

## Rural Elites in the East-Frisian Coastal Marshes (1648-1806)

Today we'll introduce you to a rural elite, who shapes its little country in a very specific way: The "Hausleute" from the little territory of East-Friesland at the Northern Seaboard in North-West Germany.

Rural elites and their environment formed each other. Thus I'll concentrate my analyses on a landscape within the territory of East-Friesland: The marshlands as distinctive natural and social space on the southern Northern Sea Coast, outstanding through very fertile ground, the near Sea and therefore the necessity to build and maintain the dykes.

The fact of dyke building, beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, is an indispensable element to understand the Frisian agrarian and social structure. It laid the basis for a system of personal responsibility for a part of the dyke; therefore the individual's failing to do his part could get a whole region in trouble. Dyke-maintenance is labour-intensive and expensive, so only prosperous farmers can set out for the popular land near the sea. The cultivation of the Polder, starting in the later middle ages, enlarges farmers land. Nevertheless storm tides are remaining a threat.

During the Middle Ages the great responsibility of coastal protection, in combination with weak structures of power in the remote area of the marshlands, brought personal freedom to the East Frisian farmers. The political structure was a cooperative system of different rural communities, called the "Friesische Freiheit", "Frisian Liberty". When in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the plague reduced the population, the region became impoverished and the cooperative system, which was founded on a widespread prosperity, broke down. Local rulers, named "Häuptlinge", chiefs, were uprising and fighting for Frisian supremacy until 1464, when Ulrich Cirksena became Count in East-Friesland. Generally the reign in the territory remains weak and has to share the power with the influential *Landstände*, *country estates*, rival *Häuptlinge* and the rich city of Emden which prevents effective administration of the country, besides there was no working infrastructure in the Marshlands: Because of the extensive moors, traveling by land was often exhausting. In 1744 the family of the East-Frisian Counts dies out and the territory becomes a Prussian province. The powerful new reign cuts the rights of the *Stände*. However: the local social structure and the power in the village keep surviving.

Hence there was less change in the agrarian social system during the Early Modern period. The farmers keep personal freedom, and they're able to deal with their land in their own responsibility, although the indivisibility of the farms was the absolute law. The farmer's heir

was as in a general rule the youngest son, but he had to pay out his brothers and sisters, therefore you can call it almost a *de facto splitting*. Due to this system an inheritance was often blamed for legal disputes and farm-bankruptcy.

Distinguishing themselves especially from the rural lower class the wealthy farmers of East-Friesland called themselves *Hausleute*. They worked their farms as owners, in hereditary lease or, increasingly during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, as leaseholders. Lessors of the farms were in that case mostly other farmers, sometimes nobility or citizens from Emden, Norden or Aurich. Thus rich farmers or owners of several farms could live on the income they made as landlords, so some of them managed to come up to a lifestyle, as prosperous rentiers, similar to that of the few noble families in East-Friesland. Generally the nobility in East-Friesland seems to be like big farmers and lessors, their peasants are free leaseholders, nevertheless unable to participate at the *Stände*-system. Altogether the rural charges were different from village to village. Most of the farms were mortgaged with some forms of lease, communal fees and contribution, definitely the strongest burden was the payment for the dykes, particularly for the most fertile marshland.

Taking into account the fertile ground, personal freedom and the free disposal of possession, there almost existed a market economy in 18<sup>th</sup> century East-Friesland. The farm-economy was export-oriented; there had been a European trade of Frisian corn and cattle since the middle ages. This way, the farms depended on European agrarian economy trends, ailing economy was leading to mass bankruptcy. Thus in good times it was essential to build up reserves, again, this was of course only an option for big and prosper farms. As inventories show, many reserves were fixed in loans to other farmers, and from time to time, in bad times or to enable expansion, rich farmers also had to get credits for themselves, because there was less cash money in rural areas. The permanent demonstration of credit standing causes a culture of a representative and again expensive lifestyle, and so on. Wealth and reputation were the keywords for participation in the local credit system and, in the end, being part of the neighbourhood and the community itself. In this system a specific farmer habitus was born. It became more evident when some farmers stopped working their fields and started living on marketing their products and supervising their labourers: That way an elite inside the rural elite of the *Hausleute* was established as a point of reference in representation. Under this circumstances consumption, private teachers, tea parties and piano lessons became part of the farmhouses, naturally not for every *Hausmann*, but widespread enough for being constitutive for the North-Sea Marshland culture. Even Friedrich Arends, *Hausmann* and kind chronicler

of the East-Frisian farmer-culture, noticed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: “Insgesamt ist wohl die Aufmerksamkeit, die man dem Geld und dem Reichtum entgegenbringt, etwas zu groß”.

(„The attention paid to money and riches seems altogether rather too much”)

Generally, the representative culture of the *Hausleute* has its point of reference inside their own social class- of course, for other social classes normally aren't competitors for the rich farmers. On the one hand, as already mentioned, there were only few and less powerful aristocrats in the region and on the other hand craftsmen were rare in the villages. Rural merchants were often identical with the farmers or part of their families. Rivals in the rural markets and, to some extent, an example for consumption and representation were the citizens of the towns, in particular the Dutch influenced Emdeners. A rural middle class, however, was nearly non-existent in the villages.

The Frisian marshlands in the 18<sup>th</sup> century stood out due to a specific demographic profile. Altogether was there a stagnation in population until the seven-years-war, hence a very slow growing of population (according to Claudia Engel an average of 0,38% in the region Krummhörn between 1780 and 1871) in the marshlands by contrast to the near uplands, with a growth up to 33% in this period because of moor-colonization. Nevertheless, the marshlands of East-Friesland did not seem to be an area of high mortality rate (in contrast to the nearby Oldenburg Marshlands, where Wilhelm Norden attested a very high mortality rate due to malaria), but different examinations suggest a low rate of birth. Also, many authors assume a constant rate of emigration: The indivisibility of farmland left no space for growing population. Maybe landless heirs and notably the lower classes emigrated in order to buy land in the newly cultivated moors, become farm-labourers in the Netherlands, merchants and craftsmen in the cities or, rather obviously in this region and as some family-chronicles suggest, sailors- there isn't much research about this subject. Corresponding with the stagnation in population growth, the farmers were not a prosperous social class. Within the overall population the number of the *Hausleute* stagnates, too, or even shrinks a little, generally a typical phenomenon for 18<sup>th</sup> century rural elites in Europe.

Nevertheless the lower class population just as well increases in the marshland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. All in all the share of the *Hausleute* in East- Friesland decreases exceptionally between 1751 and 1775, in total around 21%, and recovers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century because of the colonization of moors and polders. The number of the *Hausleute* within the whole population of East-Friesland averages around 5% in 1751 and decreases to less than 4% in 1794, nevertheless in a marshland district like the department Emden, their share of the

population increases a little from around 3% in 1751 to more than 5,5% in 1794, apparently again because of colonization. Indeed, despite their little number the *Hausleute* controlled nearly the entire farmland in the most of the villages in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This reduction of farmsteads and concentration of possessions produced a bisection in the demographic history of East-Friesland, namely the nearly complete disappearance of any rural middle class during the early modern period. The village divided into upper and lower-class farmers.

One method of land-concentration was the rapid increase of lease holding. Middle-class farmers didn't find any place for leasing, big farmers used the opportunity of leasing to expand their economic status especially in prosperous times, so they precluded lower and middle class peasants from having their share of the agrarian economic boom. Because of the predominant leasing-periods of around 4-7 years for whole farms, lease holding in keeping with the trend was worthwhile. Thus owing these trends many small businesses became bankrupt, hence a large supply of day labourers and very little tenants on and in the farms arose and helped to establish the economy of big farms. The Early Modern Frisian village had a powerful hierarchy.

The hierarchy outlined here was institutionalized in the possibilities of accessing local offices, the most important of which will be presented in the following, along with its significance for the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Frisian village:

Participation in parish and community, always one and the same in Early Modern Friesland, was normally regulated on the basis of landed property, the census for a full parishioner demanded the ownership of about 9,5 hectare but coinciding with the disappearance of the middle class there weren't many farms in this category anymore since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Finally the village was separated in full participation between farmers and a lower class, which was out of the question in local politics, although the lower class, especially at the uplands and moors, had sometimes their own kinds of organisations. But in the marshlands with their powerful tradition of farmer self-organisation the village had as in a general rule, a clearly articulated separation.

The most established office in a Frisian village was, like anywhere else, the head of the village, in the region known as *Schüttemeister*, *Bauerrichter*, *Bauermeister* or *Poolrichter*. Every village had one or sometimes more *Schüttemeister*, most of them elected, and sometimes rotated among the eligible *Hausleute*. Nevertheless, the *Schüttemeister*-office wasn't very popular: The office comprehended an exhausting position of mediation between

the rulers and the village, as well as large expense. Due to the low prestige of the office the title *Schüttemeister* wasn't found on tombstones, epitaphs or in family-chronicles, a practice very widespread for the higher offices. All in all the term of office for a *Schüttemeister* was hardly longer than one year. Finally, the *Schüttemeister*- office wasn't exploitable for social distinction purposes, the fact that one was entitled to assume office was sufficient for belonging to the local upper-class. For creating a position within the upper-class there were other, more prestigious offices.

A little more popular were offices in the church-council, because in East-Friesland the priests were elected through members of the parish, naturally those members with property. Church offices were desirable for rural elites, too, but expensive in time and money, so the most of the office-holders practiced it for only one year. In contrast to the *Schüttemeister*-title the title *Kirchenvorsteher* or *Kirchenältester* (*church master or church elder*) was very often found on farmer's donations like altars or candlesticks in the churches, seemingly donated in connection with the office. As the election of the priest by the members of the parish was established in the time of the "Friesische Freiheit", the *Hausleute* demonstrated the tradition of their family's local power by this means.

The most prestigious offices were, on the whole, those with the largest range, therefore the offices with more than local influence. It was a mark of East-Friesland, that there existed quite a number of regional farmer's offices. At this point I'll present two fields of activity for rural politics beyond the village: The dykes and the system of the *Landstände*.

The most respected families in the region were identified in the competence to fulfil the office of the head of a dyke-association, which normally included several villages. The head of the dyke-association, the *Deichacht*, was called *Deichrichter* (dykejudge) and was often combined with the office of the supervisor of the sluice, the *Sielrichter*. The office of the *Deichrichter* was in the middle ages normally held by the *Häuptlinge* and became a farmer's - office during the 16<sup>th</sup> century- the honour of the office fitted its history. In the most *Deichachten* two *Deichrichter* were known, one older and one younger, and the younger one followed the older in the office of the first *Deichrichter* and had to introduce a newly elected second *Deichrichter* to it in his turn. By the way, the two *Deichrichter* often were related, or you find related *Deichrichter* in nearby dyke-associations, so we can identify some kind of heritability or, better, a privilege for that office in some leading families of the region. For example you'll find the office in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century *Jeverland* in the Minsen family over four generations. An analysis of regional family-histories shows common patterns of

*Deichrichter*-persons: Each *Deichrichter* was recruited from the wealthiest landowners of the dyke-association, and their families had been residents of the region for generations. Also most of the *Deichrichter* held more rural offices like *Kirchenjurat* or representative of the *Landschaft*. As a conclusion, the *Deichrichter*-office was absolutely a pattern of elite-building and representation in East-Friesland.

We can also describe similar trends in the institution of the *Landstände*. The territory of East-Friesland knows three classes: The nobility, the cities Aurich, Norden and Emden and finally the *Stand* of the *Hausleute*, which consisted of elected representatives of the parishes. The marsh-districts with their rich and powerful farmers were overrepresented on the *Landtag*, although the activity of participation fluctuated in accordance with the real possibility of influence. Nevertheless, as the diary of the elected representative Menno Peters from the village of Jemgum in the 17<sup>th</sup> century suggests, the *Landtage* weren't the only possibility where the elected speakers articulated farmer's-interests. Besides the official *Landtag* there was the annual territorial accounting assembly (*Landrechnungsversammlung*), which was very well frequented by the villages. Also important for articulation were *ad hoc* meetings with representatives from the government on the level of the departments. There, rural Elites articulated interests *ad hoc* and off the beaten track of official platforms, but they spoke out and were heard by the government, as different notes about such negotiations suggest. Local prestige of persons often signifies their status as speaker, and the representatives didn't have governmental duties like the official *Schüttemeister*. There was a strong consciousness about the right of speaking and being heard in the class of the *Hausleute*, also, as we can see in the inventories, expressed in the possession of a printed East-Frisian constitution existent in many farmer-households. A continuous political engagement in the *Landschaft*, however, was seen only in some persons who held a higher territorial office like that of the powerful *Administrator* of the *Hausleute*, a permanent governmental office. These high offices were, even more than the *Deichrichter*-office, often held in the hand of one family, for example the family von Reeden from Leer: Members of this family successively hold one of the *Administrator*-offices in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century for overall 150 years.

In the End we can conclude a very hierarchical rural world and well-defined elite. Within this elite a group became apparent, which was characterized by very big farms, political commitment and a specific lifestyle.

Although we characterized East-Frisia as a really rural area with a specific local culture, one has to view the local rural economy as integrated in the European market as well. For sure, such an involvement was not restricted to the field economy, but had its effects on local consumption, too. Consequently the regional museums offer hundreds of objects often literally furnishing proof of a global, at least European involvement of the region. The analysis of inventories and protocols of auctions (*Ausmienerprotokolle*) underlines this impression.

Hence two questions arise. Firstly, how did the elite of the local peasantry get their consumer goods? Secondly – summing up and interwoven in the first part – which role did the relation between the local and the global play for the status of the East-Frisian peasant elites?

First of all let's try to arrange the field of consumption in rural East-Frisia. To do so, we establish six / seven categories for procuring consumer goods: 1. home production, 2. sale on (local) market-places and fairs, 3. grocers and peddlers, 4. sale in local “shops” – especially in towns - or by craftsmen, 5. public auctions, 6. personal orders, (7. inheritance). Although inheritance is one of the most important fields for the transfer of artifacts within rural societies, it should only be mentioned in this paper. Due to the complexity of this theme and because of the idea to highlight only ways to procure things intentionally, it will not be described at more closely.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the absolute majority of things which were consumed (in a wide sense) on an East-Frisian farm were **self-produced**. One could say that almost every big farm was able to provide itself with everything indispensable for life. Around 1780 about two thirds of the East-Frisian population lived *directly* from agriculture and although the successful farmers did not work the fields or meadows themselves, they lived on their agricultural products. For sure the rural upper-class were not only producers of milk, oat, rye, meat or beans, but also consumers of all these goods. It was not the whole of the products which was brought to the specialized regional market-places, but rather the surplus of the production. Nonetheless it would be a false impression to understand the East-Frisian farms as closed systems – which would extremely underestimate the complexity of their economy - because it was common to sell *and* buy quite similar products on the markets. From the diary of a Hausmann from 1785 for example we learned that he went to the market-place in Leer to buy peat and butter and to sell cheese and grain. By the way, the entry in his diary ends with the notification that he “[...] drove home with a three-horse-carriage”. A lesser number of horses would not have been acceptable for his position as a *Sielrichter* – an important local office – which underlines the link between material representations and social practice. Beside

this comment it is important to highlight that the additional sale of rural products was absolutely common in the Frisian marshlands during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And for sure the rich peasants needed local services to process their raw materials. Different millers (for grits, grain, etc.), smiths, weavers (linen, wool), saddlers, tailors, butchers and so on belonged to the inventory of every parish. Only looking at this part of the infrastructure, it could be suggested that almost no commodity flows from outside the region were needed. Although this is only one side of the coin – the other would for instance show the deficit of wood, which had to be imported from Norway – it highlights the need to be linked within the local society. Hence it is not surprising that the family played a central role for one's own economy, too. This role is not only explained by the position, the wealth or the regional tradition of a singular family, but also by the inter-familiar economic connections. Another look in the diary you already got to know reveals such an inter-familiar economic connection. Tammling, the diary's author, built a brickyard for his sister and leased it afterwards for six years. Despite such intensive inter-familiar and regional economic links especially the field of consumption shows a distinctive affinity to imported goods.

A first short look into regional cookbooks supports this statement. A lot of ingredients like cardamom or cinnamon came from abroad. And sugar is presented even as one of the most important components for the regional cuisine. For sure such a diet had its effects on other fields of possession as well. Sugar bowls, coffee pots and tea sets can be found in *every* inventory of the region and of course in every regional museum today. Especially for the material heritage of the 18<sup>th</sup> century's consumption (as well as for the regional trade) the axis Amsterdam-Hamburg-London can be seen as the bloodstream which nourished the region, although the region itself worked as part of this economic organism, too.

Nonetheless especially the Netherlands with its fashions, life-styles and trends were highly influential for the Frisian marshlands. Thus travelers through the region described these influences in explicit words. So we can read in the report of a priest about the East-Frisians who "hollandize" (*hollandisieren*). This neologism stands for a couple of comparisons which describe impressions from East-Frisia really similar to impressions from the Netherlands. Even so, to establish an exclusive Dutch influence would not be to the point either, because trends and fashions from France, England and Hamburg were also adopted.

A really interesting function concerning this cultural transfer can be stated for **market-places**. With the help of local calendars which were also used as account books, we can verify the knowledge about world famous markets like Leipzig or Frankfurt (Main) within the rural elites. Nonetheless the regional market-places seem to be much more important for the

majority of the farmer elite. That is where they regularly went, to sell and buy products or to get information. Interestingly the “market-space” was obviously not limited to the market-place. In fact we find edicts like this from 1803:

„Nach der hieselbst ernannten Verordnung wegen Einrichtung der Wöchentlichen Getreide-Märkte soll jeder mit Getreide zum Flecken fahrende Bauer mit seiner Ladung nach dem bestimmten Markt Platz bey der Waage fahren um seine Waaren bis 12Uhr Mittags dem nicht handelnden Publico und den Bäckern feil zu bieten, und nach dieser Stunde ist auch erst den Kaufleuten berechtigt, dem Bauern das Getreide zum freien Handel abzukaufen.“<sup>i</sup>

(“According to the decree issued hereabouts concerning the establishment of the weekly grain markets, every peasant driving thereabouts with grain shall drive to the special market place at the scales with his load to offer his goods to the not trading public and the bakers until noon, and after this hour only the merchants are allowed to buy the grain from the peasants for free trade.”)

In this excerpt the trade at regional market-places is implicitly described as an almost non-regional procedure. The grain was not sold to local bakers or the population but to professional traders who integrated the local trade in the European market. The same conclusion can be drawn for cattle trade which we get to know in the diary again. There you can read about a really rainy and unprofitable year: “A special destiny from god evolves, because everyone can sell his cattle in a good way – plenty of it goes out of the country.” For sure there was not only a group of professional traders at the market-places who sold the East-Frisian products to other European places, but also some professional salesmen who sold products from abroad at the East-Frisian market-places. This exchange system becomes always visible when it clashes with mercantile ideal of the Prussian administration. The obvious most famous example of such a clash is the Prussian prohibition of coffee and tea from 1788. How widespread and common the consumption of coffee and tea was, shows the reaction of the East-Frisian estates (*Landstände*) who formulated:

„Der Gebrauch von Tee und Kaffee ist hierzulande so allgemein und so tief eingewurzelt, dass die Natur des Menschen schon durch eine schöpferische Kraft müsste umgekehrt werden, wenn sie den Getränken auf einmal ‘Gute Nacht’ sagen sollten.“<sup>ii</sup>

(“The consumption of tea and coffee is so deeply and commonly rooted hereabouts, that human nature would have to be turned around by a creative power if it were to say ‘good night’ to these beverages.”)

Having noticed the exaggeration in this statement, it yet makes impressively clear how integrated in everyday life the consumption of the “foreign” products was.

To supply even these farms which were miles away from anywhere, a very wide net of **grocers and peddlers** existed in the Frisian marshlands. In the period between 1765 and 1788, 248 grocers (only master craftsmen without assistants) lived in the region. Theoretically calculated this means, that one grocer had 70 customers – not much to base a living on.

Reading the rules of their guild (*Gilde*) one could get the impression that rather more peddlers enriched the field of consumption for the local farmers, because there is written:

„Es soll in unserem Flecken Leer [...] kein Fremder, oder auch sonst jemand, der die Gildegerechtigkeit nicht hat außerhalb der freyen von uns vergönnten Jahrmärkte einige Crämerwaare von Laken, Sarsien, Seiden- und Wollenstoffen, [...], allerhand Seiden, Catunen, Kamelshaaren- und Linnenband, item Hüte, Knöpfe, Handschuh, Strümpfe [...] wie auch allerhand eisener Waaren bei den Thüren, es sey heimlich oder öffentlich, an jemand verkaufen.“<sup>iii</sup>

(“In our town of Leer ... no stranger or anyone else who does not have the right of the guild shall peddle a merchant’s goods such as drapes, fabrics made of silk or wool, ... all kinds of silks, cotton, camel hair and linen ribbons, item hats, buttons, gloves, socks... as well as all kinds of ironware at the doors, neither secretly nor in the open, to anyone, except during the free fairs allowed by us.”)

For sure such a restriction only makes sense if foreign peddlers did in fact sell their products at the doors of the East-Frisian farmers. And another thing within this quotation is fascinating – the goods which are mentioned and their origin. They underline the huge demand for foreign goods, which was characteristic for the entire Frisian marshlands as well as for their peasant elite. Or, to use the words of a hatter who complained about the difficulties to sell his hats: “[...] the public predominately loves the foreign without respect for the quality or beauty of a thing.”

Nonetheless even the small but nice things which were sold by the grocers show a phenomenon within the local peasant elites. So they participated in the European consumption and fashion trends, but they adapted them to their own lifestyle and traditions. Silver knobs for example were typically engraved with initials or the coat of arms of the family and even big wooden cupboards in the shape of European trends were painted with elements of the own farm or countryside.

Especially for the field of furniture in a wider sense (cupboards, wall-clocks, etc.) the regional **craftsmen and their “shops”** played an important role. Due to the fact that wood and labor were really rare in East-Frisia having exclusive furniture was a wonderful possibility to set oneself apart from the average rural inhabitants. Due to the analyses of local inventories cherrywood was the most popular wood for such representative pieces of furniture during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Ideally the owners were able to combine the material value of a thing with a further statement of their status like they did with high-class bureaus. With the help of such things they had the ability to underline the economic power as well as the affinity towards education. The local craftsmen had the skills to produce a remarkable spectrum of highly representative objects, although some classics of representation like the “Hamburger Schapp” (a special cupboard) or phaetons dominate the average inventories of the peasant elite.

Especially in the field of fashion there was a desire for imported objects. Dresses like the “Empire-Kleid” (French style) or Asian christening robes played the same important role for the peasant elite as did porcelain from Delft or English hats for a wider range of the rural population. For sure, local craftsmen tried to accommodate the demand for foreign goods and hence we know single incidents of cheating craftsmen who declared goods as foreign which in fact were produced within the region.

With regard to the relation between imported artifacts and social position one could summarize that owning an amount of foreign goods and being a part of the peasant elite simply belonged together. However, it would be a false conclusion to understand the possession of foreign goods as an exclusive sign of the peasant elite.

The analysis of public **auctions** in East-Frisia shows that almost everybody owned imported artifacts. Especially things which were used for the consumption of tobacco, coffee and tea have to be understood as rather universally prevailing goods. In the same way the analysis shows that these things are absolutely not the artifacts with the highest value. In any case the value of things is quite surprising, because beside precious metals all things which have to do with beds (like bedsteads, pillows or blankets) are noticeably expensive compared to apparently representative goods like tea-tables or mirrors with golden frames.

The explanation seems to be the lack of some materials like wood on the one hand and the lack of labor because of the migration of laborers within Europe on the other hand. Hence not only extremely representative, but also quite personal aspects like a comfortable bed belonged to the status of the rural elite.

Nevertheless the members of the peasant elite knew how to stage their selves – a fact which is underlined by the last field of consumption which should be focused here: **personal orders**.

Concerning personal orders immense differentiations within the local peasantry can be determined. While it was possible for a big percentage of local peasants to own imported goods like teacups or coffeepots from Harlingen, Delft or even China, it was only the top of the local peasantry who had the possibility to order specific, personalized artifacts from abroad. One of the impressive examples of such an order is a set of tea porcelain from King-te-chen which was ordered by two families from Emden. It was ordered on the occasion of a marriage, brought via Kanton to the north of Germany and shows the coats of arms of the two East-Frisian families which were involved in the marriage. One of these families has its origins in the local peasant elite.

Beyond doubt the woman from the peasant family leaves the typical sphere of the local peasant elite with her marriage and with such an artifact, but at the same time she *ennobles*

the family she comes from and underlines their position at the top of the local peasantry. Albeit quite particular, this example highlights the function of personal orders as to the relation of consumption and representation. If someone wanted to order something, it was not enough to have money, he also had to have the personal contacts with someone who could fix the deal and he had to have quite a good knowledge about potential things to order. In the given example of the tea service the families even had to have their own coats of arms – a kind of possession which in any case was reserved to an elite within the elite. However, the need to underline the own social position with the help of different practices again and again was essential for every member of the *Hausmannsstand*. Practices of self-representation were one important field to stay where they were – at the top of the local rural society. Consumption was one part of this field. A part which can neither be isolated from local, nor from European and global circumstances

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<sup>i</sup> StAAu, Rep.6 Nr. 4266.

<sup>ii</sup> Heisig 2007, S. 40.

<sup>iii</sup> Ebd.