

An attempted rider

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear von Olnhausen, dear Olnhausen and Ohlhausen, dear Ohlheiser, Ohlhäus/ßer and Ohlhauser, dear long-distance and close relatives, dear family, dear friends, dear guests,

Joan, you (and your husband) are heartily wellcome. Joan Isaak, the niece of Betty Lang née Ohlhauser has traveled especially from Canada.

Today, on St. Nicholas Day 500 years ago, in the night of December 5th to 6th, 1524, our common ancestor Jacob von Olnhausen died. Murdered on the eve of the Peasants' War in 1525 in the Heilbronn village of Böckingen, on the other side of the Neckar. All those who bear the names we have just welcomed are descendants of him in about the 15th generation, not only those from Olnhausen in the Heilbronn area, in the city itself, in Nordheim, Brackenheim, Frauenzimmern, etc., but also in many other parts of our country and the world such as South Africa, the USA and Canada, Sweden and Southeast Europe.

My name is Gerd Ohlhauser, I come from Darmstadt and am his descendant in the 14th generation, his grandson times four, so to speak. Our name originated almost 270 years ago on the Dilsberg above Neckarsteinach, where Johann Georg Ohlhauser was baptized with this name on May 6, 1756. His father, a certain Hanns Georg Ohlhäuser from the Protestant community of Eschelbronn, where the church records were kept in German, had married a Catholic widow there. In ecclesiastical Latin there are no umlauts, no ä, so the priest simply left out the dots. All Ohlhausers in Germany are descended from him. The numerous people with the same name in the USA were originally Ohlhäusers, who also became Ohlhausers because there are no umlauts in English. In general, many new name variants are emerging in other language areas: Olhansen, Ohlhanser, Ohlhauer, Ohlhaus, etc. They all go back to the same forefather.

My cousins from Dilsberg, Edgar and Manfred Ohlhauser, were able to trace our family tree back nine centuries, to the 12th century, to Albert (von) Otting, born in 1198. Six generations after Albert, Heinz (von) Otting was ennobled after returning from a crusade and given the name von Olnhausen. In the family tree of the von Olnhausen family in the State Archives in Vienna, it says: Heinrich (von) Otting went on a crusade to the Holy Sepulchre in 1388. But because he was an attempted rider and showed himself to be chivalrous at every opportunity, he was knighted as a Knight of the Golden Star alongside other lords and counts. At this solemnity [celebration] he was given the name von Olnhausen. After that he became an enemy of the Counts of Hohenlohe. Now that they are on good terms again, they have appointed him Vogt of Adolzfurth, a title that his children and grandchildren have inherited.

I read the text like this: The time of the great crusades has been over for almost a hundred years, the crusaders (Knights of the Teutonic Order) have lost the Holy Land to the Mohammedans. The County of Hohenlohe, which is closely linked to the Teutonic Order in Heilbronn, still occasionally organizes armed pilgrimages. Instead of well-trained crusaders, however, normal riders try (attempt) their hand at escort. The professional knights were knighted with the Golden Spur after completing their training, while the attempted riders are knighted with the Golden Star for their knightly services. Instead of a professional certificate, a pure order of merit. Stars are awards – to this day. The surname Otting was replaced by the noble title of Olnhausen, a place in the county of Hohenlohe – not far from here, as are almost all of the following villages. Although they had fallen out in the meantime, the count did not want to do without the proven employee on his staff. He appointed him bailiff, who represented him with full powers in the "administrative district" of Adolzfurth. There are still the inhabited remains of his official residence, a former moated castle, now simply called Es Schlössle.

"Because he was an attempted rider." For me, riding is always an attempt. I remember the Sunday rides in my youth. You ride, but you are also ridden. For the horse, you are the higher-ranking person from whom it expects guidance, but it only trusts you if you stick to horse rules, understand its world, only then does the herd animal feel safe. That requires clarity, clear, determined and unambiguous body language. In the weeks and months of the pilgrimage, rider and horse found each other. In danger, they could rely completely on each other. Only those who understand others can lead.

Otting's son, Heinrich von Olnhausen (I), was actually the Vogt of Adolzfurth from 1420. He was succeeded by his son, Heinrich von Olnhausen II, and from 1495 by his son Heinrich von Olnhausen III. The latter had a younger brother, our Jacob von Olnhausen, born around 1465. He naturally also needed a living. His father's employer, Kraft Count of Hohenlohe, personally recommended him to the Heilbronn City Council as a servant in the Marstall, the municipal stables, in the municipal vehicle fleet, so to speak. From 1490 onwards, he provided the horses in the stable with food, water, shoes and other things for an annual salary of 13 guilders, almost 10,000 euros in today's purchasing power, as well as free food and drink in the hospital. I quote: "He faithfully provided the horses in the stable with food, water, shoes and other things." He looked after the bridles and saddles, carried out business trips on behalf of the council, had to ride around the city between the guards in the event of nighttime dangers, and had to keep a horse ready for the mayor in the event of an extreme emergency. He was respected in the city and when Count Albrecht of Hohenlohe tried to lure him away, the council fought bitterly to keep him. One would think that he was a tried rider. In 1509, almost 20 years after taking up his post in the stables, a certificate identified him as a soldier in Heilbronn.

In the meantime he had married his second wife, Magarete. Magarete - ancient Greek for pearl. They moved to Böckingen, where, according to a document from 1514, he owned property. Böckingen and Heilbronn now argued about who he had to pay property tax to and whether the children from his first marriage on the other side of the Neckar were Württemberg serfs. Nevertheless, he seemed to be so highly regarded that in June 1515 the Heilbronn city council appointed him as the riding, i.e. mounted and armed, mayor of Böckingen for an initial period of eight years. Equipped with a good riding horse, he received 20 guilders annually, 20 malters of oats, 10 malters of grain, the yield of two acres of meadows and sufficient firewood. The 20 guilders annual salary corresponded to almost 15,000 euros in purchasing power. A mayor is an official who – literally – exacts debts, who collects the dues and taxes owed. He ensures order, the performance of compulsory labor and has to settle disputes, which could be life-threatening if violence breaks out. As a representative of the sovereign power of the imperial city of Heilbronn, he was at the forefront of the growing discontent of the peasants over the increasing burden of taxes. In 1524, uprisings had already broken out in the south of the country.

And then he really got into trouble. Jäcklein (Swabian for little Jacob), Jäcklein Rohrbach, who had just taken over a hereditary farm from his father, categorically refused to pay taxes. The barely 25-year-old, a serf of the Lords of Neipperg on his mother's side, had already rebelled against them several times and had been imprisoned in a tower. Because of an inheritance dispute, he had even written a letter of vendetta to the Dürrenzimmern community and threatened its mayor. A formal announcement of vigilante justice, in which the killing of innocents was prohibited, but the burning down of houses and the devastation of land was permitted. He had also served a short time for this. The city of Heilbronn had assigned him to the Swabian League of Cities as a mounted mercenary in their fight against the regent Duke Ulrich, who had been driven out of Württemberg. He learned that it was permissible and necessary to kill. And he experienced how the city subsequently imposed three times the tax burden on its villages to cover the costs of the war.

Rohrbach was not the only rebel in Böckingen. Magarete Renner, who will go down in the annals of the Peasants' War as the "Black Court Lady", had already refused to pay taxes for

some time. As early as 1520, her husband had refused to pay what he considered to be unjustified taxes and had been sentenced to 3 ½ years in prison by the Heilbronn City Council. She called on her feudal lords to take action against the perversion of justice. After her husband's death in prison, she refused to pay taxes and perform compulsory labor even more. The Heilbronn Council then instructed Böckingen, in the person of its mayor Jacob von Olnhausen, to withhold her grazing, water and other village rights until the claim was settled.

Rohrbach, meanwhile, agitated against the authorities in the wine bar that belonged to his farm. The situation in Böckingen must have escalated, the mayor must have inevitably clashed with the total objectors, and on the night of St. Nicholas Day 1524, Jacob von Olnhausen was murdered and his farm burned down. According to the chronicle of the city of Heilbronn (9), Jäcklein Rohrbach and his comrades [stabbed] the mayor of Böckingen. The Black Court Lady is said to have covered up or hidden the perpetrators. Under suspicion, Rohrbach was said to have had to endure a difficult investigation. Jacob's widow accused Rohrbach and the Schad brothers of the crime and, with the help of her brother-in-law (the bailiff Heinrich von Olnhausen III), demanded their property as compensation in court. The blood on his hands earned Rohrbach the admiration of the abused farmers. He invited such a large number of supporters to the legal day in Böckingen at the end of March 1525 that the plaintiffs stayed away out of fear. The council's intervention was also unsuccessful. Everything was already in ferment. I have already mentioned that the first uprisings had already taken place elsewhere. This may also have inspired Rohrbach, who dragged out the proceedings, gathered the rebellious peasants and organized the uprising.

Jacob von Olnhausen had six children. His youngest son Philipp was a servant and representative of the city of Heilbronn and was killed by a blacksmith's apprentice in Böckingen in 1565. We do not know the background. The notary Erasmus von Olnhausen is probably descended from him. He was one of 21 council members and dignitaries who donated money to this church and whose family coats of arms were placed in the nave for this purpose. The spelling Olheyser first appears in Erasmus' brother Jacob, born in 1540, which later became Ohlhäuser and Ohlhauser. He probably had enough of the noble title that only cost his father and grandfather their lives.

So much for the history of our names and our ancestor Jacob von Olnhausen. In our research we only traced back our Ohlhauser line. Jacob's brother, Heinrich von Olnhausen III, had three sons. It cannot be ruled out that another line that has continued to this day arose from this. If you belong to this line, then today you are remembering the 500th anniversary of the death of your esteemed ancestor's brother.

Back to the alleged perpetrator: Jäcklein Rohrbach is one of the best-known names from the Peasants' War and a driving force of the uprising in the greater Heilbronn area. He was educated and was considered very clever. In contrast, Moriz von Rauch describes him in the Heilbronn register as a hot-tempered "agitator". I think: Perhaps it is precisely the hot temper that is needed for the sense of justice to break through and to rebel against the hopeless situation in the first place. It takes a sudden spark that ignites. Hot temper is too cheap for me. Rohrbach was a political activist. It's just that rebellion was not yet a political category. With the murder of the Böckingen mayor Jacob von Olnhausen, he had crossed a barrier and won over like-minded people. The act became the trigger for the regional uprisings. He gathered fellow campaigners in the surrounding villages, farmers who would otherwise never have rebelled. He was not the seducer, as the Böckingers later tried to claim. The peasants followed him for good reason. He opened the floodgates for them.

At the beginning of April 1525, Rohrbach was elected leader of the peasants from the Heilbronn area and the Weinsberg valley. Their Neckar Valley group united with the Odenwald group, which had just taken Öhringen and occupied the Schöntal monastery, 8,000 peasants in total. They organized raids against castles and monasteries, the hated nests of priests. Where the nobility joined them, their castles were spared, but not the

monasteries. They forced the Counts of Hohenlohe to join the group and swear an oath to the 12 articles.

These articles, printed and distributed in large numbers, contain their basic demands and are considered an early kind of Magna Carta of human rights, or at least of peasant rights: The community should be able to elect and dismiss its own pastors and pay them from the large tithes. The small tithes and serfdom should be abolished completely, everyone should be free to catch game, poultry and fish, community forests, meadows and fields should be returned, corvées and rent payments reduced, arbitrary convictions prevented and inheritance tax abolished - all in accordance with the word of God.

The farmers' demands – modest compared to the enormous burdens. They bore the main burden of maintaining the ever-expanding feudal society: princes, nobility, officials, patricians and the clergy, priests, prelates and monasteries lived from their labor, and as the number of beneficiaries continued to rise, more and more people were pushing for the meat pots, and the taxes that the peasants had to pay also increased. In many places, real division was added, which led to ever smaller, no longer economically viable farms. More and more peasants fell into servitude and further into serfdom of their landlords, resulting in additional rents and service obligations. Taxes and duties were increased arbitrarily, and if one half of the spouses died, the other half had to pay inheritance tax on their assets. Economic hardship, social misery and powerlessness against the arbitrariness of the judiciary prevailed.

In contrast, the clergy, the wealthy monasteries and convents, especially the Teutonic Order, which had become unemployed, lived in luxury. A significant part of their income went to Rome. In addition, there was the Peter's Pence, the annual collection for the Holy See and the income from the unspeakable indulgence trade. The Vatican was financed directly from Germany, St. Peter's Basilica was begun in 1506, and from 1508 Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel. All financed by German farmers.

Luther fueled the movement with the translation of the New Testament into German and his writing "On the Freedom of a Christian" in 1520, according to which a Christian is lord over all things and no one was subject to the rebellion of the village population. There was no biblical justification for their miserable situation, on the contrary, the existing law contradicted divine law.

On Good Friday, the peasants took the Teutonic Order town of Neckarsulm. Without resistance. The castle governor of Weinsberg, Count Ludwig von Helfenstein, was asked to join the peasant brotherhood. While he was negotiating, he had his horsemen attack the peasants' rear guard. He threatened his own peasants with burning down their farms if they did not leave the peasants' camp. At the same time, news arrived of the bloody actions of Georg Truchsess von Waldburg against the peasants in Upper Swabia. A messenger from Weinsberg offered to hand over the town, but Helfenstein prevented this. He had the keys to the town handed over to him and closed it down. The peasants' negotiators were shot at. Helfenstein had already had all the peasants who fell into his hands slaughtered without further ado. Early on Easter Sunday, Rohrbach's troops marched towards Weinsberg and demanded that they be surrendered. Women and children were to be allowed out of the town. The negotiators were shot at again. The castle was stormed, its garrison killed or taken prisoner. The countess and her three-year-old son were brought to safety in Heilbronn. The citizens continued to try to negotiate with the peasants, who promised to spare them but demanded the death of the count and the knights, who were holed up in the church. The peasants entered the town, stormed the church, captured Helfenstein and 16 knights and then chased them "through the spears", through a line of peasants until they succumbed to their lance thrusts. They were encouraged by the Black Court Lady, who also accompanied the peasants as an instigator. The peasants did not want war, but their freedom. Now they had no choice but to make an example.

Rohrbach's revenge, later referred to as the "Blood of Weinsberg" against the peasants, did not fail to have an effect on the nobility. The Counts of Löwenstein, frightened, joined the mob. On Easter Monday, the mob plundered and ravaged the Carmelite monastery outside the gates of Heilbronn, from where they received a large influx of troops. The following day, Heilbronn reluctantly opened itself to an advance guard of 200 men, who immediately plundered and ravaged the Teutonic Order's courtyard. They threw all written documents into the Kirchbrunnenbach stream that flowed past, in order to rid themselves once and for all of their obligation to the order. The town equipped a troop of citizens for the peasant army.

Other towns, Wertheim, Mainz, Würzburg, joined the peasants. Meanwhile, the 10,000-strong army of the Swabian League under the leadership of Georg Truchsess von Waldenburg defeats the 12,000-strong Württemberg peasant group near Böblingen. Over 2,000 peasants are stabbed to death. Jäcklein Rohrbach is captured and burned alive on May 21, 1525 in Neckargartach on Truchsess's march to Würzburg, as is the new, apparently peasant-friendly mayor of Böckingen; others are killed, beheaded or hanged, Böckingen is partially burned down, and Weinsberg is razed to the ground.

The army of the Swabian League advances with the Electorate of the Palatinate army towards Neckarsulm. The main force of the peasants had left the city to meet Götz von Berlichingen, who was on his way to confront Truchsess. However, Knight Götz, who had been entrusted with the supreme command by the peasants, secretly leaves the peasant army at Adolzfurth after his four-week contract expires. This is also called desertion. Neckarsulm voluntarily opens itself to the federal army, and the remaining peasant warriors are executed. On the way to Würzburg, the federal army inflicts decisive defeats. Around 4,000 peasants were killed at Königshofen and 5,000 at Sulzdorf. The local uprising was thus over.

Götz von Berlichingen was imprisoned in Heilbronn for 3½ years until October 1522. He was soon allowed to exchange his prison in the Bollwerksturm – not Götzenturm – for knightly house arrest in the Gasthaus zur Krone, where his wife often stayed with him. However, he found the final bill for their food and lodging to be – literally – “dangerously” overpriced. In a letter of complaint to the council, he named the noble Jacob von Olnhausen as a witness and referred to their friendly relationship. They must have regularly drunk wine in the Krone. In fact, Jacob and Götz were great-cousins, as my own great-cousin Andreas Ohlhauser found out. Jacob's grandfather Heinrich von Olnhausen I was married to Anna von Berlichingen.

I cannot blame Götz for deserting in view of the superior strength of the approaching federal army. The cruel end of his esteemed great-cousin, barely five months earlier, may still have been in his mind, may even have been in his bones and deeply saddened his soul. It was peasants who murdered him. Götz survives because he deserts the army, but he becomes the whipping boy of the princes and bishops, who take revenge on him by locking him up.

Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen is re-enacted every year for the festival in the courtyard of the Götzenburg in Jagsthausen, the castle where Götz spent several years of his childhood. It is the only venue in Germany that shows a play at its original location and that involves us, as descendants of the great cousin, deeply in German history. Two years ago I saw the production of Goethe's furious Urgötz. I can only recommend it to you.

In October 1525, almost half a year after the uprising was crushed, the council (of the city of Heilbronn) responded to the complaint of Jacob's widow Margarete that he had to give the goods demanded to the Countess of Helfenstein after the Weinsberg massacre of her husband ordered by Rohrbach. She had already been given justice before the council, and the decision had been made to execute [the Schads] by the sword. However, the chief bailiff of Lauffen ensured that the verdict was overturned: "His serfs, the Schad brothers, were found innocent of murder at the Rottweil court. – “Invented” is surely the right word here. –

The council should ensure that Margarete and her new husband, the new mayor of Böckingen, allow the Schads to return to their families and property. Historians who believe in the sources therefore cast doubt on Rohrbach's guilt. The peasants had just turned against the arbitrariness of the judiciary. The rulers increasingly intervened in the court's proceedings. The verdict of Rottweil was probably dictated from above. The widespread mood of the time was that there was no law, even injustice. Seldom was the law more bent than in 1525, after the rulers had defeated the peasants. Legal historians turn a blind eye to this to this day.

The Peasants' War cost the lives of almost a hundred thousand peasants. The breakdown of civilization did not come from Rohrbach's massacre at Weinsberg, but from someone like Helfenstein, who negotiated at the front in order to slaughter the rear guard of the peasants, from Waldenburg, known as Bauernjörg, who burned Rohrbach alive. In Alsace, 3,000 peasants were slaughtered after they had surrendered with white flags, in Frankenhausen in Thuringia, 6,000 peasants were massacred, almost 1,000 were taken prisoner and then executed. Unbelievable brutality!

On the other hand, 3,000 castles and monasteries were destroyed. The shock was deep, on both sides, and gradually brought about a realization. The peasants were contractually guaranteed more rights, and serfdom was gradually abolished. In historiography, however, the peasants had lost their reputation once and for all. Even Luther had used Rohrbach's bloody deed at Weinsberg as a welcome excuse to distance himself from the peasants. The murderous and robber hordes of peasants should be smashed, strangled, stabbed, killed like a mad dog. The princes' protégé would ultimately have lost his monastic privileges. The verdict of the most influential historian of the 19th century, Leopold von Ranke, on the "fortunately failed destructive rage" still has an impact today. In my opinion, the Heilbronn city archives are not free from it either.

And Jacob von Olnhausen? I fear he lacked leadership qualities. An attempted rider is more than a tax collector. Wouldn't he have had the chance to give things a different course here? With all due respect: I am on the side of the farmers, he may forgive me. I bow to him.

Gerd Ohlhauser
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