

SUMMARY

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*Churches in Livonian Small Towns:  
Additions to the Late Medieval Church  
History of Hapsal and Arensburg*

The focus of this article is on churches and chapels in two main centres of the Ösel-Wiek Bishopric. In addition to the function and possible location of the houses of worship concerned, the article also mentions information available on their side altars and the liturgical practice.

Apart from the Cathedral, the only other medieval church in Hapsal that has been preserved to date is the parish church. Originally dedicated to St Nicholas, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it bears the name of St John's. Thus far, it was believed that the church was first referred to in 1524 and that the mention was recorded soon after the barn on the site had been converted into a church, and that its congregation was Lutheran from the very beginning. However, there are records which show the church to date back to the Catholic period. Thus, in 1513, the bishop confirms that a chantry at the altar of the Virgin Mary in the parish church of St Nicholas, which the late vassal Claus Kele wished to establish, has indeed been founded. The chantry of the Virgin Mary was again mentioned in 1521. In 1524, the position of priest at the chantry of St Barbara at the altar of the same name became vacant. This suggests that the church of St Nicholas had at least two side altars prior to the Reformation.

In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hapsal had about 500 inhabitants. It is evident that a town of this size must have had a hospital. The first hospital, dedicated to the Holy Spirit, was probably built soon after the foundation of the town; there are reports of it being destroyed in about 1298. The hospital as rebuilt apparently had a small church or chapel – a priest of the Holy Spirit church is mentioned in the sources in 1381. In 1531, the building is described as a chapel. It is possible that the Holy Spirit hospital was situated in John's Street, where an almshouse was built during the period of Swedish rule. In 1523, two hospitals are mentioned in Hapsal. The location, founder and patron saint of the other hospital remain unknown.

A chapel of St Anthony, first referred to in 1521, was located outside the town wall, somewhere at the coast. At the altar of St Anthony's, two chantries were established: the first in honour of St Anthony, the second in honour of St Sophia and her daughters. Chapels dedicated to St Anthony are known to have existed in several towns of medieval Livonia. Usually they were erected outside the town wall, near the main road leading to the town. They were probably intended for pilgrims and other travellers, but also served local peasants. A record from 1535 suggests that St Anthony's

chapel of Hapsal had been torn down. It is possible that it was demolished in connection with the Reformation.

In 1497, a chapel of the Holy Cross was described as situated “out of Hapsal”. This, too, did not survive the Reformation. According to the record of 1497, a perpetual chantry was celebrated in the chapel.

The chapel in the castle of Arensburg was intended for the bishop and his court. A medieval altar has been preserved there and, judging from the niches in the walls, there could also have been another altar. In 1519, the bishop founded the Hours of the Virgin Mary in the chapel, to be celebrated every day with a sung Mass. It is not known when the parish church of St Lawrence – first referred to in 1522 – was built. A 1520 letter from the bishop mentions the charity collection boxes of St Barbara and St Gertrude. Such charity boxes were usually placed near the statues of saints. It is not clear from the context whether the boxes were situated in the chapel or in the parish church.

Due to the lack of sources, it is difficult to determine which of the Catholic services in the Cathedral and in the bishop’s chapel were continued after the Reformation, when most of the townspeople and at least some of the vassals switched to the Lutheranism and when Evangelical services were established in the parish churches, which in the long run meant a considerable decrease in income for the bishop and the canons.