

Forschungsbericht

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Martial Culture in Medieval Towns

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With their walls and towers, with their armoured fountain figures and armed processions, medieval towns presented themselves as a martial entity. The research project ›Martial Culture in Late Medieval Towns‹¹ establishes towns as producers, organisers, and brokers of martial culture within the framework of the rapidly changing political world of late medieval Europe. It defines the town as crucible of, and for the period between c. 1350 and c. 1550, as pivotal for trendsetting military techniques and urban ›martial culture‹. This martial culture developed at the intersection of legal prerogatives, political requirements, physical skills, knowledge, and the evolving societal significance of the ownership and use of weapons.

The towns, and their role in martial culture, are a determining factor of the Early Modern state-building process. Research is concentrated on a selection of towns situated in the central part of the ›European Urban Belt‹, in the Swiss lands and the Upper Rhine region. The towns chosen are characterized by their geographical situation advantageous to commerce, their high – if at times heavily challenged – political autonomy, but also by their almost incessant – but unevenly distributed – involvement in war in the period between the middle of the four-

1 Hosted by the Historisches Institut at the University of Bern, funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation (grant number 178896). More information on the webpage of the project, online: <www.martial-culture.unibe.ch/> (last retrieved on 02 Oktober 2020).

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teenth and the first third of the sixteenth century. All these characteristics are at the core of the urban martial culture that is being explored.

The research project brings together three so far distinctly explored, but closely interrelated fields of study: social and institutional history that includes the identification of the participants in urban armies, the history of weapon training for the average citizen, including the study of the circulation of martial knowledge, and the transformation of the urban space itself that was driven by the incremental requirements to the town as producer, user, and provider of martial services. Each of these approaches are respectively explored by a habilitation thesis, and two PhD dissertations outlined below.

The project will (a) contribute important insights to the scholarly discourse on the role of towns in the upsurge of the »European state system« in the Early Modern period, (b) expose the interplay of people, techniques, and weapons as crucial for future military and urban history, and (c) fundamentally renew the long neglected Swiss medieval military history by its comparative and integrating approach and by focusing on the period that set the ground for the establishment of military service as the main export product of the Confederation and for the role of the latter within the political power structure of Early Modern Europe. This brief publication details the three subprojects and highlights both the perspectives and the output of the ongoing research project.

Martial experts (*Daniel Jaquet*)

As demonstrated by Walter Schaufelberger,² martial competition played a central role in the military training of citizens in the sixteenth century. Further evidence suggests that such competitions took place as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century, across a broad network of towns. The events thus isolated will undergo sequential analysis, i.e. each procedural step from planning to execution and postprocessing will be connected to the groups of people involved in order to establish a basis for comparative analysis between towns. The practical, social, political, martial, and communicative aspects of these events are analysed together with norms and forms of representation by integrating technical manuals, material culture, and of the material gathered and its comparison with secondary sources: technical literature, material culture, and iconography.

² Schaufelberger, Walter. *Der Wettkampf in der alten Eidgenossenschaft: Zur Kulturgeschichte des Sports vom 13. bis ins 18. Jahrhundert* (Bern: Haupt, 1972).

Martial associations (guilds and brotherhoods) were, from the late fourteenth century onwards, composed of citizens and inhabitants. Both groups were responsible for urban internal security because of their rights of citizenship or of habitation, and weapon ownership was regulated according to legal status. Studies of Early Modern French, Swiss, and Dutch towns point to ›games‹ played within these associations and connect them to military training. In spite of that evidence, Swiss historiography still tends to assume that citizen soldiers did not need any training because the simple weapons they used allowed them to ›learn on the spot‹. Material evidence, and information on the organization of the urban armies of the period, however, suggest that there was at least occasional active training of town-dwelling soldiers even for the period before the Burgundian wars.

This habilitation thesis investigates the concept of expertise for martial skills, and the circulation of martial knowledge. Building up on the conceptual framework of expertise in the late Middle Ages developed at the University of Göttingen,³ martial experts are identified and connected to martial activities in Swiss cities and neighbouring spaces from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. One critical element resides with the urban public festivals encompassing shooting competitions and other public displays of skills useful to the citizen-soldier (wrestling, fencing, and other physical games). These martial festivals were stages for representation and promotion of urban honour and military prowess, and functioned as hubs of communication concerning martial knowledge. A comprehensive investigation of these events in the late Middle Ages, and of the people promoting, organising, participating in, and profiting from them, sheds light on the evolution of these martial festivals and how they were integrated in medieval towns. It also enables a study of the ways in which individual expressions of martial urban cultures merged to form regional patterns.

The Town's Military Organization: The case of Fribourg (*Mathijs Roelofsen*)

This PhD dissertation studies the institutional, operational, and material aspects of medieval towns' military organization in the light of changing political circum-

3 Rexroth, Frank. »Expertenkulturen des 12. bis 18. Jahrhunderts«, in *DFG Projekt 2009–18 (GRK 1507)*, online: <www.uni-goettingen.de/de/100282.html> (last retrieved on 01 Oktober 2020).

stances, limited to the French speaking part of Switzerland – the Romandie. A particular focus is given to the city of Fribourg, where state archives hold more than 200 documents connected to the city's military activities in the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century.⁴ This study is being developed on two main axes: a comparative analysis of towns' military organization in the Romandie and a focus on the practical aspects of Fribourg's military forces. If some elements have already been studied by other researchers, a systematic analysis still needs to be done on a regional scale and in the more particular case of Fribourg.

Towns in the Romandie were subject to different political regimes, which influenced their autonomy. Savoy owned the major part of the region (Pays de Vaud/Kanton Waadt), with influences on the bishoprics of Lausanne, Geneva and Sion.⁵ It even owned Fribourg between 1452 and 1476 (after nearly two centuries of Habsburg domination). The Savoyan domination had a variable impact on the towns' military organization: For example, if towns in the pays de Vaud rarely had armed forces of their own, Fribourg was able to build its own army since the fourteenth century. In fact, Fribourg's lords had little influence on its military organization and political capacities, as the town remained able to reform its army's structure and to conclude its own military alliances.⁶

A particular focus will be the citizens' and inhabitants' involvement in the city's military organization. The duty to bear arms in service of the local lord or the town was defined by charters, which had to be recognized by the local lord, and by city ordinances. Other documents – such as expedition lists, inventories and city accountability – will provide information on the practical aspects of the citizens' and inhabitants' military involvement.

Expedition lists and equipment inventories are analysed with quantitative methods that shed light, for example, on the link between the distribution of armour and horses and wealth, or the involvement of persons in military expeditions over time. The procedures by which these documents were produced are also being addressed and present essential aspects of the administrative part of Fribourg's military organisation.

The quantitative analyses provide interesting insights in the complexity of the individuals' military duty. This is especially visible for the armed companies in

⁴ These documents are preserved in the fonds Affaire Militaires of Fribourg state's archives.

⁵ For more information on the subject, see: *Les pays romands au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Lausanne: Payot, 1997).

⁶ Dupraz, Louis. »Les institutions politiques jusqu'à la Constitution du 24 juin 1404«, in *Fribourg–Freiburg. 1157–1481*, éd. par la Société d'histoire et le Geschichtsforschender Verein (Fribourg: Fragnière, 1957), 54–130, and Castella, Gaston. »La politique extérieure de Fribourg depuis ses origines jusqu'à son entrée dans la Confédération (1157–1481)«, in *Fribourg–Freiburg*, 151–183.

the second half of the fifteenth century. Indeed, if able men and heads of household (including some women, mostly widows) had to be incorporated in an armed company (called »compagnie de chevauchée« in French and »Reisgesellschaft« in German), only a fraction was mobilised during military operations (sometimes less than 10 % of the company's members). The analysis also shows that companies situated in town (based on corporations) were declining in the end of the fifteenth century, while people from the newly acquired subject territories (such as lordships and small towns), as well as the parishes in the country, composed the most part of the fighters. For example, during the first month of Fribourg's involvement in the Swabian war (February–March 1499), 83 % of the fighters came from the country or from subject territories. Thus, this kind of analysis provides not only information on the evolution of Fribourg's military organisation but also on the city's institutional integration of its new territories.

Night-watch and Watchtower: The System of Guarding and Defending the Town in late medieval Basel (*Elena Magli*)

This PhD dissertation examines the town guard and defence in late medieval Basel and their relation to urban space. It investigates the phenomenon of guarding and defending as a means to understand the relationship between urban martial culture and urban space.

Within the walls, martial culture was most tangible in the guarding and defending of a town. Medieval towns had to be protected against dangers from outside as well as from within and to this avail, the cities were at all times guarded. In the event of an imminent threat, specific measures of defence were put into place, and the entire armed populace of a town was called upon and mobilized. Guarding and defending were thus part of the urban culture, but one that research on social and cultural urban history has largely overlooked.

This dissertation analyses city guards and city defence in Basel from the second half of the fourteenth century up until the beginning of the sixteenth century and thus aims at providing insights into the transformation of urban safeguarding and defence through a prolonged period of political and social changes. In Basel, even though hired guards carried out day-watch duties, the night-watch as well as the overall defence of the town was the business of all of the male, Christian, non-clerical city residents. The night-watch was organised along the existing merchants and artisans guilds. For example, the outer city wall was

divided into precise sections assigned to guard by specific guilds, who then were in charge of manning its gates and towers.⁷ In the late Middle Ages, the guilds in Basel had gained great political influence and we see the political structure reflected in the system of guarding. The defence was first organised within the four city parishes but then was »centralized« by the city council and also organised along the existing guild structure.⁸

The late medieval city of Basel produced a wealth of sources concerning its system of guarding and defending. To this day, the only works that concern themselves in a deeper way with these sources come from local historians Rudolf Wackernagel and August Bernoulli at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹ Both looked at the rules and norms of guarding and defending as propagated through the city councils ordinances, but without providing a systematic overview or indeed an analysis within the context of urban social and cultural fabric.

This PhD-project asks who the guards and defenders in Basel were and how they fitted into urban society and culture. It also asks how and where guarding and defending took place in the city, where it was present and visible. Strongholds such as the city walls were important, but even more so the town streets and squares. How were these spaces appropriated and used and how did people act and move in them? This dissertation also addresses how space enhanced by guarding and defending overlapped with other spaces of urban life.

During the past decade, research on urban space has provided important new insights into the specific characteristics of medieval towns. Research has focused upon social, political, sacred and economical spaces within the city walls, concentrating on the construction of different spaces, their transformation and how they overlap. This study captures the phenomenon of urban safeguarding and defence and thereby aims at broadening the research on urban space by integrating spaces of martial culture into the ongoing discussion.

7 Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt (StABS), Militär A1. Allgemeines und einzelnes, »Zunftewolertzüget«, sine dato [probably 1410–1411].

8 StABS, Militär A1. Allgemeines und einzelnes, Nr. 7, Einteilung der Stadt in 4 Panner, 1388; StABS, Militär A1. Allgemeines und einzelnes, »Die fürordnungen ernuwert Katherine 63«, 25.11.1463.

9 Wackernagel, Rudolf. *Geschichte der Stadt Basel*, vol. 2, part 1 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1911) 233, 295–305; most notably Bernoulli, August. »Basels Stadtbewachung und Verteidigung im Mittelalter«, in *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 17 (1918), 316–343.

Further contributions

Within the project's scope, Regula Schmid is investigating a number of aspects of urban military culture that can be summarized under the title of ›The urban common soldier‹. After having dedicated several articles to armour ownership and use in comparative perspective that involved the analysis of inventories, wills, and contracts, she is currently investigating the production and trade of the simple pieces of armour worn by the urban common soldier.¹⁰ She is also preparing a facsimile edition of a recently discovered book detailing the military administration of the Zurich Constaffel association between 1503 and 1581.¹¹ Furthermore, she is preparing the chapter ›The Military City‹ for a new reference book on European towns.¹² A central topic of nineteenth and early twentieth century Swiss national historiography, military and war history underlined the innate bellicosity and natural ferocity of the Swiss. This approach blurred organisational, legal, social, or even material differences between communes (rural and urban), groups, and individuals. The ongoing investigation has yielded a much clearer understanding of the implications the presence of war had on urban societies. A case in point is the legally required ownership of armour. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, only when war was imminent, the town's authorities ventured to examine the number and condition of armour citizens, guild members, and house owners were required to own. In the wake of a call to arms, women and children, clerics and men who could or would not go to war were required to loan their armour to the combatants. The ensuing circulation of pieces of armour from owners to users sheds light on the ties that held together the urban community. Similarly, the abundant sources in Swiss town archives allow to analyse the ubiquitous practice of sending proxies to war. The citizens paid these men – usually fellow citizens – for this service personally, thus building upon, and engendering, a specific kind of relationship within a »community at arms«.

10 Schmid, Regula. »Bereit zur Gewalt? Die Sorge um ›Rüstung und Wehr‹ im Spätmittelalter als Problem der vergleichenden Stadtgeschichte«, in *Reichsstadt und Gewalt*, ed. by Helge Wittmann and Evelien Timpener (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2021), 115–134 (forthcoming).

11 Schmid, Regula. *Der Reisrodel der Constaffel, 1503–1581. Edition und Kommentar* (Zürich: Chronos, 2022); Mitteilungen der Antiquarischen Gesellschaft in Zürich, 88/Neujahrsblatt 185 (in preparation).

12 Schmid, Regula. »The Military City«, in *The Cambridge Urban History of Europe*, vol. 2: *Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, ed. by Patrick Lantschner and Maarten Prak (in preparation).

Widening the scope and diversifying audiences: blog, conference, and exhibition

The research project is supported by an international network of both young and established researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, and by partners including museum professionals. To widen the original scope of the project and to diversify the different approaches to it, we work with our partners to produce three main outputs: an academic blog, an international conference, and a museum exhibition.

Our academic blog is hosted by Hypotheses (OpenEdition).¹³ This platform allows us to share our own preliminary findings (›marvels out of the archive‹) and to publish guest posts from our network (›insights into martial culture‹). Launched in December 2018, our blog included fifty contributions by August 2021, maintaining a publication schedule of two essays per month.

Besides targeted workshops and participation in conferences, both domestic and abroad, our research project is organising an international conference with selected speakers from our aforementioned research network. The conference ›Martial Culture of late Medieval and Early Modern European Towns‹ will be hosted on 11–13 November 2021 at the University of Bern. It aims at firmly establishing martial culture as an indispensable part of comparative urban (communal) history, and urban military history as an integral part of general military history of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period (thirteenth to sixteenth centuries) in an international perspective. It will also emphasise the crucial part towns played in the development of the fiscal and military state and establish venues for comparative history by connecting regional studies with international historiography in the fields of urban and military history. The conference proceedings will be published.

Lastly, a temporary exhibition at the Museum of the Old Arsenal of Solothurn with the title ›To Arms! Weapon culture, ownership and use in the old town‹ is currently being set up for an opening in September 2022. It will focus on the town of Solothurn but will be complemented by the findings of the research project in a comparative way with other towns. This opportunity will allow the communication of the results of the research project to a broader audience, and in connection to contemporary vibrant debates about martial culture nowadays in Switzerland. This exhibition will allow a dialogue between objects, archival documents and representations of martial culture. An exhibition catalogue will complement this interdisciplinary exhibition.

13 Online: <<https://martcult.hypotheses.org/>> (last retrieved on 02 October 2020).