

# The Social Identity in the Late Medieval German City: The Civic Donation to the Church in Nuremberg

Akiko HARADA

## 1. Introduction

In the study of medieval German cities, the question of urban identity is often researched through chronicles,<sup>1</sup> city seals,<sup>2</sup> or cityscapes.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, however, I investigate civic donations to parish churches so as to elucidate urban social identity. As far as I know, very few studies in this field undertake this approach.<sup>4</sup>

The term “social identity” comes from social psychology, which distinguishes personal and the social identity. Through the interaction of personal and social identity, the “self-identity” of social psychology is formed. However, given its focus, this paper is unconcerned with the details of “self-identity” formation. Rather, we are interested in defining social identity as “group identity”. Social identity thus involves the consciousness of belonging to a group, in this paper, to the urban community.<sup>5</sup>

In his famous work *Imperial City and Reformation* (1962),<sup>6</sup> Bernd Moeller

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Schmidt, Heinrich. *Die deutschen Städtechroniken als Spiegel des bürgerlichen Selbstverständnisses im Spätmittelalter*. Göttingen, 1958. Cf. idem. “Bürgerliches Selbstverständnis und städtische Geschichtsschreibung im deutschen Spätmittelalter,” in Johaneck, Peter. ed. *Städtische Geschichtsschreibung im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Köln/Weimar/Wien, 2000, pp. 1 – 17.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Späth, Markus ed. *Die Bildlichkeit korporativer Siegel im Mittelalter. Kunstgeschichte und Geschichte im Gespräch*. Köln, 2009; Furukawa, Masayuki. “The Study Trend of the Medieval German City Seals and „the Representaion of Cities,” in *Medieval European Studies* 2 (2010), pp.161 – 178 (English Summary: p. 239).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Roeck, Bernd. “Identität und Stadtbild. Zur Selbstdarstellung der deutschen Stadt im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert,” in Chittolini, Giorgio and Johaneck, Peter eds. *Aspekte und Komponenten der städtischen Identität in Italien und Deutschland (14. - 16. Jahrhundert)*. Bologna/Berlin, 2003, pp. 11 – 24.

<sup>4</sup> As an exception, Heinzmann, Guido. *Gemeinschaft und Identität spätmittelalterlicher Kleinstädte Westfalens. Eine mentatitätsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Städte Dorsten, Haltern, Hamm, Lünen, Recklinghausen und Werne*. Norderstedt, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Hogg, Michael A. Art. “Social Identity Theory,” in Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs eds. *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, 2007, pp 901 – 903.

<sup>6</sup> Moeller, Bernd. *Reichsstadt und Reformation*. Gütersloh, 1962. Rev. ed. Berlin (Ost), 1987; Trans. (English) Chenou, Albert. Genève, 1966; (French) Midelfort, H. C. Erik and Edwards, Mark U. Jr. Philadelphia, 1972; (Japanese) Morita, Yasukazu, Munesue, Hiroshi et al. Ishibiki, Masashi. Tokyo, 1990.

characterizes the late medieval urban community as a “sacred society.” His view has been strongly criticized **above all** by British and American social historians, who regard it as too harmonious. Indeed, there were tensions and conflicts within the city at any time. However, this situation did not prevent burghers from being conscious of belonging to an urban community. As Moeller emphasizes, the German city of the late Middle Ages tended to view itself as a miniature *corpus christianum*, and the civic council took responsibility for the religious life of the burghers. In this sense, the late medieval city can be considered as a “sacred society.” Recently, Moeller’s concept has been evaluated in the study of late medieval German city.<sup>7</sup>

This paper discusses the civic social identity by examining the donations of the burghers to parish churches. The foundation of this identity on the notion of “sacred society” plays a role in this matter. Nuremberg is chosen as an example to be discussed in this paper, because it is not the episcopal but imperial city. The imperial cities including Nuremberg had great autonomy and were little influenced by bishops. This characteristic allows us to consider the situation of a more civic identity. ~~It makes use not only of written sources but also other evidence such as church facilities, as historical sources.~~ Nuremberg had another practical advantage. This city, where iconoclasm almost never appeared during the Reformation, provides various historical sources not only of written sources but also of church facilities.

Nuremberg was one of the biggest cities in medieval Germany. Around 1500, it probably had a population of about 50,000. Despite its size, Nuremberg had only two parishes, St. Sebald and St. Lawrence, each of which covered a distinct part of the city. The St. Sebald parish contains the older part of the city, namely the northern bank of the river Pegnitz where the imperial castle was situated and imperial *Ministerialen* who later consisted in the governing class of the city resided; the city eventually extended into the other bank. This newer part is the St. Lawrence parish and small merchants and craftsmen settled there. <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, Bünz, Enno. “Klerus und Bürger. Die Bedeutung der Kirche für die Identität deutscher Städte im Spätmittelalter,” in Chittolini and Johaneck. eds. *op. cit.*, pp. 351 – 389.

<sup>8</sup> As for the outline of Nuremberg: Pfeiffer, Gerhard ed. *Nürnberg – Geschichte einer europäischen Stadt*. München, 1971; Diefenbacher, Michael, Bezerstedt, Horst-Dieter et al. Bauernfeind, Martina. *Kleine Nürnberger Stadtgeschichte*. Regensburg, 2012.

## 2. The social roles of the two parish churches: the artifacts of church choirs

In the first place, I would like to consider the difference in the social roles of the two parish churches by investigating the artifacts of their church choirs.

### 2-1. St. Sebald: a public space for the external world

St. Sebald's grave (*Sebaldusgrave*)<sup>9</sup> is located at the center of the choir of St. Sebaldus Church. St. Sebald was the urban patron of Nuremberg; he was consecrated in 1425 through the Roman Curia. According to the town's chronicles, political ceremonies were frequently held in St. Sebald: "Anno Domini 1361, the year when a son of the Emperor [= Charles IV] was born in Nuremberg and was named Wenceslaus, the child was not baptized for five and a half weeks, until all seven Electors came to Nuremberg; and on the day before Saint Veitz's day, when people led the Empress under a gold canopy from the castle to Saint Sebolt [= Sebald]." <sup>10</sup> Charles IV intended a tacit manifesto, since his son was to be the next Emperor. In 1431, Cardinal Julian, before the main altar of St. Sebald, presented the Margrave of Brandenburg and his knights a cross to serve in the struggle against the Hussites. The king and other lords were present. <sup>11</sup> When the Emperor and the prelates, such as legates or bishops, entered into the city, they were led first to St. Sebaldus Church to celebrate Mass. <sup>12</sup> The above-mentioned sources clearly show that St. Sebald often served as a space for political representation. In contrast, we find no record of political celebrations, which took place only at St. Lawrence.

Since 1397, the bones of Sebald have been preserved in a silver reliquary. From 1507 to 1519, Master Peter Vischer and his sons made a housing of brass for this reliquary to protect it from theft. (In fact, St. Sebaldus Church had been robbed of it in past.<sup>13</sup>) We find several entries in the city council's resolutions involving its creation, such as payments to Peter Vischer. In addition, on 11 July 1514, the council demanded that Vischer promptly complete the work and sent two councilors to him, probably because of a delay. On October 3, it lent him the urban casting house at the White Tower for four years. About six months before the setting of the brass housing, on January 21, 1519, the council asked the *Genannten*, the larger

---

<sup>9</sup> As for Sebald's grave: Fehring, Günter P. and Röss, Anton. *Stadt Nürnberg. Kurzinventar*. 2nd ed. München, 1977, p. 131 – 134.

<sup>10</sup> Chr., vol. 4, p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Chr., vol. 1, p. 382.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of Emperors: Chr., vol. 3, p. 363; vol. 5, p. 500. Prelates: Chr., vol. 1, p.410; Chr., vol. 5, p. 643.

<sup>13</sup> NRV. No. 246; Hoffmann, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Die Sebalduskirche in Nürnberg*. Wien, 1912, p.164 and 166.

**councilors**, for its financial support. <sup>14</sup>

The council had apparently been conscious of the importance of St. Sebaldus Church and the need to represent its status and dignity to the “outside” world. The upkeep and protection of the relic was, therefore, among its essential duties.

## **2-2. St. Lawrence: a space for the patriciate**

In St. Lawrence, the **sacrament house** (*Sakramentshaus*)<sup>15</sup> in the form of a tower and The Annunciation (*Englischer Gruß*)<sup>16</sup> were private donations by famous counselors. The sacrament house was given by the then churchwarden (*Kirchenpfleger*) of *fabrica ecclesiae*<sup>17</sup> to St. Lawrence, Hans Imhoff, and carved by Master Adam Kraft between 1493 and 1496. The private contract of these two men for its creation is extant.<sup>18</sup> The Annunciation was donated by Anton Tucher and chiseled by Master Veit Stoss from 1517 to 1518. Anton Tucher was a Losunger, quasi mayor of Nuremberg, and the churchwarden of St. Sebald at the time. The fact that he decorated the choir of St. Lawrence in spite of his position at St. Sebald seems, at first, strange. However, his cousin Lorenz and his brother Sixtus Tucher were former provosts of St. Lawrence. **This relationship seems to be a reason why Anton donated it there.** No written contract exists for The Annunciation, but it is recorded in Anton’s housekeeping book.<sup>19</sup>

What is common to Hans and Anton’s donations? Both are set at the most conspicuous places in these churches. Even more expensive donations were placed in St. Lawrence. For example, while the altar of St. Anne cost 1200 guilders and that of St. Roch 1050 guilders, the sacrament house was purchased for only 770 guilders and The Annunciation 550 guilders.<sup>20</sup> We may call the two donations “a visual strategy of patricians.” In those times, only altars donated by the clergy could

---

<sup>14</sup> Fehring and Ress. *op. cit.* p. 131; NRV. No. 1167..

<sup>15</sup> Fehring and Ress. *op. cit.* pp. 82 – 84; Bauer, Herberd and Stolz, Goerg. Engelsgruß und Sakramentshaus in St. Lorenz zu Nürnberg. Königstein i. Taunus, 1974, p. 8 – 12.

<sup>16</sup> Bauer and Stolz. *op. cit.* p. 3 – 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Fabrica ecclesiae* (*Kirchenfabrik*) means ... in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. vol. 15. New York, 1907 – 1912. here at Catholic Online.

<http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4541>.

<sup>18</sup> Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Imhoff-Archiv, Schublade XI, Fasc. 31, Nr. 3a. (qrt. in Schleif, Corine. *Donatio et memoria. Stifter, Stiftungen und Motivationen an Beispielen aus der Lorenzkirche in Nürnberg*. München, 1990. Here at pp. 242 – 244.)

<sup>19</sup> Stolz, Georg. “Der Engelsgruß in St. Lorenz in Nürnberg. Stiftung und Schicksal,” in idem ed. *Der Englische Gruss des Veit Stoß zu St. Lorenz in Nürnberg*. München, 1983, pp. 1 – 22. Here at p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Schleif. *op. cit.* p. 229.

be placed in the choir of St. Lawrence. Therefore, lay donors could show their families' influence only through such extraordinary monumental artworks. Imhoff and Tucher belonged, furthermore, to the newer patrician families. In Nuremberg, almost half of the old patrician houses became extinct or moved away from the city between 1332 and 1521. As a result, new families were accepted into the patrician class. Tucher attained patrician status in 1340 and Imhoff in 1437.<sup>21</sup> Through their ecclesial donations, they demonstrated their political successes to other citizens. In summary, St. Sebald served as a symbol of the city to the eternal world and St. Lawrence that of the burghers to the internal one.

### 3. Social obligation as a reason for donations: stained glass

Social obligation as a motive for donations emerges from an analysis of stained glasses. In earlier studies, religious motives and representations of donor families have been seen as reasons for medieval donation. Here, I would like to add social obligation in connection with administrative church positions. The stained glass in the two parish churches in Nuremberg was cared for by the families that had donated it; in fact, the civic council required such preservation and repair.

Here is a table with names of the windows in St. Sebald.

**Table 1. The names of the windows in the eastern choir of St. Sebald**

| I. Emperor Maximilian |                  |          |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------|------------------------|
| N. II.                | [Bishop] Bamberg | S. II.   | Margrave [Brandenburg] |
| N. III.               | Stromer          | S. III.  | Pfinzing [←Volchtel]   |
| N. IV.                | Fürer            | S. IV.   | <b>Haller</b>          |
| N. V.                 | <b>Tucher</b>    | S. V.    | <b>Schürstab</b>       |
| N. VI.                | Mendel           | S. VI.   | Beheim                 |
| —                     |                  | S. VII.  | Volckamer              |
| N. VIII.              | Grundherr        | S. VIII. | Imhoff                 |
| N. IX.                | Geudel           | S. IX.   | Paumgartner            |

Sources: Fehring, Günter P. and Röss, Anton. *Stadt Nürnberg. Kurzinventar*. 2nd ed. München, 1977. pp. 140 – 146.

The table demonstrates that stained glass functioned as familial monuments ~~and~~

<sup>21</sup> Regarding each of Nuremberg's patrician families: Fleischmann, Peter. *Rat und Patriziat in Nürnberg*. 3 vols. Neustadt an der Aisch, 2008.

~~that the families of churchwardens or sub-churchwardens (*Kirchenmeister*) were donors.~~ All glasses were given through patrician families for several years after the completion of the new choir between 1379 and 1386. Four windows –marked in boldface in the table– were donated by families of churchwardens (*Kirchenpfleger*) or sub-churchwardens (*Kirchenmeister*). In the case of window N. VIII, the donor Michael Grundherr was a churchwarden. Regarding N. V., Berthold Tucher, its donor, had served as sub-churchwarden from 1333 to 1352. The donor S. V. was Leupold Schületab; his father had been sub-churchwardens from 1350 to 1355. S. III had been called formerly “the window of the Volchtel,” that was given by Heinrich Volchtel, who the last churchwarden in this period; he played a significant role in the reconstruction of the eastern choir. These donors appear to have donated out of a sense of obligation, which probably arose from their social positions as churchwardens or sub-churchwardens.

#### **4. The Donation of the Virgin Mary’s antiphon *Salve Regina*: the donation for all believers’ souls**

New tendency about donations can be observed just before the Reformation. For example, donations of sacred objects for Mass, such as vestments, chalices, monstrances, and for communal liturgical commitments, etc.

The patrician Peter Harsdörfer donated one of the hymns for the Virgin Mary, the *Salve Regina* to St. Sebaldus Church in 1479. In his donation’s document, he expressed that he has “planned to do an eternal donation for the help and comfort of my own, my forefathers and all believers’ souls (*alle gläubigen selen*).”<sup>22</sup> An additional donation was made by Margarethe Haller, who was not related to Harsdörfer. She gave to the Rich Alms (*Reichs Almosen*) that Nuremberg’s citizen Burckhart Sailer had founded in 1388, the fund for women who has just given birth that was founded by Hans Tucher and the fund for lepers ~~that~~ at the same time.<sup>23</sup> It follows from what has been said thus far that the contribution of the *Salve Regina* by Peter Harsdörfer was equated with alms.

Peter Harsdörfer donation’s document states that “mean working people can come to it (*Salve Regina* service) and hold the service as well.”<sup>24</sup> About twenty-five

---

<sup>22</sup> StAN, Rep. 8, No. 45, “auch mein, meinen vorfordern vnnd allen gläubigen selen zu hilff vnd zu troste, ein ewig stifttung zu thun furgenommen ...”

<sup>23</sup> StAN, Rep. 8, No. 158.

<sup>24</sup> StAN, Rep. 8, No. 45, “das gemain arbeitssam volck auch dartzu komen vnd andacht empfhahen mug ...”

years later, Peter Imhoff, the oldest son of Hans Imhoff, and Ulrich Kiffhaber together donated *Salve Regina* services to St. Lawrence Church. In a book of official documents concerning St. Lawrence, one finds the following words: “[For] their forefathers, posterity and all believers’ souls”; furthermore, “mean hand-working people were moreover guided to such services, graces, and indulgences **through which** they are prepared to gain eternal bliss.”<sup>25</sup> In other documents regarding the donation of a Mass on the anniversary of someone’s death (*Jahrtag*), we find similar descriptions, such as “[for] all believers’ souls.” This is not a new formulation; however, it appears in documents offering donations for *alle gläubigen selen* in Nuremberg, especially in the 1480s. It is essential to emphasize that “mean people”, namely the poor, at the *Salve Regina* service received not material assistance for their bodies, but spiritual assistance for their souls.

In Nuremberg, the *Salve Regina* was an ecclesiastical measure for urban society, because St. Mary had been conceived as a patron saint against the plague and drought in Middle Ages. In the plague year 1483, the council requested that all clergymen in the city sing the hymn to the Holy Mother every day after vespers.<sup>26</sup> This year, Peter Imhoff and his brothers donated the Altar dedicated to St. Roch — the patron against the plague — to St. Lawrence Church.<sup>27</sup> **From 1505 to 1506, the plague spread throughout the city again and took a quite heavy toll of lives. In the middle of this plague period, the Salve Regina service was founded in St. Lawrence Church.** Just before the donation of the *Salve Regina* by Peter Harsdörfer, an unprecedented drought hit this area.<sup>28</sup> The council begged churches and monasteries within the city for processions or prayers to seek divine assistance. In summary, the *Salve Regina* was donated when the city suffered under the weight of the plague or the drought. **Then**, donors made gifts not only for the salvation of themselves and their relatives but also for that of the entire urban community.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, “irer vorfordern vnnd nachkomen, auch allen gläubigen selen, ... das gemain hanndtwercksvolk zu solichen gotlichen diensten, gnaden, vnd ablassen mer geraitzt, durch welich sie ewige seligkait zu erlangen geschickt werden ...“

<sup>26</sup> StAN, Rep. 60b, No. 11, fol. 301(qrd. in Dormeier. *op. cit.* p. 35).

<sup>27</sup> Dormeier, Heinrich. “St. Rochus, die Pest und die Imhoffs in Nürnberg vor und während der Reformation. Eine spätgotischer Altar in seinem religiös-liturgischen, wirtschaftlich-rechtlichen und sozialen Umfeld,” in *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (1985), pp. 7 – 72.

<sup>28</sup> Diefenbacher, Michael ed. *Johannes Müllner. Die Annalen der Reichsstadt Nürnberg von 1623*, vol. 3. Nürnberg, 2003, p. 49.



## 5. Conclusion

Let me summarize the main findings of this paper that emerge through a consideration of choir artifacts. In Nuremberg, public and politically significant ceremonies were quite frequently held in St. Sebaldus Church, to which the council paid careful attention. This parish church represented this imperial city to the “outside” world. In comparison, the patriciate donated freely to St. Lawrence, which was beyond the control of the council. Here, comparatively new patrician families revealed their high social standing in the urban community through donations that were focused on the “inside” of the town. Second, the analysis of stained glasses makes clear that social obligation was a motive for ecclesial donations. Previous research speaks of no more than spiritual intentions and the demonstration of family authority. Finally, during the crises of plague or drought, one of the hymns for the Virgin Mary, the *Salve Regina*, was donated for the sake of the whole urban community.

Thus, burger donations had two dimensions. One was the desire to belong to the urban community, which is indicated, in particular, through the donations of the *Salve Regina* and of stained glasses. The other is the demonstration of a donor’s social position in the community, as in the cases of the artifacts in the choir of St. Lawrence. However, almost all of civic donations appear simultaneously to contain these two motives such as a front and a rear side of a coin.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Chr. Hegel, Karl ed. *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte. Nürnberg.* Bde. 1 – 5, Leipzig 1862 – 1874; Stuttgart 1961.
- NRV Hampe, Thodor. *Nürnberger Ratsverlässe über Kunst und Künstler im Zeitalter der Spätgotik und Renaissance.* vol. 1: (1449) 1474 – 1570. Wien/Leipzig, 1904.
- StAN Staatsarchiv Nürnberg