, the *Reconquista* had been essentially completed in its strategic dimension.

In this context, the reinterpretation of the victory at Las Navas as a “Spanish” crusade and a manifestation of divine grace granted to Castile acquired an almost prophetic character. The idea that God had predestined the Spaniards to play a special role in the history of Christendom — as defenders of the faith and a chosen nation in the struggle against Islam — became firmly rooted in the historical, theological, and legal discourse of the late Middle Ages. Las Navas became significant not only as a military breakthrough but also a turning point in the formation of a Castilian (and, more broadly, Spanish) collective identity.

Monarchical Memory of Las Navas de Tolosa: Between Crusade and Reconquest

Although the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 was in many respects an event inscribed in the ideology of crusade — owing to the indulgences granted by Innocent III, the preaching campaigns in France, and the presence of French troops⁴² — in later Castilian

38 Jiménez de Rada R. 1989, 266.

39 Brea A. (ed.), 1997, 56–64; *Chronica Latina Regum Castellae*. 2003, 141–189; Campa Gutiérrez M. de 2003, 141–189.

40 Ladero Quesada M.Á. 1998, 607–662.

41 Burns R.I. 1967. I, 1–30.

42 Rodríguez A. 2017, 210. Papal documents make no reference either to the Holy Land or to indulgences connected with the Eastern Crusade. In January 1212, Innocent III granted absolution to Alfonso VIII of Castile, while advising him to accept a truce if offered and to wait for a more favourable moment to strike. See: Mansilla M. 1955, 500–501.

narratives its papal–crusading interpretation gradually faded. It was replaced by a narrative centred on the role of the monarch and the internal mobilisation of Iberian forces.⁴³

The correspondence between Alfonso VIII of Castile and the papacy, written in the aftermath of the battle, already suggested a desire to distance the Castilian crown from its dependence on Rome. The king expressed dissatisfaction with the weak commitment of ultramontane knights, emphasised his personal financial contribution to the campaign, and declared his willingness to dedicate himself *pro fide*. In these letters, military strategy, divine assistance, and the capture of prisoners later used as monastic labour were presented as evidence of the effectiveness of royal — not papal — power.⁴⁴

This interpretation was comprehensively developed in the narrative of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Archbishop of Toledo, who in *De rebus Hispaniae* described the battle as a collaborative effort of the Iberian armies, with the French forces playing a marginal role and the papacy being entirely omitted.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he did not even mention his own preaching in France or his attempts to involve Philip II Augustus, despite the explicitly crusading nature of these actions. In the *Chronica Regum Castellae*, compiled at the court of Ferdinand III of Castile, this interpretation was further reinforced: the Archbishop of Toledo was presented merely as an instrument of the Castilian monarchy, while indulgences and Rome were not mentioned at all.⁴⁶

The glory of the victory was attributed entirely to Castile, with the chronicler suggesting that the French forces departed due to the heat, which was interpreted as divine intervention allowing the Castilians to claim the full spiritual and political reward.⁴⁷ At the same time, the campaign was financed almost entirely by the revenues of the Castilian Church and royal funds, which further strengthened the model of monarchical independence.⁴⁸

Thus, the victory at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa became the basis for a monarchical memory of the Reconquista, in which the king was no longer a participant in a papal project but rather emerged as an autonomous leader of Christendom.⁴⁹ As the analysis of *Chronica Regum Castellae* and *De Rebus Hispaniae* demonstrates, the crusade

43 Mansilla M. 1955. No. 470, 500–501.

44 Mansilla M. 1955. No. 488, 519–521.

45 Smith D.J. 1999, 487–513.

46 Brea A. (ed.), 1997, 56–64.

47 The *Chronica Regum Castellae* even includes an ironic remark that the *ultramontani* (the French) withdrew from the campaign because of the heat, which the chronicler interprets as divine intervention in favor of Castile. This is a characteristic example of the “Castilianisation” of the narrative, in which Castile alone claims the victory.

48 The same chronicle also contains references to the Castilian churches allocating half of their annual revenues, while the king covered the remaining costs from the royal treasury. This is consistent with the letter of Alfonso VIII of Castile to the pope (see: Mansilla M. 1955. No. 488, 519–521), but the *Chronica* deliberately emphasises Castilian self-sufficiency and independence from the papacy.

49 Rodríguez A. 2017, 210–212. The author analyses the process of the “Castilianisation” of the memory of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa as an instrument of royal legitimacy and its gradual detachment from the universal project of the papal crusade.

underwent a process of “Castilianization” in meaning: the crosses and the language of holy war remained, but the central role of the papacy disappeared.⁵⁰ The war against Muslims was no longer regarded as part of the universal mission of the Church. Instead, it began to function as an instrument for consolidating monarchical authority and forging Iberian identity.⁵¹

In the context of the memory of Las Navas de Tolosa, it is worth recalling the observation of Jessalynn Bird that crusade preaching not only motivated participation in holy wars but also “actively constructed and preserved the memory of earlier expeditions as examples of virtue, sacrifice, and collective Christian action.”⁵² As Bird observes, crusade memory did not constitute a passive recollection of events but a tool for reactivating their spiritual significance in new political and religious contexts, both in the Latin West and on its peripheries. While the author’s analysis is primarily concerned with the crusades to the Holy Land, these mechanisms can be successfully applied to the Castilian context after 1212, when the narrative of Las Navas de Tolosa — reinforced by authors such as Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada — began to function as a local counterpart to the memory of Jerusalem, embedding the victory within a universal history of Christian struggle against non-believers. In this manner, the Reconquista was “coupled” with crusading memory — not as its supplement, but as a continuation of the crusading idea in a new geographical and political context.

In the memory of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, a particularly significant role was played by Alfonso VIII of Castile, whose participation in the 1212 campaign became not only a military fact but also a central element of a long-lasting historical and symbolic narrative. As James Naus and Vincent Ryan emphasise, medieval kings who took the cross exposed themselves to considerable risks but, in return, could gain immense prestige and a lasting place in collective memory, regardless of the ultimate military outcome.⁵³ In the case of Alfonso VIII, the rewards were exceptional: his role as leader of the victorious Christian coalition was framed as retribution for the fall of Hispania after 711, and he himself was remembered by posterity as a national hero and saviour of Spain. As Miguel Gómez observes, “the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa became a semi-legendary episode of great significance for the collective memory of

50 See: Smith D.J. 1999, 487–513. The author demonstrates that Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, in *De Rebus Hispaniae*, deliberately omits the role of the papacy in both the preparations for and the interpretation of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, despite its formal crusading character. See: A. Brea (ed.), 1997, 56–64. The text focuses exclusively on the Castilian monarchy, while entirely disregarding the crusading dimension; although the symbolism of the cross is present, it is subordinated to a local ideological narrative.

51 See: Rodríguez A. 2017, 210–212. The author shows the ideological transformation of the narrative of Las Navas towards the legitimization of royal power. See: A. Brea (ed.), 1997, 56–64. The text completely marginalises the papal dimension of the crusade, focusing on the king as the central figure of the campaign.

52 See: Bird J. 2017, 24.

53 See: Naus J., Ryan V. 2017, 145–146.

Christian Spain,” and Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada made it the climax of his *De Rebus Hispaniae*, with the intention of exalting the reputation of Alfonso VIII.⁵⁴ The monarch himself, as already mentioned, celebrated this victory in all chancery documents issued during the last two years of his life.⁵⁵ This memory was not confined solely to chronicles but also entered early modern cultural forms, where the image of the “crusader king” remained vivid. The example of Alfonso VIII thus demonstrates how the Reconquista and crusade could overlap in the realm of memory, producing a unified narrative of holy war and royal heroism.

Over the two centuries separating the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) from the time of Don Juan Manuel, the ways in which this event was remembered underwent a significant transformation. As Ana Rodríguez argues, the memory of the crusade faded in Castile as a first-hand military-religious experience and was converted into a component of post-memory — an idealised historical legacy detached from direct references to the actual crusading campaigns.⁵⁶ The crusade became a vehicle of moral symbolism, a literary topos, and an instrument of legitimising royal power, rather than a concrete obligation to fight in the name of faith.⁵⁷

This process of reinterpretation is particularly evident in the works of Don Juan Manuel, author of *El Conde Lucanor* (1330–1335), which includes, among other things, a story of knights accompanying their lord on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land — not as combatants, but as exemplars of loyalty, virtue, and penance. In this way, the crusading motif was transformed into a narrative of chivalric honour and personal expiation, as opposed to a tale of fighting for the Holy Land.⁵⁸ This marks a significant departure from the 12th century vision of crusaders as defenders of Christendom.

Concurrently, the royal court’s narrative appropriated the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, wherein Alfonso VIII of Castile became the central protagonist. In both the *Chronica Regum Castellae* and the *De Rebus Hispaniae*, the emphasis was placed on the role of the Castilian monarchy as an independent actor that organised and financed the victorious campaign, instead of highlighting papal blessings or the idea of holy war.⁵⁹ Even Alfonso VIII’s letter to Pope Innocent III, sent after the victory, focused on logistical expenses and the difficulties of mobilising the army, rather than on the spiritual dimension of the campaign.⁶⁰

In this manner, the memory of Las Navas de Tolosa was integrated into the establishment of royal legitimacy, while papal involvement, despite its formal presence,

54 See: Gómez M. 2019, 143–144.

55 See notes 34–36.

56 Rodríguez A. 2017, 202–203.

57 Rodríguez A. 2017, 202–203.

58 Rodríguez A. 2017, 203–204.

59 *Chronica Regum Castellae*. 1997; Jiménez de Rada R. 1989.

60 See: letter of Alfonso VIII of Castile to Pope Innocent III, July 1212. Mansilla D. (ed.), 1955. No. 488, 519–521.

was diminished or even omitted. As Ana Rodríguez notes, it was Juan de Osma, the chancellor and author of the *Chronica Regum Castellae*, who most clearly separated the Reconquista from the crusade, portraying the former as an internal Castilian holy war, not subordinated to Rome.⁶¹

Moreover, the crusade as an idea became increasingly detached from concrete military operations. An illustrative example is the 1307 testament of Teresa Gil of Valladolid, in which the noblewoman bequeathed one hundred maravedís “for the crusade” alongside donations for the poor and household servants. The absence of major Eastern campaigns after the death of Louis IX of France in Tunis, makes it difficult to ascertain whether this constituted a contribution to an actual crusade or merely a symbolic expression of religious piety and tradition, devoid of any tangible objective.⁶²

As a result, during the 13th and 14th centuries, a substantial reinterpretation of the crusading idea took place. The concept was assimilated into the local Reconquista narrative, and its association with the Holy Land — although sometimes formally upheld — gradually became more rhetorical than practical. As demonstrated by the Castilian case, the crusade underwent a transformation from a papal call to arms into an internal tool of dynastic politics, chivalric ethics, and historical memory.⁶³

Hence, the crusade — although formally present in social consciousness — was permanently integrated into the local Castilian context, which helps to explain how the Reconquista appropriated its cultural and political functions.

Trophies of Victory and Sites of Memory after the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa

In the process of constructing dynastic memory, Alfonso VIII of Castile engaged in both narrative strategies (as exemplified by chronicles) and material and spatial initiatives. A central element of this process was the foundation of the Cistercian abbey of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas in Burgos, established in 1187 on the initiative of Eleanor of England. This represented the most important attempt to create a royal pantheon and a space of remembrance for the Castilian dynasty, directly inspired by Fontevraud Abbey in Anjou — the necropolis of the Plantagenets, created by Eleanor of Aquitaine. Las Huelgas was therefore not merely the queen’s personal foundation but also a vehicle for transferring the *memoria regis* tradition from the Anglo-French context into Castile.⁶⁴

61 See: *Chronica Regum Castellae*. 1997; Rodríguez A. 2017, 212.

62 See: Rucquoi A. 1992, 305–323. See: Rodríguez A. 2017, 204–205.

63 See: Rodríguez A. 2017, 206–207.

64 Ruiz T.F. 2019, 6–7.

This foundation was intended to replace the previous centre of royal sacred memory (Basilica of San Isidoro in León) associated with the Leonese dynasty. The relocation of the burial place (where Alfonso VIII, his wife, and their children were interred) to Burgos symbolised a shift of power from León to Castile. Burgos thus assumed the role of both political and sacred capital of the united kingdom. The architecture of Las Huelgas, designed in the French Gothic style, served to emphasise the Castilian dynasty's connections to the West and to the universal Latin Church. The abbey functioned as a necropolis, a centre of royal cult, a space dedicated to prayer and penance, a venue for grand ceremonies, and a locus of dynastic prestige, thus merging political, religious, and commemorative functions.⁶⁵

The Christian victory at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was inscribed in collective memory not only through chronicles, chancery documents, and sacred foundations but also through war trophies seized during the campaign. These artefacts were imbued with a profound symbolic significance: insignia of the enemy ruler, elements of the caliph's encampment, banners, spears that became material relics of holy war. Their placement in locations of particular religious and political significance (e.g., at Las Huelgas or St. Peter's Basilica in Rome) legitimised the crusading ideal and reinforced the authority of monarchs.

The account of the trophies being sent to Rome was recorded by the Cistercian chronicler Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, who relied on information circulating within the network of monasteries and royal courts across Europe. According to his *Chronica Alberici Monachi Trium Fontium*, Alfonso VIII of Castile (described as *rex parvus*, the father of Blanche of Castile) and Peter II of Aragon (referred to as *miles probatissimus*) sent to Pope Innocent III, as a sign of victory, the spear and banner of al-Nasir (whom the chronicler calls Mammelinus).⁶⁶ These trophies were to be displayed prominently in St. Peter's Basilica, as enduring testimony to the "grace and mercy of Christ," through which the Christians, despite the enemy's numerical superiority, had achieved victory. Their presence in the most sacred space of the Latin Church gave the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa a universal and supraregional dimension, embedding it within a broader narrative of Christendom's triumph over Islam.

Among the objects transferred to the Santa María la Real de las Huelgas monastery was the textile that had covered the entrance to the tent of Muhammad al-Nasir. Captured during the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa and subsequently deposited in the royal necropolis, it became part of the royal treasury as both a valuable war trophy

⁶⁵ Alonso Abad M.P. 2005.

⁶⁶ See: Alberic of Trois-Fontaines 1698, 461: "King Alfonso, called the Little King, father of Queen Blanche, and the King of Aragon, a knight of the highest merit, who, as a sign of victory, sent to Rome the spear and the banner of Mammelinus — which [trophies] are still located in the Church of St. Peter, placed in the most prominent position — as an eternal memorial of the grace and mercy of Christ, through which He rendered His own — though few in comparison to the enemy — victorious in the aforementioned battle."

and a sacred artefact. In its new context, it acquired a liturgical function, being used in monastic ceremonies and preserved as a relic of Christendom's victory over Islam. The transformation of this Islamic textile into a Christian cult object reflects a broader process of reinterpreting spoils of war as signs of divine intervention and the triumph of the Castilian monarchy. Its long-standing presence in the hallowed precincts of Las Huelgas constituted an integral element of dynastic memory, serving to both commemorate the pivotal victory of 1212 and legitimise the authority of subsequent rulers.⁶⁷

A particularly powerful element of the memory of the battle was the motif of the chains that, according to Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, had surrounded the tent of Muhammad al-Nasir, symbolically marking the perimeter of the caliph's camp. During the assault by the right wing of the Christian army, these chains were famously broken by Sancho VII of Navarre, an episode that in late medieval accounts became one of the defining moments of the battle — a symbolic act of Christian triumph. Fragments of these chains are preserved to this day in Colegiata de Roncesvalles, and their image was transformed into the heraldic emblem of the Kingdom of Navarre: a golden chain on a red field with a green central emerald. This motif functioned not only as a memento of military victory but also as an element of dynastic and regional identity, still present today in the coat of arms of the Navarre autonomous community.⁶⁸

One of the less studied but equally significant aspects of the memory of Las Navas de Tolosa is its iconography, i.e. images and visual representations that transformed the battle into a sacred, political, and national symbol. This process began in the early modern period, when sacred and royal spaces were embellished with iconographic programs that glorified the victory of Christian monarchs.



Fig. 1
The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, fresco, Monasterio de las Huelgas, Burgos. (Public domain)

67 See: Feliciano M.J. 1996, 32–66; Gómez Moreno M. 1927, 3–38; Cabrera Lafuente A. 2003; Martín T. 2013, 1–28.

68 See: Jiménez de Rada R. 1989, 250–252; Martín Duque Á.J. 1966, 5–36; Fortún Pérez de Ciriza L.J. 2012.

In 1594, a monumental painting by Jerónimo Ruiz de Camargo and Pedro Ruiz de Camargo was placed above the entrance to the main nave of Santa María la Real de las Huelgas (Fig. 1).

The work portrays the triumph of Alfonso VIII of Castile, visually sacralising the Christian victory as an event of both religious and dynastic significance. Its presence in the monastic space — the royal necropolis — attests to the lasting place of the battle in the sacred topography of Castilian monarchy.

In the 19th century, the theme of the battle was reinterpreted in a Romantic and national spirit. A painting created in 1864 by Francisco de Paula Van Halen, now held at the Museo del Prado, portrays three Christian monarchs — Alfonso VIII of Castile, Sancho VII of Navarre, and Peter II of Aragon — as triumphant defenders of Christendom (Fig. 2). At their feet lie the bodies of fallen enemies, the Muslim camp, and captured war trophies, forming a visual narrative of the complete triumph of Christianity over Islam. In this Romantic reading, the battle is portrayed as a foundational moment of national pride and heroism.⁶⁹



Fig. 2 Francisco de Paula Van Halen, *The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa*, 1864. Museo del Prado. Public domain (Wikimedia Commons)

⁶⁹ See: Bango Torviso I.G. 1987.



Fig. 3 Relief depicting the three Christian monarchs: Alfonso VIII of Castile, Sancho VII of Navarre, Peter II of Aragon. Facade of Hotel Tres Reyes, Pamplona (Photo: Jialxv, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The battle is also present in the urban symbolic landscape. A notable example is the relief on the facade of Hotel Tres Reyes in Pamplona, which depicts the three Christian monarchs: Alfonso VIII of Castile, Sancho VII of Navarre, and Peter II of Aragon (Fig. 3).

This sculpture represents local and regional pride in Navarre's participation in the victory at Las Navas, as well as an exemplary illustration of the manner in which historical memory can be embedded in a city's architectural and visual cultural heritage.

These examples of iconography provide evidence that the memory of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was preserved not only in written source but also through art, heraldry, museums, and urban space. The event proved to be multifaceted in its nature, embodying a combination of triumph, sacrality, propaganda, and identity. Its legacy has endured as a material and visual collective memory that continues to shape local identity and perceptions of the past.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The memory of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was, from the outset, a dynamic phenomenon, subject to continuous transformation and reinterpretation, dependent on political, religious, and social contexts. In papal correspondence and Cistercian exegesis, the victory of 1212 was regarded as a triumph of all Christendom, embedded within the universalist idea of crusade and subordinated to the central authority of Rome. In Iberian historiography — most notably in the works of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada and in *Chronica Regum Castellae* — the same event assumed a markedly different dimension: it was assimilated into a monarchical and Reconquista-oriented narrative, wherein the emphasis shifted from the universal mission of the Church to the role of Castile as a chosen nation, predestined to wage war against Islam and reclaim lost territories. Consequently, the crusade's universal message became subordinated

⁷⁰ Uranga J.J. (ed.), 1993.

to the objectives of legitimising power, consolidating political identity, and strengthening the monarchy's position.

This process extended beyond the realm of narrative. The memory of Las Navas was also preserved through material and visual means, including sacred foundations such as the monastery of Las Huelgas and the necropolis of the Castilian dynasty; war trophies, including banners, weapons, and the caliph's insignia, were sent to Rome and displayed in places of special religious significance; the motif of the chains from al-Nasir's tent, which was transformed into the heraldic symbol of Navarre; and, finally, works of art and elements of urban architecture, which perpetuated the image of the triumph of Christianity from the Middle Ages through to the 19th century. In this way, the battle was translated into a language of symbols, images, and rituals that fulfilled both commemorative and propagandistic functions.

Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries, the idea of crusade underwent a gradual reinterpretation in Castile. What had originated as a papal call to fight in the name of faith was transformed into an element of local Reconquista tradition, which was then absorbed by dynastic politics and the chivalric ethos. In the literary tradition, as seen in the works of Don Juan Manuel, the crusading motif is characterised by progressive detachment from actual military engagement, becoming instead a pretext for stories of loyalty, virtue, and personal penance. This can be interpreted as a clear indication of the transition from historical experience to post-memory, signifying an idealised heritage severed from its direct associations with real campaigns.

An examination of this process reveals that the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa functioned within the culture of memory not only as a historical fact but also as an ideological construct, repeatedly transformed and adapted to new contexts. Over time, this event ceased to be regarded merely as a turning point in the military history of the Reconquista and became a symbol of universal significance, a tool for communal mobilisation, legitimisation of power, territorial integration, and identity building. The event gave rise to a symbol, from which a ritual derived, and from the ritual, a lasting marker of political and religious identification.

The memory of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa thus evinces mechanisms that are characteristic of medieval societies: the transformation of history into a tool of ideology, the fusion of the sacred with politics, and the linkage of military heritage with a vision of divine election. Rather than merely preserving the past, this memory is selective, specifically oriented, and actively shaped. It is more accurate to say that it assigns new meanings to the past in the service of the present. It was precisely this capacity for continuous reinterpretation that ensured the enduring presence of Las Navas de Tolosa in the imaginary of the Christian West for centuries. Irrespective of its factual accuracy, the image of the battle became one of the cornerstones of Castilian and Spanish historical identity.

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The Memory of the Mongol Invasion of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 13th Century among Contemporaries

Summary: Between 1240 and 1242, a large Mongol invasion struck Central Europe, including the Hungarian Kingdom. This first invasion had a serious impact on the entire region, both militarily and politically, as well as psychologically. Contemporary memory attempted to process the topic and the psychological shock caused by the attack in various ways. The following article reviews how this Mongol campaign was reflected in 13th-century Hungarian memory and perception of time. The study examines contemporary literary works (a poem written during the Mongol invasion and a personal memoir written a few years later), the terminology used by the royal chancellery in documents issued in the 1240s and 1250s, contemporary references to the Mongol invasion as divine punishment, and the characteristic feature of the contemporary perception of time, whereby events unrelated to the invasion were often dated as 'before the Mongol invasion' or 'after the Mongol invasion.' This view of time was not only prevalent among the upper classes of society but also among the common people, and even among those who, due to their age, had no personal experience of the Mongol invasion. It can be showed that the experience of the Mongol invasion extended beyond its actual boundaries not only in space but also in time and served as a point of reference even for those who had only experienced it as children or not at all, but who were influenced by it as a kind of 'post-memory' through the transmission of information from the older generation.

Keywords: Mongol invasion, Hungarian Kingdom, Hungary, historical memory, trauma, time perspective



Between 1241 and 1242, a large Mongol invasion struck Central Europe, including the Hungarian Kingdom. This first invasion had a serious impact on the entire region, both militarily and politically, as well as psychologically. Contemporary memory attempted to process the topic and the psychological shock caused by the attack in various ways. The following article reviews how this Mongol campaign was reflected in 13th-century Hungarian memory and perception of time.

First, it is necessary to examine why the great European Mongol invasion, which was a campaign between 1236 and 1242,¹ left such a deep mark on the memory of the time. It is important to note that there were other times when nomadic horsemen from the east attacked the region, or Hungary more specifically. During the 11th century, the Pechenegs and the Oghuz Turks were the main threat, and then, from the end of the 11th century, the Cumans, who appeared in the region, attacked several times.² The scenario of these campaigns was always very similar: they entered the border region unexpectedly and then began to plunder the area, plundering and capturing prisoners. When news of the attack reached the ruler and a Hungarian army was organised, the attackers preferred to avoid confrontation and retreated. If there was a battle, the regular army defeated the invaders. Thus, these eastern campaigns never posed a real threat to the functioning of the country. One Hungarian chronicler who wrote about the Mongol invasion, Rogerius, canon of Várad (today Oradea, Romania), conveyed the following image of the threat posed by the eastern nomadic peoples in the first half of the 13th century: 'for the Cumans used to attack swiftly and devastate a part of the country before the Hungarians could assemble, and then quickly retreat. And the Hungarians did the same in Cumania.'³ The same was true of the western campaigns. The border region was repeatedly attacked from the Holy Roman Empire (specifically from Bohemia), and in the 12th century, the southern part of the country was threatened by the Byzantine Empire, which was at the height of its power.⁴

However, the last time an enemy army reached the innermost part of the country and inflicted such a defeat on the Hungarian king that his existing power collapsed was just under 200 years before the Mongol invasion, in the middle of the 11th century, when the armies of the Holy Roman Empire placed their supported candidate, Salamon, on the throne in 1063.⁵ Subsequently, until the Mongol invasion in 1241, never before had there been an instance of a foreign army inflicting a complete defeat on the Hungarian ruler and penetrating into the centre of the country. Thus, before 1241, it had been the experience for many generations that the country was stable and

1 There is extensive literature on the great European campaign of 1236–1242, a brief summary of which can be found, for example, in: Jackson P. 2005, 58–74.

2 Kovács S. 2014, 175–177; Kovács Sz. 2014, 181–185.

3 MRE 2010, 182–183.

4 Varga G. 2003, 99–161; Makk F. 1989.

5 Varga G. 2003, 128–129.

militarily well-defended, and that attacks by nomadic horsemen from the east were not a major threat, as they could be stopped by the armies stationed along the border. This defensive strategy had yielded the same results for 200 years, and there was no reason to question it even at the time of the Mongol attack. The extent to which this was the prevailing mindset is illustrated by the aforementioned Rogerius who stated that before the clash with the Mongols in 1241, several nobles were politically opposed to the king and wanted him to lose the battle, because then they would be more appreciated: ‘They would have liked the king to be defeated so that they would then be dearer to him. They thought that any such calamity would only hit some in particular and not all in general as they had heard that such things had happened before in Hungary.’⁶ Contemporary Hungarian public opinion did not feel threatened by the Mongol invasion at all.

It is necessary to provide a brief summary of the Mongol invasion of Hungary to provide greater context.⁷ The Hungarian king, Béla IV (1235–1270), tried to prepare for the danger, so in this case there was no question of an unexpected invasion. After the Mongol armies appeared in Eastern Europe in 1236 and attacked the Cumans, the king took in a group of Cumans. The leaders of the Mongol army sent several envoys to King Béla, demanding that he extradite the fugitive Cumans, but he refused, confident in his own strength. The Cuman armies, which would normally have reinforced the Hungarian main army, turned against the Hungarians and withdrew from the country towards the south. Despite this, Béla IV gathered his army and engaged in battle near the village of Muhi, on the Sajó River. The Mongols led by Batu clashed with the Hungarians at Muhi almost simultaneously (11–12 April 1241), while another group of them fought the Polish army at Legnica (9 April 1241). Both battles ended in victory for the Mongols. King Béla IV managed to escape, but the state apparatus in the eastern part of the country collapsed completely. The Mongol army settled in the flatlands of the ‘Alföld’ and completely exhausted the region’s resources. Béla still retained power in the western part of the country, as the two parts of the country were separated by the Danube River, which the Mongols did not yet want to cross. The panicked king sought help from the pope and the emperor, but to no avail. The western half of the country fell under Mongol occupation in early February 1242, when their armies crossed the frozen river. They began to besiege some of the more important castles and fortified towns in the area and tried to capture the king, who had fled to the Adriatic Sea, but in the spring of 1242, suddenly (apparently following a central command), the individual army units withdrew from the country.⁸ Consequently, some areas in the west of the country were hardly or not at all affected by the Mongol raids.

6 MRE 2010, 182.

7 For the latest account of the events of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, see: for example Bordi Z.L. 2024, 233–263; Holeščák M. 2024, 265–286; Szabó J.B. 2025, 215–246; Szabó J.B. 2025, 263–282.

8 On the question of the withdrawal from Hungary, see: Pow S. 2021, 109–115.

Although the extent of the destruction varied greatly from region to region,⁹ the events affected the entire country. Much of domestic and foreign trade ceased, and the state apparatus ground to a halt. The Mongol armies were stationed in the flatland named *Alföld*, a large food-producing region, and consumed most of the crops and livestock, while the rest did not reach other regions of the country, resulting in widespread famine throughout the land after the Mongols withdrew. According to the somewhat exaggerated claim of later Hungarian chroniclers, 'And because during that time they could not sow their fields, the number of Hungarians who perished of hunger after the departure of the Tartars was greater than the number of those who were carried away into captivity or fell beneath the sword.'¹⁰ Although the country was starting to recover relatively quickly when the king, who had fled to the coast, returned to his country, the events had not only political but also psychological significance. The people of the country had to face the fact that something had happened that even their grandfathers could not remember: a foreign army had ruled the country. Faced with the loss of home and friends, the profound upheaval of everyday life, and the persistent fear that the Mongols might return at any moment. It is clear that the Mongol invasion left a deep mark on people's memories.

Although individuals often try to bury their personal traumas within themselves, some choose the opposite path and prefer to talk about their experiences. There are several sources that were created shortly after the Mongol invasion of Hungary. One of these is a literary work that was written in the final hours of the Mongol occupation or shortly after the events. Its title is *Planctus destructionis regni Ungarie per Tartaros* (*Lament for the Destruction of Hungary by the Tartars*), and its only manuscript is found in a late medieval codex preserved in the University Library of Wrocław.¹¹ The author of the work is unknown, but it can be established that he was a person living in Hungary,¹² educated in the church and well versed in Latin literature. The work conveys a general picture of destruction, with the slaughter of people, the unburied dead lying around, famine, and the liturgy ceasing in the country's churches. It features the early Christian topos that God punished the country for its sins with the attack. It is certain that the poem faithfully reflects the spiritual state of its author and, presumably, the general spiritual state of his contemporaries. A recurring element of the poem is its description, in unique forms, of the starvation that the country's inhabitants had to endure in early 1242 (which is a typically recurring thought in the case of a person who is actually starving), as well as the lack of public safety,

9 About the regional differences in the destruction caused by the Mongol invasion in Hungary: Romhányi B.F. 2025, 327–342.

10 *Chronica de Gestis Hungarorum*. 2018, 326 (in Latin), 327 (in English).

11 Reference: I. F. 262, the poem can be found on folios 155^v–156^r. Latin edition: PDRHT 1938, 593–598.

12 The expressions 'nostra Pannonia' and 'salva nostram Ungariam' (*our Pannonia* and *protect our Hungary*) show his attachment, see: PDRHT 1938, 596, 598.

the breakdown of traditional human relationships and the resulting uncertainty of existence. However clichéd the horrors listed in the poem may seem, taken individually, they are typical symptoms of a society in which economic relations (i.e., trade and a steady supply of goods) and social relations (the traditional master-servant relationship and the cohesive power of the community) are disintegrating. This poem reflects the uncertainty that arises in such times.

Even more interesting is another source, which is essentially a personal (prose-style) account of how the author experienced the Mongol invasion. It was written a few years after the events, around 1243, and its author was Rogerius, canon of Várad (Oradea).¹³ Rogerius came from Italy and arrived in Hungary in 1232.¹⁴ He was here when the Mongol invasion took place, which he recounts in a very vivid manner. He begins his memoir with a general political overview, then recounts the immediate events leading up to the Mongol invasion, the army's incursion, the story of the lost battle of Muhi, and the king's escape. Subsequently, the narrative suddenly shifts to a personal memoir, and the account of the Mongol invasion continues without interruption, now from the author's point of view, in the first person singular, which is sometimes replaced by a more detached narrative perspective. Rogerius clearly tried to maintain the chronological order of the narrative, so when he reached parts that he knew about but had not experienced himself, he became a 'narrator' and then reverted to a 'personal memoirist.' From his description, it can be learnt how he fled for a long time from the marauding Mongol troops, always avoiding the places where the Mongols had just struck, but later he was captured, then escaped, and then went into hiding again. His perspective is very similar to that of the author of the *Lament*: the two most important themes of the personal section are the emphasis on constant fear and hunger. In his account, written several years after the events, he relived the events emotionally and was able to provide exceptionally vivid descriptions of the psychological state that overwhelms helpless people at such times. When he heard of the arrival of the Mongols while hiding in a reinforced place:

my hair stood on end, my body shivered with fear, my tongue stuttered miserably, for I saw that the inevitable moment of dreadful death was menacing me. I already beheld my murderers in my mind's eye: my body exuded the cold sweat of death. I also saw the human beings, when earnestly expecting death, unable to grab weapons, raise their arms, move their steps to places of safety, or survey the land with their eyes. What more? I saw people half-dead with fear.¹⁵

¹³ Latin-English edition: MRE 2010, 132–227.

¹⁴ For a brief account of his life, see: MRE 2010, XLIII–XLIV.

¹⁵ MRE 2010, 204–205.

Later, when he had already been captured, 'I always saw death with my physical and mind's eyes';¹⁶ and when they were banished from the country as prisoners, 'I had no hope of survival, and a bitter and cruel death was already waiting at the door, I thought it were better to die here than to be tortured by the steady stings [of fear].'¹⁷ In addition to the terror, the descriptions of the details of starvation are so vivid¹⁸ that it is certain that reference is made to memories that he experienced — and relived while writing. In any case, it is clear from the description that Rogerius specifically wanted to record his feelings, which is well illustrated by including personal elements alongside the more narrative, detached parts.

However, it was not only the authors of these two literary works who felt this way about the Mongol invasion. The terminology used by the royal chancellery faithfully reflected the official position of the court on this issue. If the wording of royal charters after 1242 is examined, it is clear that the Mongol invasion became synonymous with some kind of universal catastrophe in the royal chancellery as well.

In his letters to the Pope, Béla IV goes beyond the bounds of factuality and speaks dramatically about the invasion of the Mongols and the destruction of the country. The Mongols themselves are often referred to with negative adjectives in official documents written shortly after their withdrawal in 1242: 'the hands of the evil Tatar people,'¹⁹ 'the persecution of the evil Tatars,'²⁰ 'the harmful Tatar people' or 'the harmful arrival of the Tatars,' 'the barbaric Tatar people.'²¹ No other people were described with such strong adjectives in the chancellery's documents; this kind of narrative approach was reserved exclusively for the Mongol invasion. When the event was mentioned in the legal text of the document for some reason, it was often exaggerated and dramatised. The fact that circa 1250 (or possibly in 1247 or 1248), King Béla IV wrote to the Pope that 'Hungary was largely laid waste by the Mongol invasion and is surrounded by various faithless peoples like a fence around a sheepfold...' ²² could even be attributed to propaganda. After all, in this letter, Béla asked Pope Innocent IV for help, so it could be assumed that he somewhat exaggerated the danger that threatened Hungary and the Christian world. However, no propaganda can explain why, in 1248, he wrote about the Mongol invasion in a letter to his subjects, saying that 'our country suffered the same cruel and savage fury of the Mongols, some of its inhabitants were miserably killed, others were taken into slavery, the land was depopulated and

16 MRE 2010, 210–211.

17 MRE 2010, 220–221.

18 MRE 2010, 204–207, 222–225.

19 "manus gentis impie Tartarorum." ÁÚO 7. 1869, 174.; *Az Árpád-házi királyok okleveleinek. 1923–1930*, 229.

20 "persecutionem impiorum Tartarorum." CDH 4/1, 406.

21 "gens pestifera Tartarorum." ÁÚO 7. 1869, 263.; "in aduentu pestifero Tartarorum." CDH 4/1, 273, 274.

22 "Cum regnum Hungarie per pestem Thartharorum pro maiori parte in solitudinem sit redactum, et quasi ovile sepibus sit diversis infidelium generibus cicumspectum." *Vetera Monumenta Historica Hungariae*. 1859, 230.

became a wasteland.²³ Here, the chancellery (and thus the ruler) certainly expresses its own point of view on how it viewed the event. Similarly, in domestic donation letters, assessments are made such as ‘during the general devastation wrought by the Tatars, when the nobles and commoners of our country fled together to save their lives,’²⁴ or that ‘the unexpected invasion of the Tatars brought great loss upon our country, and its inhabitants, nobles and commoners alike, fell victim to the slaughter of the aforementioned people, and few survived.’²⁵

Another motif appears in the documents: according to this, the Mongol invasion was God’s will, as a punishment. Since late antiquity, there had been a Christian topos that various peoples attacking Christian peoples were God’s punishment, with which He avenged the sins of the people. This view also emerged in connection with the Mongols at the time of the events. Shortly after the Battle of Muhi, on 17 June 1241, Pope Gregory IX wrote to King Béla IV, who had narrowly escaped the battle, that ‘the judgment from heaven is already destroying the Christian people on all sides... For as the clamour of humanity’s sins grew louder and louder, it rose to the ears of the Almighty and compelled him... to draw his sword in retribution for the injustices.’²⁶ Regardless of the papal letter, the image quickly spread throughout the country, and the unknown ecclesiastical author of the ‘Lament’ already emphasised in early 1242 (while the Mongols were still here) that the Mongol invasion was a fitting punishment for the sinful people. ‘Because of the sins you have committed, you have reaped the reward of your deeds,’²⁷ the author wrote, and this idea recurs several times in the poem with different poetic images.²⁸ Similarly, in the days of the Mongol invasion, in early February 1242, Hungarian prelates wrote in a letter to the pope that the Mongols had attacked Hungary ‘because of our sins, as we believe.’²⁹ This topos was eventually incorporated into the documents of the royal chancellery. Sometimes it appeared only as a subtle allusion, with the mention of the Mongol invasion accompanied by the addition that they had invaded the

23 “regnum nostrum eiusdem Tartarice persecutionis sevitia crudeliter et immaniter seviente fuisset, suis regnicolis aliis miserrime interemptis, aliis in captivitatem abductis depopulatum et pariter desolatum.” CDH 4/2, 456.

24 “in generali vastacione Tartarorum, quando communiter et nobiles et populares regni nostri pro conservacione vite sue ante faciem eorum fugiebant.” ÁÚO 7. 1869, 283.

25 “per subitam irruptionem Tartarorum grande dispendium pertulisset, et de ipsius incolis, tam nobilibus, quam inferioribus in maiori parte per prefatam gentem interemptis, pauci remansissent.” CDH 4/2, 49–50.

26 “iaculatum de coelo iudicium iam depopulatur vndique populum Christianum... Clamor enim scelerum humani generis multiplicatus, ascendens in aures omnium conditoris... expectauit, vltorem iniquitatum gladium coëgit exserere.” CDH 4/2, 216–217.

27 “ob peccata, que fecisti / messuisti / meritorum premia.” PDRHT 1938, 597. In the second part, something may be missing before *messuisti* because the usual number of syllables does not add up, although the sentence is still understandable.

28 PDRHT 1938, 595, 597.

29 “nostris, ut credimus, hoc peccatis exigentibus.” Schneider F. 1915, 669.

country ‘with the Lord’s permission’ (*Domino permittente* or *permittente Domino*).³⁰ The expression was sometimes rephrased to be somewhat longer: the Mongol invasion was ‘an inevitable divine judgment’ or ‘as we believe, divine punishment.’³¹ Sometimes, using the old topos of the ‘whip motif,’ royal charters listing the merits of their subjects wrote about the Mongol invasion as follows: ‘in that terrible time, when the heavenly power, because of our sins, whipped our country with the ferocity of the Mongols,’³² or ‘when the Lord of the heavens, who holds all power over the countries in his hands, allowed the Christian people to be whipped by the Tatars because of their sins.’³³

The sources discussed so far provide insight into the perspectives of individuals belonging to the upper echelons of society (educated clergy, members of the royal court), but it would be interesting to examine what impact the Mongol invasion had on the lives and memories of ordinary people. Although it can be reasonably assumed that it left a profound mark, unfortunately the available sources do not allow for a detailed exploration of this impact. However, there is one perspective from which the thinking of the average person can be understood and that is the perception of time. It can be shown that the Mongol invasion became a point of reference, a temporal epochal boundary in later times. Relative dating may be used, such as an event occurring before or after the Mongol invasion. This perception of time can also be traced in the terminology used in documents. In the 1250s and 1270s, several events were dated as having taken place ‘before the arrival of the Tatars’ or ‘during the time of the Tatars.’³⁴ Although this still only reflects the perspective of the document issuers, sources are available that show that even decades later, the Mongol invasion was still considered a turning point in time for the common people.

King Béla IV’s daughter, Margaret, died in a Dominican monastery in 1270, and shortly after her death, actions were initiated for her canonisation. During the proceedings in 1276, several witnesses who knew Margit were questioned, or miracles attributed to her were recounted. During the interrogation, each witness was asked about their age. The majority only gave their estimated age or compared their birth to something else. A very common point of reference (in 1276) was the Mongol invasion. ‘I was a child when the Tatars invaded this land,’ ‘When the Tatars came to this land, I was already born,’ ‘I don’t know [how old I am], but I was young before the

30 CDH 4/1, 288; CDH 4/2, 49; Gárdonyi A. 1910, 76.

31 “divino iudicio, cui resisti non potest” and “ex divina, ut credimus, ultione.” CDH 4/2, 32, 207.

32 “illo tempore formidinis, quo per Tartarorum sevitiā coelestis potencia regnum nostrum, peccatis exigentibus, flagellavit.” CDH 4/1, 405.

33 “cum peccatis exigentibus coeli dominus, in cuius manu sunt omnia iura regnorum, flagellare permisisset per Tartaros populum christianum.” CDH 4/2, 456.

34 “per nostrum privilegium ante adventum Thartarorum datum.” ÁÜO 2. 1861, 271; “quam scilicet particulam terre quidam Butus nomine, et sui cognati tempore Tartarorum, sine herede decedentes, referuntur primitus possedissee.” CDH 5/1, 161.

Tatars came’ — these were the statements made by witnesses who did not know their exact age.³⁵ Some knew more precisely, saying, ‘When the Tatars came to this land, I was six years old.’ Another witness made a similar statement and even named the source of his memory: ‘I don’t know [how old I am], but my mother told me that when the Tatars invaded this land, I was 3 years old.’³⁶ Parents certainly told their children about the Mongol invasion and also told them how old they were when they experienced it — these stories remained with them as adults, and so they were able to relate their age to this event some 35 years later. The fact that the Mongol invasion appears in the minutes as one of the most frequently recurring chronological points when an older event needs to be dated (in this case, the witnesses’ own birth dates) shows that the memory of the Mongol invasion was embedded not only in the minds of the generation that experienced it, but also in those of their descendants.³⁷

The Mongols returned to Central Europe, including Hungary, several times in the 13th century with attacks of lesser intensity.³⁸ These attacks (with the exception of an incursion in 1285) were only minor incidents affecting the border areas,³⁹ but they still served as points of reference in the particular historical context. For example, according to a document from the Lelesz (today Leles, Slovakia) convent dated 1307 and an undated (but possibly 1308) document from Palatine Aba Amadé, a crime was committed ‘in the third year after the departure of the Tatars.’⁴⁰ This event cannot in any way refer to the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242, but either to the invasion of 1285 or to a later unknown event that affected only a small part of the country.⁴¹

In summary, it can be said that the first Mongol attack was a generational shock and left a very strong mark on contemporary memory. The vast majority of coping strategies have not been preserved in the sources, but they may have been similar to later psychological strategies, since psychology did not yet exist in the Middle Ages, but the human psyche did, and it functioned according to similar principles as it does today. It is due to this psychological shock that the disaster had a much greater impact on people’s minds and memories than its long-term effects actually

35 “Puer eram, quando Tartari intraverunt terram istam”; “Quando Tartari intraverunt terram istam, iam eram natus”; “Nescio, sed ante adventum Tartarorum eram iuvenis.” MREV, 347, 349, 381.

36 “Quando Tartari intraverunt terram istam eram sex annorum”; “Interrogata quot annorum est, respondit: Nescio, sed quando Tartari intraverunt terram, habebam tres annos, sicut dixit mater mea.” MREV, 339, 344.

37 All this is very similar to the phenomenon of ‘postmemory’ created by Marianne Hirsch, which she examined in relation to the Holocaust. Postmemory is not a direct memory, but a traumatic imprint of the memories of the first generation, which becomes a defining experience for subsequent generations. See: Hirsch M. 2012.

38 For a summary of the 13th-century Mongol invasions of Europe after the first Mongol invasion, see: Hautala R. 2017, 364–372.

39 For a specific look at the 13th-century invasions of Hungary, see: Szűcs T. 2023, 325–362.

40 “tertio anno post exitum Tartarorum”. *Regesta diplomatica nec non epistolaria Slovaciae*. 1980, 239, 260.

41 For a more detailed assessment of the report, see: Szűcs T. 2023, 355, not. 113.

were. Of course, there were areas where it really was a disaster, but other parts of the country experienced only secondary effects and psychological trauma. The invasion's experience reached beyond its actual boundaries in space and time. It even became a referencepoint for those who only experienced it as children or not at all yet felt influenced by it as 'post-memory' through generational information transfer.

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Investigation of Mass Graves from the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 near Hradec Králové

Summary: The most important battles of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 took place on the battlefields in today's Czech Republic. The war was significant for the formation of present-day Europe and ranks among the largest conflicts of the 19th century in terms of its extent. Many modern elements were used in combat during the war, but soldiers fighting in battles often died without help on the battlefields and were also buried there. Today, their graves are marked by more than a thousand monuments. Many unmarked graves are at risk due to the construction of local roads, but they are being rescued and archaeologically examined. In 2024, the route of one of the motorways leading through the territory of East Bohemia was archaeologically investigated, thanks to which dozens of remains of soldiers who fell on the battlefield near Hradec Králové (Königgrätz) were uncovered and examined. Therefore, based on archaeological and anthropological research, completely new knowledge can be revealed as to the form of the war graves and the way they were created shortly after the battle.

The discovered graves will be the subject of further future research, as this is a completely unique example of their extensive exposure. The significance of these graves are presented in this article in advance of all the completed analysis. The remains will later rest in a newly built ossuary.

Keywords: battlefield archaeology, Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Hradec Králové, Sadová, Königgrätz, anthropological research, war graves

The Austro-Prussian War of 1866

The Austro-Prussian War left an indelible mark on the history of the north-eastern region of Bohemia and a part of Moravia, which witnessed extensive field battles. These have not yet been paralleled in the Czech lands for their extent, and the overall outcome of the war also influenced the further formation of Central Europe. In 1866, Prussia sent more than 255,500 men and approximately 32,000 horses against Austria, organised into a total of three separate armies. These armies were tasked with advancing separately and attacking together. Austria opposed Prussia with a smaller force of 238,000 men and in the region of 67,000 horses. The largest Prussian Second Army numbered 115,000 men and was to enter the territory of the monarchy through Silesia, while the smaller First Army with 100,000 men advanced from northern Bohemia, supported by the Elbe Army with 40,000 men.¹

After the Prussian armies entered the territory of Bohemia, the Austrian corps tried to push the invaders back to the border, but their lack of cooperation led to important defeats and losses, which could not be replenished. Under the orders of their commanders, the infantrymen of the Austrian Army engaged in murderous bayonet attacks, which could not withstand the rapid fire of Prussian breech-loading firearms. Apart from the victorious Battle of Trutnov on 27 June, Austrian weapons were unsuccessful in defeating the often smaller Prussian formations. The plan to hold the defensive positions on the Jizera River or at the Josefov Fortress could not be fulfilled and the entire Austrian Army had to retreat to the Elbe and to the vicinity of the fortress at Hradec Králové. As the Austrian military intelligence reported the advance of larger Prussian troops towards Hradec Králové from more than two directions, instructions for a potential fight were quickly issued, which were received by individual commanders at two o'clock in the morning of the fateful day of 3 July.

The main position was a semicircular defensive line 20 km long, leaning in its centre on the rolling hills around Chlum and Lípa. The plan also included the positioning of an army reserve with reserve artillery and heavy cavalry divisions. However, it lacked any instructions for retreat, extremely risky in this position on the Elbe. During the morning, the Prussians repeatedly tried to break through the positions at Chlum and Lípa with the main formation of their First Army, which advanced from Sadová, Mžany and Benátky. However, their movement in the direction of Lípa was halted due to heavy artillery fire of the Austrian cannons and could only be supported by the attack of the Prussian Second Army. This army moved in an accelerated march to Chlum from Hoříněves with the clear goal of squeezing the Austrian positions in pincers and thus freeing the main Prussian Army from the hopeless situation at Sadová.²

1 Wawro G. 1996.

2 Bělina P., Fučík J. 2005, 331–449.



Fig. 1 Attack of Austrian infantry units in tight formations on positions above Trutnov, cut-out from a painting, author: Fritz Neumann, oil on canvas (Source: Museum of Podkrkonoší Region in Trutnov)



Fig. 2 The victorious staff of the Prussian Army in the Battle of Sadová, cut-out from a painting, author: Georg Bleibtreu (Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin)

The Prussian Elbe Army did not fare any better on the left flank in the vicinity of the villages of Probluz and Dolní Přím, and since it advanced slower than expected, it did not actually intervene in the morning fighting. The fights on the right flank of the Austrian position at Máslojedy were more critical. Almost the entire right flank of the Austrian Army was gradually, in several waves, became engaged in the incredible bloodshed in the Svíb Forest. With great effort, however, the Austrian corps finally managed to push a single Prussian division out of Svíb. However, they soon had to abandon the hard-won positions, as the Prussian VI Army Corps together with the 1st Guards Division attacked in the direction from Nedělišťe to Lochenice, broke through the defensive lines and launched the main attack on the exposed centre of the Austrian position at Chlum. At this point, the battle was in fact decided, because the long-awaited arrival of the Crown Prince on the battlefield was intended to distract the main attention of the Austrians from the Prussian First Army, which could thus resume its advance.

The Austrian defensive position could not resist such pressure for long, and after an unsuccessful attempt to recapture Chlum by army reserves, the battle was decided in Prussia's favour. The complete destruction of the Austrian Northern Army, which embarked on a frantic retreat from the encirclement, was prevented by the heroic fight of the Austrian reserve cavalry divisions, which was regarded in the history of warfare as the second greatest cavalry battle of the 19th century. The Austrian cavalry was able to hold back the larger Prussian cavalry in the area between Střezetice and Dlouhé Dvory and thus sufficiently defend the entire retreat of the Austrian Army. The battle was over, and after a closer analysis of the statement of losses, it is clear that it was a decisive battle. The Austrians lost a total of 42,812 men (killed, missing, wounded or captured), 6,010 horses and 187 cannons from their contingent. The Saxon forces lost 1,501 men (135 killed, 940 wounded). Prussian official statistics reported a total loss of 9,172 men and 939 horses. The entire Austrian Army thus retreated to Hradec Králové and later to Holic and Vysoké Mýto with a plan to assemble for another march to defend Vienna. However, the Prussians successfully complicated their advance by occupying Hodonín, which led to another battle at Tovačov. The last clash of the war took place on 22 July in the suburbs of today's Bratislava, Slovakia, during which a ceasefire was declared, and the next day peace negotiations began in Mikulov.³

Burials of the fallen in historical records

After the guns fell silent, the defeated Austrian units withdrew from the battlefields in great haste. Prussian soldiers thus later took control of all the battlefields, built camps, military hospitals and organised the burials of the fallen. In general, the fallen

³ Urba O. 1986, 252.

Prussians were first buried by their own fellow soldiers after a battle clash or, very rarely, during it. Later, the graves were dug by locals under the supervision of Prussian patrols. This is evidenced by a large number of written sources, especially from the vicinity of the largest battlefield of the war near Hradec Králové. Here, the entire burial process allegedly lasted in the region of eighteen days. As is known, burying the dead was not sufficiently organised and conducted uniformly, which is evidenced by the fact that many graves had to be relocated, modified or disinfected later due to their inappropriate location and form. The record of a large-scale disinfection of the battlefield then mentions that in the worst-affected villages, for example in the vicinity of Máslojedy and the Svítb Forest, it was necessary to bury approximately two thousand dead soldiers at once. The basic rules were not set for digging large pits for the mass burials of such a huge number of bodies, so for this reason, the dead were also thrown into drainage furrows, ditches, grenade holes or even just into ruts in unpaved roads. It is therefore unsurprising that there are records of unburied bodies being found in the Svítb Forest even ten months after the battle. By the spring of 1867, close to eight hundred crosses or other monuments are said to have been erected, which were supposed to mark the graves.⁴

To this day, circa five hundred crosses and monuments have been preserved on the vast battlefield, often erected above military graves. Over the course of decades, this battlefield has been transformed into a specific place of reverence and a zone of monument protection. However, the 20th century historical records have yielded substantial information regarding the finds of unmarked graves in the area of the entire battlefield. Most recently, an unmarked war grave was found in Rozběřice in 2022,⁵ and with the approaching construction of a motorway leading across the battlefield, it was clear that more finds would definitely occur.

Archaeological research

The archaeology of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 is still a novelty among scientific topics. Archaeologists in the Czech Republic focus mainly on battlefields from the 15th to 18th centuries.⁶ The war remains from 1866 in the form of war graves were examined by archaeologists only to a minimum extent during the 1990s. However, the intensity of the discovery of war graves on various battlefields has been on the increase since 2003 due to more frequent construction activities. Most have thus been investigated in the form of rescue archaeology.⁷ In general, the topic of archaeological investigation

4 Svatoňová S. et al. 1991, 96–131; Košťál R. 1925, 36–38; Feld F. 1867, 4–13.

5 Holas M. 2021.

6 Krajč Z. et al. 2017.

7 Holas M. 2017.

of war remains from 1866 was not comprehensively published until 2019,⁸ and other results of interdisciplinary research of selected battlefields helped to establish a basic methodological framework⁹ for domestic and foreign readers.¹⁰

Uncovering war graves is absolutely crucial for gaining knowledge concerning the form of military service in the 19th century and the nature of war injuries from battles. The most frequently examined graves in Europe are those from the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), which caused the deaths of a large number of men, who are often buried in graves that have not yet been marked to this day. These are uncovered both for research purposes and as a result of local building development. The latter situation occurred recently during a similar highway construction in Austria (Wagram battlefield),¹¹ where a number of war graves of soldiers and horses were found. Other research was conducted, for example, in Russia¹² (Smolensk, Borodino), Belgium (Waterloo) and Lithuania¹³ (Vilnius). In addition, the findings from the graves at the last-mentioned site have become an important source for analyses of a sample of the human population in the pre-industrial age of the early 19th century.¹⁴ In recent years, large-scale battlefield research projects, for example, in Poland, have targeted the battlefields of Pułusk¹⁵ (1806), Sarbinowo (Zorndorf, 1758), Kunowice¹⁶ (Kunersdorf, 1759) and Warsaw¹⁷ (1831). From more recent conflicts, it is worth mentioning the specialised research into mass graves of Polish soldiers murdered by the Soviets in Katyn.¹⁸

However, more extensive research into graves from the military conflicts of the 1850s and 1860s is not being undertaken in Europe, which is why the finds from Hradec Králové are absolutely crucial and deserve at least a preliminary presentation for now.

In 2024, the long-awaited beginning of the construction of the D35 motorway leading from Plotičtě nad Labem near Hradec Králové to Sadová, with a total length of 7.5 km, came to fruition. The route crossed almost in a south-north direction the centre of the zone of monument protection on the battlefield of 1866 near Hradec Králové, which is legislatively protected in the Czech Republic by the Act on State Monument Care. Therefore, the research was conducted using above-standard archaeological methods within a cooperation between the University of Hradec Králové, the company

8 Holas M. 2019.

9 Holas M. 2022; Holas M. 2023.

10 Holas M. 2024.

11 Binder M. et al. 2021.

12 Baumgartner G. 2019.

13 Signoli M. et al. 2008.

14 Palubeckaitė Ž. et al. 2006.

15 Wrzosek J. 2012.

16 Podruczny G., Wrzosek J. 2012.

17 Weker W. 2014.

18 Głosek M. (ed.), 2003.

Archaia, z. ú, the Museum of East Bohemia in Hradec Králové and the construction companies Eurovia and Smola HK. The commemorative aspect of the project was ensured by the construction of a new ossuary, where all the remains will be stored. For the purpose of investigating the war graves from 1866, a special research team was assembled, led by the authors of this paper.

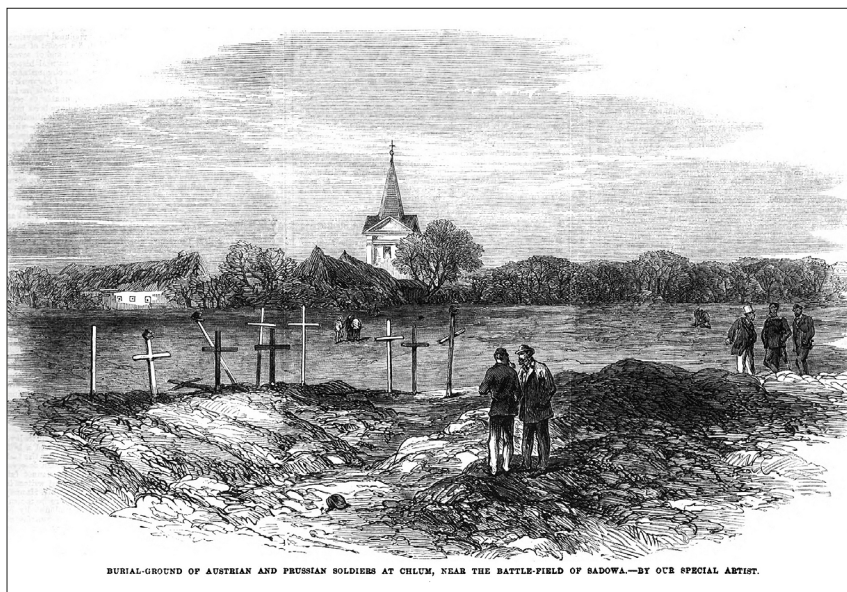


Fig. 3 Graves of soldiers at Chlum shortly after the battle (Source: The Illustrated London News, vol. 49, 25.8.1866, 193b)

The information provided is thus only preliminary, and more precise findings will be known after a complete laboratory evaluation, which is ongoing. However, from the basic field documentation significant differences can already be inferred in the form of war graves, which in the entire area under examination contained the remains of a total of 62 soldiers. A total of 12 funerary contexts of fallen soldiers (6 individual burials, 6 mass burials) and one war horse were examined. Demonstrable differences between the forms of burial of the fallen soldiers are most noticeable in the character of their placement in mass graves. According to the preliminary identification of the sets of artefacts, they were exclusively soldiers of the Austrian Imperial Army. The preliminary findings also showed that half of the individual burials were soldiers of the Prussian Army. In some cases, the fallen soldiers of the Prussian Army were buried separately even if the mass grave of the Austrian soldiers was less than 40 metres away, which indicates a possible sorting of bodies to be buried according to their military affiliation. In the following text, the focus will be on the burials of soldiers of the Austrian Army.

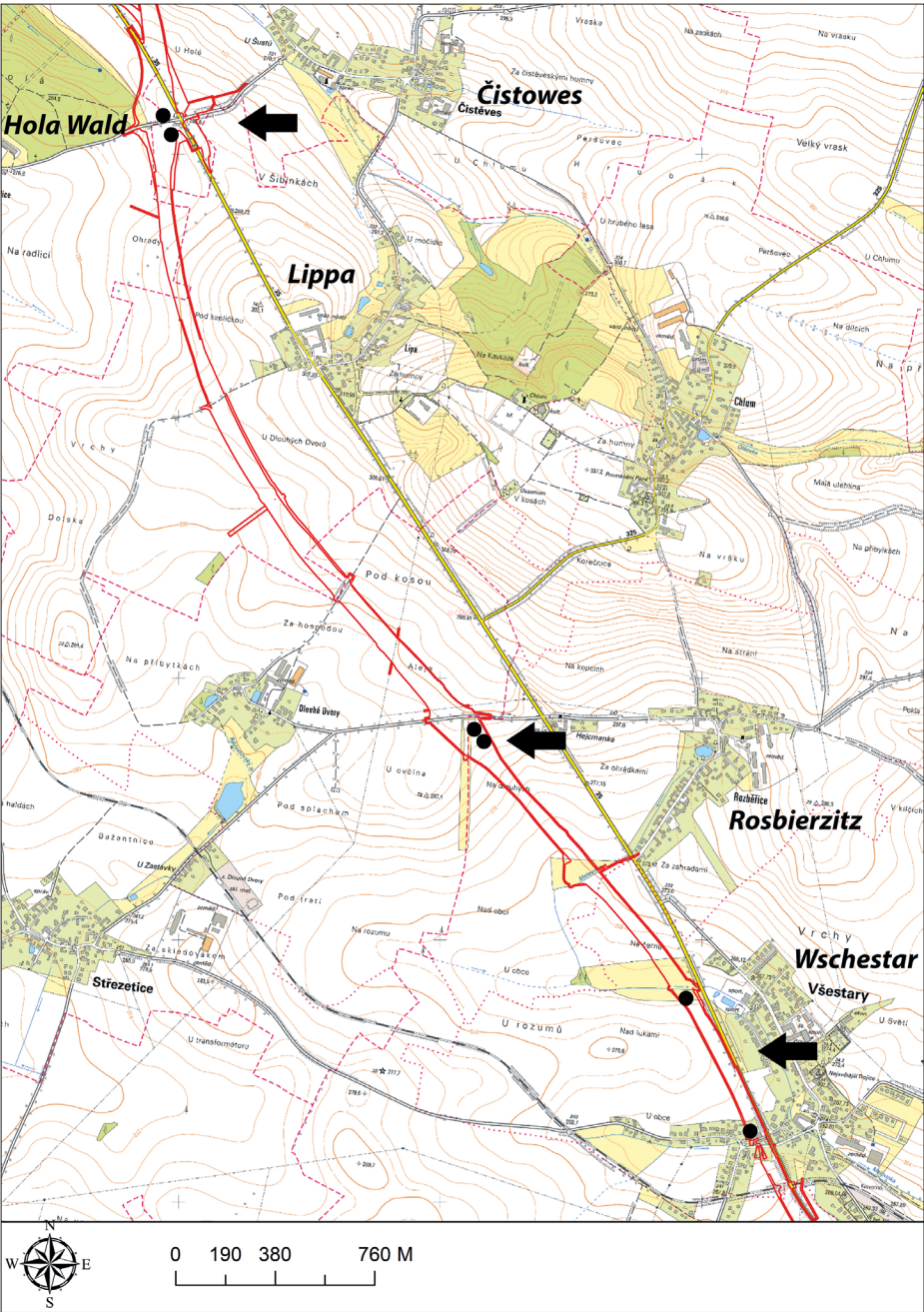


Fig. 4 Location of the examined graves on the route of the D35 motorway near Hradec Králové (Graphics by M. Holas)

In the overall distribution of the mass graves under investigation, three locations are prominent, which for clarity are recorded in the direction of the advance of the Prussian First Army, i.e. from north to south. The northernmost location is the area near the village of Čistěves (Čistowes). The second location is in the centre of the Austrian Army's position near Rozběřice (Rosbierzitz) and the third is near the village of Všešary (Wschestar). All three sites contain two mass graves each. In total, there are 6 mass graves, in which 56 bodies were deposited.

The first mass grave in the location at Čistěves contained a total of sixteen fallen soldiers in a grave pit 4 metres long and 2 metres wide. Before burial, the soldiers were undressed and their uniforms and military equipment were removed. Ten soldiers were buried in their underwear (documented by buttons from shirts and pants) and only one soldier was buried in a military coat and trousers. Fragments of metal components (small hooks at the legs) of these trousers point to the origin of the military uniform in the Hungarian part of the monarchy. All soldiers had a neckerchief fastened around their necks, which acted as neck protection from the cloth collar of the uniform. The neckerchiefs were fastened with iron buckles, thanks to which we know that no soldier was missing them in the grave. All soldiers were buried without shoes on and only two soldiers were placed in the grave with a headdress in the form of a felt shako with the brass emblem of a double-headed imperial eagle, which was covered with a protective cloth, as stated in the military regulation. The gravediggers placed the soldiers in the grave pit relatively irreverently in two layers and, at the edges of the pit, in three layers. The undressing of the soldiers and the removal of military equipment happened on the spot, because some parts (projectiles, fragments of shoe fittings) were found in the backfill of the grave pit away from the remains. The soldiers had no personal items with them, no rings or pendants.

The second grave was located not far from the first and contained the remains of a total of eight soldiers in a smaller pit (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide). Once more, no soldier was dressed in a uniform and only six soldiers were found with underwear buttons made of bone or porcelain, similar to the first grave. A total of five soldiers had neckerchiefs fastened around their necks and only one soldier wore trousers, again with the Hungarian cut. Only one soldier was buried with a Christian pendant in the form of a medallion.

At the second location near Rozběřice, the remains of a total of ten bodies were uncovered in the first larger grave. The pit here reached a length of 4 metres and a width of 2 metres. At first glance, the procedure of burying the bodies was better organised, as the bodies were placed next to each other in one layer. However, only nine of the individuals can be identified as soldiers, because one skeleton bears, in addition to a different set of artefacts (earrings), female features. The assemblage of artefacts generally suggests the presence of a large number of military uniforms and equipment. The uniform with Hungarian-style trousers is evidenced here with all

soldiers buried. A total of three shakos were found in the grave, the complete military equipment (leather straps for the ammunition pocket and bayonet sheath with iron components) remained with six soldiers and only one soldier was missing shoes. Various preserved ammunition pockets or bullet pouches were of interest. Four soldiers had these pouches full of ammunition and, conversely, two soldiers had empty pouches. One soldier had ammunition ready to shoot in his uniform pockets. It is remarkable that a total of 99.5 kreuzers in the form of many different copper and silver coins were found in the possession of one soldier (individual No. 2), which were kept in the pockets of his uniform.

The second grave at this location (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide) could accommodate only four buried soldiers, two of whom were again dressed in uniforms with Hungarian-style trousers. Only one shako was preserved in this grave and fragments from the field equipment of the Austrian Army were found again with three bodies. Three bullet pouches were also found, and only one was still closed and completely filled with ammunition. It is therefore evident that this soldier did not have time to fire his weapon during the battle. The shoes were uniquely preserved with all bodies.

At the last location near Věstary, a total of eighteen soldiers were buried in mass graves. The first grave (2 metres long and 1.5 metres wide) contained only three soldiers, two of whom were buried with uniforms, military equipment and shoes. A Shako was found preserved with one soldier and for the first time fragments of a haversack (backpack), which was made of hairy calf skin, were discovered in the grave. One of the soldiers had a cruciform pendant with Christ around his neck, another soldier had a wallet in his pocket.

The last described grave, containing the remains of fifteen men, was dug into the shape of an almost regular square with a side length of 2 metres. In this grave, ten bodies were buried with uniforms and twelve were buried with shoes. No remains of any pouches, shakos or other parts of military equipment were preserved. However, many of the buried soldiers had personal items in the pockets of their uniforms. These included one cruciform pendant, three wallets (in one case with coins and medals), three tobacco pipes, three knives and two combs.

In addition to the forms of burial, it is possible to further investigate recurring grave characteristics, including the dimensions of the pits and the average number of artefacts. Judging from the findings in the field, the grave pits were dug in three different sizes. The deepest with a depth of between 80 and 90 cm, medium-deep with a depth of between 50 and 60 cm and shallow with a depth of between 35 and 45 cm. The sets of artefacts also confirm three levels of their frequency. On average, the smallest number of artefacts per soldier was five to ten pieces. The middle level consists of ten to fifty artefacts, and the most numerous level exceeds fifty artefacts. Another important criterion is the location of the grave pits in the context of events of the battle day, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Grave locations and field battle

In order to discover why and for whom the military graves were dug, it is necessary to revisit the historical events related to the field battle and its spatial arrangement. At the beginning of the battle day, the Prussian commanders led their units of the First Prussian Army in several streams in the direction of Sadová (Sadowa), where the first shots of the battle day were heard. Here, the Prussian vanguard first clashed with the advanced patrols of the Austrian Northern Army, who, after exhausting resistance, withdrew to Lípa (Lippa). Against the advance of the Prussians, the Austrian corps deployed a total of 160 cannons at Lípa, which prevented the Prussians from moving forwards with their fire. At noon, however, the Prussians were able to oppose the Austrian batteries with 132 of their cannons and, supported by infantry reinforcements, tried to destroy the village and the artillerymen, which was unsuccessful. With this failure, the Prussian soldiers attracted the attention of the Austrian Infantry Regiment No. 49¹⁹ (IR Baron Hess) and its commander, who arbitrarily gave the order to attack in the direction of Dohalice and the Holá Forest (Holla Wald). This regiment was also supported on the right flank by the Infantry Regiment No. 44 (IR Erzherzog Albrecht), which, unlike the previous one, was recruited from the Kingdom of Hungary. However, the Prussian gunmen opened such terrifying fire from the forest at a distance of 300 steps that both regiments had to retreat with a large number of casualties.²⁰ These historical events in the vicinity of the Holá Forest and the findspots of two mass graves near the village of Čistěves correspond accurately with the form of the preserved artefacts in the graves. The buried soldiers thus most likely belong to the Infantry Regiment No. 44, which attacked on the right flank of the 49th Regiment and advanced exactly where the graves were found. According to the information from the official lists²¹ issued by the Austrian Military Office, it is known that the Infantry Regiment No. 44 reported 87 soldiers killed on the battlefield and 99 soldiers missing.²² It is possible that some of these 186 soldiers were buried in the above-mentioned two mass graves.

At the decisive moment of the battle at around two o'clock in the afternoon, when the Prussian units of the Guards Division occupied the village of Chlum in the very

19 The recruitment area was in Styria, Austria.

20 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, 261–264; 275–286.

21 The most important for this method of interpretation are the records of the number of soldiers killed on the battlefield and the number of soldiers who were no longer found in the military unit, but there were no witnesses to their killing, i.e. they were marked as missing. Frequently, the number of missing soldiers equals, sometimes even exceeds, the number of killed soldiers. It is therefore highly likely that the missing soldiers were also killed on the battlefields.

22 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, Appendix 3, p. 30.

centre of the Austrian defensive line after the Austrian unsuccessful defence, the Prussian Guards were also to seize the village of Rozběřice. In order not to allow the Prussian troops to advance and concentrate in the centre of the Austrian position, the Commander-in-Chief of the Austrian Northern Army ordered the still undeployed brigades of the Austrian Army Reserves to attack Chlum. These reserves consisted of the Austrian I Army Corps and VI Army Corps. The VI Army Corps first attacked Rozběřice, after which the I Army Corps was supposed to support it with an attack on Chlum. After reaching the area near the church in Chlum, however, the advance of the Austrians stopped, as at one point they found themselves in the crossfire of the Prussians, both infantry and artillery, from three sides. The Austrian troops had no choice but to return to their starting positions before being completely destroyed and gradually retreated to the Elbe.²³

These events had a major impact on the creation of four more mass graves, where two graves near Rozběřice are situated directly at the site of the VI Corps' attack on the village. As previously described, almost all the soldiers wore trousers with the Hungarian cut. The mentioned corps included only soldiers of the 60th Infantry Regiment (IR Prinz v. Wasa) who were recruited from the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (the city of Eger in today's Hungary) and, according to official records, this regiment reported the most missing men of the entire corps, totalling 573, which is five times more than the numbers reported by the other regiments. According to the records, this regiment identified only 14 soldiers as killed on the battlefield, which is very similar to the number of men buried in the two graves mentioned and examined.²⁴ Soldiers buried in the mass graves near Věstary may also belong to the same corps. In the smaller grave containing three buried soldiers, however, a more precise determination of the military unit is quite complicated. In the second grave, where fifteen soldiers were buried, in two of them the presence of numbered buttons of the 25th Jaeger Battalion is documented, which point to this corps. However, due to the small number of other military items, their more accurate identification is impossible for the time being.

After comparing the locations of the graves with historical cadastral maps (Imprints of Stable Cadastre from the mid-19th century), it can be observed that the mass graves near Čistěves have an evident relationship to the nearby road, and the same is also true of the graves near Rozběřice. The smaller grave at Věstary was dug in the area of grassy meadows and a nearby stream, and the larger grave was dug on plot No. 57, where there was a meadow between houses No. 46 and No. 47.

23 Bělina P., Fučík J. 2005, 412–419; K. K. Generalstabs 1868, 356–361.

24 K. K. Generalstabs 1868, Appendix 3, p. 32.



Fig. 5 An example of the irreverent burial of fallen soldiers without grave goods (a total of 16 individuals) in a mass grave at the location near Čistěves (Photo by M. Holas)



Fig. 6 The appearance of the smaller mass grave near Všeřetá with three soldiers and a number of artefacts (Photo and graphics by M. Holas)

Preliminary anthropological findings

Anthropological research of all remains is still in progress, therefore, it is not possible to provide an analytical assessment of all findings (e.g. age, stature, types of injuries).

The basic anthropological assessment took place directly on site using standard anthropological methods.²⁵ The age at death and stature were determined, and gunshot wounds and other injuries were recorded. With the exception of one questionable case, all individuals were clearly identified as male. For the individual whose sex cannot be determined by non-invasive methods, DNA analysis will be used.

The study characterises the population as very young and healthy, with an average age ranging from 18 to 25 years and stature between 160 and 165 cm. The most common pathological findings include tooth decay (caries), tartar (dental calculus), and tooth loss during life. Furthermore, the skeletons predominantly exhibit a robust build, with muscle attachments indicating increased physical exertion. No inflammatory changes were observed. Gunshot wounds were identified in two-thirds of the examined skeletons, manifesting as bullet holes in the skull, pelvis, chest, or limbs. Comminuted and complex limb fractures often indicate that a portion of the injured bone is missing. In contrast, gunshot injuries to the pelvis are simpler, characterised by clearly visible round entry and exit wounds.

Evaluation

In the preliminary evaluation, the authors have tried to answer the questions of who was buried in the graves and who had made the graves. The former question can be answered first, based on the character of the artefacts found. However, it is necessary to reconstruct the appearance of military uniforms and equipment at the time of the burial. This can be made possible by interpreting the placement of artefacts with the examined remains. This allows for the subsequent identification of the military unit of a specific fallen soldier. The findings may support the known spatial relationships of the grave pits with historical events and stages of the field battle.

In order to clarify who had conducted the burial, it is necessary to examine the placement of the bodies and thus reconstruct the form of the burial process. It is therefore evident from preliminary findings that the soldiers who were buried in the centre of the battle events at Rozběrice and Všešary were placed in the graves in full military dress with uniforms, shoes, equipment and sometimes even caps. Many were also buried with coins or other personal items. They were not robbed and the items from their uniforms were not removed. This approach corresponds to a burial process conducted under the supervision of the Prussian Army, observing a certain form of

25 Buikstra J.E., Ubelaker D. 1994.

piety or respect for the fallen soldiers. It is highly possible that in the first days after the battle, captured Austrian soldiers dug the graves for their fallen comrades-in-arms.

The opposite cases are known from the peripheral parts of the battlefield. The mass graves near Čistěves correspond to a burial process without much control, when soldiers are disposed of into the pits without any reverence and in the vast majority without uniforms, shoes, equipment or personal items. Strangely, two soldiers were buried in the graves with caps on their heads and only dressed in their underwear. The number of bodies in these graves, considering the pit size, is significantly increased compared to the previous ones.

The grave of fifteen soldiers near Věstary presents a third form of the burial process. For the most part, the soldiers were buried here in uniforms with shoes but without any military equipment. However, there were numerous personal items in their uniform pockets, from wallets with coins to tobacco pipes, knives or combs.

Preliminarily, it is possible to typologically divide the graves from a total of twelve funerary contexts into several groups according to depth and dimensions. These are the deepest ones with a depth of between 80 and 90 cm, medium-deep ones with a depth of between 50 and 60 cm and shallow ones with a depth of between 35 and 45 centimetres. The mass graves are either rectangular or square in plan, where larger graves are always dug to a width of approximately 2 metres with different lengths, which were probably based on the planned number of buried bodies (most often 4–5 metres).

Future evaluation of skeletal remains and further tracing of the origin of fallen soldiers will help to supplement this knowledge and expand upon it appropriately.



Fig. 9 Comminuted fracture of the distal part of the left femur after reconstruction in the laboratory (Photo: University of Hradec Králové)



Fig. 10 Burial of fellow soldiers under the auspices of the Prussian Army, Prussian-Danish War of 1864 (Kolding. Drawing by: Robert Landells)



Fig. 11 An example of the burial of fallen soldiers by the civilian population (Source: Hindorf A., Biron von Curland C.P.J. (eds), 1878, 25)

Conclusion

The research on the future route of a motorway running across the historic battlefield of the 1866 war near Hradec Králové has yielded a large amount of unique information regarding the forms of burial of soldiers of the Austrian Imperial Army directly on the battlefield shortly after the battle. The findings, which are of a preliminary nature, are evidenced mainly by the archaeological description of grave contexts and the recovered artefacts. The findings confirm the different forms of burial, which depended fundamentally on the place where it was performed. Burials were conducted preferentially in the centre of the battlefield, probably due to the large number of fallen and perhaps under the supervision of the Prussian Army. In the peripheral parts, the burials apparently took place without supervision, which is confirmed by the striking absence of military material and personal items of the fallen soldiers and the irreverent handling of the bodies.

According to historical maps, out of the six mass graves, four were dug in the middle of fields, one grave was dug in a meadow and one grave was dug in a plot between houses. The fact that none of these graves has been marked in the field or the marking has not been preserved to this day is strange. It can therefore be said with certainty that under the topsoil on the battlefield near Hradec Králové, hundreds of similarly unmarked war graves must be still hidden.

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The Partisan Trace in the Koriukivka Tragedy (16 January – 11 March 1943)

Summary: This study examines the concealment of information regarding the Nazi genocide of the civilian population in the town of Koriukivka in March 1943 by the leadership of guerrilla units led by Fedorov and Popudrenko, based on an analysis of archival documents.

The article explores the possible motives that may have guided the partisan leaders in deliberately suppressing the true causes and circumstances of the Koriukivka tragedy. The tactic of ‘sweeping one’s tracks’ by the so-called people’s avengers, including the concealment of their own culpability, became a defining feature of the Soviet side’s efforts to avoid potential retaliation.

Particular attention is given to several obscure yet revealing episodes in the lives of the main figures involved—Dmitriy Rvanov, Nicholas Popudrenko, and Alexei Fyodorov. It is suggested that the tragic death of N. Popudrenko, as well as the tacit justification (and perhaps even exaltation) of A. Fyodorov by the Soviet leadership, may be directly connected to the events that unfolded in Koriukivka village, Chernihiv region, in late February to early March 1943.

The author concludes that the guerrillas’ inactivity and their silence regarding their own responsibility necessitate a critical reassessment and symbolic ‘dethronement’ of the partisan leaders, despite their contributions to the struggle against the Nazi invaders during the Second World War.

Keywords: Koriukivka massacre, Ukraine, WW II, archival documents, military operations, genocide, guerrillas, falsification, cipher telegrams

Introduction

The restoration of historical justice in the past’s assessment, which became relevant during the years of Ukraine’s independence, prompted scholars to take a critical position in relation to several episodes of World War II canonised by Soviet propaganda.

In times of impartial attitude to the heroism and tragedy of the events of those years, modern scholars resorted to a critical rethinking of its fundamental postulates. One of such historical stereotypes is the concept of idealisation of the so-called 'people's avengers' — Soviet partisans and underground fighters.

It is impossible to discover how certain events unfolded and to determine their consequences without uncovering the causal factors. Establishing a cause-and-effect relationship in the process of studying the past is a basic postulate for a historian. Such a relationship should be based on a fairly specific primary source base: memories of participants in the events, eyewitness accounts, memoirs of leaders, analysis of archival documents, all supplemented by logically and factually substantiated conclusions of the researcher.

One such event, the causes of which have not yet been fully explained, is the mass extermination by the Nazis of the inhabitants of the town of Koriukivka, Chernihiv region, in March 1943.

Despite the significant number of publications devoted to the Nazi genocide of the inhabitants of Koriukivka, this tragic episode of the German-Soviet war remains a little-studied page of history. The Koriukivka tragedy is considered the largest single-moment destruction of the civilian population during the Second World War in Europe. Despite this, the genocide of the Koriukivka people did not appear as evidence of the inhumanity of Nazism at the Nuremberg Trials. The Koriukivka tragedy did not become a textbook canonical episode of the atrocities of the German-fascist occupiers in the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which should have been included in history textbooks.

Despite its scale and resonance, over a period of over eighty years, historical science has only outlined the general contours of those tragic events. Historians generally focus on the results, as if intentionally overlooking the motives for the Hungarian punitive expedition.

Aim of the Study

The article aims to review the causes of the Koriukivka tragedy of 1943, which allows for the clarification of the fatal role of the actions of Soviet partisans in provoking the enemy. It is believed that inadequate actions of the Hungarian *Sonderkommando* were caused by a previous attack on the Koriukivka settlement by Soviet partisans. It was the Koriukivka partisan sabotage action that became the impetus, and perhaps one of the main reasons for the systematic and gradual destruction of the civilian population of the aforementioned settlement by the occupiers.

To achieve the aim, the study pursues several objectives:

- To analyse the causes and course of the Soviet partisan operation, arguing that the partisans spontaneously decided to attack the town and adjacent settlements

for food and personal ambitions, and that officials falsified the reports regarding the ‘successful operation’ afterwards.

- To examine the role of the partisans in provoking the enemy and the scale of the tragedy, assessing whether the cruelty of the partisans provoked an asymmetric response from the punishers and whether the death of the prisoners was the reason for the repeated burning of the city.
- To evaluate the inaction and consequences for the command, justifying why the partisan unit did not take revenge for the destruction of civilians, having enough forces to do so, and how the leadership tried to hide its responsibility.
- To investigate Soviet myths and commemoration, revealing the mechanisms of Soviet propaganda that for decades silenced the role of the ‘people’s avengers’ and to justify the need to recognise the Koriukivka tragedy as a symbol of national grief.

Results and Discussion

Using memoir literature (which concerns the Koriukivka tragedy), which was carefully censored during Soviet times, makes it impossible to establish any objective picture of those events. The leader of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region, Balytskyi Hryhoriy, deliberately ignores it.¹ The diary of Mykola Popudrenko, which ends a month and a half before this tragic episode, does not add objectivity.² The Koriukivka tragedy is not in the field of view of the leader of the Ukrainian partisan movement, Tymofiy Strokach.³ In his memoirs, Oleksiy Fedorov does not mention the genocide of the Koriukivka people at all.⁴

However, representatives of the middle management and ordinary partisans left behind memories of the attack on the town and the atrocities of the punishers in early March 1943. In this context, it is worth highlighting the memories of Soviet partisans Hryhoriy Artozyeyev,⁵ Fedir Bykov,⁶ Ivan Vodopyan⁷ and war journalist Mykhaylo Sheremet.⁸

Unlike the direct leaders and coordinators of the partisan movement in the north of the Chernihiv region, the memoirs of the leaders of individual partisan groups and participants in those events allows for the restoration of the general picture of the partisan battle, which became the impetus for the corresponding reaction from the Nazi executioners.

1 Bazhan O.V. et al. (eds), 2010.

2 Popudrenko M.M. 1949.

3 Strokach T.A. 1966.

4 Fedorov O.F. 1981.

5 Artozev G.S. 1956, 267.

6 Bykov F.I. 1987, 168.

7 Vodopian I.I. 1982, 175.

8 Sheremet M.S. 1947, 163; Sheremet M.S. 1964, 179.

Isolated testimonies of witnesses and eyewitnesses, acts of state commissions investigating the Nazi crimes depict the consequences of the Koriukivka tragedy. However, little attention was paid to revealing its causes.⁹

Soviet researchers and witnesses of this event focused mainly on the misanthropy associated with the brutal destruction of the inhabitants of the town of Koriukivka. The analysis of the reasons, determination of motivation and excessive cruelty on the part of the punishers had remained beyond the attention of scholars until now.

There was a purposeful reprogramming of the consciousness and subconsciousness of people who were supposed to stop grieving and start rebuilding the war-torn infrastructure of their land. Although this artificially constructed, ideologically balanced motivation aided national recovery, it also contributed to the gradual suppression from memory of events that could be seen as a military-strategic error with unpredictable consequences.

Some documents cited and used in this article are stored in fund No. 62 of the Central State Archive of Public Associations of Ukraine (TsAGOU), a significant amount of which contains information concerning the partisan movement in the Ukrainian SSR. Several files were introduced into scientific circulation in 2006 in the collection of Oleksandr Gogun and Anatoliy Kentiy dedicated to revealing the specifics of the activities of Soviet partisans, in the context of reviewing the established heroic tendencies of the communist era.¹⁰

The plan for the attack on Koriukivka and a report on the results of the partisan action were discovered and published on the page of the Ukrainian Internet resource *Historical Truth* on 4 March 2011 by Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Zinchenko.¹¹

Since 2014, Kharkiv scientists Nataliya Saltan and Oleksandr Saltan have joined the study and analysis of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region. Based on a critical systematisation of existing research and a new reading of archival documents, an attempt was made to rethink the root causes and development of events related to the Koriukivka tragedy, as well as a number of mysterious related facts.¹²

The analysis of primary source data continued the archival and documentary phase of the study of events related to the Koriukivka tragedy. This stage became an alternative to the memoir period of ascertaining individual episodes of the genocide of the civilian population of the town of Koriukivka. It opened a new page in the systematisation of historiography and the source base in the study of this scientific problem.

9 *Akt Koriukovskoi raionnoi komissii...* 1978, 98–99; *Akt o zverstvakh fashistskikh zakhvatchikov...* 1985, 301–303; Melnyk S.M., Boiko M.K. 1994, 150; Narizhnyi B.M. 1988, 176; Skrypka M. 2003, 6; Tykhonovskiy A.M. 1973, 5; *Sovetskaia Ukraina...* 1985, 511.

10 Gogun A., Kentii A. (eds), 2006, 403.

11 Zinchenko O.M. 2011.

12 Saltan N.M. 2015, 316–319; Saltan O.M. 2014b, 61–74; Saltan O.M. 2014a, 123–147.

The archive documents of the TsDAGOU, related to the events of the Koriukivka tragedy, can be conditionally divided into two categories: reports by special agents and documents of an operational-tactical nature. Inherently, they are cipher telegrams, plans and reports of combat operations.

The study of the first group of primary source data invokes a feeling for the internal atmosphere that prevailed in the first Chernihiv partisan unit in February 1943. This is the so-called moral side of partisan reality, which traditionally remained behind the scenes and as is known, directly influenced the fighting spirit of the people's avengers.

The second group of documents, in terms of content and subject matter, is directly related to the events of particular interest, due to being of a planned and final nature. Their authors are the main figures in the events related to the Koriukivka tragedy: the chief of staff of the first Chernihiv partisan unit — Dmytro Rvanov and its temporary head — M. Popudrenko.

The first of the documents — a plan for an attack on the town of Koriukivka and two neighbouring villages — appears as a perfect, well-considered, thorough military operation to the minutest detail, which was conducted, 'on wheels': the day after its development.¹³ This document allows for the analysis of a partisan sabotage scenario whose success, according to the text, the 'people's avengers' did not doubt.

The visual layout of the Koriukivka partisan operation is embodied in the form of a map drawn mechanically on a piece of Whatman paper 59.4 x 84.1 cm.¹⁴ Despite its considerable age, the map looks new. It has no dirty spots, tears, folds (e.g., from being kept in an officer's map case or in a boot), tobacco smell, and traces of soot, typical of other documents of this type. The folds of the map are not glued, which indicates its infrequent use. This is another confirmation that the map could have been drawn after the Koriukivka battle.

It is not known whether there was a replacement plan for the attack on Koriukivka in case 'Plan A' did not work. At least, we have not yet discovered such information. The encrypted telegram signed by M. Popudrenko under No. 902.209 and the report by D. Rvanov, according to their content, are of a summary-generalising nature, some aspects of which warrant a more detailed focus.¹⁵

Judging by the pathos of both messages — everything went as well as possible: the town was captured, the garrison was destroyed, prisoners were released, people were helped and they returned with rich trophies. The action was presented as a large-scale and effective operation, the reason for which was the desire to inflict irreparable losses on the enemy, and not to free the family of an ordinary partisan. Obviously, the liberation of Feodosii Stupak's children was only a pretext and by no means the reason

13 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 21.

14 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 23.

15 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47; F. 64. Op. 1. Spr. 19. No. 22.

for the attack on the Koriukivka garrison. The results of the attack can be conditionally divided into two groups: military (destruction of the enemy) and trophy (seizure of material resources). By comparing and systematising, it can be concluded that the second factor was dominant. The partisan attack on the town became something akin to a socialist competition, to destroy the enemy and seize material resources.

The results of the work were embodied in a report on the implementation and over-fulfilment of the plan.¹⁶ However, M. Popudrenko went even further. Having round-the-clock access to the radio, he reported 'up the mountain' concerning the successfully conducted anti-Nazi action, confirming that 'he has the ability and desire to conduct large offensive operations.'¹⁷

Mentioning D. Rvanov, Fedir Lysenko, and himself as 'the leaders of production' as if implying that they should be encouraged somehow. At the same time, M. Popudrenko clearly outlines the role of all the characters involved: D. Rvanov organised and implemented, F. Lysenko developed success, but it was Popudrenko who exercised overall leadership.

Based on the specifics of the party hierarchy, the system of circular responsibility in matters of accountability, which was formed back in the 1930s, everyone took risks; but M. Popudrenko was the most at risk. If something had gone wrong, the tribunal would have been unavoidable, but M. Popudrenko could have blamed everything on his subordinates at any moment, who had shown excessive enthusiasm for the cause. In any case, the negative had to be carefully hidden. Therefore, it was no coincidence that on the first night of 2 March 1943, M. Popudrenko sent a radio message full of victorious reports. Regarding the German mass retaliation action, which actually turned the capture of Koriukivka by the partisans into a Pyrrhic victory, not a word was said.¹⁸

It is also worth noting the rather short time between the Koriukivka operation and the partisan report that reveals its details. The attack was undertaken on 27 February, and on the night of 1–2 March 1943, M. Popudrenko sent the legendary victorious radiogram No. 902.209. The commander of the partisan unit had to carefully consider its text. There was more than enough time — almost two days. Its content is almost impeccable from the point of view of the data indicated there.¹⁹ If the results are compared of the Koriukivka operation (allegedly compiled by D. Rvanov) with the text of the above-mentioned message by M. Popudrenko, it should be noted that he minimised its scale. Such actions can be explained by purely nomenclature pragmatism.

Underestimating the scale of the results obtained allowed them to receive help from the mainland. There is no such thing as excess ammunition. And if there is enough of it,

¹⁶ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 22, 47.

¹⁷ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 34.

¹⁸ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

¹⁹ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

it can be exchanged for food, clothing and horse-drawn transport from the local population, or from the police, Hungarians and Germans.

It should be noted that the partisan unit was in dire need of food. Especially considering that after returning from Moscow, O. Fedorov would launch a raid on Right-Bank Ukraine, which required significant resources. Therefore, the partisans under the command of the acting unit commander M. Popudrenko attacked Koriukivka and two adjacent villages — Tikhonovichi and Huta-Studenetska. Judging by the reports of the partisans, a large amount of food and fuel was concentrated in these settlements, which could be used by the partisans who remained in the Chernihiv region, or by those who were to go on a raid.

This study draws attention to several interesting details, the consideration of which allows for a reassessment of the nature of the event. The scale of the action, or rather its consequences, D. Rvanov described quite vividly and in detail. This person had a literary talent and assessed the event as a former military man. But Popudrenko, judging by the text of the above-mentioned cipher telegram, is a talented extra. He reports on the work done more specifically, but without high indicators. At the same time, he did not forget to note the performer, D. Rvanov, and to contrast him with F. Lysenko, whose group destroyed the enemies, captured weapons, provisions and dispersed the German troops. The last sentence of this document, for unknown reasons, partially disappeared from the text of the same radiogram, published together with the diary of M. Popudrenko back in 1949.²⁰

Therefore, it can be concluded that Lysenko's group had some separate tasks or acted autonomously. His name does not appear in the plan of the operation, which required concerted and coordinated actions of all its participants without exception. M. Popudrenko emphasises that F. Lysenko led the second group, which 'destroyed the gendarmerie garrison and dispersed the German armed formations.'²¹ It transpired that Lysenko's group conducted a distracting punitive raid, while the main forces of the partisans were concentrated around Koriukivka. The pursuit of the enemy cannot be dismissed, as the enemy suffered minor losses, despite the formal tactical perfection of the planned event.

As can be witnessed during the operation, the 'Lysenko men' clearly demonstrated themselves as professional quartermaster marauders. Despite the insignificant war trophies, Lysenko's group provided the connection with grain and meat in such quantities that the excess was distributed to the local population. In the aforementioned cipher telegram, M. Popudrenko transparently hints that these are his men. However, this hint cannot be interpreted unambiguously.

²⁰ Popudrenko M.M. 1949, 154.

²¹ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

In this situation, M. Popudrenko found himself in an advantageous position. The forces of the unit are formally at his disposal. The operation is planned and implemented by D. Rvanov. The 'Lysenkovtsy' act independently, delivering an auxiliary blow or performing a distracting manoeuvre. The success or failure of the operation primarily falls on D. Rvanov, and M. Popudrenko exercises general leadership, acting as an overseer.

The formal uncoordinated actions of the partisan units during the Koriukivka operation are obvious, and M. Popudrenko clearly distinguishes between 'their' and 'our' roles in these events. His logic is easy to understand. The enemy Sonderkommando has already completed the first stage of the cleanup of Koriukivka: therefore, sooner or later, someone must take responsibility for the inability to prevent the Nazi horror. The destruction of Koryukivka remained a constant and fatal burden for Popudrenko. Therefore, he tries in any way to justify himself and frame someone else.

However, in addition to artificial documentary gaps, there is a fact that is indicated in the incomplete and most reliable publication of the above-mentioned cipher telegram. Among those captured by the partisans, one German is mentioned alongside the Hungarians. Unlike the latter, M. Popudrenko focuses on this individual, identified as a railway engineer from Dresden, raising the question of his identity. It is possible that this person was extremely important and could be used as an argument or the subject of certain agreements during negotiations with the German side. Perhaps the exchange did not take place. The German was shot or killed under brutal torture. This may have provoked the cruelty of the punishers.²²

The summary of D. Rvanov and the radio report of M. Popudrenko contain some other significant discrepancies. It is necessary to pay attention to the scale of the operation. D. Rvanov's document refers to the entire settlement. Judging by the tactical and strategic considerations indicated in the attack plan, significant partisan forces were involved in this action, all directions leading to Koriukivka were blocked.²³

In contrast, M. Popudrenko's report significantly narrows the scope of the operation to the capture of a railway station. This prompts the question of whether the partisans seized a town or merely a railway junction. By definition, a station is a fixed stopping point for railway and other land transport, usually located on the outskirts of a settlement. Theoretically, it was not advisable to involve the forces of the entire unit in an attack on the prison. Several sabotage groups with the support of the Koriukivka underground cell could cope with this task perfectly. Reading the document, one gets the impression that it was planned to capture the railway station, but the scale of the operation, its uncontrollability and the fighting fervour of the partisans significantly expanded the theatre of hostilities.

²² TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

²³ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 21, 22.

This is what gave M. Popudrenko the reason to position the attack on Koriukivka as a successful and strategically important action, emphasising in the next cipher telegram that he and his men have the ability to conduct large-scale operations. This could have influenced the asymmetric actions of the punishers, which led to mass casualties among the civilian population.

Another interesting fact is worth noting — the signatories of the documents. The attack plan was developed and signed by one person — the chief of staff of the Chernihiv formation of partisan detachments — D. Rvanov. M. Popudrenko, who in the absence of O. Fedorov actually led the formation, and Fedir Korotkov, who at that time performed the duties of the commander of the partisan detachment of O. Fedorov, for reasons unknown are not listed in the list of persons who planned the attack. They gave verbal consent, consciously removed themselves from planning the operation, shifting responsibility to the partisan headquarters, or it may have been possible that they were not informed by D. Rvanov.

The final summary of the attack on the town includes the names of individuals who could not physically be present at the time of its conclusion. This includes the commissar of the Chernihiv partisan unit, Volodymyr Druzhynin, and its head — O. Fedorov, who were in Moscow at that time. However, the absence of V. Druzhinin and Fedorov, whose surnames are mentioned in the aforementioned document, is further complicated by the absence of a concluding date. This allows for the conclusion that it was printed and signed, ‘retroactively’. There is no doubt that D. Rvanov wanted to use this document to protect himself in case the military prosecutor’s office began an investigation into the causes of the destruction of Koriukivka. This raises the question of why V. Druzhinin and O. Fedorov were formally associated with events in which they did not directly participate. It is obvious that the Rvanov report was, if not compiled, then at least signed by V. Druzhinin and O. Fedorov no earlier than 5 March 1943 — after their return from Moscow. It is conceivable that they were thus protecting D. Rvanov, with whom M. Popudrenko was distrustful. It is possible that D. Rvanov and M. Popudrenko were in conflict. Although a careful reading of the text of Mykola Mykytovych’s diary does not confirm this, it remains unclear why M. Popudrenko, when printing the text of cipher telegram No. 902.209, did not take as a basis the results of the Koriukivka operation recorded in Rvanov’s report. After all, the main volume of work was conducted by the ‘Fedorovites’ — and should be privy to the report. At the same time, M. Popudrenko emphasises in the aforementioned cipher telegram that it came from Fedorov’s detachment. This means that M. Popudrenko clearly outlined the key nodes of the system: ‘organisation’ and ‘direct participation’ — D. Rvanov; ‘general management’ — he (M. Popudrenko). On the same day, at 10:30 p.m., M. Popudrenko sends a second encrypted telegram to Timofey Strokach, noting that not everything went well. There are seriously wounded, and possibly dead; a large amount of ammunition has been exhausted — so replenishments are needed.

The war trophies captured from the enemy are not enough to conduct active sabotage operations, for which the detachment as a whole is ready. Theoretically, after the attack on Koriukivka, the Soviet partisans expected a large-scale action by the occupying authorities to destroy their units. That is why M. Popudrenko hastily tries to get the 'centre' ammunition as soon as possible. The question arises as to the reason for such a rush to provide ammunition: the desire for revenge — or the necessity to repel a possible attack by Hitler's special forces to destroy partisan groups.

Nevertheless, the presence of seriously wounded remains unclear. It is worth noting that the partisans suffered no losses during the attack on the Koriukivka garrison. At least, no such data exists in Rvanov's report and Popudrenko's encrypted telegram. This short message from the leader of the partisans of the Chernihiv region expressed, first of all, the readiness to conduct large-scale military operations. The text of the cipher telegram contains the phrase 'I have the opportunity', as opposed to the alternative phrase 'I want to'. The actual opportunity to beat the enemy, to conduct an act of retaliation for the destruction of Koriukivka, was supposed to be based on the certainty of the success of such steps. In other words, the Chernihiv partisans had all the necessary means: personnel, a high level of professionalism, support from the local population and a sufficient amount of ammunition. Provided all the listed factors were present, the desire (I want to fight) was supposed to be supplemented by the functional component (I can fight) of the partisan formations that operated in the northern regions of the Chernihiv region.

Despite being 33 years old, M. Popudrenko was clearly aware that collective responsibility does not always work in war. Despite the scale of the Koriukivka operation by the partisans, the German punitive action did not simply overshadow it. It turned the actions of the Rvanov-Lysenko detachments into a Pyrrhic victory. The scale of the SS genocide against Koriukivka and its inhabitants would definitely become known in Moscow. And then punishment could no longer be avoided. It is therefore not surprising that M. Popudrenko sent another coded telegram almost a day after the 'heroic radio message' — essentially a plea. He said: 'we are ready to atone for our guilt, even take revenge — just take away the seriously wounded (whose presence slows down the mobility of the unit's actions) and give us ammunition!'

The Germans destroyed another settlement. Before that, such actions happened on a regular basis. The activation of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region had little effect on the weakening of the dynamics of the destruction of settlements and their inhabitants in the northern regions of the region. The genocide of the civilian population of Koriukivka outweighed the total losses of peaceful residents of the three northern regions of the Chernihiv region for the entire period of German occupation.²⁴

24 *Informatsiini materialy...* 2023.

Regarding the destroyed Koriukivka, they learned 'on the mountain', although the statistical data on the causes of demographic losses of this settlement were of little interest to the Soviet leadership at that time. In war as in war — that's why everything was blamed on the Germans. In legal practice, this is called excess — going beyond the limits of what is permitted, or *casus improvisus* (*unforeseen event*), the main content of which, by external signs, corresponds to what happened on 1, 2 and 9 March 1943 in the town of Koriukivka.

The special commission, convened in September 1943 and 1944, was limited to clarifying the tragic consequences of this event. Among the motives, only the statement of the bestial cruelty of the occupiers appeared.²⁵

The USSR Military Prosecutor's Office did not investigate this case, which was most likely deliberately hindered by interested parties. It is not excluded that one of these interested parties could have been O. Fedorov. Ultimately, the death of M. Popudrenko, in the author's opinion, halted the process of identifying the perpetrators of this tragedy from the Soviet side.

Summing up this article, it should be noted that a careful and impartial study of archival documents dedicated to the Koriukivka tragedy allows scholars to emphasise the real factors behind its cause. A certain disproportion between the probable and formal side of this event is noteworthy.

The available archival documents contain quite significant discrepancies. The inconsistencies in the final reports submitted to different addressees are evident. It remains unclear on whose accounts the partisan leaders, D. Rvanov and M. Popudrenko, relied when preparing their reports — particularly given that their participation in the attack on the town has not been substantiated.

Referring to the content of the above-mentioned documents and the timing of their conclusion, a clear pattern emerges: a tendency to create self-serving alibis, conceal information, distort facts and engage in deliberate efforts to obscure the truth.

Conclusions

To summarise, it is important to consider the following factors:

- The chronological framework of the Koriukivka tragedy: 16 January – 11 March 1943.
- The starting date of this event should be considered the departure of the partisan unit commander, O. Fedorov, to Moscow. The ending date is marked by the beginning of the raid by the Chernihiv partisan unit on the right bank of the Desna River.

25 *Akt Koriukovskoi raionnoi komissii...* 1978, 98–99; *Akt o zverstvakh fashistskikh zakhvatchikov...* 1985, 301–303.

- The February attack on Koriukivka by Soviet partisans was driven by the personal ambitions of M. Popudrenko and, primarily, the desire to improve the food and material supply of the unit.
- Despite the availability of military-tactical documents, the partisan units attacked the town semi-spontaneously.
- The map of the Koriukivka operation, the combat report, and possibly the attack plan, were created and signed ‘retroactively’.
- The inhuman and asymmetric actions of the punishers were most likely undertaken due to the excessive cruelty of individual partisan units.
- Mykola Popudrenko, and over time, O. Fedorov, deliberately suppressed and falsified the fact of the Koriukivka tragedy.
- Koriukivka is the only settlement in the Chernihiv region that was destroyed by the enemy in two stages during the German-Soviet war.
- The two-stage destruction of Koriukivka can be explained by the breakdown of negotiations with the enemy regarding the return or exchange of prisoners, who were presumably brutally killed.
- The partisan unit had the capability and therefore could theoretically have conducted a massive retaliatory action; however, its leadership considered it inexpedient.
- This is explained by the reluctance to unleash a local war, which could lead to the disruption of the planned raid by the main forces of the unit, as well as the destruction of all partisan forces in Pravodesenna.
- Considering the tragic consequences, the partisan operation became a ‘Pyrrhic victory’ and a ‘sword of Damocles’ for O. Fedorov and M. Popudrenko.
- O. Fedorov made M. Popudrenko a ‘scapegoat’, who would die on 6 July 1943, under rather strange circumstances.

The perpetrators of the tragedy on the part of the enemy did not receive a fair punishment for the war crime they committed, which has no statute of limitations.

For many decades, the Soviet government shifted responsibility for the actions committed onto the occupiers, deliberately concealing and falsifying the role of the so-called ‘people’s avengers’.

To gain a more objective understanding of the events related to the Koriukivka tragedy, it is imperative to conduct a thorough analysis of the available historical documents from the Hungarian and German sides.

Despite its scale, the Koriukivka tragedy has never become a symbol of national grief and conscious commemoration in Ukraine and remains only fragmentary and local in nature.

Several questions still concern specific details of the partisan punitive action — in particular, the place and role of individuals such as F. Lysenko, D. Rvanov, M. Popudrenko, and the infamous German doctor from Dresden along with the attitude of the partisans towards trophies and prisoners.

Further exploration of the details of the Koriukivka tragedy is possible only if the archival funds of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the Central State Archive of Public Associations of Ukraine (TsDAGOU) and TSAVOU, are studied, along with primary sources in Russian archives, primarily the Russian State Archive of Modern History (RDANI) and the Russian State Military Archive (RDVA). The most valuable contents of these archives could be the subjectively critical testimonies of special agents and 'envious people', who acted as indicators of the activities of Soviet partisans. A more objective picture of events could be gleaned by reading the top-secret combat logs of partisan units. By comparing the information contained with partisan reports, researchers would be able to reconstruct the true events.

It would suffice to compare memoirs and documentary-journalistic publications that describe not so much the Nazi genocide as the partisan sabotage, as herein lies not only the pretext but also the root cause of the asymmetric actions of the punishers. Despite the high degree of opportunism and bias, this type of primary source will contribute to a comparative analysis of archival and memoir data regarding the partisan military operation.

As noted above, the emergence of a new impetus in the disclosure of this tragic episode of the Soviet-Nazi confrontation would be facilitated by the creation of a joint Ukrainian-German commission of scientists, which should study the military archives of the FRG. Their study will allow for the most objective assessment of this tragic episode of World War II.

Scientific analysis of the above-mentioned historical event should be conducted taking into account the actual steps of both representatives of the partisan underground movement and the occupation authorities. It is precisely the comparison of the motivational positions of both warring camps that will contribute to the reconstruction of the most truthful and realistic picture of the events that happened around the town of Koriukivka in February–March 1943.

Thus, the study of the events related to the genocide of the Koriukivka residents in March 1943 reaches a qualitatively new level. Its main content is based on identifying the true motives of both the Soviet and German sides. Ultimately, only an awareness of the motivational factors will make it possible to uncover the true reasons for the extraordinary steps of the opposing groups at the turning point of the German-Soviet war. Finally, identifying the true reasons for the actions of the subjective side of this crime will give an answer to the question 'why did it happen?' Having received it, scientists will be able to identify the names of all the criminals, and Ukraine will eliminate one of its 'white spots' known as the Koriukivka tragedy.

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The School Image of The Spanish Civil War and the Second World War as an Instrument for Collective Memory Manipulation

A Comparative Case of History and Civics Textbooks from Early Francoist Spain and People's Republic of Poland During Stalinism

Summary: This article compares the school image of the wartime past (the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War), created during the transformative early postwar phase of Francoism in Spain and Communism in Poland. Demonstrating the political usefulness of the narratives on war was crucial to the consolidation of both regimes. Legitimisation of the new regime called for emphasising the war effort, not only in defeating the enemy but also in its struggle for social issues. For school-taught history, the early years of both dictatorships marked a period of breaking with prewar educational concepts, introducing and testing new 'revolutionary' pedagogical solutions. This article not only explains the aspirations of political rulers to rebuild the students' memory but also contributes to our understanding of the textbook authors' perception of the recent past. It analyses the meanings of terms specific to mythical stories, such as nation, power, heroes and their deeds, or wartime struggle.

The initial phase of People's Poland and Franco's Spain was thus a period of 'identity formation'. Those in power sought to create a homogeneous 'imagined community' with the leading party, where the right to rule was legitimised by the victory in the recent war. One of the tools used was the manipulation of the collective memory of the students.

The following cross-national study of Spanish and Polish teaching materials, which employs the analysis of over 90 primary sources in the form of History and Civics textbooks, seeks to elucidate the similarities and differences in the pursuit of educational politics in the two Cold War

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.05> — received: 2025-11-03 — verified: 2025-12-21 — accepted: 2026-03-08

77-95

funding information: PRELUDIUM scientific grant (2016/21/N/HS3/03461) — **conflicts of interests:** none — **declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** not used — **ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication — **the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** [MCh 100%]



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enemy camps. Comparative studies enable the discernment of phenomena that may not be readily apparent in the context of a single country's research.

This study seeks to establish which narratives were used to mark the textual boundaries of war heroes' behaviour that should have served as a moral compass for students in their epistemological orientation in the 'new world'. Questions are posed concerning which discursive strategies were used in the early stages of both dictatorships to memorise the path to victory. This analysis seeks to establish whether, and how, the textbook narratives differed and whether they abounded in arguments that were universal for the consolidation of totalitarian power. The conclusion summarises the usefulness of studying narratives concerning both wars when examining collective memory and group identity.

Keywords: modern history, Spanish Civil War, collective memory, civics textbooks, Poland, fascism, stalinism, political myths

Introduction

This study compares the school image of the war (the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War in Poland) created during the transformative early postwar phase of Francoism in Spain (1939–1951) and Communism in Poland (1945–1956).¹ The theoretical framework utilised in this study encompasses the theories of totalitarianism, collective memory and imagined communities, but especially political myth. The methods employed are rooted in historical research on school textbooks, with a predominant focus on textual and graphic analysis, while the group of sources consists of printed materials, namely textbooks for teaching History and Civics at the primary and secondary school level, published during the period under study in both countries.

The first years of the People's Poland and Franco's Spain was a period of 'consolidation of state power'. The rulers sought to create a homogeneous 'imagined community' with the leading political party, where the right to govern was legitimised by the victory in the recent war. One of the means used was the manipulation of the students' collective memory supported by school manuals.

For school-taught history, the early years of both dictatorships marked a period of breaking with prewar educational concepts, as well as introducing and testing new 'revolutionary' pedagogical solutions. This paper not only explains the aspirations of political rulers to rebuild the students' memory but also contributes to our understanding of the textbook authors' perception of the recent past. Analysed are

¹ The study is based on research conducted as part of the PRELUDIUM scientific grant (2016/21/N/HS3/03461), supported by Poland's National Science Centre. It addresses a previously uncovered research topic, which was only tentatively suggested in the aforementioned project on the educational image of the Polish Workers' Party and the Falange.

the meanings of terms specific to mythical stories, such as nation, power, heroes and their deeds, or wartime struggle.

Demonstrating the complex circumstances of the war, without omitting the detailed descriptions of the enemies' brutality — even in manuals for early grades — as the dramatic background for presenting the political usefulness of the Francoists and Polish Communists was crucial to the consolidation of both regimes. Legitimisation of the new regime called for emphasising the war effort, not only in defeating the enemy but also in the struggle for social issues.

The questions relate to the differences and similarities in the image of war conveyed at the primary and secondary school levels within an asynchronous comparison between the two countries. This study examines the question of whether the image of war conveyed in secondary schools, which were attended by a smaller percentage of the population and were considered elite, differed from the image conveyed at the elementary level as part of the mass education programme. Thus, the question of whether a comparison of the narratives from both countries will reveal more differences or similarities is posed. Finally, potential explanations are posited for the observed discrepancies and analogies in relation to the issue of the internal conflict in Spain and the international conflict in Poland, as well as in relation to the longer traditions rooted in the educational cultures of both countries.

The source base consists of school textbooks for the teaching of History and Civics. A proportion of the manuals were printed in Spain in areas occupied by Franco's troops or in Poland in areas taken by the Red Army, even prior to the cessation of hostilities in both cases. However, the majority did not contain information regarding the recent war in the main body of the text. Instead, passages promoting the new system were included in the introductions or conclusions. It is therefore indicative for the two countries that comprehensive and detailed descriptions of the war, which are relevant and crucial for this research, appeared in school textbooks only after its conclusion. The publication of these textbooks in Madrid or Warsaw was indicative of a broader issue concerning the infiltration of the education system by new political elites.

The period under study, namely the early postwar phase of each regime, can therefore be divided into two shorter periods by an internal turning point. In Spain, the initial period therefore extends from the end of the civil war to the shifts in narrative that accompanied the defeat of Spain's allies, namely fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The second period concludes with significant changes to the Spanish Ministry of Education in the early 1950s, marked by the departure of José Ibáñez Martín from his position, who belonged to the *Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas*, a Catholic group that intensively supported Franco and that nurtured the political cadres of Francoism, although to a much lesser extent than the army or the Falange.

In contrast, in Poland, after a few early post-war years, that were marked by a liberal and inclusive approach to textbook production, the pivotal shift occurred with

political transformations and the declaration of an ideological offensive in the late 1940s. Subsequently, in 1948, Władysław Gomułka was removed from his position of authority and replaced by Bolesław Bierut. The period of intense ideological discourse persisted not only until Stalin's demise but also extended until the October Thaw in Poland in 1956, a time marked by Władysław Gomułka's return to power and the appointment of Władysław Bieńkowski as Minister of Education.²

Theoretical considerations on political myths in textbook writing

Ernst Cassirer points to inflation, unemployment, a sense of injustice and humiliation as the reasons for having caused people to feel frustrated, anxious and in need of order — and these are precisely the needs to which myth responds. It transpires then that myth is not a symbolic form peculiar to a particular stage of human self-knowledge, but is constantly inscribed in humanity, lurking beneath the surface of an ever-unstable social order. Political myths are therefore nothing new. The glorification of heroes has always existed as hero-worship. However, the function and form of language have changed. Cassirer writes of the return of the magic of the word, as constitutive of mythical thinking and practiced by political leaders, who are consequently seen as wizards and prophets, i.e. skilful technicians and conscious creators: new political myths do not grow freely; they are artificial creations, fabricated by very skilful and cunning craftsmen.³ In other words, the myth might have been an investment in a particular meaning to enable specific political orientations and actions, serving as a medium of legitimacy for a community.⁴ Conversely, rational persuasion would have been less useful, since myths evoke emotion, belief and support, which can guarantee a political project's success.⁵ To eliminate discontent or the threat of rivalry, the authorities proposed something to believe in (*credenda*) and something to admire (*miranda*).⁶ As early as 1917, Rudolf Otto stated that such mutually complementary feelings of *tremendum* and *fascinosum* were part of the mythical image of the world in which the people should believe, containing elements of a sacred character.⁷

Relevant to the textbook analysis is the problem of whether a myth is truth or fiction. For Cassirer, a myth was something untrue that was created for current political

2 Notably, Bieńkowski had previously authored school textbooks on civics but was removed from the educational sector during the political purges of 1948.

3 Cassirer E. 1946, 278, 281; Hein H. 2002, 139, 144.

4 Zimmering R. 2000, 119.

5 Flood C. 1996, 4.

6 Merriam C.E. 1964, 109.

7 Bizeul Y. 2000, 17.

purposes.⁸ However, previous research on history textbooks has shown that they are mostly historical accounts with only a small portion of fiction.⁹ Jerzy Topolski added that a myth is a true description of reality, which is given excessive importance.¹⁰

Comparative analysis of the war image in Stalinist Poland and early Franco's Spain

The political myths concerning the war heroes and their deeds were not created in a vacuum. Authors placed their image in the wider context of war — the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. It is true that sometimes the myth of the specific characters or political organisations, such as parties, i.e. the Falange or Polish Workers' Party, was presented in a separate paragraph, but more often it was part of another, broader master narrative that testified to the existence of the Great Story.¹¹ In this study's view, it would be difficult to discuss the image of war in textbooks without providing a broader narrative context or in isolation from other myths. Therefore, in this subsection the focus will be on the political myths, both textual and graphic, prevalent in Spanish and Polish textbooks concerning the main themes related to the war: its beginning and end, its main commanders, the actions of the army and the main events.

While the general political myths of the Spanish Civil War have already been described in scientific studies dealing with the whole Franco era, especially by Spanish-language historians and literary scholars,¹² this work focuses on the early postwar phase of the regime, taking into account the textbooks that have not yet been discussed in the literature. Preliminary research and analysis of the sources revealed several myths. The most important ones concerned the socio-political situation around the outbreak and the end of the Civil War. The former meant that the events of 1936 were presented as inevitable in order to calm the alleged chaos on the political scene, while the end of the war in 1939 was supposed to be historical justice accompanied by widespread enthusiasm. Those myths were accompanied by the myth of Nationalist war effort. The War was presented in a biased narrative, at the textbook authors focused mainly on Franco, the other commanders and the most important battles, practically ignoring the Republican side of the conflict or presenting it only in a negative light.

Political myths regarding the Second World War in Poland have already been tentatively resolved by historians, both on the basis of school textbooks and a wider

8 Cassirer E. 1946, 69; Hein H. 2002, 9.

9 Golka M. 1997, 15–18.

10 Topolski J. 1991, 244, 247.

11 Kivimäki V., Hyvärinen M. 2022.

12 Castillejo Cambra E. 2008; Trappe U. 2011; Rutledge H. 1963; Brinkmann S. 2016.

group of sources.¹³ However, taking into account the research topic and the preliminary research on the content of textbooks, the myths associated with the outbreak and the end of the Second World War were chosen together with the notion of war effort that were most often repeated in school materials. As Joanna Wawrzyniak highlights, the years leading to 1956 were dominated by the myth of the victory over fascism. It is only in the following years that the myth of the unity of the resistance against the Germans comes to the fore, and later the myth of the innocent victim.¹⁴

Myths on the outbreak of war in Spain and Poland

The Alzamiento Nacional of the 18th of July

The Nationalists spread the myth that it was the Soviet Union and the Comintern that had started the Civil War in Spain by launching military aggression on the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁵ The Rebels tried to justify their actions by using the argument of defending Spain against revolution, injustice and external threats ('the yoke of invaders') from France, the Bolsheviks and Jews, who were declared to be anti-Spanish or conspirators sent by Moscow. To emphasise the negative connotations, these groups were called non-humans, animals, plagues, parasites, uncivilised, demons, diabolical temptations or scapegoats. Moreover, the term 'defence of Spain', or, sometimes 'defence of the Republic', was an illustration of the notion that at the beginning of the war many of the Rebels genuinely believed that they were fighting to develop the existing Republic (just like in 1934 during Asturian Revolution where among commanders sent to suppress the rebellion were future Nationalist Rebels from 1936, namely Manuel Goded, Francisco Franco or Juan de Yagüe), and not to end it or create a new state. In their view, the rebellion was about reforming Spain into a new, more conservative and authoritarian country that would be open to some changes, such as a referendum on restoring the monarchy.¹⁶

The rebellion was often described as a Glorious Uprising, but also as the beginning of a crusade or a new war of independence, while the 18th of July was considered a heroic event and only since the end of the 1950s has it been described as a dramatic nightmare. In turn, the Republicans were cruel in battle, used brutal methods of repression and destroyed the national heritage. Moreover, war was seen not only as inevitable but also as necessary, as the purifying fire of battle that would heal corrupt state structures. For this reason, the Rebels recalled the alleged precedent of Spanish

13 Eisler J. 2016, 17, 39, 339–347 (section: *Mity i stereotypy PRL*); Tazbir J. 1997, 302–336 (section: *The Bible of Stalinism*); Prokop J. 1994, 15–42 (section: *Mity fundatorskie Polski Ludowej*); Bäcker R. 2000, 127–138; Kienzler I. 2016.

14 Wawrzyniak J. 2015, 19–25.

15 *Libro de España*. 1943, 291; Payne S.G. 2011, 180.

16 *Libro de España*. 1943, 294; Payne S.G., Palacios J. 2014, 505.

QUINTA JORNADA

LA RESURRECCIÓN DE ESPAÑA
CRUZADA CONTRA EL MARXISMO



— ¡Qué pura es la luz!

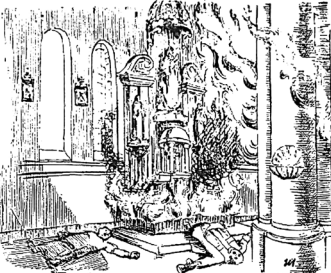
Qué contento estoy de haber madrugado! Así exclamaba Fernando, asomándose al balcón una mañana de junio.

— ¡Qué pura es la luz! ¡Qué sereno el ambiente! Un aire sano y fresco entra en la sangre llenándola de la alegría de la vida.

— ¡Isabel! ¡Isabel! Ven, ven. Que ya va a salir el sol. La sangre de la aurora comienza a teñirse de oro. ¿No ves que empieza a verse como las varillas de un inmenso abanico de luz y de color? Ya se van juntando. Mira, mira. Ya asoma un

— ¡Cuanto horror!, añadió, indignado, Fernando.

— La revolución no se contentó con eso. En octubre de 1934 estalló un movimiento revolucionario. En Asturias se cometieron viles asesinatos de sacerdotes,



Asesinato de Religiosos y quema de Iglesias.

religiosos y personas honradas; se incendiaron muchos templos; y la ciudad de Oviedo, tomada por los revolucionarios, sufrió en sus carnes de piedra terribles martirios.

El 16 de febrero de 1936 anunciaron los de izquierda que habían ganado las elecciones. Se adueñaron

Fig. 1. A visualisation of the pre-war sociopolitical situation in Spain. The postulate to 'revive Spain through a crusade against Marxism' was explained by the murder of priests and the plundering of churches in 1934 and 1936 (Source: *Libro de España*. 1943, 291, 294)

El 4 de marzo de 1934 se fundieron las organizaciones de Falange Española y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (J. O. N. S.), fundadas por Ramiro Ledesma Ramos.

Los gobernantes de la República pretendieron destruir a la Falange desde su nacimiento, haciéndola objeto de persecuciones, encarcelamientos, asesinatos, asaltos de sus locales y de toda clase de atropellos e injusticias.

254. Las elecciones de 1936.—En las elecciones de febrero de 1936 el Gobierno tuvo como norma principal el impedir el triunfo de las nuevas ideas, que comenzaban a ser arrolladoras, y evitar, por todas las ilegalidades, que las derechas consiguieran la mayoría y José Antonio llegase a los escaños del Parlamento.

Las izquierdas arreciaron en la persecución contra Falange y la privaron de su fundador y jefe, José Antonio, que fue enviado a la cárcel mientras se multiplicaban los crímenes y atentados.

255. Asesinato de Calvo Sotelo.—Los crímenes republicanos culminaron con la ejecución del insigne patriota y eminente estadista D. José Calvo Sotelo, a quien los guardias de Asalto, por orden del gobierno, arrebataron de su domicilio y dieron cruel y traidora muerte en la madrugada del 13 de julio de 1936.

Crimen tan horrendo conmovió a toda España y provocó la indignación de cuantos no se resignaban a soportar por más tiempo la tiranía marxista.

256. Alzamiento Nacional.—El asesinato de Calvo Sotelo fue la chispa que prendió fuego en el combustible almacenado por tantas indignidades.

José Calvo Sotelo.

Fig. 2. Emotional and biased language describing the continuity from the Second Republic, through the 1936 elections, to the death of Calvo Sotelo and the outbreak of the Uprising (Source: *Historia de España. Segundo grado*. 1942, 214; *Historia de España. Primer grado*. 1944, 137)

history, believing that national unity had already been achieved by the expulsion or conversion of the Jews in 1492 and of the Moors in 1502. It is worth noting that these assumptions were more apocalyptic than a narrative of a new peaceful nationalist-Catholic era.¹⁷

The beginning of the war and the Brotherhood-in-Arms with the USSR in Poland

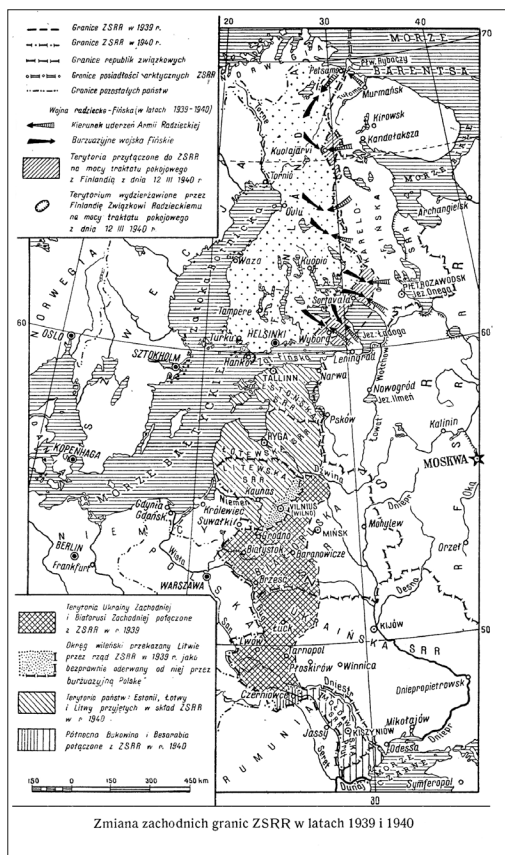


Fig. 3. The illustration of the Soviet 'liberation of eastern Poland' in 1939, found only in the Polish version of a Soviet textbook (Source: Pankratowa A.M. 1955, 413)

The authors of textbooks from the period analysed only rarely mentioned the Red Army's invasion of Poland in September 1939 or Poland's eastern border but avoided the Katyn massacre. Moreover, only occasionally did they mention the liberation of Poland in 1944 or the Home Army. Instead, events directly related to the Communists were described, such as the creation of the Polish Workers' Party, the joint struggle of Polish and Soviet partisans, the creation of the KRN and the PKWN and its manifesto. The USSR's commitment to the Poles was also not overlooked, such as help in the creation of the Union of Polish Patriots and the Polish Army, the Red Army offensive and the participation of Polish troops in the liberation of the country.¹⁸ At the same time, school curricula began to focus on the achievements of Soviet science, taking into account and emphasising that the needs of the state, not of the individual citizen, were paramount.

In order to strengthen the idea of friendship with the USSR, the authors referred to the myth of a strong enemy, more precisely the eternal enemy — Germany. At the same time, the Poles were supposed to feel a sense of brotherhood with other Slavs. In such a constellation, the Battle of Grunwald in 1410 was supposed to be the victory of the Slavic world over the Germanic one, with the allied help of Russia.

17 Serrano de Haro A. 1943, 85; Pemán J.M. 1940, 219.

18 Sternik L. 1954, 124–125; Młynarczyk-Tomczyk A. 2010, 314–315.

Byli jednak plemiona, do których nie docierał nigdy żaden kupiec, tak niedostępne były ich siedziby.
 Powień zakonnik niemiecki, pisząc o tych Słowianach, powiedział, że „był to lud cierpliwy i twardy, do ciężkiej pracy nawykły”.
 Na pewno potrafiliby z czasem zbudować mocne państwo. Nie dali im tego uczynić Niemcy.

3. NAJAZDY NIEMIECKIE

Na lekcjach historii często mówić będziemy o wiekach. Wiek to 100 lat. Inaczej nazywamy go też stuleciem.

Mamy teraz XX wiek. Wiecie, co to znaczy? To znaczy, że od narodzin Chrystusa, od którego to momentu wiekznieć narodów oblicza czas, minęło 19 pełnych stuleci, a zaczęło się dwudzieste. Wypadki, o których zaraz mówić będziemy, działy się w IX i X wieku.

Już od IX wieku zaczęli Niemcy napadać na plemiona słowiańskie i zdobywać ich ziemie. Słowianie walczyli mężnie w obronie swych grodów, w bitwie śmiało rzucając się na wroga.

Różnica w uzbrojeniu była ogromna. Niemcy mieli pancerze z kółek lub łusek stalowych, hełmy na głowach, wielkie obosieczne miecze, topory. Od ciosów wroga zasłaniali się drewnianą, żelazem obitą tarczą, którą nosili na lewym ramieniu.

Słowianie okrywali ciało skórzaną lub płócienną kurtką, mieli noże, długie dzidy, nie licząc tylko wojownicy mieli miecze i tarcze. Chętnie strzelali z łuków, a strzały mieli zatrute trucizną, którą wyrabiali z niektórych roślin.



Rycerz w zbroi IX i X wieku

7

NARÓD POLSKI W SOJUSZU Z ZSRR W WALCE Z NAJAZDEM NIEMIEC HITLEROWSKICH

87. KLĘSKA WRZEŚNIOWA

Już na wiosnę 1939 r. Hitler otwarcie wystąpił przeciw Polsce. Niemcy hitlerowskie domagały się Gdańska i zgody na przeprowadzenie przez Pomorze, przez tzw. „korytarz” gdański, autostrady do Prus Wschodnich. Zaborec żądania hitlerowskie wywołały wzburzenie społeczeństwa polskiego i silny protest mas. Pod ich naporem rząd, który początkowo zataił notę Hitlera, musiał odpowiedzieć odmownie. Wtedy Niemcy hitlerowskie zerwały z Polską układ o nieagresji. Faszystowski rząd polski odrzucił wszelkie propozycje pomocy, ofiarowywanej w marcu i czerwcu 1939 roku przez Związek Radziecki. Zawarł natomiast w kwietniu przymierze zaczepno-odporne z Anglią. Pozbawił w ten sposób naród polski jedynej realnej pomocy, jaką chciał mu okazać Związek Radziecki. Rząd sanacyjny brnął dalej po drodze zdrady narodowej, pechając kraj do zguby.

1. IX. 1939 roku o godzinie 5 rano armia hitlerowska z kilku stron wtargnęła do Polski siejąc śmierć i zniszczenie. Tysiące samolotów bombardowało obiekty wojskowe i otwarte miasta mordując bezbronną ludność cywilną. W ciągu trzech dni

41

Fig. 4. ‘German invasions’ in the 10th century were repelled by a Slavic alliance and in 1939 with the help of the USSR (Source: Dłuska M. 1947, 7; Missalowa G., Schoenbrenner J. 1951b, 41)

Myths on the war effort

The Nationals’ war effort

The Glorious National Uprising, which ‘has saved Spain from Bolshevism’, was presented as a truly momentous event. Part of the narrative was stories concerning war heroes or battles such as the Alcázar and the role of Colonel Moscardó, who was compared to the character of Guzmán el Bueno — a nobleman and Spanish hero in the war against the Moors in the thirteenth century. On the other hand, the fights at the Santuario de Nuestra Señora de la Cabeza were compared to the actions of Hernán Cortés. All the battles were described in reference to imperial traditions, or simply as a ‘continuation of the struggle’. In addition, the authors also mentioned the situation behind the front lines, contrasting the brutality and disorder in the Republican zone with the Nationalist zone, which was credited with order and success in the creation of auxiliary units, social aid, technical junta and military tribunals.¹⁹

In the early postwar phase of Francoism, in the chapters on the Civil War, textbook authors referred to the military officials who were supposedly constantly receiving mass

¹⁹ *Libro de España*. 1943, 301; Serrano de Haro A. 1943, 87.



Fig. 5. The beginning of the Rebellion portrayed in a sublime and monumental manner. The Alcázar, not yet destroyed, symbolised the order violated by the Republicans. Notwithstanding, the text contained inaccuracies: 'G. Moscardó' instead of 'J. Moscardó', who was presented in the paragraph on the siege as 'general' while his rank at that time was 'Colonel' (Source: *Historia de España. Primer grado*. 1949, 68–69)

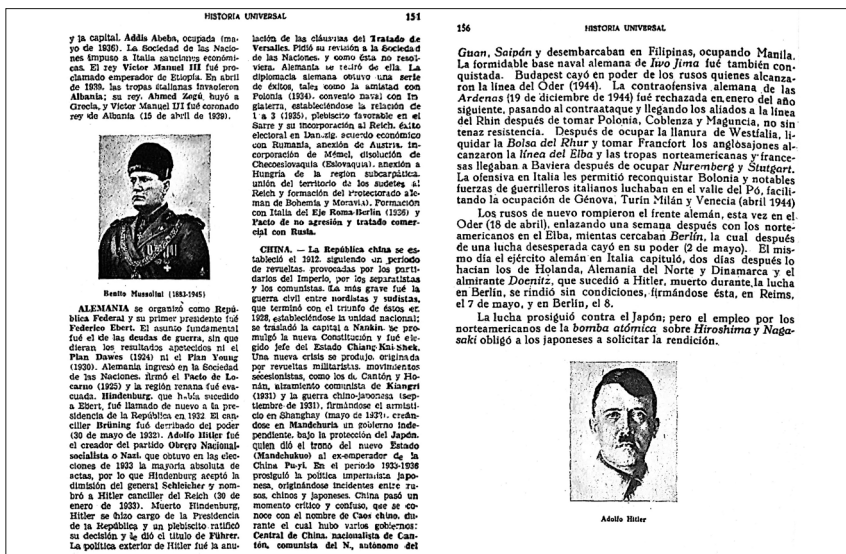


Fig. 6. History textbooks made no mention of German and Italian support for Spain, suggesting an independent Francoist war effort, but both countries were assigned special place in general history textbooks (Source: García Prado J. 1946, 151, 156)

support from the youth, patriotic organisations and 'elements of order'. At the same time, the myth of the *retaguardia* (rearguard) also appeared frequently in textbooks. The Nationals as a whole were referred to as the National Government, while the Spanish historian José Álvarez Osés eventually noted that only one textbook avoided naming both sides of the conflict. Moreover, the names of German and Italian units were also mentioned as 'auxiliary forces cooperating with the infallible Commander in a victorious war'.²⁰

The war effort of the Polish People's Army

The communists were aware that the military and its tradition were highly respected in Poland, so when they created the Polish army in the USSR, they defined the nature of the 'socialist army' in two ways. Externally, it was to defend the territorial integrity,

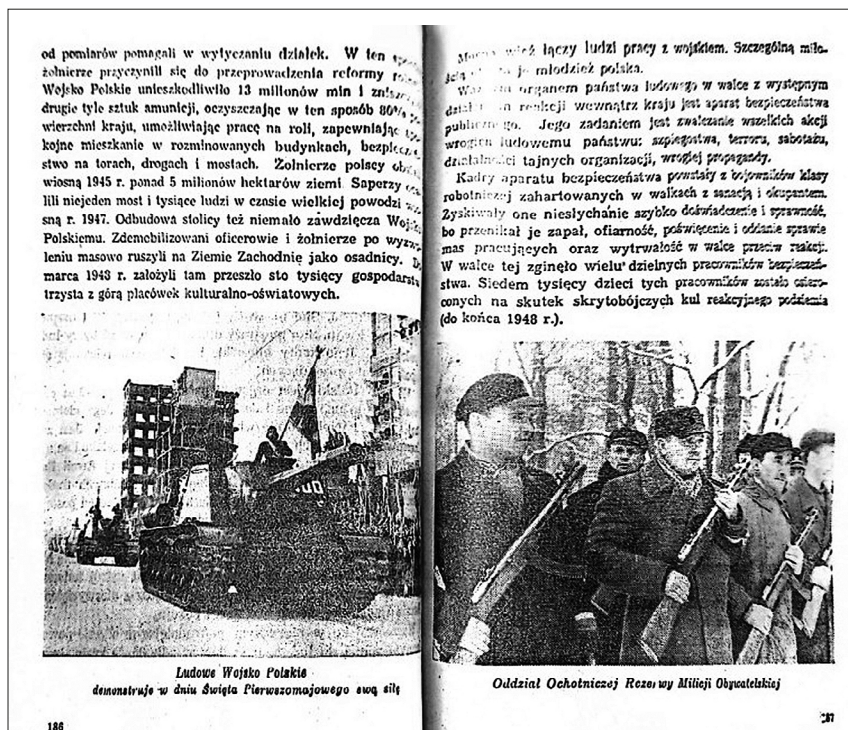


Fig. 7. The image of the military as a force to defend the country from outside was combined with that of an internal law enforcement force (Source: Barbag J. et al. 1950, 186–187)

20 Álvarez Osés J.A. 2000, 170–177.

the interests of the state and the entire Soviet empire, and internally, it was 'an instrument for the protection of the socialist system'. Moreover, from the very beginning of the People's Poland, propagandists popularised the more precise myth of the so called Polish People's Army (*Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*) as a military reservoir of 'national and patriotic' forces, knowing full well that the military still enjoyed a high esteem inherited from the Second Polish Republic. According to this myth, the perpetrators of the greatest misfortunes were the Germans, who could only be stopped by the noble and immaculate army, while Soviet rule and order in Poland was primarily the responsibility of the Polish communist police (*Milicja Obywatelska*).²¹

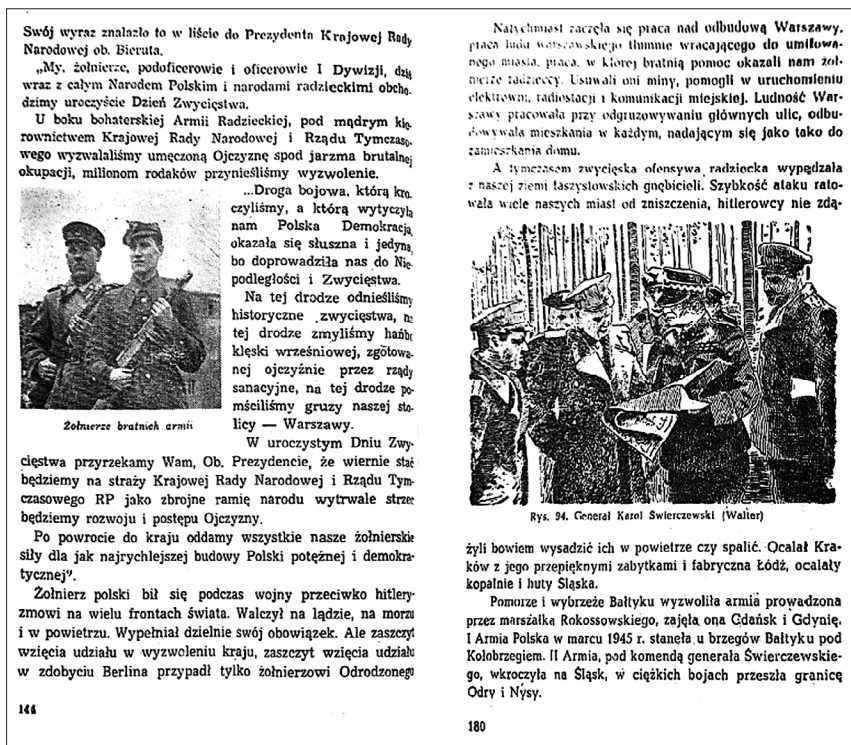


Fig. 8. The Polish-Soviet brotherhood of arms was to apply not only to front-line soldiers but also to senior officers (Source: Barbag J. et al. 1950, 144; Dłuska M., Schoenbrenner J. 1956, 180)

21 Dłuska M., Schoenbrenner J. 1956, 182–183.

Myths of victory

The romantic myth of the victory of 1st April in Spain

Together with the myth of the 18th of July Uprising, the myth mentioned in the title of this subchapter, formed a coherent propaganda discourse on the subject of the Civil War. The narrative of victory was intended to have only positive connotations, namely that it ended the tragedy and brought peace. It was to emphasise that the aim of those responsible for starting the war was not only to win the conflict, but above all to establish a strong new state with solid foundations for a stable and prosperous future. Any association with murderous soldiers, with great human loss and with the destruction of culture and property, was to be justified by the aforementioned myths of a higher purpose.²²

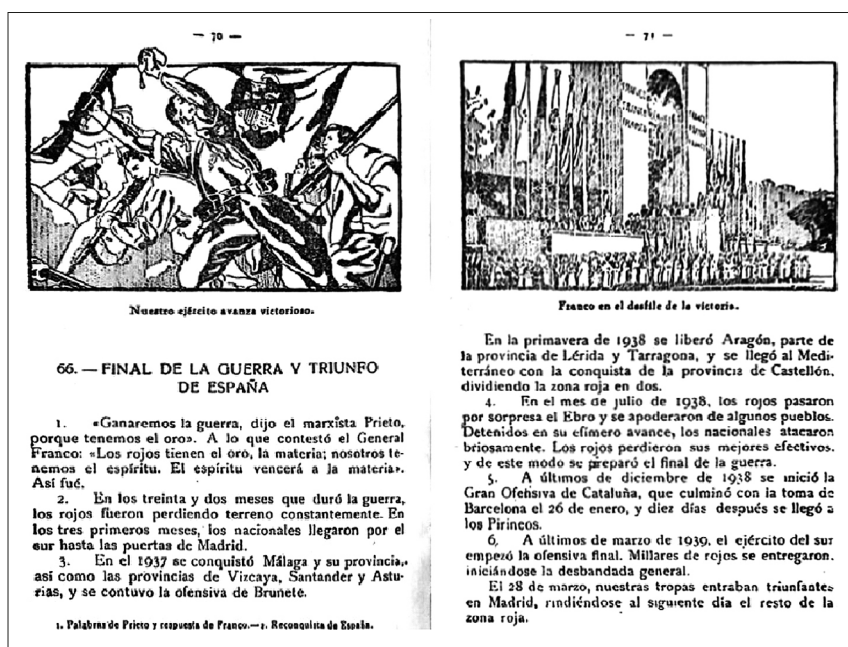


Fig. 9. The army's war effort led to 'Spain's triumph' and entry into Madrid as 'the rest of the Red Zone surrendered' (Source: *Historia de España. Primer grado*. 1949, 70–71)

The New State was the project of a complex group of victors led by Franco, so only messages that presented an image of a united and strong country based on the value of work, with the Caudillo as its leader and saviour, were allowed. The Falange, which

22 Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez. 1940, 34; *Historia de España. Segundo grado*. 1948, 149.

had participated in the Crusade to save the country, was presented as a collective force leading the new Spain, devoting all its strength and skills to its welfare. The narrative claimed that during the war the Party was supported by various institutions and groups, such as the army, full of enthusiasm and devotion to the national cause; the Falangist youth, even their older colleagues, the *camisas viejas* (old shirts) — party members from before the war, among whom in fact were several sceptics to Franco, contrary to *camisas nuevas* (new shirts) — new postwar members loyal to Franco who constituted the majority compared to the ‘old shirts’; the children, who were carefully taught discipline and positive values; the Auxilio Social, which took care of the most needy, especially orphans; the workers who worked tirelessly in the factories; or the farmers, who, thanks to their perseverance, produced abundant harvests. There was no despair, no crisis, no shortage, no lack, only discipline, order and the desire to build a better future. The only negative issue regarding the end of the war was the number of victims. In most of the early Francoist textbooks, the authors put the figure at 1 million. Nevertheless, the 1st of April became the founding myth of the Estado Nuevo in the history manuals.²³



Fig. 10. The victorious ‘new government made a revolution in the social sphere, ensuring fruitful work, banning divorce and cleaning libraries and museums’, while the ‘hardworking Franco’ took care of the needy (Source: *Historia de España. Segundo grado*. 1948. 147; Serrano de Haro A. 1943, 89)

23 *Historia de España. Segundo grado*. 1948, 147; Serrano de Haro A. 1943, 89.

Myths of victory and common joy in Poland

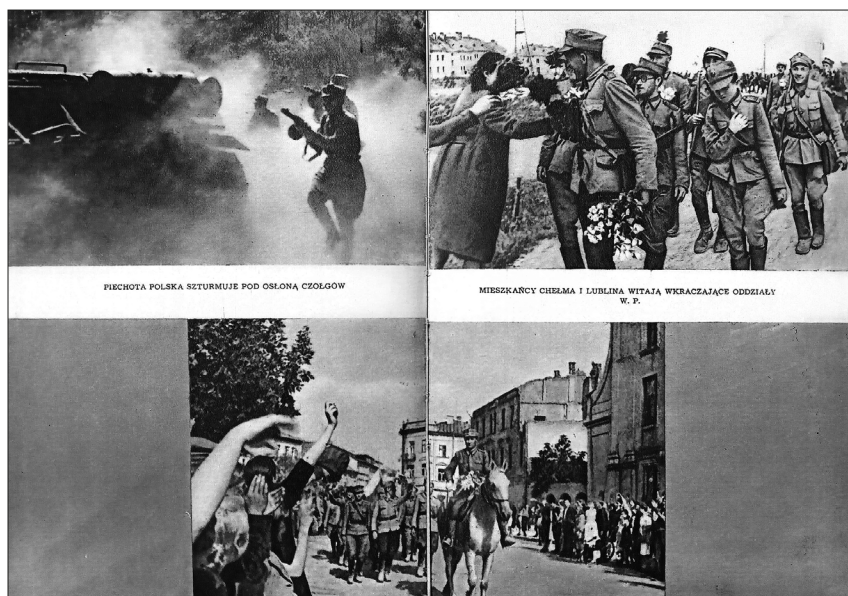


Fig. 11. Universal enthusiasm was to be seen as a natural consequence of the war effort
(Source: Bieńkowski W. 1948, 60–61)

The victory was significant because it was associated not only with the return to the 'motherland' and liberation by the Soviet army, but also with the introduction of the communist system. Propagandists often used the term 'great opportunity' to describe this event. Any atrocities occurred only in the Generalgouvernement, and the only enemy was the Third Reich and its successor, West Germany. In this way, victory was presented as an endangered good that had to be constantly defended against present enemies, whose defeat in the future would ensure complete victory. In this strategy, the 9th of May became a reference point in the history of the Polish People's Republic, as it became the founding myth of the new state. The glorification of the victory over the Germans also served to make the historical legitimacy of the regime more credible. In this symbolic invention, the trauma was to be healed through the recognition of combat merits.²⁴

The propagandists emphasised heroism and strength, which, in their view, were more useful for building the new Poland than a martyrdom narrative. In addition, the myth allowed many meanings to be derived from it, which were useful for

²⁴ Barbag J. 1950, 150–151.

integrating society with the rulers. Thus, the authorities recommended emphasising themes such as pride or specific alternatives to defeat and sacrifice. The assault on Berlin by Polish soldiers was to be a revenge for the defeat of 1939 and the years of brutal occupation. At the same time, it was called the ‘better Grunwald’, which ensured the defeat of the thousand-year-old German threat and allowed the return to the Piast lands. It meant not only the end of the old Poland, but also the birth of a new People’s Poland. Thus, peace could only be linked to an alliance with the Soviet Union and denying it would end in the fall of Poland.²⁵



Fig. 12. Combining historical and political myths in a civics textbook — an example of the ‘better Grunwald’ (Source: Bieńkowski W. 1948, 76–77)

Conclusion

The research discussed herein has proved that both regimes attempted to reshape the social imagery by reconstructing concepts and ideas concerning the past. Thus, the politics of memory is an area where the community of historical fates and experiences of societies is most clearly visible. Based on Tomasz Pawelec’s statements on the communists’ practices, it can be said that the indoctrination processes in both countries were indeed characterised by common features, such as

²⁵ Missalowa G., Schoenbrenner J. 1951a, 285–286.

assumptions shared by those who defined and/or implemented the politics of memory. These were concrete actions conducted within societal spaces (together with their products) aimed at (i) creating new realms of memory, and (ii) deconstructing/transforming/annihilating the realms of memory that had previously existed within the collective memory of a given society. They also offered a final normative structure and shape of the collective memory of that society (one that could be desirable from the standpoint of the communist ruling elite).²⁶

As Joanna Jaroszyk-Pawlukiewicz has noted, an analysis of the review processes and censorship institutions of the two countries, and thus also the image of war conveyed by these institutions, revealed surprising analogies, regardless of the ideological differences that underpinned each state. This is probably due to the limited repertoire of means with which both regimes have tried to control the media of social communication, in different historical periods and in different geographical locations.

The employment of symbols has frequently been demonstrated to be an efficacious strategy. The textbook authors proposed a new image of the past, while enriching it in various ways, such as the employment of historical myths. Moreover, existing schemes and personality patterns were frequently adopted, filled with new content. However, this was not a symmetrical translation, as after the war events that had previously been of secondary importance became much more prominent.

In constructing the school narrative, the textbook authors were guided by the existing patterns of propaganda invented by the central Party organs and aimed at the general public. The transfer of interpretation models occurred in both countries through the implementation of specific directives (*consignas* in Spanish and *wytuczne* in Polish). For this reason, the content of textbooks did not differ significantly from the official propaganda. On the most important issues, the narratives were obviously convergent. However, the textbooks differed in their narrative style and were richer in epithets or complicated linguistic constructions. The actual history of the mythologised events, such as the last war, was irrelevant; what mattered was the conformity with the ideology implemented in the textbooks.

Thus, the dissemination of Communist and Francoist textbook propaganda is an essential issue that is best understood within a comparative framework that highlights certain key nuances of the two apparently monolithic memory policies. Following the American social psychologist James V. Wertsch, Soviet public memory was shaped by master narratives that could be divided into four elements: 'the peaceful life of a community, the initiation of trouble or aggression by enemies, conflict and,

26 Malczewska-Pawelec D., Pawelec T. 2007, 28.

finally, its resolution through the triumph over the enemy.²⁷ It seems to be a justified conclusion, that this template can also be applied to the narratives of the early Franco state.

Such a master narrative was accompanied in both regimes by a conglomerate of facts and legends described as the myth of victory over fascism (Poland) or over the Republicans (Spain). All the battles were presented as strategic to the campaign, without which victory would have been more costly or delayed, but not impossible, since the triumph of the 'right' idea was unquestionable. The analysis of such statements allowed the identification of narrative patterns of legitimisation, such as comprehensive statements that conveyed political goals, which was possible thanks to recurring textual configurations. This therefore allows for another conclusion to be drawn. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, for example, have argued that comparisons are important for theory, that 'societies and even civilisations follow certain common paths or similar patterns and are thus largely the same, even though they differ in space, time and detail.'²⁸

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²⁷ Wawrzyniak J. 2015, 19–25.

²⁸ Haupt H.G., Kocka J. 1996, 17–19.

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Eternal Battle — the Memory of Conflict in Belfast Murals

Summary: The murals present in the urban space of Belfast are one of the most distinctive forms of expression of the beliefs of Northern Ireland loyalists. Their symbolism and depictions of historical events that create a coherent imagery not only produce a network of associations and symbols, but they also contribute to maintaining the group's distinctive identity. This article provides a detailed analysis of murals themselves as a medium, as well as that of the motifs appearing on those of them which still exist within city's landscape. The heraldic and vexillological symbols discussed are placed within the broader context of loyalist ideology and worldview. The role of paramilitary organisations in the creation of the system of symbols present in the cityscape is being examined. Recurring depictions of historical events on the city walls are being discussed within the broader context of the narrative of the past favoured by loyalists in Northern Ireland. Loyalist art constructed the image of reality in this way. The role of memory of the past in creating the contemporary social imaginary plays a special role in this discussion. These reflections, which align with the research on national myths, lead to conclusions regarding the role played by memory politics and historical narratives in creating a sense of religious, ethnic and political distinctiveness. This analysis is particularly relevant in the context of the changes that have been taking place in Northern Irish society in recent decades, including those related to the Brexit process.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Belfast, murals, loyalists, unionism, politics of memory, historical narratives, symbolism

For several decades, Belfast has been undergoing a substantial transformation. The post-industrial city, hitherto associated with ethno-religious conflict, is changing in order to attract tourists. Bombs no longer explode on the streets, nor is the presence

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.06> — received: 2025-09-23 — verified: 2025-11-06 — accepted: 2025-12-21

97-117

funding information: University of Lodz — **conflicts of interests:** none — **declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** not used
ethical considerations: the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication
the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is: [AP 100%]



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of British soldiers to be found. However, in some districts, a passer-by may still have the impression that their actions are being watched by a figure in a balaclava, rifle in hand — immortalised on one of the numerous murals.¹ The memory of the conflict has been preserved on the city walls and continues to affect members of local communities.

Although we are accustomed to thinking of the conflict in Northern Ireland as a dispute that ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, antagonisms are nevertheless still present in the city.² Furthermore, the social and economic problems that once fuelled the conflict have not disappeared. The decline of industry in Belfast and the attempt to change the character of the city by attracting tourists have not significantly improved the economic situation in the poorest districts. A large proportion of the city's inhabitants still live in ethnically and culturally homogeneous enclaves — Protestant or Catholic housing estates.³ Acts of sectarian violence still occur in Northern Ireland, and according to police data, paramilitary organisations responsible for acts of terrorism between 1969 and 1998 are still active and conducting recruitment.⁴

Sally Browne, in her article *Northern Ireland's fragile peace: how the Troubles paused and mutated since its official 'end' in 1998*, posits that the dispute has not been ended, but merely suspended and quietened; it continues to smoulder, however, and the process of reaching an agreement related to the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union has only exacerbated it.⁵ The problem of the existence of a heavily controlled border between Ireland and Northern Ireland was once one of the main points of contention. EU law also served as a safeguard against the curtailment of the rights of the Catholic minority. The Brexit process has therefore released hitherto suppressed, yet still smouldering, antagonisms.

Collective memory and its physical manifestations have an impact on the perpetuation of patterns that gave rise to conflict in the past. Symbolically, an eternal battle continues on the streets of Belfast: literally in the form of commemorations of the Battles of the Boyne or the Somme, and figuratively — between two groups whose conflicting historical narratives clash in the urban space through the medium of murals.⁶

Terminology and Research Methodology Used

The conflict in Northern Ireland is often presented as a religious dispute; however, this is a distinct oversimplification. The religious aspect in Northern Ireland is strongly linked to ethnic and cultural identity, however this is not a doctrinal conflict.

1 *Prepered for Peace Ready For War*.

2 Piórko A. 2008, 233–234.

3 Dawson G. 2020, 149.

4 Browne S. 2019, 222–225.

5 Browne S. 2019, 215.

6 McDowell S., Switzer C. 2011, 82.

It is not the Catholic Church that remains in conflict with the Protestant Church of Ireland — it is the congregants of these churches who remain in dispute, where the element of faith becomes merely a determinant of the division into two warring groups.⁷ Therefore, it becomes crucial to define the studied community in a way other than through the prism of religion.

Irish Loyalists are a group of Northern Irish residents who perceive themselves as ethnically, culturally and religiously distinct from the rest of the inhabitants of the island. Politically, Loyalists present Unionist views, seeing a need to continue the union with Great Britain, in contrast to Republicans, who seek to abolish this link. However, although Irish Loyalists identify as British — citizens of the United Kingdom — they also emphasise their ethnic distinctness and describe themselves as Ulstermen: descendants of the Scottish settlers of the Ulster Plantation who arrived in Ireland in the 17th century.⁸

The distinct, characteristic identity of Loyalists is based on a system of employed symbols. The aim of this article will therefore be its thorough analysis, both in terms of the signs used and their connotations, as well as the narratives created through them. Of particular importance in this context will be considerations regarding the memory of historical events that shaped the consciousness and distinct identity of this group, and the manner of their commemoration and representation in public space. The main task will therefore be an attempt to seek an answer to the question of the functions of murals and the goals pursued through them.

Although the text will also include references to the Republican muralist tradition, the analysis will focus on wall depictions created in the Loyalist and Unionist tradition containing its symbolic components. In order to focus on currently functioning symbolism and narrative, the source material will consist of murals whose existence in the urban space was confirmed in 2024 and later. Conversely, those that disappeared from the streets of Belfast before 2024 will be omitted, except in situations where the mention of earlier depictions serves to outline the history of the phenomenon.

It should also be emphasised that today another form of expression is appearing, arising from the mural tradition but simultaneously competing with it: large-format banners. Due to their specific nature, completely different aesthetics, and even more ephemeral character, this article will devote attention only to murals understood as wall paintings, and the accompanying material culture such as commemorative plaques (but only in combination and relation to the primary medium). The application of these selection criteria yields a fairly large set of source materials, consisting of approximately 40 wall depictions analysed in the text. Thus, over 100 years of the Loyalist mural tradition will be subjected to study, as the earliest depictions appeared

7 Cairns D. 2000, 438.

8 Moore R., Sanders A. 2002, 10.

on the streets of Belfast in the first decades of the 20th century, while the latest examples discussed in the article commemorate the coronation of King Charles III in 2023.

It is also crucial to emphasise that this analysis is conducted using tools characteristic of historical research, rather than from the perspective of an art historian or anthropologist, although these issues certainly also fall within the scope of such research. The analysis of the narrative used, particularly that concerning symbols and depictions of historical events, serves here for considerations on identity and the perception of history by the Loyalist group. It thus forms part of the discourse on the issue of national myths.

Murals and Their Creators: Social and Economic Context

Murals are large paintings executed directly on the walls of buildings. The contemporary meaning of this term and its connotations largely derive from the Mexican movement of muralism. One of its most characteristic elements was the link between art and political and social manifestos, as well as the ideas of socialism. For Mexican artists, murals were also a form of expressing pride in their culture and tradition.⁹ It is also worth mentioning the tradition of using this medium for advertising purposes, where large-format advertising is placed in the form of a painting on the wall of a building at the initiative of a company to support its economic activity.

Both aforementioned contexts are extremely important from the perspective of analysing the murals of Belfast. They create a historical narrative and emphasise the identity of the community. Their message is often saturated with political context and enters into polemics with the narratives of other groups. On the other hand, murals are created through private initiative, and their authors often create their works based on clear guidelines from those commissioning them.¹⁰ The aesthetic aspect of the works often yields to the information being conveyed. This information is comparable to an advertising message: symbolic, quick to read, and intended for a specific target audience whose established network of associations will allow for the rapid reception of the intended message.¹¹

It is therefore justifiable to ask: who actually is the author of the analysed message and who, through the medium of murals, shapes the politics of memory?

The process of creating this characteristic form of street art has only recently been studied, therefore detailed data on every painting is not accessible.¹² The current state of knowledge allows for the categorisation of several groups of commissioners. Historically, murals were created at the initiative of local communities, often associated with

9 Coffey M. 2012, 1–5.

10 Lissle D. 2006, 40.

11 Lissle D. 2006, 37.

12 Crowley T. 2011, 33.

a specific district or area of the city. Social organisations and paramilitary groups were also responsible for the creation of paintings.¹³ The artists creating the murals were less responsible for creating the message itself. They often remained anonymous, working for commissioners and receiving payment for it, whereby some of them worked on both Loyalist and Republican murals.¹⁴ In this respect, the murals of Belfast are closer to commercial advertising murals than to Mexican muralism.

Heraldic and Vexillological Motifs

Heraldic symbols and flags are an emanation of one of the primary ideological elements of Loyalism: the attachment to the union with Great Britain. The mere presence of elements referencing British heraldic tradition distinguishes the Loyalist tradition from the Republican one, which rejects these elements entirely.

Loyalist murals on the streets of Belfast often visually reference the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.¹⁵ Other heraldic symbols, such as British lions or Scottish unicorns, are also utilised. A significant element of the crest is prominently displayed: the British Crown, which simultaneously manifests attachment to the institution of the monarchy and the reigning sovereign.¹⁶ Monarchist sentiment is also expressed through symbolic depictions praising Charles III and celebrating his accession to the throne.¹⁷ These are accompanied by the prominent, traditional phrase *‘God Save the King!’*¹⁸ This motto also functions independently of the monarchical context on murals concerning other subjects.¹⁹ In some depictions, the French phrase *Dieu et mon droit* (eng.: *God and my right*) is also present, serving as the traditional heraldic motto of the British monarchy.²⁰ However, no maxim appears as frequently as the motto of the Unionist movement: *Quis Separabit?* (eng.: *Who shall separate us?*).²¹ These words, a quotation from St Paul’s Letter to the Romans, emphasise what Loyalists perceive as the indissoluble nature of the relationship with Great Britain, while simultaneously engaging in polemics with the Republican movement, which advocates for precisely such a separation.²²

13 Lissle D. 2006, 40.

14 Lissle D. 2006, 42.

15 *Gertrude Star Flute Band*.

16 *East Belfast Protestant Boys; YCV Division; Loyalist Tigers Bay; Tigers Bay First Flute*.

17 *God Save The King*.

18 *God Save The King*.

19 *Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant*.

20 *Dieu Et Mon Droit; Gertrude Star Flute Band*.

21 *East Belfast Brigade Remembers Our Fallen; Robert Dougan Memorial; UDA South Belfast Brigade A Battalion; Village South Belfast Brigade C COY*.

22 All illustrations used in this article are from the Virtual Belfast Mural Tour website. The author would like to give special thanks to the VBMT team for granting permission to use them.

Fig. 1. *Dieu Et Mon Droit*
(Source: VBMT)



Loyalist murals constantly use the symbolism of national flowers, depicting the connection between Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom in a literal intertwining of the stems of Scottish thistles, English roses and Irish shamrocks.²³ This allows for the incorporation of both a clearly legible symbolic message and an aesthetic element into the display. It is worth noting that murals, most often located in working-class

She also encourages you to visit the Virtual Belfast Mural Tour website and see other murals at <https://www.virtualbelfastmuraltour.com/>.

²³ *Dieu Et Mon Droit; Ordinary People Extraordinary Roles.*

districts, also serve the function of beautifying a landscape dominated by the brick buildings of terraced houses.²⁴ Both the aesthetic element and the symbolism of pride, accentuating the values of a given community, are extremely precious to the residents of these parts of the post-industrial city.²⁵

The most legible group of national symbols is comprised of flags. Murals are thus adorned with depictions of the national colours of England, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.²⁶ In this way, Ulster is celebrated as one of the constituent elements of the Kingdom.²⁷

The primary place in the Loyalist imaginary is occupied by the flag of the United Kingdom, the so-called Union Jack. It might seem that its depiction on murals constitutes, like other flags, an element of identification and an emphasis on the group's identity. However, placing this phenomenon in a historical context reveals another aspect related to it. As a state symbol, the Union Jack was subject to special legal protection until 1987, which penalised its tearing down, destruction, or removal. However, flags associated with the Catholic or Republican tradition did not enjoy the same kind of protection.²⁸ This created a system in which a symbol key to the identification of Loyalists and Unionists was covered by special legal protection, while symbols important to Republicans could be easily removed and destroyed. In this context, the Union Jack became not only an identity element — it was also the most obvious symbol of social inequality and 'Protestant Ascendancy' in action.²⁹

The attachment, also at the symbolic level, to the concept of the Union is also strongly linked to one of the main elements of the Loyalist narrative — a phenomenon described by researchers as the 'siege mentality'.³⁰ Although Protestants in Northern Ireland have historically constituted a majority, they were a minority relative to the total population of the island. In the view of Protestants, only the system of Protestant Ascendancy guaranteed security and protection against Catholic revanchism. The Union constituted the guarantor of that security.³¹ The prospect of granting autonomy to Ireland deeply unsettled Unionists: it actualised a vision in which political and economic issues would be decided by Republicans and Catholics. The Union is therefore perceived as the only form of defence against such a fate.³²

24 Vannais J. 2000, 21.

25 Vannais J. 2000, 21.

26 *God Save The King; Ballybeen UFF; Dieu Et Mon Droit; Symbolising the Union of England Scotland Ireland; The Ulster Conflict Is About Nationality.*

27 Bryan D. 2005, 26.

28 Bryan D. 2005, 28.

29 *Protestant Ascendancy* – an economic and political dominance of the Protestant population in Ireland from the 17th to the 20th century, maintained through legislative acts discriminating against the Catholic population (*Penal Laws*).

30 Cairns D. 2000, 445.

31 Goalwin G. 2013, 201.

32 McIntosh G. 2000, 93–112.

Symbols and Emblems of Paramilitary Organisations

The sense of threat felt by Loyalists influences the role fulfilled by the murals they create. They are intended to deter a potential adversary and manifest control over a given territory. On the walls of Belfast, this task is performed by depictions related to the activities of paramilitary organisations.

The most prevalent type of symbols immortalised in the form of paintings are the emblems of organisations such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and the Young Citizen Volunteers (YCV). It is worth mentioning that among the aforementioned organisations, only the youth wing is not included on the United Kingdom government's lists of proscribed terrorist organisations.³³



Fig. 2.
Welcome to the
Shankill Road
(Source: VBMT)

³³ Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations list.



Fig. 3. Prepared For Peace Ready For War (Source: VBMT)

The most widespread and culturally recognisable symbol is the emblem of the Red Hand of Ulster, used by most paramilitary organisations. It is also the only symbol of likely Celtic origin consistently used by Loyalists. The bloody hand marks the streets of Protestant districts in its numerous variants: inscribed within a six-pointed gold star as the symbol of the UFF,³⁴ adorning an intense green shamrock with the YCV designation,³⁵ or inscribed in a circle and surrounded by the motto 'For God and Ulster' where it marks the presence of the UVF.³⁶ The Red Hand may be bleeding,³⁷ clenched in a fist,³⁸ or, perhaps most surprisingly, extended in a gesture of greeting and surrounded by cheerful welcomes in various languages, as seen on the mural welcoming people to the Shankill Road.³⁹ This last example, it must be emphasised, is significantly distinctive from other murals due to the function it performs. The *Welcome to Shankill Road* painting, although it uses a traditional symbol of Loyalism, has a primarily joyful and encouraging tone, softening the image of this area (formerly a centre of activity for Loyalist groups). In both its message and form, it contrasts with the traditional role of paramilitary murals.

This role is best expressed through depictions of masked, armed figures. UVF militants thus overlook the residents of Mount Vernon Park from above the barrels of rifles.

³⁴ Ballybeen UFF.

³⁵ YCV Division.

³⁶ East Belfast Ulster Volunteer Force; For God and Ulster.

³⁷ Brian Robinson Mural; South Belfast Volunteers.

³⁸ Ulster Young Militants; Loyalist Tigers Bay.

³⁹ Welcome to the Shankill Road.

The only part of the figures' faces not obscured by a balaclava are the eyes, which follow the gaze of the passer-by.⁴⁰ Similar depictions can be found at other points in East Belfast.⁴¹ On some murals—those celebrating the activities of youth organisations—it is children who are armed with baseball bats and rifles.⁴²

These depictions fulfil several functions. Primarily, their task is to mark territory controlled by military organisations. In this respect, Loyalist murals do not differ from Republican ones.⁴³ They are created in enclaves and inform anyone entering a given territory of its character, while also serving a deterrent function.⁴⁴ Thus, a large portion of the information contained in the mural is received by the group of 'outsiders' intended to be deterred in this way.

However, the second part of the information reaches the local residents, for whom these murals become a symbol and a landmark.⁴⁵ They are also intended to provide them with a sense of security and a conviction of the protection extended over them by paramilitary organisations.

It is worth emphasising that after the Good Friday Agreement, the profile of these organisations changed. They morphed towards organised crime, engaging in the trafficking of weapons and drugs.⁴⁶ According to police data, 25% of all individuals involved in organised crime in Northern Ireland are members of paramilitary organisations, which still maintain their ideological profile, treating criminal activity as a method of financing their ideological work.⁴⁷ The support of the local community and control over the narrative of the conflict are absolutely crucial for their operations and recruitment capabilities.⁴⁸

Murals and Narratives of the Past

One of the key functions of murals is the construction of community identity by creating narratives about historical events.⁴⁹ The way the past is perceived, and the act of inscribing it into accepted frameworks, allows contemporary events to be explained by incorporating them into established patterns.

40 *Prepared For Peace Ready For War*.

41 *Trevor King Mural; For God and Ulster; UDA South Belfast Brigade A Battalion; Ulster Young Militants*.

42 *Ulster Freedom Corner; YCV 1st Belfast Battalion B Company*.

43 Smithey L.A. 2009, 96.

44 Goalwin G. 2013, 202.

45 Flannery E. 2006, 76.

46 Smithey L.A. 2009, 91.

47 Browne S. 2019, 221–222.

48 Smithey L.A. 2009, 95.

49 Campbell S. 2017, 105.

It is therefore justifiable to no longer analyse specific symbols, but depictions of historical events, to discover what kind of memory network is created by Loyalist murals. Which events are actively commemorated? What role do historical patterns play?

One of the most characteristic features of the historical narrative visible on the murals is its punctiform rather than linear nature. The history presented in the paintings is captured at characteristic, breakthrough moments.⁵⁰ Certain elements are excluded from this narrative, while other events are emphasised and celebrated.

A great absence in the Loyalist vision is the ancient, pre-Christian past. Traditionally, references to the Celtic imaginarium constitute the domain of Republicans.⁵¹ Although there have been attempts in recent years to fit certain mythical heroes into the Loyalist narrative, this is not a permanent element of the imaginarium, and currently, no mural with this type of message functions in Belfast.⁵² Likewise, the use of the Gaelic language is linked to the Catholic community and the Republican movement.⁵³ Consequently, on the Loyalist side, there is a need to demonstrate a right to the land, justifying the group's presence in Ireland. This can only be realised through depictions of the Irish landscape as a backdrop for the Loyalist message. Paramilitary fighters are thus depicted against the backdrop of the hills surrounding Belfast and urban buildings.⁵⁴ Another form of emphasising this connection is the symbolic depiction of the borders of the six northern counties.⁵⁵

In analysing the narrative of the past preserved in murals, three key historical events can be distinguished around which Loyalist group identity is built: the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the Ulster Crisis of 1912–1914 and the Battle of the Somme in 1916. These are moments in history that conform to a pattern highly characteristic of the Loyalist narrative, which can be dissected into several key narrative elements.⁵⁶ The first is the element of threat to Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. In the case of the Battle of the Boyne, it is the threat from Jacobite forces seeking the return of a Catholic monarch to the throne.⁵⁷ The events of the Ulster Crisis, on the other hand, were caused by the threat of the Home Rule Act coming into force, under which Protestants would become a minority in a separate Dublin parliament dominated politically by Catholics. This threat was still present in the Loyalist consciousness during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, which in their narrative was to serve as a test of Northern Ireland's loyalty to the British Empire.

50 McAuley J.W., Ferguson N. 2023, 145.

51 *You Cannot Break Ireland*.

52 *Loyalist Cuchulainn Shankill Parade Belfast* [removed]. Moore R., Sanders A. 2002, 12.

53 *C Company Carnan Street; YCV 1st Belfast Battalion B Company*.

54 *C Company Carnan Street; YCV 1st Belfast Battalion B Company*.

55 *Donegall Road Remembering the History of the Bonfire*.

56 Beiner G. 2007, 370.

57 Cairns D. 2000, 441.

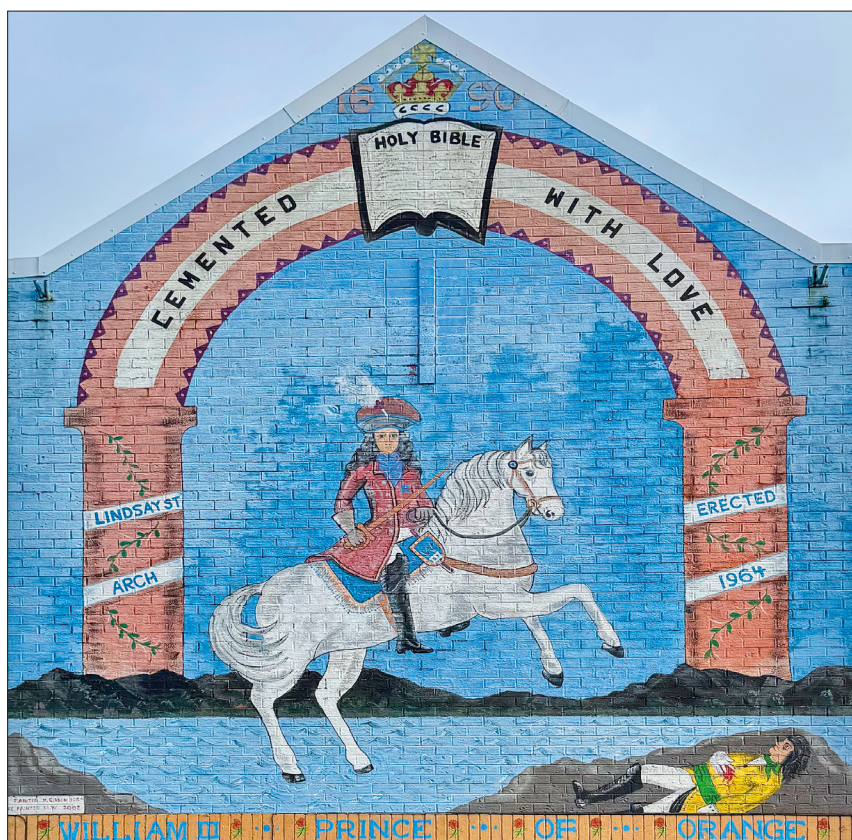


Fig. 4. Prince William of Orange (Source: VBMT)

The motif of threat is strictly linked to the element of mobilisation and the repelling of enemy forces in the face of overwhelming danger. Thus, both the murals depicting the triumph of William of Orange on the banks of the River Boyne⁵⁸ and those commemorating the mobilisation of Unionists during the Ulster Crisis,⁵⁹ as well as the soldiers of the 36th (Ulster) Division during the Battle of the Somme,⁶⁰ actually depict the same phenomenon: a moment of testing and mobilisation upon which the survival of the community and Protestant Ascendancy depends. Victory occurs on the edge of defeat, and the collective is bonded by a sense of peril.⁶¹ Success, in turn, guarantees the continued functioning of the group on its preferred terms.

58 *Prince William of Orange.*

59 *Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant; Better The Grave Than Slavery; Trevor King Mural; UVF; Carson's Volunteers; For God and Ulster.*

60 *Cosy Somme Association East Belfast; Carson's Volunteers; Lord Street Remembers; Lest We Forget.*

61 Beiner G. 2007, 371.



Fig. 5. Trevor King (Source: VBMT)

The Loyalist struggle of the second half of the 20th century is also inscribed into this pattern. This is achieved through a specific symbol: the Flanders poppy. In the cultural sphere of the former British Empire, this is a sign commemorating the heroism of soldiers on the fronts of the Great War. The tradition of commemorating fallen soldiers in this way dates back to 1919 and continues to this day.⁶² However, the use of the poppy on Belfast murals is not limited solely to commemorations of British soldiers' combat in the World Wars, which gives the symbol different connotations in this specific context.

Poppy wreaths in Belfast are an element of murals reminding viewers of the victims of Republican terrorist attacks.⁶³ However, it is not only civilian victims of the conflict who are celebrated in this way. Poppies frame murals dedicated to members

62 Village South Belfast Brigade C COY; Welcome to the Shankill Road.

63 We Owe It To The Future And The Victims.

of Loyalist paramilitary organisations. In this manner, for example, Robert Dougan — an active member of the UDA killed in an assassination in 1998 — was commemorated.⁶⁴ A poppy wreath also frames the likeness of Trevor King, one of the UVF commanders heavily involved in terrorist activities.⁶⁵ Memorials do not always concern specific individuals. The symbolism of the poppy on murals refers just as often to a collective hero: a member of a paramilitary organisation who lost their life fighting ‘for the cause.’⁶⁶ Memory of the heroes of the Great War is also linked and fused in the Loyalist narrative with the memory of the activities of the Loyalist movement from 1970 to 1998. On the streets of Belfast, examples of murals commemorating events of the First World War can be found near which plaques or badges have been placed celebrating members of Loyalist paramilitary organisations who died tragic deaths.⁶⁷

Historical events are thus arranged by the Loyalist community into a specific pattern but are also used to create a positive image of movement members by comparing them to fallen soldiers. This creates a message not only for Loyalists and Republicans but also for bystanders. In this way, murals are used to win the sympathy of those not involved in the cultural conflict. The paintings thus become a method of fighting for victim status — which is crucial for gaining social support. In this context, murals dedicated to figures of Loyalist ‘martyrs’ are extremely important in creating the group’s image.⁶⁸ Forms of commemoration and the politics of memory contribute to the cementing of the conflict. As long as the community identifies as victims, perceiving the other group only as oppressors, it is difficult to speak of dialogue.⁶⁹

Summary

Murals and the symbolism contained within them perform several functions in the urban space of Belfast. Primarily, they serve to build group identity by creating a shared network of associations that construct community identity. Through heraldic symbols, flags and emblems, connections to Great Britain are emphasised. Pro-British sentiment is an element that distinguishes Ulstermen from other inhabitants of the island. Group identity is also built by references to historical events that define its history. The element of pride in the achievements of ancestors, creating a positive vision of one’s own community, is significant here.

⁶⁴ *Robert Dougan Memorial.*

⁶⁵ *Trevor King Mural.*

⁶⁶ *Village South Belfast Brigade C COY; C Company Carnan Street.*

⁶⁷ *Poppy Mural.*

⁶⁸ Beiner G. 2007, 386.

⁶⁹ Spencer G. 2023, 226.

An equally important aspect is the confirmation of the right to Irish land — whether in the form of backdrops for murals celebrating events or individuals important to the community, or through the placement of the paintings and their role in marking the territory of Protestant estates.

This is linked to the function of power projection, in which Loyalist murals inform the recipient of the group's historical victories: the triumph at the Boyne or during the Ulster Crisis. This is also achieved through depictions of members of paramilitary organisations, symbolism related to weapons and aggression, or even through the use of the British flag symbol, which in the context of Belfast acquires a new meaning, reminding one of centuries of Protestant Ascendancy.

The deterrent function is directed at recipients from the Republican camp. However, shows of strength and triumph also reach members of the community with a Loyalist outlook, creating a sense of security and protection. Given which organisations commission some of the murals, one can point here to a link between this protection and the existence and functioning of paramilitary and criminal forces, which in this way emphasised the legitimacy of their operation.

The sense of security also merges with the created historical narrative. Celebrated events from Northern Ireland's past conform to a recognisable and stable pattern underpinning the 'besieged fortress syndrome' presented in Loyalist views.⁷⁰ In this narrative, there is a sense of constant threat that must be overcome through the mobilisation of the community, ensuring triumph and the preservation of dominance.

Today, however, this narrative pattern does not work as effectively as it once did. The 2021 census clearly showed that one of the eternal fears of Protestants has finally come to pass: they have become a minority even within Northern Ireland.⁷¹ In Belfast, according to the census, 45% of the population was raised Catholic, while only 36% was raised in one of the Protestant denominations.⁷² Demographic data shows that the system of Protestant political, economic, and social dominance can no longer be restored, a fact of which the Loyalist-leaning community is aware.⁷³ This also manifests in political changes. In February 2024, for the first time in history, a member of the Republican party Sinn Féin, Michelle O'Neill, became the First Minister of Northern Ireland.

The memory of past events preserved in murals reinforces the cultural distinctness of Loyalists while simultaneously presenting a trap for them, in which a focus on the past and dwelling on ancient victories does not provide the tools to deal with the challenges of the present.

70 Szczecińska-Musiałek E. 2015, 120.

71 Cenzus 2021.

72 *Belfast Census 2021*.

73 Campbell S. 2017, 98.

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Murals of War in Kharkiv: Visual Narratives of Memory, Resistance, and Decolonisation

Summary: This article explores the phenomenon of wartime murals in Kharkiv as a form of public visual expression amid the full-scale war. The murals are analysed not only as artistic objects, but also as political, memorial and symbolic gestures that represent experiences of loss, resistance, collective memory and national self-awareness. The focus is on how murals transform urban space, alter its symbolic geography and contribute to the displacement of colonial and Soviet meanings. The author identifies three main types of murals: memorial murals (dedicated to fallen defenders, volunteers and victims of the war), resistance murals (which affirm heroism, national unity and visual protest) and decolonial murals (which reframe urban space through figures of Ukrainian culture, particularly Hryhorii Skovoroda). The study combines methods of visual analysis, theories of cultural memory (Pierre Nora, Aleida Assmann, James Young), urban studies (Andreas Huyssen, Jill Bennett), postcolonial critique (Edward Said, Achille Mbembe), and the Ukrainian experience of decommunisation. Special attention is given to specific examples of murals, their location, visual language, artistic teams and the layers of meaning formed in Kharkiv's public space. Murals are examined as a form of counternarrative, as acts of visual resistance that mobilise the community while functioning as a living archive of the war. In conclusion, it is argued that Kharkiv's wartime murals are not only a response to trauma, but also a mechanism for reinterpreting space, shaping a new civic identity and affirming Ukraine as a subject of history resisting both physical and symbolic aggression.

Keywords: visual culture, decolonisation, murals, national identity, memory, public space, resistance



The full-scale war launched by Russia against Ukraine in 2022 has become not only an unprecedented challenge to national security but also a catalyst for profound transformations in Ukrainian society, particularly in the realms of collective memory, visual culture and the decolonisation of public space. In this context, the significance of non-institutionalised, often spontaneous or grassroots forms of interpreting wartime experience grows, among which street murals, appearing in frontline cities such as Kharkiv, play a special role. In wartime, the visual language of art becomes a means of immediate reflection, public commentary and the construction of memory narratives that bypass the filters of official historiography or state memory policies. The mural, as a form of street art, combines artistic expression with spatial presence in the daily life of the city. Unlike traditional memorial objects, murals often emerge rapidly, at the site of trauma or victory, responding to specific events or figures. They capture living, unprocessed memory in the process of its formation. In the case of Kharkiv, a city targeted by intense shelling from the very first days of the full-scale war, murals play a dual role: on one hand, they serve as a means to honour loss and trauma; on the other, as an act of cultural resistance and a marker that the city is alive, fighting and remembering. Furthermore, murals in Kharkiv function as a tool of decolonisation by displacing the visual codes of the Soviet and imperial past, filling the urban space with the Ukrainian language, symbolism, images of contemporary heroes and heroines and cultural identifiers.

The study aims to analyse the role of wartime murals in Kharkiv as visual tools that shape memory, strengthen civic resistance and support decolonial reorientation in the urban space. The murals discussed in this article were selected according to three criteria. First, they were created in Kharkiv after the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, and therefore directly reflect wartime experiences. Second, the selected murals exhibit explicit or implicit references to themes of resistance, collective memory, or decolonisation, making them representative of the broader cultural and political dynamics emerging in the city. Third, the study focuses on murals that gained public visibility through their location in central or symbolically significant districts, circulation in media, or active engagement by local communities. The analysis employs a qualitative, visual-interpretative approach that combines elements of semiotic and narrative analysis. The murals are examined through the lens of their symbolic structures, visual metaphors and iconographic references. The visual readings are contextualised with ethnographic observations, photographic documentation and public reactions collected from local media and social networks, allowing for an understanding of how these artworks operate within the city's sociopolitical and cultural landscape. Thus, the analysis of war murals in Kharkiv enables the exploration of how new memory narratives are formed in the contemporary urban environment, what aesthetic and political functions public art fulfills during times of crisis, and how visual culture becomes a powerful means of understanding and

transforming collective experiences. This topic is critical in the broader debates on the de-imperialisation of public space, community participation in memory-making, and the role of art in documenting history ‘from below’.

Public urban space is not only the material environment of everyday life but also a carrier of collective memory, a field of symbolic struggle for identity, interpretation of the past and the formation of shared narratives. In studies of the city’s role in memory production, approaches based on the idea of the spatial localisation of memory — its rooting in the physical environment — are particularly important. The French historian Pierre Nora formulated the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) as material, symbolic, or functional objects where ‘memory crystallises and is fixed’. In the context of visual art in the urban environment, murals can be understood as such ‘sites of memory’, especially when they appear at locations of traumatic events, commemorate the fallen, or symbolise resistance. Nora identifies that these sites emerge when memory is no longer a ‘living experience’ but becomes ‘consciously constructed’ through objects, rituals, or images.¹ Australian scholar Jill Bennett, develops the idea of affective memory, which is conveyed not only through narrative but also through sensory experience. Bennett emphasises that art can serve as a mediator of traumatic experience, allowing the viewer to engage with memory not as an abstract story but as an emotionally involved experience.² In this context, war murals function as affective ‘zones of memory’ that do not merely inform but evoke emotional responses such as empathy, anger, solidarity, or resistance. The German cultural theorist Andreas Huyssen, considers cities as palimpsests of memory, where various historical layers, cultural codes and political contexts overlap. He emphasises that in contemporary conditions, visual culture in public space — memorials, graffiti, murals — becomes a key means of affirming or reinterpreting memory.³ According to Huyssen, street art in the city can serve as a form of ‘counter-memory’, opposing official, dominant narratives. These approaches allow for a complex understanding of the city as a performative space of memory, where murals simultaneously become documents of traumatic experience, gestures of resistance and spatial acts of decolonisation.

A mural in the context of war is not only an artistic gesture but also a complex memorial and political form. Its analysis requires the engagement of interdisciplinary theories — from visual studies and urbanism to trauma theory and the decolonial turn. The visual image as a memorial agent is presented in the work of W.J.T. Mitchell, where the author argues that images possess their own ‘agency’ in public space — they seem to ‘want’ to say something, evoke a reaction, and exert influence.⁴ Thus, the mural acts

1 Nora P. 1989, 7–8.

2 Bennett J. 2005, 36.

3 Huyssen A. 2003, 7–9.

4 Mitchell W.J.T. 2005, 30.

not as a passive representation but as an active agent in the memory process. Viewing the mural as a visual text, it can be seen that it functions in an urban space similarly to a literary or documentary narrative. It unfolds stories of heroism, pain and resistance, addressing the viewer through metaphors, symbols, colour and sometimes literal quotes. James Young notes that unstable memory, in the form of visual representations, is capable of capturing not only facts but also the emotional colouring of events, often contesting official history.⁵ Aleida Assmann also speaks about the mediation of memory — its ‘carriers’ can be not only archives and documents but also images, spatial interventions and cultural gestures.⁶ Murals precisely function as such a ‘medium’, capable of being simultaneously aesthetic, political and documentary. The study of visual art as a form of trauma representation is especially relevant for analysing war murals. Dominic LaCapra⁷ and Cathy Caruth⁸ view art as a space for working through collective pain that is not always easily verbalised. In this context, murals function as visual acts of emotional witnessing, sometimes replacing traditional monuments.

As a spatial intervention, a mural changes the city’s semantics — it intrudes into a landscape that may still carry Soviet or imperial traces, effectively a rewrite. Miwon Kwon emphasises that site-specific art transforms not only space but also the identity of a place.⁹ Kharkiv’s murals, often created on sites of war destruction, shape a new topography of memory where space speaks of contemporary history and trauma. This gesture also holds political power, which Boris Groys describing art as a form of soft political intervention, especially in conditions of crisis or authoritarian control.¹⁰ In the case of Kharkiv, this is also a decolonial gesture that, according to Edward Said, undermines the representational hegemony of imperial discourse.¹¹ Achille Mbembe¹² and Madina Tlostanova¹³ also emphasise the need to decentralise knowledge and restore local voices in public art, which is especially important for post-Soviet, trauma-affected spaces. Ukrainian scholar Heorhii Kasyanov, in numerous works, emphasises that post-Soviet societies, particularly Ukraine, are characterised by a multiplicity and competition of memory narratives, which take on a distinct spatial form in streets, memorials and visual objects. According to Kasyanov, memory in the 21st century is a ‘battleground’, not merely a background narrative of history.¹⁴

5 Young J.E. 1993, 15.

6 Assmann A. 2011, 107.

7 LaCapra D. 2001.

8 Caruth C. 1996.

9 Kwon M. 2002, 3.

10 Groys B. 2008, 24.

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13 Tlostanova M. 2017.

14 Kasyanov H. 2018, 17–18.

As a tool of soft decolonisation, especially in eastern Ukrainian cities where the Soviet legacy remained visually dominant for a long time, street art is interpreted in the research of Kharkiv scholar Roman Liubavskyi. He views the mural as an act of transforming the urban environment that ‘blurs the boundary between official and unofficial art, between monument and protest.’

Thus, murals in Kharkiv emerge as multifunctional entities: markers that anchor memory in space; texts that tell stories in visual form; and interventions that transform the visual and political semantics of the environment. Applying the approaches of Mitchell, Kwon, Young, Groys, Assmann, Said and others allows not only for a deeper interpretation of the functioning of murals in public spaces but also for situating the Ukrainian experience within the global context of post-traumatic art, decolonial action and cultural resistance.

The total destruction of architecture and urban spaces caused by the war creates new contexts for artistic practices that generate visual responses to the devastated urban environment.¹⁵ In this situation, murals themselves become vulnerable objects: exposed to continuous shelling and urban degradation, they risk being damaged or erased, turning the question of their preservation into an urgent cultural and ethical challenge.¹⁶ The murals that appeared in Kharkiv after the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine are not only visual manifestations of wartime but also markers of the transformation of urban space and collective consciousness. They capture reactions to trauma, mobilise resistance, redefine identity and create new, hybrid forms of public expression. To understand this phenomenon, it is useful to distinguish several functional types of Kharkiv murals, which can simultaneously overlap or interact within a single image.

In the context of war, Kharkiv’s murals can be seen as a form of ‘traumatic art’ that captures shock, loss and grief, while simultaneously transforming these states into visual resistance. Memory in the murals is not only a fixation on the past but also an invitation to act — remembrance becomes a form of mobilisation. The murals in Kharkiv have become public monuments to contemporary heroes. They emerge not by top-down decisions but from the initiatives of communities, comrades-in-arms, families and artists. Among the examples of memory and heroisation murals, one mural is highly prominent which is dedicated to two fallen fighters of the ‘Kraken’ unit — Andriy Khrypunov (call sign ‘Psykh’) and a fighter with the call sign ‘Vzhyk’ (Fig. 1). Andriy participated in the Kharkiv counteroffensive, which led to the liberation of his native village, Kivsharivka. ‘Psykh’ died at the age of 21 on the Donetsk front while on a combat mission. Information about ‘Vzhyk’ is still limited due to certain

¹⁵ Belinskyi S. et al. 2023, 16–34.

¹⁶ Molodid O. et al. 2023, 1381–1390.

circumstances. During the battles for Soledar, thanks to his knowledge of topography, a successful evacuation under enemy fire was conducted. He died a Hero while performing a combat mission on the Kupiansk front. At the centre of the mural is a shield featuring the Kraken unit's logo and an inscription that, translated from Latin, means 'God and Fatherland'. This phrase was chosen deliberately, as both young men were Orthodox Christians and gave their lives for their country. The mural was created by members of the creative group 'Kailas-V' — Yana Vovk, Roman Partala and Serhii Yakimenko.¹⁷ During the full-scale war, murals have also appeared in Kharkiv dedicated to Chief Sergeant of the engineering and sapper reconnaissance of the 95th Separate Air Assault Brigade Oleksii Ostapenko; fighters of the 'Kraken' unit, Oleh Sapalenko ('Yuvelir') and Oleh Fadeyenko ('Malysh'); as well as the commander of the volunteer formation 'Freikor' Heorhii Tarasenko ('Zhora'). The iconography of these murals forms a heroic pantheon of the contemporary war, combining individual stories, religious symbols and signs of belonging to the military community. They not only commemorate memory but also integrate it into the visual narrative of a city caught in armed conflict and ongoing self-identification.



Fig. 1. The mural honouring two fallen fighters of the 'Kraken' unit — Andriy Khrypunov (call sign 'Psykh') and a fighter with the call sign 'Vzhyk'

¹⁷ Tsomyk H. 2024.



Fig. 2. The mural in honour of volunteer Anton Khrustaliyov



Fig. 3. The mural 'Kharkiv — Hero City'



Fig. 4. One of the three murals on the façade of the Kharkiv Theatre of Musical Comedy

In this typology, a particularly striking example is the mural dedicated to volunteer Anton Khrustaliyov, created by artist Andriy Palval in Pivnichna Saltivka — a district of Kharkiv that suffered extensive destruction from shelling (Fig. 2). On 16 March 2022, Anton, along with his comrades, was delivering humanitarian aid — food and medicine — to the civilian population. Their vehicle was struck by Russian rocket artillery fire.¹⁸ This act became a symbol of civic sacrifice: not only soldiers but also volunteers have become heroes of Kharkiv's new history. The mural bearing his portrait is not merely a tribute — it is a visual localisation of pain and resilience. Its placement amid the ruins of Pivnichna Saltivka adds both physical and emotional depth to the work, as it becomes part of the landscape of trauma. As Aleida Assmann notes, memory in public space functions most effectively when it is tied to a specific place and a personal story.¹⁹ In this case, the personal becomes collective: Khrustaliyov represents not only himself but also embodies the image of thousands of volunteers who risked — and continue to risk — their lives for the sake of others.

The war has radically transformed Kharkiv's public space. The urban landscape, destroyed by Russian strikes, has become both a site of destruction and a stage for resistance. In this context, murals have acquired a particularly significant function — they

¹⁸ *U Kharkovi...*

¹⁹ Assmann A. 2011, 243.

are no longer merely aesthetic or memorial. They have become visual declarations symbolising the city's resilience, gestures of solidarity with Kharkiv and its residents, acts of cultural restoration and expressions of political protest. A powerful example is the mural 'Kharkiv — Hero City' by artist Anastasiia Khudiakova, created in October 2022 at 95 Novobavarskyi Avenue (Fig. 3). This building — one of the first to be destroyed by enemy shelling on 1 March 2022 — was restored, and its facade now features a large-scale mural. The artwork depicts construction workers rebuilding Kharkiv, as well as iconic architectural landmarks: the Assumption Cathedral, the Ferris Wheel, the Mirror Stream fountain, the Annunciation Cathedral, the Derzhprom building and the Central Railway Station.²⁰ Thus, this mural serves as a redefinition of a space of trauma: a site of destruction becomes a site of visual renewal — a space that declares Kharkiv lives, resists and rebuilds. In this artistic gesture lies a form of visual solidarity with the city as a living organism, one that resists not only physical devastation but also symbolic erosion.

Murals created not only in memory or honour, but directly at sites of traumatic events — literally on the wounds of the city — play a special role in the visual resistance. In this context, the murals on the façade of the Kharkiv Theatre of Musical Comedy serve as a multilayered visual testimony to resilience, an aesthetic response to violence and a symbolic act of resistance through art. On 23 August 2022, Kharkiv City Day, a Russian missile struck the theatre, damaging the façade and shattering all the windows. Instead of simply applying a covering of plywood, the theatre's administration transformed these scars into a space for artistic intervention by engaging the theatre's artist, Mariya Storozhuk. The first mural — portraits of the theatre's actresses dressed in blue and yellow, gazing hopefully into the sky — is a deeply metaphorical image. It combines beauty, vulnerability and resilience, with the female figures simultaneously embodying the Muse and the Mother-Protectress, symbolising the role of culture as a source of spiritual resistance. The second mural is a vivid theatrical metaphor for freedom and defiance (Fig. 4). It depicts a ballerina in mid-leap, wrapped in the Ukrainian flag. Her movement is a gesture of life, a dance as an act of resistance, and the blue-and-yellow banner becomes an almost winged form. The inscription on the façade — a graphic play on the Ukrainian words for 'free' (*vilna*) and 'war' (*viina*) — underscores the fragile yet unyielding nature of Ukrainian freedom, which grows in spite of destruction. This is an example of the visual deconstruction of language through art, opening new horizons for semiotic resistance. The third mural continues this logic, combining military themes, patriotic symbolism and a hope for victory. It functions as a public message to the community, conveying not only the fact of struggle but also its meaning — the transition from darkness to light, from pain

²⁰ *Mural Kharkiv – Misto Heroi*. 2025.

to rebuilding.²¹ This triptych on the theatre's façade exemplifies what W.J.T. Mitchell, calls an image that possesses its own 'will'²² — in the context of war, the image ceases to be a passive representation and becomes an active participant in dialogue, a subject of remembrance, resistance and renewal. The theatre, as an institution, acquires new meaning here — the cultural space becomes a bunker of freedom, where every artistic gesture is a response to violence, a visual manifestation of the city's resilience. Art placed directly at the site of impact becomes a form of counter-narrative, one that publicly rejects the occupier's discourse and offers an alternative perspective: resistance through beauty, survival through creativity.

Among all forms of artistic resistance, a distinct aesthetic and ethical position is occupied by the street art of Hamlet Zinkivskiy — one of Kharkiv's most renowned artists. His work does not follow the typical pattern of 'military murals' — there are almost no depictions of weapons or heroism in the conventional sense. Yet his pieces serve as invisible pillars of inner resistance, philosophical defiance and hope. Hamlet's first graffiti appeared back in 2000, and since then, he has created over 150 works, more than 100 of which have survived even after the massive shelling of the city. This testifies not only to the material durability but also to the symbolic resilience of his art. His approach stands in stark contrast to loud propaganda: concise black-and-white figures and handwritten texts, often placed directly on entrance walls, fences, or utility buildings. Phrases like 'Everything will be okay', 'Light will prevail', 'You are alright', and later during the war: 'The city that stands', 'People matter more than buildings', 'It's hard to strangle bastards with your hands down' (Fig. 5) — become forms of care and solidarity, gentle yet unwavering gestures of support.²³ These are words that do not shout but whisper — and yet they resonate at the very heart of social pain. In this sense, Zinkivskiy plays the role of a city chronicler and visual philosopher. His art is a diary of inner resilience, something akin to a quiet but persistent 'internal front'. These images do not carry canonical memorial weight, but that is precisely where their power lies: they are woven into the fabric of everyday life, as if piercing it with new meanings. As Miwon Kwon notes in *One Place After Another*, site-specific art derives its strength precisely from being rooted in the place and context in which it exists.²⁴ Hamlet's graffiti are exactly that — not 'exported' symbols, but organic parts of the urban organism that convey its pain, hope and self-irony. These works are not just art on a wall. They are the 'voices of the city', an inner monologue that has become collective, creating a narrative of shared resistance, dignity and resilience.

21 Tsvietkova S., Hnatiuk I. 2022.

22 Mitchell W.J.T. 2005, 30–35.

23 Ponomarenko I. 2025.

24 Kwon M. 2002, 3.



Fig. 5. The mural by Hamlet Zinkivskyi is titled: 'It's inconvenient to strangle scum with lowered hands'



Fig. 6. The mural dedicated to Hryhorii S. Skovoroda was created by Anastasiia Khudiakova and Mykhailo Novikov

The third dimension of Kharkiv's murals is visual decolonisation. This involves not merely creating new images but re-signifying the urban space—replacing traces of the Soviet or Russian imperial past with new narratives rooted in Ukrainian identity. Such murals do more than decorate facades — they intervene in the fabric of the city, rewriting the identity of streets, squares and buildings, restoring historical agency. As Edward Said wrote, colonial power creates a 'geography of domination', subjugating space not only physically but also imaginatively.²⁵ A mural as counter-geography is a way to deconstruct a foreign narrative, overlay it with one's own Ukrainian meaning, and create an emancipated topography where not the Kremlin or Lenin dominate, but Skovoroda, Shevchenko and Marko Vovchok. One of the most powerful gestures of visual decolonisation in Kharkiv is the monumental mural dedicated to Skovoroda, unveiled for his 300th anniversary on 3 December 2022 (Fig. 6). This mural not only honours the figure of the Ukrainian philosopher but also directly displaces imperial images from the old centre of Kharkiv — right next to buildings where architectural remnants of the Soviet era once prevailed. Skovoroda is depicted in a blue zhupan, holding a book and a staff, as a wandering thinker and symbol of Ukrainian spiritual self-sufficiency. The format itself — 18 by 13 metres, composed of 70 separate fragments — represents an architectural manifestation of an idea, not a random drawing but a declaration of presence. The materials allow the mural to be dismantled and relocated — symbolically becoming a mobile, living memory, much like Skovoroda's own thought. The authors are Anastasiia Khudiakova and Mykhailo Novikov, well-known artists in Kharkiv.²⁶ It is important that the mural did not appear on a 'blank slate', but in a place where visual dominance had long belonged to other — imperial — symbols. Its emergence is an act of visual displacement, negation and at the same time, cultural emergence.

Another initiative is a mural created by the community of Kharkiv National Pedagogical University named after Skovoroda (Fig. 7). Here, the philosophical legacy is presented through a combination of a portrait of the thinker and the visualisation of his aphorisms, inscribed on the walls: 'Love arises from love: when I want to be loved — I am the first to love', 'As a nut is nothing without its kernel, so is a person without a heart'. The authors are faculty members and students — Dmytro Chaus, Yehor Lobodynskyi, Mykhailo Lytvyn, Denys Khomyakov and Nadiya Sydorova.²⁷ Thus, the educational institution acts not only as a learning establishment but also as an active participant in the cultural decolonisation of the city. This mural carries not only an educational but also a spatial-political message: it demonstrates that Skovoroda does not belong to the empire, as he was often represented in the Soviet cultural canon — he is a Ukrainian thinker, and his philosophy is part of our national emancipation.

25 Said E. 1994, 225.

26 *Mural Hryhoriu Skovorodi*. 2025.

27 Todorova O. 2022.



Fig. 7. The mural dedicated to Hryhorii Skovoroda was created by faculty and students at Kharkiv National Pedagogical University

Thus, in Kharkiv, the mural becomes a tool for rewriting the city's symbolic map. This is especially significant in a place that, for decades, was saturated with imperial visual markers — from Lenin monuments to street names, architectural landmarks and memorial bas-reliefs. Now, each new mural is not merely a 'decoration' on a wall. It is a local point of resistance, a living form of collective memory, where we ourselves determine who has the right to belong in the space, whom we choose to remember, and whom we choose to displace.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the war murals in Kharkiv are not merely aesthetic expressions of art but, above all, visual documents of the present that record experiences of loss, resistance, trauma and national affirmation. They shape a new public topography of memory, where every façade becomes a potential bearer of meaning — a marker of dignity or pain. In wartime, art steps beyond the confines of galleries, becoming a weapon, an act of solidarity, a form of intervention in a space under constant threat. The analysed examples reveal three key functions of these murals: memorial (honouring the fallen, articulating collective grief), resistance (heroisation, protest, solidarity) and decolonial (displacing imperial meanings, affirming Ukrainian identity). These functions intertwine, and each mural is not merely an image but a text that enters into dialogue with the city and the viewer, assigning new meanings to space and time. Through its murals, Kharkiv transforms into a living archive of war, where every building façade bears witness to the emotional and historical experience of the community. Their appearance is not accidental but reflects a societal need to speak, remember, resist and reclaim identity. Thus, the visual narratives formed in the urban space are not only a response to wartime reality but also a powerful means of transforming collective memory, cultural self-identification and asserting Ukraine as a subject of history.

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Urbanonymy as an Instrument of Commemoration and De-commemoration of the German-Soviet War in Kharkiv

Summary: The article explores the process of commemoration and de-commemoration of the Second World War events in Kharkiv. The study examines how the memory of the German-Soviet War is inscribed into Kharkiv's toponymic landscape and analyses the transformations shaping this commemorative dimension in the present era. The scientific novelty of this publication lies in examining the emergence and consolidation of the memory of individuals and events of the Second World War, particularly its German-Soviet dimension, within the toponymic landscape during the second half of the XX century and the first quarter of the XXI century; in assessing the influence of state normative and legal acts adopted between 2015 and 2025 on the contemporary nomination of urbanonyms; and in advancing hypotheses concerning the prospective trajectories of commemorating the history of 1941–1945 through the renaming of specific toponyms.

Analysing the transformations in Kharkiv's contemporary toponymy, the author concludes the city is undergoing a reformatting of historical memory through the new nomination of urbanonyms. The current authors of state ideology, active proponents of a revised interpretation of Ukraine's history, expect that by renaming objects within the street and road network, they will be able to reshape the commemoration of the German-Soviet War. Over time, this is anticipated to erode the respectful attitude toward that period of the country's past in popular memory and to alter public perceptions of the veterans of that war. An examination of the de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War reveals an intensifying state involvement in the nomination of geographical names. At present, Ukraine has a series of normative legal acts that regulate the narratives to be employed in geographical naming. An analysis of commemoration and de-commemoration in Kharkiv indicates that the formation of the city's new toponymic landscape is significantly influenced by members of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) 'Decolonisation. Ukraine.'

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.08> — received: 2025-09-25 — verified: 2025-10-21 — accepted: 2026-03-22

135–148

funding information: Kharkiv Scientific and Methodological Center of the Protection of Cultural Heritage — **conflicts of interests:** none
declaration regarding the use of GAI tools: not used — **ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication — **the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** [HD 100%]



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This organisation seeks to contest and reframe the public memory of those who fought against the Nazis in the ranks of the Red Army during the Second World War, as well as the events that unfolded in the Kharkiv region between 1941 and 1945.

Keywords: World War II, Kharkiv, urbanism, ideology, commemorations, de-commemorations

Introduction

Humanity tends to preserve the memory of pivotal historical events, and those of particular symbolic weight are often inscribed into geographical names. This dynamic is evident in the commemoration of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945. Across numerous cities of the former Soviet Union, streets and avenues were named after Soviet liberators or after events linked to the liberation of settlements from Nazi occupation. Kharkiv, like thousands of other settlements of the former Soviet Union, embodies this commemorative practice in its toponymic landscape.

The aim of this study is to examine how the memory of the German-Soviet War has been embedded in Kharkiv's toponymic landscape and to explore the disruptions affecting this commemorative aspect in the present day. The scientific novelty of this publication lies in investigating the emergence and consolidation of the memory of individuals and events from the Second World War, particularly its German-Soviet dimension, through toponymy in the second half of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century. Additionally, it aims to identify the impact of state normative and legal acts adopted between 2015 and 2025 on the contemporary naming of urbanonyms.

This article is based on the minutes from the sessions of the City Council deputies covering the period from 2010 to 2024.¹ It also references decrees issued by the mayor² and regional authorities,³ all of which can be found on the official websites of the respective administrations.

To explain the reasons for the renaming of urbanonyms, the study draws on the Methodological Materials for the Commemoration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation and the 70th Anniversary of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War (8–9 May 2015), published by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, as well as the relevant laws of Ukraine: On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the XX Century, On the Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–1945, and On the Condemnation

1 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 156/16; Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 437/23; Rishennia Kharkivskoi mis-koi Rady.

2 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

3 Rozporyadzhennya no. 513V.

and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonisation of Toponymy. The latter two are commonly referred to as the laws on decommunisation and derussification.

The author explored certain aspects of the subject in her own publications. Notably, she contributed to the volume *Kharkiv: A Reference Guide to Names: 7,000 Streets, Squares, Parks, Districts...*, which provides systematic, reference-style descriptions of the city's streets, including their origins, naming and subsequent renaming.⁴ Additionally, in her article *The Reflection of the History of the Great Patriotic War in the Toponymy of Kharkiv*, the author analysed the chronology and mechanisms by which elements of the street network were named to commemorate the events of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945.⁵ Contemporary changes in urbanonyms have also been documented by several current journalists.⁶ Their publications provide detailed reports on the proposed modifications to street names and consistently follow the process of implementing the relevant legislative acts.

Data Analysis and Results

The first urbanonyms related to the stated theme appeared shortly after the end of the war. In the course of rebuilding the city, the inhabitants of Kharkiv established streets named *Armiiska* (Army Street), *Artilleriiska* (Artillery Street), *Hvardiiska* (Guards Street), *Serzhantska* (Sergeant Street), *Ofiterska* (Officer Street), and others.

Subsequently, a number of additional Streets were established, including *Kharkivskyykh Dyvizii* (Kharkiv Divisions Street, 1963), *Hvardiitsiv-Zaliznychnykh* (Guards Railwaymen Street), *23-ho Serpnia* (23rd of August Street, 1968), *Heroiv Stalingradu* (Heroes of Stalingrad Avenue, 1982).⁷ These urbanonyms serve to commemorate significant episodes in the history of Kharkiv connected with the events of that war.

Hvardiitsiv-Zaliznychnykh (Guards Railwaymen Street) was named so due to its proximity to the Railway Administration. On 1 July 1941, the 28th Railway Brigade departed for the front from this location. By the end of the war, the unit bore the official title First Guards Railway Warsaw Order of Kutuzov Brigade, which had distinguished itself in combat operations in Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

The 'Heroes of Stalingrad' narrative bears a direct relevance to the Kharkiv region. Within historical scholarship, it is widely acknowledged that the Battles of Stalingrad and the Caucasus (1942–1943) were the consequence of the Red Army's defeat in the spring and summer of 1942 in the Kharkiv region and in Crimea.⁸

⁴ Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011.

⁵ Diakova E. 2010, 327–330.

⁶ See: *Ponad 500 vulic...*

⁷ *Ponad 500 vulic*; Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 68, 69, 84, 334.

⁸ Antill P. 2007, 29.

In the aftermath of the victory at Stalingrad, Soviet forces advanced westward, undertaking the liberation of Ukrainian territories from German occupation. Between January and March 1943, combat operations extended into the Kharkiv region. At the outset, these engagements proved favourable for the Red Army, and on 16 February, Kharkiv was liberated for the first time. However, on 19 February, German troops launched a counteroffensive of the battle to their advantage. It was only on 25 March that the Red Army succeeded in re-establishing stability along the front line.

Fierce fighting took place near the villages of Taranivka and Sokolove. On 2 March, a platoon under the command of Lieutenant Petro Shyronin assumed the defence near the railway junction close to Taranivka. The unit successfully blocked the advance of 25 tanks and mechanised infantry. In the course of repelling repeated assaults, the guardsmen destroyed 16 tanks and assault guns and inflicted nearly 100 enemy casualties. Twenty-five soldiers received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for their actions.⁹

On 23 August 1943, Kharkiv was finally liberated from German occupation,¹⁰ and the event provided the basis for commemorating this victory through the naming of a street. Upon the completion of military operations in the region, ten divisions that had distinguished themselves in the battles for the city were conferred the honorific title 'Kharkivski' (Named after Kharkiv). Thus, the chrononyms listed above bear direct relevance to the history of the Kharkiv region and were intended to preserve the memory of the events that took place in the area between 1941 and 1943.

In the Soviet period and during the years of Ukraine's independence (up to 2014), the majority of streets within this thematic category — 115 in total — were of an anthropological character, that is, they were named after individuals who had demonstrated courage and heroism either at the front or in the enemy's rear. A number of hodonyms commemorated Heroes of the Soviet Union, including pilot Mykola Gastello, General Lev Dovator, commander of the 17th Rifle Brigade of the NKVD troops Ivan Tankopii and junior lieutenant of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Infantry Battalion Otakar Jaroš. Others were dedicated to commanders of fronts and armies involved in the liberation of Kharkiv from Nazi occupation, such as Marshals Ivan Konev, Rodion Malinovskyi, and Pavlo Rybalko. Further examples honouring partisans and underground activists, among them Ivan Bakulin, head of the Kharkiv underground regional committee of the Communist Party and Oleksandr Zubarev and Halyna Nikitina, leaders of the Kharkiv underground regional Komsomol committee.¹¹ Thus, through the naming of elements of the street and road network, the residents of Kharkiv were consistently reminded of those who had fought against the Nazis both

⁹ Khandozhko R., Lastouski A., Sklokina I. 2012, 39–45.

¹⁰ Erickson J. 1983, 121.

¹¹ Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 21, 67, 92, 111, 140, 183, 211, 276, 310–311, 366, etc.

at the front and in the occupied territories, as well as of the heroic deeds of Red Army soldiers and commanders, partisans, and underground activists.

Substantial shifts in the interpretation of the events and participants of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 took place in 2014, coinciding with the change of political leadership in Ukraine. The first legislative acts to redefine approaches to the war were adopted on 9 April 2015: On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the XX Century, and On the Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–1945.¹² These laws placed Red Army soldiers on the same level as Ukrainian nationalists and fighters of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In doing so, the laws effectively blurred the dividing line between representatives of opposing sides, individuals who had confronted one another on the battlefield.

An additional landmark document influencing the interpretation of the events of 1941–1945 was the 'Methodological Materials for the Commemoration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation and the 70th Anniversary of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War' (8–9 May 2015), issued by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (Ukrainskyi instytut natsionalnoi pam'iaty, UINM) on 30 April 2015. From that moment, it became official in Ukraine to refer to the conflict not as the Great Patriotic War, but as the German-Soviet War or the Second World War.¹³ Although these methodological guidelines were not directly concerned with toponymic change, they clearly signalled a reorientation of the state ideology regarding the events and participants of the war. For scholars examining the naming and renaming of urbanonyms, it was evident that the new ideological framework would necessitate transformations in the nomenclature of the street and road network.

The first state legal act to mandate changes in geographical names was the Law of Ukraine: On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols. This law established the requirement to alter toponyms, with the explicit caveat that this did not apply to 'the names connected with resistance and the expulsion of Nazi occupiers from Ukraine.'¹⁴ In other words, the document specified that anthroponyms associated with individuals who had participated in the expulsion of the Nazis from Ukraine were exempt from renaming.¹⁵ This provision could be interpreted as indicating that the names of the street and road network commemorating Soviet servicemen who had participated in the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 were not subject to change. To ensure clarity in the implementation of the law, the staff of the UINM

12 Zakon Ukrainy no. 314-VIII, no. 25, art.191.

13 Metodichni materiali...

14 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

15 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

compiled a list of individuals falling within the scope of the decommunisation legislation, thereby designating the hodononyms commemorating them as subject to remaining.

The register also included the name of Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgii Zhukov, who had long been regarded as the ‘Marshal of Victory’, but was included on the grounds that he had ‘distinguished himself by numerous orders for the execution of Red Army soldiers and by engaging in acts of looting in the occupied territories of Germany.’¹⁶ The name of Georgii Zhukov entered the toponymic landscape of Kharkiv in February 1990. At the public hearings on urbanonymic renamings held on 10 November 2015, the residents of the district where the avenue is located voted by a majority to retain the Marshal’s name. Nevertheless, pursuant to the order issued on 17 May 2016, by Ihor Rainin, then Head of the Kharkiv Regional Administration, the avenue was renamed in honour of Petro Hryhorenko.¹⁷

The decision provoked considerable discontent among part of Kharkiv’s residents, including the city’s then mayor, Hennadii Kernes. He filed a lawsuit seeking the annulment of the order of the regional administration, arguing that a majority of participants at the public hearings had opposed the renaming. This initiated protracted litigation between the municipal authorities and the UINM, which consistently advocated for the renaming of the avenue. The legal dispute continued until September 2020, when Kernes contracted COVID-19 and subsequently passed away in December, thereby bringing the proceedings to a close. The renaming in honour of Petro Hryhorenko ultimately prevailed. Hryhorenko himself had been a participant in the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 and pursued a military career after the war, attaining the rank of major general. From the 1960s onward, however, he was subjected to persecution for his criticism of the Soviet regime. His connection to Kharkiv was limited to a two-year period of study at the Technological Institute (now the National Technical University Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute).¹⁸ It is noteworthy that since the 2010s, the public image of Georgii Zhukov in Ukrainian mass media has been constructed almost exclusively in negative terms. This ongoing stream of critical representations has had a profound impact: currently, a significant portion of Ukrainian society views Zhukov unfavourably, characterising him as a corrupt figure and a military commander who showed little regard for the lives of his soldiers.

The year 2015 should be regarded as the starting point for the reconfiguration of collective memory concerning the events of 1941–1945. The systematic demystification of Georgii Zhukov and other military commanders precipitated an erosion of the previously dominant positive remembrance of the war. Within this framework, maintaining

16 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

17 Rozporyadzhennya no. 181.

18 *Hryhorenko Petr Hryhorevich*.

thematically related toponyms has become increasingly difficult to justify and legally inconsistent with decommunisation legislation, since the Red Army soldiers fought to restore Soviet authority rather than to establish Ukraine as an independent state.

Notwithstanding the ongoing process of de-commemoration, in 2016, a new anthroponym associated with the Second World War was nonetheless introduced into Kharkiv's urbanonymic landscape: Dzherelnyi Lane was designated in honour of Vanda Binevska, a sniper of the 1st Czechoslovak Battalion who had fought on the territory of Kharkiv in March 1943.¹⁹

An indicator of the declining reverence toward veterans and the events of the German-Soviet War is the launch in 2017 of the online project 'Decommunize Kharkiv'²⁰ by nationalist-oriented youth. The project's primary objective was to monitor the implementation of the decommunisation law.

The large-scale renaming of toponyms acquired renewed momentum with the outbreak of the War of Independence of Ukraine²¹ on 24 February 2022. In response to the Russian aggression, nationalist-oriented groups began to demand the removal of all geographical names in Ukraine that evoked associations with Russia or its shared history with Ukraine. On 21 March 2023, the Law of Ukraine: On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonisation of Toponymy was enacted.²² This legislative act established the requirement to replace geographical names, including anthroponyms dedicated to individuals who had 'supported, glorified, or justified Russian imperial policy,'²³ thereby extending its scope to those who had fought for Soviet power during the years 1941–1945.

In Kharkiv, a considerable number of elements of the street and road network were subject to renaming, many of them connected with the German-Soviet War. It was apparent that the simultaneous renaming of all designated urbanonyms was not feasible; consequently, the process was implemented gradually over a two-year period and was formally completed on 24 July 2024.

With the change in the political situation in Ukraine, the members of the online project 'Decommunise Kharkiv' reconstituted themselves as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) 'Decolonisation. Ukraine'. The relatively slow pace of standardising the names of Kharkiv's street and road network provoked dissatisfaction among the organisation's representatives, who sought to accelerate the process of eliminating Russian and Soviet legacies. For this reason, they came to be referred

19 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 156/16, 4.

20 Alina Alina. 2017.

21 A new term, introduced based on: Zakon Ukrainy no. 4579-IX, chapter 1, article 1, point 1, subpoint 1.

22 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII. no. 65. art. 221.

23 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII. art. 8, point 6.

to colloquially as ‘decolonisers’, a term by which they will subsequently be designated in this publication. These activists continued to identify urbanonyms for re-naming in accordance with the law on decolonisation.

In March 2022, the decolonisers compiled a register comprising 509 elements of Kharkiv’s street and road names network, proposed for remaining, 41 of which were associated with the events and participants of the German-Soviet War.²⁴ The register was published online and subsequently submitted to the City Commission and to the Department for Toponymy and the Protection of the Historical and Cultural Environment²⁵ of the Kharkiv City Executive Committee. Within this thematic category, the decolonisers identified for renaming such urbanonyms as Heroiv Stalingradu (Heroes of Stalingrad), Molodohvardiiska (Young Guard), Hvardiitsiv-Shyronintsiv (Shyronin Guardsmen), Panfilovtsiv (Panfilov’s Men), and 7-ma Hvardiiska Armiia (7th Guards Army), along with 36 additional anthroponyms. The latter group encompassed generals who had commanded forces in the liberation of the Kharkiv region from Nazi occupation, among them — Marshal of Armored Forces Pavlo Rybalko, Colonel General Ivan Managarov, and Colonel General Mykhailo Shumilov — as well as soldiers and officers awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, including both local residents and those decorated for their actions in battles fought on Kharkiv soil, such as platoon commander Lieutenant Petro Shyronin, writer and journalist Serhii Borzenko and NKVD officer Colonel Ivan Tankopii. The register further incorporated underground activists who had resisted either in Kharkiv or in other regions of the Soviet Union, for example Oleg Koshevoi, the leader of the underground organisation ‘Moloda Hvardiia’ (‘Young Guard’) in Donbas and Lialia Ubiivovk, head of the Poltava underground organisation and a graduate of Kharkiv University.

Finally, the list was inconsistent, including both genuinely distinguished figures and individuals who can be seen as constructs of Soviet propaganda, such as the political commissar Vasily Klochkov (remembered for the phrase later transformed into a slogan, ‘Russia is vast, but there is nowhere to retreat — Moscow is behind us!’) and Sydir Kovpak, one of the leading commanders of the Soviet resistance movement.

The first renaming addressed a designation associated with Moscow, the capital of the Russian Federation: on 11 May 2022, Moskovskyi Avenue was renamed Heroiv Kharkova (Heroes of Kharkiv).²⁶

The city’s mayor, Ihor Terekhov, justified the new designation with the following explanation: ‘By Heroes of Kharkiv one should understand all those who have defended and continue to defend Kharkiv during the war — the army, territorial defence units,

24 *Ponad 500 vulic.*

25 Вони мають однакову назву.

26 Rishennia Kharkivskoi miskoi Rady narodnykh deputativ no. 258/22.

rescuers, medical personnel, volunteers and municipal workers.²⁷ This rationale implied a departure from anthroponyms commemorating participants of earlier military conflicts. Subsequent changes in the nomenclature of the street and road network, however, demonstrated inconsistency of such an interpretation.

Based on the estimates of activists from the NGO (NGO) 'Decolonisation.Ukraine' between 2023 and 2024 a total of 561 toponyms²⁸ were altered in Kharkiv, including a number connected with the events and participants of the German-Soviet War. In the course of this process, streets were either restored to their historical designations or renamed in honour of individuals who had fallen in the War of Independence of Ukraine. For example, Vulytsia Koneva (Konev Street) was reverted to its earlier name, Honcharivska,²⁹ Vulytsia Malynovskoho (Malinovskiy Street) regained its historical designation, Zbroiarska (in Ukrainian, but previously named Oruzheynaya from 1937 to 1968),³⁰ and Prospect Heroiv Stalingradu (Heroes of Stalingrad Avenue) was restored to its prior name commemorating the English poet George Byron. By contrast, Vulytsia Henerala Lva Dovatora (General Lev Dovator street), which had honoured a Hero of the Soviet Union, was renamed to commemorate Valerii Romanovskiy,³¹ a serviceman and historian who was killed in 2023.

Two renamings from this period warrant particular scholarly attention: Vulytsia Hastello (Hastello Street) and Vulytsia Kashuby (Kashuba Street). The former was renamed in honour of Oleksii Naikov.³² A native of Kharkiv, Naikov emigrated to Israel in 1996 and subsequently served in the Israel Defence Forces. On 29 October 1998, while escorting a school bus, he encountered a vehicle laden with explosives driven by members of Hamas. In order to avert the loss of children's lives, Naikov deliberately rammed the terrorist vehicle with his jeep, sacrificing his own life in the process and thereby saving the passengers.³³ This act evokes parallels with the wartime of pilot Nikolai F. Gastello, who, on 26 June 1941, directed his burning aircraft into enemy convoys at the cost of his own life. Thus, from 1951, the street bore the name of a pilot credited with ramming a column of German vehicles in July 1941,³⁴ whereas in 2024 it was renamed in honour of a soldier whose heroism took the analogous form of a vehicular sacrifice. From 1983 onwards, one of Kharkiv's streets bore the name of Lieutenant General Volodymyr Kashuba, Hero of the Soviet Union and former head of the

27 *Harkovchanam ostavili...*

28 M'iasnikova A. 2025.

29 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 437/23.

30 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

31 Rozporyadzhennya no. 513V.

32 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

33 Larin Yu. 2023.

34 *Nikolai Gastello*.

Kharkiv Tank School.³⁵ By the order of Mayor Ihor Terekhov of 26 April 2024, the street was renamed in honour of Captain Oleksandr Lavrenko, Hero of Ukraine and alumnus of the Kharkiv Institute of Tank Troops.³⁶ During the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Donbas, Lavrenko commanded a tank company of the 93rd Separate Mechanised Brigade. In 2014, he was killed in action during the battle for the village of Pisky in Donetsk Oblast. The anthroponyms of these streets may be interpreted as thematically consistent: in the first instance, both figures were associated with acts of ramming, whereas in the second, both were tank officers linked to the same tank training institution.

On 6 January 2025, the ‘decolonisers’ expanded their register with additional hononyms, among which those connected to the designated theme included 23rd of August, Hvardiitsiv-Shyronintsiv (Shyronin Guardsmen), Andrii Oschepkov, Oleksandr Zubarev and Hryhorii Rudyk.³⁷ Andrii Oschepkov was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union for his actions in August 1943, when, during combat near the settlement Budi outside Kharkiv, he covered the embrasure of a German bunker with his body, thereby enabling his battalion to advance. The full designation of Rudyk Street commemorates Guards Major Hryhorii Opanasovych Rudyk, commander of the 285th Guards Regiment of the 93rd Kharkiv Guards Rifle Division, who was killed during the liberation of Kharkiv from German forces.³⁸ As indicated earlier, Hero of the Soviet Union Oleksandr Zubarev served as head of the Kharkiv underground regional Komsomol committee. The official rationale for the necessity of renaming these streets was not provided; however, it may reasonably be inferred that the decision was motivated by a broader effort to de-commemorate the memory of figures associated with the German-Soviet War.

The case of the 23rd of August carries particular historical significance. The date is traditionally recognised as the day of Kharkiv’s liberation from nazi occupation and, since 1997, has simultaneously served as the city’s official holiday. In the present context, however, the ‘decolonisers’ have called for a revision of the City Day celebration, contending that its observance on this date diverts the public³⁹ from the Day of the National Flag, commemorated in Ukraine on 23 August, and from Independence Day, observed on the following day.

‘Furthermore, 23 August is observed as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinist Terror (and one might also note, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition)’, stated Milla Denchuk, co-founder of the project ‘Decolonisation. Ukraine.’ ‘It appears profoundly cynical that in Ukraine this

35 Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 125–126.

36 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

37 *V Harkove...*

38 Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 274.

39 M’yasnikova A. 2025.

day is framed as a festive occasion, while internationally it is marked by commemorative practices honouring the victims annihilated by Stalin's regime.⁴⁰ In addition, the 'decolonisers' consistently emphasise that Kharkiv's definitive liberation occurred approximately ten days later, in early September. On these grounds, the activists have advocated for the rescheduling of the City Day celebration to a different date.

The activists acknowledge that on 23 August 1943, a red flag was raised as a symbol of victory over the adversary, yet they disregard the fact that the flag was hoisted not on the outskirts, as they claim in their publications and petitions, but in the very centre of the city, on the Derzhprom building, located on Kharkiv's main square. It is true that on that day the city had not been fully liberated and fighting persisted on the outskirts, which, in contemporary terminology, may be described as the 'mopping-up' of the city. Moreover, it should be recalled that in the postwar period, Kharkiv expanded through the incorporation of nearby settlements, which indeed had been liberated somewhat later than the city proper.

It is noteworthy that the 'decolonisers' have left outside the scope of their attention such designations as *Armiiska* (Army Street), *Artyleriiska* (Artillery Street), *Hvardiiska* (Guards Street), *Zviazku* (Signal Corps Street), *Serzhantska* (Sergeants' Street), *Ofiterska* (Officers' Street) and similar examples. These toponyms emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and likewise bear a direct connection to the events of that period.

The official stance on the history of the German-Soviet War at the higher levels of government remains ambivalent. On the other hand, contemporary attempts have been made to reconfigure its representation, including the substitution of the designation 'Great Patriotic War' with 'German-Soviet War' or 'Second World War.' Nevertheless, emphasis continues to be placed on the fact that Ukraine incurred immense losses in the struggle against Nazism — losses which, it must be underscored, were intrinsically tied to the broader project of restoring Soviet power in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The analysis of urbanonymic transformations indicates that in Kharkiv, the systematic renaming of streets and related toponyms operates as an instrument for the re-configuration of historical memory. Proponents of the prevailing state ideology, who advocate for a revised interpretation of Ukraine's past, anticipate that such changes will gradually reshape the commemoration of the German-Soviet War. It is expected that this process will, over time, attenuate the respectful collective attitude towards this period of the nation's history and reframe public perceptions of its veterans, thereby diminishing the heroic status traditionally ascribed to them.

40 M'yasnikova A. 2025.

At present, a pantheon of new defenders of state sovereignty is in the process of formation in which a central place is assigned to individuals who, in one way or another, engaged in the struggle for Ukraine's independence in the XX century, as well as to those who participated in the ongoing War of Independence of Ukraine. The latter, in accordance with the Law of Ukraine: On the Principles of State Policy of National Memory of the Ukrainian People, is officially recognised as having commenced on 19 February 2024.

Exploring the de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War reveals the growing extent of state intervention in the sphere of geographical nomenclature. Archival evidence concerning the naming and renaming of the street and road network under Soviet rule indicates that such decisions were predominantly taken at the municipal level, albeit under the discernible influence. In present-day Ukraine, by contrast, a series of normative legal acts prescribes which narratives are to be embedded in geographical names and which are to be proscribed. The ideological dimension has thus been formally institutionalised at the legislative level, authorising the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and other state bodies to intervene directly in the process of naming and renaming, even when doing so contravenes considerations of historical appropriateness.

An analysis of the commemoration and de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War in Kharkiv indicates that members of the NGO 'Decolonisation. Ukraine' play a substantial role in shaping the city's new toponymic landscape. Their activities are directed toward redefining public memory of the Soviet past, which in turn affects the remembrance of those who fought in the ranks of the Red Army during the Second World War, as well as the events that took place in the Kharkiv region between 1941 and 1945.

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The Last Journey of Fallen Soldiers in Ukraine: Traditions and Legal Norms

Summary: The Russo-Ukrainian war, which has existed as a limited conflict since 2014 and acquired the character of a full-scale war since 24 February 2022, has led to numerous casualties among both civilians and military personnel. This has brought to the fore the issue of a dignified farewell on the final earthly path of soldiers who gave their lives in battle or died of wounds. In Ukraine during the specified period, informal traditions for the departure of the fallen began to materialise. A military funeral ceremony was developed and, in 2021, legislatively enshrined, which constitutes the formal component of bidding farewell to the fallen. The essence of this ceremony lies in the dignified honouring of the deceased defender, in rendering them due military honours to emphasise that the person being buried is not just anyone, but someone thanks to whom the state of Ukraine exists. This is further supported by the designation of special places for the burial of fallen soldiers, including the National Memorial Military Cemetery, solemnly opened in 2025. These aspects are continually evolving and changing, adapting to new conditions and societal demands. An example is the nationwide minute of silence introduced in March 2022, shortly after the start of the full-scale war, as a daily ritual of gratitude, respect and remembrance for the fallen. This symbolic unifying act, open to the participation of all, is intended to preserve the memory of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the cost of the common struggle for freedom and independence.

Keywords: Russo-Ukrainian war, national memory, military funeral ceremonial, military cemetery, honouring the fallen

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.09> — received: 2025-10-24 — verified: 2025-11-23 — accepted: 2026-03-17

149–159

funding information: Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi National Army Academy, Lviv, Novovolynsk Electromechanical Vocational College
conflicts of interests: none — **declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** not used — **ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication — **the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** [AK 50%] [LK 50%]

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In loving memory of our son, Taras Kharuk,
Lieutenant of the Medical Service, 14th Separate Mechanised Brigade,
fallen on 30 August 2022.

Death has always been an inseparable companion of soldiers and an inherent attribute of any war. Since ancient times, the farewell to those fallen in battle has been accompanied by specific rituals. Although their form has changed repeatedly over the centuries, the essence has remained constant: the community and society paying tribute to those who gave their lives defending their comrades-in-arms and fellow citizens.

The current Russo-Ukrainian war has become the bloodiest armed conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian men and women have sacrificed their lives in the struggle against Russian aggression. The dignified commemoration of the fallen and their farewell on their final earthly journey is a matter of profound importance, touching not only the families of the deceased but also their local communities and Ukrainian society as a whole.¹ This commemoration may be conventionally divided into several dimensions: the informal traditions surrounding the farewell to the fallen; the legal norms governing the burial of soldiers; and the establishment of special burial sites for the fallen.

The article presents how Ukraine commemorates its defenders who died in the war with Russia since 2014. This study considers official legal regulations, military ceremonial procedures, burial sites and informal practices. As illustrated in the article, armed conflict has influenced funeral rituals, which in turn has fostered national identity and social unity.

The article is based on legislative acts and decrees issued by the President and the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. The authors also utilised press and online publications. This approach allowed the study to highlight both the legal aspects of these ceremonies and their social and symbolic significance.

Informal traditions of bidding farewell to the fallen

The emergence of informal customs began during the Revolution of Dignity in early 2014. As a result of the attempts by the authorities of President Viktor Yanukovich to disperse the protest camp (known as the Euromaidan) in the centre of Kyiv, on Independence Square, the first protesters were killed on 21–22 January. Between 18 and 20 February, during large-scale assaults on the protest camp, the number of victims reached one hundred. The fallen were immediately referred to as the Heavenly Hundred (ukr.: *Небесна сотня* = *Nebesna sotnia*). On 21 February, a public farewell for the

¹ See: Beck K.F. 2025, 122–144.

deceased was held on Independence Square. Their bodies were carried in coffins to the stage as ‘Our Father’ (ukr.: *Отче наші* = *Otche nash*) was recited over them. News agencies reported: ‘From time to time, Lemko folk songs resounded.’² The song in question was ‘A Duck Floats on the Tisza’ (ukr.: *Пливе кача по Тисині* = *Plyve kacha po Tysyni*). The 2002 a cappella version performed by the vocal ensemble ‘Pikkardiyska Tertsia’ (ukr.: *Пікардійська Терція*) was chosen as a requiem during the first memorial services on Independence Square for the heroes of the Revolution of Dignity. The composition was first performed in January 2014 at the funeral of the fallen Belarusian Mykhailo Zhiznevskiy. His friends knew that ‘A Duck Floats on the Tisza’ was his favourite song, and therefore they played it during his farewell.³ Because of the deep symbolic and emotional resonance of this song, it continued to be performed in memory of the fallen and gradually became an unofficial hymn sung in honour of the activists of the ‘Heavenly Hundred’ and soldiers who died in the war in eastern Ukraine. Among contemporary informal customs is the formation of a ‘living corridor’, in which residents of a city or village greet their fallen compatriot by kneeling as the funeral procession passes.

At times, new informal traditions have had to replace old Soviet ones. Since the time of the USSR’s military intervention in Afghanistan, the term Cargo 200 (ukr.: *Вантаж 200* = *Vantazh 200*; originally rus.: *Груз 200* = *Gruz 20*) has become established as a euphemism for the dead. Under this code name, aircraft from Afghanistan delivered the bodies of fallen soldiers to the Soviet Union.⁴ In the context of Ukraine’s war against Russia, the use of this term-rooted in the imperial past-became entirely inappropriate. Therefore, in June 2022, veteran and civic activist Leonid Ostaltsev proposed replacing *Vantazh 200* with the designation ‘On the Shield’ (ukr.: *На щиті* = *Na shchytі*).⁵ The new name alludes to ancient military traditions, when fallen warriors were carried by their comrades in a shield.

Ostaltsev’s proposal was supported by both the society and the authorities. In August of the same year, the units of civil-military cooperation responsible for transporting the bodies of fallen defenders of Ukraine restructured the Humanitarian Project of the Armed Forces of Ukraine ‘Evacuation 200’ (ukr.: *Евакуація 200* = *Evakuatsiya 200*) into the Humanitarian Project ‘On the Shield.’⁶ Corresponding logos were developed for the vehicles used to transport the bodies of the fallen to burial sites.

Naturally, every funeral is accompanied by a ceremony of the relevant confession; however, this in detail will not be dwelt upon. It should only be noted that the clergy

² *Na Maidani...*

³ *U ‘Plyve kacha’...*

⁴ Korovushkin V.P. 2020, 80.

⁵ Savoskina K. 2022.

⁶ *Ne “Vantazh 200”...*

and communities of all religious denominations duly render final honours to the fallen. Yet there are also reprehensible exceptions when priests of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine refuse to perform the burial service for soldiers.⁷

Formal Legal Norms Governing the Burial of Fallen Soldiers

The formal legal norms regulating the organisation of burials for fallen soldiers are embodied in the military funeral ceremonial, approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 2 July 2021. These norms are stipulated in Appendix 18 to the *Charter of Garrison and Guard Duty*, titled *Procedure for Conducting the Military Funeral Ritual*.⁸

The main mission of this ritual is to ensure the dignified commemoration of the fallen defender, rendering them appropriate military honours in such a manner that their relatives and local community understand that the person being laid to rest is not an ordinary individual, but someone whose sacrifice underpins the very existence of the Ukrainian state. Regardless of the number of attendees, the family's financial circumstances, or the location of the burial, the ritual is to be performed with precision and reverence, properly honouring the memory of the Warrior who gave their life for the Fatherland. The military funeral ceremony is a privilege granted primarily to fallen defenders of Ukraine and to service members who have previously participated in the defence of the country's independence and territorial integrity.

The ceremony consists of several parts — transportation, farewell (commemoration), and burial. It provides for the participation of an honour guard, military band (or, a bugler and drummer), saluting and a guard bearing the State Flag of Ukraine with a mourning ribbon. Officials of local self-government bodies are obliged to assist in organising the ceremony in every way, while units of the National Police of Ukraine, when necessary, are to ensure the temporary closure of roads during the passing of the funeral cortege. The ceremony also requires the participation of a member of the clergy during the farewell and burial. The ritual is conventionally divided into military and religious parts. Moreover, since the events of the Revolution of Dignity, the tradition of performing funeral services in public squares has become widespread. Consequently, the farewell often takes place not within a religious building but under the open sky.⁹

The contemporary Ukrainian military funeral ceremonial draws simultaneously on ancient national traditions and the standards of the present time. While there is no need to examine all of its components in detail, one element deserves particular mention:

7 "Іє випадки..."

8 *Zakon Ukrainy 'Pro vnesennia zmin do Zakonu Ukrainy...*

9 Buket Ye. 2024.

the covering of the fallen soldier's coffin with the State Flag of Ukraine. Before the coffin is lowered into the grave, the flag is carefully folded and accompanied by appropriate words, presented by the head of the cortege to a relative or another close person of the deceased. Ceremonies involving the State Flag represent a completely new element of the funeral ritual, previously absent in Ukraine, although they are customary in most NATO member states. On the other hand, national traditions whose roots go back to the Cossack era include a rifle salute performed during the lowering of the coffin into the grave. The custom of kneeling while accompanying the coffin with the body of the fallen also dates back to Cossack times.

The transportation of a soldier who has died or been killed in the line of duty — including those who perished outside of the territory of Ukraine — to the places of farewell, commemoration, and burial (or cremation) is conducted at the expense of the state budget. Businesses, institutions, organisations and establishments of all forms of ownership located near the site of the farewell ceremony for the deceased soldier are encouraged to limit the conduct of entertainment and other public events.

Certain provisions of the military funeral ceremony, although formally approved in the relevant normative act, cannot be implemented under current wartime conditions. This applies, in particular, to the Day of National Mourning, which, according to regulations, should be declared in Ukraine when three or more soldiers who died in the line of duty are buried on the same day. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the number of fallen soldiers each day, regrettably, far exceeds this threshold. Consequently, days of mourning are now declared only within individual territorial communities.

On 14 October 2018, on the grounds of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, the Memorial Complex for Honouring the Memory of Service Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine — Hall of Remembrance (ukr.: *Меморіальний комплекс вшанування пам'яті військовослужбовців Збройних Сил України — Зала пам'яті* = *Memorialnyi kompleks vshanuvannya pam'iaty viiskovosluzhbovtiv Zbroinykh Syl Ukrayiny — Zala pam'iaty*) was inaugurated. The memorial is dedicated to those who gave their lives for the freedom, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as well as for global peace and order. Since its opening, each day the names of the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who died on that same calendar date since 1992 — either in combat for Ukraine or during peacekeeping missions — have been recited aloud. After each name, the Bell of Remembrance tolls.¹⁰ Beginning on 29 August 2019, the Hall of Remembrance began honouring not only members of the Armed Forces but also service members of all military and law-enforcement formations who died in battles for Ukraine. Finally, on 15 March 2021, the commemoration ritual was extended

¹⁰ *Vidkryto...*

to include fallen volunteer fighters. As of early 2020, a total of 2,678 plaques bearing the names of the fallen had been installed in the Hall of Remembrance.¹¹

The beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, necessitated a reconsideration of the ways in which the memory of the fallen was honoured. The daily ritual held in the Hall of Remembrance — which had included the reading aloud of names and the tolling of the bell — was suspended. In its place, on 16 March 2022, by a Decree of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a daily nationwide minute of silence was introduced to honour the memory of those killed as a result of Russian armed aggression. The commemoration takes place at 9:00 a.m.¹² The procedure for conducting this nationwide minute of silence was not explicitly defined. It has been most consistently observed in military institutions and educational establishments, and gradually extended to other institutions, including schools, universities and businesses. In cities — though not yet universally — it has become customary to pause traffic for one minute in observance of the ritual.

At the end of 2024, a draft ‘Ceremonial Protocol for the Minute of Silence’ was developed. It was prepared by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, in cooperation with the public organisation ‘Vshanui’ (ukr.: *Buanyū*), and with the participation of the Centre for Human Rights and War Memorialisation at the Kyiv School of Economics. The draft incorporated the results of public discussions and the approaches expressed during a series of roundtables held jointly with the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Humanitarian and Information Policy. The document emphasises that the minute of silence is practiced as a daily ritual of gratitude, respect and remembrance. This symbolic unifying act, open to the participation of all people, is intended to preserve the memory of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the cost of the collective struggle for freedom and independence. The ritual consists of textual and practical components and is performed voluntarily, at each person’s own discretion. The textual part may include words spoken during the announcement of the Minute of Silence, while the practical part may involve various gestures — such as stopping, standing up, placing a hand over the heart, bowing the head, or folding the hands in prayer. During the Minute of Silence, it is recommended to pause all services, including electronic ones (accompanied by an appropriate on-screen message), and to temporarily halt work tasks where possible. These provisions may be included in the schedules of government bodies, educational, cultural, and healthcare institutions, enterprises and organisations of various forms of ownership, as well as reflected in internal workplace regulations. An important element of personalising the ritual

¹¹ Kozubenko O. 2020.

¹² *Ukaz...*

is the remembrance, by the collectives of institutions and organisations, of those among their members who have participated in the defence of Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity since 2014.¹³

Places of Burial for the Fallen

Military cemeteries are unique spaces of remembrance. They differ from other memorial complexes in their profound symbolic meaning, as they form an integral part of a nation's historical memory. Such cemeteries become tangible witnesses of an era, reminding future generations of the sacrifice and heroism of those who defended their homeland. Unlike civilian cemeteries, military ones often possess a distinct atmosphere and visual composition that emphasise their solemn character, ranging from pathos to contemplation.

Ukrainian legislation — specifically the Law of Ukraine 'On Burial and Funeral Affairs' (Article 23) — provides that, by decisions of the executive bodies of village, settlement, and city councils, certain areas within cemeteries may be designated as sectors for the burial of deceased (fallen) service members. For honorary burials, local self-government bodies may allocate land plots outside existing cemeteries, on which memorial boulevards, squares, parks, or Mounds of Glory may be established.¹⁴

At the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory developed recommendations on possible ways to honour the memory of fallen soldiers and to organise military burial sites. It was advised that plots for military burial sectors be designated in central or most frequently visited parts of cemeteries in villages, towns and cities. In urban areas with several cemeteries, the creation of a dedicated military sector at the central cemetery was recommended. A military burial sector should include: a perimeter separated from the rest of the cemetery by paths or greenery (for example, a hedge); sufficient distance between graves and the surrounding paths; a designated area for the construction of a monument to the fallen soldiers, and a flagpole for the State Flag of Ukraine. It is also recommended to take into account the possibility of holding ceremonial and commemorative events within the military burial sector, such as visits by honorary delegations, memorial services, flower-laying ceremonies, the posting of an honour guard and requiem gatherings.¹⁵

An illustrative example of organising a place of burial for fallen soldiers is the city of Lviv. In 2014, the burial of fallen Ukrainian service members began at the Lychakiv Cemetery. When available space in one of its sections became exhausted, it was decided in early spring 2022 to conduct burials at the Lychakiv Military Cemetery

¹³ *Proiekt...*

¹⁴ *Zakon Ukrainy "Pro pokhovannia..."*

¹⁵ *Viiskovi pokhovannia...*

(on Mechnykov Street), also known as the Field of Mars, which is located adjacent to Lychakiv Cemetery. On 20 May 2022, the executive committee of the Lviv City Council adopted a resolution to create the Memorial Complex of Military Burials of the Heroes of Ukraine on Mechnykov Street, and to move the remains of Soviet Army servicemen and other individuals from the Second World War to another cemetery.¹⁶

Among all the burials at the Field of Mars in Lviv, one deserves special mention: the grave of Przemysław Rasewicz-Kuczyński, a Polish volunteer who fought for Ukraine from 2022 and was killed on 6 August 2024, during a combat mission. Before his death, he requested to be buried in Lviv — a wish that was fulfilled on 14 August. Przemysław Rasewicz-Kuczyński thus became the first foreigner buried at the Field of Mars.¹⁷

For several years, discussions had been underway in Ukraine regarding the establishment of a National Military Memorial Cemetery (NMMC) (ukr.: *Національне військове меморіальне кладовище* — HMBK = Natsionalne viyskove memorialne kladovyshche — NVMK), modelled after Arlington National Cemetery in the United States. The initial plans envisaged its creation between 2015 and 2018,¹⁸ but practical implementation began only in the spring of 2022. On May 31st, they officially defined the NMMC's legal status as:

A spatial complex located on a specially designated land plot, including a military cemetery, a museum complex, a ceremonial building, and other necessary facilities for the organisation of honourable burials of deceased persons who defended the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and who fulfilled their duties and oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people.¹⁹

Debates over the choice of location for the NMMC continued for more than a year. Several sites within and around Kyiv were considered. Ultimately, on August 19, 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine decided to establish the cemetery near the village of Hatne, in the Fastiv district of Kyiv Oblast.²⁰ The official opening of the National Military Memorial Cemetery took place on 29 August 2025, the Day of Remembrance of the Defenders of Ukraine, honouring those who died in the struggle for independence. The first burials were held on the same day.²¹

The commemoration of the fallen extends far beyond the dignified conduct of their final journey. On 12 August 2024, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine approved

¹⁶ *Miskrada...*

¹⁷ Masiuk M. 2024.

¹⁸ *Plan...*

¹⁹ *Zakon Ukrainy 'Pro vnesennia zmin do deiakykh...*

²⁰ *Pro realizatsiiu...*

²¹ Vikarchuk O. 2025.

the Concept for Honouring the Memory of Fallen (Deceased) Defenders of Ukraine. The main objectives outlined in the concept include:

- Preserving the memory of the war for future generations of the Ukrainian people
- Maintaining public awareness that the war concerns everyone, and that the defence of the homeland is a shared responsibility of the entire nation
- Uniting society around the figures of heroes, who differ in background but share a common goal — regardless of gender, religion, skin colour, or political beliefs — the defence of the state.

Every fallen soldier is posthumously awarded a state award: the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, 3rd Class (for officers) or the Order 'For Courage', 3rd Class (for sergeants and privates). In addition, many brigades have established their own commemorative insignia for the fallen, which are presented to their families. It has also become common practice to grant posthumous honorary citizenship to fallen soldiers in their hometowns.

Since 2014, the war with Russia has become an inseparable part of Ukrainian social reality. On 24 February 2022, it evolved from a localised conflict in eastern Ukraine into a full-scale war. The existential nature of this war has significantly changed Ukrainians' attitudes towards commemorating the fallen. A fallen warrior is now not merely a service member who fulfilled his duty, but a person who, at the cost of his own life, saves thousands of his compatriots. Funerals of the fallen are becoming mass events in both small and large communities. Not only relatives and close friends come to pay their last respects but also hundreds of fellow residents.

Thanks to the courage and self-sacrifice of its defenders, Ukraine continues to resist a far larger and stronger enemy. Tragically, many defenders have given their lives in this struggle. Ensuring their dignified remembrance remains a sacred duty of the Ukrainian state and the entire nation.

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Documents on the Efforts of Swedish Diplomacy for the Release of the “Warsaw Swedes” (1942–1945)

Summary: The publication contains ten documents from the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office in Berlin regarding Swedish citizens arrested in 1942 on charges of collaborating with the Polish underground resistance. These published sources enable the tracing of the espionage network’s activities and illustrate Swedish diplomatic efforts to secure the detainees’ release. Ultimately, the sentences imposed on the accused by the Third Reich authorities were mitigated, most likely in exchange for deliveries of ball bearings to the German army.

Keywords: documents, Sweden, Poland, Third Reich, espionage, diplomacy, WW II

Introduction

In July 1942, the Gestapo arrested several Swedish industrialists in Warsaw on charges of espionage and collaboration with the Polish resistance movement. A year later, four of these individuals were sentenced to death in Berlin. However, following an appeal for clemency by King Gustaf V of Sweden, Adolf Hitler commuted their sentences to imprisonment. Through high-level secret negotiations between Swedish and German authorities, the Swedes were ultimately released — most likely in exchange for Swedish exports of ball bearings to the German army.

The fate of this group, later referred to as the “Warsaw Swedes” (Swed.: *Warszawsvenskarna*), was recently detailed in my 2025 publication titled *Starania szwedzkiej*

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.10> — received: 2025-12-15 — verified: 2026-01-21 — accepted: 2026-04-13

161–185

funding information: University of Gothenburg; Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin; Polish-Scandinavian Institute, Copenhagen — **conflicts of interests:** none — **declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** not used — **ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication — **the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** [SE 100%]

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*dyplomacji o uwolnienie 'Warszawskich Szwedów' (1942–1944).*¹ In this work, I presented the key events connected to this case, based largely on previously overlooked materials from the Political Archive of the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. Relevant references to the literature are also provided there. While the topic has been explored in Sweden in recent years through several books and a semi-documentary film, these efforts have not included a close analysis of the sources held in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office in Berlin. This archive currently preserves nearly 40 documents related to this intriguing subject, most of which remain unknown to researchers.

To provide interested readers with closer insight into this subject, ten letters, telegrams, and memoranda from the collections of the aforementioned archive are presented here. They constitute a supplement to the aforementioned publication, which could easily be further expanded. Other sources illuminate many aspects of the case, such as the extent to which Swedish deliveries of ball bearings to the German Wehrmacht played a role in securing the release of those sentenced to death. Much indicates that this was indeed the case. The plea for clemency submitted by King Gustaf V of Sweden was certainly also of great importance. In any event, considerable diplomatic effort was required to bring this story to a conclusion favourable to the Swedes.

For the Polish participants, the outcome of these developments was significantly graver. In his sixteen-page letter written on 31 December 1942, Heinrich Himmler mentioned 51 additional prisoners, predominantly Poles. They were brutally interrogated and, in most cases, sentenced to imprisonment, deported to concentration camps, or executed.

In the present edition, each document is preceded by an abstract prepared by the editor, containing basic information about the source, including the place and date of issue, as well as its archival reference number. Any additions made by the editor are indicated in italics.

In the case of multi-page documents, the original pagination has been preserved and indicated in square brackets. The internal structure of the typescripts has also been retained, including the arrangement of paragraphs, bullet points, spaced lettering, and underlining appearing in the original documents. All handwritten corrections, additions, deletions, and underlinings made on the original typescripts have been identified and described in footnotes.

Where possible, the names of diplomats and officials mentioned in the documents have been supplemented with brief biographical notes. The edition preserves the source character of the published materials while introducing the necessary scholarly apparatus to facilitate their analysis and interpretation.

¹ Ekdahl S. 2025, 161–184.

For their kind assistance, I would like to thank my former colleague from the Secret State Archives of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and later Director of the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office in Berlin, Dr. Ludwig Biewer, as well as the current director, Dr. Martin Kröger. My heartfelt thanks go above all to Professor Tadeusz Grabarczyk of the University of Łódź, who made the publication of these documents possible.

Documents

1.

30 July 1942, Stockholm

Viktor Prince zu Wied, German envoy in Stockholm, sends an encrypted telegram to the office of Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in Berlin, reporting that the State Secretary (Kabinettssekreterare) of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Erik Boheman, has informed them about the arrest of seven Swedes in Warsaw by the Gestapo on charges of espionage and collaboration with the Polish resistance.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29728, p. 92–93.

[1]

Telegramm

(G – Schreiber)

Stockholm, den 30. Juli 1942, 20.20 Uhr

Ankunft: 30. “ 22.00. “

Nr. 2089 vom 30. 7.

Staatssekretär schwedischen Außenministeriums teilte Gesandtschaft in Vertretung des zur Zeit beurlaubten Außenministers heute mit, dass die führenden Direktoren der schwedischen Zündholzwerke in Warschau und der Telefonwerke L.M. Eriksson in Warschau in diesen Tagen überraschend verhaftet worden seien. Es handle sich um den Generaldirektor der schwedischen Zündholzwerke in Warschau, Generalkonsul Herslow, früher schwedischer Militärattaché in Berlin, um die Ingenieure Widen, Lagerberg, Gergen und Groenberg sowie um Generaldirektor Haeggberg der Erikssonwerke und den früher verhafteten Direktor Berglind. Die Verhaftung dieser führenden Persönlichkeiten der schwedischen Wirtschaftsinteressen in Polen habe in der schwedischen Öffentlichkeit großes Aufsehen erregt. Die zuständigen schwedischen Stellen hätten heute ein Kommuniqué über die Tatsache der Verhaftung veröffentlicht in der Absicht, private Meldungen zu vermeiden, die zur unnötigen

Verschärfung der Situation und vielleicht zu unerwünschten Kommentaren führen würden. Die Presse sei ersucht worden, die Angelegenheit mit gebotener Zurückhaltung zu behandeln. Staatssekretär Boheman fügte [2] bei, daß er Generalkonsul Herslow und Generaldirektor Haeggberg persönlich gut kenne und sich nur schwer vorstellen könne, daß diese Herren sich ernsthafter Vergehen schuldig gemacht haben könnten. Da die schwedischen Zündholzfabriken ihrer gesamten Direktion in Warschau zur Zeit beraubt seien, werde Direktor Ekstroem von der Stockholmer Zentrale der Zündholzgesellschaft demnächst den Antrag stellen, ihm die Einreise nach Warschau zu gestatten. Das Außenministerium wäre besonders dankbar, wenn dem Wunsche von Direktor Ekstroem entsprochen werden könnte.

Wied¹

¹ *Wilhelm Friedrich Adolph Hermann Viktor Prinz zu Wied (1877–1946) – German diplomat, envoy in Stockholm in years 1933–1943.*

2.

17 September 1942, Stockholm

Viktor Prince zu Wied, German envoy in Stockholm, sends an encrypted telegram to the office of Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in Berlin, stating that information has been received from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the activities of the Polish government-in-exile in Stockholm and the measures taken by the Swedish government as a result.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29728, p. 166–167.

[1]

Telegramm

(Geh. Ch. Verf.)

Stockholm, den 17. September 1942 13,20 Uhr

Ankunft: 17. “ “ 15,10 “

Nr. 2560 vom 17. 9.

Geheim!

Im Anschluß an Telegramm vom 5. Nr. 2466 bei Pol V.

Nach vertraulicher Mitteilung schwedischen Außenministeriums hat die hier durchgeführte permanente Überwachung der Stockholmer Vertretung polnischer Exilregierung ergeben, daß eine Anzahl polnischer Staatsangehöriger in Stockholm Handlungen

vorgenommen habe, die die Wahrung der strikten Neutralität Schwedens zu gefährden geeignet seien. Die Verantwortung für die Handlungen entfalle in erster Linie auf den polnischen Gesandten Potworowski, der seit dem 12. Juni 1936 in Stockholm akkreditiert ist. Infolgedessen werde P. auf Veranlassung der schwedischen Regierung demnächst von seinem hiesigen Posten abgelöst werden, um voraussichtlich nach England überzusiedeln. Außer ihm seien weitere 7 polnische Staatsangehörige zum Verlassen des Landes aufgefordert worden. Durch diese Säuberungsaktion seien zuständige Stellen der schwedischen Regierung jetzt in der Lage, die Tätigkeit der hiesigen [2] Gesandtschaft der polnischen Exilregierung und der mit ihr zusammenhängenden polnischen Kreise in Zukunft noch besser als bisher zu übersehen und zu überwachen.

Auf Rückfrage versicherte Chef politischer Abteilung schwedischen Außenministeriums, daß die Wiederzulassung eines neuen Gesandten polnischer Flüchtlings-Regierung nicht in Frage käme, sondern daß laufende Geschäfte, die sich in erster Linie auf Unterstützungsmaßnahmen beschränkten, von einem Geschäftsträger wahrgenommen werden sollten.

Wied

3.

17 October 1942, Stockholm

A communication marked "Secret," signed by [R?]uhe, addressed to State Secretary [Gustav Adolf Steengracht von Moyland], Undersecretary of State [Andor Hencke], and Envoy [Werner] von Grundherr, stating that, by order of Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the exchange of decorations between Germany and Sweden is to be suspended until further notice. The name LR Zapp also appears in the document.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29728, p. 220.

Prot. B. 5031 IX 310–172.

17. Oktober [194]2

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxx]

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx] Stockholm

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx]

LR Z a p p.

Geheim!

St.S

U.St.S. Pol. Und

Gesandter von Grundherr.

Aufgrund höherer Weisung soll der Ordens austausch mit Schweden sofort abge-
stoppt werden.

Es wird gebeten dafür Sorge zu tragen, das ^a bis auf Weiteres ^a kein schwedischer
Staatsangehöriger einen deutschen Orden oder eine andere deutsche Auszeichnung
erhält und kein Deutscher einen schwedischen Orden oder eine andere schwedische
Auszeichnung annimmt.

[R?]/uhe

^b Vermerk: Aufgrund der am 15.10. abends telefonisch durchgegebenen Weisung
des Herrn Reichsaußenministers sind sofort alle schwebenden schwedischen Ordens-
angelegenheiten im Protokoll angehalten worden. ^b

^{a-a} — *handwritten addition above the crossed-out text: "in Zukunft"*

^{b-b} — *added on the left side at the level of the second paragraph*

4.

31 December 1942, Berlin

*Letter from Heinrich Himmler concerning the arrested Swedes and Polish intelligence.
Of the five copies, this one is addressed to Joachim von Ribbentrop. Two other copies
were sent to Hermann Göring and Ernst Kaltenbrunner.*

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29729, p. 121–134.

Der Reichsführer-SS
und
Chef der Deutschen Polizei
im Reichsministerium des Innern
B.-Nr. IV E 5 – K. 52 g.Rs.
Bitte in der Antwort vorstehendes Geschäftszeichen und
Datum angeben

^a Geheime Reichssache ^a

^b Auswärtiges Amt

R 5001 g. Rs

13. Jan. 1943 ^b

^c Eilt sehr ^c

Berlin, SW 11 den 31. Dezember 1942
Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8
Fernsprecher: 12 00 40

z.Zt. Feld-Kommandostelle,
Antwort nur an die Berliner
Anschrift erbeten.

An den

Herrn Reichsaussenminister

Reichsminister v. Ribbentrop

Berlin W 9

Betrifft: Nachrichtenverkehr des polnischen Nachrichten-
dienstes zwischen dem General-Gouvernement und
Stockholm.

Bezug: Dort. Schreiben vom 17.9.1942 – R.6410 g II

und hies. Schreiben vom 18.7., 21.7., 24.7., 31.7.

und 26.9.1942 – IV E 5 – K. 52 g.Rs.

Anlagen: Eine.

Im Rahmen des gesamten feindlichen Nachrichtendienstes gegen Deutschland nimmt der von der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung aufgebaute Nachrichtendienst eine besondere Bedeutung ein. Über den Umfang und die Bedeutung dieser Tätigkeit der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung, die bis in kleinste Splittergruppen verästelt und sehr wohl durchorganisiert ist, ist bei Gelegenheit der Durchführung von grösseren sicherheitspolizeilichen Zugriffen verschiedentlich Bericht vorgelegt worden.

[2] Aufgrund von Beobachtungen, die zum Teil gemeinsam mit Dienststellen des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht durchgeführt wurden, steht seit längerer Zeit fest, dass der von der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung aufgebaute Nachrichtendienst wesentlicher Bestandteil des Nachrichtendienstes der Feindmächte ist, und dass der polnische Nachrichtendienst teilweise über Funk-, teilweise aber auch über Kurierverbindungen mit dem feindlichen Ausland, insbesondere mit England, in laufender Verbindung steht. Eine der wichtigsten dieser Verbindungen lief über Stockholm, wo insbesondere die von der polnischen Exilregierung in London bestätigte frühere polnische Gesandtschaft unter Führung des "Gesandten" P o t w o r o w s k i lebhafte Verbindung sowohl nach Warschau als auch nach London, daneben aber auch zu den diplomatischen Vertretungen der Feindmächte unterhält.

Die im Anschluss an diese Feststellungen durchgeführten Ermittlungen führten zu dem Ergebnis, dass eine Reihe von in Warschau lebenden schwedischen Staatsangehörigen — Angehörigen der Warschauer Niederlassungen der schwedischen Firmen "ASEA", "Ericsson", "Zündholzmonopol AG" —, die aus dienstlichen oder persönlichen Gründen häufig nach Schweden reisten, als vermutliche Nachrichtenträger in Frage kam. Nachdem verschiedene Durchsuchungen beim Grenzübertritt irgendwelches Belastungsmaterial nicht zu Tage gebracht hatten, wurde am 10.7.1942 als 1. schwedischer Staatsangehöriger der zweite Direktor der Firma [3]

Ericsson, Nils B e r g l i n d, geboren am 26.3.1900 in Stockholm, bei der Ausreise nach Schweden auf dem Flughafen in Berlin-Tempelhof festgenommen. Aufgrund der weiteren Ermittlungen wurden ^dwenige Tage später folgende schwedischen Staatsangehörigen festgenommen: ^d

2. Carl H e r s l o w, geboren am 4.9.1877 in Stockholm. H e r s l o w, der früher Angehöriger des schwedischen Generalstabs und als Oberstleutnant Militär-Attaché in Berlin und Moskau gewesen ist, war bis zum Herbst 1939 schwedischer Generalkonsul in Warschau. H e r s l o w ist Generaldirektor der schwedischen Zündholzmonopol-A.G., die ihren Sitz in Jönköping b. Stockholm hat. Trotzdem hatte er seinen ständigen Wohnsitz in Warschau.

3. Sigfrid H ä g g b e r g, geboren am 17.9.1887 in Mariefred/Schweden, leitender Direktor der Elektrizitäts-A.G. L.M. Ericsson.

4. Tore W i d é n, geboren am 31.10.1895 in Örebro, technischer Betriebsleiter der Zündholzmonopol-A.G. in Warschau.

5. Stig Lagerberg, geboren am 13.5.1905 in Stockholm, Prokurist der Zündholzmonopol-A.G. in Warschau.

6. Reinhold Grönberg, geboren am 3.6.1906 in Berlin, Direktor bei der Zündholzmonopol A.G. in Warschau.

7. Einar G e r g e, geboren am 2.12.1895 in Flenninge, Ingenieur [4] bei der Zündholzmonopol-A.G. in Warschau.

Ausser diesen festgenommenen schwedischen Staatsangehörigen wurden weiterhin insgesamt 51 Personen, zum grössten Teil ehemals polnische Staatsangehörige, festgenommen, unter denen sich u.a. der ehemalige Stadtpräsident von Warschau, der Grossindustrielle D r z e w i e c k i, der polnische Direktor der Firma ASEA B r u z e k sowie eine Anzahl von Frauen befinden, von denen eine gewisse K o s m o w s k a frühere Sejmabgeordnete und polnische Delegierte beim Völkerbund war.

Durch die zum grossen Teil sehr schwierigen und umfangreichen Ermittlungen, die im wesentlichen abgeschlossen sind, ergibt sich folgender Sachverhalt:

Die festgenommenen schwedischen Staatsangehörigen und weitere Angehörige der schwedischen Kolonie in Warschau, – vor allem

Sven N o r r m a n, geboren am 18.3.1891 in Stockholm, Direktor der Fa. ASEA in Warschau, z. Zt. in Schweden,

Karl Gösta G u s t a f s s o n, geboren am 16.1.1902 in Stockholm, Prokurist der Fa. ASEA in Warschau, z.Zt. angeblich in der Schweiz,

Harald A x e l l, geboren am 19.10.1885 in Fernebo/Schweden, Direktor bei der Bank “Amerykanski” in Warschau, z. Zt. in Schweden –

[5] haben zu Nachrichtenstellen der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung Verbindungen unterhalten und sich diesen zur Übermittlung von Nachrichten nach Stockholm zur Verfügung gestellt. Darüber hinaus haben sie im Laufe der Zeit umfangreiche Devisenbeträge, vor allem amerikanische Dollar, von Stockholm aus nach Warschau

illegal verbracht und diese Beträge an Angehörige der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung für deren Zwecke übermittelt.

Die Höhe der Devisenbeträge lässt sich nicht eindeutig feststellen. Die festgenommenen schwedischen Staatsangehörigen haben aber zugegeben, dass sie mindestens 25000 Dollar im Laufe der Zeit von Stockholm nach Warschau verbracht haben. H e r s l o w hat zugegeben, 10000 Dollar überbracht zu haben, H ä g g b e r g ist geständig, 12000 Dollar geschmuggelt zu haben, B e r g l i n d 3100 Dollar. Diese Dollarbeträge wurden teilweise in Kleidungsstücke eingenäht, teilweise auf andere Weise im Gepäck mitgenommen. In einem im Laufe der Ermittlungen sichergestellten Anzug waren bei der Beschlagnahme noch 3000 Dollar eingenäht.

Die Devisenbeträge wurden den Festgenommenen teilweise von dem polnischen "Gesandten" P o t w o r o w s k i, teilweise von anderen Angehörigen der polnischen Gesandtschaft (Pilch, Czochowicz) übergeben, die als Nachrichtenfunktionäre bekannt sind. Die Festgenommenen bestreiten zwar zum grössten Teil, gewusst zu haben, dass die Beträge für Zwecke der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung und damit gegen die deutschen Interessen [6] verwandt werden sollten. Nach Lage der Sache muss aber davon ausgegangen werden, dass ihnen der Verwendungszweck bekannt war.

Häggberg, der im ehemaligen schwedischen Gesandtschaftsgebäude in Warschau seine Wohnung hatte, hat die von ihm geschmuggelten Beträge nach einem Verzeichnis an im General-Gouvernement wohnhafte Polen ausgezahlt, das ihm von P o t w o r o w s k i oder dem hier als Nachrichtenfunktionär bekannten Polen C z e c h o w i c z in Stockholm übergeben worden war. B e r g l i n d hat ihm Quittungen über die Auszahlung solcher Dollarbeträge zur Aufbewahrung in seiner Wohnung übergeben, weil er offenbar annahm, dass das Gebäude der ehemaligen schwedischen Gesandtschaft und damit die Wohnung H ä g g b e r g's als extrritorial angesehen würde. H ä g g b e r g hat diese Belege verbrannt, als der hier in Rede stehende Personenkreis in Warschau festgenommen wurde. Zur gleichen Zeit hat er B e r g l i n d beauftragt, den Direktor der schwedischen Firma ASEA in Warschau, S v e n N o r r m a n, der sich gerade auf einer Reise nach Schweden befand, durch die schwedische Gesandtschaft in Berlin warnen zu lassen. N o r r m a n war, wie die Feststellungen einwandfrei ergeben haben, der wichtigste Träger des schwedisch-polnischen Nachrichtenkreises.

Bei der Durchsuchung der Wohnung H ä g g b e r g's wurde in einem Tresor ein Betrag von 120000 Zloty und [7] von 1800 Dollar gefunden. Hierzu hat H ä g g b e r g angegeben, dass der Zlotybetrag ihm von N o r r m a n übergeben worden sei. Von dem Dollarbetrag sei ein Betrag von 1200 Dollar dazu bestimmt, für einen polnischen Professor R o s t a f i n s k i auf illegale Weise einen Pass zu besorgen. R o s t a f i n s k i ist flüchtig und konnte noch nicht festgenommen werden.

Ebenso wie H ä g g b e r g hat auch G e r g e Kleidungsstücke in seinem Gepäck von Stockholm nach Warschau verbracht und es dort Polen übergeben. In einem der von G e r g e nach Warschau geschmuggelten Anzüge waren 3000 Dollar eingenäht.

Ein weiterer Anzug, in dem nach vertraulichen Mitteilungen 5000 fr.frs. eingenäht gewesen waren, konnte ermittelt werden. Der Geldbetrag war jedoch bereits entnommen.

H e r s l o w, H ä g g b e r g und G e r g e haben darüber hinaus zugegeben, Briefe von Stockholm nach Warschau bzw. umgekehrt unter Umgehung der hierzu ergangenen Bestimmungen übermittelt zu haben. H e r s l o w hat weiterhin angegeben, einen geheimen Funkschlüssel, der ihm von dem Vertreter des polnischen "Gesandten" in Stockholm, P i l c h, übergeben worden war, nach Warschau gebracht und ihn an Angehörige der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung übergeben zu haben. Ebenfalls im Auftrage des P i l c h hat er Erkundigungen darüber eingezogen, ob die auf dem zwischen Warschau und England vereinbarten illegalen Funkwege erfolgenden [8] Sendungen in Warschau gut gehört werden konnten.

Aus den Aussagen der festgenommenen Schweden geht hervor, dass der illegale Briefverkehr zwischen Stockholm und Warschau zu einem erheblichen Teil unter "Missbrauch der Kurierpost der schwedischen Gesandtschaft in Berlin erfolgt ist." Die illegal zu verbringenden Postsendungen wurden von der schwedischen Handelskammer in Warschau gesammelt, unter Benutzung von Umschlägen mit der Aufschrift "Expedition officielle" im Kuriersack zur schwedischen Gesandtschaft nach Berlin und von dort auf dem üblichen diplomatischen Kurierweg weiter nach Stockholm verbracht. Obwohl eine schwedische Vertretung in Warschau nicht mehr bestand, war dieser Weg nach Angabe von H e r s l o w aufgrund einer zwischen ihm und dem schwedischen Gesandten in Berlin getroffenen Vereinbarung gewählt worden. ^e Ob die schwedische Gesandtschaft von dem Inhalt der Post Kenntnis erhalten hat, steht nicht fest, es muss aber nach Lage der Sache angenommen werden, dass die Kurierabteilung der schwedischen Gesandtschaft in Berlin ^f durch die Weiterbeförderung polnischer Briefe diese Tatsache erfahren hat. Auch die von der schwedischen Gesandtschaft in Berlin an N o r r m a n gegebene Warnung lässt den Schluss zu, dass die Gesandtschaft von dem Treiben des festgenommenen schwedischen Personenkreises unterrichtet war.

H e r s l o w hat angegeben, dass der Leiter der Presseabteilung des schwedischen Auswärtigen Amtes, G r a f s t r ö m, ihm die Möglichkeit verschafft [9] habe, die offizielle schwedische Kurierpost von Stockholm nach Berlin zur Übermittlung von Briefen und in einem Falle von Dollarbeträgen benutzen zu können.

In diesem Zusammenhang interessieren weitere Angaben des H e r s l o w über eine nachrichtendienstliche Tätigkeit im Interesse Schwedens. H e r s l o w hatte als ehemaliger schwedischer Generalstabsoffizier und Diplomat Verbindungen zu massgeblichen Kreisen der schwedischen Diplomatie und der schwedischen Armee. Der Kabinettssekretär im schwedischen Auswärtigen Amt, B o h e m a n, der nach Angaben von H e r s l o w Halbjude und englandhörig ist, hatte ihm zu dem Zweck, seiner Person diplomatischen Schutz zu gewähren, einen Diplomatenpass vermittelt, obwohl er Diplomateigenschaften nicht besass. B o h e m a n war bekannt, dass H e r s l o w für die polnische Widerstandsbewegung Nachrichten zwischen Warschau und Stockholm

vermittelte. In Unterhaltungen mit B o h e m a n gab dieser H e r s l o w zu verstehen, dass es im Interesse Schwedens läge, autentische Nachrichten aus dem General-Gouvernement zu erhalten. Zugegebenermassen hat er folgende Nachrichten an B o h e m a n bzw. an schwedische militärische Kreise übermittelt:

1. Vor Ausbruch des deutsch-sowjetrussischen Krieges traf er Feststellungen über deutsche Truppenbewegungen in Richtung nach dem Osten und hat berichtet, dass offenbar ein deutscher Angriff gegen Sowjetrussland bevorstehe.

2. Durch einen Angestellten der ehemals polnischen [10] Staatsdruckerei, die deutsche Aufträge ausführt, hatte er im April 1942 erfahren, dass die Herstellung türkischer Generalstabskarten eingestellt, dafür aber schwedische Generalstabskarten in Auftrag gegeben worden seien. Er liess daraufhin feststellen, ob es sich um die in Süd- und Mittelschweden üblichen Generalstabskarten im Maßstab 1:100000 und um die für Nordschweden gebräuchlichen Generalstabskarten im Maßstab von 1:200000 handele, was ihm bestätigt wurde. Diese Feststellungen liess er durch G e r g e persönlich auf dem schnellsten Wege der schwedischen ^g Gesandtschaft in Berlin überbringen, die sie – wie ihm später von dem schwedischen Oberkommandierenden, General T h ö r n e l l, bestätigt wurde, unverzüglich nach Stockholm weitergeleitet hat. In Stockholm wurde die Nachricht als sehr bedeutsam angesehen.^g

3. Im Mai 1942 erstattete H e r s l o w mündlich eine ihm zugegangene Meldung, wonach in Stettin und Danzig erhebliche deutsche Truppenkontingente zusammengezogen wurden. Der Befehlshaber der schwedischen Wehrmacht, General T h ö r n e l l dem er diese Meldung erstattete, sagte ihm jedoch, dass diese Truppenkontingente, wie ihm bekannt sei, für Finnland bestimmt seien.

H e r s l o w hat weiter angegeben, dass er sowohl dem schwedischen König wie auch dem Kronprinzen bei seiner Anwesenheit in Stockholm verschiedentlich Vortrag über die Zustände im General-Gouvernement gehalten hat. Den Vortrag hat er in einer dem Reich abträglichen Weise gehalten. Schliesslich hat er angegeben, dem schwedischen König [11] Schreiben übergeben zu haben, die ihm die polnischen Fürstinnen C h a r t o r y s k a und L u b o m i e r s k a mit der Bitte um Übergabe an den König gegeben hatten. Über den Inhalt der geschmuggelten Briefe war trotz eingehender Ermittlungen nichts festzustellen.

Schliesslich hat H e r s l o w noch Angaben über seine Beziehungen zu dem Legationsrat bei der französischen Gesandtschaft in Stockholm, ^h Comte de F l e u r i e u, ^h gemacht, mit dem er ebenso wie mit P o t w o r o w s k i regen persönlichen Verkehr unterhielt. ⁱ F l e u r i e u ⁱ hat H e r s l o w gegenüber erklärt, er sei Anhänger de G a u l l e s und Leiter des englisch-französischen Nachrichtendienstes in Stockholm. Von dieser Tätigkeit seien sowohl der Kabinettssekretär B o h e m a n als auch der Befehlshaber der schwedischen Armee, General H o l m q v i s t, unterrichtet. F l e u r i e u habe weiter erzählt, dass er sowohl B o h e m a n als auch H o l m q v i s t gegenüber erklärt habe, auf seine nachrichtendienstliche Tätigkeit verzichten

zu wollen, wenn dies verlangt werde. Dieses Verlangen habe man jedoch nicht an ihn gestellt.

Wie aus absolut sicheren Meldungen hervorgeht, wurde durch die geschilderten Massnahmen der ^jwichtigste Kurierweg zwischen der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung ^j im General-Gouvernement und der polnischen Emigrantenregierung ^k in London ^k lahmgelegt. Aus weiteren Meldungen ergibt sich, dass es bisher nicht gelungen ist, eine [12] Ersatzverbindung zu schaffen. Bemerkenswert ist der Umstand, dass die schwedische Regierung auf die erfolgten Festnahmen durch Festnahmen von Angehörigen der "polnischen Gesandtschaft" in Stockholm und die Ausweisung des "polnischen Gesandten" P o t w o r o w s k i unverzüglich reagierte. Die Polen sind später auf englische und amerikanische Intervention aus der Haft entlassen worden.

Ein Teil der in Warschau festgenommenen Polen ist des Hoch- und Landesverrats überführt, im übrigen dauern ihre Vernehmungen noch an.

Die Vernehmungen gestalten sich sehr schwierig, da die Schweden – mit Ausnahme von H e r s l o w – grundsätzlich nur zugeben, was ihnen aufgrund vorliegenden Belastungsmaterials nachgewiesen werden konnte.

Nachdem die Ermittlungen nunmehr im grossen und ganzen abgeschlossen sind, ist ^l die Frage zu entscheiden, ob die festgenommenen Schweden dem Richter vorgeführt und ein ordentliches Strafverfahren durchgeführt werden soll. ^l Mit dem Erlass von richterlichen Haftbefehlen gegen sämtliche festgenommenen Schweden und ihrer Verurteilung ist zu rechnen. Ob ^m auf Durchführung eines Strafverfahrens verzichtet, nach Durchführung eines Strafverfahrens ^m eine Vollstreckung der zu erwartenden gerichtlichen Strafen erfolgen oder in Anwendung des § 456a der StpO eine Auslieferung der Verurteilten an die schwedische Regierung in Erwägung gezogen werden soll, wird von der Beurteilung [13] staatspolitischer ⁿ und aussenpolitischer Erwägungen ⁿ abhängig zu machen sein, die sich aus der augenblicklichen gesamtpolitischen Lage ergeben. In sicherheitspolizeilicher Hinsicht sind folgende Überlegungen massgebend:

Der polnische illegale Nachrichtendienst in Stockholm hat sich zu einem Exponenten des kombinierten alliierten Nachrichtendienstes entwickelt, dessen Gefährlichkeit nicht ernst genug genommen werden kann. Durch die Aufdeckung des vorstehend geschilderten Sachverhaltes ergibt sich die Möglichkeit, auf die schwedische Regierung u.a. einen ^o Druck dahin auszuüben, dass die bekannten Vertreter dieses feindlichen Nachrichtendienstes für immer aus Schweden entfernt werden und an ihre Stelle keine neuen Funktionäre gesetzt werden. ^o An der Liquidierung der "polnischen Gesandtschaft" in Stockholm als solcher besteht hingegen kein Interesse, da zur Zeit gute Verbindungen dorthin bestehen und die Aufnahme neuer ^p Verbindungen zu einem zweifellos alsdann eingerichteten illegalen polnischen Apparat sehr schwierig sein dürfte. ^p

Daneben laufen gleichwertige Interessen der deutschen militärischen Abwehr, die mit der schwedischen militärischen Abwehr gut zusammenarbeitet. Es soll im Augenblick auf diesem Wege versucht werden, zwei der am wenigsten belasteten

Schweden, nämlich ^aW i d é n und L a g e r b e r g,^a schon vor Durchführung des [14]^r gerichtlichen Verfahrens zu einem Austausch anzubieten, wenn seitens der Schweden einer der gefährlichsten polnischen Nachrichtenfunktionäre, der bei der ^sjapanischen Gesandtschaft in Stockholm ^sals Mitarbeiter des japanischen Militärattachés tätig ist, nach Deutschland verbracht wird.^r Japanischerseits würden hierbei Schwierigkeiten nicht entstehen.

Abgesehen von diesen Erwägungen liessen sich auch auf wehrwirtschaftlichem Gebiet gegenüber Schweden Vorteile für das Reich erlangen.

Nachdem die Ermittlungen in vorstehender Angelegenheit schwerste Belastungen gegen die leitenden Persönlichkeiten von Warschauer Tochterunternehmen der drei schwedischen Firmen ASEA, Ericsson und Zündholzmonopol-A.G. ergeben haben, dürfte^t die Frage zu prüfen sein, ob die Möglichkeit besteht, gegen diese Firmen Zwangsmaßnahmen zu ergreifen^t mit dem Ziele der endgültigen Ausschaltung des politisch und wirtschaftlich unerwünschten schwedischen Einflusses im General-Gouvernement. Die Bedeutung dieses Einflusses ergibt sich u.a. daraus, dass z.B. die Firma E r i c s s o n praktisch noch heute das polnische Telefonmonopol besitzt und als Rüstungsbetrieb im deutschen Auftrage besonders auf dem Gebiet der Flugzeugindustrie arbeitet.

Der Herr Reichsmarschall hat gleichen Bericht erhalten.

^u-H. Himmler -^u

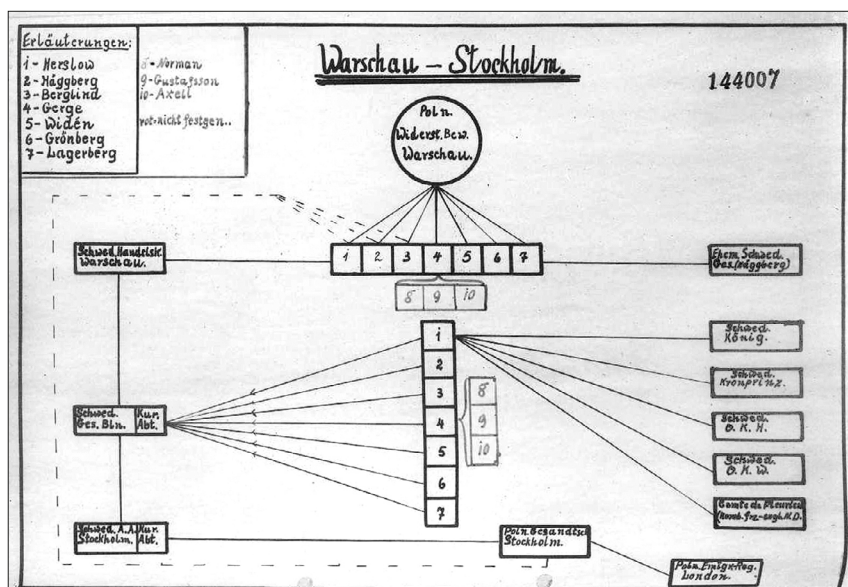


Fig. 1. Diagram illustrating the routes taken by couriers and consignments between Warsaw and Stockholm. Page from H. Himmler's letter to J. Ribbentrop of 31 December 1942 (Source: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29729, p. 15)

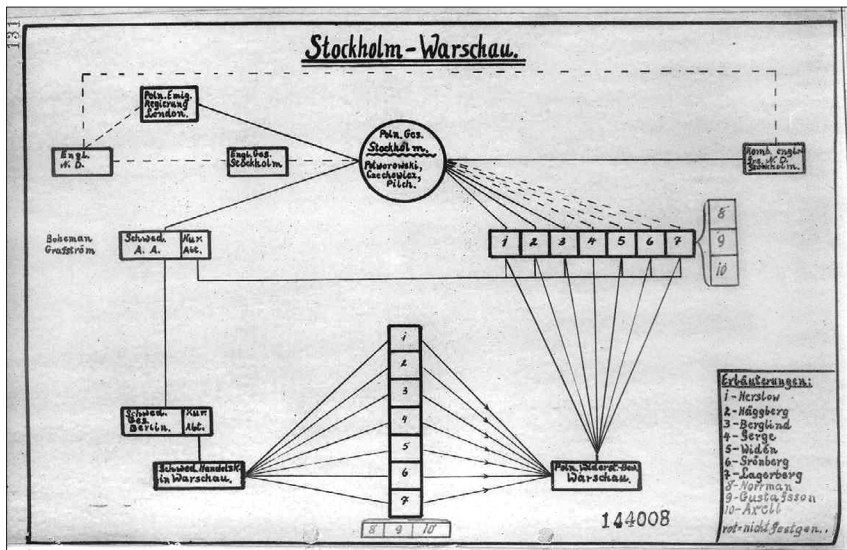


Fig. 2. Diagram illustrating the routes taken by couriers and consignments between Stockholm and Warsaw. Page from H. Himmler's letter to J. Ribbentrop of 31 December 1942. (Source: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29729, p. 16)

- a-a – two stamps with identical content
- b-b – stamp
- c-c – handwritten
- d-d – handwritten underlining
- e-e – handwritten underlining
- f-f – handwritten underlining
- g-g – handwritten underlining
- h-h – handwritten underlining
- i-i – handwritten underlining
- j-j – handwritten underlining
- k-k – handwritten underlining
- l-l – handwritten underlining
- m-m – handwritten underlining
- n-n – handwritten underlining
- o-o – handwritten underlining
- p-p – handwritten underlining
- q-q – double handwritten underlining
- r-r – passage marked with a hand-drawn vertical line in the left margin
- s-s – handwritten underlining
- t-t – handwritten underlining
- u-u – handwritten signature

5.

22 February 1943, Berlin

Memorandum by Erich Albrecht, head of the Legal Department at the German Foreign Office, containing comments on Himmler's letter.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29729, p. 179–181.

[1]

Geheim!

In dem Schreiben des Reichsführers SS vom 31. Dezember v. J. [1942] wurden unter sicherheitspolizeilichen Gesichtspunkten folgende Erwägungen angestellt:

1. Die Aufdeckung der den verhafteten Schweden zur Last fallenden Straftaten ergebe die Möglichkeit, dahin zu wirken, daß die bekannten Vertreter des feindlichen Nachrichtendienstes für immer aus Schweden entfernt und an ihre Stelle keine neuen Funktionäre gesetzt werden.

2. Im Benehmen mit der deutschen militärischen Abwehr, die mit der schwedischen Abwehr gut zusammen arbeitet, sollten zwei der am wenigsten belasteten Schweden, Widén und Lagerberg, zum Austausch gegen einen der gefährlichsten polnischen Nachrichtenfunktionäre, der bei dem japanischen Militärattaché in Stockholm tätig ist, angeboten werden.

3. Ferner glaubt der Reichsführer SS, daß vielleicht eine Möglichkeit bestehe, auf wehrwirtschaftlichem Gebiet von Schweden Vorteile für das Reich zu erlangen und gegen die schwedischen Firmen Asea, Ericsson und Zündholz-Monopol-Aktiengesellschaft Zwangsmaßnahmen mit dem Ziel der endgültigen Ausschaltung des politisch und wirtschaftlich unerwünschten schwedischen Einflusses im Generalgouvernement zu ergreifen.

zu 1.: Wenn es dem Reichsführer SS möglich ist, auf einem besonderen Weg die Unterbindung des feindlichen Nachrichtendienstes in Schweden zu erreichen, kann das Auswärtige Amt nur zustimmen.

zu 2. und 3.: Das Auswärtige Amt hat in seinem Antwortschreiben vom 8. d.M. es als außenpolitisch erwünscht bezeichnet, daß gegen die festgenommenen Schweden ein gerichtliches Verfahren eingeleitet wird, aber keine Bedenken dagegen geltend gemacht, daß die beiden weniger belasteten Schweden zum Gegenstand eines Austauschgeschäfts gemacht werden. Zu der Frage, wie weit das gerichtliche Verfahren [2] durchzuführen wäre und welche Gegenleistungen von der schwedischen Regierung für die Freilassung der übrigen Verhafteten zu fordern wären, hat es eine Entscheidung nach Benehmen mit dem Reichsführer SS und dem Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Abwehr vorgeschlagen. Wegen der Frage der Ausschaltung des

schwedischen Einflusses bei bestimmten Betrieben im Generalgouvernement beabsichtigt das Auswärtige Amt, zunächst mit dem Generalgouverneur in Verbindung zu treten. Es erscheint mindestens zweifelhaft, ob es zweckmäßig ist, die Frage der Freilassung der verhafteten Schweden mit der Einleitung von Maßnahmen gegen die genannten Gesellschaften zu verbinden. Was insbesondere die Interessen der Ericsson-Gesellschaft angeht, so trifft die Annahme des Reichsführers SS, daß diese Firma praktisch noch heute das Telefonmonopol im Generalgouvernement besitzt, nicht zu. Das von Ericsson gebaute Telefonnetz ist bald nach Beendigung des Polenfeldzugs von der Reichspost übernommen worden. Die Firma Ericsson hat darauf durch Vermittlung der schwedischen Gesandtschaft eine Entschädigung gefordert. Diese Verhandlungen hierüber haben sich lange hingezogen, dürften aber demnächst zu einem Abschluß kommen.

Der Reichsführer SS geht mit dem Gedanken um, ohne gerichtliches Verfahren bereits jetzt mit den Schweden auf dem ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Weg gegen eventuelle Kompensation wegen der Freilassung sämtlicher Verhafteten in Verbindung zu treten.

Eine Feststellung im Auswärtigen Amt, ob Fälle vorliegen die bei dieser Gelegenheit mit Schweden geregelt werden können, hatte kein positives Ergebnis. Das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Abwehr teilte mit, daß außer dem schon für einen etwaigen Austausch gegen den in Dänemark verurteilten schwedischen Staatsangehörigen Staff bereits benannten deutschen Staatsangehörigen von Schoeller in Schweden nur noch schwedische Staatsangehörige verurteilt sind, an denen die Abwehr ein Interesse habe. Es handelt sich dabei um den schwedischen Staatsangehörigen Koch, der zurzeit eine Strafe [3] wegen Spionage verbüßt, und um den 68 Jahre alten gebürtigen Reichsdeutschen, jetzt schwedischen Staatsangehörigen Dr. Michael, der früher wegen eines ähnlichen Vergehens verurteilt war, sich zwar jetzt auf freiem Fuß befindet, aber wegen der Verurteilung seine Praxis als Arzt nicht mehr ausüben darf. Das Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Abwehr, würde es gern sehen, wenn Koch begnadigt und dem Dr. Michael die Ausübung seiner Praxis wieder gestattet werden würde.

Es ergibt sich die Frage, ob die Leistungen, die von den Schweden gefordert werden können, ausreichen, um dagegen die 7 Verhafteten freizugeben. Unter außenpolitischen Gesichtspunkten ist hierzu folgendes zu bemerken:

Die Schwedische Gesandtschaft hat sehr häufig wegen der verhafteten schwedischen Staatsangehörigen beim Auswärtigen Amt interveniert. Für die Beziehungen zu Schweden bedeutet somit dieser Fall eine Belastung, deren Beseitigung an sich erwünscht ist. Wenn der Reichsführer SS, dem das Ermittlungsergebnis in größerer Vollständigkeit vorliegt als dem Auswärtigen Amt, der Meinung ist, daß ein gerichtliches Verfahren besser vermieden wird, kann der von ihm beabsichtigten Behandlung der Angelegenheit zugestimmt werden. Dabei könnten ihm die von der Abwehr geäußerten Wünsche wegen der Fälle Koch und Michael mitgeteilt werden.

6.

22 June 1943, Stockholm

Telegram from Hans Thomsen, head of the German embassy in Stockholm, to Berlin concerning relations between King Gustav V of Sweden and King Haakon VII of Norway.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29730, p. 104–105.

[1]

Telegramm (G-Schreiber)

Stockholm, den 22. Juni 1943 – 08.50 Uhr

Ankunft: den 22. Juni 1943 – 10.30 Uhr

Nr. 1780 vom 22.6.

Vertrauensmann teilt folgendes mit: “Die Tatsache, dass König Haakon von Norwegen König Gustav zu seinem Geburtstag kein Glückwunschtelegramm sandte, hat in Hof- und Regierungskreisen Bestürzung ausgelöst. Aussenminister Guenther sprach am 18. Juni dem Leiter des amtlichen schwedischen Nachrichtenbüros Reuterswaerd gegenüber von einer ‘Taktlosigkeit’, die man nicht einmal König Haakon zugetraut hätte”.

Das Ausbleiben des Telegramms wird folgendermassen erklärt:

König Haakon sandte am 2. März an König Gustav ein Handschreiben, in dem der König von Schweden gebeten wurde, zur Einstellung der deutschen Urlaubervertransporte mitzuwirken. König Gustav liess König Haakon ein persönliches Schreiben zu stellen, in dem es hiess: “Ich bitte Euer Majestät davon überzeugt zu sein, dass Norwegens Lage mir und meiner Regierung sehr am Herzen liegt. Wir sind nicht ermüdet und werden nicht ermüden, ihrem schwer heimgesuchten Land zu helfen. Unsere Hilfe kann jedoch nicht über die Grenzen hinaus geleistet [2] werden, die die Pflicht gegen unser eigenes Land und die Rücksicht auf übernommene Verpflichtungen ziehen. Ich beherzige Euer Majestät Ersuchen bezüglich des sogenannten Urlauberverkehrs, muss jedoch in dieser Hinsicht auf das Obengesagte verweisen”.

Seit diesem Briefwechsel ist alle Korrespondenz zwischen den beiden Königen eingestellt worden. Als der schwedische Gesandte am norwegischen Hof vor einigen Tagen seinen Dienst wiederaufnahm, wurde er sehr kühl empfangen. Auch dies wird König Haakons Ärger über die Stellungnahme des Königs von Schweden und der schwedischen Regierung zugeschrieben.

Die amtliche schwedische Nachrichtenagentur TT (Tidningarnas Telegrambyra) durfte in ihren Meldungen nicht darauf aufmerksam machen, dass König Haakon unter den Gratulanten fehlte. Die am 19. d. Mts. in “Nya Dagligt Allehanda” erschienene Notiz “warum gratuliert Haakon nicht” ist auf direkte Initiative des schwedischen

Aussenministeriums veröffentlicht worden um – wie sich der Pressechef des Ausenministeriums, Thorsing, TT gegenüber ausdrückte, – “gewissen Leuten zu zeigen, wie die norwegische Regierung und der König gegen einen alten ehrlichen Mann handeln können”.

Es wird angenommen, dass die Angelegenheit in der Debatte um die norwegische Zusammenarbeit nach dem Krieg Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen wird.”

Thomsen¹

¹ *Hans Thomsen (1891–1968) – German diplomat. Head of the German embassy in Stockholm in 1943–1945.*

7.

2 July 1943, Berlin

Fernschreiben of Gustav Adolf Freiherr Steengracht von Moyland to the office of the German Foreign minister Joachim v. Rippentrop in Fuschl, Österreich, concerning the telegram of the Swedish king to Hitler and some remarks.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29730, p. 118–119.

Publ.: Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945. Serie E: 1941–1945. Bd 6: 1. Mai bis 30. September 1943. Selection of documents: I. Krüger-Buleke, M. Mantzke, Ch. Stamm. Ed.: M. Mantzke, Ch. Stamm, Göttingen 1979, no. 126, p. 219–220.

[1]

Berlin, den 2. Juli 1943.

Fernschreiben

an Büro RAM

Fuschl.

Der Schwedische Gesandte¹ suchte mich heute auf und überreichte mir mit Verbalnote ein Telegramm des Königs von Schweden an den Führer, in dem um Begnadigung der zum Tode verurteilten vier schwedischen Staatsangehörigen gebeten wird.

Ich übermittle nachstehend den Wortlaut der Verbalnote und des Telegramms:

“Der Königl. Schwedische Gesandte ist beauftragt, den in der Anlage beigegeführten Text eines Telegramms Seiner Majestät des Königs von Schweden an den Herrn Deutschen Reichskanzler mit der ergebenen Bitte um gefällige Weiterbeförderung zu überreichen. Berlin, den 2. Juli 1943.

Telegramm S.M. des Königs von Schweden. 2. Juli 1943. An Seine Exzellenz den Herrn Deutschen Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler, Berlin.

Mein lieber Herr Reichskanzler,

Zu Meinem lebhaften Bedauern habe Ich erfahren, daß die schwedischen Staatsangehörigen Berglind, Herslow, Häggberg und Widén bei der Gerichtsverhandlung vor dem zuständigen deutschen Gericht solcher Delikte schuldig befunden, die nach deutschem Recht mit Todesstrafe bestraft werden sollen, und zum Tode verurteilt worden sind.

[2] In dieser Lage empfinde Ich es als Meine Königliche Pflicht, an Sie, Herr Reichskanzler, die eindringliche Bitte zu richten, im Gnadenwege den Verurteilten die Todesstrafe erlassen zu wollen.

Ihr sehr ergebener

(gezeichnet) Gustaf R.”

Ich schlage vor, das Telegramm dem Führer mit folgender Darstellung des Sachverhalts vorzulegen:

Im vorigen Jahr wurden 7 Schweden, die als Betriebsführer oder Ingenieure leitende Stellen bei schwedischen Unternehmungen in Warschau hatten, wegen Spionageverdacht verhaftet. In der Hauptverhandlung vor dem Volksgerichtshof am 30. Juni wurde festgestellt, daß 4 der Verhafteten Nachrichten über militärische und sonst wichtige Vorgänge im Generalgouvernement gesammelt und an schwedische Stellen, an die Polnische Gesandtschaft in Stockholm und andere Personen in Schweden mit dem Bewußtsein, daß diese Nachrichten wohl an die Engländer gelangen würden, weitergegeben haben. Außerdem haben sie von der Polnischen Gesandtschaft Devisenbeträge zur Verteilung an Polen im Generalgouvernement, die teilweise mit Decknamen bezeichnet waren und der Aufstandsbewegung angehörten, entgegengenommen. Diese 4 Schweden sind zum Tode verurteilt worden. Ein weiterer Angeklagter, dem nur Verratstätigkeit zu Gunsten der Schwedischen Regierung zur Last fällt, erhielt lebenslängliches Zuchthaus. Für ihre Verratstätigkeit haben die Verurteilten keinerlei Entgelt erhalten. Der Gesamtumfang ihrer Verratstätigkeit ist nicht bekannt. Soweit er festgestellt werden konnte, war er nicht von großer Bedeutung. Die Summe der übermittelten Gelder belief sich auf 30 000 Dollar.

Zwei weitere Angeklagte wurden freigesprochen, da ihnen die Beschuldigung, einen flüchtigen Mittäter über seine bevorstehende Verhaftung gewarnt zu haben, nicht mit hinreichender Sicherheit nachgewiesen werden konnte.

^{a-} Steengracht ^{-a}

¹ *Arvid Richert.*

^{a-a} – *handwritten*

8.

5 August 1943, Berlin

Memorandum by Undersecretary of State Andor Hencke on a conversation with the Swedish Envoy in Berlin, Arvid Richert, concerning the Swedes in Warsaw. 5 August 1943.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29730, p. 206–208.

[1]

U.St.S. Pol Nr. 433

Berlin, den 5. August 1943

Der Schwedische Gesandte¹ suchte mich heute auf, um, wie er sich ausdrückte, gewisse Sorgen abzuladen. Er wolle von vornherein betonen, daß er ohne Auftrag spreche.

Auf das vor längerer Zeit von dem König von Schweden an den Führer gerichtete Gnadengesuch für die zum Tode verurteilten schwedischen Staatsangehörigen sei, soweit er wisse, noch keine Antwort erteilt worden. Falls das Gnadengesuch abgelehnt und die Urteile vollstreckt werden sollten, wäre die Wirkung in Schweden geradezu katastrophal. Seit Jahrzehnten sei in Schweden kein Todesurteil vollstreckt worden. Wenn daher jetzt in Deutschland schwedische Staatsangehörige hingerichtet würden, bräche ein Sturm in der schwedischen Öffentlichkeit^a los^a, dem die Schwedische Regierung, insbesondere aber der Deutschland gegenüber sehr verständnisvolle Schwedische Außenminister kaum standhalten könnte. Der Gesandte bemerkte gleichzeitig, daß er die Schwere der Verbrechen seiner Landsleute kenne und daher die Gerechtigkeit des Urteils nicht anzweifeln wolle. Ich erwiderte dem Gesandten zunächst, daß meines Wissens der Führer dem König^b telegrafisch^b mitgeteilt habe, daß von ihm eine Prüfung der Angelegenheit angeordnet worden sei und die Todesurteile einstweilen nicht vollstreckt würden. Zur Sache selbst müsse ich feststellen, daß durch den Antrag auf Begnadigung ein Entgegenkommen von Deutschland gewünscht [2] würde, das durch die schwedische Haltung nicht gerechtfertigt sei. Um eine gute Atmosphäre zu schaffen, müßte in erster Linie etwas von schwedischer Seite geschehen. Die anti-deutsche Schreibweise gewisser schwedischer Zeitungen sei geradezu empörend und könne gar nicht scharf genug gebrandmarkt werden. Ferner müsse ich ihn auf die anti-deutschen Reden führender schwedischer Persönlichkeiten, z.B. des Ministers Möller,² hinweisen. Auch die Kündigung des Transitverkehrs nach Norwegen ist von uns natürlich als ein großer Mangel an Verständnis und Entgegenkommen empfunden worden. Er könne sich denken, daß diese Dinge eine positive Entscheidung des Führers auf das Gnadengesuch nicht gerade

erleichterten. Wann diese Entscheidung fallen und wie sie aussehen würde, könne ich natürlich nicht sagen.

Der Gesandte erwiderte, daß er sich seit Jahren darum bemühe, daß die schwedische Presse vernünftiger schreibe. Bisweilen habe er auch Erfolg gehabt.

Was die Kündigung des Transitabkommens anlange, so bemerkte der Gesandte, daß er unsere Unzufriedenheit mit dieser schwedischen Maßnahme verstehe. Umso dankbarer sei er für die sachlichen Besprechungen, die er in dieser Frage mit dem Gesandten Schnurre habe führen können. Schließlich sei ein verhältnismäßig befriedigendes Ergebnis erreicht worden, das ^czum mindesten^c, wenigstens nach [3] außenhin die deutsch-schwedischen Beziehungen nicht besonders belastet. Abschließend gab der Gesandte seiner Hoffnung Ausdruck, daß die verurteilten Schweden begnadigt würden. Selbstverständlich verstehe er vollkommen, daß eine Prüfung des Antrages des Königs notwendig sei und eine gewisse Zeit erfordere.

^d-Hencke ^{d3}

Dem Herrn St.S. vorgelegen. ^e M 6/8 ^e

H.Dg.Pol

Pol VI

R

Ha Pol

¹ Arvid Richert (1887–1981) – Envoy (diplomatic minister) in Berlin from 1937 to 1945.

² Fritz Gustav Möller (1884–1970) – Minister for Social Affairs, member of the Social Democratic Party.

³ Andor Hencke (1895–1984) – German diplomat, from April 1943 Ministerial Director with the title of Under-Secretary of State in the German Foreign Office.

^{a-a} – handwritten correction (instead of “aus”)

^{b-b} – handwritten correction (instead of “telefonisch”)

^{c-c} – crossed out

^{d-d} – handwritten signature

^{e-e} – handwritten

9.

26 August 1943, Berlin

Memorandum by Undersecretary of State Andor Hencke concerning a personal conversation held the previous day with the Swedish diplomat Eric von Post, who had approached him in order to unburden himself of certain personal concerns. The discussion

concerned four Swedish nationals sentenced to death and two who, although acquitted, had not yet been released. Forwarded to Department 'R' with a request for further action and for information on subsequent developments to be communicated to Department Pol.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 102/29730, p. 260–263.

[1]

U.St.S. Pol Nr. 480

Berlin, den 26. August 1943

Der Schwedische Geschäftsträger suchte mich am 25. August auf, um, wie er sich ausdrückte, gewisse persönliche Sorgen bei mir abzuladen. Er betonte dabei ausdrücklich, daß er nicht im Auftrage seiner Regierung spreche, sondern nur aus eigener Initiative handle.

Nach dieser Einleitung kam er auf die Angelegenheit der in den bekannten Spionageprozeß verwickelten und teilweise zum Tode verurteilten schwedischen Staatsangehörigen zu sprechen:

1. Die Tatsache, daß eine Entscheidung auf das Gnadengesuch des Königs für die vier zum Tode verurteilten schwedischen Staatsangehörigen noch nicht getroffen sei, beunruhige ihn außerordentlich. Für die deutsch-schwedischen Beziehungen würde es eine untragbare Verschlechterung bedeuten, falls die Urteile vollstreckt werden sollten. Es sei für die schwedische Regierung schon heute sehr schwer, die Presse und die öffentliche Meinung in dieser Angelegenheit zurückzuhalten.

2. Zwei schwedische Staatsangehörige, und zwar Lagerberg und Grönberg seien vom Gericht freigesprochen worden. Ihre Freilassung sei jedoch nicht erfolgt, sie seien vielmehr nach Breslau überführt worden, wo sie sich in Gewahrsam der Staatspolizei-Leitstelle befänden. Der Geschäftsträger wäre für eine [2] Auskunft über den Grund dieser Maßnahme, die in Schweden kaum verstanden werden würde, dankbar.

Ich habe Herrn v o n P o s t ' folgendes erwidert: zu 1.: Die Tatsache, daß die Todesurteile gegen die schwedischen Spione noch nicht vollstreckt worden wären, der Führer vielmehr auf Grund des Gnadengesuches des Königs von Schweden eine Nachprüfung durch das Justizministerium veranlaßt hätte, bedeute bereits ein außerordentliches Entgegenkommen. Ich verstehe nicht, daß der Schwedische Geschäftsträger in diesem Zusammenhang von der Gefahr einer Verschlechterung der deutsch-schwedischen Beziehungen sprechen könne. Grund zur Beschwerde hätten in diesem Falle ausschließlich wir, weil schwedische Staatsangehörige die Gastfreundschaft, die sie im deutschen Machtbereich genossen hätten, zur Spionage gegen das im Kriege befindliche Deutsche Reich mißbraucht hätten. Spione würden im Kriege in jedem Lande hingerichtet. Ich sei überzeugt, daß auch die Schwedische Regierung, wenn sie sich im Kriege befände, mit ausländischen Spionen kurzen Prozeß machen würde.

Ich könne ihm nur sagen, daß bei der Behandlung des Spionagefalles deutscherseits den Schweden gegenüber angesichts gewisser Zusammenhänge ein ganz ungewöhnliches Entgegenkommen an den Tag gelegt worden wäre. Wenn die Schwedische Regierung – selbst für den Fall einer Vollstreckung des Urteiles an diesen gefährlichen Spionen – sich nicht [3] in der Lage sähe, einer Verschlechterung der deutsch-schwedischen Beziehungen vorzubeugen, sei dies allerdings höchst bedauerlich. Überhaupt könne ich dem Geschäftsträger nur wiederholen, was ich bereits seinem Gesandten gesagt hätte, daß eine Regierung, wenn sie ein Entgegenkommen erwarte, auch ihrerseits etwas für die Verbesserung der Atmosphäre tun müsse. Auf die skandalöse Haltung der schwedischen Presse hätte ich sowohl Exzellenz Richert sowie ihn selbst wiederholt hingewiesen. Wir hätten für diese, von der schwedischen Regierung geduldete Zügellosigkeit nicht das mindeste Verständnis. Hier liege eine ganz einseitige schwedische Feindseligkeit vor. Die deutsche Presse habe niemals Schweden, schwedische Staatsmänner oder schwedische Einrichtungen in beleidigender Weise angegriffen.

Was das Gnadengesuch selbst anlange, so unterläge es, wie ihm bekannt sei, zurzeit der Prüfung durch die deutsche Justizbehörde. Auf diese vom Führer angeordnete Prüfung könne das Auswärtige Amt keinen Einfluß nehmen. Das Ergebnis müsse abgewartet werden.

Der Schwedische Geschäftsträger war sehr betroffen. Er betonte nochmals den rein persönlichen Charakter seiner Vorsprache und versicherte, daß unter den schwierigen Verhältnissen eines parlamentarischen Staates die Schwedische Regierung alles täte, [4] um auf die Presse mäßigend einzuwirken. Im Übrigen handele es sich doch nur um einige Blätter, während andere Zeitungen ausgesprochen im pro-deutschen Sinne schrieben. Ich verblieb demgegenüber bei meinem Standpunkt.

Zu 2.: Mir sei über die Verbringung der ^a freigesprochenen^a Schweden nach Breslau nichts bekannt, ich würde mich aber nach dem Sachverhalt erkundigen. Persönlich könne ich mir denken, daß es sich um eine Ausweisungs- oder Schutzhaft handle und daß wahrscheinlich ein staatspolitisches Interesse daran bestände, daß die in den Prozeß verwickelt gewesenen Personen nicht frei in Deutschland herumlaufen.

Hiermit

Abteilung R

zuständigkeitshalber mit der Bitte um weitere Veranlassung. Ich wäre dankbar, wenn Abteilung Pol über die weitere Entwicklung auf dem laufenden gehalten werden könnte.

gez[eichnet] Hencke

¹ *Eric von Post (1899–1990) – Swedish diplomat, counsellor of legation.*

^{a-a} – *improved from “freigewordenen”*

10.

25 January 1945, Berlin

Letter from the head of the "Inland II" department in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Horst Wagner, to SS-Standartenführer Rudolf Brandt of Heinrich Himmler's personal staff, expressing the gratitude of the Swedish government for the release of the convicted Swedes. One of several copies sent to various addresses.

Orig.: PA AA, sign. RZ 214/101134, p. 281.

Durchdr. a. Konz. (R l. b.) Wo

Den ^a 25 ^{-a}. Januar 1945

Gruppenleiter Inl. II

Inl. II B 14 g.Rs.

2 Ausfertigungen

2. Ausfertigung

^b M. Schellenberg ^{-b}

Lieber Kamerad Brandt!¹

Der Schwedische Gesandte² hat dem Herrn Staatssekretär³ "den Dank und die Genugtuung" der Schwedischen Regierung für die Freilassung der Schweden, die seinerzeit in Warschau verhaftet und wegen Spionage verurteilt worden waren, übermittelt und gebeten, der Reichsregierung den aufrichtigen Dank seiner Regierung zu übermitteln.

In einem anschließenden Privatgespräch erwähnte der Gesandte, daß die Behandlung dieser Schweden im deutschen Gefängnis in Bautzen vorzüglich gewesen sei und sich die Freigelassenen dankbarst geäußert hätten. Ein besonderes Lob gebühre dem Direktor des Gefängnisses, der mit großer Umsicht seine schwere Aufgabe durchführe.

Ich wäre dankbar, wenn Sie den Reichsführer hiervon unterrichten würden.

SS-Obergruppenführer Kaltenbrunner habe ich gleichzeitig hiervon Kenntnis gegeben.

Heil Hitler!

Gez[eichnet] Wagner⁴

1. An

SS-Standartenführer Brandt

Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS

Feldkommandostelle

über

Berlin SW 11

Prinz-Albrecht-Str. 8

- ¹ Rudolf Brandt (1909–1948) – SS-Standartenführer, personal adviser to Heinrich Himmler and head of a department in the Reich Ministry of the Interior.
- ² Arvid Richert.
- ³ Gustav Adolf Steengracht von Moyland (1902–1969) – German diplomat, State Secretary at the Foreign Office of the Third Reich from 1943 to 1945.
- ⁴ Horst Wagner (1906–1977) – German diplomat, head of the “Inland II” section group at the Foreign Office of the Third Reich.

^{a-a} – the digit “2” in the date “25” was added by hand

^{b-b} – handwritten

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The publication of this volume was co-funded by:



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