

Maximilian I and his Subjects: Aspects of Town, Court and Countryside in Renaissance Austria, circa 1500

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What do the records tell us about the living standards of town, court, and countryside in Renaissance Austria in the decades around the year 1500? Can we focus on any detailed evidence, despite the unsuitability of the sources when we try to seek from them answers to questions of a social nature, that resembles evidence deposited by advanced, modern societies like our own? What was life like for the ordinary person in Austria during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries? The question is easy to ask but the answers can only be vague. The student of early modern societies is bound by unsuitable, fragmented, and pragmatic documents, which he interprets with little hope of any ultimate accuracy.¹ This factor goes some way towards explaining why many early modernists have tended to avoid the simplifications and guess-work that lie behind social history, and here Austrian historians usually have not shown any lack of caution. Undoubtedly any plan to follow up questions that are strictly unsuitable to the archives that survive is dangerous. A start has to be made, however, and we will here briefly survey land, politics and population, then examine aspects of the urban and rural situation and the condition of labour. The largest single enterprise in Renaissance Austria was probably at Innsbruck at the court and household of Maximilian I and his second wife Bianca Maria Sforza. We will examine in greater depth the life and labour of this operation within the tertiary sector of the pre-industrial Austrian economy, and attempt the reconstruction of an old age pension granted to a chambermaid in this establishment. The study ends with an analysis of the ruling attitude to the deserving poor as it appeared in Maximilian's last will and testament.

The approach is very much to let archive materials determine the questions to be answered. In view of the lack of evidence for the period, it is thought essential to provide case studies from the scattered sources that survive and to shun more theoretical interpretations until we know more historical facts of life and labour in this transitional period just before the Reformation in central Europe.

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¹ Cf. the cautionary remarks in F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean*, 2 vols. (London, 1971-72), especially I, pp. 417 ff. on his model of the Mediterranean economy, circa 1600. The best German regional survey is R. Endres, "Zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Franken vor dem Dreissigjährigen Krieg," *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung*, 28 (1968).

LAND AND POLITICS

In 1493 King Maximilian became sole ruler of the Austrian Habsburg patrimony. To his existing holdings in Upper Austria were added the lands of Lower Austria and Inner Austria.² Upper Austria comprised the County of Tirol which extended into the North Italian plain with capitals at Innsbruck and Bozen (Bolzano). Within its sphere of influence were the Bishoprics of Brixen (Bressanano) and Trient (Trento), which, although technically autonomous within the federal system of the German Empire, were client states under the Habsburgs. To this complex, Tirol — Brixen — Trient, Maximilian later added the County of Görz (Gorizia). At Rovereto (in Trient) and Ampezzo (in Görz) Maximilian's political entity of Greater Tirol cut into the Italian plain and involved him in frontier rivalry with mainland Venice. To the west, Maximilian's Tirol bordered on, and came into painful conflict with, the Swiss Confederation, especially in the Engadin Valley and along Lake Constance. Three further regions were also part of Upper Austria; these were affiliated to the County of Tirol and its administration at Innsbruck.

The first of these regions was the *Vorlande* between Tirol and Lake Constance, centred on Bregenz, Feldkirch and Bludenz and run with the cooperation of surrounding high noble dynasties friendly to the Habsburgs, such as those of Montfort and Furstenberg. The second region comprised a number of landed estates, which included high and low jurisdictions and areas of hunting and forest rights in East Swabia near Augsburg, all centred on the Margraviate of Burgau.³ It was here that Maximilian indulged his craze for hunting, and the region ranked equal to the Inn Valley in Tirol valued most highly as a place of security and recreation for the restless King. To this Maximilian added his love of Augsburg town with its *cantado* adjoining the autonomous Bishopric of Augsburg. This area as a whole acted as a buffer between Habsburg and Wittelsbach spheres of dynastic power, and its rivalries were duplicated along the middle Inn Valley to the south. The lands that provided lines of communication between Augsburg in East Swabia and Innsbruck in Tirol were thus the heart of Maximilian's empire. The third region included in Upper Austria was the residual and scattered Habsburg holding in Alsace and along the Upper Rhine, a pale reflection of earlier attempts to uphold a strong post-Hohenstaufen Royal and Imperial presence on the borders with the Swiss, Burgundians, and French in the Vosges and Black Forest and between the Rhine and Upper Danube. Ensisheim was the administrative centre of Habsburg high jurisdiction here. The town of Freiburg in the Breisgau served the area as the effective centre of its trade and communications. Just as Augsburg was essential to holding together the Habsburg presence

² Cf. G. W. SANTE, ed., *Geschichte des deutschen Länder, (Territorien Ploetz)*, 1 (Würzburg, 1964); M. MITTERAUER, "Ständegliederung und Ländertypen," *Herrschaftsstruktur und Ständebildung*, III (Munich, 1973): 115-206.

³ For a survey of the Burgau as an estate record, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, HS-W 321, folios 289-312. An excellent study that breaks new ground is P. BLICKLE, *Landschaften im Alten Reich* (Munich, 1973), pp. 96-108 (for Habsburg Swabia), 159-254 (for Tirol), 255-315 (for Vorarlberg).

in East Swabia, so Freiburg served a similar purpose for the Habsburg regions of Upper Rhine.

Upper Austria was thus a convenient geographical expression for the disparate dynastic property that Maximilian held between the Upper Rhine, the Upper Danube, and along the Inn Valley in the north, cascading over the Alps onto the Italian plain in the south. The only solid bloc of territory with real traditions of continuity in internal affairs was the county of Tirol with its Estates of nobles, towns and free peasants. The *Vorlande*, especially Habsburg East Swabia, Alsace, and Upper Rhineland, were too fragmented to develop their own politically significant territorial assemblies. They were no match against Habsburg governors, nor could they emulate effectively the privileges of the Estates of Tirol. In practice they followed the dictates of the Habsburg government at Innsbruck, which Maximilian ran with the support of the territorial Estates of Tirol on generally amicable terms.

Geographical expressions for the Habsburg lands of Austria have changed over the centuries, as the frontiers have been re-adjusted to new dynastic and political situations. It is therefore essential to describe Lower and Inner Austria in terms of what was generally understood by these regions at the time of Maximilian I.⁴ Lower Austria comprised the two provinces above and below the river Enns, which flows into the Danube to the east of Linz. Linz, Wels, and Gmunden were the principal towns of the province above the Enns (*Ob der Enns*) where Maximilian liked to spend part of the winter, especially around Christmas. He died at Wels in January 1519 *en route* from Innsbruck to Vienna, where he wished to organise a crusade against the Turks. The province above the Enns shared borders with the Archbishopric of Salzburg and the Bishopric of Passau. Both ecclesiastical principalities were clients of Maximilian and members of his group of political friends at the Imperial Assembly. Both were of strategic importance. Salzburg offered easy communications between Innsbruck, Linz, and Vienna, and acted as a buffer between Wittelsbach Bavaria and Habsburg Austria. Passau controlled the junction of the rivers Inn and Danube, pushing well into Wittelsbach Bavarian and Upper Palatine lands, which later helped to make Regensburg accessible to the Habsburgs as their favoured town for Imperial Assemblies.

The province of Lower Austria above the Enns with its capital at Linz provided residence for Frederick III during the last three years of his life. Its territorial Estates of clergy, higher nobles, knights, and town councillors were active in assembly and committee and were less predictably loyal to Habsburg policies than were the Tiroleans. In 1493, on the death of Frederick III, the Estates at Linz wrote to Maximilian to reject the candidacy of his childhood friend, Sigismund Prüschenk, for the top post of Lord Lieutenant (*Landeshauptmann*). They refused to put into writing why they objected to him, but Maximilian avoided confronta-

⁴ H. PIRCEGGER, *Geschichte und Kulturleben Deutschösterreichs, 1526-1792* (Vienna, 1931), maps.

tion by employing Prüschenk in a neighbouring province. The matter indicates the independence of mind of the territorial Estates above the Enns.⁵

The province of Lower Austria below the Enns (*Unter der Enns*) was the economic centre of Habsburg Austria. It had excellent communications along the Danube and into the plains of Hungary, and its populous capital, Vienna, was the first German speaking *entrepôt* for goods moving between south-eastern Europe and the German and Bohemian-Moravian hinterlands. The burghers of Vienna looked back on a century of political factiousness, of which Maximilian had gained experience as a very young child in the 1460s, when his family was nearly starved in the besieged town castle as a result of civil wars in the Habsburg dynasty. These wars weakened Vienna's position in the economy of the Danube basin.⁶ Maximilian never forgot his early experiences and, like his father, he never resided in Vienna thereafter, although he used the town for planning and provisioning some of his campaigns and for holding important conferences, and he had his father buried in its *Stephansdom*.

The territorial Estates of this province below the Enns were carefully wooed by Maximilian, for they provided him with continued control over important revenues from agriculture (wine, fruits, and cereals), as well as the customs duties. But the province was also the most strategically vulnerable of his lands, with its open frontiers to Bohemia-Moravia and Hungary, so that Maximilian had a necessary interest to avoid internal conflict with his territorial subjects there. An important regional government functioned from the *Hubhaus* in Vienna. It employed prominent members of the territorial Estates and it was never in practice subordinated to Maximilian's government at Innsbruck, nor to the officials of his travelling household, except in a very personal and *ad hoc* manner. The Vienna administration was as often as not held together by great territorial subjects like the Counts of Hardegg, marcher lords with lands stretching from the Czech frontier to the north in a great arc to the southeast, protecting Vienna from the Hungarian plains and the river-ways into Inner Austria. Count Henry of Hardegg was the younger brother of the very Sigismund Prüschenk who had been Maximilian's close friend in his youth and against whom the territorial Estates at Linz had banded themselves in 1493. The Prüschenks were employed to protect the Lower Austrian eastern border. Maximilian allowed them to create a state within a state. They were his most powerful subjects and his most substantial native creditors.⁷

Inner Austria comprised Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, the client Bishopric of Gurk, and the escheated marcher lordship of Cilli. A substantial number of enclaves in Inner Austria belonging to the distant Bishoprics of Freising and Bamberg in the Bavarian and Franconian spheres of in-

⁵ Territorial Estates Ob der Enns to Maximilian, Linz, 1493, in Victor von Kraus, *Maximilian I. Vertraulicher Briefwechsel* (Innsbruck, 1875), pp. 97-98.

⁶ Cf. A. LOEHR, *Österreichische Geldgeschichte* (Vienna, 1946), pp. 29-35.

⁷ Hofkammerarchiv, Vienna, GB 14, folio 41; GB 15, folio 216.

fluence also guaranteed a certain degree of loyalty from these ecclesiastical states to Habsburg policies in the German Empire. The largest single province, Styria, had considerable mining wealth, comparable with that of the Tirol, at least once the relatively advanced metallurgical manufacturing industries of Styria were taken into account. Styrian finished iron and alloy goods, such as blades, were used in farming as well as in war and were exported all over Europe, as the best quality and finish of tempered metals made anywhere in Renaissance Europe.⁸ Maximilian grew up at Wiener Neustadt, at that time a Habsburg refuge from rebellious Vienna, just inside the province of Styria, on the borders of Lower Austria and Hungary. Many of the men who made careers in the service of Frederick III and Maximilian I were of Styrian or Tirolean noble origin, as was the case with the Prüschenks and Liechtensteins.

The main problem facing the inhabitants of later fifteenth century Inner Austria was how to defend themselves against Turkish raids.⁹ Most of the territorial assemblies of Styria, Carniola, and Carinthia were called with this problem in mind. The level of taxation was consequently very high, and the need for military support from Maximilian meant that the Inner Austrian Estates were in no position to adopt strong policies in opposition to Habsburg officials at Graz, Judenburg, Laibach, and St. Veit. Under Maximilian, the south-eastern borders of Inner Austria continued to be the main area of incursion by the Turks. In 1493, Maximilian personally organised and actually led one campaign against the Turkish raiders, an undertaking which was grandly termed a crusade at the time. Significantly, this campaign took place in Inner Austria, but it failed miserably in its efforts to destroy any Turkish mercenaries. A fortified border with the Turks had to wait for another generation and Maximilian, in effect, did nothing to protect his Inner Austrian subjects against the endemic slave raids that the Turks operated from the Balkans. It was in Inner Austria that Maximilian was to face his most serious peasant revolts towards the end of his reign.¹⁰

POPULATION

Population figures for the reign of Maximilian I do not exist. The 1490s were a time of experimentation with Imperial poll-taxes. Detailed records listing subjects who paid poll-taxes at the territorial state level, such as those of the Archbishopric of Salzburg, were partly examined

⁸ F. FISCHER, "Die Sensenausfuhr aus Österreich," in *Der Aussenhandel Ostmitteleuropas, 1450-1650*, ed. I Bog (Köln, 1971): 286-319.

⁹ K. GROSSMANN, ed., *Jakob Unrest. Österreichische Chronik* (Weimar, 1957), *passim*. W. NEUMANN, "Die Türkeneinfälle nach Kärnten," *Festgabe H. Steinacker* (Munich, 1955).

¹⁰ F. MAYER, "Materialien und kritische Bemerkungen zur Geschichte der ersten Bauernunruhen in Steiermark und den angrenzenden Ländern," *Beiträge zur Kunde steiermärkischer Geschichtsquellen*, 13 (Graz, 1876); 14 (1877); and the same author in *Mitteilungen des historischen Vereins für Steiermark*, 23 (1875), pp. 107-34.

before some of these archives were destroyed by bombing at Frankfurt-am-Main during the Second World War.¹¹ Not enough systematic work has been done, although many documents survive. We still have to make inferences from the information of neighbouring regions and from estate records of the 1520s which survive in a more thorough and systematic manner than do those from previous decades. The 1520s thus form an arbitrary divide in Austrian history. This leaves open the wider question as to how rapid was change within pre-industrial early modern Austrian society, a problem to which we must return, once more evidence has become available, in order to modify the way in which material from the later sixteenth century has been used here.¹²

There were probably 1.5 million inhabitants in the Habsburg Austrian lands ruled by Maximilian I.¹³ Lower Austria below the Enns (including Vienna) may have accounted for 0.5 million. This made it the most populous of all the Habsburg provinces with one-third of the whole Austrian population. Next came Lower Austria above the Enns and Styria in Inner Austria with about 300,000 people each. Tirol and Carinthia had something over 100,000 each, with the Vorarlberg region on the Swiss border comprising only about 32,000 inhabitants. The neighbouring client state of Salzburg may have contained about 75,000 people. These figures presume errors of up to twenty per cent at the earliest point of calculation, 1527.¹⁴

A recent estimate has been made of the number of taxable buildings in Austria circa 1527. These could be more readily ascertained than actual population figures from estate and tax registers. There is no agreement about household sizes, although average multipliers fluctuate from four to seven souls for this period. Lower Austria below the Enns, including Vienna, had a probable housing stock of 80,000. Next came the province above the Enns with 56,000 dwellings, Steiermark with 41,000, Carinthia with 22,000, Tirol with 18,000, neighbouring Salzburg with 12,500, and Vorarlberg with a mere 7,000. According to late sixteenth-century urban evidence there were still only about twelve towns in Habsburg Austria that had more than three thousand inhabitants. Of these Vienna may have had up to 50,000, with Steyr, Schwaz, Graz, Innsbruck and Wels, ranging from five to nine thousand. Krems, Klagenfurt, Wiener Neustadt, Linz, St. Pölten, and Klosterneuburg were estimated to have had between three and five thousand people each.¹⁵

¹¹ H. WIDMANN, "Die Einhebung der ersten Reichssteuer in Salzburg im Jahre 1497," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde, Festschrift aus Anlass des 50. jährigen Bestandes der Gesellschaft* (1910): 91-106; R. JUNG, "Die Akten über die Erhebung des gemeinen Pfennigs von 1495 ff. im Stadtarchiv zu Frankfurt-am-Main," *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins*, 8 (1909): 328-35; P. BLICKLE, "Gemeiner Pfennig und Obrigkeit," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 63 (1976): 180-93.

¹² K. KLEIN, "Die Bevölkerung Österreichs (circa 1500-1750)," in *Beiträge zur Bevölkerungs- und Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, ed. H. HELCZMANOVSKI (Vienna, 1973): 47-112.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 97; cf. E. KIRSTEN, ed., *Bevölkerungs-Ploetz* (Würzburg, 1955-56).

¹⁴ Klein, in HELCZMANOVSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 105, 112.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

A recent study of the distribution of housing in Vienna for the mid-Sixteenth Century has to serve also as an indication for the other, more modest towns in Habsburg Austria some fifty years earlier. In 1563 just under one thousand households of artisans and craftsmen were traced in the Vienna records. Forty percent of these artisans and craftsmen owned the accommodation that they lived in. The rest rented their houses, flats or rooms. This social group constituted the backbone of the Viennese population, making up about one-third of the static population and occupying one-third of the traceable, owned and rented housing stock in the town.¹⁶ Household sizes, including domestics and apprentices, as well as children and relatives, varied from two to twelve, averaging six souls per household for the higher social groups and four for the rest.¹⁷ About ten per cent of the urban population, including officials and those calling themselves by the title of "burgher," represented the upper social group. About thirty percent of the population made up the middle group of small traders and craftsmen, and sixty percent the lower group of domestics, labourers, lodgers and migrants. Six times as many people lived in the suburbs than inside the walls of the old town, although this changed during the time of the first Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529, as more of the well-to-do sought security behind the town wall.¹⁸

Naturally Vienna was something of an exception as an urban centre, as it was almost five times as populous as its next Austrian rivals. In the mid-fifteenth Century, when Vienna was still the residence of the Habsburg court, it is estimated that court and nobility, clergy and university totalled more than one-quarter of the whole population, roughly equal in size to all those who called themselves "burghers". The "burghers" comprised town council families, merchants, guildsmen and even craftsmen. Almost half the population made up the lower stratum, including labourers, domestics, Jews, carters and persons in the transport trade, poor folk in recognised institutions, licensed beggars, and women, generally self-employed or more specifically earning a living as prostitutes.¹⁹

THE URBAN SITUATION

A recent study argues that the relationship between real prices and wages for the unspecified labourer in the German regions, as well as the amount of regular work available to such a person, was so favourable in the Fifteenth Century that he achieved a level of well-being that was not reached again by his descendants until well into our own century. During the course of the Sixteenth Century crucially selective price increases began to cut the value of real wages and this trend continued inexorably

¹⁶ E. LICHTENBERGER, "Von der mittelalterlichen Bürgerstadt zur City," *ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁷ E. KUNZE, "Wandlungen der Sozialstruktur," *ibid.*, p. 345 (using evidence from eighteenth-century Krems).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 301, 346-47 (combining evidence from fifteenth-century Vienna with eighteenth-century Krems and Stein).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

until the era of industrialisation towards the end of the Nineteenth Century. In other words, common standards of living reached a high point in the reign of Maximilian I and from thence they continued to fall for nearly four hundred years, before picking up and reaching all-time record levels in our own century.²⁰ The decline of wages, and hence purchasing power, was calculated for the course of the Sixteenth Century. It seems that the main cause of this decline in living standards was the continued increase in population, on which so much more research has yet to be done.²¹ As there were more people than there were jobs, those in work had to be grateful increasingly for any economic conditions that they were offered. In 1548, for example, the Estates of County Lippe acting as employers and sitting in their local parliament in Westphalia, Northwest Germany, discussed this problem as recorded in their minutes: "Since the serious damage of poverty has created a great mass of day-labourers and servants, that neither the landlords nor anyone can pay necessary day-wages or servants' keep, let alone provide enough food, we recommend that my gracious lord [i.e. the government] provide us for the good of everyone with a decreed policy [*Ordnung*] outlining to what extent the landlord is liable for providing food, and what each and everyone should earn in day-rates or other wages."²²

From evidence already collected in the 1930s as part of a history of prices and wages in early modern Germany and Austria, statistics have been produced for towns like Nuremberg, Augsburg, Cologne, Frankfurt-am-Main, and Vienna. In Hamburg, for example, the official wages of carpenters and weavers rose by forty per cent during the sixteenth century, while the price of their basic foodstuff, ryemeal for black bread, rose by 380 per cent. Similar trends were traced in England, France and the Low Countries, and Poland.²³ What had happened, one wonders, to the favourable wage situation estimated for the end of the fifteenth century? Can we really believe the study made of ordinary burghers at Nuremberg in the period from 1470 to 1500 which suggests that there was little overcrowding, acceptable conditions of work, and sufficient pay for a daily meat dish, except on fast days when there was ample fresh and salted fish?²⁴

²⁰ W. ABEL, *Massenarmut und Hungerkrisen im Vorindustriellen Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1972 and Hamburg, 1974). A useful survey of the secondary literature is provided by E. MASCHKE and J. SYDOW, eds., *Gesellschaftliche Unterschichten* (Stuttgart, 1967).

²¹ Cf. D. SABEAN, "Famille et tenure paysanne," *Annales*, 27 (1972).

²² Translated from Staatsarchiv Detmold, L 9 Bd. 1, folio 196; G. BENECKE, "Labour relations and peasant society in northwest Germany c. 1600," *History*, 58 (1973), pp. 355-56.

²³ M. J. ELSAS, *Umriss einer Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Deutschland* (Leiden, 1936-49); A. F. PRIBRAM, et al, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Österreich* (Vienna, 1938). See the discussion of the Elsas Archive by W. Abel, "Preis-, und Agrargeschichte," in *Wege und Forschungen der Agrargeschichte. Festschrift für Günther Franz* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1967): 67-79.

²⁴ G. STRAUSS, *Nuremberg in the sixteenth century* (New York, 1966), pp. 200-01. Contrast C. L. SACHS, *Nurnbergs reichsstädtische Arbeiterschaft (1503-11)* (Nuremberg, 1915), pp. 40-44, appendices.

In graphs produced for the sixteenth century, wages were calculated as the cost of a man's labour, therefore as an aspect of prices in general. This wage-as-price line dips, becomes horizontal or at best rises gently in a way similar to the price lines of manufactured goods. But cereals as essential high calorie foods climb steeply off the page as the century wears on.²⁵ In sixteenth-century Austria it is estimated that wages remained constant and that manufactured goods rose by one quarter at most while cereal prices increased an average of two and a half times. Even so, a building worker at the end of the sixteenth century could still earn, in a full day's work, the equivalent of 23,000 calories of rye, pease, or beans. If he used his wages to buy meat and dairy products, then he only earned enough to purchase 7,000 calories.²⁶ The conclusion from this is that, although meat prices did not rise, they remained beyond the reach of ordinary family budgets. However much cereal prices rose, flour products were still the best buy in calorific terms. The more cereal prices rose, the less the labourer and his dependents could afford to buy anything else. But perhaps the problem is not so much to trace the depressing decline of real wages in early modern times, as to question how this decline came about, and indeed whether the working family was really quite well off before this economic decline was firmly under way.²⁷ As the transition is put around the year 1500, the records of the reign of Maximilian I become of crucial importance. We will examine some of them, basically with two questions in mind. Firstly, is the gloomy picture of wage decline from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries exaggerated? Secondly, is the picture of work and plenty that was given for later fifteenth century Nuremberg, if extended to the towns of the Empire as a whole, perhaps not an over-optimistic view of common standards of living at the end of the medieval era?

An overall analysis of the price and wage lists in Pribram's study of fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century Austrian evidence, covering Vienna and the two provinces of Lower Austria, gives the following trend. The ratio of wages to prices was probably at its most advantageous to the worker in the mid-fifteenth century. There was a dip in this prosperity in the 1470s, recovery up to the 1510s, and a decline once more in the 1520s to a position worse than that of the 1470s. In the 1530s the situation steadily deteriorated for the wage-earner, as one depressed decade was followed by another. When we look back over the early modern centuries of "hard times" for labouring families, the 1520s seem to provide a watershed. These years seem to have been the last time for centuries that Viennese labourers could earn enough to live well. How tenable is this view?

²⁵ ABEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²⁷ See the important modifications of Abel resulting from the case study of one south Baltic coastal town, H. HAUSCHILD, *Studien zu Löhnen und Preisen in Rostock im Spätmittelalter* (Cologne, 1973).

The Vienna *Bürgerspital*, or town charity hospital, has left careful records of its housekeeping.²⁸ Its commissioners paid six to eight kreuzers a day, plus keep, to journeymen builders and carpenters between 1440 and 1540 in the summer time. The kreuzer was worth four pfennigs. The «without-food» wage rate was between one-twelfth and two-thirds higher than the net rate of pay with meals included. Winter rates were a standard one kreuzer below summer wages, and summertime rates operated for two-thirds of the year for all labouring jobs that the *Bürgerspital* provided. Apprentices received one-half to one whole kreuzer a day less than journeymen. A master craftsman was paid only one kreuzer a day more than the journeyman. The tylers (*Ziegeldecker*) were the best paid among the Vienna *Bürgerspital's* work force. A journeyman tyler netted ten kreuzers a day between 1440 and 1540, an indication, no doubt, of the hazards of his trade. The navy only earned four to five kreuzers a day.

Agricultural labour in the *Bürgerspital's* fields outside the city was on the whole less rewarding, although harvesters usually received their keep as well as pay. This, of course, made economic sense as it made sure that workers were not impaired by hunger from working to full capacity during the day. The state of their dependents who had to exist on their take-home pay did not seem to have concerned the employer. The skilled vineyard worker received between two and a half to six kreuzers a day, but at harvest time this could go down to one and a quarter kreuzer a day, as seasonal labour and the generally favourable weather and time of year presented vineyard overseers with a superabundance of labour. Other harvesting rates were according to piece-work (*Accordlohn*) — still standard practice today. One and a half kreuzers were paid for chopping one *Fuder* of fire-wood, about thirty-two heavy baskets full. In contrast to this slave-rate, scything and stooking, perhaps the most physically exhausting of all jobs, were well rewarded at fifteen kreuzers a day. The scyther had to stay on a first-class diet, and as the economy ultimately depended on the speed and thoroughness of his work in the grain-fields, he commanded a good wage for a job that had to be well done. This equally applied to the thresher who could earn between ten and twelve kreuzers for every thirty *Metzen* (1,350 litres) of ready grain that he flailed. In 1470 threshers were briefly asked to provide their own keep and the *Bürgerspital* paid them an unusually high rate of twenty-two kreuzers a day.

Yet these high rates were only paid to the skilled and healthy labourer at harvest time. High earnings for brief periods of the year had to tide labouring families over the weeks and months of relatively low employment and the inevitably serious petty debts that this entailed for their family economy. At the *Bürgerspital* only the carpenters and builders had regular, full-time employment. A number of navvies were hired according to need for periods of time fluctuating between several days to several months a year. Although there was a certain degree of job security for the workers hired by the *Bürgerspital* in that they knew that they would

²⁸ For the following survey, PRIBRAM, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

be hired every year, they never knew how long any one period of employment would last or when exactly they would next be called upon.

The relatively highly paid tylers were employed between 20 and 100 days every year by the *Bürgerspital* in the period between 1452 and 1778. This left room for a great deal of economic uncertainty, as a tyler needed more than one employer, but enough idle time to be on call to do jobs for regular customers. A vineyard worker, on the other hand, was more sure of the time and duration of his work. In accordance with the fairly predictable growth cycle of the crop, his services were usually only called upon in March and April. Whereas the scyther or thresher picked up most of his year's pay in the autumn, the skilled vine pruner or tyler earned most of his in the spring. No doubt the tyler found that he had most work in the gusty late autumns, notorious in the region.

Full employment, regular pay, and job security meant greatly different things in practice to each employer and to each of his labourers. How did the best day-wages of full summertime employment compare with the prices of high-calorie foods? Once again we are fortunate for the Vienna *Bürgerspital* left detailed accounts. This institution could buy in bulk more cheaply than the labourer, craftsman, or their wives who daily bought tiny amounts at retail cost in the markets and small shops. If it is assumed, for lack of shopkeepers' price records, that the day labourer could buy flour at the same favourable rates as the commissioners for the *Bürgerspital* and full summertime employment is assumed, then the journeyman builder with his maximum eight kreuzers a day without keep earned on average the equivalent of twenty-four pounds of rye flour per day. Naturally this equivalent does not take into account the cost of housing, clothing, and heating, let alone loss of earnings through illness or unemployment. The navvy at that time would have had a maximum earning power of eighteen pounds of rye flour a day. This is reckoned from the recorded cost of rye flour to the *Bürgerspital* which ran at between one-third and one-half a kreuzer per pound in the later 1520s and earlier 1530s.

Fernand Braudel has estimated that a Mediterranean labourer needed one and a quarter pounds of cereals daily to keep fit for work around the year 1600.²⁹ This condition was certainly met, indeed with plenty to spare, by the Viennese workmen of the 1520s.³⁰ Always providing that the labourer was in full employment, he could still earn enough in the Vienna of the late and immediately post-Maximilian era to feed a family of ten if need be. This picture loses its theoretical cosiness, however, if we consider not only price increases, but also price fluctuations. For example, within the period 1520-40, wheat flour ranged in price from one-third of a kreuzer

²⁹ F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean*, I, p. 420.

³⁰ Contrast E. H. Phelps BROWN and S. V. HOPKINS, "Seven centuries of the prices of consumables compared with builders' wage-rates," *Economica* (1956), appendix B, pp. 311-19 for an English urban situation. Compare H. ZATSCHKE, "Die Handwerker Wiens," *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien*, 8 (1949-50).

to two and two-thirds kreuzers, which represented an eight-fold fluctuation within a mere two decades. What use is it, therefore, to estimate an average of two-thirds kreuzer per pound for this commodity when even one month of unusually high cereal prices could lead to hunger and perhaps to a weakened labour force, whose resistance to disease would be seriously eroded?

Although day-wage rates remained fairly constant between 1440 and 1540, or rose only slightly, high-calorie commodity prices rose far more rapidly. In 1440 wheat stood at five kreuzers per *Metzen* (that is per thirty pounds). By the 1530s its price was between thirteen and thirty-six kreuzers per *Metzen*, entailing a near three to seven-fold price increase on top of a large price fluctuation of up to eight times. As a price rise over almost one century, this was serious, for in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Vienna, the workman suffered price inflation without accompanying wage increases. Uncertain climate and harvest were natural causes of price fluctuation, but to these factors had to be added political and military upheavals. Vienna and its fertile plain were under threat and then under siege from the Turks in the 1520s and consequently prices rose drastically.

At such times — as the price of high quality flour shot up to seventy-eight kreuzers per *Metzen* — the Viennese housewife turned to alternative foods. Oatmeal was one resort at a cattle-fodder price of under three kreuzers per *Metzen*. This soon reached seven kreuzers and, when it became too expensive in its turn, there were always cabbages as a last resort costing one pfennig (one quarter of a kreuzer) each in the early 1530s, or sweet turnips at three kreuzers per *Metzen* in 1463, rising to eleven kreuzers in 1530. The price rise tended to hit the poorer or cheaper food-stuffs even harder than dearer or better quality goods, as demand for cabbages and turnips rose and for flour products fell, proving that times of dearth display a peculiar economic logic of their own.³¹ In more normal times the wife of a better-paid and more secure worker went to market to buy high-grade flour which increased three-fold in price in Vienna between 1469 and 1536. The poorer and less job-secure worker made do with sweet turnips, the price of which increased four-fold over the same period of time.

Bürgerspital price lists are by no means exhausted by this brief survey. We have concentrated on the more popular high calorie commodities, as they determine the balance between health and sickness, life and death, to the labourer and his family. It was less important for the labouring family to know the price of a sheep or the cost of prunes by the hundred-weight, for it could not afford either. The employers were more interested, for they could afford them. Meat prices hardly rose at all during the whole period and this indicates that the social rift between the haves

³¹ Compare the *Annales* article of G. VERLINDEN, *et al.*, "Prices and wage movements in Belgium," in *Economy and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. P. BURKE (London, 1972), pp. 61-62, 71, 83, n. 45.

and havenots was deepening. In the 1520s in Vienna one pound of beef was the same price as three pounds of rye flour and, given the wage rates, the common family could afford either one or the other, not both. In calorie terms beef was, then as now, a foolhardy buy for a family who budgeted just above the hunger line.

Naturally the common housewife had to go for the bargain in the market-place, and the chance of survival that her family had probably quite frequently depended on her skill in switching to alternative cereals when high-grade flour and rye products, for example, became too expensive. As her family economy was dependent on day-wages, it seems unlikely that she could buy in bulk when food was cheap or put anything by for a rainy day. The common family was thus subject to the full impact of day-to-day market forces.

To relieve his insecurity, the labourer was given the dubious blessing of cheap, fixed-price beer by the town council, an arrangement which, one may feel sure, only caused his family further hardship. Institutions like the *Bürgerspital* manufactured and offered for sale in their tap-rooms a fixed-price brew to the working man. The constant price no doubt entailed fluctuations and deterioration in quality, but the town's politicians must have regarded this as a lesser evil than the one that they would have faced at the hands of the crowd if they increased its price.

The evidence from the *Bürgerspital* for the period 1440-1540 would lead us to suppose that a price rise occurred which was indeed more steep than any wage increase. Still in these one hundred years it was possible for the labourer to earn enough to feed his nuclear family, regardless of its size, provided of course that he remained in full employment and in good health. Price increases had thus not seriously begun to pauperise commoners in Vienna during the earlier part of the sixteenth century. As time went on wives certainly had to be more careful with their buying, and if the daily meat course that has been surmised for Nuremburg had ever been a reality, then it would probably have disappeared long before 1540, even among a relatively prosperous workforce like the Viennese.³²

RURAL EVIDENCE

What were the living conditions of country folk? The Austrian archives are full of estate records (*Urbare*) and from the 1490s alone several thousand survive. Yet their analysis for social history as a whole has hardly begun. Some details from the period around 1500 exist, and it is worth looking at examples to indicate the value of these sources. The *Urbar*, or survey of the estate of Austrian Ortenburg from 1499, gives evidence of conflict between Habsburg bailiffs and peasants over rents and tenancies. The bailiffs were interested in increasing the duties of the peasants and began to record services which were claimed to have been carried out in the past and which the current generation of tenant

³² But note the cautionary remarks in MASCHKE, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

farmers would need to be coerced to do again. For example, "Note, near Woltzpuhl is a meadow that the Maltzpuhlers and all those who live nearby *should* mow, harvest and deliver to my Lord".³³ One of the purposes of an *Urbar* was probably to increase the landlord's revenues at the tenant's expense.³⁴

Like many estate records of the time, the 1499 *Urbar* of Ortenburg lists the duties of tenant farmers, who numbered 124 in this case, but its special interest lies in bringing to light a conflict between tenants and bailiffs, which led to the removal of at least one recalcitrant tenant. This may well have been a common occurrence at the time. Surprisingly, Maximilian I also took an interest in the case. Here Emperor and peasant came face to face.³⁵ It is worth examining the document that settled the original charge of tenant disobedience some ten years later.³⁶

Item, Lienhart Zott used to pay annual rent of five pounds of pennies for his tenant-farm in the Liser, and for this our most gracious Lord the Roman Emperor and King has given him another farm in exchange, called the farm at Oberaich near Väschenndorf which Christian Räss rents at the annual rates [there follows the list of rents in kind]... Concluded by Imperial and Royal fiat, will and wish, recorded by this letter...

Elsewhere in the same *Urbar*, peasants are reported to have refused to pay the increase in their rents. We know from the fate of Lienhart Zott that the least they could expect was a summary termination of their farming contract. Zott was fortunate to receive another farm. This *Urbar* reflects the kind of peasant truculence that must be seen as the most common start to more politically serious protest, depending on whether the local authorities would be forced by the extent of their debts to the treasury to make an issue of the matter. The following are reported to have been perhaps typical peasant replies in the bailiff's *Urbar* entries, "but he is not prepared to pay so much rent"; "He gives no chickens or hares"; "Now he is not prepared to pay so much".³⁷

It is clear that in Ortenburg in 1499, 124 tenant farmers were being assessed for more rent. Maximilian, as the direct landlord, informed himself of the affair. His involvement in the machinations of Europolitics thus did not exclude an interest in common estate management. In Ortenburg those peasants who refused to pay what the officials considered full rents were prepared to speak their minds. Having done so, they could expect (as Zott) to be moved out of their holdings. Whether they would then obtain a new farm was up to the labour market and the whim of official and landlord. In Zott's case Maximilian intervened in his favour, a

³³ Translated from Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, HS-B753, *Urbar Ortenburg 1499*, folio 10.

³⁴ P. J. WICHNER, "Über einige Urbare," *Beiträge zur Kunde steiermärkische Geschichtsquellen*, 13 (1876), pp. 95-95.

³⁵ As in the Emperor Maximilian's own prayer-book: "Dear Lord, we are all your peasants (*Lieber Gott, wir sind alle Deine Bauern*)," in R. M. and G. RADBRUCH, *Der deutsche Bauernstand*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1961), p. 29.

³⁶ Translated from *Urbar Ortenburg 1499*, last entry (peasant no. 124).

³⁷ Translated from *ibid.*, folio 9 verso.

grand moment indeed for the humble serf-peasant family. They received favourable judgement, seemingly handed down from the Emperor himself.

An *Urbar* entry like the Ortenburg one concerning Lienhart Zott can help to throw light upon the human beings whose labour and produce was the basis of the whole economy. It was the peasant producer-manager who made possible what the records of state tell us about the politics and diplomacy of the period. Let us be clear that without the peasant-manager, without the serf tenant-farmer, there would be no records at all. Of course no one really disputes the idea that the economic basis of early modern society lies in its peasants and labourers, their work, produce, and taxes. What is perhaps still in dispute is the claim that the records of such labour relations and living standards are sufficient to allow a reconstruction of the history of the common man which would be neither banal nor misleading. In order to strengthen this claim and show what rich finds are yet to be uncovered in the documents, we turn to an example of a mundane labour dispute.

In 1510 the Carthusians at Gaming, Lower Austria, were in conflict with their employees, butchers, and skimmers. Scribbled between the covers of his price-guide for the buying and selling of commodities, the Carthusian master of purchases left a record of his plans. He wanted to know what neighbouring skimmers were receiving before deciding whether or not his own employees' demands for better pay and sustenance were unfair. He wrote, "The skimmers notify that from skinning they hardly earn more than ten pfennigs a day [two and a half kreuzers]. Instead they want one pfennig for each skin. We must ask the other skimmers at Scheibbs, namely Master Paul and Master Ruprecht about this. Whilst they are at work they insist on having much wine to drink."³⁸

Underlying such a dispute is the general problem, firstly of what living standards were like, and secondly how they accorded with the aspirations of employer and employee, landlord and tenant. The general view so far seems to be that if conditions were worsening in the towns and larger markets with all their trading and financial resources, then the village and farm communities were even worse off. The organisation of credit probably never favoured villages and tenant-farms, let alone the agrarian labourer.

A MINING COMMUNITY

Around 1500 so much wealth was tied up in the exploitation of mineral resources in the Alps that mining communities were of crucial importance to the economic well-being of rulers like Maximilian and financiers like the Fuggers.³⁹ This was especially the case in the Tirol, Inner Austria, and

³⁸ Translated from Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, HS-R214, Ein brawch wie man kauffen und zalln soll, Memorialsachen vmb Ao. 1510, Carthusia Gemnicensis, folio 136.

³⁹ See L. SCHEUERMANN, *Die Fugger als Montanindustrielle in Tirol und Kärnten* (Innsbruck, 1959); M. VON WOLFSTRIGL-WOLFSKRON, *Die Tiroler Erzbergbaue* (Innsbruck, 1903); S. WORMS, *Schwarzer Bergbau* (Vienna, 1904) for fifteenth-century background.

the Habsburg satellite Archbishopric of Salzburg, where miners were the producers of strategic and precious minerals which became immediately available to pay for ambitious patronage, diplomacy, wars, and pleasures. Salt, silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead were among the more lucrative minerals mined in these regions. Maximilian himself went down to inspect the silver-ore seam at Rottenmann in north-western Styria and wrote back in ecstasy to his uncle, Sigismund of Tirol, when he found enough there for up to six years' exploitation.⁴⁰

The pay book or *Soldregister* of the salt and iron mines at Hallein in the Archbishopric of Salzburg has survived for the year 1507. It gives a vivid account of wages and conditions of work, which we may take as indicative for Maximilian's own miners in Tirol, Inner Austria, and the *Vorlande*. The salt miners were paid for the year a cash sum totalling just under 7000 pounds in pennies.⁴¹ On top of this, miners received unspecified payment in salt worth ten to twelve and a half pennies per *Fuder*. Scales of pay reflected the complicated division of labour. Thirty-two distinct occupations were described for this mining-township. They begin with the warden or *Phleger* at the top, and he alone took over five hundred pounds in pay (seven per cent of the total wage-bill in coin). Team-leaders were well paid. Two chief foremen or *Gryesknechte* netted just short of seventy pounds in cash for the year. The miner could become quite well-off, although it was no doubt a struggle to arrive at the high station of works' official or foreman. Foremen's pay was certainly about twice that of an educated bookkeeper or customs' official, four of whom were employed at Hallein in 1507 at annual rates of thirty-four to forty-three gulden.⁴²

In the four iron mines of Hallein the manager netted 176 fl, and his foremen received forty-six gulden a year each. Payment was made monthly in thirteen annual instalments (no doubt double at Christmas). The total wage bill here, however, less than 2400 fl, showing that the iron mines at Hallein were less lucrative than the salt mines in that year. Consequently, wages in iron mining were lower than in the salt industry. The salt pans were run by sixteen overseers with ninety men under them. When panning was in operation an overseer or *Perer* was paid one gulden a week. A manual worker by contrast received 88 pennies a week, about one-third of the overseer's rate. The weekly wage bill during panning was sixty-eight gulden. This would have given an annual wage bill of over 3500 fl at the salt pans alone if a full rate of pay had been sustained over the year, but the actual annual wage bill in 1507 was well under a half of

⁴⁰ For example Maximilian was asked to appoint "informed miners" to settle a dispute between miners, peasants, and foresters in Schwaz; Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, *Maximiliana*, Kart. 46 (XV), folio 177 (undated).

⁴¹ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, HS-R275, *Soldregister Hallein*, 1507. In 1507 the pound of 240 pennies was accounted as equivalent in value to the Rhenish Gulden or florin (fl.); all payments were made in pennies of this sort.

⁴² *Ibid.*, folios 2-27. Cf. J. VOZAR, "Die sozialen Folgen des Bergbaues," in Bog, *op. cit.*: 569-83, pp. 574-77.

this at 1500 fl. Thus, on average the salt pan overseer earned about thirty-three gulden a year, and his labourer about eleven gulden a year. The latter wage was still higher in money terms than that received by poorer peasants and labourers but it was quite near the hunger line, being about level with the earnings of poorer artisans and urban workers. No doubt the real difference lay in the level of fringe benefits, such as rights to collect free fuel from the surrounding alpine woodlands, grazing rights for livestock, or even quotas of salt for the miners.

We have already noted that peasants, artisans, rural and urban labourers and their families were unlikely to have consumed meat regularly, considering the relationship between real prices and wages. With the miners of Hallein we may surmise that foremen, overseers and those in skilled jobs certainly earned enough at about thirty pennies or more a day to have afforded quite an acceptable standard of living. Also, the prospect of promotion to such a well-paid position was probably higher in mining than in any other kind of job available to the common man in the early sixteenth century. It was a career open to talent in a strikingly modern sense. In the Hallein salt pans about one in six persons was an overseer with three times the pay of the other five. That is, one in six was taking home nearly thirty pennies per day on average, while the rest may have taken home somewhat under ten pennies a day. The latter was the rate that Lower Austrian skimmers were receiving at about the same time, and over which rate they would go on strike in 1510.⁴³ No wonder that at this very time in booming east-central Germany Luther's father was rising successfully via a mining career from the younger son status of a serf to local town-council burgher standing, sending his son into higher education and living in a house of stone in the County of Mansfeld.

Mining was a buoyant industry. It was a career open to talent in the quite new manner of capitalistic self-help. No doubt mining was a badly paid occupation for new entrants to it, but those who worked hard, had practical skills, and survived the hazards to health in the open casts on the hillsides, in the pans and foundries of the valley, or in the underground shafts, were rewarded with a pay structure of great opportunity, rising, in the case of Hallein, from eleven to nearly seventy gulden a year. The only problem was that the miner was subject to direct market forces, depending on the ready availability of his ore at source, his finance and good luck in extracting it; and the price was dictated by the pressures of monopoly financiers upon rulers. However, Hallein in 1507 was a success story, and the miner could and did do well, but he surely paid for this with a higher degree of economic insecurity and health hazard than usually pertained among common subjects outside the theatre of war, famine, and disease.

⁴³ See note 38.

THE COURT OF MAXIMILIAN AND BIANCA MARIA

The Court of Maximilian and his second wife, Bianca Maria Sforza, established in the *Neue Burg* at Innsbruck in 1497, employed a number of guards, artisans, labourers, domestics, journeymen, and master craftsmen as well as women and men of the so-called higher and nobler sort, like officials, priests, choir-boys, secretaries, and ladies (and gentlemen) -in-waiting. The records that survive of the Court and its economy from the last two decades of Maximilian's reign are relatively plentiful and they go into minute detail unmatched by the records of town, country, and mining community.⁴⁴ As the Court contained at any one time many more menial servants than members of any other group, it is essential for our study of common people under Maximilian to use this evidence and to compare and contrast it with those common standards of life that pertained elsewhere in the late medieval and early modern Alpine and Austrian lands.

Was the menial servant at Maximilian's Court well-off, or at least generally better off than common workers in town and country? How did the living conditions of menials at Court compare with the conditions offered to the "higher and nobler" sort also serving at Court? Were the latter well-off, and can we take their standards of life as indicative of burghers', patricians', and low nobles' own family economies elsewhere in the Austrian and German lands around the earlier sixteenth century?

The first problem is to establish how many courts Maximilian kept simultaneously. We can glean this information from a substantial budget estimate of expenditure from the fiscal era of treasurer Georg Gossembrot in Innsbruck which survives, undated, from circa 1500, a high point in Maximilian's career of extravagant expenditure and simultaneous fight to ward off bankruptcy.⁴⁵ Gossembrot was authorised to spend annual revenues of 364,000 fl from the Tirol, Lower Austria, and the Austrian mines. The Tirol was to provide for the upkeep of the Hapsburg government at Innsbruck, as well as Empress Bianca Maria Sforza's Court. Bianca Maria received 4,000 fl a year pocket money. Her Court servants were to cost no more than twice that — 8,000 fl — in annual keep. The Innsbruck government had to make do with 20,000 fl yearly, whereas, by way of comparison, debt repayment to the silver consortium of chief creditors headed by Fugger was over 170,000 fl from this one source alone. Considering that Bianca Maria's Milanese dowry had been in the region of one million gulden five years earlier, Maximilian was indeed holding his second wife short of cash and comfort at this mere 12,000 fl gross for the

⁴⁴ A. GATT, "Der Innsbrucker Hof zur Zeit Kaiser Maximilian I," Innsbruck University thesis, 1943 (typescript in Landesarchiv Innsbruck, COD. 5499) is an invaluable account based on the records available in Innsbruck. As Professor Stolz in his examination of this thesis pointed out, the Vienna materials also needed to be taken into account. In 1943 that was not possible.

⁴⁵ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (alt 39-X-2), folios 41-43. (Source cited as *Maximiliana*.)

year.⁴⁶ At even the most modest of interest rates she was really entitled to at least four times that amount as gross annual expenditure. The twelve thousand Maximilian actually allowed turned out to be exactly the same amount that the Emperor reserved for his own personal spending, as taken out of the revenues of Lower Austria and itemised later in this budget.

Gossembrot earmarked over 40,000 fl for Maximilian and his own peripatetic Court, which was an establishment distinct from the Innsbruck government and from Bianca Maria's Court, since Maximilian usually only spent a few weeks a year in Innsbruck. He was a compulsive traveller, and he seldom allowed his second wife to follow him.⁴⁷ The Lower Austrian government at Linz cost just under 12,000 fl, and building, artillery, hunting, shooting, and fishing took up 24,000 fl — twice as much as Bianca Maria's total Court allowance. The rest comprised regular debt repayment from the domain treasuries of Innsbruck, Vienna, and Linz which, at five and six per cent interest represented capital indebtedness in excess of one and a half million gulden. With income of 364,000 fl and 1,720,000 fl in debts, Maximilian had borrowed nearly five times his income. This placed his treasury in a difficult financial position, and treasurer Gossembrot was forced to economize.

One such way was to cut the allowances of those least able to retaliate. This applied above all to Empress Bianca Maria, who, unloved and unseen by Maximilian, was consigned to penury. She was kept so short of funds and provisions that at least twice the burghers of Freiburg-in-Breisgau and Worms forcibly detained her and her ladies-in-waiting until Maximilian had paid their bills. During the enforced stay in Freiburg in the late 1490s one Court lady tried to put pressure on Maximilian to pay up by contacting her lover, the influential Chancellor Ciprian von Serntein. Her letter, among others of a more intimate nature, has survived and is indicative of the frustration that Maximilian's finances could cause.⁴⁸

Dear Serntein. I send you herewith many very friendly greetings and wish you everything that is agreeable to you. And I do beg of you that you will use all your diligence so that we can get away from here and return home.

(signed) Catherina von Schrofenstein.

Some ten years later Empress Bianca Maria's Court was being refused dining facilities at Innsbruck and another lady-in-waiting wrote to Chancellor Serntein asking him to use his influence to release her from Court service. Miss Sibila of Polhaim would rather have been dismissed

⁴⁶ Cf. *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45, folios 14-15, summary account, including military expenses just short of half a million ducats, including the entry "pro aliis expenses uxoris..... 10 m [10,000 ducats]". Maximilian had eleven surviving natural children and their upkeep along with that of their mothers had also to be borne in mind. See Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, HS-W1095 (Böhm Nr. 1330).

⁴⁷ GATT, *op. cit.*, *passim*, esp., p. 192; Victor von KRAUS, "Itinarium," *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte*, 87 (1899).

⁴⁸ Translated from *Maximiliana*, Kart. 43 (V/5), folio 12 (undated). Cf. Kart. 46 (XV), folios 37, 64-65. This lady is not among the twenty-seven Germans listed as present in Bianca's *Frauenzimmer* at a later (but unspecified) date, Gatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

from Court than suffer the indignity of having her belongings mortgaged and then having to rely on meals from an inn-keeper. She claims, in a letter to Serntein, to have more confidence in him than in her brothers to act speedily on her behalf. She says that, rather than stay with the Empress, she would like to accompany Serntein on his business journeys between Innsbruck and Füssen, where he was at that time Chancellor to Maximilian's peripatetic Court.⁴⁹ Miss Polhaim, however, remained in Bianca's *Frauenzimmer*.⁵⁰ No doubt this was due to the fact that Serntein was married to Dorothea Perl, a burgher's heiress, whom he had snapped up before she was twelve years old in 1492, when he was already 35. In 1512, when Serntein was helping Maximilian as his Chancellor to run the imperial assembly at Cologne, he had left Dorothea at Castle Fragenstein near the Zirl pass outside Innsbruck. Her letters from June to September 1512 to him have survived and they relate boredom, lack of money, fear of catching plague (*rote ruhr*), devoutness, and a vivid account of her emotional state during the birth and death after two weeks of their baby, Ursula.⁵¹

Yet the testimonies of Court ladies, as well as the shortage of money and supplies to Empress Bianca Maria, do not explain the real living standards at this Court. They show that courtiers' expectations were sometimes in excess of the conditions they actually enjoyed. After 1496, Maximilian organized a household for his wife and for Katherine of Saxony, Archduke Sigismund's widow. Maximilian drew up minute and strict rules which left his wife with no administrative duties and with nothing to do except needlework, eating, feeling ill or intriguing with her servants. She died on the last day of 1510. Then from 1517, for the last two years of his life, Maximilian made further arrangements for his grand-daughter, Maria, betrothed to the ill-fated King Louis of Hungary (later killed at the Battle of Mohacs against the Turks in 1526), and for King Louis' sister, the young Anna, who was to consummate her marriage with the future Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand I in 1521. To set up effective Court-households at various times for Empress Bianca Maria and then for the two young Queens, Maria and Anna, was an important matter of state for Maximilian.⁵²

In seeking ways out of his financial embarrassments Maximilian turned to administrative regulations. An example is an undated instruction to his Innsbruck treasury, giving the finance officials there a free hand to raise money from mining assets in Tirol, Inner and Lower Austria to fund, among other things, the royal Court (*Hofstaat*) at 13,200 fl per cent annum

⁴⁹ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 43 (V/5), folios 50, 54.

⁵⁰ GATT, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

⁵¹ The six letters are reprinted in G. RENSING, "Briefe einer deutschen Edelfrau des 16. Jhs. an ihren Gatten. Dorothea an Cyprian von Sernstein, 1512," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 25 (1935): 321-26.

⁵² *Maximiliana*, Karts. 45 and 46, analysed as follows. Cf. G. HEISS, "Politik und Ratgeber der Königin Maria von Ungarn in die Jahren 1521-31," *Mitteilungen des instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 82 (1972), p. 120.

for the next fifteen years. This in itself represented a mere ten per cent of the total annual expenditure budgeted from this one source. Maximilian promised to give his officials full powers over his finances and he promised to abide by their decisions. In case of war in the Tirol and *Vorlande* (lands exposed to French, Swiss, and Venetian attack), even the ten per cent regular expenditure for the Court was to be redirected to cover any emergency military costs.⁵³ Maximilian further agreed not to issue any more credit notes on the Innsbruck treasury without his councillors' agreement; if such notes were nevertheless issued his treasury would not be required to honour them. Maximilian wrote, "We promise that we will not burden our Tirolean treasury with extraordinary expenditures that are against this decreed establishment [*Staat und Ordnung*]. But if despite this extraordinary expenses or promissory notes on the Innsbruck government and treasury are issued, then they shall not be responsible and bound to accept these bills."⁵⁴ One wonders how the concept of chivalric honour or *Ehre* fitted that kind of financial deviousness.⁵⁵ Maximilian then personally initialled the *Ordnung*, and Lord Marshal Paul von Liechtenstein as head of the Innsbruck administration was detailed to operate the new system.⁵⁶

Since income was so scarce, every few years Maximilian had to economize. His ambitious war policies and mercenary troop recruitment meant that he had to make continuous reductions in home expenditure. His courts felt the cold austerity measures perhaps most keenly of all. At one point he cut Empress Bianca Maria's establishment down by a quarter, from 196 to 148 persons. Forty-eight courtiers and servants were sacked. Bianca Maria's chamberlain dispensed with the services of two ladies-in-waiting, two organists, the dwarfs, a medical doctor, and a substantial number of men and women menials from the house, yard, stables, and kitchen.⁵⁷ Even with approximately 150 persons the Court remained quite sizable, considering the Austrian territorial resources that had to be marshalled to feed it. It was, however, and scandalous show of poverty for an Empress who was supposed to hold Court as the wife of the first ruler in Christendom — at least according to the ideology of the Holy Roman Empire to which Hapsburg Maximilian subscribed. For the Court establishment from the chamberlain down to the lowliest stable-boy and scullery-hand, budget arrangements were made by the accountants to the last candle-end, measure of wine, and slice of bread.⁵⁸

⁵³ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (alt 39-X), folios 14-15. In a note appended to Gatt's thesis, professor Stolz explains the word *stat* as *Kostenanschlag* (estimate of costs).

⁵⁴ Translated from *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Compare Maximilian's own wide concept of *Ehre* in dynastic-diplomatic spheres of interest, P. SUTTER-FICHTNER, "The politics of honour: Renaissance chivalry and Habsburg dynasticism," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 29 (1967): 567-80.

⁵⁶ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (alt 39-X), folios 17-24.

⁵⁷ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 46 (XIII/2), folios 138-44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, folios 146-58, "die personen, so taglich zu Ynnsprug Vnderhalten werden," and as follows in the text here.

The Court was divided into five departments under the masters of house, yard, stable, kitchen, and wardrobe. There were four washerwomen for the ladies' fine things, two chaplains with two servants, Master Rupert the furrier with an assistant, three door-keepers with two assistants, three lutanists, three drummers and pipers, and the master of the stable with one assistant. Then came seven noble pages, two silversmiths, one assistant to clean the silverware, a candlemaker and two accountants, four cooks with four domestics, three stable-hands, eight wagoners, one teacher of dancing, four guards, a gardener, two fools, and various cleaners and porters. They were carefully assigned specific keep and places at certain dinner tables in the main hall.

The Empress sat at high table (as did subsequently the young Queens Maria and Anna) with *Hofmeisterin* Paula. At the next table the Lord High Steward presided over the heads of the Court-household departments, including the personal servants and domestics of the Empress and later of the Queens. This group included an Italian Tailor. At further tables sat the noble pages, ladies, common servants, guards and porters. Chamberlain von Firmian, his wife and daughter presided over the table of the ladies-in-waiting, and over two tables for their own personal servants. An extra table accommodated a number of favoured servants, including the ladies' tailor, musicians, and guards of the inner chambers. This was the inner Court.

The outer Court comprised the cooks' table, which included the accountants and table and kitchen servants. Thereafter came the cellarer's table with the stable hands, unruly folk who needed the Chamberlain's personal supervision to preserve decorum and discipline in the hall. A table was set aside for servants' children. Those detailed to do the rough work of hewing, fetching, carrying, hygiene and cleaning, including the wagoners and woodcutters, sat at the outdoor servants' table. Next was the Chaplains' table at which the choir boys sat, no doubt upset by the rude proximity of the surrounding tables which accommodated more outdoor servants, and which included the cooks' extra table for kitchen boys, washerwomen, porters, the carpenter, a Hungarian wagoner and, surprisingly, the dancing teacher. At the time that this seating plan was drawn up the Hungarian wagoner was ill and given his food in the town.⁵⁹ Fourteen tables in all were provided.

Rations of wine were dispensed five times a day. At dawn the Empress, and later the Queens, received two measures each. The wagoners, kitchen staff, and rough servants were the only others to receive wine this early. They required wine to stimulate them in carrying out early morning chores. To keep them company, the Empress and Queens were given a liberal quantity to use for washing and personal hygiene. The early morning wine was vinegar. At breakfast everyone received a measure of wine at the table or place of work about the Court. Between the morning and evening meal a number of people received an extra measure, notably the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, "Jst krank vnd wierdeth hin aus in der stat gespeyst."

kitchen staff to cheer them through their preparations for the evening meal. At supper everyone received another measure at the table. Finally a number of people received a night drink or *Schlaffdrunck*. It was handed as a stimulant to those who had late duties, such as door-keepers, guards, tailors and accountants working late, but only to the drummers and pipers when they were not performing at an evening dance concert. The ladies-in-waiting and all senior Court officials were favoured with a *Schlaffdrunck*. In all, over 300 measures of wine were consumed daily, ranging from six measures for Empress Bianca Maria, down to a minimum of two measures for the common servants.

There were only two set meals a day at Court. At these meals rolls of fine white bread (*semeln*) were given primarily to the senior Court officials and personal, indoor servants. The rest made do with black bread made from rye. At nine thick slices to the loaf, black bread was issued four times daily. Only those who were eligible for the extra measures of wine received extra amounts of black bread. In all over sixty loaves of black bread and 140 white rolls were consumed every day. This provided about one third of a black-bread loaf (three thick slices) and one white roll per person per day. Although privileged and indoor servants obtained considerably more fine bread than the outdoor servants, two measure of wine and two slices of black bread were the minimum official ration for anyone working at Court.

During the half-year from late September until mid-April the Court consumed 103 candles nightly. In summertime the rate was thirty-two candles nightly. Consumption of candles for lighting ranged from fourteen nightly in winter in the Empress' rooms down to two per night for the accountants. Most people at Court received no lighting allowance, although one must take into account a fair amount of night-work (tailors, accountants) and amusement (musicians) as well as devotions (chaplains, choirs) and guard duty.

The Court stabled forty-two horses including the cart and draught-horses as well as riding beasts- one horse for every four persons at Court. Stabling costs were understandably high in an age when it took more to feed a horse (reckoned at half a *Star* of oats per day) than a domestic servant, and when horse power was a crucial factor in warfare and communications. Maximilian held Bianca Maria's Court very short and only increased the number of horses when the Court was moved or when pomp and circumstance demanded.⁶⁰

Despite all these minute regulations in the service of stricter economies, Maximilian was informed that 336 persons were still claiming daily meals at Bianca Maria's Court, well over twice the number officially

⁶⁰ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (XIII/1), "Kunigin Maria Stat," for processions: 69 horses for 23 women and 91 men; for every-day use: 35 horses for 37 women and 60 men, representing an eight per cent reduction in staff but a fifty percent cut in the total number of horses at the Court's regular disposal.

accounted for.⁶¹ When a second count was made and recorded later in the same set of documents, the number had come down dramatically to an acceptable 191 persons. There was no mention of alms to beggars or Court charity feeding. Perhaps in this sector Maximilian was quick to make real economies, although the Innsbruck government handed out just over a hundred gulden worth of charity a year in weekly instalments. This seems to have been the extent of Maximilian's regular duty to the concept of good works.⁶²

Was a Court dinner worth experiencing? The menus of the Empress' and the later Queens' Court at Steyr have survived.⁶³ Menus were divided into three classes. The best foods went to the Empress and Queens and to their ladies-in-waiting. The Chamberlain and inner Court servants ate according to the second menu, and the outer Court were given a third menu of rough fare. There were only two meal times, nine o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon. It was forbidden to receive meals in private chambers unless the individual was ill or indisposed. This rule applied to the Empress herself, who presided in person at meals like any lady of a household. One fast days, and Fridays only one meal was prepared. There were two basic types of fare: firstly, soup and meat (game with pepper and cabbage, veal and lamb fried in batter, or pie with pastry); secondly, freshly cooked fish with cabbage, or salted herrings and stockfish with vegetables and soup. Wine and bread were always available at meals. A typical diet at Court on a meat day was thus,

Breakfast: game, cabbage, porridge, bread, wine.

Dinner: cooked cabbage or beets, stew, salted calf's-head, or similar dishes according to seasonal choice and availability, bread, wine.

A typical Friday menu consisted of salted, dried fish (stockfish), soup, cabbage, vegetables, bread, and wine. From this we see that those in the first-class menu certainly lived well, but the diet was none too varied, nor were meals turned into marathons of gluttony by providing too many unnecessary courses. Dairy products and fresh greens were notably absent. Everything seemed to be well-cooked and well-spiced, an understandable measure of safety possibly further enhanced by the disinfectant properties of the relatively great quantities of weak alcohol (wine) that were consumed.

Clothing was issued twice yearly. Each person in Court service was entitled to one suit every summer and winter. A pair of slippers for indoor wear was to be supplied every three months and outdoor shoes every four weeks. Early modern footwear was not long-lasting and the Court would no doubt lose face (and the Empress lose credit from her purveyors) if servants walked abroad ill-shod and in tatters. In the last two years of his life Maximilian tried to save too much money by cutting Court clothing

⁶¹ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 46 (XII/2), folios 165-68, 221-24.

⁶² *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (XIII/1), folios 31-40 verso. Cf. Landesarchiv, Innsbruck, Raitbücher, 1490-1519.

⁶³ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 46 (XIII/2), folios 245-46, 248 v, 251.

rations. Immediately after his death in January 1519 Court officials led a strike over arrears in clothing supplies and over pay. They refused to disband or to hand over Maximilian's personal effects and property until they had been paid in full. They claimed that each was owed two coats, two pairs of breeches, and two jerkins. They had received only one green winter-coat in two years' service.⁶⁴ They wrote to the arbitrator handling the case for young Archduke Ferdinand and King Charles,⁶⁵

Well-born, noble, stern, highly-learned gracious Lord. After we have humbly notified to both of our gracious lady Queens how our Court clothing allowance is in arrear, so their majesties have directed us to Lord Chamberlain von Firmian in order that we shall be supplied and paid. Now, gracious Lord, we write to you that we have not been supplied nor has his late Imperial Majesty's last wish in this matter been carried out. Thus we humbly beg your grace to recognise our needs and just claims that the clothing still owing to us be provided, since a number of your grace's servants have had similar claims satisfied and we wonder why this has not happened to us as well, seeing that we have always carried out our duties faithfully.

(signed) Both our Lady Queen's most humble Officers and Court servants.

Court service was not necessarily a sinecure. Leonhard Vischmaister served for six years at eight gulden, two suits of clothing, and one pair of boots yearly, totalling 102 fl in money terms. Of this he only received five gulden in pay from Maximilian. To obtain this position he had lent forty-six gulden of his own money to the Emperor which had not been repaid. Claus Botzen had also served six years and had only received two suits and twenty gulden pay during this time. As a liveried servant, Botzen had been promised eight gulden annually in cash and eighteen gulden worth of clothing. Servant Liendl had been hired with his wife and she had served indoors for five years without receiving her full pay. Such complaints are scattered throughout the documents.⁶⁶

As Court service provided food, shelter, and clothing, the money element in the job was relatively small. Annual rates of pay ranged from that of the chief cook at twenty-six gulden down to the stable-hands and porters at six gulden. The annual salary bill of Bianca Maria's Court was less than 1500 fl and this included the salaries of top officials like the Chamberlain who netted between 150 and 300 fl every year. On average chamber-servants received eight gulden a year and master-craftsmen twenty gulden. Chaplains, lutanists, accountants, stable-masters, and master-cooks also received twenty gulden. Ladies-in-waiting were promised surprisingly little. At between ten and twelve gulden per annum, they no doubt relied on their noble families to make them an extra allowance.⁶⁷

Range of pay at Court, especially for craft and menial or unskilled and apprenticed tasks was thus marginally lower than in the mines, agriculture or towns. Whereas a miner's range of pay was eleven to seventy

⁶⁴ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 46 (XIII/2), generally, and Kart. 45 (XIII/1), folios 57 v-59.

⁶⁵ Translated from *ibid.*, folios 245-46.

⁶⁶ *Maximiliana*, Kart. 45 (alt 39-X), folios 34-35. Cf. HKA: GB 5, 10.

⁶⁷ See notes 57 and 58.

gulden in Hallein in 1507, that of a Court scullery hand rising to chief cook was from six to twenty-four gulden. At Court no doubt security and good conditions, livery and perquisites made up for the discrepancy, but ultimately working at the Hapsburg Court was probably just like most jobs anywhere else at that time, since rates of pay were uniformly minimal, although they were above the starvation level. Was a position at Maximilian's Court hotly competed for or not? We do not as yet know, but the evidence so far looked at suggests that even menial posts had to be purchased with bribes worth up to five years in expected salaries. At Court a prepared dinner was always available, but life there was institutional, regimented, and public. The worker on day-rates in town and village may have enjoyed his privacy, though it rapidly became a useless luxury in times of dearth, bad health, high prices, and underemployment. At such times families sought the service and protection of a lord and his household on any conditions that he might have cared to offer. The wise commoner, given the chance, would have seized the opportunity to invest in Court service, even if salaries and clothing rations were hopelessly in arrear at the Courts of Maximilian and Bianca Maria around the year 1500. An example of this is the account of the provision of an old age pension in Maximilian's Tirolean household.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS AT COURT: A CASE STUDY

The Innsbruck chancellery granted the following pension on 22 April 1492.⁶⁸

Margreth Wuestin. We recognise and openly proclaim in this letter that we have acknowledged herewith the honest Margreth, widow of the late George Wuesten, for her long and regular service which she rendered to the late gracious Eleonore, born of Scots, Archduchess of Austria, of praiseworthy memory, in her Grace's chamber, that the next *Scheffel* of salt which becomes available in our panning-house at Hall be given to her weekly, or its equivalent in money. We order our faithful counsellor Lienhard Vellser and any subsequent salt-pan supervisor at Hall that you provide Margreth with one *Scheffel* of salt or its equivalent in money when available every week without fail.

It was an instruction by Maximilian to his Innsbruck counsellors to arrange for payment of a pension to a former domestic servant of Princess Eleonore. The sixth child of King James I of Scotland, Eleonore died eleven years previously at Innsbruck on 20 November 1480 as the wife of King Maximilian's cousin, Archduke Sigismund, who retired from governing the Tirol in March, 1490. What insight does this document provide into the terms of employment enjoyed by a domestic whose mistress was a Scottish princess and ruling duchess in the Alps during the middle of the fifteenth century? Who was Margreth Wuestin and what was she being promised by King Maximilian in 1492?

⁶⁸ Translated from Landesarchiv Innsbruck, Kopiaibuch, "altere Reihe, 15, 1492," folios 32v-33.

The first clue is with her former employer to whose life a dissertation has recently been devoted.⁶⁹ Princess Eleonore was probably born in 1433, brought up at Linlithgow and orphaned in 1445. She was sent to the French royal court from where she was given in marriage to Duke Sigismund of Tirol in 1448. Sigismund was twenty-one and Eleonore sixteen years of age, but the marriage that lasted until Eleonore's death was childless. The story that they had a son, Wolfgang, who died young, was an invention of the Innsbruck chronicler, Gerard de Roo, who in 1592 misread the gravestone at Stams of Sigismund's elder brother, Wolfgang, who died in infancy in the 1420s.⁷⁰ Sigismund was reputed to have been a womaniser.⁷¹ He sired so many bastards that the Innsbruck chancellery insisted on a list of his authentic natural children before Maximilian was asked to provide for their well-being out of treasury revenue in 1492, just at the time that old domestic servant Margreth Wuestin was promised her pension.⁷²

Eleonore kept a lively court. She was fluent in German and French, and was a keen huntress. She travelled often and helped to found the first library in Innsbruck castle, where she had a *Frauenzimmer* of about fifty ladies-in-waiting. It was probably here that Margreth Wuestin found employment. Eleonore's habit was to reward courtiers for faithful service with pensions out of income from the salt-pans in the nearby town of Hall in the Inn valley. The widow of her former doctor, Hans Speck, was granted a substantial rent of fifty *Fuder* of salt a year in 1475, over thirty times as valuable as Margreth Wuestin's promised salt-rent in 1492.⁷³

This suggests that it was still the custom after seventeen years to reward faithful court servants from the same source of revenue. Was Maximilian being particularly sensitive to the memory of his late kinswoman, Eleonore of Scots, whom he probably met but once as a adolescent in the mid-1470s, or was he just making use of a social service for widows and old-age pensioners among Innsbruck court servants? Furthermore, what did Margreth Wuestin's promised income actually amount to in 1492.

⁶⁹ M. KOFLER, "Eleonore von Schottland. Versuch einer Biographie" Innsbruck University thesis, 1968.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207, as cited in Jacob Mennel's Maximilian chronicle, 1518, "Graf Sigmund... und Leonora, kunig Jacobs von Schotten dochter, kain kind... aber der unelichen weyber, wan er gar ain grosser frawn man gewesen ist, find ich kain zal."

⁷² Landesarchiv Innsbruck, Kopialbuch, ältere Reihe, 15, 1492, folio 67, "Seyen wir kurtzlich deshalb durch bemelton vnnsern gnedigen herren von österreich ersucht, also haben wir seinen Räten geantwurt, Sy kennen zum tail selber die kinder, nu seyen der vil, also mugen Sy die all und aufschreiben lassen." A year later Maximilian was postponing payment, saying that he was too busy with the French war to deal with the matter. Victor von Kraus, *Maximilians I. Beziehungen zu Sigmund von Tirol, 1490-6* (Vienna, 1879), document 48, p. 51.

⁷³ KÖFLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-66, esp. p. 153; F. ENGEL, *Tabellen alter Münzen, Masse und Gewichte* (Rinteln, 1965), p. 8.

One *Scheffel* of salt was perhaps twenty litres dry volume of granulated salt. Its value was just under ten kreuzers, according to the Vienna *Bürgerspital* prices of 1493.⁷⁴ In 1491 Maximilian's Tirol silver deal with the Fuggers quoted the Rhenish gulden at sixty kreuzers.⁷⁵ A mid-day meal consumed by a well-off burgher and banker like Fugger cost about four kreuzers, reckoning one kreuzer per dish. Twelve kreuzers worth of salt was consumed in one meal by about 140 courtiers and court servants travelling with Maximilian through South Tirol in 1510.⁷⁶ It was considered possible to live on an income of forty gulden a year.⁷⁷ That was over forty-six kreuzers a week. Margreth Wuestin was being granted under ten kreuzers a week. Was this the basic old-age pension of late fifteenth-century Austria? If so, then it was a pittance. Yet Margreth Wuestin had to be more than grateful for Maximilian's intervention on her behalf. It was proof of King Maximilian's meticulous attention to his writing desk, and a credit to the officials in his Innsbruck chancellery and treasury, one of whom was Lienhard Vellser. Just two months before promising Margreth Wuestin her pension, Maximilian had appointed Vellser as one of his four chief treasurers at Innsbruck, at a time when the King was struggling to preserve Austrian Tirol and the *Vorlande*, especially in Swabia, from disintegrating under the weight of former Archduke Sigismund's debts and mismanagement.⁷⁸

How old was Margreth Wuestin in 1492? She had served many years in Eleonore's chamber and we may surmise that she was appointed as a young woman when the Princess arrived as a bride in Innsbruck castle in 1448 or shortly thereafter. Perhaps she was about Eleonore's own age when appointed, which would have made her sixty in 1492, truly a great age for a woman who had married and worked at menial tasks. Comparing the lives of Eleonore and Margreth, the roles seem to be reversed from the stereotype that one might expect. The chamber-maid lived to a ripe age, married and probably bore children, outliving her husband, George. Her employer died eleven or more years before her, married, but was barren, and was outlived by the husband, Sigismund.⁷⁹

Margreth Wuestin was not the only servant promised a pension from Maximilian. Her fellow employee in Eleonore's *Frauenzimmer*, Waltpurg Kolpockin, widow of Wolfgang Windeck, was granted sixty marks Bernese a year by Maximilian to bring up her son, payable quarterly from customs revenues as of 14 September 1493.⁸⁰ Peter Rueger, an old retainer to Sigis-

⁷⁴ W. ROTTLEUTHNER, *Die alten Localmasse und Gewichte... in Tirol* (Innsbruck, 1883), p. 83; A. F. PRIBRAM, et al, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Preise und Löhne in Österreich* (Vienna, 1938), pp. 102, 150.

⁷⁵ Landesarchiv Innsbruck, Kopialbuch, ältere Reihe, 14, 1491, folio 11.

⁷⁶ Victor von KRAUS, *Kaiser Maximilian I. Sein Leben und Wirken* (Vienna, 1877), pp. 137-38, including an itemised "Küchenzettl," Bozen, 6 January 1510.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Landesarchiv Innsbruck, Kopialbuch, ältere Reihe, 15, 1492, folios 18-19.

⁷⁹ See C. GILBERT, "When did a man in the Renaissance grow old?" *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14: 7-32.

⁸⁰ Landesarchiv Innsbruck, Kopialbuch, ältere Reihe, 16, 1493, folios 39-40, worth 10 gulden.

mund, was also granted a salt-pension identical to Margreth Wuestin's on 20 January 1493, this time payable immediately since the death of a certain Schmagl had created a vacancy. Sigismund's fire-stocker, Sebastian Dreyer, was also pensioned at the same rate.⁸¹ Salt-pensions were indeed standard practice and a number seem to have been reserved regularly for retired court servants.

What everyday retail prices did Margreth Wuestin contend with, assuming that she received just under ten kreuzers or forty pfennigs a week gross to live on? In 1493 Maximilian's Innsbruck counsellors issued a table of maximum prices at the urgent request of the Estates at the territorial assembly of 1492 in Sterzing.⁸² Rye or black bread retailed at around one kreuzer for the two pound loaf, and the Innsbruck pound weighed a substantial 560 grams.⁸³ Margreth Wuestin probably bought her bread in half pound loaves for one *fiere* (farthing or quarter-kreuzer, the same as one pfennig). She may also have yearned for the typical basic fare of her former employers in the *Frauenzimmer*, namely fine white bread at around two kreuzers for a three ounce roll. Did she treat herself to one just occasionally? Although meat prices were not standardised, the cheapest fish retailed at three kreuzers per pound with carp at four, bream at five and eel at six kreuzers. When it came to luxuries such as fish and meat, she probably only ate scraps on rare occasions. Comparisons with present-day retired people on minimum pensions are probably not too far out of place.

How many more retired people were living in similar circumstances? Was Margreth Wuestin even reckoned to be rather well off — one of the lucky few who had served at court? What of cleaners and menials who had not worked for such august employers? How did they fare? The labour relations which were part of everyday existence in late medieval and early modern Europe need to be rediscovered from the fiscal archives, and they can be reconstituted with the help of biographical techniques applied to the *menu-peuple* like Margreth Wuestin of Innsbruck, one time servant to a fifteenth-century Scottish princess.

THE INSTITUTIONAL POOR IN MAXIMILIAN'S WILL

It was no doubt rather natural that as a traditional Christian ruler Maximilian I should feel the need to establish alms-houses for the common poor in his will, in order to prompt the inmates to pray for his soul, for like his predecessors he had upheld a system which heavily burdened the labourers and peasants in his realm.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, folio 31.

⁸² *Ibid.*, folios 88-93, "Gerichts vnd Landsordnung," Innsbruck, 3 March 1493, with prices as follows.

⁸³ F. VERDENHALVEN, *Alte Masse, Münzen und Gewichte* (Neustadt, 1968), p. 40.

On 30 December 1518, shortly before his death, Maximilian had dictated his last will, to his private secretary, Hanns Vinsterwalder.⁸⁴ It is a conventional document for Maximilian was at pains to atone for his sins by means of chantries which would make certain that regular masses were sung for his soul. The will provides insights into the late medieval ruling-class attitude towards poverty and good works. Obsessed with the need for his name to last for ever, Maximilian linked his piety with provision of charity. Good works would atone for his actions in the eyes of God and posterity. Among other arrangements, eight hospitals for the poor were to be founded, one in each of his provincial capitals: Innsbruck, Vienna, Linz, Graz, St. Veit, Laibach, Breisach, and the eighth in his beloved Augsburg. In thus catering to the urban poor Maximilian chose his locations very carefully in order to glorify most effectively his name and dynasty. The fact that he went into the closest details over these arrangements is yet another indication of his passion for rules and regulations, on this occasion indulged at death's door. The problem was that he expected far too much of the money that he was prepared to invest — truly a problem that Maximilian had always faced in life and which he optimistically took with him to his grave. In his will he sought to associate a select few of the deserving poor with his good name. Was he then merely expressing the kind of pious sentiments that were expected of a Christian ruler, or did he also experience a real need to repent for having burdened his common subjects with twenty-five years of personal rule? A closer examination of the will shows that Maximilian's arrangements were puny in quantity yet perceptive in quality.

Maximilian directed that each of the eight hospitals be endowed with one thousand gulden capital in perpetuity for the upkeep of its patients. The money was to be taken out of local domain revenues at a five per cent annual interest rate. The revenue needed for building and essential services was to be collected from other securities that were safer than domain revenues, for the latter were open to frequent alienation. Out of this perpetual fifty gulden net annual income each hospital was to pay for a priest to read mass for Maximilian's soul. It thus seems that uppermost in Maximilian's mind was his desire to be remembered by posterity. The next priority was to provide social and medical care for the sick inmates, expressed as follows by the Emperor himself. "Then, in each of these hospitals there shall be a large room and chamber with bedsteads for the poor, and in each bedstead a straw sack shall be made up and kept."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ B. SEUFERT, *Drei Register, 1478-1519* (Innsbruck, 1934), p. 337. There are six versions of Maximilian's last will and testament. The one used here is in HHSA, Familien Urkunden Nr. 1117 (from the original in Landesarchiv Graz). It is printed in F. B. VON BUCHOLTZ, *Geschichte der Regierung Ferdinand des Ersten*, 1 (Vienna, 1851), pp. 476-81. For comparative material, see generally, E. SUDECK, *Bettlerdarstellungen vom Ende des XV. Jahrhunderts bis zum Rembrandt* (Strasbourg, 1930), pp. 5-11; and particularly, A. SEMLER, *Geschichte des Heilig-Geist-Spitals in Überlingen*, 1957. W. BERGER, *Das St.-Georgs-Hospital zu Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1972) is a very competent study in accountancy.

⁸⁵ BUCHOLTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

Each establishment was to employ a warden, cook, cellarer, and other servants for daily needs. Each patient should be given every morning and evening vegetable potage and sufficient bread, plus a measure of water, flavoured with honey and berries. Bread, vegetables, and sweetened fruit-juice would provide a worthy diet for sick and ailing common people when one compares it with the diets of urban and rural labouring families.⁸⁶

Having made arrangements for the provision of a reasonable diet, Maximilian turned to the question of clothing for the prospective patients. The clothing ration was, in theory, very generous. Each patient was to receive two smocks a year, of single cloth in summer and double cloth in winter. Four times a year they would be provided with a long shirt and one pair of shoes. Each winter they would also be given an overcoat. Maximilian instructed that his plans be scrutinised by accountants; he showed a last passion for administrative detail as he set up annual audits (*jährliche Raittung*) for his posthumous almshouses.⁸⁷

Never a man to ignore the impact of the visual image as propaganda, Maximilian decreed that each almshouse should have a portrait statue of him holding a candle, in front of which masses were to be sung to the glory of God, Maximilian, and his patrons, Saints George and John the Evangelist.⁸⁸ And he ordered all his government, court and local domain officials to remain at their posts after his death until these measures had been carried out.⁸⁹

In theory this arrangement was all very fine, but Maximilian's real appreciation of the needs of the poor and afflicted must be contrasted with the knowledge that his small charity grant of 8000 fl would not go very far towards satisfying the needs that he stipulated in his will. In return, Maximilian expected the prospective recipients of his charity to pray for his soul. Whenever they received his bounty, they should thus remember what a good ruler he had been. All this consolation Maximilian wished to buy for 8000 fl, a sum that two decades previously he had been spending on his falcons and falconers in one year alone.⁹⁰ The old Emperor thought that a mere rent of 400 fl per annum was enough to secure for all time the memory of his charity and goodness throughout Austria.

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We have tried to survey certain aspects of the life and economy of some of Maximilian's subjects. Admittedly much more work has to be

⁸⁶ See the above sections on the urban situations and rural evidence.

⁸⁷ BUCHOLTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 480, "Wir wollen vnd ordnen auch das in jedem Spital, an ainem gelegenn Ort ein Pilt von vnser Persohn vnd vnserem Angesicht Conterfehert gegossen werde..."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 481; cf. p. 495, as Maximilian's closest associate and propagandist, Merx Treitzsauerwein, advanced to German Secretary under the new chancellor's regency government of the future Ferdinand I in Vienna, 1520.

⁹⁰ Hofkammerarchiv, GB 7, 8, 10, *passim*.

done, especially on archive records that are still largely untouched, before we can provide more satisfactory answers to the questions of standards and expectations of life in the Renaissance era. Our first impression is clearly one of a strict economy for town and country dwellers in the Hapsburg patrimony. Maximilian's subjects were not starving, but they had little surplus to save themselves from fluctuations in climate, harvest, trade, and manufacture at the best of times. Yet it seems to have been a balanced and ordered society despite its harsh inequalities and traditional hierarchies. What we may now begin to appreciate, however sketchily, are the lives of common people who bore the cost of Maximilian's reign in providing the produce, rents, taxes, and labour to pay for his establishment and its traditionally ambitious dynastic policies. These policies have been well covered up to the present time by historians of Renaissance Austria.⁹¹ The task now lies ahead for the social historian to integrate his work with the traditional political, diplomatic, institutional, and economic history. Such harmony may be seen to lie in socio-biography based on prosopography culled from the surviving archives of the period. This article is an attempt to open up such lines of further inquiry into late medieval and early modern central European history.

⁹¹ Cf. H. WIESFLECKER, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1971-77) taking the political narrative up to 1508; R. BUCHNER, *Maximilian I*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1970); H. ULMANN, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1884-91).