

## Schlaraffia Associations as a “Freundschaftsbund” of the Central European Middle Class (1859-1939)

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### ABSTRACT

“Schlaraffia” is a title used to this day in reference to exclusively male associations that cultivate mutual friendship, art, and humor while maintaining pseudo-medieval “chivalric” ceremonies. These groups grew out of the humorous and artistic society of Prague theatre workers founded in 1859. From 1876, the individual local organizations united in the Allschlaraffia Union, which was active mainly in Germany and Austria-Hungary but also in German-speaking communities elsewhere in Europe and around the world. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the social stratification within middle-class elites led to the movement’s being rebuilt; Schlaraffia came to more closely resemble so-called lodge associations, which were seen as more civilized and serious. The original drinking society character evolved into that of a solid, socially exclusive men’s club. Schlaraffia in Prague and its chapters subsequently pursued goals along the same lines as lodge societies like the Freemasons, Odd Fellows, and B’nai B’rith, which sought to instill a sense of idealism, humanity, tolerance, friendship, and brotherhood in their members and foster personal growth. The Schlaraffia, however, differed in the means by which they sought to achieve these goals. Schlaraffian sociability relied not on arcane rituals but rather on cheerful ceremonies, not on edifying lectures and charitable campaigns but on artistic endeavors and humorous performances. This mix of the serious and the frivolous gave the Schlaraffia their unique character and made this network an attractive avenue for recreation, communication, and socialization, especially among the German-speaking middle class. Because they attracted a high number of elites, they played a considerable role in the cultural and social history of Central and East Central Europe.

**KEYWORDS:** Schlaraffia, middle-classes, associations, friendship, network

### Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

### Funding Statement

This work was supported by the Czech Science Foundation under Grant number 23-04979S (Schlaraffia: The Element of Play in Nineteenth-Century Culture) at the Silesian University in Opava.

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ZfO / JECES 75/2026/3

(received 2024-04-10, accepted 2025-05-22)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25627/202675311834> – eISSN 2701-0449, ISSN 0948-8294



## Introduction

In nineteenth century Europe, voluntary organizations established for the purposes of socialization, (self-)cultivation, and improvement of various aspects of public life<sup>1</sup> were a typical feature of the emerging civil society.<sup>2</sup> Historians rightly regard voluntary associations of individuals as a central element in the formation of the modern bourgeoisie. Such associations not only provided venues for the discussion of public affairs, but also spaces in which class-specific cultural patterns were negotiated. They have thus been called “schools of bourgeois identity.”<sup>3</sup> Given the important role such groups played in constituting and consolidating social and cultural identities and their far-reaching consequences, it would be a mistake to classify membership and involvement in such associations solely as a leisure activity.

Modern forms of solidarity—unlike premodern estate-based affiliations—were founded on fine nuances of shared status, norms, values, and cultural patterns. Proper attention must therefore be paid to the settings in which these solidarities were established and reinforced. This brings into focus even those seemingly marginal social or recreational associations that had no political ambitions whatsoever and pursued purely idealistic aims. Due to the subtlety of their goals (social conviviality, entertainment), some of these associations long escaped the attention of historians. One of those that remains insufficiently explored—despite the boom of interest in nineteenth-century bourgeois history—was the global Allschlaraffia union, which brought together several hundred local associations known as “Schlaraffias.”

“Schlaraffia” is a term used to this day to refer to exclusively male associations that cultivate mutual friendship, art, and humor while maintaining pseudo-medieval “chivalric” ceremonial.<sup>4</sup> The first Schlaraffia was founded in

1 THOMAS NIPPERDEY: Verein als soziale Struktur in Deutschland im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert: Eine Fallstudie zur Modernisierung I, in: THOMAS NIPPERDEY: Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte, Göttingen 1976, pp. 174–205.

2 See, for example: THOMAS ADAM: Bürgerliches Engagement und Zivilgesellschaft in deutschen und amerikanischen Städten des 19. Jahrhunderts im Vergleich, in: RALPH JESSEN, SVEN REICHARDT et al. (eds.): Zivilgesellschaft als Geschichte: Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 155–174; STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN: Gesellschaft und Demokratie, Göttingen 2003.

3 GUNILLA BUDDE: Blütezeit des Bürgertums: Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert, Darmstadt 2009, pp. 15–16: “Schulen der Bürgerlichkeit.”

4 For an overview of the role of historicism in the Schlaraffia’s development in the nineteenth century, see: HEINER MEININGHAUS: Schlaraffia—Ein Verein des Historismus, in: Weltkunst 73 (2003), 2, pp. 191–192; MARTIN PELC: Topography of Humour: Several Issues Regarding the Organisational and Social Structure of the Schlaraffia Clubs prior to 1914, in: KARLA VYMĚTALOVÁ, JIŘÍ KNAPIK (eds.): Processes of Cultural Exchange in Central Europe in 1800–2000, Opava 2014, pp. 209–222; MARTIN PELC: Recesistické spolky Šlarafie: Herní prvek v kultuře 19. století [The Šlarafie Satirical Societies: A Playful Element in 19th-Century Culture], in: MARTIN HRDINA, KATEŘINA PÍORECKÁ (eds.): Historické fikce a mystifikace v české kultuře 19. století, Praha 2014, pp. 248–257.

Prague in 1859 by local theatre people, initially as an excentric humor table society, which was transformed into an association of the same name in 1861. The specific conditions of Prague around 1860 can hardly explain the future flourishing of Schlaraffia around the world, however, for similar associations emerged in other multi-national cities throughout Central Europe during this period.

What set the Schlaraffia apart from other such associations was their formal unification around a central organization with a headquarters in Prague. This facilitated its subsequent development as a widespread movement providing a social and cultural niche for the German-speaking middle class. In fact, by 1939 a total of 303 local chapters had been established in no less than 29 (present-day) countries. The majority of these chapters were situated in German-speaking areas of Central Europe (i.e. within Germany and Austria-Hungary or its successor states), where perhaps 90 percent of the association's members lived.

A major step in this process took place with the first All-Schlaraffia council (general assembly) in Leipzig in 1876, where the individual local Schlaraffia organisations agreed to adhere to uniform statutes (*Schlaraffen-Spiegel*) and ceremonies (*Ceremoniale*). Only the council, which subsequently convened on a regular basis every five years, could change these rules and rituals. The initial union of the Schlaraffia from 1876 was informal; shortly thereafter it assumed the title Allschlaraffia, and, in 1895, it gained legal recognition as an incorporated association.

By the time the Nazi regime destroyed the Schlaraffia in its classical form, tens of thousands of members, mostly wealthy and/or well-educated middle-class elites, had entered the association at some point. These included important actors (Alexander Girardi, Paul Hörbiger, Attila Hörbiger), musicians (Gustav Mahler, Franz Lehár), painters (Emil Orlik, Georg Jilovsky), writers (Peter Rosegger, Robert Hohlbaum, Karl Hans Strobl), journalists (Paul Kisch, Oskar Wiener), architects (Ludwig Baumann), military personnel (including generals), and businessmen and financiers (Alfred Mannesmann, Emil Ritter von Škoda, Ignaz and Isidor Petschek), as well as high bureaucrats and occasional politicians (including the former prime minister of Cisleithania, Ernst Seidler von Feuchtenegg). At its peak before 1933, the union had nearly 14,000 members. However, due to the socially exclusive character of the association, its cultural significance was much greater than these numbers might even suggest.

An essential element to contextualizing the Schlaraffia phenomenon is a basic understanding of the enigmatic Schlaraffian rituals and ceremonies that formed the background of all the activities of the association's members. The central motif woven through Schlaraffia activities and thought is an imaginary deity embodied by an eagle-owl (*Uhu*) with all its symbolic meanings and connotations (wisdom, mysticism). The members of the Schlaraffia chapters (*Sassen*) met in pseudo-historical rooms, used a number of specific phrases evoking archaic German (*Schlaraffen-Latein*), dated events according to their own calendar (*anno Uhui*), and wore strange headgear (*Helm*) and robes with

Tab. 1: Membership of the Allschlaraffia Union in 1912/13<sup>5</sup>

| State           | Chapters   | Members      | Percentage of total membership |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Germany         | 81         | 3,411        | 45 %                           |
| Austria-Hungary | 63         | 3,297        | 44 %                           |
| USA             | 15         | 559          | 7 %                            |
| Switzerland     | 4          | 137          | 2 %                            |
| Great Britain   | 1          | 31           | <1 %                           |
| Russia          | 1          | 28           | <1 %                           |
| Netherlands     | 1          | 26           | <1 %                           |
| Belgium         | 1          | 16           | <1 %                           |
| total           | <b>167</b> | <b>7,505</b> |                                |

Tab. 2: Membership of the Allschlaraffia Union in 1930/31<sup>6</sup>

| State          | Chapters   | Members       | Percentage of total membership |
|----------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Germany        | 130        | 6,512         | 49 %                           |
| Austria        | 33         | 2,353         | 18 %                           |
| Czechoslovakia | 39         | 2,159         | 16 %                           |
| USA            | 20         | 816           | 6 %                            |
| Romania        | 7          | 311           | 2 %                            |
| Yugoslavia     | 8          | 283           | 2 %                            |
| Poland         | 7          | 204           | 2 %                            |
| Switzerland    | 4          | 198           | 1 %                            |
| Hungary        | 2          | 152           | 1 %                            |
| Japan          | 2          | 61            | <1 %                           |
| China          | 2          | 46            | <1 %                           |
| Netherlands    | 1          | 37            | <1 %                           |
| Latvia         | 2          | 37            | <1 %                           |
| Brazil         | 1          | 30            | <1 %                           |
| Argentina      | 1          | 26            | <1 %                           |
| total          | <b>259</b> | <b>13,225</b> |                                |

5 RT. EIDAM [FRANZ SCHÖN]: Allschlaraffische Statistik, in: Der Schlaraffia Zeyttungen (DSZ), 1913-01-01, 407, pp. 4384–4386.

6 DSZ, 1931-02-01, 657, p. 2142.



Fig. 1: Headquarters of the Schlaraffia Praga and the global Allschlaraffia Union. The four-story house was built near Wenceslas Square in 1897, postcard, ca 1900 (author)

a sash (*Rüstung*) that were not at all reminiscent of the knightly armor to which these terms referred. With the associations, members were obliged to take an assigned, again mostly parodic, pseudo-knight name (*Rittername*). Schlaraffia meetings (*Sippungen*) provided opportunities for the cultivation of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) among the members but also for the presentation of the members' own creative output (collectively called *Fechsungen*), sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, in the form of songs, poems, lectures or other genres. The artistic program featured at such evening events also included productions of other works, mostly by German "cultural heroes."<sup>7</sup>

Formal meetings took place only from the beginning of October to the beginning of May, during the so-called *Winterung*, but the Schlaraffia did not remain a seasonal affair. Even between the *Sippungen*, many members met in their favorite cafés (*Reychscafé*) and other places for socializing. In Prague, for instance, they frequented the so-called Chapter Bowling Lane (*Reychskegelbahn*) in the garden of the German New Town Theatre. During the off-season in the spring and summer months, the Schlaraffians would meet in popular restaurants and inns for informal get-togethers (*Krystallinen*) with family members, including wives and daughters. In such secular environments, the members of Schlaraffia identified themselves with the so-called Roland needle (*Rolandnadel*) worn in their lapel. The annual all-Schlaraffian summer festival (*Sommerfest*) and its regional branches gradually grew. Starting around the turn of the twentieth century, the Schlaraffia also organized excursions and travel for its wealthier members; destinations included Istanbul, the Holy Land and Egypt (1908), and even the USA, where they visited members of overseas branches (1911, 1931). The Schlaraffian members also founded informal spa "colonies," some of which published their own membership lists and jubilee anthologies. Like the Freemasons, the Schlaraffians organized so-called field or war colonies and chapters at the front during World War I, which brought together members who happened to meet. Thanks to the intensive informal meetings, and despite the association's formal restriction to men only, strong bonds of friendship were forged not among the members themselves but also more broadly between their families.

Admission to the Allschlaraffia Union was decided by a vote of a chapter's members. Once elected, the adept became a squire (*Knappe*) and put aside his civil status and name. He was given a membership number, tabulated in a continuous series from foundation of each separate local chapter. After fulfilling

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7 Of the internal Schlaraffian historiography, the following should be mentioned in particular: DRASAL DER GLOCKENTHURM [ALBERT MÄRTENS]: *Chronica Allschlaraffiae*, Praga 1911; NATURALIST VOM AMBTSBLATT [LOUIS WEINERT-WILTON]: *Chronica Allschlaraffiae*: II. Teil (1597–a. U. 50), II. Band, Praga 1914; *Chronik des Verbandes Allschlaraffia zur Hundertjahrfeier in Norimberga a. U. 100* (1959): Band I–II, Landshut/Bayern 1959; Band III, Bern 1984; Band IV, Bern 2009.



Fig. 2: The pseudo-medieval "Castle Schachtburg" built in 1912/13 for Schlaraffia Ostravia (Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch-Ostrau) (State District Archive Opava)

the conditions set,<sup>8</sup> he was usually promoted to the “lower nobility” of the Schlaraffia within a few months. He became a *Junker*, after which he was addressed by his first name or a variant thereof. After approximately one to two years, he would receive a new name during the initiation ritual of “being dubbed a knight.” It was under this name that he was henceforth to be known in the Schlaraffia. The knightly name, while formulated in such a way as to mimic aristocratic or royal names, generally poked fun, in the spirit of the humorous tone of the association, at some characteristic of its bearer—his civil name, profession, personality trait, physical characteristics, family circumstances and ties, hobbies, or a favorite turn of phrase. Putting aside such “secular” (in contrast to a “sacred” Schlaraffian) existence allowed for the creation of an idealistic friendly community, undisturbed by worldly conflicts. The tight and thoroughly hierarchical organization of the Schlaraffia created space for mutual communication and social gregariousness. The Schlaraffia locales, so-called castles (*Burgen*), provided a refuge from the cacophony of everyday life: the exclusion of potentially controversial worldly topics (politics, religion, work) freed up space for cheerful Schlaraffian play in the interest of recreation, socialization, and mutual cultivation.

The social level of the Schlaraffia was determined by the formal, economic, and status demands placed on its members. Fees and fines were imposed for a number of reasons, including every level of promotion within the society, unexcused absences, and ceremonial items, among others. Individual members were also assumed to have a certain degree of financial security and capability; they might, for example, be expected to invite other members to suitable entertainment after a Schlaraffian promotion or on the occasion of some anniversary, etc. During the great expansion of Schlaraffia at the end of the nineteenth century, some members demanded stricter criteria in order to preserve the social stability (read: exclusivity) of the movement. They suggested revisions in the “self-recruitment” process—in other words, in assuring that the association was addressing appropriate adepts.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the *Schlaraffen-Spiegel* had previously stipulated that only “blameless men” could become members, the stricter “authentic interpretation” issued by the Council of Munich in 1888 restricted membership to “blameless men of mature age and secured status.”<sup>10</sup> Among other things, the Council fundamentally excluded students and military personnel below the rank of colonel from membership, which was also the substance of an internal instruction the Prague leadership sent out in 1898. The form of the communication is also interesting: a confidential circular. The Schlaraffia wanted to avoid suspicions of excessive elitism, but in fact a number of mech-

8 Namely, attendance of at least six meetings, impeccable behavior, strict adherence to the statutes, an effort at self-improvement, a benefit to the association, and a passing mark on the prescribed examinations.

9 RT LABOURSE-OU-LA-VIEH [RUDOLF CASPART]: Ueber Neugründungen seit dem V. Conzil, in: DSZ, supplement, 1899-11-01, 241, p. 1786.

10 Schlaraffen-Spiegel, s. I. [between 1888 and 1890], p. 12.

anisms were applied that guaranteed its aforementioned exclusive character.<sup>11</sup> Further restrictions were contained in the internal statutes of the individual chapters (*Hausgesetze*). For instance, the *Hausgesetz* of the Schlaraffia Tridentina (Trent) from 1906 stated in paragraph 1: "Every established knight has the right to bring pilgrims who are socially equal and fit into the framework of the Schlaraffia."<sup>12</sup>

Tab. 3: Socio-professional structure of the Allschlaraffia (most represented groups by number)<sup>13</sup>

|                                              | 1887/88             | 1930/31             |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Businessmen, self-employed</b>            | <b>1,156 (46 %)</b> | <b>4,771 (36 %)</b> |
| Merchants                                    | 729                 | 2,166               |
| Self-employed, businessmen                   | 225                 | 629                 |
| Architects, builders, engineers, technicians | 71                  | 1,171               |
| Factory owners, including top management     | 131                 | 805                 |
| <b>Artists</b>                               | <b>829 (33 %)</b>   | <b>1,178 (8 %)</b>  |
| Theatre employees, musicians                 | 753                 | 1,392               |
| Fine Artists                                 | 55                  | 293                 |
| Writers                                      | 21                  | 93                  |
| <b>Officials</b>                             | <b>134 (5 %)</b>    | <b>2,294 (17 %)</b> |
| <b>Physicians, Pharmacists</b>               | <b>119 (5 %)</b>    | <b>1,200 (9 %)</b>  |
| Physicians                                   | 55                  | 724                 |
| Dentists, orthodontic technicians            | 21                  | 239                 |
| Chemists (Pharmacists)                       | 41                  | 168                 |
| Veterinarians                                | 2                   | 69                  |
| <b>Attorneys, court clerks</b>               | <b>91 (4 %)</b>     | <b>490 (4 %)</b>    |
| <b>Professors, teachers</b>                  | <b>60 (2 %)</b>     | <b>911 (7 %)</b>    |
| <b>Army</b>                                  | <b>36 (1 %)</b>     | <b>664 (5 %)</b>    |
| <b>Other professions</b>                     | <b>112 (4 %)</b>    | <b>1,816 (14 %)</b> |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>2,537</b>        | <b>13,324</b>       |

Despite its consistently elite character, the socio-professional composition of the Schlaraffia changed profoundly during the 80 years of its pre–World War II history: The originally dominant artistic professions were reordered by class

11 Státní okresní archiv (SOKa) [State District Archive] Opava, Schlaraffia Opava, box 10, inv. nr. 62, ref. nr. 2, ref. nr. 2/1898-1899.

12 Hausgesetze der Schlaraffia Tridentina, Trient 1906, pp. 3–4.

13 DSZ, 1888-02-14, 109, supplement, [p. 2–3]; DSZ, 1932-02-01, 657, p. 2142.

with preference for the bourgeoisie (entrepreneurs, financiers). The proportion of artists (theatre workers, musicians, visual artists, and writers) in the membership gradually decreased, from 33 percent in 1887 to 13 percent in 1930,<sup>14</sup> although their importance to the union remained significant given its focus—after all, the motto of Schlaraffia was *In arte voluptas* [There is pleasure in art]. The growing pressure for social exclusivity from the late 1880s reduced the percentage of craftspeople,<sup>15</sup> while the share of Schlaraffians who were members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (approx. “educated classes”<sup>16</sup>) grew at a much faster rate. From this period on, the Schlaraffia remained an association primarily comprised of Central European bourgeois elites until 1939.

In terms of nationality and confession, the Schlaraffia’s “policy” was largely tolerant, although some individual chapters did later internally reject Jewish applicants and there was a visible surge in nationalism during World War I. The union as a whole was, however, open to all confessions and at least formally to other nationalities. There were several Czechs among the founding members, and the Schlaraffian branches in the multi-ethnic milieus of the Balkans, Low Countries, England, and the USA admitted members of other nationalities. German was not formally declared the “official language” (*Ambts-sprache*) of the association until 1914, more than 50 years after its founding, but it had effectively been such since the beginning. At the same time, however, Schlaraffian humor reveals a considerable sense of linguistic hybridity, and the designation of German as the official language had no effect on the unofficial entertainment, during which a diverse mixture of languages continued to be heard locally. For example, prior to 1918, Germans, Serbs, and Croats got along amicably in the Schlaraffia Bosna Saraj (Sarajevo), and some native English speakers reportedly joined the Schlaraffia groups in the USA to learn German.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Ibid.

15 MICHAEL MAASS: Der Männerbund “Schlaraffia” in den Jahren 1914–1937: Eine Studie zum weltanschaulich ungebundenen Vereinswesen in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus, Nürnberg 1993, p. 24.

16 I am of course aware of difficulties in defining the concept of the modern bourgeoisie and historiographical debates over whether to include, for example, officers, subaltern civil servants, teachers, artisans and artists, etc. However, given the focus of this study, I am guided by shared cultural values and practices (*Bürgerlichkeit*) rather than by the economic potential of membership. Rather than the internal division of the bourgeoisie, I am interested in the definition of social elites vis-à-vis the ambitious lower middle classes. Therefore, I use the somewhat general designation of social “elites” or bourgeoisie (*Bürgertum*). MANFRED HETTLING: Politische Bürgerlichkeit: Der Bürger zwischen Individualität und Vergesellschaftung in Deutschland und der Schweiz von 1860 bis 1918, Göttingen 1999, pp. 354–358; JÜRGEN KOCKA (ed.): Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Einheit und Vielfalt Europas, vol. 1, Göttingen 1995; JÜRGEN KOCKA (ed.): Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 1987.

17 Verhandlungen des VIII. allschlaraffischen Concils 16. bis 18. des Brachmondes a. U. 55 in der Tonhalle in Turicensis, [Prag s. d.], p. 33; Die Verhandlungen des XIII. Allschlaraffischen Concils zu Posonium in den Tagen vom 26. bis 28. des Wonnemondes a. U. 79, Prag [1938], p. 14.



Fig. 3: Felix Lechner (Unser Devast der Große, formerly Devast vom Böhmerwald), the head of the global Allschlaraffia Union for almost 30 years (1906–1933) (State District Archive Opava)

In terms of religion, the members were similarly diverse, corresponding to the Schlaraffian ideals of apoliticality, tolerance, and humanity. Not only were Jews not marginalized, but the central Allschlaraffia association was even led for almost thirty years (1906–1933) by Felix Lechner (born Löwy), a Jewish wood wholesaler from Lobositz (Lovosice) in North Bohemia. Michael Maaß reports that in 1933, 20.3 percent of members of the Schlaraffia Berolina (Berlin) were Jewish, although Jews made up only 3.8 percent of the general population of that city. Meanwhile, in Hamburg, where Jews were just 1.5 percent of the general population, 14.3 percent of the Hammonia members were Jewish, and in Munich, 4.5 percent of the Monachia members were Jewish, which was still roughly four times the proportion of Jews (1.2 percent) within the general population.<sup>18</sup> Current research has shown that the proportion of members of the “Israelite” faith was even higher in some other locations. For example, in Carnovia (Krnov/Jägerndorf) in Czechoslovak Silesia, Jews—mostly local business elites engaged in the textile industry—made up 45 percent of the members in 1921. In Carnovia’s mother chapter, Oppavia (Opava/Troppau), confessional relations during this period were even more complicated: Although a slight majority were Catholic, nearly 30 percent of the members were Jewish and 20 percent Protestant. Within the city’s general popula-

<sup>18</sup> MAASS, p. 74.

tion at that time, Protestants comprised a minority of just 4 percent and Jews just 3 percent. These minorities, were however, significantly larger within the bourgeois elite from which the Schlaraffia recruited its members.<sup>19</sup>

### The Schlaraffia as a Men's Association

The dominant interpretive framework of the history of the Schlaraffia movement is the concept of the male brotherhood (*Männerbund*),<sup>20</sup> as Maaß, the author of the only critical monograph on the subject to date, suggests.<sup>21</sup> It is true that the Schlaraffia only admitted men and employed initiation rituals to signal membership within the association that, like other aspects of its organization and activities, staged the social hegemony of masculinity and thereby reinforced gender roles and a gender-based social order. The Schlaraffia attributed to men an exclusive ability to establish cordial friendships free from superficiality and pettiness and to cultivate supra-personal values of humanity in an idealistic spirit through art and refined humor. Membership in the Schlaraffia can also be understood as one of the socially acceptable escapes from the female-dominated private sphere into a milieu of masculine dominance.

The initial drinking humor was full of erotic innuendos (*allerlei Eroticis*), slander of mothers-in-law (in Schlaraffian jargon *Burgschreck*), and glorification of bachelorhood.<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the 1880s, however, presumably as a result of the founding generation of artists being outnumbered and overshadowed by a growing proportion of bourgeois elites, a certain civilization of relations towards women took place. The “risqué” song *Wüste Nächte* was removed from the songbook, politeness was enforced, and disrespectful comments about women began to be punished more consistently.<sup>23</sup> The “civilization” of the Schlaraffia also resulted in a revision of the minimum age for applicants for membership in the association, which was now basically set at 24 years. While in its playful beginning phase, the Schlaraffia table society had included younger people (the youngest of the 23 founders was 22 years old),

19 BRANISLAV DORKO, MARTIN PELC: Arizace humoru: Spolky Urschlaraffia v letech 1925–1938 [The Aryanisation of Humor: The Associations of Urschlaraffia in 1925–1938], in: Časopis Matice moravské 143 (2024), 1, pp. 105–134.

20 There is extensive literature on the concept of the *Männerbund*. Given the different focus of this article, I refer only to the standard works on the history of men's associations: GISELA VÖLGER, KARIN VON WELCK (eds.): *Männerbande, Männerbünde: Zur Rolle des Mannes im Kulturvergleich*, Köln 1990; HELMUT BLAZEK: *Männerbünde: Eine Geschichte von Faszination und Macht*, Berlin 2001. See also: EDWIN A. BIEDERMANN: *Logen, Clubs und Bruderschaften*, Düsseldorf 2004.

21 MAASS.

22 RT BOMBAST [RICHARD KUKULA]: Aus dem Archive der Allmutter, in: DSZ, 1913-05-01, 414, p. 4517.

23 See, for example: MARTIN BRANTNER: “Derer Schlaraffen Lieder”: Entwicklung, Bedeutung und Verwendung des Liedgutes des Vereines Schlaraffia seit dessen Gründung anhand gewählter Beispiele. Diplomarbeit, Universität Wien, 2011, pp. 47–48.

the Allschlaraffia became more of an association of respectable, better established men. Evidence from Carnovia (Krnov/Jägerndorf) and Oppavia (Opava/Troppau) in 1920/21 has shown that average age of the members was just under 48 years.<sup>24</sup>

As in other male associations, alcohol played an important role both in Schlaraffian humor and in some rituals and ceremonies (*Brudertrunk*, *Humpenweihe*, *Oho Trankopfer*, *materielles Duell*). No Schlaraffian entertainment, formal or informal, was complete without beer (or wine).<sup>25</sup> At least in the most important points, however, the Schlaraffia gradually made room for loftier goals within the framework of the "civilization process." While the first printed edition of the Ceremonial (ca. 1877) had the newly knighted knights swear to honor "malt and hops," by the turn of the century the passage had been replaced by a promise to "hold high the banner of friendship."<sup>26</sup> Even the *materielles Duell* (a competition of two members in the speed of drinking beer) was definitively cancelled in 1929. In this case, however, rather than imposing new limits on the use of alcohol to foster sociability, the abolition was recognizing how the group was forging its own identity. By this point, Schlaraffians viewed the "material duel" as an obscure legacy of the "old days," taken over from the drinking culture (*Trinkkultur*) of student associations.<sup>27</sup>

The relationship between Schlaraffia and the *Burschenschaften* (and other student associations) was complicated. Indeed, many members of Schlaraffia had belonged to the *Burschenschaften* of various political ideologies during their studies. This did not, however, seem to influence the Allschlaraffia Union significantly, apart from some practices borrowed from this student culture, including a number of melodies and the "material duel," which echoed the beer-drinking contest of *Bierjunge*. The same Council that banned the "beer duel" also decided to remove most of the "profane" melodies that were used in Schlaraffian songbook (consisting of 300 "canonical" songs) and replace them with original compositions. This applied to the students' musical heritage, too. The reform of the musical canon was finished in 1933 with the publication of a revised edition of *Derer Schlaraffen Lieder*. The new edition helped to present Schlaraffia as an autonomous "sacred" space for socialization, aloof from the quarrels of the world at large.

24 1921 census records, in: SOkA Opava, Okresní úřad Opava I [District Office Opava I], and SOkA, Bruntál, se sídlem v Krnově [State District Archives Bruntál Headquartered in Krnov], Okresní úřad Krnov [District Office Krnov].

25 MARTIN KRSEK: Za cinkotu číší a rolniček: Alkohol jako inspirační zdroj recesistického světa Schlaraffie [To the Jingle of Cups and Bells: Alcohol as an Inspiration for Schlaraffia's Pranking World], in: Němci v českých zemích: Zprávy Společnosti pro dějiny Němců v Čechách 7 (2013), pp. 117–124.

26 Offizielles Protokoll der Verhandlungen des IV. allschlaraffischen Konzils abgehalten zu Dresdensia vom 27. bis 29. Lenzmondes 1593, in: DSZ, 1893-04-01, 166, p. 1100; ULRICH VON HUTTEN [LUDWIG SIMON]: Schlaraffen-Ceremoniale nach den ältesten Urkunden, Prag [ca. 1877], p. 20. Cf. also the oldest preserved Schlaraffen-Spiegel, in: Allschlaraffisches Archiv, Bern, "Praga"-Archiv, no. 4, 13.

27 DSZ, 1929-12-01, p. 1500.



Fig. 4: An ideal Schlaraffian wife (*Burgfrau*) according to Egon Lehnert from Schlaraffia Oppavia (Opava/Troppau) (State District Archive Opava)

Also, in 1924, an antisemitic alternative to Schlaraffia had been founded in Vienna; it attempted to concentrate the *Alte Herren* of the nationalist student associations and gymnastic clubs (*Turnvereine*) as well as other politically radical groupings. As German nationalists became radicalized in the postwar period, they increasingly rejected engagement in the “*verjudete*” Schlaraffia (in

which even a part of its leadership was Jewish). Despite some personal overlaps between the *Burschenschaften* and Schlaraffia, this seems rather a dead-end in the attempts to contextualize and interpret the Allscharaffian Union.<sup>28</sup>

It is also worth emphasizing the differences between the Schlaraffia and other male associations. Schlaraffian rituals and ceremonies were always performed before a backdrop of humorous satire. The importance of the differences between men and women was deliberately exaggerated *ad absurdum* and justified pseudo-scientifically; members' wives played along with these jokes, publishing humorous articles in the association magazine on the *Schlaraffia feminina* that comically inverted gender roles. By satirizing the utopian women's Schlaraffia, they contributed to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and prescribed social roles. These contributions mostly entertained the membership at the *Burgfrauenabende*, important events in the Schlaraffian calendar. In addition to these evenings for the participation of female relatives (wives and daughters), members families might have met during Christmas celebrations, informal summer meetings, and joint trips and tours. Although the members' wives and other women were excluded from ceremonial acts, they maintained close ties with the association—sometimes even as widows.<sup>29</sup>

### The Schlaraffia as a Humorous Association

The history of the "merry societies" dates to antiquity. Since the sixteenth century, we are well-informed about a number of such associations devoted to satirizing contemporary social conditions. These include, for example, the Polish aristocratic Babin Republic (*Rzeczpospolita Babińska*) of the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods, the French *Régiment de la Calotte* from the era of Louis XIV, or the spoofing *Scriblerus Club* (also *Scribblers' Club*) founded in England in the 1730s.<sup>30</sup> The Wetzlar Knights' Table (*Wetzlarer Rittertafel*), made famous by Goethe's mentioning it in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*,<sup>31</sup> imitated—just as the later Prague Schlaraffians did—the world of knightly courtly culture. Alongside the excessive consumption of food and drink, its activities mostly consisted of entertainment conducted in accordance with prescribed ceremonial forms. As later in Schlaraffia, even the most absurd rules had to be observed with utter seriousness, and members of the society adopted invented "knightly" names. Schlaraffia also displays commonalities with the later *Rit-*

28 Recent Schlaraffian historiography seems to accentuate the heritage of students' organizations in the Schlaraffia. RT. KUNI-FECHS: Schlaraffia und das studentische Brauchtum, in: Chronik des Verbandes Allscharaffia, Band IV, pp. 118–124.

29 During World War I, the association set up a support fund for widows, orphans, and soldiers disabled in the war.

30 See: KARL FRIEDRICH FLÖGEL, FRIEDRICH WILHELM EBELING: Floegels Geschichte des Grotesk-komischen, Leipzig 1886.

31 JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE: Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit. Illustrierte und kommentierte Ausgabe, Leipzig 1903, pp. 373–375.

*terschaften* that were, however, dedicated to a more serious, late-romantic chivalric game.<sup>32</sup> Thanks to its unified rules and centralized structure, Schlaraffia became by far the most popular of all the “merry societies,” and in turn inspired many similar groups in different national milieus, including, among others, the Czech *Kosové* [Blackbirds] and the Croat *Kvak* club.<sup>33</sup>

A comparison of the Schlaraffia with other “fun” societies reveals that its ceremonies were not very original. The Schlaraffia was perhaps most like Vienna’s *Grüne Insel*, which was established only four years earlier, likewise within artistic circles. Founded by the actor and poet Friedrich Kaiser, the *Grüne Insel* was intended as a kind of successor organization to the *Biedermeier Ludlamshöhle*, which was banned in 1826. The *Grüne Insel* also adopted pseudo-chivalric hierarchical structures and bestowed knight-like names upon its members, who met in a “castle.” Their humorous discourse was dominated by puns and “higher nonsense”; they incorporated quasi-medieval German and celebrated the anniversaries of “heroes” of German culture. In fact, several members of the Schlaraffia were also members of it (Conrad Adolf Hallenstein, Eduard Kremser). Just like the Schlaraffia, the *Grüne Insel* had branches in other cities, but unlike the Schlaraffia, it did not seek to institutionalize their connection to the Viennese “headquarters.” *Grüne Insel* also remained a table society without becoming legally incorporated for much longer than the Schlaraffia.<sup>34</sup>

Humor played an inimitable role in the Schlaraffia. It figured among the three main goals of the association and, at least from the outside, gave the movement its characteristic image. The purpose of this humor went far beyond pure entertainment in the sense of carnival merriment. The seemingly self-serving parodic ceremony gave Schlaraffian proceedings an attractive aura of mystery that played both a distinctive and cohesive role. By requiring a certain degree of initiation, it appeared elitist on the outside but egalitarian on the inside.<sup>35</sup> It defined membership against “ignorant” non-members and, at the same time, formed a mutual bond of trust between the informed. Similarly, humor as

32 See, for instance: ALFRED LIEDE: *Dichtung als Spiel: Studien zur Unsinnspoese an den Grenzen der Sprache*, Berlin—New York 1992, p. 285.

33 NADA BEZIĆ: *The Zagreb Kvak Club and Music—With Special Emphasis on the Period from Its Foundation in 1879 to 1907*, in: *Arti Musices* 43 (2012), 1, pp. 3–44; PAVEL KOBETIČ: *Chrudimský humor (II.): Stolní společnost Kosů chrudimských [Humor in Chrudim (II): The “Kosové” Society in Chrudim]*, Chrudim 2017.

34 *Fünfzig Jahre “Grüne Insel”: 15. Februar 1855 – 15. Februar 1905*, Wien 1905; FLÖGEL/EBELING, pp. 360, 367.

35 STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN: *Unter Männern: Freundschaft und Logengeselligkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: MANFRED HETTLING, STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN (eds.): *Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel: Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 2000, pp. 193–216; MARCUS B. PATKA: *“Wohltätigkeit—Brüderlichkeit—Eintracht”: Die israelitischen Humanitätsvereine B’nai B’rith für Österreich (1889–1938)*, in: EVELYN ADUNKA, GERALD LAMPRECHT et al. (eds.): *Jüdisches Vereinswesen in Österreich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Innsbruck—Wien 2011, pp. 91–108, here p. 92.

an important form of social communication fulfilled both an inclusive and exclusive function in the Schlaraffia. Shared humor, conditioned by a certain level of education and knowledge, strengthened the sense of belonging, while an inability to understand allusions, intertextual borrowings, parodies, travesties, and pastiches could exclude one from the socially select community of the Schlaraffia.<sup>36</sup> It was for this reason that the Schlaraffia devoted considerable attention to formulating the meaning of humor within the movement during its transformation in the early 1890s. The association's leadership in Prague even sent a confidential letter to the leading dignitaries of all the branches in which they outlined an authoritative interpretation of Schlaraffian humor. Dated 1 October 1893, it does not define humor in stylistic terms but rather socially, calling humor "the highest form of comedy" and distinguishing it from the "mere jest [Spaß] of the lowest social classes."<sup>37</sup> It was no coincidence that this move to more sharply demarcate the Schlaraffia's position came at a time when the bourgeoisie as a whole felt increasingly threatened in its hegemonic claims by the social rise of the lower middle class (*neuer Mittelstand, Kleinbürgertum*).<sup>38</sup>

It is clear that Schlaraffia was not "merely" a prankster or humorous association by the end of the 1880s at the latest; it was instead an association that set itself more profound goals, such as mutual cultivation and self-enhancement of its members and the cultivation of the ideals of humanity. Humor, like art more generally, was seen as one of the means to achieve these higher goals, not as an end in itself. In fact, the Schlaraffia subsequently devoted a great deal of energy to correcting the prevailing public image which associated it with the organization of carnival parties. It published educational texts and sought to distance itself from such associations in every possible way. The Schlaraffian chapters in western Germany even rejected the Phrygian jester's cap as part of their costume, which was considered a symbol of carnival associations in the region, and obtained an exception to use the "Renaissance" beret. Humor remained part of the "intimate" sphere of Schlaraffian friendship, but the Schlaraffia rarely presented itself outwardly in such terms. Some local organizations continued to throw thematic carnival parties or (parodic) benefit performances, but the association as a whole focused mostly on its internal life.

36 On the sociologies of humor, see especially the work by Giseline Kuipers. GISELINDE KUIPERS: *The Sociology of Humor*, in: VICTOR RASKIN (ed.): *The Primer of Humor Research*, Berlin—New York 2008, pp. 361–398; GISELINDE KUIPERS: *Humour Styles and Symbolic Boundaries*, in: *Journal of Literary Theory* 3 (2009), 2, pp. 219–239; SAM FRIEDMAN, GISELINDE KUIPERS: *The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries*, in: *Cultural Sociology* 7 (2013), 2, pp. 179–195; GISELINDE KUIPERS: *Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*, Berlin—Boston 2015.

37 Confidential Letter of the Allmother Praga to all "Oberschlaraffen" and "Chancellors" from 1893-10-01, in: SOkA Opava, Schlaraffia Opava, box 8, inv. no. 57, ref. no. 21.

38 BUDDE, pp. 103–107; JÜRGEN KOCKA: *Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte 1850–1980: Von Privatbeamten zum angestellten Arbeitnehmer*, Göttingen 1981.

## The Schlaraffia as a Social Network

The Schlaraffia gains in significance when viewed in connection with the (trans)nationalism debates<sup>39</sup> in Central Europe, for it represents a still rarely explored network of nationally and confessionally tolerant German-speaking bourgeois elites. Understanding its history can contribute to a revisionist view of Central European history, one that emphasizes state-building and culturally unifying elements instead of the previously dominant separate national narratives.<sup>40</sup> Research on Schlaraffia thus sheds new light on the specific multi-national and multi-confessional space of Central Europe during this period. Although the influence of nationalism and later National Socialism did eventually cause some friction and divisions between the association's individual chapters, the Allschlaraffia Union's board in Prague maintained the tolerant liberal ethos of the early Schlaraffia.

As Eduard Schmidt-Weissenfels, one of Schlaraffia's founders, wrote in 1890, the uniqueness of the Schlaraffia phenomenon lay solely in its branched and at the same time centralized organization.<sup>41</sup> Although the structure of the Allschlaraffia Union may initially seem to bear some resemblance to the Masonic world chain, there were significant differences. The Allschlaraffia Union had a single undisputed global center in Prague and, rather than a metaphorical mesh or grid, it resembled a spider's web, branching out radially from the center to the sides.<sup>42</sup> Since the mid-1860s, when the first branch in Berlin was established and declared itself a daughter chapter of the Prague Schlaraffia, the

39 PHILIPP THER: Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Networks, in: HEINZ-GERHARD HAUPT, JÜRGEN KOCKA (eds.): Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives, New York—Oxford 2009, pp. 204–225, emphasizes the cultural dimension and network character of transnational research in Europe, and also challenges various portrayals of Central Europe in the scholarship, calling instead for a *histoire croisée* that could also be fruitful for the research of Schlaraffia-like associations in different national milieus. On the transnational perspective of associations, see: STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN: Democracy and Associations in the Long Nineteenth Century: Toward a Transnational Perspective, in: The Journal of Modern History 75 (2003), pp. 269–299. On Prague, where Schlaraffia was established, see: GARY COHEN: The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague 1861–1914, Princeton, NJ 1981; INES KOELTZSCH: Geteilte Kulturen: Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag (1918–1938), München 2012.

40 See, for instance: PIETER M. JUDSON: The Habsburg Empire: A New History, Cambridge, MA—London 2016; PIETER M. JUDSON: Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria, Cambridge, MA—London 2006; TARA ZAHRA: Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900–1948, Ithaca 2008.

41 EDUARD SCHMIDT-WEISSENFELS: Schlaraffengesellschaft, in: Die Gartenlaube (1890), 27, p. 852.

42 KLAUS BEYRER, MICHAEL ANDRITZKY: Das Netz: Sinn und Sinnlichkeit vernetzter Systeme. Publikation anlässlich der Ausstellung “Das Netz. Sinn und Sinnlichkeit vernetzter Systeme” im Museum für Kommunikation Frankfurt (28. Februar bis 1. September 2002), Heidelberg 2002.

association has maintained this pseudo-genealogical structure. As among the Masons, a new chapter could only be founded by an existing group that assumed the role of mother chapter. If the mother chapter established multiple branches, these were regarded as "sisters." This system created a "multigenerational" structure within which closely related chapters maintained more intensive correspondence and personal contacts with each other than with other more distantly related chapters. At the same time, it ensured the "education" of new additions in the same spirit, and thus the cohesion of the global union.

Despite critics' suggestions to the contrary, the Schlaraffian organization was not secret. Only the content of the meetings was considered secret. In fact, the association was practically obsessed with sharing information about the mobility of its members both horizontally (geographically) and vertically (within the internal Schlaraffian hierarchy). It invested considerable resources in printed media meant to link geographically diverse local branches. From 1881 to the 1937/38 season, it published an annual *Stammrolle* that listed all members around the world with a wealth of information intended to facilitate communication between individuals and entire branches. This extensive collection of more than 50 volumes provides unique insight into the inner workings of the union; furthermore, as a continuous series of publications with a uniform structure, it offers relatively unexplored possibilities for examining the mobility of the Central European bourgeoisie.

The last volume published before the secession of the German branches ran to almost 600 pages, but the structure of the *Stammrolle* make them easy to search. Each volume contains two indexes, one with "secular" and one with Schlaraffian "knightly" names. The bulk of the content consists of membership lists for each individual chapter, arranged and numbered chronologically according to the date of their establishment—from "1. Praga" (Prague) to "303. Baltimora" (Baltimore). In addition to "civil" and "knightly" names, each member's entry includes his Schlaraffian ranks and honorary titles, as well as his professional occupation or social position (*Charakter*) and home address. In addition, the volume provides information about where and when each chapter regularly met.

Between individual editions of the *Stammrolle*, the association also issued the newsletter *Der Schlaraffia Zeyttungen*, which listed the admission of adepts and members' promotions, awards, elections to positions, moves, deaths, and sometimes even announcements of engagements, marriages, or the birth of a child. After the Dresden Council (1893), the names of applicants for membership were also published in the union's magazine. As a result, we know not only the names of the complete membership base, but also those who were interested but were not, for whatever reason, ever admitted.



The network character of the Schlaraffia sought to facilitate smooth transitions of members between individual chapters. Members were encouraged to attend meetings of local "Schlaraffian friends" whenever travelling for work or leisure. Before their departure, their mother chapter issued them a "passport" for this purpose on a form provided by the Prague union leadership. The passport was valid for one year, but could be extended repeatedly. This meant that members could maintain contact with the Schlaraffia even when away from home. The network character was also supported by the institute of "traveling knights" (*fahrende Ritter*). A member who moved could remain a member of his parent chapter, but if he moved to a city where the Schlaraffia was active, he was obliged to transfer his membership to that chapter within a year. The local Schlaraffia organization was required to accept such an applicant and uphold his previously acquired status:

"Every member of any chapter has the right, without balloting, free of charge, and with preservation of his status, to enter and be matriculated in another chapter, into whose domain he has demonstrably transferred his permanent residence."<sup>43</sup>

The specifics of the Schlaraffia's organizational structure fostered its success among highly mobile professional groups: artists, civil servants, and members of the military. Especially in multi-national and multi-confessional Austria, the Schlaraffia provided a common cultural and social denominator that facilitated socialization across very different milieus. For example: In 1887, there were very few members of the imperial and royal Austro-Hungarian military in the association (the 36 individuals with military backgrounds made up barely 1 percent of the membership), but the civilized and serious Schlaraffia of the *fin de siècle* was increasingly attractive to them.<sup>44</sup> By the census of 1912/13, the Allschlaraffia had registered 1,010 military members, which means that every seventh Schlaraffian worked for the army. Even more interestingly, of these members with a military background, only 65 were in Germany, while a full 945 were in service to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, meaning that every third Schlaraffian there was member of the imperial and royal army. There were 10 chapters in Austria-Hungary that were more than 50 percent military<sup>45</sup> in 1912/13, and Pietas Iulia (Pula/Pola, the main Austrian-Hungarian military port) was almost entirely (96 percent) composed of army personnel.<sup>46</sup> The Schlaraffia's members included officers with ranks of general, like, for example, Major General Maximilian von Hoen, who was not only the head of the propaganda *Kriegspressequartier* during World War I, but also the president of the Schlaraffia Vindobona chapter.

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43 Schlaraffen-Spiegel und Ceremoniale a. U. 55, Prag [1914], p. 8.

44 MAASS, p. 26.

45 Pula/Pola, Sanok, Kraków/Krakau, Korneuburg, Goriza/Görz, Maribor/Marburg and der Drau, Osijek/Esseg, Pressburg (later Bratislava), Trento/Trient, and Sibiu/Hermannstadt.

46 DSZ, 1913-12-01, 418, p. 4639.



Fig. 6: The Schlaraffia Porta Moraviae in Hranice/Mährisch-Weißkirchen, at the time the location of a well-known military academy, was one of the numerous Austro-Hungarian chapters with a high percentage of military personnel (State District Archive Přerov)

Although Schlaraffias all over the world observed the same rules and ceremonies, the significance of the association in the social practice of individual countries varied. In the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, membership in the Schlaraffia was not only a permissible leisure activity but was a quite typical social outlet for those in the officer corps. The Schlaraffia provided a welcome means of socialization for elites in cities mostly inhabited by people of a different nationality, language, and culture. Not even the ballot for admission to the Schlaraffia was generally an obstacle, though a negative vote for a member of the military personnel could be perceived as an insult to his honor.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, news spread that the Austro-Hungarian army headquarters intend to ban the military personnel from Schlaraffia,<sup>48</sup> but eventually the situation calmed and only a few isolated individuals were ever forced to leave.<sup>49</sup> After the collapse of the monarchy, the “national” armies almost completely stopped relying on the Schlaraffia for this purpose, and by 1930

47 On the concept of male honor in relation to the duel, see: UTE FREVERT: *Ehrenmänner: Das Duell in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, München 1991.

48 SOKA Opava, Schlaraffia Opava, box 10, inv. no. 62, ref. no. 223/1898-1899; *ibid.*, box 11, inv. no. 63, ref. no. 42/1900-1901.

49 See, for instance, the example of Alfred Bayer (Komotavia; Chomutov/Komotau): *Matrka členů [Registry of Members]*, in: SOKA Chomutov se sídlem v Kadani [State District Archives Chomutov in Kadaň], Schlaraffia Chomutov (unordered fonds), fol. 12v.

only one in twenty Schlaraffian members was associated with the military—a percentage that was even then rapidly dwindling, for 85 percent of those were retired officers.<sup>50</sup>

### Schlaraffia as a Lodge

While Schlaraffia's self-concept has been based for a century on mantras emphasizing the differences between the union and Freemasonry, this argument took on new urgency due to historical developments and the purposeful association of the Schlaraffia with Freemasonry by conservative Catholic clerics, German nationalists, and National Socialists. In 1935, the reformed Inquisition Office of the Roman Catholic Church—the Holy Office—issued a decree that included the sentence "Societas 'Schlaraffia' a catholicis non est frequentanda." The chairman of the union, Karl Walko, concluded that the Vatican suspected the Schlaraffia of being a Masonic organization and drafted a memorandum in response; it was to be translated into Italian and submitted to Pope Pius XI (who granted Walko an audience according to Schlaraffian documents).<sup>51</sup> In the first version of the memorandum, Walko stated that none of the leading representatives of Schlaraffia were Freemasons. As members of the Vindobona chapter tactfully pointed out in their letter, however, this claim was untrue: No fewer than three of the eight members of the union's leadership (Eduard Kleinschnitz, Robert Zilchert, and Ignaz Himpan) were Freemasons. The chancellor of the Allschlaraffia Union Eduard Kleinschnitz even served as the chairman of one of the Prague Masonic lodges (*Freilicht zur Eintracht*),<sup>52</sup> and there were similar ties in other cities. The membership also frequently overlapped with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) and the Jewish lodges of B'nai B'rith were frequent. For example, in Moravian Ostrava (Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch-Ostrau), the chairman of the local Schlaraffia Ostravia, Rudolf Reiss, was simultaneously the head of the local B'nai B'rith lodge Ostravia, and his brother Josef was a member of all three—the Freemasons, B'nai B'rith, and Schlaraffia.<sup>53</sup>

50 DSZ, 1913-12-01, 418, p. 4639; DSZ, 1932-02-01, 657, p. 2142; EIDAM, pp. 4384–4386.

51 Karl Walko: Gedächtnisprotokoll der Verhandlungen mit dem Sanctuum Officium in Rom 21.–23. X. 1935, p. 7, in: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, I. HA Rep. 227 Schlaraffia (Depositum), no. 181. Walko wrote that the audience took place on 24 October 1935.

52 Spolkový katastr [Association Cadastre], in: Archiv hlavního města Prahy (AHMP) [Archive of the Capital City of Prague], sign. IX/0443; AHMP, Německý spolek Schlaraffia v Praze [The German Association Schlaraffia in Prague], inv. no. 10.

53 Pavel Reisz: Some Recollections of Life in Ostrava 1922 to 1937, in: Židovské muzeum v Praze [Jewish Museum in Prague], inv. nr. SHOAH/PERS/Ostrava/Rice\_Paul/003; B'nai B'rith: Monatsblätter der Großloge für den Čechoslowakischen Staat (1937), 2, p. 62; Allschlaraffische Stammrolle a. U. 78/79, Prag 1937, p. 177.

Even before external forces sought to discredit the Schlaraffia by suggesting it was akin to Freemasonry, such associations were quite common among its own members. The Styrian poet Peter Rosegger (a member of the association's chapter in Graz) wrote in 1889: "If we called it [the Schlaraffia] a Masonic order carried to the point of the bizarre, we would be right."<sup>54</sup> A theatre almanac from 1884 by a journalist from Brno/Brünn includes a very poignant remark on the similarity of Schlaraffia and Freemasonry. The author labelled the Schlaraffia a "humorist sect" (*Humorsecte*) and called them *Frohmaurer*, a clear allusion to the German *Freimaurer*.<sup>55</sup> A certain similarity to the Schlaraffia was also noted by authors from among the ranks of those "lodge" organizations.<sup>56</sup>

On the one hand, the Schlaraffia could rightly object that they were not secret societies. On the other hand, if what distinguishes a lodge is its creation of a community that is to varying degrees distinct from society, its selection and acceptance of members based on certain criteria, and a subsequent expectation that those members should be bound by secrecy regarding internal association matters, then the Schlaraffia seemingly fulfils the definition of the term. Moreover, academic research has revealed what the Schlaraffian scholars were happy to marginalize in their partisan historiographical accounts.<sup>57</sup> The Schlaraffia did in fact consciously adopt the features of a lodge.

The transformation of the Schlaraffia from its origins as a drinking table society of artists into a solid union of bourgeois elites took place at the turn of the 1890s. A certain "serious ambition" of Schlaraffia was already noted by the Polish anthropologist Marcin Bojda in his pioneering study.<sup>58</sup> Maaß even correctly attributes the shift in the character of Schlaraffian sociability to the movement's expansion, which forced the formalization of some procedures and rules, and to the overshadowing of the previously dominant artistic professions by members of the upper bourgeois classes.<sup>59</sup> Recent detailed research of the Schlaraffian discourse refines his intuitively formulated theses. Leading up to the Third All-Schlaraffian Council in Munich in 1888, a wing had consolidated within the Schlaraffia that one of the movement's founders described as repre-

54 PETER ROSEGGGER: Das Reich des Uhu: Eine Randglosse zur Culturgeschichte unserer Tage, in: *Heimgarten: Eine Monatschrift* 14 (1889), 2, pp. 134–139.

55 Von unserem Theater für unser Theater: Decamerone der Brünnner Schauspieler, Brünn 1884, p. 60.

56 BR. FREIMAURER: Was sind die Freimaurer und was wollen sie?, Lissa i. P. 1905, p. 94; THEODOR ROHLEDER: Kulturaufgaben der Freimaurerei und deren Vernachlässigung, s. l. 1905, p. 28.

57 Chronik des Verbandes Allschlaraffia, Band I–IV; KARL WALKO: Schlaraffia, Prag 1936.

58 MARCIN BOJDA: Parodic Ceremonial—Serious Ambitions? The Meaning(s) of the "Schlaraffia" Society, in: MAGDALÉNA NOVÁ, MARIE OPATRŇÁ (eds.): *Obsah—Forma: Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní konference studentů doktorských programů*, Praha 2017, pp. 247–254.

59 MAASS, p. 25.

sending the "serious trend."<sup>60</sup> The adherents of this wing favored an internal restructuring of the association to distinguish the Schlaraffia from associations devoted purely to entertainment, pranking, or carnival celebrations. The means of the required transformation was to become a civilization of manners in the sense of the bourgeois canon of social behavior. This "civilization" gave the cheerful and often even frolic society a more serious appearance.

Before the Munich Council, the president of the Schlaraffia in Bern and editor of the *Berner Tagblatt*, Paul von Bingo, reflected on the movement's ideological foundations, character, and perspectives.<sup>61</sup> Evidently, he thereby articulated the views of a wider circle of members, because his thoughts were given considerable space in the All-Schlaraffia magazine. Von Bingo stated that the Schlaraffia saw itself as a "brotherhood" (*Bruderbund*), the aim of which was the (self-)enhancement of the individual through the cultivation of friendship, art, and humor. Unlike in Freemasonry, however, the Schlaraffia chapters were not lodges, since they did not declare any serious field of activity, such as the broadly conceived humanism of the Freemasons. Such a focus, von Bingo continued, was ultimately incompatible with Schlaraffia's cheerful character. He saw the similarity with Freemasonry only in the final purpose, which was "true brotherly love" (*echte Bruderliebe*).<sup>62</sup> He did, however, demand substantial changes for the future, including a unified symbolism and internal regulations that would not exactly transform the movement into a "lodge" (*logengemäße*) but rather into a "lodge-like" (*logenähnliche*) organization.<sup>63</sup>

Notably, von Bingo used the same term here as the Nazis many years later when they compared the Schlaraffia with Freemasonry. At the end of the nineteenth century, the association did not resist the idea of similarity with the lodges, but rather wanted to become more like them. The bourgeois elites entered the dissolute Schlaraffia, but over time they broke off the thorns and adapted the movement to their own image, to give it a deeper meaning. This was nothing other than "Masonic" humanism. Although it did not find its way into the first paragraphs of the *Schlaraffen-Spiegel*, it did infiltrate the rhetoric of the Schlaraffian leaders through the back door, and it already represented its standard figure and cornerstone in the 1930s. From the end of the 1880s, the chapters increasingly became a kind of more relaxed alternative to serious Masonic lodges. Incidentally, one of the reasons for the unprecedented response to the Schlaraffian idea in Austria could also be the fact that Freemasonry was outlawed there, in contrast to both Germany and Transleithania.<sup>64</sup>

60 DSZ, 1893-04-01, 166, p. 1110.

61 RT BOMBASTICUS DER GROSSE [PAUL VON BINGO]: Gedankenbalken zum Concil 1588, in: DSZ, 1887-03-24, 101, p. 568.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 MAASS, p. 26.



Fig. 7: Interior of “Castle Schellenburg,” the premises of Schlaraffia Oppavia (Opava/Troppau). Like other Schlaraffian castles, it was laden with symbolic and ceremonial objects, ca. 1900 (State District Archive Opava)

It should be further emphasized that the reforms along the lines of “lodge” organizations would have been even greater if the association leadership had not intervened against the further restructuring of the union before the Dresden Council (1893). In its commentary on their draft of the council proceedings, the leaders justified the rejection of the amendments

“which aim at remodeling the unique Schlaraffian character along the lines of some secular social institutions, thereby dragging the fresh, cheerful spiritual essence of the Schlaraffia into the sphere of mysticism and restricting the free development of our second basic principle—humor.”<sup>65</sup>

The “seriousness” of the Schlaraffia in the late 1880s was nevertheless so striking that it shook the very foundations of the movement. There was even a questioning of the name Schlaraffia, which evoked rather the unbridled pranking from the beginnings of the movement and was no longer suitable for a civilized union of bourgeois elites. In January 1888, several Schlaraffian chapters met in Leipzig as part of the preparatory talks before the Third Council, at which the issue of renaming the association was seriously discussed. There were suggestions mooted such as *Artushof* [Arthur’s Court] or a name derived from the ancient Greek *glaux* (γλαῦξ), after the eagle-owl as the central symbol of the

65 SOKA Opava, Schlaraffia Opava, box 8, inv. no. 59, ref. no. 100/1892-93.

Schlaraffia and at the same time the owl accompanying the goddess Athena, sometimes depicted with owl features as Athena Glaukopis.<sup>66</sup> Although the name Schlaraffia did not fit the redefined focus of the association, it was not possible to replace it as a well-known brand, and—as far as we know—no one tried to do so again.

## Summary

Originally a drinking and pranking society, the Schlaraffia evolved into a respectable men's club in the late 1880s and early 1890s. It underwent a complex process of "civilization" and "seriousness." The transformation from the original playful drinking *Bier- und Weingesellschaft*<sup>67</sup> into an exclusive community also explains the certain discrepancy between the external, comic image of Schlaraffia and the soulful entertainment in the spirit of universal humanity that it promoted. Although it resisted mixing with the lodges to escape persecution from nationalist, National Socialist, and conservative clerical circles, it was in reality recruited partly from the same classes and bore a number of common features. If we are to characterize the Schlaraffia in general, we can describe them as male friendly associations of local elites, which were internally built following the model of "lodge" associations at the latest from the end of the 1880s.

The Schlaraffia pursued similar goals to these lodge organizations: the cultivation of humanity, tolerance, friendship (brotherhood), and the mutual cultivation and self-enhancement of its members. However, it differed in the means by which it intended to achieve these goals. Instead of mysterious rituals, it relied on cheerful ceremony; instead of promoting serious educational lectures and public charity, it sought to cultivate the spirit and social amiability through art and humor. This mixture of the serious and the frivolous gave the Schlaraffia its unique character. The Allschlaraffia Union thus represented an attractive recreational, communication, and socialization tool of the German-speaking bourgeoisie until the 1930s, when multi-national, multi-confessional Central and East Central Europe began collapsing under the onslaught of Nazism.

As the writer Max Brod pointed out, Schlaraffia's pseudo-historical chivalric character lent its practices a rather old-fashioned air,<sup>68</sup> which is why it attracted men with fairly conservative cultural preferences. Some critics of bourgeois "philistinism" mocked the movement: In 1912, Karl Kraus called the Schlaraffia in *Die Fackel* "the bond uniting all the banalities of the world."<sup>69</sup>

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66 DSZ, 1888-02-14, 109, pp. 630–631.

67 This is how one of its chroniclers, more than 50 years afterwards, described the early Schlaraffia, see: RT BOMBAST.

68 MAX BROD: *Život plný bojů* [A Life Full of Struggle], Praha 1994, p. 163.

69 KARL KRAUS: Ritter Sonett und Ritter Tonreich, in: *Die Fackel*, 1912-02-29, 343/344, p. 7.

The esotericist Rudolf Steiner, who once happened to visit a Schlaraffian session, wrote to his future wife, Marie von Sivers: “It was a sacrifice. [...] Listening to speeches delivered in the peculiar Schlaraffian dialect caused me pain.”<sup>70</sup> But tens of thousands of middle-class men disagreed. They found in the Schlaraffia a friendly harbor where they could, amid attractive surroundings, forget their everyday stress and routines and devote themselves to witty entertainment and the cultivation of homosocial bonds.

It would be an overreach to formulate conclusions about a specific Central European identity based on the Schlaraffia case, which itself varied widely depending on chapter locations. It does represent, however, an alternative bourgeois network in the age of nationalism(s) that was not subject to a radical national shift. It incorporated men of different political, confessional, and sometimes even national backgrounds, as long as they were willing to look up to the German cultural heritage and simultaneously acknowledge the same right for other national and language groups.

As one of the chapters stated in 1933, faced with the growing front of Nazism, Allschlaraffia was to be seen “as a creation of German culture, in which, however, cultural goods are cultivated with due respect to the achievements of other nations in the fields of art and science.” Although the leadership—not wanting to get bogged down in political issues—never officially sanctioned the laconic statement that “Schlaraffia was not a political association,”<sup>71</sup> its informal statements were in accordance with this point of view.

Many local Schlaraffian leaders were political persons—mostly engaged in self-governing bodies—but they regarded the Schlaraffia as an apolitical niche. When Nazism began to prevail among Germans, members were either forced to leave the association, or to decide collectively to sever ties between their local chapter and the liberal Prague headquarters: this happened throughout Germany in 1933, in most of the Austrian chapters in 1937, and in two thirds of Czechoslovak local organizations in the spring of 1938. The remaining chapters and the union’s leadership stuck to its democratic principles, though, until the bitter end.

This study is only an introduction to broader research of the Schlaraffia associations, including their own artistic (musical, literary, fine arts) production and rich material culture. While these aspects may interest a rather limited group of experts, the overview of Schlaraffia’s national, confessional, social, and ideological profile sketched above could help integrate it into the transnational and revisionist debates on the history of Austria-Hungary and Central Europe, as well as refine our image of the specific Central European cultural space prior to 1939, and even more so before 1918.

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70 RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER-VON SIVERS: Briefwechsel und Dokumente 1901–1925: Herausgegeben zum 100. Geburtstag von Marie Steiner am 14. März 1967, Dornach/Schweiz 1967, pp. 24, 28–29.

71 XII. Concil zu Maria Aquensis Herbstmond a. U. 74, in: DSZ, 1933-10-01, 675, p. 2463.

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