

*Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der Einwohner der Stadt Pernau 1702–1800*, bearbeitet von Raimo Pullat, Tallin 2005, Estopol, 463 pp., index of persons and place names.

Posthumous inventories have for several score years been attracting the interest of historians in many countries, e.g. in Poland, Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Posthumous inventories are a specific source for they give the researcher the unique chance of getting an almost direct insight into the existence of persons who died a long time ago. This seemingly impersonal document, drawn

up by an official scribe, usually contains a detailed description of the house in which the deceased lived, its interior arrangement and equipment, from the bedroom, dining room, drawing rooms to the kitchen (the furniture, bed clothes, utensils, paintings, books, musical instruments, etc.); it also enumerates personal belongings, even the most intimate ones (clothes, underwear, toilet articles). It allows the researcher to reconstruct not only the material situation and living conditions of the deceased but also his/her tastes, hobbies, level of education and interests, as well as the way he and his family spent their leisure time. Without the information contained in these inventories it would have been impossible to develop research on everyday life, another field of historiography which has been very popular and fruitful during the last few decades.

Thanks to the initiative and work of Raimo Pullat, a well known researcher into the history of Tallinn and Hanseatic trade, the capital of Estonia has for the last few years been a centre of intensive research in this field. Under the motto *Modus vivendi* Pullat has organised two conferences (in 2002 and 2005) which were attended not only by Estonian scholars but also by researchers from many other countries (Germany, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Canada and Iceland). These meetings discussed everyday life in the towns of northern Europe, from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, and the authors of many papers used posthumous inventories as their main source. R. Pullat himself has recently published three monumental volumes in which he presented the inventories of the property of German merchants who lived in Tallinn in the 18th century<sup>1</sup>. The publication was received with great interest and has been reviewed in many periodicals<sup>2</sup>.

We have now received another volume by Pullat which contains the texts of 53 inventories of the inhabitants of Pärnu from the years 1702–1800. Pärnu, a sea port on the Gulf of Riga, which belonged to Poland for some time and was occupied by Sweden in 1617 and taken by Russia in 1710, was still an important centre of Baltic trade in the 18th century. The inventories gathered in the volume provide a picture of all sections of the population: merchants and craftsmen representing various trades (baker, purse maker, furrier, shoemaker, goldsmith, joiner, saddler, blacksmith, bricklayer, tanner, butcher, confectioner), journeymen, persons connected with the Church (minister, organist), representatives of the preintelligentsia (pharmacist, book-keeper, professor, teacher, surgeon, notary), military men of various ranks as well as a skipper, town notables (councillors), municipal functionaries (postman) and also women, widows and working females (two midwives). Among the merchants there are several Dethleffsons (Dethleffsons), members of a very extended and active family from Flensburg, known thanks to the recent publication of letters written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the senior of the family, Christian Dethleffsen<sup>3</sup>.

The inventories are arranged chronologically. They provide a wealth of information on living quarters and farm buildings in Pärnu, on the prosperity of its inhabitants (many data on the realty, amount of cash and valuables they possessed), on the interior equipment of their houses (testifying to love of luxury) and on what was considered fashionable at that time. Many inventories mention

<sup>1</sup> *Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der deutschen Kaufleute in Tallin 1702-1750*, Bd. I, bearb. von Raimo Pullat, Tallin 1997; *Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der deutschen Kaufleute in Tallin 1752-1775*, Bd. II, bearb. von Raimo Pullat, Tallin 2002; *Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der deutschen Kaufleute in Tallin 1777-1800*, Bd. III, bearb. von Raimo Pullat, Tallin 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *Inter alia* K. R. Allik in "Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa Forschung", 47, 1996, № 4, p. 623; Henryk Samsonowicz in: "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", XLV, 1997, № 1, pp. 103–104; O. H. Elias in: "Hansische Geschichtsblätter" 116, 1998, pp. 306–307; D. Kühn in: "Ostdeutsche Familienkunde" 1999, 1, pp. 174–175; P. H. Wilson in: "Continuity and Change" 14, 1999, pp. 275–276; A. Klönder in: "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", XLIX, 2001, № 4, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> D. Kraack (ed.), *Die Briefkopialbücher des Flensburger Kaufmanns Christian Dethleffsen*, Flensburg 1998.

paintings and especially books. Some book collections comprised several dozen items, mainly religious books (the *Bible*, postillas, collections of psalms, hymn-books), but also historical and legal books as well as handbooks and even *belles-lettres* (romances, O p i t z's poetry) could also be found. Many data concern credit and trade turnover, loans and pawns, testifying to the town's intensive economic life. Next to the inventories listing the belongings of the rich are modest lists of the few objects left by a midwife or a journeyman. A historian who on this basis will try to write a study on the townspeople of Pärnu in the 18th century, on its social, material and even intellectual stratification, will find food for thought in this volume.

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