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**Power and Violence in Medieval
and Early Modern Theater**

With numerous figures

V&R unipress



Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-8471-0316-5

ISBN 978-3-8470-0316-8 (E-Book)

Sponsored by the University of Iowa.

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Cora Dietl

Preface

In recent decades, violence has become a popular topic in cultural studies. While sociological, historical and literary approaches generally distinguish between structural, verbal and physical violence, detailed studies show that a clear boundary between verbal and physical violence cannot be drawn. Rather, verbal and physical violence refer to and depend on each other in a kind of dialogical structure.

The particular type of violence displayed by medieval religious plays as well as the civic violence that they supposedly kindled were discussed in drama research long before the 'cultural turn'. With respect to Passion plays, we are used to interpreting the function of the violence depicted on stage as either provoking compassion (with Christ), or as fostering negative emotions against those who are depicted as acting violent (the Jews, the enemies of God), or as compensating possible violent fantasies and desires of the audience. Drawing upon recent sociohistorical work on the phenomenon of violence, theater historians have started to reconsider its parameters, with a large number of recent studies now re-examining the correlation between the different forms of violence in the plays and their relationship to violence in social history.

The first colloquium of the German/Austrian/Swiss chapter of the *Société Internationale pour l'Étude du Théâtre Médiéval*, which took place in Rauschholzhausen in February 2012, was dedicated to the topic of *Gewalt im mittelalterlichen Spiel und Theater* ('Violence in Medieval Plays and Theater'). The discussions during the colloquium revealed that an important key to the understanding of violence in medieval plays can be found in the relationship between *violentia*, *vis*, and *potestas* ('violence, force, and power'), the three possible meanings of the German term *Gewalt*. Medieval plays – and especially religious plays – normally do not present violence as an isolated feature, but rather represent it as an expression or a means of power, and as a mode to discuss the legitimacy of power. The dramatic negotiations of power are thereby not only located in the play texts, but also involve the performance, music, and



Fig. 7: *Comedia Sexta Fides, Spes et Charitas* (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Wien, Alt Rara 77.O.25, n.p.)

Klaus Ridder, Beatrice von Lüpke, Rebekka Nöcker

From Festival to Revolt

Carnival Theater during the Late Middle Ages
and Early Reformation as a Threat to Urban Order

Abstract: For a limited time every year, carnival theater in its different varieties turned the anthropological, social, and political order of local communities upside down. The performances of the carnival season increased the awareness of the existing order, but also subverted order by increasing the awareness of its weaknesses. Based on points of intersection between the theatrical and ritualized communication of carnival activities, our project, which is presented in this article, identifies situations of threatened order and articulates criteria according to which the staged reversal of order becomes a real one. The project's aims result in three areas of analysis: In Nuremberg, 110–115 mainly anonymous carnival plays are documented from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These plays nearly always treat issues relevant for the social order of the time. The second area of analysis is concerned with carnival theater and the discourse on urban order in those towns from which no carnival play texts have survived, but in which a tradition of theater during the carnival season is documented, such as Ulm, Regensburg and Strasbourg. The third area regards the Protestant Reformation, during which carnival theater often resulted in the spilling of blood. In general, our research focuses on the intersections between symbolic and social systems. An analysis of carnival plays from the fifteenth century and of records from medieval Ulm and Nuremberg serves to illustrate the three areas of research and the overall aims of the project.

Introduction: The Carnival Season as an Element of Urban Festival Culture

The medieval course of the year was mainly formed by the liturgical calendar and its holidays. In addition, there were gradually more festivities concerning private areas of life like christenings, marriages, or funerals. Feasts and festivities in medieval urban society generated a public culture and were an integral part of the social order. This was especially true for the carnival season as a period of communal festivity, which brought people from different social classes and regions together in town for a short period of time. Carnival theater com-

prised an essential component of this festival together with its complex rituals of performance and representation. It evolved during the 14th and 15th centuries in late medieval towns, by which it was structurally supported but also controlled.

Initial Situation: The Current State of Research

Our project, presented here, deals with urban carnival theater as a possible form of threat to public order. We thus concern ourselves with the following three areas of research: Firstly, the idea that the carnival season was a time of crisis; secondly, the relation of carnival to the discourse on urban public order; and thirdly, the link between carnival theater and Reformation.

The Carnival Season as a Time of Crisis

Heidy Greco-Kaufmann¹ has convincingly explained via a variety of sources that in Lucerne carnival rituals served as a licensed occasion for acts of personal revenge, private feuds, and vigilante justice. The mood at a carnival gathering could turn for the worse and the event could develop into a collective expression of displeasure and irritation. The riots of the so-called *Böse Fastnacht* (wicked carnival) of Basel in 1376, with their far-reaching consequences for local political culture, have been described in detail by Markus Wenninger.² During Duke Leopold III of Austria's visit to Basel on the occasion of a carnival tournament, knights and citizens attending the event clashed violently, resulting in several deaths. These riots were the culmination of a deeper conflict about the citizens' right to have a say in local politics. Twelve citizens were executed for their role as ringleaders and the imperial ban was imposed on Basel.³

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie⁴ has similarly investigated the connection between social-revolutionary riots and the activities belonging to the carnival season. In 1579, a few weeks before carnival, a phase of rebellious acts that lasted one year started in Romans, a town in southern France. These riots ended in a bloody altercation on Ash Wednesday the following year, when the hostile po-

1 Greco-Kaufmann, 'Zuo der Eere Gottes'.

2 Wenninger, 'Fasching als Krisenzeit'.

3 Such feuds or actions of punishment and war in Switzerland have been examined for some time now, which is why there is a lot of material on these topics. Cf. Wackernagel, *Altes Volkstum der Schweiz*; Wackernagel, 'Fehdewesen, Volksjustiz und staatlicher Zusammenhalt'; Weidkuhn, 'Ideologiekritisches'; Weidkuhn, 'Fastnacht – Revolte – Revolution'.

4 Le Roy Ladurie, *Karneval in Romans*.

litical camps formed up into competing carnival organizations (on one side the peasants and the new urban leadership of the craftsmen, on the other side the gentry and the Patriciate, who only had limited power).

Carnival Theater and the Discourse on Urban Order

In many cases, the urban authorities took steps to mitigate political tensions. They often assumed control of certain events (e.g. the *Schembartlauf* in Nuremberg), encouraged visitors during the carnival season to behave reasonably, and arranged representative meetings and meals on the occasion of the carnival season.⁵ As of yet, theatrical activities during the carnival season (like public dances, processions or tournaments) have not been the subject of detailed surveys.⁶ This holds true in particular for the connections between the approximately 110 preserved carnival plays of Nuremberg and the contemporary discourse on urban order.⁷ The relevant mandates and statutes of town councils as legislative bodies have in quite a few cases, especially in southern German towns, not yet been taken into consideration under the aspect of 'carnival theater as a menace to urban order'.⁸ Two studies provide points of contact for the examination of performance records related to carnival: In his monograph on carnival theater, Eckehard Simon⁹ put the main emphasis on the northern German free cities and also on Nuremberg. Bernd Neumann¹⁰ on the other hand compiled the performance records of religious plays.

Carnival Theater and the Reformation

During the Reformation, carnival theater functioned as a medium of political-religious agitation and took place in the context of social unrest. The connection of carnival theater and Reformation has – except for the Swiss Reformation-age plays that were thoroughly surveyed by Glenn Ehrstine¹¹ – not yet been systematically explored in the context of council records and other urban archival documents. Some important initial work nonetheless exists: For Bern

5 Cf. for example with regard to Lucerne Greco-Kaufmann, 'Zuo der Eere Gottes' I, pp. 193–239.

6 Cf. Moser, 'Städtische Fastnacht des Mittelalters'; Kirchgässner and Becht (eds.), *Stadt und Theater*.

7 For approaches to this cf. Bastian, *Mummenschanz*; Nöcker, "'vil krummer urtail'"; Ridder, 'Fastnachtstheater'.

8 On the subject of urban regulatory policies cf. Meier and Schreiner, 'Regimen civitatis'.

9 Simon, *Die Anfänge der weltlichen Schauspiels*.

10 Neumann, *Geistliches Schauspiel*.

11 Ehrstine, *Theater, Culture, and Community*.

and Lucerne, the studies by Peter Pfrunder and Heidy Greco-Kaufmann; for Germany, the essays by Bob Scribner and Eckehard Simon.¹²

All in all, we lack attempts to link theatrical or scenic performances to social and political processes as well as literary and aesthetic sources to non-literary ones. This is where our project comes in: It investigates all sources concerning the carnival season that point to a context of threat. Within these sources, we focus on aspects of order and threat in addition to examining the role of cultural and scenic components for carnival processes of this kind. To aid in defining our methodological framework, we turn first to preliminary considerations concerning our main terms and the corresponding components of our investigation.

Research approach

The Terms *Carnival Theater* and *Discourse on Order*

The term *carnival theater* covers everything that was performed during the carnival season, be it written plays or performances without a text (processions and parades, carnival tournaments, scenic performances, dancing rituals, or festive practices). The *discourse on urban order* signifies the discourse contained in diverse types of social regulation, often formulated in statutes and codes (e.g. festival and sumptuary laws, marketplace regulations), pertinent decrees of the urban council as legislative body (e.g. council records) as well as other sources that reflect social norms (e.g. chronicles).

The Carnival Season as a Time of Endangered Urban Order

For a limited time every year the carnival theater in its different varieties turned the anthropological, social and political order upside down. This short phase of a world turned upside-down (*verkehrte Welt*) increases the awareness of the existing order, but it also increases the awareness of its weaknesses. On the one hand, carnival functions to stabilize the existing order; on the other, it has the potential to create conflict: Under the impression of performances that portray a topsy-turvy order, latent tensions, personal enmities, and conflicts

¹² Pfrunder, *Pfaffen, Ketzer, Totenfresser*; Greco-Kaufmann, 'Zuo der Eere Gottes'; Scribner, 'Reformation, Karneval und die "verkehrte Welt"'; Simon, 'Fastnachtspiele inszenieren die Reformation'.

between groups can lead to the eruption of violence, civil disturbances, and riots (the incidents in Basel and Romans, mentioned earlier, are examples of this). Because of this, both secular and religious authorities intervened with regulations and sanctions, and infractions of social norms that occurred as part of carnival theater were the object of council decrees and orders.

Carnival theater is an activity of urban society; as such, it takes place under official supervision and can have tendencies to affirm, but also to subvert order. For this reason, carnival theater is a subject of communication among different levels of urban society, both on festive days and during the rest of the year. The theatrical, ritualized communication of carnival theater intersects with the discourse on urban order and where they meet, situations of endangered order can be identified. In this respect we use the term *threat* as a heuristic tool: This term makes it possible to identify the situation-specific tensions produced by the area of conflict between carnival theater and urban order. It also enables us to analyze the complex relations between theatrical staging, social orders, and respective measures taken by urban authorities.

Carnival as a 'Tipping Phenomenon'

We focus particularly on phenomena in which the scenic representation of threat can 'tip', turning into a real threat. Our project sees the carnival season as a yearly recurring *tipping phenomenon*, during which ambivalent frames of reference overlap on different levels, such as on the level of social groups, on the level of how participants judge carnival activities, or on an organizational and representational level. Concerning representation, three components of urban activities are opposed to one another: First, the cultural component of theater, second, the social component of orders and regulation and third, the religious component. Inasmuch as social tensions become apparent in the guise of carnival, carnival theater can be seen as an indicator of these tensions. Moreover, because the carnival season accelerates these processes of unrest, it sometimes even assumes the role of catalyst. Therefore it is necessary to find the criteria to describe these inner dynamics of the carnival season.

Research Aims and Areas of Analysis

Our research aims and areas of analysis are based on the aforementioned research approach as well as on the premise that the scenic representation of the topsy-turvy world creates the socially accessible framework which makes it possible to question the existing order. The aim of our project is to draw a con-

trasting picture of the processes of interaction between carnival theatrical activity and the politics of urban order on the one hand, and on the other hand between 'play' infringements of order and real-world violations. Only by drawing connections between literary and non-literary texts do the tensions between carnival theater and urban order become tangible. To this end, we examine the texts of surviving plays, which with the exception of one Lübeck play are all from Nuremberg (app. 115 plays), alongside other performances, urban statutes, reactions of the city council and of religious institutions, as well as chronicles and literary works. The project's aims result in three areas of analysis.

Nuremberg Carnival Plays and the Discourse on Urban Order

In Nuremberg, 110–115 mainly anonymous carnival plays are documented from the 15th and early 16th centuries. These plays nearly always treat, in carnivalesque inversion, issues relevant for the social order of the time: sexuality and physicality, social and religious marginalization, the regional market and (long-distance) trade, urban and imperial policy. The large group of about 25 courtroom plays make obvious (parodistic) reference to the legal system of the time, especially to particularities in the legal institutions of Nuremberg.¹³ Numerous other plays reveal the high degree of hostility towards Jews in late medieval Nuremberg (especially KF 1, 20, 68, 106). Many plays allude to the policies of public order of the imperial town of Nuremberg with its strong regulations and manifold prohibitions, for instance sumptuary laws and regulations concerning marriage, dancing or public safety (KF 11, 45, 65, 66, 83, 89, 104, 105). In addition, the plays hint at perceived or feared disadvantages and reprisals at the hands of public servants, or they describe the function of such servants, e.g. official wine inspector (*Weinkieser*), mercenary (*Söldner*), guard (*Wächter*), and town distrainer (*Stadtpfänder*).

One such allusion to the urban system of surveillance occurs in the Nuremberg play *Aliud von frauenriemen* (KF 11). In this revue (*Reihenspiel*), women praise their physical attributes, while their husbands support their self-praise or partially qualify it. Almost imperceptibly, however, the typical carnivalesque discourse on sexual qualities segues into a discussion of town sumptuary laws and the urban system of policing that must enforce its observance. Two women say the following:

13 E.g. charges because of damages and insults: KF 10, 18, 24, 34, 52, 69, 104, 112. From here on 'KF' is used as an abbreviation for the carnival play edition by Adelbert von Keller (Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*).

Die sechst frau spricht:

Nu bin ich auch ein stolzes weip
Und het wol zu zieren meinen leip,
Mich irret auch daran kein gelt,
Das ich mich ziret gen der welt,
Wann mir sein gar wol gund mein man,
So muß ich do groß sorge han
Auf die und die mich rufen auß
Und mit ir zungen tragen auf das rathaus.

Die sibent frau spricht:

Mein schwester, des gelaub ich wol dir,
Was hie du klagest, das gepricht mir.
Ich tet mich zieren auch gar schon
Hie gen der werlt vnd meinen man,
Man tet mich auf das rathaus tragen,
Die scheden die must ich verklagen.
Nu will ich mir ein pißner anschneiden,
Das mich niemant darumb mag neiden. (KF 11, p. 106, ll. 8–25)

The sixth woman speaks: I, too, am a stately woman and know how to adorn myself. Nor do I lack the money to dress up in public, because my husband wants that very much for me. But I have to fear those who want to discredit me and bring me with their talk to the town hall.

The seventh woman speaks: I believe what you say, my sister. What you are complaining about I suffer as well. I dressed up nicely, too, to show myself off as well as for my husband. I was reported to the town hall and had to bear the losses. Now I am going to make myself a plain dress, so that no one can envy me because of it.

In Nuremberg, violations against the clothing order (mainly by the mercantile upper class and the patriciate) were reported to the *Fünfergericht* (tribunal of five), which met at the town hall. In the play, the fear of being reported possibly alludes to the town distrainer, who was responsible for the observance of Nuremberg statutes and laws, or to the so-called *heimliche Knechte* (secret servants), who assisted the distrainer as informers. Denunciations by personal acquaintances surely played a role as well.

Another example concerns a carnival custom: In the carnival play *Die egen* (KF 30) seven women are yoked to a plough in order to punish them for not having taken a suitor yet. When asked by a peasant, they give various reasons for not having married yet, such as not having a very appealing outer appearance or that slanderous remarks had alienated suitors from them. The play refers to the widespread *Rügebrauch* (custom of reproach) to yoke marriageable, but still unmarried women in front of a plough and then to drive them through the streets as the laughing stock of all onlookers. A woodcut illustration on a

broadsheet made for the fabliau *Die hausmaid im pflug* (The Maid in the Plow) by Hans Sachs (1532) shows this custom:



Pulling the plough in Regensburg on Ash Wednesday 1532. Broadsheet illustration by Erhard Schön, Albertina Bibliothek Wien, Graphische Sammlung. Cf. Stadtgeschichtliche Museen Nürnberg (ed.), *Die Welt des Hans Sachs*, No. 130, pp. 133, 148.

According to scholarly consensus, this custom, mainly carried out by young and unmarried men, was legitimized by the fact that the unmarried and thus childless state of women endangered social order and the survival of the community. This custom of reproach is therefore a reaction to a violation of social norms. It should not surprise us that the already violent act of yoking women to the plough escalated from time to time and endangered urban society. In Lübeck in 1499 for instance, an unmarried woman stabbed a man to death who had accosted her as part of this custom. The play *Die egen*, however, is not about the practice of the custom itself, but about its representation and discursive thematization. Our project will examine whether these women's more or less understandable reasons for remaining unmarried call the custom itself into question, as has been claimed by Werner Röcke.¹⁴

This discourse on social norms becomes possible only in the upside-down world of the carnival plays and must thus be a focus of analysis. The play texts make reference to different 'complexes of order' (*Ordnungskomplexe*), for instance the gender order, the religious order, the legal order, the political order of the medieval town, and not least to a certain degree the topsy-turvy order of carnival. These complexes of order were in varying degrees controlled by municipal statutes. The literary analysis of the manifold relations of the Nuremberg carnival plays to the various complexes of municipal order will not only

¹⁴ Cf. Röcke, 'Text und Ritual'. On this play, cf. also Ragotzky, 'Die hausmaid im pflug'.

enable us to understand and interpret passages from these texts, but will also provide a deeper understanding of the genre.

To achieve this, it is necessary to situate the plays vis à vis texts concerning the order policies of the imperial city Nuremberg and, furthermore, to analyze administrative and trade books, *Achtbücher* (books of proscriptions), sumptuary laws, and regulations concerning public order, craftsmen, fire precautions, festivals, trade, and the marketplace. We will also take annual town council decrees, which have survived from 1474 onwards, into account. Eckehard Simon's selection already gives one an impression of the 'assiduousness bordering on compulsive control'¹⁵ with which the inner council of Nuremberg, apparently threatened by the diverse forms of carnival theater, controlled urban society. The following ban from 1469 indicates that bawdy and obscene carnival plays constituted a particularly serious cause for offense:

Nachdem zu vergangnen vasnachten etlich personen spil unnd reymens weise vil leichtvertiger, üppiger, unkeuscher unnd unzimlicher wort unnd geperde nit allein in den heusern, sonder auch sunst bey tag unnd nacht wider unnd für gepraucht haben, [...] das hin für zu einicher zeit, unnd sunderlich zu der zeit der vasnacht nyemantz, weder manns oder frauenbild, jung oder alt, wer der oder die sein, soliche unzüchtige und unzimliche wort oder geperde reymens oder in annder weise uben oder gebrauchen sol in einich weise. [...] Dann wer das überfure unnd sich anders dann yetzgemelter maß hielte und sich des, so er darumb furbracht wurde, mit seinem rechten nit benemen mochte, der sol gemeiner stat darumb zu puß verfallen sein, ye als oft das beschehe, drei guldin. Es mochte sich auch in den dingen yemand so frevelich unnd unzüchtiglich halten, ein rat wolte den oder die selben darzu straffen an leib oder gut nachdem er zu rath wurde.

Since during the last carnival several persons, in rhyming plays, made use of frivolous, wanton, unchaste and unseemly speech and gestures, not only in the houses, but also in public during day and night, [...] [We decree] that from now on at no time, particularly during the carnival season, no one, neither man nor woman, young or old, whoever they may be, should in any manner make use of such obscene and unseemly words or gestures, be it in rhyme or some other form. [...] For whoever violates this [rule] and behaves otherwise than is here proclaimed and who, after being reported to the court, is unable to exonerate himself, shall be fined on behalf of the whole citizenry, three gulden for each occurrence. If someone should behave in a particularly outrageous and obscene manner, the council shall reserve the right, after due consultation, to punish him or her corporally or in terms of property.

¹⁵ 'an Kontrollsucht grenzende Beflissenheit'; Simon, 'Fastnachtspiele inszenieren die Reformation', p. 293.

Carnival Theater and the Discourse on Urban Order in Southern German Towns

The second area of analysis is concerned with carnival theater and the discourse on urban order in those towns from which no carnival play texts have survived, but in which a tradition of theater during the carnival season is documented. Where there are no surviving texts (and this is almost always the case), references to the forms as well as agents of carnival theater, to urban concepts of order and to acute situations of conflict or threat can be found in the council protocols. Therefore, in this second area of analysis, we study the archival records from the archives of Ulm, Regensburg, and Strasbourg. Previous studies of sources show that the aim of the public authorities consisted mainly in protecting public calm and order from the dangers of private as well as public performances that might lead to tumult and 'peasant clamor'. According to Wolf-Henning Petershagen,¹⁶ who examined the corresponding council minutes, the carnival period in Ulm consists of periodically recurring confrontations with the city council. From references in the work of Geiler von Kaysersberg we can also deduce an extensive carnival culture in Strasbourg, although here our study of source material awaits further progress. For the particular carnival tradition of Regensburg, in which the secular (council) as well as the religious authorities (monasteries and the cathedral) both took part, we have documents from the 14th century; by the 15th century, carnival plays were an established tradition, and two texts of plays have survived (early 17th century). Here imprisonments and jail sentences give particular evidence for excesses. One chronicle for the year 1510 reports that two young citizens were taken to the so-called madhouse after they let others pull them through the streets in a barrow while they imitated coitus.¹⁷

Carnival as a Medium for the Reformation

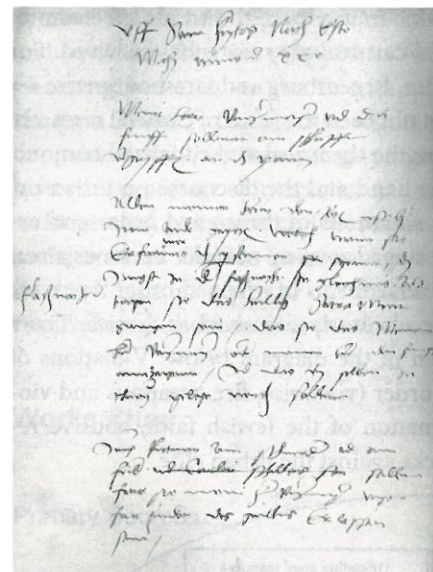
The playful notion of turning the world upside down during the carnival season was put into frequent practice during the first years of the Reformation. The violent actions of Protestants against Catholic institutions and buildings were often carried out in the form of 'visitations'. The councils of the respective towns often saw the need to intervene even when they were open-minded about the Reformation. The carnival season had now developed into a serious threat to order, often resulting in the spilling of blood. The Reformation man-

16 Petershagen, *Schwörpflicht und Volksvergünstigen*.

17 Cf. Eckl, *Fastnachtspiele in Regensburg*, p. 30f.

aged to change the carnival theater on many levels, but it could not completely suppress it. Our particular focus here lies on the connections between carnival theater and the social unrest unleashed by the Protestant Reformation, for which promising results can be expected. On the basis of previously unexamined documents from the respective municipal archives, this third area of analysis focuses on the development of the carnival season as a 'tipping phenomenon' during the Reformation in the imperial towns of Ulm, Regensburg and Strasbourg.

An example from Ulm helps to illustrate this connection: During the carnival season of 1525, a mock procession of the sacrament took place. The members of the council were urged to report the culprits to the Court of Five.¹⁸



Vff Sam Frytag Nach Esto
Michj anno d xxv

Meine heren Burgermaister vnd die
funff sollennt ain schriftt
vergriffen an dy porten

Allen meinen hern den Reten ist bj
Jrem aide gepoten ~~welch~~ wann sie
Erfarenn wer dy personen se seyenn / dy
Jungst jn der faßnacht jn gleichnus als
tragen sie das heillig Sacrament
gangen sein / das sie das Meinem
hern Burgermaister oder meinen hern den
funffen

annzaigenn / vnd das dy selben jn
thurrn gelegt werden sollenn

[...]

On Friday after 'Esto Mihi' anno d xxv. My Lord Mayors and the Five shall affix a text on the door. All members of the council are commanded by their oath that when they learn who the persons were who recently during carnival paraded about as if carrying the holy sacrament, they should report this to my mayor or one of the five, so that these people shall be placed in the tower.

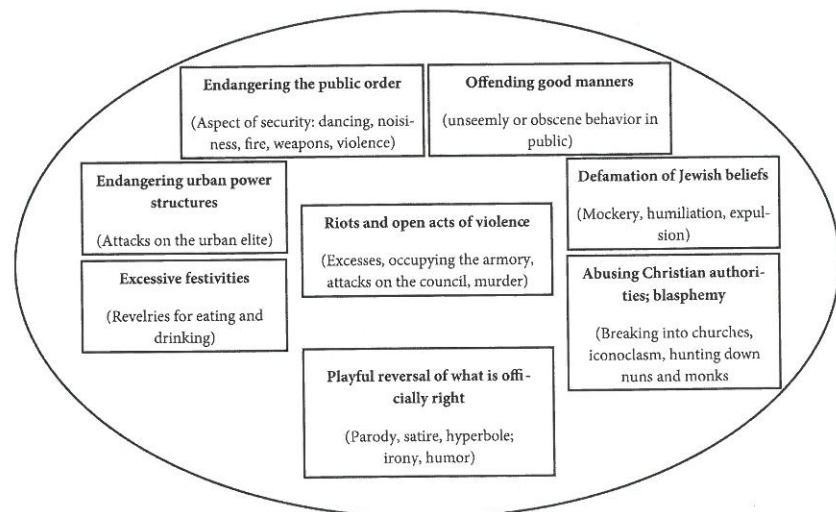
18 Stadtarchiv Ulm, A 3530, Rp 8 (Mai 1524–Mai 1527), fol. 125^v [3rd March 1525]. Cf. Scribner, 'Reformation, Karneval und die "verkehrte Welt"', p. 408, note 17.

Method, Choice of Material, Period of our Study

After having presented our areas of analysis, we now turn to our methodological approach, our choice of material, and our period of study.

There are no limits to the scope of sources in an urban context. Our project deals with plays, municipal sources, literary works, legal texts, account books, and chronicles. In cases where continuous records exist (town council minutes, for instance), but cannot be fully consulted, we will analyze the customary period of carnival activities from December until Easter. The overall time frame will stretch from 1450 to 1550. This way a sufficiently long period before and after the Reformation can be taken into account. We chose Nuremberg as object of research for the first field of work because there the whole spectrum of relevant sources, especially the corpus of carnival play texts, has survived. For the second and third areas of analysis, Ulm, Regensburg and Strasbourg were selected as important towns that have as yet not been the focus of carnival research.

Via the points of intersection between the theatrical and ritualized communication of carnival activities on the one hand and the discourse on urban order on the other, our project identifies situations of threatened order and articulates criteria according to which the staged reversal of order becomes a real one. To this end, we differentiate the diverse forms of inverted order that were typical for the carnival season and were obviously perceived as threats. There are several types of such threats, as seen in the diagram below: Violations of good manners, endangering the public order (via noise, fire, weapons and violence), excessive festive customs, defamation of the Jewish faith, abusive remarks on Christian authorities and attacks against the urban elite.



Methodological Approach

The research on the Nuremberg carnival plays and their context will systematically illuminate further the areas of tension between theatrical and literary history on the one hand and cultural and social history on the other. The corresponding methodological aim consists of an analysis of how the texts use and interpret elements of social tensions, the manner in which order is conceptualized in these towns, and how the staging of reversed order influences these connections. At the same time, the play texts should not be seen as determined solely by external structures or situations. Only work on the cultural and socio-historical implications of the plays from the perspective of literary studies can produce new results regarding the cultural processes which they helped shape and by which they were shaped as well. The research on sources in southern German town archives ties in with recent work on a wider understanding of the term 'theater'. In that case results on the special role of carnival plays can be gained only by analyzing pragmatic sources and interpreting socio-historical processes of interaction.

In general, our research focuses on the intersections between symbolic and social systems. On this basis, we can formulate our overall goal once more: In its three areas of analysis, our project aims at an adequate understanding of carnival as symbolic as well as social communication.*

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* Translated from German by Melina Munz. We would like to thank Glenn Ehrstine, who kindly advised us regarding technical language.

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