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Attempts by non-Germans to obtain burgher rights in Riga in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with two unsuccessful attempts by non-German craftsmen to gain burgher rights in Riga, which would have entitled them to trade freely and keep taverns. In the early modern period, burghers and non-Germans belonged to two linguistically and legally distinct groups. People who applied for burgher rights represented the wealthy segment of the non-German group. Riga Town Council and the influential German merchants were opposed to the idea of non-Germans joining the ranks of the burghers. Their arguments for preventing it included damage to the burghers' reputation, the origins of non-Germans, and their lack of trading skills. The situation was also influenced by issues relating to the consolidation of Baltic German society and attempts by the Russian government to improve the integration of the Baltic provinces.

KEYWORDS Burgher rights in Riga; non-Germans; Baltic German urban elite

Introduction

In the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, Riga was the biggest city of Russia's Baltic provinces, a fortress as well as a key location of the administrative and military authorities, and of courts and trading companies. Consequently, the population was very diverse in terms of social background and ethnic origin, and in terms of occupation and religious affiliation. The terms of Riga's capitulation to Russia in 1710, during the Great Northern War, markedly affected the life and work of Riga society until the middle of the nineteenth century. Under the treaty, Riga kept all its former rights and privileges, granted to the city by previous rulers, namely the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Swedish Empire (Brüggemann, Laur, and Piirimäe 2014, 1–4). Russia's key interests in Riga centered on military and fiscal matters, while the local administration was in the hands of Riga Town Council. The town councilors were members of all the boards and courts that governed the city. Thus, the German-speaking and German-writing elite that had been governing Riga since the Middle Ages retained its position into the early modern period. Nevertheless, the Baltic German community constituted only a small minority of the population of the Baltic provinces.

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According to historical data, Riga's population was 20,000 in the 1760s, 24,000 in the 1780s, 28,000 in the 1790s, and 32,000 in 1803. The merchants belonging to guilds formed about 5% of the inhabitants, while craftsmen affiliated to craft unions constituted about 15% (Zeids 1978, 327–8, 336). In the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the population of Riga was growing steadily, albeit mainly due to immigration rather than natural increase. Most migrants came from the neighboring rural territories, and only a small number were merchants and craftsmen from cities of Germany, the Baltic or other European countries. There was no mass migration of German peasants to the Baltic region.

The cornerstone of Riga's economy was trade in goods supplied from a vast economic hinterland and delivered to Riga along the river Daugava waterway. These goods included timber, hemp, flax, linseed, etc. Although the rates of sale fluctuated for particular goods, in general, export volumes grew steadily during the eighteenth century (Zeids 1978, 258). In Riga, the goods were loaded onto foreign ships and delivered to various European countries, mainly Great Britain and the Netherlands. The privileges of the city of Riga dictated that only burgher merchants could purchase goods in bulk from suppliers and resell them to nonresidents.

In the Baltic cities, it was common for substantial proportions of the export trade to be concentrated in the hands of a few families (Zacharov 2004, 53). The wealthy and influential members of Riga society had formed their own perception of the respectability of their rank and their reputation, forming the basis of their self-confidence, and a perception of their role in the city and affiliation to a particular social class, the members of which were responsible for the prosperity and growth of the city.

The parties to the dispute

In order to understand the process of granting burgher rights in Riga, some background is necessary concerning the social status of the applicants as well as their opponents. Riga society in the early modern period can be divided into two groups in terms of legal status: burghers and non-burghers. The parties to the dispute belonged to either of these two groups, even though each represented only a small minority, rather than the group as a whole. The administration and development of the city was in the hands of the burghers (*Bürgerschaft*, *Bürgergemeinde*). Other social groups had no access to the decision-making institutions. The burghers were commonly regarded as constituting the city community. From the sixteenth century onwards, only members of the Riga Town Council, merchants who belonged to the Great Guild (corporation of merchants), scholars, and craftsmen from craft unions who belonged to the Small Guild could be burghers. In the early modern period, Riga Town Council represented the burgher community, which, in turn, was the holder of rights and freedoms (Bader and Dilcher 1999, 705, 726). According to a continuous medieval tradition, craftsmen and merchants formed the core of society, since they ensured the economic basis of the city. Further, a particular corporative spirit was maintained in the guilds and craft unions by only accepting new members who came from a similar background to the current members because each of the corporations protected the welfare of its members (Bader and Dilcher 1999, 484, 507).

In Riga, the burghers did not constitute a uniform group. Alongside German patrician families who controlled the export trade and city administration, the burghers also included immigrants from other European countries, particularly craftsmen, and foreign

merchants. Certain individuals and families – like Barclay de Tolly, the Piersons, and the Cummings – lived in Riga for several generations after arriving from Britain.

Studies focusing on early modern cities in east-central Europe show that ‘urban authorities made an effort to maintain social and economic stability by eliminating certain groups of the population from burgher status. Most cities applied criteria that influenced the social, confessional and ethnic composition of the upper class of urban society’ (Miller 2016, 38). In the German-speaking area in the early modern period the claimant usually had to provide evidence of legitimate birth, a certain level of income and confessional affiliation but in most towns there were exceptions and local rules (Sobania 1993, 132).

In Riga, people in the city who were not burghers were called *Beiwohner* or *Beisassen* – those living nearby. This social group – especially the poorest section of inhabitants – was not as strictly structured or united. In the early modern period non-burghers formed the majority of the city’s population, around 80% (Brambe 1982, 135). Among these people, there were various craftsmen with no affiliation to craft unions, petty traders, workers, and hired laborers. Although the city’s population was divided into several legally distinct segments that existed alongside each other, the separation between them was not only legal but also physical. Many burghers lived in multi-storey stone buildings within the city walls, while non-burghers, including non-Germans, lived in wooden houses in the suburbs, where they often practiced subsistence farming in a similar way to people in rural areas.

In Riga, not all burghers were against incorporating non-German craftsmen into the burgher community. The principal opposition came from the urban elite: the families of town councilors, the heads of the Great Guild and the wealthy merchants, who had been involved in trade for several generations and held posts on Riga Town Council, namely members of the Berens, Schwartz, Porten, Dreiling, and Bulmerincq families, and others. In 1782, there were 467 merchants in the Great Guild (Zeids 1978, 272). Their status and wealth guaranteed the continuity of their political power over the course of time. Alexander Cowan, researcher of the urban environment in the early modern period, notes that ‘the legal distinction between burghers and non-burghers was one of the most potent divisions in urban society in contemporary political and social theory’ (Cowan 1998, 85).

Normally, in the cities of the Baltic Provinces burgher rights were granted to everyone who requested them. In actuality, requests were only submitted by those who knew in advance they would be successful, while the rest of the population took no interest in the process. According to historical sources, rights were refused to post rider Niclass Stein in 1727 because he could not prove his ancestry (Straubergs 1936, 100).

The people discussed in this study who requested burgher rights in Riga included fishermen, ferrymen, and timber graders. In historical sources these are referred to as Latvian, native, or non-German crafts (*lettische, einheimische, unteutsche Ämte*). Apart from fishermen, in the historiography these are also called auxiliary trade crafts, as they include 10 crafts dealing with the sorting, handling, and transportation of trade items, for example, the crafts of hemp dressers, wine porters, and cabmen. Some of the crafts dated back to the Middle Ages while others, like the ferrymen, appeared only in the eighteenth century. Riga was not unique in having so-called non-German crafts. In Reval (Tallinn), where there were 10,600 inhabitants in the 1780s, the local non-German inhabitants were also involved in fishing and transportation of trade items (Johansen and von Zur Mühlen 1973, 127–68; Elias 1978, 36).

In Riga, crafts that did not belong to the Small Guild or overlapped with the ones that did were also called native or non-German crafts. The practitioners of these crafts included native and German shoemakers, tailors, bricklayers, and carpenters, as well as native weavers. These particular crafts unions, that were, however, not included in the Small Guild, communicated with the city institutions separately from the members of the auxiliary trade crafts, and intermarriage between the two communities was also uncommon. The situation was similar in Reval in the seventeenth century: non-Germans could not become members of burgher craft unions belonging to guilds; instead, their crafts were considered non-German or native; these included bricklaying, stonemasonry, cab-driving, among others (Hartmann 2005, 91–3).

The term 'non-Germans' (*Undeutsche*) is frequently used in documents of the early modern period; however, it did not necessarily always refer to a person's ethnic origin. Baltic German linguist August Wilhelm Hupel (1737–1819) pointed out in 1789 that the term was used to denote 'the local rural population, the native peasants,' and that the division into 'Germans' and 'non-Germans' is incomplete and not specific enough (Hupel 1789, 201). Nevertheless, Hupel (1774, 140–1) himself wrote that the term 'Germans' encompasses all people who are not peasants: 'Those who are not peasants are called Germans, even if they cannot speak a word of German – for instance, Russians, Englishmen, and others.' In his words, this social class includes noblemen, scholars, civil servants, free servants, and even the freed peasants after they have changed their old clothing to German dress.

Another Baltic German historian, Constantin Mettig, has also pointed out the ambiguous nature of the term *Undeutsche*. He believed that in the Middle Ages and the early modern period the term was only applied to the local population, namely, Livs, Latvians, and Estonians but never to Lithuanians or Russians (Mettig 1900, 62). The most recent linguistic studies (for example, by Līva Rutka) suggest that the word *Undeutsch* referred to 'the others, outsiders' in the Baltic German-speaking area during the early modern period. Rather than having ethnic connotations, it was more often used to highlight social differences (Boguna et al. 2011, 29–30; see Donecker 2017, 86–8). Likewise, historian Tiina Kala (2012, 11–34) has demonstrated that the term 'non-German' was applied to different groups of people in different times and different contexts.

The term 'non-German crafts' or 'Latvian crafts' is much easier to define, since it covered specific crafts but carried no unambiguous, necessary reference to ethnic origins. Each craft had its own regulations and monopoly rights to their business but unlike German crafts they were not organized into craft unions and did not belong to the Small Guild. Most of the people who practiced these crafts lived in the suburbs of Riga and belonged to Latvian parishes; marriage was common between families of non-German craftsmen. They formed a consolidated socio-economic group with a corporate identity. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a degree of stratification between the crafts appeared. Some crafts, like ferrying or timber grading, were better-paid than others, like pilotage (Taube 1980, 6). A similar stratification existed within the crafts, since some families had been engaged in the same craft for generations and handed down property from one generation to the next. Accordingly, the most successful craftsmen enjoyed quite prosperous lifestyles for the standards of their social group, living in households consisting of several buildings and keeping servants, while other practitioners of the same craft had to support their families in modest conditions. In the literature of the Soviet period the offspring of these more

prosperous families were included in 'the extensive group of Riga petty bourgeois' (Zeids 1978, 388).

The reflections of Johann Heinrich Rudolf von Neuendahl (1754–1824), the municipality secretary during the so-called regency era in Riga (in Russian *namestnichestvo*, partially in place from 1783, fully in effect between 1787 and 1796), about Riga society are not flattering to non-German craftsmen. He points out that they do not even belong to the non-burghers (*Beiwohner*) but rather to the servants (*Dienstleute*). Admittance to these crafts was conditional on honest service of several years as a servant or a cabman of one master, and, therefore, this could be considered an effective way of improving one's social position. 'Clearly, it was difficult for any free Latvian to rise. The prejudice against their origins was deep and overwhelming for this nation' (Neuendahl 1870, 32). Likewise, historian Peter Wörster points out the predominating prejudice against the inhabitants of Latvian origin in his article about the prohibition by the administration of Riga Lyceum in 1782 against the burial of a student of Latvian origin in the school cemetery (Wörster 2005, 138, 143).

In this study, requests for burgher rights from two non-German craftsmen are discussed, and in both cases the aim was to acquire the right to trade. These requests passed through the local, provincial, and higher authorities, thus shedding light on the arguments of the opposing parties, as well as the reaction of the decision-making authorities over the course of half a century. Apart from these two requests, other non-Germans also tried to join the Great Guild or the Small Guild but their requests were limited to the local authorities or incorporated into craft-related documents dealing with other issues (Taube 1956, 30–1).

In this study the term 'non-Germans' is used only with regard to practitioners of non-German crafts, rather than non-German population groups because it is impossible to describe relationships between particular ethnic groups, for example, the Poles and Russians, in Riga during the period without further research. Where particular historical documents are mentioned, the original terms are used whenever possible.

Burgher objections to the economic activity of non-Germans

It is easier to understand the rights the non-Germans did not have, the rights they wanted, and the rights the burghers did not want to surrender, by observing when and why there was an upsurge in the conflict. Another important point was that non-Germans lived and engaged in all kinds of activities in the Riga suburbs, where city privileges were observed less strictly and control was more difficult. This was especially relevant in the suburb on the left bank of the River Daugava – the *Mitauer* or 'Third' suburb, which obtained its status in the second half of the eighteenth century, having previously been considered a rural territory.

The first complaints from merchants to Riga Town Council about non-Germans having gained burgher rights are recorded as early as 1682. The merchants wanted to limit the economic activity of non-Germans because, in their view, the opportunity for non-Germans to trade and have free access to burgher rights was harmful and dangerous, even disgraceful. The merchants closely associated burgher rights with their welfare. In this situation, the town council replied that 'it can never prove that a non-German had been admitted to the category of burghers as a non-German' (Straubergs 1936, 23, 209). Historian Jānis Straubergs (1936, 24) interprets this as evidence that it was possible for non-Germans to belong to the Small Guild as practitioners of their craft,

which allowed them to be admitted as burghers, while non-Germans who did not belong to any craft unions were denied this possibility.

Straubergs has particularly noted two issues which prompted the burghers to oppose prosperity among the non-Germans: the rights to property and tavern ownership. It is important to understand how these events unfolded in order to analyze them with regard to the issue of obtaining burgher rights. The major move of the burghers against the increasing prosperity of non-Germans was the 1738 order by Riga Town Council (instigated by the Great Guild) on the expropriation of the hereditary tenure estates of non-burghers in the suburbs and the rural territories of the city. Craftsmen complaining about this order included cabmen, fishermen, ferry-men, and timber graders, who called themselves 'free native people,' descendants of the Livs (the original people from which the toponyms Livonia and Livland derives), and loyal subjects of the crown.¹ The Livs were a Finno-Ugric ethnic group living in the northern part of present-day Latvia and the lower reaches of the river Daugava at the beginning of the Livonian Crusade. Non-Germans believed that the Livs of old had been the equals of the Germans of the same period because they had concluded trading and support alliances.

The case was reviewed by the Deputy Governor General of Livland, Ludolf (Rudolf) August von Bismarck (1683–1750), to whom the non-Germans complained. The governor general was the highest authority in the province and was directly subordinate to the Russian Emperor. Riga Town Council argued that the practitioners of Latvian crafts could not prove their descent from the Livs, that they came from fugitive or freed peasants, and that they had been appointed to do community work in order to remind them of their origins as servants. They argued that their audacity and pride, as well as their aspiration to obtain property, was increasing along with prosperity. The town council also emphasized that non-Germans were barred from the so-called *bürgerliche Nahrung*, the right to engage in trade, brewing, keeping taverns, and lodging travelers – these being occupations exclusively allowed to burghers (see Straubergs 1936, 35–76). A typical expression of the burghers' disapproval was formulated as follows: 'What will happen if every Latvian who has money is allowed to buy a manor? Riga will perish, and the small manors will prosper. Latvians will buy up all the small manors and islands and consequently take over all the livelihood and trade from the burghers and expel the Germans' (cited after Pāvulāne 1971, 53).

On 25 October 1763, Riga attorney Melchior von Essen responded to Johann Steinhauer in the appeal case for the right to trade in timber. The case was handled by Riga Town Council at the time but the litigation continued until 1779. After a protracted lawsuit the town council lost the case and, in accordance with a decree by Deputy Governor General Bismarck, the craftsmen kept their property.

The second attempt to restrict non-German craftsmen was by depriving them of the right to keep taverns in 1751. Governor General Peter Lacy (1678–1751) had instructed Riga Town Council to adjust the policy on keeping taverns in Riga. The town council reacted by forming a committee consisting of members of the guilds, who decided to make keeping taverns a business of burghers. Since several practitioners of Latvian crafts owned taverns or inns in the suburbs, where they sold beer, they complained to the governor general about this decision. The merchants pointed out the plebeian origin of the non-German craftsmen and indicated that they were interfering with the privileges of the burghers:

We regard the audacity of the claimants with nothing but astonishment, since not only have they failed to show adequate respect to the Town Council as the authority; they have also ... dared to place themselves ... at our level. It is time to curb this extensive pride among non-German people, to bend their endless arrogance, and to crush their utterly unfounded aspiration to the livelihood of burghers ... Non-German craftsmen have no claim to burgher rights and have never belonged to the community of German craftsmen, but rather have been appointed to carry out public and private duties for the benefit of the burghers.²

The guilds considered that victory for the non-German craftsmen in this case would bring harm, since the keeping of taverns in the city and its suburbs had been a part of the burghers' livelihood. The guilds argued that:

- (1) The claimants have imagined that they are the descendants of the Livs and flatter themselves by calling themselves 'free people;'
- (2) In general, these craftsmen earn more than many burghers;
- (3) Non-German craftsmen cannot be the equals of the men of the Small Guild.

The non-German craftsmen referred to the oldest available regulations, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³ Although their crafts did not belong to the guilds of merchants and artisans, their rights were similar. Non-German craftsmen had always been free people and could enjoy the rights of the guilds. The craftsmen believed that the burghers only wanted to deprive them, as honest people, from tavern-keeping out of undeserved hostility.⁴

In 1753 the Deputy Governor General Vladimir Dolgorukov (1708–61) ruled in favor of the non-German craftsmen. Nevertheless, even decades later Riga Town Council complained to the authorities that non-burghers were violating the burghers' exclusive rights to keep taverns, thus preventing the poorest burghers or their widows from making a living (see Straubergs 1936, 171–81).

The first request for burgher rights

Timber graders were among the first non-German traders to claim burgher rights. Their numbers were low, up to 10 masters and 40 journeymen. During the active season they graded timber that had been delivered to Riga by rafting or floating and sorted it into categories according to use. In winter they traveled to forests in the southern regions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to assess growing trees, and to manage their felling and the first stage of processing. In addition to carrying out private orders, some of the craftsmen also worked for the crown and tried to bypass the trade prohibition imposed by the city as civil servants. One of them, Jānis Steinhauer (1705–79), son of the timber grader Matīss Steinhauer, had purchased several manors in the vicinity of Riga, where he set up a paper mill and a sawmill. For many years, he litigated against Riga Town Council to gain the right to sell the timber processed by his company (Svarāne 1982, 15). His brother, state-employed timber grader Daniel Steinhauer (1721–61), tried to trade in unprocessed timber and involved burghers who were not patricians in his deals in order to bypass the trade regulations. However, merchants who were not involved in these deals but were informed about them regularly sued him (Svarāne 1982, 19–20).

In 1747, Daniel Steinhauer requested Riga Town Council to admit him to the burgher category but his request was declined. Steinhauer turned to the Collegium of Justice,

which was the highest appeal court in the Russian Empire, pointing out that there was no law forbidding 'free non-Germans' from gaining burgher rights and claiming that his request had only been declined by the town council because of its habitual distrust of non-Germans. He confirmed that he could pay all the duties, was born in a legal marriage, led a decent life, and that he had been admitted to the timber graders on account of his skills, knowledge, and good manners. He also pointed to the significant contribution made by non-Germans from the city's Pārdaugava (left-bank) district to the defense of the city.⁵ Some of Steinhauer's arguments for gaining burgher rights can only be understood in the context of the medieval perception of burgher rights, which was that the burghers were key taxpayers and the defenders of the city from external enemies (Bader and Dilcher 1999, 440–3).

In a response to Steinhauer's claim, coordinated between the guilds, Riga Town Council argued that 'the non-German population was insolent, boastful, and arrogant,' and that they could not be considered completely free because their ancestors came from fugitive peasants who had been admitted to Riga only to be hired as workers or servants. The council also pointed out that, according to the regulations for the craftsmen of the guilds, non-Germans were not to be admitted; that non-German craftsmen were engaged in *oneribus servilius, allein knechtliche Dienstleistungen* (community work) for the benefit of the city as a reminder of their origin; that they earned well not only through their jobs but also through animal husbandry and gardening; and, therefore, they ought to accept the existing conditions. Furthermore, the council noted that non-Germans could not be relied upon in the battlefield, and, finally, they added that Steinhauer's trading activities caused damage to the burghers while his family grew rich and became greedy.⁶

To this Steinhauer replied that he wanted to carry on his work without the humiliating constraints he had experienced hitherto, and that his claim was legal as per city regulations and police regulations (*Polizei-Ordnung*). Steinhauer considered himself a free dweller of the suburbs. He pointed out that he interacted with the Germans as their equal, not as a non-German (*ich mit denen Teutschen, als ein Teutscher, aber nicht als ein Unteutscher umgehe*).⁷

Steinhauer's phrase leaves space for interpretation. Without doubt, the more affluent and active non-German craftsmen interacted with German society more frequently than their poorer counterparts since they represented their crafts in the courts or at the town council, as well as communicating with merchants as a part of their job. Accordingly, some of the non-German craftsmen could speak German or Polish. The wealthier sent their children not only to the parish school but also to higher educational institutions, where teaching was in German. This could have inevitably led to a gradual Germanization of the family; however, the assimilation of non-Germans in the Baltic provinces has not been sufficiently researched to warrant any assumptions (Johansen and von Zur Mühlen 1973).

By referring to humiliating constraints, Steinhauer most likely meant his own and his father's litigation against the burghers to gain trading rights. Business deals were often suspended for the duration of the court proceedings, which could take years.

Riga Town Council replied that no document existed that could affirm the affiliation of non-Germans to the guilds or their rights to obtain the status of burghers; that non-Germans had their own crafts, which did not belong to the Small Guild, and that practicing non-German crafts did not bring those who practiced them any advantages; and that Steinhauer and his peers could not be considered free local inhabitants. The

town council admitted that some official documents indeed referred to non-Germans as 'free local inhabitants,' but that this was of no advantage to Steinhauer and others like him because the governor general applied this term only because the claimants had used it previously in their complaint, although 'in the past, non-Germans like Daniel Steinhauer and his companions never dared to call themselves free, although we [Riga Town Council] do not intend, and have never intended, to declare Steinhauer and his peers as serfs.'⁸

In 1749, the Collegium of Justice declared the decision of Riga Town Council unfounded because the police regulations mentioned by both parties demonstrated that non-Germans were allowed to join crafts and guilds.⁹ The town council delayed the implementation of the decision of the Collegium of Justice until Steinhauer turned directly to Deputy Governor General Dolgorukov. He ordered implementation of the decision of the Collegium of Justice, against which the town council had appealed to the Senate, where it also complained about the governor general (Straubergs 1936, 123–4). The Senate was the highest legislative and judicial body of the Russian Empire.

At the time of the court proceedings, Riga Town Council turned to other Baltic cities to find out whether it was possible for non-Germans to gain burgher rights and whether this opportunity had been used. The only answer which has survived to this day came from Pernau (present-day Pärnu), stating that non-Germans were not forbidden to gain burgher rights but that there had been no requests for them (Straubergs 1936, 136). Historian Stefan Hartmann (2005) has noted that in Reval non-German craftsmen could also in theory apply for burgher rights but in reality they did not, realizing that they did not meet the requirements imposed by the city. Similarly, non-Germans there had limited property and brewing rights (Elias 1978, 10–13).

In its explanation to the Senate, Riga Town Council held that the admission of Steinhauer would diminish or nullify the burgher privileges and harm their welfare and status; that the claimant was a non-German or a Latvian – all of whom originated from the peasantry; spoke a different language and dressed differently from Germans; that according to the regulations they could not be admitted to the rank of burghers and were not allowed to buy anything more than was necessary for their own consumption; that the only reason why members of the auxiliary trade crafts had ever been allowed to gain burgher rights was because these had previously been German crafts, which had been handed over to the non-German servants who had loyally served for many years; that if these people were to be admitted to the rank of merchants, honorable people (those with formally recognized high status) would leave Riga forever to avoid calling their former non-German servants 'brothers,' therefore, it would be impossible to hire servants, there would be no one to represent trade crafts, and total chaos would ensue. The council also noted that prosperity had encouraged Latvians to desire manors and rights.¹⁰ In 1752, the Senate ruled that Steinhauer was not to be granted burgher rights, since he could not prove his origin, whereas Riga Town Council had proven that non-Germans could not be admitted to the rank of burghers.¹¹

Based on the analysis of Steinhauer's case, Otto Heinrich Elias, researcher of early modern history in the Baltic provinces, concluded that ethnicity-related arguments played an essential role in rights-related issues in Riga as early as the middle of the eighteenth century, and that even aspirations of small social groups to gain more rights provoked active resistance (Elias 1966, 481). Ethnicity-related arguments in this context, however, must not be confused with the perception of ethnic origin (especially in the Baltic region) in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the

twentieth century. A detailed analysis of this problem has been offered by historian Tiina Kala (2012, 11–34). Nevertheless, in the Baltic region language clearly worked as a factor separating social groups, as defined by historian Andrew Blumbergs (2008, 46), ‘Language served the dual purpose of identifying and delineating cultural boundaries between ethnically differing social groups based on a rigidly structured and regulated social hierarchy.’

It must be noted that Steinhauer and the group of people he represented are called *unteutsche* throughout the case in the documents of both parties to the dispute. Only in the Russian original of the Senate’s decree of 1752 the term *latyshy* (‘Latvians’) is used, but in the translation of the same document into the German language *latyshy* is translated as *unteutsche*. It is possible that the officials of the capital found the term ‘non-Germans’ too unfamiliar to be used in Russian. On the other hand, in the complaint of the Riga Great Guild of 1753, described below, the term *letten* (‘Latvians’) entirely replaces the usual *unteutsche*.

The consequences of declining requests for burgher rights

Although in 1752 the Senate ruled in favor of the burghers, in 1753 the Great Guild submitted a complaint to the town council with the following propositions to improve the city’s welfare:

- (1) To make Latvians give up wearing German clothes, some of which were expensive, and make them wear clothing appropriate to their lower social status;
- (2) To use Latvian names and titles in the court documents for the elected officials of non-German crafts in order to differentiate them from free burghers;
- (3) To forbid all Latvians to engage in trade, and to strip some of them of their building plots and meadows;
- (4) To clearly define the community duties of non-German craftsmen;
- (5) To restore the non-German craftsmen’s previous, lower wages, so that trade would not be burdened by their high salaries, and to stipulate that craftsmen must carry out their duties themselves rather than delegate them to hired workers;
- (6) To forbid burghers to hire non-Germans for trade or craft.¹²

Riga Town Council did not actively react to this petition, and there were no significant changes in the lives of non-German craftsmen. Meanwhile, Daniel Steinhauer gained a new justification for his trade deals. In 1754, Grand Duke Peter (after 1762, Peter III) made Steinhauer the commercial commissary of Silesia and Holstein. Consequently, after several summons to the trade court, Steinhauer turned to Governor General Dolgorukov, who declared that all cases involving Steinhauer must be reviewed by his chancellery (Straubergs 1936, 169).

In the 1760s, the Steinhauer brothers collaborated with a member of the German social estate of educated people (*Literaten*), namely Johann August Maskov from Saxony, who lived in Riga and was collecting material about the relationship between the local population of Riga and the knightly orders as well as the Pope in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the rights and privileges of the local population in later centuries. This included the guild regulations of non-German craftsmen (various porters) from Riga, written in the Middle Ages. Maskov intended to deliver the collected

documents to Empress Catherine II but his plans failed for unknown reasons. Blumbergs (2008, 94) has stressed the role of Maskov as the first defender of the Latvians' rights to live as free people in Riga, and his input in the gathering and critical analysis of historical sources. Blumbergs also mentions the significance of Maskov's work in the Latvian historical writing of the twentieth century. After his brother died, Jānis Steinhauer continued business activities until the end of his days and went on litigating against merchants, appealing to higher authorities, and using the material collected by Maskov in his arguments (see Svarāne 1982, 26–7).

In 1760, Andrejs Dalbing (1721–78), a master timber grader, requested permission to trade in various goods in a similar way to the burghers of Riga; however, the Senate declined his request with reference to Steinhauer's case. The position of Riga Town Council in this case was that, according to the privileges of Riga, only genuine burghers could engage in burgher trade, whereas it was forbidden for Latvians residing in Riga. The council claimed that Dalbing was born a Latvian and had no understanding of trade, and that burghers had been separated from Latvians since the founding of Riga.¹³

In the period of the so-called regency – when the Russian Imperial state brought the administration of the Baltic provinces more under the control of St. Petersburg, thus weakening the privileges of the Baltic Germans – the strict division into burghers and non-burghers was temporarily lifted as a result of administrative reforms. During this period, anyone could become a burgher and engage in trade if they could prove the possession of a certain amount of capital and pay the corresponding capital tax. From 1785, when personal taxation was introduced, the city community (*Stadtgemeinde*) was divided into payers of capital tax (three merchant guilds) and payers of personal tax, who were further divided into craftsmen who belonged to crafts unions, burgher taxpayers (*Bürger-Okladisten*), workers (*Arbeiter-Okladisten*), and servants (*Dienstleute*) (Brambe 1982, 134). Fully-fledged burghers could be either capital or personal taxpayers but they did not belong to the burgher taxpayer category. Accordingly, discrepancies arose between the town administration's usual division of the inhabitants (into three groups, the burgers, i.e. the members of the Great and the Small Guilds, the *Beiwohner*, and the *Beisassen*) and the division of the taxpayers. These discrepancies will be significant when reviewing the second attempt by non-Germans to gain burgher rights.

In 1783, several timber graders turned to the Senate and requested their admission to the burghers. The claimants explained that they came from Livland and were the subjects of Russia. Riga Town Council wanted to include them in the group of peasant taxpayers; however, they had never been peasants, and, therefore, wanted to be listed with the merchants and burghers and, accordingly, to pay capital tax. The Senate ruled that, as per the request, the timber graders should be listed with Riga's merchants. The town council, in turn, drew the Senate's attention to the following facts:

- (1) Timber graders originated from serfs and could not be considered free men;
- (2) Anyone who wants to become a merchant in Riga has to undergo professional training for six years;
- (3) Nobody who processes trade goods is allowed to trade in them (Straubergs 1936, 198–203).

Nevertheless, the Senate kept its decision unchanged, and eight master timber graders were admitted as burghers of Riga. This was only possible, however, due to the

amended legislation of the period of regency under Empress Catherine II, where the principal criterion for obtaining burgher rights was the ability of the candidate to pay taxes.

A contemporary of these events, Neuendahl was shocked that during the period of regency anyone could join the ranks of the burghers if they were in possession of a certain amount of capital and paid the corresponding taxes, and that such people were automatically entitled to all the burghers' honors and benefits. In his words, this had caused a major influx of various 'scum, equivalents of sans-culottes ... bakers of flat cakes, butchers, purchasers ...,' which formed 'the future burgher class of the non-German nation' and significantly decreased the number of workers (Neuendahl 1870, 66–7).

Historian Mati Laur (2014, 128) has noted that it was the rule of Catherine II that marked the beginning of the period when Russia seemingly wanted to integrate the Baltic provinces into the rest of the country but nevertheless was either unready or unable to radically change the situation for decades. This does not mean, however, that the reforms of Catherine II had no consequences for Baltic cities. Historian Heinz von zur Mühlen (1985, 302) notes that in Reval the period of regency marked the beginning of the end of the power that Reval Town Council and the Great Guild had over the city. This statement partially applies to Riga, too.

The second request for burgher rights

After the regency was abolished, in 1798, Simon Ranck (1743–1814), a ferryman and alderman for the fishermen, turned to Riga Town Council on behalf of himself and six other ferrymen (three of whom were his relatives) with the request to grant them burgher rights and list them with the merchants. According to the census of 1795, 32 fathers and 28 sons were fishermen by trade. They had monopoly rights to fish in a certain section of the river Daugava and sell fish in Riga market. Ferrymen numbered 49 fathers and 48 sons. This craft flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century when its principal source of profit was transporting trade goods to and from trading ships. Practitioners of both crafts owned boats and small ships operated by their family members and/or hired boatmen.

Riga Town Council declined the request. It referred to the reinstated city regulations, according to which no one could be listed as a merchant unless they had undergone professional training with a merchant for at least six years.¹⁴ Ranck appealed against this decision to the Collegium of Justice. A lengthy dispute ensued about who could be considered a merchant in Riga (at that time there were 790 merchants in Riga) and which city regulations were in force at the time. The dispute was not only related to the issue of non-Germans; the merchants of the Great Guild also wanted to fully reinstate the earlier procedure of listing merchants, which would also protect the guild from the influx of Russian merchants, and in their view, restore the incentive to strive for the common good and compliance with the principles of honor (Bulmerincq 1870, 115, 129).

The town council argued that Ranck and his peers:

- (1) had not mastered trading and did not have the necessary skills;
- (2) were not allowed to trade in the goods for which they were responsible as ferrymen;

- (3) were non-German craftsmen and descendants of Latvians, that is, fugitive serfs or freed peasants, and, therefore, could not be included even in the union of craftsmen because they had not mastered any craft but instead had been tasked with providing food for the city as fishermen, or assisting in trade jobs. Like day laborers, they were paid according to the instructions and tariffs set by the city.

Furthermore, the city emphasized that most of them did not speak any language other than Latvian. Considering that their duties involved various community jobs in the city in accordance with their origin (cleaning the bridge across the Daugava, the city walls and gates, as well as transporting cannons to and from the city walls), the city authorities considered Latvian craftsmen similar to city servants or workers.¹⁵

The Collegium of Justice forwarded the request to the Senate, as it considered that the matter was significant enough to affect the administration of the whole province of Livland. The Collegium of Justice believed that Ranck should not be denied admission to the merchants. If only people with six years of training could be listed as merchants there would be few merchants in the cities, and the state treasury would lose significant tax income. The Collegium of Justice considered that the arguments provided by Riga Town Council did not outweigh the interests of the state.¹⁶

In 1800, the Senate decided to decline the request of Ranck and his peers, as they had not undergone the necessary training with merchants.¹⁷ They were, however, to be included in groups of burgher taxpayers, which had not been the case before. If they had not chosen another social class, they (just like craftsmen) were to be included in the lower urban class (in Russian, *v meshchanskoe zvanie*), subject to the corresponding taxes.¹⁸ Ranck took this as permission to list himself as a merchant, since he was allowed to choose, while Riga Town Council thought it only meant applying the burghers' taxes (*oklady*) because the council assumed that the decree on inclusion as a burgher taxpayer did not annul the decree on not admitting Ranck to the burghers.

Another dispute ensued in 1802. It lasted for several years and was reviewed by Governor General Sergei Golitsyn (1749–1810) and the provincial office of Livland, the main executive power in the province.¹⁹ Both parties used the same arguments they had used before. By providing copies of every possible document, Riga Town Council managed to convince everyone that Ranck was wrong. At the time of Ranck's lawsuit, some merchants protested against reinstating the powers of the town council and the earlier principles of listing burghers. The protesters, including Russian merchants, demanded that the regulations of the regency period be reinstated. By imperial decree, a committee comprising representatives of both guilds and Riga Town Council was formed to evaluate the existing system of city governance (Bulmerincq 1870, 130–7, 142). Although the urban elite held its positions regarding the rules of listing merchants, the guilds and provincial institutions carefully monitored how the city budget and debt issues were managed for the duration of the committee's operation.

The Napoleonic Wars, the Continental System, and the related trade restrictions, as well as the succession of several governors general, the threat of a siege of Riga by Napoleon's army in 1812, and the burning of the suburbs forced the population to deal with more pressing issues and temporarily forget about the city's regulations. The uncertainty regarding the social grouping of the city and which one non-German craftsmen belonged to endured even after the cases of requests for burgher rights were closed. Some inspections listed practitioners of non-German crafts in the burgher taxpayers' group (*oklad*), while others listed them in the group of craft unions.

Eventually, these crafts decayed and disappeared as did the monopoly rights of the merchants.

Conclusion

During the period in question, the economy of Riga was based on trade. The strict control of the quality and weight of goods under Riga's trade regulations enabled the development of auxiliary trade crafts. These functioned similarly to craft unions. The city had defined monopoly rights for the practitioners of each craft to engage in certain activities and limited the number of people who could be admitted to the craft to balance trade requirements and the need of the craftsmen to earn a living. The principle of the ability to earn a living included the unwritten provision that craftsmen should accept a set level of income. As soon as the most prosperous craftsmen wanted more, the city authorities perceived this as an attempt to gain something to which that particular group in society was not entitled.

At a time when so much is being written about social mobility, it becomes apparent that in Riga social mobility was neither accessible nor acceptable to everyone, even in the urban environment of the late eighteenth century, commonly considered to be more open to change than rural areas. Clearly, various factors responsible for accepting some groups and rejecting others were at work in society. Daniel Steinhauer requested burgher rights during a relatively peaceful and prosperous time for the city, while Simon Ranck's request came on the brink of a much more restless period, after the Russian government had attempted to reform the governance of the city and after the French Revolution, which was a definitive sign of change in Europe.

The burgher community and trade flourished in the period of Russian rule, namely the eighteenth century. At the same time, this was also the period when the burghers felt most threatened, since their social group did not exist in and was foreign to Russia (Eckardt 1870, 5).²⁰ Historian and current affairs writer Julius Eckardt describes the community of Baltic burghers as a distinct class formed over the course of time, entitled to relative autonomy and defined by pride and self-confidence. They represented the autonomy of the Baltic cities, and its preservation was a precondition for the preservation of the 'German component' in this area. According to Eckardt (1870, ix–xii), elimination of this community would have meant breaking the connection with western Europe and descending to the level of Russian cities. Accordingly, Eckardt justified the burghers' hostility toward innovation by the necessity of this class to isolate itself in order to survive, since it was constantly threatened by the unfriendly attitude of the noblemen living in the countryside and the reluctance of the Russian government to delve into the specifics of Rigan society. This provoked the aspirations of the upper class of Riga to cultivate their accustomed way of life by concentrating political power in the hands of selected families and making the guilds accessible only to selected individuals in order to protect the ethnic segregation of burghers based on the craft unions (Eckardt 1870, 7–8).

Recent studies on society in the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century also suggest that the legal definitions of population groups did not correspond to the actual social and economic reality, even in cities (Kamenskii 2014, 136–7; Ivanova and Zheltova 2009, 360–2). The feeling of being under threat was not unique to the Baltic German merchant elite. Historian Lothar Gall writes that being a burgher in a German city in the

eighteenth century meant that one's income was protected by corporation or 'guaranteed sustenance,' whereby social care, as well as domestic and legal protection was provided by the city. At the same time, it also meant economic and social immobility, and distrust in the unknown (Gall 2000, 44).

The town council won the first case by referring to the necessity of training in order to become a merchant and won the second by using linguistic manipulation. It is clear that the most active of the wealthy merchants and town councilors did not consider the representatives of non-German trades worthy of equal treatment. The principal arguments of Riga Town Council and the merchants were based on social and economic factors: low status birth, the performance of servants' work, and the threat to the burghers' welfare.

Would non-Germans really have done any damage? The few who managed to get themselves listed as merchants during the period of regency either went bankrupt during economic crises or merged with the prosperous and educated social class and blended in without provoking any changes to the existing order.

For most people who lived in Riga the issue of gaining burgher rights was never important. There is an undeniable connection between prosperity, social recognition, and the request for burgher rights. In their time, the Steinhauers and the Rancks represented the most prosperous and self-confident part of their community. They had become prosperous through their own work and learned to defend their interests in court. Members of the Steinhauer and Ranck families were often invited to become godparents in their own parish. Members of both families not only practiced non-German crafts but were also the aldermen of their crafts for shorter or longer periods of time. This demonstrates the recognition they had earned among their peers, who had spotted possible leaders in their personalities. On the other hand, being in charge of the craft made them responsible for defending the interests of their craft at various instances of the town council, as well as for finding compromises among the craftsmen or between the craftsmen and merchants, and for taking care of social issues, such as helping the weak and the widows. Thus, along with their direct responsibilities they also had a broader view of the situation of their craft in the context of city life.

It is possible that the burgher community of Riga felt isolated and threatened while living under the supervision of the unfamiliar Russian civil servants and military personnel and alongside the subjugated indigenous population of non-German Baltic peasants. With their urban mentality, they also found little in common with the rest of the Baltic Germans – the nobility of rural areas – whose interests and lifestyle differed markedly from, and sometimes clashed with, those of the city dwellers. Apparently, when addressing the issue of non-Germans, the government also decided in favor of preserving the former lifestyle of the inhabitants of Riga and in turn received (as it probably expected) pledges of Baltic loyalty to the Russian throne (Brüggemann, Laur, and Piirimäe 2014, 3–4).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the lengthy proceedings forced both parties to clearly define to others how they perceived the status of their group and that of their opponents in the dispute. While non-Germans had to justify their rights to become burghers, the traders had to make their arguments against granting these rights to non-Germans. Accordingly, the documents relating to burghers' rights are a very useful source for studying self-identity issues of the population groups of Riga, as

well as where these groups drew boundaries between themselves, and why and how people attempted and wished to transcend these boundaries.

Notes

1. Petition by the free local inhabitants to the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces, 12 May 1740, National Archives of Latvia, Latvian State Historical Archives (Latvijas Nacionālais Arhīvs–Latvijas Valsts Vēstures arhīvs; hereafter LNA–LVVA), 673. f., 1. apr., 812. l., 3–42. lp.
2. Explanation of the burghers of both guilds to the town council in the case against non-German craftsmen about the right to keep taverns, undated, 1751, LNA–LVVA, 224. f., 1. apr., 142. l., 335, 336. lp.
3. In the sources of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these regulations were called *die Schragen*, *die Ordnung* or *das Reglement*. In 1753 the merchants of the Great Guild appealed to the town council to prohibit use of the term *Schragen* in naming the regulations for the non-German crafts, probably because it was often used for the regulations of the German crafts (Straubergs 1936, 236). Nevertheless, *die Schragen* continued to appear in the official correspondence of the second half of the eighteenth century.
4. Declaration of the non-German craftsmen against the arguments of the burghers in the case about tavern keeping. Undated, before January 1754, LNA–LVVA, 4038. f., 2. apr., 80. l., 8–14. lp.
5. Copy of Daniel Steinhauer's application to the Collegium of Justice for cases of Livland and Estland, 29 January 1748, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 2–4. lp.
6. Duplicate of the response of Riga Town Council to the Collegium of Justice, 12 May 1748, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 8–13. lp.
7. Copy of Daniel Steinhauer's reaction to the response of the Riga Town Council to the Collegium of Justice, 19 September 1748, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 15–21. lp.
8. Duplicate of the response of Riga Town Council to the application by Daniel Steinhauer to the Collegium of Justice, 18 October 1748, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 33–43. lp.
9. Copy of the resolution of the Collegium of Justice in the case of Daniel Steinhauer, 11 April 1749, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 48. lp.
10. Duplicate of the commentary to the case of the two Riga guilds' complaint about Daniel Steinhauer, 3 September 1752, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 66–90. lp. It should be clarified that the ambiguous use of the term 'honor' as a factor dividing social groups is characteristic not only of the Baltic but of the rank-based society of early modern cities in general (Schmidt 2007, 117–18).
11. Copy of the decree of the ruling Senate regarding admission of Daniel Steinhauer to Riga's burghers, 23 November 1752, LNA–LVVA, 8. f., 3 g. apr., 19. l., 3–12. lp.
12. Complaint by the Great Guild to Riga Town Council, 5 March 1753, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 434. l., 465–70. lp.
13. Copy of the decree of the ruling Senate in the case of Andrejs Dalbing's complaint, 17 May 1760, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 729. l., 183–6. lp.
14. Record in the book of minutes of Riga Town Council about the receipt of Simon Ranck's request to be admitted to the burghers, 13 August 1798, LNA–LVVA, 749. f., 6. apr., 209. l., 311–12. lp; Record in the book of minutes of Riga Town Council about the refusal of Simon Ranck's request to be admitted to the burghers, 1 November 1798, LNA–LVVA, 749. f., 6. apr., 209. l., 510–11. lp.
15. Copy of the Senate's decree regarding Ranck's admission to the merchants, 10 September 1800, LNA–LVVA, 1. f., 2. apr., 1015. l., 33–4. lp.
16. Copy of the Senate's decree regarding Ranck's admission to the merchants, 10 September 1800, LNA–LVVA, 1. f., 2. apr., 1015. l., 37–8. lp.
17. Copy of the Senate's decree regarding Ranck's admission to the merchants, 10 September 1800, LNA–LVVA, 673. f., 1. apr., 565a. l., 48–57. lp.
18. Copy of the Senate's decree regarding the inclusion of Riga's fishermen and ferrymen in the group of burgher taxpayers, 24 December 1800, LNA–LVVA, 1. f., 2. apr., 1015. l., 11–12. lp. The Russian term *meshchane* is used in the legal documents of the 1760s to describe the citizens, or more generally, the people living in the city. The merchants and traders were gradually excluded from the *meshchane*. Accordingly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the term *meshchane* relates only to the lower urban class (Ivanova and Zheltova 2009, 368, 371, 394).

19. Request by Simon Ranck to the Military Governor of Riga, 24 September 1804, LNA–LWA, 1. f., 2. apr., 1015. I., 5. lp.
20. A while ago, historian Otto Brunner (1968, 225–41) wrote extensively on the principal economic and political differences in the formation of the communities of inhabitants of Russian and European cities.

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