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Lysistrata's Daughters: A Nineteenth Century German Source Exploration

The document “Women’s Activism in the Revolution of 1848/49: Appeal of the Married Women and Maidens of Württemberg to the Soldiers of Germany (1849)” was originally published in a Württemberg newspaper in 1849, and was then re-published in various newspapers around Germany shortly afterwards.¹ GHDI, the website which translated this document into English, found it in Gerlinde Hummel-Haasis’ book *Schwestern zerreit eure Ketten: Zeugnisse zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Revolution von 1848/49*. This book was published in 1982 and cites the document from a diary published in 1853 by Daniel Staroste.²

The names of the authors remain unknown, but it can be assumed that this document was drafted by multiple women living in the Kingdom of Württemberg in 1849. Although the first women’s association in Germany was not officially established until years later, there were stirrings of female political organization throughout the 1848/9 revolutions.³

The 1848 revolutions were a series of political upheavals throughout the German states and across Europe resulting from periods of unrest among citizens who longed for the installment of a liberal constitution under a united German nation. Because of the initial violence that swept through the streets of various major German cities, especially in Berlin, the military

¹ Two newspapers citing the document can be found online:

“Die Württembergischen Frauen und Jungfrauen an die deutschen Krieger.” *Centralblatt der Niederlausitz: Organ zur Wahrung der Volksrechte*, (May 23 1849).

“Zuruf württembergischer Frauen und Jungfrauen an unsere deutschen Krieger.” *Coburger Tageblatt*, (May 15 1849).

²Hummel-Haasis, Gerlinde. *Schwestern zerreit eure Ketten: Zeugnisse zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Revolution von 1848/49*. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1982), 22-23.

Staroste, Daniel. *Tagebuch über die Ereignisse in der Pfalz und Baden im Jahre 1849: ein Erinnerungsbuch für die Zeitgenossen und für Alle, welche Theil nahmen an der Unterdrückung jenes Aufstandes*. (Riegel, 1852).

³ Hagen, William W. “Frauen: Women, Family, Feminism, 1789-1914.” *German History in Modern Times: Four Lives of the Nation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 170-182.

was employed on behalf of the monarchies who wanted to maintain order within their kingdoms and avoid a situation like what resulted from the French Revolution. German women's roles during this period expanded gradually into the political sphere, from admittance into previously all-male club meetings to spontaneous organization in the streets.⁴ This source in particular is a message from the women of Württemberg who were affected by those revolutions. It comprises both an urging of German soldiers to sympathize with the revolutionary cause, and a declaration that Württemberg women will refuse to marry or love soldiers who attack German citizens.

The editor of *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader* describes this document as “an early version of today's tactic of refusing to date men who aren't feminists.”⁵ While I disagree with this interpretation, the similarities are clear. In both situations, women are using their decision of whether to participate in sexual or romantic activities with men as a way to advance their own agendas. However, refusing to date a non-feminist man today is an individual action that a woman might take for her own self-fulfillment or for the benefit of her own gender, as opposed to this document which threatens a broader and more conditional action taken through the collective agency of all participating women in a specified region. Also, the goal of these 1849 women was not to advance women's rights, nor did they seek to benefit on an individual level. Instead, they viewed marriage and love with German soldiers as something that they might want, but would pledge to avoid for the revolutionary cause.

Notably, this document bears resemblance to the plot of Aristophanes' ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata*. Here, women gather together from various Greek states and swear an oath to refuse sex and love to their husbands until they agree to end the Peloponnesian wars.⁶ As one historian notes, ancient Greece became a fascination in Germany during the Romantic period, which “fed on a highly idealized understanding of that culture and its artistic creations as the product of an era in which thought and feeling, and reason and expression were in harmony.”⁷ In

⁴ Sperber, Jonathan. *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 251.

⁵ Weiss, Penny A. *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*. (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 84-85.

⁶ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. Jack Lindsay. (New York: Arden Book Company, 1933).

⁷ Lebow, Richard Ned. “Germans and Greeks.” *In The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 151–82 .

fact, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Philhellenism became “a defining feature of middle class intellectuals [*Bildungsbürgertum*]” A statue of Aristophanes himself was depicted on the stage curtain of a Leipzig theater when it first opened in 1766,⁸ and the first published German translation of *Lysistrata* was released in 1806.⁹ All this is to say that it is not unlikely that the women who drafted this document had read *Lysistrata*, and were inspired by its bold female characters who, though humorously depicted, were successful in their endeavor. The women in 1848 and 1849 who had their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons killed in the revolution would have been able to identify with the strife of the women at the beginning of the play, and would have seen their strategy as a tool potentially applicable to their situation. This play would have encouraged women to see the power they held in their interpersonal relationships and to wield it in favor of a cause they saw to be more important than sex or love: political revolution.

Despite the message directly addressing the German soldiers, I argue that they are not the actual intended audience of this document. Instead, this message is a symbolic threat that serves as more of a call to arms of the women in Germany, encouraging them to contribute to the revolutionary effort and deny any support to the military’s cause. They had to have known that their specific threats would not be taken seriously by the army. In fact, in one 1849 correspondence a German involved in the military quotes the document and explains that it was read at a dinner, whereupon “a loud laughter vouched for the incredulity of my people.”¹⁰ Rather than an honest attempt at organizing a strict ban on sex with German soldiers, the women who wrote this document were aiming to recruit more women to dedicate themselves to the revolutionary cause. This point is also evident in previous newspaper publishings by German women in Württemberg, who had called for women to “form a regiment to fight and quarrel for the fatherland” in the *Neues Tagblatt für Stuttgart und Umgegend* and “to make charpie for the

⁸ Brandt, George W., Wiebe Hogendoorn, ed. *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600-1848*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1993, 84-5.

⁹ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. D August Christian Borheck. (Köln, 1806).

¹⁰ Kehrer, A., ed. *Ereignisse und Betrachtungen während der Verwendung der Grossherzogl. Hessischen Armeedivision in den Jahren 1848 und 1849. In brieflichen Mittheilungen*. (Rahke, 1855), 171-3. [Translation through Google Translate]

wounded in Schleswig-Holstein” in the *Eßlinger Schnellpost*.¹¹ The call for a military regiment was not a common one, and usually women’s efforts were limited to donating goods such as bandages for the wounded. The “Appeal of the Married Women and Maidens” document, however, is an example of women attempting to rally other women in a new way, while still wielding the power they held in their domestic roles.

Following this document’s publication in several German newspapers, such as in Niederlausitz and Coburg, a response was published by a group of women in Prussia, who defend the men fighting for the Prussian army.¹² Despite the fact that this response advocates for the other side, this document serves as a further example of women recognizing the power they held in their responsibilities to support their husbands, and in their coming together as women to unite for a political purpose.

Ultimately, this document is significant because it is a rare example of documented evidence of female political involvement in an area that had yet to see a movement for women’s rights. It was recognized as such even at the time of its publication, resulting in its reprinting in various newspapers across Germany. Though responses were mixed, from the soldier incredulity to the Prussian women’s rejection of the Württemberg women’s ideology, the fact that this message generated such passionate responses in the first place is testament to its impact. This level of publicized female unity for a political cause was scarce in Germany prior to the 1848 revolutions, and the publications of this message from the Württemberg women illustrate the widespread emergence of women’s voices into the public sphere. Despite their repression into rigid gender roles typical in Europe at the time, the women who constructed this document recognized that they were not powerless, and by writing this message Württemberg women displayed their interest in politics, asserted their right to be involved, and encouraged other women in Germany to do their part for the revolutionary cause.

¹¹ Lipp, Carola. *Schimpfende Weiber und partiotische Jungfrauen : Frauen im Vormärz und in der Revolution 1848/49* (Elster Verlag Moos & Baden-Baden, 1986).

¹² Also published in Hummel-Haasis’ book, she cites the original source as a newspaper: “Offener Brief an die »sämtlichen« Frauen und Jungfrauen Württembergs.” *Der Deutsche Volksfreund*, Frankfurt, June 2, 1849.

The women here note themselves to be Prussian, but this source article was published in Frankfurt, most likely as a republication.

Annotated Bibliography (Chronological Order)

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. D August Christian Borheck. Bavarian State Library, 1806.

This is the earliest result in Google Books for a full German translation of *Lysistrata*.

The translator mentions in the foreword that the work had never before been translated into German. Because this translation existed at the time of the document's creation, it is possible that the authors could have read it.

“Zuruf württembergischer Frauen und Jungfrauen an unsere deutschen Krieger.” *Coburger Tageblatt*, Coburg, Bavaria, May 15 1849.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=qxQPAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

A newspaper in Bavaria, a kingdom in southern Germany, which published the Württemberg document. This issue is available on Google Books where it was digitized from a version in the Harvard University library.

“Die Württembergischen Frauen und Jungfrauen an die deutschen Krieger.” *Centralblatt der Niederlausitz: Organ zur Wahrung der Volksrechte*, Niederlausitz. May 23 1849.

https://books.google.com/books?id=uuFDAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Another of the newspapers in which the document was originally published, this issue is available for free on Google Books. This is from an 1849 publication in Niederlausitz, a region southeast of Berlin which at the time consisted of several states in eastern Germany.

“Offener Brief an die »sämtlichen« Frauen und Jungfrauen Württembergs.” *Der Deutsche Volksfreund*, Frankfurt, June 2, 1849.

This is the newspaper in which the Prussian women published a response to the original document. Here, they show support for the monarchy and devotion to the military, an example of women's involvement in supporting the other side of the revolutions as well.

Staroste, Daniel. *Tagebuch über die Ereignisse in der Pfalz und Baden im Jahre 1849 : ein Erinnerungsbuch für die Zeitgenossen und für Alle, welche Theil nahmen an der*

Unterdrückung jenes Aufstandes. Volume 1, Riegel, 1852.

https://books.google.com/books/about/Tagebuch_%C3%BCber_die_Ereignisse_in_der_Pfa.html?id=IJAACAAAJ

This is the diary that Hummel-Haasis cites as her source for the document. Since its original publication in Potsdam, Brandenburg, this source has been republished by several German presses over the years, including Nabu Press and Forgotten Books. The original is available at the Bavarian State Library, but it can also be accessed online in an open-access digitized version through Google Books, which was scanned from a copy in Harvard University's Hohenzollern Collection. However, no English translation or information about the author is readily available.

Kehrer, A., ed. *Ereignisse und Betrachtungen während der Verwendung der Grossherzogl. Hessischen Armeedivision in den Jahren 1848 und 1849. In brieflichen Mittheilungen*. Rahke, 1855, 171-3.

https://books.google.com/books?id=HW0AAAAAcAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s

A collection of letters within a German army division throughout 1848-9. One directly quotes the Württemberg document and mentions German soldiers laughing in response to it being read aloud at a dinner.

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. Jack Lindsay. New York: Arden Book Company, 1933.

This is the translation of Aristophanes that I read to understand where the document's author(s) may have gotten their inspiration. Lysistrata, the protagonist, is the leader of the women and is depicted as the most capable and bold, directly challenging the men who taunt her and refusing to give in to temptation even as some of her cohorts abandon the cause. Despite the way that some of the other women are illustrated, as weak and irresolute in their ambitions, Lysistrata stands as a strong female character throughout her struggles, which German women in 1849 may have found admirable.

[Found at UCSB library]

Gerlinde Hummel-Haasis, *Schwestern zerreit eure Ketten: Zeugnisse zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Revolution von 1848/49*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1982, 22-23.

This is the book that GHDI cites as their source for the document. It compiles numerous German documents by and about women during the 1848/9 revolutions, including a response published by Prussian women.

[Found through UC Interlibrary loan]

Lipp, Carola. *Schimpfende Weiber und partiotische Jungfrauen : Frauen im Vormärz und in der Revolution 1848/49*, Elster Verlag Moos & Baden-Baden, 1986.

This book gives extensive information on German women's participation in the 1848/9 revolutions and explicitly mentions the efforts of women in Württemberg as documented through earlier newspaper publishings.

[Found through UC Interlibrary loan]

Sperber, Jonathan. *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 251.

This book gives some background information about the 1848 revolutions and provides context for the way women's involvement in politics changed in Germany during this period.

[Found at the UCSB Main Library]

Brandt, George W., Wiebe Hogendoorn, ed. *German and Dutch Theatre, 1600-1848*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 84-85.

A 1776 Pamphlet quoted in this book describes the appearance of the stage curtain at a Leipzig theater, including the significance of Aristophanes' representation as one of "the greatest dramatic authors." His presence denotes the growing popularity of Greek works in Germany at the time.

Lebow, Richard Ned. "Germans and Greeks." *In The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves*, 151-82. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

This chapter reveals how an interest in ancient Greek works began to thrive in Germany's romantic period not only among the upper classes, but throughout the educated middle class as well. This is part of the evidence which points to the possibility that the authors of this document may have read Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.

Hagen, William W. "Frauen: Women, Family, Feminism, 1789-1914." *German History in Modern Times: Four Lives of the Nation*, 170-182. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

This chapter gives background information about the women's roles in Germany during this time period and mentions how female involvement in politics began to rise during the 1848 revolutions.

Weiss, Penny A. *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2018, 84-85.

One of the few English-language publications containing excerpts of the Württemberg document, this book provides some commentary about how and why the authors of this document felt compelled to organize for the benefit of their nation.

Research Process Notes

- I began researching for this project by using the UCSB library to find books with background information on nineteenth century German women as well as what roles women played in the 1848/9 revolutions. I also found a copy of *Lysistrata* to support my statement that the document's authors may have been inspired by a German translation of it.
- I then focused more on the document itself and used databases like Google Books, Google Scholar, Worldcat, and JSTOR to search different sections of the document and find where it had been reprinted. This way I was able to find digitized versions of two newspapers the document had been published in during 1849, the Staroste diary, the letters, the feminist studies book which reprinted it just this year and the Hummel-Haasis book which I was able to get a hard copy of through interlibrary loan.
- The last book I found for this assignment was Carola Lipp's book, which is partially available online. I found some of the information online useful but needed to see what newspapers she was referencing with the abbreviations "ESP" and "NT." The reference page was not available online, but fortunately I was also able to get a hard copy of this book through interlibrary loan and got the information I needed that way.