

SUMMARY

*Was there a “Nationalities Question” in Medieval Reval*

The first studies in the field of history, culture and identity of Estonians were written by Baltic German scholars during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. During the first half of the twentieth century local German historiography dealing with social and ethnic relationships elaborated on the concept of non-German(s) – *undeutsche*. This term became widely used especially in the Baltic German medieval studies and was also taken over by Estonian historiography.

In research, the word *undeutsch* was (and often still is) mostly used to designate the indigenous local population of the eastern Baltics – the Estonians, Latvians and Livs, as well as objects of material culture related to these ethnic groups. The aim of the present article is to explore on the basis of the daily record-keeping of late medieval Reval, the original medieval use and meaning of the ethnonyms *Este* and *undeutsch*, but also the use of other ethnonyms occurring in those sources.

Late medieval town council register books contain thousands and thousands of entries concerning Estonians. In most cases, Estonians are referred to either by their names, nicknames or craft. According to these entries in the second half of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century some Estonians still carried ancient Estonian names, while others had Christian names. In the second half of the fifteenth and first quarter of the sixteenth century Estonians living in the city of Reval had mostly Christian names, but in some cases their Estonian origin is revealed through their Estonian nicknames, which have not been translated into German. Such nicknames often refer to some physical peculiarity.

The ethnonym *undeutsch* appears in the sources after the languages of the record-keeping switches from Latin to Low Middle German during the fourteenth century. And even then ethnonyms – both *Este* and *undeutsch* – are used extremely rarely when compared with the overall number of entries that concern persons of Estonian origin. The question is, in which cases and why they were used at all. There are several cases that suggest that at least during the second half of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century the words *Este*, *undeutsch* and *Bauer* were treated as synonyms. This assumption can be most shortly and clearly confirmed by the entries in the town magistracy account book concerning the inhabitants of the village of Vethe near Reval: on some occasions they are referred to as *Este*, on other occasions as *Undeutsche* and sometimes as *Bauer*.

Not only the ethnonym *Este* resp. *undeutsch* but also the ethnonyms of other peoples who were numerous in late medieval Reval such as for

example Germans, Swedes or Finns occur very rarely in the sources. Mostly ethnonyms have been used in cases when a person was a stranger in the city. In the case of Estonians (or *Undeutsche*) such strangers could have been mostly peasants, in case of other nationalities people coming from overseas, like non-local Germans or Scandinavians.

The historiographical concept of *undeutsch* as an ethnic, cultural and social term referring to lower classes of population – both peasants and city dwellers – seems to have never been used in this meaning in medieval sources. In late medieval Reval, the question of nationalities was rather a question of territorial and juridical pertinence, not a question of language, culture or other criteria characteristic of modern concept of nationality.