

The construction of the Elbe bridge in 1422/23 under the direction of Hans Scharnow

By Dr. H. Haase (2024)

On April 11, 1422, a pier of the stone bridge collapsed as a result of flooding of the Elbe River. This was evidently the reason for the construction of a wooden bridge in front of Magdeburg's old town^{1/}.

Das na in dem suluen iar
als in xiii vnd xxii Wart
des kade to magdeborch des
to kade myt vullbort der
schepen vnd aller zummge
dat se meynde to maken
gode to loue der stad to eren
vnd vromen vnd menige
mynsthen to troste Eyne hol-
teue bruggen ouer de
groten eluen vor de olden
stad magdeborch vnd de
samme zeghen der bruggen
dar vor de vere gherwest
hadde vnd vele lude dar
nemen louen to hadden dat
me eyne bruggen ouer de
groten eluen maken konde
vnd mistrosteden sere Of
konde de kath neymande
hebben de sik dar wolde
to keyfen laten to binnester
wente dat wol to merkende
is dat dar vnsprecklik an-
beyt forge vnd moye vnd
grote vorsumemisse vñ schade
ouer neyninghe den vennen
dar van komen wolde de
sik des vnderwinden vnd
en wusten nicht efft de brug-
ge wolde bestendich wesen
vnd sachten dat maniger-
leye ouer Des was dar in
beydene eyne bederue man

De plach in dem kade to
wesen de hert hans Schar-
now de hir sere to sterfede
de lude vnd anherdede vñ
sik of wol birwes vromen
To lesten vorkenden se sik
als vor schreuen is vnde
koren dar to binnemester
buten dem kade de do in
dem kade nicht enveren
dar koren se vnd koren dar
ven to als Claves Clump-
suluer de Borgermester
west hadde vnd disse vor-
schreuen hans Scharnow
vnd Cyriacus van borch
vnd hinnik hassen Disse
ven arbeiden sik gan triu-
welken dar yme vnd lete
dat houet ersten stoten up
eyn syt der elue vnd stote
se van dort her Des wart
Claves Clumpsuluer be-
swaret mit den Schulteten
amechte vnd bestediget vñ
bischop Shunter na olden
wouhert De entonde so
nicht mehr so triuwelken
dar by wesen van sons am-
mechtes wegghen also he
gherne dan hedde Of wol-
de sik neymant in syn stede
bieden laten wente zowelt
schurwede sik vor dem gro-
ten swaren arbeide vnd
vorsumemisse Also dem
disse drie zeghen als hans
Scharnow Cyriacus vñ
borch vnd hinnik hassen dat
sik neymant hir to wolde
wynden vnd de kath ouer
nicht volaten wolde So

arbeiden se disse bruggen
mit allen trunven vnde
vullbrueden de brugghe
vnd hadden dar to eynen
trinerman de of hyn vuse
borger was de hert Claves
Schartekop vnd dat holt
toffen se uth dem holthe
to gusen Of hadde de kath
ouer marschalk nolte sand
to dresen de brachte dem
kade eyn vloze uth dem
behmer wolde dat of to
der bruggen kam van der
suluen vloze moeste de kade
van magdeborch greuen
albrechte triu gulden tho
tollen gheuen dar dem
kade grot ouer mot an schact
Of burueden disse burwef-
ters to dem ersten in der
groten elue grote kornie by
dem ouer uppe dat de elue
den ouer vnd mersch nicht
vorterde vnd was al vor
lorne vnd dede men scha-
den wenn vromen wente
dat water vel ouer de kornie
vnd brak den ouer an dem
mersche grot aff

From the Magdeburg Schöppen Chronicle, Ms. boruss. fol. 172, Blatt CLV

Freely translated (errors excepted):

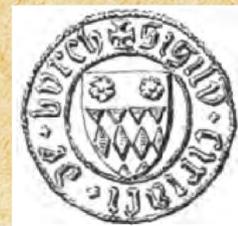
Then, in the same year, 1422, the Magdeburg council, with the consent of the lay judges and all the guilds, decided, out of love for God, for the honor of the city, and for the comfort of pious people, to build a wooden bridge across the Elbe River in front of the old city of Magdeburg and the dam opposite the bridge, where the ferry had previously been. Many people didn't believe that a bridge across the Elbe was possible and were very skeptical. The council also had no one willing to be chosen as the future master builder. They realized that this would bring immense work, worry, and effort, as well as significant business losses and damage to their own efforts, especially given the uncertainty of the bridge's durability. They pondered this matter at length.

*There was a respectable man, a former council member, named **Hans Schartow**, a well-known and esteemed man, who decided to undertake this construction project. To ensure they fulfilled their commitments, they needed to select master builders, whom the council could not do without. They chose Claus Klumpsilber, the former mayor, along with the proposed **Hans Schartow**, Ciriac* von Burg, and Heinrich Hasse. These four agreed to initially establish the bridgehead on one side of the Elbe and then extend the bridge across from there.*

*Claus Klumpsilber was then entrusted with the office of mayor and confirmed by Archbishop Günther according to old custom. However, due to his official duties, he could no longer be as conscientious as he would have liked. Nor was anyone willing to take his place. They shied away from the considerable workload and the potential for oversight. Apart from the three aforementioned **Hans Schartow**, Ciriac von Burg, and Heinrich Hasse, no one else was willing to undertake it, and the council refused to delegate anyone.*

*There, with the help of all their trusted associates, they built this bridge and completed its construction. They had a carpenter for the job, who was also a local citizen named Claus Schortekopf. They bought the timber from the forest near Gusen**. The council also sent Marshal Nolte to Dresden. He brought the council a raft from the Bohemian Forest, which was also used for the bridge. For this same raft, the Magdeburg council had to pay Count Albrecht*** 300 guilders, which was a great hardship and loss for the council.*

These builders also installed large baskets along the banks of the Elbe River to prevent it from flooding the marshes. This proved futile and did more harm than good, as the water overflowed the baskets, causing significant erosion of the marshland.



Seal of 1384 ^{/2/}

* The chronicle states "Czyliacus". However, the name "Ciriac(i)" has been used in the von Burg family for generations.

** Today's Güsen is north of Burg near Magdeburg

*** Albrecht III (c. 1375–1423?), Elector and Duke of Saxe-Wittenberg

/1/ Hoffmann: History of the city of Magdeburg, Vol. 1, p. 357

/2/ Hertel: Charter book of the city of Magdeburg, Vol. 2, Plate II