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Collective Memory in Contemporary Poland and Pre-Independence (1918) Warfare: An Early 21st Century Foreign Traveler's Observations concerning Polish Battlefield Memorials

 Rodney Walton

Abstract

This essay examines war memorials in contemporary Poland. The article also analyzes Polish historical memory through the prism of three theories of collective memory discussed by Nachman Ben-Yehuda. To the eye of a foreign observer, Polish memorialization of pre-1918 battle sites appears strange. Significant battlefields from the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and World War I are largely ignored in favor of emphasis on medieval battlefields. The author argues that this pattern reflects both Polish ethnocentric nationalism and a desire to forget the many years during which German-speaking peoples controlled portions of present-day Poland. The author maintains that Poland's early Cold War-era policy of de-Germanization of cultural sites is no longer appropriate for contemporary Poland - a member of the European Union.

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