Tower Ball Deposits and Urban Space in the German Lands

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Summary

Drawing on an extensive survey of known sites, this article focuses on the spatial implications of tower ball deposits in Austrian, German and Swiss cities. From the late Middle Ages up to the present, representatives of user communities have deposited chronicles and objects in *Turmkugeln* overlooking major buildings such as churches, town halls and city gates. The evidence can date back to their original construction, with further items added during subsequent repairs, usually with the explicit intention to inform posterity and invoke divine protection. In many cases, therefore, the spheres contain segments of materials stretching over several centuries.

The overarching theme of co-spatiality raises a series of complex questions in relation to this material: given that tower balls occupied liminal positions between earth and heaven, should they be seen as belonging to the secular or religious domain? Were their functions mainly apotropaic, comparable to 'construction sacrifices' (*Bauopfer*), or akin to those of *Erinnerungsorte* aimed at the evocation of the 'right' kinds of collective memories? Given the existence of multiple, contrasting and sometimes covert deposits, who was actually in charge of these communications – individual scribes, social elites or entire localities? The paper conceptualises tower balls filled with contents as 'generation sites', with each layer of deposits acting as a 'booster point' for the communicative memory of successive user communities, allowing horizons to stretch well beyond their regular extent of less than a century.

Given that the phenomenon can also be found in the countryside, a final section identifies the greater likelihood of multiple and typologically varied tower ball archives as distinctive 'urban' features. Each repository, and indeed each set of deposits within it, affords a different view and topography of the city. Juxtaposition of all evidence across sites and periods thus uncovers a (chronologically) multi-layered and (socially) diverse range of spatial constitutions of the respective cities.

Focus, applied concept and method

When the celebrated humanist and religious reformer Philipp Melanchthon wrote a town chronicle to be placed in a golden ball towering high above Wittenberg's *Stadtkirche* in 1556 (Müller 1911), he joined a long line of scribes recording important facts, events and personalities in hundreds of individual locations since the Middle Ages. Such compilations served both to express collective identities and to preserve anything considered worthy of transmission to posterity. Known in German as *Turmkugeln* or *-knäufe*/*-knöpfe*, these architectural ornaments can be found on top of town halls, parish churches, monasteries, city gates, castles, schools and other prominent building types all over Europe. Intriguingly, however, for reasons as yet not fully understood – perhaps relating to the symbolism of the *Reichsapfel* with its globe and cross or phenomenological links to the spheres on top of obelisks displayed in Rome since Antiquity – the custom seems to be restricted to the lands of the erstwhile Holy Roman Empire. There, it continues to the present day, usually accompanied by taking-down and setting-up ceremonies generating substantial local interest. In some cases, the oldest evidence can date back to the original

construction of an edifice, with further items – normally sealed in separate cartridges or boxes – added on the occasion of subsequent repairs, resulting in up to a dozen layers of materials stretching back centuries (Kümin 2021). In line with our theme of co-spatiality, this contribution focuses on the spatial implications of the phenomenon in a range of territorial towns and imperial free cities.

Starting with an outline of the evidence identified to date, the project database – a work-in-progress excel file recording locations, deposit years, material contents and supporting information – currently contains well over 900 relevant sites. The earliest surviving source is a copy of a metal plate deposited at Halberstadt's *Liebfrauenkirche* in 1394, the first manuscript a note deposited on top of the residence of a monastic bailiff in the city of Zurich 1467 (Fuhrmann 2014: no. 20; Einsiedeln: no. 971). After the 16th century, we come across entire series, for example for the parish church of St Martin at Schwyz in Central Switzerland, where documents from 1550, 1627, 1651, 1750 and 1773 survive alongside more recent deposits (Keller 1974). Chronologically, the evidence naturally increases as we move towards the present, with the 19th century emerging as a peak period. From a regional perspective, sites can be found throughout Austria, (eastern and central) Switzerland as well as Germany; the Swiss canton of Lucerne offers a record density of 20 sites per 100,000 inhabitants, with the *Länder* of the former GDR (Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia) also well accounted for.

The concept of co-spatiality – which informed the eponymous 2020 Erfurt conference at which these thoughts were first presented – deals with '"vertical" superimpositions of different spaces which "occupy" the same extent' (Lévy 2021: 1). It allows researchers to explore how two or more sets of social usages or cultural constructions by different religious or profane user communities could concurrently relate to the same location. Rather than on stacks of distinct segments without contacts, it focuses on instances when those lived or imagined spaces become connected and investigates the respective preconditions and results, including harmonious co-existence, eruption of conflicts and various intermediary constellations – many of which were exemplified by papers delivered at the Erfurt gathering (Wagner 2021) and are now included in this collection. The present essay interprets tower balls as potential 'switches' facilitating the emergence as well as scholarly scrutiny of co-spatiality in European urban communities.

State of the art

To date, tower ball deposits have attracted local and regional rather than general historiographical attention. There are dedicated survey works for e.g. Upper Austria (Haider 1998) and Lucerne (Colombi 2010; Zimmermann 2010) alongside large numbers of individual case studies, some in combination with an edition of the respective documents, as for Allerstedt in Saxony-Anhalt (Irsigler et al. 2008). Only recently has the phenomenon started to appeal to scholars engaged in more general research on collective identities and local memory, as in the case of *Der Pfarrer als Arbeiter am Gedächtnis*, a monograph dedicated to clergymen as key agents within the forging of local commemorative cultures in early modern Saxony (Dornheim 2013).

In this brief investigation of manifestations of co-spatiality associated with tower ball deposits, I would like to draw on three related conceptual frameworks. The first is spatial theory more generally (surveyed from a historical perspective in Rau 2019). Within its ongoing differentiation, the notion of cultural construction rather than given physical existence remains central. One influential sociological definition perceives 'space' as the mental synthesis of the respective positioning of human agents as well as material objects in consideration of atmospheric elements (Löw 2001). A second point of reference is memory studies, specifically the distinctions between individual and collective recollections on the one hand and between more recent/active/immediate types of *communicative* memory and the more distant/heavily filtered and mediated forms of *cultural memory* on the other. Here, we can turn to seminal approaches from archaeology and literary studies (J. Assmann 2007; A. Assmann 1996) as well as more recent works specifically on the early modern period (Pollmann 2017). Last but not least, there is the lively field around *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1984–92), with its special emphasis on given monuments and historical events which modern society – following the loss of previously dominant forms of direct oral transmission – prioritises to foster 'officially approved' kinds of collective memory. All three frameworks help us to connect individual micro-sites of tower balls with wider social practices and mental processes in given local contexts. The resulting findings may, in due course, connect with cognate research areas such as the history of archives, into which our lofty repositories are yet to be included (Head 2019).

Historical and spatial exposition, agents

If we zoom in on a single locality such as the Tyrolean capital of Innsbruck, the architectural feature can be very prominent. As evident from a 17th-century prospect of the city, tower balls appear not only on top of the *Hofkirche* and the parish church of St James (nos 1 and 6 on an online print version of Merian 1649; both of which with documented deposits) but also the town hall, Franciscan monastery, Servites church and hospital building, sites which may or may not hold any content. With a view to co-spatiality, a first point to note is thus the diversity of user communities in different topographical locations with distinct perspectives on the same town. At the Hofkirche (whose congregation included noble and princely elites), deposits came to include chronicles and precious objects presumably intended to protect the church against demonic forces, items resembling apotropaic *Bauopfer*. On top of nearby St James', there was a similar mixture of writings and devotional items, but its natural audience would have been the town burghers rather than the members of the Tyrolean court, two constituencies with very different social and educational profiles. At the Hofkirche, therefore, we find writings on parchment, a privilege endorsed by no lesser figure than Pope Urban VIII and a Latin account of an earthquake from a provincial secretary, while the author of a poem placed in the tower ball of St James in 1723 was a lay official primarily concerned with parochial matters (Haider 1998: 5–14).

But why did medieval communities start identifying such lofty spots as suitable places for the preservation of chronicles and associated items? First and foremost, tower balls occupied a liminal zone between earth and heaven, between the hustle and bustle of earthly life and the inscrutable metaphysical domain (similar, in many ways, to the Indian stepwells and ghāt examined by Sara Keller, Tangible and Imagined Spatialities around Water: Munsar Lake as a Study Case of South Asian Hydro-space (Viramgam, India, 11th–

12th centuries), and Supriya Chaudhuri, Spaces of the Sacred: Religious Practice in Urban Interstices, respectively). Looking at them from below, like at Berg am Laim in Munich (Fig. 1), they reach furthest into the sky as the uppermost outposts of local society. Their spherical shape, furthermore, invites associations with the earth or sun and, in a more abstract way, ideas of well-rounded harmony. Entrusting something to a repository which remains inaccessible for decades at a time yet re-enters public consciousness during occasional repairs (carried out at unpredictable intervals determined by the vagaries of climate, natural disasters or building delapidation) generated an idiosyncratic rhythm of recurring connections with preceding generations, whose successors might reasonably be expected to continue the custom so as not to sever the links between past, present and future. Occupying a distinct niche within a wider and differentiated 'deposit culture' in early modern Europe (in the case of a city gate at Sopron/Ödenburg in present-day Hungary, for example, different kinds of items were stored in a heraldic eagle figure at the very top of the structure as well as a sphere immediately below it: Tűztorony 2012), tower balls were thus neither constantly 'open' for viewing (like public monuments) nor permanently sealed (like relics in altars or saints statues) nor intended for a single point of future discovery (as in the case of time capsules or foundation stones).

Fig. 1. The tower ball of St Stephan, Berg am Laim (Munich/Germany), viewed from ground level. Picture by the author.

One of the fascinating aspects of engaging with this phenomenon is the promise of relatively unfiltered access to humbler layers of society. Abstracting from celebrity exceptions like Melanchthon or learned Latinists like the librarian Johann Raue at St Nikolai in Berlin 1671 (Tautz 1925: 233–234), the documents were usually written by members of the lower clergy or representatives of civic/parish communities. At Rosdorf in

November 1749, the chronicle flowed off the pen of Lutheran pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Leschen, who offered high-level reflections on European affairs (such as the end of the War of the Austrian Succession) as well as glimpses of popular festivities associated with setting-up ceremonies. The latter struck the highly respectable clergyman as rather crude and undignified, suggesting fundamentally contrasting conceptions of church space. As he recorded in a dismissive postscript, a slater named Haack 'went round the village with the ball, a flag and music' to collect money for his efforts and also demanded a pair of new shoes and socks, 'which he put on while sitting on the ball [at the top of the tower], pretending that this was owed to him by custom' (Dolezel 1994: 38–46, postscript: 59–64). In other places, the writers were members of the parish or town council, with rectors, mayors, city scribes and vestrymen making up the lion's share of authors. At times, though, the builders themselves left a note for posterity, occasionally adopting a rather more critical and challenging tone than most of the 'official' documents. A notable example is the plumber and roofer Josef Christen, who carried out repairs at Lucerne's Hofkirche in 1885, a lofty position he used to reflect on what was wrong with the town and the world more generally. In a letter deposited within protective copperplate wrapping, he criticised the miserly pay offered by his employers (the local church council) as well as the warmongering spirit among his contemporaries, adducing evidence from as far away as China. He also deplored deficiencies in the 19th-century educational system and a general lack of job opportunities, while meekly apologising for his bad handwriting ('I am not a good writer.'). Hinting at a personal evocation of co-spatiality during the drafting of this text, furthermore, Christen reminisced about the work he had conducted on the tower ball of the *Haus zur Gilgen*, a prominent townhouse a few hundred meters away the year before (Luzern, Staatsarchiv: PA 244/1.2).

Overlaps between the secular and religious spheres at varying scales of analysis also emerge from multi-media deposits, which combined manuscripts and printed texts with a near-unlimited spectrum of objects ranging from strips of writing via coins to devotional objects, the latter particularly in Catholic areas of the German lands. At Pulkau in Lower Austria, the spectrum of items left in 1671 included a chronicle roll, starting with a list of dignitaries headed by the reigning Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, alongside a coin minted back in 1623 (possibly deriving from a previous opening of the ball, thus providing all those who found it with a tangible link to the past) and also some small crucifixes, a saints' medallion and a tiny bag, perhaps containing a relic (intended to link successive generations of Pulkau residents into wider metaphysical spheres; Reich 1963: 19). Typically, each set of deposits is hermetically sealed in a copper tube or cartridge to shield the contents from the elements (for often several decades at a time). These mini-archives then cluster at the bottom of a balls' lower half; given that many of the metal containers measure a meter or more in diameter, there is room enough for numerous separate layers.

In the vast majority of sites identified to date, pleas for heavenly protection and the transmission of key information to successive generations were two of the principal functions associated with the custom, regardless of confessional affiliation. The former emerges from near-universal invocations and thanksgivings; in 1636, the (Catholic) writer of the document for the town hall of Sursee (Canton Lucerne) put: 'Gott wol es alles zum besten wenden [und vor Feuersbrünsten] uns … ewig wolbehüten Amen [*May God direct everything for the best and … protect us eternally from fire damage Amen*]' (Zimmermann 2010: 51), while Protestant slater Johann Christoph Grieser concluded his verses for the Heidecksburg in Rudolstadt (Thuringia) with the wish:

Es geh dem Fürstenhof, der Stadt und Lande wohl,

das ist es, was ich von Herzen wünschen soll.

Es stehe dieser Turm auf viele hundert Jahre,

Vor Blitz und Donnerschlag Gott gnädig ihn bewahre!

Gott hat alles wohl gemacht,

Daß es glücklich ist vollbracht … Gott befehl ich alle Sache.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

May the court, town and country fare well,

that is, what I shall heartily desire.

May this tower stand for many hundred years,

and God protect it from lightning and thunder!

God has made everything well, so that it could happily be completed …

In God I entrust all things.

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

(Rein 1934: 12 April).

Direct addresses to posterity are nearly as common. At the Jägerhaus in Dresden, for example, a document was drawn up in 1673 'der werthen Posteritaet … zu(o) guten Andencken [*for the good consideration … of worthy posterity*]' (Dresden Hauptstaatsarchiv, 10047, Nr. 4825, 4v) and at St Nikolai, Berlin, we get confirmation that such appeals had a good chance to be gratefully received. The scribe of the church's 1695 chronicle explicitly acknowledged that his report was meant to follow on from that of a predecessor dating from 1671 (which had just been recovered from the tower ball) and aimed to update his own successors in turn (Müller and Küster 1737: 1.278, 280–281). Keen to maintain a similarly uninterrupted line of longitudinal communication at the Hofkirche in Lucerne, our plumber friend Christen expressed the hope that later writers would link to his account of 1885 just as he had to that of an artisan called Fassbinder from 1833 (Luzern, Staatsarchiv: PA 244/1.2). What their fellow metalworker Franz Schinacher wrote for a monastic church in the same town in 1957 might in turn spark a flash of (diachronic) co-spatiality for those finding his account in the future: 'Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, wie die Welt … aussehen wird …, wenn die Kugeln auf der Jesuitenkirche einmal geöffnet werden. Es mag vielleicht dann für diejenigen, die unsere "Kugeleinlagen" sichten, ein kleines Interesse haben' ['*I cannot imagine how the world … will look …, when the balls on top of the Jesuit church will be opened again. Perhaps our "deposits" will be of some small interest to those who look through them*'] (Luzern, Staatsarchiv: A 1250/16, p. 4). At St

Martin, Dornbirn (Vorarlberg) in 1857, finally, we find the perhaps clearest formulation of the practice's potential to forge long-term bonds and a sense of community between people living in a given locality at different points in time:

> Im Nachgange einer altherkömmlichen und lobenwerthen Gepflogenheit, und um einer Anforderung der Nachkommen zu entsprechen, welche sich keineswegs bloß auf eitle Neugierde stützt, sondern auf die Kontinuität einer Gemeinde und auf den geistigen Verband, welcher zwischen Vorfahren und Nachkommen statt findet; legen wir bei Veranlassung der an der Thurmspitze nothwendig gewordenen Reparatur, speziel die hiesige Gemeinde betreffende Notizen zur wohlwollenden Mittheilung an die Nachkommen in diesem Turmknopfe nieder (Bohle 1991: 28).

> [*Following a time-honoured and praiseworthy custom, and to meet a demand from posterity, which rests not only on vain curiosity, but on the continuity of a community and the spiritual bond between ancestors and their offspring; we deposit notes particularly concerned with our locality for well-meaning transmission to posterity into this tower ball on the occasion of necessary repairs to the top of the spire.*]

Yet on occasion ruling regimes suspected depositors of less benign motives. During a period of confessional tensions at Leipzig in the 1590s, the tower ball of St Nicholas church moved into the centre of attention. In the course of a major campaign against crypto-Calvinists orchestrated by Saxony's Lutheran establishment, the authorities began to wonder whether clues might be found among the documents recently deposited there. Such a secret location, they thought, could have been chosen for the safe-keeping of subversive plots and perhaps even lists of sympathisers. At great expense, therefore, the ball had to be taken down again and the content was carefully inspected. Whether or not incriminating evidence came to light appears to have been disputed among contemporaries but one diarist, at least, recorded that objectionable items were found and removed (Wustmann 1878: 81; a copperplate print depicting the episode is held by the Sächsische Staatsarchiv, Leipzig). From the point of view of co-spatiality, this particular site thus triggered very different associations for inhabitants of diverging confession looking at it at the same time: the congregation of St Nicholas simply regarded their tower ball as the traditional repository of their (Protestant) parochial identity; the defenders of Lutheran orthodoxy, in contrast, feared it as an ominous site of instability, a symbol of attempts to push the city and principality into a more radical religious direction. In any case, the sphere was soon returned to the top of the church.

Explanatory hypotheses, potential generalisations, possible relations to other factors

Recapitulating the sites, materials, functions and reflections outlined above, this paper proposes to conceptualise (content-filled) tower balls as liminal and latent *Generationenorte* ('generation sites'), placed in the transition zone between earth and heaven and moving in and out of local consciousness at unpredictable intervals. Where they came to be filled with *serial* deposits, typically at instalments of 30 to 80 years, the constituent layers forged connections resembling links in a commemorative chain. Activated and recharged at successive openings, each relay point boosted the

communicative memory (as defined above) of a given user community well beyond its regular, unaided horizon of less than a century. In the most extreme cases, it might reach back to the original construction of a building and, in the opposite direction, forward into an indefinite point in the future, be it the eventual dismantling of the edifice or, ultimately, the end of the world. In short, tower ball archives served as repositories for the transfer of self-representations by groups associated with specific buildings to inform and diachronically sustain the collective memory of a long line of successive generations. As one scholar of collective memory has put it in another context, past/present/future could enter into some sort of fusion: 'Jede Impression enthält immer auch Phasen der Retention und der Protention [*each impression simultaneously encapsulates phases of retention and protention*]', or in other words, each momentary act of perception involves a consciousness extending both backwards and forwards in time (Berek 2009: 73).

Is urbanity thus a precondition for co-spatiality? In spite of the strong correlation identified so far, it should be pointed out that countless villages engaged in the custom, too, with a similar emphasis on invoking divine favour and addressing posterity. Between 1390 and 1798, the tiny Alpine polity of Gersau in present-day Switzerland enjoyed an extraordinary degree of self-government as a 'parish republic' (Kümin 2014). On 24 September 1655, its scribe Anton Nigg concluded the first surviving tower ball chronicle as follows (Fig. 2):

> W[an] nun sach möchte sein, daß diser brief wurde ehröf[net] werden von unseren Nachkomentten, so wellendt die selbigerzitt inwoner dis lands gott den allmechtigen für uns Jezige inwoner bitten auch für alle stiffter undt guottdätter dis gotzhuses mitt einerem allgemeinen Christlichen gebätt das ehr uns alle unser sündt undt missetatth aller gnädiggist verzichen welle. Auch diser landt in dem wahren Cathollischen glauben, in Jhren allten von gott gegebnen freiheitten, so uns unsere forfahrer von den alten keyseren undt königen her ehrworben undt so Redlich herrgebracht habendt, aler gnädiggist erhalten wärde undt allezitt in guottem fridt undt wollstandt in guotter ein Müettigkeitt dis landt gregirett wärde ..."

> [*Should it occur that this letter be opened by our successors, may the residents of our land at that time intercede with God Almighty for us current residents as well as for all founders and benefactors of this church, with a general Christian prayer, that He will graciously forgive us all our sins and misdeeds. May this land also be graciously preserved in the true Catholic faith and in its ancient God-given liberties, acquired by our ancestors from the old emperors and kings and honestly preserved since, and may it always be governed in good peace and prosperity in good unity ...*]

Fig. 2. Extract from the first surviving tower ball chronicle deposited at St Marcellus, Gersau, in the present-day Canton of Schwyz (Switzerland), with the original German text of the quote extending from line 4 to 17 and the signature of 'land scribe Anthonj Nigg' bottom right. Gersau, Pfarreiarchiv, Turmkugel-Dokumente, Nr. 1: 1655, p. 2, reproduced with kind permission of Gersau District Council. Picture by the author.

This particular document, incidentally, raises two further intriguing issues. One relates to confessionally-specific functions: in such a staunchly Catholic region, the desire to enlist future intercessors emerges as an additional motive for deposits, i.e. a good work conducive to salvation. The other involves questions about 'originality', as the 1655 chronicle is now kept in the parish archive rather than on top of the tower (where typed copies of the text were deposited during the last major repairs in 1983). Can we still call this a 'tower ball document' strictly speaking or should the term be reserved for items still stored away from our gaze, i.e. fulfilling the initial purpose? Weighing up the conflicting priorities of original intention and present-day conservation more generally, should items dating from centuries ago be left where they were found or is it preferable to preserve them in the best possible conditions on the ground? At Bern's Holy Ghost church, for example, 18th-century deposits were scientifically restored and then returned to their lofty location in 2014 (Münsterbauleitung 2014: 63). The issue is complicated further by the fact that some 'historic' documents turn out to be period copies of even older originals, as at Grossdietwil in Lucerne, where a chronicle dated 1650 is actually a transcript made by the then parishioners in 1701 (Gössi 1973: 51).

Compared to major cities, to refocus on our town/country comparison, there were fewer prominent buildings in villages, so if we look for 'distinctive signs of urbanity' then we could note a higher likelihood of multiple tower ball deposits as one element and a greater typological range as another. As in the case of Innsbruck examined above, both are similarly apparent at Meißen in Saxony (Fig. 3), with possible sites including the parish church of Our Lady as well as monasteries, palaces and a cathedral. At the *Liebfrauenkirche* (from 1549: Leicht und Granz 1894: 30–41) and the *Albrechtsburg* (from 1653: Dresden, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 10057 Kreisamt Meißen, Nr. 3634), at least, contents have indeed been found. Similarly, towns accommodated a larger absolute number of potential viewers at any one time as well as a more frequent turnover of visitors and passers-by. These characteristics all enhanced the chances for incidences of co-spatiality, be it in the form of simultaneous/diachronic imaginations of the place in purely worldly terms or with the addition of supplementary metaphysical dimensions. As in Martin Christ's article on early modern bedchambers (Co-Spatiality in the Early Modern European Bedchamber), urban settings tended to favour a greater diversity of actors and objects, but there was no fundamental dichotomy to the situation in the countryside.

Fig. 3. Prospect of the City of Meißen featuring various 'liminal' tower balls on churches (such as the Frauenkirche and St Afra), the Dome and the Albrechts-/Bischofsburg, whose locations and contents might be variously noted (or not) by local residents as well as visitors to the city. Picture by the author.

In support of my argument that tower ball deposits have the potential to enrich and alter people's spatial perceptions of given localities beyond those of mere containers, consider the testimony of a present-day parish official. Uta Herrmann, whose family has lived in the town of Osterode (Lower Saxony) for many generations, reported that the reconstruction of the *Marktkirche* in 1951 became a 'prägend [*formative*]' event for her, since the parental metal workshop played an active role in the building project. 'Die Bekrönung stand auf dem Hof, bevor sie zum Vergolden abgeholt wurde. Ich war erstaunt, wie klein Hahn und Kugel in 63 Meter Höhe später aussahen' ['*The ornaments which would crown the tower were stored in our courtyard before gilding. I was surprised at how small the cockrel and sphere at a height of 63 meters later looked from below*']. A decade later, her mother wrote one tower ball chronicle and two foundation stone documents for other local churches and, in more recent times, the 'Turmknopf der Sankt Marienkirche [errang] eine besondere Bedeutung für mich, weil ich als Kirchenvorstandsvorsitzende die Bauarbeiten [von 2018] begleitet habe und so die Situation der Menschen gut nachvollziehen kann, die in der Vergangenheit Urkunden eingelegt haben. Ich erinnere mich gut an die Zeit der letzten Öffnung (1965), obwohl ich mich nicht an das Ereignis selbst erinnern kann' ['*the tower ball of St Mary's acquired particular significance for me, because I was involved in the building works of 2018, allowing me to gain a good impression of the situation of the people who deposited documents in the past. I remember the time around the last opening (in 1965) well, even though I cannot recollect the event itself*']. Her recollections suggest that, in contrast to other, 'normal' residents, she sees Osterode (simultaneously) through several layers of deposits from at least three sites and that the respective documents help her to recover a more differentiated – quasi 'higher-resolution' – picture of the town's past than would be possible purely on the basis of her own memory alone. Two further striking clues relate to the moment when the cartridge of St Mary was opened in 2018, of which Herrmann remembers '[d]as Bemühen, sich in die jeweilige Zeit der fünf Öffnungen vor uns hineinzuversetzen' ['*the effort to place oneself in the time of the five preceding openings*'] and her sense of obligation, 'die Tradition weiterzuführen, weil ich eine

gewisse Verpflichtung spüre, das Überkommene zu achten und dem Wunsch der Verantwortlichen vor uns nachzukommen' ['*to continue the tradition, since I feel a certain obligation to respect customs and to act in accordance with the wishes of those who shouldered responsibilities before us*'] (all quotes from Herrmann interview 2019, reproduced here with kind permission and translated by the author). Extrapolating from this evidence, the same would apply to many chroniclers themselves, particularly those of elevated local standing (such as wealthy merchants looking back on a municipal *cursus honorum*), who came to be associated with multiple buildings through their ownership of a prominent house, membership of a particular parish and office-holding in town, guild, ward and militia.

If, by way of conclusion, we remind ourselves of the proposal to conceptualise tower ball archives as generation sites serving distinctive roles for self-representation, protection and diachronic communication, what were the factors conducive to the generation of co-spatiality in this context? Relevant (and not necessarily binary or mutually exclusive) variables included singularity/plurality (of relevant sites); presence/absence (i.e. the idiosyncratic rhythms of tower ball information moving in and out of local consciousness); uniqueness/repetition (since successive layers prolong the temporal extent of communicative memory); private/public (with civic officials more likely to gain affiliations to more than one prominent building); inclusion/exclusion (in that marginal or itinerant groups forged fewer links to user communities, if any at all); stabilisation/subversion (affecting the reach, appeal and interpretation of specific documents); micro/macro (as embedding in supra-local networks boosted both the range of relevant sites and mental horizons); and – last but not least – (meta-) physicality (although both dimensions were usually present in any case study). Given that the phenomenon can also be found in the countryside, this paper posits the higher likelihood of multiple and typologically distinct tower ball archives alongside the greater differentiation of audiences as distinctive 'urban' features. Each repository, and indeed each layer within it, enriches (and perhaps complicates) the spatial constitution of a locality, resulting in ever more elaborate matrixes for at least selected members of successive generations. Juxtaposition of surviving evidence from across sites and periods thus promises historians at least approximative insights into the complexities of imagining a city.

Where could investigations take us next? The long-term target of a fuller historical survey of the phenomenon, taking account of its complex regional, chronological and thematic characteristics, clearly requires further and ideally collaborative efforts. Churches shared by different confessions (*Simultaneen*), like Püchersreuth (Bavaria) in this sample, might constitute particularly interesting objects of closer study. Scholars from other disciplines will no doubt add their own questions. Issues of intermediality could be productively explored. Do tower balls play significant roles in works of literature or the visual arts and how exclusive are their contents? Can any of the deposits be found elsewhere – either 'hidden' on top of other spires or 'open' in building inscriptions and related source genres – and to which extent are the respective documents recycled/adapted versions of pre-existing texts produced for distinct purposes (such as town histories, anniversary brochures or newspaper reports) in the first place? Conversely, in which ways might tower ball writings, images or objects, rediscovered after decades, gain meaning for fresh audiences through subsequent oral dissemination, press coverage, scholarly editions or even social media posts? Last but not least, given the existence of ball-shaped ornaments on top of some obelisks and minarets, are there similar deposit customs in other cultural

contexts and what exactly are the differences to related phenomena like time capsules (left on earth) or the items of cultural heritage intended for intergalactic audiences (rocketed into space)? A lot remains on the research agenda and any pointers or further suggestions would be gratefully received.

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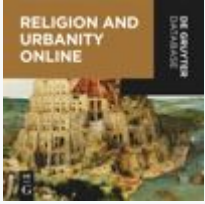
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