

## Shooting the Bird and the *Maigraf* Festival in Medieval Livonian Towns<sup>1</sup>

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Feasts and festivals form an inseparable part of human life and can be considered among the most important cultural phenomena of any period in history. This paper aims to discuss two festivals celebrated in medieval Livonia<sup>2</sup> in springtime, namely the bird-shooting (*Papagoienschützen*) and the election of the Lord of May (*Maigraf*). These two festivals were among the most favoured outdoor entertainments of urban communities in the region, especially since carnival, the greatest popular feast, remained relatively modest, the main emphasis being laid on the indoor celebrations of the individual guilds and confraternities.

Our knowledge about the May-festival and bird-shooting in Livonia is based on a more than a century old survey by Eduard Pabst.<sup>3</sup> The merits of his work lie above all in his detailed use of documents from the two major towns in the region, Reval<sup>4</sup> and Riga, but also the comparative material he collected on these festivals in Germany and Scandinavia. Other Baltic German authors as well have provided brief overviews of these two feasts; however, in their writings the festivities were approached in a rather general and descriptive way, being introduced incidentally to illustrate medieval urban culture.<sup>5</sup> Post-war scholarship dealing with the

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper delivered at the *International Medieval Congress* in Leeds, July 14-17, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Medieval Livonia covered approximately the territories of present-day Estonia and Latvia.

<sup>3</sup> Eduard Pabst, *Der Maigraf und seine Feste* (Reval, 1864).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I use the German, i.e. medieval names of Livonian towns, thus, Reval for Tallinn, Dorpat for Tartu.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Amelung and Georges Wrangell, *Geschichte der Revaler Schwarzenhäupter* (Reval: Wassermann, 1930); Constantin Mettig, *Geschichte der Stadt Riga* (Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1897); Herbert Spliet, *Geschichte des rigischen Neuen Hauses, des später sogenannten König Artus Hofes, des heutigen Schwarzhäupterhauses* (Riga: Verlag Ernst Plaies, 1934).

(urban) history of the region<sup>6</sup> has added little to Pabst's facts or interpretations. What I wish to do is to turn back to the sources, particularly to archival material not known or disregarded by previous scholars.<sup>7</sup> In the light of new evidence, I intend primarily to examine the questions of how the bird-shooting and May-festival were carried out, and who they were meant for; that is, who were the organisers and who could take part in them. I also used a prosopographical approach and tried to gather biographical data on some key figures at these festivals.

Since the guilds and confraternities were the main power behind the urban feasts, it is relevant to review briefly the major associations in Livonian towns. The guild system, transferred to Livonia from German areas, was established mainly in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Without going into too many details, one can say that in Riga and Dorpat the burghers were organised into a Great Guild (*Grosse Gilde*), which united the great merchants, and a Small Guild (*Kleine Gilde*) consisting of different craftguilds. Medieval Reval provides an exception since it had two minor guilds: St.Canute's Guild (*Kanutigilde*) consisted of more respectable and more highly skilled branches of craftsmanship, such as goldsmiths, smiths, tailors, etc., whereas St.Olaf's Guild (*Olavigilde*) was formed of less prestigious crafts dealing with transportation, fishing, etc. The merchants of the Great Guild were the urban elite, and the most influential positions were held by them, including places in the town council. One particular confraternity in Livonian towns was the Brotherhood of Blackheads (*Bruderschaft der Schwarzenhäupter*), also a corporation of merchants, but consisting of young, unmarried merchants and merchants-journeymen as opposed to the merchants of the Great Guild who were married burghers. When a Blackhead got married, he joined the Great Guild. The Brotherhood of Blackheads was the secondmost influential corporation after the Great

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<sup>6</sup> Edgars Dunsdorfs and Arnolds Spekke, *Latvijas vesture 1500-1600* [A History of Latvia 1500-1600] (Stockholm: Daugava, 1964); *Tallinna ajalugu 1860-ndate aastateni* [A History of Tallinn to 1860s], ed. Raimo Pullat (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1976); *Tartu ajalugu* [A History of Tartu], ed. Raimo Pullat (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> These are above all certain account books which throw light on the practical organisation of these feasts: Tallinn City Archives (henceforth TLA), F.191, n.2, s.19: *Maigrafenbuch 1527-1543*; F.191, n.1, s.179: *Rechnungen der Grossen Gilde, Maigrafenrechnungen 1526-1532*; Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga (henceforth LVVA), F.224, apr.1, l.412: *Schutten Aldermans Buch (Rechnungsbuch der Schützengilde) 1454-1569*; F.4922, apr.2, l.124: *Kämmereirechnungen der Schwarzen Häupter 1466-1582*; and bird-shooting regulations delivered by the Town Council of Reval: TLA, F.230, n.1, s.B.s.1: *Ratswillküren 1405-1620*, fol. 39-40 "Regeln über das Vogel und Scheibenschiessen."

Guild, and these two merchants' organisations often co-operated closely, as can also be seen in the case of preparing and carrying out the feasts.

Moving on to the spring festivities in Livonian towns, one has to face the fact that there exist no actual medieval descriptions of these occasions. The only surviving narrative about the bird-shooting contest and the *Maigraf*-celebrations is contained in the sixteenth-century chronicle of Balthasar Russow, a pastor in Reval.<sup>8</sup> This chronicle is especially valuable for its vivid descriptions of the customs and traditions of the "good old days in Livonia," that is, before the beginning of the Russian-Livonian war in 1558 and the subsequent collapse of Old Livonia in 1561. It should be noted that the author, Balthasar Russow, was a Lutheran pastor of the period which immediately followed the Reformation; therefore, his negative evaluations concerning the lifestyle of the Livonians, whom he describes as "constantly carousing and pursuing pleasure," are most likely exaggerated. At the same time, his detailed accounts of local customs offer valuable information on the practice of feasts and festivities in Livonia.

Russow describes the bird-shooting as follows:<sup>9</sup>

"The burghers also had pleasure and pastime in summer days, between Easter and Pentecost, as they went, one guild and company after another, to shoot the bird. It took place in this way, that the one who had shot the bird down a year ago and was called the Old King, on one Sunday afternoon was escorted by two aldermen and a long procession of all the guild brothers, and accompanied by town trumpeters, out of the city to the field where the pole with the bird had been set up. There the whole town community gathered, young and old, to watch this pastime, which because of iron arrows was not without danger [...]. And after they had been shooting at the bird for half a day, and had shot it down, the New King was greeted by everybody with great joy. No less was the happiness of the King's friends and of those who had bet on him and won. Not long afterwards this New King, accompanied by trumpeters, paraded in procession [...] through the city to the guild house. Many people were standing in front of every door, men, women, maidens, children, and

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<sup>8</sup> Balthasar Russow, *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt* (Rostock, 1578). In the following, I have quoted the revised version published in 1584, reprint in *Scriptores rerum Livonicarum*, vol. 2 (Riga, Leipzig: Eduard Frantzen, 1853). On Russow, see Paul Johansen, *Balthasar Russow als Humanist und Geschichtsschreiber*, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Baltischen Geschichte, vol. 14, ed. H. von zur Mühlen (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar Russow, *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt*, 45. Excerpts from the chronicle translated by Anu Mänd.

servants, all looking at the New King with great admiration and joy. Then the King had to carry a stick with a silver bird in his hand, and his steel bow along with the arrow with which he had shot down the bird was carried high in front of him. And when they reached the guild house, where everything was splendidly and well decorated, their wives and daughters also came to the banquet. Then a Queen was chosen from among the adorned maidens for the New King, and she had to sit next to him and to dance only with him, even though he himself had a wife."

And Russow finishes on a note of indignation:

"Such festival of the bird-pole was held on the three Sundays after Easter. Therefore the priests usually did not hold afternoon services on these three Sundays, since everybody preferred to go to the bird-pole rather than to the church."

Shooting contests similar to the one described by Russow in Livonia are known to have already been taking place in the towns of Flanders and southern Netherlands as early as the end of the thirteenth century, whence this custom spread to Germany, as well as to other parts of Europe. The formation of special shooting guilds (*Schützengilde*) began in the fourteenth century and intensified during the course of the fifteenth century. The annual shooting contest of such guilds, together with the election of the shooting king (*Schützenkönig*), usually took place in spring or summer, most frequently around Pentecost.<sup>10</sup> These shooting guilds were often called parrot-companies (*Papagoiengesellschaften*), since the symbol of such guilds as well as the trophy for the best bowman was, especially in Hanseatic towns, a colourful "parrot."

The earliest known record of a bird-shooting contest in Livonia is found in a decision (*bursprake*) of the Town Council in Reval at the end of the fourteenth century. The *bursprake* ordains that "there must be only one bird-shooting (*papeghoye*), and the drinking feast should not last longer than from the Sunday when they shoot the bird up to the following

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<sup>10</sup> On shooting confraternities and their contests, see August Edelmann, *Schützenwesen und Schützenfeste der deutschen Städte vom 13. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: E. Pohl, 1890); Hermann Goja, *Die österreichischen Schützengilden und ihre Feste 1500-1750: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte* (Vienna: Verlag Notring der wissenschaftlichen Verbände Österreichs, 1963); Jürgen Küster, *Wörterbuch der Feste und Bräuche im Jahreslauf* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1985), 170-71; *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 7, col. 1595, "Schützengilden" by O. G. Oexle; Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1996), esp. chapter 3 "Shooting Confraternities and the Circulation of Prestige," 65-94.

Sunday."<sup>11</sup> From this short passage, nothing can be deduced about who arranged or who took part in the contest. However, it seems likely that more than one confraternity had tried to hold its own contest and to elect their own shooting king since the town authorities attempted to limit the number of such contests to a single one.

No more informative is the statute of the Great Guild in Dorpat from approximately the same period, that is, the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The statute mentions only that "in the time of bird-shooting, the members should pay two marks to the guild house for (its) trouble," presumably referring to the required contribution for the organisation of the feast. But from this early statute of Dorpat, it is clear that the Great Guild itself organised and participated in the shooting contest.

The *bursprake* of Reval and the Dorpat statute are the only two pieces of information from the fourteenth century. However, the number of sources from the fifteenth century is relatively higher. From the year 1408 originates the statute of the shooting confraternity (*schutten kumpanie*) in Riga,<sup>13</sup> which is the oldest among such organisations in Livonia. The membership of this confraternity is not specified, but according to the list of names mentioned at the end of the document, it consisted most probably of the members of the Great Guild. At Easter 1416 followed the foundation of a shooting confraternity of the Great Guild and the Blackheads in Riga.<sup>14</sup> The Town Council also took an active part in this formation since at the head of the shooting guild stood one of the burgomasters (*Bürgermeister*), two town councillors (*Ratsherr*), and the town treasurer (*Stadtkämmerer*). The membership of this guild thus consisted of representatives of the three elite corporations: the Great Guild, the Blackheads, and the Town Council.

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<sup>11</sup> "Revalsche Bursprake aus dem Ende des 14. Jh-s", in *Liv-, Est- und Kurländisches Urkundenbuch* (henceforth *LECUB*), ed. Friedrich Georg von Bunge, vol.4 (Reval: Kluge, 1859), no.1516, §84.

<sup>12</sup> "Schragen der Grossen Gilde zu Dorpat vom Jahre 1387," in *Die Schragen der Grossen Gilde zu Dorpat*, ed. Constantin Mettig (Riga: Häcker, 1907), 45.

<sup>13</sup> *Schragen der Gilden und Aemter Riga bis 1621*, ed. Wilhelm Stieda and Constantin Mettig (Riga: Häcker, 1896), 548-49, no.109.

<sup>14</sup> Constantin Mettig, "Das Schützengildenbuch der Schwarzen Häupter," *Sitzungsberichte der Gesellschaft der Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands* (henceforth *SB Riga*) 1885 (1886), 105. The year 1416 actually marks the establishment of an account book of this shooting confraternity; therefore it cannot be excluded that this confraternity was identical with the previously mentioned the statute of which was delivered in 1408. However, since this account book, the "Schützengildenbuch", covering the years 1416-1555, was taken from Riga to Germany in 1939, and I have not had a chance to consult it, the question of the relations of the two confraternities will at this point remain open.

Somewhat later the craftsmen of Riga must have followed the model of the merchants, since in 1436 another shooting confraternity, that of the Small Guild, first appears in the documents.<sup>15</sup> The information on these two shooting confraternities can mainly be gathered from their account books, in which they listed each year the names of the alderman, his assessor (*Beisitzer*), and the shooting king, then the number of brothers participating in the feast, and finally the foodstuffs purchased and other expenses.<sup>16</sup> However, besides these rather standardised entries, one can occasionally find short remarks on some unusual events<sup>17</sup> or on new regulations concerning the feast.

The time of the annual shooting contest in Riga varied between Easter and Pentecost.<sup>18</sup> The contest was performed outside the town walls. For the fifteenth century, we only know that this place was called the Shooting Garden (*schetengarden*),<sup>19</sup> but there is no information concerning its exact location. From the beginning of the sixteenth century we know that both confraternities used a common spot for their contest, which was situated near the windmills behind the *Kalkpforte* (also known as *Sandpforte*).<sup>20</sup> The latter was the main gate of Riga on the land side, and the contest site was a public place open to everybody. A wooden or metal bird was fixed on the top of a pole and served as the target. It can be concluded from the sources that these two shooting confraternities did not elect a common shooting king, but that both guilds competed separately,

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<sup>15</sup> Constantin Mettig, "Ueber das Schützen-Gildenbuch der kleinen Gilde zu Riga," *SB Riga* 1893 (1894), 24.

<sup>16</sup> The account book of the shooting confraternity of the Small Guild covers the years 1454-1569 and is kept in the Latvian State Historical Archives, LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412. Since the "Schützengildenbuch" of the Blackheads has not been accessible to me (see note 14), I have used the drafts for this account book, found in LVVA, F.4922, apr.2, 1.124: *Kämmereirechnungen der Schwarzen Häupter 1466-1582*, as well as the excerpts from the "Schützengildenbuch" written down in the 18th century, LVVA, F.4038, apr.2, 1.234: *Manuscripta Livonica* 5, "Auszüge aus den bei der Gesellschaft der Schwarzen Häupter in Riga befindlichen Büchern," 147r-148v.

<sup>17</sup> Unusual either in a positive sense, such as the presence of guests of high status, or in a negative sense, such as circumstances due to which the shooting contest was postponed (a storm) or even cancelled (plague, outburst of war).

<sup>18</sup> Most often it is indicated in the sources as *up passchen* or *up pingesten*, only in some years it is specified that the contest took place on the Monday after Easter (LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412, fol.20), on the second Sunday after Easter (*Ibid.*, fol.14), or on the Monday after Pentecost (LVVA, F.4922, apr.2, 1.124, fol.31).

<sup>19</sup> LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412, fol.3 (anno 1454); Stieda and Mettig, *Die Schragen*, 549.

<sup>20</sup> Spliet, *Geschichte des rigischen Neuen Hauses*, 250-51. Cf. LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412, fol.20 (anno 1517).

and, thus, there would be two such kings each year. What is more important, the honour of being the shooting king of the town was reserved exclusively for the winner from the merchants' guild, whereas the shooting king of the craftsmen was acknowledged only by the members of his confraternity. This suggests that the *Schützenkönig* not only had to be good in archery, but also – or even primarily – of decent origin, a member of the urban elite, in other words, a proper person to represent the town community.<sup>21</sup>

There is no evidence on the existence of similar shooting confraternities in Reval; however, all the major corporations – the Great Guild, the Blackheads, and St. Canute's Guild – arranged shooting contests between Easter and Pentecost. Here, too, the shooting place and the target – the pole with the wooden bird on top (*papagoienbom*) – was one and the same for all three guilds. The contest took place outside the town wall in a garden in front of the Strand Gate (*Strandpforte*), which therefore received the name Parrot Garden (*Papagoiengarten*).<sup>22</sup> It was the duty of the town carpenters to set up the pole, and in return, they received one tun of beer. The costs of setting up the pole, looking after it, and taking it down were covered by the Great Guild, which, however, demanded that two thirds of the costs should be reimbursed by the Blackheads and St. Canute's Guild.<sup>23</sup>

The bird-shooting seems to have been not only a fun pastime but a serious ritual for the confraternities. The statutes of the Great Guild (1436) and the Blackheads (1520) in Reval obliged every member to participate in the shooting contest with his crossbow. The fine for non-participation was, in the case of the Great Guild, one mark, and in the case of the Blackheads, one pound of wax.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The first town councillor to win the title of the *Schützenkönig* was Godeke Durkop in 1433, and he was followed by several others, Mettig, "Das Schützengildenbuch der Schwarzen Häupter," 108.

<sup>22</sup> There were two Strand gates, a "Big" and a "Small," in medieval Reval, and the exact location of the "Parrot Garden" is unknown. According to some scholars, it was situated near the *Grosse Strandpforte*: Eugen von Nottbeck, *Die alten Schragen der Grossen Gilde zu Reval* (Reval: Kluge, 1885), 30; Paul Johansen and Heinz von zur Mühlen, *Deutsch und Undeutsch im mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Reval* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1973), Fig. 3 "Die alten Immobilien Revals." However, the bird-shooting regulations delivered by the Town Council state that the bowmen must gather "*vp den schutzen wall twischken der Kleinen Strandporten*", TLA, F.230, n.1, s.B.s.1, fol.39r.

<sup>23</sup> Nottbeck, *Die alten Schragen*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49, §72; Amelung, *Schwarzenhäupter*, 77.

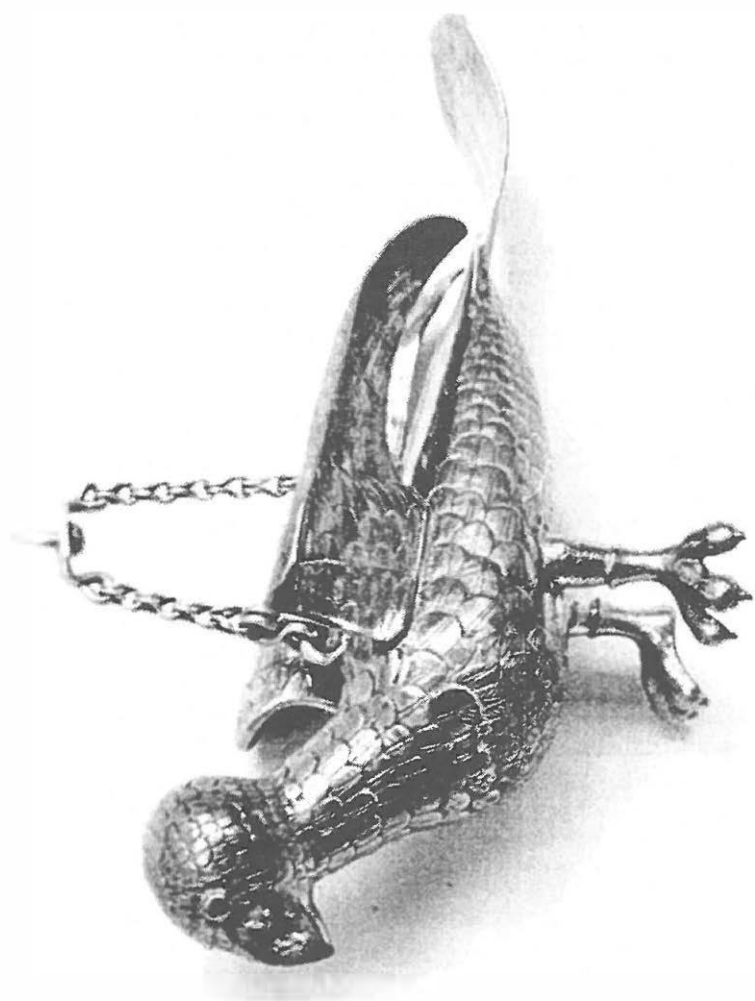


Fig. 1: Silver "Parrot" of the Reval Blackheads, 16<sup>th</sup> century.



The shooting contest was, however, only one part of the festival. It was followed by the yearly drinking feast called *Schützendrunke*, which was celebrated in the guild halls. The Blackheads decided in 1514 that at the time of the carnival celebrations (*Fastelabenddrunke*) in February, they should name two stewards, the *Papagoien-Schaffer*, who would be responsible for organising the bird-shooting festival together with the drinking feast in the company house.<sup>25</sup> Another duty of the stewards was to provide the pole with the painted wooden bird, which was to be made "not of very hard wood" in order to avoid accidents. They were also to commission a silver bowl, the weight of which was fixed to half a pound. This bowl should be the prize for the future winner since the silver bird, that is the parrot, which was carried by the king in the procession and used each year as the trophy, was the property of the confraternity. One such silver "parrot" from the sixteenth century, belonging to the Blackheads of Reval, has been preserved, and is kept in the Estonian Museum of Art in Tallinn (fig.1).<sup>26</sup> The inventories of St.Canute's Guild frequently record a silver parrot as well as a crossbow of silver.<sup>27</sup> The latter was most likely also carried as a trophy by the winner of the contest.<sup>28</sup> The Town Council of Reval had a special award (*Rades Clenodia*) for the shooting king, which could be kept by the latter during his year of "reign." The regulations delivered by the Town Council took care that no foreigner or non-burgher was to win this award.<sup>29</sup>

But let us turn back to the drinking feast. Regulations regarding the brewing for the bird-shooting celebrations have been preserved in the agreement from 1497 between the Town Council of Reval and the representatives of St.Canute's and St.Olaf's guilds.<sup>30</sup> This agreement states

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<sup>25</sup> Amelung, *Schwarzenhäupter*, 76. A similar statement is found in the statute of the Blackheads in Riga (1477), see Stieda and Mettig, *Schragen der Gilden*, 557, §8. For some years the names of the two *Papagoien-Schaffer* were indicated among the participants of the drinking feast at carnival, TLA, F.87, n.1, s.21: *Bruderbuch der Bruderschaft der Schwarzenhäupter zu Reval 1500-1570*, fol.144b, 146b.

<sup>26</sup> See also Anton Buchholtz, *Goldschmiedearbeiten in Livland, Esthland und Kurland* (Lübeck: Nöhring, 1892), 18-19, table XVII; Annelore Leistikow, *Baltisches Silber* (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1996), 81, 91, ill. 119.

<sup>27</sup> *LECUB*, vol.9, n.922.

<sup>28</sup> A silver crossbow was also carried by the shooting king of the craftsmen in Riga, LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412, fol.6: "*Item dat suluer armborst dat de konick drecht...*" (anno 1486).

<sup>29</sup> "*Eyn vthman edder de nicht borger is mach des Rades Clenodie nach dem Vogel nicht gewinnen*," TLA, F.230, n.1, s.B.s.1, fol.39v.

<sup>30</sup> *Revaler Pergament Rentenbuch 1382-1518*, ed. Arthur Plaesterer, Publikationen aus dem Revaler Stadtarchiv Nr. 5 (Tallinn: Eesti Kirjastuse Ühisus, 1930), 314, no.1177.

first that the beer should be brewed out of no more than three *Last* of barley; second, that this beer should not be sold outside the company houses; and third, that the tasting of the beer should begin no earlier than eight days after Easter. The regulations concerning the annual shooting feast became more and more detailed in the course of the centuries, thus reflecting the general trend in late medieval Europe, the attempts of town authorities to increasingly regulate the public aspects of urban life.

The ordinances of the Blackheads from 1522 fix the amount and kinds of foodstuffs that the stewards had to purchase for the feast, namely 7 good sheep, 3 good hams, 6 smoked sausages, and 7 tongues, then spices, almonds, raisins, butter, flour, eggs and honey for the cakes.<sup>31</sup> However, twenty years later, in 1542, it was decided that the spiced soup and sausages should be left out because the costs of the feast were already too high.<sup>32</sup>

The account books of the shooting guilds in Riga reveal that the honour of being the shooting king resulted in considerable economic burden: Not only had the king to pay the required contribution for the feast (as all the other brothers had to), but he also had to give one banquet at his own cost. Considering the fact that in the first decades of the sixteenth century the average number of brothers participating in the feast of the merchants' guild fluctuated between 80 and 100<sup>33</sup>, and 50 and 80 within the shooting confraternity of the Small Guild,<sup>34</sup> this duty of being the host was certainly not an easy one. In 1532 the craftsmen finally decided to reduce the obligations of their king by exempting him from the participation fee and diminishing the types of food he had to serve on his banquet "so that the brothers would have more delight and eagerness to shoot at the bird" without fear of incurring the obligation.<sup>35</sup> In 1545 a similar decision was made by the Town Council of Riga together with the aldermen of the Great Guild and of the Blackheads, which led to the result that the shooting king was no longer expected to arrange a banquet, and

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<sup>31</sup> Amelung, *Schwarzenhäupter*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> LVVA, F.4922, apr.2, 1.124, fol.27, 29-30, 39.

<sup>34</sup> LVVA, F.224, apr.1, 1.412, fol.18-34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 32: "Item int jar [15]32 [...] do warth boueleth vann den gemeinen broderen olth und junck dat de koninck solde de fryenn druncke hebbenn unnd wen de konick de kost deyt nha older lefflicker wyse unnd gewanht, so sall de konick frig brodt hebbenn, kokenn unnd eyer, kesen sollenn genzlick aff gedaenn werden [...]. Düsse vorgeschreuen artikkel unnd puncte synt boueleth unnd ingegaenn vann den gemeinen broderen, dat idt dem koninge nicht tho swar valle mith der wanlickenn kost alsdann heft ock ey yder broder desto mher lust unnd leue nha dem vogell tho schetenn."

had only to pay for the wine and mead for the women invited to the feast.<sup>36</sup>

Every feast had to contain not only food and drink but also music. In the case of the bird-shooting festival, the town musicians were present both at the shooting place and at the following celebrations in the guild houses.<sup>37</sup> Their payment consisted partly of money, partly of beer. Occasionally, as reflected in the sources of Riga, the shooting guilds also hired the musicians who were in the service of the master of the Livonian Order, or even some Russian musicians.<sup>38</sup> Sometimes guests of quite high rank were known to have been present at the shooting feasts in Riga, for example, the master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order in the year 1473,<sup>39</sup> the archbishop in 1492, and the bailiff of the castle in 1510.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, to sum up, we can say that the bird-shooting festival was a festival for the entire town community. Both the merchants' guilds and the craft guilds took part in the contest, and since it was a public, open-air occasion, everybody could come and participate as spectators. At one level, such contests offered an opportunity for the burghers to show their individual skills in shooting; at the same time, this festival also functioned as a demonstration of the armed forces of the city, the readiness of the burghers to defend their town. The presence of highly esteemed guests certainly added prestige to the feast, and, at the same time, for the town community it offered the possibility of manifesting its power and military strength as well.

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The celebrations of bird-shooting were followed by another immensely popular festival, the election of the Lord of May (*Maigraf*). The earliest information about this feast in Livonia comes from the same late fourteenth-century *bursprake* of Reval cited for the bird-shooting festival. This *bursprake* contains the sentence that "there should be (i.e. be elected) only one *Maigraf*."<sup>41</sup>

Almost two centuries later, the chronicler Balthasar Russow describes the feast as follows:<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> LVVA, F.4038, apr.2, l.234, S.148r.

<sup>37</sup> The sources frequently mention *spellude*, sometimes specified as *vigeler*, *bassuner*, *piper*, *trumper*, and *trommitter*.

<sup>38</sup> LVVA, F.224, apr.1, l.412, fol.20-21.

<sup>39</sup> Spliet, *Geschichte des Neuen Hauses*, 88 note 90, 253.

<sup>40</sup> LVVA, F.224, apr.1, l.412, fol.7, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *LECUB*, vol. 4, no. 1516, § 84.

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar Russow, *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt*, 45.

"At Pentecost, the burghers and journeymen rode out into the May and elected the *Maigraf* from among themselves, who would best arrange a magnificent banquet, and then sent him back into the town with great pomp. Such *Maigraf*-celebrations were held by everybody and also by common folk throughout the summer on every Sunday, and not without all kind of light-mindedness."

Although Russow's description of this feast is much shorter than that of the bird-shooting, in practice the celebrations connected with the election of the Lord of May seem to have been considered more important. For example, we read in the statute of the Great Guild of Riga that "the drinking feast of parrot-shooting must last four days, but if it were the case that May day (i.e. the first of May) happens to fall into the (period of the) shooting-drinking-feast, then this day must be dedicated to the Lord of May, because it is his highest day."<sup>43</sup>

Although the statutes of both the Great Guild and of the Blackheads affirm that the Lord of May was to be elected on the May day,<sup>44</sup> in practice the feast seems to have been connected rather with Pentecost. For instance, the statute of the Great Guild in Dorpat prescribes that the guild hall must be ready for the *Maigraf*-feast eight days before Pentecost.<sup>45</sup> In Reval, the banquets took place at Pentecost and on the following Monday,<sup>46</sup> and the Blackheads in Riga celebrated the festival until the Wednesday after Pentecost.<sup>47</sup> Russow, too, connects the *Maigraf*-festival with Pentecost.

The source material on the *Maigraf*-celebrations is much more abundant than in the case of bird-shooting. In the following, I will concentrate on what can be said about the election procedure, how the celebrations were organised, and what is known about the persons who were elected to be Lords of May.

First, it must be said that, although Russow speaks of "everybody," there is no trace of any active participation of the craft guilds in this event, that is the right to elect the *Maigraf*, or for one of their members to be elected as one. This may be partly due to the fact that the status of the Lord of May involved relatively large expenditures. The sources from all three towns prove that the merchants' guilds and the members of the Town Council alone organised this feast. The statute of the Great Guild in Reval specifies that the Lord of May was to be elected by one of the burgomas-

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<sup>43</sup> Stieda and Mettig, *Die Schragen*, 322, §72(77): addition for the year 1559.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 557 §10: "den meygreven sal man kesen uppe meydach."

<sup>45</sup> Mettig, *Die Schragen der Grossen Gilde zu Dorpat*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> TLA, F.191, n.2, s.19.

<sup>47</sup> Stieda and Mettig, *Die Schragen*, 557 §10.

ters and a number of town councillors, the alderman of the Great Guild and his two assessors (*Beisitzer*), and by the Lord of May of the previous year.<sup>48</sup> The statute of the Blackheads in Riga from 1477 asserts that the *Maigraf* had to be a citizen of the town.<sup>49</sup> The statute of the Great Guild in Riga states that the alderman of the guild cannot be chosen as the Lord of May as long as he holds the office of alderman,<sup>50</sup> which makes sense in view of the fact that the alderman of the Great Guild was among the persons who decided about the future *Maigraf*.

The election would take place in a field outside of the town, to which the burghers rode on horseback. Unfortunately, the sources do not indicate exactly how the *Maigraf* was chosen, that is according to which qualities. Surely, the ability to organise a festive meal, as Russow claims, was not the only criteria. We will return to this question later.

The election was followed by a triumphal riding into the town and by festive meals and celebrations. As was the case with bird-shooting festivities, the two stewards organising the *Maigraf*-feast and responsible for its finances had already been appointed in February during the carnival celebrations.<sup>51</sup> The duty of the steward was by no means popular, not only because of the organisational efforts required but also because of the material responsibility. According to the statute of the Great Guild in Dorpat, if something was broken in the guild hall during the feast, for example, windows or other things, the stewards had to pay for this.<sup>52</sup> Also, if the expenses for the feast were higher than the income, the stewards had to make up the difference.

The most valuable source concerning the practical side of the feast is undoubtedly an unpublished account book, the *Maigrafen-Buch* of Reval, covering the years 1527-1543,<sup>53</sup> together with some separately surviving bills of the same feast from the years 1526, 1529, and 1532.<sup>54</sup> This account book was kept by the stewards of the *Maigraf*-celebrations. Each year the name of the Lord of May was written down first, followed by the names of the two stewards. Then, the stewards listed all the expenses for food, drink, decoration of the guild hall, horses, payments for helpers, bakers, musicians, and so on. After that, the stewards recorded the income of the feast, which consisted of the contributions collected

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<sup>48</sup> Nottbeck, *Die alten Schragen*, 49, §76: addition for the year 1473.

<sup>49</sup> Stieda and Mettig, *Die Schragen*, 557, § 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 322, §70: addition for the year 1559.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 557 § 8.

<sup>52</sup> "Schragen der Grossen Gilde zu Dorpat vom Jahre 1387", 45.

<sup>53</sup> *Maigrafenbuch 1527-1543*, TLA, F.191, n.2, s.19.

<sup>54</sup> *Maigrafenrechnungen 1526-1532*, TLA, F.191, n.1, s.179.

from the guild members as well as from the guests attending the feast. The *Maigraf* himself had to pay fixed 30 marks, a considerable sum of money (in the beginning of the period, in 1526-30, it formed almost half of the total sum spent for the feast). The rest of the income was collected from the representatives of the Blackheads. Occasionally, small sums were earned by selling the leftover beer or beef. In most years, the stewards managed to balance their books (or at least managed to suggest that they had); that is, the total income corresponded exactly to the sum which was spent. In some years<sup>55</sup> the income was even a little higher than the expense. In such cases the company usually decided to give this small amount of money (1-2 marks) to the stewards as a bonus for their good job.

If the expenses listed in the account book are examined more closely, it becomes evident that the types of foodstuffs and drinks bought for the feast remained practically the same during the whole period, but the prices tended to rise, which resulted in general increase of the total sum spent for the feast (graph 1). The expense-list always started with beer, which was purchased in considerable quantities, and which formed more than forty percent of the expenditure (graph 2). In addition to the ordinary beer, table-beer and Hamburg beer were bought, and also wine, sometimes specified as Rhenish wine. Among the meat products were always beef, ham, smoked sausages, and tongues. Moreover, we find bread and alms bread, cakes, nuts, apples, etc. Thus, the tables in the guild hall must have been richly covered. The problem is that we do not know for how many people this amount of food was intended.<sup>56</sup> The feast itself must have lasted at least two days, since in some years it is specified that the helpers were hired for two days, the horses were rented for two days, and the flowers and greenery for decorating the hall were purchased for two days. These days were most likely the Pentecost Sunday and the following Monday since on these two evenings the participation fee was collected. Although the celebrations took place in the house of the Great Guild, the Blackheads shared an equal responsibility for carrying out the feast: one of the stewards was appointed from among the members of the Great Guild, and the other one from among the Blackheads.<sup>57</sup>

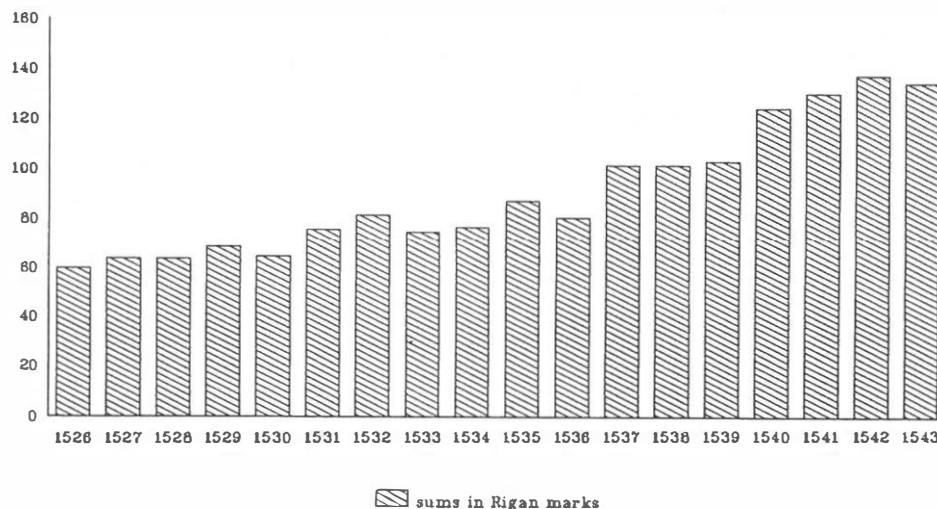
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<sup>55</sup> 1527, 1528, 1538, 1539.

<sup>56</sup> Unlike in the accounts of the drinking feasts (*drunke*) at carnival and Christmas, the names of the participants in the *Maigraf*-feasts were not listed.

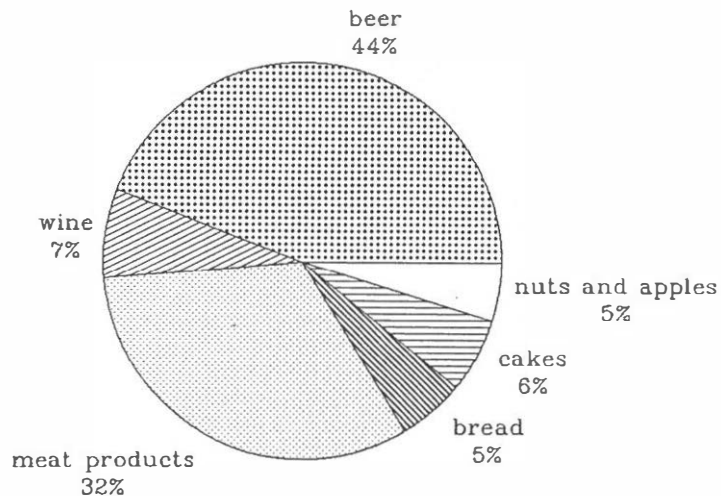
<sup>57</sup> The names of the stewards in the *Maigrafenbuch* were always listed in this order: first the representative of the Great Guild and thereafter the Blackhead. There were three exceptional years (1529, 1537, 1539) when both stewards came from the Great Guild. On those occasions, however, the second steward was chosen from among the junior members of the guild. TLA, F.191, n.2, s.19, fol.14, 46, 54.

# Expenditure for Maigraf feast 1526–1543



Graph 1

## Expenditure on food and drink in 1527



Graph 2



What do we know about the persons elected to be the Lord of May? The accounts record the names of eighteen Lords of May from the years 1526-43, to whom can presumably be added one more person occurring on the first page of the *Maigrafenbuch*.<sup>58</sup> A study of their backgrounds<sup>59</sup> enabled me to determine which guild they belonged to at the time of being elected, as well as to trace their previous or subsequent career (see the appendix). It turns out that ten Lords of May were members of the Great Guild and eight were Blackheads. Three persons (Euert Hessels, Andres Luhr, and Euert Eckholt) were officially accepted to the Great Guild during the drinking feast at Christmas of the very same year as they gained the status of *Maigraf*. All nineteen originated from well-known families in Reval which were represented in the Town Council.<sup>60</sup> The Lords of May from among the Blackheads were often the sons or nephews of town councillors, which indicates the importance of family ties. The Lords of May elected from within the Great Guild tended to be by no means ordinary members of this corporation, but had often held the most prominent positions, such as alderman or assessor of the Great Guild, or *Vorsteher* of the Table Guild.<sup>61</sup> Many Lords of May became town councillors afterwards. It is also interesting to note that the age of the future Lord of May was of no significance. Some of the Blackheads seem to have been relatively young; there are, however, several persons (e.g. Cordt Cardenall,<sup>62</sup> Wolmer Brockhusen, Hinrick Busch, Mauritius Rotert, Berent Bussman) who must have been over forty. Thus, to emphasise once more, it was the origin of a person, his family ties and wealth, and his outstanding status within his corporation, which played the decisive role in being considered for the honour of being elected as *Maigraf*. Again, as in

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 1. The note indicates only the name, Rotger Boismann, and a year [15]24; and there is no further data, such as an expense list, which forms the core of the regular entries of the following years.

<sup>59</sup> TLA, F.191, n.2, s.1: *Mitgliederbuch der Grossen Gilde zu Reval nebst Satzungen und chronikalischen Nachrichten 1364-1549*; F.191, n.2, s.15: *Rechnungen und Brüderverzeichnisse der Grossen Gilde zu Reval 1509-1603*; F.87, n.1, s.21: *Bruderbuch der Bruderschaft der Schwarzenhäupter zu Reval 1500-1570*; F.87, n.1, s.21a: *Bruderbuch der Bruderschaft der Schwarzenhäupter zu Reval 1500-1581*; F.230, n.1, s.B.N.1: *Testamente*; F.230, n.1, III-b: *Testamente*.

<sup>60</sup> See Friedrich Georg von Bunge, *Die Revaler Rathslinie* (Reval: Kluge, 1874).

<sup>61</sup> Table Guild (*Tafelgilde*) was a charitable organization consisting of the members of the Great Guild.

<sup>62</sup> There exists evidence for two Cordt Cardenall's in Reval; however, since the "second" one appears as a member of the Blackheads only after 1530 (TLA, F.87, n.1, s.21a, fol.210ff.), it is most likely that the "first" one was the one elected to be Lord of May in 1526.

the case of the shooting contest, we see the same pattern – the "winner" had to come from among the urban elite.

The office of the *Maigraf* lasted for one year. Among his obligations, after the festival itself was finished, were the preparations for the feast of *Corpus Christi*. He had to invite women to make candles in the house of the Great Guild as well as to choose male persons to carry these candles in the *Corpus Christi* procession.<sup>63</sup> The fact that the position of the Lord of May was highly respected is underlined by the fact that in the regulations of Reval from 1451 and 1460,<sup>64</sup> that established the order in which the guilds and confraternities had to walk in the *Corpus Christi* procession, the Lord of May with his candles is specifically mentioned. The order was to be the following: first, the members of St. Gertrude's guild, then St. Olaf's guild and St. Canute's guild, then the Great Guild itself. After these came the skippers, then the Lord of May with candles and the Blackheads, then the Table Guild, and the Sacrament itself. The feast of *Corpus Christi* closed the feast-cycle which had begun with Easter, the cycle of springtime festivities. Hence, the *Corpus Christi* feast provides an appropriate end for this paper.

As can be seen, the two festivals – bird-shooting and the election of the Lord of May – not only followed each other in time, but shared many common features. The ceremonial, open-air parts of these festivities were meant for everybody in the town community, but for "everybody" in the sense of spectators. At the same time, these festivals were organised by the town elite, and only the town elite could actively participate, by being elected as the shooting king or the Lord of May. The drinking feasts, connected to these two festivals, were celebrated by each guild in their company houses, and, thus, had a less public character. Whereas the outdoor part of these festivals aimed to demonstrate and strengthen the unity of the entire town community, the following banquets served to strengthen the social identity and common values inside the corporations, and, by doing so, to set themselves apart or even in opposition to other guilds and other urban residents.

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<sup>63</sup> Nottbeck, *Die alten Schragen*, 28, 47.

<sup>64</sup> *LECUB*, vol. 11, no. 158.

## Appendix: The *Maigrafen* in Reval 1524, 1526-1543

Abbreviations: GG= Great Guild ; BB= Brotherhood of Blackheads;  
 TG= Table Guild; TC= Town Council; Bm= burgomaster;  
 f= *Fastelabenddrunke*; w= *Weihnachtsdrunke*

Year	Name of the <i>Maigraf</i> and his membership at the time of election	Remarks
1524	Rotger Boismann [GG]	member of GG since 1517f; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1527; assessor of GG 1528-29; member of TC 1535-42; died 1545.
1526	Cordt Cardenall [GG]	member of GG since 1503w; assessor of GG 1518-20; alderman of GG 1529-32; died 1549.
1527	Tonnies Bokelmann [BB]	mentioned in BB 1526-35; member of GG since 1535w.
1528	Wolmer Brockhusen [GG]	member of GG since 1501f; alderman of GG 1514- 17; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1514; member of TC 1507-22; testament 1548; died after 1549.
1529	Euert Hessels II. [BB]	son of Euert Hessels I. (member of TC 1507-24); mentioned in BB 1523-29f; steward of BB 1528w; member of GG since 1529w.
1530	Hinrick Boismann [GG]	member of GG since 1518w; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1532; assessor of GG 1534-35 and 1539; alderman of GG 1541-44; member of TC 1554-63; brother of Rotger Boismann.
1531	Hinrick Hulsberch [BB]	mentioned in BB 1527-35; member of GG since 1536f; member of TC 1536-39.
1532	Hans Vygent (Viant) [BB]	mentioned in BB 1525-33; member of GG since 1534f; member of TC 1534.

1533	Andres Luhr [?]	son of Hernen Luhr (member of TC 1511-34); not mentioned in BB; member of GG since 1533w.
1534	Hinrick Busch [GG]	member of GG since 1512f; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1524; testament 1547; died 1550.
1535	Merten Bretholt [BB]	mentioned in BB 1527-35; steward of BB 1531f; member of GG since 1538f.
1536	Hans Hower [GG]	member of GG since 1523w; steward of <i>Maigraf</i> feast 1531; assessor of GG 1537; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1542; member of TC 1539-50 (1550 Bm); testament 1565 and 1566.
1537	Andres Witte [BB]	mentioned in BB 1524-38; steward of <i>Maigraf</i> feast 1533; steward of BB 1534f.
1538	Hans Kampferbeck [GG]	member of GG since 1526f; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1542; assessor of GG 1544-45; member of TC 1550-59.
1539	Thomas Hessels [BB]	mentioned in BB 1530-57; steward of BB 1533w.
1540	Mauritius Rotert [GG]	steward of BB 1517f; member of GG since 1521f; assessor of GG 1538-40; died 1547.
1541	Berent Bussman [GG]	member of GG since 1518w; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1530; assessor of GG 1532-33; alderman of GG 1538-41; testament 1547.
1542	Cordt Beckhusen [GG]	mentioned in BB 1523-28; member of GG since 1528w; steward of <i>Maigraf</i> feast 1535; assessor of GG 1541-43.
1543	Euert Eckholt [BB]	mentioned in BB 1534-37f and 1547f; member of GG since 1543w; <i>Vorsteher</i> of TG 1561.

MEDIUM AEVUM  
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38

KREMS 1998

HERAUSGEGEBEN  
VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG  
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

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## Vorwort

*Medium Aevum Quotidianum* legt mit diesem Heft 38 die erste Veröffentlichung des Jahrgangs 1998 vor. Der Band widmet sich im besonderen den Statements zu einem Round-Table-Gespräch "History of Daily Life: The Variety of Approaches", welches im Juli 1997 am *International Medieval Congress* in Leeds mit reger Publikumsbeteiligung stattgefunden hat. Dabei zeigte sich wieder, daß einerseits die interdisziplinäre Analyse unterschiedlichsten Quellenmaterials im jeweiligen Kontext, andererseits die vermehrte Heranziehung bildlicher Überlieferung im Zentrum der Diskussion stehen. Aspekte der digitalen Bildverarbeitung spielen dabei eine relevante Rolle sowohl in bezug auf Bilddokumentation als auch hinsichtlich der Analysen. Zwei Einzelstudien behandeln Wirtshauskriminalität im spätmittelalterlichen Ragusa, sowie die Ausgestaltung von Kaufmanns- und Handwerkerfesten im spätmittelalterlichen Baltikum.

Heft 39 wird bereits anfangs Juli 1998 erscheinen und sich vorrangig mit verschiedenen Möglichkeiten der Bildanalyse in der Geschichte des Alltags auseinandersetzen. Die einzelnen Beiträge werden den nord- und zentraleuropäischen Raum behandeln und konzentriert von Beispielen mittelalterlicher Wandmalerei ausgehen.

Unser Heft 40 wird – mit Schwerpunkt auf dem ungarischen Raum – vor allem der mittelalterlichen Ernährung gewidmet sein und soll neue interdisziplinäre Forschungsansätze vorstellen; dabei werden besonders die Möglichkeiten einer Verbindung der Analyse schriftlicher Quellen und archäologischen Materials im Zentrum der Argumentation stehen.

Heft 41 wird sich wiederum in starkem Maße mit jenen Ergebnissen auseinandersetzen, welche am *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds 1998, in dessen alltagsgeschichtlichen Sektionen zur Vorstellung gelangen werden. Damit soll neuerlich vermittelt werden, auf welcher intensiven Weise sich die Anwendung moderner Methoden und die Verwirklichung neuer Ansätze in aktuellen Studien zu Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters – im internationalen Rahmen – verfolgen läßt.



*Medium Aevum Quotidianum* dankt seinen Mitgliedern und Freunden für das anhaltende bzw. steigende Interesse an den Anliegen und an der Arbeit der Gesellschaft.

Gerhard Jaritz, Herausgeber

## History of Daily Life: The Variety of Approaches

At the *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds 1997, a round table discussion was organised as part of the strand "History of Daily Life" that dealt with the variety of possible approaches towards this, still rather young field of Medieval Studies. The international panel consisted of Axel Bolvig (Copenhagen), Gerhard Jaritz (Krems), Françoise Piponnier (Paris), Norbert Schnitzler (Chemnitz), and Melitta Weiss Adamson (London, Ontario).

As a kind of basis for the discussion, it was emphasised that the history of medieval everyday life is a field of research dependent on interdisciplinary approaches. Written and pictorial sources, as well as archeological evidence play important roles for any analysis. The different contexts of information and their interpretation determine our (re)construction of everyday life in the Middle Ages decisively. The aim of the round table was to discuss some of the methods and approaches which are relevant for today's research. It should also show that "History of Daily Life", generally, has to be seen as an indispensable field of Medieval Studies that also offers relevant methodological aspects and results for many other historical disciplines.

We are happy to be able to publish the modified short statements of the panelists in this volume of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*. The originally English statements of Françoise Piponnier and Gerhard Jaritz were translated by their authors into French and German respectively.