

SCRIBE VERSES — A STEPCHILD OF RESEARCH IN CULTURAL HISTORY AND FOLKLORE

Bruno Schier

Aside from the general survey by Wilhelm Wattenbach, the verses by scribes in municipal books and chronicles have hardly ever been dealt with comprehensively. This is due to the bulk and variety of widely dispersed material which has been handed down. Using examples from old municipal registers from Friedland and Reichenberg, the author attempts a small contribution to this neglected branch of cultural history and folklore.

In form and content, the scribe verses are a mirror image of their particular age. In the 16th century they were usually written in Latin and were permeated by ideas taken from Humanistic literature. The 17th century displayed a predilection for newspapers in rhyme: even the dullest reports on grain prices or the composition of the council were presented in doggerel verse. The baroque spirit of the 18th century delighted in the playful use of rhyme effects, chronograms and acrostics.

Scholarly book knowledge and popular maxims may be considered the main sources of the scribe verses in the Friedland and Reichenberg municipal books. But only the scribe of the town of Friedland, Johann Friedrich Posselt (1680—1746) was able to achieve a lively new unity out of these sources. Only when more scribe verses are available, will it be possible to determine whether one can speak of a genuine scribe art and whether it is justified to regard scribe verses as part of the larger field of popular poetry.