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In-Cult



Knowledge Section

**Interviews about German cultural
treasures**

Ileu e.V., Germany

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Stumbling Blocks: MAKING PLACES TALK



The interview with Dr. Nicola Wenge, DZOK (Dokumentationszentrum Oberer Kuhberg Ulm e.V.) was conducted by Bertram Wegemer

Why are these Stumbling Blocks an important part of German remembrance culture?

The basic idea of the Stumbling Blocks is that people stumble over people's destinies and names, of people who suffered at this very place unimaginable hardships during the National Socialist era. The Stumbling Blocks create a bridge between the world of the people of today and the people of that time. It is a task of memorial work in general, to create time zones where people can understand what had been in the past. To make the places speak. However, we also have to tell the stories.

*The first Stumbling Block in Germany was laid in Cologne in 1992 by the artist **Gunter Demnig**. How do you personally feel about the engagement of this artist?*

I have an enormous respect for his life's work, that he very unpretentiously found an artistic form of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism that makes many people think and motivates them to work for the culture of remembrance. I think that's great - personally, but also as the head of the local Nazi Documentation Centre that deals with precisely these questions.

In Ulm, the first 14 stones were laid in May 2015. What was the reaction to this?

The city wasn't all that enthusiastic at first because a memorial book for the victims of the Holocaust was being prepared at the time. It is important to create a scientific basis for remembrance. In a few sessions with those involved, we have considered when and where would be a good moment to lay the Stumbling Blocks. In 2015 the first laying took place and the city's reaction to it was incredibly positive. It has also shown that it was not a flash in the pan action, and that there is a continuous interest from citizens who accompany the Stumbling Blocks to this day. In other cities, there had been disputes with house owners who did not want the Stumbling Blocks to be laid in front of their property. We didn't have that at all.

Not only the artist, but the city and the organisers are involved...

Yes, for one particular group the Stumbling Blocks are incredibly important, these are the relatives of the victims. I find it remarkable that the initiative and the Documentation Centre have repeatedly succeeded in establishing contact and also in taking care of this group. And that people get underway to participate in laying of the Stumbling Blocks. This is a very important gesture of honour and for that alone this project is worthwhile. I think the importance of the connection of the second and the third generation to the cities from which their ancestors were expelled, abducted and murdered has long been underestimated. It is important that there are people today in this very city where the crimes took place, who not only distance themselves from the crimes of the National Socialists, but by these Stumbling Blocks they also honour the people who were killed by the Nazis. The history of these people, their existence, were to be erased from history. And that's exactly why the Stumbling Blocks and the biographies behind the names have an important function.

How are the Stumbling Blocks received in the city today, at this time of resurgent racism?

The Stumbling Blocks have established themselves as a natural part of the culture of remembrance, just like the Oberer Kuhberg concentration camp memorial, just like many other initiatives and memorials that exist in the city. I really don't see the situation getting any worse. In connection with the so-called "Corona walks", there are always attacks on the culture of remembrance or very weird comparisons with dictatorships, including the appropriation of victims. But so far, the Stumbling Blocks have not been affected.

How is the cooperation with other organizations and with the relatives of the victims?

The city archive is always there to advise when it comes to clarifying historical background. That's very important, and I've already mentioned the city, which helps with practical, organizational and ideological questions. However, other institutions are also involved. For example, the Theatre Ulm, when actors have performed at a laying. And of course, we as the DZOK can utilize the network of contacts with the relatives.

How can the message of the Stumbling Blocks be passed on?

The Stumbling Blocks alone do not speak. We have to provide the people with the background. We need to tell the stories that make the places speak. The Ulm Stumbling Block initiative, for example, puts the biographies of those whose names are on the stones on the Internet. Then you have not only the names and dates of the people, but also learn something about their personalities, about the family history. We need to include communication channels that young people use. For example, we are also on Instagram. Many of the younger ones do not even know what their ancestors did under National Socialism. But many also come to us from other cultures and we have to make connections: Why is this topic so important in our society?

The culture of the bakehouses in Baden-Württemberg



The interview with Dr. Wolfgang Doster was conducted by Betram Wegemer

Dr. Wolfgang Doster, expert on the subject of bakehouses, took a closer look at the baking traditions in the Danube countries.

Link: <https://bread-connects.tastes-of-danube.eu/brotbackhaeuser/>

Mr. Doster, why have so many bakeries been built in Württemberg?

According to our research, the history of bakehouses in Central Europe began around 400 years ago. At that time, almost every farming family had own oven at their farm. Most families baked their bread from home-grown wheat, spelt, rye or other flours. However, baking in own courtyards often led to devastating house fires and fire catastrophes. Therefore, in 1808, the baking in one's own yard was banned by the Württemberg fire protection authorities. From then on, community bakehouses on the outskirts should ensure adequate fire protection. This was not adhered to, but over the time more and more bakehouses were built in the village centre, often near the church or the village hall, and were used collectively. The villagers gathered wood together and fired up the stove, saving both time and wood.

How was the use of the bakehouses organised?

There was often a master baker who was commissioned by the community to organize the baking process, distribute the work and monitor the baking process on the so-called baking day. Because the ovens in the bakehouse were very simple and were built differently from village to village, to bake good bread the master bakers needed a lot of experience. But the social factor should not be underestimated, bakehouses were places of community. That is why, as we in our working group suspect, bakehouses were banned in socialist countries.

How come?

Bakehouses were a place of lively interaction between the villagers. There was a lot of social interaction while waiting for one's turn or for the bread to be baked. The people, especially the women, exchanged news, discussed things of everyday village life and work organization, but at the same time many things of everyday life in the community were settled there. Presumably that's why the use of the bakehouses was prohibited during the communist era, because they could have been community places where people organized themselves without state control. However, it could also be that the importance of the (extended) family is greater in Eastern European countries and that is why the ovens were more likely to be found on property used by families.

Who runs the bakehouses?

Today it is mostly clubs and associations that regulate the use of the bakehouses and the life around it. This has given rise to many newer traditions, such as bakehouse festivals, which often attract many people from all over the area. This is where economic, ecological and social components come together in the village community. Bakehouses are not just places where the basic food bread is made, but also places where local customs and festivals are organized and held, with many local pastries baked, such as the Brittlekuchen, the Platzkuchen and, in many places, the onion cake.

With today's technologies, bread is baked quickly and cheaply by corporations. Nevertheless, many village communities have raised money to restore old bakehouses, partially in self-help, to get them going again or to build new ones. What is the motivation behind the bakehouse revival?

The bakehouses are subject to a functional change. In the past, bread had to be baked there for the extended family. Today you can buy bread very cheaply anywhere in Germany. The motivation today has an ecological background. The bakehouse users want sourdough bread that keeps longer and is produced without artificial additives, for example a hearty farmhouse bread with a thick crust. You won't find anything like that in the supermarket. An oven can hold up to 40 loaves of bread at a time. That's why bakehouses still serve as a kind of social bond today. The residents of the communities meet and bake their bread together. In everyday life, most of them work in very different jobs, often in different places and under very different conditions. The baking brings everyone together. In any case, for the "bakehouse people", bread is not just staple food, but also stands for community, sharing and responsibility for everyone.

Men in three-four time



The interview with Franz-Josef Heinle was conducted by Rebekka Antoniadou

Men dance the *Schuhplattler*, which means shoe slapping. One of the men who has been doing this for 50 years is Franz-Josef Heinle. He is 62 years old, a farmer and master carpenter by profession and since a long-time *Vorplattler* in the Thalkirchdorf local history club:

Mr. Heinle, why is the dance called the Schuhplattler?

Platteln means slapping your shoes. But it is much more than that. You rhythmically slap your thighs, the soles of your shoes at the front, the back and across and stomp your shoes on the floor. There are twelve different ways to slap in the *Schuhplattler*. Those who dance a little better are the *Vorplattler*. You dance and the learners try to copy the sequence of steps.

At what age do you learn to platter?

Already three-year-olds start with simple figures. One is called the "Three Leather Stockings". The boys slap their thighs and clap their hands, then they alternately give each other their right and left hand and in between they turn. Then, over time, the *platteln* is added.

What is special about the Schuhplattler?

The change from the pair dance with the women to the solo of the boys. When this change works well, it's a wonderful feeling. And that we *platter* in our traditional costume. That connects. The women wear their beautiful dirndls and we wear our lederhosen. And when we loudly cheer while dancing and the audience joins in, then it's very special.

What is the most difficult thing about this dance?

A good *platterer* should have a good sense of tact and rhythm. You also need a good physical condition, coordination and agility. When you *platter*, you alternately hop from one foot to the other, turning your feet up every now and then to slap your shoes. That can be pretty exhausting. But over time, the more you practise, the easier it gets.

What do you wear to dance?

We wear traditional costumes. Each community has their own. Since the dancers also come from different communities, our local club in Thalkirchdorf equips the dancers with uniform costumes for their performances. In our case it is the Allgäu mountain costume. We are wearing short black deerskin lederhose. When we slap the leather, it makes a better sound. In the short trousers we can bend our knees better. We also wear suspenders made of green fabric with hand-embroidered edelweiss, a white shirt, grey knee-high socks and a loden hat decorated with tuft of chamois hair. With the leather brogues you can stomp wonderfully loudly on the ground.

Where does the dance come from? Can you tell us something about the history of the dance?

It has been danced since the mid-19th century. Originally it was danced by a couple, with the male partner improvising and slapping to impress the female partner. Since then, women and men dance it at local history evenings, village and mountain festivals, club anniversaries of friendly neighbouring clubs, at May festivals after the maypole had been erected, but also at private celebrations. One usually dances in clubs until getting married, but some continue after that, like me as a *Vorplattler*. Tourism has revived the dance even more. Everywhere in the Allgäu more and more *Plattler* groups have emerged.

Mr. Heinle, do you think that the Schuhplattler is actually an important cultural asset worth protecting, or is it now purely a show dance?

It is a dance worthy of protection as a cultural asset, because it connects people across generations. Young and old meet to practise, celebrate together, travel to other communities to dance. Being on stage in the traditional costume while the audience wildly cheers is an overwhelming experience. This is pure joy of life. This motivates many young people to join the club, after which they are captivated by the dance and the tradition is preserved

Shrovetide and Carnival - Mummery or Basic Need?



Professor Dr. Mezger was interviewed by Horst Buchmann

Professor Dr Werner Mezger became a professor in 1989 with a paper on the idea of the fool and on carnival customs. Since 1996, Mezger has been Professor of Folklore in Freiburg im Breisgau and Director of the Institute for Folklore of the Germans of Eastern Europe there.

What is characteristic of the Swabian-Alemannic 'fooling' places? Is the basic tenor the same or are there major differences?

The basic tenor is certainly the same. The people in the Swabian-Alemannic area don't want to get drunk. They want to have fun, but they also want to convey joy. They have a sense of cohesion beyond the carnival days and get involved all year round. For example, now in aid campaigns for Ukraine. There is a very strong sense of community everywhere. But nowadays it is also the experience of a certain timelessness. The time factor plays an important role. For us, time is very much out of joint. It has lost its rhythm. We turn night into day, go glacier skiing in summer and to the Caribbean in winter. Even the week no longer has a rhythm. Shrovetide, on the other hand, is a fixed point in the year. We live for it when it is approaching. We live from it when it is over.

What distinguishes the Swabian-Alemannic Fasnet from Carnival?

In Cologne there was almost the same masquerade as in the south until the French Revolution. Everywhere the earliest masks were of devilish figures, only later did the costumes become freer. In the Enlightenment and due to the Napoleonic changes in the world, celebrations finally collapsed. Later, under the Prussians, the people of Cologne made cautious attempts at revival by introducing themed parades with a romanticizing character. The "Hero Carnival" made his way into the city and was married to Princess Venezia.

In the middle of the 19th century, specifically around 1848, people became aware for the first time of social upheavals in Shrovetide and Carnival: the common people could not take part in the elegant balls at all. They felt like mere extras in the parades, which were designed by the haute volée.

This was the same in the Rhineland as in the Alemannic region. In Rottweil, too, the common people felt patronised by the upper echelons during carnival, because only their ideas were allowed to be implemented in themed parades. This finally led in 1870 to the Rottweil

craftsmen simply getting their old 'fool's' costumes out of the cupboards and chests again. This regression to the former *Mummenschanz* did not happen in Cologne. But in order to bring the different social classes together at carnival, the people of Cologne discovered singing. To this day, nowhere is there more carnival singing than in Cologne.

Where does the basic need to celebrate Shrovetide actually come from?

At first, Shrovetide was an economic custom. At the beginning of Lent, people stopped eating certain foods; no meat or dairy products. The slaughter of large livestock could be stopped, that was no problem. Chickens ended up in the soup pots of the nobility. The remaining flock still laid eggs. When celebrating Shrovetide, other things were added. There was singing, dancing, theatre. Until the 15th century, the church had not been critical of Shrovetide. The theologians granted people a kind of outlet before Lent, before they entered the period of abstinence. In analogy to Augustine, they later equated Shrovetide with the devil's state and Lent with God's state. Therefore the earliest known carnival masks were devils.

What does Fasnet do to someone who takes part in the parade?

Every year, as an active jester, you ask yourself why you do it. For example, you walk down through the town of Rottweil in your costume and mask and people look at you like you were a prize-winning cow. Only very gradually do you realise that they don't even recognise you and that you are a mystery to them. This opens up completely new social possibilities. As a jester, you can address with a familiar "you" unmasked people with whom you have no contact at all in normal life. You can, for example, engage local celebrities in funny conversations and "recite" to them, i.e. rub their noses in the foolishness they have indulged in during the year. Behind the mask, you are someone else. In a way, you can participate in your everyday world from a completely new perspective.

Can interested people from Bulgaria or Romania really understand this kind of carnival?

Indeed they can! Especially the southern German masks and disguises are anything but foreign to Romanian and Bulgarian spectators. With the so-called "Kukeri" and "Survakari", Bulgaria has an enormous wealth of carnival masks. In Romania, or more precisely in Transylvania, there is even a carnival tradition that looks deceptively similar to Swabian-Alemannic customs. These are the so-called "Urzeln" from Agneteln (Agnita in Romanian), whose black Fleckles robes and fox tails look like the "Häs" of the Überlingen "Hänsele".

Many inhabitants of Agneteln who fled or were driven out came to southern Germany after the war. Quite a few even brought their original robes with them, an impressive testimony to their love of their homeland. And in Großsachsenheim near Ludwigsburg, they have ever since continued to cultivate the custom of their old home town.

Carnival figures like those in south-west Germany can be found in twenty European countries. They stretch from Spain to the Black Sea, from Sicily to England. And when you meet them - in whatever carnival town - they have something like an air of eternity about them: The masks always stay young, only the wearers underneath get old. When a jester's dress is inherited and passed on to the next generation the deceased lives on in his or her former mask and the accompanying "Häs".

Seen in this light, Shrovetide is not only fun or amusement, but can also be very thought-provoking and go straight to the heart.

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.