



CARRY ON THE FLAME

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Why do we celebrate carnival?

The answer is simple for a carnavalist: it's just a lot of fun! And it is a tradition in which everyone can get involved - from children to old age and with all their talents. The so-called fifth season is a time when creativity explodes. We simply celebrate life!

This brings us very close to the historical origins. Around 600 A.D. Pope Gregory introduced the forty-day Lent before Easter. In the days before, for the last time before Easter, there were exuberant celebrations, with masquerades and dances, parodic speeches on the church and secular rulers as well as smaller plays. This form of carnival was mainly supported by the guilds - for Nuremberg this has been well documented since the Middle Ages. As a counterpoint to the abstinence of Lent, the carnival definitely has a religious origin.

From about 1200 A.D. the Fastnacht (as the carnival is also called) is increasingly mentioned in sources. The partly vehement criticism of the authorities and the clergy led in the course of the Middle Ages again and again to censorship, prohibitions of the masquerade or complete prohibitions of the carnival. Criticism of the powerful is still an important part of the traditions today - with mockery by speakers or the symbolic disempowerment of mayors by conquering city keys and city coffers.

A direct reference to earlier Germanic winter festivals is no longer assumed today, even if there are influences. Ecclesiastical and courtly rituals are gradually adopted and incorporated into carnival traditions. In the breadth of the urban population, however, the festival loses its ritual binding power over the centuries and degenerates more and more into a feast - partly also connected with riots. In Protestant areas, carnival traditions disappeared after the reformation, as excesses were generally frowned upon. The carnival traditions were therefore able to continue mainly in Catholic regions of the former Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, in today's Germany mainly along the Rhine and Main rivers.

In 1823, new structures were created in Cologne's upper middle-class milieu, which led to the revival of carnival in a 'civilized' way. Association structures, meetings and the current form of carnival processions were created. The figure of the carnival prince as ruler over the festival (later mostly in female company as a couple of princes) also appears. As a persiflage on the military, 'Carnival guards' are created, which fool around with drill exercises and military rank signs (orders). From parodic marches and folk dance elements, guard dances were created, which developed through influences from ballet and acrobatics to today's usual guard dance.

The new traditions spread quickly from Cologne along the Rhine and Main rivers and are today a defining feature of the Rhenish carnival. In Southwest Germany, however, this tradition is abandoned and early modern traditions are reverted. This archaic-looking version of carnival, the Swabian-Alemannic carnival, may seem older, but it is in fact a development of the early twentieth century.