

The Turkish Tax Surcharge in Geradstetten 1544/45

The Turks before Vienna! In 1529 the first siege began, but as a result of the battle of Kahlenberg the city was again rescued. Yet as soon as twelve years later the Turks conquered Ofen, the current Budapest. The [Austro-Hungarian] emperor Karl V was hard pressed, and asked the German princes for financial support to underwrite a planned campaign. This was granted to him by the parliament at Speyer through a general capital levy.

In a “*General Rescript*, a comprehensive plan against the Turks,” Duke Ulrich prescribed a tax surcharge in November of 1529, the so-called Turkish Tax, which brought in about 45,000 Gulden. The tax lists of over 50 district tax offices have almost all been preserved.

House and land holdings, currency and foodstuffs, harvest stores, cattle, and wine barrels were all assessed. In total about 52,300 people, with a taxable net worth of 9 Million Gulden, were classified into five tax levels. (The third richest person in Württemberg was a Schorndorf resident, the widow of Max Schmidlapp with 13,000 Gulden!)

The first page of the tax list bears the title:

*Calculation of the Turkish outlay
of our noble and princely Lord's subjects
of Geradstetten on the first day of January
as one counts fifteen hundred forty
five years*

The tax records of the town of Geradstetten tallied 101 persons, along with 11 charges. The accounting yielded a net worth of 15,000 fl. The property of 13 man servants and 13 maids hardly mattered, as they brought in only a few Batzen. The average net worth per resident was about 134 fl., putting it in the upper third of the Schorndorf tax district.

A four-person commission in Stuttgart named the *Receivers* had at their disposal a large money chest. Each of the receivers possessed a key to one of the four locks of the chest. The subjects of the Duke, by duty and under oath, had to report their goods and chattels. One cow at 4 Gulden, calves at 1 Gulden, sheep at 1-pound Heller, wine barrels per pail at a half Gulden. Land and property were set by the market price. One sees, they thought of everything!

If we glance at the holdings lists, we see they cover 13 pages with a write-up of all citizens subject to tax. The receivers' work was short and sweet: Name, the net worth value, and the amount of the tax payment, this is how simple it was in that time. The poor and those who had no net worth paid 4 Kreuzer, as also the two women:

Barbara Katzinwadel has nothing, pays 1 batzen
Gertrud Loefflerin has nothing, pays 1 batzen

The richest Geradstettener was a B. Schuemacher with a 600 Gulden net worth, followed by Hanss Stetter, Hanss Fritz, and Gabriel Vayhingen with 500 Gulden. The “*pfarrher aignes*” [pastor’s personal holdings] with 200 fl in property was assessed a payment of 1 Gulden in currency, as also the mayor Hanss Schwann. One sees here the difference between the rich and the poor, as large in that time as today!

The page of the tax lists contains the summary. The Geradstetten citizens were assessed as follows:

	<i>Total</i>	
<i>75 Gulden</i>	<i>14 Batzen</i>	<i>2 Kreuzer</i>

Of this the receivers got 67 Gulden and 4 Batzen, and they charged 8 Gulden and 10 Batzen and 2 Kreuzer for travel expenses and transaction costs, rather high, over 11%! But this practice was common throughout the Duchy.

On the reverse side of the last page we find something noteworthy, a Latin epigram. Pfeilsticken reports in his work “*Neuen Württembergerischen Dienerbuch*,” that no similar inscription is to be found in any of the many tax lists of the Duchy. It must have been written by a foreign hand, as shown by handwriting comparison with the contents of the tax lists. It is now quite impossible to understand how the writings below have evaded interpretation:

The epigram announces:

*Forte est vinum
fortior est lex
fortiores sunt mulieres
super omnia autem vincet veritas*

A try at a German translation:

*Stark is der Wein
stärker is das Recht
noch stärker sind die Frauen
über allem aber siegt die Wahrheit.*

And finally a try at an English translation:

*Strong is the wine
stronger is the law
even stronger are the women
above them all triumphs the truth.*