

*The imprese of the Fruchtbringende and the Tugendliche  
Gesellschaft – a comparison*

Thank you for letting me talk about two societies, the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* and their culture of *imprese* and emblems. I've slightly changed the title and used the Italian word *imprese* instead of devices and would like to add that especially the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* preferred the word "emblem" to *impresa*.

I hope to arouse your interest in a subject which might shed light on the early use of *imprese* in German societies in the 1620ies. I have been encouraged to do so since both Ingrid Höpel especially with her exploration of Franz Julius Knesebeck and his "Dreiständige Sinnbilder" and Mara Wade – particularly with her contribution on fruitbearing member Sten Bielke and his *Gesellschaftsbuch* – have done their share to introduce the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and its emblematics to a wider audience.

To start with a look back from the point of view of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, I'd like to mention Johann Christoph Gottsched **the** representative of the early enlightenment who – apart from sharing the usual rejection of emblems with his contemporaries – drew an insightful connection between the culture of the emblems/*Sinnbilder* and the societies at the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century: „The art of inventing emblems and interpreting them in short poems was one of the main activities of literary societies a hundred years ago“. This close bond between the emblem tradition and the *Gesellschaftsbücher* of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* has been lost

during the last 250 years and I'd therefore like to revitalize it on the occasion of this conference.

My approach will be two-fold, first, I'll give a short introduction to the principles of these societies with reference to their *Gesellschaftsbücher* and, second, I'll explore the theory and practice of *impresae* on the part of the respective leaders of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and *Tugendliche Gesellschaft*, the reformed Prince Ludwig of Anhalt-Köthen and his Lutheran sister Countess Anna Sophia of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt.

The *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, a men's organization, was founded in 1617 in the tradition of the Italian academies. It quickly developed into the most important society of seventeenth-century Germany with 890 members, and thus became a role model for other societies. Its name *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, its motto *Alles zu Nutzen* (*Let everything be of use*) and its *pictura* (*the coconut palm*) — all form the *impresa* and are linked in the poem, the "Reimgesetz" (*stanza*) — are closely connected with particular notions of society and sociability. The utilitarian aspect of the society, its goal of a virtuous life, is explicitly stated in the treatise *Short Report on the Purposes and Intentions of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* first published in 1622 in the *Gesellschaftsbuch*. Two aims are expressed:

Firstly, that every member of this society should act honourably, usefully and delightfully and behave accordingly wherever he is. At meetings he is expected to be kind-hearted, joyful, cheerful and amicable in words and deeds, neither should one take offence at an amusing word. Hence one should refrain from coarse and troublesome speech and jokes in such gatherings. — Secondly, that one should maintain the High German Language in its substance and dignity without intermingling foreign words from abroad and by striving for the best *pronunciatio* and the [grammatically] purest and [stylistically] clearest manner of writing prose and poetry.

This strong affirmation of utilitarianism in the mainly courtly and principally non-scholarly academy becomes an affirmation of social responsibility in its utopian vision: a national ruling class in which differences of confession, region, profession and class are neutralized under the motto *Alles zu Nutzen*. The adoption of society names, which mask the status of the member — Prince Ludwig, head of the society, is called “Der Nährende” (*The Nutritive*) — intensifies this impression. The society motto implies that each member and lover of the arts is admonished and encouraged both to contribute to the ‘whole’ according to his talents and at the same time to become a useful member not only of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, but of society itself. Thus the court could potentially develop into a centre of both cultural and political reform through the programmatically anti-hierarchical *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*.

The *Tugendliche Gesellschaft*, which came into existence two years later, could be described as a female counterpart of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*. Indeed it was Prince Ludwig’s younger sister, Anna Sophia, who succeeded in creating an order of female members, all coming from the German middle and upper nobility. Only 73 women could be members at one time, but over the years a total of 103 women became members, making this the first sizeable society of women in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Germany. Interestingly enough, we have proof of kinship to Fruchtbringer-members for nearly every noblewoman of the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft*.

As far as programmatic differences are concerned, the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* did not explicitly aim at improving the vernacular. It can be

classified — *nomen est omen* — mainly as an „order of virtue“ or a „school of virtue“ according to the society’s motto (*Tugend bringt Ehre; Virtue leads to Honour*). Here the influence of a single man, the Lutheran Wolfgang Ratke, philosopher and pedagogue, must be mentioned. He proposed the harmonizing of language, government and religion“ („Vereinheitlichung von Sprache, Regierung und Religion“). In particular he advocated „disciplining morals“ („Disziplinierung der Sitten“), a subject to which he refers in the philosophical *Sittenlehr der Christlichen Schule* („The morality of the Christian school“); there he borrows Aristotle’s classification of virtues into the practical („ethische“) and the theoretical („dianoetische“). For him strict ethics and profound religiousness were absolutely necessary to create a well-functioning community. And at this point in his philosophy the noble woman played an important role: Ratke saw in her the guarantor of the Christian community and took the opportunity to spread his ideas of reform among women of the upper nobility and beyond by winning the members of the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* as role models.

After introduction to the programmatic ideas of both societies I turn to Prince Ludwig’s early contacts to Florence in 1598 and the *Crusca*. He became member of this Italian academy at the age of 21 and contributed to the *Vocabulario*. — As is often repeated in secondary sources, with regard to an explicitly German reception of emblems and *imprese* Germany was a relative late-bloomer: A multilingual reception was far more common, as the Latin book titles suggest: Peter Isselburgs “*Emblemata Politica*“ (first published in 1617) or Daniel Cramer’s “*Emblema sacra*“ (1622). As our edition and the published letters of the

*Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* show, Prince Ludwig produced a *Gesellschaftsbuch* with exclusively German *subscriptiones*, the so-called “Reimgesetze” of the *picturae*, as early as 1622. At that time no *pictura* had been executed which demonstrated a strong impetus to improve the vernacular, the above mentioned 2<sup>nd</sup> aim of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*.

However, Prince Ludwig developed a beautiful *impresa* at exactly the same time – by the way, executed by Peter Isselburg who lived at Bamberg at that time and worked at the court of Johann Casimir of Sachsen-Coburg – demonstrating the reception of a member. This *impresa* honoured Duke Wilhelm IV. of Saxony-Weimar, the future head of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, whose own *impresa* with identical motto, society name and main elements of the *pictura* appeared in the *Gesellschaftsbuch* 1629 seven years later, the latter including the German *scriptio*. So Prince Ludwig adopted the culture of *impresa* from the Italian academies at a very early stage and I was therefore motivated to research possible sources for such an early reception – apart from his membership in the *Crusca* and his visit to Italy in 1598. So I took a closer look at his impressive library in order to find traces of his theoretical knowledge, the precondition for the elaborate *impresa* culture of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*. And indeed: A great number of prominent books on emblems and *impresa*, Dutch, French, Latin and German can be found in his library. To name just a few: “Alciati Emblematus liber”, the already mentioned “Emblemata Sacra” by Daniel Cramer, Claude Paradin’s “Devises heroiques”, Roemer Visscher’s “Zinne-Poppen”, Nicolaus Taurellus’ “Emblemata Physica,

Ethica" (1602), and above all Andreas Friedrich's "Emblemata" used in a Wolfenbüttel copy as a *Stammbuch*. Despite the rich holdings of emblem books at the Herzog August Bibliothek the cooperation between Illinois and Wolfenbüttel – thanks to Mara Wade and Thomas Stäcker – was of inestimable worth when I tried to widen my knowledge about authors and works referring to emblems and *impresae*. Given Prince Ludwig's Renaissance ideal of civility à la Castiglione, Gelli and Guazzo these authors were a must in his library; and Guazzo's work is especially interesting with regard to our subject. Prince Ludwig possessed the edition of the "Dialogi Piacevoli" "in blaw Pappir" and we may conclude from it that he knew the fifth dialogue of "Delle Imprese" very well. According to Ingrid Höpel this important dialogue had been left out of the German translation by Melchior Wiesaeus in 1625.

Still, I was not satisfied with these results yet: I missed the Italian expert of the *impresa*, Girolamo Ruscelli, in Prince Ludwig's library. I could not believe that Prince Ludwig was unaware of it. And to be sure, in leafing through the volumes of our edition I found a letter written by Prince Ludwig to Christian of Anhalt-Bernburg asking his brother in January 1625 to let him have "Ruscelli" for a longer period of time than originally agreed. Given Prince Ludwigs close Italian connections and the afore-mentioned findings in his library it would have been natural for him to perform the society's linguistic and ethical aims by means of this splendidly illustrated membership book, with engravings produced by Matthäus Merian the Older.

Through the obligation and consent of each individual member to be of use to the society according to the motto of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* "Alles zu Nutzen" the ethical and linguistic aims could both be fulfilled. Thus, for instance, Duke August of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel was called "The Liberator" (*Der Befreiende*). His motto was "Vom Schlage" and his *pictura* the plant "Gamanderle" (wall germander). On knowing the medical effects of the "Gamanderle" (helped avoiding strokes "Schlag", "Schlagfluß") and connecting all parts of the *impresa* by means of the Reimgesetz the member's special task becomes obvious – in this context Duke August (as any Prince and any servant) is admonished to live a life of virtue and on doing so he will be liberated of tyranny with the help of god.

To return to the culture of *impresa* in the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* the correspondence between Prince Ludwig and Duchess Anna Sophia shows that the idea of producing a *Gesellschaftsbuch* was influenced by Prince Ludwig. Indeed, Anna Sophia even aimed at surpassing her brother's work and succeeded with regard to the more elaborate *subscriptio*. Members of the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* received, as they did in the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, a society word, a motto; a society name and a *pictura* which was explained in the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* not merely by one but rather four poems. The Lutheran context and the canon of virtue on which the *impresa* culture was based caused a significant difference regarding the choice of *pictura*, none of which stemmed from the world of plants but rather from other sources e. g. the animal kingdom - in any case it hints at a special positive moral

characteristics like braveness (represented by a lion) explained at length by means of the interpretative multi-part *subscriptio*.

What I find especially worthwhile mentioning: This *Gesellschaftsbuch* is a unique example of an emblematic work of art created for and most notably by women, esp. by Anna Sophia herself. Looking at her book collection (in the inventory) you will not find any theoretical book about *imprese* or emblems, you'll find only the *Gesellschaftsbuch* of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* itself. However, what you will find in the heavy society manuscript is a surprising proof for the internal theoretical discussion about emblems! I am very fortunate to be able share this finding with you. The title of this short treatise is "About the emblem" and it is divided didactically into eleven questions and eleven answers. The introductory one reads as follows: What is an emblem? It is an illustration of a simile which provides the basis for moral life "sittliches Leben".

In my opinion the construction of this concise theory of the emblem can be traced back to the cooperation between Anna Sophia and her close friend Wolfgang Ratke, indeed the countess seems to have been very familiar with contemporary discussions about the emblem.

I'd like to conclude by emphasizing three major points:

- 1) The *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and the *Tugendliche Gesellschaft* use their performative cultures of *imprese* to identify with their ethical and, in the case of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, linguistic aims and encourage their members to act as role-models.

2) Their main representatives were not only well-informed about the theory and practice of *imprese* (Prince Ludwig) or created their own theory (Countess Anna Sophia) but the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* even left a convincing footprint in the emblematic history through the publication of various *Gesellschaftsbücher*.

3) The female *Gesellschaftsbuch* represents, in and of itself, the performative act of creating an emblem book for and by women. It demonstrates not only the existence of a female society at an early stage of history but also reveals that princesses, duchesses and countesses participated actively in emblematic cultural life in Germany at the beginning of 17th century.