

Between Public and Secret: Town Archives and Historiographic Notes

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Common history is one of the important features of the urban public. Even when the history of a community is not explicitly written down, there are the stories, interpretations, and legends which cement the urban identity and self-awareness. This kind of a public urban sense of history may be easily postulated; it is, however, often difficult to establish the mechanisms of its formation and transferral in the Middle Ages. There has been a kind of oral tradition, there are different commemorative monuments, and so on. Among the most obvious means of recording and transferral of common past are urban history writing and collections of the town archives.

Urban history writing is a complex late medieval phenomenon, mostly known from the Italian and German contexts.¹ It is very variable in its form. There are chronicles in a proper sense: that is, more or less consistent narratives of the past and contemporary events. There are also more heterogeneous historiographic notes (*Aufzeichnungen*) scattered in different town records or collected later from these records. Also the audience of this history writing has been very different. The chronicles were intended for the widest possible public and appeared quite early in print. There are also all kinds of shorter historiographic notes, which were mainly intended for the use of the town council. Sometimes it has been explicitly underlined that they are not for the wider public, that is secret (*hemlik*).²

The notion of public archives is of course modern. The historical origin of secret archives is even nowadays reflected in the names of some archives, as for example *Geheimes Staatsarchiv* in Berlin or *Archivio Segreto* in the Vatican. Medieval archives were rather more like the treasury, with quite limited access. This does not deny the fact, however, that it was also often necessary in the Middle Ages to retrieve (make public) some information from the collections of the chancellery of the town council. The most obvious documents to be preserved in order and retrievable were different charters, i.e. the privileges of

¹ On the current state of research see: *Städtische Geschichtsschreibung im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Peter Johannek (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000).

² Klaus Wriedt, "Bürgerliche Geschichtsschreibung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Ansätze und Formen," in *Städtische Geschichtsschreibung*: 19-50.

the town. The specialization of the documentation of the town council into the town books (*Stadtbücher*: copy-books, accounts of real estate transactions, different monetary documents) was also quite plausibly a measure of simplifying access to documents of special types.

This paper deals with the interconnection between the collections of the town archives and urban historiography. In studies on urban chronicles it has often been taken for granted that the writers had access to the archives and made use of them in their writings. To what extent the writers used documentation has been assessed in the critical editions of the texts of the chronicles. Shorter notes of historiographic nature found in town records are often bound with the daily administration by their origin. The question which most interests me here is: can the historiographic texts tell us something about the accessibility and organisation of a medieval archives?

For a closer study I have selected the case of medieval Reval in Livonia, the most northeastern region of German colonisation in the Middle Ages. Reval was one of the three major towns in Livonia. Among the medieval Livonian town archives only Reval has had the luck to preserve its medieval collections without major losses.³ The problem of this collection is, however, that it has undergone several major rearrangements during the modern period, so it is difficult to say something about the organisation of the depository in the Middle Ages. Mostly there are the documents themselves, e.g. the volumes already bound in the Middle Ages, which refer to the organization of the material.

The traditions of local Revalian history writing are, to be honest, not very glorious.⁴ Only a small fragment of a chronicle of the town survives from the early sixteenth century.⁵ From the second part of the sixteenth century there is a

³ On the earlier history of the collections of Reval see: Friedrich Georg von Bunge, "Nachrichten über das alte Archiv des Rathes zu Reval," *Archiv für die Geschichte Liv-, Esth- und Curlands*, 3 (Dorpat: 1844): 293-312 (hereafter Bunge, "Nachrichten"); Theodor Schiemann, "Die Ordnungs-Arbeiten am Revaler Stadtarchiv," in Theodor Schiemann, *Historische Darstellungen und Archivalische Studien* (Hamburg: E. Behre, 1886), 245-264; [Otto Greiffenhagen and Rudolf Kenkmaa], *Viiskümmend aastat teaduslikku tööd Tallinna Linnaarhiivis. Fünfzig Jahre wissenschaftlicher Arbeit im Revaler Stadtarchiv* (Tallinn, 1933); Wilhelm Lenz, "Das Revaler Stadtarchiv. Bemerkungen zu seiner Geschichte, seinen Archivaren und seinen Beständen," in *Reval und die Baltischen Länder. Festschrift für Hellmuth Weiss zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Jürgen von Hehn, Csaba Janos Kenez (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 1980), 233-242; *Tallinna riiklik keskarhiiv/Centralnyi Tallinskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv/Tallinner Staatliches Zentralarchiv 1883-1983*, ed. Kaja Altof (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1983).

⁴ On Livonian historiography see *Geschichte der Deutschbaltischen Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Georg von Rauch (Cologne: Böhlau, 1986).

⁵ The chronicle lacks a modern edition, but has been retold in modern German by Eugen von Nottbeck, "Fragment einer Revaler Chronik," in *Beiträge zur Kunde Ehst-, Liv- und Curlands* 4 (Reval: 1894), 450-468. See also Norbert Angermann, "Die mittelalterliche Chronistik," in *Geschichte der Deutschbaltischen Geschichtsschreibung*: 19-20 (hereafter Angermann, "Chronistik").

chronicle of Revalian protestant minister Balthasar Russow,⁶ which is not a town chronicle in a strictest sense, but is certainly part of the Revalian historical tradition because of the Revalian patriotism of its author.

The fragment from the early sixteenth century consists of 12 large pages.⁷ The text is written mostly without corrections, and has also quite large margins. Places of some dates have been left empty, plausibly for later addition in ink of a different color. Some pages have been left blank for further additions. Included between the pages is a contemporary variant of the text on six pages of smaller format, which includes some extra parts which have perished from the main body of the book.

The events narrated in the excerpt vary considerably. It starts with the short instruction of how to act in case of plague,⁸ followed by two minor court cases from the year 1454-1455. From the 1480s the chronicle becomes more detailed. The main issue is then the conflict of the town with the nobles. The chronicle narrates at length the negotiations of the town with the representative of its overlord, the Master of the Teutonic Order in Livonia. The last preserved part of the chronicle relates an incident of robbery during the Russo-Livonian War in 1501-1503.

It has been generally accepted that the author of the fragment was Johann Gellinckhusen,⁹ a prominent member of the town council. Originating from a patrician family of Lübeck, Gellinckhusen acquired the rights of burgher of Reval in 1478.¹⁰ In 1481 he is first mentioned as a member of the magistracy.¹¹ He was active in different diplomatic missions and negotiations of the town. He died as a burgomaster in 1504.¹²

⁶ A critical edition is also lacking for this chronicle. Balthasar Russow, *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt*, *Scriptores Rerum Livonicarum*, vol. 2 (Riga: Frantzen, 1853); an English translation is: *The Chronicle of Balthasar Russow & A Forthright Rebuttal by Elert Kruse & Errors and Mistakes of Balthasar Russow by Heinrich Tisenhausen*, tr. Jerry C. Smith, Juer-gen Eichhoff and William L. Urban, (Madison: Baltic Studies Center, 1988). See also Paul Johansen, *Balthasar Rüssow als Humanist und Geschichtschreiber*. Aus dem Nachlaß ergänzt und herausgegeben v. Heinz von zur Mühlen (Cologne: Böhlau 1996) (hereafter Johansen, *Balthasar Rüssow*).

⁷ Tallinn Town Archives f. 230, n. 1, Aa 23b (hereafter TLA).

⁸ See Mihkel Tammet, "Some Aspects of Herbal Medical Treatment on the Example of Medieval Reval," in *Quotidianum Estonicum. Aspects of Daily Life in Medieval Estonia*, ed. Jüri Kivimäe and Juhan Kreem (Medium Aevum Quotidianum, Sonderband 5) (Krems: Medium Aevum Quotidianum, 1996), 114.

⁹ See, e.g., Angermann, "Chronistik," 19.

¹⁰ *Das Revaler Bürgerbuch 1409–1624*, ed. Otto Greiffenhagen (Reval: Estnische Verlags-genossenschaft, 1932) 32; Eugen von Nottbeck, *Die Älteren Rathsfamilien Revals* (Reval: Estländ. Gouvernements-Typographie 1875), 45.

¹¹ Friedrich Georg von Bunge, *Die Revaler Rathslinie nebst Geschichte der Rathsverfassung*, (Reval: Kluge, 1874), 96.

¹² Mentioned as deceased in December 1504, see *Liv-, Est und Curländisches Urkundenbuch* Vol. 1/1–12, 2/1–3, ed. Friedrich Georg von Bunge, Hermann Hildebrand, Philipp Schwartz, Leonid Arbusow, August Bulmerincq (Reval: Kluge u. Ströhm, 1853–1914), vol.

Nothing is known about the intentions of Gellinckhusen or perhaps a commissioning of his work by the magistracy. A greater amount of the text treats the years just before the death of Gellinckhusen. It is clear because of the blank pages that the work was not finished, most likely because of the death of the author. There are several more or less hypothetical impulses which Gellinckhusen may have received for the writing of the chronicle. In 1491, for example, Gellinckhusen met the famous Hanseatic history writer Albertus Krantz, when they both took part in the mediation of the conflict between the Teutonic Order and Riga.¹³ Because of the fact that the chronicle of Gellinckhusen starts with advice against the plague, it may be also connected with the epidemic in Reval in 1504.¹⁴

Because Livonian Chronicle by Balthasar Russow is widely known it can be introduced here only briefly. The book of Russow had completely another faith from that of Gellinckhusen. Firstly, it was finished and appeared in print in 1578; in 1584 a second enlarged edition appeared. Russow attempted to describe the whole history of Livonia, but his chronicle deals primarily with the history of his own times, i.e. the tribulations of the Russo-Livonian War (1558-1583). Furthermore, the viewpoint of Russow is not so much Livonian, but clearly Revalian.

The chronicle of Balthasar Russow probably emerged initially from the private initiative of its author. It cannot be denied, however, that Russow is inclined to justify the pro-Swedish position of the Revalian town council, although not much is known about the direct support of the magistracy for Russow. Paul Johansen has indicated the support of the *syndicus* of Reval, Conrad Dellinckhusen, for the work of Russow.¹⁵ When Johann Gellinckhusen, member of the town council, had unlimited access to the archives of the town and, moreover he was himself active in producing the documents, then Russow is from the point of view of the magistracy an outsider. It was most likely Dellinckhusen who provided Russow with the access to the archives and the transcripts from the most recent documents in the collections of the magistracy.

Which kind of documents were they and how did Gellinckhusen and Russow incorporate in their narratives?

The longest episode of the narrative of Gellinckhusen treats the difficult negotiations with the Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order over the case of Hans Rosen, a nobleman from Sage in the neighbourhood of Reval. Hans Rosen had arrested a man in the territory of the town and imprisoned him in the castle. The town insisted on its right of jurisdiction in its territory, where the overlord

2/2 no. 701 (hereafter *LECUB*).

¹³ *Kämmereibuch der Stadt Reval 1432–1463*, ed. Reinhard Vogelsang (Cologne: Böhlau 1976) no. 2125; see also *Hanserecesse 1256–1530*, ed. by Karl Koppmann et al. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1870–1930), vol. 3/2, no. 414 (hereafter *HR*).

¹⁴ *LECUB* vol. 2/2, no. 669.

¹⁵ Johansen, *Balthasar Rüssow*, 60, 247-249.

had no right to intervene. Connected to this, the question of peasants who had fled from nobles and found refuge in town was debated.¹⁶ Gellinckhusen was one of the two members of the town council who took part in the negotiations in Rujen, Alp, and Wait as the Master was approaching Reval on his tour of homage.

These same negotiations were recorded in several places in the collections of town archives. First there is quite a detailed description of the meeting in Rujen by Gellinckhusen himself.¹⁷ The negotiations just before Master entered Reval were also added at the end of the account book of St. Johns Hospital in Reval. It seems that account books were convenient places for writing down important events, because Reval's account book (*Kämmereibuch*) also includes descriptions of the entrances of the Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order from the years 1513 and 1525.¹⁸

For Gellinckhusen these were events of his own life. When he produced the reports for the town magistrate he could use them again in his chronicle, although they appear there in adapted form. If Gellinckhusen really used his earlier accounts for his chronicle or wrote from memory is difficult to say. It is more important, however, that he narrates events which were already recorded in several places. In this way the chronicle of Gellinckhusen first shows how closely its text is bound to the documents of daily administration of the magistracy, and second, how it participated in the making of history out of the same documents.

Russow, who describes in his chronicle many of the negotiations of the town, never participated in these negotiations himself. His knowledge was based on the same type of reports from the archives of the magistracy as in the case of Gellinckhusen. Russow describes in this way, for example, the negotiations of town with the local nobility under the supervision of the Teutonic Order in 1543.¹⁹ This story was incorporated in the text of the second edition of the chronicle of Russow, thus it was accessible 35 to 40 years after the negotiations took place.

Another interesting type of material common to both Russow and Gellinckhusen is the court book (*Gerichtsbuch*). Gellinckhusen describes court cases and solutions in a minute form in the first part of his chronicle. Some of the cases illustrate the hostile acts of the nobility against Reval, which Gellinckhusen witnessed. For Russow the most prominent story, taken from Revalian court records is the decapitation of the nobleman Johann Üxküll.²⁰ Al-

¹⁶ See Vilho Niitemaa, *Die undeutsche Frage in der Politik der livländischen Städte im Mittelalter* (Helsinki: Suomen Akatemia, 1949) 138-139, 142-144.

¹⁷ *LECUB* vol. 2/1 no. 779; TLA, BL 1.

¹⁸ Paul Johansen, "Ordensmeister Plettenberg in Reval," *Beiträge zur Kunde Estlands*, 12 (Reval: Estländische Verlagsgenossenschaft, 1926-1927): 100-115.

¹⁹ Johansen, Balthasar Rüssow, 59.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

though from slightly different angle Gellinckhusen and Russow both underline the confrontation of the town with the nobility and the desperate desire of town to protect its sovereignty.

These cases with nobility are also recorded elsewhere. Some preserved excerpts were taken from an old court book in the sixteenth century: the original book has been lost but the excerpts covering the years 1457-1550 survive.²¹ Whether these notes were made for a kind of collection of curiosities or for a handbook of court practice may be debated.²² Some of the recorded cases are too exceptional to have been preserved for further court practice. What is true, however, is that the excerpts clearly simplify the access to the older court book. In a similar way the marginal inscriptions in the account books and the minutes of the town council enabled later retrieval of information.

The chronicles of Gellinckhusen and Russow and the preserved excerpts of a court book testify that the descriptions of old court cases were also accessible decades later. The period between the time when Gellinckhusen wrote his text and the earliest case he mentions is about half a century (1454-1503). In the case of Russow the gap is somewhat shorter, 35 to 40 years (1535-1570s). What should be underlined here is that both Gellinckhusen and Russow were not selecting randomly, but these court cases have a clear place in the structure of their arguments.

When these types of sources were already in their original form close to the narrative of events, then there are types of documents, which were clearly not so communicative. For example, direct quotes from letters interrupt the flow of the narratives. Both Gellinckhusen²³ and Russow²⁴ use direct quotes from letters of their own times. From the point of view of narrative the town privileges were also the type of material which was hard to integrate into the text. Although Russow and Gellinckhusen are not quoting privileges at length, their chronicles often speak of them.

The donation charters of the privileges were the most important documents of town archives. Not much is known about the deposition of Revalian charters. In the nineteenth century, when the archives were first described, they were kept in the treasury of the Town Hall,²⁵ and there is no reason to believe that this was not the case in the Middle Ages. Several impressive chests survive which could have been used for this purpose. From 1688 there is a wooden

²¹ TLA, Aa 9 *Aus dem alten Gerichtsbuch ein kurzer Auszug 1457-1550*. Published in modern German under the title "Herberssche Auszug" in Eugen von Nottbeck, *Die alte Criminalchronik Revals* (Reval: Prahm, 1884): 48-88. According to Paul Johansen, the writer of the excerpts was Conrad Dellinckhusen: see *Das Revaler Geleitsbuch 1515-1626*, ed. Nikolai Essen, Paul Johansen (Tallinn: R Tohver, 1939) 58-59, note to no. 407.

²² See also Erik Somelar, "Van des keisserlichen Lübischen Rechtes wegen." Circumstances of Criminality in medieval Reval," in *Quotidianum Estonicum*: 80.

²³ TLA, Aa 23b, fol. 23v.

²⁴ See Johansen, *Balthasar Rüssow*, 59-60.

²⁵ Bunge, "Nachrichten," 294.

decorated chest which is known as the depository of the privileges of the town.²⁶ The ability of the council members to bring out these charters in cases of dispute is recorded in the chronicle of Gellinckhusen.²⁷

The chronicle of Gellinckhusen is too fragmentary to tell more about the collection of privileges. There is, however, something to say about the data in the chronicle of Russow.²⁸ Most revealing is the sampling of the older privileges of the town and their misdating by Russow. In his chronicle, Russow tells that in 1513 the Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order, Wolter von Plettenberg, took over the lordship of Reval from the Grand Master of the Order.²⁹ This event, whereby the Livonian Master confirmed all the earlier privileges of Reval, took place in 1525.³⁰ In 1513, however, Wolter von Plettenberg confirmed all the privileges of Reval for the first time, a document which was certainly deposited together with the most important charters of the magistracy and is still preserved in the town archives.³¹ How could these relatively recent dates for Russow have been mistaken? Knowing that an important transferral of rights took place during the reign of Plettenberg, probably the most famous Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order, the date was taken from the earlier charter “on the top of the pile.”

There are further indications of how the collection of Revalian charters was used by Russow in his chronicle. In his chronicle Russow mentions an old debt of a nobleman, Otto Tödwyn, to the nunnery of St. Bridget. This relatively random fact from the remote past (the debt was incurred in 1466), was taken from a document which is now also preserved in the same collection of charters where the above-mentioned confirmations of the privileges are found.³² Russow’s misdating of the purchase of Estonia by the Teutonic Order in 1347 (the correct date is 1346) may have been caused by the fact that the most impressive transcript (*Transsumt*) of the earlier privileges of the town was completed then by the Livonian master Burchard von Dreileben.³³ In the same year the Grand Master in Prussia confirmed the earlier privileges of the town.³⁴

We do not know for sure who made the mistakes. Whether it was Russow

²⁶ On the preserved chests of the town hall see Rasmus Kangroop, *Tallinna Raekoda* (Tallinn Town Hall) (Tallinn: Kunst, 1982), 110-111.

²⁷ In the case when Plettenberg was approaching Reval and the town proved him his rights. see: TLA, Aa 23b, fol. 15r.

²⁸ See also Johansen, *Balthasar Rüßow*, 57-60.

²⁹ Johansen, *Balthasar Rüßow*, 58-59.

³⁰ Juhan Kreem, “Teutonic Order as a Secular Ruler in Livonia: The Privileges and Oath of Reval,” in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150–1500*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 220-221.

³¹ TLA, f. 230, n. I-1, no. 937. Published by Friedrich Georg von Bunge, *Die Quellen des Revaler Stadtrechts*, 2 (Dorpat: Kluge, 1847), no. 54.

³² TLA, f. 230, n. I-1, no. 718. *LECUB* 1/12, no. 405.

³³ TLA, f. 230, n. I-1, no. 168.

³⁴ TLA, f. 230, n. I-1, no. 170. Bunge, *Die Quellen*, no. 36. *LECUB* 1/2, no. DCCCLXXV.

himself, or somebody who provided him access to the documents, most likely Conrad Dellinghusen. Dellinghusen as a *syndicus* (i.e. lawyer) of town would probably have assessed the contents of the charters more precisely. What is important in our present context is that the selection of facts in the chronicle of Russow indicates at least some of the most eye-catching pieces of the content of the treasury of the town archives. The collection was easy to use for picking up facts from remote past.

I have touched here in the example of Reval upon some aspects of the relations of the administration's literacy and historiographic tradition. In a local context it could be shown how the records of administration (court proceedings, minutes of negotiations) were carried over to historiographic texts. Although the public of these chronicles was different (in the case of Gellinckhusen probably only the magistracy, in case of Russow the Middle-Low German-speaking world), both examples clearly bring the results of record keeping to a wider public than originally intended in the records. These cases also show the nature of the accessibility of the documents. Privileges and court records were relatively easy to use even when a considerable period of time had passed.

When speaking of the accessibility of the documentation then there were certainly also limits. The most striking of these limits is the text of Gellinckhusen, which may have been at one point even a part of one of the town books, but was not used by Russow. Nevertheless, even if there was thus a certain interruption of a literal tradition, the tenor of the both men, Gellinckhusen and Russow, is comparable. Both patriots of Reval narrate how the town protected its rights against the nobility, an issue which in their times had great publicity. Gellinckhusen and Russow both used the documents of the town archives to create Revalian historiographic tradition, which is also remembered much later.

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HERAUSGEGEBEN
VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

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