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MIDWIVES IN DORPAT (YURYEV) UNIVERSITY (1802–1918)

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ABSTRACT

Women were not officially accepted as students in the University of Tartu (Dorpat) until 1915. However, there were certain occupations that were either reserved for women, or women could also obtain the qualification after taking obligatory examinations to be able to work in the field. One of these occupations was midwifery, which was reserved only for women. The author explores the requirements for becoming a midwife in Baltic Provinces in the Russian Empire and introduces women who filled these posts and became midwives throughout the 19th century. It widens the understanding of working among married and unmarried women.

Keywords: Baltic Germans, gender history, midwifery, University of Tartu.

INTRODUCTION

University of Tartu (aka Dorpat or Yuryev) did not accept women as official students until World War I, 1915 (Tamul 1999, 112). During a few years, after the 1905 revolution in the Russian Empire, women could also attend lectures in the university of Dorpat as the so-called free listeners, without equal rights to male students – they were not permitted to pass the examinations and acquire a degree in the end.

Even though women were not accepted as students, there were certain occupations that were either reserved for women, or women could also obtain a qualification, and during the 19th century they were obliged to take examinations to be able to work in the field. It also meant that women had to follow through courses, not just take examinations as in the beginning.

The occupations that required successfully passed university examinations included midwives, governesses and dentists. From 1888, women could also become assistant pharmacists and pharmacists (Leppik 2006b, 34–52).

This article is based on the research and findings in the framework of the project "Women at the University of Tartu before 1919" (KUM-TA31), which is funded by the Estonian Ministry of Culture. The aim of the project was to establish how many women took different courses and examinations to obtain a certification for a certain job, who were these women and what was their social background. This article concentrates on midwives, who were the earliest and the most numerous group among women acquiring university certifications before 1919. The author considers their social background, expanding the concept of female employment sphere during the 19th century regarding women, who mostly belonged to the urban craftsmen's class. The study suggests that more married women had an occupation outside home than previously thought.

Prosopographical data analysis based on data sets created during the project was used in compiling the paper. Data and conclusions are based on the collection of Imperial University of Tartu, Fund 402, Imperial University of Tartu Students' Personal files kept in the National Archives of Estonia. Even though the aspiring midwives during the years in question, 1802–1918, were not officially students, their folders were stored together with the official students' folders. All the folders have not been preserved. On the basis of the official university's statistics, compiled in 1902, in celebration of hundred years from (re)opening the university, 1373 midwives had graduated by 1901 (Statisticheskie tablicy, 1902, 15–19). One of the project's aims is to check the official statistics against the personal files. Since the women who did not pass their examination, also had a personal file, there is an opportunity to shed light on them, as well as explore the reasons why they did not pass the examinations. So far, 438 women have been categorized and studied more thoroughly. They mostly belong to the register number two, which is compiled of older sources, starting from 1802. Therefore, representation in the data is inclined towards the women, who aspired to become midwives in the first half of the 19th century. Conclusions are derived from the database built up on the personal data found in the documents of women. Since this is an ongoing project and register number one, which mostly contains the data from the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century up to 1918 will be added, the results and conclusions provided in this paper are preliminary. The database of midwives is not public during the ongoing project, but will be accessible later with other databases created during the project No. KUM-TA31 through University of Tartu Library data repository.

Natalya Mitsyuk, Natalya Pushkareva, and Veronika Ostapenko have studied midwifery in Russian province Smolensk (Mitsyuk, Pushkareva,

Ostapenko 2017, 359–373), Anna Kuxhausen has written about the beginning of state's interest in regulating midwifery in her book *From the Womb to the Body Politic. Raising the Nation in Enlightenment Russia* (Kuxhausen 2013).

Development of education for midwives in the territory of today's Estonia is studied by Viktor Kalnin in the 1960s (Kalnin 1968, 46–53) and Väino Sirk in the 1980s (Sirk 1983, 33–36, 81, 82, 130–133, 225, 229) as a part of all vocational education's development. Lea Leppik has mentioned midwives as one of many people, who belonged to the university of Dorpat but were not students (Leppik 2011). Viktor Kalnin has written several times about Johann Friedrich Deutsch, who established the first Birthing Clinic (Kalnin 1996). Inna Jürjo has described the local midwives during the Middle Ages and early modern times (Põltsam-Jürjo 2018; Põltsam 1999; Põltsam 1998). Midwives in Tallinn have been studied, among other professions, also by Heino Gustavson (Gustavson 1969).

Only Jürjo and Leppik have written about midwives as people, in other writings they have been part of a background for medical professors in the university.

BEGINNING OF OFFICIAL MIDWIFERY EDUCATION IN DORPAT

Several European states, Russian Empire being one of the first, started to attend to the education of midwives as a growing population was needed to provide soldiers and peasants. During the 18th century and the 19th century, a lot of children were born but many did not survive infancy, let alone reach adulthood. Empress Catherine the Second was the first to acknowledge the problem and decreed the creation of District midwife position in her 1775 regulation for the governorates. It was an official job intended solely for women. District midwives were few and scarce in numbers, and had to oversee the work of local midwives. They had to learn the job on their own and then prove their worthiness to the state medical collegium (Leppik 2011, 154).

There were some smaller and short-lived courses and establishments in the Livonian and Estonian Governorate, which tried to educate and teach midwives for towns.

In Dorpat, the training of peasant women as midwives was discontinued, due to a language problem between the Estonian-speaking peasant women and the German-speaking district doctor and district midwife. In the period from 1810 to 1813, 12 women received a certificate of completion of midwifery courses, whilst another 20 certainly had attended

the courses. In addition to the language, peasant women regarded these courses with suspicion, even though they were paid for by local manors or Knighthoods. The main way people living in the villages could have more midwives still remained by women learning from locals like themselves (Sirk 1983, 34).

In University of Dorpat, reopened in 1802, it was initially found that obstetrics is an unimportant subject, which initially was taught as a minor part of surgery, and later assigned to be taught by a veterinary professor. As midwifery was seen as strictly women's business, concerning only women, and midwives were therefore solely female, it was hard to find learned men, who had studied medicine in the university and would also be willing to teach women.

Christian Friedrich von Deutsch, a German national, was needed to change this way of thinking. He worked as a professor of emergency obstetrics in Germany. In Dorpat, he became a full professor of children's and women's diseases, and later also the rector of Dorpat University for a short period of time. He established a maternity clinic in Dorpat in 1806 (DBL 1970, 166). As this kind of establishment was unknown and strange in the eyes of locals, pregnant women (especially lower-class women usually treated in clinics) were reluctant to come to the small clinic.

The school of midwives created by Deutsch operated by the same university maternity clinic. The graduates of 4 April 1812, were Elisabeth Meisner, Johanna Brennicke, Carolina Wieghorst and Anna Dowenick. None of them were locals from Dorpat, they came from other towns and even another province. Dowenick was the graduate with the best results and therefore soon became a midwife at the university clinic (Kalnin 1996, 30–33).

ANALYSIS OF MIDWIVES' PERSONAL FOLDERS

Source folders do not contain equal amount of information about the aspiring midwives, some are very scarce, others contain more personal details and brief life stories told by women themselves. Almost all have the hand-written free-form applications, where women turned to the faculty of the medicine to ask for permission for taking the examination to become a midwife. Earlier applications from the first quarter of the 19th century include short life stories or some sentences of substantiation, why the woman wanted to become a midwife and where she had learned her practical skills. If the woman was allowed to take the examination, there usually was a summary of the results. Most folders also included a printed diploma. Before diplomas, signed midwives' oaths were the indicators that women had passed the examinations.

The oaths themselves can be very telling. Heino Gustavson has marked that in 1739, Estonian midwives in Dorpat were forbidden to assist citizen women (who were mainly Germans) (Gustavson 1969, 134). Yet the midwife's oath (*Hebammen-Eid*) of 1832 does not contain such rule. Midwives were obliged to always give help to all, whether rich or poor, regardless of how long the delivery may take (RA-EAA, 402–2–15108).

Deciding by the names, confession and status as a *Bürger,* marked on the diplomas, most of the midwives who took the examinations, were local Baltic Germans, Evangelic Lutherans and 186 out of 438 categorized more thoroughly were marked as *Bürgers*, meaning citizens in German (Anepaio, Laidla 2024, Table of Midwives). Based on descriptions of births, the aspiring midwives were supposed to deliver, Baltic German midwives helped to birth Estonian and Russian children, as well. Ethnicity was not indicated separately, but it can be broadly assumed by the name, taking into account that more established Estonians used German names as well, and the Estonians of Orthodox faith used Russian Orthodox names. Therefore, it seems that providing aid to women with lower status was not prohibited, as Estonians were invariably considered lower than Germans.

Women belonged to the same stratum as either their father or their husband (*Provinzialrecht*, § 225–231, 235), it was less common to move between strata and very common to marry someone from the same stratum. Most of the midwives were daughters and wives of craftsmen: shoemakers, tailors, building masters or painters, or a master potter, several merchants, several hatmakers or hat company owner, a cigar maker, at least two goldsmiths, maker of very delicate lace, several locksmiths. Some were also town citizens, while others were not.

Besides *Bürgers*, there were the women whose estate was not so distinctly marked but who nevertheless belonged to the tax-paying stratum. Everyone apart from the upper nobility and some upper-class clerks had to pay taxes, with an additional exception of the Jews but they had their own restrictions. Becoming a midwife also meant being freed from common taxing (Leppik 2006a, 51, 60, 62–63), it was written on every diploma until the end of the 19th century that the local court had freed the recipient from taxes. There are also examples of official letters, stating that a diploma could not be issued before the tax question was settled (RA-EAA, 402–1–8768). Issuing a diploma also cost money, hence, some women just had a letter confirming that they had all the requirements for the position and practicing as a midwife (RA-EAA, 402–1–8768).

Among women, so far there have been two women of the nobility. Marie von Loudon (née Pigene), a baroness by marriage, was born in Paris in 1840. By 1878, she was married to a local nobleman and wanted to become a midwife (RA-EAA, 402–2–14379). Maria Alexandra Kerbedz (née Dzydzul), born

in 1833 in Livland but deciding to use her paternal name, Išidor Dzydzul (RA-EAA, 402–2–11924), did not belong to the local Baltic-German nobility. On the other hand, in 1890s, there were three women who were the daughters of labourers (RA-EAA, 402–2–20585; RA-EAA, 402–2–6598; RA-EAA, 402–2–20456). All in all, the long list revealed that the background of midwives was variegated, – this proved to be a practical profession and a certificate for people with versatile life experience.

Sources so far have been deficient in the matter of earliest diplomas, yet, since a female dentist's diploma from 1814 has been found (RA-EAA, 402–2–23142), which is originally designed and printed to be a midwife's diploma and has been altered to add the needed information and corrections, it can be assumed that midwives had diplomas already from the beginning.

The aspiring midwives had to include a free-form application in which they requested admission to the examinations from the representatives of the Faculty of Medicine (See, for example, RA-EAA, 402–2–15973). Furthermore, a certificate had to be obtained from the local police officer, confirming the date of her arrival from one city to another, and that it was the person she claimed to be, – it had to be submitted to the university when moving from one city to another (See, for example, RA-EAA, 402–2–9417).

Initially, women also had to provide a certificate proving that their husband agreed with his wife's profession as a midwife. According to the Baltic Provincial Law, which concerned most aspiring midwives coming from nearby towns, a woman had to obtain her husband's consent in order to work (*Provinzialrecht,* § 4194). This draws attention to the fact that many women were married, when they became midwifes.

Out of 438 midwives examined, 332 were married, 54 were single, 11 were widows, two were divorced and the family status of 39 women is unclear (Laidla, Anepaio 2024, the Table of Midwives). The number of widows could be higher, since some files, especially the older ones, are incomplete. Widows aspired to become midwives, as it provided a suitable means of livelihood for women who had not inherited a sufficient livelihood. It also proves to be continuation of the traditions from the middle ages and early modern times in territories of Estonia, when midwives had to be married (Põltsam-Jürjo 2018, 22–23, 31).

This indicates that it was mostly seen as a profession for married women who presumably had the experience of childbirth themselves, whilst not exclusively so. The first presumably single woman Charlotte Elisabeth Kapp applied to take the examinations in 1833 (it is unclear whether she passed or not) (RA-EAA, 402–2–11623). In 1858, however, there were three single women passing the examination, meaning it was no longer an extraordinary occurrence (RA-EAA, 402–2–12190; RA-EAA, 402–2–16994; RA-EAA, 402–2–17245).

LANGUAGE, ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

The language of instruction was German until 1893, when the language of teaching became Russian in the whole university (Hiio 2007, 154–155).

Due to language and socio-economic reasons, it was mostly Baltic German women who trained as midwives at the University of Dorpat clinic, since German was their mother tongue. Over time, Estonian, Russian and Jewish women were added, because learning in Russian was more available, and also pushed some Baltic German women out.

Since many of the courses were supervised by midwives who had graduated earlier, these midwives were *de facto* the first female lecturers at the University of Dorpat (Leppik 2011, 155).

As stated, most Jewish women started to study for the midwife's diploma when the language of teaching changed to Russian. However, the earliest Jewish female student recorded so far completed her examination in 1840s. A new question arose with Jewish women becoming certified midwives. Midwife's oath, besides the promises to help every birthing woman, had been heavily filled with references to Evangelical Lutheran god and being a pious Evangelical Lutheran, especially during the first half of the 19th century. As a Jew, one could not sign this, since it would have been against the basic rules of their religion to praise another god. Marianne Lewensohn, née Kann, had signed her oath on 9 June 1845. Her oath abounded in hand-written corrections to make it compatible with her religion (RA-EAA, 402–2–14724).

Sometime during the 1870s, midwife's oaths became more general, no longer including vivid examples of Evangelical Lutheranism. Jewish women did, however, receive their own version of the oath, which was more minimalist (RA-EAA, 402–2–16097).

Religion impacted the acquisition of the profession in more aspects than in terms of Christians and non-Christians. As noted before, during the period under study, the university's teaching language was German, and mostly Baltic German women took their courses and examinations there, and majority of Baltic Germans were Lutherans. However, there were some occasional Catholics as well, in fact, one of the earliest midwives – Elisabeth Meisner, née Albrecht, whose oath and other documents besides diploma have been preserved from 1812, was Catholic (RA-EAA, 402–2–16325). Besides, the number of Orthodox women sitting for the examinations grew in time as Russian women from inner governorates of the Empire came to Dorpat. From then on, religion was marked on the diploma and was left out of the oath. Other social background components became obsolete (RA-EAA, 402–1–8768; RA-EAA, 402–1–8999).

QUALIFICATIONS

Examinations and requirements became stricter. Before the 1850s, women had often accomplished their practical learning with some local doctor, and then came to Dorpat to take the examination. Later in the century, the women had to acquire midwife courses that lasted for several months and had to deliver at least 3 babies successfully (RA-EAA, 402–2–10021). Depending on their performance, they could become regular midwives or privileged midwives. An examination could require the use of the so-called "phantom" or not. The "phantom" was the closest thing to a life-size model-doll with a woman's anatomy (Kalnin 1996, 32–33).

There was a change in the ranking of midwives in the beginning of 20th century, as they were then classified as First Class and Second Class (Koppel 1904, 7).

Midwifery courses in the University of Dorpat usually spanned several months. Serving and practicing by a midwife or a doctor could take three months, but also a few years, being quite individualist in approach, as well as influenced by personal life and socio-economic opportunities. However, official courses by the university birthing clinic usually took four to five months. It may be assumed that systematically taught theory may take less time than exclusively practice-based training.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, before women were allowed as official students to University of Dorpat (Yuryev), there were several professions that opened the university doors to females, requiring them to take examinations. The earliest and most popular of these was the profession of a midwife. Teaching midwives at the university was set up by Johann Friedrich Deutsch, who was the establisher of Birthing Clinic and responsible for teaching obstetrics at the University of Dorpat. Even though the exact number of women, who received the diploma of midwife, is not known and might remain so due to sources lost, nevertheless, the patterns among women can still be observed. Based on the data from Fund 402 of Imperial University of Tartu, mostly from register two, but to a small extent also register one, the current study offers a clear evidence that midwifery was a popular profession among women, especially married Baltic German women but later – the increasing number of Jewish, Russian and Estonian women, including unmarried women. Although there were a few noble women among them, they mostly were not nobles and did not belong to the stratum of peasants, as their fathers and husbands held very different jobs and might or might not belong

to the town citizenry. Craftsmen were the most frequent employment, yet the long list of professions reveals that the background of midwives varied. It proved to be a practical profession and a certificate for people with versatile life experience and social standing, highlighting that as early as during the 19th century a lot of women (also Baltic German ones) worked outside home, if they did not belong to the upper classes. It must also be noted that not only local women, meaning women from the Livonian and Estonian Governorates came to Dorpat with a view to become midwives, – other governorates and regions of the Empire were also represented by the aspiring professionals, more so after the university's teaching language became Russian.

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VECMĀTES TĒRBATAS (JURJEVAS) UNIVERSITĀTĒ (1802–1918)

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ANOTĀCIJA

Sievietes Tartu (Jurjevas) Universitātē oficiāli tika uzņemtas tikai 1915. gadā. Tomēr bija noteiktas profesijas, kuras bija paredzētas tikai sievietēm vai arī kurās sievietes varēja strādāt pēc obligāto eksāmenu nokārtošanas. Viena no šādām profesijām bija vecmāte, kas bija paredzēta tikai sievietēm. Rakstā tiek pētītas, kādas bija prasības, lai kļūtu par vecmāti Krievijas impērijas Baltijas provincēs, un atspoguļotas sievietes, kas tās izpildīja un kļuva par vecmātēm 19. gadsimtā. Pētījums paplašina izpratni par precētu un neprecētu sieviešu darbu.

Atslēgvārdi: vācbaltieši, dzimtes vēsture, vecmātes, Tartu Universitāte.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Līdz 1915. gadam Tartu Universitātē sievietes netika oficiāli uzņemtas. Tomēr bija noteiktas profesijas, kas tika uzskatītas par piemērotām arī vai tikai sievietēm. Vecmāšu profesija bija rezervēta tikai sievietēm. Sievietēm bija jāapgūst teorija par vecmātes profesiju, mācoties pie praktizējoša ārsta vai vecmātes vai apmeklējot oficiālos vecmāšu kursus Tartu. Lai strādātu nozarē, bija jākārto obligātie eksāmeni. Raksts lielā mērā balstās uz datu kopu, kas apkopota projekta "Sievietes Tartu Universitātē pirms 1919. gada" veiktā pētījuma laikā.

Tartu (Tērbatas) Universitātē oficiāli vecmātes sāka apmācīt 1806. gadā, kad Tērbatā ieradās neatliekamās dzemdniecības profesors Kristians Frīdrihs fon Doičs no Vācijas. Viņš kļuva par pilntiesīgu bērnu un sieviešu slimību profesoru un 1806. gadā Tērbatā nodibināja dzemdību klīniku un vecmāšu skolu.

Avotu zudumu vai bojājumu dēļ nav iespējams precīzi konstatēt vecmāšu skaitu, kas mācījušās un absolvējušas Tartu (Tērbatas) Universitāti. Aplūkojot līdz šim izskatītās 438 vecmāšu personu lietas (projekts nav beidzies, un tie ir provizoriskie rezultāti), lielākā daļa vecmāšu bija precējušās ar amatniekiem un tirgotājiem, taču bija arī dažas sievietes no muižniecības aprindām. Kopumā pētījums paplašina zināšanas par precētu, galvenokārt vācbaltiešu, bet arī igauņu, krievu un ebreju sieviešu nodarbošanos 19. gadsimtā.