

German Language Societies: “Fruit-Bearing Society” (1646)

Abstract

Modeled on foreign societies, so-called language societies with the goal of cultivating the national language and literature were also formed in Germany. The first and best-known of them was the Fruit-Bearing Society (Palm Order), which was founded in 1617 in Weimar. The members of these societies, as well as authors (such as Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, and Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen) strove to enhance German as a national language.

Source

The Fruit-Bearing Society: name, purpose, emblem, and motto. After every induction, properly engraved in copper and composed in eight-line rhymed strophes. The First Hundred. Frankfurt am Main. Mattheo Merian, 1646.

A Short Report on the Purpose and Plans of the Fruit-Bearing Society

Because many of you from the Fruit-Bearing Society want to have a report on its actual purpose and on how and why it was established and set up, it was found to be a good thing to write the following brief [report] for everyone desiring instruction. It should therefore be known that in 1617, on August 24, at an elegant, although sad, gathering of princely and noble people, to erase the memory of the preceding sorrows and to inspire praiseworthy youth to pursue all kinds of lofty virtues, mention was made of various academies that have been established in foreign countries to maintain good faith, to develop respectable customs, and to practice every country's national language. But at the same time, it must further be considered that, because our widely respected High-German mother tongue, both with its old, beautiful, and graceful speech and with its profusion of effective and meaningfully expressive words, can make any matter correctly understood better than the foreign languages, it has an advantage that is not insignificant. Attention must be paid to coherence, how such a society is to be brought to life and established, a society in which people can speak and write well, purely, and clearly, and furthermore in such composition and elevation of its mother tongue (to which every person is obligated by nature) can be useful and of service. While this society was initially formed as a narrow circle, it must be developed in such a way that every person who is a lover of honesty, virtue, and courtesy, but primarily of the fatherland, would have reason, through guidance of abundant material selected for that purpose, and all the more after absorbing that good purpose, to voluntarily commit himself to it. And in the case of such banding together, it is not unusual, and is conducive to bringing more cheer, that in the beginning the entire society not just focus on a particular matter, its name, but also choose for itself an appropriate emblem and a fitting motto to express its purpose and significance, as in consequence any society that plans to launch itself ought to do. Consequently, this society is named the “Fruit-Bearing [Society],” an Indian palm or nut tree [coconut palm] is declared to be its emblem, and “Let everything be of use” established as its motto. The name “fruit-bearing,” so that everyone who joins or wishes to join, could not but choose for himself something connoting fruitfulness, i.e., belonging to fruit, trees, herbs, or other such, and growing from the earth, or arising from it, and in addition should eagerly seek to bring forth fruit everywhere. Its emblem was chosen for the reason that, just as in the case of animals there is none more useful even in the slightest way than the sheep, the same proves true of this Indian palm or nut tree, as the books on trees and herbs, but especially the East Indian descriptions with more of such, attest. But the motto, for the purpose that in and at this society everything shall be intended to be of use, of benefit, and for good cheer, but nothing to cause

harm, damage, or chagrin. Consequently, then the following [is to take place] as soon as various people have joined this society and its actual purpose and plans have in a short time been directed to and focused on the two points below. First, every person in this society shall show himself to be honorable, useful, and pleasant, shall always behave kindly, cheerfully, and amusingly in meetings, and be agreeable in word and deed; and just as no one shall take offense at pleasant words of another, people shall refrain from all crude, sullen talk and jests. Secondly, members shall to the extent possible and feasible preserve the High-German language in its correct form and state without mixing in foreign words and shall also cultivate the best pronunciation in speaking and the most refined manner in writing and composing poetry. Accordingly, it is also desired that every member of the oft-mentioned society shall wear the emblem, name, and motto, cast in gold on one side [of a medallion] and his own name on the other on a parakeet-green silk band. The society's [membership] is growing at the moment, [listed] in order by each person's age at induction, and not by class advantage; this is adequately apparent from the attached copper engravings of emblems and the explanations on them composed in verse.

Sonnet to the Fruit-Bearing Society. The emblem is an Indian nut or palm tree, the motto, "Let everything be of use."

Come, learn from the palm tree, you who wish to join
The society, as you begin causing everyone
To call you fruit-bearing and take you for such.
You must just mimic its fruit in every way.
Almost all that man needs in life
The tree brings forth: from it, needles can be made,
Thread, cords, rope, ships, masts and sails for them as well.
Wine, vinegar, spirits, oil its fruits provide,
Bread, sugar, butter, milk, cheese. From the bark
Comes a cup, spoon, pot. Its leaves form
Roof shingles. Mats are woven from it.
In every month it bears fruits anew,
Good for him who, just as it does, strives and struggles
To bring forth on earth fruit and usefulness in all things.



[...]

Source: Ludwig (Anhalt-Köthen, Prince): *Fruchtbringenden Gesellschaft Nahmen/ Vorhaben/ Gemählde und Wörter: Nach jedes Einnahme ordentlich in Kupfer gestochen/ und In achtzeiligen Reimgesetze verfasst ...* Franckfurt am Mayn : Merian, 1646, Title page, pp. 2ff. Available online at: <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/17-4-1-eth/start.htm>

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Recommended Citation: German Language Societies: "Fruit-Bearing Society" (1646), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-285>> [July 05, 2025].