

**The Talk of the Town:
Oral Communication and Networks of Information
in Sixteenth-Century St. Gallen**



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Abstract

This thesis explores oral communication in St. Gallen through the lens of the linen merchant Johannes Rütiner (1501–1556/7). By reconstructing Rütiner's network of informants and probing four genres of communication within their respective social contexts – jokes, gossip, rumour, and memory narratives –, it explores early modern sociability, the circulation of information, and the relationship between oral testimony, manuscript, and print.

Sixteenth-century St. Gallers relied heavily on informal, oral networks to provide them with news and information of all kinds. An individual's access to information was thus to a large degree determined by the social networks within which they spent their life. As St. Gallers sought to secure a place for themselves in such circles, they in turn used jokes, gossip, and information of all kinds as a form of "communicative social capital", allowing them to present themselves as witty, well-connected, and knowledgeable. Rather than treating the instability of oral narratives as evidence of the inherent unreliability of the spoken word, this study proposes to analyse their evolution as a key to early modern mentalities. It also calls into question some of the dominant narratives regarding the printing revolution. Not only did oral communication continue to play a central role in the dissemination of information in the first half of the sixteenth century, but existing systems of "source criticism", developed in the context of dominantly oral networks, moreover cast doubt on the reliability of anonymous prints: because they made their trust in a piece of news conditional on their trust in the messenger, Rütiner and his fellow citizens often preferred oral narratives provided by familiar, trustworthy informants.

Long Abstract

Inspired by Marshall McLuhan's work on media and their effect on society, historians of the early modern period have extensively studied written media such as letters, printed books, and pamphlets. Oral communication, in contrast, has often been neglected, in spite of the fact that it was arguably the most universal and accessible medium at the time. Only with an increasing interest in information culture has the focus started to shift to different types of communication, including speech. This shift is reflected in the large number of studies on "crimes of the tongue" such as libel or blasphemy published over the last two decades, and in the growing interest in rumour and gossip. Underlying all these studies is the idea that for the majority of people in sixteenth-century Europe, oral communication continued to dominate most social interactions and exchanges of information, and therefore needs to be studied in its own right.

Research into the subject, however, has been limited by the sources available. While it may be possible to approach certain aspects of oral culture via court records or through popular proverbs and learned discourses on talking and remaining silent, these sources can only give us a limited idea of its role in everyday life. In order to bridge the gaps in the historical material, historians have often drawn on modern sociological, anthropological, and psychological theories which link oral exchanges to a broad range of social practices. Yet the extent to which these theories apply to the early modern context remains unclear. In a period that lacked regular newspapers and in which the public postal system was still in the early stages of its development, oral communication arguably served a broader set of purposes and should be studied both as a social practice *and* as a vital means for transmitting information. Using the notebooks of the St. Gallen linen merchant Johannes Rütiner (1501–1556/7), this thesis shall therefore (1) explore the social contexts of different forms of oral communication, (2) establish what information people had access to and in what form it reached them, and (3) examine how the medium through which information was spread influenced both its content and the recipient's trust in it.

From 1529 to 1539, Rütiner recorded the "talk of the town" about past and contemporary political events, economic developments, wars, accidents, crimes and scandals, as well as conversations, jokes, gossip, and rumours from all over Europe. Rütiner's *Commentationes*, which have received hardly any scholarly attention so far, allow us a rare glimpse of an oral culture usually hidden from view. Since Rütiner usually named his informants, their sources, and the context in which information was exchanged, his notebooks are exceptionally suitable for a study of oral communication and networks of information. Unlike most chroniclers, Rütiner described significant events several times and did not change earlier accounts even if they conflicted with later ones. In conjunction with a variety of sources from St. Gallen and beyond (e.g. contemporary chronicles, pamphlets, and court records), the *Commentationes* therefore allow us to study both how information travelled across Europe and how individual stories changed over time and as they were passed on.

Rütiner wrote at a time of profound religious and political change. St. Gallen had just been reformed and was striving for complete independence from the powerful abbey situated within its walls. Simultaneously, conflicts were arising between Protestant and Catholic states in the Swiss Confederacy, of which St. Gallen was an associate. Hence, Rütiner's collection of hearsay not only tells us what people talked about, but also how they coped with a lack of verifiable information at a time of great uncertainty.

This thesis presents the first comprehensive study of Rütiner's *Commentationes* and traces their development from loose personal notes to a more systematic collection of information. Resisting all conventional categorization, the *Commentationes* were neither diary nor chronicle. Rather, the peculiar features of the notebooks can be traced back to its author's social position at the intersection of two powerful, but quite distinct social groups within St. Gallen: the circle of humanists and theologians around the reformer Vadianus, and the leading members of the weavers' guild.

By reconstructing Rütiner's network of informants and probing four genres of communication in their respective social contexts – jokes, gossip, rumour, and memory narratives –, this thesis explores early modern sociability, the circulation of information, and the relationship between oral testimony, manuscript, and print. Sixteenth-century St. Gallen relied heavily on informal, oral networks to provide them with news and information of all kind. Even written and printed media were typically consumed in sociable settings as their content was read aloud, summarised, and discussed. An individual's access to information was thus to a large degree determined by the social networks within which they spent their life. As St. Gallen sought to secure a place for themselves in such circles, they used jokes, gossip, and information of all kind as a form of "communicative capital", allowing them to present themselves as witty, well-connected, and knowledgeable. Consequently, information passed on orally did not only evolve as a result of memory loss, but it was also consciously tailored to the taste and expectations of a specific audience. Rather than treating the instability of oral narratives as evidence of the inherent unreliability of the spoken word, this study therefore proposes to analyse their evolution as a key to early modern mentalities.

This thesis also calls into question some of the dominant narratives regarding the printing revolution, and argues that a history of reception, not production, is needed to adequately evaluate its impact. Not only did oral communication continue to play a central role in the dissemination of information in the first half of the sixteenth century, but existing systems of "source criticism", developed in the context of a dominantly oral networks, moreover cast doubt on the reliability of anonymous prints: because they made their trust in a piece of news conditional on their trust in the messenger, Rütiner and his fellow citizens often preferred oral narratives provided by familiar, trustworthy informants.

Chapter 1 introduces St. Gallen, Rütiner, and his notebooks, which it discusses as part of a broader trend in St. Gallen that saw numerous citizens take up writing chronicles around the time of the Reformation. At the same time, the chapter draws attention to the many distinctive features of the *Commentationes* and their resistance to any conventional categorization.

Chapter 2 deals with the most peculiar feature of Rütiner's work, namely the "references" he provided for over seventy percent of his notebook entries. Based on these "references" and using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the chapter offers a reconstruction of Rütiner's information network. It shows that Rütiner's network was distinctly local, overlapped to a large extent with his social and trade network, and was based, for the most part, on face-to-face interactions and oral exchanges.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore two forms of oral communication which are usually described as gendered – obscene jokes and gossip – within their respective social contexts. *Chapter 3* looks at how jokes circulated orally and in print, and highlights some of the creative processes and social skills involved in making a successful joke. By studying humour within its cultural and social contexts, the chapter calls into question the widespread notion that obscene humour represented a

safety valve for men's sexual aggressions against women. Rather, they primarily targeted the male body and offered jokers an opportunity to display their social skills, their sexual experience, and their masculinity. *Chapter 4* challenges the view that early modern gossip was an inherently disruptive and primarily female form of communication, whose only value – if it had any at all – resided in its social function. It argues that gossip was precious both as a social activity and as a way of spreading important knowledge about the people in one's surroundings; in particular in the context of a small town like St. Gallen.

While chapters three and four focus primarily on the social context of oral communication, the last two chapters widen the focus to include the circulation, transformation, and verification of information. *Chapter 5* discusses the infrastructure and media which brought news from all over Europe to St. Gallen. Even highly educated citizens like Rütiner typically obtained news in oral form, via informal networks which were based on pre-existing social ties. Since it was usually impossible to verify news independently, Rütiner and his contemporaries relied on an elaborate system of "source criticism"; a system which often worked in favour of oral news because it linked people's trust in a piece of news to their trust in the messenger.

Chapter 6 looks beyond institutionalised commemoration and the historical narratives of the elite and explores the ways in which collective narratives around past events emerged out of conversations in which individual memories were shared and reshaped. Changes in the way past events were remembered, so it argues, should not be seen as evidence for the frailties of human memory, but rather offer us important insights into early modern mentalities.

As a whole, this thesis argues that oral communication still played a central role in the circulation of information in 1530s St. Gallen and beyond. Moreover, the dissemination of news was intimately intertwined with the circulation of gossip, jokes, and tales, and went hand in hand with social practices. Only by taking into account the social dynamics of the innumerable oral interactions in which information was shared, discussed, processed, confirmed or contradicted, can we begin to understand the circulation of ideas in early modern Europe.

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Abbreviations and Conventions

Comm. I. Johannes Rütiner's *Commentationes*, notebook I: Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, ed. and transl. Ernst G. Rüschi, 5 vols. (St. Gallen, 1996), i–ii (= VadSlg, Ms 78: Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, vol. 1).

Comm. II. Johannes Rütiner's *Commentationes*, notebook II: Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, ed. and transl. Ernst G. Rüschi, 5 vols. (St. Gallen, 1996), iii–iv (= VadSlg, Ms 79: Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, vol. 2).

Johannes Rütiner's notebooks are often referred to (misleadingly) as *Diarium*, a title which was reluctantly adopted by the editor of the notebooks, Ernst Gerhard Rüschi. Throughout this thesis I will use Rütiner's own title, *Commentationes*. Rüschi numbered all individual entries in the *Commentationes*; in references these are used to identify the relevant quote (i.e. Comm. I.1 = *Commentationes*, notebook I, entry 1).

StadtASG: Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen.

VadSlg: St. Galler Kantonsbibliothek Vadiana, Vadianische Sammlung.

ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara: Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Abteilung Alte Drucke und Rara.

Translations and quotations from primary sources

All Latin and German sources are rendered in English in the main body of the text, while the original is provided in the footnotes. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own. Rütiner's Latin is often grammatically incorrect; separate clauses and new sentences are indicated with spaces in the manuscript (rendered as [] in Latin citations) or line breaks (rendered as /) rather than with punctuation. I have attempted to stay as close to the original wording and sentence structure as possible in order to render the notebook character of the *Commentationes*. In the interest of comprehensibility, punctuation has been added to translations, and square brackets are used to indicate where it was necessary to provide additional text (for instance to fill in missing auxiliaries). In translations and in the main body of the text, the names of people and places, where they could be identified with certainty, are standardised and modernized in accordance with the *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*.

All citations from Scripture are based on the King James Version.

Introduction

In July 1532, one year after the disastrous second battle at Kappel am Albis which had cost Huldrych Zwingli his life and plunged the Swiss Protestants into a deep crisis, the St. Gallen linen merchant Johannes Rütiner (1501–1556/7) recorded the following prophecy in his notebooks, or *Commentationes*:

In July. A certain peasant from Degersheim, Schachman, known by the nickname *Kuttler* [triper] because of his talkativeness, a weaver, is anticipating many things. They say he predicted the first battle of the Helvetians at Albis, which they call the boys' fair [*bursticorum dedi[c]ationem*] because nobody was hurt. He also predicted the following bloody [battle] and that Zwingli and many of his followers would perish. He is already announcing another third one, in which many more will come together from both sides. Two mutes will conciliate in the middle of the battle lines. Then the Turk will come. First he will subjugate everything courteously, then harshly like a furious lion, defeating both the Pope and the Emperor. Near Naples a few pacified Helvetians will attack him together, with that standard with which they were presented by the Pope, not knowing to what end etc. They will kill him [and] choose a new Emperor and Pope. Before there will also be a plague in which those who talk to each other will die immediately. Such a worthlessness of gold and silver will come that nobody will lift it off the ground. This he learned on the way to the mountain of Venus from a travelling scholar, it is said. He showed it written down in a book.¹

Schachman's prophecy reflected many contemporary concerns and resonated with fears regarding epidemics, economic decline, and Ottoman expansion. Above all else, it warned that another war between the Catholic and Protestant cantons of the Swiss Confederacy was looming; a threat which was to hang over St. Gallers for many years.² Yet another subject subtly pervades the entire entry;

¹ 'Iulio quidam rusticus de Tegerschen schachman / cognomine kuttler a loquacitate dictus textor / plura praesumens [] dicunt eum praedixisse primum / praelium Heluetiorum an Albis vocant Burst/icorum deditationem [*sic*, probably dedicationem] quia nemo leditur [] Se/quens eciam praedixit cruentum et Zwingli / et eius sequaces perituros quam plurimos [] Iam iterum / tercium nuncians vbi vtrunque multo plures con/venient [] 2 muti in medio acierum conciliabunt / Deinde turca veniet [] Omnia primo comiter / subiungabit [] deinde austere sicut leo seui / et papam et Caesarem vincens [] Circa Neapolim / pacati Heluetij vna eum aggredientes pauci cum / illis quadratis quibus donati a papa nescij quo / fine eum interficient [] Nouum Cesarem et papam / eligentes etc [] Item pestem futuram prius quo / colloquentes subito peribunt [] tanta vilitas auri / et argenti veniet vt nullus leuaret a terra / haec didicit iturus in montem Veneris a vagante / vt dicitur scolari [] in libello conscriptum ostendedit.' Comm. I.301.

² This is discussed more extensively in chapter five.

one which seems so ordinary that it is quite easy to miss: the subject of talk. Talk occupied a central role in the prophecy itself. Peace and unity were to be re-established by two people lacking speech, while conversations would prove fatal during the announced plague. In line with contemporary views, Schachman's prophecy thus warned of the dangers of talk and praised the virtue of silence. Silence, however, was clearly not Schachman's strong suit. As Rütiner tells us, he was known for being talkative, and his graphic nickname suggested that he was in the business of gutting, of cutting open and spilling the secrets hidden deep inside. Yet even though he may have talked too much, what he had to say was not deemed to be idle talk; nor was his voice the only one which spread his prophecy. The talk of the town in St. Gallen – 'they say', 'it is said that' – confirmed that Schachman's prophecies had been fulfilled twice before and suggested that they should not be taken lightly. Finally, the case of Schachman allows us to glimpse at the relationship between speech and writing: the prophecy (or parts thereof) were apparently written down in a book, displayed, circulated and discussed orally before being recorded in another book, namely Johannes Rütiner's *Commentationes*.

Even where speech permeates early modern sources, it easily escapes historians' attention. One could of course argue that this is not a problem. As Peter Burke has put it, 'at first sight it might be thought that oral communication has no history, as it is a permanent feature of life in society.'³ Yet of course this does not mean that it is immune to change. As is the case for other human constants such as emotions and sexuality, the perception, uses, and regulations of speech changed considerably over time. In a period that lacked regular newspapers, in which the public postal system was still in the early stages of its development and only a fraction of the total population could read and write, oral communication arguably served a broader and slightly different set of purposes than it does at present.⁴ For the majority of people in sixteenth-century Europe, it continued to dominate most social interactions and exchanges of information long after the invention of moveable-type print. It therefore deserves to be studied in its own right.

Through the lens of Johannes Rütiner's notebooks, this thesis will explore oral communication in St. Gallen in the first half of the sixteenth century. By reconstructing Rütiner's network and probing four genres of communication within their respective social contexts – jokes, gossip, rumours, and memory narratives – it wishes to contribute to debates about early modern sociability,

³ Peter Burke, 'Communication', in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *A Concise Companion to History* (Oxford, 2012), 157–76, here p. 159.

⁴ For Germany, Robert Scribner estimates that only around 10–13 percent of townspeople, and 5 percent of the entire population, were literate around 1500: Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk. Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford, 1994, 1st edn. 1981), here p. 2. More recent local studies estimate that the number of people with basic reading skills was considerably higher, at around 10–20 percent of the population and up to 50 percent in cities: Andreas Würzler, *Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte 85, München, 2013), here p. 94. Of course such estimates must be treated with extreme caution; even more so because reading and writing skills were not taught at the same time, and therefore many more people could read than write.

the circulation of information, and the relationship between oral testimony, manuscript, and print. Schachman's prophecy anticipates many of the topics which will be covered in this thesis: the discrepancy between speech ideals and speech practice, the role of the 'talk of the town' in spreading and confirming news, and the use of books in conversations, to name just a few. It is one of the main premises of this thesis that oral exchanges of information cannot be understood outside of the social settings within which they took place.⁵ Particular attention, therefore, will be paid to the double role of speech as a central element of social interactions on the one hand, and as a vital means for the dissemination of information on the other.

The earliest and most important theoretical impulses for a history of oral communication came not from within history, but from research at the intersection between media studies, literary theory, and social anthropology. From the 1960s onwards, Marshall McLuhan, Jack Goody, Walter J. Ong, and many other scholars studied how new technologies such as writing affect individuals' cognitive processes and lead to profound social transformations. The history of orality, literacy and print, as they tell it (albeit with some variations), broadly consists of a series of evolutions which turned homo sapiens into chirographic and then 'typographic man'; a shift first from an oral/aural world of myth to a literate/visual world of history, scepticism, and logic, followed by another shift to print which paved the way to the 'Gutenberg Galaxy' and modernity.⁶ In this galaxy, oral communication still exists, but the specific cognitive framework of *primary* oral cultures is lost.⁷ Of course the postulation of such a linear development is problematic for a number of reasons, and not just because of its close resemblance to narratives of Western progress. Ruth Finnegan, for instance, has taken issue with its narrow focus on technological advancement, arguing that 'it is not ... the technology *itself*' that leads to social change, but rather 'the use and control of that technology, ... in other words, the *social* not the technological aspect.'⁸ This may be an obvious point, but it is an important one to make. It encourages a shift in focus from the seemingly inherent qualities of different media to the historically specific circumstances of their use, and it may prevent us from making sweeping and anachronistic generalisations.

⁵ A similar argument is made by John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, 2013), p. 13.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, 1962), idem, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London, 1964); Jack Goody and Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5/3 (1963), 304–45, and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word* (London, New York, 1988, 1st edn. 1982).

⁷ See for instance Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 14.

⁸ Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford, 1988), here p. 42. McLuhan anticipated, and strongly rejected such a view; see McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, esp. pp. 7–11.

Yet while the historical narratives presented by McLuhan, Goody, and Ong should certainly be treated with caution, historians have learned much from their theoretical approach to media.⁹ McLuhan's famous dictum, 'The Medium is the Message', may take it a step too far for some historians, but nobody would deny that the medium is *part* of the message.¹⁰ No longer are media seen as neutral vessels for storing information and transporting it from one place to another. Their effect on the content of the message and its reception is almost universally acknowledged, and so is their potential to transform culture and society.

Inspired by this conceptualisation of media, early modern historians have extensively studied letters, printed books, pamphlets, and broadsheets.¹¹ Speech, on the other hand, was rarely of more than marginal interest to such studies, despite the fact that it was arguably still the most universal and accessible medium of the period.¹² This is all the more astonishing in light of the fact that McLuhan's definition of the term 'medium' as any 'extension of man' explicitly included speech, and that orality features prominently in Goody's and Ong's work.¹³ It almost seems as though early modern history has been under the spell of a kind of *sola scriptura* principle of its own: its focus has been on two areas which are seen as defining of the period, namely Protestantism and print.¹⁴ As Alexandra Walsham aptly notes, both 'have often been presented as inherently hostile to oral

⁹ For a brief introduction to the more problematic aspects of the relationship between media studies and history, see for instance Jan-Friedrich Missfelder, 'Endlich Klartext. Medientheorie und Geschichte', in Jens Hacke and Matthias Pohlig (eds.), *Theorie in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Einblicke in die Praxis des historischen Forschens* (Eigene und Fremde Welten 7, Frankfurt, New York, 2008), 182–98.

¹⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, esp. pp. 7–21. See also Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, 'Introduction', in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, New York, 2002), 1–51, here p. 4.

¹¹ For a concise overview, see Würigler, *Medien der Frühen Neuzeit*. The most influential works include Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1980, 1st edition 1979); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, transl. Lydia Cochrane (Princeton NJ, 1987); Michael Giesecke, *Der Buchdruck in der frühen Neuzeit: Eine historische Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien* (Frankfurt a.M., 1991); Michael Schilling, *Bildpublizistik der Frühen Neuzeit. Aufgaben und Leistungen des illustrierten Flugblatts in Deutschland bis um 1700* (Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur 29, Tübingen, 1990); Hans-Joachim Köhler (ed.), *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit. Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium 1980* (Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit 13, Stuttgart, 1981); Wolfgang Harms and Alfred Messerli (eds.), *Wahrnehmungsgeschichte und Wissensdiskurs im illustrierten Flugblatt der Frühen Neuzeit (1450–1700)* (Basel, 2002); Hanz-Dieter Heimann and Ivan Hlaváček (eds.), *Kommunikationspraxis und Korrespondenzwesen im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Paderborn, München, Wien et. al., 1998). For a more general introduction to media in historical research, see Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹² For an example, see Jürgen Wilke, *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2000). Despite promising an overview over the history of media and communication 'from the beginning to the 20th century', on the first pages of his book Wilke already reduces 'media' to mass media, and 'communication' to mass communication enabled by such media. Consequently, a mere two-and-a-half pages of over 350 are dedicated to oral communication (pp. 4–6).

¹³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 77–80; Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge, 1987); Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

¹⁴ On the strong link between them, see for instance Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 162–6.

tradition.¹⁵ In a historical period characterised by a marked increase in both administrative records and personal writing; a period moreover that saw a series of communication revolutions which, so the grand narrative goes, enabled the Reformation to take root and fundamentally changed the dissemination of information across Europe, it seemed to make sense to focus primarily on the new medium of print rather than on the ‘old’ medium of speech.¹⁶ This is the stance taken, for instance, by Michael Giesecke in his seminal work on printing, in which he postulates that ‘the early modern period in Europe is dominated by the competition of two information technologies, the art of writing, perfected over thousands of years ... and the art of printing.’¹⁷

Yet this focus on writing and print not only ignores the continuing importance of oral communication, it also misses a central aspect of the reception of early modern texts. As Elizabeth Horodovich reminds us, the latter ‘circulated and were received in a context that was pervasively oral’.¹⁸ Over the last few decades, there has been a growing awareness among historians that the “age of print” was not simply characterised by a revolutionary shift from speech and writing to print, but rather by new modes of interaction between the three media.¹⁹ The introduction of a new medium does not necessarily render earlier modes of communication redundant, but simply adds another colour to the palette – a colour which may well come to dominate the painting, but also produces new shades when mixed with those already in use. In the early modern period, information constantly moved back and forth between speech, manuscript, and print: oral narratives were recorded

¹⁵ Alexandra Walsham, ‘Reformed folklore? Cautionary tales and oral tradition in early modern England’, in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, New York, 2002), 173–95, here p. 173. On the debate about whether the invention of the printing press should be regarded as the starting point of the early modern period, see for instance ‘Podiumsdiskussion und Gegenrede: Beginn die Neuzeit mit dem Buchdruck? Ist die Ära der Typographie im Zeitalter der digitalen Medien endgültig vorbei?’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 41: Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit, eds. Johannes Burkhardt and Christine Werkstetter (München, 2005), 9–54.

¹⁶ That the early modern period is marked by a series of communications revolutions is the thesis proposed by Eisenstein, *Printing Press*, and Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Wolfgang Behringer has made a similar argument with regards to the postal system: Wolfgang Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2003); see also idem, ‘Communications Revolutions: A Historiographical Concept’, *German History*, 24/3 (2006), 333–74.

¹⁷ Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*, p. 67. See also idem, pp. 501–2, where he even goes so far as to claim that ‘[t]he intellectual history of the (early) modern period should ... be written as a history of typographical information.’

¹⁸ Elizabeth Horodovich, ‘Introduction: Speech and Oral Culture in Early Modern Europe and Beyond’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16/4 (2012), 301–13, here p. 302.

¹⁹ For instance Chartier, *Cultural Uses of Print*, esp. pp. 5–6; Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (eds.), *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus OH, 2000); Burke, ‘Communication’, p. 157; Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, New York, 2007); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000); Fox and Woolf, ‘Introduction’, esp. pp. 4–8; Walsham, ‘Reformed folklore?’, esp. p. 186; Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007); Allyson F. Creasman, “‘Lies as Truth’: Policing Print and Oral Culture in the Early Modern City”, in Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Robin B. Barnes (eds.), *Ideas and Cultural Margins in Early Modern Germany. Essays in Honor of H.C. Erik Midelfort* (Farnham, Burlington, 2009), 255–70, here pp. 256 and 269; Briggs and Burke, *Social History of Media*, pp. 44–8. For the medieval context, a similar relationship has been postulated between speech and manuscript; see for instance Dennis Howard Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge, 1994).

and printed; letters and printed works were read aloud, inserted into elaborate performances, and in turn appropriated by oral informants in conversations. These numerous interactions are explored in an exemplary manner by Filippo de Vivo in his *Information and Communication in Early Modern Venice*, which deserves a special mention here, not least because it has given a new impetus to the field.²⁰ By exploring media as they were received in a variety of social settings, de Vivo was able to show that ‘the city acted as a vast resonating box’.²¹ To acknowledge the constant flows of information from one medium to another is thus not to deny that each medium had specific effects on the message, nor does it reduce media to mere “vessels” once more. Rather, the transformative effects and historically specific uses of media remain invisible if we do not take into account the interactions between them and the social context of their reception.

Interest in oral communication has also been growing in other fields. Literary historians have looked for traces of oral tradition and “fictitious orality” in literary texts, while simultaneously studying the performances and oral practices which surrounded their reception.²² Legal historians have investigated “crimes of the tongue” such as insults and blasphemy, demonstrating the power attributed to words which threatened people’s honour, or, worse still, the honour of God.²³ Since the “spatial turn”, many scholars have moreover become interested in the ways in which specific sites – in particular public ones such as taverns, churches, pharmacies, baths, streets, squares, and, of course, coffee houses – facilitated social interaction, the exchange of information, and, ultimately, may have led to the emergence of a public sphere.²⁴ Focusing on specific settings rather than

²⁰ See for instance Daniel Bellingradt, ‘The Early Modern City as a Resonating Box: Media Public Opinion, and the Urban Space of the Holy Roman Empire, Cologne, and Hamburg ca. 1700’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16 (2012), 201–40, here pp. 204–5.

²¹ De Vivo, *Information and Communication*, p. 13.

²² For an introduction to the place of orality within literary history, see Karl Reichl (ed.), *Medieval Oral Literature* (Berlin, Boston, 2012). With regards to oral performances of early modern texts, see in particular a recent special issue dedicated to ‘Oral Culture in Early Modern Italy: Performance, Language, Religion’, *The Italianist*, 34/3 (2014). Linguists and scholars of literature became interested in orality much earlier than early modern historians. For the German context, see for instance the results of the ‘Freiburger Sonderforschungsbereich 321: Übergänge und Spannungsfelder zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit’, summarised in Wolfgang Raible, *Medienwechsel. Ergebnisse aus zwölf Jahren Forschung zum Thema ‘Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit’* (ScriptOra 113, Tübingen, 1998).

²³ On insult and blasphemy, see for instance David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford, 2010); Francisca Loetz, *Mit Gott handeln: Von den Zürcher Gotteslästerern der Frühen Neuzeit zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Religiösen* (Göttingen, 2002); Gerd Schwerhoff, *Zungen wie Schwerter: Blasphemie in alteuropäischen Gesellschaften, 1200–1650* (Konstanz, 2005); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996). On the link between insults and honour, see also Rainer Walz, ‘Agonale Kommunikation im Dorf der Frühen Neuzeit’, *Westfälische Forschungen*, 42 (1992), 215–51.

²⁴ This is of course Jürgen Habermas’ famous, and fiercely contested, hypothesis: Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied, 1962). The following represents only a small selection of more recent literature which combines the study of space with the history of early modern communication: Renate Dürr and Gerd Schwerhoff (eds.), *Kirchen, Märkte und Tavernen: Erfahrungs- und Handlungsräume in der frühen Neuzeit*, *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit*, 9/3–4 (Frankfurt a.M., 2005) (see especially the contributions of Gerd Schwerhoff, Beat Kümin, and Susanne Rau within this volume); Riita Laitinen and Thomas V. Cohen, ‘Cultural History of Early Modern Streets – an Introduction’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12/3 (2008), 195–204 (see in

specific social groups, this line of research is particularly promising because it has the potential to render visible communication across social strata.²⁵

Oral communication thus lies at the intersection of several strands of research in which early modern historians have taken an interest for some time. Only since the start of the new millennium, however, has a growing number of early modern historians turned their attention to oral communication itself.²⁶ The Italian city states with their rich archives have emerged as particularly well-suited objects of study. Filippo de Vivo's work has already been mentioned. Elizabeth Horodovich, Alexander Cowan, Elizabeth Cohen and Thomas Cohen have primarily studied conversations and gossip brought up in Venetian and Roman courts, and have reflected on the ways in which these sources may illuminate oral communication outside of the legal context as well.²⁷ Other parts of Europe, however, have not yet received as much attention. The few studies of orality in early mod-

particular the contribution of Elizabeth S. Cohen within this special issue); Helmut Bräuer and Elke Schlenkrich (eds.), *Die Stadt als Kommunikationsraum. Karl Czok zum 75. Geburtstag* (Leipzig, 2001); Beat Kümin, *Drinking Matters: Public Houses and Social Exchange in Early Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke, New York, 2007); Beat Kümin and Ann Tlustý (eds.), *The World of the Tavern: Public House in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2002); Filippo De Vivo, 'Pharmacies as centres of communication in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 21/4 (2007), 505–21; Bellingradt, 'City as a Resonating Box'; Katja Hürlimann, *Soziale Beziehungen im Dorf. Aspekte dörflicher Soziabilität in den Landvogteien Greifensee und Kyburg um 1500* (Zürich, 2000), esp. pp. 235–88.

²⁵ With regards to communication among women, for instance, Lyndal Roper has rightly warned that 'a segregated view of early modern culture' may hide the extent to which their networks and communication was structured by the patriarchal society in which they lived: Lyndal Roper, 'Gendered Exchanges: Women and Communication in Sixteenth-Century Germany', in Herwig Wolfram and Helmut Hundsbichler (eds.), *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Wien, 1992), 199–217, here esp. p. 208. In her doctoral thesis entitled 'Gesellschaft im Exzess – Die soziale Produktivität des Unmässigen am Beispiel der Basler Mediziner um 1600', to be completed by September 2016, Sarah-Maria Schober (University of Basel) will demonstrate that focusing on social sites renders visible numerous connections beyond the confines of any one social group.

²⁶ This growing interest in oral communication is also reflected in the publication of several edited volumes and special issues of journals focusing on the subject. Edited volumes include Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, New York, 2002); Thomas V. Cohen and Lesley Twomey (eds.), *Spoken Word and Social Practice: Orality in Europe (1400–1700)* (Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 14, Leiden, Boston, 2015); Heather Kerr and Claire Walker (eds.), *Fama and her Sisters: Gossip and Rumour in Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2015). For the German context, albeit (tellingly) with a stronger focus on print media than on oral communication, see for instance Johannes Burkhardt and Christine Werkstetter (eds.), *Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit, Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte 41* (München, 2005). With regards to journals, the special issues 'Speech and Oral Culture in Early Modern Europe and Beyond', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16/4 (2012), and 'Oral Culture in Early Modern Italy: Performance, Language, Religion', *The Italianist*, 34/3 (2014), deserve particular attention.

²⁷ Elizabeth Horodovich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 2008); idem, 'The gossiping tongue: oral networks, public life and political culture in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 19/1 (2005), 22–45; idem, 'Witchcraft and Rumour in Renaissance Venice', in Heather Kerr and Claire Walker (eds.), *Fama and Her Sisters: Gossip and Rumour in Early Modern Europe* (Early European Research 7, Turnhout, 2015), 65–83; Alexander Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture in Early Modern Venice', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 12 (2008), 313–33; idem, 'Seeing is Believing: Urban Gossip and the Balcony in Early Modern Venice', *Gender & History*, 23/3 (2011), 721–38; Elizabeth S. Cohen, 'She Said, He Said: Situated Oralities in Judicial Records from Early Modern Rome', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16/4 (2012), 403–30; Thomas V. Cohen, 'Tracking Conversation in the Italian Courts', in idem and Lesley K. Twomey (eds.), *Spoken Word and Social Practice: Orality in Europe (1400–1700)* (Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 14, Leiden, Boston, 2015), 139–81.

ern England, for instance, focus largely on the extent to which speech reflects the island's rich literary tradition.²⁸ Several promising research projects on news networks in the Low Countries are taking into account speech and rumours, yet only very little has been published so far.²⁹ In the German-speaking areas, which are the main focus of this thesis, early impulses from Robert Scribner and a call for a cultural history of 'uncontrolled talk' by Pia Holenstein and Norbert Schindler did not produce a strong echo.³⁰ Despite numerous studies of early modern "communication", the term is kept deliberately broad to encompass written, printed, non-verbal and symbolic forms of communication, while everyday speech is typically discussed only in a cursory manner.³¹

²⁸ This is particularly true for the work of Adam Fox: Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, and idem, 'Remembering the Past in Early Modern England: Oral and Written Tradition', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1999), 233–56. For the Catholic context, see for instance Shell, *Oral Culture*.

²⁹ See in particular Henk van Nierop, "And Ye shall Hear of Wars and Rumours of Wars." Rumour and the Revolt of the Netherlands', in Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (eds.), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke* (Leiden, 2007), 69–86. Rosanne Baars, for instance, is currently working on a PhD project entitled 'Transnational news networks and public issues in France and the Netherlands during the Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt, 1559–1598' at the University of Amsterdam under the supervision of Henk van Nierop, while Louise Vermeersch's thesis on 'Multimedia practices and urban contexts in the Reformation Low Countries' is supervised by A.L. Van Bruaene at the University of Gent.

³⁰ Robert W. Scribner, 'Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert', in Herwig Wolfram and Helmut Hunsbichler (eds.), *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Wien, 1992), 183–97; Pia Holenstein and Norbert Schindler, 'Geschwätzgeschichte(n). Ein kulturhistorisches Plädoyer für die Rehabilitierung der unkontrollierten Rede', in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Dynamik der Tradition. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung IV* (Frankfurt a. M., 1992), 41–108, and Norbert Schindler, 'Die Prinzipien des Hörensagens. Predigt und Publikum in der Frühen Neuzeit', *Historische Anthropologie*, 1 (1993), 359–93. One notable exception is Benedikt Mauer, '>Gemein Geschray< und >tögllich Reden<. Georg Kölderer – ein Augsburger Chronist des konfessionellen Zeitalters' (Studien zur Geschichte des bayrischen Schwaben 29, Augsburg, 2001).

³¹ See for example James Van Horn Melton (ed.), *Cultures of Communication from Reformation to Enlightenment: Constructing publics in the early modern German lands* (Aldershot, Burlington, 2002), which operates with a definition of the term which includes, besides print, '[r]eligious iconography and ritual, sermons, songs, civic architecture, court ceremony, street gossip' and 'acts of violence' (p. 2). For a concise introduction to the history of communication, see for instance Wolfgang Behringer, 'Introduction: Communication and Historiography', *German History*, 24/3 (2006), 325–32, and Albert Müller, 'Mobilität – Interaktion – Kommunikation. Sozial- und alltagsgeschichtliche Bemerkungen anhand von Beispielen aus dem spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Österreich', in Herwig Wolfram and Helmut Hunsbichler (eds.), *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Wien, 1992), 219–49, which also discusses some of the problems of this line of research. See moreover Burkhardt and Werkstetter (eds.), *Kommunikation und Medien*; Heimann and Hlaváček (eds.), *Kommunikationspraxis und Korrespondenzwesen*; Herwig Wolfram and Helmut Hunsbichler (eds.), *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Wien, 1992); Hans Pohl (ed.), *Die Bedeutung der Kommunikation für Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Referate der 12. Arbeitstagung der Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte vom 22.-25.4.1987 in Siegen* (Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Beihefte Nr. 87, Stuttgart, 1989). On symbolic communication, see in particular the large collaborative research project on the subject of 'Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme vom Mittelalter bis zur französischen Revolution. Der neue Münsterer Sonderforschungsbereich 496', led by Gerd Althoff and Ludwig Sief, which was completed in 2011. For the Swiss context, see for instance Michael Jucker, 'Körper und Plurimedialität. Überlegungen zur spätmittelalterlichen Kommunikationspraxis im eidgenössischen Geandtschaftswesen', *Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung*, 8/1: Der Körper. Realpräsenz und symbolische Ordnung, ed. Karina Kellermann (2003), 68–83, and idem, 'Vertrauen, Symbolik, Reziprozität. Das Korrespondenzwesen eidgenössischer Städte im Spätmittelalter als kommunikative Praxis', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 34 (2007), 189–213; Daniela Hacke, 'Confessional Cultures and Sacred Space: Towards a History of Political Communicati-

The history of oral communication is thus still full of blind spots. It focuses primarily on centres of information, i.e. large cities, and in particular those on the Italian peninsula.³² Its thematic scope is further limited by the available sources. While it is possible to approach certain aspects of oral communication via court records or through popular proverbs and learned discourses on talking and remaining silent, these sources can only give us a limited idea of their role in everyday life.³³ By focusing on conflict and moralisation, we are moreover in danger of reinforcing the overly negative assessment of oral communication which pervades many early modern texts. In order to bridge the gaps in the historical material, early modern historians have often drawn on modern sociological, anthropological, and psychological theories which link oral exchanges to a broad range of social practices. Yet the extent to which these theories apply to the early modern context remains unclear.

Analysing oral communication through the lens of Johannes Rütiner's *Commentationes* may offer a remedy to several of these problems. From 1529 to 1539, Rütiner wrote down what various people told him about past and contemporary political events, economic developments, kinship, accidents, crimes, and scandals – to name just a few. Containing a colourful potpourri of gossip, rumours, and news from all over Europe, the *Commentationes* are more than a mere collection of information; they may also be seen as a record of conversations. Rütiner usually named his informants, their sources, and the context in which information was exchanged, allowing us a rare glimpse at an oral culture typically hidden from view. Further opportunities for research are moreover offered by the notebook character of the *Commentationes*. Since Rütiner did not intend to make his notes public, on many occasions the latter offer a much less polished view on his times and contemporaries than the chronicles of the same period. Instead of constructing a coherent narrative, Rütiner wrote about many events several times and did not change earlier entries even if they conflicted with later ones. In conjunction with a variety of sources from St. Gallen and beyond – contemporary chronicles, letters, pamphlets, and court records – the *Commentationes* therefore allow us to study both how information travelled across Europe and how individual stories changed over time and as they were passed on.

Rütiner spent most of his life in the small town of St. Gallen on the margins of the Swiss Confederacy. We are thus dealing with a much smaller community than in a city like Venice, and one, moreover, located on the periphery of the emerging European information system rather than at its centre. Sixteenth-century St. Gallen was not an information hub buzzing with foreign merchants and bursting with written and printed news. It may thus provide a useful counterpoint to the many

on in Early Modern Switzerland', in Melissa Calaresu, Filippo de Vivo, and Joan-Pau Rubiés (eds.), *Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke* (Farnham, Burlington, 2010), 169–87.

³² See similarly Ghobrial, *Whispers of Cities*, p. 11.

³³ For a brilliant analysis of such proverbs, see for instance Holenstein and Schindler, 'Geschätzgeschichte(n)'. On the limits of such sources, see also Müller, 'Mobilität – Interaktion – Kommunikation', p. 244.

studies which focus on larger centres of trade.³⁴ St. Gallen's medium size also has a practical advantage: since it makes it easier to trace individuals through a variety of sources, it often enables us to place oral exchanges not only spatially, but also socially.

Like all studies of early modern orality, this thesis has to rely on written sources to get to the oral, and a few words of caution are therefore in order. While the *Commentationes* often create the illusion that they allow us to listen in on conversations five hundred years in the past, they do not of course give us access to the spoken word itself. Rütiner usually recorded brief summaries of his conversations, and thus they are rendered in Rütiner's words and shaped both by his personal interests and by the limits of his memory. Even where he provides direct speech, as he does on many occasions, we ought to be careful not to mistake it for a transcript of the exact words spoken – and even less so because Rütiner did not only turn speech into script, but moreover translated the vernacular into Latin. What his notes enable us to do, however, is to explore the content, social settings, mechanisms and conventions of speech and its relationship to other media in the context of everyday life in a small town.

Another matter of concern might be the extent to which the results of this study are representative of communication in sixteenth-century St. Gallen as a whole, and perhaps beyond. After all, the *Commentationes* are clearly an exceptional source, and the glimpse at oral communication which they offer might therefore come at the expense of considerable distortions. By taking a wide range of other contemporary sources into account, such distortions can certainly be rendered visible and balanced out. Moreover, against such concerns one might argue that as a record of conversations, the *Commentationes* contain not only one voice, but many – at least 349, to be precise. This is the number of informants “cited” by Rütiner.³⁵ Certainly, their voices are filtered through Rütiner's writing, yet some shared characteristics can hardly be denied. For example, people of all social levels routinely provided elaborate frame narratives to assure their audiences that they were drawing on reliable sources.³⁶ In this sense, Rütiner's *Commentationes* represent a ‘normal exception’ as conceptualised by Edoardo Grendi; an atypical source filled with very typical content.³⁷

³⁴ It is a rather strange coincidence that this small town's oral culture at two different points in its history has already become the subject of two articles; one focusing on the medieval period and the monk Notker (d. 912), the other on the role oral communication played in the Reformation of the town: Matthew Innes, ‘Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society’, *Past & Present*, 158 (1998), 3–36, and Arnold Snyder, ‘Communication and the People: The Case of Reformation St. Gall’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 67/2 (April 1993), 152–73.

³⁵ See chapter two.

³⁶ See chapter five.

³⁷ Edoardo Grendi, ‘Micro-analisi e storia sociale’, *Quaderni Storici*, 35 (1977), 506–20, here p. 512. Grendi's conceptualisation of the ‘normal exception’ is slightly narrower than the one proposed by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, ‘The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace’, in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds.): *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe. Selections from Quaderni Storici* (London, 1991), 1–10, here esp. pp. 7–8.

I have already sketched some of the theoretical approaches to oral communication above. The purpose of this thesis is not to contribute to these debates on a theoretical level, but to study oral communication in a specific historical context. Nevertheless, a few remarks on the theoretical underpinnings of this study are necessary. From Marshall McLuhan, it takes the awareness that the medium is (part of) the message.³⁸ Where the medium is speech, the message is tied to the physical presence of the speaker; it is embodied.³⁹ According to the historian Rudolf Schlögl, this ‘communication of presence’ (*Anwesenheitskommunikation*), as he calls it, was central to processes of socialisation until the end of the fifteenth century. Since then, the so-called *Anwesenheitsgesellschaft* (society of presence) has been ‘transformed slowly and fundamentally by ... successive media revolutions’.⁴⁰ Whether Schlögl’s necessarily abstract long-term narrative will hold up in light of empirical research remains to be seen. His reflections on the dynamics and characteristics of face-to-face communication, however, are of great value to this thesis. Drawing heavily on Niklas Luhmann’s work, Schlögl reminds us that speech, in contrast to other media, is characterised by a multitude of sensory information attached to the message and allows mutual observations between speaker and audience. Speech is not only heard, but seen, too: a substantial part of it is conveyed not by the words uttered, but in the speakers’ intonation, facial expressions, and gestures. Because it is tied to the body, speech is moreover attached to a social persona and embedded in a specific social context. The social context of speech, and above all the speaker’s status and relationship to the audience, not only affect how the audience understands and reacts to a message – a joke, for instance, may well be received with laughter in one context, and with uncomfortable silence in another. In reaction to, or in anticipation of a presumed reaction of the audience, the speaker may choose to use different words, to leave out parts deemed problematic, to add explanations, or to remain silent altogether.⁴¹

To Schlögl’s model of early modern face-to-face communication I wish to add another element which simultaneously drives and structures oral exchanges in the early modern period, something which I shall call “communicative social capital”. The term is derived from an article by Her-

³⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 7–11.

³⁹ On the relationship between the body and communication, see for instance Jucker, ‘Körper und Plurimedialität’.

⁴⁰ Rudolf Schlögl, ‘Kommunikation und Vergesellschaftung unter Anwesenden. Formen des Sozialen und ihre Transformation in der Frühen Neuzeit’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 34 (2008), 155–224, here p. 155.

⁴¹ Schlögl, ‘Kommunikation und Vergesellschaftung’, esp. pp. 164–5; 183–8. See similarly Thomas V. Cohen and Lesley K. Twomey, ‘Introduction’, in idem (eds.), *Spoken Word and Social Practice: Orality in Europe (1400–1700)* (Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 14, Leiden, Boston, 2015), 1–44, here pp. 10–4, and Jörg Meier, ‘Städtische Kommunikation im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit’, in Andreas Laubinger, Brunhilde Gedderth and Claudia Dobrinski (eds.), *Text – Bild – Schrift: Vermittlung von Information im Mittelalter* (MittelalterStudien 14, München, 2007), 127–45, who emphasises the need to study communication within its social context (esp. p. 144), and Johannes Schwitalla, ‘Erzählen als die gemeinsame Versicherung sozialer Identität’, in Wolfgang Raible (ed.), *Zwischen Festtag und Alltag. Zehn Beiträge zum Thema ‘Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit’* (ScriptOralia 6, Tübingen, 1988), 111–32, who stresses the speaker’s dependence on the audience (pp. 114–5).

nando Rojas, Dhavan V. Shah, and Lewis A. Friedland, in which they explore the communicative basis of social capital as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu.⁴² For Bourdieu, social capital consists of those ‘resources which depend on membership of a group’.⁴³ Since Rojas, Shah, and Friedland see communication as ‘the fundamental source of societal integration’, they introduce the term “communicative social capital” to emphasise the exchange of information resources and the communicative practices surrounding such exchanges.⁴⁴ The term seems not to have made it into historians’ vocabulary thus far, yet historians have similarly found that in the early modern period – that is at a time when information was still relatively hard to come by –

the exchange of information was a key factor in establishing ... relationships. This was particularly significant for people seeking advancement. The pre-eminence of patronage in the political, social, and economic structure of early modern societies, meant that those in receipt of useful information could benefit substantially.⁴⁵

In what follows, I will use the term to describe the communicative potential of individuals. As we shall see, this potential depended not only on an individual’s access to information, but also, for instance, on their oratory and social skills.

In addition to its engagement with oral communication, this thesis also presents the first comprehensive study of Rütiner’s *Commentationes*. Astonishingly, this exceptional source has received hardly any scholarly attention so far, in spite of the fact that Ernst Gerhard Rüschi’s edition of the *Commentationes*, accompanied by a German translation, appeared in 1996.⁴⁶ The first two chapters

⁴² Hernando Rojas, Dhavan V. Sha, and Lewis A. Friedland, ‘A Communicative Approach to Social Capital’, *Journal of Communication*, 61 (2011), 689–712. For a brief introduction to social capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital’, transl. Reinhard Kreckel, in Reinhard Kreckel (ed.), *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (Soziale Welt Sonderband 2, Göttingen, 1983), 183–98.

⁴³ Bourdieu, ‘Ökonomisches Kapital’, p. 190–1.

⁴⁴ Rojas, Sha, and Friedland, ‘Communicative Approach’, esp. pp. 689 and 692.

⁴⁵ Claire Walker, ‘Whispering *Fama*: Talk and Reputation in Early Modern Society’, in Heather Kerr and Claire Walker (eds.), *Fama and Her Sisters: Gossip and Rumour in Early Modern Europe* (Early European Research 7, Turnhout, 2015), 9–35, here p. 22.

⁴⁶ Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, ed. and transl. Ernst G. Rüschi, 5 vols (St. Gallen, 1996) (henceforth referred to as “Comm.”) Rüschi’s brief but excellent introduction to his edition is still the most substantial contribution: Ernst G. Rüschi, ‘Kommentarband: Einführung und Register’, in Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, ed. and transl. Ernst G. Rüschi, 5 vols (St. Gallen, 1996). Most of Rüschi’s other publications on Rütiner, however, consist mostly of excerpts from the *Commentationes*; see for instance idem, *Alltag in St. Gallen um 1530. Aus dem Diarium des Leinwandherrn Johannes Rütiner* (St. Gallen, 1991); idem, ‘Zwingli im Diarium Johannes Rütiners’, *Zwingliana*, 19/1 (1992), 293–305; idem, ‘Schaffhausen im Diarium des St. Gallers Johannes Rütiner 1529–1539’, *Schaffhauser Beiträge zur Geschichte*, 69 (1992), 7–19; idem, “*Woluff vom pflügel und vom pflug!*” *Reisläufergeschichten aus dem alten St. Gallen: aus dem Diarium von Johannes Rütiner* (St. Gallen, 1993). The same is true for two earlier publications by Theodor von Liebenau, ‘Aus einem historischen Notizbuch der Reformationszeit’, *Katholische Schweizer-Blätter und Archiv für schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte*, III/1 (1904), 341–52, and idem, ‘Aus dem Diarium des Johannes Rütiner von St. Gallen aus den Jahren 1529–1539’, *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 4 (1905), 45–53. Since the nineteenth century, the *Commentationes* are occasionally mentioned in works on Swiss histori-

therefore lay the groundwork for the analysis of this source. *Chapter one* introduces St. Gallen, Rütiner, and his notebooks, which it discusses as part of a broader trend in St. Gallen that saw numerous citizens take up writing chronicles around the time of the Reformation. At the same time, however, the chapter draws attention to the many distinctive features of the *Commentationes* and their resistance to any conventional categorization. *Chapter two* deals with the most striking feature of Rütiner's work, namely the "references" he provided for over seventy percent of his notebook entries. Based on these "references" and using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the chapter offers a reconstruction of Rütiner's information network. Combined, the first two chapters argue that Rütiner's place between two powerful, well-connected and well-travelled, but fairly separate social groups within St. Gallen – the linen merchants on the one hand, and the circle of humanists and theologians around the mayor Joachim Vadianus on the other – put him in a prime position for collecting information and may explain some of the peculiar characteristics of his notebooks.

Chapters three and four explore two forms of oral communication which are usually described as gendered – obscene jokes and gossip – within their respective social contexts. *Chapter three* looks at how jokes circulated orally and in print, and highlights some of the creative processes and social skills involved in making a successful joke. By studying humour within its cultural and social contexts, the chapter calls into question the widespread notion that obscene humour represented a safety valve for men's sexual aggressions against women. Rather, they primarily targeted the male body and offered jokers an opportunity to display their social skills, their sexual experience, and their masculinity. *Chapter four* challenges the view that early modern gossip was inherently disruptive and that its only value – if it had any at all – resided in its social function. It argues that gossip was precious both as a social activity and as a way of spreading important knowledge about the people in one's surroundings; in particular in the context of a small town like St. Gallen.

ography; for instance Georg von Wyss, *Geschichte der Historiographie in der Schweiz* (Zürich, 1895), pp. 238–9; Richard Feller and Edgar Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz. Vom Spätmittelalter zur Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Basel, Stuttgart, 1962), here i, p. 238; more extensively in Rudolf Gamper, 'Liebe und Zorn – Menschliche Regungen und die Allmacht Gottes in St. Galler Chroniken der Reformationszeit', in Andreas Härter (ed.), *Liebe und Zorn. Zu Literatur und Buchkultur in St. Gallen* (Wiesbaden, 2009), 40–63. They are also used as a source for local histories (most extensively by Wilhelm Ehrenzeller, *St. Gallische Geschichte im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit*, 3 vols. (St. Gallen, 1931–1947), here iii, pp. 34–50; Paul Staerkle, *Beiträge zur spätmittelalterlichen Bildungsgeschichte St. Gallens* (St. Gallen, 1939); Johannes Häne, *Der Auflauf zu St. Gallen im Jahre 1491* (St. Gallen, 1899)) or selectively mined for evidence for a variety of topics (for instance in Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago, 2003), p. 78; Pirmin Meier, *Paracelsus: Arzt und Prophet* (Zürich, 1994), pp. 46–58; Kaspar von Greyerz, *Passagen und Stationen: Lebensstufen zwischen Mittelalter und Moderne* (Göttingen, 2010), pp. 45, 115 and 162, and idem, 'Das Haus als Ort der Andacht', in Joachim Eibach und Inken Schmidt-Voges (eds.), *Das Haus in der Geschichte Europas: Ein Handbuch* (Berlin, Boston, 2015), 537–52, here p. 542). Since the publication of Rüsch's edition in 1996, only a single article has been published which focuses explicitly on Rütiner's *Commentationes*: Ursula Brunold-Bigler, 'Historien von Krieg, Pest und Hunger: Bemerkungen zu den "Commentationes" des Johannes Rütiner, St. Gallen 1529–1539', *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, 84 (1998), 175–87.

While chapters three and four focus primarily on the social context of oral communication, the last two chapters widen the focus to include the circulation, transformation, and verification of information. *Chapter five* discusses the infrastructure and media which brought news from all over Europe to St. Gallen. Even highly educated citizens like Rütiner typically obtained news in oral form, via informal networks which were based on pre-existing social ties. Since it was usually impossible to verify news independently, Rütiner and his contemporaries relied on an elaborate system of “source criticism”; a system which often worked in favour of oral news because it linked people’s trust in a piece of news to their trust in the messenger. *Chapter six* looks beyond institutionalised commemoration and the historical narratives of the elite and explores the ways in which collective narratives around past events emerged out of conversations in which individual memories were shared and reshaped. Changes in the way past events were remembered, so it argues, should not be seen as evidence for the frailties of human memory, but rather offer us important insights into early modern mentalities.⁴⁷

Since the history of oral communication lies at the intersection of social and cultural history, it calls for a combination of methods from both fields. In order to exploit Rütiner’s *Commentationes* to their full potential, my analysis will shift back and forth between quantitative methods and detailed case studies.

⁴⁷ There are many forms of oral communication which will not be covered in this thesis. One notable absence is the vast field of verbal insults and blasphemy; another one the literary genre of song. Both have been left out of this study partly because they are already extensively covered by the existing literature, and partly because they play only a minor role in Rütiner’s *Commentationes*.

1 Sum Johannis Ruthineri Sangallensis: St. Gallen, Rütiner, and the *Commentationes*

Johannes Rütiner and his St. Gallen

Situated on the margins of the Swiss Confederacy, a few kilometres southeast of Lake Constance, Rütiner's St. Gallen was a Protestant town of around 4,000 to 5,000 inhabitants.⁴⁸ The town had grown around the renowned St. Gallen Abbey, but since the fourteenth century it had gradually freed itself from the abbot's rule and grown into a largely independent political and, eventually, confessional entity. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, St. Gallen was both a Free Imperial City and an associate member of the Swiss Confederacy.⁴⁹ It was ruled by a Small Council composed of councilmen and guild masters, and headed by a triumvirate who took on the positions of mayor, old mayor, and imperial bailiff in yearly turns. The considerably less powerful Great Council consisted of the Small Council and representatives from each of the town's six guilds.⁵⁰ The weavers' guild was by far the largest and most important among them, reflecting the fact that St. Gallen's economy was dominated by, and largely dependent on, the linen trade.⁵¹ Rigorous controls at every stage of production ensured high quality standards and made St. Gallen linen (*St. Galler Tuch*) a highly sought-after commodity all over Europe.⁵²

It was this flourishing linen trade that had drawn Rütiner's grandfather to St. Gallen.⁵³ By the time Rütiner was born on 11 November 1501, his father Hansi Rütiner owned a successful business

⁴⁸ Hans-Peter Höhener, *Bevölkerung und Vermögensstruktur der Stadt Sankt Gallen im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert (Auswertung der Steuerbücher)* (Univ. Zürich Ph.D. thesis, 1974), p. 29.

⁴⁹ Werner Näf, *Vadian und seine Stadt St. Gallen*, 2 vols. (St. Gallen, 1944–1957), esp. i, 21–63, and ii, 180–190, 236–241. St. Gallen obtained the status of a Free Imperial City at the beginning of the fifteenth century; in 1454, a few years after the St. Gallen Abbey, it became an associate member of the Swiss Confederacy. For an analysis of St. Gallen's position between the Swiss Confederacy and the Holy Roman Empire, see Bettina Braun and Wolfgang Dobras, 'St. Gallen: eine Stadtrepublik zwischen Reich und Eidgenossenschaft', in Christine Roll, Bettina Braun and Heide Stratenwerth (eds.), *Recht und Reich im Zeitalter der Reformation. Festschrift für Horst Rabe* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996), 397–416.

⁵⁰ For a concise introduction to St. Gallen's political system, see Ernst Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der Stadt St. Gallen* (St. Gallen, 1988), especially pp. 231–5. More detailed, but imprecise in parts, is Carl Moser-Nef, *Die freie Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen*, 7 vols. (Zürich, 1931–1951), here i, pp. 88–98 and 166–233.

⁵¹ According to the St. Gallen humanist and mayor Joachim von Watt, called Vadianus, the weaver's guild was composed of '450 masters ... not counting those who have neither a wife nor children' ('vierdhalbhundert meister ... one die, die weder weib noch kind habend'). Joachim von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, ed. Ernst Götzinger, 3 vols. (St. Gallen, 1875–1879), here ii, p. 422.

⁵² For a comprehensive account of the development of the linen trade in St. Gallen, see Hans Conrad Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel der Stadt St. Gallen von den Anfängen bis 1520*, 2 vols. (St. Gallen, 1960).

⁵³ Comm. II.31; Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', p. 15.

and held several public offices, most of which were linked to the linen trade.⁵⁴ Although he never acquired a fortune comparable to that of the richest linen merchants in St. Gallen, at the end of his life Hansi Rütiner belonged to the richest 10 percent of the town's tax payers.⁵⁵

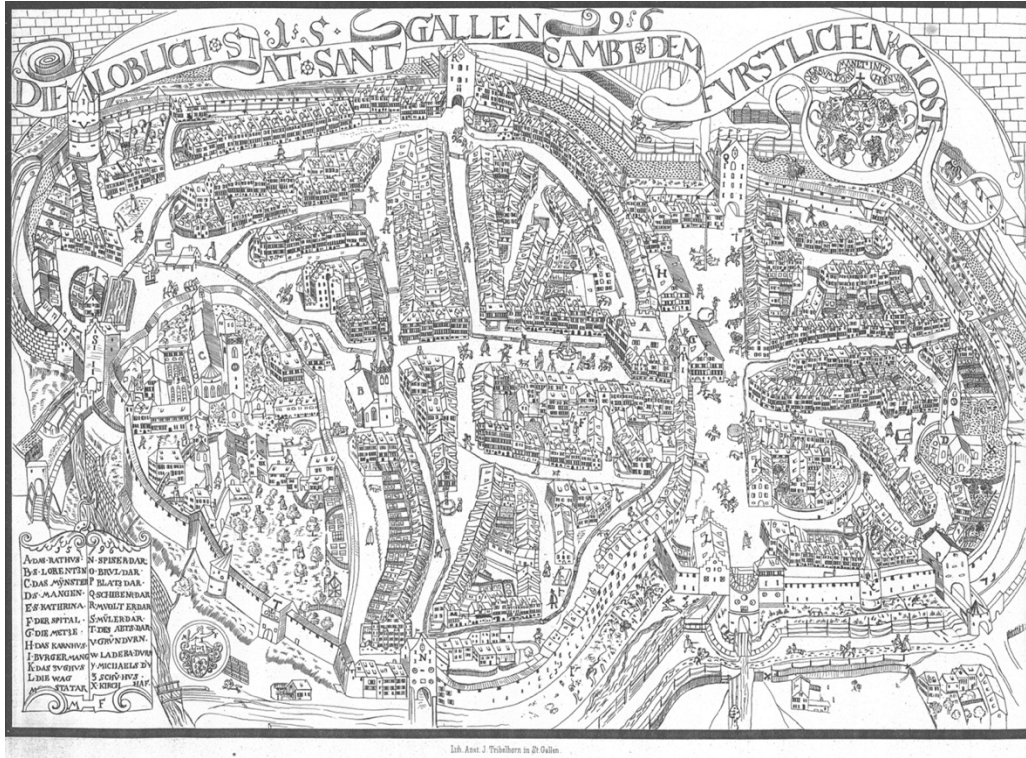


Fig. 1: *Die loblich Stat Sant Gallen sambt dem Fvrstlichen Clostr* (1596), by Melchior Frank.

Thanks to his family's economic advancement, Rütiner was able to enjoy a broad education. From 1512 onwards he attended the local Latin school, and then moved to Basel in 1519 or 1520 to continue his studies at university.⁵⁶ A collection of texts copied and annotated by Rütiner during his time as a pupil and student survives in the *St. Galler Kantonsbibliothek Vadiana* as part of the *Vadianische Sammlung*, a collection of medieval and early modern books and manuscripts for which the foundation was laid by the town's mayor and reformer Joachim von Watt, called Vadianus

⁵⁴ Between 1481 and 1513, Hansi Rütiner was appointed linen inspector numerous times. See Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, ii, pp. 83–7. From 1504 to 1510 Hansi sat on the Small Council, and from 1514 to 1515 he represented the weavers' guild on the Great Council as one of the *Weberelfer*: StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, pp. 6 and 26.

⁵⁵ Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, pp. 64 and 78.

⁵⁶ It was not until 1522, however, that Rütiner appeared in the university's matricule: *Die Matrikel der Universität Basel*, ed. Hans Georg Wackernagel, 5 vols. (Basel, 1951–1980), here i, p. 351.

(1484–1551).⁵⁷ Along with Rütiner's entries on his time in Basel, it provides a fragmentary, but nevertheless enlightening picture of his education. At university, he was taught regularly by Johannes Atrocianus, an outspoken opponent of Protestantism, as well as by Magister Gabriel Beronanus, whom Rütiner called 'my most beloved teacher'.⁵⁸ The main focus lay on classical authors such as Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Horace, and on satirists like Lucian of Samosota, Juvenal, Plautus, and Persius. Alongside these classical texts, contemporary humanist authors such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Baptista Mantuanus, Angelus Politianus and Joachim Vadianus were studied.⁵⁹

Latin authors, or Latin translations of Greek authors, were Rütiner's main focus, while his knowledge of Greek appears to have been limited.⁶⁰ This was in line with the purpose of his studies: Rütiner probably never intended to earn a degree, let alone to become a priest, as has sometimes been suggested. Rather, he wanted to improve his Latin and earn a broad humanist education before entering his family's trade.⁶¹

The years Rütiner spent in Basel seem to have been formative in many respects, and it is likely that they also laid the foundation for his loyal support of the Reformation. In Basel Rütiner was exposed to texts by leading humanists and critics of the papacy. He heard lectures by Melchior Macrinus and Konrad Pellikan, both of whom later became important supporters of the new faith.⁶² Moreover, he spent his first years in Basel in the company of a man who was to play a significant role in bringing the Reformation to St. Gallen: Johannes Kessler (1502/3–1574), a fellow citizen and childhood friend of Rütiner's, who went on to study theology in Wittenberg and was among the first laymen who held public bible readings in St. Gallen.⁶³

Late in 1524 or early in 1525, around the time when the Reformation was starting to take root in his hometown under the direction of the humanist scholar, town physician, and later mayor Joachim Vadianus, Rütiner returned to St. Gallen to take up his family's trade. At first he lived with his brother Christian on the *Webergasse*, but by 1526 he already had a household of his own on the

⁵⁷ VadSlg, Ms 485: Sammelband humanistischen Inhalts.

⁵⁸ 'praeceptor meus amantissimus', Comm. I.892. Gabriel Beronanus is likely identical with 'Gabriel Meyer de Berona' who matriculated in Basel in 1513/4: Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', p. 19–20.

⁵⁹ For a full list of the texts Rütiner copied and annotated in his compilation, see VadSlg, Ms 485: Sammelband humanistischen Inhalts, fol. 684r–v.

⁶⁰ Comm. I.81g contains a Greek expression, but otherwise there is little evidence that Rütiner had any more than superficial knowledge of Greek. The only Greek piece in his schoolbook is an extract from Homer's *Odyssey* (VadSlg, Ms 485: Sammelband humanistischen Inhalts, fol. 555r–569v). Normally, he seems to have read Greek authors in Latin translation (see for instance idem, fol. 295r–304r, and ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 18.423: *Varia Historia Philol. Theologica* [?] *Reformatoriis* [?], which contains Latin translations of sermons by the Church Fathers John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus).

⁶¹ Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', pp. 22–3.

⁶² Comm. II.156b and I.575.

⁶³ For evidence that Kessler and Rütiner studied together, see a poem by Kessler dating from 1520 and dedicated to their teacher Atrocianus, which Rütiner wrote down in his schoolbook: VadSlg, Ms 485: Sammelband humanistischen Inhalts, fol. 264v and Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', p. 21.

Neugasse where he had grown up.⁶⁴ Little is known about Rütiner's business. While he regularly writes about the linen trade in general or records the prices at which other merchants bought and sold linen, he only mentions a single purchase of his own.⁶⁵ Yet he does give us a clue as to the size of his business in his notes on the rigorous linen examination of 1528, during which the trade in St. Gallen, and Rütiner's own business, suffered a great deal. Of the twenty-one pieces of cloth Rütiner had examined that year, eight were considered second-rate and not fit for bleaching, while only two of the thirteen which were bleached satisfied the linen inspectors and received the town's highest quality seal, the *Krebs*.⁶⁶ 1528 was an exceptional year in which linen had to meet even higher standards than usual. This entry nevertheless gives us a hint of the scale of Rütiner's business that year: twenty-one cloths corresponded roughly to the number produced by two to three weavers.⁶⁷ Considering Rütiner had entered the linen trade only four years earlier, that was a respectable number, but it certainly did not place him among the ranks of his most successful fellow guildsmen, some of whom employed over twenty weavers and produced more than one hundred cloths per year.⁶⁸

There is no evidence that Rütiner engaged in any long-distance trading. In fact, in the years in which he wrote his notebooks, he seems to have hardly travelled at all. Rütiner did not know the area around Lake Zurich well, and even the route to Constance seems to have been foreign to him: when he listed the villages through which one passed on the way back to St. Gallen, he put them in

⁶⁴ StadtASG, 274: Steuerbuch 1525, fol. 31r, where Rütiner is listed as part of his brother's household, and StadtASG, 275: Steuerbuch 1526, fol. 24r, where he is listed on his own. Rütiner continued to call the *Neugasse* by its medieval name, *Gerbergasse* (Tanners' Street); see Ernst Ziegler, *St. Galler Gassen. Dreiunddreissig Kurzbeschreibungen aller Gassen, Strassen und Plätze von St. Gallens Altstadt* (St. Gallen, 1977), p. 36. Christian is the only one of Rütiner's eight siblings who appears regularly in the *Commentationes* (Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', pp. 18f). By the time Rütiner started writing his notebooks, many of them had already passed away: his oldest brother, Conrad, whom Rütiner described as a gambler, drunkard and trouble-maker (Comm. II.7c), died in 1515 during the disastrous campaign of the Swiss Confederacy against the French army which ended with the famous battle at Marignano. One of Rütiner's sisters, Anna, and her husband Rudolf Appenzeller fell victim to the plague of 1519 (Comm. I.69, I.905g). Another sister, Verena, who had married one Michael Haltmaier, passed away in 1525, leaving her orphaned children under Rütiner's guardianship (Comm. I.191, see also StadtASG, 281: Steuerbuch 1533, fol. 51). Little is known about Rütiner's sisters Wiborada (d. 1533, Comm. I.524), Elisabeth, and Barbara, but Katharina, Rütiner's youngest sister, married his close friend Paulus Schlumpf (on 4 April 1529; StadtASG, 513a: Ehebuch, Band 1, 1528–1862, p. 6).

⁶⁵ Comm. II.294e. For more general remarks on the linen trade and his fellow merchants' businesses, see in particular Comm. I.935, as well Comm. I.84; II.81f/g; II.162c; II.206c; II.210; II.322; II.372m.

⁶⁶ Comm. I.84. On the rigorous linen examination, see also II.162c. On the St. Gallen linen inspection and quality seals, see Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, ii, pp. 20–1.

⁶⁷ According to Hans Conrad Peyer, one weaver probably produced between 10–12 pieces of cloth per year, each 130 ells (approx. 97.5m) long. Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, ii, p. 15.

⁶⁸ According to Rütiner, Heinrich Locher employed 17 weavers who produced a total of 107 pieces of cloth, while Conrad Schaiawiller employed 23 weavers. Comm. II.81f.

the wrong order.⁶⁹ Rütiner's regular journeys only took him to the close-by markets in Wil, Lichtensteig, Bischofszell and Rorschach.⁷⁰

Sometime between 1526 and 1528 Rütiner married Engla Keiser, who came from a family of linen merchants herself. Together they had six children: Salomon (b. 24 September 1528), Isaak (b. 28 August 1530, d. 11 October 1531), Sara (b. 9 December 1533), Isaak II (b. 23 January 1535), Johannes (b. 4 August 1536), and Barbara (b. 17 November 1538).⁷¹ It is important to note that – with the exception of Johannes and Barbara – these names were still somewhat uncommon in St. Gallen at the time. By naming his children after characters from the Old Testament, Rütiner probably followed the example of his learned friend Kessler (whose sons were called David, Josua, and Esaias) and tried to distinguish himself from his fellow weavers. Despite the fact that all of his children's births fall into the ten-year period in which Rütiner wrote the *Commentationes*, his family plays only a minor role in the notebooks, and in fact Rütiner only mentions two of his children at all.⁷²

Similarly, Rütiner only speaks of his political career in passing and with great modesty. When he became an assistant to the linen inspectors in 1534, he stressed that he owed his election to an unexpected vacancy.⁷³ That same year, Rütiner was elected *Weberelfer*, one of eleven men representing the weavers' guild on the Great Council.⁷⁴ Although the Great Council's powers were limited, this office marked an important step in Rütiner's career; not least because, as we shall see in the next chapter, Rütiner's fellow *Elfer* soon became his most frequent informants. In August of 1539, Rütiner's name appears on a list of councilors who investigated a sermon by the St. Gallen pastor Furtmüller concerning the invalidity of marriage vows without parental consent.⁷⁵ Rütiner seems to have proven himself in this investigation, for less than a year later he was chosen to serve alongside his friend Johannes Kessler and the mayor Vadianus as one of five lay and four clerical judges on the marriage court. Rütiner was by far the least experienced among the judges, and perhaps his prominent contacts helped him secure this position.⁷⁶ Rütiner left the marriage court when he was elected onto the Small Council in 1549.⁷⁷ This was to be the peak of his political career, and

⁶⁹ Comm. I.495 and II.389.

⁷⁰ Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, ii, pp. 5 and 11. For evidence of Rütiner travelling to these towns, see for instance Comm. I.282; I.831; I.833; I.838; I.906; I.949c; II.1; II.2; II.4; II.31; II.37-8; II.162c.

⁷¹ StadtASG, 510: Taufbuch St. Laurenzen und St. Mangen, Band 1 1527–1566, pp. 51, 108, 201, 230, 261, 301.

⁷² Rütiner writes entries upon the birth of Sara (Comm. I.524) and the death of Isaak (Comm. I.354; I.455).

⁷³ Comm. I.497. Andreas Morly who had been elected linen inspector was freed from the burden of public office, and thus his assistant Paulus Schlumpf succeeded him, leaving his office vacant.

⁷⁴ StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, p. 26.

⁷⁵ StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 25. August 1533 – 26. September 1541, p. 302, 29 Aug 1539.

⁷⁶ Apart from Martin Salzmann, about whom little is known, the panel of lay judges consisted of the mayor Vadianus, the councilor Ambrosius Aigen, and the former head of the St. Gallen court, Jakob Rütlinger. See StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, pp. 109–10.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

he remained a councillor until 1555, shortly before his death in 1556 or 1557.⁷⁸ From the tax records we know that Rütiner's wealth increased fairly steadily throughout his life (Fig. 2).⁷⁹ The only noticeable leaps in the graph – from 1541–1542 and 1549–1550 – roughly coincide with the years in which he was appointed to a new public office.⁸⁰ At the end of his life, he belonged to the richest 15 percent of the town's taxpayers.⁸¹

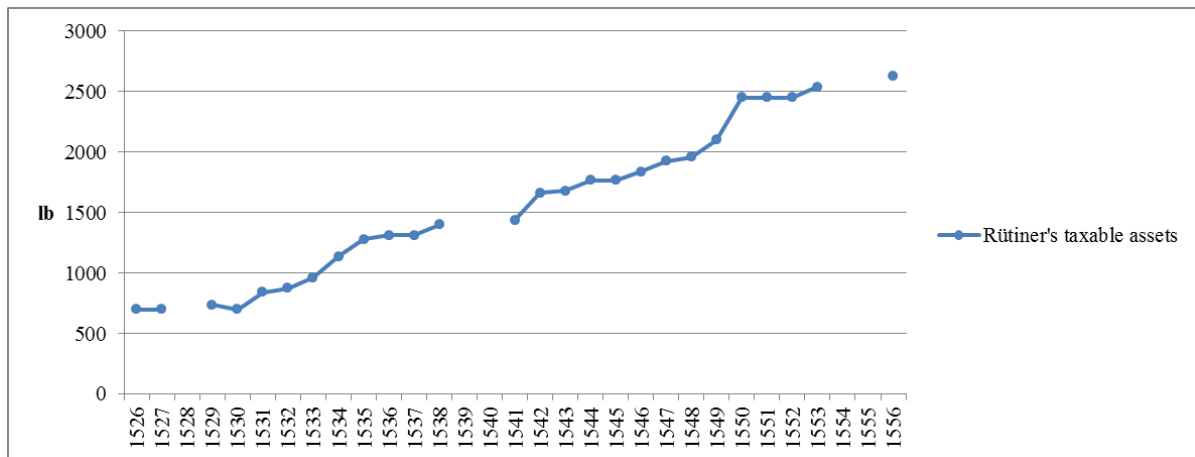


Fig. 2: Rütiner's economic advancement from his first appearance in the tax records as head of his own household (1526) until his death.⁸²

Since Rütiner rarely writes about himself, his biography necessarily remains fragmentary. Yet from the few hints in his notebooks and other sources it is possible to piece together a slightly more

⁷⁸ StadtASG, 916: Regimentsbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, Band 1, Rats- und Gerichtsämter, 1378–1798, p. 21, and Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', pp. 27 and 35. A few more public offices are listed in the *Stemmatologia Sangallensis*; however, I have been unable to find evidence of Rütiner holding any of them; cf. StadtASG, Johann Jacob Scherrer and Jacob Huber, *Stemmatologia Sangallensis oder Geschlecht-Register aller in der Stadt St. Gallen verbürgerten und sich noch im Wesen findenden Geschlechtern, von ihrem Ursprung, soweit man auf denselben kommen können, in genealogischer Ordnung hergeleitet bis auf das Jahr 1732 von Johann Jacob Scherrer und bis auf jetzige Zeiten fortgesetzt von Jacob Huber*, 27 vols. (St. Gallen, 1752–1769).

⁷⁹ This is not taking into account, however, the effects of inflation, the precise extent of which is impossible to determine; see Rudolf Gamper, 'Bartlome Schobinger', in Rudolf Gamper and Thomas Hofmeier (eds.), *Alchemische Vereinigung. Das Rosarium Philosophorum und sein Besitzer Bartlome Schobinger* (Zürich, 2014), 124–92, here p. 136.

⁸⁰ Usually Rütiner's fortune increased by only 35–100 lb per year, yet after he was appointed marriage judge his assets rose by 225 lb, and when he became a councilor the increase even amounts to 350 lb in one year.

⁸¹ Höhener, *Bevölkerung und Vermögensstruktur*, p. 70, table 15a.

⁸² The table is based on StadtASG, 275–296d: Steuerbücher 1526–1556. The gaps in the graph are due to the loss of the tax records from 1528, 1539–1540, and 1554–1555. Rütiner's wealth was calculated from the taxes he paid each year and the yearly tax rate of 0.25%. St. Gallen's citizens were taxed based on their own estimate of their assets (see Höhener, *Bevölkerung und Vermögensstruktur*, pp. 15–7); Rütiner's actual wealth might therefore have been even slightly greater than suggested by the tax records.

colourful picture of his views and interests. In his writing, Rütiner presents himself as a loyal supporter of the Reformation. He considered those still adhering to the old faith to be ‘enemies of the Gospel’,⁸³ and his portrayal of the Catholics echoes much Protestant propaganda: the Catholic clergy in the *Commentationes* are depicted as lecherous and greedy, and their rituals and processions as unnecessarily pompous.⁸⁴ Rütiner’s desire to distance himself from Catholicism even extended to certain terms associated with the old faith. When he wrote about the ritual objects saved by the St. Gallen abbot as he fled from the reformed city, the list included, among other things, ‘monstrances, as they call them, for the Eucharist’.⁸⁵ Or when Rütiner described the Catholic procession ordered by the French King Francis I in January of 1535, he stressed the fact that ‘relics (as they call them) of the Saints’ were paraded.⁸⁶ Almost identical phrases can also be found in a contemporary chronicle written by the pastor Hermann Miles, a former Catholic priest.⁸⁷ Little more than a decade after the Reformation had started to take root in St. Gallen, Rütiner and other reformed citizens thus described Catholic ritual objects as though they were completely alien to them.

A similar sense of distance also shines through some of Rütiner’s entries on Catholic doctrine. In one entry, Matthäus Altherr, a Protestant pastor in St. Gallen, recalls that the mayor Caspar Schlumpf (d. 1524) believed his son’s prayers would save him time in purgatory after his death, and how he despaired when his son passed away before him. ““Look”, [Altherr] said, “at our blindness. Why did we feed the priests at the time?”” Rütiner reports Altherr’s words, and adds, ‘It was well said. Nobody scolded him.’⁸⁸

Yet the distance separating Rütiner from the Catholics and his own Catholic past was certainly neither as wide nor as insurmountable as Rütiner has us, and perhaps himself, believe. With the exception of the few years between 1529 and 1531 during which the abbot was in exile, Protestant St. Gallen continued to share the confined space within its walls with the Catholic abbey and was moreover surrounded by the abbey’s territory (see Fig. 1).⁸⁹ Much to the distress of St. Gallen’s Protestant citizens and authorities, Catholic processions regularly penetrated the town’s space on

⁸³ ‘Aduersarij euangelio’. Comm. I.412.

⁸⁴ For criticism of the clergy see for instance Comm. II.39, II.296c and II.372f; for criticism of Catholic ritual and processions see for instance Comm. I.762, I.936, II.138 and II.400g.

⁸⁵ ‘monstrantia vt vo/cant Eucharistiae’. Comm. I.529.

⁸⁶ ‘reliquijs (vt vocant) sanctorum’. Comm. I.541.

⁸⁷ Hermann Miles, *Die Chronik des Hermann Miles*, ed. Ernst Götzinger (Mitteilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte 28, St. Gallen, 1902), 275–385, here p. 355.

⁸⁸ ‘videte inquit cecitatem nostram / cur nutriuimus sacrificulos eo tempore [] bene / dictum fuit [] nemo obiurgauit’. Comm. II.296c. On the changing views on purgatory in Protestant St. Gallen, see Alfred Ehrensperger, *Der Gottesdienst in der Stadt St. Gallen, im Kloster und in den fürststädtischen Gebieten vor, während und nach der Reformation* (Zürich, 2012), p. 51–4.

⁸⁹ Ernst Ehrenzeller, ‘Die Stadtrepublik im Bunde mit den Eidgenossenschaft’, in Ernst Ehrenzeller, Paul Fritz Kellenberger, Werner Vogler et al., *St. Gallen und die Eidgenossenschaft* (131. Neujahrsblatt des historischen Vereins des Kantons St. Gallen, St. Gallen, 1991), 25–42, here p. 34.

their way to the abbey.⁹⁰ The Catholic objects and rituals described by Rütiner as foreign were thus not only familiar to him from his youth, but they also remained visible all around. Perhaps, then, it was the palpable, continuing presence of Catholicism in St. Gallen, not its absence, which made it necessary for Rütiner to write about it as if it were a distant memory.

In contrast to his depiction of Catholicism, Rütiner's views on Anabaptism were much more nuanced. These were not 'enemies of the Gospel', but rather people who had misunderstood it. Although Rütiner sometimes spoke of the 'madness of the Anabaptists' or the 'heresy of Anabaptism',⁹¹ he also retained a lot of sympathy for those who were persuaded by its teachings and seems to have objected to their brutal persecution. On several occasions he reports executions of Anabaptists in much detail and with great compassion, implicitly pointing out the irony of a crowd of sinners and adulterers condemning people who had only 'talked a little about God'.⁹² When the former Anabaptist Felix Hottinger told him about his family's martyrdom as they met on the way to Wil, Rütiner even noted: 'As he told me about the farewell of his father and sisters, he moved [me] to tears; he himself steadily continued to speak, yet not aggressively like others.'⁹³ It is important to note that while Rütiner's attitude towards individual Anabaptists may seem surprisingly empathetic, it reflects the broader sentiment towards the movement in St. Gallen. Here Anabaptism, though forbidden after the disputation of 1525, met with much more sympathy than Catholicism, and was not persecuted as violently as in Zurich.⁹⁴ Not a single Anabaptist was executed on the grounds of their faith, and many of them continued their political careers after 1525 – including one of Rütiner's regular informants and fellow *Elfer*, the linen merchant Jakob Spichermann.⁹⁵

Rütiner's views on religion were thus not very exceptional for St. Gallen, and the same is true for his opinions on other matters. To a large extent they reflect the views of the town council and

⁹⁰ For instance Comm. I.594 and II.400g. In contrast to Rütiner, his friend Johannes Kessler tends to downplay the fact that these processions were perceived as threatening; see Johannes Kessler, *Sabbata. Mit kleineren Schriften und Briefen*, ed. Emil Egli and Rudolf Schoch (St. Gallen, 1902), p. 433 (=452b–453a), and pp. 473 (=489a–490a). See also Comm. I.410–12, where Rütiner personally observes some of his fellow citizens perform Catholic rituals in St. Gallen and calls them 'adversaries of the Gospel'.

⁹¹ 'insania catabaptistarum' and 'heresi catabaptismi'; Comm. II.306e and II.347 respectively.

⁹² 'cum parum de deo locuti'. Thus Rütiner reports one martyr's accusations, without calling it into question; Comm. I.186.

⁹³ 'mihi fletum narrando patris et sororum valedictionem / concitavit, ipse constanter recitando pergit non tamen / vt alij mordicus'. Comm. II.1.

⁹⁴ As Heinold Fast argues, the large Anabaptist movement which had grown out of Kessler's public bible readings held a decisively different status than similar movements in other reformed towns – partly because of the kinship ties between Vadianus and the leading Anabaptist Konrad Grebel, and partly because Anabaptism found many supporters in the Great Council: Heinold Fast, 'Die Sonderstellung der Täufer in St. Gallen und Appenzell', *Zwingliana*, xi/4 (1960), 223–40. According to Ingeborg Wissmann, Kessler, like Rütiner, saw Catholicism as the main enemy. He rarely called Anabaptists heretics, but depicted them as people who had misunderstood the Gospel: Ingeborg Wissmann, *Die St. Galler Reformationschronik des Johannes Kessler (1503-1574). Studien zum städtischen Reformationsverständnis und seinen Wandlungen im 16. Jahrhundert in der Sabbata* (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. 17 and 145.

⁹⁵ A long account of Spichermann's spiritual development and his imprisonment in 1525 can be found in Comm. II.106b. See also Fast, 'Sonderstellung der Täufer', p. 231.

Rütiner's humanist friends. On several occasions Rütiner criticized gambling and excessive drinking, as for instance when his neighbour Marcus Stuchely bragged of his drunken adventures 'as if [they were] noble deeds. At last it has come this far, that these are the famous deeds of the nobles with which knights are adorned.'⁹⁶ Moderation, hard work, prudent house-keeping, and the promotion of the common good, on the other hand, were presented as ideals worth striving towards.⁹⁷ Cautionary tales about men who had lost their fortunes through gambling and an extravagant lifestyle circulated in great numbers and were contrasted with the biographies of those who had acquired moderate, but lasting wealth through honest work.⁹⁸ In several entries, Rütiner pointed out the selfish behaviour of the mercenary commanders who were only interested in personal profit and pensions, and contrasted it with an idealized past in which commanders had sought to promote the good of the community by negotiating tax exemptions for all St. Gallen citizens in exchange for their services. 'Oh the faithful citizens who prefer the common [good] to the private', Rütiner wrote in this context, again very much in line with the ideals promoted by the city council.⁹⁹

Rütiner may have called his notebooks *Commentationes*, but his primary interest lay in recording, rather than commenting on, the events around him. Remarks such as the ones discussed above are therefore rare and appear primarily towards the end of the notebooks. Moreover, even when we do find them, Rütiner's comments often remain somewhat stereotypical. To get a clearer picture of the man who left behind such an extraordinary collection of stories – many of which, moreover, speak of anything but moderation – it therefore does not suffice to study the few instances where he explicitly states his opinion. Rather, it seems necessary to also take a closer look at his interests and activities, and in particular those on which he spent most of his free time and money.

Even after Rütiner had left university, he retained a keen interest in books. There is evidence that he used the St. Gallen abbey library – to which he referred as 'our library' – while it was under the control of the city.¹⁰⁰ After the abbot Diethelm returned to St. Gallen in 1532, Rütiner made snide comments about Diethelm's lack of appreciation and care for the wealth of knowledge in his

⁹⁶ 'tamquam generosa fa/cinora [] Huc tandem ventum vt haec nobilium/ praeclara gesta quibus in equites ornantur'. Comm. II.299d. See also Comm. II.36 and II.330d.

⁹⁷ This comes out strongly in an entry in which Rütiner contrasts a monks excessive whoring and idleness with what he considers more appropriate, namely 'care for the household' ('curis dome/sticis'; Comm. II.372f), and in one in which he claims that a father's 'wrongfully acquired riches' ('diuitiae male partae') turned his son into a criminal, and his daughter into a whore (Comm. II.39). For the ideal of moderate drinking and its relation to gender, see for instance Michael Frank, 'Trunkene Männer und nüchterne Frauen. Zur Gefährdung von Geschlechterrollen durch Alkohol in der Frühen Neuzeit', in Martin Dinges (ed.), *Hausväter, Priester, Kastraten. Zur Konstruktion von Männlichkeit in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1998), 187–212, here esp. pp. 189–92.

⁹⁸ See for instance Comm. I.694–5; II.81f; II.196; II.269; II.372m; II.409l.

⁹⁹ 'O fideles ci/ues publicum privato praeferentes'. Comm. II.244b. For an introduction to the concept of the "common good", see Peter Hibst, *Utilitas Publica – Gemeiner Nutz – Gemeinwohl: Untersuchungen zur Idee eines politischen Leitbegriffs von der Antike bis zum späten Mittelalter* (Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York et. al., 1991).

¹⁰⁰ 'bibliotheca nostra'. Comm. I.505. See also Comm. I.219; I.248.

possession, which stood in stark contrast with the abbot's avid interest in other forms of wealth.¹⁰¹ Perhaps it was the unavailability of the abbey library after Diethelm's return which inspired Rütiner to draw up and copy catalogues of numerous private libraries in St. Gallen and elsewhere between 1534 and 1554. These catalogues were bound together with an inventory of the abbey library and survive in the *Vadianische Sammlung*.¹⁰²

When Johannes Kessler addressed Rütiner in his Reformation chronicle, the *Sabbata*, he praised his friend for accumulating 'a precious treasure' of learned books.¹⁰³ Since Kessler generally drew an overly flattering picture of Rütiner, this may well be something of an exaggeration. Yet evidence from the *Commentationes* indeed confirms that Rütiner was in regular contact with booksellers and bookbinders, and that he personally knew the humanist printer Johannes Oporinus in Basel.¹⁰⁴ Rütiner even writes about one particularly lucky purchase: upon his death, a schoolmaster with ambitions to study medicine left behind a 'beautiful treasure of new books of every kind'.¹⁰⁵ Since his heirs had no use for the books, the mayor Joachim Vadianus, Rütiner and the St. Gallen scholar and merchant Bartholome Schobinger were able to purchase the books at a good price and divide them among themselves.¹⁰⁶ One volume of printed texts from Rütiner's collection survives in the *Vadianische Sammlung*; it contains a potpourri of historical, geographical, mathematical, and medical works.¹⁰⁷ Another four books from Rütiner's library are now owned by the *Zentralbibliothek Zürich*; they include an edition of Augustinus' *Sermones* in two volumes, and two volumes containing various short works, pamphlets, and translations by contemporary reform-

¹⁰¹ Comm. I.908. Similar accusations were made by Vadianus and Kessler: Conradin Bonorand, 'Bücher und Bibliotheken in der Beurteilung Vadians und seiner St. Galler Freunde', *Zwingliana*, 14/2–3 (1974/5), 89–108, here esp. pp. 102–3. In a work dedicated to Vadianus and dating from 1531, Kessler even has the library herself complain about the carelessness and infidelity of her husband, the monastery: Johannes Kessler, *Die Rede der Klosterbibliothek zu St. Gallen an den Herrn Bürgermeister Joachim von Watt MDXXXI*, ed. and transl. by Ernst Gerhard Rüschi (St. Gallen, 1984), esp. pp. 19–27.

¹⁰² VadSlg. Ms 80: Johannes Rütiner, *Bücherverzeichnisse*. The volume includes a list of the books owned by the Zurich physician Conrad Gesner, the St. Gallen pastor Wolfgang Wetter, the merchant Bartholome Schobinger (a friend of Rütiner's), and Leonhard Beck, a friend of Vadianus' in Augsburg. For an admiring description of Beck's library, see also Comm. II.215.

¹⁰³ 'ainen kostlichen schatz [der gelerten buocher]'. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 16 (=11b).

¹⁰⁴ Rütiner's informants also included the bookseller David in Wil and the bookbinder and –seller Anton; see for instance Comm. I.370–1, I.511, I.557, I.627, I.932e–f, II.391d. Rütiner's friendship with Oporinus is confirmed in letters to Vadianus, where Oporinus asks him to pass greetings on to his 'old friends' Kessler and Rütiner: Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ 'pulcherrimum librorum / thesaurum omni genere nouorum'. Comm. I.571.

¹⁰⁶ Comm. I.571 and I.932b. See also Gamper, 'Bartolome Schobinger', pp. 165–7.

¹⁰⁷ VadSlg. Inc. 808: *Sammelband*. The list includes, among other texts, Gaius Julius Solinus' *Polyhistor*, Pomponius Mela's *De situ orbis libri tres*, Heinrich Glarean's *De geographia*, Jordanus Nemorarius' *De ponderibus*, and Niccolò Leonicensio's *De Plinii et plurium aliorum medicorum in medicina erroribus*.

ers such as Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bugenhagen, and Melancthon, published between 1518 and 1536.¹⁰⁸

Rütiner's primary interest, however, lay within the field of historiography. He was familiar with Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeitbuch vnnd Geschichtbibell*, Beatus Rhenanus' *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres*, Petermann Etterlin's *Kronica von der loblichen Eydtgnoschaft*, and Johannes Stumpf's *Gemeiner loblicher Eydtgnoschafft Stetten Landen vnd Völckeren Chronik wirdiger Thaa-ten beschreybung*, to name just a few.¹⁰⁹ A volume containing extracts from numerous chronicles, copied by Rütiner between 1547 and 1552, was later inherited by his youngest daughter Barbara.¹¹⁰ Yet Rütiner's interest in the past was by no means limited to reading and copying chronicles. Numerous activities which Rütiner pursued in his spare time bear witness to his keen interest in etymology, numismatics, and archaeology, all subjects which were regularly discussed among his humanist friends.¹¹¹ With Kessler, Vadianus, and the pastor Matthäus Altherr, Rütiner sometimes studied ancient coins and tried to decipher their inscriptions and depictions in order to date them.¹¹² Time and again, Rütiner also recorded detailed descriptions of local castles and ruins, most of which were passed on to him by Johannes Maier, who, like Rütiner, had studied at university before taking up a trade.¹¹³ On one occasion Maier even took Rütiner on a veritable tour of the castles along the route from Bischofszell to St. Gallen – to Singenberg, Heidelberg, Blidegg, and Alt-Ramschwag – during which they carefully studied at least one of them:¹¹⁴

Then, upon descending, the Ramschwag follows, which the locals call lower Ramsburg, built on a steep rock above the Sitter ... [The castle], which I and Johannes Maier examined on the Friday after Corpus Christi, is strongly fortified with a double moat. When we approached it from the side of the river, a gate ap-

¹⁰⁸ ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 2.36 – 2.37: Aurelius Augustinus, *Sermones*, ed. Sebastian Brandt, 2 vols. (Basel: Johannes Amerbach); ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 18.423: *Varia Historia Philol. Theologica* [?] *Reformatorii* [?]; ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, III.B.94.

¹⁰⁹ Comm. II.244c (Franck); Comm. I.505, I.791–2, I.859, II.159 (Rhenanus); Comm. I.789; II.374 (Etterlin). See also VadSlg, Ms 77: *Chroniken zur St. Galler Geschichte*, which contains extracts from Stumpfs' chronicle copied by Rütiner.

¹¹⁰ VadSlg, Ms 77: *Chroniken zur St. Galler Geschichte*.

¹¹¹ For etymology and ancient languages, see for instance Comm. I.118; I.597; I.789; II.386. For history, see I.219; I.226c. For numismatics, see II.240, II.326, II.358.

¹¹² For the most detailed description of this activity, see Comm. II.326.

¹¹³ See for instance Comm. I.698–706; I.728; I.734; II.5; II.139. On Johannes Maier's career, see I.954c and II.7c.

¹¹⁴ On all of these castles and for a map depicting them lined up along the Sitter on the way from Bischofszell to St. Gallen, see Gottlieb Felder, *Die Burgen der Kantone St. Gallen und Appenzell. Erster Teil* (47. Neu-jahrsblatt des Historischen Vereins des Kantons St. Gallen, 1907), esp. pp. 28 (Alt-Ramsschwag) and 95 (map).

peared, marked with a shield cut in stone: a large rose without a stem, on the other side an empty shield.¹¹⁵

Rütiner then went on to describe the ruins of the Ramschwag in much detail: he studied the gate and fortifications, took note of the embrasures and of an old, dried up fishpond, and he recorded the measurements of the ‘very high tower of astonishing antiquity’, over-grown with ivy: ‘The width of the tower: my height and four fingers.’¹¹⁶

Despite Rütiner’s great interest in history and ‘books of every kind’, we should be careful not to think of him as a scholar. When his daily business offered him an opportunity to pursue his other interests, Rütiner took it; as for instance when he made a small detour from his regular route between the market in Bischofszell and St. Gallen to visit the castles on the way. Though he was interested in etymology, there is no indication that Rütiner read much Greek or even Hebrew, and even his Latin was crude and full of mistakes. Moreover, even when Rütiner bought learned books he was depicted by Kessler not as a scholar, but rather as a ‘prudent housekeeper’ who prepared for harsher times by stocking up on wine and grain in times of plenty.¹¹⁷ Buying books was at once a means to confirm one’s status as a member of the educated elite and a potentially worthwhile investment. It was therefore worth pursuing despite the fact that Rütiner, as Kessler claims, did not have time to read all of his books from cover to cover:

And if you must hear the mockers say: “What do you want with so many books, you can never read them all”, you always answer according to your gentle nature: “Although I may not read them all in their entirety, I read a little bit in each of them.”¹¹⁸

Indeed, of the surviving printed texts which were once owned by Rütiner, only Solinus’ *Polyhistor*, Oecolampadius’ *In Genesim enarratio*, and Augustinus’ *Sermones* contain underlines and marginalia in his hand, and in the former two works even these are concentrated on a few pages.¹¹⁹

Yet besides providing him with material for his own reading, Kessler continues to “quote” Rütiner, his collection of books might also offer him an opportunity to contribute to the common good:

¹¹⁵ ‘Deinde sequitur descendendo Rainsch/wayg quam accolae inferiorem Ramsp/urg vocant, super praecipitem rupem super /Sintrinnum conditum ... quam ego et Ioannes Maier die/ Veneris post Eucharistiae diem Lustra/uimus [] aggressi versus fluuium porta / apparuit insignita inciso lapide scuto / extensa rosa sine caule [] ex aduersio scutum vacuum.’ Comm. I.906.

¹¹⁶ ‘altissima turris / horrendae vetustatis ... turris / densitas meae Staturae et 4 digito/rum’, *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ ‘fürsichtigen hushaltern’. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 26 (=12a).

¹¹⁸ ‘Und so du die spötter hören muost sagen: was wiltu mit so vil buocher thuon? du magst die niemer durchlesen, antwortestu alweg nach diner sänftmuott: Ob ich die nit alle durchlis, lis ich uß ietlichem etwas’. *Ibid.*, p. 28 (=11b).

¹¹⁹ VadSlg. Inc. 808: Sammelband; ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, III.B.94; ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 2.36–2.37.

“I can also show and lend them to others and let them grow into something beneficial and good. Perhaps this is my calling and office, the benefit and fruit yielding from my studies, to assist other people’s learning in this way, given that I do not otherwise teach or preach; for there are still too many who despise the purchase of books as an unnecessary, dispensable thing, or who, worthy and appreciative of them, cannot buy them because of their poverty.”¹²⁰

In Kessler’s view, then, by collecting books and lending them to others Rütiner was able to turn his university education into something productive in spite of the fact that he had not become a scholar or a preacher himself.

Rütiner was thus average in many respects: he owned a medium-sized business; for the most part he shared the majority views on religious, social, and economic issues; and though he may have read more than most of his fellow guildsmen, he was more of a collector than a scholar. Yet as we shall see in the next section, it may have been precisely Rütiner’s mediocrity and his humble ambitions which produced some of the unique characteristics of the *Commentationes*.

‘A wondrous time’: The Commentationes in context

‘On Christmas [15]29 I began.’¹²¹ With these words, and without any further explanation, Rütiner starts his notebooks. He was only one of many St. Gallen citizens who began recording memorable events of their present and recent past around that time. His friend Johannes Kessler’s Reformation chronicle, the *Sabbata* (1523–1539), is well known, and so is the St. Gallen mayor Joachim Vadianus’ *Diarium* (1529–1533).¹²² Both have been credited with inspiring Rütiner’s writing.¹²³ Yet Rütiner, Kessler and Vadianus were part of a much larger phenomenon which saw numerous St. Gallen citizens take up writing in the late 1520s and 1530s.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ ‘kain och anderen die fürsetzen, lichen und zuo nutz und guottem erschießen laßen. Das ist villicht min beruof und ampt, nutz und frucht uß minem studieren erwachsen, so ich niemat sunst mit leren und predigen, doch den weg anderen ander zu leren behulffen sin; dann nach deren nun zuo vil sind, so den buocherkof als ain unnutz, überflüßig ding verachtend oder, die den werd und hoch achtend, zuo kofen von armuott nit haben.’ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 16 (=11b–12a).

¹²¹ ‘Natiuitatis 29 incepi’. Comm. I.1.

¹²² von Watt (Vadianus), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, pp. 227–528.

¹²³ Rüsch, ‘Zwingli im Diarium’, p. 293.

¹²⁴ See Ehrenzeller, *Stadt St. Gallen*, p. 130, and Feller and Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz*, pp. 220–39, for an (incomplete) listing of the St. Gallen chronicles of this period, and Renate Frohne, ‘Städtische Chronistik zur Zeit der Reformation’, in Werner Wunderlich (ed.), *St. Gallen. Geschichte einer literarischen Kultur. Kloster – Stadt – Kanton – Region*, 2 vols. (St. Gallen, 1999), i, 299–328. For a broader overview over German city chronicles in the late medieval and early modern period, see for instance Peter Johanek

- 1) Hermann Miles (1463–1533), a former Catholic priest, wrote a chronicle covering the period from the town's foundation until 1532, but focusing mainly on the Reformation. A copy of the chronicle survives as part of a larger historical work by Magnus Murer, dating from the second half of the sixteenth century.¹²⁵
- 2) Around 1530, the Catholic Fridolin Sicher (1490–1546), priest and organist at the St. Gallen Abbey, started writing a chronicle which would eventually cover the period from 1423–1531.¹²⁶ His notes until 1515 are based on an earlier chronicle.¹²⁷
- 3) Rudolf Sailer (d. 1531), chancellor of the St. Gallen Abbey and a loyal supporter of the abbot, wrote two diaries covering the years of abbot Kilian's exile (1529–1530, probably commissioned by the abbot himself) and the beginning of abbot Diethelm Blarer's reign (1530–1531).¹²⁸
- 4) Wiborada Mörli, called Fluri (d. 1550), abbess of the Franciscan convent St. Leonhard just outside of St. Gallen, recorded the various stages of the nuns' fight against the reformed town council's attempts to dissolve their convent between 1524–1538.¹²⁹

While the works listed above survive either in their original form or in a contemporary copy, we also know of a number of other notebooks and chronicles from the same period which have since been lost:

- 5) According to Rütiner, 'Oth[mar] Lieb wrote down everything which happened in 42 years when the council was to be transferred [*transponendo*],¹³⁰ [he recorded] baptized boys when they entered the monastery.'¹³¹ Lieb was a chaplain at St. Laurenzen who, like Hermann Miles, joined the Reformation and got married in 1527.¹³²

(ed.), *Städtische Geschichtsschreibung im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2000).

¹²⁵ Miles, *Chronik*.

¹²⁶ Fridolin Sicher, *Fridolin Sachers Chronik*, ed. Ernst Götzinger (Mittheilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte XX, St. Gallen, 1885).

¹²⁷ Markus Kaiser, 'Sicher, Fridolin', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D14767.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016, and Gamper, 'Liebe und Zorn', p. 58.

¹²⁸ Rudolf Sailer, *Die Tagebücher Rudolf Sailers aus der Regierungszeit der Äbte Klian German und Diethelm Blarer (12. August 1529 bis 20. November 1532)*, ed. Joseph Müller (Mittheilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte 33, St. Gallen, 1913). See also Lorenz Hollenstein, 'Sailer, Rudolf', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D18742.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016.

¹²⁹ Wiborada Fluri, 'Bericht über das Frauenkloster St. Leonhard in St. Gallen von der Frau Mutter Wiborada Fluri, 1524–1538', ed. Gabriel P. Meier, *Anzeiger für schweizerische Geschichte*, 13/1 (1915), 14–44.

¹³⁰ Perhaps Rütiner is referring to elections in the council and/or appointments to public offices.

¹³¹ 'Oth lieb omnia conscripsit quae 42 annis facta in / transponendo senatu [] Pueros baptisatos intran/tes in claustrum.' Comm. I.306.

¹³² Miles, *Chronik*, p. 323.

- 6) Rütiner also tells us of Georg Wallen's chronicle, which, according to Wallen himself, 'contains some domestic matter etc., also observations about the weather, namely when the day [was] clear or rainy, also when citizens contract a marriage etc. In between some public events, namely our turmoil on Ash Wednesday [i.e. *St. Galler Auflauf*, 1491], when [people] are beheaded.'¹³³ This description suggests that among all the St. Gallen chronicles of this period, in terms of content Wallen's chronicle resembled Rütiner's *Commentationes* the most.
- 7) From the council records we know that at least four more St. Gallen citizens were suspected of writing chronicles.¹³⁴ One of them, Beda Miles, was indeed found to be writing a chronicle containing 'slandorous and inappropriate things' which were harmful to the city's reputation.¹³⁵ In 1557 he was therefore ordered to hand over all his papers to the Council and forbidden from writing a 'chronicle or similar things' in the future.¹³⁶

It is certainly not a coincidence that almost a dozen St. Gallers, and perhaps more, were writing about their time in the late 1520s and early 1530s. The Reformation, and in particular the dramatic events of 1529 and 1531 had inspired many of them to put pen to paper.¹³⁷ 1529 in particular seemed to mark a new era in the history of St. Gallen: in the course of a few months, an iconoclastic mob stormed the abbey cathedral and burned all religious images, the fatally ill abbot Franz fled St. Gallen and died shortly thereafter in exile, and for the first time in its history, the reformed town seized control of the abandoned abbey. The Protestant cantons' defeat at Kappel am Albis in 1531, followed by the new abbot's triumphant return to St. Gallen in 1532, in contrast, left many reformed citizens completely disillusioned.¹³⁸ By the end of the 1530s, most of the St. Gallen chroniclers had given up writing; many of their works remained unfinished.¹³⁹

There is some evidence to suggest that recording the Reformation of St. Gallen for posterity was, at least in part, a joint project; a project with roots in the social circle around Vadianus. Almost all of the Protestant chroniclers mentioned above were intimately linked to St. Gallen's re-

¹³³ 'continet negotium cuius/dam domesticum etc [] item obseruationes tempestatum / videlicet quando dies serenus vel pluuiosus / Item quando ciues matrimonium contraxere etc / Interea acta quaedam Publica [] videlicet [] Tumultum / nostrum die cinerum quando decollati etc.' Comm. I.754.

¹³⁴ StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 30. Dezember 1555 – 22. Dezember 1556, fol. 111v–114v, 20–23 July 1556.

¹³⁵ 'schmählich und ungeschikht ding'. StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 9. Dezember 1556 – 23. September 1557, fol. 14v, 01 Feb 1557.

¹³⁶ 'chronekh und derglichen ding', ibid.

¹³⁷ Gamper, 'Liebe und Zorn', p. 42. See also Sicher, *Chronik*, p. 178, and Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 15 (=11a).

¹³⁸ According to Rütiner and Kessler, Vadianus suffered a major breakdown after the battle of Kappel; see Comm. I.361 and Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 371 (=390a).

¹³⁹ Gamper, 'Liebe und Zorn', p. 42. Vadianus, Hermann Miles, and Fridolin Sicher all stopped writing in the early 1530s. Wiborada Fluri's account ends in 1538, while Rütiner's *Commentationes* and Kessler's *Sabbata* continued until 1539.

former in one way or another. We have already seen that Kessler and Rütiner were part of Vadianus' circle, and so was Hermann Miles.¹⁴⁰ Beda Miles may have been related to Hermann Miles, and it is possible that he is identical with the Beda Miles in whose house Kessler held his first bible readings in 1524.¹⁴¹ We know that Beda Miles and Rütiner were neighbours, and Miles shared intimate secrets with him when they spent the night together at the inn in Wil.¹⁴²

There is also clear evidence that these men knew about, and supported each other's work. Upon Hermann Miles' death, Kessler notes that Miles recorded 'all noteworthy events which happened during his time', and that his legacy would 'be accepted with gratitude and shall never be forgotten'.¹⁴³ Vadianus is known to have encouraged Kessler's work on the *Sabbata*,¹⁴⁴ and Kessler explicitly credits Rütiner with inspiring him to record their turbulent times:

Now then, my Johannes, thus you receive what you have often requested of me, namely my chronicle [*chronische verzeichnungen*]; yet perhaps it is different from what you expected. As you know well, in our various discussions and conversations (which we had together from our youth onwards ...), but especially now, when we fall into contemplation of this, our wondrous time, we have considered it to be a shameful negligence to let the Lord's great miraculous deeds pass unnoticed and not to offer us and ours a short memory [*gedechtnus*] of the same. Due to all your advice ... I have therefore resolved to record in my free hours the most noteworthy local and foreign histories, as far as they were truthfully reported to me ...¹⁴⁵

The resolution to record these 'wondrous times' was thus a collective one, emerging from conversations among St. Gallen's learned reformers and their closest circle of supporters. It was facilitated by the fact that Vadianus, Kessler, and Hermann Miles exchanged extracts of their work in pro-

¹⁴⁰ For evidence for the friendship between Miles and Vadianus, see afterword in Miles, *Chronik*, pp. 364–6. Hermann Miles also appears as an informant in Rütiner's *Commentationes* on two occasions; Comm. I.785 and I.977.

¹⁴¹ Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 198–9 (=125a–126b).

¹⁴² See StadtASG, 277: Steuerbuch 1529, fol. 26v; Comm. I.870; I.893g.

¹⁴³ 'aller fürnemen lofen, die sich zu sinen ziten zugetragen haben; das billich mit dankbarkait anzenemmen und im nimmer solle vergessen werden.' Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 399 (=422a).

¹⁴⁴ Wissmann, *St. Galler Reformationsschronik*, p. 15. See also Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 15–6 (=11b), where Kessler mentions that similar Reformation chronicles were being written by Martin Luther, by the pastors of Zurich, and by Vadianus.

¹⁴⁵ 'Wolhin, min Joannes, so empfach ain mal, das du von mir oftmals begert hast, namlich diß min chronische verzeichnungen; aber villicht anderst, dann du vermainst. Dir ist ja wol wißend under anderen unseren manigfaltigen underredungen und gesprechen (so wir von jugend an ... mit ananderen gehalten) fürnemlich aber ietzund, so wir fälend in betrachtung diser unser wunderbarlichen zit, vermeintend wir gar ain ufhebliche hinleßigkait sin, also unachtsam die großen wunderwerk Gottes verschinen laßen und nit uns und den unseren doch ain kurze gedechtnus der selbigen stellen. Hierumb ich och durch dinen samethaften ratschlag ... fürgenommen hab, fürnemste in- und ußländige historien zuo minen gelegnen stunden, so ver ich deren mit warhait bericht wurd, zu verzeichnen'. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 15 (=11a).

gress: Vadianus quotes Hermann Miles several times, and in some parts Kessler's *Sabbata* shows such a striking resemblance to Miles' chronicle that one must have drawn on the other.¹⁴⁶ Rütiner had access to the *Sabbata* as early as 1534, and he owned copies of extracts of the *Sabbata*, Vadianus' *Diarium*, and even of Johannes Stumpf's chronicle before the latter was published.¹⁴⁷ Even though most of the St. Gallen chronicles only appeared in print in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we may thus assume that long before then, extracts circulated in manuscript form among St. Gallen's educated elite.

There is one glaring gap in all of the St. Gallen chronicles, however: nobody, not even Kessler, ever mentions Rütiner's *Commentationes*. Since Rütiner's notebooks contain a lot of compromising information about prominent people in St. Gallen, including his closest friends, it was certainly not in his interest to share his notes with them. If Kessler had no 'intention or desire to write publically for the community, nor to make it known beyond mine and yours',¹⁴⁸ – a claim which is clearly at odds with the representative character of the *Sabbata* – Rütiner's ambitions were even more modest, and it is likely that he did not envision any readership at all.¹⁴⁹

There is strong evidence that Rütiner was quite successful at keeping his notebooks to himself, and that it was indeed in his best interest to do so. As mentioned briefly above, shortly before Rütiner's death at some point between September 1556 and 1557,¹⁵⁰ the Small Council grew suspicious of the town's chroniclers. On 20 July 1556, it confiscated Beda Miles' chronicle and ordered him to report anyone engaging in similar activities. It seems that Miles complied: over the next few days, five men were called before the Council in similar matters. Both Johannes Kessler and Magnus Murer had their chronicles scrutinized by the Council, while the three other men denied having written chronicles and were released under the condition that they keep quiet.¹⁵¹ A few months later, on 25 January 1557, the court scribe Wolfgang Fechter was also summoned and told to hand over all books and chronicles which used to belong to the late mayor Vadianus. Fechter had previously copied Vadianus' chronicle; now he was told not to write anything 'of that kind which con-

¹⁴⁶ See afterword to Miles, *Chronik*, pp. 366 and 70–1. On the close collaboration between Kessler and Vadianus in particular, see also Bernhard Stettler's introduction to Joachim von Watt, *Kleinere Chronik der Äbte*, ed. Bernhard Stettler (St. Gallen Kuter und Geschichte 37, Zürich, 2013), esp pp. 31–8.

¹⁴⁷ Rütiner seems to have drawn on the *Sabbata* on several occasions, and cites it in Comm. I.366 and II.400g. For Rütiner's copies of extracts from Kessler's, Vadianus', and Stumpf's works, see VadSlg, Ms 77: Chroniken zur St. Galler Geschichte. Rütiner dates some of his copies of Stumpf's chronicle to 1547, a year before the chronicle was published in Zurich. Since Stumpf drew on Vadianus' work, it is quite likely that Rütiner's friendship with the St. Gallen mayor allowed him to consult the chronicle prior to its publication.

¹⁴⁸ 'nit des fürnemens nach willens, öffentlich in die gemain ze schriben oder ferns dann den minen und dinen kundt zr machen'. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 15 (=11a).

¹⁴⁹ On the representative character of the *Sabbata*, see also Wissmann, *St. Galler Reformationschronik*, pp. 20–1, and Rudolf Gamper, 'Repräsentative Chronikreinschriften in der Reformationszeit', in Katharina Koller-Weiss and Christian Sieber, *Aegidius Tschudi und seine Zeit* (Basel, 2002), 269–86, here esp. pp. 276–8.

¹⁵⁰ Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', p. 35.

¹⁵¹ StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 30. Dezember 1555 – 22. Dezember 1556, fol. 111v–114v, 20–23 July 1556.

cerns the common city' without the council's knowledge.¹⁵² Although only Beda Miles' chronicle was found problematic in the end, in the course of a few months all chronicles originating from the circle around Vadianus were thus inspected by the council, either in their original form or in a copy – all but the *Commentationes*. It is likely that Rütiner, whose notebooks were probably the most controversial of them all, was spared because nobody knew about their existence.

Yet the fact that he kept his notes to himself was not the only glaring difference between Rütiner's work and that of the other St. Gallen chroniclers. As Kaspar von Greyerz has stressed, in terms of genre, Rütiner's *Commentationes* are unique.¹⁵³ In order to understand Rütiner's intentions and the peculiar way in which he responded to the call for a record of his 'wondrous times', we need to take a closer look at the composition and content of his notebooks.

Composition and character of the Commentationes

Today the *Commentationes* present themselves as two notebooks in sextodecimo format (11x16.5cm), both of which are bound in simply decorated leather and could originally be closed with two metal hooks.¹⁵⁴ Yet their present appearance is misleading: Rütiner originally wrote on loose bundles of paper which were only bound together and paginated retrospectively.¹⁵⁵ Though he only rarely dates his entries, the few instances where he does suffice to see that the chronological order of his notes was partly lost in the process. In particular in the first volume, entries from the same year are only loosely thrown together without following the order in which they were taken, and are often interrupted by notes dating from several years later.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² 'das gemeine statt möchte berüren'. StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 9. Dezember 1556 – 23. September 1557, fol. 15r, 25 Jan 1557.

¹⁵³ Von Greyerz, *Passagen und Stationen*, p. 162.

¹⁵⁴ VadSlg, Ms 78–7: Johannes Rütiner, *Diarium 1529–1539*, vols. 1 and 2. We do not know how and when exactly the *Commentationes* ended up in the *Vadianische Sammlung*. They are first mentioned in a library catalogue of 1740 (Rüsch, 'Kommentarband', p. 45). As we have seen, Rütiner's schoolbook, the two volumes containing copies of library catalogues and chronicles, and the compilation of printed texts containing marginalia in Rütiner's hand all survived in the *Vadiana* alongside the *Commentationes*. It therefore seems likely that Rütiner's descendants, perhaps without properly grasping their controversial content, donated his books and manuscripts to the library sometime after his death. By the early seventeenth century, at least, bequeathing books, manuscripts, and even material objects to the growing library had become a matter of prestige among St. Gallen's citizenry and guilds. On the history of the *Vadiana* and the bequests made to the library by St. Gallen citizens, see Georg Caspar Scherer, *Die Stadtbibliothek St. Gallen (Vadiana). 1. Teil: Geschichte der öffentlichen Bibliothek der Stadt St. Gallen, 1551–1801*, ed. Hans Fehrlin (91. Neujahrsblatt des Historischen Verens des Kantons St. Gallen, St. Gallen, 1951), in particular pp. 13–4 and 23.

¹⁵⁵ Vadianus' *Diarium* was composed in a similar manner; see Ernst Götzinger, 'Einleitung', in Joachim von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, ed. Ernst Götzinger, 3 vols. (St. Gallen, 1875–1879), vol. iii, i–xxvi, here p. xi.

¹⁵⁶ The first volume starts with a few entries dated 1528 (I.1 – I.12), continues with notes from 1529 (ca. I.13 – I.177), then suddenly jumps to 1532 (I.178, perhaps also I.176 and I.179) before returning to 1529 (ca. I.180 – I.261). Later in the same volume notes from 1532 (ca. I. 294b – I.304) are followed by notes from

When we take a closer look at the chronology of the *content* of Rütiner's notes, things become even more complicated. Unlike most of St. Gallen's chroniclers, Rütiner did not make any attempt at a chronological arrangement of the events he described; instead, he simply recorded information in the order in which it reached him. Even when several entries on the same or similar subjects follow one another, we should not be fooled into thinking that Rütiner arranged them accordingly. Rather, it seems that such thematic clusters often grew naturally out of conversations between Rütiner and his friends, in the course of which various people shared what they knew about a certain event or subject.¹⁵⁷ This allows us to study Rütiner's stories in the communicative context in which they reached him, but it also means that we often do not know when exactly he wrote them down.

For the most part, Rütiner's style of writing was concise and unpolished. Both the Latin vocabulary and the grammatical structures he had at his disposal were limited, and therefore repetitive. The fact that Rütiner nevertheless chose to write in Latin – even when this scholarly language regularly proved inadequate for capturing the talk of the town¹⁵⁸ – suggests that there must have been other advantages to it. Perhaps using the language of scholarship, much like buying books, was part of Rütiner's self-image as a former university student. In addition, writing in Latin rather than in German may well have guaranteed a higher level of privacy within Rütiner's household.¹⁵⁹

Yet even without this language barrier, the *Commentationes* would not have been easily accessible. Many entries contain only loosely associated clauses and almost cryptic references which require additional knowledge to be deciphered; knowledge which Rütiner apparently presupposed. Punctuation is all but missing completely; in its stead, subordinate clauses and new sentences are indicated by gaps in the text. Larger gaps were often left for details Rütiner did not remember at the time of writing – names, numbers, places, and dates – but probably intended to fill in later.¹⁶⁰

Rütiner's notebooks have been called many things: *Diarium*, chronicle, *collectanea* and *loci communis*.¹⁶¹ Yet such attempts to press the *Commentationes* into familiar contemporary genres

1534 (I.305 – at least I.314) before returning to 1532 (I.315 or I.343 – ca. I.348). For an attempt at reconstructing the original chronological order of Rütiner's notes, albeit one which is imprecise in parts, see Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', p. 60.

¹⁵⁷ See for instance Comm. I.534 (on the topic of lost items which were recovered with the help of black magic); I.536 (Rütiner and his fellow guildsmen discuss various accidents), II.387f – II.390 (on Zwingli and Zurich).

¹⁵⁸ Rütiner regularly had to fall back on his German dialect because he failed to find a suitable Latin equivalent. See for instance Comm. I.340, in which Rütiner names various items of clothing for which he lacks a Latin equivalent.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. in contrast Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', p. 38.

¹⁶⁰ For example Comm. I.351.

¹⁶¹ The misnomer *Diarium* is based on a title given to the notebooks in the eighteenth century, but was unfortunately adopted by most historians; see for instance Meier, *Paracelsus*, p. 46. Wilhelm Ehrenzeller even suggested that Rütiner might have named his notes after Vadianus' *Diarium*: Ehrenzeller, *St. Gallische Geschichte*, iii, p. 39. Though Ernst Gerhard Rüschi was strongly opposed to the characterisation of Rütiner's

tend to conceal the peculiarities of this source. The title Rütiner gave his notes might be more suggestive. Written across the fore edges of both volumes, it is unfortunately no longer decipherable with any certainty. *Commentationes* (studies, treatise) seems to be the most common transcription, which is the reason I have decided to use it throughout this thesis. The earliest author to mention Rütiner's notebooks, however, read it as *commentarii* (notes, recordings).¹⁶² If this was indeed the original title, it may well have been inspired by Pliny the Elder's *commentarii* described in the widely-read letters of Pliny the Younger.¹⁶³ These *commentarii* were 'second-order notes ... sorted under topical headings and copied unto papyrus for long-term preservation from an earlier stage of temporary notes'.¹⁶⁴ Even if Rütiner had not read about Pliny's *commentarii*, he was likely familiar with contemporary note-taking practices modelled upon them. As Ann Blair has convincingly argued, the greater availability of paper and information, combined with an acute awareness for how much knowledge had been lost since antiquity, formed the fertile soil on which early modern note-taking practices grew. Students of Latin such as Rütiner were not only instructed to annotate the texts they read in class, but also encouraged to take notes while reading independently and, in a second step, to copy and rearrange their notes thematically.¹⁶⁵ Although Rütiner primarily recorded what he heard, not what he read, and though he never seems to have attempted to rearrange his notes according to subject matter, his note-taking practice may nevertheless have been influenced by the model note-takers presented to him in his readings and the instructions he had been given as a student.¹⁶⁶

The character of Rütiner's notes changed noticeably in the second half of the decade. From around 1534 onwards, Rütiner systematically recorded the names of his informants, and over the following five years these "references" became ever more detailed. Both the length and the total

notebooks as a *Diarium* (or as a chronicle, for that matter), he used the term in his edition to avoid confusion. See Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', p. 37 and 39. On the characterisation of the *Commentationes* as a chronicle, see for instance Ehrenzeller, *St. Gallische Geschichte*, iii, pp. 34–50. Both *collectanea* and *loci communis* are used in Brunold-Bigler, 'Historien von Krieg', pp. 175 and 180. On the genre of Renaissance commonplace books, see Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford, 1996).

¹⁶² Gottlieb von Haller, *Bibliothek der Schweizer-Geschichte und aller Theile, so dahin Bezug haben*, 6 vols., (Bern, 1785–1788), here iii, p. 170. See also Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', pp. 45–8.

¹⁶³ Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Briefe: Epistularum Libri Decem*, ed. and transl. Helmut Kasten (Düsseldorf, Zürich, 1967), p. 140 (= Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, III.5). A sixteenth-century manuscript copy of Pliny's epistles can be found in the *Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen* (Cod. Sang. 896), and two early sixteenth-century editions of Pliny the Younger's letters survive in the *Vadianische Sammlung* (VadSlg, Inc 764 and VadSlg Inc 758).

¹⁶⁴ Ann Blair, 'The Rise of Note-Taking in Early Modern Europe', *Intellectual History Review*, 20/3 (2010), 303–16, here p. 307.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 309–13.

¹⁶⁶ In terms of form and genre, the *Commentationes* are thus much more closely related to Vadianus' *Epitome*, a collection of notes on which the humanist relied for his *Grössere Chronik der Äbte*, than to Kessler's *Sabbata*: much like Rütiner's notes, the *Epitome* were not ordered chronologically, but instead structured by the logic of the historical sources Vadianus consulted. The *Epitome* was published alongside the *Diarium* in von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, pp. 165–226. See also Ernst Götzinger, 'Einleitung', here pp. v–x.

number of entries per year increased in the second half of the decade, reaching its peak in 1537. While the first volume of the *Commentationes* contains all of Rütiner's notes from 1528 to 1536, as well as some dating from 1537, the second volume is entirely dedicated to 1537, 1538, and the first two months of 1539. In contrast to Kessler, whose account focuses primarily on the early stages of the Reformation and who only allows us a cursory glance at the events of the late 1530s, Rütiner seems to have taken particular interest in these years.¹⁶⁷ They were also the years in which Rütiner's notes appear the most systematic. At the beginning of the notebooks he rarely even noted the current year on the margins; in 1536 he often wrote down the current month as well as the year,¹⁶⁸ but from the beginning of the second volume in March of 1537 he suddenly records full dates at fairly regular intervals. It is likely that these dates only roughly correspond to the day a story was recorded: their position at the top of the page and the colour of the ink suggest that the dates were not always recorded at the same time as the entries underneath. They nevertheless indicate that Rütiner wrote (or planned to write) at least two to three times per month, mostly on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, except for two later additions, and in stark contrast to the first volume, the chronology of Rütiner's entries in the second volume seems intact.¹⁷⁰ All of this suggests Rütiner had become much more systematic about his writing, and that he was dedicating more and more time to his notebooks.

Was this just a natural, primarily formal development, or had Rütiner's intentions changed along with his notes? Had what started as a private memory aid turned into a much more ambitious project modelled on Kessler's *Sabbata*? The content of Rütiner's notes suggests otherwise. In contrast to Kessler, it was certainly never Rütiner's intention to give an account of the Reformation movement in St. Gallen. He simply seems to have written down anything that he considered memorable, and that applied to the mundane details of his fellow citizens' lives just as much as to 'God's miraculous deeds'. Exploring why that type of information held such great value in sixteenth-century St. Gallen shall be a substantial part of this thesis. For the moment, it shall therefore suffice to say that not only censorship, but also substantial rewriting and reordering would have been required before Rütiner could have passed his notes on to a wider audience – if that was ever his intention.

In fact there is much reason to believe that in their present form, the *Commentationes* did not even work properly as a memory aid for the author himself. Rütiner regularly recorded contradictory accounts of the same event, and he never returned to correct earlier entries when new infor-

¹⁶⁷ With the exception of 1537, in which Kessler extensively discusses the Wittenberger Concord of the year before, he dedicates fewer and fewer pages to each year of the late 1530s.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance Comm. I.698; I.922; I.961; I.952; I.966.

¹⁶⁹ See for instance Comm. II.1; II.23; II.137k; II.143b; II.162d; II.188; II.212; II.241b; II.244c; II.265d; II.266a, II.314.

¹⁷⁰ For the later additions, see II.89c-e and II.301.

mation proved them wrong.¹⁷¹ Kessler's *Sabbata* granted its readers easy access to information about specific events through its chronological arrangement, an index, and marginalia indicating the topic of each paragraph. Vadianus' own collection of notes, which he called *Epitome*, and his *Diarium* contained numerous cross-references; manicules and marks in Latin directed the readers' attention.¹⁷² Rütiner's *Commentationes*, in contrast, offered none of the above, and the sheer number of entries made it very difficult to retrieve information from the notebooks. The formal changes in the second notebook may therefore represent an (only partially successful) attempt at making the *Commentationes* more accessible and, as a consequence, more useful for Rütiner himself.

In the spring of 1539, the *Commentationes* end abruptly: 'All *Elfers*' reads the last heading, but Rütiner never recorded what they had told him.¹⁷³ Ernst Gerhard Rüschi speculated that by 1539, Rütiner had either become too busy to continue his notes, or that he was starting to worry about their potentially explosive nature and the harm they could do to his political career.¹⁷⁴ Yet both hypotheses fall short of explaining why Rütiner, who had worked on the *Commentationes* with increasing intensity for an entire decade and who had never shied away from recording controversial information, would discontinue his notes from one day to the next. It seems significant that Kessler, too, finished the *Sabbata* in 1539. Perhaps, then, by 1539 they both felt that the 'wondrous times' had passed and that there were now more important tasks at hand. By 1540, at least, Rütiner, Kessler, and Vadianus shared a new responsibility; this time as judges on the marriage court.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ See for instance Comm. I.356, II.235 and II.360 (on the battle of Kappel, with differing numbers of casualties); I.834, II.151, and II.361q (on a man from the Thurgau who was buried in a waistcoat containing most of his fortune, with differing accounts of how the money was eventually recovered by his sons); II.274b, II.305, and II.359c (on a man from Roggwil charged with blasphemy, with contradictory information about the exact date of the arrest and the severity of the sentence).

¹⁷² See Ernst Götzinger, 'Einleitung', here pp. v–vi, x–xii.

¹⁷³ 'Omnes vnderarij'. Comm. II.427.

¹⁷⁴ Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', pp. 42–3.

¹⁷⁵ StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch, pp. 109–10.

2 A hominibus veridicis audivit...: Rütiner's network of informants

One of the most peculiar features of the *Commentationes* are the “references” Rütiner recorded for a majority of the entries included in his notebooks. It was not unusual for early modern chroniclers and diarists to indicate from time to time which sources and informants they drew upon,¹⁷⁶ yet Rütiner’s “references”, which seem to have grown out of his increasingly systematic approach to note-taking, stand out in number, detail, and form. Some of his earliest entries are also followed by a name, but these are later additions written in a different ink. It was only from around 1534 onwards that Rütiner started to systematically record his sources by writing the name of an informant underneath the relevant entry (Fig. 3).

These “references” soon became more and more detailed. First Rütiner started writing down not only one, but several informants, occasionally specifying exactly which part of the story was told by whom. Sometimes he recorded long information chains and traced stories back to as close to their alleged origin as he possibly could. Then he started adding details about the context in which he or his informants had heard a story. Such details could include the place and time of an exchange, a list of the people present, and information on whether a story was shared in writing or orally. Finally, and in particular when gathering information from people he did not know well, he carefully wrote down any character traits that made them seem reliable: ‘Leonhard, otherwise a taciturn man, related this at the table in Wil, on the fifth of February, [when] he dined and breakfasted with us.’¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ In addition to including many pamphlets and broadsheets in his chronicle, the Augsburg chronicler Georg Kölderer (ca. 1550–1607) named some oral informants giving their full names, and many more recording only their initials; Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, pp. 23–4; 41–2, and Silvia Serena Tschopp, ‘Wie aus Nachrichten Geschichte wird. Die Bedeutung publizistischer Quellen für die Augsburger Chronik des Georg Kölderer’, *Daphnis*, 37 (2008), 33–78, here esp. pp. 54–62. The Cologne city councilor and diarist Hermann von Weinsberg (1518–1597) named numerous sources, including oral informants, rumours, prints, and chronicles; Matthew Lundin, *Paper Memory: A Sixteenth-Century Townsman Writes His World* (London, 2012), pp. 239 – 45. According to Gerhard Diehl, the chronicler Johannes Oldecop from Hildesheim (1493–1574) was particularly specific about the printed sources he used, but he also quoted oral sources and rumours: Gerhard Diehl, *Exempla für eine sich wandelnde Welt. Studien zur norddeutschen Geschichtsschreibung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, 2000), pp. 188–96. The Lucerne apothecary and city scribe Renward Cysat left behind an enormous collection of information on the basis of which he intended to write a chronicle. Like Rütiner, Cysat quoted oral informants, reflected on their credibility, and noted the circumstances in which he received information; Heidi Greco-Kaufmann, ‘“Observiert vnd duchgegründet”: Renward Cysat (1545-1614) als Sammler und Vermittler von Wissen’, in Andreas Gardt, Mireille Schnyder, and Jürgen Wolf (eds.), *Buchkultur und Wissensvermittlung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin, Boston, 2011), 119–30, here p. 124. As Thomas Cohen has shown, the same was true of testimonies delivered in Roman courts, which often inserted evidence into a communicative context: Cohen, ‘Tracking Conversation’, pp. 143–7.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Idem / Leonardus homo alias taciturnus retulit / z Wyl in mensa 5 februarij nobiscum coe/natus et pransus’. Comm. II.370.

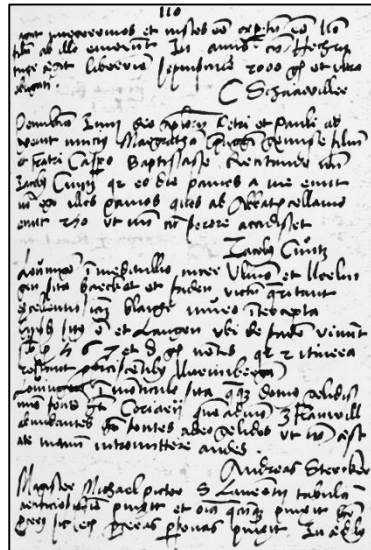


Fig. 3: A page from Rütiner's second notebook, showing entries with informants underneath.

The care Rütiner took in recording this data, which occasionally borders on the obsessive, shows that to him this was important information inseparably linked to the stories he recorded. Chapter five will discuss the purpose of these references in the context of early modern news mongering. In this chapter, I shall use them to explore Rütiner's information network and his social circles. After a brief discussion of the methodology of network analysis, the present chapter offers a reconstruction of Rütiner's information network, mapping its geographical scope and discussing the social contexts in which information was shared in sixteenth-century St. Gallen. It will then address how networks of information overlapped and interacted with social and economic networks. I shall argue that Rütiner's place between two powerful, well-connected and well-travelled, but fairly separate social groups within St. Gallen put him in a prime position for collecting information and may moreover explain some of the peculiar features of his notebooks.

Network analysis: method and problems

Over the last two decades, historical network analysis has become increasingly popular. From marriage patterns to correspondence networks, many different types of relationships have been studied using network theory.¹⁷⁸ In one particularly ambitious project, *Six Degrees of Francis Ba-*

¹⁷⁸ One of the earliest and most influential articles used network analysis to reconstruct the marriage and business network of the Medici family and showed that their rise was linked to their key position within the society of late medieval Florence: John F. Padgett and Christopher K. Ansell, 'Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400–1434', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98/6 (1993), 1259–1319. There is a long list of publications related to correspondence networks as well as a few noteworthy works in progress. Ruth and

con, historians and computer scientists are even attempting to reconstruct *the* social network of early modern England using information from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and an interactive website.¹⁷⁹ The growing interest in networks is certainly linked to the availability of digital tools for large-scale data analysis and visualisation, which make such research possible in the first place. Yet the appeal of network analysis also lies in its promise to bridge the gap between micro- and macrohistory. Placing individuals within the larger context of their relationships seems to make the overarching social structure visible.¹⁸⁰

In reality, of course, networks are much more complex, and their reconstruction fraught with problems. The three main issues lie in (1) the types of sources available for the early modern period, (2) historians limiting their research to one or very few types of relationships at a time, and (3) the complexity of human relationships which makes them notoriously difficult to quantify.

Let us look at these problems in more detail. First, the datasets available for the early modern period are often incomplete or inconclusive. This is problematic because in networks every new link holds the potential to change the whole structure, for instance when it establishes a connection between two previously detached groups.¹⁸¹ Moreover, tracing a person using their name is not as easy as Ginzburg and Poni suggested in their influential article ‘The Name and the Game’.¹⁸² People may be called by a nickname, women marry and remarry, and since children were often named after their parents and grandparents, in early modern sources we usually encounter several contemporaries bearing the same name.

Secondly, historians usually limit their research to one type of relationship.¹⁸³ In some cases this works quite well. Networks of academic exchange, for instance, covered wide distances and do not necessarily overlap with other types of relationships. Yet in the case of early modern economic networks, for instance, the situation is quite different. In particular in the context of small towns, such networks abound with multiplex ties.¹⁸⁴ Business partners may also be relatives, neighbours,

Sebastian Ahnert are currently working on a quantitative analysis of Protestant letter networks, while Christoph Kudella is studying Erasmus’ correspondence network. So far, however, focus has usually been laid on the Republic of Letters, for example: Laurence Brockliss, *Calvet's Web. Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth Century France* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁷⁹ <<http://sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com/>>, accessed 09 Jan 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Claire Lemerrier, ‘Formale Methoden der Netzwerkanalyse in den Geschichtswissenschaften: Warum und Wie?’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 23/1 (2012), 16–41, here pp. 19 and 34. A similar argument, albeit with a different focus, is also made by Ginzburg and Poni, ‘The Name and the Game’, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸¹ B.H. Erickson, ‘Social Networks and History. A Review Essay’, *Historical Methods*, 30/3 (1997), 149–57, here p. 151.

¹⁸² Ginzburg and Poni, ‘The Name’, pp. 6–7.

¹⁸³ Lemerrier, ‘Formale Methoden der Netzwerkanalyse’, p. 24.

¹⁸⁴ For an example and a more detailed discussion of multiplexity, see Veronika Hyden-Hanscho, ‘Ego-Netzwerke zwischen Paris und Wien. Kulturvermittlung im 17. Jahrhundert am Fall Bergeret’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 23/1 (2012), 72–94, here pp. 84–7.

or fellow guildsmen. If we ignore such parallel relationships, the network structure we observe may well be an expression of these hidden links rather than the type of relationship we claim to study.

Finally, identifying a link between two people is just the first step of reconstructing a network. At this point the network is not much more than a skeleton – a sum of lifeless joints and bones which can only hint at the whole body’s shape. In order to bring the network to life, we need to account for the complexity of human relationships and determine their nature, intensity, and significance. This can be done by considering a wide range of additional factors, not all of which are quantifiable. In the case of an information network, for instance, these factors include direction (who tells the story, and who listens?), frequency (how often does A tell B a story?), the ‘lifespan’ and ‘biography’ of those ties (in what years does A share stories with B, and does the frequency change over time?), content (what does A tell B about?), and trust (does B believe in what A tells her?). Relationships studied in all their complexity pull some people closer together while distancing them from others, adding flesh and life to the network body’s basic structure. To study a network in any significant way, we thus need quantifiable as well as descriptive sources.

Rütiner’s notebooks provide an ideal test case. In order to avoid the problems discussed above, I have constructed an extensive relational database using Microsoft Access. It holds a record for all 2474 people mentioned in the *Commentationes*, as well as a range of biographical information and relational data. Biographical details include names (first name, surname, maiden name, and nicknames), date of birth and death, citizenship, profession, religion, public offices, and level of wealth.¹⁸⁵ The relational data links people to one another in a range of categories: kin (parents, siblings, spouses, children), neighbourhood, economic ties, and ‘friendships’.¹⁸⁶ All of this data makes it easier to distinguish between individuals of the same name and to trace people even when their last name changes.

In addition, all people in the database are linked to the notebook entries in which they appear in two separate categories: as subjects of the story told, and/or as informants. This allows us to see not only who provided Rütiner with information, but also how often individuals acted as informants and what they shared with him.

¹⁸⁵ For the most part this data is taken from Rütiner’s notebooks themselves. Where important information was missing, I have drawn on alternative sources such as Kessler’s *Sabbata*, the *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, and the book of public offices of St. Gallen (StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen). Any economic data is taken from the tax records of St. Gallen (StadtASG, 227–286: Steuerbücher 1529–1538).

¹⁸⁶ Kinship ties were reconstructed with the help of the *Commentationes* and the genealogical reference work of St. Gallen, the *Stemmatalogia Sangallensis*: StadtASG, Scherrer and Huber, *Stemmatalogia Sangallensis*. Since taxes were recorded street by street, the tax records may give us an indication of who lived in the same neighbourhood; StadtASG, 227–286: Steuerbücher 1529–1538. ‘Friendship’ is here used in the broadest sense of the term and is only included when Rütiner uses terms such as ‘familiaris’, ‘amicus’, or ‘socius’ to describe a relationship between two unrelated people or otherwise emphasises the close social ties between them.

At the most basic level, any network consists of nodes and links connecting them.¹⁸⁷ In the case of Rütiner's information network, the nodes consist of all people who shared information with him on one or more occasions between 1529 and 1539. For want of a more accurate expression, I refer to them as 'informants', yet it is important to note that this is not meant to suggest any formal role or professional occupation. The links connecting these informants to Rütiner consist of one or several exchanges of information, i.e. their being cited as a source for a particular story.¹⁸⁸

Overall, 71.5 percent or 1304 entries in the *Commentationes* are linked to one or several informants (Table 1). Rütiner records 349 direct informants, of which the vast majority, 88 percent, are men (Table 2).¹⁸⁹ This reflects the broader gender imbalance in the notebooks: the percentage of women mentioned lies only slightly above that of female informants, at 17.9 percent (Table 3).¹⁹⁰

The data Rütiner provides us with concerning the professions of his informants is sparser and less conclusive. It covers only about a third of all informants and suggests that Rütiner's information network consisted of people from a variety of backgrounds. Weavers, bleachers, millers, barbers, pastors, printers, peasants, publicans, peddlers and wealthy merchants, a midwife, a washerwoman, and even the city's executioner – they all shared stories with Rütiner which he considered worth writing down. Although professions linked to the linen trade are slightly more numerous than others, given the scarcity and disparity of the data it is difficult to draw any conclusions other than that Rütiner's information network consisted of people from all levels of society.

The *Commentationes* and archival records from St. Gallen allow us to locate over half of Rütiner's informants in St. Gallen, and another 14.3 percent in a variety of places within the Swiss Confederacy and Southern Germany (Table 4 and Fig. 4). These included larger towns such as Basel, Zurich, and Constance, but the majority of informants in this second group lived in the villages surrounding St. Gallen; in Wittenbach, Straubenzell, Teufen, Rorschach, Wil, Lichtensteig, Bischofszell, and many others. In about a quarter of all cases we do not know where an informant

¹⁸⁷ Erickson, 'Social Networks', p. 149.

¹⁸⁸ In what follows, each entry in the *Commentationes* which cites a particular informant is counted as one exchange of information. Of course this is a somewhat imperfect unit of measurement: in reality, one entry in the *Commentationes* may be based on several exchanges, and a single exchange may be quoted on several different occasions. Yet as we shall see, the number of entries in which an informant is cited may nevertheless tell us something about the regularity with which they interacted with Rütiner, and even more so if we take into account additional factors such as the context of these interactions and their even or uneven distribution over the ten-year period in which Rütiner wrote his notebooks.

¹⁸⁹ Occasionally Rütiner also mentions indirect informants, that is sources named by his direct informants. These indirect informants will be discussed further below.

¹⁹⁰ This only includes women for whom Rütiner gives us a name (first name, last name, or nickname). Unnamed women and men were not included in the database.

was from. Yet even lacking this information it seems quite clear that Rütiner's network was distinctly local and concentrated around his home town.

Table 1: Entries with or without informants

	Number of entries	Percentage
Total number of entries	1824	100
Entries with informants	1304	71.5
Entries without informants	538	29.5

Table 2: Male and female informants

	Number of informants	Percentage
Informants	349	100
Male informants	307	88
Female informants	42	12

Table 3: Men and women named in *Commentationes*

	Number of people	Percentage
People mentioned by name	2747	100
Male	2256	82.1
Female	491	17.9

Table 4: Informants by location

	Number of informants	Percentage
Total number of informants	349	100
St. Gallen	208	59.6
Other	50	14.3
Unknown	86	24.6

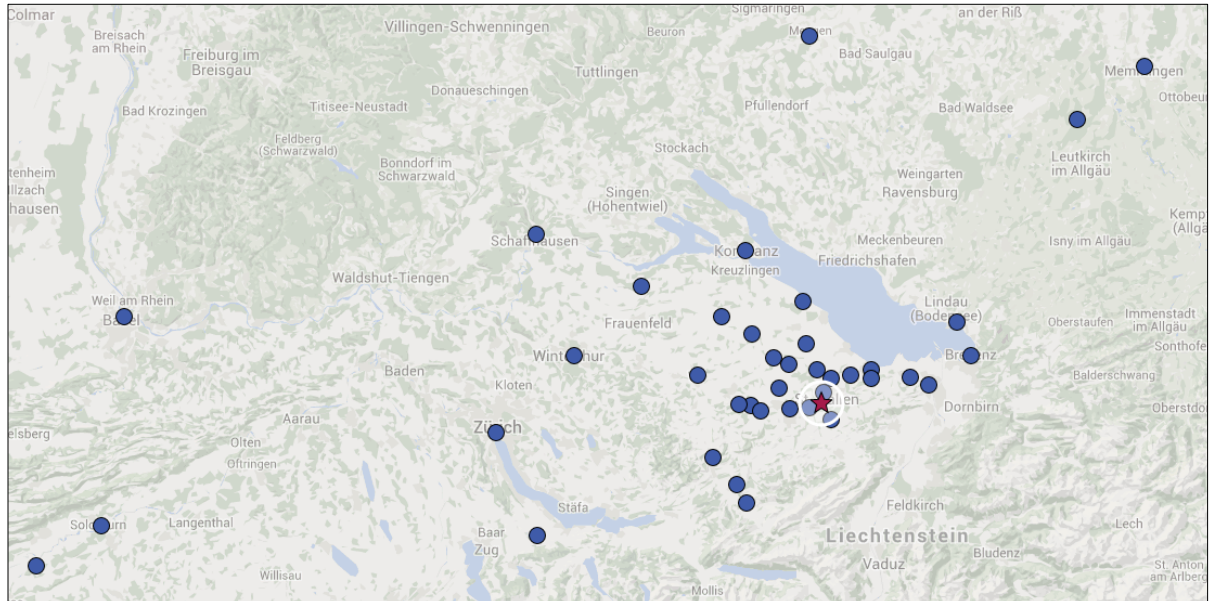


Fig. 4: Map of locations of Rütiner's informants (blue) and St. Gallen (red).

If we take a closer look at the type of information exchanges which lay at the heart of Rütiner's network, we see that they confirm this picture. For the most part, the network was based on face-to-face, oral exchanges of information. Although Rütiner only explicitly says so in about 20 percent of all entries (Table 5), the actual number must have been significantly higher and probably includes most entries which are followed by nothing but the name of an informant. Nothing suggests that Rütiner corresponded with his informants, and given that most of them lived within St. Gallen or close-by, there was neither need nor incentive to do so.¹⁹¹

Table 5: Oral and written sources

	Number of entries	Percentage
Total number of entries	1824	100
Entries with oral source(s)	371	20.3
Entries with written source(s)	7	0.4
Entries with oral and written source(s)	59	3.2
Entries in which type of source is not specified	1387	76.1

¹⁹¹ Simon Teuscher found that letters were almost never sent to people within the same city: Simon Teuscher, 'Bernische Privatbriefe aus der Zeit um 1500. Überlegungen zu ihren zeitgenössischen Funktionen und zu Möglichkeiten ihrer historischen Auswertung', in Eckart Conrad Lutz (ed.), *Mittelalterliche Literatur im Lebenszusammenhang*, (Scriinium Friburgense 8, Freiburg, 1997), 359–85, here pp. 369 and 383. Something resembling a public postal system only started to develop in St. Gallen in the second half of the sixteenth century; see chapter five.

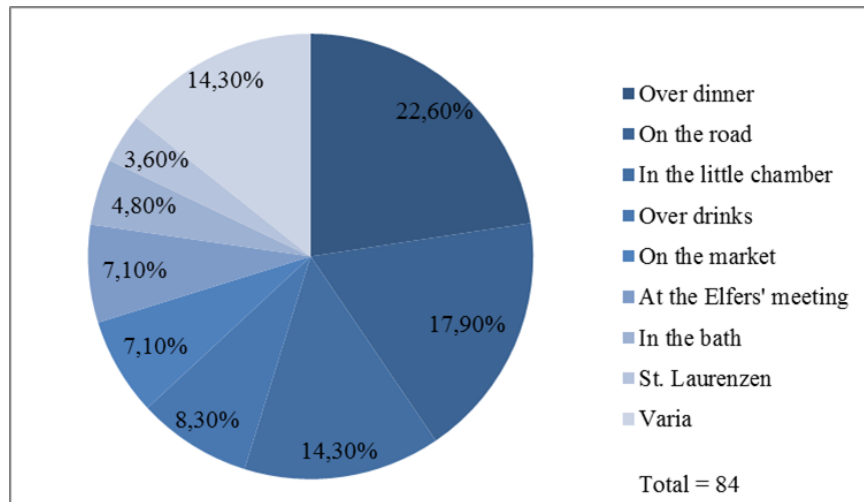


Fig. 5: Places of information exchange.

Rather, Rütiner's day-to-day activities and his business provided him with plenty of opportunity to meet and talk to a variety of people. Figure 5 indicates where and in what context Rütiner usually received information. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people often related stories in sociable contexts such as during dinner and while drinking, and news was also spread on the market square and in church. The weavers' guild represented another information hub, as Rütiner gathered information during meetings with his fellow *Elfer* and in the 'little chamber' (*hipocaustulum*), most likely a meeting chamber in the weavers' guildhall.¹⁹²

What is remarkable, however, is the large proportion of stories which Rütiner heard on the road, while travelling to or from Wil, Rorschach, or Lichtensteig. All three towns were local centres for the production of yarn and linen, which were then transported to St. Gallen to be bleached and sold on the textile market.¹⁹³ Situated between twenty and thirty kilometres from St. Gallen, the journey there offered small-scale linen merchants like Rütiner plenty of opportunities for long conversations with fellow travellers, as well as for chance encounters. In fact, we owe some of the

¹⁹² This is where Ernst Gerhard Rüsch located the *hipocaustulum*; for instance Comm. I.930; I.932h. While Rütiner does not explicitly say where the 'little chamber' was located, the context of his entries suggests that it was a place where he principally interacted with his fellow weavers, and especially with the *Elfers*. See for instance Comm. II.26; II.39; II.259; II.361a or II.416b.

¹⁹³ Peyer, *Leinwandgewerbe und Fernhandel*, ii, pp. 5 and 11.

most interesting stories in the *Commentationes* to surprisingly personal exchanges between Rütiner and strangers as they met on the road to one of these towns and decided to travel together.¹⁹⁴

As we have seen, Rütiner's network was largely based on oral exchanges, and these often coincided with other types of interactions such as social gatherings, business transactions, guild meetings, or travel. Written and printed information, on the other hand, played a much more minor role than one might expect. Only sixty-six times, which amounts to less than four percent of all entries, does Rütiner name manuscript or print sources at all (Tables 5 and 6). The list includes the works of humanists and reformers such as Erasmus and Luther, chronicles like Petermann Etterlin's *Kronica von der loblichen Eydgnoschaft* and Kessler's *Sabbata*, and a variety of other authors including Sebastian Franck, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, and Hans Sachs.¹⁹⁵

Almost half of the written sources were letters, yet not a single one of them was addressed to Rütiner. Some were sent to his fellow guildsmen by family members or factors trading in cities such as Nuremberg and Krakow, and their content was then shared with Rütiner and other members of the guild.¹⁹⁶ If letters addressed to individuals were relevant to the council, they were read out in front of the whole assembly.¹⁹⁷ Letters to Vadianus were shared with his inner circle over dinner, and Kessler summarised them for Rütiner when he was not present.¹⁹⁸ When a copy of one of Luther's letters reached St. Gallen, it was circulated and discussed by the town's literate citizens.¹⁹⁹ All of these practices confirm the argument that letters were not considered private, but formed an integral part of oral communication practices.²⁰⁰

Table 6: Direct and indirect written sources

	Total number of entries	Percentage
Entries with written sources	66	100
Entries with direct written sources	10	15.2
Entries with indirect written sources	41	62.1
Unclear	15	22.7

¹⁹⁴ Among them we find the story of the anabaptist Felix Hottinger discussed in chapter one; Comm. II.1.

¹⁹⁵ See for instance Comm. I.50, I.538 (Luther); I.571 (Agrippa); I.613 (Kessler); I.856 (Erasmus), I.889 (Hans Sachs); II.244c (Franck); II.374 (Etterlin).

¹⁹⁶ See for instance Comm. I.663, I.956, II.142, II.261, II.266c.

¹⁹⁷ See for instance Comm. II.375.

¹⁹⁸ See for instance Comm. II.165, II.359c. Kessler also included copies of letters by Vadianus, Luther, and others in his chronicle: Kessler, *Sabbata*, for instance, pp. 452–3 (=470a–b), or 458–465 (=475a–482b).

¹⁹⁹ See for instance Comm. II.90. See also Comm. I.671.

²⁰⁰ Teuscher, 'Bernische Privatbriefe', pp. 375–6 and 378, and Esther-Beate Körber, 'Der soziale Ort des Briefs im 16. Jahrhundert', in Horst Wenzel (ed.), *Gespräche – Boten – Briefe: Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Philologische Studien und Quellen 143, Berlin, 1997), 244–58, here pp. 251–7. See also Horodowich, 'Introduction', p. 302.

The fact that written and printed sources played such a minor role compared to oral informants is remarkable, and even more so seeing that over half of the written sources mentioned in the *Commentationes* also reached Rütiner in oral form as they were read out, summarised, and discussed in St. Gallen (Table 6). This is how one might expect illiterate individuals to consume letters and prints, not a former university student who wrote a 600 folio notebook in Latin.²⁰¹ Just as striking is the almost complete lack of so-called “popular print”. While Rütiner owned several Protestant pamphlets and mentions another three authored by Luther in his *Commentationes*, there are only two occasions on which he explicitly refers to prints as a source of *news*.²⁰² In 1537, he received information on a disastrous thunderstorm in Heidelberg from a variety of oral informants, including Hulrich Ramsower who ‘read it from printed letters’.²⁰³ The phrasing and the close parallels between Rütiner’s account and a *Neue Zeitung* printed in Wittenberg suggest that Ramsower may have read the print aloud.²⁰⁴ One year later, Rütiner mentions a printed tract on a volcanic eruption near Naples, but it remains unclear whether he personally consulted the source or simply recorded a conversation about it.²⁰⁵

To some extent, the minor role written and printed material played in Rütiner’s network can be explained with the lack of a local printing press and of a regular, affordable public postal service in St. Gallen in the 1530s, which is discussed in more detail in chapter five. Yet it may also be linked to the purpose of the notebooks: if the *Commentationes* were intended as a memory aid, it made sense for Rütiner to focus on the most fleeting form of communication, namely speech. The *Commentationes* probably complemented written and printed material rather than replacing it. Nevertheless, the wealth of knowledge Rütiner drew from his distinctly local and overwhelmingly oral network seems to confirm Henk van Nierop’s claim that in the sixteenth century ‘written – let alone printed information – played only a limited role in the daily provision of information’ even among highly literate citizens.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ See for instance Scribner, ‘Flugblatt und Analphabetentum. Wie kam der gemeine Mann zu reformatorischen Ideen?’, in Hans-Joachim Köhler (ed.), *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit. Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium 1980* (Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit 13, Stuttgart, 1981), 65–76, here pp. 66–7. On reading aloud, see also Chartier, *Cultural Uses of Print*, esp. pp. 152–9.

²⁰² For the pamphlets owned by Rütiner, see ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 18.423, and ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, III B 94. In the *Commentationes*, Rütiner only refers to *Von Kauffshandlung und wucher* by title; see Comm. I.378. Comm. I.50 contains a vague reference to Luther’s work (‘aliquo loco’, that is ‘some place’ in Luther’s work), but the content suggests that Rütiner was here referring to *An den Christlichenn Adel deutscher Nation*. Luther’s *Ursach vn antwort das jungkfrauen kloster gotlich verlassen mugen* is referred to as an ‘Epistola paraenetica’ in Comm. I.678; the context of the entry suggests that Rütiner may not have read the pamphlet himself.

²⁰³ ‘Ex litteris impressis legit’. Comm. II.160.

²⁰⁴ See *Ein erschreckliche Neue zeitung/ von einem grausamen Vngewitter/ So sich auff S.Marcus tag zu Heidelberg/ jnn diesem XXXVII jar/ erhaben hat* (Wittenberg: Nickel Schirlentz, 1537, VD16 E 3840).

²⁰⁵ Comm. II.421. See also chapter five.

²⁰⁶ van Nierop, ““And Ye shall Hear””, p. 70.

Indeed, the geographical area discussed in the *Commentationes* far exceeded the geographical range of Rütiner's information network. While the latter was concentrated around St. Gallen, the former covered a large part of Europe, reaching as far as Krakow and Vienna in the East, Naples and Barcelona in the South, Lyon and Paris in the West, and Münster and Leipzig in the North. There are even a few stories about cities in Asia, Africa, and South America.²⁰⁷ How did information from so far away reach Rütiner?

As we have seen, St. Gallen's economy depended almost entirely on the export of linen to larger centres of trade such as Lyon, Nuremberg, Vienna and Venice, and thus many of Rütiner's informants travelled much further and much more frequently than he did. Not only did the large St. Gallen trading companies correspond with their subsidiaries and partners in those cities, but most of the more successful merchants also travelled there in person to deliver linen to factors or to sell it on the local market. Along with wax, metal, spices and fur, they brought back foreign news and rumours when they returned to St. Gallen. It seems that some of them took their role as bearers of news quite seriously. When a rumour spread in Alsace about the arrest of a general, the St. Gallen merchant Conrad Kapfman, who was in Lyon at the time, 'waited for two days to discover the truth' before returning to St. Gallen with the news that the rumour was false.²⁰⁸ Klaus Gerteis has argued that their privileged access to foreign news and information gave long-distance traders a distinct advantage over their competitors.²⁰⁹ As I shall argue in the next few chapters, it also allowed them to present themselves as bearers of information and to accumulate "communicative social capital".

²⁰⁷ See for instance Comm. I.130; I.949c; II.141; II.250.

²⁰⁸ 'expectauit 2 dies vera / scissitaturus', Comm. I.941.

²⁰⁹ In his article on messengers and correspondence in early modern Europe, Gerteis claims that collecting information of all kinds was particularly important for merchants who conducted business over wide distances. Klaus Gerteis, 'Reisen, Boten, Posten, Korrespondenzen in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit', in Hans Pohl (ed.), *Die Bedeutung der Kommunikation für Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Referate der 12. Arbeitstagung der Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte vom 22.-25.4.1987 in Siegen* (Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Beihefte Nr. 87, Stuttgart, 1989), 19–36, here p. 26. Rütiner also regularly suggests that information could translate into economic advantage: see for instance the case of Friedrich Schumacher who tricked his relatives into selling him a certain type of fabric at a very cheap price, knowing from his travels to Lyon that demand for this fabric was increasing; Comm. I.514 and chapter four.

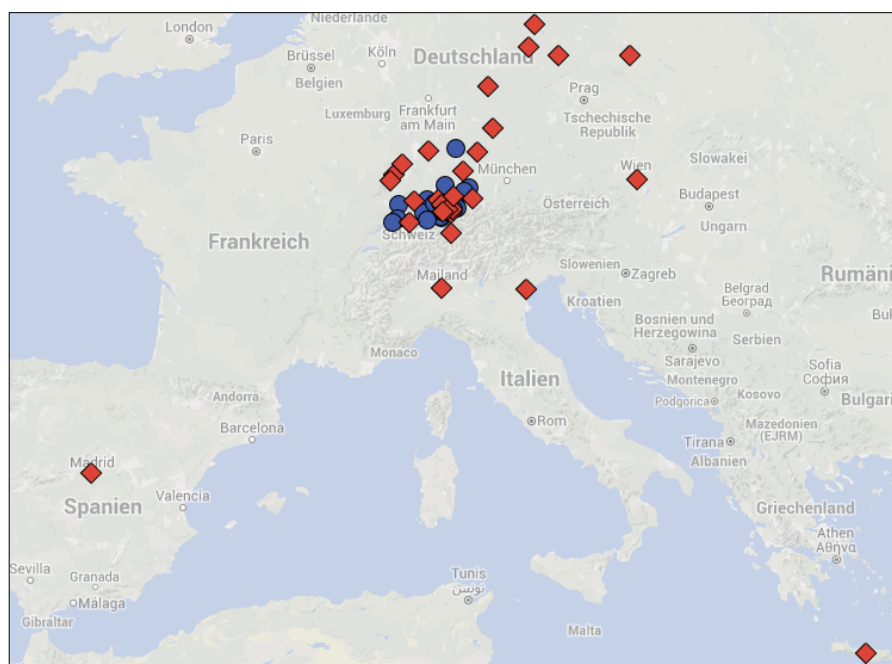


Fig. 6: Map of locations of Rütiner's informants (blue), including former places of residence (red).

Yet merchants were not the only well-travelled citizens of St. Gallen. At least twenty-eight of Rütiner's informants had fought in battles in Northern Italy or France at some point in their lives, and one of them even claimed that he had visited more splendid cities during his time as a mercenary than some merchants had in an entire lifetime of travelling for business.²¹⁰ Some of Rütiner's informants represented St. Gallen at the Imperial Diets or, more frequently, at the Swiss Diet in Baden.²¹¹ Many more had moved to the city from abroad, or had spent several years living, working or studying elsewhere before settling in St. Gallen (Fig. 6).

Most importantly, however, Rütiner's network did not stop at his direct informants. They, too, had a circle of informants, and by repeating stories heard elsewhere they granted Rütiner access to an even larger pool of information. In 207 entries Rütiner recorded such chains of information. If he did not know the names of his informants' sources, he wrote down a short characterisation instead: 'Johannes Studer heard it from customers who speak truthfully.'²¹² Where he does name indirect informants, we can see that they not only enlarged his information network, but also 'upgraded' it: Rütiner's informants often drew – or in some cases perhaps rather *claimed* to draw – on

²¹⁰ Namely Milan and Florence, Comm. I.514.

²¹¹ For instance Conrad Schaiawiller or Andreas Müller, see Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 118 (=134b), 421 (=441a).

²¹² 'Ioannes / Studer a veridicis cunden audiuit'. Comm. II.89c.

information passed on to them by prominent figures such as Georg von Hewen, Theodor Bibliander, Johannes Zwick, and even Luther himself.²¹³

As we have seen, Rütiner's network reached far beyond the cities where his informants lived, and the information it provided covered a large geographical range as well as a variety of themes. This is also linked to the fact that Rütiner's network included people from a variety of backgrounds and from many different social levels. What mattered to Rütiner was not so much an individual's social status, but rather whether they had an interesting story to share and whether they seemed reliable (which was occasionally, but not necessarily, linked back to their status).

This does not mean that all of Rütiner's informants were equally important, of course. Seventy-seven percent of them only vouched for one to three entries (Table 7), while Rütiner's most frequent informant, Paulus Schlumpf, is cited no less than 105 times. Some of them Rütiner met only once on the road to Wil or as they were passing through St. Gallen, while others were his neighbours, members of his guild, and his friends. In order to understand Rütiner's network and the social contexts in which he received information, it is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the network's central protagonists and to explore their relationship to Rütiner.

Table 7: Number of entries per informant

Number of entries	Number of informants	Percentage
1–3	269	77.1%
4–20	61	17.5%
21–40	9	2.6%
41–60	4	1.1%
61–80	2	0.6%
81–100	3	0.9%
>100	1	0.3%

Table 8: Location of informants who are cited ≥ 4 times

	Number of informants	Percentage
Total number of informants	80	100
Citizens of St. Gallen	64	80
Other	11	13.8
Unknown	5	6.2

²¹³ See for instance II.261 (von Hewen); II.165 (Zwick); II.409aa (Bibliander); II.90 and II.427 (Luther).

The vast majority of entries in the *Commentationes* can be traced back to the eighty informants quoted in four or more entries, most of whom were St. Gallen citizens (Table 8).²¹⁴ Tracing them through the *Commentationes* and a variety of sources from the St. Gallen archives such as the *Sabbata*, the *Stemmatalogia Sangallensis*, the tax records and lists of public offices moreover reveals that most of these people were linked to Rütiner in a number of ways: they were his relatives, friends, neighbours, and fellow guildsmen as well as his informants, and some of them were all these things at once.

Two distinct social groups stand out (Fig. 7). In the previous chapter, we have already seen that Rütiner was part of the circle of learned men and protestant pastors around the mayor Vadianus. The second, and even more important sub-group in Rütiner's network was the weavers' guild, and in particular the group of men who served alongside Rütiner as *Elfer*. Apart from these two main social circles, Rütiner also gathered information among his neighbours on the *Neugasse* and his family. Most of his frequent female informants were relatives of his; they included his mother, sister, aunt, and wife.²¹⁵

Of course these four groups were not completely separate from each other. There was quite a lot of overlap between Rütiner's family, his neighbourhood, and the weavers' guild. Rütiner's most frequent informant, the weaver and *Elfer* Paulus Schlumpf, for instance, not only lived in close proximity to Rütiner on the *Neugasse*, but he was also married to Rütiner's sister Katharina.²¹⁶ Yet there was considerably less social interaction between Rütiner's two major social circles, namely the weavers' guild and Vadianus' circle. In the 1520s, Kessler had been encouraged to hold bible readings by a group of weavers, including many of Rütiner's informants, yet only Rütiner and Vadianus' circle were invited to Kessler's wedding in 1525.²¹⁷ Likewise, Vadianus regularly met with the elite of the weavers' guild on the Small Council, yet little suggests that they socialised outside the realm of politics.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Of course we should not determine the significance of an individual informant based on the number of entries attributed to them alone, yet the latter does indicate whether there were regular noteworthy interactions between them and Rütiner. By drawing the line at 4 and above, we can simultaneously eliminate most of the informants who are named in a series of consecutive entries, representing in fact only a single interaction.

²¹⁵ See for instance Comm. I.149, I.341, II.49, II.86 (Tely, Rütiner's mother), I.733, I.760d/e, II.109e, II.211, II.416d (Verena, Rütiner's sister); I.30, I.877, I.883, I.887c, I.893b/e/f/g/h, II.12, II.31, II.52, II.54, II.59, II.61, II.62, II.109b (aunt Ursula, Rütiner's principal informant on the history of the Rütiner family); I.488, I.512, II.184b, II.265k, II.271f, II.296k, II.316a, II.361cc, II.366f, II.409s (Engla, Rütiner's wife).

²¹⁶ They got married in April 1529: StadtASG, 513a: Ehebuch, Band 1 1528–1862, p. 6.

²¹⁷ Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 107 (=125b) and 207 (=211a).

²¹⁸ Rütiner does not mention his fellow guildsmen in the context of gatherings in Vadianus' circle, for instance.

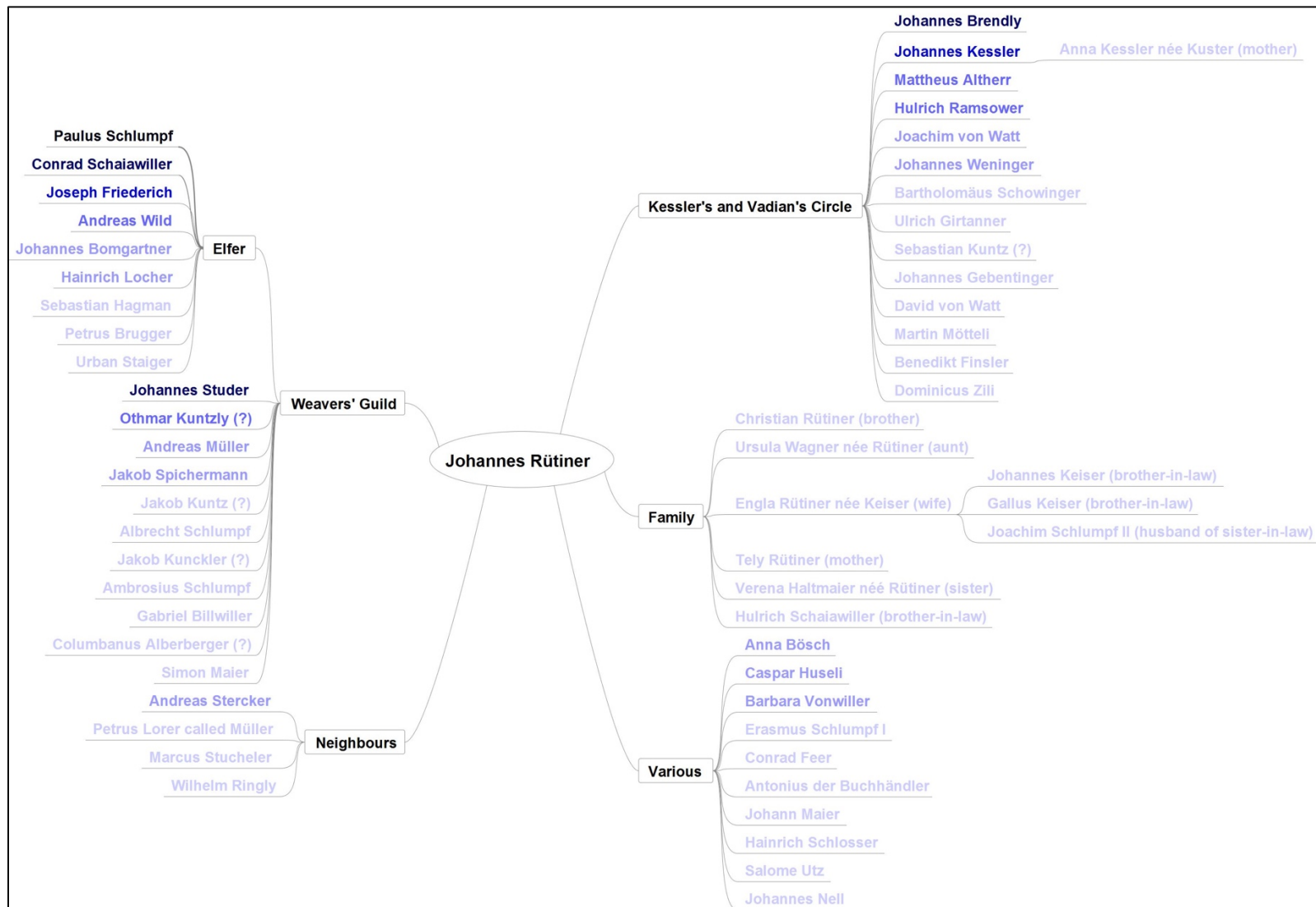


Fig. 7: Rütiner's most frequent informants, sorted by social group and frequency of appearance as informant (darker colours = higher frequency).

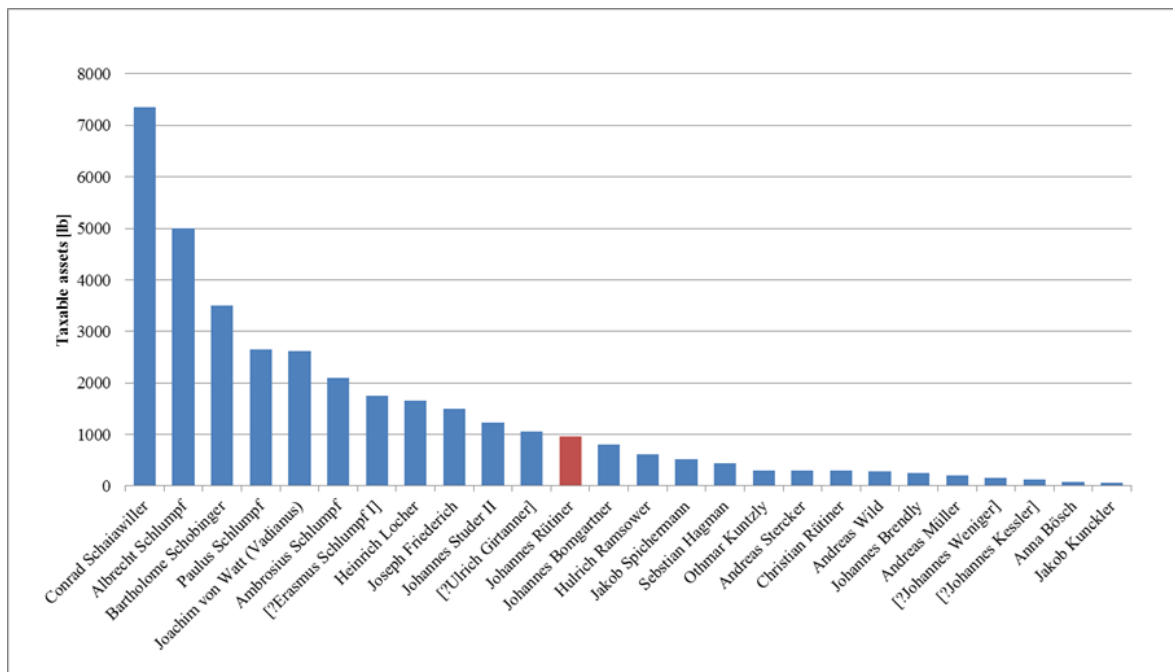


Fig. 8: Taxable assets of Rütiner's most frequent informants in 1533.²¹⁹

What was Rütiner's place among his most frequent informants? The tax records of 1533 indicate that economically, he held an average position at best (Fig. 8). Even among Rütiner's most frequent informants we find a wide social spectrum, ranging from the almost penniless to the guild master Conrad Schaiawiller, one of the richest men in St. Gallen.²²⁰ Yet Rütiner's position was not just average in financial terms. When he was elected *Elfer* in 1534, he joined a group of mostly senior guildsmen with years of political experience (Table 9). They had lived through the dangerous years at the end of the fifteenth century when St. Gallen was threatened from the outside as well as from within – the war with the Swiss Confederacy in 1490, an attempt to overthrow the town council during the *St. Galler Auflauf* of 1491, and the Swabian War of 1499. Many of these men had also served as soldiers in various battles at the beginning of the sixteenth century and had returned to St. Gallen with adventurous stories of bravery and survival. Rütiner held the greatest respect for them and recorded their stories in incredible detail, but of course he had little to offer in

²¹⁹ StadtASG, 281: Steuerbuch 1533. The tax records of that year were chosen for a closer analysis because they show Rütiner's situation a few years into writing the *Commentationes*, but just precede his election as *Elfer* in 1534. Only Rütiner's most frequent informants are depicted in the graph, as far as they could be found in the tax records. Names in square brackets mark those individuals who could not be identified with complete certainty, either because there were several individuals of the same name on the tax records or because they were listed under an abbreviated name or a nickname.

²²⁰ In the 1530s and 1540s, Schaiawiller was among the twenty wealthiest citizens in St. Gallen. Höhener, *Bevölkerung und Vermögensstruktur*, p. 83.

return. He had never fought in a battle and depended heavily on the other *Elfer*'s inside knowledge of St. Gallen economy, history, and politics.

Table 9: Weaver's *Elfer* of 1534

Name	Taxable assets in 1533 (lb)	Year of birth	Date of first election as Elfer	Further career
Conrad Schaiawiller	7350	1476	1510	Small Council 1521–1535 Guildmaster 1536–1542
Paulus Schlumpf	2650	1500	1532	Small Council 1541–1563
Heinrich Locher	1662.5	[?]	1528	Guildmaster 1548–1556 Small Council 1556–1565
Joseph Friederich	1500	1486	1525	Guildmaster 1542–1544 Deputy Mayor 1544–1557
<i>Johannes Rütiner</i>	<i>962.5</i>	<i>1501</i>	<i>1534</i>	<i>Marriage Court Judge 1542–1549</i> <i>Small Council 1549–1556</i>
Johannes Bomgartner	800	[?]	1524	Guildmaster 1535–1537 Deputy Mayor 1537–1561
Sebastian Hagman	437.5	before 1476	1530	
Urban Staiger	320	1499	1532	
Andreas Wild	280	[?]	1529	Guildmaster 1556–1566
Andreas Morly	[?]	[?]	1533	Guildmaster 1558–1559 Deputy Mayor 1559–1566 Mayor 1566–1580
Augustin Teschler	[?]	[?]	1534	

There was one exception among the *Elfer*, however: Paulus Schlumpf, Rütiner's most frequent informant. One year Rütiner's senior, Schlumpf had only joined the *Elfer* two years before Rütiner, in 1532. His relationship to Rütiner is worth exploring since they were not only fellow guildsmen, but also neighbours, close friends, and in-laws. Schlumpf was probably Rütiner's classmate at the local Latin school, but in contrast to Rütiner, he never went beyond the standard education he re-

ceived in St. Gallen. In fact as Rütiner tells us his academic progress was rather slow and he only just managed to master the basic arithmetic necessary for a career as a merchant.²²¹

Yet in all other areas, Schlumpf, too, was one step ahead of Rütiner. He owned more than twice as much as Rütiner did in any given year, and while his political career must have seemed mediocre in comparison to that of his father, the late mayor Caspar Schlumpf, he still advanced much faster than Rütiner. Not only did he join the weavers' *Elfer* two years before Rütiner, but he also became Rütiner's superior when he was appointed to the office of linen inspector and Rütiner became his assistant in 1534. Finally, Schlumpf was elected to the Small Council eight years before Rütiner, in 1541.

If Rütiner had hoped that his years of studies at Basel University and his ability to read and write in Latin would raise his social status, aid his business, or boost his political career, he was disappointed. As we have seen, even Paulus Schlumpf had by far surpassed him. Not only did Rütiner's university education seemingly fail to bring him any major economic or political advantages after he had returned to St. Gallen, but in the eyes of his fellow guildsmen it even stood in his way of becoming a successful weaver and linen merchant.²²² "I have never seen students rise," Joseph Friederich warned Rütiner after telling him the story of his father, also a former student at Basel University, who had returned to the linen trade in St. Gallen only to waste all his money. "They are always more remiss and prone to slacking, except for Johannes Maier, who is exceptionally industrious and diligent." Rütiner took his friend's words very personally: '[Joseph Friederich] and Erasmus Schlumpf ... said this in a harsh tone, as if they were reproaching me. From then on I used more diligence.'²²³

Rütiner was certainly not the only linen merchant who had studied at Basel University for some time, but what perhaps distinguished him from others was his reluctance to give up his past as a student in favour of his business. As we have seen, Rütiner continued to spend considerable sums of money on books he had no time to read and stubbornly held on to Latin when writing his notebooks, despite the fact that this academic language regularly proved inadequate for capturing the everyday life of St. Gallen. Did Rütiner feel closer to the learned men of St. Gallen, to the circle surrounding Vadianus, than to the men in his guild?

²²¹ Comm. II.104g.

²²² That education was often seen as a waste of time by those who took up a trade is also confirmed by Fernando J. Bouza Alvarez, *Communication, Knowledge, and Memory in Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 61–2.

²²³ 'Numquam vidi / emergere Studentes [] semper remissiores sunt / ad schlecken proni [] praeter Ioannem Mayer / ille praeter omnem morem industrius et diligens / Adeo acerbe retulit ipse et Erasmus Sch/lumpff Hulrichi filius quasi mihi exprobr/arent [] in posterum magis adhibui diligentiam'. Comm. I.954c.

Kessler seems to have thought so. When he addressed Rütiner at the beginning of the *Sabbata*, he told his friend to ‘disregard the idle talk of the ignorant’, and reassured him that his ‘fame is with the erudite and the learned’. Yet this flattery was followed by a warning indicating that Rütiner’s place with the learned was not quite as secure as Kessler portrayed it: ‘You know what Quintilianus says: he who seeks to please the ignorant displeases the learned.’²²⁴

Indeed, Rütiner thoroughly enjoyed the company of the learned and thrived off their conversations. His friendship to Kessler and their time spent together in Basel had opened him the door to the circle of humanists and theologians around Vadianus, and they in turn opened up a far broader network of humanists across Europe with which they corresponded. It was with much pride that Rütiner recorded the news and knowledge this group shared with him and any nights spent in their exclusive company:

Vadianus told us all this and many other things on Wednesday after the Circumcision of Christ [i.e. after 01.01.1537] in the house of Johannes Brendly, because on that day we had a farewell meal with Marcus Angelus. [...] Vadianus, Kessler, H[ulrich] Ramsower, J[ohannes] Weninger, and I.²²⁵

The fact that Rütiner felt it necessary to explicitly include himself in the list of people present at the dinner shows what great importance this occasion held for him. Yet it also indicates that such occasions were a rare pleasure. Rütiner made this more explicit when he compared the farewell meal of 1537 to a night he spent observing a comet with Vadianus and Kessler in 1531:

Oh what a welcome, sweet dinner conversation we had! Everybody opened their heart, whatever they could they shared with us. We have not encountered anything more pleasant since that night when we watched the comet from Hochrütiner’s *Bürgli*. Oh how true spoke the father of Aeneas Silvius: The greatest pleasure is to associate and converse with learned men.²²⁶

Of course this does not mean that between 1531 and 1537 Rütiner never spent time in the company of these learned men; otherwise they would not rank among his most frequent informants. It seems, however, that Rütiner never belonged to Vadianus’ innermost circle. When prominent figures visit-

²²⁴ ‘laß nun etlicher unverständigen gschwetz vor oren gon ... Din ruom ist by den glerten und verständigen; du waist, wie Quintilianus spricht: Der sich flist den unglerten ze gefallen, missfalt den glerten.’ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 17 (=12a).

²²⁵ ‘Omnia illa et varia retulit nobis Vadianus Die / Mercurij sequenti post Circumcisionis Domini in aed/ibus Ioannis Brendly Quia eo die prandium / cum Marco angelo sumpsimus pro valedictione ... Vadianus Ahenarius / H Ramsower I Weniger et Ego.’ Comm. I.788.

²²⁶ ‘O quam grates et dulces colloquij epulas habui/mus [] Vterque sinum aperiens quicquid potuerunt no/bis impartiti sunt [] a nocte illa qua Cometen / obseruauimus in arcula Hochrutiners nih/il interim lepidius nobis contigit [] O quam vere dixit Aeneae siluij Pater [] Summum bonum esse conuersari doctis et colloqui’. Comm. I.788.

ed St. Gallen, such as Martin Bucer in 1533, Rütiner was not among those invited to dine with Vadianus and his guest.²²⁷ It seems that whenever Rütiner did join Vadianus' circle, he was mainly perceived as Kessler's sidekick – so much so, in fact, that when Kessler was on his own for once, Vadianus allegedly jokingly asked, “Hans, where is your Johannes Rütiner?”²²⁸ The fact that Vadianus is often only named as an indirect rather than a direct informant suggests that the relationship between him and Rütiner was rather one-sided and not very close.²²⁹ As Rüsch noted, Rütiner was probably unable to make a substantial contribution to the discussions revolving around theology, politics, history and linguistics, but instead collected them like precious gems and preserved them in his notebooks.²³⁰

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Rütiner rarely writes about himself, but the few instances where he does show that he was painfully aware of his own shortcomings and the limitations imposed on him by his career choices. As a student at the University of Basel he had earned a broad education, but unlike Vadianus and Kessler he had not continued his studies or graduated with a degree. He knew Latin and had read many ancient and contemporary authors, yet his decision to return to St. Gallen and enter the linen trade had stopped him from taking his education any further. At the same time, his peers who had not studied at university had had a head start in the linen business. When a fellow student told Rütiner that the hunchbacked Koler of Lichtensteig had become steward of a monastery, Rütiner's frustration became apparent: ‘All of us who were at Basel [University] have come to nothing, only this hunchback parades so many horses.’²³¹

Of course this was a huge exaggeration. The tax records show that Rütiner's economic rise was slow but steady, and the same is true for his political career. If Rütiner nevertheless perceived himself as a failure, it was because he compared himself to the wrong people: to Kessler and Vadianus, who had surpassed him in all academic matters; to Conrad Schaiawiller, the guildsmaster who belonged to the richest men in town; and to Paulus Schlumpf, who had most probably profited from his father's reputation and thus always advanced at a faster pace than Rütiner.

Rütiner was certainly not a figure on the margins, even though he may have perceived his position in that way. In fact his position was in the middle – halfway between the learned men and the weavers, halfway between the wealthy linen merchants in his guild and the craftsmen in his neigh-

²²⁷ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 403–4, (=425b–426a).

²²⁸ ‘Hans, wo hastu dinen Joann Rütiner?’ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 17 (=12b).

²²⁹ See for instance Comm. I.361, I.879, I.930, II.52, II.154–146a, II.165, II.217, II.248, II.271c, II.276, II.386.

²³⁰ Rüsch, ‘Kommentarband’, p. 26. See also Comm. I.856 for an example of Rütiner paraphrasing Erasmus in a conversation with Kessler, only to be lectured by his friend.

²³¹ ‘omnes nos qui Basileae fuimus/ in nihilum redacti solus ille gibbosus tot equis ince/dit’. Comm. I.880.

bourhood.²³² And perhaps it was exactly this medium position to which we owe the peculiar form, if not the very existence of the *Commentationes*, for they too stand halfway between two traditions. Rütiner's notebooks may have been inspired by his learned friends' call to record 'God's miraculous deeds' and by instructions for taking notes which he had received as a student, but his ambitions were more modest and his notes often concerned with very mundane things – with the linen business, familial relationships, local gossip, and conflicts between St. Gallen citizens. This is not to suggest that such things were not discussed in Vadianus' circle – they were, and in abundance – but rather that the St. Galler chroniclers did not usually include them in their written works. Rütiner's *Commentationes*, in contrast, filled an academic format with everyday content and thus reflect the two worlds which shaped Rütiner's daily life.

What Rütiner may not have realised was that his place in the middle gave him a distinct advantage in collecting information, for it allowed him to tap into a great number and a great variety of sources. Thus Rütiner was able to gather stories about battles and wars from former soldiers, recipes for economic success from his fellow guildsmen, news and political rumours from merchants returning from markets all over Europe, information about the progress of the Reformation from Vadianus and Kessler, and many not-so-well-kept secrets about his fellow citizens from their neighbours, friends, and employees.

Yet this is not the only way in which Rütiner may have profited from his position in between. As we shall see over the next few chapters, oral exchanges in early modern St. Gallen typically took place in a social context which was not limited to the sharing of what we would deem "useful" information, but which involved eating, drinking, cracking jokes, telling entertaining and shocking tales and sharing gossip. Contributing to these conversations allowed St. Gallers on all social levels to present themselves as bearers of insider information and to raise "communicative social capital". Rütiner does not discuss the purpose of his notebooks, but at least in theory they represented both a record of past conversations *and* plenty of material for future ones. Thus, Rütiner's position at the intersection of two powerful, but largely separate groups may have offered him an opportunity to share stories gathered in one circle with the other, presenting himself as a bearer of insider information to both of them.

²³² It may be worth noting that other sixteenth-century ego-documents were written by men similarly mediocre and trapped between two worlds. See for example the case of Hermann Weinsberg, who claimed – albeit more in self-defence rather than with any conviction – that 'the middle is best'. Lundin, *Paper Memory*, esp. pp. 75 and 110–21.

3 Homo ioci plenus: Obscene humour, gender, and sociability

A version of this chapter was published in Carla Roth, 'Obscene Humour, Gender, and Sociability in Sixteenth-Century St Gallen', Past & Present, 234/1 (2017), pp. 39–70.

The surgeon of Bischofszell gave a purgative powder to a companion, a widower already engaged [to remarry], who had begged him for an aid for fornication for the [wedding] night. When he entered his bride's bed, he soiled it. He got up [and] would have grabbed the doctor by the throat if others had not intervened.²³³

This joke combines three stock ingredients of much sixteenth-century bawdy humour — an old man, sex, and faeces. As typical of its time as it was popular, it was printed in many different variations in some of the most prominent Latin and German joke collections. It was spread by word of mouth too: the joke of the incontinent groom was retold in towns as far apart as St. Gallen and Leipzig.²³⁴ In its present form it was recorded by Rütiner in 1529.

Early modern jokes often follow narrative patterns similar to those found in modern jokes, and identifying them and their punch lines may therefore seem intuitive.²³⁵ However, these formal similarities do not necessarily make it easier to understand early modern humour, let alone to laugh. What was so funny about an old man soiling his wedding bed, for instance? And perhaps more importantly: why should we care? As Robert Darnton has famously argued in *The Great Cat Massacre*, humour can serve as a key to a foreign culture. Jokes playfully exploit common stereotypes and ambiguous metaphors which only make sense and produce laughter in a particular historical context. If we 'get the joke', we may therefore also get a better understanding of the culture of which it was part, and in particular of its most obscure aspects.²³⁶ Yet, as I intend to show in this chapter, jokes are also shaped by the means of their circulation and the social settings in which they are shared. They offer us insights into the dissemination of information and aspects of early modern sociability which often remain hidden from the historian's gaze.

²³³ 'Bischoffzell chyrurgus / socio viduo iam sponso orantem vt pro nocte/ adiumentum stupri daret [] dedit puluerem pro pur/gatione [] consenso lecto sponsae lectum foedauit / surgens iugulum medici petiisset nisi in/tercessum fuisset ab alijs'. Comm. I.210.

²³⁴ See for instance Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ed. Johannes Bolte, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1924), ii, 13, no. 708; Heinrich Bebel, *Fazetien: Drei Bücher*, trans. Manfred Fuhrmann (Bibliotheca Suevica 13, Konstanz, 2005), 101, no. 15; Comm. I.545.

²³⁵ See for instance Theresa Hamilton's article on the mechanism of humour, where she argues that Victor Raskin's and Salvatore Attardo's *General Theory of Verbal Humor* is also applicable to early modern comic tales because the narrative structure remains fairly similar: Theresa Hamilton, 'Der 'Mechanismus' des Humors. Eine linguistisch-narratologische Diskussion humoristischer Erzählungen an der Schnittstelle von Vormoderne und Moderne', in Stefan Biessenecker and Christian Kuhn (eds.), *Valenzen des Lachens in der Vormoderne (1250–1750)* (Bamberger Historische Studien 8, Bamberg, 2012), 71–94.

²³⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1985), 77–8.

Thus far, historical humour research has primarily focused on Shrovetide plays, comic tales, satires, printed joke collections, and other literary texts.²³⁷ These types of sources provide historians with a large stock of jokes and can thus highlight some of the common themes of early modern humour. Yet they rarely shed any light on the place and role of humour in everyday life.²³⁸ They neither tell us how jokes were circulated orally, by whom, where, and in what form they were re-told, nor how the audience understood and reacted to them.

Lacking evidence for the social context of jokes, early modern historians have often drawn on psychological and sociological theories when writing about the function of jokes — a move which deserves more critical reflection than it has hitherto received, for it is based on the assumption that while humour has a history, its social function does not. Two theories have dominated the discussion thus far. The first has its roots in the psychological release and relief theories developed since the nineteenth century and sees humour as a safety valve. Aggressions, anxieties, and illicit desires which may otherwise disturb the peace of a community are channelled into humour and find release in laughter.²³⁹ The second draws on sociological research which explores the role of humour in the making and breaking of social bonds.²⁴⁰ According to this approach, humour fosters group

²³⁷ See for instance Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, 'Introduction: Humour and History', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 1–10, here p. 3. Recent studies include Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525* (London, 2008); Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof und Michael Lindener* (KOLA 4, Trier, 2009); Lisa Perfetti, *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (Ann Arbor, 2003); Johannes Klaus Kipf, *Cluoge geschichten: Humanistische Fazetienliteratur im deutschen Sprachraum* (Literaturen und Künste der Vormoderne 2, Stuttgart, 2010); Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, London, 2003); Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, London, 2011); Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2006).

²³⁸ See also Gerd Dicke, 'Fazetieren: Ein Konversationstyp der italienischen Renaissance und seine deutsche Rezeption im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert', in Eckhart Conrad Lutz, Johanna Thali and René Wetzels (eds.), *Literatur und Wandmalerei II: Konventionalität und Konversation. Burgdorfer Colloquium 2001* (Tübingen, 2005), 155–88, here pp. 178–9. According to Sebastian Coxon, Heinrich Bebel's collection is an exception to the rule: Sebastian Coxon, 'Friendship, Wit and Laughter in Heinrich Bebel's *Facetiae*', *Oxford German Studies*, 36/2 (2007), 306–20, here pp. 312–6.

²³⁹ For an overview over, and critique of, these early humour theories, see for instance Patricia Keith-Spiegel, 'Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues', in Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (eds.), *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues* (New York, London, 1972), 3–39, here esp. pp. 10–13 and 20–1. Sigmund Freud is often cited as one of the most prominent advocates of this theory: Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (London, 1960). For the application of the relief theory in historical research, see for instance Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, pp. 5, 46 and 177; Roger Thompson, 'Popular Reading and Humour in Restoration England', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9/3 (1975), 653–71, here p. 658; Jacques Le Goff, 'Laughter in the Middle Ages', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 40–53, here p. 47; Gerd Dicke, 'Homo facetus. Vom Mittelalter eines humanistischen Ideals', in Nicola McLelland, Hans-Jochen Schiewer and Stefanie Schmitt (eds.), *Humanismus in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters und in der Frühen Neuzeit. XVIII. Anglo-German Colloquium, Hofgeismar 2003* (Tübingen, 2008), 299–332, here p. 326, and Dicke, 'Fazetieren', p. 158.

²⁴⁰ Eugène Dupréel's essay on the sociological problem of laughter is usually seen as the foundational text of this theory: Eugène Dupréel, 'Le problème sociologique du rire', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 106 (1928), 213–60, here esp. pp. 234–5. For a concise introduction to the sociological approach-

cohesion by forming ‘communities of laughter’, whose shared laughter — and, by extension, shared values — separate them from outsiders and from the people ridiculed. Humour creates and confirms these communities, and laughter simultaneously draws their boundaries, outside of which we find those who have transgressed the written or customary rules and are punished with scorn and ridicule.²⁴¹

While alternative theoretical approaches stressing humour’s close relationship to play and entertainment have not received much attention, both of the dominant humour theories thus associate humour with aggression and describe jokes as an act of non-physical violence involving insiders and outsiders, or an aggressor and a victim.²⁴² This conception of humour, however, makes it difficult to distinguish between jokes and insults.²⁴³ Moreover, as we shall see it has had far-reaching consequences, in particular in relation to sexual humour, where the line between aggressor and victim has usually been drawn along the line separating the sexes. Early modern sexual humour has thus commonly been fitted into a narrative of male dominance, aggression, and sexual violence against women.

This chapter will propose a different view on early modern humour, and on obscene humour in particular. It is of course not my ambition to present here an alternative general theory of obscene humour. Rather, I want to draw attention to some aspects of sixteenth-century obscene humour which have often been overlooked, in part because of the ways in which the theories discussed above have shaped our view of the sources, but largely because of the limitations of the source material itself. In contrast to literary sources, which usually present jokes as detached from their social context, the *Commentationes* allow us to study obscene humour as part of a variety of social interactions in a sixteenth-century small town.

es to humour, see Gary Alan Fine, ‘Sociological Approaches to the Study of Humor’, in Paul E. McGhee and Jeffrey H. Goldstein (eds.), *Handbook of Humour Research*, 2 vols. (New York, Berlin, Heidelberg et. al., 1983), i, 159–81.

²⁴¹ For the application of the theory of ‘communities of laughter’ in early modern history, see for instance Werner Röcke and Hans R. Velten (eds.), *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter in Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2005); Derek Brewer, ‘Prose Jest-Books Mainly in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries in England’, in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 90–111, here p. 90; Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, pp. 5, 8, 78 and 178; Norbert Schindler, *Widerspenstige Leute. Studien zur Volkskultur in der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M., 1992), p. 158; Johan Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society in the Spanish Netherlands* (Basingstoke, New York, 1999), p. 100.

²⁴² One notable exception is of course Mikhail Bakhtin, who stressed early on that modern humour theories are inadequate for dealing with Renaissance humour because they portray it in an overly negative light: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, transl. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), p. 71. For an alternative humour theory, see for instance Daniel E. Berlyne, ‘Laughter, Humor, and Play’, in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 5 vols. (Reading MA, Menlo Park CA, London et. al., 1969), iii, 795–852.

²⁴³ See for instance Schindler, *Widerspenstige Leute*, pp. 153–8, who draws no clear distinction between humour, insult and blasphemy in his description of carnival rituals.

The two main sections of this chapter discuss Rütiner's jokes within their social and cultural contexts respectively. The first section deals with the dissemination of jokes through speech and print, and with the social settings in which they were shared in St. Gallen. By comparing different versions of the same joke, I shall illustrate how jokes changed as they were circulated and how they were continuously adapted to fit the tastes of a particular audience. In the subtle changes made to jokes as they were retold, I argue, often lies the key to understanding early modern humour. Complementing the findings in the first section, the second provides a detailed analysis of Rütiner's joke collection and places it within its broader cultural context. I shall argue that sexual and scatological humour were closely linked through both medical discourse and a common set of metaphors. Rather than representing a safety valve for men's aggressions against women, "obscene jokes" first and foremost offered a platform on which acceptable forms of masculinity could be circumscribed and reaffirmed.²⁴⁴

Circulation and social context of obscene humour

Obscene humour can be found in a wide range of sixteenth-century sources, bearing witness to its broad appeal as well as to its wide circulation. Exploiting a plethora of sexual metaphors and double-entendres and containing only thinly veiled, detailed descriptions of sex and defecation, Shrovetide plays feature among the most extreme varieties of bawdy humour.²⁴⁵ Yet while carnival certainly suspended some of the rules which normally constrained excessive humour, obscene jokes were by no means limited to the fifth season, nor were they a peculiarity of popular culture. Recent scholarship has made it abundantly clear that the learned elite played a central part in the recording and dissemination of humorous material, including its sexual and scatological varieties.²⁴⁶ Since the art of joking was closely linked to ancient rhetoric, it was commonly taught as part of the syllabus in Latin schools, and indeed it was during his studies that Rütiner was first intro-

²⁴⁴ For want of a better term to capture both sexual and scatological jokes, I shall refer to them as 'obscene jokes'. This is not meant to imply that these jokes also seemed obscene to the early modern reader. See also Johannes Müller, *Schwert und Scheide. Der sexuelle und skatologische Wortschatz im Nürnberger Fasnachtsspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700 2, Bern, 1988), p. 22.

²⁴⁵ For a detailed review of the sexual and scatological vocabulary in German Shrovetide plays, see Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*.

²⁴⁶ See in particular Barbara C. Bowen, *Humour and Humanism in the Renaissance* (Aldershot, 2004); Kipf, *Cluoge geschichten*; Anja Grebe, 'Der Künstler als Komiker. Albrecht Dürers Selbstbildnisse und die Lachkultur des Humanismus', in Stefan Biessenecker and Christian Kuhn (eds.), *Valenzen des Lachens in der Vormoderne (1250–1750)* (Bamberger Historische Studien 8, Bamberg, 2012), 187–210. Yet while it has been widely acknowledged that humour played an important role in humanist sociability, the extent to which the learned elite revelled in *obscene* humour is still occasionally downplayed; see for instance Dicke, 'Fazetieren', e.g. pp. 166 and 172.

duced to classical satire in the work of Plautus, Persius, Juvenal, and Lucian of Samosata.²⁴⁷ Printed joke collections by humanist authors such as Heinrich Bebel, or by members of the clergy such as Johannes Pauli, were also full of sexual and scatological humour, albeit dressed up in academic Latin and hidden beneath a thin layer of moral justification.²⁴⁸ Since humour was often seen as the sugar which made the medicine go down more easily, crude jokes were even used in sermons, in particular at Easter, when it was customary to give the congregation a good laugh.²⁴⁹

This type of humour also leaked into other media. Protestant pamphlets used scathing humour full of sexual and scatological references to denounce the excesses of the pope and the Catholic clergy in word and image; depicting, for instance, the papacy's birth from a she-devil's anus and peasants exposing their backsides to the pope.²⁵⁰ Or consider the work of the Nuremberg illustrator Peter Flötner, whose illustrations featured defecating peasants and a 'human sundial' depicting a half-naked male body with widely spread legs, allowing the beholder to take a close look at the man's anus and his faeces at the very moment of their expulsion; a joke which presumably played on the idea that the human body with its regular excretions provided the most accurate clock of all.²⁵¹

Most importantly, however, jokes were a common element of a wide range of social interactions. In contrast to the Benedictine abbey in its midst, where strict monastic rule forbade excessive laughter, the city of St. Gallen was a place where humour, obscene and otherwise, regularly entered conversations.²⁵² Inns and taverns have traditionally been listed among humour's most natural habi-

²⁴⁷ See Rütiner's copies of these texts in VadSlg, Ms 485: Sammelband humanistischen Inhalts. On the role of classical satire in early modern education, see for instance Bremmer and Roodenburg, *Introduction*, pp. 6–7, or David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins. Humor and humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, 1998), pp. 7–8.

²⁴⁸ Bowen, *Humour and Humanism*, pp. 266–7. For examples of sexual and scatological humour in these works, see for instance Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 1, pp. 21, no. 11; 51, no. 51; 55, no. 60; 69–70, no. 80; book 2, 99, no. 13 and 14, to name just a few; or Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, i, pp. 48, no. 65; 49, no. 68; 186, no. 294; 331, no. 585; 364, no. 653.

²⁴⁹ This was also the case in St. Gallen; Ehrensperger, *Gottesdienst in der Stadt St. Gallen*, pp. 31–2. The Basel reformer Johannes Oecolampadius harshly criticized the widespread practice of the *risus paschalis*. See Oecolampadius's letter to Wolfgang Fabricius Capito (18 March 1518), which was published with Frobenius: Johannes Oecolampadius, *Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oekolompads. Zum vierhundertjährigen Jubiläum der Basler Reformation*, ed. Ernst Staehlin, 2 vols. (Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte 10, Leipzig, 1927–1934), i, pp. 44–59, no. 35. See also Peter Burke, 'Frontiers of the Comic in Early Modern Italy, c. 1350–1750', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 63, and Schindler, *Widerspenstige Leute*, 61–75, here p. 155.

²⁵⁰ See for instance Eric W. Gritsch, 'Luther on Humor', *Lutheran Quarterly*, 18/4 (2004), 373–86, here p. 377.

²⁵¹ On Peter Flötner, see Barbara Dienst, *Der Kosmos des Peter Flötner. Eine Bildwelt der Renaissance in Deutschland* (München, Berlin, 2002), here in particular p. 79.

²⁵² In fact the monastic ban on laughter was itself the target of one of Rütiner's jokes. In Comm. I.688 the abbot of St. Gallen forbids the tailor Andreas from visiting the monks ('noli eos adire'), for he considers Andreas and his excessive joking a threat to monastic life. The next day, however, Andreas lives up to his reputation by crawling through their door, saying: 'I have been forbidden from walking' ('interdictum mihi ire').

tats, and indeed Rütiner often heard jokes in this context.²⁵³ When Rütiner and his fellow guildsmen travelled to the smaller market towns around St. Gallen, they often used this opportunity to spend a night of exuberant conviviality at the local inn.²⁵⁴

The jesting culture pertaining to these spaces is particularly visible in the sources, not least because it is often associated with excessive drinking and violent conflict and thus found its way into court records.²⁵⁵ Yet obscene jokes were not restricted to sociability in inns and taverns. Both in and outside these public spaces, we find conversations about a wide variety of topics being interspersed with obscene jokes. The elderly maid and midwife Anna Bösch, for instance, provided Rütiner with an account of her former employer Georg Gerung's marriages, a detailed description of his sex life, and an obscene joke which Gerung's second wife once made at his expense — all while, so it seems, Bösch was looking after Rütiner's wife in childbed and their new-born daughter Barbara.²⁵⁶ On other occasions, an account of the first war at Kappel am Albis (1529) was accompanied by a humorous anecdote about a mercenary, a series of sexual jokes delivered by a schoolmaster was followed by a list of the latter's familial ties, and a conversation about the war against the Turks turned into a joke about a Catholic priest.²⁵⁷

Obscene jokes were also a common feature of social gatherings among St. Gallen's learned elite, in particular in the circle around Vadianus.²⁵⁸ Warnings against excessive joking and obscene humour by influential figures such as Erasmus, Oecolampadius, and Luther thus seem to have mostly fallen on deaf ears even among their greatest admirers — all the more, perhaps, because some of these men set a rather poor example.²⁵⁹

Only once does Rütiner explicitly mention Vadianus' direct involvement in a prank with sexual undertones. The occasion deserves a detailed analysis, however, for it illustrates some of the key characteristics of learned humour. As Vadianus personally tells Rütiner, he was once complicit in a

²⁵³ See for instance Kumin, *Drinking Matters*, pp. 123–4; Brown, *Better a Shrew*, p. 72. See also Comm. I.316; I.545; II.402a/b.

²⁵⁴ The most detailed description of such an evening can be found in Comm. II.402b.

²⁵⁵ See for instance Phil Withington, 'Company and sociability in early modern England', *Social History*, 32/3 (2007), 291–307, here pp. 291–3.

²⁵⁶ Comm. II.385b/c. Chapter four will offer a more detailed discussion of Anna Bösch's relationship to Rütiner and her role as Rütiner's informant.

²⁵⁷ Comm. I.309–10; I.316–7; II.158–62a.

²⁵⁸ The merchants David and Georg von Watt, Vadianus' brother and cousin, shared sexual and scatological jokes with Rütiner on several occasions, and so did Johannes Weniger, a regular guest at Vadianus' dinner table. Comm. I.591b; I.652; II.162a. See also Comm. I.788 for evidence of Johannes Weniger's link to Vadianus' circle.

²⁵⁹ Luther's biting and often scatological humour is well-known. See for instance Gritsch, 'Luther on Humour'; Dicke, 'Homo facetus', p. 304; Dicke, 'Fazetieren', pp. 180–4. While Erasmus' humour was more moderate, he nevertheless included many jokes of sexual and scatological content in his *Apophthegmata*: Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Apophthegmata*, ed. and trans. Heribert Philips (Würzburg, 2001), for instance book 3, p. 222, no. 40; or 231, no. 100. See also Burke, 'Frontiers of the Comic', pp. 68–70, and Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society*, pp. 70–6.

prank played by Benedikt Burgauer on the elderly Catholic priest Adam Weckerli during a game of dice:

Whenever Adam [Weckerli] rolled the dice badly, he got up, for he was weak-sighted ... Burgauer fetched an egg, in Vadianus' presence and with his permission. When [Weckerli] got up, [Burgauer] placed it under him. He felt it immediately and laughed, because he only wore a shirt and sleeves.²⁶⁰

There is certainly a strong element of slapstick humour in this joke, yet the egg was not a random choice of prop. In combination with Weckerli's long white shirt and sleeves and his constant, rapid movements, the egg seems to have perfected the visual image of a nervous breeding hen. It thus linked and likened Weckerli to a popular character in the contemporary joke collections: a man laying or breeding eggs.²⁶¹ In one of Heinrich Bebel's jokes, for instance, an imposter successfully convinces his host that he is able to lay eggs, and ends his demonstration by defecating in the host's hand as the latter eagerly awaits an egg to emerge from his guest's bottom.²⁶² Similarly, in a joke which circulated in St. Gallen about Claus Narr, court fool of Duke Albrecht of Saxony, Claus observes a hen breeding eggs and then spends several days sitting on a pile of horse excrements, determined to make foals hatch from these 'eggs', too.²⁶³ Moreover, Patricia Simons has shown that eggs were also a common metaphor for the testicles, and broken eggs often referred to semen spilled in vain, in particular in the context of jokes about masturbation.²⁶⁴ In these jokes, eggs, faeces, and testicles symbolised each other, and together they pointed to men's doomed attempts at reproduction.²⁶⁵

As a symbol of fertility and a common metaphor for both the testicles and faeces, the egg in Vadianus' joke could thus not have been more perfectly placed. Squashed under the bottom of an elderly man, and a Catholic cleric no less, it insinuated that Weckerli was incontinent as well as short-sighted, or worse, it could be understood to poke fun at his inability to procreate due to his

²⁶⁰ 'quoties male protrusit tesseris Adam / Surrexit [] luscus enim fuit ... / Burggower praesente Vadiano eius / consensu ouum attulit [] cum autem surrexit suppo/suit subito sentiuit [] risit [] Nam camisia et / braccha solum indutus'. Comm. I.787.

²⁶¹ This character also appears in many illustrated popular prints where he mocks men dominated by their wives: Kristina Bake, *Spiegel einer Christlichen vnd friedsamten Hausshaltung. Die Ehe in der populären Druckgraphik des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockforschung 49, Wiesbaden, 2013), pp. 230–3, see also p. 480, fig. 118.

²⁶² Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 3, pp. 283–8, no. 111.

²⁶³ Comm. I.652. In Johannes Pauli's later version of the joke, published in 1555, Claus Narr sits on a slice of cheese trying to produce a calf (Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ii, p. 83, no. 841). Vadianus and his friends were likely familiar with this joke and the additional comic layer it added to Burgauer's prank, for it was Vadianus' cousin Georg von Watt who shared the joke about Claus Narr with Rütiner.

²⁶⁴ Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 248. For a joke in which broken eggs represent semen spilled in the context of masturbation, see for instance Rudolf M. Dekker, *Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 113.

²⁶⁵ For the metaphoric connection between egg and faeces, see for instance Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, pp. 204–5.

age and vocation. This scene must have been entertaining enough at the time, but when Vadianus repeated the joke in Rütiner's presence and in the context of post-Reformation St. Gallen, the fact that the now Protestant pastor Burgauer had made the joke at the expense of Weckerli, who, in contrast, had stayed Catholic and bound by his pledge to celibacy, added yet another twist to the story. The changed circumstances allowed Vadianus to turn the joke into a critique of the Catholic clergy's pledge to celibacy, symbolised by the image of an old Catholic priest literally sitting on, and thus crushing, his long-hoarded 'eggs'.²⁶⁶

The above example highlights three important aspects of the circulation and the social context of (sexualised) jokes which shall receive further discussion below. First, it confirms that obscene jokes were a common feature of social gatherings among the educated elite and even among churchmen, and one that was not surrounded by secrecy or shame. Quite the contrary: the fact that Vadianus stressed his own role — 'in Vadianus' presence and with his permission' — suggests that he was proud of his complicity in such an excellent prank. Second, it seems difficult to draw a clear dividing line between a 'community of laughter' and the target of the joke, for Weckerli allegedly laughed along to the prank played on him. This is of course not to suggest that Weckerli appreciated the joke to the same extent or for the same reasons that Vadianus and Burgauer did, and perhaps he simply felt obliged to laugh along to prevent an escalation, but it nevertheless suggests that the mechanisms at work were too complex to allow for a neat separation between those bonding over laughter and the person laughed at. And finally, this example illustrates that an old joke delivered in new circumstances could take on quite a different meaning. A popular character in the contemporary joke collections, a man breeding or laying eggs certainly lent himself well to an adaptation in a practical joke. Yet Vadianus' account, delivered in the context of post-Reformation St. Gallen, added another comic dimension to the joke. If jokes only make sense in context, this context is thus both cultural and social; it depends both on a set of common humorous stock figures and the specific context of the conversation in which a joke is made.

While the printed joke collections tell us little about the social context of jokes, they can shed some light on the sources for Rütiner's collection and on the circulation of jokes in general. Rütiner never directly cites a collection of *facetiae*, but he knew some of the important contemporary authors such as Angelo Poliziano, Heinrich Bebel, Johannes Pauli, by name.²⁶⁷ It is therefore possible that he was familiar with their work and drew on it for his own collection. Mostly, however, jokes

²⁶⁶ Weckerli later became the victim of a second joke; one which also mocked his old age and his stubborn loyalty to the Catholic faith for all the wrong reasons. When Weckerli complained that the proposed salary of 15 lb for Protestant pastors was far too low, Vadianus replied: 'In spem vivatis' (you shall live in hope). Yet the half-deaf Weckerli understood 'ite an speng' (go to the distribution of alms) and immediately launched upon an angry tirade: 'The devil shall go to the alms box! [This is] intolerable, intolerable.' ('Diabolus ... eat ad stipem [] intoll/erabile intollerabile'). According to the two Protestant pastors Hulrich Girtanner and Mathäus Altherr, everybody present burst into laughter. Comm. II.287.

²⁶⁷ Comm. I.506; I.538; II.402a/b.

from these collections circulated orally and reached Rütiner through friends or acquaintances.²⁶⁸ In 1535, for instance, Vadianus' cousin Georg von Watt told Rütiner three jokes about Claus Narr, two of which were variations of jokes published in Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*, a hugely popular and often obscene German collection of entertaining and moralising short stories.²⁶⁹ Another humorous anecdote taken from Pauli's collection was shared with Rütiner in the following context:

Jakob Venetus, the son of Johannes Venetus in Wil ... related this drollery ... On Christmas Eve he had dinner with us in Wil. He knows extremely well how to act like a Bavarian or a Lower German ... He is the one for whom Antonius [the bookbinder] bound together Polydore Virgil, Herodotus and *Schimpf und Ernst*.²⁷⁰

Again, this example demonstrates that jokes were not a guilty pleasure, but an integral part of humanist culture: Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* stood quite literally side by side with the works of Herodotus and the Italian humanist Polydore Virgil. Yet Jakob Venetus did not simply reproduce a joke he had found in *Schimpf und Ernst*. Instead, he inserted it into a much more elaborate comic performance. Tellingly, this performance took place during a dinner just before Christmas. The eve of an important religious holiday was apparently not reserved for solemnity and serious conversation. Instead, it was spent cracking jokes and mimicking Germans.

This episode suggests that instead of only looking at the relationship between the 'community of laughter' and those targeted by its jokes, we should perhaps explore the role of the joker himself. Herman Roodenburg has suggested that one of the main purposes of jest-books was to serve in conversation, and that being able to entertain one's companions with witty remarks and well-timed jokes was an essential requirement for any gentleman.²⁷¹ Similarly, in an article on the *homo facetus*, Gerd Dicke has described this humanist ideal as someone who could entertain and simultaneously 'demonstrate intellectual, linguistic, and social finesse'.²⁷² I would argue that the same applies to those delivering sexual and scatological jokes. 'Social finesse' was certainly required when

²⁶⁸ For instance Comm. I.887a and Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, i, p. 94, no. 138; Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 1, p. 41, no. 35 and 75, no. 85.

²⁶⁹ Comm. I.652 and Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ii, pp. 82–3, no. 840–1.

²⁷⁰ 'Iacobus Venetus Ioannis Veneti Wil filius ... / retulit illam fabul/am ... / Vigilia / natiuitatis nobiscum cenatus z Wil / perquam bellissime nouit agere Bauarum item / Germanum inferiorem ... / ille est cui Antonius Vergilium Po/lidorum Herodotum et Schimpf v Ernst combi/nauit.' Comm. II.402a/b. See also Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, i, p. 15, no. 14.

²⁷¹ Herman Roodenburg, 'To Converse Agreeably: Civility and the Telling of Jokes in Seventeenth-Century Holland', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1997), 112–33, here pp. 122–5. For a similar argument, see also Withington, 'Company and sociability', esp. pp. 302–3; idem, "'Tumbled into the dirt": Wit and incivility in early modern England', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 12/1:2 (2011), 156–77, and Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, pp. 36–8.

²⁷² Dicke, 'Homo facetus', pp. 300–1.

choosing the audience and the target of the joke, but it did by no means entail the exclusion of obscene humour.²⁷³

In fact, Rütiner's notebooks not only bear witness to the huge popularity of this material, but also to the social esteem enjoyed by those who could draw on such jokes to provide entertainment, both inside and outside of humanist circles. If laughter was indeed 'a kind of "admission ticket" into the world of humanism',²⁷⁴ it could also open the doors to other social groups. Rütiner and his fellow guildsmen very much appreciated the company of a talented entertainer such as Jakob Venetus, and Venetus in turn used his copy of *Schimpf und Ernst* to establish himself as a witty, and therefore valuable, dinner companion. Others were known and admired for their clever practical jokes, and they often personally delivered detailed accounts of their pranks, earning them a second round of laughter.²⁷⁵ It seems, thus, that it was highly desirable to be known as a *homo ioci plenus* (a man full of wit) or his (albeit much rarer) female counterpart.²⁷⁶ Wit increased the value of one's company — perhaps not least because of the health-promoting qualities which sixteenth-century humanists and physicians ascribed to laughter.²⁷⁷

How did one earn a reputation as a *homo ioci plenus*? According to early modern instructions for delivering a successful joke, the joker had to take into consideration the time and place, his audience as well as his own social position.²⁷⁸ A certain degree of social intelligence was required, in particular if a joke targeted a specific individual, and even more so if that individual was present at the time the joke was made. A *homo ioci plenus* knew how to entertain without causing irreparable damage, and thus the surest sign of a successful joke was not the audience's laughter — although that, too, was necessary — but the victim's.²⁷⁹ This may explain why Rütiner so often insists that the person targeted 'intellexit [et] risit' — got the joke and laughed along.²⁸⁰

Yet even jokes which did not target a specific individual were often adapted to the circumstances in which they were to be performed, and existing jokes were frequently rebranded as factu-

²⁷³ As Stephanie Altmann has aptly noted, the authors of early modern joke collections often reassure their readers that they have excluded obscene material, only to then provide a detailed account of the jokes they claim to have erased from their collection. Stephanie Altmann, *Gewitztes Erzählen in der Frühen Neuzeit. Heinrich Hebel's Fäzeten und ihre deutsche Übersetzung* (Kölner Germanistische Studien, Neue Folge 10, Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2009), pp. 33–4.

²⁷⁴ Grebe, 'Künstler als Komiker', 206.

²⁷⁵ For example Comm. I.316; I.584; I.787.

²⁷⁶ For example Comm. I.85; II.385b; II.387h.

²⁷⁷ See Sebastian Coxon, 'Gelächter und Gesundheit. Humanistische Thematik im >Quacksalber< des Hans Folz?', in Nicola McLelland, Hans-Jochen Schiewer and Stefanie Schmitt (eds.), *Humanismus in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters und in der Frühen Neuzeit. XVIII. Anglo-German Colloquium, Hofgeismar 2003* (Tübingen, 2008), 383–9, here p. 384. See also Altmann, *Gewitztes Erzählen*, p. 42, and Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society*, p. 63.

²⁷⁸ Giovanni Pontano, *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani De Sermonibus Libri Sex*, eds. Sergio Lupi and Antonino Riscato (Lucca, 1954), pp. 17–9, I.12.

²⁷⁹ Dicke, 'Fäzetieren', esp. 159.

²⁸⁰ For instance Comm. I.591b–c; I.787; II.385c.

al stories. When the wealthy weaver and councillor Albrecht Schlumpf bragged about his rather crude pranks, for instance, he failed to mention that he drew heavily on the large stock of humorous anecdotes in circulation, and perhaps even on printed sources. During his stay at an inn in Lichtensteig, Schlumpf allegedly conspired with a peasant to play a prank on a mercenary from Glarus who prided himself a little too much on his achievements on the battlefield. Schlumpf duped the soldier into thinking that the peasant was an *Ammann*, i.e. the head of the local government, and when this so-called '*Ammann*' defecated in the bed he shared with the mercenary, the humiliated soldier did not dare to blame him and paid a maid to remove the excrement.²⁸¹

Yet what was presented by Schlumpf as an original prank bore striking similarities to one of the stories in Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*. There, a priest is subjected to a similarly humiliating procedure by a man resentful of the fact that the priest is treated as a guest of honour, while he has to sit with the common folk.²⁸² The differences between the two versions of the joke are small but effective. Instead of targeting a priest, Schlumpf's prank was directed against another popular target of Swiss Protestantism: the mercenary. Moreover, Schlumpf managed to present himself as the master-mind behind the operation without compromising his respectability. He demonstrated his wit, but left the dirty work to someone he apparently considered more suitable for the job: a peasant. Given the right circumstances, printed or orally circulated *facetiae* thus translated easily into practical jokes — or could at least be retold as such.

Schlumpf was hardly singular in his clever adaptation of existing jokes. As the latter circulated, they were continuously changed to fit a new place and the particular tastes of a different audience.²⁸³ The joke about the old groom cited at the beginning of this chapter, which Rütiner recorded in 1529, provides a good example of this process. Six years later, in 1535, Rütiner retold almost the exact same story, only this time the protagonists were an apothecary and an old man from Wittenberg rather than a surgeon and an old man from Bischofzell:

An old man married a young woman in Wittenberg. He came to an apothecary to have a strengthening [medicine] prepared. Meanwhile another man asked for a laxative. [The apothecary] made both, placed them at the window and left it to the maid to distribute them. She gave them the wrong way. The groom spent all night shitting. He wanted to kill the apothecary.

²⁸¹ Comm. I.316.

²⁸² Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, i, p. 364, no. 653.

²⁸³ See similarly Keith Thomas, 'Bodily Control and Social Unease: The Fart in Seventeenth-Century England', in Angela McShane and Garthine Walker (eds.), *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England. Essays in Celebration of the Work of Bernard Capp* (Basingstoke, 2010), 9–30, here p. 19.

Jakob Kuntz [heard it] from the publican in Leipzig, from where he came.²⁸⁴

What seem to be, if read separately, two humorous anecdotes from Bischofszell and Wittenberg, was of course an evergreen in early modern humour: the story of the old groom who accidentally takes a laxative instead of an aphrodisiac was printed in German in 1533 as part of an extended edition of Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst*, but had already been published in Heinrich Bebel's collection of Latin *Facetiae* in 1508.²⁸⁵ Yet the raw material provided by Bebel and Pauli, which did not refer to any particular location, was adapted depending on whether the joke was reproduced for a St. Gallen or Leipzig audience. In each case, a town close by was chosen as the setting. This simple change created a more intimate relationship between the audience and the joke and increased its comic effect by suggesting that this was a factual story which had happened close by, and perhaps even to someone one knew.²⁸⁶

Yet there was also a much more substantial change to the version published in print. As the joke circulated, it was reduced to its humorous essence, to the very minimum necessary for it to work. While Bebel and Pauli follow both the old groom and the man who accidentally receives the aphrodisiac in his stead and is 'tortured all night by the erection of his prick without relief',²⁸⁷ the Wittenberg version mentions both but focuses only on the agony of the old groom. Finally, the Bischofszell version does not even mention the confusion but presents the story as a prank played by a witty surgeon.

When jokes are circulated, they undergo processes of assimilation and accentuation.²⁸⁸ In contrast to the printed joke collections, these altered versions can tell us how a wider audience understood and reproduced jokes. It can also show us what exactly people laughed at. Returning to the example above, an elderly man soiling his wedding bed apparently seemed hilarious, while the other half of the joke about a man suffering from an unwanted erection could be discarded without the joke losing any of its appeal. The reasons for this are the subject of the next section.

²⁸⁴ 'Vuittenbergae senior iuuenulam duxit [] ad ph/armacopolum venit vt confortatium praeparet / interim alius petijt Relaxationem [] ambo / fecit [] ad fenestram posuit [] ancillae commisit // distribi [] diuersimodo dedit [] sponsus totam noctem / cacando consumpsit interfecturus pharmacop/olam [] Iacob Cuntz ab hospite / z Libttz unde migratus.' Comm. I.545.

²⁸⁵ Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ii, p. 13, no. 708; Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 2, p. 101, no. 15.

²⁸⁶ On this effect see also Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, p. 37; Altrock, *Gewitztes Erzählen*, p. 61.

²⁸⁷ 'tota nocte cruciabatur erectione virgae sine laxatione'. Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 2, p. 101, no. 15.

²⁸⁸ Both of these processes have also been described by rumour theorists. See for instance Pamela Donovan, 'How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumour Research', *Diogenes*, 54 (2007), 59–82, here p. 64.

In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Freud claimed that obscene jokes were originally directed towards women and may be equated with attempts at seduction. If a man in a company of men enjoys telling or listening to smut, the original situation, which owing to social inhibitions cannot be realized, is at the same time imagined. A person who laughs at smut that he hears is laughing as though he were the spectator of an act of sexual aggression.²⁸⁹

Freud's gendered view of sexual humour has been echoed in numerous studies which rightly point out the blatant misogyny encountered in much of early modern humour.²⁹⁰ Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, for instance, have found that female voices in obscene jokes are 'mostly faked, functioning as a vehicle to bolster existing hierarchies'.²⁹¹ Sebastian Coxon has argued that the German comic tales which contain explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse offer no moral message but instead reinforce 'traditional (misogynist) sexual stereotypes'.²⁹² Even when cuckoldry and impotence were identified as dominant themes in sexual humour, as for instance by Roger Thompson in an article on seventeenth-century British humour, it was suggested that these 'deep-seated neuroses' could represent an 'attempt at the restoration of anxious masculine dominance'.²⁹³ Few scholars put it as bluntly as Gershon Legman in *The Rationale of the Dirty Joke*, but much of the literature on early modern humour nevertheless supports his impression that 'this material has all been created by men, and there is no place in it for women except as the butt'.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 97.

²⁹⁰ In addition to the examples cited below, see for instance Francis E. Dolan, 'Why are Nuns Funny?', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 70/4 (2007), 509–35, here esp. p. 512; Elfriede Moser-Rath, 'Lustige Gesellschaft': Schwank und Witz des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts in kultur- und sozialgeschichtlichem Kontext (Stuttgart, 1984), esp. pp. 91–2, 101–8, 116–7; Hiram Kümper, 'Sexualität – Gewalt – Humor', in Stefan Biessen-ecker and Christian Kuhn (eds.), *Valenzen des Lachens in der Vormoderne (1250–1750)* (Bamberger Historische Studien 8, Bamberg, 2012), 437–61; Mirosława Czarnecka, 'Misogyne Lachgemeinschaft: Barocke Frauensatire im deutsch-polnischen Vergleich', in Stefanie Arend, Thomas Borgstedt, Nicola Kaminski et. al. (eds.), *Anthropologie und Medialität des Komischen im 17. Jahrhundert (1580–1730)* (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), 357–70; Monika Jonas, 'Idealisierung und Dämonisierung als Mittel der Repression: Eine Untersuchung zur Weiblichkeitsdarstellung im spätmittelalterlichen Schwank', in Sylvia Wallinger and Monika Jonas (eds.), *Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung. Studien zur bezwungenen Weiblichkeit in der Literatur vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Germanistische Reihe 31, Innsbruck, 1986), 67–93, here esp. 90; Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, esp. pp. 190–249; Schilling, *Bildpublizistik der Frühen Neuzeit*, esp. pp. 242–5.

²⁹¹ Bremmer and Roodenburg, 'Introduction', p. 5.

²⁹² Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, p. 46.

²⁹³ Thompson, 'Popular Reading', p. 667.

²⁹⁴ Gershon Legman, *The Rationale of the Dirty Joke. An Analysis of Sexual Humour* (New York, 2006), p. 217.

A number of scholars have recently started to criticise this narrative.²⁹⁵ Sarah Toulalan has convincingly argued that by linking sexual humour to sexual aggression, the psychoanalytic approach obscures its pleasurable and erotic dimensions. Instead, Toulalan reads obscene jokes through the lens of contemporary medical theory and thus uncovers a variety of layers and hidden targets in jokes which seem exclusively misogynist on the surface.²⁹⁶ While Toulalan argues that women were not the only butt of sexual jokes, Pamela Allen Brown opposes the view that making such jokes was a male prerogative. Jestling women, Brown argues, played an important part in early modern comic literature, and female humour ‘constitutes a previously unnoticed vector of critique and social power, which may at times threaten and even disrupt reigning ideologies enforcing female subjection’.²⁹⁷ Fictional female jesters do not, of course, necessarily represent female humour, let alone female agency. In her more recent work on the seventeenth-century manuscript jestbook of Sir Nicholas Le Strange, Brown therefore moves beyond the literary sources to show that elite women did in fact regularly make bawdy jokes at social gatherings.²⁹⁸

My analysis of Rütiner’s collection builds on Toulalan’s and Brown’s insights, but seeks to exploit the peculiarities of the *Commentationes* to make clearer how their findings relate to joking practices and to the experiences of real women and men. Moreover, the notion that obscene jokes are necessarily weapons in a struggle between the sexes itself deserves some scrutiny.²⁹⁹ As an analysis of Rütiner’s jokes will show, men and women could laugh with as well as at each other, and men frequently revelled in obscene humour targeted at their own sex.

Let us first look at some examples of women taking part in sexual humour. In December 1538, the maid and midwife Anna Bösch shared the following anecdote with Rütiner: her former employer Georg Gerung the Elder once refused to sleep with his wife during vigil, the eve of a religious festival. The next day, his wife cut out a *Schuben*, a kind of apron, from his best piece of cloth. When Gerung asked what she was doing, she replied, ‘yesterday night was Holy Vigil, surely a holy festival follows and I should dress accordingly’.³⁰⁰ She thus took revenge on her husband and

²⁹⁵ In addition to the scholars mentioned below, see also Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 96; Silvia Serena Tschopp, ‘Geschlechterkampf als Gesprächspiel: Frühneuzeitliche Ehesatire im Spannungsfeld von Affirmation und Diskursivierung sozioethischer Normen’, in Stefanie Arend, Thomas Borgstedt, Nicola Kaminski et. al. (eds.), *Anthropologie und Medialität des Komischen im 17. Jahrhundert (1580–1730)* (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), 429–63, esp. pp. 456–8.

²⁹⁶ Sarah Toulalan, Sarah, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, New York, 2007), esp. pp. 199–204 and 231–2.

²⁹⁷ Brown, *Better a Shrew*, pp. 3–4. For a similar study, but focusing on medieval literature, see also Perfetti, *Women and Laughter*, pp. 2–3.

²⁹⁸ Pamela Allen Brown, ‘Jesting Rights: Women Players in the Manuscript Jestbook of Sir Nicholas Le Strange’, in Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (eds.), *Women Players in England, 1500–1600. Beyond the All-Male Stage* (Aldershot, Burlington, 2005), 305–14, here esp. pp. 306–8.

²⁹⁹ Brown is critical of the claim that early modern humour is authored only by men, but does not generally question that sexual jokes are targeted at members of the opposite sex: Brown, *Better a Shrew*, pp. 3–4 and 10.

³⁰⁰ ‘Sacra inquit Vi/gilia heri noctium fuit [] vtique sacra festi/uitas sequitur [] festiue me induam’.

simultaneously mocked him for being so prudish: the *Schuben* was a common symbol of chastity worn by virgins.³⁰¹ By exaggerating her eagerness to remain chaste during vigil — for what she suggested was nothing less than a return to her virginal state — the wife poked fun at the rules prescribing a period of sexual abstinence and those who adhered to them. Even though her husband was the victim of her joke — and a joke which would have been quite expensive at that — ‘the good man understood his wife’s humour and liked her joke’.³⁰²

He was not the only man said to appreciate female humour, even if that humour was much more explicitly sexual and highly insulting. Elisabeth, a maid who served Ulrich Ramsower in St. Gallen, allegedly got away with the following joke:

On the day when the grandfather bathed in the copper [tub], the daughter Barbara and the maid [Elisabeth] wanted to lift him up because he was not able to do anything himself [*sui nihil potens erat*]. When he stood erect, the maid pulled away the nude man’s thigh, in the presence of the daughter, who forbade it. Touching his penis with her little finger [Elisabeth] said: “Ah, how impotent.” The father laughed.³⁰³

The joke contains two puns: just when the old man stands erect, his missing erection becomes visible. By paralleling *nihil potens* with *impotens*, the joke further mocks the old man’s lack of physical strength and sexual potency and thus questions his masculinity on both levels. Contrary to what one might expect, however, Elisabeth’s disrespectful joke did not earn her master’s rage, but his laughter!

Of course one may argue that these are also faked female voices; that this second joke is just as much a product of male fantasy as those printed in the early modern joke collections. Even if Elisabeth did make a sexual joke at the expense of her master’s father, it is very unlikely that she would have had the necessary linguistic skills to play on the double entendre of *erectus* and *impotens*. Yet apparently it seemed perfectly plausible to Rütiner that women would mock men and their sexuality in this way.³⁰⁴ And more importantly: it was funny. Men laughed along with women at members of their own sex.

³⁰¹ ‘Schieben, Schuben’ in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon: Wörterbuch zur Schweizerdeutschen Sprache*, 17 vols. (Frauenfeld, 1881–), viii, columns 75–6.

³⁰² ‘In/tellexit vir bonus mulieris lepiditatem [] com/placuit ei iocus’. Comm. II.385b. For a second joke criticizing sexual abstinence during vigil, see Comm. I.303.

³⁰³ ‘quo die auus lauatus se in aheno [] filia Bar/bara cum ancilla volentes eum extrahere quia / sui nihil potens erat [] erectus [] ancilla nudo / foemorale abtraxit praesente et vetante filia / Priapum digitulo tangens ait ah quam impotens / risit pater.’ Comm. I.591b.

³⁰⁴ For more examples of women taking a very active part in sexual and scatological humour, see Brown, ‘Jesting Rights’.

Indeed, more often than seeing men laughing at women, we find men laughing at men and their (sexual) shortcomings in Rütiner's notebooks. And more often than the female body, it is the male body and his fluids that generate a comic effect. Ejaculation, impotence, and male incontinence are among the most common themes in Rütiner's collection. In what ways did they produce laughter among a male audience?

In jokes revolving around ejaculation, comic effect is usually produced by the use of unfamiliar metaphors to describe sperm to a woman who has never seen it before. In a joke told by the schoolmaster Ignatius Rotmund, for instance, a nun who confessed to herself and is punished with rape by her confessor is told that the semen is her 'absolution'. Two things which share nothing but their being given by a priest to a nun — semen and absolution — are paralleled for comic effect, and sin is forgiven by committing sin. The joke thus mocks the Catholics by pointing out their corruption and the dire state of their sacraments. Yet it does not end there: 'If only I had shat in church', the nun replies to the priest, 'what would have been laid upon/put inside [*impositum*] me then!'³⁰⁵ The joke plays on the ambiguity of *imponere*: the nun is clearly referring to the punishment which was *imposed* on her, but she is also commenting on the person who *lay upon* her and on the penis he *put inside* her. By fantasizing about how much more would have been laid upon, or, literally, inside her, had she committed an even greater sin, she is suggesting that both the punishment and the priest's body have failed to fulfil their purpose; in short, he has proved himself inadequate as both priest and lover.

In another joke following the same pattern, the man replies that the semen are 'eggs cooked in butter'.³⁰⁶ This is more than just an unconventional description of sperm. As we have already seen, eggs were a common symbol for the testicles, and sex was often likened to cooking in both popular and medical discourse.³⁰⁷ The French physician Jean Fernel, for instance, described the sexual act as one in which semen was 'clotted and whitened by heat', invoking the image of an egg being fried.³⁰⁸ Rütiner's joke, too, plays on this symbolism as it describes sperm as the content of the male 'eggs' cooked in the nun's 'butter' (i.e. vaginal lubrication). Moreover, it refers to a dish charged with notions of fertility – *Eier-i-Schmalz* (eggs-in-fat) – which was commonly served after a wedding.³⁰⁹ Hence the joke not only works on the level of the unusual analogy, but also because *Eier-i-Schmalz* ironically refers to a luxurious wedding when it is in fact the result of rape.

³⁰⁵ 'vtinam cacassem / in templum [] quid mihi tandem impositum esset'. Comm. I.309.

³⁰⁶ 'Oua cocta in butyro'. Comm. I.309.

³⁰⁷ Simons, *Sex of Men*, for instance pp. 248 and 262.

³⁰⁸ Jean Fernel, *The Physiologia of Jean Fernel (1567)*, trans. John M. Forrester (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 547, see also 541–553.

³⁰⁹ 'Eierischmalz' in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, i, row 13.

Yet again, this is not the end of the joke. ‘Lift up the *Pfannenknecht* [i.e. a metal device used to stabilise a pan during cooking], or else the butter will run down to the arse’,³¹⁰ the woman replies and thus turns the joke back on her attacker. Adding to the metaphors he employed, she points out that his *Pfannenknecht* was no longer performing as required but had to be “lifted up”.³¹¹

In yet another joke of the same type, a woman touches a man’s penis and asks whether it is made of bone or sinew. After the man has ejaculated, he responds, ‘they are bones, but broken ones. The marrow flows through the anus’.³¹² Again, the joke humorously reflects the medical knowledge of the time. First suggested by Plato, the idea that sperm flew from the spinal marrow to the testicles was still very much alive in Rütiner’s time and was depicted, for instance, in Leonardo da Vinci’s drawings of sexual intercourse.³¹³ This idea was combined with the ‘broken bone’ metaphor, a common image linked to the flaccid or impotent penis.³¹⁴ The sexual act was thus imagined as one in which an injury was inflicted on the man, a violent fight which ended with marrow flowing from his broken bone.

At the centre of most of these jokes lies a violent act against a woman, who is simultaneously ridiculed for her ignorance in sexual matters. Yet given that the women usually have the last word and expose their attackers with witty replies it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that they are the only butt of these jokes.³¹⁵ Moreover, none of the jokes focus on the female body. This is particularly striking when compared with the sexual jokes discussed by Sarah Toulalan, which mostly revolve around the exposure of female genitals and ‘do not generally make [male genitalia] the object of derision’.³¹⁶ Rütiner’s jokes, in contrast, primarily draw attention to, and laugh at, the *male* body and his fluids. In his entire collection there is only one instance in which a sexual joke focuses exclusively on the vagina; namely one in which the duchess of Saxony jokingly offers her sexual services to Claus Narr at the price of 10 gl, and claims that her private parts are ‘golden and surrounded by pearls’.³¹⁷ Yet even then it is the gullible, sexually inexperienced fool who is ridiculed, not the duchess.

Referring to printed joke-books, Barbara Bowen has argued that ‘with a few exceptions, ‘dirty’ jokes are *either* sexual *or* scatological’.³¹⁸ The jokes collected by Rütiner, however, suggest

³¹⁰ ‘Leuate pfannen/knecht alias butyrum in culum descendit.’

³¹¹ ‘Pfanne(n)knecht’ in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, iii, columns 727–8.

³¹² ‘Ossa sunt [] fracta autem med/ulla per anum fluit.’ Comm. I.309.

³¹³ Simons, *Sex of Men*, pp. 135 and 161.

³¹⁴ Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, p. 115.

³¹⁵ Roger Thompson has observed similar patterns in English jokes: Thompson, ‘Popular Reading’, p. 664.

³¹⁶ Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, p. 218.

³¹⁷ ‘aureum cum margaritis sceptum’, Comm. I.652. See similarly, but without the explicit reference to the duchess’ vagina: Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, ii, p. 82, no. 840.

³¹⁸ Barbara C. Bowen, ‘The ‘Honorable Art of Farting’ in Continental Renaissance Literature’, in Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (eds.), *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art. Studies in Scatology* (Studies in European Cultural Transition 21, Aldershot, Burlington, 2004), 1–13, here p. 2.

that sexual, anal and scatological humour were closely intertwined. In many of the jokes already discussed, the sexual act is linked to excretion and sperm is imagined to flow through or down to the anus after intercourse. Although there are no explicit descriptions of anal sex, some of the jokes clearly play with the taboo. In one of them, a prostitute confesses to cheating on a man she had previously stolen from another woman. Appalled by her shameless behaviour, the priest shouts, ‘earth, open up and suffocate her.’ Yet the quick-witted woman turns her buttocks towards the priest and replies, ‘arse, suffocate the priest’.³¹⁹ As Sebastian Coxon has pointed out, turning one’s exposed backside towards another person was a common insult, but one which was almost exclusively employed by men. When a woman used it, the gesture took on a distinctly sexual connotation.³²⁰ The prostitute in Rütiner’s joke alludes to this when she tells her behind to “suffocate” the priest. By revealing her backside, she simultaneously exposes his desire for it, making him a bigger sinner than herself.

Another joke similarly references anal sex, albeit even more obscurely:

Discord arose between dogs and cats about the private parts. They dispatched a dog to Rome. They fastened a charter of liberties under the tail/penis [*sub pene*]. Therefore they look for it there [i.e. beneath the tail] when they meet. They hate the cats.³²¹

Cats were closely associated with women and the female sphere, and the vagina was also often referred to as a cat — a metaphoric link which still lives on in words such as ‘pussy’, or the French ‘chatte’.³²² The dogs, on the other hand, are clearly marked as male by their penises. The joke seems to play on the observation that dogs sniff each other’s behinds when they meet; a phenomenon which is explained with their search for the papal decree fastened to their penises/underneath their tails, i.e. near the anus. Perhaps, then, the dogs represent the Catholic clergy, who, ‘liberated’ by papal decree from intercourse with cats/women, engage in much more sinful sexual practices with one another.

While jokes about sodomy are hidden underneath several layers of metaphors, scatological jokes are much more explicit, and more explicitly linked to sex. The various fluids and solids erupting plentifully from the male body — semen, faeces, urine — were likened to each other, and impotence was often joined by incontinence.³²³ In the joke of the old groom who accidentally takes a

³¹⁹ ‘Terra aperi te / suffoca illam [] reversa culum aposuit, ait [] culum suffoca / sacerdotem.’ Comm. I.309.

³²⁰ Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, p. 137.

³²¹ ‘Discordia orta inter canes et feles super / inguinal [] dimiserunt canem Romam sub / pene literas ligarunt de libertate hac id/eo quaerunt eam convenientes [] feles odientes.’ Comm. I.132c.

³²² Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*, p. 95.

³²³ On the association of masculinity with this threat of erupting and soiling liquids in sixteenth-century Germany, see Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994), here p. 112.

laxative rather than an aphrodisiac, his inability to perform sexually is matched by his failure to control his bodily functions during his wedding night, and instead of semen, faeces flow uncontrollably from his body.³²⁴ It is not a coincidence that an old man was chosen as the target of this joke. According to contemporary medical theory, men were hotter and dryer than women, yet they lost some of their virile strength and distinctly male characteristics as they grew older and colder.³²⁵ Impotence and incontinence were thus both symptoms of a transformation which old men were imagined to undergo; a transformation which moved them closer to the opposite sex.³²⁶

The sexual act and semen were also paralleled with defecation and faeces, as for instance in a joke which Rütiner records at the very beginning of his notebooks in 1529:

A man visited a nunnery. After long prayers, he lay down on a bench and uncovered his penis. Asked what it was, he replied, ‘it is a pipe/oats [*avena*].’ “Give it to my hen”, [the nun] said. After he had given it often, he finally shat on her. He said it was the brood.³²⁷

Several jokes are wrapped up in one. The first plays on the double meaning of the Latin word *avena*: originally referring to oats, its secondary meaning, pipe, is derived from the similarities in the shape of stalk and instrument. Both, moreover, were common contemporary metaphors for the penis.³²⁸ In a second step, the nun builds on the metaphor and assures the man that her hungry “hen” craves his “oats”.³²⁹ Finally, the man defecates on the nun and calls his excrements “brood”. Thus, the joke above not only draws on the likeness of egg and faeces to playfully extend the oat/hen metaphor even further, but it also literally reproduces a contemporary German expression: *bescheissen*, to shit upon, also meant to betray and was commonly used when a man took a woman’s virginity but broke his promise of marriage.³³⁰ Moreover, the joke points out the illegitimacy

³²⁴ Comm. I.210; I.545.

³²⁵ Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 154. In fact, some physicians even prescribed complete sexual abstinence to their elderly patients, for each ejaculation was thought to draw precious heat from their aging bodies. See Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham, Burlington, 2009), here pp. 1–4.

³²⁶ For an example of how negative stereotypes regarding old age and gender intersected in the figure of the comically lecherous old man, see Gabriela Signori, ‘Die verlorene Ehre des Heiligen Joseph oder Männlichkeit im Spannungsfeld spätmittelalterlicher Altersstereotypen. Zur Genese von Urs Grafs “Heiliger Familie” (1521)’, in Klaus Schreiner and Gerd Schwerhoff (eds.), *Verletzte Ehre. Ehrkonflikte in Gesellschaften des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit* (Norm und Struktur 5, Köln, 1995), 183–213.

³²⁷ ‘Quidam in nonialium clauetro diuertens / post longas preces super scanum decumbens / priapum detegens Interrogatus quid esset / respondit auenu[=a]m est [] Da inquit gallinae / meae [] sepius dato tandem cacauit in / eam [] ait esse bruott [] etc’. Comm. I.185.

³²⁸ Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, pp. 83 and 88; Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 236.

³²⁹ (Female) hunger was a common metaphor for sexual desire, and eating a metaphor for coitus. See Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, pp. 105–7 and 121–8; Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 201.

³³⁰ ‘Bescheissen’, *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, viii, columns 1334–41. See also Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, p. 200.

and fruitlessness of the sexual encounter between the man and the nun: excretion takes the place of ejaculation, and instead of legitimate offspring, their relationship produces only faeces.

The close link between sex and defecation in early modern jokes may seem foreign to us, but we should be careful not to view it as pathological.³³¹ In the context of sixteenth-century culture the connections between intercourse and digestion were numerous and more than just metaphoric. This was a culture in which the sexual act was described using metaphors linked to cooking and eating, in which the penis, testicles and semen were likened to foodstuffs and the vagina to a hungry mouth waiting to be fed.³³² It was also a time in which the medical discourse postulated close links between all bodily fluids: food was thought to be transformed into blood as it went through the digestive system, blood in turn became breast milk and seed, and the latter was also metaphorically represented by marrow and urine.³³³ The healthy body depended on the right flow and balance of all its fluids, and sex and excretion, responsible as they were for the expulsion and transfer of liquids, played an important role within this system.³³⁴ This shared role made it easy to draw parallels between the sexual and excretory functions of the body.³³⁵ As Sarah Toulalan has argued, this means that ‘the body’s excretions can ... all stand for one another, so that humour about breaking wind, defecation, and urination can also be about sex and sexual fluids’.³³⁶

In the context of Renaissance medicine, then, faeces were not only associated with dirt and degradation. In a system that depended on the flow and balance of bodily fluids, excretion was of high importance to sustain a healthy body.³³⁷ This idea is reflected in another joke recorded by Rütiner, in which a group of poor students insert a piece of wood into the anus of a baker’s pig. The next day the pig dies ‘because it could not shit’.³³⁸ Due to its sudden and mysterious death, the pig’s meat cannot be legally sold, and so it is given to the only people still willing to have it: to the students who were responsible for the pig’s death in the first place.

It has sometimes been suggested that talking about sex and faeces constituted a taboo, and consequently the comic effect of scatological jokes was attributed to a pleasurable transgression of

³³¹ See Lyndal Roper, *Der feiste Doktor. Luther, sein Körper und seine Biographien*, trans. Karin Wördemann (Göttingen, 2012), p. 64. Nor is it productive to apply psychoanalytic categories to early modern scatological humour, as has sometimes been attempted. See for instance Claude Gandelman, “‘Patri-arse’: Revolution as Analogy in the Scatological Caricatures of the Reformation and the French Revolution”, *American Imago*, 53/1 (1996), 7–24.

³³² For instance Simons, *Sex of Men*, pp. 248 and 262.

³³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4 and 272; Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, p. 199.

³³⁴ Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 126 and 272.

³³⁵ Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 230–1.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³³⁷ For an extreme example of how crucial the balance between intake and excretion seemed to doctors in the early modern period, see for instance Shigehisa Kuriyama, ‘The Forgotten Fear of Excrement’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38/3 (2008), 413–42. See also Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 199 and 228–9, and Simons, *Sex of Men*, p. 127.

³³⁸ ‘quia / non cacare potuit moritur.’ Comm. II.183.

social norms and the relief it provided.³³⁹ By now, however, it should have become clear that the taboo is a modern one; one based on the idea that defecation in particular is a private, shameful act and an inappropriate topic of conversation. In the sixteenth century, *talking* about faeces was not forbidden, and excretion was less hidden away.³⁴⁰ Norbert Elias has famously used Erasmus of Rotterdam's *De civilitate morum puerilium* to demonstrate how ideas about manners started to shift at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but he also noted that Erasmus did not yet find any shame in calling 'the bodily functions by their name'.³⁴¹ The same is true for Rütiner and his contemporaries, who regularly and openly discussed both sexual and scatological matters. We have already seen that even women could talk about sex under certain circumstances, as in the case of Anna Bösch who laid bare her late employer Georg Gerung the Elder's sexual activities; detailing, for instance, how he 'stood next to [his maid's] bed with a lustful penis' one night and asked her to sleep with him.³⁴² Rütiner and his friends also regularly discussed other men's (in)digestion over dinner.³⁴³ They talked about the steward of Oberberg who 'did not shit for two full years',³⁴⁴ or about Friedrich Schuhmacher who suffered from such terrible diarrhoea that he 'shat from his horse' while riding to the market in Lyon.³⁴⁵ Jokes did thus not offer a space of freedom to discuss things which could not otherwise be addressed; rather, they represented a specific *way* of addressing them.

But if, as I argue, these jokes neither drew their comic effect from allowing aggressions against women to be released, nor from breaking a taboo related to sex and faeces, what made them funny? I would argue that the jokes play on inversion and misplacement.³⁴⁶ Faeces produced laughter when they were imagined to be dumped where they did not belong, such as in a church or in the marital bed. They were hilarious when they took the place of semen during intercourse or when, as Bebel puts it, a man's expected sexual potency was replaced by the 'old man's strongest potency', namely incontinence.³⁴⁷ When semen was described as a cooked egg or bone marrow, or when a man emptied his bowels instead of his testicles after sex, the jokes referred to the contemporary medical knowledge but simultaneously inverted it, comically replacing one bodily fluid with another.

³³⁹ For instance Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, p. 8, or Thompson, 'Popular Reading', p. 665.

³⁴⁰ See Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim, 'Introduction: Scatology, the Last Taboo', in idem (eds.), *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art. Studies in Scatology* (Studies in European Cultural Transition 21, Aldershot, Burlington, 2004), xiii–xxi, here p. xvii; Thomas, 'Bodily Control and Social Unease', 11, and similarly Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, 228–9. For an account of Martin Luther's anal and scatological rhetoric and its link to Luther's theology, see for instance Roper, *Der feiste Doktor*, pp. 54–67.

³⁴¹ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M., 1976), i, pp. 273–4.

³⁴² 'nocte quadam iuxta lectum eius / stetit pruriente mentula, permitte inquit / ut tecum dormiam'. Comm. II.385c.

³⁴³ See for instance Comm. I.361.

³⁴⁴ '2 integris annis / non cacavit'. Comm. I.893n.

³⁴⁵ 'de equo / cacavit'. Comm. II.153f.

³⁴⁶ See also Coxon, *Comic Tales*, p. 99.

³⁴⁷ Bebel, *Fazetien*, book 2, p. 101, no. 15.

Inversion and misplacement both served to challenge the masculinity of the main characters in Rütiner's jokes in a number of ways. Men were likened to breeding hens; they symbolically crushed their own testicles; their penises were described as broken and in need of being 'lifted up', or they were considered fodder for a nun's hen or a prostitute's buttocks. They shat uncontrollably, soiling themselves and others, and some were even accused of sodomitical tendencies. Rather than only reinforcing misogynist sexual stereotypes, these jokes first and foremost paraded a whole army of inadequate men. Impotent grooms, incontinent old men, gullible fools, humiliated mercenaries and lecherous priests — these are the protagonists of Rütiner's jokes. It seems important to note that the cuckold, so prominent a target in early modern printed joke collections, is missing from the list.³⁴⁸ Rütiner and his friends apparently preferred to laugh at men who were betrayed by their own bodies, not their wives. Through their jokes, they thus circumscribed and reaffirmed an image of desirable masculinity as rooted in the body and dependent on sexual potency, physical strength, and full control of all bodily functions.

In the sixteenth century, sexual and scatological jokes were not a guilty pleasure, not something one read in secret and repeated only in hushed voices, in the privacy of one's home, earning slightly uncomfortable chuckles. Evidence from St. Gallen shows that both men and women, artisans and the intellectual elite, made and enjoyed sexual jokes, which were often shared over dinner, in the presence of both friends and strangers. By studying the social context of Rütiner's jokes, we have seen that the latter were not only a safety valve for aggressions and unwanted emotions, but also a source of positive ones. Wit required a high degree of social intelligence and was therefore both a valued possession and an important element of sociability.

Although Rütiner and his friends borrowed plentifully from the humorous material in circulation, they never recited a joke just like it appeared in a printed joke collection. Sometimes they retold it as an ingenious practical joke, or as a factual story which had 'truly' happened in a town close by. Sometimes they replaced the butt of a joke with a more suitable target, or they got rid of an element which no longer seemed funny. Therefore, the printed collections of *facetiae* are not in themselves representative of sixteenth-century everyday humour despite the fact they often served as one of its sources. In general, Rütiner's jokes are even more explicitly sexual, more detailed in

³⁴⁸ On the popularity and interpretation of cuckoldry jokes, see in particular Brown, *Better a Shrew*, pp. 83–117, and Moser-Rath, "Lustige Gesellschaft", pp. 123–30. See also Thompson, 'Popular Reading', pp. 666–7, and Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 213–4.

their description of bodily excretions, and for the most part free of any moralising. Yet they are also complex and multi-layered, often playfully exploiting the double entendre of Latin words and drawing on contemporary medical discourse, making it impossible to separate sexual from erudite humour.³⁴⁹

Sexual humour was also closely related to anal and scatological humour. This was the consequence of a culture in which coitus was described with metaphors related to eating and cooking, and in which semen and excretions were believed to belong to the same system of bodily fluids.³⁵⁰ In fact humour, too, was part of this system, for laughter, like sex and digestion, was thought to enhance the flow and release of liquids.³⁵¹ It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Rütiner and his friends often shared sexual and scatological jokes over dinner: as they consumed food and drink, they humorously reflected about the substances into which the former would be processed, and perhaps they even imagined their laughter to support this transformation.

Historians have often found early modern jokes to be aggressive and misogynist. Yet the fact that most obscene jokes in Rütiner's *Commentationes* focus on the male body and his fluids suggests that we should also take a closer look at the ways in which men targeted other men and their sexuality in early modern humour. Like excessive misogyny, men's aggressions towards those who fail to meet the dominant standards of masculinity, along with their anxious attempts to comply with these standards, have sometimes been taken as evidence for a crisis of masculinity itself.³⁵² This, however, is not how I think Rütiner's jokes should be understood. If anything, the *Commentationes* point towards competitiveness rather than anxiety. In the same contexts in which Rütiner heard most of the jokes discussed in this chapter, his learned friends demonstrated their knowledge of history, linguistics, and classical literature, councillors offered glimpses into local politics, and well-travelled merchants boasted of their international networks providing them with news from all over Europe. In this context, obscene humour provided one opportunity among many for men to distinguish themselves and to contribute to the conversation. Those who made successful jokes displayed their social skills, their intelligence, and, in a humanist setting, their proficiency in Latin. Those who made obscene jokes moreover boasted medical knowledge and sexual experience. And if these jokes targeted other men and their failing bodies, the joker implied that he, in contrast, sat-

³⁴⁹ Herman Roodenburg has made similar observations in relation to a private manuscript joke collection dating from the seventeenth century; Roodenburg, 'To Converse Agreeably', pp. 119–21.

³⁵⁰ See for instance Simons, *Sex of Men*, pp. 262–4.

³⁵¹ Coxon, 'Gelächter und Gesundheit', especially pp. 384–5.

³⁵² Mirosława Czarnecka, for instance, argues that misogynist humour is symptomatic for a crisis of masculinity; Czarnecka, 'Misogyne Lachgemeinschaft', p. 369. As Toby L. Ditz has aptly noted, however, historians risk downplaying male power by laying the emphasis on anxious, fragile and fragmented masculinities: Toby L. Ditz 'The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History', *Gender and History*, 16/1 (2004), 1–35. For a similar critique, see also Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2006), p. 5; Simons, *Sex of Men*, pp. 73–8.

isfied the expectations early modern society placed on men. Perhaps, then, this particular type of humour was so popular among Rütiner's friends because it allowed them to present themselves as entertainers and to display their masculinity at the same time.

Jokes, thus, functioned as a kind of "communicative currency" in social exchanges. Another type of currency, gossip, will be the subject of the next chapter.

4 *Vetula loquax?* Gossip and the value of social knowledge

Rütiner did not like gossips. His attitude towards those who talked too much is best illustrated by the following anecdote:

Kessler once spoke of how nature indicated silence with the teeth, which fortify [the mouth] like a fence so that talk cannot burst out, similarly the lips etc. Immediately Andreas Stercker burst out: “That is why”, he said, “old women are so talkative and [why they] always chatter: because of the broken fence.” He was unaware that he was jumping over the fence himself; he did not listen to nature’s warning. I was present myself.³⁵³

Rütiner agreed with Kessler that talking too much was against nature, and more importantly, it displeased God. The comparison Kessler drew between teeth, lips, and a fence echoed the Book of Psalms: ‘Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips’.³⁵⁴ Yet this was only one of numerous condemnations of loose talk in the Old Testament. ‘In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise’³⁵⁵ was taught in the Proverbs, for instance; while Leviticus warned that ‘thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people’, continuing, revealingly, ‘neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour’.³⁵⁶ Gossip was thus presented as incompatible with neighbourly love; an immoral activity which led, almost inevitably, to conflict and sin. It was the type of talk that threatened people’s reputation. Indeed, Rütiner himself experienced the destructive power of gossip when three of his siblings-in-law died within the space of a few weeks: ‘dissolute and all-too trusting’³⁵⁷ people in St. Gallen immediately started a rumour that Rütiner’s in-laws had been called to the Valley of Jehosaphat, where according to popular belief God judged over sinners. ‘I wondered’, Rütiner writes, ‘why the magistrate did not fine some of the people who talked so thoughtlessly, [bringing] disgrace on the Gospel’.³⁵⁸

³⁵³ ‘Ahenarius aliquando locutus quemadmodum natura sil/entium indicauerit per dentes quae tanquam sepe mu/niunt ne loquacitas prorumpat [] similiter labia etc / Serie prorupit Andreas Stercker [] Hinc fit / inquit [] quod vetulae tam loquaces subinde garri/unt fracto sepe [] Ipse immemor quod et / ipse transiliens sepe naturam non audit / monentem [] ipse interfui’. Comm. I.932k.

³⁵⁴ Psalms 141:3.

³⁵⁵ Proverbs 10:19.

³⁵⁶ Lev. 19:16.

³⁵⁷ ‘solutos et praefideles’

³⁵⁸ ‘mirabar non a magistratu aliquot homines mul/ctatos tam temere loquentes in infamiam / Euangelij’. Comm. II.316a.

As Andreas Stercker's joke about old women's toothless mouths suggested, by the sixteenth century gossip had become closely associated with female talk.³⁵⁹ Women's sharp tongues, early modern writers suggested, posed a threat to male authority and honour and had to be closely controlled; silence was recommended as a female virtue.³⁶⁰ A famous sixteenth-century woodcut of the "ideal" woman, for instance, depicted her with a lock sealing her lips, 'so that it may prevent idle talk / and never harm anybody's honour'.³⁶¹ At the same time as they warned of the power of women's talk, early modern writers also sought to diminish that power by depicting it as idle and unreliable.³⁶²

Given Rütiner's and his contemporaries' contempt for loose talk, it seems ironic that historians initially dismissed the *Commentationes* as an unreliable source on the very basis that they contained mostly local gossip.³⁶³ There seems to have been some discrepancy between Rütiner's condemnation of gossip on the one hand, and his active participation in the practice on the other. As I intend to show in this chapter, the same was true more generally for men's scepticism towards female talk, for they also relied on women's gossip.

While nineteenth-century historians did not think that gossip constituted a valid subject of historical research, over the last few decades interest in the subject has grown, especially because it is now commonly understood as an 'expression of the rules and values governing behaviour in a par-

³⁵⁹ See especially Schindler and Holenstein, 'Geschwätzgeschichte(n)'. This association is still reflected in the modern terminology: 'gossip' drives from 'god-sib' and 'originally denoted a godparent of either sex, but came to apply almost exclusively to women, and to denote any close female friend'; see Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 51. Its modern German equivalent, *Klatsch*, is even more closely associated with the female sphere: originally describing a loud bang or a dirty stain, it was intimately linked to a place of female labour: the washhouse. See Birgit Althans, "'Halte dich fern von den klatschenden Weibern...'" Zur Phänomenologie des Klatsches', *Feministische Studien*, 4/2 (Nov. 1985), 46–53, here p. 46. See also Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, p. 175–7.

³⁶⁰ Cf. however Christina Luckyj, *"A Moving Rhetorick": Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2010), who argues that in some instances, silence could also be seen as a male virtue.

³⁶¹ Anton Woensam and Wolfgang Resch, *Dise Figur sol man an schawen. Die bedewtet ein weyse Frawen* (c. 1525), woodcut, Graphische Sammlung Albertina in Vienna, DG 1966/218. Here taken from Bake, *Spiegel einer Christlichen vnd friedtsamen Haushaltung*, p. 453, fig. 68. In full, the accompanying poem goes as follows: 'Von gold trag ich vor meinem munde / Ein schloß tag nacht und alle stunde / Auff das es unnütz red vermeyd / Und niemand nie sein Eer abschneyd' ('In front of my mouth I carry a golden / lock, day and night and at all hours, / so that it may prevent idle talk / and never harm anybody's honour').

³⁶² See for instance Holenstein and Schindler, 'Geschwätzgeschichte(n)', pp. 42–3 and 47–51; Horodovich, 'The gossiping tongue', pp. 25–8; idem, *Language and Statecraft*, pp. 134–41. For an example of a cautionary tale warning of the effects of gossip and in particular of women's inability to keep a secret, see for instance Geoffrey R. Hope, 'The Wife Multiplies the Secret' (AaTh 1381D): Some Fortunes of an Exemplary Tale', in Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (eds.), *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art. Studies in Scatology* (Studies in European Cultural Transition 21, Aldershot, Burlington, 2004), 14–23.

³⁶³ See for instance Bonorand, 'Bücher und Bibliotheken', p. 102; Bernhard Milt, *Vadian als Arzt* (Vadian-Studien 6, St. Gallen, 1959), p. 137, where Milt calls the *Commentationes* a 'cracker-barrel-diary... containing quite some city gossip.' ('Stammtisch-Tagebuch ... das nicht wenig Stadtklatsch enth[ält]'); von Liebenau, 'Aus dem Diarium', p. 45; similarly, but not as dismissive, von Wyss, *Geschichte der Historiographie*, p. 239, and Feller and Bonjour, *Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz*, p. 238. See also Ernst Gerhard Rüschi's apt critique of such views in his introduction to the *Commentationes*: Rüschi, 'Kommentarband', pp. 44–5. It is important to note, however, that Rüschi ultimately argued that Rütiner's notes should *not* be viewed as gossip, but as a depiction of life in St. Gallen at a key moment in its history.

ticular time and place'.³⁶⁴ Much like in the case of humour, historians' interest in gossip was in part inspired by the work of social anthropologists and psychologists.³⁶⁵ Based on Elizabeth Colson's study of Makah Indians, the social anthropologist Max Gluckman argued that gossip fosters group cohesion by reaffirming the group's values, demarcating its boundaries and providing a tool for the control and sanctioning of outsiders.³⁶⁶ One could thus argue that he proposed a kind of 'community of gossip' akin to the 'community of laughter' discussed in the previous chapter; a relatively homogenous social group in which gossip functions as the 'hallmark of membership'.³⁶⁷ Gluckman's view of gossip has been hugely influential among early modern historians, who have since studied the numerous ways in which social groups, and especially groups of women and those deprived of formal power, upheld their values, policed deviant behaviour, and resisted the authorities through gossip.³⁶⁸

What has often been overlooked, however, was that Gluckman's functionalist approach to gossip was challenged early on by Robert Paine, who proposed that research on gossip should focus on the individual rather than the group. According to Paine, gossip is employed by individuals in pursuit of their personal interests; its potential to unite or divide social groups should therefore be seen as a side effect, not its primary function.³⁶⁹ Paine was also among the first scholars to suggest that gossip should be studied both as a social practice *and* an important way of spreading and obtaining information.³⁷⁰ He thus offered an important critique to the widespread idea that 'because

³⁶⁴ Edith B. Gelles, 'Gossip: An Eighteenth-Century Case', *Journal of Social History*, 22/4 (1989), 667–83, here p. 668. See similarly Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture', p. 315.

³⁶⁵ The parallels between research on early modern humour and gossip are striking: both were elusive oral practices which left few traces outside of literary sources and court records; both are primarily viewed through the lens of the theories proposed by scholars of neighbouring disciplines; and in both cases, these theories tried to make sense of such practices by linking them to processes of inclusion and exclusion. Psychoanalysts have also suggested that gossip touches on taboos and provides a 'discharge mechanism' for anxieties and aggressions which cannot otherwise be expressed: Jean B. Rosenbaum and Mayer Subrin, 'The Psychology of Gossip', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 11 (1963), 817–31, here especially pp. 820–30. This second theory, closely modelled on Freud's theory of humour as a safety valve, however, is rarely discussed in the historical debate.

³⁶⁶ Max Gluckman, 'Papers in Honor of Melville J. Herskovits: Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4/3 (June 1963), 307–316.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³⁶⁸ There is hardly a historical study of gossip which does not cite Gluckman, and his arguments, although based on a small sample of cases taken from a secondary source, are usually repeated uncritically. See in particular Suzannah Lipscomb, 'Crossing Boundaries: Women's Gossip, Insults, and Violence in Sixteenth-Century France', *French History*, 25/4 (2011), 408–26, here esp. pp. 412–3; Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960* (Aldershot, Vermont, 1995), for instance pp. 2 and 4; Gelles, 'Gossip', pp. 667–8; Chris Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance Among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past & Present* 160 (1998), 3–24, here pp. 9–13 and 16; Walker, 'Whispering Fama', p. 23.

³⁶⁹ Robert Paine, 'What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis', *Man. New Series*, 2/2 (June 1967), 278–85, here pp. 278 and 283. See also Peter J. Wilson, 'Filcher of Good Names: An Enquiry into Anthropology and Gossip', *Man. New Series*, 9/1 (March 1974), 93–102.

³⁷⁰ Paine, 'What is Gossip About?', p. 282.

[gossiping] is a sociable process, the content of the talk is not as important as the interaction which the talking supports'.³⁷¹

Most studies of historical gossip rely on court records. In these sources gossip typically appears in two forms: either it is discussed as part of libel charges, or evidence of a wide range of criminal behaviour is brought forth by gossip networks.³⁷² The type of gossip that leaves traces in court records, however, represents merely the dirtiest tip of the iceberg, namely hostile, socially divisive, and potentially libellous talk. It thus confirms the negative picture of gossip in the contemporary learned discourse sketched above.

By building on Paine's suggestion to study gossip as a type of information-mongering, and by turning to a source which allows us to study everyday gossip in a broader variety of social contexts, I shall attempt to refine this picture of early modern gossip. In what follows, gossip is understood as a social practice concerned with the sharing of information about physically absent, but socially relevant third parties.³⁷³ Section one focuses on the gossip shared with Rütiner by his most frequent female informant, the midwife Anna Bösch, and challenges Gluckman's assumption that those who share gossip must necessarily belong to the same social group. We shall see that in practice, Rütiner was reluctant to apply the negative stereotype of the unreliable, chatty woman to his female informants. Rather, their access to insider information often made their stories particularly valuable. Section two looks at gossip in conversations among Rütiner's male friends to argue that it was different areas of expertise, not different gossip practices, which distinguished male from female gos-

³⁷¹ Sally Yerkovich, 'Gossiping as a way of speaking', *Journal for Communication*, 27/1 (1977), 192–96, here p. 192. See also similarly Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 57, and Gelles, 'Gossip', p. 667.

³⁷² For a critical reflection on court records as a source for gossip, see Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, esp. pp. 141–2. Studies of gossip focusing on court cases include Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1999), esp. pp. 16–42; Steve Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 9/3 (1994), 391–419; Samuel S. Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society in Restoration York', *Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 16/1 (2003), 1–16; Horodowich, 'Witchcraft and Rumour'; Lipscomb, 'Crossing Boundaries'; Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture'. One notable exception is Gelles, 'Gossip', which explores gossip in transatlantic letters sent between members of an eighteenth-century family.

³⁷³ My definition of gossip builds upon those proposed by Edith B. Gelles, Elizabeth Horodowich, and Chris Wickham: Gelles, 'Gossip', p. 667; Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, p. 133, and Wickham, 'Gossip and Resistance', p. 11. The early modern terminology draws no clear distinction between gossip, rumour, slander, and idle talk, and some historians have argued that it does not make sense to separate these concepts (see for instance Walker, 'Whispering *Fama*', p. 12). Yet Rütiner only uses the term *fama* to denote the result of gossip, i.e. reputation, not the process of gossiping itself (see also chapter five). Moreover, Rütiner would certainly not have described his own activities as "gossiping" even if he had had the vocabulary to do so. We therefore cannot avoid relying (to some extent) on a modern conception of gossip. My definition attempts to bring to light some of the specific characteristics of gossip: 1) Gossip may of course turn into slander, and the threat gossip could potentially pose to individuals' honour is what made it a matter of public concern in the first place, but gossip was not always aimed at harming another person's reputation. 2) Gossip sometimes involves rumours, but in contrast to the latter it is always concerned with *people*. Talk about a natural disaster may take on the form of a rumour, but it would not qualify as gossip – unless, say, that natural disaster destroyed goods owned by one's neighbour, or a well-known merchant in town. 3) Similarly, gossip is sometimes considered news or comes in the form of a tale, but in contrast to the latter it only concerns named individuals connected in some way or another to the community within which gossip is shared.

sips. Combined, the first two sections examine the ways in which St. Gallen's gossips sought to convey an image of themselves through gossip, and argues that gossip represented a form of "communicative social capital". According to Rütiner's friend Joseph Friederich, malicious gossip targeted two groups in particular: the very fortunate and the criminals, about whom so many malicious stories were spread that 'if half of it were true, everyone deserved death'.³⁷⁴ The third section of this chapter is devoted to them; it examines gossip *about* St. Gallen court cases, highlighting the ways in which talk about crime could harm both the accused's reputation and threaten the authority of the court.

An outsider on the inside: Anna Bösch

For a few months in 1536 and 1538, respectively, Anna Bösch suddenly became Rütiner's primary source of information. In this short time she shared more memorable stories with Rütiner than Vadianus did in the entire decade between 1529 and 1539, and supplied him with plenty of juicy stories about her former employers.

Despite her frequent appearance as an informant, it is unlikely that Anna Bösch was part of Rütiner's social circle: as a single woman who did not live in Rütiner's immediate neighbourhood, whose taxable assets amounted to less than a tenth of Rütiner's, and who was almost 30 years his senior, they had little in common.³⁷⁵ It seems likely, however, that Bösch helped deliver some of Rütiner's children and cared for the new-born and the mother in childbed. Rütiner's son Johannes was born in August 1536, just around the time when Bösch makes her first appearance as an informant. Another child, Barbara, was born on 17 November 1538, and indeed Bösch reappears in the notebooks that very month.³⁷⁶ As a midwife and nurse, or *Pflegeren*, as Rütiner called her, she would have spent a lot of time in Rütiner's house in the critical weeks after a birth.

While this explains Bösch's regular appearance as an informant in 1536 and 1538, it does not explain why Rütiner gave so much weight to her stories. Despite being sceptical of gossips, and despite the close association between (old) women and unreliable talk, Rütiner recorded Bösch's stories in as much detail as the dinner conversations in Vadianus' circle or the tales told by his fel-

³⁷⁴ 'vt si dimidiatum verum / esset quisque dignus morti'. Comm. I.860.

³⁷⁵ For Bösch's age, see Comm. II.376. In 1533, Anna Bösch's taxable assets were estimated at 70 lb, while Rütiner's were already above 900 lb. The tax records moreover tell us that Bösch lived *Im Loch* on the southwest end of St. Gallen, while Rütiner's house lay a few streets further north, on the *Neugasse*. See StadtASG, 281: Steuerbuch 1533, fol. 41r.

³⁷⁶ Comm. I.948g/II.376. For the dates of birth of Rütiner's children, see chapter one.

low guildsmen, and even complimented her on her remarkably good memory.³⁷⁷ What could Bösch provide that his other, more prominent informants could not?

Bösch was an almost inexhaustible source for information about people and their relationships. Born in 1474, she had worked as a maidservant, midwife, wet-nurse, and nurse in St. Gallen for several decades and had gradually accumulated an immense knowledge of who was related to whom. When describing the wedding of one of her employers, for example, she could tell Rütiner that Mertzin, the bride,

had been brought up well by her father's maid, Anna of Muolen, who for a long time served in the castle Hagenwil, whom Jakob Mertz married afterwards, from whom he begot Jakob, the goldsmith, who in his youth had learned to weave from Jakob Oderboltz ...³⁷⁸

In her stories, Bösch thus wove individuals into their familial structures and into St. Gallen's larger social fabric, making visible the numerous bonds and alliances which structured Rütiner's social world. Since such knowledge could be immensely useful in the context of a face-to-face-community, Rütiner gathered similar 'family histories' from a variety of sources, but they were rarely as detailed as Bösch's.³⁷⁹

There is evidence that Rütiner drew on this type of knowledge in his capacity as a councillor. When one Christoph Schurpf came before the Great Council and sought to renew his St. Gallen citizenship in December of 1538, for instance, Rütiner was able to draw on information he had previously received from Bösch: according to her, Christoph Schurpf originally came from a respectable, hard-working St. Gallen family.³⁸⁰ Rütiner repeats the information given by Bösch in an entry on Schurpf's petition, and notes that the Great Council indeed decided to renew his citizenship.³⁸¹ This is of course not to say that the story provided by Bösch directly influenced the council's decision. It did, however, provide Rütiner with important background information about a person whom he had to judge worthy or unworthy of becoming a citizen once more.

Part of the reason why chatty wives were feared and why defamation cases often revolved around the talk of neighbours, servants, and midwives, was that they all had privileged access to

³⁷⁷ Comm. II.376.

³⁷⁸ 'bene educata ab / ancilla patris Anna de Muola quae longo tempore / ancillata est in arce Hagenwila [] Quam Iacobus / Mertz postea duxit ex qua Iacobum illum auri/fabrum sustulit qui in adolescentia texere di/dicit a Iacobo Oderboltz'. Comm. II.377c.

³⁷⁹ For a small selection, see for instance Comm. I.591a (Neff family); I.724d (Krum and Grübel families); II.7 (Schlumpf family); II.31 (Rütiner family); II.67 (Miles family). On the role of women in remembering and passing on genealogies, see for instance Katherine Hodgkin, 'Women, Memory and Family History in Seventeenth-Century England', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 297–313.

³⁸⁰ Comm. II.380c.

³⁸¹ Comm. II.382a.

intimate, and potentially compromising, information.³⁸² It was this access which made Bösch so valuable as an informant: her stories opened up the doors to some of St. Gallen's most prominent households. The list of Bösch's former employers, which Rütiner records in full in one entry, included, among others, the late mayor Walter Kuchimaister, the wealthy linen merchants Lingenhagger and Vonwiller, and the master of the hospital, Georg Gerung the Elder.³⁸³ Through her occupation, which often involved her lodging with her employers, Bösch claimed to have had insight into their most private affairs. Occasionally, she further increased the value of her stories by claiming that she had been sworn to secrecy. Heinrich Locher's wife, for instance, boasted that they had already earned 2200 fl, and immediately added 'but don't you tell anyone'³⁸⁴ – a demand which Bösch blatantly ignored, and apparently repeated, when she shared the gossip with Rütiner.

Many of the stories Bösch had to share about these elite families were indeed quite remarkable. According to Bösch, Stephan Grübel, one of the richest merchants of St. Gallen, was so stingy that he attacked his wife with a dagger when she dared suggest sending a fish from their pond to his brother.³⁸⁵ Her former employer and master of the hospital Meinrad Weninger used to serve up decadent meals of capons and chickens for some of the hospital's staff – until numerous complaints forced him to give up these extravagant dinners.³⁸⁶ But Bösch seems not to have resented any of her employers as much as Lucas and Fides Lingenhagger, the children of the wealthy merchant Lucas Lingenhagger the Elder. In several entries, Bösch gave detailed testimony of how Fides mistreated everyone in her household, including her husband and step-mother; while her brother Lucas the Younger, Bösch suggested, was to blame for his father's sudden death: his failure to invite his own parents to his wedding left Lucas the Elder so bitter that he died that very night.³⁸⁷

While telling her stories, Bösch made sure to stress that she had witnessed most of the events she described with her own eyes.³⁸⁸ Allegedly she personally discovered that Heinrich Locher beat his wife and reminded him of his pledge not to harm her.³⁸⁹ She prepared food and lodgings for the

³⁸² For more examples in which gossip was passed on by wives and servants, see for instance Comm. I.573, II.231; II.414a. See also Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, pp. 24–6; Thomas, 'Midwifery and Society', p. 11; Una McIlvenna, 'Word versus Honor: The Case of Françoise de Rohan vs. Jacques de Savoie', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16/4 (2012), 315–34, here pp. 318–20; Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture', pp. 326–9; Lipscombe, 'Crossing Boundaries', pp. 422–3. On the other hand, however, their insider knowledge could also give more weight to their testimony before court. Midwives in particular were often consulted by the St. Gallen court as witnesses: Marianne Degginger, *Zur Geschichte der Hebammen im alten St. Gallen* (128. Neujahrsblatt des Historischen Vereins des Kantons St. Gallen, St. Gallen, 1988), in particular pp. 36–40.

³⁸³ Comm. II.385d. According to StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, p. 143, Gerung was Master of the Hospital from 1511–1517.

³⁸⁴ 'ne cuiquam autem dicas'. Comm. II.384c.

³⁸⁵ Comm. II.405l.

³⁸⁶ Comm. II.409h. Weninger was Master of the Hospital from 1530–1537: StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, p. 143.

³⁸⁷ Comm. II.377c, II.399b.

³⁸⁸ In additions to the examples quoted below, see for instance: Comm. II.376; II.377c; II.384a; II.384c; II.399c; II.400c; II.403; II.405i; II.409g; II.419.

³⁸⁹ Comm. II.409g.

waggoners who brought one Lemennin's inheritance to St. Gallen and thus got a glimpse of her riches.³⁹⁰ And when she was Bullentretterin's wet-nurse, the latter personally told her of all the ordeals her various lovers had put her through.³⁹¹ Often, Bösch plays more than a supporting role in her stories. A disagreement over her duties as a maidservant, she claimed for instance, lay at the core of a violent conflict between Fides Lingenhagger and her husband Johannes Vonwiller. When Lingenhagger returned from the bath one day and found that Bösch had not yet fed her son, she immediately launched on an angry tirade. Her husband, however, took Bösch's side:

[Vonwiller said:] "Be quiet, the maid was very busy giving out wine." [Lingenhagger] turned from the maid to her husband. "You beggar", she said, "you tell me to be quiet? You had nothing, everything you have [you got] from me. All of your [family] are recorded in the *Schelmenbuch* [i.e. the criminal records]!" The man however became so exasperated that he got up [and] wanted to attack her with his fist. When the maid intervened, the wife said, "let him! I shall see whether he dares to attack me!" The good man got so exasperated that he fainted, and was attacked by gout, so that the neighbours who were called expected [his] soul [i.e. they expected him to die].³⁹²

According to her story, Bösch was not only the subject of the fight, but also played an active role by preventing it from escalating further. Bösch thus wrote herself into the narratives she shared with Rütiner, stressing her role not only as an insider and eye-witness, but also as an independent actor.³⁹³

Why was Rütiner interested in these stories? His general curiosity certainly played a role, and one could speculate that as a man who never reached the highest ranks in St. Gallen and thought of himself as a bit of a failure, he took some pleasure in the sins and weaknesses of these local "celebrities".³⁹⁴ Yet could the stories offered by Bösch also have served a more concrete, practical purpose? Most of the protagonists of Bösch's stories were dead by the time Rütiner learned of their frailties, and thus this knowledge could not be held against them. What is more, Bösch often simply offered an insider's account of something that was already an open secret. The case of Bullentretterin illustrates this quite well: the fact that Bullentretterin had previously been the lover of three

³⁹⁰ Comm. II.395.

³⁹¹ Comm. II.400d.

³⁹² 'Tace inquit maxime occupata ancilla / vino dando fuit [] Ipsa ab ancilla in vir/um vertit [] Mendice inquit tacendum imperas? / nihil habuisti [] omnia ex me habes [] Tui / omnes im schelmen buoch obsignati? [] Vir autem / admodum exasperatus vt conscenderit pugno illam / petiturus [] interveniente ancilla vxor ait / dimitte illum [] videbo num me petere velit / adeo exasperavit bonum virum vt in an vnmacht / venit accessitque podagra vt vicini advo/cati animam expectarunt.' Comm. II.399b.

³⁹³ In addition to the example above, see for instance: Comm. II.393; II.400d

³⁹⁴ This, at least, is one of the pleasurable effects of gossip according to psychoanalysts; Rosenbaum and Subrin, 'Psychology of Gossip', pp. 829–30.

wealthy and powerful citizens was a poorly hidden secret in St. Gallen. On two occasions, close male friends of Rütiner's also mention her affairs and illegitimate children.³⁹⁵ Yet Bösch's account was not only much more detailed than theirs, she was also able to tell the story from Bullentretterin's own perspective. When Bösch worked as her wet-nurse, Bullentretterin allegedly told her how she had given birth to a stillborn because the stingy merchant Zollikofer kept her in an unheated house, how another lover, Strub, sometimes locked her up for several days, how she was offered money for sex but refused to take it, and how she finally managed to restore her honour by marrying Peter Bullentretter.³⁹⁶

The value of Bösch's stories thus lay not only in that they unveiled the scandalous behaviour of St. Gallen's elite, but also in the details and the inside perspective she provided. Since they often concerned people whose memory was still very much alive and who were talked about regularly, Bösch's stories gave her, and by extension Rütiner, "communicative social capital". In the previous chapter, I argued that St. Gallers used jokes to distinguish themselves among their friends, and that their ability to entertain rendered them popular dinner guests. The same is true for gossip. As we shall see in the next section, St. Gallen's men may have condemned loose-tongued women, but when they met in the guildhall or had dinner together they too enjoyed sharing gossip about the scandalous behaviour of the city's past and present elite. Bösch's stories gave Rütiner something to contribute to these conversations and thus may have strengthened his position in a circle of men who were otherwise superior to him in terms of knowledge, wealth, and political influence.

Finally, Bösch was also able to provide Rütiner with personal information about his own friends, fellow guildsmen, and neighbours. For instance, she complained about Melchior Toubert and Bartholomäus Steck, who had not paid for services received years earlier. Steck was a linen merchant like Rütiner, and both men appear among Rütiner's informants several times.³⁹⁷ Bösch also disclosed to Rütiner that Anna Fässler, wife of his close friend Johannes Kessler, had only agreed to marry the latter to end a rumour accusing her of having an affair with her own uncle.³⁹⁸ And finally, she described to Rütiner the ordeal through which Heinrich Locher, her former employer and Rütiner's fellow guildsman and *Elfer*, had put his wife. First, he took her virginity but refused to marry her, and when they did eventually get married, he immediately turned violent. Locher not only beat his pregnant wife, but he also forced her to beg her father for money to cover for valuable textiles he had embezzled.³⁹⁹ The abuse did not even stop after Locher's father-in-law made him sign a contract promising not to beat her again, and it also continued when his wife was in childbed and could not produce any milk for the baby. Locher, who was convinced that his wife

³⁹⁵ Comm. II.224a and II.366d.

³⁹⁶ Comm. II.400d.

³⁹⁷ Comm. II.409o.

³⁹⁸ Comm. II.403.

³⁹⁹ Comm. II.409g.

was deliberately refusing to feed the new-born, squeezed her breasts so violently that she was said to have screamed: ‘Heinrich, Heinrich – you have given me enough!’⁴⁰⁰ Soon afterwards, she passed away.

According to Gluckman, sharing such stories would have been a fairly risky undertaking. Certainly, other people also gossiped to Rütiner about his close friends. Hulrich Ramsauer, for instance, told him that Kessler was ‘a man who only cares for his own, greedy [for his own] benefit’, and that he had not yet paid off a debt to his brother-in-law Johannes Nell, whose workshop he had bought years earlier.⁴⁰¹ Yet according to Gluckman’s conception of gossip, Bösch, an outsider to Rütiner’s social circle, clearly lacked the right to gossip about some of his closest friends and associates in his presence.⁴⁰² There is no indication, however, that Rütiner thought her behaviour improper, and apparently he did not deem it problematic to record her stories in his notebooks either. Gossip, it seems, was all the more valuable when it concerned people with whom Rütiner interacted on a regular basis. Through her stories, Bösch indicated to Rütiner who among his friends and informants was a dishonourable thief and oath-breaker, an unreliable business partner and violent son-in-law, and could therefore prevent him from intensifying his relationships with them. And perhaps it was precisely the fact that she was not part of Rütiner’s social circle which made her such an important informant: she could provide Rütiner with gossip to which his other informants had no access.

Anna Bösch’s gossip thus held great value for Rütiner. Unfortunately we do not know what Bösch gained from the exchange – if it was an exchange at all. Perhaps – and here we enter the realm of speculation – Bösch used her stories to construct an image of herself as a bearer of local knowledge, hoping it would earn her Rütiner’s esteem, and potential further employment. It is telling, in any case, that Rütiner never applied the stereotype of the unreliable, chatty old woman to the one female informant in his network who would have fitted it best.

Male gossips

While early modern historians generally agree that both men and women gossip, in practice it often proves much harder to overcome the century-old association between female talk and gossip.⁴⁰³ Some historians still maintain that women were more actively involved in the practice, while

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Hanriche hanrice sa/tis mihi dedisti’. Comm. II.384a.

⁴⁰¹ ‘homo est omnino sua curans audius vorteils’. Comm. II.32d.

⁴⁰² On the right to gossip as a sign of membership of a social group, see Gluckman, ‘Gossip’, pp. 313–4.

⁴⁰³ See for instance Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, pp. 153–4; Cowan, ‘Gossip and Street Culture’, pp. 315 and 322–9; Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, p. 26; Wickham, ‘Gossip and Resistance’, p. 11.

others implicitly perpetuate the stereotype by focusing on female talk when writing about gossip.⁴⁰⁴ Since the contemporary terminology related to gossip was quite varied and ambiguous, it leaves much room for interpretation to the historian.⁴⁰⁵ Consequently, the same piece of information may be classified as mere gossip when it is exchanged among women, but takes on an air of authority as soon as it is shared with a man. This ‘oldest trick’, as Chris Wickham calls it, can be found in early modern sources as well as in modern historical studies.⁴⁰⁶ Samuel Thomas, for instance, writes that on the same occasion – a churching – the midwife Bridget Hodgson spread information she had obtained about the pregnancy of an unmarried woman ‘in two different ways, *reporting* it to a clergyman and *gossiping* about it with the women [*my emphasis*]’.⁴⁰⁷ Of course Hodgson herself did not use those words, and it remains unclear whether she would have made such a distinction.

The link between gossip and female talk thus often re-enters through the back door, not least because gossip is typically thought to revolve primarily around what happens in the domestic sphere.⁴⁰⁸ Talk about women’s sexual misconduct has been the primary focus of research on early modern gossip, and it should not surprise that women played a central role in the circulation of this kind of information in particular.⁴⁰⁹ As we have seen in the case of Anna Bösch, women (and many individuals at the lower end of the social ladder) sometimes had freer access to what we would consider the most intimate social spheres. Rütiner’s male friends were quite aware of that, and in spite of the negative stereotypes which discredited female talk, they often referenced female sources of gossip when it suited them. They did so, moreover, to underline, not undermine, the veracity of their stories. Kessler, for instance, knew that Lukas Falck was so jealous that he spied on his wife and followed her disguised as a beggar; the irony of the story being that Falck ‘was himself a fornicator, [whereas] he had a good wife’. Kessler had heard this from his ‘aunt, who works there’.⁴¹⁰ Again, it was a female insider who was able to provide the most reliable information.

The same, however, was true for anyone who could claim privileged access to information, as the example of Margaretha Schuhmacher, called Guggin, illustrates. In 1537, Guggin entrusted her maid with a urine sample and sent her to have it inspected first by Vadianus, then by another doc-

⁴⁰⁴ See for instance Lipscomb, ‘Crossing Boundaries’; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*; Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk?*.

⁴⁰⁵ See similarly Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft*, pp. 133–4. In Latin, *rumores* (rumours, murmurs) was sometimes used; in German, the more neutral term *Geschwätz* (idle talk) was common, while *ein Geschrei machen* (to make noise, to scream) described both gossiping and slandering (Moser-Nef, *Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen*, for instance pp. 253–5). Most of the time, however, Rütiner and his contemporaries did not use any specific vocabulary to mark gossip.

⁴⁰⁶ Wickham, ‘Gossip and Resistance’, p. 11. See similarly Althans, “Halte dich fern”, p. 52.

⁴⁰⁷ Thomas, ‘Midwifery and Society’, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁸ See similarly Holenstein and Schindler, ‘Geschwätzgeschichte(n)’, p. 56.

⁴⁰⁹ On male and female gossip and their respective social spheres, see in particular Cowan, ‘Gossip and Street Culture’, pp. 322–9.

⁴¹⁰ ‘Erat autem ipse scortator / probam vxorem habens [] / Ioh keßler a matertera / quae ibidem laborans.’ Comm. I.573.

tor. Both concluded that she was pregnant. Then Guggin sent her maid to the apothecary, who later complained to Vadianus that ‘such strange people demand such suspicious things’.⁴¹¹ Rütiner does not specify what these ‘suspicious things’ were, but it seems likely that Guggin was suspected of attempting an abortion.⁴¹² Finally, Vadianus confronted Guggin on the market square, warning her

not to deceive, otherwise the council would not rest, as if he suspected her of pregnancy. Joseph Friederich heard such things from the cloth vendors, some also from Caspar Vonwiller’s wife; he told me secretly. Because Margaretha did not have her period for some time. Now she has recovered again.⁴¹³

Yet in the same year, after Guggin had left St. Gallen, more disturbing accusations were circulated. Over drinks, Johannes Weniger told Rütiner that Caspar Guggi, Margaretha Guggin’s brother, ‘had a thing with his sister for 3 years’.⁴¹⁴ Then, ‘on the second-to-last of June ... a messenger arrived [and said that] Margaretha Guggin had given birth to a boy and baptised him [after] the brother Caspar’.⁴¹⁵ This seemed to convince the remaining sceptics. Schurpfin, for instance, had personally witnessed Caspar’s jealousy when his sister was courted by another man, yet as she told Rütiner, ‘she never believed it, until [Margaretha] gave birth’.⁴¹⁶

As the example above suggests, sexual misconducts were closely monitored and discussed by both men and women in St. Gallen. Premarital sex, illegitimate pregnancies, and adultery ranged among the most common subjects of malicious gossip, and on the more extreme end we also find accusations of sodomy and incest.⁴¹⁷ Yet the example above also raises a variety of issues beyond the enforcement of community standards. In particular, it highlights the ways in which men and women communicated a certain image of themselves along with the gossip they shared. Schurpfin emphasised her connection to Guggin and her brother, but simultaneously stressed that she did not share in their blame: she, too, had been deceived. Friederich had heard the gossip from the former mayor’s wife and the cloth vendors, who would have witnessed the exchange between Vadianus and Guggin on the market square. They in turn cited people who had had direct access to the physi-

⁴¹¹ ‘adeo rarae personae tam suspicio/sa poscunt’. Comm. I.860.

⁴¹² These were serious accusations. Some years earlier, Ursula Hochrütiner and Helen Kuchilin were condemned to a public shaming because Hochrütiner had attempted to buy a root with abortive and contraceptive powers from Kuchilin: StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch 1489–1565, p. 42, 10 Feb 1528.

⁴¹³ ‘ne fall/at [] alias senatus non obdormiet [] quasi illam / in suspicione de impraegnatione haberet [] Talia / Ioseph Friderich a Redemptoribus panno/rum quaedam eciam ab Vxore Caspari Vonwillers / audiuit [] mihi clanculum dixit [] Quia Mar/garetha aliquo tempore non habuit menstruum / iam iterum revaluit’. Comm. I.860.

⁴¹⁴ ‘3 annis rem cum sorore hab/uisse.’ Comm. II.171d.

⁴¹⁵ ‘Penultima Iunij ... ad/venit nuncius Margratham Guggin genuisse filium / et Fratri Casparo Baptisasse.’ Comm. II.228.

⁴¹⁶ ‘numquam / credidit donec peperit.’ Comm. II.361aa.

⁴¹⁷ These were such common topics of discussion that the following represents just a small selection: Comm. I.491; I.496 and I.591b; I.860; II.137c; II.137l; II.331c. For a more extensive list, see the cases listed under ‘Liebschaften’ in the subject index in Rüsch’s ‘Kommentarband’, p. 208. Two more cases of incest are discussed in Comm. II.171d and I.482. For a case of sodomy, see Comm. I.440.

cal evidence: the two doctors who had examined Guggin's urine, and an apothecary who had been asked for 'suspicious things'. The ultimate proof of the gossip, however, was a boy named after his uncle; a messenger brought this piece of gossip from the town where Guggin had taken refuge. The gossips' gender seems to have been secondary in these exchanges; what mattered more was that each one of them played up their own role, showed off their contacts, and claimed access to first-hand information and evidence.

In an article on gossip in early modern Venice, Alexander Cowan has argued that female and male gossip 'each had their habitual spaces': while 'men exchanged gossip outside the house in the open, largely because many of their social interactions took place there, ... women exchanged gossip within the house because they met indoors.'⁴¹⁸ Rütiner does not tell us much about such a clear spatial separation between female and male gossip in St. Gallen; rather, the *Commentationes* seem to suggest, women's and men's somewhat separate social spheres translated into different areas of expertise. While women were often cited in cases of suspected sexual misconducts, men in St. Gallen, who were equally interested in these stories, often had easier access to other kinds of gossip. When Melchior Stadler voted for the known Anabaptist Gallus Berli during the mayoral election, for instance, male gossips soon carried the story beyond the doors of the town hall: the guildmaster Conrad 'Schaiawiller related one part, the rest, namely who it was, [Rütiner heard from] Caspar Huseli'.⁴¹⁹ The case not only reveals how porous the walls of the town hall were, but also offers us a glimpse at the politics of gossip: Schaiawiller withheld a central piece of information, 'namely who it was'. Rütiner's gossip network, however, quickly filled the gap.

It was certainly important to know if a councillor sympathised with known Anabaptists, but gossip about local office-holders also revolved around much more mundane matters. 'Caspar Brisig and Johann Raitter have foul breath', Rütiner learned in Vadianus' circle.⁴²⁰ The mayor Heinrich Hochrütiner 'was rotten on the inside' and suffered from Syphilis before he died, one Leonhard told Rütiner, 'thanking God that [Hochrütiner] was freed from this misery'.⁴²¹ More than a decade after the former mayor Caspar Vonwiller had been suspended from office, people not only still discussed the causes of his downfall.⁴²² The elite of the weavers' guild moreover recalled that when Vonwiller had been elected guild master, he changed from a simple garment into a silk jacket before presenting himself to the public.⁴²³ Some of these gossip snippets displayed the character of the people discussed, but more often they revealed something about those who discussed them:

⁴¹⁸ Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture', p. 329.

⁴¹⁹ 'Schaia/willer partem retulit [] ceterum scilicet quis sit / Caspar Hußeli.' Comm. I.973.

⁴²⁰ 'Caspar Brißig Ioh Raitter habent foeditium ex/halatum.' Comm. I.564.

⁴²¹ 'intus putridus fuit ... / Leonardus mihi referens Deo / gratias agens quod solutus fuit ab illa miseria'. Comm. II.125.

⁴²² Vonwiller had allegedly gone too far in trying to win 'councilmen and others' over to his side. Comm. I.973.

⁴²³ Comm. I.930.

much like in the case of Anna Bösch, it allowed them to show off their intimate insight into the town's political elite.

A conversation about Paracelsus, who spent a few months in St. Gallen in 1531 treating the mayor Christian Studer, may illustrate how gossip evolved as various people shared their expertise.⁴²⁴ Master Simon, a surgeon, knew that Paracelsus wrote all the time and hardly ever slept – and when he did, he went to bed with his shoes on. He had moreover heard that Paracelsus ‘was a gypsy for 5 years’, during which time he had studied the sciences of the travelling folk.⁴²⁵ To Sebastian Cunz, Paracelsus had bragged about his beautiful library and suggested that he owned another one in Munich, ‘but Barthol[ome Schobinger] says [these] are mere trifles. [Paracelsus] is a very vain man’.⁴²⁶ It was also Schobinger who had caught Paracelsus using ‘chiromantic signs to call a demon’ while he was treating the mayor Studer, Schobinger’s father-in-law.⁴²⁷ The gossip shared among these learned men thus illustrates how everyone sought to contribute to the conversation, and how these contributions quickly moved from a description of quirky personal habits to something that could be seen as an accusation of sorcery. None of this gossip, however, had any legal consequences.

Some gossip travelled long distances: a popular subject of talk in St. Gallen were the stories of the infamous excesses of the French King, Francis I, which were regularly brought back by the town's merchants. ‘At night, Francis roamed the city, walking about like [any] other fornicator. [When he was] exhorted by the court, he stopped. He speaks through the nose, suffers from the French illness [i.e. Syphilis], other than that he is the most noble among the French’, Rütiner learned from Jakob Studer when the latter returned from France.⁴²⁸ Other people's accounts were less nuanced. Francis I was often depicted as cruel and lecherous; and rumour in Paris had it that ‘he was a great fornicator, [did it] with his mother, but had a very chaste wife’.⁴²⁹

Yet it was not only Catholic enemies such as Francis I who became the targets of gossip in St. Gallen: the mainstays of the Reformation were also critically discussed in these conversations. The St. Gallen pastor Hulrich Ramsauer, for instance, undermined Martin Salzmann, whose appointment as pastor of Krummenau he opposed, by suggesting that Salzmann owned, and intended

⁴²⁴ On Paracelsus' time in St. Gallen, see also Meier, *Paracelsus*, pp. 33–70.

⁴²⁵ ‘5 annis zeginer fuit’. Comm. I.390.

⁴²⁶ ‘sed Bartol ait meras esse nu/gas [] homo vanissimus est’.

⁴²⁷ ‘cyromanticis charcteribus invocantem demonem’. Comm. I.391.

⁴²⁸ ‘Franciscus nocte percucur/rit vrbem vagus vt scortator alius increpatum per Curiam / destitit, per nares loquitur morbo gallico correptus, alias / procerissimus gallorum’. Comm. I.677.

⁴²⁹ ‘Magnum eum esse / scortatorem [] cum matre [] habere autem pudicissimam vx/orem’. Comm. I.491. On contemporary French satires mocking king Francis I and his mother, albeit without such explicit sexual content, see also Denis Crouzet, ‘From Christ-like King to Antichristian Tyrant: A First Crisis of the Monarchical Image at the Time of Francis I’, transl. Philippa Woodcock, *Past & Present*, suppl. 7 (2012), 220–40.

to wear in office, forbidden and unseemly types of clothing.⁴³⁰ Kessler balanced praise with criticism when he talked to Rütiner about Pelagius zum Stein, the pastor of Altstätten in the Rhine Valley, who ‘preaches in the most learned fashion, except he has bad manners, not unlike [Christoph] Schappeler’.⁴³¹ The contrast to the portrayal of these two pastors in the *Sabbata* is revealing: in his writings, Kessler presented them as learned men who made important contributions to the Reformation and made no mention of their ‘bad manners’.⁴³² An even worse example was set by another central supporter of the Reformation in the Rhine Valley, Johannes Vogler. Gossip in St. Gallen had it that he slept with his maidservant, denied the charges from the pulpit, swore on the Gospel that he was innocent, and finally, after the truth was revealed, blamed his maid for seducing him.⁴³³ To someone who knew this gossip, Kessler’s characterisation of Vogler as an ‘eager lover of evangelical truth’ in the *Sabbata* must have appeared to be dripping with irony.⁴³⁴

In other cases, criticism was a little subtler. Heinrich Bullinger, Rütiner was told by Jakob Uotz,

is rich, [he has] much from his wife. For preaching the word [he receives] 70 fl annually and the canon benefice ... [He is] not very hospitable. Leo Jud, in contrast, [is] more generous, he never saves anything, like our Wolfgang Jufly⁴³⁵ ... Recently, the council paid his debtors [*sic*, Rütiner probably means creditors] once 100 fl, once 6 fl. He has the worst wife.⁴³⁶

Even Zwingli was far from untouchable. After his death in the battle at Kappel am Albis, some St. Gallers openly called him bloodthirsty, and numerous anecdotes seemed to support this image.⁴³⁷ Conrad Schaiawiller bemoaned that too much power in the hands of a few had led to the execution of Jakob Grebel in 1526, and, hinting at Zwingli’s testimony during Grebel’s trial, he added, ‘he was destroyed by Zwingli’s mouth.’⁴³⁸ Andreas Müller recalled that back in 1529, when the Re-

⁴³⁰ Comm. II.391a. Ramsauer took issue with Salzmann’s slashed trousers and long *Latz* (a type of codpiece) made of fur, both of which had been forbidden by the city council in 1527. On prohibited clothing, see Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 251–2 (=254b–255a), and Ernst Ziegler, *Sitte und Moral in früheren Zeiten: Zur Rechtsgeschichte der Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen* (Sigmaringen, 1991), pp. 34–42.

⁴³¹ ‘doctissime concionatur nisi quod / malos mores habet [] non dissimiles a Schapelle/ro’. Comm. I.932a.

⁴³² On zum Stein, see for instance Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 292 (=315b–316a); on Schappeler, see p. 36 (=29b) and p. 107 (=125a).

⁴³³ Comm. II.137h.

⁴³⁴ ‘ain yferiger liebhaber evangelischer warhait’. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 292 (=315b–316a).

⁴³⁵ I.e. the St. Gallen pastor Wolfgang Wetter, called Jufly (d. 1536).

⁴³⁶ ‘diues ab vxore plurima [] ob / verbi praedicationem annatim 70 fl et Beneficium / canonicum ... / non admodum hospitalis / Econtra Leo Iudae liberalior nihil reseruatur semper / quemadmodum Vulffgangus noster Iunffly ... senatus breui suis debitoribus semel / 100 fl aliquando 6 fl numerarunt [] Pessimam / mulierem habens’. Comm. I.809.

⁴³⁷ See also Comm. II.106b.

⁴³⁸ ‘Zwinglij ore perditus’. Comm. II.21. For Zwingli’s testimony in the case, which revolved around French pensions Grebel had accepted, see Huldrych Zwingli, *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke*, 10 vols. (Corpus Reformatorum 88–93.5, Berlin, Leipzig, Zürich, 1905–1991), here v, pp. 406–15, no. 99.

formed troops and the Five Inner Cantons had first faced each other at Kappel, Zwingli had pushed for an attack. In light of the fact that this first conflict was ultimately resolved without any bloodshed, Zwingli's eagerness to attack their fellow Confederates certainly reflected badly on him. Rütiner's own memory of Zwingli was also ambivalent: 'One sermon [by Zwingli] I heard here, so that afterwards I would not even have gone out to the Linsibühl. He repeated often that we were a small community, [that] we were obstinate and talkative, [that] our [matter] stood in words'.⁴³⁹ Rütiner thus remembered Zwingli's sermon at the St. Galler Synode of 1530 as confrontational and deeply disconcerting. Zwingli allegedly accused the St. Gallers of standing with the Reformation in words only, and it is tempting to link Rütiner's notes to the Corinthians: 'For the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power'.⁴⁴⁰ Other people present at the sermon also remembered Zwingli's bellicose rhetoric: 'Paulus Schlumpf says [he spoke] often of bombardments and war; similarly Joseph Friederich'.⁴⁴¹

Again, a comparison with Kessler is revealing. According to the *Sabbata*, the content of Zwingli's sermon was similar to what he had written to Philipp, Landgrave of Hessen. Zwingli spoke of 'the providence and perfection of God'⁴⁴² and explained that 'neither help nor consolation is certain nor sure for anyone, nothing is true nor inerrable other than what is with God'.⁴⁴³ One might wonder whether Kessler is here alluding to the part of the sermon which left Rütiner so frightened, but Kessler, perhaps tellingly, cuts his description of the sermon short at this point, arguing that Zwingli used 'such bright and proper words' that Kessler could not do them justice in writing.⁴⁴⁴

Rütiner's and his friends' memory of Zwingli may well have been tainted by the disastrous defeat at Kappel in 1531, but it also seems quite clear that Kessler's depiction of Zwingli in the *Sabbata* erred on the opposite side. Ironically, it is precisely his defence of Zwingli at a later point in the *Sabbata* which suggests how widespread accusations against Zwingli were. After his account of the battle at Kappel am Albis, Kessler spends no less than twelve pages defending Zwingli and the manner of his death: Zwingli gave his life in the service of God, he argues, and that was 'this very just man's death's true cause, regardless of what else the others are grumbling about the causes of his death'.⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁹ 'Vnam autem hic / audiui contionem vt deinde ne ad Lisibuchel exissem / subinde repetens paruam nos esse communem [] contuma/ces et loquaces esse in verbis nostra stare'. Comm. I.591g.

⁴⁴⁰ 1. Corinthians 4.20. Ernst Gerhard Rüschi suggests this connection in his edition of the *Commentationes*: Comm. I.591g.

⁴⁴¹ 'Paulus Schl [] ait subinde de bombar/dis et praelio [] similiter Ioseph Fridrich'. Comm. I.591g.

⁴⁴² 'von der fürsehung Gottes und siner vollkommenheit'.

⁴⁴³ 'kain hilf nach trost nieman gewiss nach sicher, nichts wars nach unfehlbar dann by Gott'.

⁴⁴⁴ 'mit so hellen und gebürlichen worten'. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 356 (=372b).

⁴⁴⁵ 'disers ganz gerechten mans tod warhafte ursach, geb was sunst die anderen für ursachen sines umbkm-mens tandtend'. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 382 (=398a-b). See also chapter six.

What does all this tell us about gossip? First, there was apparently no contradiction in supporting the Reformation and simultaneously undermining the men who fought at the forefront of reform through gossip. Granted, the stories circulating in Protestant St. Gallen were not quite as biting and malicious as those spread in the Catholic states, where Zwingli, among other things, was decried as a sodomist.⁴⁴⁶ Yet Rütiner and his friends certainly did not idealise the Protestant pastors and reformers, as the *Sabbata* alone might suggest. Instead, they took a close, and rather sober, look at these men: at the same time as they praised their qualities, they also mercilessly brought to light their minor and major flaws. Clearly, the pastors and reformers they discussed did not (yet) quite live by the moral principles they were supposed to teach.⁴⁴⁷ It seems, however, that there was a difference between what one could say about these men and what one could write down in a representative chronicle. While Kessler, too, shared such gossip in conversations with Rütiner, only airbrushed images of the reformers made it into the *Sabbata*, and it is therefore not surprising that it passed the council's examination in 1556. The *Sabbata* was intended for the following generations, to whom Schappeller's and zum Stein's bad manners would have mattered less than their contribution to the Reformation. It is important to bear in mind that people like Rütiner who knew the gossip, however, might have read the *Sabbata* quite differently.

There were apparently certain rules and conventions which one had to follow as a gossip; but what if one became a victim of gossip oneself? We have already seen that Rütiner wished the council would fine those who spoke badly of his late in-laws, but revealingly he did not take any legal action himself. It seems that most St. Gallers only resorted to such drastic measures in the most extreme cases of defamatory gossip. As the following example shows, in most cases it was thought best to simply ignore people's talk. When Paulus Schlumpf's father Caspar passed away, he left his house to Paulus and his sister, instructing them not to sell it. Although Paulus was keen to fulfil his father's wishes and to hold on to the property – not least because he was afraid of what people might say if he did not – in order to do so he would have had to burden himself with a debt of 300 gulden. Faced with this dilemma, he turned to the mayor Caspar Vonwiller for advice. Vonwiller recommended Paulus ignore both his father's wishes and the gossiping tongues, and told him how he had once overcome gossip which accused him of having wasted his wife's dowry:

I kept quiet; I did not care about the detractors. Meanwhile, the business grew. I resisted the rumour. So do not care about the talk of the people who are saying:

⁴⁴⁶ Comm. II.267c. See also Holenstein and Schindler, 'Geschwätzgeschichte(n)', pp. 63–4.

⁴⁴⁷ On reformed efforts to professionalise and discipline Protestant pastors, which seem to have become more successful at the turn from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, see for instance Ulrich Pfister, 'Pastors and Priests in the Early Modern Grisons: Organized Profession or Side Activity', *Central European History*, 33/1 (2000), 41–65. Cf. also Luise Schorn-Schütte, 'Priest, Preacher, Pastor: Research on Clerical Office in Early Modern Europe', *Central European History*, 33/1 (2000), 1–39.

You are giving up your father's house. There will come a time when you will thank me, not them.⁴⁴⁸

Paulus received the same advice from Leonhard Sitz, a close friend of his late father, whom he approached next. 'Sell [it] immediately', Sitz told him. 'Do not mind the detractors; fear your loss instead.'⁴⁴⁹ Vonwiller and Sitz thus agreed that succumbing to the pressure of gossip could have severe economic consequences. It was therefore better to ignore people's talk than to prevent it at any cost.

Of course there was also gossip which could not be so easily ignored because it threatened to cause permanent damage to one's reputation. That is the kind of gossip which we find in court records because it led to violence, or called for legal action. Yet it is important not to overestimate the proportion of gossip which was prosecuted by early modern courts. As we have seen in this section, gossip was as common an ingredient of conversations between men as it was among women, and most of it – including the kind of gossip which was considered malicious and defamatory – never entered a courtroom. As we shall see in the next section, gossip from the courtroom, in contrast, often entered people's conversations.

Condemning talk: gossip about courts and criminals

In the second half of the sixteenth century, an anonymous poet wrote the following verses on the first page of the St. Gallen town council's protocol:

Oh man, think long
before talk escapes your mouth.
Speak thoughtfully, without anger and hatred,
thus you succeed all the better.
To hear quickly and answer slowly,
to consider carefully, that is how wise men live.
Through talk many have been overcome,
in silence few have been found dishonourable.
There is no better protection from dishonour

⁴⁴⁸ 'tacebam non curans detractores [] interea sucre/uit operibus famae obstiti [] itaque non curas hominum loquelas / dicentium [] patris aedes dimittis [] veniet tempus quo / mihi non illis gratias ages.' Comm. I.531.

⁴⁴⁹ 'Vende subito ... non curans ob/trectatores [] time potius tuum damnum.' Comm. I.531.

than being the master of your tongue.⁴⁵⁰

The poem's prominent place, just next to the words of the *Urfehde* (oath of truce), is significant. A warning against committing crimes of the tongue such as swearing and libel, the poem was perhaps intended as a timely reminder for those who had to swear not to take revenge on the town in deeds or words. Yet it also reflected much broader concerns with uncontrolled talk and with the threat it posed to the reputation of individuals and the authorities of St. Gallen. Aware that its own authority was still fragile, the city council was extremely sensitive to any form of criticism and strictly forbade its members to share with outsiders what was discussed in the council.⁴⁵¹

This, of course, did not prevent sensitive information from spilling out of the town hall onto the streets of St. Gallen. Quite the contrary: despite the city council's warning, St. Gallen's inhabitants regularly and critically discussed crimes, trials, and judgments passed by the city's various courts as they met on the market, in the bathhouse, or in private homes. The *Commentationes* are full of such conversations. By comparing these discussions to the relevant court records, we shall see what kind of information moved from the community into the courtroom and back again, and how St. Gallen's gossiped not only about those who were condemned by the courts, but also about those who judged them. In what follows, I shall focus on three sets of records in particular. First, on the *Ratsprotokolle*, or town council's protocols concerned with minor offences.⁴⁵² Second, on the records of the *Malefizgericht* concerned with capital punishment, whose trials St. Gallen followed particularly closely.⁴⁵³ And third, on the records of the newly established marriage court, on which Rütiner later became a judge himself.⁴⁵⁴

Rütiner was well informed about the trials taking place in St. Gallen. He usually knew not only who was convicted and why, but could also specify the date, time and circumstances of their arrest.⁴⁵⁵ With great accuracy, Rütiner recorded even minor details such as the number of years someone had been involved in criminal activities or how many times and where a victim had been

⁴⁵⁰ 'O Mensch, thu dich bedenken lang / Ehe dir die Red auß dem Mund gang. / Red besinnlich ohne Zorn vnd haß / So bestehestu so vil desto baß. / Schnell hören vnd trüg antwort geben / wol betrachten ist der weisen läben. / Im Reden sind vil vberwunden / Mit Stillschweigen wenig in schand funden. / Vor schanden ist kain besser list / Dann wer seiner Zungen Meister ist.' Cited after Moser-Nef, *Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen*, i, p. 217–8. The poem seems to echo Proverbs 10:19: 'In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.'

⁴⁵¹ Moser-Nef, *Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen*, i, p. 107.

⁴⁵² StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 29. April 1512 – 21. Juni 1518; StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 28. Juli 1528 – 22. August 1533; StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 25. August 1533 – 26. September 1541.

⁴⁵³ Two separate *Malefizbücher* were kept simultaneously in St. Gallen, one recording the sentences and *Urfehden* sworn by those who were found guilty but escaped execution (StadtASG, 913: Malefizbuch 1508–1554), and one containing those cases which led to a death sentence (StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch 1489 – 1565). Both record only brief, standardised summaries of the offences and the judgment passed. When a death sentence was passed, a list of the officials involved in the trial was also recorded.

⁴⁵⁴ StadtASG, 803: Protokoll des Ehegerichts 1528–1530; StadtASG, 804: Protokoll des Ehegerichts 1530–1539, and StadtASG, 804b: Protokoll des Ehegerichts 1540–1551.

⁴⁵⁵ For instance Comm. I.270; I.440; I.471; I.473; I.482; II.51; II.415.

stabbed.⁴⁵⁶ In one remarkable case, Rütiner's notes even reflect a later alteration in the court records. In November of 1537, numerous citizens were fined after two factions violently clashed in St. Gallen's streets. Rütiner not only accurately recorded the fine each one of them had to pay, but his notes moreover reflect that Othmar Spengler's fine was later remitted: 'Spengler 30s' was struck from the council's protocol, and Rütiner also crossed out 'Othmar just as much', adding instead, 'Spengler nothing.'⁴⁵⁷

How did such information reach Rütiner? Sometimes summaries of a culprit's offences and the court's judgment were read out to the public, for instance at executions, at least some of which Rütiner attended.⁴⁵⁸ Yet this cannot explain why Rütiner's knowledge often goes far beyond what we find in the court records, nor how he received information about civil cases. Before 1534, Rütiner did not hold a public office which would have allowed him to become involved in criminal trials, but he was friends with people who did. Vadianus regularly appears in the records as the *Reichsvogt*, the head of the *Malefizgericht*.⁴⁵⁹ Other informants of Rütiner's, such as the guild master Conrad Schaiawiller and the mayors Christian Studer and Ambrosius Schlumpf, were also occasionally involved in the prosecution of crimes, and Rütiner even quotes Schaiawiller as a witness for one of the cases.⁴⁶⁰ The case of the marriage court is even more striking: of the five judges who presided over the court from 1531 to 1540, four also appear among Rütiner's informants.⁴⁶¹ It is therefore quite probable that Rütiner often received first-hand information from people present at the trials. That group did not only include judges. In the case in which Rütiner recorded and then crossed out Othmar Spengler's fine, for instance, it was Hulrich Schaffhuser, a witness, who told Rütiner about the council's decision.⁴⁶² Even the families of the accused facilitated the flow of information between the courts and the wider town: When Erasmus Schlumpf appeared before the marriage court, admitted that he had deflowered Verena Ochenmennin, and agreed to pay 30 fl in

⁴⁵⁶ For instance Comm. I.253, I.440, I.471.

⁴⁵⁷ ~~'eodidem Othmarus~~ Spengler nihil'. Comm. II.259 and StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 25. August 1533 – 26. September 1541, p. 222, 09 Nov 1537.

⁴⁵⁸ His description of two executions in Comm. I.263 and I.952, for instance, suggest that he was an eye-witness.

⁴⁵⁹ StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch 1489–1565, for instance pp. 56; 60; 68; 74; 76; StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, p. 110.

⁴⁶⁰ StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch 1489–1565, pp. 56; 66; 74. See also Elisabeth Eggimann, *Die Verwaltung der Todesurteile: Gerichtspraxis, Kriminalität und städtische Schriftlichkeit in St. Gallen 1500-1550*, unpublished Lizentiat thesis (University of Zürich, 1996), p. 80. Schaiawiller is quoted in Comm. II.296o. Other regular informants of Rütiner's held the office of *Stadttrichter* (Johannes Brendly, David von Watt and Jospheh Friederich: StadtASG, 916: Regimentsbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, Band 1, Rats- und Gerichtsämter, 1378–1798, p. 241) and *Hofrichter* (Johannes Brendly, from 1535–7, idem, p. 289).

⁴⁶¹ Joachim von Watt, Wolfgang Wetter, Dominikus Zili, and Franziskus Studer. StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, pp. 109–10.

⁴⁶² Comm. II.259.

compensation, it was his sister Anna who told Rütiner the details of their relationship and the agreement they had reached.⁴⁶³

Details of crimes and trials were intensively discussed and passed on in conversations in St. Gallen, especially if the matter was considered scandalous. The example of Bartolomaeus Huser, called Strapler, who tried to stab his mother and threatened to kill her legal guardian, illustrates how stories about the condemned circulated in the town in the aftermath of an execution:

When Bartolomaeus Strapler was weaving with Othmar Rott, [Strapler] said, “Help me, I will kill all superiors.” Laughing [Rott] agreed, deeming it to be a joke. [Strapler] often repeated the same thing. Once, when they were eating breakfast, he said, “Now we will do it.” Othmar told Gabriel Billwiller, who told Paulus Schlumpf, who [whispered it] into my [Rütiner’s] ear after [Strapler] had been beheaded.⁴⁶⁴

This example is interesting not just because it allows us to trace a chain of gossip all the way back to its origin (or at least so Rütiner has us believe), but also because of the element of secrecy hinted at in the last sentence. Perhaps Rütiner and his friends thought it inappropriate to talk about someone who had just been executed, but to give gossip an air of secrecy also seems to have been a common rhetoric move.⁴⁶⁵ In the case of Margaretha Guggin discussed above, we have seen that Rütiner’s friend Friederich, too, shared the gossip “secretly” – despite the fact that it had already, and quite literally, spilled out onto a public forum. Yet sharing gossip in secret whispers nevertheless gave the conversation an air of intimacy, suggested that what was shared was highly sensitive, and therefore valuable information, and allowed people to share gossip without making themselves accountable for its further circulation.⁴⁶⁶

Interest in such information was naturally at its peak during, or in the immediate aftermath of a trial, but the *Commentationes* suggest that even minor cases were sometimes still remembered and discussed years later. The case of Andreas Küfferly, who had repeatedly insulted the mayor Vadianus, provides an interesting example. When a certain Birchfelder got into an argument with the mayor Ambrosius Schlumpf five years after Küfferly’s conviction, he was reported to have

⁴⁶³ Comm. I.602, and see also StadtASG, 804a: Ehegericht 1530–1539, fol. 154v, 25 June 1536.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Bartolomaeus Strapler texens vna cum Oth/maro Rott dixit Adiuua me omnes super/ius interficiam [] ridendo annuit [] iocatum put/auit [] sepe retulit idem [] aliquando matutimum cib/um sumentes iam inquit hoc faciamus / Othmarus Gabrielo Billwiller retulit ille / Paulo schlumpff ille mihi in aurem postquam de/collatus’. Comm. I.952.

⁴⁶⁵ See for instance Comm. I.868; I.482.

⁴⁶⁶ In fact Friederich even went on to condemn malicious gossip in the same conversation, when he claimed that what is being said with regards to Caspar Guggi’s fortune was invented by ‘ill-speaking’ people. Comm. I.860,

said, ‘Lord Mayor, I want to climb the ladder, I do not want to fall down like Küfferly’.⁴⁶⁷ This example not only shows that Küfferly’s case was still remembered years later, but also *how* it was remembered; namely as a warning not to pick a fight with a mayor.

Ulinka Rublack has argued that early modern courts relied heavily on denunciations to pursue their ‘widening programme of moral policing’, a strategy which did not sufficiently take into account people’s reluctance to share gossip with the authorities.⁴⁶⁸ Similar tendencies can also be found among St. Gallers: despite the numerous gossip networks crossing through St. Gallen, it seems that gossip moved more easily from the court to the wider town than from the town into the court. As the following example shows, this was not only true of petty crimes. In 1533, Conrad Mülibach was burned at the stake because he had engaged in mutual masturbation with at least nine different young men. It seems that this was a poorly kept secret: As Mülibach claims, one boy approached him and became his sexual partner after hearing about his homosexual tendencies. Another boy, whom he did not have any relationship with, assaulted him, saying Mülibach was ‘not a man like another man and as good as him’.⁴⁶⁹ Rütiner also reports an incident where Mülibach allegedly molested the son of Christian Ziegler, whom he occasionally stayed with. Despite the fact that numerous people knew about Mülibach’s homosexuality, the latter only came to the court’s attention after 14 years, when Mülibach encouraged a local servant to steal from his master and then used his knowledge of the crime as leverage.⁴⁷⁰

On the one hand, St. Gallers could be quite reluctant to share their knowledge of crimes with the authorities, but on the other they also complained when the courts appeared to act too leniently. When Debes Schugger was arrested in 1539, for instance, Rütiner remarked that the authorities should have taken action much earlier because Schugger had been involved in fraudulent activities for years.⁴⁷¹ In a different case, Rütiner’s fellow *Elfer* Heinrich Locher vented his anger at a mild judgment in the weavers’ guildhall: ‘If the council won’t punish – if only the peace was lifted, I would take revenge with my own hand. Trivial things they inquire diligently, if it pleases [them something] is easily found.’⁴⁷² In particular, Locher took issue with the fact that the council had not

⁴⁶⁷ ‘Domine consul [] Ibo per scalas nolo praecipitari tamquam / Kufferly’. Comm. II.296n.

⁴⁶⁸ Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, pp. 16 and 27.

⁴⁶⁹ ‘er sig nit ain man als ain annder man unnd als gut als er’. StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch, p. 75, 08 Oct 1533.

⁴⁷⁰ Comm. I.440. For a discussion of the case of Mülibach in the context of other early modern sodomy trials, see Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation*, p. 78.

⁴⁷¹ Comm. II.415. See also StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch, p. 29, 23 Jan 1539.

⁴⁷² ‘Si magistratus non multabit [] Vtinam pax illa / sublata [] ego mea manu vlciscar [] Triuialio/ra diligenter quaerunt [] si iuuat facile reperiuntur’. Comm. II.259. See also StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 25. August 1533 – 26. September 1541, pp. 121–2, 09 Nov 1537. On ‘peace bidding’ and the legal consequences of breaking the peace in early modern Swiss towns, see for instance Susanne Pohl, ‘Uneasy Peace: The Practice of the *Stallung* Ritual in Zürich, 1400–1525’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 7/1–2 (2003), 28–54.

punished the authors of a defamatory letter which, it seems, targeted members of Locher's family.⁴⁷³

Apparently it was not unusual to voice such discontent with the courts in a semi-public forum such as the guildhall, or, as the following example shows, in a tavern:

Studer filched two measures of spelt because of his poverty, because [he had] a lot of children. He was beheaded. At the table in Bernhardzell they spoke diversly about him [and] whether one could kill someone because of this. Finally magister Hermann [Miles] replied, "Probitas cannot be destroyed by poverty – improbitas cannot be tamed by wealth."⁴⁷⁴

Although this final "verdict" supported the court's decision, the example shows not only that a broader public engaged in debates about crimes and adequate punishment, but that they also felt they could criticize the court's decisions despite the council's warnings.⁴⁷⁵

Criticism of the town's political elite, accusations of nepotism and arbitrary judgments were very common in St. Gallen. When the town council launched an investigation in the shoemakers' guildhall after an anonymous letter had been left at the door of the town hall – a letter which accused the Small Council of arbitrary rule and nepotism – one of Rütiner's informants suggested that this investigation was itself arbitrary: 'They [i.e. the shoemakers] were chosen by lot', he said to Rütiner.⁴⁷⁶ Or when the mint-master Paulus Zacharias was accused of a crime, he managed to escape with his riches because the majority of the Small Council refused to confiscate them – a decision which seemed all the more dubious in light of the fact that Zacharias had wine and dined said councillors twice a week.⁴⁷⁷

As we have seen, gossip about criminals often went hand in hand with gossip about the town's authorities. It is important to keep in mind that these authorities consisted of individuals who were themselves part of St. Gallen's social structure and presided as judges over people they knew.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷³ Comm. II.259.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Studer ob pauperiem 2 mod/ios farri suffuratus quia plures pueros / decollatus [] In mensa Bernatzell de eo / loquentes varie num possit eo interfici / Tandem M Herman respondit [] Probitas non / potest expelli pauperie [] Improbilas neque potest contineri diutius'. Comm. I.204.

⁴⁷⁵ See also Comm. I.441 for discussions about two further judicial errors, and Comm. II.242 in which representatives of the weavers' guild accuse St. Gallen's courts of judging the poor more harshly than the rich.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Sors in illos cecidit.' Comm. II.325.

⁴⁷⁷ Comm. II.296e.

⁴⁷⁸ During Rütiner's time as a judge on the marriage court, for instance, he routinely judged over cases in which his friends or their families were involved. StadtASG, 804b: Ehegerichtsprotokolle 1540–1550, for instance p. 10, 07 June 1540 (Rosa Locherin vs. Jacob Schuhmacher gen. Guggi), where Rütiner's close friend and brother-in-law Paulus Schlumpf represents his relative Schuhmacher; pp. 25–42, 20 Oct 1540 (Katharina Negelin vs. Albrecht Schlumpf the Younger) where three of Rütiner's informants and fellow guildsmen appear as witnesses; or p. 59, 27 July 1542 (Cleophe Schlumpf vs. Othmar Cuntz), where Paulus and Ambrosius Schlumpf testify for their relative Cleophe Schlumpf.

Or, as the guildmaster Conrad Schaiawiller put it, ‘among 14 [councillors] there is undoubtedly someone who knows the person concerned, so that nothing will be done rashly’.⁴⁷⁹ According to Schaiawiller, the intimacy between judges and the accused could offer protection from unjust decision. Conversely, however, this meant that people with troubled personal relationships to St. Gallen’s judges and councillors were more likely to be judged harshly.

One last example, namely the trial of Friedrich Schuhmacher, called Guggi, illustrates how gossip provided important background information on court cases and rendered visible the net of relationships which determined the criminal’s place within the social world of St. Gallen – including, in this case, Guggi’s problematic relationship to several members of St. Gallen’s political elite. According to the trial records, in June of 1532 Friedrich Guggi, the father of Margaretha and Caspar Guggi whose allegedly incestuous relationship became the subject of gossip in St. Gallen some years later, attempted to kill his pregnant wife and her unborn baby because he accused her of adultery. He was also found guilty of stealing spices, clothes and household goods from friends and family on numerous occasions. Confronted with the ample evidence against Guggi, the *Malefizgericht* condemned him to be beheaded.⁴⁸⁰ Apart from the fact that Guggi was a resident, but not a full citizen of St. Gallen, no further information on the case and its protagonists can be found in the books of the *Malefizgericht*. Through the lens of these records, the case of Guggi therefore appears to revolve around theft and attempted murder.

Rütiner’s account does not explicitly contradict any of the facts given in the trial records, but the information he provides on Guggi and his family nevertheless profoundly changes this initial interpretation of the case. Rütiner describes the events of 1532 as follows:

On 27 June, Fridly Schumacher, called Guggi, was summoned by the council with his relatives and those of his wife, [and] urged to live cautiously in the future and to look after his kin. The next day, agitated by rage, he grabbed his wife, [who was] already close to giving birth, and tried to kill her along with the child. Accusing her of having met with another [man], he threw her to the floor [and] attacked her with an axe. When the neighbours rushed [to her aid], he said dazedly that he had done it driven by jealousy. When they asked, “Of whom?”, he said, “I do not know.” The next day the wife delivered a boy, dead, black, with a broken skull. ... On Friday [Guggi] was condemned and beheaded, only a few mem-

⁴⁷⁹ ‘ex 14 vtique aliquis est qui no/uit hominem de quo agitur ne temere quicquam fiet’. Comm. II.21.

⁴⁸⁰ StadtASG, 912: Malefizbuch 1489–1565, pp. 68–70, 05 July 1532.

bers of the council presided [over his case], because of the threefold kinship [between the] Schlumpf, Ransperg, [and] Vonwiller etc.⁴⁸¹

Rütiner's account differs from the trial records in three ways. First, Rütiner makes it quite clear that this was neither a case of theft nor attempted murder: in light of the baby's death, Guggi's crime had to be interpreted as an infanticide. This vital piece of information is missing from the trial records, perhaps because it was assumed, and rightly so, it seems, that it was common knowledge.

Second, Rütiner mentions familial ties to the Schlumpf, Ransperg, and Vonwiller families which prevented a large part of the council from presiding over Guggi's case. These were some of St. Gallen's most powerful families.⁴⁸² As evidence from the *Commentationes* and the St. Gallen city archives suggests, Guggi was tied to these families by marriage. His first wife had been a daughter of the late mayor Caspar Schlumpf.⁴⁸³ After her death, Elisabeth Ransperg had become Guggi's lover. According to Rütiner, Vadianus personally made sure that Ransperg and Guggi got married, and he did so behind the back of the councillor Albrecht Schlumpf, Guggi's brother-in-law from his previous marriage: 'In Aberli's absence, Vadianus called [them] before the marriage [court] judges [and] married them. He did not want them to come before the council'.⁴⁸⁴ In the year of Guggi's execution, his first and second wives' relatives filled numerous important public offices, including those of deputy mayor and mayor.⁴⁸⁵ Guggi's place within the St. Gallen's social structure thus becomes clearer: though not a full citizen, Guggi was a well-connected man with close ties to the town's economic and political elite.

Finally, Rütiner also offers an alternative interpretation of Guggi's motive. He implies that the conflict between Guggi and his wife was sparked off by an incident not mentioned in the trial records, namely their being summoned by the town council the day before. The council protocols of that day do not mention Guggi, but only a legal dispute between Guggi's sister, her husband Con-

⁴⁸¹ '27 Iunij [] Fridly schuomacher dictus guggi / a senatu vocatus cum amicitia et eciam vxoris mo/nitus vt postea caute viuat et amicitia pro/videat [] Sequenti die concitatus ira vxorem / iam vicina partui comprehendens vna cum puero / interficere tentans insimulans eam cum altero / congressam esse, projiciens in terram axe eam petens / irruentibus vicinis atonitus ait zelotipia motum / hac fecisse, interrogantibus cuius? nescio ait / Mulier sequenti die peperit puerum mortuum nigrum / cerebri tegmine fracto... / Die veneris damnatus / decollatur, paucis senatoribus iudicantibus, prop/ter triplicem amicitiam Schlumpffen Ransperg / Vonwiller etc.' Comm. I.473.

⁴⁸² Rütiner's aunt Ursula, for instance, recalled a time when nobody could climb the social ladder without being related to the Vonwillers: Comm. II.109b.

⁴⁸³ Comm. I.28, see also Comm. I.514.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Vadianus absente Aberli advocans ad / matrimonij iudices coniunxit noluit / vt ad senatum veniant.' Comm. I.132e. The case was indeed discussed in front of the marriage court, yet Vadianus' involvement is not mentioned there; StadtASG, 803: Ehegericht 1528–1530, fol. 11v, 08 Feb 1529. The marriage was formally registered in the marriage record that same month: StadtASG, 513a: Ehebuch, Band 1, 1528–1862, p. 6. It seems that Vadianus did not want the case to be discussed by the Small Council because Albrecht Schlumpf was a councillor at the time; StadtASG, 919a: Ämterbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁵ Hans Ransperg was elected mayor in 1531, and Ambrosius Schlumpf became deputy mayor in 1532. StadtASG, 916: Regimentsbuch der Stadt St. Gallen, Band 1, Rats- und Gerichtsämter, 1378–1798, p. 3.

rad Schaiawiller, and Jakob Ransperg.⁴⁸⁶ It revolved around a considerable amount of debt which Ransperg allegedly owed Guggi's sister. Guggi may well have been present in court that day, but contrary to Rütiner's story, he seems not to have been the centre of attention.

In order to understand this discrepancy, we have to look at other gossip about Guggi. An interesting narrative emerges from the numerous stories Rütiner heard about Guggi over the years: born into a poor family from Waldkirch, Guggi had made an astonishing career in St. Gallen's linen trade. He spent several years travelling between St. Gallen, Lyon, and Spain, where he sold linen for the Zollikofer family.⁴⁸⁷ Rütiner and the council records agree that this almost cost him his life in 1514, when the Swiss Confederacy accused him of treason. On his way to Lyon, he had allegedly offered his services to an imprisoned French regent.⁴⁸⁸ Guggi was arrested and tortured, but ultimately saved by his first wife's powerful relatives and his brothers-in-law, who intervened on his behalf.⁴⁸⁹ After being released from prison, Guggi continued climbing the social and economic ladder, yet his meteoric ascent was met with much envy by St. Gallen's less successful merchants.⁴⁹⁰ His relationship with the Schlumpf family also deteriorated. Instead of showing his gratitude to the people who had most probably saved his life, Guggi tricked his brother-in-law Joachim Schlumpf and Antoninus Vonwiler, another relative of his wife's, into selling him a certain kind of fabric far below value. Guggi's first wife reportedly reproached her husband for treating her family so poorly, while sparing his own relatives. 'You tricked my blood relatives, but your Spicher[mann] escaped,' Guggi's brother-in-law Jakob Spichermann reports her words.⁴⁹¹

Rütiner's account of Guggi's trial has to be seen in this context. Given Guggi's reputation as a trouble maker who did not even stop short of betraying his first wife's family, the rumour that he had been summoned by the council and 'urged to live more cautiously and to look after his kin' the day before he attacked his second wife was not hard to believe. Although Rütiner and his informants probably misinterpreted Guggi's appearance before court, the legal dispute between Conrad Schaiawiller and his wife on the one hand, and Jakob Ransperg on the other, was by extension also a conflict between Guggi's relatives and those of his new wife. To make matters worse, the case was heard before the Small Council to which, as we have seen, numerous members of the

⁴⁸⁶ StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 28. Juli 1528 – 22. August 1533, p. 245, 27 June 1532. The case continues on pp. 246–7, 03 July 1532.

⁴⁸⁷ Comm. I.64; II.409v.

⁴⁸⁸ Comm. II.173c and StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 29. April 1512 – 21. Juni 1518, pp. 121–4, 02–14 June 1514.

⁴⁸⁹ For a list of members of the Schlumpf family who vouched for Guggi in 1514, see StadtASG, Ratsprotokolle 29. April 1512 – 21. Juni 1518, p. 124, 14 June 1514.

⁴⁹⁰ Comm. II.173c.

⁴⁹¹ 'meos con/sanguineos illudum [] Spicherman autem tuus eff/ugit'. Comm. I.514. Spichermann was married to Guggi's sister. Perhaps this incident also explains why Caspar Schlumpf openly warned St. Gallen's weavers never to trust a merchant and named his son-in-law as an example; Comm. II.171c.

Schlumpf and Ransperg families belonged. Despite the fact that this dispute did not concern Guggi himself, it is not implausible that it did indeed fuel the conflict between him and his wife.

While the trial records portrayed Guggi's case as a marital conflict sparked off by the husband's jealousy, gossips in St. Gallen suggested that the roots of the conflict ran much deeper: the attack was related to an on-going struggle between Guggi and the powerful families he had married into. It was through the lens of this gossip that St. Gallen's viewed, and made sense of, Guggi's case, not through the brief summary of his most recent offences read out at his execution. Guggi's case moreover highlights the need for information on the social networks of those judged by, and presiding over, early modern courts – a need which was just as pressing for their contemporaries as it is, or should be, for early modern historians working with court records today.

In theory, Rütiner and his friends were sceptical of gossips, and female ones in particular. In practice, however, they constantly relied upon, and took part in, the very talk they deemed immoral and untrustworthy. Rütiner may have condemned people's loose tongues, but he nevertheless eagerly wrote down what they shared with him. The fact that he devoted so much time, ink, and paper to this kind of talk shows that it was anything but idle. In a small town like St. Gallen, and in the context of a close-knit community so focused on reputation, knowing who one was dealing with was of the essence, and being well-informed was not limited to politically and economically relevant information. Gossip helped St. Gallers understand and navigate their social world. It mapped the complex delta of familial ties, friendships networks, dependencies, and factions, highlighting the most promising routes and marking out potentially problematic ones. It added context to, and explanations for what was happening in the town's courts; a place where, so it seems, both the reputation of the accused and the authority of the court itself could be at stake. Gossip was also central for anyone who sought to do business in St. Gallen, to climb the political ladder, to get married, or even just to socialise – and not only because it provided St. Gallers with information about one another. Along with their stories, St. Gallen's gossips also communicated an image of themselves as sources of privileged insider information. In an everyday context, it was not, therefore, best to keep gossip anonymous, as has been suggested in the case of gossip in court records.⁴⁹² Quite the contrary: Rütiner's gossips typically exaggerated their own role because it allowed them to present themselves as eye-witnesses or to demonstrate how well-informed and connected they were. The

⁴⁹² Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, p. 19; Cowan, 'Gossip and Street Culture', pp. 132–3.

next chapter will explore the effects of this type of ‘self-fashioning’ on the reception of rumour and news.

5 Fama in foro: Rumour, news, and trust

On the evening of Saturday, 14 October 1531, an unsettling rumour reached St. Gallen and was spread in discussions on the market square: Zurich had been defeated and Zwingli killed at Kappel am Albis. For some St. Gallers, Zurich's defeat did not come as a surprise. Hulrich Schaiawiller for one had predicted the outcome of the war. Even 'a child would understand that it does not suit confederates to fight like this, but the plague is upon us'⁴⁹³ he had said to Rütiner before the battle. Now he saw his fears confirmed. 'Did I not say it?' he told Rütiner when they discussed the rumour on the market that day.⁴⁹⁴

This example illustrates two aspects of early modern rumour: first, news of recent events often first reached contemporaries in the form of rumour. Second, a rumour was not automatically assumed to be untrue. Whether one believed in it depended on a number of factors, including whether it fitted one's frame of reference. Schaiawiller did not doubt the rumour because it confirmed what he already knew: God was going to punish those who broke their oath and turned against their own confederates.

Early modern historians have stressed time and again that oral communication still played a major role in the daily provision of information in sixteenth-century Europe.⁴⁹⁵ Yet there is still a strong tendency to view it as subordinate to print. Its role is often reduced to spreading information locally and to the illiterate, and it is usually assumed that information spread orally was considered less reliable than written or printed news.⁴⁹⁶ In his work on the printing revolution, Michael

⁴⁹³ 'puer ... intelligeret non / decere ita contendere confederatos [] sed plaga ad/est'

⁴⁹⁴ 'non dixi'. Comm. II.52.

⁴⁹⁵ For instance: de Vivo, *Information and Communication*, pp. 121–3; Horodowich, 'Introduction', p. 301; Mauer, >*Gemain Geschrey*<, p. 40; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, p. 2, and Scribner, 'Flugblatt und Analphabetentum', p. 66; Snyder, 'Communication and the People', p. 162; van Nierop, "'And Ye shall Hear'", pp. 70–71; Cohen, 'She Said, He Said', p. 422; Bouza, *Communication, Knowledge, and Memory*, for instance pp. 3 and 11; Cohen and Twomey, 'Introduction', p. 16; Richard Cust, 'News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, 112 (1986), 60–90, here esp. pp. 65–6.

⁴⁹⁶ For instance Scribner, 'Flugblatt und Analphabetentum', pp. 66–7; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, p. 2; Mauer, >*Gemain Geschrey*<, pp. 42–51, 68; Johannes Schwitalla, *Flugschrift* (Grundlagen der Medienkommunikation 7, Tübingen, 1999), pp. 27–9; Snyder, 'Communication and the People', pp. 162 and 171; Margot Lindemann, *Nachrichtenübermittlung durch Kaufmannsbriefe. Brief- "Zeitungen" in der Korrespondenz Hildebrand Veckinchusens (1398–1428)* (Dortmunder Beiträge zur Zeitungsforschung 26, München, New York, 1978), p. 49; Adam Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *The Historical Journal*, 40/3 (1997), 597–620, here p. 620; or Schilling, *Bildpublizistik der Frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 118–24, who argues that a more critical stance towards news prints only developed in the seventeenth century (p. 140). Marco Mostert even hypothesises that for semi-literate people in medieval Europe, 'the written word ... could contain only true, reliable statements.' Marco Mostert, 'The Memory of Writing. Thoughts about How the Introduction of Written Culture Restructured Memory in the Middle Ages', in Hartwin Brandt, Benjamin Pohl, William Maurice Sprague et al. (eds.), *Erfahren, Erzählen, Erinnern. Narrative Konstruktionen von Gedächtnis und Generation in Antike und Mittelalter* (Bamberger

Giesecke argued that a ‘devaluation of oral information’ took place around the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century.⁴⁹⁷ This idea is still echoed in more recent studies of sixteenth-century news. Benedikt Mauer, for instance, concludes that print was at the top of the ‘hierarchy of reliability’ and rumour was at the bottom. He does so in spite of having previously demonstrated that the Augsburg chronicler Georg Kölderer often noticed contradictions between prints and preferred to believe a rumour which fit his world view than a printed pamphlet which contradicted it.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, Henk van Nierop notes that information spread by word-of-mouth was more widely available and faster than written information, and that the diarist Wouter Jacobz was sceptical of letters when he did not know their author well. Even so, he goes on to suggest that one way of verifying the veracity of a rumour was to ‘check it against a letter or a similar, trustworthy *written* piece of evidence’.⁴⁹⁹

This reluctance to give too much credit to oral communication says more, however, about our own time than about the early modern period. Today, we are trained to trust the written word more than the spoken one. Instead of sealing a contract with an oath, we give our signature, and we are sceptical of rumour until we find it in cold print in a serious newspaper. Yet as Adrian Johns has convincingly argued in *The Nature of the Book*, print is not naturally more reliable than other media, and the trust we now invest in the printed word is the result of a long cultural process.⁵⁰⁰ The fact that printed sources have a much better chance of being preserved than oral communication has moreover led to a rather distorted view of the impact of print compared to other media, and speech in particular. Yet unless we study what was one of the most universal and accessible media for spreading information at the time, both within and between different communities, we cannot claim to fully understand what people believed and on what basis they made decisions.

Kessler’s reflection on the reliability of different sources at the beginning of the *Sabbata* allows us a glimpse at an alternative “hierarchy of trust”. Though Kessler was a great admirer of the new technology of print and explicitly credited it for enabling the Reformation to spread, it is not discussed as a source for the *Sabbata*.⁵⁰¹ Instead, Kessler claims to be recording events which he

Historische Studien 9, Bamberg, 2012), 15–58, here p. 44. For a critique of such views, see Horodowich, ‘Introduction’, p. 305.

⁴⁹⁷ Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*, p. 33.

⁴⁹⁸ Mauer, >*Gemain Geschrey*<, pp. 51, 60–1, 68. See similarly Silvia Serena Tschopp, ‘Wie aus Nachrichten Geschichte wird. Die Bedeutung publizistischer Quellen für die Augsburger Chronik des Georg Kölderer’, *Daphnis*, 37 (2008), 33–78, here p. 64.

⁴⁹⁹ Van Nierop, “‘And Ye shall Hear’”, pp. 70–71, 75. For further examples, see for instance Lindemann, *Nachrichtenübermittlung durch Kaufmannsbriefe*, p. 49.

⁵⁰⁰ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book. Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1998), p. 2. See also Alexandra Walsham, who argues that Protestantism equated oral tradition with Catholicism and played an important part in the marginalization of the spoken word in the seventeenth century – while simultaneously contributing the oral tradition itself: Walsham, ‘Reformed folklore?’, here esp. p. 178.

⁵⁰¹ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 8 (=5a–b).

had either ‘seen [him]self’ or which he had ‘truthfully received through reliable informing’, including hearsay.⁵⁰²

And though perhaps the stories [*historien*⁵⁰³] picked up from hearsay might be less trustworthy, because talk on the streets [*gaßenschrai*] (from which I abstain) often removes or adds [things] to the things which [really] happened; if, as a consequence, one did not believe anyone anything at all, how could the whole world work? For it is as impossible to see everything as it is for a person to be everywhere at once; in particular, one should remember in this context what the old Germans used to say: one must still trust, even if a murder happened every day; so it is here: one must still believe, even though lies are told every day.⁵⁰⁴

Of course Kessler was not gullible enough to believe everything he heard, but he nevertheless recognised his dependence on the spoken word and emphasised the necessity to trust in others. Moreover, according to Kessler it was personal eye-witnessing, not printed or written accounts, which was preferable to hearsay.

In this chapter, I will study rumour, a form of communication which is typically associated with orality and placed at the lower end of the “hierarchy of trust”, and its relationship to news to argue that we need to challenge our modern idea of what was considered reliable information and what was not. In a sixteenth-century small town like St. Gallen, the role and status of oral information was quite different from today. Since it was ‘impossible to see everything’ and to personally verify most news, Rütiner, Kessler, and their contemporaries relied on an elaborate system of “source criticism” to tell them whom they should or should not believe; a system which, as we shall see, often led to a perception of oral information, and even *fama*, as being more reliable than printed news.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² ‘so ich selbst gesehen, zum tail durch globwirdigen unterricht wahrhaft empfangen hab.’

⁵⁰³ Kessler is clearly not referring to ‘histories’ in the modern sense of the term. On the changing meaning of the term ‘historia’ throughout the early modern period, see Joachim Knape, *Historie in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Begriffs- und gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen im interdisziplinären Kontext* (Saecvla Spiritalia 10, Baden-Baden, 1984).

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Und wievol villicht die historien, so uß hörsagen ufgmerckt, weniger globens tragen möchten, von wegen das durch gaßenschrai (deren ich mich entschlagen) geschechnen dingen oftmals von oder zuogesezt wirt: sölte man aber darumb niemat gar nichts globen, wie welte die ganze welt beston? Dann alles sechen ist so glich onmöglich, als ainem menschen uf ain mal allenthalben zuo sin; sunder och hierinnen gedenken, wie die alten Tütschen gesprochen haben: man muoß dannocht truwen, und wenn alltag ain mord gescheche; also hie: man muoß dannocht globen, ob alltag gelogen wirt.’ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 4 (=1b). A remarkably similar argument is made by the author of a seventeenth-century print, quoted in Creasman, “‘Lies as Truth’”, p. 261.

⁵⁰⁵ For other examples of such “source criticism”, see for instance the works by the Cologne councillor Hermann von Weinsberg (Lundin, *Paper Memory*, pp. 239–45), or by the Augsburg chronicler Georg Kölderer (Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, esp. pp. 50–1).

How did Rütiner and his contemporaries learn about current events? As Wolfgang Behringer has pointed out, the impact of early modern media can only be understood if we simultaneously study the infrastructure in place for circulating them.⁵⁰⁶ Only then can we assess how far and fast they could have been disseminated. Let us therefore first take a closer look at the infrastructure in place for circulating written and printed information in Rütiner's time.

In spite of its economic success, in the 1530s St. Gallen still lay on the periphery of the growing European information network. It did not have its own printing press until 1578, and printed material thus had to be brought to St. Gallen from larger cities such as Zurich, Basel, Nuremberg, and Augsburg.⁵⁰⁷ Further, St. Gallen was not yet connected to the developing imperial postal system.⁵⁰⁸ The latter naturally followed the main trade roads through Europe, and St. Gallen, situated as it was in the triangle between the Swiss Alps and Lake Constance, therefore did not have direct access to the imperial post.⁵⁰⁹ This did not mean that St. Gallen was cut off from communication across Europe, of course. The town's merchants communicated regularly with their agents in Nuremberg and Augsburg, two of the cities which lay at the heart of the new communication system. Since the fifteenth century, private citizens could hire the town's official messengers when the latter were not travelling on council business, provided that they covered the messenger's salary and all incurring expenses.⁵¹⁰ Yet lacking a relay system, these messengers travelled much more slowly than those on the imperial post. Moreover, the majority of St. Gallen citizens could not af-

⁵⁰⁶ Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, p. 16.

⁵⁰⁷ Ehrenzeller, *Geschichte der St. Gallen*, p. 218. On the first printing press in St. Gallen, see Hermann Strehler, *Die Buchdruckkunst im alten St. Gallen. Die Geschichte der Offizin Zollikofer: Vom <Wochenblatt> zum <St. Galler Tagblatt>* (St. Gallen, 1967).

⁵⁰⁸ The imperial postal system was introduced at the turn of the century. It led from the large Italian cities via Innsbruck and Augsburg all the way to Antwerp and provided a regular public postal service from the 1530s onwards (Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, pp. 70–8). Only in the second half of the sixteenth century did St. Gallen's merchants create their own regular postal service to Nuremberg, connecting them to the larger imperial post: Alfred Schelling, *Die Kaufmännische Botenanstalt St. Gallen-Nürnberg. Ein Beitrag zur Schweizerisch-Süddeutschen Verkehrsgeschichte* (St. Gallen, 1919), p. 11.

⁵⁰⁹ The main trade road to Milan ran along the East bank of Lake Constance via Lindau and Bregenz before turning South to Feldkirch and Chur, while the main road to Lyon passed through Constance, Schaffhausen, Baden, Bern and Geneva; see Alfred Höhn, *Die Strassen des Nürnberger Handels. Ein Streifzug durch Geschichte und Landschaft* (Nürnberg, 1985). Not only did the main trade routes bypass St. Gallen, but according to Fritz Glauser, the Taxis generally avoided the territory of the Swiss Confederacy wherever possible. Fritz Glauser, 'Kommunikation und Innovation im 16. Jahrhundert: Zu den Anfängen der Post in der Schweiz', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 53/1 (2003), 1–33, here pp. 28–9.

⁵¹⁰ Volker A. Simon, *Der Wechsel als Träger des internationalen Zahlungsverkehrs in den Finanzzentren Südwestdeutschlands und der Schweiz. Historisch-dogmatische Untersuchung der Entwicklung des Wechsels bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse in St. Gallen* (Stuttgart, 1974, Schriften zur südwestdeutschen Landeskunde 12), p. 43. See also *ibid.*, p. 226, footnote no. 162.

ford this service, and even Vadianus often relied on merchants or other travelling citizens to transport his personal letters.⁵¹¹

This could be problematic for a number of reasons. Letters often failed to reach their destination, thus interrupting the vital flow of information between merchants and their faraway agents. In the case of one St. Gallen trading company, this had disastrous consequences: a letter containing instructions for the immediate sale of wax, whose value was about to drop by a third, was stopped at Buchhorn, causing a loss of over 600 fl. The fate of the company was sealed when an unwise business decision coincided with the loss of a second letter, leaving the merchants with a huge supply of unsellable stock and bankruptcy.⁵¹² Yet even when letters did arrive, the senders sometimes paid dearly for saving the costs of a professional messenger, as the following example illustrates: While on his way to Lyon in December of 1537, Othmar Zollikofer wrote a letter to his sister-in-law Lingenhagerin. In Rickenbach he entrusted it to the innkeeper Christoph Rutz, who carelessly 'gave it to my [i.e. Rütiner's] brother Christian, who [gave it] to Jakob Laderer, who in turn [gave it] to Jakob Zollikofer. He opened it. They received it with much laughter'.⁵¹³ The exact content of the letter is unknown, but it seems to have fed rumours about an affair between the recently widowed Zollikofer and his sister-in-law. What is significant here, however, is that even on the relatively short distance between Rickenbach and St. Gallen (c. fifty kilometres), Zollikofer's letter passed through four different pairs of hands. Moreover, it was unrightfully opened and its content exposed to public ridicule.

Given these risks, St. Gallen's citizens had a strong desire for a fast and reliable postal service; a desire which was reflected in many tales about particularly fast messengers. According to Rütiner, Clam, the town's official messenger, bragged that he did not need more than a day to reach Baden, situated around ninety kilometres from St. Gallen.⁵¹⁴ A man from Altstätten was rumoured to be able to walk the sixty kilometres to Constance *and back* in a single day.⁵¹⁵ Yet extremely fast messengers could also be suspected of sorcery. In a legal dispute between the abbot of St. Gallen and the town, the abbot's messenger Hensilin of Wil was said to have used black magic to travel to Rome and back in just three days.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹¹ Marc Moser, *Das St. Galler Postwesen. Ein Beitrag zur Kultur- und Verkehrsgeschichte der Stadt St. Gallen*, 5 vols. (Rorschach, 1953–1981), p. 38. According to Wolfgang Behringer, most humanists relied on foot messengers or travellers for delivering letters (Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, p. 101).

⁵¹² Comm. I.376.

⁵¹³ 'Christano / fratri meo dedit [] ipse Iacobo Laderer [] ille / vicissim Iacobo Zolikoufer [] aperuit [] maximo / risu exceperunt.' Comm. II.372l.

⁵¹⁴ Comm. I.647.

⁵¹⁵ Comm. I.646.

⁵¹⁶ Comm. I.24 and I.534.

Of course in reality travelling was much slower. For the journey to Baden, for instance, at least a day and a half was needed according to Rütiner.⁵¹⁷ And when the St. Gallen messenger was sent to Zurich before the first battle at Kappel in 1529, he allegedly needed fifteen hours to travel the seventy kilometres.⁵¹⁸ What these fantasies suggest, however, is that speed was of the essence.⁵¹⁹ While the imperial postal system had managed to respond to the need for fast communications by dividing space into manageable portions and introducing a relay system on the most important routes, St. Gallen's merchants remained dependent on a combination of expensive private messengers and travelling individuals, who were often slow and unreliable.⁵²⁰

But let us set these practical problems of circulating letters and other written material aside for a moment and look at what types of media could potentially bring news to St. Gallen. Letters had long served the dissemination of news, and they remained an important source of information in the sixteenth century.⁵²¹ Yet they depended on a large network of correspondents and on an infrastructure for transporting and delivering these letters fast, safely, and at an affordable price – an infrastructure which, as we have seen, was not yet fully developed.

Newspapers did not exist before the seventeenth century, and hand-written newsletters only started to come into fashion north of the Alps towards the end of Rütiner's life.⁵²² What did exist in Rütiner's time, however, were pamphlets and the so-called *Neue Zeitungen*, printed news about note-worthy events.⁵²³ Yet obtaining accurate current news through these media was difficult. Pamphlets played an important role in the early Reformation, and indeed Rütiner owned quite a few from that time.⁵²⁴ Yet the main concern of such prints was to convince and incite, not to inform

⁵¹⁷ Comm. I.946.

⁵¹⁸ Comm. I.61.

⁵¹⁹ This is true for both the dissemination of letters and responses to them. St. Gallen's mayor Komerer, for instance, was criticized heavily because he used to postpone reading incoming letters instead of immediately calling a council meeting upon the arrival of the city messenger: Comm. II.299i.

⁵²⁰ This system was still very similar to the one used by merchants a century earlier. For an example of how information was spread through merchants' letters in the late Middle Ages, see Lindemann, *Nachrichtenübermittlung durch Kaufmannsbriefe*, pp. 18, 33–35, 43; see also Teuscher, *Bernische Privatbriefe*, p. 369.

⁵²¹ Franz Mauelshagen, 'Netzwerke des Nachrichtenaustauschs. Für einen Paradigmenwechsel in der Erforschung der 'neuen Zeitungen'', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 41: Kommunikation und Medien in der Frühen Neuzeit, eds. Johannes Burkhardt and Christine Werkstetter (München, 2005), 409–525, here p. 413.

⁵²² Early examples of such newsletters can be found in the *Fuggerzeitungen* of the second half of the sixteenth century. See Oswald Bauer, *Die Zeitungen vor der Zeitung. Die Fuggerzeitungen (1568–1605) und das frühmoderne Nachrichtensystem* (Colloquia Augustana 28, Berlin, 2011), pp. 36–9.

⁵²³ For an overview, see Paul Roth, *Die neuen Zeitungen in Deutschland im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1914). As contemporaries used the term *Neue Zeitung* for news in general, whether it was spread in print or letters, it is difficult to define it as a distinct genre of printed news. Since in the secondary literature the term is commonly used in the sense of printed news pamphlets, however, I am here using it in that sense of the term.

⁵²⁴ ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, III B 94 and ZBZ, A.Drucke Rara, 18.423. The latter contains, among others, Martin Luther, *Sermo de digna praeparatione cordis pro suscipiendo Sacramento Eucharistiae R. P. Martini Luther Augustiniani Vuittenbergensis* (1518), idem, *Adversus execrabilem antichristi bvllam* (Wittenberg, 1520), idem, *Assertio omnium artoculorum M. Lutheri, per Bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum*

about current events.⁵²⁵ The *Neue Zeitungen* promised to bring news of important recent events, but they were usually printed anonymously and sometimes long after the event.⁵²⁶ Reporting on violent battles, gruesome crimes, and natural disasters, they aimed to shock and entertain as well as to inform, and above all they wanted to sell.⁵²⁷ In the eyes of many of Rütiner's contemporaries, their news value, therefore, remained questionable.⁵²⁸ Moreover, in contrast to regular newspapers these were one-off publications about individual events. They could not provide the current flow of news St. Gallers needed to conduct their business and to stay abreast of current developments.⁵²⁹

Obtaining reliable current news in St. Gallen was no simple task. Within this system, the role and status of rumour was quite different from today. It was not simply an alternative to “official” sources of information, or the “black market” of news, as it is usually described in rumour theory.⁵³⁰ Often, rumour, in the sense of unverified information, was the only, or at least the first, source of news available.⁵³¹ In chapter two, we have seen that printed and written sources of infor-

(1521); Huldrych Zwingli, *De Canone Missae Huldrychi Zvinglii Epichiresis* (Zürich: Christoph Froschauer, 1523); idem, *Ad Ioannis Bugenhagii Pomerani epistolam responsio Huldrychi Zvinglij*. ([Zürich]: [Christoph Froschauer the Elder], [1525]); Andreas Karlstadt, *Do. Andreae Carolostadij & Archidiaconi Wittenburgen. CCCLXX & Apologeticae conclusiones pro sacris literis & Wittenburgen. compositae* ([Schlettstadt]: [Schürer], 1519).

⁵²⁵ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, p. 4; Paul Ukena, ‘Tagesschrifttum und Öffentlichkeit im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert in Deutschland’, in *Presse und Geschichte. Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung* (Studien zur Publizistik 23, München, 1977), 35–53, here p. 46.

⁵²⁶ Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News. How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, London, 2014), p. 72.

⁵²⁷ Doris Stoll, *Die Kölner Presse im 16. Jahrhundert. Nikolaus Schreibers “Neue Zeitungen aus Cöllen”* (Buchwissenschaftliche Beiträge aus dem deutschen Bucharchiv München 34, Wiesbaden, 1991), pp. 17 and 20.

⁵²⁸ See for instance Hermann von Weinsberg: Lundin, *Paper Memory*, pp. 239–45. Silvia Serena Tschopp has argued that early modern chroniclers were less likely to quote from such prints than from established chroniclers because the latter were considered more reliable: Tschopp, ‘Wie aus Nachrichten Geschichte wird’, p. 39.

⁵²⁹ A brief glance at two contemporary St. Gallen collections of such prints seems to support this picture. The first, owned by Vadianus, contains twenty prints in total, of which eight date from the 1530s (including three pamphlets on the wars against the Ottomans, and one each on the Battle at Kappel, the Münster Anabaptists, and the wars between Charles V and Francis I); VadSlg GA 920 (K1–K20). A second collection, owned by Kessler, contains 36 prints dating from the 1520s, the vast majority of which are pamphlets by Protestant reformers. Among them, there are also a handful of newsprints concerning, for instance, the peace between Charles V and Francis I or the Peasants’ War; VadSlg GA 1812 (K1–K36). Though these collections may represent only a fraction of the printed newssheets which were available in St. Gallen, they indicate that such prints only offered a patchy perspective on current events. Nor do we know exactly when these pamphlets reached St. Gallen, and whether they would still have counted as “news” by that time. The pamphlet on the Battle of Kappel, for instance, was only pulished in 1532, many months after the news had reached St. Gallen by other means.

⁵³⁰ For instance: Donovan, ‘How Idle is Idle Talk?’, pp. 60–1; Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Gerücht. Das älteste Massenmedium der Welt*, transl. Ulrich Kunzmann (Leipzig, 1996), pp. 19 and 25–6; Gary Alan Fine, ‘Rumour, Trust and Civil Society: Collective Memory and Cultures of Judgment’, *Diogenes*, 54 (2007), 5–18, here pp. 7 and 12.

⁵³¹ See similarly Penny Roberts, ‘Arson, Conspiracy and Rumour in Early Modern Europe’, *Continuity and Change*, 12/1 (1997), 9–29, here pp. 10–1. For a case in which rumours about the bankruptcy of a St. Gallen merchant informed his creditors in Constance, see Frank Göttmann, ‘Bankrott und Gerücht in politischer, rechtlicher und moralischer Grenzlage: Ein Schuldprozess zwischen Konstanzer und St. Galler Kaufleuten im 16. Jahrhundert’, *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Schwaben*, 100: Grenzüberschreitungen. Die Aus-

mation played only a minor, and mostly indirect role as a source for Rütiner's *Commentationes*. This may partly be due to the fact that only the town's elite had the contacts and funds required to sustain a large network of regular correspondents. Even highly educated men like Rütiner thus depended heavily on oral sources of information, and often he had to rely on *fama*.⁵³²

Fama: rumour, reputation, news

Over the last century, rumour research has established itself as an important area of study within a wide range of academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and social anthropology.⁵³³ Yet there still seems to be hardly any agreement about its nature across, or even within individual disciplines. Rumours have variously been described as 'propositions for belief' for which hard evidence is lacking,⁵³⁴ as a way of reshaping reality to fit a group's hostile beliefs,⁵³⁵ or as 'improvised news' which help people cope with a lack of information at a time of great uncertainty.⁵³⁶

What unites these different conceptions of rumour is their focus on rumour as a reflection of stereotypes and anxieties and on the patterns according to which rumours develop as they are circulated. Consequently, they rarely discuss rumours which turned out to be true. According to all definitions, rumour ceases to be rumour and becomes information, news, or fact the moment it is confirmed.⁵³⁷ Thus, while all psychological and sociological studies agree that rumours do not necessarily have to be false, in practice they perpetuate the idea that they are. Moreover, some of the most influential rumour studies were published in the aftermath of World War II, in a political cli-

senbeziehungen Schwabens im Mittelalter und Neuzeit, eds. Wolfgang Wüst, Georg Kreuzer and David Petry (Augsburg, 2008), 493–514.

⁵³² See for instance van Nierop, "And Ye shall Hear", p. 73, or Thomas Maissen, 'Lorsque la rumeur deviant nouvelle: La perception du sac de Rome au nord des Alpes', in M. T. Jones-Davies (ed.), *Rumeurs et nouvelles au temps de la Renaissance* (Société Internationale de recherches interdisciplinaires sur la Renaissance, Colloque 1996/7, 22, Paris, 1997), 177–201, where Maissen shows how the learned elite north of the Alps learned about the Sack of Rome (1527) through rumours (albeit rumours disseminated in letters).

⁵³³ For a detailed overview over the field, see Donovan, 'How Idle is Idle Talk?'.

⁵³⁴ Gordon W. Allport and Leo J. Postman, *The Psychology of Rumour* (New York, 1947), p. ix.

⁵³⁵ Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumours, Race and Riots* (New Brunswick, 1975), p. 159. See similarly also Ralph L. Rosnow, 'Rumor as Communication: A Contextualist Approach', *Journal of Communication*, 38/1 (1988), 12–28, here p. 12, where he describes rumours as 'public communications that reflect private hypotheses about how the world works.'

⁵³⁶ Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis, 1966), and similarly Fine, 'Rumour, Trust and Civil Society', p. 7. Shibutani's theory has been particularly influential on research of historical rumour. See for instance De Vivo, *Information and Communicatio*, p. 193, where he refers to Shibutani's 'law of rumour'; or Boris Bove, 'Deconstructing the Chronicles: Rumours and Extreme Violence during the Siege of Meaux (1421–1422)', *French History*, 24/4 (2010), 501–23, here p. 513, where he describes rumours as a product of a 'lack of information' which made people project their anxieties onto any facts available.

⁵³⁷ Kapferer, *Gerüchte*, p. 22.

mate that condemned rumours for their power to undermine official sources and threaten national security.⁵³⁸ Combined, this has led to a rather negative assessment of rumours as unreliable, hostile, and harmful.⁵³⁹

In the early modern period, however, the status of rumour was quite different. This is partly due to the fact that it played such an important role in the daily provision of information, but it is also linked to the wide semantic field spanned by the term *fama*. In Rütiner's time, *fama* referred not only to rumour, but could also mean reputation, fame, public opinion, and tidings.⁵⁴⁰ It was not used primarily to express concern about the factual correctness of a story, but rather described a specific mode of communication: at the most basic level, *fama* was simply what people commonly said about a person or an event.⁵⁴¹ This is also reflected in the term's early modern German equivalents, *Sag* (rumour or tale, from *sagen*, i.e. to say), *Geschrei* (rumour, gossip, libel, from *schreien*, i.e. to shout), and *Ruf* (reputation, from *rufen*, i.e. to call): they all stress the vocal nature of *fama*.⁵⁴²

Let us look for a moment at how the term was used in Rütiner's notebooks. *Fama* appears almost 100 times in over eighty different entries, covering all the meanings outlined above. Most often it is used in the phrase 'fama est', which can refer to both rumours and tidings and is best translated as 'rumour has it' or, more neutrally, 'it is said that'.⁵⁴³ *Fama* is also explicitly cited as the source of information on several occasions.⁵⁴⁴ For instance, 'Vadianus, Johannes Studer, and const[ant] *fama*' are given as informants for the story of a conflict between St. Gallen and its Cath-

⁵³⁸ In particular Allport and Postman's seminal *Psychology of Rumour* was later heavily criticized for its limited focus on false rumours and their threat to morale and national security in the context of World War II. See for instance: Ralph L. Rosnow, 'Psychology of Rumour Reconsidered', *Psychological Bulletin*, 87/3 (1980), 578–91; Donovan, 'How Idle is Idle Talk?', pp. 63–4; Kapferer, *Gerüchte*, pp. 12–6.

⁵³⁹ This is also true of many historical studies. In addition to the ones discussed in the introduction to this chapter, see also Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp. 37–8, where rumour is discussed under the revealing heading 'Rumour and False News'.

⁵⁴⁰ Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, 'Introduction', in idem (eds.), *Fama. The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, London, 2003), 1–11, here p. 2, and Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *Fama. Eine Geschichte des Gerüchts* (Berlin, 1998), p. 56. The term *rumor* is less broad and can be translated either as rumour or murmur. Philippe Depreux argues that in the medieval use, the term *rumor* (in contrast to *fama*) usually has a negative connotation: Philippe Depreux, 'Rumeur, circulation des nouvelles et gouvernement aux temps carolingiens', in Maité Billoré and Myriam Soria (eds.), *La Rumeur au Moyen Âge. Du mépris à la manipulation (V^e-XV^e siècle)* (Rennes, 2011), 133–47, here pp. 145–5. Because Rütiner only rarely uses the term *rumor*, I shall focus on *fama*.

⁵⁴¹ See also the following illustrated print, published in Basel (?), Leipzig, and Speyer in 1534, which features this definition prominently in its title: *Fama: Was man sagt, ist mein Tittel, Vermeyn ich trifft das recht mittel, Alt missbreuch unnd jren mutwillen, Hinzulegen unnd zustillen, Darauf bevor an der Keyser mildt, Bedracht was da sagt dieses Bild* ([Basel?]: [Hieronymus Rodler?], [1534?], VD16 F 592).

⁵⁴² See 'Sag' in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, vii, columns 375–377; 'G(e)schrei' II, *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, ix, columns 1444–1451. The Latin *fama* is similarly related to the verb *fari*, i.e. to speak.

⁵⁴³ See Comm. I.8, I.90, I.122, I.208, I.314, I.372, I.374, I.541, I.560, I.584, I.613, I.802, II.28, II.184c, II.189, II.246c, II.259, II.265k, II.274b, II.292, II.296b, II.330a, II.361u, II.361w, II.367.

⁵⁴⁴ Comm. I.535, I.591b (constans fama), I.594, I.604, I.608, I.680, II.387c (concors fama).

olic neighbours.⁵⁴⁵ *Fama* could thus describe both content and medium, both a particular type of message and a particular type of messenger.⁵⁴⁶

Although Rütiner did not reflect on the nature of *fama* in any detail, we can deduce some of its characteristics by taking a closer look at the phrases in which the term commonly appears in his notebooks. *Fama* is often used in conjunction with adjectives that stress its power and public nature. One's *fama* (here meaning reputation) could be bad or damaged, but more often *fama* was public, common or commonly known, constant, and concordant among people.⁵⁴⁷ These adjectives indicate that *fama* drew its power from the many voices which carried it forth and repeated it, as well as from the wide publicity it thus received. Unlike its modern equivalents, the term *fama* did not necessarily imply that a story could not be trusted. Of course Rütiner and his contemporaries were aware that *fama* could be made up or exaggerated, but at the same time *fama* represented a form of public consensus. In fact popular sayings stressed that 'a common rumour is rarely made up'.⁵⁴⁸ In the Italian city states, *fama* was considered so trustworthy that it became a legal category on the basis of which a trial could be initiated and upon which the court could draw as evidence.⁵⁴⁹ This was also true for the Holy Roman Empire, where the *Carolina* specifically mentions 'bad reputation and rumour' of the accused as the first on a list of eight factors indicating guilt.⁵⁵⁰

The verbs used in conjunction with *fama* are equally revealing. Most of them reflect *fama*'s close relationship with speech and movement. *Fama* relates, narrates, and accuses, but more often it flies, arrives, appears, grows, spreads, and falls upon people.⁵⁵¹ Rütiner also stressed the speed at which *fama* travels. A rumour spread 'citissime' (very fast) about Georg Guldy, undermining his unjustified claim to have conquered the enemy's standard at the battle of Peschiera.⁵⁵² Only two hours after Hulrich Bader's parents drowned while crossing Lake Constance, *fama* brought the sad

⁵⁴⁵ 'Vadianus Ioh Stud et const fama.' Comm. I.594.

⁵⁴⁶ See also Neubauer, *Fama*, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁷ *Fama mala* (I.738, II.357, II.361n), *laesa* (I.755), *communis* (I.901, II.246c), *vulgaris* (II.32f), *constans* (I.591b, I.594), *concors* (II.387c).

⁵⁴⁸ The Augsburg chronicler Georg Kölderer writes: 'Man sagt im gemainen Sprüchwortt ein gemain Geruch sey sellten erlogen.' Cited after Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, p. 51.

⁵⁴⁹ Antonella Bettoni, 'Voci malevole: fama, notizia del crimine e azione del giudice nel processo criminale (secc. XVI-XVII)', *Quaderni Storici*, 41/1 (2006), 13–38, here pp. 18–20; Thomas Kuehn, 'Fama as a Legal Status in Renaissance Florence', in Thelma S. Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (eds.), *Fama. The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, London, 2003), 27–46, here p. 35.

⁵⁵⁰ Karl V, *Des allerdurchleuchtigsten großmechtigsten vnüberwindtlichsten Keyser Karls des fünfften: vnnd des heyligen Römischen Reichs peinlich gerichtts ordnung / auff den Reichstzügen zuo Augspurgk vnd Regenspurgk / inn jaren dreissig / vnd zwey vnd dreissig gehalten / auffgericht vnd beschlossen* (Mainz, 1533), p. vi, art. xxv.

⁵⁵¹ *Fama referebat* (Comm. I.503, I.535, II.32f), *narrabat* (I.511), *deferebat* (I.531, II.361n), *(per/ad)volat* (I.75, I.578, I.624, I.832, II.73, II.44, II.191, II.265e, II.295, II.296n, II.296o, II.316a, II.330e, II.352, II.364e, II.398), *(ad)venit* (II.200, II.266c, II.308b, II.408), *emersit* (II.405c), *orta est* (II.372c), *increbuit* (II.32e, II.173d, II.313, II.325), *accidit* (II.357).

⁵⁵² Comm. II.44.

news to St. Gallen.⁵⁵³ It was also *fama* which announced in the middle of the night that Maximilian I's troops were marching towards the Schwaderloh and prompted St. Gallen's soldiers to prepare for battle.⁵⁵⁴ *Fama*, it appears, was talk in motion, and since it moved extremely fast, it held great importance for the circulation of information.

Although *fama* has a plural form, Rütiner and his contemporaries only used it in the singular. This suggests that they had a very specific image in mind when they wrote about *fama*, one which probably drew on ancient authors and contemporary depictions in which *fama* was usually personified as a woman. Virgil had most famously described *fama* as a monster-like winged creature, covered all over in ears, eyes, and mouths.⁵⁵⁵ Rütiner, who read the *Aeneis* while studying in Basel, certainly knew Virgil's unflattering description of *fama*, and perhaps he was even familiar with her monstrous appearance in Sebastian Brant's illustrated edition of Virgil's works, published in 1502 (fig. 9).⁵⁵⁶ Yet Rütiner may also have had in mind a more positive pictorial tradition, one which depicted *fama* as a beautiful winged woman blowing one or two trumpets (fig. 10–13).⁵⁵⁷ There are clear parallels between this tradition and Rütiner's use of the term. According to the latter, *fama*'s two main activities were flying and speaking.⁵⁵⁸ These are also emphasised in *fama*'s attributes in this type of image, namely in her wings and trumpets.

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Fig. 9: *Fama*, probably by Hieronymus Greff, first published in 1502 in Sebastian Brant's edition of Virgil's work.

⁵⁵³ Comm. II.191.

⁵⁵⁴ Comm. II.408.

⁵⁵⁵ Virgil, *Aeneis*, 4.173–97.

⁵⁵⁶ Publius Virgilius Maro, *Publij Virgilij Maronis Opera*, ed. Sebastian Brant (Strasbourg: Johann Grüninger, 1502). Evidence that Rütiner was familiar with the *Aeneis* can be found in Comm. I.575.

⁵⁵⁷ The two trumpets represent good and bad reputation; Neubauer, *Fama*, p. 80.

⁵⁵⁸ *Fama* “flies” through Rütiner's notebooks on a great number of occasions, see for instance: Comm. I.75, I.578, I.624, I.832, II.73, II.44, II.191, II.265e, II.295, II.296n, II.296o, II.316a, II.330e, II.352, II.364e, II.398.

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Fig. 10: *Fame, the Printer's Symbol of Sigmund Feyerabend*, by Virgil Solis (1514 – 1562).

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Fig. 11: *Fama*, by Virgil Solis (1514–1562).

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Fig. 12: *Triumph of Fama over Death* (c. 1510), French tapestry by unknown artist.

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Fig. 13: Title page of *Die europäische [Fama]*, Altona/Hamburg, 30 April 1694.

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Fig. 14: Woodcut illustration to Hans Sachs, *Fama. Das gerücht mit seiner wunderlichen Eygen-schafft / nach beschreibung Virgilij des Poeten* (Gotha, c. 1550), by unknown artist.

How are these two very different depictions of *fama* compatible with one another? At first sight, it seems that the apparent contradiction between them could be neatly resolved by attributing each to a different meaning of the term. This would suggest that although a single word was still used to describe rumour, reputation, fame, and tidings in Latin, in practice these were seen as separate phenomena with quite different connotations. While the beautiful, angelic *fama* spread people's fame, Virgil's nightmarish *fama* with her many eyes and tongues could be understood as the darker side of the coin, namely rumour and bad reputation – and this is indeed how these female figures are often interpreted.⁵⁵⁹

Yet both depictions of *fama* and the contemporary use of the term defy such clear-cut distinctions. There are many instances where the two traditions merge into one. Consider for instance figure 12. Here we see *fama* spreading the fame of Aristotle, Plato, and Alexander, and ultimately triumphing over death, which is personified by Atropos. Yet while *fama* is depicted with her usual attributes, she also wears a skirt of feathers covered with eyes and mouths – a clear reference to Virgil's more sinister rumour-*fama*.

⁵⁵⁹ See for instance Neubauer, *Fama*, p. 84, who even argues that the more positive fame-*fama* replaced Virgil's monstrous rumour-*fama* in the early modern period.

Such visual references and the close connection between *fama*, reputation, and news continued far into the age of the periodical press. Winged, trumpet-blowing *fama* appears in numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German newspaper titles and on their front-page illustrations, and sometimes her dress still matches Virgil's description (fig. 13).⁵⁶⁰ It follows that newspaper producers assumed two things. First, that readers would recognise *fama* immediately (in fig. 13, the woodcut even replaces the word *fama* in the title); and second, that their association with *fama* would help them sell their product. In this context, *fama* was clearly not associated with unreliable information. Quite the contrary: the many faces of *fama* allowed her to become an allegory for news and its quick dissemination, and to vouch for the quality of the information provided at the same time.⁵⁶¹ In short, she represented both tidings and reputation, and there was no clear distinction between her roles as a bearer of news and as the guarantor for its trustworthiness.

Rütiner and his contemporaries were clearly aware of *fama*'s many faces and the close relationship between the concepts she embodied. They were moreover usually unable to reduce her to a single one of those concepts. When Hans Sachs published his translation and commentary of Virgil's *fama* in 1534, for instance, he translated *fama* not in one word, but in three: 'leumund, ghrüch oder neue mār' (repute, rumour, or new tidings).⁵⁶² As a consequence, Sachs' depiction of *fama* is much more ambiguous than Virgil's, and so is the woodcut accompanying a later edition of the poem (fig. 14). In addition to providing a translation of the Latin original, Sachs reminds his readers that they are responsible for their own *fama* and should therefore behave honourably. Here, *fama*'s role is both to spread rumours and to publicise people's misdeeds: 'Nothing is so secret, as is commonly said, / in due course everything will come to light'.⁵⁶³

The conceptual and metaphoric links between rumour, reputation, and tidings have to be taken seriously if we aim to understand how *fama* was perceived by Rütiner and his contemporaries. Not only was there no neat separation between these concepts, but they were all based on the same type of communication: on talk passed on from person to person. If early modern historians claim that rumour was generally considered unreliable because it drew only on hearsay, then what about reputation, which owed its existence and dissemination to the exact same principle? I would argue in contrast that contemporary views of *fama* were far less negative than is usually suggested. This is of course not to say that *fama* was generally considered reliable, but neither was she perceived as

⁵⁶⁰ On *fama* on title pages of seventeenth-century newspapers, see for instance Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, pp. 645–6, and Hedwig Pompe, *Famas Medium. Zur Theorie der Zeitung in Deutschland zwischen dem 17. und dem mittleren 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, Boston, 2012), p. 4.

⁵⁶¹ Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, pp. 645–6; Pompe, *Famas Medium*, p. 127.

⁵⁶² Hans Sachs, *Werke*, ed. Adelbert von Keller, 26 vols. (Stuttgart 1870–1908), here iv, p. 161.

⁵⁶³ 'Nichts ist so haymlich, wie man spricht / Es kumbt zu seyner zeyt ans liecht.' Ibid., iv, p. 163. Rütiner was familiar with some of Hans Sachs' work (see for instance Comm. I.889), but it is unclear whether he knew his translation of Virgil.

naturally unreliable: even Virgil's *fama*, however monstrous she may have appeared, spoke the truth.⁵⁶⁴

As we have seen, Rütiner received an enormous amount of information via word-of-mouth, and there was rarely any way of verifying it independently. Yet written and printed information was equally hard to check. This meant that trust in a piece of news depended on factors which were only indirectly determined by the medium through which it was disseminated. As we shall see in the next section, *fama* not only played an important role in the dissemination of news, but also in its validation: whether one believed in a *fama* (tidings) depended to a large degree on the *fama* (reputation) of the messenger.⁵⁶⁵ A close study of oral, written, and printed news about the Devil of Schiltach (1533) will illustrate how this process functioned in practice.

From an 'uncertain story' to 'a common and consistent tale': The Devil of Schiltach

On 10 April 1533, Holy Thursday, a small village in the Black Forest called Schiltach burnt to the ground. The culprit was soon found: a devil had haunted the house of the *Schultheiss* (head of the municipality) in the days leading up to the fire and kept its inhabitants awake with strange whistling, the beating of invisible drums, and threats to set the house and the whole village on fire. The devil's mischief only stopped when the *Schultheiss*' maid, who was suspected of bringing him into the house as her lover, was sent away. Yet the inhabitants of Schiltach were soon to learn that peace and quiet had not been restored. On Holy Thursday the maid flew back to Schiltach on a fireplace poker and poured fire and flames over the village, all with the devil's help. Shortly after she was arrested in the neighbouring village of Oberndorf and burnt at the stake on April 21, after admitting to witchcraft under torture.⁵⁶⁶

This episode sparked off a veritable explosion of rumours, which were recorded by numerous chroniclers in Southern Germany and the Swiss Confederacy.⁵⁶⁷ At least two longer pamphlets and an illustrated one-page leaflet circulated widely after the event, both referring and contributing to

⁵⁶⁴ Arthur L. Keith, 'Vergil's Allegory of Fama', *The Classical Journal*, 16/5 (1921), 298–301, here p. 300.

⁵⁶⁵ This link also exists in medieval German literature; see Horst Wenzel, 'Boten und Briefe. Zum Verhältnis körperlicher und nichtkörperlicher Nachrichtenträger', in idem (ed.), *Gespräche – Boten – Briefe: Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Philologische Studien und Quellen 143, Berlin, 1997), 86–105.

⁵⁶⁶ For a full account and a collection of most major contemporary sources on the event, see Hans Harter, *Der Teufel von Schiltach. Ereignisse – Deutungen – Wirkungen. Mit einer Quellendokumentation* (Schiltach, 2005).

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 120–25, where Harter mentions Nicolaus Thoman's *Weissenhorner Historie*, Heinrich Hug's *Villingen Chronik*, and the *Zimmersche Chronik*. The case was also recorded in the chronicles of Sebastian Franck, Kessler, and Vadianus.

the stories that were spread by word-of-mouth.⁵⁶⁸ Erasmus of Rotterdam even received a letter from the Portuguese diplomat Damião de Góis enquiring whether the rumours were true, and his response was published one year later.⁵⁶⁹

Yet this overload of information in print, manuscript, and oral form did nothing to confirm the rumour. If anything, it cast even more doubt on the veracity of the story. The three pamphlets disagreed on many details, including the exact sequence of events and the number of witches involved.⁵⁷⁰ The rumours were contradictory, too. As Nicolaus Thoman wrote in his *Weissenhorner Historie*, ‘afterwards there was a rumour that it was just a tale and not true; I have left it at that’.⁵⁷¹ Faced with two contradictory stories, neither of which he could verify, Thoman refused to judge between the two and chose to remain in a state of uncertainty instead. In his response to de Góis, Erasmus too did not dare to confirm ‘whether all that is commonly said about this is true’.⁵⁷² The most sceptical among them was Sebastian Franck. An extended edition of his *Chronica*, published in 1536, contains a short paragraph on the fire in Schiltach under the revealing heading of ‘Schiltach was burnt down, and other uncertain stories’.⁵⁷³ Franck made it very clear that he found it hard to believe that a devil was responsible for the fire: ‘As many say and has been published in print, [Schiltach] was set on fire by the devil, which, however, I cannot believe, for he is a spirit’.⁵⁷⁴ Only through ‘children of faithlessness and anger ... who ... may well be called devils’, could the devil have committed such a crime, Franck concludes.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁸ *Ein erschrocklich Warhafftige History wie es yetz auff den Gründonnerstag im Kintzgertal zuo Schiltach im dreyunddreissigsten jar/ der listog Teufel die frumen leut dasebst/ mit falschen worten/ pfeiffen/ allerley gesang/ etc. betrogen/ zu lest die Statt gar verderbt/ und verbrent hat/ wie er wider antwort geben/ findestu gründtlich in dism buechlin getruckt ston.* M.D.XXXiii (s.l., 1533, VD16 E 3856); *Ein wunderbarlich erschrockenlich handelunge/ So sich auff den Grün Dornstag dis iars/ ynn dem Stedlein Schiltach/ mit einer brunst durch den b[oe]sen geist gestiftt/ begeben hat/ ym M.D.xxxiiij.* (Leipzig: Michael Blum, 1533, VD16 W 4588); *Ein erschrocklich geschicht Vom Tewfel und einer unhulden/ beschehen zu Schilta bey Rotweil in der Karwochen.* M.D.XXXiii Jar. (Nuremberg: Stefan Hammer, 1533). Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, pp. 105–18, and Wolfgang Behringer, ‘Witchcraft and the Media’, in Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Robin B. Barnes (eds.), *Ideas and Cultural Margins in Early Modern Germany. Essays in Honor of H.C. Erik Midelfort* (Farnham, Burlington, 2009), 217–36, here pp. 220–2.

⁵⁶⁹ For Erasmus’ reply to de Góis, see Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterdami*, ed. Percy S. Allen, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1906–1958), x, p. 275, no. 2846, or alternatively Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, p. 119.

⁵⁷⁰ That such contradictions were noticed and cast doubt on the veracity of the story as a whole can also be seen in the case of Georg Kölderer’s Augsburg chronicles: Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, p. 50.

⁵⁷¹ ‘Darnach wart die sag, eß were ayn fabel, were nit war, dabey hab ichs bleiben lassen.’ Nicolaus Thoman, *Weissenhorner Historie. Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Oberschwaben*, ed. Franz Ludwig Baumann (Stuttgart, 1968), p. 190.

⁵⁷² ‘an omnia vera sint quae vulgo iactantur, non ausim affirmare’. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, x, p. 275, no. 2846.

⁵⁷³ ‘Schiltach verprunnen und ander ungewiß histori.’ Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch vnnd Geschicht-bibell von anbegyn bisz in diss gegenwertig M.D.xxxvi. jar verlengt[...]* (Ulm: Johannes Varnier, 1536).

⁵⁷⁴ ‘als etlich sagen und im truck außgangen lassen vom teüffel anzündt, welchs ich aber nit glauben kan, weil er ein geist ist.’ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ ‘kinder des ungläubens und zorns ... welche ... wol teüfel mögen genent werden.’ Ibid.

Rumours about the Devil of Schiltach also reached St. Gallen, yet as we have seen, it was impossible to verify them by checking them ‘against a letter or a similar solid, trustworthy *written* piece of evidence’.⁵⁷⁶ Even if one or several of the pamphlets reached St. Gallen, they would not necessarily have qualified as trustworthy sources – and even less so if they were contrasted with Erasmus’ letter, published in 1534, or Franck’s extended *Chronica*, which we know was available in St. Gallen.⁵⁷⁷

Yet four years after the fire, a different opportunity to verify the rumours arose. In February 1537, Johannes Brendly, one of Rütiner’s close friends and most regular informants, travelled to Rottweil in the Black Forrest in a legal matter. Upon his return to St. Gallen, he shared what he had been able to find out with Rütiner, his friend Johannes Kessler, and perhaps a few other members of Vadianus’ circle over drinks.⁵⁷⁸ Brendly’s version of the Devil of Schiltach, at least as it was recorded by Rütiner, reads like a puzzle put together with pieces from all three pamphlets as well as some original elements designed to fill the gaps. With the first pamphlet it shares the description of the devil’s voice as human and the claim that the devil screamed ‘ia’ – although the latter is taken out of context and only makes sense in the pamphlet, where ‘ia’ (‘yes’) is the devil’s answer to a question.⁵⁷⁹ In accordance with the second pamphlet, Brendly’s account specifies that it was the *Schultheiss*’ house that was haunted, and that the devil’s mischief stopped briefly when the maid was sent away.⁵⁸⁰ Like the illustrated third pamphlet, Brendly’s account provides the number of years the maid had intercourse with the devil, and the figures given only differ by a year.⁵⁸¹

Yet despite all this “plagiarism”, Brendly’s account also contradicts and ignores a large number of elements in the printed accounts. It neither mentions the devil’s imitation of birds, his outing of a secret Lutheran whom he had seen eating meat in Basel during Lent, or the claim that some houses were spared from the fire because they were inhabited by the poor.⁵⁸² Thus, while Brendly’s account partly overlaps with the pamphlets, it is not an exact copy of any of them. Either some of

⁵⁷⁶ van Nierop, ““And Ye shall Hear””, p. 75. Both Rütiner and Kessler mention rumours about the Devil of Schiltach: Comm. II.32e and Kessler, *Sabbata* pp. 399–400 (=422b).

⁵⁷⁷ Rütiner cites Franck’s chronicle in Comm. II.244c; however it is not clear which edition he read. Both the 1531 and the extended 1536 editions of Franck’s chronicle survive in the *Vadianische Sammlung* (VadSlg, GA 200 and GA 201). The illustrated pamphlet *Ein erschrocklich geschicht Vom Tewfel* later became part of the *Wickiana*, a famous sixteenth-century collection of pamphlets and news put together by Johann Jakob Wick (1522–1588) in Zürich: *Deutsche illustrierte Flugblätter des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 7 vols., vi: Die Sammlung der Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Teil 1: Die Wickiana I (1500 – 1569), eds. Wolfgang Harms and Michael Schilling (Tübingen, 2005), pp. 26–7, no. VI.13. Given the close ties between St. Gallen and Zurich, it is quite possible that it also reached St. Gallen.

⁵⁷⁸ Comm. II.32e/f.

⁵⁷⁹ Comm. II.32e and *Ein erschrocklich Warhafftige History* (VD16 E 3856). See alternatively Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, pp. 105 and 108.

⁵⁸⁰ Comm. II.32e and *Ein wunderbarlich erschrockenlich handlung* (VD16 W 4588). pp. 2 and 5. See alternatively Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, pp. 111 and 115.

⁵⁸¹ 18 and 17 years respectively, compared to the 14 years mentioned by Erasmus. See Comm. II.32e and *Ein erschrocklich geschicht Vom Tewfel*. See alternatively Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, pp. 118 and 120.

⁵⁸² Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, pp. 108, 114, 118.

these shared elements were also circulated orally, or what Rütiner recorded was a pick-and-mix compilation of those elements in the pamphlets which seemed most interesting or most convincing. Brendly's account also contains quite a few errors. One of the most striking ones concerns the one detail which all other sources agree upon, namely that the fire started in the morning of Holy Thursday. In Brendly's version of the story, however, the fire is moved to Good Friday and occurs during the night.⁵⁸³

Nevertheless, Brendly's account apparently managed to convince his St. Gallen audience. This is even more remarkable when we take into account that Rütiner and his humanist friends did not readily believe in tales of demons, witchcraft, and magic, but would usually dismiss such stories as common people's superstitions.⁵⁸⁴ When a house in St. Gallen was rumoured to be haunted, for instance – by a ghost, a demon, *and* a basilisk, no less – a very profane explanation for the strange noises coming from the house was soon found, and one that sat comfortably with Protestant views: according to Rütiner, the Catholic priests who lodged there were visited by prostitutes at night, and failed to keep it quiet.⁵⁸⁵

Yet in the case of Schiltach, St. Gallen's learned men came to a different conclusion. Vadianus did not seem to doubt the story when he noted in his *Diarium*,

A curious affair happened in Schiltach at the *Staig*⁵⁸⁶ in Württemberg, where the devil came into a house and slept with a maid and threatened to burn down the little town, which he did too. It happened around the middle of April through a witch [*abholdin*] who was sentenced in Oberndorf.⁵⁸⁷

Kessler's immediate response to Brendly's account is especially enlightening. 'In all respects it is similar to a tale', Rütiner reports his words,

⁵⁸³ Comm. II.32e.

⁵⁸⁴ As Alexandra Walsham has argued, Protestant discourse associated such superstitions with Catholicism: Walsham, 'Reformed folklore?', esp. pp. 175–9.

⁵⁸⁵ Comm. II.372c. That Rütiner generally took a rather critical stance on rumours about the supernatural can also be seen in a series of examples of popular superstition and some St. Gallen citizens' laughable attempts at sorcery that he records just before he writes down Brendly's story: Comm. II.28.

⁵⁸⁶ Vadianus is here referring to the *Schiltacher Steige*, a steep ascent on the main road through the Black Forest.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Zuo Schiltach an der Staig in Wirtenberg verluf sich ain wunderlicher handel, da der tüfel in ain haus komen und ain magt beschlafen und getröwt, das stätli zuo verbrennen; das er ouch tet. Geschach um mitten abrellen durch ain abholdin, die zuo Oberndorf gericht worden.' Von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, p. 523, no. 579.

and if it had not happened in such close proximity I would only be convinced with difficulty ... God warns us [by example of] a small town, a larger one is therefore not exempt [from such dangers] and equally prone to them.⁵⁸⁸

According to Rütiner, in spite of his initial doubts Kessler was convinced by the story because it happened in ‘close proximity’. And though he still called the story of the devil of Schiltach a *sag* (rumour, tale) in the *Sabbata*, it had now become ‘a common and consistent *sag* also among trustworthy people’.⁵⁸⁹

What, then, rendered Brendly’s version of the events of 1533 so believable? Brendly was not only Rütiner’s second-most-frequent informant and godfather to two of his children, but also a respectable citizen whose house was often used for the social gatherings of St. Gallen’s intellectual elite.⁵⁹⁰ The mere fact that it was Brendly who told the story and that he himself seemed convinced by it therefore gave it some weight. But it was above all the elaborate frame narrative which Brendly delivered along with his account that convinced his audience. While travelling from Rottweil to Strasbourg, Brendly was accompanied by an advocate from Rottweil who had been

a most skilful teacher of the fine arts some time ago ... Among other things they mentioned Vadianus. [The advocate] elevated this man over everyone else. Among other things he said that he had no greater wish in this life than to see him and to engage him in some conversation.⁵⁹¹

As Brendly and the advocate passed through the village of Schiltach on their journey, Brendly seized the opportunity to inquire about the rumours regarding the Devil of Schiltach. The advocate’s answer is worth quoting in full:

“I will not tell you anything”, [the advocate] said, “but we shall visit the inn in our town. [There is] an old citizen who once moved here, exiled from there for breaking a contract [*ob foedifragium*]. From him we will find out how it hap-

⁵⁸⁸ ‘per omnia similis fabulae et si non in tanta vicinitate facta esset [] difficulter persuaderet ... / in paruulo oppido monuit nos deus maius propterea non exemptum aequè promptum est’. Comm. II.32f.

⁵⁸⁹ ‘Ist ain gemaine und iberainstimmende sag och by den globwirdigen personen’. Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 400 (=422b).

⁵⁹⁰ On Brendly as a godparent, see StadtASG, 510: Taufbuch St. Laurenzen und St. Mangen, Band 1 1527–1566, pp. 51 and 108. For evidence of Brendly’s link to St. Gallen’s elite, see for instance Comm. I.788. According to StadtASG, Scherrer and Huber, *Stemmatalogia Sangallensis*, Brendly held several public offices, including city court judge (1530), blacksmiths’ *Elfer* (1535), and deputy mayor (1544). It is likely that Brendly worked as a barber surgeon; see Comm. II.173a and Gertraud Gamper and Rudolf Gamper, *Katalog der Inkunabeln in der Kantonsbibliothek St. Gallen. Vadianische Sammlung der Ortsbürgergemeinde und Eigenbestand* (Zürich, 2010), p. 160. Barber surgeons were part of the blacksmiths’ guild; see von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, ii, p. 422.

⁵⁹¹ ‘ante aliquot tempora ibidem ludi/magister bonarum artium peritissimus / ... [] inter alia Vadiani memores adeo / extulit illum virum vt nihil supra [] inter alia / dixit nihil in vita magis exoptare quam illius / conspectu et conversatione aliqua frui.’ Comm. II.32e.

pened, for his house was next door to the house of the *Schultheiss* where the fire started, [he is] a man who speaks the truth; trust [*fidem tribuito*] whatever he will say, because he is not someone who speaks idly [*vanidicus*].”⁵⁹²

The advocate thus went through a lot of trouble to assure Brendly of the reliability of the eye-witness, the inn-keeper, and so did the witness himself. As he told Brendly about the events of 1533, he constantly stressed his status as an eye-witness. Alongside eleven other men, the inn-keeper claimed, he had personally witnessed the demon’s nightly mischief in the *Schultheiss*’ home; during the fire, he told Brendly ‘in tears’,⁵⁹³ he had personally saved fifteen people from the flames, and as if to rule out any remaining doubt he ‘showed [Brendly] the scars and burn marks on his body’.⁵⁹⁴

This elaborate frame narrative served a single purpose: to render the story credible, to make the rumour true. By tying Brendly’s account all the way back to an eye-witness, it created the ‘close proximity’ which Kessler had found so convincing. Moreover, Brendly made every effort to present his sources as reliable. The inn-keeper’s intimate knowledge of the events that had transpired in 1533, his tears, and the burn marks and scars on his body all “proved” that he spoke the truth.⁵⁹⁵ But Brendly’s efforts to present his sources as reliable even extended to the intermediary who led him to the inn-keeper in the first place and who vouched for the eye-witness’ reliability. By describing the Rottweil advocate as an educated man and an admirer of Vadianus, his judgment, too, appeared reliable – especially to Brendly’s audience, which included at least two great admirers of St. Gallen’s brightest humanist star, Kessler and Rütiner, and perhaps even Vadianus himself.

Proximity to the events and trustworthiness of the sources – those were the two main criteria any story was measured by, and they were also what distinguished Brendly’s story from the rumours and printed pamphlets in circulation. In addition, some of the original elements in the version presented by Brendly seem almost custom-made for his St. Gallen audience. Brendly’s account contains a detailed description of how the *Schultheiss* of Schiltach had initially shrugged off the strange sounds his daughters had heard coming from the maid’s room, attributing it instead to fear. Yet shortly after, Brendly’s account continues, even the *Schultheiss* could not help but notice

⁵⁹² ‘Nihil / inquit tibi dicam [] Diuertemus autem in hospicium / in nostrae vrbis antiquus ciuis qui olim inde / coactus ob foedifragium illuc migravit ex / illo omnia quemadmodum gesta experiemus quia conti/gua illius domus est domus Praefecti vnde / ignis inicium sumpsit, homo veridicus quiquid / narrauerit huic fidem tribuito quia non / vanidicus est.’ Ibid.

⁵⁹³ ‘flendo’. Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ ‘cicatri/ces ostendidit in corpore suo vsturae et stig/gmata’. Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ In a later entry, Comm. II.53, Brendly adds another eye-witness to the story, namely a priest who was injured when he tried to exorcise the demon. Again, physical marks ‘proved’ that the witness was reliable: four years later, so Brendly claims, the priest’s wounds still had not healed. If Brendly was indeed a barber surgeon, his focus on physical proof may have made his story particularly credible.

the strange whistling and shouting.⁵⁹⁶ By offering an example of how a similarly sceptical eye-witness had overcome his doubts when he was confronted with the evidence, Brendly's account thus anticipated and addressed the doubts his audience might have had. Moreover, Brendly's account is the only one that traces the whole series of disastrous events back to a mercenary going off to war, leaving his desperate lover, the *Schultheiss*' maid, vulnerable to the seduction of the devil. This idea sat well with attitudes towards mercenary service in the Protestant cantons of the Swiss Confederacy, where it was seen as a source of great evil.⁵⁹⁷

Clearly, there was a weak link in the allegedly solid chain of information presented by Brendly. Whether the inn-keeper made a business out of telling the story his guests wanted to hear, whether Brendly had not actually found a reliable eye-witness but wanted to distinguish himself among his friends by offering a "factual" account of the events of 1533, or whether Rütiner misremembered or embellished the story when he wrote it down is impossible to determine. Yet the interesting question is not who lied or who got it wrong, but rather how Brendly's version of the story managed to convince the sceptics Rütiner and Kessler.

The case of the Devil of Schiltach reveals a set of four criteria for trustworthiness applied to all information, independently of whether it reached St. Gallen in oral, manuscript, or print form:

- 1) *volume*: a multitude of voices repeating similar accounts of the same story.⁵⁹⁸

In Rütiner's world, consensus was central to finding truth. The bible taught that 'in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established', and Rütiner and his contemporaries took this quite literally.⁵⁹⁹ If several people witnessed an event,⁶⁰⁰ if independent sources brought the same news,⁶⁰¹ even if a crowd gave its (tacit) approval to a story

⁵⁹⁶ Comm. II.32e.

⁵⁹⁷ Zwingli, for instance, compared the recruiters of mercenaries in Swiss villages to the devil seducing Eve. See Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester, 2002), p. 52.

⁵⁹⁸ Comparing information from several sources was also central to Hermann von Weinsberg's "source criticism"; Lundin, *Paper Memory*, p. 242.

⁵⁹⁹ 2 Corinth. 13:1. For Luther, for instance, the number of witnesses made all the difference between sin and a valid marriage: at least two witnesses had to be present at the exchange of vows, 'for God speaks: all things should be confirmed by two or three mouths' ('Weil Got spricht / Alle sachen sollen bestehen ynn zwey odder dreier munde.') Martin Luther, *Von ehesachen* (Wittenberg, Hans Luft, 1530, VD16 L 7249), fol. 5v.

⁶⁰⁰ Even when Rütiner personally witnessed an event, he sought confirmation from others. When a French female beggar tricked people into giving her money on the market square in St. Gallen, for instance, he noted that 'I saw it, and several others' ('Vidi et plures alij'; Comm. I.611).

⁶⁰¹ As Rütiner carefully recorded, for instance, St. Gallen's contractors and Gabriel Billwiller both related that Duke Wilhelm of Bavaria had insulted Ulrich of Württemberg and called Philipp of Hessen Ulrich's fool. Moreover, Billwiller himself drew on several informants, too, including Georg von Hewen, Ulrich of Württemberg's commander-in-chief (Comm. I.837). Similarly, a story about a legal dispute between two men from Appenzell was related 'unanimously by Brendly, David [von Watt] and Johannes Weninger' ('Brendly Daud et Ioh Weniger / vnanimis retulerunt'; Comm. II.57). In May of 1537, David von Watt shared the news of the defeat of Ferdinand I's troops by the Ottomans at Klis, stressing the fact that he was drawing on letters sent to him independently from merchants in Linz and Nuremberg (Comm. II.159).

told in their presence, they amplified and gave weight to the information shared.⁶⁰² In the case of the Devil of Schiltach, in contrast, a large number of contradictory voices initially cast some doubt over the veracity of the story.

- 2) *proximity*: an information chain tracing a story as closely back to an eye-witness as possible.⁶⁰³

Sixteenth-century humanists and reformers taught that truth should be sought at the source, and in the case of news their call *ad fontes* translated into a call *ad testes*: the most reliable account was an eye-witness account. As we have seen in the case of the Devil of Schiltach, Rütiner's informants made every effort to present themselves or their sources as eye-witnesses.⁶⁰⁴ If they could not plausibly do so, they created proximity by claiming that they (or their sources) had been physically close to the place where an event occurred.⁶⁰⁵

- 3) *reliability*: "proof" that all the links in the information chain were reliable.⁶⁰⁶

When an informant was part of the St. Gallen community, a simple name sufficed to decide whether they could be trusted or not. In the case of unnamed or indirect informants, however, their own *fama*, or reputation, often became part of the story.⁶⁰⁷ A reliable informant was *probus*⁶⁰⁸ (upright, honourable), *fidelis*⁶⁰⁹ (trustworthy), or *veridicus*⁶¹⁰ (truthful, literal-

⁶⁰² Conrad Schaiawiller, for instance, shared several stories 'in the presence of all [*Elfer*], and everybody nodded' ('praesentibus omnibus retulit et omnes annuerunt'; Comm. I.846b). Perhaps the fact that Rütiner often records who else was present as a story was shared is also linked to this process: by listening to a story without challenging it, a crowd could also demonstrate that it approved of what was being said (see for instance Comm. I.788; I.807; II.259; II.267c; II.278; II.347; II.366bb; II.387d).

⁶⁰³ See also Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, p. 51; Lundin, *Paper Memory*, p. 242; Fine, 'Rumour, Trust and Civil Society', pp. 9–11.

⁶⁰⁴ On 92 occasions Rütiner explicitly states that his informant was an eye-witness (for instance Comm. I.511; II.278; II.306a; II.316a). As the following example shows, his informants were keen to stress their status as eye-witnesses: Othmar Cuntzly could not only describe the death of a commander during the Battle of Bicocca (1522) in extraordinary detail because he 'was thrown down next to Othmar Cuntzly' ('iuxta Othmarum Cuntzli prostratur'). Cuntzly was also able to deliver a detailed account of a supposedly private commanders' meeting before the battle, assuring Rütiner that he 'was also at the assembly, because it is custom that each commander is accompanied for protection by the 4 or 5 men whom they trust the most' ('In senatu eciam illo Othmarus / fuit quia mos est vt singuli capitanei 4 / vel 5 secum quibus maxime fidunt committantur / in protectionem'; Comm. II.306a). Rütiner's informants provided him with list of their own sources on 208 occasions, and often these "information chains" lead all the way back to an eyewitness (for instance Comm. I.952; II.165; II.194; II.256b).

⁶⁰⁵ In 1535, for instance, 'our merchants returning from the Christmas trade fair in Lyon' ('Mercatores nostri Lugduno redeun/tes Nundinis natiuitatis') shared unsettling stories about the persecution of Protestants under King Francis I (Comm. I.541). For more examples of merchants returning with foreign news from the markets in Lyon, Augsburg, Nuremberg, and many other cities, see for instance Comm. I.747; I.762; I.916; II.18; II.25; II.28; II.97c; II.159; II.161; II.194; II.211; II.247; II.265g; II.306d; II.408.

⁶⁰⁶ See also Mauer, >*Gemain Geschray*<, p. 51 and 68; Horst Wenzel, *Mediengeschichte vor und nach Gutenberg* (Darmstadt, 2008), p. 51, and van Nierop, "'And Ye shall hear'", p. 72, where trust in the informant is mentioned as one of the main criteria for regarding a piece of news as reliable.

⁶⁰⁷ For instance: Comm. I.493; I.615; I.737; I.770; I.828; I.837; II.26; II.89c.

⁶⁰⁸ For instance: Comm. II.207e.

⁶⁰⁹ For instance Comm. I.615; I.737; I.770; I.837.

ly: speaking the truth); neither a flatterer nor someone who talked too much.⁶¹¹ In the case of the Devil of Schiltach, physical evidence (scars and tears) also played a part in “proving” that the inn-keeper was a reliable witness.

- 4) *plausibility*: a story that was compatible with the audience’s frame of reference.

As Steven Shapin has convincingly argued in *A Social History of Truth*, whether we find a story plausible depends both on our trust in the source of the story and on the extent to which the story is compatible with our personal frame of reference.⁶¹² Rütiner and his contemporaries, diligent though they were when assessing the reliability of their sources, nevertheless more readily believed in stories which were compatible with their view of the world. It made sense that Zurich’s troops were defeated in a war against their confederates, that Catholic priests were caught in the company of prostitutes, and that a mercenary had set off the series of events that led to the destruction of Schiltach, for all of these stories confirmed Rütiner’s assumptions about the world in which he lived.

What does all this tell us about the “hierarchy of trust” and the relationship between printed, manuscript, and oral news? Let us turn to the case of the Devil of Schiltach once more. While the pamphlets helped circulate the story, in contrast to Brendly’s story they failed on all other points. With the exception of the first pamphlet, which claimed to have been written on site in Schiltach, they did not mention where they got their information from, and so their distance or proximity to the events of 1533 remained unknown.⁶¹³ The fact that all authors remained anonymous meant there was no guarantee that they and their story could be trusted.⁶¹⁴ And finally, these prints reached every reader in the exact same form, regardless of their social, educational, and religious background.

In her hugely influential work on the print revolution, Elizabeth Eisenstein claims that one of the major advantages of print was standardization.⁶¹⁵ This may well have been the case for print editions of the bible or of academic works, but in the case of news, and in particular news concerning miraculous events, a certain degree of flexibility could be an advantage. For a story like that of

⁶¹⁰ For instance Comm. II.26; II.89c. Occasionally, these reassurances even take the form of a circular argument, such as in the case of an indirect informant who ‘speaks the truth ... as he truthfully says of himself’ (‘veridicus retulit ... vt vere de se praedicat’; Comm. I.493).

⁶¹¹ For instance Comm. I.828; II.254a; II.370.

⁶¹² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth. Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, London, 1994), pp. 4 and 21–2. See similarly Fine, ‘Rumour, Trust and Civil Society’, pp. 8–9.

⁶¹³ *Ein erschrocklich Warhafftige History* (VD16 E 3856). See alternatively Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, p. 110.

⁶¹⁴ While none of the three pamphlets’ authors are known, one pamphlet at least included the name of its Nuremberg printer; Harter, *Teufel von Schiltach*, p. 16. See also Diehl, *Exempla für eine sich wandelnde Welt*, p. 195, where Diehl argues that contemporaries found it suspicious when a text was published anonymously.

⁶¹⁵ Eisenstein, *Printing Press*, pp. 80ff.

the Devil of Schiltach to be successful, it had to make its audience believe in the unbelievable. This was achieved more easily by oral communication than by print precisely *because* the former could not be standardised to the same extent the latter could.⁶¹⁶ Ironically it was this lack of consistency which allowed the story of the Devil of Schiltach to adapt and develop until it had reached a form that Rütiner and his learned friends found plausible.

Of course things were rarely as clear as they seemed in the case of the Devil of Schiltach, where only Brendly's account fulfilled all of the criteria listed above. The next section will discuss how Rütiner dealt with two instances in which his sources contradicted one another.

'Mars is approaching when lies are told': Uncertainty and the limits of Rütiner's "source criticism"

On 18 November 1538, the Augsburg citizen Leonhard Beck sent a letter containing a variety of news to the St. Gallen court scribe Thomas Fechter.⁶¹⁷ It contained news of a volcanic eruption in Naples, a list of cities recently conquered by the Ottomans, and an account of a case of adultery and attempted rape by an Augsburg citizen. On account of this last story, the whole letter was read out in the public marriage court, and its content then passed on orally from Brendly to Rütiner.⁶¹⁸ In this section, however, I shall focus on the first two pieces of news, both of which were intensely discussed in St. Gallen at the time. The first one, concerning news about a natural disaster in Southern Italy, provides an example of how St. Gallen's merchants asserted their authority as bearers of news by discrediting competitors on the marketplace of information. The second one, regarding rumours about the progress of the Ottomans and their impending alliance with several Catholic powers, is used to illustrate how an overflow of contradictory information exposed the limits of Rütiner's system of "source criticism".

Starting on 29 October 1538, a week-long volcanic eruption accompanied by ash rain, earthquakes, and the formation of *Monte Nuovo* (new mountain), destroyed Pozzuoli, a small village

⁶¹⁶ According to F. J. Levy, in contrast to printed news manuscript newsletters were also regularly 'tailored to suit the recipient': F.J. Levy, 'Staging the News', in Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (eds.), *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus OH, 2000), 252–78, here pp. 253–4.

⁶¹⁷ Beck was heir to the richest woman of St. Gallen, Regina Schittli, and Fechter was put in charge of executing her will. See Conradin Bonorand, 'Hieronymus Sailer aus St. Gallen, Schwiegersohn des Augsburger Großkaufherrn Bartholomäus Welser, und seine Tätigkeit im Lichte seines Briefwechsels mit Vadian', *Zwingliana*, xx (1993), 103–25, here pp. 116–8.

⁶¹⁸ Comm. II.373–5.

west of Naples.⁶¹⁹ Beck's letter was the first medium to bring the news to St. Gallen. It was not unusual for news from the south to reach St. Gallen from the north. By the 1530s, the imperial postal system facilitated the flow of information between the Italian lands and Augsburg, turning the latter into an important centre not just of trade, but also of news.⁶²⁰ As an Augsburg citizen, Beck was therefore in a prime position for gathering and redistributing foreign news.

Yet Beck's account of the volcanic eruption was soon challenged by one which, according to Rütiner's criteria, seemed even more reliable:

17 September [*sic!*]. In Naples, as the sea was moving back and forth, everything was burnt and reduced to ashes. The wind which followed pushed [the ashes] into a pile and formed an exceptional mountain. Dominicus Hochrütiner related it when he returned. And he saw: it did not burn as long as it was said.

Paulus Schlumpf⁶²¹

The entry contains little news in the literal sense of the term. Beck had already informed St. Gallers about the receding sea which had exposed fire-breathing crevices at the bottom of the Mediterranean.⁶²² Yet Hochrütiner was nevertheless able to make a contribution: from his own observation, so he claimed, he knew that earlier reports had been exaggerated.⁶²³ At the same time, however, Hochrütiner's own account – at least as it was recorded by Rütiner – was highly exaggerated as well. Although Naples literally lay in ashes after the eruption, it was not destroyed by fire, but simply covered in volcanic ash which had fallen down on it like snow.⁶²⁴

Early in 1539, yet another informant added to the story: 'When [Jakob Schlapartitz] returned from the autumn markets in Campania, he observed the earthquake and that conflagration near Naples'.⁶²⁵ In contrast to Hochrütiner's account, Schlapartitz's version is both more detailed and more compatible with other extant sources, and one in particular: a letter written by the Neapolitan

⁶¹⁹ For an account of the eruption which draws on contemporary sources, see Mauro Di Vito, Lucio Lirer, Giuseppe Mastrolorenzo, et al., 'The 1538 Monte Nuovo eruption (Campi Flegrei, Italy)', *Bulletin of Volcanology*, 49 (1987), 608–15.

⁶²⁰ Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, pp. 76–6 and 324.

⁶²¹ '17 Septemb [] Neapoli mari reciprocato comb/usta omnia et in cinerem redacta [] vehe/menti vento subsecuto in cumulum contrusit / montemque formavit eximium [] Dominicus Hoch/rutiner rediens retulit [] Veditque non / diu vt dictum fuit vssit / P Schlumpf'. Comm. II.406.

⁶²² Comm. II.374.

⁶²³ It is unclear whether Hochrütiner was referring to Beck's report or perhaps one of the contemporary printed accounts which indeed claimed that the fires were still burning ('print noch ymer dar'). See *Wunderbarliche vund erschrockliche neue zeitung, so sich neulich auff den 28 tag Septembris im 1538 jar, in Welschland, nit fern von Neapolis zugetragen haben* ([Nürnberg]: [Johannes Petreius], [1538], VD16 W 4605), fol. 2v.

⁶²⁴ This is how one contemporary Neapolitan, Francesco Marchesino, described the volcanic ash: Francesco Marchesino, *Copia de Una lettera di Napoli che contiene li stupendi, & gran prodigij apparsi sopra à Pozzolo* (s.l., 1538).

⁶²⁵ 'Ex Campania rediens autumnalibus nund/inis et percepto terremotu et conflagratione / illa circa Neapolim' ; Comm. II.421.

Francesco Marchesino on 5 October 1538, which was later published in print.⁶²⁶ In fact the close parallels between Marchesino's letter and Schlaparitzky's account seem somewhat suspicious. Both mention a thermal bath near Pozzuoli, a detail which never made it into the *Sabbata* or the German pamphlets.⁶²⁷ Moreover, Schlaparitzky's description of how he investigated the sulphuric fires on a mountain between Florence and Piacenza seems to echo Marchesino's observations during his first walk on the newly formed *Monte Nuovo*.⁶²⁸ It is therefore possible that what was presented by Schlaparitzky as an eye-witness account was in fact based on a print of Marchesino's letter.

Like Hochrütiner, Schlaparitzky was not only asked to share his own observations, but his expertise was also sought to verify earlier accounts:

When asked whether it happened as it was told in a little tract [*tractatulo*]: Perhaps, he said, they have added a few things. In substance, however, some things did happen. The wind pressed the ashes down into the form of a mountain.

Jakob Schlaparitzky

Similarly Dominicius Hochrütiner also reported it to Paulus Schlumpf.⁶²⁹

The *tractatulum* mentioned here is probably identical with the pamphlet entitled *Erschrockenliche vnd grusame zeychen erschienen*, which survived in the *Zentralbibliothek Zürich* and parts of which Kessler quotes *verbatim* in his *Sabbata*.⁶³⁰ Yet as this example shows, merchants such as Schlaparitzky and Hochrütiner were considered the authoritative source for events which happened where they had travelled for business. Their accounts – and indeed those of travelling St. Gallers in general – carried particular weight because they were both part of the local St. Gallen community and could plausibly claim to have been present at, or physically close to, events which took place far away; in short, they combined reliability and proximity. Their oral testimony was preferred over other, less trusted sources on which they were expected to comment upon their return. Both

⁶²⁶ Marchesino, *Copia de Una lettera*.

⁶²⁷ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 478 (=502b); *Wunderbarliche vund erschrockliche neue zeitung* (VD16 W 4605); *Erschrockenliche vnd grusame zeychen erschienen / ouch groß erdbyden beschehen nach by der statt Nappoli / an einem ort genant Puzolo/ an S. Michels abend/ mitt schwebel raegen / donneren vnd blitzgen/ ouch mit vffbrechung der bergen/ vnd grossen fñür flammen ...* (1538, VD16 ZV 29549); *Wunderbarliche Neue Zeytnng [sic!], So sye newlich auff den XXVIII. tag Septembris jm MDXXXVIII. Jar Jm Welsch lande, nit ferr von Neapolis sich zu tragen hat, bey Bykelo anderhalb meyl on Neapolis, Des erschrockenlichen prinnens viii. Welscher Meyl. Anzaigung Der straff Gotes künfftig. MD XXXIX* (Augsburg: Melchior Rammingen, 1539, VD 16 W4607).

⁶²⁸ Marchesino, *Copia de Una lettera*, p. 2.

⁶²⁹ 'intero/gando num se habuerit quemadmodum trac/tatulo narratum [] Forsan inquit nonnihil / adiecerunt [] in re tamen facta [] quaedam in / montis formam ventus cinus detrusit / Iacob Schlaparitzky / Similiter et Dominicus Hoch/rutiner retulit Pau/lo Schlumpfen.' Comm. II.421.

⁶³⁰ *Erschrockenliche vnd grusame zeychen erschienen* (VD16 ZV 29549). Kessler even entitles his own account 'Erschrockenliche und grusame zaichen': Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 478 (=502b). The editors of the *Sabbata*, in contrast, wrongly assumed that Kessler relied on the *Wunderbarliche vund erschrockliche neue zeitung* (VD16 W 4605); see their commentary in Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 593–4.

Hochrütiner and Schlaparitzky claimed to be eye-witnesses and gave a demonstration of their insider knowledge by partially discrediting other accounts, including at least one printed tract. Their authority as a source of news derived precisely from the fact that they did *not* have to rely on printed accounts or letters (or at least so they had their audience believe), but could draw on their own observations instead.

It is important to note that while these oral informants called into question earlier written and printed accounts, Rütiner did not record any contradictions between Hochrütiner's and Schlaparitzky's testimony. In fact, Schlaparitzky even confirmed what Hochrütiner had reported about the formation of *Monte Nuovo*. But what happened if several equally trusted informants contradicted one another?

Early in 1537, St. Gallen was swamped with news about a possible alliance between Suleiman the Magnificent and several Catholic powers:

Erasmus Schlumpf, Hulrich's [son], heard from Albrecht Miles and Jakob Zili when they returned from Lyon in February that there were 800 Turks in Marseille who had been given two of the city's quarters as lodgings. A great and noble ambassador of the Turk was said to have departed via Lyon in the direction of the King in Paris; it is unknown what is to be discussed. When [Bartholome] Schobinger heard Erasmus tell me this, he immediately replied: "What I said about this treaty was meaningless and random. It belonged to the merchants of Lyon, now they tell such [stories]."

[Schobinger] added: before the war, when the Emperor was still in Rome, the Duke of Ferrara captured a messenger from the Turk to the King and brought him before him. The Emperor said: "Release him, I know very well what both are planning."

When he related this, C[aspar] Huseli was present. On the previous Monday he had heard in Wil from a trustworthy man of the *Vogt*, master Tobel, that a messenger from Nuremberg, dressed in the city's colours and coat of arms, had passed through Winterthur. This man said that he had just seen the Turk, the King of France and the Pope in Marseille, from where he was returning. He did not know what they were planning, and when he spread this in the Thurgau, the *Landvogt* of Frauenfeld, now [a man] from Uri, almost had him arrested.

On the Sunday before Sebastian Cuntz died [04 February 1537] Gebentinger said that he had heard something similar from the mayor Ransperg, because [the lat-

ter] read that letter in St. Laurentzen in the assembly after the service, namely that those three had convened in Venice to confirm the treaty. Yet the Venetians have not yet agreed because the old convention has now ended, just as they had mutually agreed. He also added that the Turk had decapitated a resistant citizen there.⁶³¹

In 1537, it seems, the Ottomans were everywhere: in Marseille, in Venice, and on everybody's lips. Information about their plans was available in abundance, and it all seemed to come from reliable sources. Schlumpf had heard his version of the story from two St. Gallen merchants who had just returned from the market in Lyon, one of the towns the Turkish ambassador passed through on his way to Paris. A 'trustworthy man' told Huseli what he had learned from an eye-witness, a Nuremberg messenger whose authority was in turn confirmed by the clothes he wore.⁶³² The Nuremberg messengers' testimony seemed all the more significant in light of the *Landvogt's* intervention: the fact that a Catholic official had attempted to bury news of a Catholic-Ottoman alliance only made the latter seem more plausible. Finally, Gebentinger learned about the meeting in Venice from a letter the St. Gallen mayor read out to the council. Yet the stories which reached St. Gallen in February 1537 were clearly incompatible with one other. The only thing they all agreed upon was that the Turk and Francis I were planning an alliance – which was of course not far from the truth.⁶³³

The rumours which circulated in St. Gallen in 1537 were not only a reaction to the military campaign of Suleiman the Magnificent, but also an expression of growing concerns regarding the future of Protestantism.⁶³⁴ A far greater threat than that posed by the Ottomans was starting to take shape in these rumours and in the letters sent to Vadianus around that time. Between 1537 and

⁶³¹ 'Erasmus Schlumpff Hulr audiuit ab A[l]brechto Mi/liti et Iacobo Zily redeuntes Lugduno Feb/ruario [] 800 Turcas in Massilia esse quibus / 2 regiones vrbs inhabitandum traditae. / Magnus et praecipuus Turcae legatus per Lug/dunum Lutetias versus ad regem proficisci / quid agendum nescire [] Audiens illa cum mihi re/ferebat Erasmus [] Schowinger respondit subinde / vana et euentita erant quae de foedere hoc dice/bam [] Lugdunensibus mercatoribus fuit iam / ipsi talia referunt / Addidit idem dum Caesar adhuc Romae degit / antequam bellum illud inceptum. Dux Ferrariae / legatum quondam Turcae ad Regem, captum, ad se / adductum. Respondit Caesar. dimitte illum no/ui optime quid vtrique moliantur. / Astitit referendo C Huseli praecedenti Lu/nae Vuyll audiuit a praefecti Dominus Tobel very/dico quod Vitoduri praeterijt Nuncius Nurenbergensis / colore et insigni vrbs indutus [] Ille dixit se / iam Massiliae vnde redeat [] Vidisse [] Turcam / Regem Franciae et Papam [] quid moliantur nesciat / et talia per Turgauiam seminando parum ab/fuit quin a praefecto Frowenfeld captus fuisset / de Vry iam / Illa dominica qua postea Sebastianus Cuntz mo/ritur simile quiddam retulit Gebentinger se au/diuisset a Consule Ransperg quia in templo Laur/entij illas literas legisse senaculo post con/tiones [] videlicet illos 3 convenisse Venetijs / pro foedere confirmando. [] Tamen Venetianos / nondum consentisse quia vetus conventio iam fini/ta est quemadmodum olim pepigerunt invicem [] Ad/didit eciam [] Turcam ibidem Ciuem obluctantem / decollasse'. Comm. II.25.

⁶³² On the clothes of messengers as a means to establish trust, see also Jucker, 'Vertrauen, Symbolik, Reziprozität', p. 210.

⁶³³ On the 1536 treaty between Francis I and Suleiman the Magnificent and its political and economic consequences, see De Lamar Jensen, 'The Ottoman Turks in Sixteenth Century French Diplomacy', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16/4 (1985), 451–70.

⁶³⁴ On contemporary St. Gallers' reactions to the Ottoman threat, see Ernst Gerhard Rüschi, 'Die türkische Bedrohung des Abendlandes zur Zeit Vadian's im Spiegel der st. Gallischen Quellen', *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung*, 110 (1992), 169–83.

1539, the St. Gallen mayor's correspondence was bursting with unconfirmed rumours about several possible Catholic alliances: between Charles V and Francis I,⁶³⁵ or between Charles V, Francis I, and the Pope,⁶³⁶ or between Charles V, Francis I, and the Venetians,⁶³⁷ or between the Venetians, the Italian Princes, and the Pope.⁶³⁸ Sent by numerous eminent Protestants including Martin Frecht, Simon Grynaeus, and Heinrich Bullinger, such rumours about a Catholic union were quite alarming – and even more so in light of the divisions between the Zwinglians and Lutherans which the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 had just brought to light once more.

In 1537, concerns about the progress of the Ottoman army, about an imminent Catholic alliance, and about the irreconcilable divide between Zwinglians and Lutherans thus seem to have merged with rumours about the treaty between Francis I and Suleiman the Magnificent. In St. Gallen, these rumours fell on fertile soil. For a Protestant town surrounded by Catholic territory and completely dependent on the export of linen, an alliance of the kind reported by some of the rumours – namely one between Francis I, the Ottomans, the Venetians, *and* the Pope – was the ultimate threat to both its economy and its confessional freedom.⁶³⁹ However unlikely such an alliance may have seemed, the rumours did not fail to have an effect. Although Rütiner quickly realised that his sources contradicted one other, he did not dismiss them altogether: 'See what diverse, dissimilar [things] are spread at one and the same time, so that it has not become a saying in vain: Mars is approaching when lies are told'.⁶⁴⁰ In this instance, Rütiner's system of "source criticism" had failed. Yet to him, this failure was itself evidence that the rumours were true in their essence: war was imminent.

The threat of war was to hang over St. Gallen for several years. In 1538, Rütiner writes in an entry concerning the St. Gallen abbot and other Catholic authorities:

Everywhere they act more tyrannically than hitherto, I do not know [by what] they are animated. It is to be feared that a great persecution will follow shortly, perhaps from the concord between the King and the Emperor or another thing.

⁶³⁵ *Die Vadianische Briefsammlung der Stadtbibliothek St. Gallen*, ed. Emil Arbenz and Hermann Wartmann, 7 vols. (Mitteilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte XXIV–XXX, St. Gallen, 1890 – 1913), v.2, p. 403, no. 939: Simon Grynaeus to Vadianus, [Basel], 07 January 1537.

⁶³⁶ *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.2, p. 517, no. 1031: Heinrich Bullinger to Vadianus, Zurich, 1 January 1539.

⁶³⁷ *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.2, p. 477, no. 999: Martin Frecht to Vadianus, Ulm, 17 February 1538.

⁶³⁸ *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.2, p. 456, no. 981: Freiherr Georg von Hewen to Vadianus, [Tuttlingen], 12 December 1537. See also *ibid.*, pp. 454–5, no. 979: Freiherr Georg von Hewen to Vadianus, [Tuttlingen], 7 December 1537; pp. 472 – 3, no. 994: Johannes Comander to Vadianus, Chur, 3 February 1538.

⁶³⁹ Similar rumours circulated again two years later; see *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.2, no. 1060: Martin Frecht to Vadianus, Ulm, 3 June 1539.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Vide quam varia illo et vno tempore / disparguntur dissimilia vt non frustra in pro/verbium abijt [] Martium appropinquare / quum de mendatijs loquitur.' Comm. II.25.

Yet while we despair, God will give a good end to all this ... All this from Antonius Zili.⁶⁴¹

The Swiss Protestants were still holding their breath early in 1539, and the tone of their letters became increasingly dramatic. In a letter to Vadianus dating from 1 January 1539, Bullinger reports another set of rumours and hints at a gloomy future lying before them:

Rumour ... has it that Ferdinand, the Pole and the Voivode of Hungary are to convene in Vienna, elsewhere the Emperor, the Gaul [i.e. Francis I] and the Pope, so that they can earnestly discuss the Lutherans, who are to be suppressed ... See, my Vadian, with what signs this year begins. You can conjecture what will happen ... To die is not the worst ...⁶⁴²

This example illustrates the lasting effect uncertain and contradictory news could have; especially when they grew out of, confirmed, and fed, pre-existing fears. Such rumours were not dismissed lightly, and they persisted over several years precisely because they could neither be verified nor disproved. It does not matter so much whether the threat which these rumours reported was real, but rather that Rütiner and his contemporaries believed it to be.

Perhaps their fear of war, fuelled by constant rumours from a variety of sources, may go some way towards explaining why Rütiner's notes, in contrast to Kessler's, became more and more detailed in the last years of the 1530s. In those years, 'God's miraculous deeds' were increasingly hard to come by, and so there was less for Kessler to record. Yet the need for a record of the innumerable rumours flying through the city and for a system, however limited, for determining which ones to trust, was greater than ever.

* * *

As we have seen in this chapter, Rütiner's "references" served an important purpose: they allowed him to establish whether a piece of news was trustworthy and to weigh contradictory ac-

⁶⁴¹ 'Vndique magis tyrannice ag/unt quam hactenus nescio animati [] Timendum / breui magnam persecutio-nem secuturam / forsan ex concordia Regis et Caesaris vel / alterius rei [] Sed deus his omnibus felicem ex/itum dabit nobis desperantibus ... / Ab Antonio Zili / haec omnia'. Comm. II.356.

⁶⁴² 'Rumor deinde est, Ferdinandum, Polonum et Vaywodam Ung(ariae) conventurus Viennae, alibi Caesa-rem, Gallum et papam, ut serio tractent de opprimendis Lutheranis ... Vide, mi Vadian, quibus auspiciis hic annus ingrediatur. Quid futurum sit, conicere potes ... Mori non est miserum'. *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.2, p. 517, no. 1031: Heinrich Bullinger to Vadianus, Zurich, 1 January 1539. According to Rütiner, Vadianus shared Bullinger's concern; see for instance Comm. II.248.

counts against one another. Moreover, if Rütiner intended to use any of the information he recorded in conversations, it was important that he, too, could present his sources as reliable.

While Rütiner may have been exceptional in his meticulous recording of sources, the criteria he applied were much more universal. It seems that most of his informants, from the maid Anna Bösch to the educated Brendly, understood what it took for their stories to become believable and to resonate with their audiences. Similar “references” were required from witnesses in courts. In the protocols of the St. Galler *Siebnergericht* (Court of the Seven), the court scribe routinely recorded long chains of information, such as the following: ‘Ulr[ich] Rainsperg says Thias Schiegg told him the messenger from Zug told him a *mantzer*⁶⁴³ said that God cannot be eaten nor shat’.⁶⁴⁴ Like these oral accounts, letters sent to St. Gallen were full of reassurances that their authors were drawing on reliable informants. ‘If you hear anything different’, wrote one of Vadianus’ correspondents, for instance, ‘you should not believe it: for this I have personally heard in Kassel from the people who were present...’.⁶⁴⁵ Even authors of early newsprints often attempted to establish credibility by insisting that what they reported “truly” happened and by including lists of eye-witnesses as supporting evidence.⁶⁴⁶ Michael Giesecke’s argument that the primacy of the eye (and thus of the eye-witness) is a distinctive characteristic of the age of print with its focus on visual rather than aural experience does not square with such evidence.⁶⁴⁷ Nor can it be said that ‘ideals of face-to-face communication’ were immediately ‘devalued’ with the advent of print.⁶⁴⁸ Rather, early print relied on mechanisms of verification which had been well-established in both oral and written forms of communication.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, print was still a relatively new medium, and even more recent were the new genres of texts such as pamphlets and broadsheets which had developed as a result of the new technology. Instead of thinking about early modern print in terms of modern

⁶⁴³ Perhaps derived from *mänzen* (to squabble) or *munzen* (to tell secretly); see ‘mänze(n)’, in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, iv, column 346, and ‘munze(n)’, in *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, iv, column 347.

⁶⁴⁴ ‘Ulr[ich] Rainsperg sait Thias Schiegg hab im gsait, der bot von Zug hab im gesait ain mantzer hab geredt got lass sich nit essen noch schissen.’ StadtASG, 797: Protokoll des Siebnergerichts 1519–1527, p. 78, 01 Mar 1527. On the St. Gallen *Siebnergericht* see also Moser-Nef, *Reichsstadt und Republik St. Gallen*, i, pp. 378–80.

⁶⁴⁵ ‘Ob ir annders hortten, sonnd ir eß nitt globenn; den diß hab ich selber Kaßell gehortt vonn dennen bersonnen, die dorby gweßenn...’ *Vadianische Briefsammlung*, v.1, p. 231, no. 826: Jakob Grübel to Vadianus, Heidelberg, 12 July 1535. For a similar example, see also *ibid.*, v.2, p. 278, no. 865: Niklaus Guldin to Vadianus, 12 January 1536. On the numerous ways in which contemporaries tried to establish trust in written correspondence, see Jucker, ‘Vertrauen, Symbolik, Reziprozität’.

⁶⁴⁶ See for instance *Deutsche illustrierte Flugblätter*, vi, pp. 90–1, no. 44; pp. 128–9, no. 63; pp. 228–9, no. 114. This last pamphlet, for instance, names several ‘wahrhaftige Personen’ (truthful people) as witnesses and even includes the places where they lived. M.T. Jones-Davies has demonstrated that similar mechanisms of verification were also discussed in Elizabethan theatre: M.T. Jones-Davies, ‘Échos des rumeurs en Angleterre vers le tournant du XVIe siècle dans la presse populaire et au théâtre’, in *idem* (ed.), *Rumeurs et nouvelles au temps de la Renaissance* (Société Internationale de recherches interdisciplinaires sur la Renaissance, Colloque 1996/7, 22, Paris, 1997), 13–23, here esp. pp. 19–20.

⁶⁴⁷ Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*, esp. pp. 568–90.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

print, it may therefore be more productive to compare it to a new medium of our own time: the internet. Both print and the internet made information available on a hitherto unknown scale. As we have seen, this was a mixed blessing. As Matthew Lundin put it, an ‘abundance of information could make contemporary observers feel that they knew less, not more’.⁶⁴⁹

It has often been argued that Europe “shrank” with the introduction of the printing press and the imperial postal system – just as it is often claimed that the world “shrank” with the introduction of the internet – for they allowed efficient and fast communication and travel over long distances and thus moved people closer together.⁶⁵⁰ At the same time, however, the sources of news became more elusive as the physical distance between author and audience grew. In a system where trust in a piece of news was inseparably linked to one’s trust in the messenger, this caused much uncertainty. As Cohen and Twomey argue, in ‘an oral world where men and women often knew one another, the written word seemed disembodied’.⁶⁵¹ This was particularly true for information spread in print, whose dissemination was not tied to pre-existing social networks to the same extent that oral accounts and letters were.⁶⁵² Eventually, regular newspapers published under the same title would develop their own *fama* on the basis of which readers could decide whether or not to trust them.⁶⁵³ In Rütiner’s time, however, there was no established, reliable way of circulating print, nor were there any big names in the printing business which could vouch for the quality of what was published.⁶⁵⁴ Even when printed news did reach St. Gallen, it therefore seemed safer to trust in a familiar oral informant.⁶⁵⁵

It was their flexibility and social embeddedness which often gave oral narratives an advantage over other media. Oral informants which created the illusion that news stories from far away had only passed through a few reliable hands before reaching their destination made the space in between “shrink” as well, and more successfully so than anonymous prints.⁶⁵⁶ Indeed, as in the case

⁶⁴⁹ Lundin, *Paper Memory*, p. 239. See similarly Briggs and Burke, *Social History of the Media*, p. 18.

⁶⁵⁰ For instance by Behringer, *Im Zeichen des Merkur*, p. 104.

⁶⁵¹ Cohen and Twomey, ‘Introduction’, p. 18.

⁶⁵² Michael Giesecke, for instance, has praised print’s ability to communicate information ‘free of interaction’ (‘interaktionsfrei’); see ‘Podiumsdiskussion und Gegenrede’, p. 18. I would argue in contrast that this instilled more scepticism than confidence in its early audience.

⁶⁵³ To some extent, this may have already been the case for *Neue Zeitungen* when they were at the peak of their production in the second half of the sixteenth-century. As Schilling has argued, even learned collectors of such prints often received them rather uncritically: Schilling, *Bildpublizistik der Frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 115–25.

⁶⁵⁴ Johns, *Nature of the Book*, p. 2. See also Franz Mauelshagen, ‘Was ist glaubwürdig? Fallstudie zum Zusammenspiel von Text und Bild bei der Beglaubigung aussergewöhnlicher Nachrichten im illustrierten Flugblatt’, in Wolfgang Harms and Alfred Messerli (eds.), *Wahrnehmungsgeschichte und Wissensdiskurs im illustrierten Flugblatt der Frühen Neuzeit (1450–1700)* (Basel, 2002), 309–38, here p. 338.

⁶⁵⁵ In this regard, Rütiner was not very different from the medieval St. Gallen monk Notker who, so Matthew Innes argues, ‘had access to written sources, but chose to establish legitimacy and a direct link to the past by placing himself in a chain of personal contacts.’ Innes, ‘Memory, Orality and Literacy’, pp. 33–4.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. in contrast Giesecke, *Buchdruck in der Frühen Neuzeit*, p. 499, where he argues that reports were only considered informative if they ‘relied on visual perception’, and that oral communication was devalued as a

of jokes, oral informants sometimes actively obscured the fact that they drew on printed information. Oral witnesses were also more successful in catering to their audience's expectations. Early modern prints are often studied as a mirror of contemporary attitudes and ideas: because their main objective was to sell, it was in their producers' interest to give their audience what it wanted.⁶⁵⁷ Yet while it is certainly true that pamphlets were written with a particular readership in mind, their authors had no control over who read their work and no means of addressing all possible audiences at once.⁶⁵⁸ Those who spread a story orally, on the other hand, usually had a better idea of who they were talking to. Talented storytellers could thus adapt their account according to what they knew about their audience, react to its reactions, anticipate and dissipate any doubts it might have.

This was not only true for accounts concerning current news, but also for those related to days long gone by. The next chapter will explore how conversations in the present shaped St. Galler's visions of the past.

consequence. His argument, however, is based on an understanding of oral communication as being limited in geographical scope and unable to plausibly claim reliance on eye-witness reports, both of which are certainly not the case in sixteenth-century St. Gallen.

⁶⁵⁷ For instance Chartier, *Cultural Uses of Print*, p. 145; Scribner, *Simple Folk*, pp. 8–9. A similar argument regarding early newspapers is made by Paul Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix. How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1550–1700* (Leiden, Boston, 2014), pp. 8–9.

⁶⁵⁸ On this problematic aspect of 'media of distribution' ('Verbreitungsmedien') see similarly Schlögl, 'Kommunikation und Vergesellschaftung', esp. pp. 171 and 207–8, and Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, esp. pp. 99–100.

6 Si recte memini: Memory and narrative

Ernst Ehrenzeller has argued that Rütiner's *Commentationes* bear witness to 'a true sense of history' which existed within Vadianus' circle, and has quoted as evidence their conversations about ancient history, their obsession with old coins and castles, and their awareness of social change.⁶⁵⁹ Yet as we have already seen, Rütiner's *Commentationes* hold a somewhat exceptional position among the writings which emerged from Vadianus' circle. Rütiner's notes were guided more by the needs of the present than an ambition to write for posterity, and he made no effort to turn his informants' fragmented and contradictory oral testimonies into a coherent, chronological account of the past. Rather than measuring the *Commentationes* by the standards of early modern historiography, it may therefore be more productive to look at his entries concerning the past from a different angle, namely as a collection of memories.

What is memory, and how does it differ from history? Over the last century, numerous scholars have attempted to answer these questions. A model first proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s distinguishes between collective memory and history. While collective memory is a living thing, inseparably linked to social groups and constitutive of their identity, history, in Halbwachs' view, is universal and critical; it typically enters the stage only after collective memory has died.⁶⁶⁰ This distinction was further developed by Pierre Nora, who inserted it into a historical narrative in which pre-modern, living collective memory is 'swept away' by modern history; a narrative which has been repeatedly challenged by early modern historians.⁶⁶¹ Aleida Assmann has proposed an alternative distinction; one which differentiates between functional memory on the one hand, and storage memory on the other. The former is comprised of "inhabited" memories which are selective and serve a purpose in the present (e.g. for the formation of group identity), while the latter consists of the much larger body of "uninhabited" memories preserved by historians. Assmann's model is more fluid and less one-directional than those of Halbwachs and Nora: in her view, storage memory is the "backdrop" of functional memory rather than its opposite; a storehouse of knowledge about the past with the potential to become "inhabited" again.⁶⁶² Yet Assmann's dis-

⁶⁵⁹ Ehrenzeller, *Stadt St. Gallen*, p. 131.

⁶⁶⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, ed. Gérard Namer (Paris, 1997, 1st edn. 1950), esp. pp. 130–2. On Halbwachs' conceptualisation of memory as rooted in social contexts, see also idem, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1925).

⁶⁶¹ Pierre Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, transl. Wolfgang Kaiser (Berlin, 1990, 1st edn. 1984), esp. pp. 11–3. Most recently, Nora's hypothesis has been challenged by Judith Pollmann, Hans Medick and others in 'Forum. Memory before Modernity: Cultures and Practices in Early Modern Germany', *German History*, 33/1 (2015), 100–122.

⁶⁶² Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München, 2009, 1st edn. 1999), pp. 133–5.

tion between functional and storage memory nevertheless echoes the more traditional separation of collective memory and history. As Peter Burke has argued, in the context of postmodernity this distinction is problematic in itself, for history is no longer viewed as objective or universal.⁶⁶³

While the distinction between collective memory and history is becoming increasingly blurred, memory itself is being fractured into an ever larger number of sub-categories. According to Jan Assmann, we need to distinguish between communicative memory, which ‘lives in everyday interaction and communication’ and usually only reaches three generations into the past, and cultural memory, which deals with the remote past and is institutionalized and stabilized in a wide range of media such as texts, rituals, and memorial objects.⁶⁶⁴ This distinction is problematic, however, for it suggests that only events of the recent past are passed on informally – and according to Jan Assmann, that means above all orally – and that only the remote past is remembered in any formalized manner.⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, the model is based on a definition of memory which excludes its practical functions: knowledge about the past is only considered memory when it has a bearing on a group’s identity.⁶⁶⁶ Therefore, Patrick Schmidt has recently proposed a third type, pragmatic memory, which comprises all knowledge which is passed on for merely practical purposes (e.g. information about duties and privileges, accounts of legal disputes, or membership lists).⁶⁶⁷ In spite of all this differentiation, however, it seems less and less clear what memory is, and the term is increasingly used as a catch-all phrase for a variety of quite diverse practices related to the past.⁶⁶⁸

While many studies focus on the moment in which memory becomes history, less attention has been paid to the relationship between personal and collective memory. Early modern sources usually tell us less about memories of individuals than about collective practices of commemoration, and the latter have therefore been the main focus of historians.⁶⁶⁹ Moreover, historians are

⁶⁶³ Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, 1997), pp. 43–6.

⁶⁶⁴ Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin, New York, 2008), 108–18, here pp. 109–10.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 117. See in particular the binary structure of fig. 2.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶⁶⁷ Patrick Schmidt, *Wandelbare Traditionen – tradierter Wandel. Zünftische Erinnerungskulturen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2009), pp. 47–53 and 182–200.

⁶⁶⁸ Historical studies of memory deal with practices as diverse as mnemotechniques (most famously Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London, 1966)); institutionalised commemoration (for instance Schmidt, *Wandelbare Traditionen*), and genealogy (for instance Hodgkin, ‘Women, Memory and Family History’). Some works operate with such a broad conception of memory that almost any kind of information falls under their topic; see for instance Jacques LeGoff, *Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, transl. Elisabeth Hartfelder (Frankfurt, New York, 1992, 1st edn. 1977), who discusses encyclopaedias as a form of externalised memory (p. 120).

⁶⁶⁹ See similarly Hans Medick in ‘Forum. Memory before Modernity’, here p. 109, and Dagmar Freist, ‘Lost in Time and Space? Global Memoryscapes in the Early Modern World’, in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 203–21, here esp. p. 203. According to Oexle, mediaevalists similarly focus first and foremost on the *memoria* practices of social groups and institutions. Particular attention has been paid to *memoria* in liturgical and monastic contexts, and to the role it played in the nobility’s attempts to legitimise

usually interested in change, and even ego-documents rarely allow us to trace the transformation of an author's memory over time. At best, memoirs can be checked for their historical accuracy. Consequently, personal memories have primarily been discussed as part of an argument about their unreliability as a source of history.⁶⁷⁰ Yet collective memory is not formed in a vacuum, nor is it the product of the elite alone.⁶⁷¹ As we shall see, collective narratives around past events are developed in conversations in which individual memories are shared and reshaped.⁶⁷² This is not to say that collective memory is the sum of all individual memories in a group; rather, it develops from their lowest common denominator.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to look beyond institutionalised commemoration and the historical narratives of the elite, and draw attention to the numerous ways in which events were remembered and commemorated informally by individuals on different social levels. The first section looks at how ancient and medieval mnemotechniques are reflected in early modern attempts to turn objects and places – or *imagines* and *loci* – into bearers of memory. Two case studies, dealing with nuts and houses respectively, will illustrate how objects were used to inscribe memories in the youngest generation of St. Gallers, and how closely narratives of past events were tied to places. The second section traces changes in the way past events were remembered and retold. It argues that these changes are not simply evidence of the frailties of human memory, nor do they occur at random. Rather, they may offer us a key to early modern mentalities. Finally, the third section attempts to bridge the gap between memory and history. It explores Rütiner's view of the past and argues that while his writing may have been inspired by the historiographical activities of St. Gallen's humanists, it owed just as much to a sense of change which was mediated through memories shared by his senior guildsmen and members of his family.

their power: Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Memoria als Kultur', in idem (ed.), *Memoria als Kultur* (Göttingen, 1995), 9–78, here pp. 37–8.

⁶⁷⁰ See in particular Johannes Fried, *Der Schleier der Erinnerung. Grundzüge einer historischen Memorik* (München, 2004).

⁶⁷¹ This seems to be Daniel Woolf's assumption when he argues that 'most people below the level of the gentry were excluded from making an active contribution to [social memory], at least prior to the mass literacy of the nineteenth century.' Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past. English Historical Culture 1500–1730* (Oxford, New York, 2003), p. 297.

⁶⁷² See similarly Freist, 'Lost in Time', esp. p. 214, where Freist argues that 'memory is constructed rather than reconstructed through social interaction and communicative processes within the parameters of specific social milieus and their memory discourses.' That the context of the conversation in which memories are shared shape the latter is also the contention of psychologists Gerald Echterhoff and William Hirst, 'Remembering in a Social Context: A Conversational View of the Study of Memory', in Gerald Echterhoff and Martin Saar (eds.), *Kontexte und Kulturen des Erinnerns. Maurice Halbwachs und das Paradigma des kollektiven Gedächtnisses* (Konstanz, 2002), 75–102.

In 1524, the Basel canon Jodocus von Rinach was accused of having abducted and sexually abused a young girl. His arrest caused quite the scandal, not least because it fuelled lingering tensions between the city council and the Cathedral chapter.⁶⁷³ When news of another case of sexual violence reached Rütiner from Basel over a decade later, he was reminded of the scandal he had witnessed during his student years and recorded it in his notebooks. Yet the memory of Jodocus von Rinach in turn triggered a whole series of memories linked to Rütiner's time in Basel:

[Jodocus von Rinach's] hall [*aula*] was where one comes to the plain from the *Sprung*, close to the cloth house; [then] follows [the hall] of Master von Andlau,⁶⁷⁴ a most handsome man; then Gundelfinger's,⁶⁷⁵ a man of small stature; [then] follows [the hall] of the vicar; then upon descending the hall of the scholar whose whore was an Edelmennin; to the left [follows the hall] of the custos Hallwiller,⁶⁷⁶ facing the church; [and] Olpe's [hall].⁶⁷⁷ Then [follows] a different Rinacher the Elder's [hall],⁶⁷⁸ in which we played the *Eunuchus*. When [one reaches] the road to St. Alban, next to the fountain, [there is] the provost's [hall], which Cratander⁶⁷⁹ bought and has now sold to Westheimer⁶⁸⁰ etc.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷³ For the controversy around von Rinach's arrest, see *Aktensammlung zur Geschichte der Basler Reformation in den Jahren 1519 bis Anfang 1534*, eds. Emil Dürr and Paul Roth, 6 vols. (Basel, 1921–1950), here i, pp. 147–151, no. 276.

⁶⁷⁴ Likely Philipp Jakob von Andlau, canon and cantor at the Basel Cathedral, who owned the *Andlauerhof* on the Münsterplatz in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. See Eugen A. Meier, *Verträumtes Basel* (Basel, 1974), p. 87.

⁶⁷⁵ Rütiner may be referring to von Gundelsheim, the owner of the *Gundoldsheimerhof* which was adjacent to the Andlauerhof on the Münsterplatz, rather than to Gundolfinger. See Meier, *Verträumtes Basel*, p. 87.

⁶⁷⁶ Johann Rudolf von Hallwyl (after 1460 – 1527), custos of the Basel Cathedral from 1510 onwards. See Catherine Bosshard-Pfluger, 'Hallwyl, Johann Rudolf von', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D17039.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016.

⁶⁷⁷ Likely Johann Bergmann von Olpe (c. 1455–1532), priest and publisher in Basel. See Veronika Feller-Vest, 'Bergmann von Olpe, Johann', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D21492.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016.

⁶⁷⁸ Perhaps Rütiner is referring here to the *Reinacherhof* on the Münsterplatz. See Meier, *Verträumtes Basel*, p. 87.

⁶⁷⁹ Andreas Cratander (around 1490 – before 1540), printer in Basel. See Frank Hieronymus, 'Cratander, Andreas', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D41533.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016.

⁶⁸⁰ Bartholomäus Westheimer (1499–1567/8), printer in Basel. It is usually thought that Westheimer took over Thomas Wolff's printing shop in 1536, yet Cratander also stopped printing in 1536. According to Rütiner, it was the latter's shop that Westheimer bought.

⁶⁸¹ 'Aula illius fuit quando ventum in planiciem vom Sprung / proxima am tuochhuß [] sequens domini de Andlo/w formosissimi viri [] deinde Gundelfingers / parui viri staturae [] sequens Vicarij [] Deinde de/scendendo aula cuius scortum fuit Edelmennin scho/larici [] In sinistro latere Hallwillers custodis ver/sus templum [] Olpen. [] alius deinde Senioris Rinachers / in qua Eunuchum lusimus. [] Quando iter gen S Alban / iuxta fontem [] Prepositi quam Cratander emit et / nunc Vvestheymero vendidit etc.' Comm. II.207c.

The memory of the scandal around Jodocus von Rinach was not only tied to the latter's house, but it was inserted into a strikingly accurate mental map of Basel. Or, to put it differently, it was the starting point for a walk down memory lane which led Rütiner from the steep alley called *Rheinsprung*, where the University of Basel was located, to the Cathedral square, past the prestigious courts of Basel's Cathedral canons, and then onwards to the *Dompropstei* (i.e. the residence of the Cathedral provost) situated where *Rittergasse* turned into *St.-Alban-Graben*. On this mental walk from the university towards the suburbs, Rütiner was in turn reminded of a whole series of characters and events from his Basel years: of the handsome cantor Jakob von Andlau, whom he would have seen in church; of a scholar rumoured to have had an affair; and of the play by Terence which Rütiner performed in one of these houses during his student years.⁶⁸²

The passage contains both evidence of Rütiner's profound local knowledge, even years after he had left Basel, *and* a testament to the power of cultural memory: it echoed a longstanding philosophical tradition which emphasised the visual nature of memory and described the process of remembering as a mental walk. Treatises on rhetoric by Cicero and Quintilian, as well as the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, contained detailed instructions on how to use the visual nature of memory to one's advantage. In order to remember a speech, an orator had to visualise it, and this was done by choosing *imagines* (images) associated with each element of the speech and arranging them within a series of *loci* (places), so that by "walking" through these mental places the orator would remember his entire speech in the right order.⁶⁸³ Medieval writers, and above all Thomas Aquinas, not only recommended the use of *loci* and *imagines* as memory aids, but raised the stakes by making memory an indispensable element of prudence (and thus of the cardinal virtues), and by emphasising the close links between remembrance and piety.⁶⁸⁴ By the sixteenth century, classical mnemotechniques had passed their prime. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* wrongly attributed to Cicero remained immensely popular, but contemporaries of Rütiner's such as Erasmus and Melancthon now discouraged their students from using *loci* and *imagines* as memory aids. They did not question their efficacy, however; rather, they deemed these techniques outdated and argued that memorisation alone could not replace proper studying.⁶⁸⁵

As an aid for memorising speeches, *loci* and *imagines* may have become increasingly insignificant throughout the sixteenth century, but as we shall see in this section, the assumptions about the

⁶⁸² For a list of all plays in which Rütiner took part, see also Comm. I.528.

⁶⁸³ Yates, *Art of Memory*, pp. 1–4.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., in particular pp. 70–81.

⁶⁸⁵ Jörg Jochen Berns, 'Umrüstung der Mnemotechnik im Kontext von Reformation und Gutenbergs Erfindung', in Jörg Jochen Berns and Wolfgang Neuber (eds.), *Ars memorativa. Zur kulturgeschichtlichen Bedeutung der Gedächtniskunst 1400–1750* (Tübingen, 1993), 35–72, here in particular pp. 37–9. Erasmus, for instance, confirmed that these techniques were helpful, but stated that study, order, and care were preferable. Yates, *Art of Memory*, p. 127.

nature and value of human memory on which classical and medieval mnemotechniques were based would prove much more long-lived.

Rütiner greatly admired those men and women who succeeded in recalling events which lay far in the past. Almost half a century had passed when Anna Bösch shared her memories of the war between St. Gallen and the Swiss Confederacy (1490) with Rütiner in 1538, yet he made sure to stress that despite her age she ‘has kept everything in good memory’.⁶⁸⁶ Those with a reliable memory were not only admired by Rütiner for the wealth of knowledge which they had at their disposal. According to Mary Carruthers, medieval writers had linked memory and morality to such an extent that ‘a person without a memory’ would have been seen as ‘a person without moral character’.⁶⁸⁷ This idea was still prevalent in Rütiner’s time. When he wrote about how the former St. Gallen mayor Caspar Vonwiller had defended the town’s interests against accusations from Wil, he linked Vonwiller’s efforts for the common good to his good memory: ‘C[aspar] Vonwiller answered [the accusations] most resolutely from article to article, having kept everything in his memory; no little word [was] unnecessary ... [Caspar Schlumpf] admired his memory very much’.⁶⁸⁸ Vonwiller had apparently perfected the art of memory as it was envisioned in ancient rhetoric theory: he was able to defend the town’s interests because he had memorised his speech perfectly, and not a single unnecessary word distracted from the matter at hand.

The link between memory and morals becomes even clearer if we look at another story passed on to Rütiner. This time it was Caspar Schlumpf whose memory was praised. According to his son Paulus, Schlumpf and his friend Hugo von Watt once travelled to Constance to meet with the famous astronomer Marcus Schinnagel. Among other things, they inquired about the fate of St. Gallen, and Schinnagel accurately predicted both the war with the Swiss Confederacy of 1490 and the attempted coup against the city council of 1491 (discussed in more detail below). When he noticed how carefully Caspar Schlumpf was paying attention, however, he added yet another prophecy:

“See”, he said, “this one [i.e. Caspar Schlumpf] will remember everything in order, but Hugo will forget everything.” And it happened as he said; for Hugo did not [only] play a minor part in that conspiracy [i.e. he was actively involved].⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁶ ‘bona / memoria omnia meminit’; Comm. II.376.

⁶⁸⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 13. Similarly LeGoff, *Geschichte und Gedächtnis*, esp. pp. 102–7.

⁶⁸⁸ ‘respondit C Vonwiller de articulo ad articulum / constantissime [] omnia in memoria comprehensa [] ne verbum frustraneum ... maxime admiratus illius memoriam’. Comm. II.81a.

⁶⁸⁹ ‘videte inquit ille omnia ex ordi/ne reminiscetur [] Hugo autem omnium obliuiscetur. Contigit autem vt dixerat quia Hugo non mi/nimus fuit in coniuratione illa’, Comm. I.977.

In Rütiner's view, studiousness, memory, and moral behaviour were closely intertwined. It was Hugo von Watt's carelessness which caused him to forget Schinnagel's prediction and eventually turned him into a conspirator against his own hometown.⁶⁹⁰ Moreover, his words again echo mnemonic theory: Caspar Schlumpf did not just remember Schinnagel's prophecies, but he could recall them *ex ordine* (in order), much like ancient orators used *loci* to recall the argumentative order of their speeches.⁶⁹¹

Even outside of religious contexts, memory was thus tied to morality and order. The ability to remember the past was much more than an admirable personal quality, and rather more akin to a civic duty. In this context, the idea that memories could be safely stored away in, and reliably retrieved from, visual reminders or *images*, became all the more significant. In contrast to the mental images created by ancient orators, however, early modern *images* often took on a more concrete form, namely that of material objects.

For the St. Gallen context, the use of nuts as part of the town's memory politics provides a particularly telling example. On 13 June 1454, the town of St. Gallen became a *Zugewandter Ort*, an associate member of the Swiss Confederacy. The treaty between St. Gallen and most of the confederate cantons marked an important step towards the town's emancipation from the powerful abbey in its midst, which had signed a similar treaty three years before. As a contemporary of Rütiner's recalled, the town's treaty with the Swiss Confederacy had been years in the making: 'Hulrich Kuntzly, Othmar's father, remembered that our [citizens] pleaded for [the town] to be made an *Ort* four times in forty years. They always declined'.⁶⁹² When the Swiss Confederacy finally granted the town's request, 'nuts were distributed among the children [*pueris*] for the sake of memory'.⁶⁹³

The distribution of nuts as reminders seems to have been quite a common practice in St. Gallen at the time, and one over which the town council did not have a monopoly. When St. Gallen and Zurich entered a reformed alliance in 1528, the official celebrations consisted of a service in the church of St. Laurenzen, a parade through the city, and festivities in the weavers' and tailors' guildhalls; yet 'Stucheler, the jester' also 'scattered nuts among the children in memory' of the alliance.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁰ Comm. I.777 and I.977.

⁶⁹¹ While order is an important element of both classical and medieval mnemonic theories, Thomas Aquinas in particular stressed its importance for remembrance; see Yates, *Book of Memory*, p. 76.

⁶⁹² 'Hulrichus Cuntzli [] Pater Othmari [] 4ter meminit / in 40 annis solicitatos nostros vt fiat pagus / semper renuentes'. Comm. II.319.

⁶⁹³ 'Nuces pueris disper/guntur ob memoriam'. Comm. I.41. Ernst Gerhard Rüschi translates 'pueris' as 'boys'. It is indeed possible that boys were the primary target of this kind of memory politics, yet since Rütiner's use of 'pueris' is ambiguous, I have chosen a more neutral translation.

⁶⁹⁴ 'Stucheler morio pu/eris nuces in memoriam spargit'. Comm. I.52.

Nuts were also employed to replace old memories with new ones, as the following example illustrates: ‘After [Vogelwaider] had bought Jakob Zollikofer’s house’, writes Rütiner, ‘he scattered nuts among the children so that the name of the previous owner would be erased’.⁶⁹⁵ In the absence of house numbers, most buildings in St. Gallen were known by their owner’s name.⁶⁹⁶ Yet previous owners’ names sometimes stuck to a house even long after it had been sold, in particular when it used to belong to one of the richest and most prominent men in town such as Zollikofer.⁶⁹⁷ In order to fully “own” his new home, Vogelwaider therefore actively tried to erase Zollikofer’s name from both his house and the neighbourhood’s memory. In a different entry, the mechanisms by which nuts were supposed to change the memory of the neighbourhood are described even more explicitly: ‘In order to erase the name of the house, he distributed nuts among the children, so that when they came home and [were] asked where they had collected the nuts, his name would become known’.⁶⁹⁸

While it was not uncommon for St. Gallen’s youth to receive special treats during public celebrations, these examples suggest that nuts were quite specifically linked to memorial practices.⁶⁹⁹ The evolution of the expression *in nuce* may shed some light on how nuts came to be so closely associated with memory. It goes back to a tale related by Pliny the Elder about an *Illias* manuscript written in such miniscule characters that it fit into a nutshell.⁷⁰⁰ Subsequently, the nut became a common metaphor for a wealth of knowledge packed into a tiny vessel, and many early modern authors drew on this image by claiming that their books represented ‘the world in a nutshell’.⁷⁰¹ There are strong parallels between this metaphoric nutshell and memory, for both were thought of

⁶⁹⁵ ‘Postquam domum emit Iacobi Zoli/kouffers pueris nuces sparsit quo nomen veteris / deleteret possessoris etc’. Comm. II.330c.

⁶⁹⁶ On the naming of houses in early modern towns, see for instance Karin Czaja and Gabriela Signori (eds.), *Häuser – Namen – Identitäten. Beiträge zur spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Stadtgeschichte* (Konstanz, 2009).

⁶⁹⁷ Jakob Zollikofer, a member of the Small Council from 1529 until his death in 1544, paid the highest taxes of all St. Gallen citizens in 1533. See StadtASG, 281: Steuerbuch 1533, fol. 44v.

⁶⁹⁸ ‘quo nomen domus deleteret nu/ces in pueros sparsit quo venientes domum et / quaerentes vbi nuces legerint [] illius nomen inno/tesceret’. Comm. II.86.

⁶⁹⁹ During the papal nuncio Achille Grassi’s visit to the town in 1509, for instance, Grassi personally handed out cherries to the town’s youth. Comm. II.33.

⁷⁰⁰ Gaius Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder), *Natural History*, transl. H. Rackham, 9 vols. (Cambridge MA, London, 1938–1952), ii, pp. 560–1 (= Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, 7.21).

⁷⁰¹ For instance G. C. Laurentius, *Orbis In Nuce Oder Der Erdkreis in einer Nuß/ Das ist: Ein kurtzer/ doch gnugsamer Bericht: I. Wie der gantze Erdkreis eingetheilet worden/ und warumb? II. Wie man so wohl den Globum als die Land-Carten verstehen/ und III. Wie man die Particuliere und Universale Land-Carten machen/ und zu solchem Ende IV. Eines jeden Orts Longitudinem und Latitudinem, item seine Distantz von andern Orten/ ohne den Globum und Land-Carten finden solle* (Leipzig, 1685); Andreas Stübel, *Latinismus in Nuce: Sive Nova, compendiosissima & memoratu facillima Grammatica Latina. Das ist: Die gantze kurtgefaßte Lateinische Sprach-KunstAuff eine neue ... Art ... in kurtzer Zeit beyzubringen* (Leipzig, 1694); Christoph Weigel, *Gründliche Erzählung der Merckwürdigsten Welt-Geschichten Aller Zeiten: Von Anfang der Welt biß auf Gegenwärtige, so in den Historischen Kupfer-Tafeln Der Gedächtnuß-Hülflichen Bilder-Lust, Sonsten Die Welt in einer Nuß (!) betittelt, vorkommen, und Zu besondern Behuf und Belustigung, So wohl der studierenden Jugend als auch Anderer Liebhaber derer Historien, Solche ordentlich zu fassen, Und nach der Jahr-Rechnung leichte zu behalten, In angenehmer Erfindung und bequemer Einrichtung* (Nürnberg, 1726).

as containers whose storage capacity far exceeded their physical size: just like the whole world could be contained in a nutshell, so could the memory of a whole town rest within a single person. In addition, the nut's peculiar shape – a sweet treasure protected by a hard, durable shell – may have seemed like a fitting metaphor for the valuable memories which the children of St. Gallen were supposed to safeguard.

In contrast to the classical rhetoricians, Aquinas had argued that *images* should be 'corporeal similitudes' of the memories they represented.⁷⁰² Nuts certainly fulfilled this requirement, but it is important to note that they did not symbolise a specific event; otherwise the practice of handing them out during so many different occasions would have resulted in quite confused memories. Rather, nuts symbolised memory itself. Handed out by both the magistrate and individuals, they marked important events and reminded their recipients of the need to remember. They were not distributed randomly, and neither was the burden of memory attached to them: they were given to the youngest generation of St. Gallen citizens. Children were expected to grow into bearers of the memory that the previous generation had marked as significant, and it was their responsibility to preserve it for generations to come.

While nuts were distributed in memory of singular events, such as the signing of a treaty or the sale of a house, more complex narratives about the past required a more complex set of reminders. A close study of the stories passed down to Rütiner about the *St. Galler Auflauf* of 1491 may illustrate some of the processes which individual memories of important political events underwent as they were retold and passed on to the next generation. According to Johannes Häne, the failed coup of 1491 was essentially a response to the economic pressure caused by the war with the Swiss Confederacy in 1490 and the reparations the St. Gallen town council had agreed to pay in its aftermath. In the tense months after the siege, as resentment against the Small Council grew, a rumour tipped the scales in favour of the conspirators. It claimed that the councillors who had sold salt on behalf of the city had embezzled the profits, and that a considerable amount of the salt had disappeared as well. Moreover, the council allegedly refused to investigate the matter.⁷⁰³ The leaders of the conspiracy used this rumour and the council's inaction to legitimize their planned coup and recruit supporters.⁷⁰⁴ Yet before they were able to carry out their plans, an anonymous letter warned the council of the impending threat. As the matter was discussed in the town hall on 10 February, Fat Thursday, one of the main conspirators and a member of the Great Council, Ambrosius Spengler,

⁷⁰² Yates, *Art of Memory*, p. 76.

⁷⁰³ Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, pp. 30–4. Resentment against the authorities grew as the city council decided to compensate some, but not all citizens whose houses had been burnt down as part of St. Gallen's defence strategy during the siege by the confederate troops. Economic and power inequality may also have played a part in the revolt, since most of the conspirators belonged to the lower ranks of society and many of them had been in conflict with the law. Members of the Small Council, by contrast, were recruited from the wealthiest citizens of St. Gallen. See *ibid.*, pp. 49–51.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–8; 45–6.

fled the scene and called his fellow conspirators to arms. A day of chaos and turmoil followed, at the end of which the council, faced with an armed mob, agreed to put together an independent committee of 84 men to investigate the conspirators' accusations.⁷⁰⁵ Over the next few days, the conspirators met in the shoemakers' guild where they renewed their oath, elected their own shadow government, and drafted 24 articles charging the council with various cases of embezzlement and partisanship.⁷⁰⁶ In the meantime, however, the town council was able to restore order and regain public support, especially after it became known that the conspirators had renewed their oath despite the council's concessions. When the conspirators sensed that their luck was turning, some of them took refuge within the abbey's walls where the town of St. Gallen lacked jurisdiction. Yet the council had already called upon the *Reichsfiskal* (imperial fiscal) Heinrich Martin, who had the authority to suspend the protection the abbey walls normally granted. In little more than a week after the uprising, the leading six conspirators were arrested, tried, and beheaded on St. Gallen's market square.⁷⁰⁷

The generation of Rütiner's parents perceived the coup of 1491 as one of the most momentous events in the town's recent history. Following on the heels of the *Rorschacher Klosterbruch* of 1489 and the subsequent war with the Swiss Confederacy in 1490, the riot made painfully clear how brittle St. Gallen's social fabric had become and how vulnerable the city was to attacks from within and without.⁷⁰⁸ As Caspar Schlumpf, a councillor at the time of the coup, told his son Paulus, he 'saw many tribulations' in his life, 'but nothing frightened him more than our civic discord'.⁷⁰⁹ As a consequence, Schlumpf and his contemporaries were keen to pass their experiences on to the next generation. Over the ten-year period in which Rütiner wrote his notebooks, he heard many different versions of the events of 1491 from a variety of sources.⁷¹⁰ Rütiner's close friend Paulus Schlumpf shared with him what his late father Caspar had told him about the conspiracy on two occasions.⁷¹¹ Both Rütiner's own mother and Anna Kessler, mother of his friend Johannes Kessler, had witnessed the riot as young girls and told Rütiner what they remembered.⁷¹² So, too,

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 56–63.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 64–70.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 80–1.

⁷⁰⁸ In 1489, the St. Gallen abbot planned to move the abbey to Rorschach to free it from the town's clutches. His plans were thwarted by a group of St. Gallers and Appenzellers who feared that the region's economic centre would shift to Rorschach along with the abbey and partially destroyed the new buildings. The abbot reacted by calling upon his Swiss confederates for support, whose siege on St. Gallen quickly led to the capitulation of the town. See Johannes Häne, *Der Klosterbruch in Rorschach und der St. Galler Krieg, 1489-90* (St. Gallen, 1895).

⁷⁰⁹ 'plurimas tribulationes vidit / nihil autem magis expauit quam discordiam nostram / ciuilem.' Comm. I.777.

⁷¹⁰ The riots are discussed in the following entries: Comm. I.75; I.712–3; I.754; I.756; I.777; I.780; I.977; II.153a; II.185a; II.188; II.310b.

⁷¹¹ Comm. I.777, I.780.

⁷¹² Comm. I.777; II.185b/d.

did Sebastian Hagman, Rütiner's neighbour and fellow *Elfer*, who vividly recalled being held up by his father so he could see the executions.⁷¹³

What, then, did these informants pass on to Rütiner and his friends, most of whom were born a good decade after the riots? In his earliest entry on the subject, dating from 1529, Rütiner writes:

The cause of our tumult was this: 100 gl, which the purveyors had gained from [the sale of] salt, was lost and withheld without the council's knowledge. A rumour flew through the city. Some private [citizens] murmured this and that. Then some gathered in the house where Paulus Schlumpf now lives, gossiping this and that about the city council; it was agreed that when 300 of them had come together, they would invade the city hall. From here and there one called the other. Some people disclosed some part of this to the city council, so that the matter was discussed during the carnival season on Ash Wednesday. With his sword drawn, [Ambrosius] Spengler ran into the house where Kantengusser sat already [and] where all the armed [conspirators] had gathered. In turmoil they ran to the city hall. With [the help of] the private [citizens] an intercession was reached. Nobody was injured. One [man] climbed onto the granary and restored peace by persuading them to assemble in the church of St. Laurenzen and to ask the council [to reveal] the culprit etc. etc. The imperial fiscal announced the sentence from the door of Nell's bed[chamber].⁷¹⁴

Eight years later, in 1537, Rütiner describes the events of that day again, this time with a slightly different focus:

Heinrich Zili was mayor then. From the town hall, he shouted down to the conspirators: "If we have culprits among us, point them out. We will keep them in custody until the trial." It did not help. He was chased over the market square into St. Laurenzen and around the altar by someone with a drawn sword. Immediately a loud clamour was heard everywhere, the gates were closed, one ran together

⁷¹³ Comm. I.777.

⁷¹⁴ 'Causa tumultus nostri haec fuit [] c gl / perdita ac supressa erant inscio senatu / qui ex sale a redemptoribus soluti erant [] fama vrbem pervolat [] quidam priva/torum haec et alia mussitantes [] tandem / quidam conuenientes in domum vbi nunc pa/uli Schlumpff [] haec et alia de sen/atu garrientes convenit inter eos vt / si eorum trecenti conciliati fuerint sena/torium invasuri [] hinc inde alius alium / convocat [] nonnihil senatui aperitur per quos/dam adeo vt circa carnispruium die / cinerum de hac re in senatu consulturi / Spengler districto gladio cucurrit / in domum vbi iam kantengusser sedit / ibidem armati convenerant etc [] Tumu/ltu accurrunt ante senatorium [] Ex priu/atis fit intercessio [] nemo leditur / vnus conscendit granarium [] fecit concor/diam persuadendo vt templum Laurentij / conveniant [] ex senatu reum poscant / et etc [] Fiscalis cesareus sen/tentiam per valuam cubilis Nellen dixit.' Comm. I.75.

from everywhere. The conspirators gathered and came together in the shoemakers' guildhall.⁷¹⁵

In both entries, Rütiner described the events of 1491 as a series of fast, chaotic movements from private to public space and back again, touching on a variety of places on the way. His narrative clearly diverged from the exact chronology of events. In some entries, the events of an entire week – from the riot to the conspirators' flight to the asylum – were packed into a single day.⁷¹⁶ Most of Rütiner's informants wrongly dated the riots to Ash Wednesday rather than Fat Thursday, and the only time Rütiner records the year of the coup, he was off by two years.⁷¹⁷ Moreover, Rütiner (or his informants) confused the names of some of the story's main protagonists. For instance, they claimed that the mayor Heinrich Zily restored peace in St. Gallen, yet Zily was neither mayor that year, nor was he the man who allegedly calmed down the angry crowd on the market square.⁷¹⁸

In contrast, Rütiner's notes, and by extension the stories passed on to him, were quite specific and surprisingly accurate with regards to the places touched by the conspiracy and the movements between those places.⁷¹⁹ As one might expect, the story's key events were firmly positioned around St. Gallen's main landmarks: the town hall, the market square, St. Laurenzen. However, it also seemed important to locate the less known places featuring in the story. Rütiner carefully recorded where the conspirators had met (in the house that now belonged to his friend Paulus Schlumpf⁷²⁰), where the conspirator Ambrosius Spengler sat as the conspiracy was exposed ('just right of Caspar Schlumpf'⁷²¹), where the conspirators had hidden ('in the container where the candles for St. Blasius Day [are kept], behind the altar [dedicated to him]'⁷²² and 'in the sewer' of the abbey⁷²³), and how Rütiner's neighbour Sebastian Hagman witnessed their execution ('his father was standing on the block of wood in front of the hospital and lifted him up'⁷²⁴). Why did the narrative passed on from one generation to the next revolve so strongly around places and movement, while neglecting other, seemingly more important elements such as names and chronology?

⁷¹⁵ 'Hanrichus Zili Consul fuit [] Clamauit / de senatorio ad seditiosos [] Si habemus inter nos / nocentes indicate eos [] pro iure contestando seruab/imus [] Nihil iuuat [] stricto gladio ab aliquo per / forum vsque in templum Laurentij circum altare Fug/atus [] Subito magnus clamor vndique au/ditur, clauduntur portae [] concurritur vndique / Seditiosi collecti in domo calceatorum concurrunt'. Comm. II.185b.

⁷¹⁶ For instance Comm. I.777 and II.185b.

⁷¹⁷ In Comm. I.713, Rütiner dates it to 1489 rather than 1491, which could suggest that the *St. Galler Auflauf* was closely associated with the *Rorschacher Klosterbruch* of 1489.

⁷¹⁸ In fact, Walther Kuchmeister was mayor that year, and the former mayor Lienhard Merz is said to have calmed down the crowd. See Comm. II.185b and Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, pp. 38 and 61.

⁷¹⁹ I believe Rütiner's account deserves more credit than Johannes Häne was willing to give him. In fact, Häne's sources include the court records from the trials following the events of 1491, many of which confirm Rütiner's description of movements; cf. Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, pp. 57–64.

⁷²⁰ Comm. I.75.

⁷²¹ 'ad dexteram iuxta / Caspar Schlumpffen'. Comm. I.777.

⁷²² 'in illo conditorio / reseruati vbi candelae die S Blasij abscond/diti retro eius altare.' Comm. I.777.

⁷²³ 'in cloaca', Comm. II. 185b.

⁷²⁴ 'Super truncum ante hospitale pater eius stans illum / subleuauit.' Comm. I.777.

One could argue that the story had become a purely cautionary tale and that names were consciously omitted so that the descendants of those involved would not be offended. Such was the stance of Vadianus, who refused to name the conspirators in his account.⁷²⁵ And indeed, Rütiner himself writes that after some of the conspirators had proven their loyalty to St. Gallen during the Swabian War, the council decided to abandon its politics of remembrance: from 1499 onwards, the conspirators' names were no longer read out to the public on St. Stephen's Day.⁷²⁶ This may have erased the conspirators from public remembrance, but it did not remove them from the public's memory. The conspirators' names continued to be passed on in unofficial narratives of the conspiracy and were thus still familiar to the generation born after 1499.⁷²⁷ Although Rütiner was not always sure about the role individual conspirators had played during the riot,⁷²⁸ he knew many of them by name, including one which Vadianus may have been particularly keen on forgetting: Hugo von Watt, the man who had played an active part in the conspiracy in spite of Schinnagel's prophecy, was a relative of Vadianus'.⁷²⁹ Indeed, it was not the conspirators who had fallen into oblivion by the time Rütiner wrote his notebooks, but the story's hero Lienhard Merz who had prevented bloodshed by calming down the agitated crowd that had gathered in front of the town hall.⁷³⁰

If names were not actively suppressed in the stories passed down to Rütiner, but were nevertheless transformed to a larger extent than the references to the various settings of the conspiracy, we must assume that the latter were more indispensable to the narrative than the former. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, as Alexandra Walsham has argued, early modern popular historical consciousness was shaped more by a sense of space than a sense of chronology.⁷³¹ Though university students were now discouraged from memorizing with the help of *loci*, in practice narratives about the past were still tied to places, albeit in a much more literal sense than the ancient rhetoricians had envisioned. Aquinas had argued that

it is necessary for reminiscence to take some starting-point, whence one begins to proceed to reminisce. For this reason, some men may be seen to reminisce from

⁷²⁵ von Watt, *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, ii, p. 369.

⁷²⁶ Comm. I.712; see also Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 87.

⁷²⁷ For a list of people implicated in the conspiracy, see Comm. I.713; further people are named in Comm. I.777.

⁷²⁸ In Comm. II.185c, Ambrosius Spengler is confused with Ambrosius Schlumpf, for instance. One particularly interesting case, namely that of Othmar Ortwig, will be discussed in the next section.

⁷²⁹ Comm. I.777 and I.977. As Rütiner points out, Hugo von Watt was saved from prosecution by his powerful family.

⁷³⁰ Compare Comm. II.185b and Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 61.

⁷³¹ Alexandra Walsham, 'Sacred Topography and Social Memory: Religious Change and the Landscape in Early Modern Britain and Ireland', *Journal of Religious History*, 36/1 (2012), 31–51, here p. 33. See similarly also Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers, 'Introduction. On the Early Modernity of Modern Memory', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 1–23, here p. 10; Woolf, *Social Circulation*, pp. 310–5 and 350; Fox, 'Remembering the Past', pp. 241–3. On the role of space for collective memory, see also Halbwachs, *Mémoire collective*, pp. 193–236.

the places in which something was said or done, or thought, using the place as it were as the starting-point for reminiscence, because access to the place is like a starting-point for all those things which were raised in it.⁷³²

According to Aquinas, memories could thus be accessed via the sites where the events that one sought to remember had occurred. It was this concrete variety of *locus* around which the narratives passed down to Rütiner were built. In the 1530s, most human protagonists of 1491 were long dead, but the immobile spacial protagonists remained visible all throughout town. The places touched by the conspiracy were woven together and into the present urban space by memory and narrative, forming a second map of the town on which certain places were marked as vulnerable (e.g. market square) or dangerous (e.g. shoemakers' guildhall). Thus, Rütiner's informants created a backdrop for the story that the next generation could still relate and refer to; and one, moreover, designed to aid their memory.⁷³³

Of course this does not mean that the people of St. Gallen visualised the events of 1491 every time they crossed the market or entered St. Laurenzen. Space is neither static nor one-dimensional; it allows people to attach different meanings to it and perceive it in various, even contradictory ways.⁷³⁴ What memory could do, however, was to actualise these meanings from time to time. Perhaps this is what happened in December of 1537, when an anonymous letter was placed at the door of the town hall. It contained a long list of threats and accusations, including the claim that the Small Council consisted of the members of a few rich families who protected each other's interests in all financial, political, and legal matters.⁷³⁵ The letter also explicitly referred to the conspiracy of 1491, which, so the authors claimed, had been caused by a similar division among the citizens of St. Gallen.⁷³⁶ Interestingly, the council immediately sought to protect the places that had been taken by the conspirators almost half a century earlier. 300 men were ordered to rush to the market square should they hear any noise or bells ringing, and the council launched an investigation in the shoemakers' guildhall – the very house in which the conspirators of 1491 had gathered and renewed their oath after the turmoil.⁷³⁷ '[The shoemakers] were chosen by lot', one of Rütiner's informants re-

⁷³² Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros De sensu et sensato, De memoria et reminiscencia commentarium*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi (Turin, 1949), p. 107; cited after Yates, *Art of Memory*, p. 72.

⁷³³ For a similar argument see Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 350; for the medieval period, see for instance Mostert, 'Memory of Writing', pp. 23–4.

⁷³⁴ See similarly Schwerhoff, 'Die grosse Welt im kleinen Raum. Zur Ver-Ortung überlokaler Kommunikationsräume in der Frühen Neuzeit', *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit*, 9/3–4: Kirchen, Märkte und Tavernen: Erfahrungs- und Handlungsräume in der frühen Neuzeit, eds. Renate Dürr and Gerd Schwerhoff (Frankfurt a.M., 2005), 367–75, here pp. 373–4.

⁷³⁵ See Ernst Gerhard Rüsch, 'Politische Opposition in St. Gallen Zur Zeit Vadian's', *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung*, 104 (1986), 67–113, here pp. 79–82.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷³⁷ Comm. II.185b; Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 64.

marked, but perhaps the council's choice was rather based on a map of memories related to 1491 on which the shoemakers' house was marked as dangerous.⁷³⁸

Rütiner never explicitly refers to ancient or medieval mnemonic theories, but as we have seen, they clearly had a bearing on both conceptions of memory and memorial practices in St. Gallen – and not just within the elite group of St. Gallen men who would have read Cicero and Aquinas. In fact, it seems that the men in Rütiner's guild and the women in his family and neighbourhood were just as eager to discuss events of the past, and even more precise in locating them than St. Gallen's humanists. Those with limited access to chronicles and public records; those moreover who could not, or would not, put their memories down in writing, were more likely to employ other means of remembering, including techniques which had been developed for the very purpose of delivering a speech in the absence of written memory aids. Even within what Jan Assmann has termed "communicative memory", there was thus considerable scope for formalisation and mediatization. Both the magistrate and individuals employed specific objects to encourage remembrance, and their narratives and personal memories turned buildings and places into memorials long before the memory of events such as the *St. Galler Auflauf* entered institutionalised cultural memory.

Changing Memory

The use of physical objects and places as reminders bears witness to the efforts made by Rütiner's contemporaries to preserve the memory of important events, but of course they could not prevent memory loss altogether. A trail of gaps and internal inconsistencies runs all through the *Commentationes*, many of which are attributable to either Rütiner's or his informants' faulty memories. Rütiner was under no illusion about the limits of his memory. Time and again he qualified information he recorded in the notebooks with a 'si recte memini' ('if I remember correctly').⁷³⁹ It was usually small details such as numbers, names, and dates which Rütiner could not recall with any certainty.⁷⁴⁰ He also found it particularly challenging to remember information linked to places with which he was unfamiliar. In an entry on a dinner conversation with the Zurich pastor Benedikt Finsler, Rütiner describes how Finsler was 'going over [*peregr[in]ando*]⁷⁴¹ the entire territory extremely elegantly', listing the heavy grievances the villages around Zurich had to pay to the local monasteries. Yet by the time Rütiner wrote about the dinner with Finsler, he had already forgotten

⁷³⁸ 'Sors in illos cecidit.' Comm. II.325.

⁷³⁹ For instance Comm. I.759, I.760c, I.785, I.850, I.893c, I.911, I.915, II.4c, II.222.

⁷⁴⁰ For instance, he was uncertain about how much gold bishop Hugo von Hohenlandenberg owned at the time of his death, or whether a crime had really been committed during Lent. See Comm. II.222 and II.4e respectively.

⁷⁴¹ Literally: wandering through.

much of what Finsler had told him: ‘I could not keep it because I am unacquainted with that territory’, he admits.⁷⁴²

At first glance, Rütiner’s faulty memory may seem to pose a methodological problem. In his controversial book *Der Schleier der Erinnerung*, Johannes Fried argued that human memory is so prone to error that every piece of historic evidence ‘which is based only on memory should principally be considered false’.⁷⁴³ According to Fried, this poses a particular challenge to scholars of historical periods for which written evidence is scarce, for they lose the ‘basis of *secure* factual knowledge’ on which they could previously rely.⁷⁴⁴ Yet Fried’s critics have rightly pointed out that the indisputable frailties of human memory only pose a problem as long as the objective of historical research is to find historical “facts”.⁷⁴⁵ Depending on the questions we ask, faulty memories may prove to be an asset rather than an obstacle. Changes in the way singular events are remembered are not simply a consequence of the human memory’s shortcomings. Rather, they are the product of trial-and-error, of a sort of evolutionary communicative process in which some details of a narrative are preserved, while others are altered or abandoned altogether. In this sense, changing memories are not interesting as proof that human memory is imperfect, but rather as an expression of this social process and as a (necessarily incomplete) reflection of a community’s mentality.⁷⁴⁶

Let us look at the *St. Galler Auflauf* once more. By the 1530s, the memory of the events had changed in a number of ways. While most of St. Gallen’s chroniclers continued to date the riot to Fat Thursday of 1491, among the broader citizenship the riot was now more commonly known as ‘our tumult on Ash Wednesday’.⁷⁴⁷ This shift may be explained with the dwindling significance of Fat Thursday, which traditionally heralded the start of Carnival in the region, after the reformers’ ban on such festivities. Evidence from the *Commentationes* suggests that along with its religious function, Fat Thursday had also lost its role as a marker of time. It was no longer obvious what Fat Thursday was, or when it was celebrated: ‘Fat Thursday (so it is called) [celebrated] during carnival’,⁷⁴⁸ writes Rütiner the only time he mentions the feast. In light of this development, it made little sense to date the riots with reference to Fat Thursday. Instead, they became associated with a

⁷⁴² ‘perquam eleganter totam ditionem / peragrando ... non potui / continere quia inexpertus agri illius.’ Comm. II.389.

⁷⁴³ Fried, *Schleier der Erinnerung*, p. 48.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 48

⁷⁴⁵ See for instance Marcel Moning, ‘Eine Apologie des Historismus’, KULT_online, 6 (2006), <<http://kult-online.uni-giessen.de/archiv/2005/ausgabe-05/rezensionen/eine-apologie-des-historismus>>, accessed 05 Nov 2015.

⁷⁴⁶ See for instance Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 265; Judith Pollmann, ‘Of Living Legends and Authentic Tales: How to Get Remembered in Early Modern Europe’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013), 103–25, here p. 106; Pollmann and Kuijpers, ‘Introduction’, p. 15.

⁷⁴⁷ ‘Tumultum / nostrum die cinerum’; Comm. I.754. See also Comm. I.713; I.977; I.75; II.185c. Cf. in contrast von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, ii, p. 371; and Miles, *Chronik*, p. 292.

⁷⁴⁸ ‘Insano die Iouis (sic dicitur) in bacchanalibus’; Comm. II.361t. German humanists used the term *bacchanalia*, meaning orgy or drunken feast, to refer to (and criticize) contemporary carnival excesses.

more memorable feast day of the same period; one which, although it no longer marked the beginning of fasting, was still part of the liturgical calendar.

At the same time as the riots were moved from the beginning of the carnival season to the beginning of Lent, the narrative was significantly condensed. In many accounts, the events of the entire carnival season, from the riots until the conspirators' demise, were packed into a single day. Moreover, the lengthy tug-of-war between the council and the conspirators, which cast the former in a negative light and made for a rather unappealing plot, was boiled down into a highly symbolic anecdote.⁷⁴⁹ According to Paulus Schlumpf, on the day of the riots the whole town was up in arms until nightfall, but just when 'all things [seemed] desperate, a simple but upright man'⁷⁵⁰ proposed the following solution:

"Oh councillors", he said, "you see that it has come this far – though I say it in tears – that nothing remains but to resolve this quarrel through this, namely that we divide ourselves: those who agree with the council should come together, and those remaining should stand with [those who share] their opinion." It was done as he had suggested. The smaller part remained with the conspirators. After they had fled, they made for the asylum.⁷⁵¹

A similar account also reached Rütiner through a different source one year later:

Anna Kesslerin, who told me everything, was present. For a long time they discussed [the matter] from all sides. Finally the mayor said: "Whoever is on the council's side should come together." [The conspirators'] number was so diminished that they fled to the asylum.⁷⁵²

It would be wrong to dismiss this anecdote on the grounds that it lacks any factual basis. Though it did not render the events of 1491 as they were described in the contemporary records, it nevertheless captured their essence by portraying the conspirators' demise as the result of a shift in public opinion.⁷⁵³ Moreover, this alternative narrative was apparently disseminated successfully, perhaps not least because eye-witnesses such as Anna Kessler gave it authority. By the 1530s, the reversal of the conspirators' fortune had thus been recast as a single dramatic moment which ultimately

⁷⁴⁹ According to Häne, the council had deliberately lulled the conspirators in a false sense of security until it had regained the upper hand. Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 75.

⁷⁵⁰ 'omnibus rebus de/ speratis ... simplex quidam sed probus / homo'. Comm. I.777.

⁷⁵¹ 'O senatores inquit videtis huc ventum rem, / quamuis lachrymis dico vt nihil supersit quam/ vt hac re lis dirimatur Nempe vt segr/egamur consentientes senatui [] coeant et / reliqui pedibus in sententiam eant [] Factum vt / suasit [] minor pars apud Coniuratos man/sit [] fuga facta Asylum petiere'. Ibid. *Pedibus in sententiam ire* is a fixed expression meaning to agree (and showing one's agreement by stepping to one side of the senate-house).

⁷⁵² 'praesente Anna Keßlerin quae mihi omnia re/tulit [] Diu vtrinque collocuti [] tandem Consul ait / qui ex parte senatus est coeant [] adeo minutus num/erus vt fuga asylum petentes.' Comm. II.185b.

⁷⁵³ Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 75.

legitimised the council's actions: according to Rüiner's informants, the community had literally stood by the council.

At the same time as the narrative of the conspiracy was simplified, however, a remarkable side-plot concerning a certain Othmar Ortwig emerged. According to Rütiner's informants, the simple-minded Ortwig repeatedly declined the conspirators' courtship and only joined them when they threatened his life.⁷⁵⁴ Yet even after he had sworn them allegiance, the conspirators continued to doubt Ortwig's loyalty and immediately suspected him of treason when their plot was exposed: 'Ortwig has revoked, Ortwig has revoked [his oath]!',⁷⁵⁵ they shouted as they fled from the town hall according to one of Rütiner's informants. Nevertheless, Ortwig was eventually among those sentenced to death precisely because he had not disclosed the conspiracy to the council. By giving in to the conspirators' threats, he had become stuck between a rock and a hard place, and his death sentence left a bitter aftertaste even among those who delivered it. Among the conspirators were 'Caspar Schlumpf's best companions. He was almost driven insane when he had to pass a judgement [on them], in particular when Ortwig was condemned, whom [the conspirators] themselves had almost stabbed in Ackermann's house'.⁷⁵⁶ Or, as a different entry puts it: '[Ortwig] was pitied by everyone with the greatest compassion, but especially by C[aspar] Schlumpf, who often told [the story to] Paulus, sighing.'⁷⁵⁷ The court records, however, disagree with this depiction. Ortwig indeed claimed to have been pressured into joining the conspiracy, yet his credibility was considerably diminished by the fact that he simultaneously confessed to storming the town hall in full arms and threatening the council.⁷⁵⁸ Indeed, Ortwig's tragic death was much more consistent with the new narratives which had emerged by the 1530s: if the story reached its dramatic climax when every citizen was asked to choose a side, the story of Ortwig warned of the dangers of getting caught in the middle, even if one was innocent.

Erika Kuijpers has argued that a story which combined a good plot with a clear moral message had a much better chance at surviving as it was passed on orally.⁷⁵⁹ In the case of the *St. Galler Auflauf*, we can see how such a plot emerged from the testimonies of numerous individuals. Within less than fifty years, they turned the story of the *St. Galler Auflauf* into something of a Greek drama: following the fate of a few exemplary characters such as the tragic anti-hero Ortwig, it was

⁷⁵⁴ Comm. I.777; I.780; II.185c.

⁷⁵⁵ 'Ortwig retexuit Ortwig retexuit'. Comm. II.185c.

⁷⁵⁶ 'optimi sodales Caspar Schlumpffen [] ferme in/sanus factus iudicando, praecipue dum Ortwig / iudicabitur, quem ipsi in aedibus Ackerman fer/me transfodissent.' Comm. I.780.

⁷⁵⁷ 'maxima miseratione misertus / ab omnibus praecipue autem C Schlumpff qui sepiuscule / Paulo filio retulit ingemiscens.' Comm. II.185c.

⁷⁵⁸ Häne, *Auflauf zu St. Gallen*, p. 59. For a transcript of Ortwig's confession, see *ibid.*, p. 139, no. 4 (which corresponds to StadtASG, Tr. XXXV.22.12: Vergicht Ortwigs).

⁷⁵⁹ Erika Kuijpers, 'Between Storytelling and Patriotic Scripture. The Memory Brokers of the Dutch Revolt', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 183–202, here p. 200.

now told as a series of dramatic events taking place on the public stage of St. Gallen over the course of a single day.

Yet the memory of past events could also change over a much shorter time-span. The battle of Kappel provides an interesting case study of how Rütiner and his contemporaries remembered a critical event of their own time, and how their narratives evolved over the years immediately following the battle.⁷⁶⁰ On 11 October 1531, Zurich suffered an unprecedented defeat against the forces of the Catholic Five Inner Cantons and lost its most influential public figure, Huldrych Zwingli. Though not involved in the battle at Kappel, the town of St. Gallen fought on Zurich and Bern's side during the subsequent war and ultimately shared their defeat. Zurich was forced to return the territory around St. Gallen to the abbot, and so the reformed town became enclosed by Catholic territory once again. The triumph of the Catholic cantons over their Protestant confederates thus represented a severe setback to the reformers' efforts, and one which, given Zwingli's death on the battlefield, held considerable symbolic power.⁷⁶¹

By comparing Rütiner's entries on Kappel to each other and to the chronicles by Kessler, Vadianus, and Johannes Stumpf, we can glimpse how the narrative evolved in the years following the battle. Let us first look at an element shared by all accounts, namely the tale of the standard-bearer. According to all sources, Zurich's standard was lost and heroically regained several times during the battle. Finally, a soldier who was severely wounded while saving the standard screamed out for help: 'Is there no brave Zurich citizen who will save our city?'⁷⁶² Upon this another soldier grabbed the standard and fled the battlefield, saving it from falling into the enemy's hands.⁷⁶³ Losing a standard on the battlefield was seen as a great humiliation, not least because such booty was often publically displayed by the triumphant party.⁷⁶⁴ The detail with which all authors recorded the heroic efforts to save the Zurich standard thus reflect the symbolic power attributed to it. Yet in contrast to Stumpf, Vadianus, and Kessler, who agree that the standard was saved in a joint effort by Schweitzer and Kambli from Zurich, in Rütiner's account a certain 'Hirt from St. Gallen' plays the

⁷⁶⁰ Rütiner writes about the battle of Kappel on seven occasions: in 1531 (Comm. I.355/6), July 1532 (Comm. I.301), 1535 (Comm. I.641), and twice in 1537 (Comm. II.52/II.235) and 1538 (II.360/II.388) respectively.

⁷⁶¹ See also Helmut Meyer, *Der zweite Kappeler Krieg. Die Krise der Schweizerischen Reformation* (Zürich, 1976).

⁷⁶² 'Ist kain frommer Züricher hie, der unser statt errett?', Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 367 (=383a). See almost identically Johannes Stumpf, *Schweizer- und Reformationschronik*, eds. Ernst Gagliardi, Hans Müller, and Fritz Büsser, 2 vols. (Basel, 1955), ii, p. 173, although here the standard-bearer asks whether there is no man who might save the city's *honour* ('eer rett' instead of 'errett').

⁷⁶³ With slight variations, this is the story told by Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 367 (=38a); Stumpf, *Schweizer- und Reformationschronik*, ii, p. 173, and von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, p. 302, no. 310. See also Comm. I.641.

⁷⁶⁴ Peter M. Mäder, 'Fahnen', in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <<http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D12810.php>>, accessed 06 June 2016.

key role.⁷⁶⁵ This is a remarkable twist considering that St. Gallen's troops were not involved in the battle of Kappel.⁷⁶⁶ When the story was adapted for a St. Gallen audience, however, a fellow citizen was introduced into the narrative and took on the part of one of the story's main protagonists.

It is hardly a coincidence that Rütiner recorded the tale of the standard-bearer at the time of the *Bannerhandel*; just when rumours about a St. Gallen standard which had allegedly been won by Appenzell in 1403 but secretly returned to St. Gallen sparked off riots in Appenzell and caused high tensions between the two towns.⁷⁶⁷ Perhaps it was particularly important to encourage identification with the heroic standard-bearer of the battle of Kappel at a time in which St. Gallen was involved in a battle over a standard of its own.

Rütiner's notes on the battle at Kappel not only differ from those of Stumpf, Vadianus, and Kessler, they also contain some internal contradictions. The number of Protestant clergy killed during the battle, for instance, increased every time Rütiner recorded it. At first he mentioned only Zwingli and a few others, then he agreed with Kessler that fifteen pastors had died during the battle, but only one year later this number had increased to twenty-five or twenty-six.⁷⁶⁸ One could argue that this is a detail of little significance, yet the regularity with which conversations about Kappel returned to this figure suggests otherwise. Nor was this a personal obsession of Rütiner's: though they all disagreed on the exact figure, Kessler, Vadianus, Stumpf, and the writer of an anonymous pamphlet similarly specified the number of the casualties among the Zurich clergy.⁷⁶⁹

In order to understand the deeper significance of this number, we must first look at what Rütiner and his contemporaries thought to be the cause of Zurich's defeat. In the years following the battle, various explanations were proposed. Initially, the defeat was blamed on treason.⁷⁷⁰ Then it was said that Zurich's troops had been ill-prepared, disorganised, and simply outnumbered by the

⁷⁶⁵ 'Hirt de sancto / Gallo', Comm. I.641.

⁷⁶⁶ Rütiner himself confirms earlier in his notebooks that they left St. Gallen only an hour before the start of the battle; Comm. I.355.

⁷⁶⁷ See for instance Comm. I.613 and I.624. On the *Bannerhandel*, see Gottfried Bodemer, *Der Bannerhandel zwischen Appenzell und St. Gallen 1535–1539. Ein Beitrag zur schweizer. Kulturgeschichte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (St. Gallen, 1905).

⁷⁶⁸ Comm. I.356, II.235 and II.360.

⁷⁶⁹ Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 367 (=383a); von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, p. 309, no. 320; Stumpf, *Schweizer- und Reformationschronik*, ii, p. 177; *Merckliche vnnd warhafftige geschichten von den Schweytzerzern Nemlich wie im Jare Funffzehenhundert eyns vnd dreyßig die fünff Orth der Eydgnoschaft als Lucern Vri Schweytz Vnderwalden vnd Zuog denen von Zürich sampt jrem anhang schriftlich abgesagt Vnd als balde darauff mit jnen vnd denen von Bern vnd Basel [et]c. Vier trefflicher Schlachten gethan vnd allzeyt den Syegk wider sie erhalten Vnd darnach beyde partheyen eyn Vertragk yffgericht haben Mit etlichen sonderlichen artickeln sampt eyner declaration so jüngst darüber gmacht* (Strasbourg: Johann Konbloch the Younger, 1532, VD16 M 4840), pp. 6–7. See also Ernst Götzinger, *Joachim Vadian, der Reformator und Geschichtsschreiber von St. Gallen* (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 50, Halle, 1895), p. 57.

⁷⁷⁰ Rumour had it that a man from Zurich accepted money from the commander of the Five Inner Cantons' troops in exchange for his help; Comm. I.356 and Comm. II.307. See also Meyer, *Der zweite Kappeler Krieg*, pp. 157–8, and von Liebenau, 'Aus einem Notizbuch', pp. 346–9.

enemy's forces.⁷⁷¹ Finally, Rütiner's informants variously blamed the disloyal peasants of Zurich who had fled the battle scene, and Bern, the Thurgau and the Toggenburg for hesitating or refusing to send troops in aid of Zurich.⁷⁷²

As we have already seen in chapter four, Zwingli's own responsibility was a recurrent theme as well. Although Rütiner and his informants stress the reformer's courage and determination during the battle, they certainly did not turn a blind eye to his faults.⁷⁷³ They described the reformer as an impulsive and confrontational man who ceaselessly attacked those less inclined to violent conflict from his pulpit and accused them of cowardice.⁷⁷⁴ At a dinner with the Zurich pastor Benedictus Vintzler seven years after the battle, Kessler therefore asked his guest a vital question: Did the people of Zurich blame Zwingli for their defeat? Although Vintzler immediately diverted the focus away from Zwingli by claiming that they only blamed themselves and their sins, Kessler's question suggests that Zwingli was not beyond all doubt.⁷⁷⁵

Vintzler's response also implies that another explanation for the defeat at Kappel had emerged, and one which likely seemed more frightening than all others: had God punished the Protestant confederates for straying from the right path? As we have seen in chapter five, one of Rütiner's informants certainly thought so:

Shortly before the battle of Kappel, [Hulrich Schaiawiller] said to me and others:
"A child would understand that it does not suit confederates to fight like this. But the plague is upon us." On that Saturday when the rumour of the death of Zwingli and other citizens of Zurich came to us, which was spread publicly on the market-place in the evening, he said in my presence: "Did I not say it?"⁷⁷⁶

A comet spotted a few months before the battle supported Schaiawiller's interpretation; it was retrospectively interpreted as a divine warning announcing Zwingli's impending death.⁷⁷⁷ Moreover, in Rütiner's own memory the defeat at Kappel was linked to a whole series of local and personal catastrophes which accumulated to a day of quasi-apocalyptic quality:

On Tuesday [*sic!*] 11 October at three o'clock our city sent 200 soldiers in aid of Zurich ... The previous night at around nine o'clock a massive earthquake shook

⁷⁷¹ Comm. I.641.

⁷⁷² Comm. II.235; II.388.

⁷⁷³ Comm. II.235, II.360.

⁷⁷⁴ Comm. II.235.

⁷⁷⁵ Comm. II.388. For the content and context of the conversation, see also Comm. II.385a; II.387g-II.389

⁷⁷⁶ 'Breui ante Alpense praelium / ad me dixit [] alios puer inquit intelligeret non / decere ita contendere confederatos [] sed plaga ad/est [] Eo sabbato quo rumor ad nos venit / de Zwinglij et aliorum Tigurinorum morte / quia sub vespere dispergitur fama publice in foro / dixit me praesente [] non dixi non dixit.' Comm. II.52.

⁷⁷⁷ Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 359–62 (=376b–379a); Oswald Myconius, *Vom Leben und Sterben Huldrych Zwinglis*, ed. Ernst Gerhard Rüschi (St. Gallen, 1979), p. 71.

the city so much that the guards feared that the destruction of the city was imminent. During the same night, between two and three o'clock, my Isaak died. The day before, during the night, the powder magazine burned down.⁷⁷⁸

Against this backdrop, it becomes more understandable why the number of clergy who died during the battle of Kappel seemed significant to Rütiner and his contemporaries: Zwingli's improper behaviour in the months leading up to the war, the comet and the series of accidents and natural disasters on the eve of battle, the disastrous defeat of Zurich at Kappel and the subsequent loss of reformed territory to the St. Gallen Abbey seemed to suggest that God had indeed punished the Protestant cantons for taking the wrong path. The high number of casualties among the Protestant clergy lent further credence to this theory. The fact that so many pastors had participated in the war was controversial enough in itself. As Vadianus put it, with his 'punishment God has surely indicated that the servants of the word should not dedicate themselves to, and teach war, but peace'.⁷⁷⁹ If the number of casualties among them increased as the story circulated, this could either be seen as an attempt to increase the story's dramatic effect, or as the result of the huge psychological impact the battle and Zwingli's death had had on the people of St. Gallen.

Changes in the way past events were remembered and retold did not occur randomly. They followed a distinct set of patterns which are well-known from rumour theory and which we have encountered many times throughout this thesis: as they circulated orally, narratives were "levelled", that is reduced and simplified; details considered particularly important or shocking were simultaneously "sharpened", and some parts of the narrative were "assimilated" to fit the cognitive framework of the respective audience.⁷⁸⁰ By analysing the successive stages of a narrative's development, we can therefore reconstruct parts of that framework. In the case of the *St. Galler Auflauf*, the narrative increasingly centred on the rift the conspiracy had opened up within the community and the necessity to choose a side. At a time where a deep confessional divide threatened the cohesion of both the reform movement and the Swiss Confederacy – a divide, moreover, which ran straight through the heart of St. Gallen – such a narrative would have resonated strongly with Rütiner and his contemporaries. Similarly, the development of the narrative around the battle at Kappel suggest that Rütiner and his contemporaries did not only see another confrontation between Catholic and

⁷⁷⁸ '11 Octobr die martis hora 3 vrbs nostra / 200 milites in auxilium Turegi missi ... / praecedenti nocte hora nona terraemotus ingens / concussit vrbem adeo vt Vigiles praesentem ru/inam veriti [] Eadem nocte hora inter / 2 et 3 moritur ISAac meus / Pridie in nocte conburitur puluerhuß'. Comm. I.353–5.

⁷⁷⁹ 'an welcher straf Got wol angezaigt hat, daß die diener des wortz nit zuo kreig, sonder zuo friden richten und leren sölind.' Von Watt (Vadian), *Deutsche Historische Schriften*, iii, p. 309, no. 320.

⁷⁸⁰ Kuijpers, 'Between Storytelling and Patriotic Scripture', pp. 184–5, and Donovan, 'How Idle is Idle Talk?', p. 64.

Protestant forces looming on the horizon, but that they also doubted whether God was still with them.⁷⁸¹

The memories recorded by Rütiner were thus more closely tied to his present than to the past of St. Gallen. How did this affect Rütiner's view of the past, and what does it tell us about the nature of the *Commentationes*?

A sense of change

A sense of change, writes Daniel Woolf, 'has always been taken as a precondition to think historically'.⁷⁸² It has often been suggested that the rupture caused by the French Revolution and its aftermath was a turning point in the history of historical consciousness; a point where the experience of change was so dramatic that a cyclical view of time was abandoned in favour of a linear model of historical progress. Just as often those claims have been refuted, however, in particular by early modern historians who have diagnosed their period with a whole series of ruptures of its own, among which the Reformation and the Thirty Year's War are the most prominent ones.⁷⁸³

Though Rütiner's entries about the past always referred to, and reflected his present, his view of history was not a cyclical one.⁷⁸⁴ As we have already seen, Rütiner and his contemporaries experienced the Reformation as a radical departure from their Catholic past. Less than a decade after the Reformation had taken root in St. Gallen, Rütiner described Catholic ritual as though he had never participated in it, and marvelled at the beliefs he had held in his youth.⁷⁸⁵ It was this experience of change which inspired Kessler and many of the other chroniclers to write about their time.

Yet the confessional divide was by no means the only gap which had opened up between Rütiner's own age and the generation of his parents and grandparents. In fact Rütiner noticed quite dramatic shifts in almost every aspect of life in St. Gallen, and their origins often lay much further in the past than the Reformation. 'In the 40 years before 1532', Rütiner wrote, for instance, 'clothing changed so much that [the changes] cannot easily be enumerated'.⁷⁸⁶ He then went on to describe in much detail how the fashion of hats, shirts, hoses, and robes had evolved over this period. In a later entry, he went even further back in time: 'A century ago', he wrote, people walked about

⁷⁸¹ See for instance Comm. II.25 and chapter five.

⁷⁸² Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 19.

⁷⁸³ Most recently by Brecht Deseure and Judith Pollmann, 'The Experiences of Rupture and the History of Memory', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 315–29, here esp. pp. 316–8 and 328.

⁷⁸⁴ Pollmann similarly argues that a view of history as repetitive and a sense of change do not necessarily exclude one another; Pollmann and Kuijpers, 'Introduction', p. 21.

⁷⁸⁵ For instance Comm. I.541; II.296c. See also chapter one.

⁷⁸⁶ '40 annis ab 1532 tam plurima in vestitu / mutata vt non facile recenseri potest'. Comm. I.340.

in ‘wooden sandals’ and ‘shoes with long tips’, which Rütiner held responsible for many a deformed foot among the senior St. Gallen citizens.⁷⁸⁷ They also wore the infamous slashed clothes which could still be spotted occasionally in St. Gallen, even though they had long been forbidden.⁷⁸⁸

Daniel Woolf has argued that ‘English men and women in 1500 were only dimly conscious, if at all, of the fact that people, scenes, buildings, and material culture of previous centuries would have looked different from those to which they were accustomed’.⁷⁸⁹ This was clearly not the case in sixteenth-century St. Gallen. Rütiner’s report on the development of fashion – from extravagant hats, plumes of feathers, slashed trousers, and pointed shoes to the more modest post-Reformation style of dressing – reveals his awareness of, and curiosity about the differences between the present and the past. Entirely free from nostalgia, this narrative stood in stark contrast to his notes on the contemporary changes in economic practice which, in Rütiner’s view, were accompanied by a dramatic decay of morals. This is particularly palpable in his entries on the stories passed down by the late mayor Caspar Schlumpf to his son Paulus. During Caspar Schlumpf’s youth, and in particular before the Burgundian Wars (1474–1477), life in St. Gallen had been quite different: nobody suffered from poverty, even the houses on the market square were humble constructions, and mercenaries were a rare sight.⁷⁹⁰ Caspar Schlumpf’s generation of linen merchants had also greatly contributed to the flourishing linen trade through their frugality and modest lifestyle. In contrast to Rütiner and his contemporaries, they had travelled to the nearby markets on foot rather than on horseback, and when it rained they even walked barefoot to save their shoes. They thought of their businesses at all times and saved money wherever they could. As they passed through the woods on the way back from the markets, for instance, they would carry with them pieces of wood or rocks which could be used to repair their houses, and twigs to make besoms; and Rütiner recalled with much pride that his own father used to collect and reuse all scraps of yarn left when the linen was cut.⁷⁹¹

Of course this is an idealized, nostalgic vision of the past – and one, moreover, which seems to run counter to Rütiner’s account of the contemporary development of fashion – but the detail and frequency with which Rütiner records the political, cultural and economic transformations St. Gallen had undergone within a single generation nevertheless reveal his great concern about the instability of the very fabric of his hometown. Moreover, the drastic changes experienced by Caspar Schlumpf’s generation were by no means limited to fashion and economic practices. Along

⁷⁸⁷ ‘Ante seculum lingneis sandaleis intrantes [] Item calceos / longis aciebus.’ Comm. I.462.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid. For the details of the ban imposed by the St. Gallen town council on opulent and improper clothing in 1527, see Kessler, *Sabbata*, p. 251–2 (=254b–255a).

⁷⁸⁹ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 220.

⁷⁹⁰ Comm. II.157 and II.361b.

⁷⁹¹ Comm. II.81f.

with old customs and longstanding traditions, whole families had disappeared. According to Rütiner, ‘C[aspar] Schlumpf remembered fifty very rich lineages, of which not one remains. Reclining on the oven, he counted them’.⁷⁹²

It seems that Rütiner’s conversations with an older generation of St. Gallen citizens, and in particular with his fellow weavers, had made him acutely aware that all manmade things, as well as men themselves, were constantly threatened by oblivion.⁷⁹³ Some of the books Rütiner read may have further accentuated his sense of how easily knowledge could be lost forever. Rütiner’s annotations of his copy of Camertes’ introduction to Solinus’ *Polyhistor* are particularly revealing.⁷⁹⁴ For instance, he underlined a passage in which Camertes deplores the loss of Solinus’ biographical data, a loss which he attributes to the fact that ‘the monuments of those who wrote after him [i.e. of those who could have mentioned Solinus] perished almost entirely when the barbarians ravaged everything’.⁷⁹⁵ This passage is followed by an underlined list of authors whose works ‘have perished, to the great disadvantage of students’.⁷⁹⁶ It is possible that these sentences resonated with Rütiner because they reminded him of his own time. As we have seen in the previous chapter, towards the end of the 1530s Rütiner became increasingly certain that war was imminent. This time, the “barbarians” would come in the form of the French, the Catholics, or the Ottomans, or, so rumour had it, all of them at the same time.⁷⁹⁷

Rütiner thus clearly shared Kessler’s view that their world was undergoing radical changes, and he was just as aware that their past and present would quickly be forgotten if it remained unrecorded. Yet while Kessler wrote to preserve ‘God’s miraculous deeds’ for posterity, Rütiner seems to have been concerned about the fleeting nature of knowledge in general, even when that knowledge only concerned the mundane lives of his fellow citizens and only held any relevance in the present. As a result, Rütiner and Kessler wrote about the past in fundamentally different ways. Johannes Kessler followed a strict chronology: every piece of information concerning the past was inserted into its proper place in the history of St. Gallen and stabilised in the form which corresponded to Kessler’s state of knowledge at the time he completed the *Sabbata*. The view of the past

⁷⁹² ‘C Schlumpff vltra 50 prosapiarum ditissimarum / meminit quarum ne vnus restat / super fornacem cubans numerando.’ Comm. II.86.

⁷⁹³ Although Rütiner never writes about it in as explicit words as Hermann von Weinsberg, the two men seem to have shared this anxieties around forgetting, and they both attempted to counteract oblivion by means of writing. Lundin, *Paper Memory*, in particular pp. 161–99.

⁷⁹⁴ Of course it is impossible to identify a person’s handwriting in mere lines, yet the corresponding marginalia are all written in Rütiner’s hand.

⁷⁹⁵ ‘monumenta, qui post eum scripserunt, Barbaris cuncta uastantibus, fere perierint universa.’ Caius Julius Solinus, *C. Iulii Solini Polyhistor, seu rerum orbis memorabilium collectanea. Adiectus praeterea in libri calce est index, summam totius pene operis carptim insinuans, ut studioso lectori facile inventu sit quod quaerit atque depromptu, mendis quibus antehac scatebat pro virili expurgatis emaculatisque*, ed. Johannes Camertes (Cologne, 1520), fol. 1v. For Rütiner’s underlines and annotations, see VadSlg, Inc. 808: Sammelband.

⁷⁹⁶ ‘quae magna studiosorum iactura, perierunt.’ Ibid., fol. 2v.

⁷⁹⁷ Comm. II.25.

which we are presented with in the *Commentationes*, on the other hand, is much less stable and always tied to the present: the memory of certain events could be activated when Rütiner was confronted with comparable events in his own time; references to the past came up in conversations without following any chronological order (yet not randomly, for they were always linked to the topic discussed by association), and memories evolved according to the demands of the present.

Given these differences, do Rütiner's *Commentationes* really reflect 'a true sense of history' radiating from Vadianus' circle? With the St. Gallen humanists Rütiner certainly shared an interest in the remote past, but as we have seen it was in his guild and family that Rütiner learned most about the recent past of his hometown and the dramatic changes it had witnessed.⁷⁹⁸ Rütiner's reliance on the memories of an older generation of St. Gallen citizens may in part be explained with his preference for eye-witnesses. Their memories often shaped Rütiner's view of the past to a larger degree than the chronicles produced by his learned friends, resulting in many striking differences between the *Commentationes* and the *Sabbata*. Rütiner's notes may therefore serve as a reminder that most people in early modern St. Gallen and elsewhere would not have encountered the past in the form of a well-ordered chronicle, but as a set of slightly haphazard, fragmented, and contradictory narratives which changed considerably over time.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁸ For instance on the *St. Galler Auflauf* of 1491, Comm. I.777, on social change, Comm. II.81f and II.361b. This is an important point given that even studies of history in the context of early modern orality usually focus only on elite conversations about printed histories; see for instance Daniel Woolf, 'Speaking of history: conversations about the past in Restoration and eighteenth-century England', in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The spoken word: Oral culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, New York, 2002), 119–37.

⁷⁹⁹ See for a similar argument regarding early modern England Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, p. 222. The decisive difference, however, is that Fox portrays this as the kind of history encountered by 'ordinary people', suggesting that the educated had a different approach to history.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the last century, the historian Theodor von Liebenau wrote that Rütiner's *Commentationes* contained quite a few 'golden nuggets', albeit hidden 'underneath an enormous amount of worthless slag'.⁸⁰⁰ This "worthless slag", the debris of conversations in a sixteenth-century small town, however, is precisely where the value of Rütiner's notebooks is to be found. Through a close study of them, this thesis has shown, we can get some sense, however fragmentary, of the protagonists, contexts, contents, and mechanisms of oral communication at the time.

Sixteenth-century St. Gallers relied heavily on oral networks to provide them with news and information of all kind. Even written and printed media were typically consumed in sociable settings as they were read aloud, summarised, and discussed. An individual's access to information was thus to a large degree determined by the social networks within which they spent their lives. As St. Gallers sought to secure a place for themselves in such circles, they in turn used jokes, gossip, and information of all kind as a form of "communicative social capital", allowing them to present themselves as witty, well-connected, and knowledgeable. Perhaps this was also one of the main purposes of the *Commentationes*: as a treasure chest full of past conversations, it provided Rütiner with plenty of "communicative currency" to be spent on conversations in the present.

Information disseminated orally through such social circles was never anonymous. Just like the majority of Rütiner's entries are linked to an informant, speech was always tied back to a speaker, even where the original source of a story remained unknown. Moreover, the same network that provided Rütiner with news also spread social knowledge about numerous members of the community, thus giving Rütiner and his contemporaries the means to evaluate *fama* by considering the *fama* of the speaker.

Talented story-tellers, however, could also use their knowledge of the audience to tailor a story to their needs and expectations. Familiar places, characters, and stereotypes were often introduced into narratives circulating in St. Gallen, so that they would gain credibility or pique the audience's interest. Over time, complex narratives were often boiled down into highly symbolic scenes, and these were lined up on a string of locations where they had literally taken *place*. Rather than treating the instability of oral narratives as evidence for the inherent unreliability of the spoken word, this study has proposed to analyse their evolution as a key to early modern mentalities.

⁸⁰⁰ Von Liebenau, 'Aus einem historischen Notizbuch', p. 342.

Yet St. Gallen audiences did not only want to hear what their informants knew. They also expected to hear *how* they knew it. As a consequence, Rütiner's informants regularly related (and perhaps even more often *created*) elaborate frame narratives to explain why their stories should be trusted. A detailed analysis of such frame narratives has shown that the greatest trust was placed in eye-witnesses. Granted, St. Gallen's learned, political, and economic elite played a central role in Rütiner's network. Yet it was not their high social status alone which turned them into key informants; rather more important, it seems, was the privileged access to information which they could claim as a direct result of their occupation, public offices, and high-profile contacts.

Individuals further down the social ladder, too, were often cited as authorities in their own areas of expertise. Former mercenaries, for instance, related detailed accounts of battles they had fought; maids such as Anna Bösch shared their insight into St. Gallen households; and the tales of older female and male citizens seemed to unlock a door to the town's recent past. In one particularly telling example, Rütiner even cites a former prisoner as a source for the measurements of the local prison cell.⁸⁰¹ As a consequence of this communicative system which gave priority to eye-witnesses and simultaneously valued a broad variety of information, the *Commentationes* thus allow us to listen to many voices which usually struggle to be heard, or whose impact, where they are heard, is deemed negligible. The fact that an educated man with close ties to the elite like Rütiner spent so much time, paper, and ink on recording their stories, even where they contradicted those written by his friends and St. Gallen's chroniclers, suggests that they warrant more attention than they are usually granted.

This thesis has also called into question some of the dominant narratives regarding the printing revolution and argued that a history of reception, not production, is needed to adequately evaluate its impact. The effects of the invention of moveable-type print did not become palpable everywhere at the same time, but differed considerably from one place to another. A monolithic view of print as a medium rather than as a technology for producing a broad variety of genres, moreover, threatens to obscure differences in the reception of early modern printed texts, and thus of their impact. In Rütiner's St. Gallen, existing systems of "source criticism", developed in the context of dominantly oral networks, cast doubt on the reliability of anonymous prints. It was therefore one thing to rely on a printed chronicle or a pamphlet by Luther, and quite another to cite an anonymous *Neue Zeitung* reporting on a case of witchcraft. Even when Rütiner's informants drew on such prints, they often masked the fact by citing an "eye-witness" instead.

If we look beyond Rütiner's St. Gallen and the 1530s, one might hypothesise that one of the greater transformations in the history of early modern communication was a growing separation between the dissemination of news and the circulation of social knowledge. Over the course of the

⁸⁰¹ Comm. II.394.

period, and especially with the rise of the regular press in the seventeenth century, news was increasingly circulating independently of personal networks. Jokes, gossip, and tales, on the other hand, remained more closely associated with sociability, and this may perhaps go some way towards explaining why modern theories often reduce them to mere social practices without any informational value. Further studies are needed to test these hypotheses and to establish when and where this process started. In 1530s St. Gallen, at least, the circulation of news was still intimately intertwined with the circulation of rumours, gossip, jokes, and tales, and the dissemination of information went hand in hand with social practices.

In an essay published in 1992, Albert Müller argued that what the history of communication needed was not a new kind of historical source, but rather a new kind of reading on the part of the historian.⁸⁰² This thesis has tried to achieve this by tapping into the unique and unexploited potential of the *Commentationes* for a study of oral communication. It is my hope that by uncovering some of the mechanisms of early modern talk, this case study may also alert us to similar “debris” in other, more common sources of the period, such as letters, chronicles, and ego-documents. For only by taking into account the innumerable oral exchanges in which information was shared, discussed, processed, confirmed or contradicted, can we begin to understand the circulation of ideas in early modern Europe.

⁸⁰² Müller, ‘Mobilität – Interaktion – Kommunikation’, p. 233.

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