

## Schwörmontag



**The interview with Dr. Litz (Head of the Department of Medieval and Early Modern Times at the Haus der Stadtgeschichte - Stadtarchiv Ulm) was conducted by Ildiko Dobrescu.**

### **Why is Ulm's annual Schwörmontag so important for the city?**

It is so important because it goes back to a very, very long tradition to the year 1345, it has shaped the self-image of the citizens of Ulm, it has had continuities and breaks and it is still the largest city festival of the Ulm people.

### **How long has Schwörmontag existed?**

It is a reminder of the old imperial city constitution, which was called Schwörbrief here in Ulm. For the imperial city we have three different Schwörbriefe, the oldest is from 1345. These Schwörbriefe are constitutions, they document the compromises that were found between the patricians, the city nobles, and the guilds, the craftsmen, the merchants and grocers, in order to shape this city for the good of all in peaceful coexistence and to form a city government, the imperial city council. In the first two Schwörbriefe of 1345 and of 1397, the so-called Großer Schwörbrief, there is a majority of the guilds in the Ulm Council. Emperor Charles V abolished this constitution in the course of the Reformation in 1548. With the so-called New Schwörbrief of 1558, the people of Ulm were once again able to win their constitutional day, but now the patricians gained the majority in the council. In 1802, however, this changed.

### **What happened then?**

After 1802 this was no longer possible, because Ulm was no longer an independent city with its own sovereignty, but was a Bavarian city until 1810 and then a Württemberg city. After 1802, there was no longer a Schwörmontag in the true sense of the word. It was not until 1933 that the National Socialists took up the Schwörmontag tradition again, albeit with a different emphasis that was intended to serve their propagandistic goals.

### **What happened after the Second World War?**

In August 1949, the Schwörmontag was revived in the ruins of Ulm, and now the democratic element came to the fore. To this day, the whole city council and many citizens of Ulm are gathered in the Weinhof, when the mayor gives a kind of account

and then ends it according to old tradition with the swearing formula from the first swearing letter of 1345: "To be a common man to rich and poor in all equal, common and honest things without reservation.

### **How is it celebrated, who organizes the Schwörmontag?**

At first, there was only a small house at the Weinhof in Ulm, on whose two-story porch the Schwörakt was held. The mayor, his council clerk and the members of the council gathered in its upper arcade after the council election. In the 17th century, a large Schwörhaus was built on this site. The people of Ulm are the only ones who had a Schwörhaus built especially for this constitutional act, for the celebration of this political day, when the town clerk read the text of the constitution to the people and it was then invoked by the town government and people. After that, there have always been celebrations, but the actual real occasion was a political act.

### **Is the Schwörmontag a celebration for all those who are up to daytime boozing or for the city's elite, who in front of the celebrating their own bourgeoisie in front of the Schwörhaus?**

Schwörmontag is a festival for everyone, yes, and for guests as well. The boozing has a long tradition - there are indications that the partying was also exaggerated in the Middle Ages, it's probably part of it, as with all festivals. However, this is not the only content of the day, it is not in the foreground. Everyone can participate, from the visit of the more serious part at the vineyard, the political speech, to the numerous events afterwards.

### **Don't you have the impression that young people are losing the meaning of this holiday?**

Young people see the celebrations; they don't go to a constitutional act. But they are introduced to it and the older they get and stay in the urban society, the more important this part of the celebration becomes - hopefully. The pupils from Ulm can take part in guided tours and lessons, are taught about the historical and political background and take this with them in the hope that they will later stand up for democracy and work hard to help shape their own community. It's a nice day to show the urban society and its cohesion and at the same time capture the diversity of life, what's going on in Ulm.