

# “A German Oak Built of Stone”. Neo-Gothic Guildhalls in Riga\*

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**ABSTRAKT** „*Niemiecki dąb wzniesiony z kamienia*”. *Neogotyckie siedziby gildii w Rydze*. Artykuł poświęcony jest dwóm neogotyckim budowlom użyteczności publicznej w Rydze: przebudowie Wielkiej Gildii Mariackiej (Stube zu Münster, później Grosse St. Marien Gilde, Lielā ģilde, Amatu ielā 6, Karl Beyne, 1854–1860), pochodzącej z połowy XIV w., która była siedzibą kupców, oraz Małej Gildii św. Jana (Stube zu Soest, później Kleine St. Johannisgilde, Mazā ģilde, Amatu ielā 3/5, Johann Daniel Felsko, 1864–1866) należącej do cechów rzemieślników. Stały one obok siebie, tuż przy murach miejskich. Skomplikowane dzieje ich budowy ukazane zostały na tle przemian znaczenia niemieckich elit kupieckich i rzemieślniczych w Rydze około połowy XIX w. oraz postępującej unifikacji Imperium Rosyjskiego i rusyfikacji nadbałtyckich prowincji rozpoczętej za rządów cara Aleksandra II.

**SŁOWA-KLUCZE** Ryga, Wielka Gildia, Mała Gildia, architektura XIX w., neogotyck, Niemcy bałtyccy, konflikt narodowy, architektura polityczna, prowincje bałtyckie

**ABSTRACT** The article concerns two neo-Gothic public buildings in Riga: the restructuring of the Great Guildhall of St. Mary (Stube zu Münster, later Grosse St. Marien Gilde, Lielā ģilde, Amatu ielā 6, Karl Beyne, 1854–1860), dating from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, which was the seat of the city’s merchants, and the Little Guildhall of St. John (Stube zu Soest, then Kleine St. Johannisgilde, Mazā ģilde, Amatu ielā 3/5, Johann Daniel Felsko, 1864–1866) belonging to the craftsmen’s guilds. The two buildings stood next to each other, beside the city walls. The complicated history of their construction is shown against the background of the changes in the importance of the German merchant and craftsmen elites in Riga around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the progressive unification of the Russian Empire, and the Russification of the Baltic provinces that began during the reign of Tsar Alexander II.

**KEYWORDS** Riga, Great Guildhall, Small Guildhall, 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture, neo-Gothic, Baltic Germans, national conflict, political architecture, Baltic provinces

THE SUBJECT of this article is the history of the redevelopment of two merchants' guildhalls in Riga (today the capital of Latvia), a city that was incorporated into Russia in 1721. The modernisation of the seats of the Merchants' Guild and the Craftsmen's Guild was undertaken in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, during the period of the city's economic prosperity, which was linked to the growing trade, increasing industrialisation and the bringing of the railway line to Riga. These measures were also associated with the desire, prevalent among Riga's economic elite, to consolidate its German identity. The choice of neo-Gothic style forms for the new guildhalls was programmatic and symbolic. This was because the style was identified with German architecture at the time and was used primarily in Catholic and Protestant churches, town halls and, in exceptional cases, the headquarters of stock exchanges.

In the Russian Baltic provinces, the use of this stylistic costume signified a clear stand for Germanness. This is why the title of the current article refers to the new guildhall being described as "a German oak built of stone", an epithet which appeared in the Riga press at the time and which makes it clear that the restructuring of the Riga guildhalls was a clever and deliberate manifestation of their own German identity by the merchants and craftsmen who were members of these associations.<sup>1</sup> The oak tree, as I explain at length in the conclusion, was a recognised and widely understood Germanic symbol. The restructuring of the Riga guildhalls constitutes an example – unique in Russia – of

a national, German demonstration emphasising the historical continuity and ethno-cultural belonging of the region expressed through architectural forms and stylistic choices. In this way, at a time when Russian state policy towards ethnic minorities was changing, the guildhalls served to represent German culture and history, to legitimise German social domination in the South Baltic region, and to demonstrate the region's belonging to the German cultural area. These new buildings were erected in a period when the processes of Russification of the area and the construction of Russian domination had already begun and the Latvian national movement was emerging. The local Germans perceived these factors as a threat. An analysis of both buildings with these changes in mind makes it possible to bring the seats of the Riga guilds into the circle of political architecture in Central Europe. This topic has not yet been presented in the context of the importance of the German elite in Riga and its contribution to imparting a new symbolism on the city's architecture.

The capital of the Latvian governorate<sup>2</sup> was at the time Russia's westernmost port.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to its location on the Baltic Sea and at the same time at the mouth of the mighty thousand-kilometre-long Daugava River, it played the role of an intermediary in trade between the Baltic basin and the territories in the Russian hinterland accessible by river trade. After the Crimean War, Riga experienced rapid economic revival and development.<sup>4</sup> This was aided by the construction of a railway line and the defortification, which began simultaneously in 1857

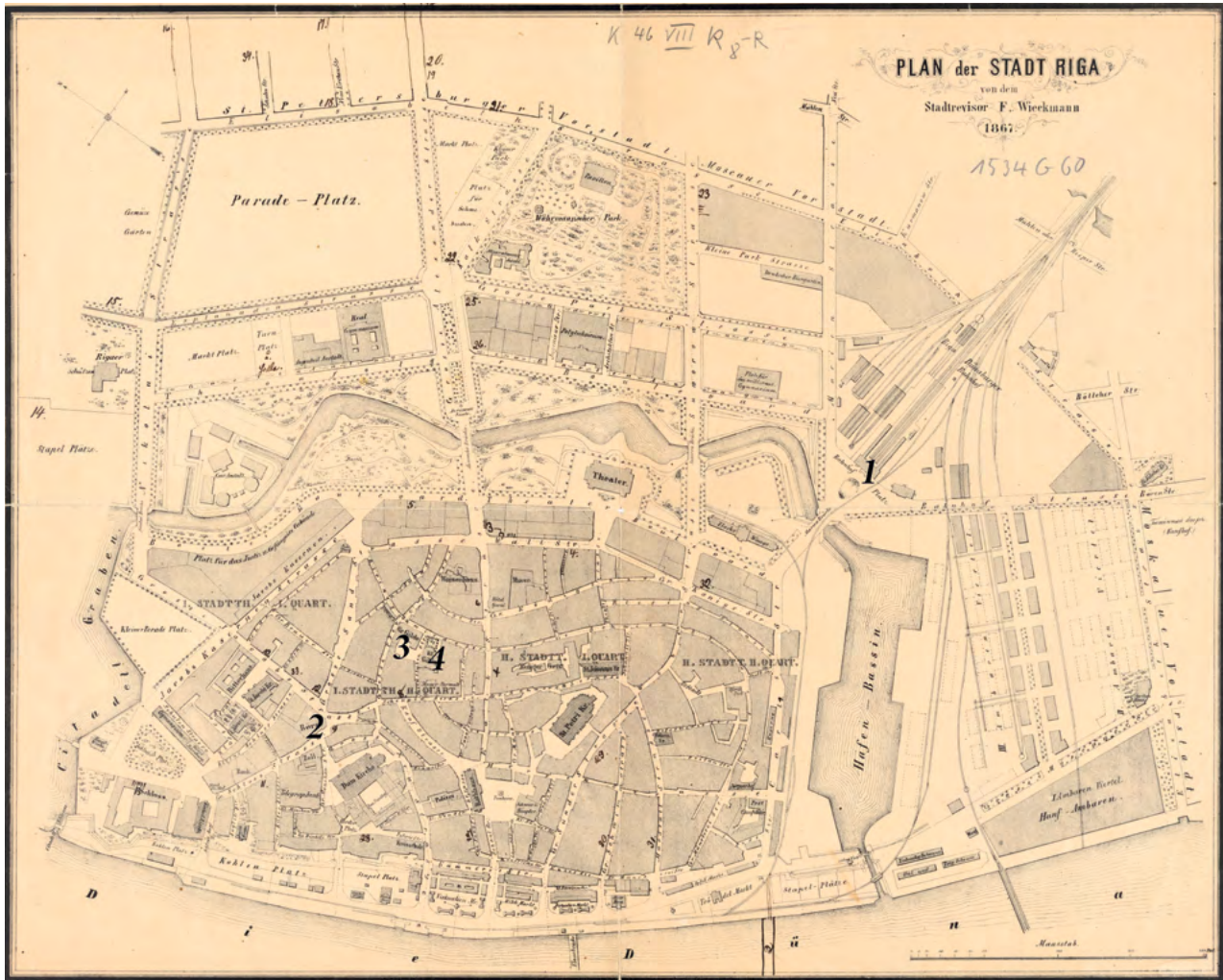
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1. The phrase "eine in Stein gebaute Deutsche Eiche" was used in the article "Wo soll das Haus der kleinen Gilde stehen?", *Rigasche Zeitung*, no 110. (14 May 1863): 2.

2. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Baltic provinces were divided into three governorates: the Latvian, Estonian and Courland ones.

3. Andreas Fülberth, *Riga. Kleine Geschichte der Stadt* (Wien: Böhlau, 2014), 122–151 (on its history in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century); Jörg Hackmann, "Architektur als Symbol. Nation building in Nordosteuropa. Estland und Lettland im 20. Jahrhundert", in *Riga im Prozeß der Modernisierung zum Wandel einer Ostseemetropole im 19. Jahrhundert und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Eduard Mühle, Norbert Angermann (Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut, 2004), 149–172.

4. Fülberth, *Riga*, 145ff. For the history of the bourgeoisie in Riga: Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit. Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).



1 Plan of Riga (1867) showing the new, already partially built-up boulevards and railway station: 1. Railway Station, 2. Stock Exchange, 3. Great Guildhall, 4. Little Guildhall, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, K-46-VIII\_R\_8\_-R

(opening of the railway station 1861) (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there emerged the idea of constructing a modern stock exchange building and restructuring the old guildhall, known as the Great St. Marien Guildhall (Stube zu Münster, later Grosse St. Marien Gilde, Lielā gilde, Amatu ielā 6), dating from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which was the seat of the merchants, as well as the Small Guildhall of St. John (Stube zu Soest, later Kleine St. Johannisgilde, Mazā gilde, Amatu ielā 3/5) belonging to the craftsmen's guild.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of trade necessitated the erection of a new stock exchange, as its former location in the town hall prevented further business development. The new Neo-Renaissance building of the stock exchange (Fig. 2), based on Venetian models, was raised in 1852–1855 to a design by Harald Julius Bosse, the son of Ernst Gotthilf Bosse, a well-known portrait and history painter from Riga, himself a graduate of schools and studios in Dresden and Darmstadt and a professor at St Petersburg's Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>7</sup> The building's style fitted in well with the Italian models

5. Fülberth, *Riga*, 123–124, 145ff.

6. Wilhelm Neumann, "Die Gildenhäuser", in *Riga und seine Bauten*, ed. Rigaschen technischen Verein, Rigaschen Architekten-Verein (Riga: Verlag der Buch- und Kunstdruckanst. des "Rigaer Tageblatt", 1903), 191–196.

7. [www.gottfriedsempclub.de/news/Einleitung%20Bosse-Ausstellung.pdf](http://www.gottfriedsempclub.de/news/Einleitung%20Bosse-Ausstellung.pdf), accessed February 21, 2024; В.А. Андреева, *Гаральд Боссе* (Москва: Издательский дом "Коло", 2009);





2 Riga, Stock Exchange, photograph, ca. 1920, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 25285

favoured in Germany at the time. The stock exchange was built before the demolition of the city's fortifications, so it was originally intended to house a theatre and the headquarters of the Great Guild, which was also located in the immediate vicinity.<sup>8</sup> In the end, the intention to house several institutions in the exchange was not implemented, but the structure was nevertheless a multifunctional building with meeting rooms, a ballroom and a grand dining hall. It therefore also acted as a merchants' office, accessible not only to the Riga merchants and burghers, but also to visitors. The stock exchange offered the most beautiful premises for social life in Riga at the time and fitted perfectly into the stylistic modus then prevailing for this genre of building. Its references to the Italian Renaissance and Venetian architecture were universal and allowed Riga's

merchants to build an identity linked to the tradition of European trade.

The Riga Stock Exchange, where the merchant world from different parts of Russia and Europe met, can therefore be interpreted as a place that evoked a European identity in general. Rapid social and political changes changed the position of the Riga economic elite and, in a way, forced the need to constantly emphasise the dominant Germanness among them. This resulted in two major projects: the extensive modernisation and expansion of the Great Guildhall and the construction of the new premises of the Small Guildhall.

Both edifices were located within the city delineated in the Middle Ages, on a narrow street closed by a city gate (Fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> The *Stube zu Münster* and the *Stube zu*

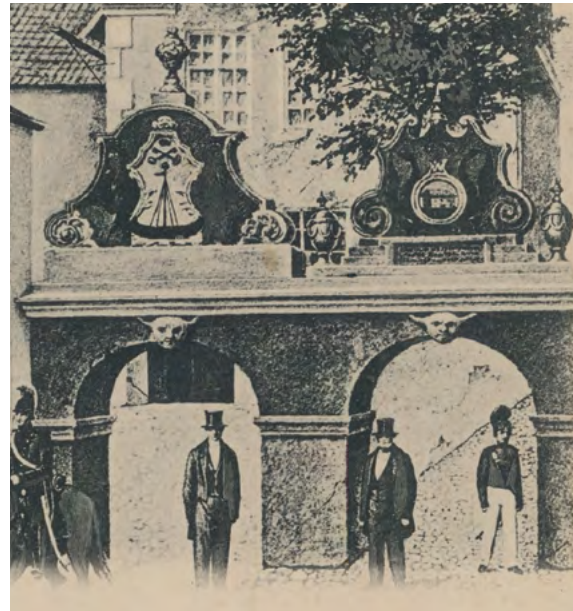
Wilhelm Neumann, "Börse und Banken", in *Riga und seine Bauten*, 240; Daina Lāce, "Rīgas Biržas ēka Eiropas 19. gadsimta arhitektūrā", in *Latvijas vizuālās mākslas Eiropas kontekstā: Apvienotā Pasaules latviešu zinātnieku III un Letonikas IV kongresa sekcijas referāti* (Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas Mākslas vēstures institūts, 2011), 35–46. Very interesting variants of the façade solution included in Jānis Krastiņš, *Eklektisms Rīgas arhitektūrā* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1988), 113–115. The plans are also published in Daiga Upeniece et al., *Mākslas muzejs Rīgas Birža / Art Museum Riga Bourse* (Rīga: Jumava, 2011), 18–32. See also "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861* (Riga: Wilhelm Ferdinand Häcker, 1861), 3–6; "Das Haus der St. Johannis-Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1867* (Riga: Wilhelm Ferdinand Häcker, 1867), IX–XV.

8. Fülberth, *Riga*, 120.

9. View of the gate and parts of both guildhalls before reconstruction, Wilhelm Neumann, *Das mittelalterliche Riga. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der norddeutschen Baukunst* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1892), 53.

Soest had been bought by the city from the Teutonic Order in 1353, and this date functioned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the founding year of both guilds, providing a pretext for celebrating their five-hundredth anniversaries. Men of letters, doctors and, to a limited extent, officials were also admitted as members.<sup>10</sup> There was a lively debate about the latter, which was also reflected in the press. It was feared that there would be an influx of Russian officials, which could threaten the dominant German character of the association. The statutes of the Small Guild stipulated that only Christians could be admitted, on presentation of a baptismal certificate, and with a knowledge of German; this excluded Jews as well as Russians and Latvians.<sup>11</sup>

The guilds played a very important complementary role in the city's governance structure. In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century they were given more and more rights, their authority included taxation matters,<sup>12</sup> and they also had influence over the judiciary. Undoubtedly this was also the reason why their members were so carefully selected. The craftsmen's guild also secured for itself the exclusive right to carry out crafts, thus defending itself against "bunglers", i.e. craftsmen not affiliated with the guild. It was not until the introduction of freedom of practice in the Baltic provinces in 1866 that those not belonging to guilds were given full practice rights.<sup>13</sup> Both guilds had public law rights,<sup>14</sup> amended only in the "Law on Cities" in 1877. After that year, they could only operate as private-law societies, which greatly reduced their political significance. The Great Guild's building had the character of a typical merchants' office



3 Riga, closure of the street by the guildhalls leading beyond the first line of the city walls, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252843

with numerous rooms for social gatherings and balls. It was the venue for ceremonial swearing-in of citizens of the city of Riga, religious services and concerts, and its functions can therefore be compared with those of the Schütting in Bremen, the Gürzenich in Cologne or the Christian merchants' Old Stock Exchange (Alte Börse, built 1825) on the Salzring in Breslau.

The history of the two guilds was widely recalled in 1853, in connection with the festive celebrations

10. "Zur Geschichte des ersten Halbjahres 1863. XIII", *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 171 (26 July 1863): 1. At the time, only fifteen officials belonged to the guild. On the guilds, see Constantin Mettig, *Geschichte der Stadt Riga* (Riga: von Jonck & Poliewsky, 1897), 123; Napoleon Asmus, *Album von Riga* (Riga: Wilhelm Ferdinand Häcker, 1871), 7ff; Friedrich Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte der Kleinen oder St. Johannis-Gilde in Wort und Bild. Zum Jubiläumsjahr 1901* (Riga: Alexander Stahl, 1902); Karl von Loewis of Menar, *Riga. Kurzer geschichtlicher Führer* (Riga: von Jonck & Poliewsky, 1918), 30; *Die Gilden zu Riga* (Riga: R. Ruetz & Co, 1936); Carla Redlich, "Das älteste Riga und die Stuben zu Münster und Soest", *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 37, no. 4 (1988): 555–580, here 572–573.

11. Statutes cited by Alexander Friedrich Neumann, *Kurze Geschichte der Rigaer Kleinen Gilde oder St. Johannis-Gilde und ihres Hauses* (Riga: Selbstverlag, 2004), 23–25. On nationalities, *ibid.*, 44, 50.

12. Fülberth, *Riga*, 109ff., 147.

13. *Die Gilden zu Riga*, 24–25; "Aus der Baugeschichte der Marien-Gilde zu Riga", *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 24 (30 January 1936): 5, 6; Helene Dopkewitsch, "Die Große Gilde zu Riga", *Baltische Monatshefte* 5, no. 1 (1936): 8–24; Friedrich Alexander Redlich, "Haltung, Sitte und Brauch im Leben der Großen Gilde zu Riga", *ibid.*, 1–8.

14. "Aus der Baugeschichte der Marien-Gilde zu Riga", *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 24 (30 January 1936): 5.

marking the five-hundredth anniversary of their founding.<sup>15</sup> Representatives of all the Churches (Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic), government, army and municipal authorities attended, the city was illuminated, and large portions of bread, vodka and meat were distributed to the poor. The celebrations thus reminded all Riga residents of the importance of the merchants' and craftsmen's societies for the history and functioning of the city.

On the occasion of the jubilee, the issue of modernising the Great Guildhall, which was not in a good state of repair and was too small to hold so many functions and accommodate the increasing number of its members, was raised. The matter had already been dealt with in 1841 and 1844 (designs by Johann Daniel Felsko),<sup>16</sup> and in 1851 the architect Harald Julius Bosse proposed two variants of the stock exchange: with a theatre and a large guildhall and, after this concept was rejected, with a stock exchange and a guildhall.<sup>17</sup> A year later, the gubernatorial architect David e Ollthoff<sup>18</sup> presented a project for the reconstruction of the guildhall maintained in "theatrical Gothic manner" ("in theatergo-tischer Art").<sup>19</sup>

After these concepts were rejected, new plans were commissioned in 1854 from Karl Beyne, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg. Works began on 10 May 1854. The style of the building was described as "Old Gothic" ("altgotisch").<sup>20</sup> The construction, delayed because of the Crimean War, was not completed until 1860.<sup>21</sup> The modernised guildhall was intended to emphasise the centuries-old history and importance of Riga's merchants.<sup>22</sup> The purchase of adjacent plots of land ensured that the building was significantly enlarged. The building was probably constructed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was extended several times, probably obtaining a Mannerist gable (Fig. 4) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Its most valuable spaces were the Gothic two-aisled, cross-vaulted main meeting hall on the ground floor and the adjacent small nuptial chamber, known as the Hall of the Newlyweds (Brautkammer) (Figs. 5, 6).<sup>24</sup> Beyne treated these most precious rooms like a treasure vault and enclosed them by adding new walls to reinforce the old structure (Fig. 7). He added a monumental entrance avant-corps (*Risalit*) with a vestibule and a ceremonial staircase leading to the great

15. Descriptions in "Die Festfeier der Kaufmannsgilde in Riga den 2. Februar 1853", *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 5 (5 February 1853): 41–43; Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 481–485 (erroneous date in the title); Neumann, "Die Gildenhäuser", 191–194.

16. *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 42 (15 October 1841): 332; "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 4–6; Daina Lāce, "Johans Daniels Felsko un Mazās ģildes pārbūve Rīgā", *Mākslas Vēsture un Teorija*, no. 3 (2004): 18, 19; ead., *Pirmais Rīgas pilsētas arhitekta Johans Daniels Felsko (1813–1902)* (Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas Mākslas vēstures institūts, Mākslas vēstures pētījumu atbalsta fonds, 2012), 205.

17. On the site of the former guildhall, cf. "Aus der Baugeschichte der Marien-Gilde in Riga", *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 24 (30 January 1936): 5. View of the old guildhall before reconstruction: "Das Haus der St. Johannis-Gilde. Seine Baugeschichte und seine innere Gestaltung", *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 29 (5 February, 1936): 5, 6, here 5; Neumann, *Das mittelalterliche Riga*, 53.

18. News of Ollthoff's (Ollthoff) death at the age of 37: *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 50 (12 December 1857): 364, where reference is made to "Livl. Gouver. Arch., Akademiker, Coll. Assessor".

19. "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 5; "Aus der Baugeschichte der Marien-Gilde zu Riga", *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 24 (30 January 1936): 5.

20. "Der Umbau der Gildenstube", *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 20 (16 May 1863): 181–182, here 181.

21. Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 493.

22. "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 4–6; Neumann, "Die Gildenhäuser", 191–194. On neo-Gothic buildings in Latvia, see Jānis Zilgalvis, *Neogotika Latvijas arhitektūrā* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2005), 178–185 (on the guildhalls).

23. Detailed description of the medieval guildhall and drawing of the condition before rebuilding: Neumann, *Das mittelalterliche Riga*, 52–54, here 53.

24. The Brautkammer was a chamber/room intended for a newlywed couple who held their wedding reception in the guildhall. The wedding party had left the guildhall at a certain time, which was regulated by law; afterwards, the young couple spent their wedding night in the "Brautkammer"; see *Die Gilden zu Riga*, 24–25; Alexander Friedrich Neuland, *Kurze Geschichte der Rigaer kleinen Gilde* (Riga: Selbstverlag, 2004), 85; Floor plan Neumann, *Das mittelalterliche Riga*, 53. See also "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 5.



4 Riga, Great Guildhall after the Mannerist restructuring, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, 252844



hall on the first floor. It had an area of approximately 400 m<sup>2</sup> and measured ca. 10 m in height. It was covered with a magnificent wooden ceiling and decorated with the town's coats of arms (Fig. 8). Numerous club rooms were placed in the new section. Beyne skilfully combined the old elements with the new, with the original parts treated as extremely valuable *spolia*.<sup>25</sup> The façades were rhythmised by the divisions of the piano nobile

frame: large tracery windows, with a dense arrangement of mullions, were divided by semi-columns connected by a simple cornice, giving the building a palace-like character. The structure was topped with a massive cornice on corbels and a crenellation; the corner avant-corps with an entrance, topped with a high gable with turrets, was particularly distinctive; it visually closed a narrow street (Fig. 9).

25. "Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 5; Neumann, "Die Gildenhäuser", 191–194; Andris Kolbergs, *Porträt einer Stadt. Geschichte Rigas Altstadt* (Riga: Jāņa sēta, 1998), 146–150.



5 Riga, Great Guildhall, the Gothic hall on the ground floor, postcard, ca. 1900, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252846

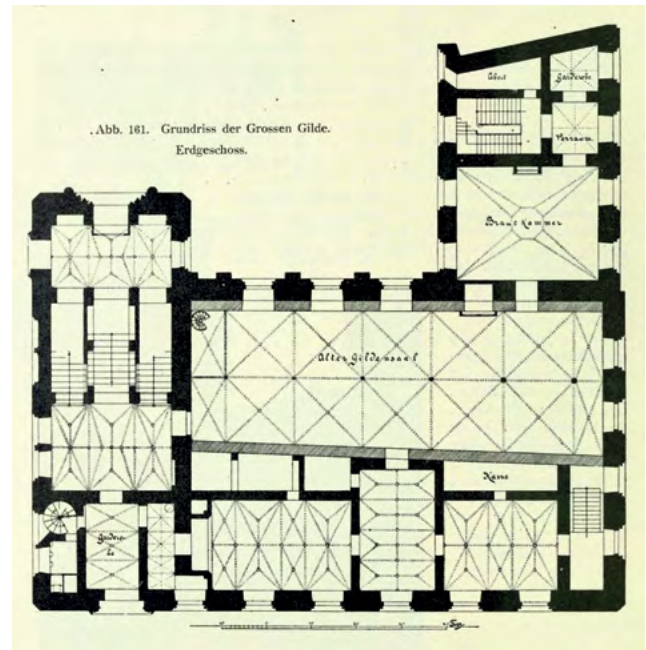


6 Riga, Great Guildhall, Hall of the Newlyweds (Brautkammer), Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252847



The building thus provided a kind of decorative, but at the same time defensive setting for the most valuable rooms inside, illustrating the continuity and power of the Riga merchants. It has been emphasised in contemporary literature that as his models Beyne chose “[die Muster der] ehrwürdigen alten Rathäuser Deutschlands und Belgiens; Gebäude, die einen entscheidenden Charakter an sich tragen und vom Sockel bis zum First im gothischen Baustyl angelegt und ausgeführt sind”.<sup>26</sup> The choice of neo-Gothic forms was probably dictated by a number of factors. Above all, it formed a stylistically compatible setting with the most important rooms of the old building and symbolically complemented them. Also, the palatial/defensive form acted as a guardian and protector, as it were, of the greatest treasure, that is, both the Gothic rooms and the very precious artefacts stored in the guildhall. Perhaps this form was a reference to the guildhall’s former frontier location at the oldest line of defensive walls. A somewhat symbolic manifestation of this location was the gate connecting the two guildhall buildings. The Gothic style also fitted in well with the medieval architecture that still existed in Riga at the time. However, it is significant that the author of the 1861 article pointed to German and Belgian city halls. The frame divisions are reminiscent of Belgian and Dutch city halls, while the pointed-arch, tracery windows, blends and corner turrets can be linked to some North German city halls. The turrets in the avant-corps in the entrance area are also strikingly similar to the Gürzenich in Cologne. The architecture of Riga’s Great Guildhall therefore combined many elements of German architecture and this, as shall be discussed below, was not coincidental. In today’s literature on the subject, it is probably wrong to link the form and style of this building with the English Gothic Revival style, without taking into account the historical context of the building’s construction.<sup>27</sup>

Shortly after work on the Great Guildhall was completed, between 1864 and 1866, a completely new



7 Riga, Great Guildhall, ground floor plan after restructuring. Source: *Riga und seine Bauten* (Riga 1903), 192

building was erected for the Small Guild of St John, that is, the guild of craftsmen, comprising representatives of 36 guilds.<sup>28</sup> The status of craftsmen was lower than that of the merchants, but they were still important actors on the city scene, participating, together with the members of the Great Guild, in the governance of the city. In view of the rebuilding of the Great Guildhall across the street, the small seat of the craftsmen contrasted sharply with the new, grand building of the merchants. The Small Guildhall was built on the site of a Minorite monastery secularised during the Reformation and was also adjacent to the former city walls. It did not have any valuable old interiors, and the building itself (Fig. 10) did not represent great architectural value.<sup>29</sup>

The design of the new building was entrusted to the town architect Johann Daniel Felsko.<sup>30</sup> The history of the construction of this guildhall is interesting because

26. “Das Haus der großen Gilde in Riga”, in *Rigascher Almanach für 1861*, 5.

27. Fülberth, *Riga*, 145–147. The Anglican church built near the cathedral to Felsko’s designs is a testimony to the important English presence in Riga.

28. Concisely on the history of the guild, Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 269–480; on the construction of the new seat, *ibid.*, 493–535.

29. Lāce, “Daniels Felsko un Mazās ģildes pārbūve Rīgā”, 17–19.

30. See Neumann, “Die Gildenhäuser”, 194–196. The redevelopment is discussed at length by Daina Lāce, “Johans Daniels Felsko un Mazās ģildes pārbūve Rīgā”. See also *ead.*, *City Architect of Riga Johann Daniel Felsko (1813–1902)* (Rīga: Riga City Architect’s Office, 2011), 18–21; *ead.*, *Pirmais Rīgas pilsētas arhitekts Johans Daniels Felsko*, 201–213; *ead.*, “Die Tätigkeit des Rigaer Hauptarchitekten Johann Daniel Felsko”, *Studien zur Kunstgeschichte im*



8 Riga, Great Guildhall, Great Hall, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252848

of the changing design concepts. In 1862/1864, Felsko produced as many as three design versions, all of which maintained a neo-Gothic costume.<sup>31</sup> The first and most grandiose one, published in a local technical journal, envisaged a two-storey edifice with a seven-axis central part flanked by extended avant-corps (Figs. 11, 12). A distinct element of the façade were the windows of the first floor, covered with rich sculptural decoration with coats of arms and floral motifs. The entrance led through an extended hall with a monumental staircase to the first floor, where a large hall illuminated by tall, pointed windows with rich tracery was situated. The side avant-corps were crowned by stepped gables with

pinnacles and turrets. They clearly corresponded with the Great Guildhall gable in the entrance avant-corps.

The project sparked widespread discussion in the local press. When the building's size reached the public awareness, voices were raised that it should stand next to the new boulevards established on the site of the former fortifications;<sup>32</sup> this was considered to be the most appropriate area for imposing public buildings. It was pointed out that the design did not need to show extraordinary reverence for the old building, as was the case with the Great Guildhall, as there were no valuable rooms. It was hoped that the municipal authorities would donate suitable land to the guild and

*Baltikum*, ed. Lars Olof Larsson (Kiel: Martin-Carl-Adolf-Böckler-Stiftung, 2003), 71–86. In Poland, on the architect Felsko: Zdzisława and Tomasz Tołłoczko, *Architectura sine historiae nihil est. Z dziejów architektury i urbanistyki ziem Łotwy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, 2013), 171–185 (on the construction of the guilds); the text is unfortunately marred by numerous factual errors.

31. *Notizblatt des Technischen Vereins in Riga*, no. 12 (1862): 60; Lāce, *Pirmais Rīgas pilsētas arhitekts Johans Daniels Felsko*, 204–208.

32. P. H., “Die Neugestaltung Riga’s und die Pietät für historischen Boden”, *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 105 (7 May 1863): 1. See also P. H., “Die Neugestaltung Riga’s und die Pietät für historischen Boden”, *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 20 (16 May 1863): 183–185, and P. H., “Die Neugestaltung Riga’s und die Pietät für historischen Boden”, *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 21 (23 May 1863): 191–193.





9 Riga, Great Guildhall, view of the entrance section, postcard, ca. 1900, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252845

that the institution would therefore not incur the cost of purchasing a plot. Such a solution would have made it possible to display the Great Guildhall “in seiner vollen gothischen Pracht”,<sup>33</sup> in an excellent way, and on the vacated land it was postulated that a park should be established and a monument erected: “Und daß sich die Commune diesem Act der Liberalität sich nicht

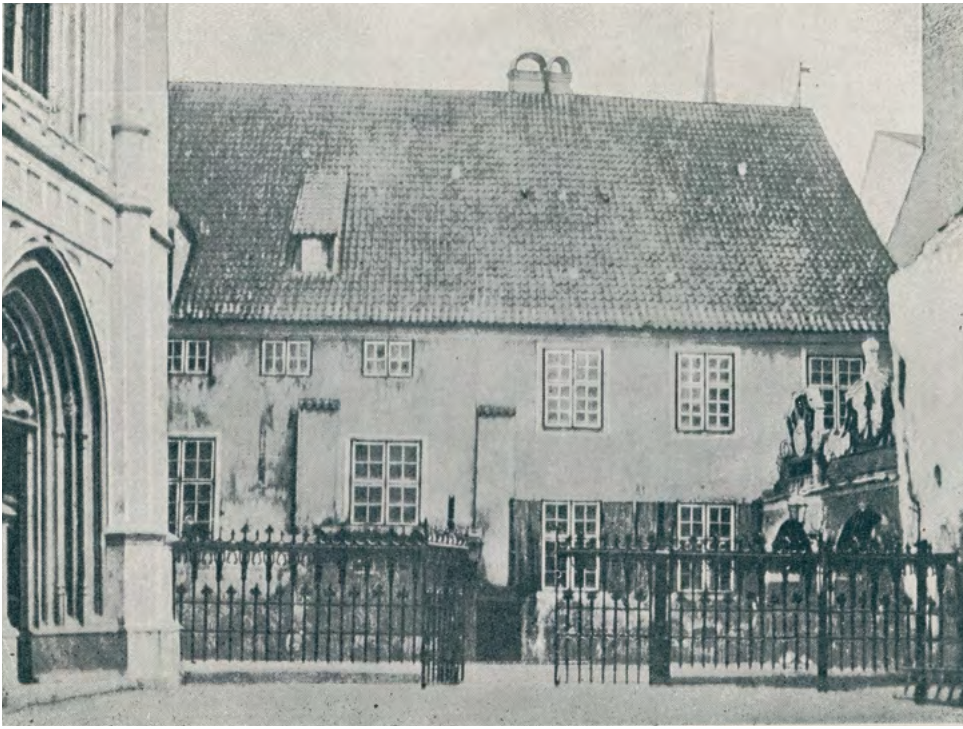
entziehen wird, scheint uns zweifellos zu sein.”<sup>34</sup> It was averred that it would be a reprehensible act (*Frevel*) in the eyes of posterity not to implement this intention.<sup>35</sup> It was also argued that the construction of the stock exchange in the Old Town and the rebuilding of the Great Guildhall were justified by the timing of their implementation, i.e. before the demolition of the

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

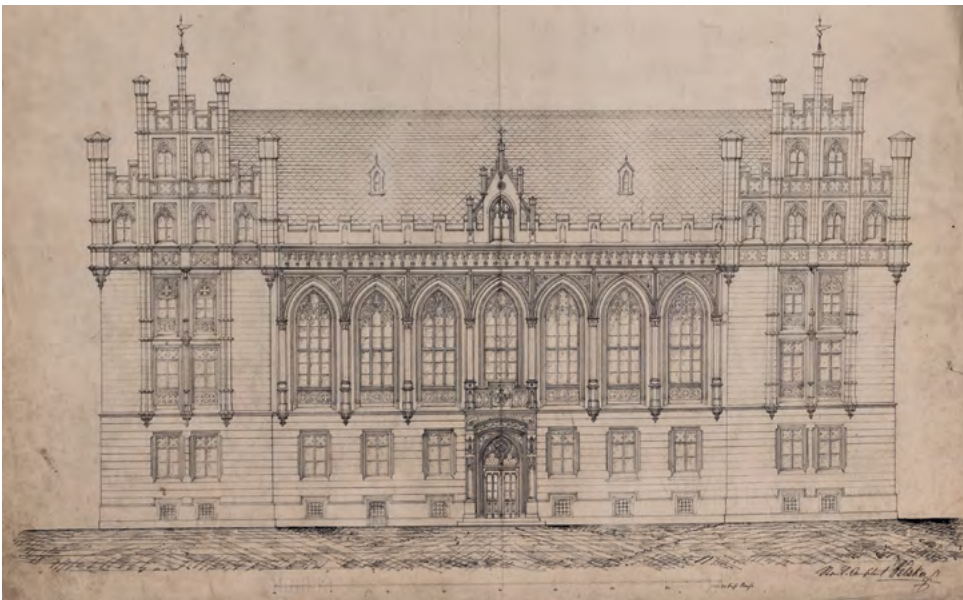
35. P. H., “Die Neugestaltung Riga’s und die Pietät für historischen Boden”, *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 20 (16 May 1863): 185.





10 Riga, Small Guildhall, view before the restructuring, photograph, ca. 1864, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252850

*The entrance to the new building of the Great Guildhall visible on the left; to the right, the gates closing the street leading towards the Old Town.*



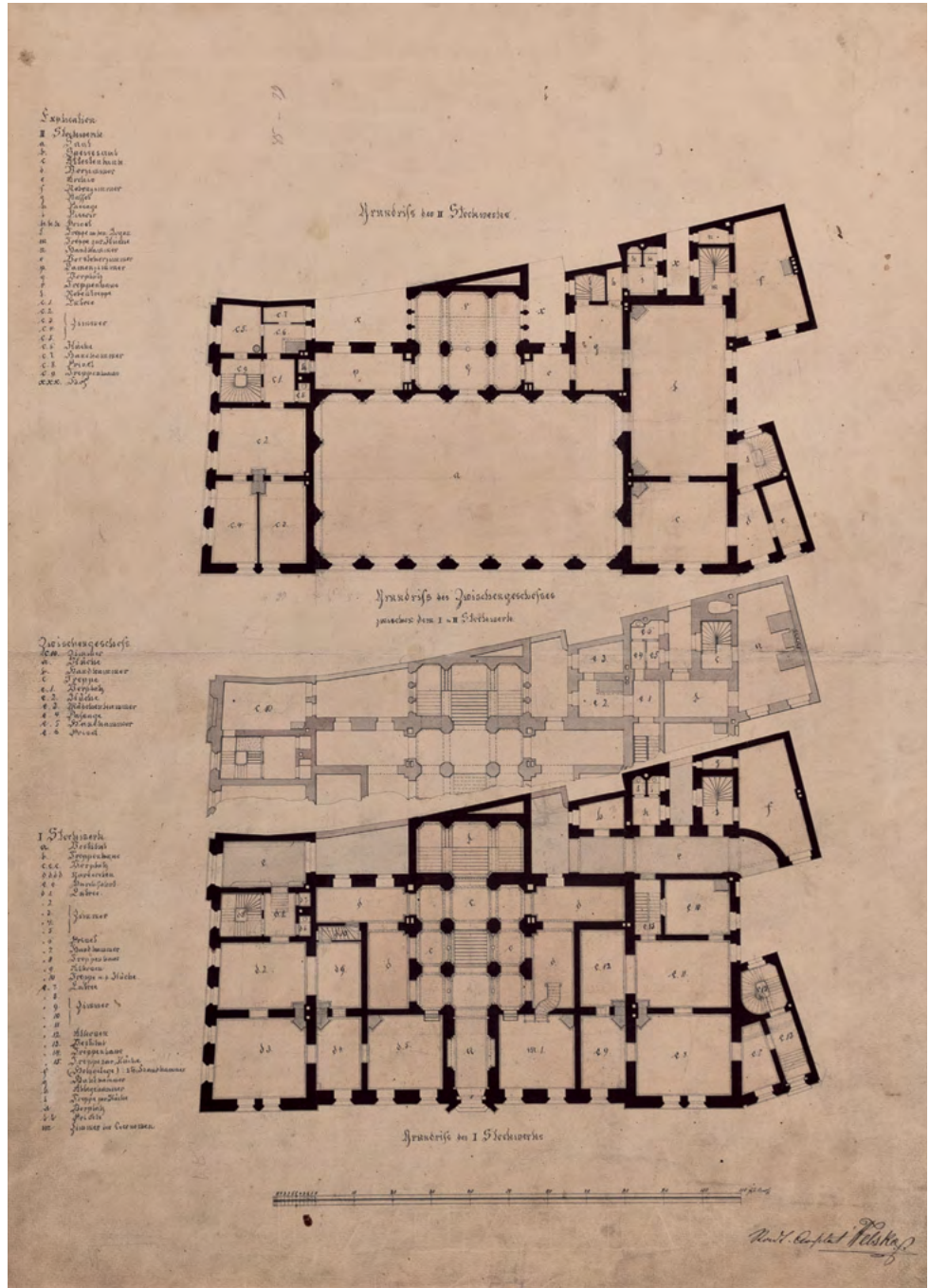
11 Johann Daniel Felsko, first design for the Small Guildhall in Riga (not implemented), front elevation from Amatu ielā, 1862, Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs / Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, inv. no. VRVM 33 278

fortifications, when the boulevards had not yet been laid out; but that in the new spatial situation of the city, after the defortification, all the new, grand buildings should fill the magnificent new space by the promenade: “Es ist vorzugsweise wünschenswert, daß öffentliche Gebäude die neuen Stadtteile zieren, weil gerade solche ihnen nicht nur einen höheren Wert verleihen, indem die anderweitige Bauten veranlassen, sondern auch

ihnen selbst ein freieres Fels zu ihrer eigenen zweckmäßigeren und schöneren Anlage sich darbietet”.<sup>36</sup> The development of a narrow Old Town street would create a “Bürgerwinkel” instead of a “Gildenplatz” and worsen the already dramatically cramped conditions in the city.<sup>37</sup> Given that the plan of old Riga was very irregular and the streets winding and narrow, the argument concerning the modernisation of cramped buildings

36. “Wo soll das Haus der kleinen Gilde stehen?”, *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 110 (14 May 1863): 2.  
37. *Ibid.*

12 Johann Daniel Felsko, first design for the Small Guildhall in Riga (not implemented), ground and first floor plans, 1862, Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs / Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, inv. no. VRVM 33 278

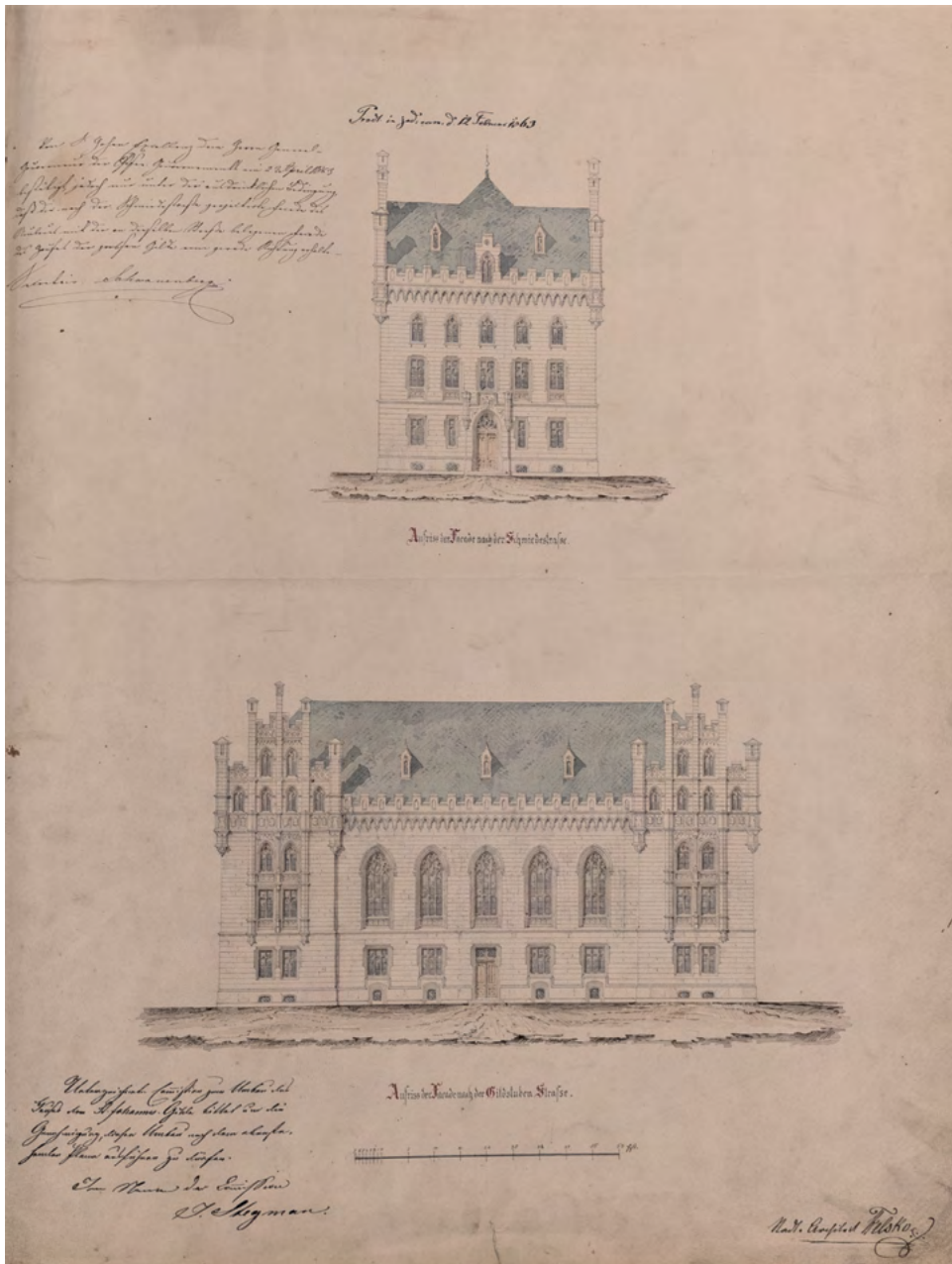


was convincing. This discussion is puzzling in that it took place in May and June 1863, while the announcement that the guild had purchased the neighbouring houses and was preparing a development on the plot of land it owned had been released as early as in March. It was also announced that the new building (in the

first design version) would be used not only for guild meetings, but also for balls, concerts and restaurant receptions; it would therefore be a building with a much larger number of functions and rooms than the Great Guildhall.<sup>38</sup> Those opposed to the implementation of the first concept presented by Felsko raised the very

38. "Ein neues Projekt für den Bau des St. Johannis-Gilden-Hauses, beleuchtet von einem Gliede der Johannisgilde", *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 129 (6 June 1863): 1, 2. As demonstrated by Lāce, the author of the article was a member of the Little Guild, Friedrich Georg Brunstermann, Lāce, "Johans Daniels Felsko un Mazās ģildes pārbūve Rīgā", 23; ead., *Pirmais Rīgas pilsētas arhitekts Johans Daniels Felsko*, 210. See also "Ueber den Bau des Hauses der kleinen Gilde", *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, no. 38 (19 September 1863): 347-349.





13 Johann Daniel Felsko, second design for the Small Guildhall in Riga (not implemented), late 1862, Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs / Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, inv. no. VRVM 33 278

high cost of construction. Their reasoning was that the guild could not afford such a magnificent building and would have to take out a high loan for its erection.<sup>39</sup> It seems that Felsko's wonderful design would indeed have looked much better on the boulevards (see Figs. 1, 2). In the narrow streets it would have been seen in a highly abbreviated perspective and would have completely dominated the Great Guildhall. Furthermore,

its multifunctional character would pose a challenge to the merchants' building. A massive press campaign, including the publication of the design in a professional Riga technical journal<sup>40</sup> – a move that made it widely known – also primed the public opinion for a critical attitude towards the concept.

Objections to the cost of such a large investment caused Felsko to rework his design, considerably

39. "Projekte zum Umbau des Hauses der St. Johannis-Gilde", *Notizblatt des Technischen Vereins in Riga*, no. 12 (1862): 60.

40. Lāce, *Pirmais Rīgas pilsētas arhitekts Johans Daniels Felsko*, 208–209.





14 Design for the Small Guildhall in Riga by an unknown author, elevations, June 1863, Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs / Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, inv. no. VRVM 33 278, Plate 36



15 Design for the Small Guildhall in Riga by an unknown author, June 1863, projection, Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs / Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, inv. no. VRVM 33 278, Plate 37

reducing the size and decoration (Fig. 13).<sup>41</sup> However, in the spring of 1863, when preparations were being made to begin construction works, the debate over the location of the guildhall and its costs flared up again. A programmatic article of June 1863 detailed the cost objections and proposed the erection of a smaller building using older convent buildings.<sup>42</sup> The article prompted a petition from 135 guild members to seek a cheaper design. A sketch of a new design variant (Figs. 14, 15), by an unknown architect, was added to the petition.<sup>43</sup> In the face of numerous objections, both of a financial nature and, it seems, ones having prestige overtones (the latter perhaps raised by the merchants), it was finally decided to abandon the earlier, monumental version of the building. On the basis of the sketch provided, Felsko drew up a new design version, in which he only

slightly modified the interior, replacing the rectangular, three-nave hall with an impressive polygonal hall leading to a grand staircase (Figs. 16, 17). Reducing the size of the edifice made it possible to carry out the recommended widening of the street and to remove the double gate that once separated the enclosed area of the two guildhalls divided by a metal fence.<sup>44</sup> Communication routes in this very dense area were thus modernised. The new spatial arrangement made it possible to delineate a garden square on a part of the plot and to open up a spectacular view of the Great Guildhall, but it deprived the institution of many previously designed rooms and functions.

In his sketch, the unknown architect proposed to give the building an original form with a mixed palace and villa character. This version was relied upon by

41. “Ein neues Projekt für den Bau des St. Johannis Gilden-Hauses, beleuchtet von einem Gliede der Joh. Gilde”, *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 129 (6 June 1863): 1, 2; Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 495.

42. Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 495.

43. Each of the passages in the gate led to one of the two guildhalls, Neuland, *Kurze Geschichte*, 85.

44. This is evident from the analysis of the window openings and spatial solutions visible in the plan.



16 Johann Daniel Felsko, third design for the Small Guildhall in Riga (implemented), elevation, 1863, Valsts kultūras pieminekļu aizsardzības inspekcija / State Inspectorate for the Protection of Cultural Monuments

→ 17 Johann Daniel Felsko, third design for the Small Guildhall in Riga (implemented), ground and first floor plans, 1863. Source: *Riga und seine Bauten* (Riga 1903), 194

Felsko, who appears to have altered little of this anonymous author's proposal.<sup>45</sup> The final concept and size of the building, however, differed significantly from his original idea. The seven-axis, two-storey façade consisted of a relatively low ground floor and a high *piano nobile* with a great hall. The pointed-arched tracery windows were divided by lesenes connecting to an elaborate arcaded cornice crowned with a crenellation, which made the composition similar to the framework divisions of the Great Guildhall façade, but at the same time was a clear reference to Felsko's first design. The entrance, which led to a polygonal hall and a ceremonial staircase, was designed much more modestly than in previous versions. The symmetry of the façade was broken up by the side turrets with statues of the patron saint of the Small Guild, St John; there was a staircase inside each turret. The picturesque garden elevation, in turn, was different, since it copied the design by the unknown author (Fig. 18). It was asymmetrical, with a diversified composition created by a three-bay driveway with an entrance leading to the meeting room, a lofty polygonal

stair tower topped with a crenellation, and a retracted part of the building in which small office rooms were located. Only the fairly tall tower remained from the original concept of side avant-corps with gables.

The interior of the building was very rich, not only filled with valuable artefacts but, above all, emphasising the Germanness of the edifice at every turn. The entrance to the ceremonial staircase was decorated with *spolia*: figures of Roman warriors rescued from the demolished city gate, the Sandtor. Thus, the members of the guild became, in a way, the guardians of tradition and the past, which was of great importance for the symbolism of the institution.<sup>46</sup> The interior of the building was extremely impressive, filled not only with valuable collections, but above all with mottoes at every turn, which emphasised the Germanness of the building, since "nach altem Brauch, an passenden Stellen altdeutsche Kern-, Denk- und Sinnsprüche angebracht, wie sie in alten Zeiten 'zum Nutz und Frommen' wohl in keinem Amts- oder Gildenhause fehlen durften".<sup>47</sup>

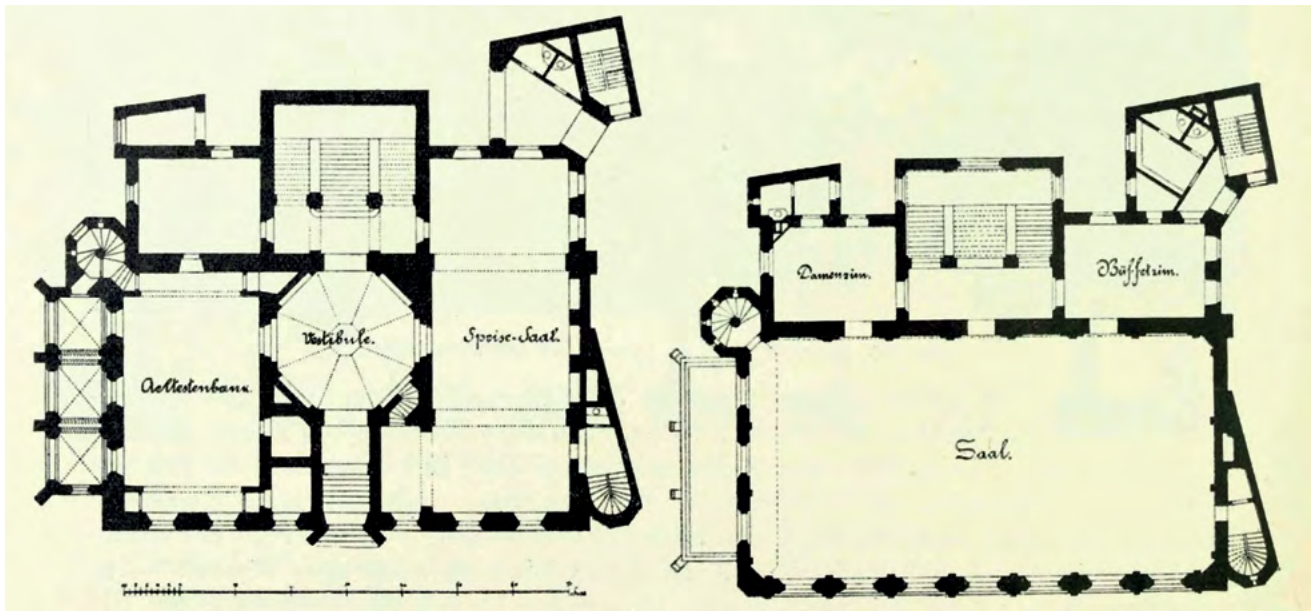
The German connection was proclaimed by numerous

45. Neuland, *Kurze Geschichte*, 96.

46. Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 500–535. Brunstermann's very detailed description of all the plaques, inscriptions, portraits, paintings, coat-of-arms shields, etc., is in itself very interesting and could be used to analyse both the creation of a specific identity image of the guild members at the time of the opening of the edifice and its filling with new content related to political events in the following years.

47. A very detailed description of the interior of Little Guild of St John: Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 501–535. A full description: *Das Haus der St. Johannis-Gilde in Riga. II. Theil* (Riga: H. Birchardt's Druckerei, 1890). A detailed account of the discussions on the designs: Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 495–496; on stained glass, *ibid.*, 499; also Lāce, "Johans Daniels Felsko un Mazās gildes pārbūve Rīgā", 25; Neuland, *Kurze Geschichte*, 92–123. A very





inscriptions in German, commemorative plaques, coat-of-arms shields, as well as stained-glass windows made, as in the Great Guildhall, in the well-known stained-glass atelier of Alois Freystadt in Hanover (Fig. 19). The coats of arms of cities indicated Riga's commercial ties; they included the coats of arms of the Russian cities of St Petersburg, Moscow and Narva, of the Latvian cities of Liepāja (Libau) and Ventspils (Windau), of the Estonian cities of Tallinn (Reval) and Kuressaare (Arensburg, Kingissepa), and of the German cities of Lübeck, Rostock, Hamburg, Stettin, Memel, Danzig, Königsberg and Bremen. It is worth mentioning that the coats of arms of cities also decorated the Great Guildhall. The new building was opened in 1866.

In the view from the garden side, the two guildhalls were clearly visible and formed a complementary, picturesque composition in the spirit of a medieval castle. Both remained in the Old Town area, symbolically still anchored in the history of the city and in places with which merchants and craftsmen had been associated for centuries. Elements of modernity manifested

themselves in the widening of the street, the establishment of a garden square (albeit fenced off from the street and therefore semi-public) and the removal of the gates that once enclosed the premises of both guildhalls. But the most distinctive feature of both seats was the choice of elements of the Gothic style. This was intended as the strongest link between the past and the present. The local press described it as follows:

Zum Baustyl ist das Gotische gewählt, und dadurch dem Gildenhause der Charakter einer Zeit verliehen, aus welchem sich das Entstehen der alten Zünfte und Erblicken der ehrenwerter Gilden „am deren Mitte große Meister und Werke hervorgegangen“, herschreibt und in welcher auch der Gotische Styl, mit dem damaligen Geist der Zeit verwachsen, bei Ausführung jeglicher Art von Bauten Anwendung fand, sowie auch dem Andenken an eine ruhmreiche Vergangenheit Rechnung getragen. Ein zweiter beachtenswerter Grund, der für die Wahl des Gotischen Styls spricht, ist der, da durch die Anwendung desselben an dem Hause der kleinen Gilde, nachdem das Haus der großen Gilde bereits im Gotischen Styl erbaut ist, der beide Gebäude in sich schließende Stadtteil auf

detailed description of the interiors of the Great Guild is given in the guide to Riga: Constantin Metig, *Illustrierter Führer durch Riga und Umgebung und Kunö* (Riga: von Jonck & Poliewsky, 1914), 60–67. The Great Guild contained the coats of arms of 46 Hanseatic cities: Wisby, Polotsk, Bergen, London, Bruges, Novgorod, Lübeck, Soest, Münster, Bremen, Hamburg, Rostock, Danzig, Königsberg, Elbing, Stettin, Wismar, Stralsund, Dorpat, Tallinn, Narva, Greiswald, Kolberg, Lüneburg, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Dortmund, Brunswick, Goslar, Amsterdam, Cologne, Arensburg, Hapsal (Haapsalu), Parnawa, Wolmar (Valmiera), Vindava, Fellin (Viljandi), Wesenberg, Weitzenstein, Kokenhuafen (Koknese), Lemsal (Limbaži), Roop (Straupe), Kies (Wenden, Cēsis) and Piltyn (Piltene). Baltic ports and North German Hanseatic cities predominated, but the coats of arms of the most important Latvian and Estonian cities with which trade contacts were maintained were also included; *ibid.*, 62.





18 Riga, Small Guildhall, view from the garden. Source: *Die Aeltestenbank der St. Johannis-Gilde ihrem Aeltermann Fr. Brustermann zur freundlichen Erinnerung gewidmet 1885*

eine die Vergangenheit ehrende Weise besondere Bedeutung erhalten und die Behandlung beider in ihrem Zweck verwenden Gildenhäuser bei gleichen Styl-Ausbildung ein harmonisches Ganzes bilden würde.<sup>48</sup>

Already the first designs made for the Great Guildhall by Olthoff were described as “theatrical Gothic”, Felsko’s designs of 1844 also followed this style, and Beyne’s concept confirmed this trend. Felsko therefore conformed to the imposed concept for a number of

reasons. His designs represent a synthesis of the stylistic forms favoured in the northern German countries, representing a phase of transition from a romantic fascination with the English Gothic to one based on a deeper historical study of German medieval architecture evident in the construction of the Bremen Stock Exchange or Julius Carl Raschdorff’s extension of the Gürzenich in Cologne.

Felsko’s first design for the Small Guildhall of St John in 1863 is a demonstration of his excellent knowledge of these implementations and of the architectural publications, especially magazines, of the time. This elaborate and decorative edifice, with almost palace-like forms, superbly resolved in the interior, with a monumental staircase and a great hall on the first floor, would, according to the architect’s intention, have corresponded perfectly to the guild members’ need for ceremonial. However, it seems that the most important motive for choosing this stylistic costume was to emphasise the Germanness of both buildings. Both were made for merchants and craftsmen, who were predominantly German and who maintained close commercial ties with German cities. Giving the buildings a Gothic Revival form and incorporating relics of older buildings (the Great Guildhall) into their walls was a confirmation of the continuity of the institutions that had been founded in the late Middle Ages and of the German identity of their members. In a way, the new buildings strengthened the unique national status of Riga’s merchant/craftsman elite, who confirmed their German roots and connections at every step.

Around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic Revival style was used, albeit rarely, in buildings associated with the activities of merchants and craftsmen, i.e. stock exchanges and guildhalls. Undoubtedly the most famous edifice of this type was the Antwerp Stock Exchange, considered one of the most important stock exchanges in Europe. In 1852, its late-Gothic seat was covered with a magnificent cast-iron structure in the form of a neo-Gothic dome (concept by Charles Marceliss).<sup>49</sup> A fire in the building in 1858 caused the complete collapse of this canopy. A competition was announced in the same year and repeated in 1860. Both competitions, as well as the competition for the Berlin Stock Exchange (1858), were a breakthrough in the

48. *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 53 (5 March 1863): 3.

49. On stock exchange buildings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including in particular the Antwerp stock exchange, see Sonja Anna Meseure, *Die Architektur der Antwerpener Börse und der europäischen Börsenbau im 19. Jahrhundert* (München: Scaneg, 1987), 27ff.

search for stylistic forms for stock exchange buildings, an increasingly popular architectural task in European metropolises. The stylistic patterns initially referred to Classicism (Paris, St. Petersburg, Königsberg, Moscow, Warsaw at the latest), then to the Renaissance (Stettin, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg), and finally combining the Renaissance with the Baroque (Berlin). Around the middle of the century there also appeared a group of buildings with revivalist elements in the Gothic style. Prominent among these were, in Germany, the stock exchange in Bremen with its spectacular, church-like form, designed by the city's most popular architect Heinrich Müller (1861–1864), and the stock exchange in Breslau, built between 1864 and 1867 according to the design by the local artist Carl Lüdecke.<sup>50</sup> However, the choice of the Gothic style was generally very rare. Such constructions tended to be erected where, around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conflict on the basis of nationality and/or religion intensified among the merchant community and the economic elite.<sup>51</sup>

The buildings in Riga, a city that had belonged to Russia since 1721 and had been dominated by the German bourgeoisie for centuries, are a special case in point. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Riga's fairly stable arrangement in terms of the hegemony of the German bourgeoisie began to gradually disintegrate. The activity of Russian government officials and merchants, the emergence of competition from Jewish merchants, the aspirations of Latvians and Estonians to gain influence, and finally Tsar Alexander II's reforms to unify state governance raised questions about the identity of the Germans living in the Baltic provinces and their role in the system of power.<sup>52</sup> This was also a period of rapid development of cultural and social life, which was reflected in the

emergence of numerous nationally profiled societies.<sup>53</sup> The uncertainty of German circles manifested itself, on the one hand, in an attempt to define the identity of Germans as a national group, and on the other, in an effort to consolidate their political, social and cultural position.<sup>54</sup>

A telling illustration of these processes is the large article that appeared in the "Rigascher Almanach" in 1863, i.e. exactly at the same time as the discussion on the shape of the Small Guildhall was taking place. The "Rigascher Almanach" was a yearbook, a kind of calendar addressed to a wide, multinational but German-speaking audience; it contained a detailed calendar for the whole year, lists of offices, officials, institutions of various kinds, prices, postal ports, statistical data, etc. It also included articles on the most important new and old buildings in Riga, short stories, poems, etc. A 19-page essay entitled "Beiträge zur Charakteristik unserer Provinzialen", published in 1863, perfectly captures the positioning process of the Baltic Germans at a time when their status in social structures, which had been established for centuries, imperceptibly began to waver:

Die Bewohner der Ostseeprovinzen nicht eben viel von sich hören lassen, sondern ein isoliertes, in sich abgeschlossenes Dasein abspinnen; unsere Zustände sind von denen Deutschlands nach Außen hin nicht wesentlich verschieden genug, um die Wissbegier unserer Stammesgenossen rege zu machen; nach anderer Seite hin von diesen wiederum so abweichend, dass sie nicht für ihnen homogen gelten können. Im Inneren des russischen Reichs ist man den baltischen Zuständen gleichfalls im Allgemeinen fremd; die Abneigung der Russen und Polen gegen diejenigen Deutschen, die in jenen Ländern zerstreut leben, wird in vielen Fällen auf die Landsleute derselben am Ostseestrande übertragen und man fühlt

50. Agnieszka Zabłocka-Kos, "The 'Merchant Schism' in Breslau: A Christian-Jewish Conflict and the Construction of the Exchange Building in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 120 (2019): 79–112. <https://doi.org/10.12775/APH.2019.120.04>; ead., "'The First Such Liberal Undertaking in Breslau'. The Breslau Competition for the Design of the New Exchange Building in 1863", *Quart*, no. 1 (2020): 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.11588/quart.2020.1>.

51. I study this phenomenon primarily in relation to German-speaking areas.

52. *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Baltische Länder*, ed. Gert von Pistohlkors, Hein von zur Möhlen (Berlin: Siedler, 1994), 374ff.

53. *Vereinskultur und Zivilgesellschaft in Nordosteuropa. Regionale Spezifik und europäische Zusammenhänge*, ed. Jörg Hackmann (Wien: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

54. Extensively on this topic: Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*. On the inhabitants of Riga by ethnic divisions: *Riga. Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857–1914*, ed. Erwin Oberländer, Kristine Wohlfart (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 2004).



sich nicht eben gedungen, von dem, was an der Düna oder am Embach passiert, mehr Notiz zu nehmen, als notwendig ist. So werden die Ostseeprovinzialen von den Russen zu den Deutschen, von der Bewohner Deutschland zu den Russen gezählt und es geschieht am Ende häufig, dass sie selbst nicht wissen, was sie eigentlich sind oder sein sollen.<sup>55</sup>

The above text shows how precarious the German identity was in the Baltic governorates, how it was feared for, and how the sense of threat and the need to defend this bastion of Germanness grew. In order to emphasise the Baltic Germans' belonging to the German cultural circle, the author asserted: "So bietet unsere baltische Colonie ein getreues Miniaturbild des deutschen Stammlandes, das vor der Fülle seiner einzelnen, häufig interessanten, immer tief begründeten und doch nicht immer berechtigten Individualitäten zu keiner Einheit kommen kann".<sup>56</sup>

And further on, he argued:

Wir sind aber insgesamt ächte Colonisten [emphasis in the original text] bewusst oder unbewusst verrathen wir es, daß kein Volk hinter uns steht, daß wir uns auf einem Boden bewegen, aus dem unsere Individuen erwachsen sind, nicht aber unsere innerste Nationalindividualität hervorgegangen ist, den wir mit dem Schwerte erobert haben und seit siebenhundert Jahren vertheidigen, einst mit dem Waffen der Gewalt, heute mit denen des Rechts, der Intelligenz und der natürlichen Ueberlegenheit über die Ureinwohner. Der Deutsche in den Ostseeprovinzen, mag er dem Adel oder dem Bürgerstande angehören, mag es ein eingewandter Proletarier, oder auch nur ein sogenannter Klein- und Halbdeutscher sein, als ächter Colonist ist er zugleich geborener Aristokrat, der sich seiner Überlegenheit über die Eingeborenen, mag dieselbe eine reale oder eine eingebil-dete sein, zu jeder Stunde bewusst ist. In dieser Thatsache liegen alle unsere Provinzialeigentümlichkeiten, unsere Mängel, wie unsere Tugenden begründet; aus ihr ist es zu erklären, da wir dem Ausländer durch unsere größere Formengewandtheit und gesellschaftliche Glätte auf-fallen; das häufig karrikierte, immer stolze Bewusstsein

ein Deutscher und als solcher ein Culturapostel zu sein, erhebt den ärmsten Kleinbürger über seine lettische, estnische Umgebung und erfüllt ihn mit der Prätension, eine gewisse Geltung zu haben.<sup>57</sup>

The text therefore reached many of Riga's inhabitants, not only Germans, but also Jews, whose upper classes identified with German culture.<sup>58</sup> It was probably intended to make them realise that the leading role in political and social life was, and would continue to be, played by Germans. In the above context, the two guild-halls take on a new significance. They were a kind of "confession of faith", a carrier of the "apostolic tradition of spreading culture", and through their style, interior decoration, German proverbs and inscriptions, they became part of a distant homeland and linked to the "Stammesgenossen". They also served as a reminder of the centuries-old trade ties linking Riga to the Hanseatic League cities. This reference to the Hanseatic League was certainly not coincidental, for in the new historical realities of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century their recollection was related to the reconstruction and consolidation of Riga's international position in European trade.

It is worth mentioning that also in Tallinn (Reval) at this time, the seat of the Craft Guild of St. Canute (1863) was restructured in the spirit of a rather modest neo-Gothic.<sup>59</sup> Despite its unpretentious outlook, the resultant building was considered to be the most beautiful new edifice in the city.

The much-feared event – the slow dismantling of the old system of municipal government – came to pass while the Small Guildhall was still under construction. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1860s (sic!), municipal power was divided between three curiae formed by the city council and representatives of two guilds. The first curia included possessors of assets worth above 15,000 roubles, the second, above 5,000 roubles.<sup>60</sup> They were usually members of both the Great Guild and the Small Guild at the same time. When the first drafts of

55. Julius Echardt, "Beiträge zur Charakteristik unserer Provinzialen", in *Rigascher Almanach für 1863* (Riga: Wilhelm Ferdinand Häcker, 1863), 31–49, here 31–32.

56. Ibid., 33.

57. Ibid., 35–36.

58. On the role of Riga trade and municipal authorities, Svetlana Bogojavlenska, *Die jüdische Gesellschaft in Kurland und Riga 1795–1915* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 138–153.

59. Lāce, "Johans Daniels Felsko un Mazās gildes pārbūve Rīgā", 17.

60. Markus Lux, "Das Riga der Deutschen", in *Riga. Porträt einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857–1914*, 96.



19 Riga, Small Guildhall, interior of the hall on the ground floor, postcard, Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Marburg, Campe Collection, no. 252851

the reform of this system were drawn up in 1863,<sup>61</sup> there was a talk of dissolving the estate system and granting municipal citizenship (*Bürgerschaft*) only to persons of Christian faith, with property worth at least 3,000 roubles and income above 500 roubles. Representatives of the municipal authorities, exclusively Germans, sought an extension of the existing principles of city management and the special status of the Baltic governorates, fearing, rightly so, a loss of influence and position. This discussion was reflected in ideas for the reconstruction of the guildhalls. The idea of demolishing both buildings and constructing a single edifice was put forward.<sup>62</sup> The two curiae in the municipal council were merged in 1866; this move heralded the reform of the municipal government system. In 1865, the freedom to practise

crafts (*Gewerbefreiheit*) was introduced in the Baltic governorates, which undermined the prestige of the Small Guild and the importance of the guilds, taking away their control of craft production.<sup>63</sup>

A new “Law on Cities” concerning Riga was discussed until 1877, with six different variants being developed. On 26 March 1877, however, a tsarist decree was promulgated, introducing a new law on cities also in the Baltic governorates; first enacted on 16 June 1870, from now on it covered the remaining cities of the empire as well (with the exception of the Kingdom of Poland, where it was never introduced). From now on, Riga was to be governed by a magistrate and a municipal *duma*, elected on a completely new basis.<sup>64</sup> The medieval privileges of the guilds were thus finally abolished and these

61. In detail, Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 536ff.

62. *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 114 (18 May 1863): 3.

63. Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 536.

64. The residents were divided into three tax classes. A total of 5212 persons had the right to elect 72 councillors; in this total, tax class III had 4410 members, tax class II, 629 members, and tax class I, 173 members out of a population of about 160,000; Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 540. This was therefore about 6% of the men (excluding the Jews, who had no legal entitlement) eligible to vote. For a detailed account of the municipal election system, Lux, “Das Riga der Deutschen”, 87–90, here 88; Bernhard Hollander, *Riga im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Rückblick* ((Riga: Verlag der Buchhandlung Löffler, 1926),), 82ff; also Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 539–541.



institutions were out of necessity transformed into organisations of a private and social nature, even though they continued to play an important role in the charity system of care for the poor and the behind-the-scenes control of power.<sup>65</sup> The guilds still tried to maintain their status: the ceremonial meetings of the new *duma* were held in the Small Guildhall and the inaugural speech referred to its medieval tradition.<sup>66</sup> Although the new municipal authorities were still dominated by the Germans, their preponderance being assured by an electoral law based on a wealth censorship, the process of the German elite's loss of influence accelerated. Among the attempts to counteract it were the great modernisation of the interiors of the Small Guildhall and their even stronger "Germanisation" (with new stained glass windows, frescoes etc.).<sup>67</sup>

The introduction of the judicial reform in 1889 and Russian as the official language finally put an end to the system of city governance that had existed since the Middle Ages and was linked to the domination of the German bourgeoisie.<sup>68</sup> The farewell words spoken at the last meeting of the municipal *duma* in the old make-up, which took place on 27 November 1889 were: "Mit dem Rat der Stadt Riga wird der letzte festgestaltete Verfassungskörper verschwunden sein, dessen Anfänge in die Anfangszeit des Deutschtums, der Zivilisation und des Christentums in Livland hinaufreichen."<sup>69</sup>

The first *duma* meeting at which Russian was already the compulsory language was held a week later, on 4 December 1889.<sup>70</sup> The Germans, most of whom

had little or no knowledge of this language, were thus almost excluded from office.

#### CONCLUSION

The admiring exclamation: "Schon steht in wunderbarer Verjüngung das Haus der großen Gilde da, ein edles Bild blühender Kraft, eine in Stein gebaute Deutsche Eiche!" was written in 1863<sup>71</sup>. An oak tree was considered, among others, to be a symbol of fidelity, firmness and perseverance; in this case, these meanings were further strengthened by its being made a "German oak built of stone", a synonym for Germanness in the Romantic German culture. A specific reference, however, was made to a magazine published twice a week in Heidelberg from 1850 onwards. Its subtitle proclaimed it to be "Zeitschrift zur Förderung deutschen Sinnes, deutscher Gesittung und deutscher Reinsprache durch Belehrung und Unterhaltung". The programmatic article in the first issue contained an observation on the meaning of the German oak: "Die deutsche Eiche war von jeher ein Sinnbild deutscher Stärke, Kraft und deutschen Sinnes. Kraft und Stärke aber werden und bestehen nur in und durch Eintracht – durch Vereinigung aller deutschen Bruderstämme zu einem großen Ganzen, zu einer gleichgesinnten brüderlichen Hausschaft (Familie)". The aim of the magazine was to be "deutsche Eintracht, deutsches Leben und deutschen Sinn durch reine deutsche Sprache zu wecken, deutsche

65. Hollander, *Riga im 19. Jahrhundert*, 63ff.

66. Brunstermann, *Die Geschichte*, 541–543.

67. See *Das Haus der St. Johannis-Gilde in Riga. II. Theil*.

68. Lux, "Das Riga der Deutschen", 89.

69. Hollander, *Riga im 19. Jahrhundert*, 9.

70. On the course of the Russification of the Baltic governorates and on the elections: Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit*, 172ff; *Der Stadt Riga Verwaltung und Haushalt in den Jahren 1878–1900. In Veranlassung des 700 jährigen Bestehens Rigas unter Mitwirkung v. A. V. Berkholz, A. Blumenbach, Emil v. Boetticher, u. a.*, ed. N. Carlberg (Riga: Verlag der Müllerschen Buchdruckerei, 1900); Karsten Brüggemann, "Als Land und Leute 'russisch' werden sollten. Zum Verständnis des Phänomens der 'Russifizierung' am Beispiel der Ostseeprovinzen", in *Kampf um Wort und Schrift. Russifizierung in Osteuropa im 19.–20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Zaur Gasimov (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 27–50; *Russland an der Ostsee. Imperiale Strategien der Macht und kulturelle Wahrnehmungsmuster (16. bis 20. Jahrhundert) / Russia on the Baltic. Imperial Strategies of Power and Cultural Patterns of Perception (16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, ed. Bradley D. Woodworth, Karsten Brüggemann (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 2012); Karsten Brüggemann, *Licht und Luft des Imperiums. Legitimations- und Repräsentationsstrategien russischer Herrschaft in den Ostseeprovinzen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018).

71. Cf. note 1.

Bildung zu fördern, zu stärken und für und für zu erhalten [all emphases in the original text].<sup>72</sup> This was the role of Riga's two guildhalls, designed by architects of German origin. Through their forms, thoughtfully chosen styling and interior decoration, they were meant to unite the Baltic Germans with the "motherland", to create and support the cultural togetherness so necessary in a diaspora, to buttress their strength and to give meaning to the activities of the German elite who had been established in Riga for centuries, but were

strangers to the Russian state. The guildhalls in Riga stand out, in particular, when compared to buildings erected at the initiative of merchants in Europe, which were generally given neo-Renaissance forms. The Riga edifices constitute "political architecture" and emphasise the importance of the national diaspora threatened by the Russian state. In the face of the political changes that took place in the 1880s, these magnificent structures became the last visual manifesto and testimony to the former power of German elites.

72. *Die Deutsche Eiche. Erste Zeitschrift zur Förderung deutschen Sinnes, deutscher Gesittung und deutscher Reinsprache durch Belehrung und Unterhaltung*, no. 1 (Heidelberg: Brugger, 1850), 1, 2.

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