

Beitrag der illegalen Korrespondenz als Forschungsquelle zur Geschichte der deutschen NS-Konzentrationslager. Pädagogische Anwendungsmöglichkeiten

The present study deals with the illegal KZ-letters from the national-socialist concentration camps, especially the contribution of these letters as investigation sources to the history of these camps as well as their utilization possibilities for pedagogical purposes.

By defining in the introduction the scope of the study subject and clarifying the notions “letters”, “German national-socialist concentration camps” and “illegal”, the study treats the question of the choice of the documents and the camps having to be considered, further the point to know which prisoner categories were on the basis of the edicts excluded from the post mail, discriminated or privileged and also the cases in which letters can be considered as illegal on the grounds of their form or their contents. In this context, the most important articles of the “Auszug aus der Lagerordnung”(extract from the camp rule) relating to the post mail are discussed in details and the concrete consequences of the application of the camp regulations (especially the repressive ones) for the prisoners are described.

Afterwards, the reasons are explained why the number of the illegal KZ-letters is today rather limited. The study points out however that the quantity of these letters must have been much higher at that time and takes by way of proofs the SS edicts, communications and measures on one side, the testimonies of the witnesses on the other side.

Next, the importance of the illegal mail for the prisoners and the functions it fulfilled at that time are examined closely. Different functions are distinguished. They are of communicative kind (real dialog with the close relations, free expression of feelings, isolation break), of informative kind (revelation of NS-crimes; materials for the publication of propaganda leaflets and pamphlets, proofs for the guilty of criminals), of conspiratorial kind (contacts with resistance organizations, preparation of escapes, acts of sabotage, smuggles of medicines, foodstuffs and weapons) and of fighting kind (letters as instruments in the fight against the oppression, as form of the underground struggle, as form of mental resistance). The functions can also have therapeutical aspects (increase of the resistance capacity, providing of new forces, restoring of the contact with the outside world, middle against the despair, the demoralization, “letzte Reserve gegen die Selbstaufgabe“ (last reserve against the moral suicide), inner freeing from the inhuman SS-domination), cognitive aspects (better understanding of the events and the own person), psychological aspects (suppression of aggressions), transcendental aspects (mental escape), philosophical aspects (reflection about the meaning of life), moral aspects (discovery of new values) and humanistic aspects (self-assertion, recovery of the personality rights and of the human dignity).

After, several categories of illegal letters (artistically decorated letters, letters in foreign languages, letters with false or feigned senders, letters with secret messages, clandestine letters, letters thrown out of the “death trains”, letters buried in the camp ground) are analysed from the double point of view of the form and the contents. One of these categories, the clandestine letters (called “Kassiber”), representing the majority of the illegal letters, is dedicated the most attention to.

Concerning these „Kassiber“, the study shows that they were not only the results of individual and isolated conspirative initiatives, but also regular and therefore important components of resistance actions which were sometimes undertaken on a large scale. The different forms of the clandestine letters smuggle, the role of the intermediaries in this smuggle, its significance in the different camps as well as the different aims the clandestine letters pursued, are also the subject of a close examination.

In the next part, the study tries to distinguish some characteristics which are common to the authors of the NS-concentration camps; one of them is the overproportional representation of the „Funktionshäftlinge“, e.g. the “prominent” prisoners who have fulfilled supervising functions.

Further, the worth of these letters as history sources is the subject of a detailed analysis by means of some criteria, which are applied to other sources too; the respective importance of all these sources for the history of the NS-camps is evaluated. The conclusion is that the illegal NS-letters are because of the representativity of their themes, their immediacy and relative reliability and despite of their low literary worth, in no way secondary sources but on the contrary important, quite relevant means for the research about the history of the NS-concentration camps. Together with other study subjects, they should be utilized as useful tools in critical and interdisciplinary perspective for a true, e.g. the most effective possible reproduction of the KZ-reality.

Thanks to their relatively great worth as sources, these letters offer moreover new efficacious didactical material in the struggle against the oblivion. By discussing the possible pedagogical utilisations of the illegal KZ-letters, the study shows that these letters, perhaps even more than other sources, present excellent pedagogical potentialities, since they can be published in collections of letters and be critically analyzed, constitute central subjects of expositions, seminars, web quests, public lectures, scenic lectures and so on, so be used for every kind of pedagogical project in keeping with the education to democratic and humanistic values.

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