

Die Revaler Lotterien leisteten wohl einen substantiellen Beitrag zur Finanzierung wünschenswerter Projekte. Allein die erste Zuchthauslotterie erwirtschaftete einen Reingewinn von über 1 400 Rubel. Dieser Betrag deckte über 40 Prozent der Ausgaben des Zuchthauses zwischen 1748 und 1753, als die neue Institution einen besonders hohen Finanzbedarf hatte. In den späteren Jahren, als die laufenden Kosten auf ein kalkulierbares Maß gesunken waren, bedurfte es der Lotterie zur Geldakquise nicht mehr.

SUMMARY

*Lotteries in the Eighteenth
Century: The Case of Reval*

The article examines lotteries in Reval (Tallinn) during the eighteenth century to provide a different angle on social and economic questions. So far, lotteries have been largely neglected in the context of the Baltic enlightenment, although archives and libraries offer a variety of sources, such as lottery plans, protocol books and drawing lists.

A lottery is a form of gambling whereby players risk a relatively small sum of money to receive a disproportionately bigger non-cash or cash prize. As the outcome of the game is exclusively caused by good or bad luck, players can win a fortune regardless of their personal or social situation. By the eighteenth century, different lottery formats had become widely accepted by authorities and highly appreciated by gamblers throughout Europe. While officials could generate money for, among other things, charity projects without increasing taxes or dues for the population, lottery participants were legally allowed to gamble if they had some money to spare.

Lotteries developed in Reval as in many other parts of Europe. Members of the town council or church authorities initiated so-called “class lotteries” aiming to raise money, which was intended to fund, for example, a house of correction or a new organ in St Olaf’s Church. The demand for lottery tickets remained low in the first half of the eighteenth century. Often the drawings had to be postponed, the original lottery plans needed to be altered or the tickets simply did not sell. That indicates that the system had not been professionalized yet. Only one clerk, for example, was employed to offer relatively expensive tickets for a lottery initiated in support of the new house of correction in 1747. Thus, the distribution of tickets depended mostly on the personal networks of noteworthy local merchants. The lottery, nevertheless, made a respectable profit of more than 1,400 rubles due to some tricks and good luck. The total expenditure for

the house of correction between 1748 and 1753 amounted to 3,400 rubles, so that the revenues from the lottery covered a fair share of the costs.

The demand for lottery tickets increased in the late 1760s and early 1770s when the organizers reduced the ticket prices and came up with seemingly more attractive formats. Instead of one or two rubles, gamblers had to pay just one quarter of a ruble in the lowest category, while they could nonetheless win up to 1,000 rubles if they were lucky.

The prohibition of lotteries in the entire Russian Empire by Catherine the Great in 1771, however, put a stop to the increasing commercialization and professionalization of this form of gambling in Reval. Consequently, the so-called “Lotto di Genova”, an immensely popular lottery format that was based on drawing numbers, could not be established. Catherine thought that lotteries could be appropriate if only wealthy people participated. But ticket prices below one ruble would lure the poor into spending unreasonable amounts of their small incomes. This would neither be beneficial for them nor their families, and it could eventually endanger the well-being of society in general.