



### The year 1525

In the year 1525, Memmingen was a place in which history was written. Due to oppressive taxes and excessive official duties, fifty representatives of Upper Swabian farmers joined together in the free imperial city to form a "Christian association". The meeting place in March 1525 was the building of the Kramerzunft (salesmen guild) here at Weinmarkt. On the basis of "Twelve Articles", they wanted to obtain relief from their Lords. A statute gave their association an organisational structure.

With the agreement on the basic principles of political community such as freedom, justice, election, self-determination and co-determination, the meeting of the peasants became the first constituent assembly. The principles of the peasants would not be found again on Germany soil until 1848 in Frankfurt Paulskirche (church in Frankfurt) and, as applicable law, in the Weimar Constitution of 1919.

# Anno 1525

Dye Grundlichen Vnd rechten Haupte Artickl aller Baur-  
schaffe vnd Hynderfessen der  
Gaislichen vnd Welcl-  
chen oberkayre / von  
wölichen sy sich  
beschwert ver-  
mainen.



# Zwölf Artikel

## The „12 Articles“

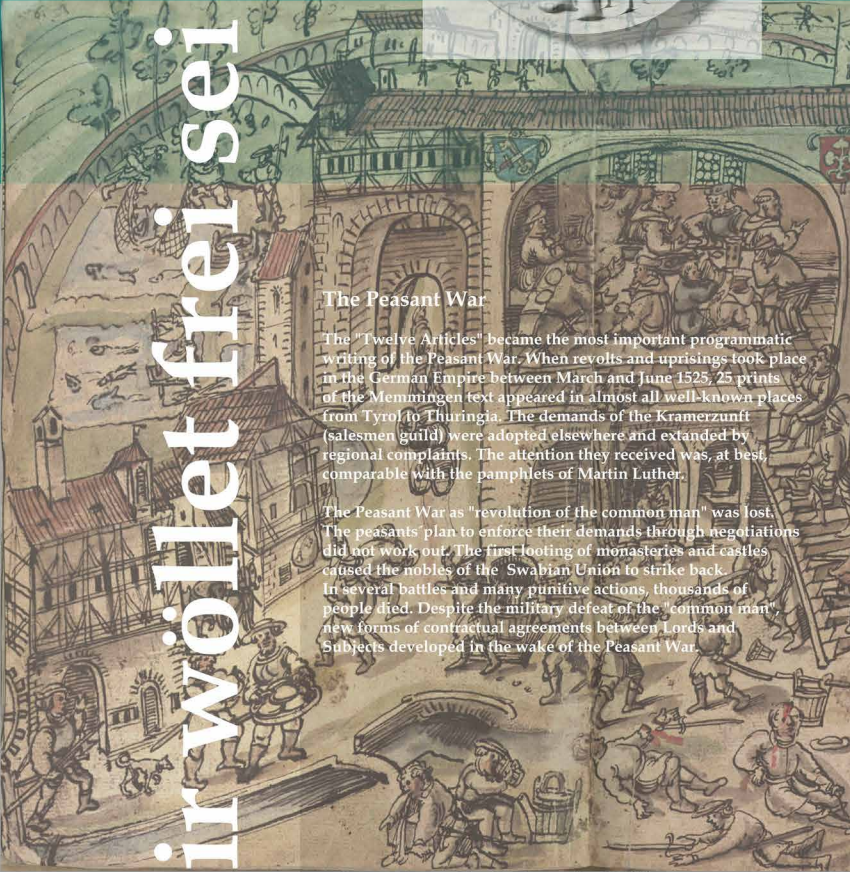
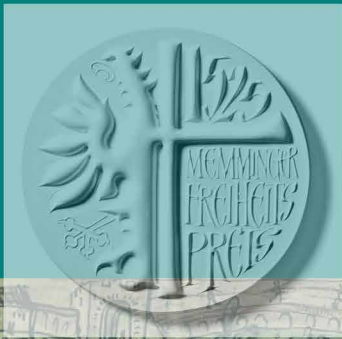
The "Twelve Articles", written by the Memmingen lay preacher Sebastian Lotzer, are a milestone in the struggle for freedom rights. With reference to the Word of God, it is stated that there are principles of law which may not be overridden by any local or other special law. It calls for the legitimation and restriction of sovereign power.

In the holy bible, the farmers read that they „are and ought to be free“. With their message of the dignity of every human being, the "Twelve Articles" are an early proof of the universality of human rights. As monuments to the human struggle for freedom, they are considered a unique document of German constitutional history.

In spring 1525, Sebastian Lotzer anonymously wrote a pamphlet containing the farmers' most important complaints, the so-called "12 Articles". They represent the only and most important programmatic document of the uprising of the "common man" in European history and considered to be a manifesto for a society of freedom and ethical responsibility.

1. Each parish is to select a priest to strengthen its faith.
2. The tithe is to be used for the priest's salary, for the deserving poor and tax reserves
3. By the crucifixion of Christ, people became free. This is why serfdom is to be abandoned.
4. Peasants are to receive hunting and fishing rights. Non-vouched claims to power are to be declared unenforceable.
5. Due to the "fundamental need for wood", wooded areas are to be returned to the parish, unless they were bought.
6. Compulsory Service is to be performed according to source and Word of God, but must not be increased at random.
7. Fiefs must secure the peasants' existence. This is why additional services to Lordship are to be rewarded.
8. Excessive levies for goods force the peasants into ruin. Therefore, the levies should be reassessed by "honorable men".
9. Instead of arbitrariness in criminal prosecution, old, written legal principles corresponding to the crime are to be observed again.
10. Former community meadows and fields shall be returned to the parish, unless they have been legally acquired.
11. Inhuman, degrading levies in the event of the death of a peasant (case of death) are to be eliminated completely.
12. All demands correspond to the Word of God. A counter-opinion must be based on the gospel.

# Mirwöllet freisei!



## The Peasant War

The "Twelve Articles" became the most important programmatic writing of the Peasant War. When revolts and uprisings took place in the German Empire between March and June 1525, 25 prints of the Memminger text appeared in almost all well-known places from Tyrol to Thuringia. The demands of the Kramerzunft (salesmen guild) were adopted elsewhere and extended by regional complaints. The attention they received was, at best, comparable with the pamphlets of Martin Luther.

The Peasant War as "revolution of the common man" was lost. The peasants' plan to enforce their demands through negotiations did not work out. The first looting of monasteries and castles caused the nobles of the Swabian Union to strike back. In several battles and many punitive actions, thousands of people died. Despite the military defeat of the "common man", new forms of contractual agreements between Lords and Subjects developed in the wake of the Peasant War.

## „Memminger Freiheitspreis 1525“ (Memminger Liberty Prize 1525)

Since 2005, the city of Memmingen and the "Board of Trustees" Twelve Peasant Articles" have awarded the "Memminger Freiheitspreis 1525" for services to freedom, rights and justice.

The prize is a reminder that no success in the history of freedom once acquired is automatically secured forever. The prize is awarded to celebrities of public life who stand up for freedom, law and justice in the name of human dignity. In their efforts to disclose abuse of power, they should be motivational role models in our society.