

berg and knew what was going on in the larger political world outside the city. Her interests and activities extended well beyond the chores of family and business. She keeps Balthasar abreast of local events: fires in the city, the execution of a fruit dealer and a specialty weaver for sodomy, even a trout-fishing expedition, the details of which she learned from Jakob Imhoff. The deaths of friends, acquaintances, even strangers, are so dutifully reported that a virtual obituary section appears in most of her letters. She conveys the latest news about the Strasbourg Bishop's War (1592-93), including casualty figures and the number of enemy flags (three) captured by the Protestant leader, Duke Christian of Anhalt. Between 1592 and 1594, her letters carry the highlights of western Europe's war against the Turks in Hungary, as Nuremberg became a staging area for troops en route to the front.

Magdalena also occasionally hobnobbed with elite intellectuals and politicians, and she did not spare them criticism. Attending founder's day at the Altdorf Academy, she witnessed the installation of the locally famous scholar Johann Praetorius as rector, an event she found so boring that she promised to stay home with Balthasar on the next founder's day. When she dined with a count in Altdorf after a wedding party, apparently for the Count's cook, she did not relish the meal. "They had many courses," she informs Balthasar, "but little to eat, as the food was so God-awfully prepared in their Polish manner."

### ◆ KEEPING UP WITH THE IMHOFFS

MAGDALENA TO BALTHASAR

9 December 1591, in Nuremberg

Honest, friendly, dear Paumgartner:

I cannot stop writing to you every week, even though

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you give me no reason to do so. It is now three weeks since I last heard from you and there may be no letter again this Saturday, which will leave me quite dejected. I cannot help thinking of the old proverb: "Out of sight, out of mind." Your brother tells me that you are preoccupied with a great many business letters, for which I think I am being made to suffer. Your not writing has made me wonder whether you are well, but Jörg gives me to understand that you are doing a great deal of writing. I pointedly reminded him that in the end I have simply to believe that there is no other reason for your not writing to me than that you have so much to do. He says that he understands from your letter [to him] that you will be departing Lucca before the fair. Confirmation of this I eagerly await with all my heart in your letter on Saturday; such news from you also makes me happy. We are, praise and thank God, still as we were, in good health; may God continue to keep us both so. Amen.

Dear Paumgartner, I am writing this letter because of the boy, who constantly admonishes me when I write to ask you to bring him a suit of clothes. So I am sending along with this letter a measure of the length and width of the jacket, also the length of the sleeves and the pants, all of which I have taken liberally from his old velvet suit, which still fits him properly, and I have also measured him. Choose only something black, for he already has two colored suits. Of course, in this matter it is yours to do as you please.

Old Bair is the same as a week ago; one still believes he cannot last more than three or four days. Every day some rotted flesh is cut away from his wound. However, he feels no pain and he no longer asks for anyone. He speaks only when he is thirsty or wants something to eat. He has lost interest in everything. May the Lord God end it soon for him.

Frau Tobias Kastner sends warm greetings to you. She is now living here with her mother on the third floor in Frau Lienhart's manor house. She had traveled around for three days with her mother before arriving. Blood has begun to flow from her mouth, and

she is so weak that I do not know if she will last long. I visit her often, for she was earlier going to put up with us. She has now been sick here for three weeks. I worry that she will not last long when she goes back home [to Engelthal]. May God help us all!

Dear treasure, I ask you not to forget about my Italian coat, one like the one Wilhelm Imhoff brought his wife from Venice, which is worn as a fur. Do not think ill of me because I always try to wheedle something out of you in every letter. I especially ask that you bring some red and saffron-colored satin, if you can find an inexpensive measure or two. Brother-in-law Jörg says a package is coming to me in a trunk; I hope the material for the vest is what is on the way; I very much need it.

Later today I must be a dinner guest of old Frau Kleewein, who is entertaining the girl, her new daughter-in-law, who is going to stay with her for a while. In a week, God willing, we will celebrate brother Paul's betrothal. Would to God that you could also be here. May Almighty God bring us together again in joy after this tedious separation that we all want to forget with his help!

Kind, dear treasure, I have nothing more to write at this time, only to send many friendly and warm greetings to your loyal heart. May the Lord God keep you in his grace. Many, many others, all of whom I cannot list, send greetings to you—Frau Gröser, Frau Scheurl, Herr [Hieronymus] Paumgartner—yesterday I gave him a note at an engagement party, he has been to see us and greets you—Frau Lochner, Frau Roemer, Wilhelm Imhoff, Plauen, [both] he and she—the list is just too long. So many danced with me this week at the Pfinzings' wedding [December 6]. They wished you the best and asked me when I last had a letter from you. I dissembled and said, "Last week," when it has already been three weeks! This for now!

*Magdalena Balthasar Paumgartner,  
your loving housewife*

Magdalena never stopped her personal requests for foodstuffs and for clothing. With greater or lesser regularity, she begs sugar, cheeses, quinces, Zellernuts (from Zell, near Würzburg), pears, sweet fennel, olive oil, "green nuts," and "a ham or three." She was also very fond of inexpensive fine white ruffled linen collars, very popular among the urban ladies; she loved aprons and pieces of scarlet, satin, velvet, and damask.

Magdalena also sought, mostly in vain, a number of luxuries. Among them were Netherlands dishware, ivory-handled knives, an alabaster pitcher (for which Balthasar searched both Florence and Venice), and two ounces of unspun (unspooled) Venetian gold thread. She made special requests for Arles silk for her own wardrobe. Once she planned to make a silk vest to replace her "completely bad" damask one. Another time she ordered enough silk for several new garments because "my clothes are so bad around the arms that I dare not wear them during the day, and I always have guests coming." When the silk arrived, she was rhapsodic: "it is beautiful, thick, lustrous."

In the winter of 1591, Magdalena set Balthasar looking for a special Italian fur coat, "like the one Wilhelm Imhoff brought his wife from Venice." With the same stroke of her quill, she begs Balthasar not to think ill of her "because I always try to wheedle something out of you in every letter," immediately adding a request for red and saffron-colored satin. Balthasar ordered the coat specially from Michael Imhoff in Venice. From Magdalena's description Balthasar believed the coat to be a new model, certainly one he had never seen before. As it turned out, the coat was not a new Venetian model, since no record of it could be found among the Imhoff orders sent from Venice to Nuremberg. Suspecting that it came from Augsburg, Balthasar told Magdalena to try to get more precise information.

~~Magdalena's vanity found charming expression in the~~