On an August morning in 1645, Georg Killreitter, a butcher and a citizen of Augsburg, took his horse for a ride outside the city gates. On this particular Sunday, the otherwise innocent activity seemed suspicious, even seditious, to the newly elected members of the city council, for Killreitter’s ride had taken place during the annual swearing-in ceremony. On this day each year, all men who had reached the age of majority were expected to appear at one of three squares in the city to take their oath of citizenship and swear allegiance to the Burgomasters and councilmen. Failure to take the oath was not taken lightly by local authorities, who viewed the butcher’s absence as an act of defiance. Killreitter was arrested upon his return to the city and questioned about why he would choose to avoid swearing allegiance to his hometown.¹

The ceremony of the “oath-day” (Schwörtag) was a standard institution in all free German towns, as well as elsewhere in Europe. Councilmen and Burgomasters were newly appointed each year, and the elaborate ceremonies that marked the passing of power from one government to the next underscored the permanence of civic institutions of government.² The ceremonies were highly ritualized and often festive affairs, heralded by the same alarm bells that also served to call men to arms in times of threat. Typically, the outgoing Burgomaster presided over the ceremony. Once the citizenry had assembled, the civic oath was read aloud, and the citizens then swore collective obedience and fidelity to the community and the incoming government. The promise was not one-sided, for the new councilmen likewise swore an oath of loyalty to the citizens. Processions from council house to church then served to link secular and religious institutions, and thus further emphasized the legitimacy of the new government. This link was also supported by the scheduling of annual oath-days on Sundays or religious holidays.³

¹ B. A. Tlusty, The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany
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The formal procedure itself could apparently be tiresome, for civic oaths were sometimes lengthy, as were the formal rituals attending the passing of power to the new government. Citizens did not always take the ceremony seriously, sometimes making a joke of it, showing up drunk, or avoiding it altogether, as had Killreitter.\textsuperscript{4} Formalities were also dictated by space; in larger cities it was sometimes impossible for all citizens to gather in one spot. In this case oaths might be taken only every few years, or administered in separate groups by neighborhood.\textsuperscript{5} Regardless of the quality of the ceremony, however, the oath itself was taken very seriously by civic authorities. It was the oath that bound citizens to their government and to each other in “loyalty and friendship” (trew vnd fraintschaft), the theoretical basis of the civic commune.\textsuperscript{6} The vow of obedience also implied adherence to all civic ordinances and could be recalled if these laws were broken, adding the serious charge of oath-breaking to any other accusations. Magistrates also reminded citizens of their oath before taking witness statements or conducting interrogations during legal proceedings. Male witnesses were regularly sworn in with a reminder of their promise of “duty of citizenship” (burgerliche pflicht), whereas the language used for those who were not citizens, including women and Jews, concentrated only on a promise of constancy in the given instance. Female witnesses, for example, might be sworn in “on their honor in lieu of an oath,” and Jews testifying in a Christian court swore by the name of Moses or other Old Testament figures.\textsuperscript{7}

Citizenship or full membership in the civic commune, as suggested by these rituals, conferred both political rights and communal responsibilities. The civic oath thus included not only a pledge of obedience to authority, but also expressions of loyalty to the town and its other residents and a promise specifically to protect the community from harm.\textsuperscript{8} The pledge of collective allegiance was made in the interest of maintaining civic peace (Stadtfrieden). This medieval concept, which was inherited by the towns of the Holy Roman Empire, implied a fraternal bond that included collective defense and peaceful relations between citizens.\textsuperscript{9}

Also implicit in the concept of Stadtfrieden were rights of self-defense and household peace (Hausfrieden). German law allowed persons of all stations the right to protect themselves, their families, and their communities from threats to life, limb, and property. The right to keep the peace, thus to resist threats and tyranny with force of arms, existed both personally and collectively, extending to the communities and estates of the Empire. The collective protection of the various estates was theoretically the responsibility of their rulers.\textsuperscript{10} In order to exercise their right to