

**Decree of the City of Strasbourg,
written in Alsatian German (1537)**
prohibiting the provision of food
and drink in public places

This Broadside, which contains the text of a municipal government ban of the City of Strasbourg, is, due to its rarity, of great historical value. The document, measuring 208 x 319 mm, was printed on paper in 1537 by Balthasar Beck¹, and the number of copies printed is unknown. Only one copy of this document is registered by the USTC (Universal Short Title Catalogue)², namely, the one at the Archives de la Ville et de la Communauté Urbaine of Strasbourg, in France.

The document publishes a decree of the Magistrates of the City of Strasbourg, concerning certain licentious habits of some inhabitants of the city and its *Hinterland*. It establishes a fine of 30 pence for those who organize shooting competitions (*Königreich*), parties between members of a group (*Kolben*), or other celebrations in which there is plenty of eating and drinking. And the need for such a measure is based on the waste that these practices cause, with the decrease in the assets of families and the city. In the text, the citizen authorities at their various levels (master craftsmen, counselors, etc.) play a leading role, which follows the practices of communal government, of representative and originally Roman stamp, in the decisions that concern the well-being of the town.

Written in Gothic font, typical of the early German printing press of the 16th century (it is worth noting here that Strasbourg and its region, currently in France, were then politically and culturally German!), the document presents a few abbreviations and ligatures, generally easily legible. There are no signatures nor stamps on the document, and it is in very good state of conservation. It is dated and decreed on Monday, February 12, 1537.

This document may be of great interest to scholars occupied in the Alsatian culture in the Renaissance, or, more broadly, in European popular culture and politics in the 16th century. Due to its rarity, it may also arouse interest in research circles dedicated to the early European Printing Press, and in Book- or Historical Museums.

¹ Balthasar Beck was a relevant German printer, active in Strasbourg between 1527 and 1551, of whom numerous editions are known. It should be remembered that Strasbourg was one of the capitals of European printing during the 16th and 17th centuries.

² It is the N° 751849, see <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/751849>.

Text Transcription

Als unsere Herrn Mayster und Rath yetzo augenscheinlich sehen und vernehmen / wie allenthal- // ben auf den stuben und wurtsheüsern / von den burgern künigreich / kolben und andere zerung // zechen und prassen getriben wirt / Dadurch sie das ir inen selbs / iren weibern und kindern unnot- // wendig und ueberflüssig verschwenden / und zuo endlichem verderben künfftiglich wirt reychen. // Dem selben (als die Oberkeyt) auß schuldigem ampt / so vil moeglich vorzusein / Haben die genan- // ten unsere Herrn Meyster und Rath sampt den Eyn und zweintzigen erkant / Das hinfüro keyn Wurt noch Gasthalter / desgleichen keyn Hauptkan uff den stuben in diser statt und dem burck- // bann in Ruprechtzaw / Schilddicken / Ilkirch / oder zuo Sanct Oßwald / keyn angefengt kü- // nigreich noch kolben / oder der Gleichen angelegt geschelschafft in iren heüsern oder uff den stu- // ben annemen / halten/ oder denen die solich künigreich/ kolben oder geselschafft ufftreiben / debei // oder damit sein woellen / weder essen oder trincken / durch sich selbs / ire weiber kind oder gesind // in keynen weg zuorüsten oder geben sollen. Dann welcher Wurt oder Hauptkan obgemelt hie // wider handeln / oder yemandt wider gemelt maß zuessen und trincken geben / oder geben lassen // würden / demselben werden sie on alles nachlassen yedes mals umb XXX. ß. Pfenning thun straf- // fen. Des wißs sich meniglich vor schaden gewarnt zesein. Dat. Et Decret. Montags den XII // Februarii. Anno rc. xxxvii.

Text in Modern German

Als unsere Herrn Meister und Rat jetzt augenscheinlich sehen und vernehmen / wie allenthalben auf den Stuben und Wirtshäusern / von den Burgern Königreich, Kolben und andere Zehrung, Zechen und Prassen getrieben wird, dadurch sie das ihr ihnen selbst, ihren weibern und kindern unnotwendig und überflüssig verschwenden und zu endlichem verderben künftiglich wirt reichen. Dem selben (als die Obrigkeit) aus schuldigem Amt so viel möglich vorzusein, haben die genannten. unsere Herrn Meister und Rat samt den Einundzwanzigen erkannt, dass hinfür kein Wirt noch Gasthalter, desgleichen kein Hauptkann auf den Stuben in dieser Stadt und dem Burgbann in Ruprechtsau, Schilddicke, Ilkirch oder zu Sankt Oßwald, kein angefengt Königreich noch Kolben oder dergleichen angelegte Gesellschaft in ihren Häusern oder auf den Stuben annehmen, halten, oder denen, die solche Königreiche, Kolben oder Gesellschaft auftreiben, dabei oder damit sein wollen, weder essen oder trinken, durch sich selbst ihre Weiber, Kind oder Gesinde in keinen Weg zurüsten oder geben sollen. Dann welcher Wirt oder Hauptkan obgemeldet hiewider handeln oder jemandt wider gemeldet maß zu essen und trincken geben oder geben lassen würden, demselben werden sie ohne alles Nachlassen jedesmals um XXX. ß. Pfenning [thun] strafen. Des wisse sich menniglich vor Schaden gewarnt zu sein. Dat. et Decret. Montags den XII. Februarii. Anno rc.³ xxxvii.

³ The expression "rc." is equivalent here to 1500, but it is confusing because it hides a typographical error (see images below).

English Translation

As it has been now observed with their own eyes, and listened [quite well] by our Craftsmen Masters and [the members of] the Council, some citizens everywhere organize, in meeting rooms (*Stuben*)⁴ and inns, shooting contests (*Königreich*), private celebrations (*Kolben*)⁵, and other kind of parties, [plenty of] eating, drunkenness and waste. In this way they squander what they, their women and children do not need and find superfluous [for the moment], but in the future [those behaviors] will lead them to ruin⁶. To prevent this, the higher authority, being those mentioned Craftsmen Masters and the Council, together with the Twenty-One⁷, decreed that, from now on, no innkeeper or guest, and likewise no pourer (*Hauptkan*)⁸, is authorized—in the public spaces of this city and in the neighboring jurisdictions from Ruprechtsau, Schilddicke, Ilkirch or Sankt Oswald⁹—to organize or celebrate shooting competitions or parties or other planned gatherings in homes or public spaces, attend or participate in them, nor prepare or sell food (*Mass*) in any way or drinking. [The prohibition] extends to themselves, to their wives, children and their employees. The innkeeper or pourer who, as has been said before, acting in contravention of this ban, dispenses food or drink or causes it to be dispensed, will be punished, without any reduction of the fine, each time with XXX ß [thirty pence]¹⁰. This warns everyone of this damage. Dated and Decreed. Monday, the 12 February. Year 1537.

4 The word *Stuben* means “gathering places.” See *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm auf CD-ROM und im Internet (Der digitale Grimm)*, vol. XX, column 157, s.v. “Stube”, acc. N° 10.

5 The word *Kolben*, which means “clubs” or “pistons”, was used, in the context of the document, to designate a type of celebration among groups of friends, who were invited by circulating a *mace* or *club* or *piston* from the inviting house in circle (*Der digitale Grimm*, Vol. XI, columns 1602-1611, s.v. “Kolben” acc. N° 10).

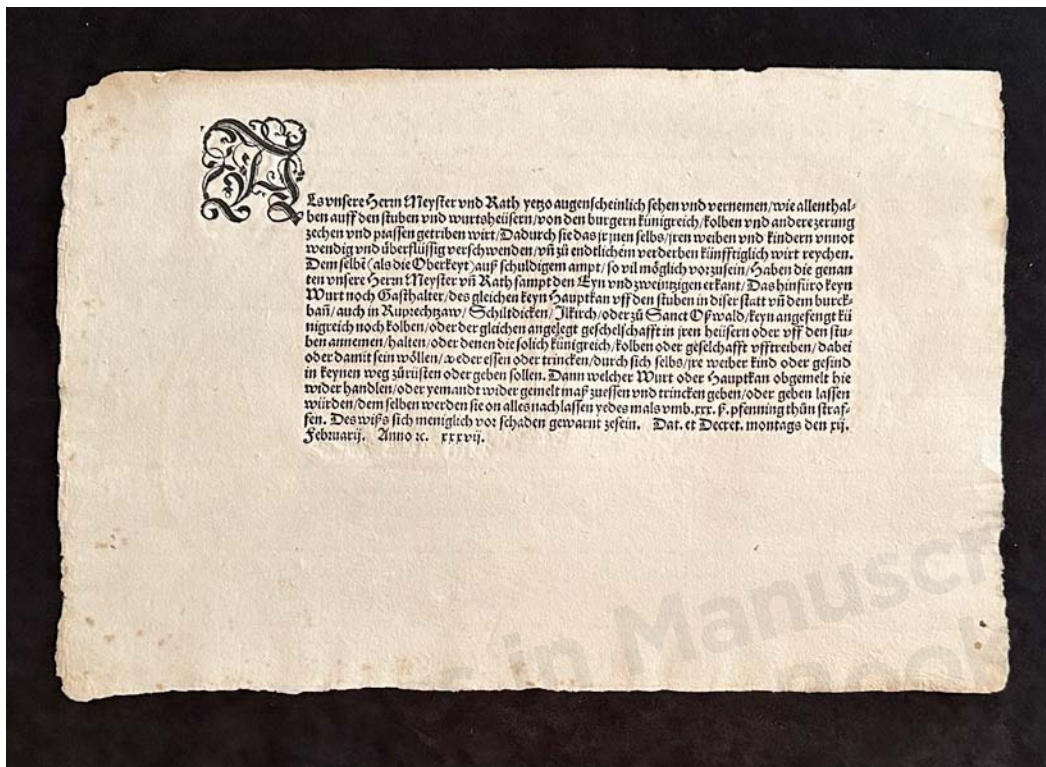
6 According to a Decree of the Council of Strasbourg, in 1535 there was a complaint about the way in which some citizens of the borough were engaged in carousing and drinking in community halls and taverns (see Johannes Georg Scherz, *Glossarium germanicum mediæ ævi*, ed. by J. J. Oberlinus, Straßburg, 1781-1784, I, in II, p. 809).

7 The Council that governed Strasbourg consisted in the 14th and 15th centuries of a number of 25 magistrates (or some less occasionally), elected from the neighborhoods or communes, a tradition that is clearly continued for the 16th century, as our document illustrates, in which 21 dignitaries in office are referred to.

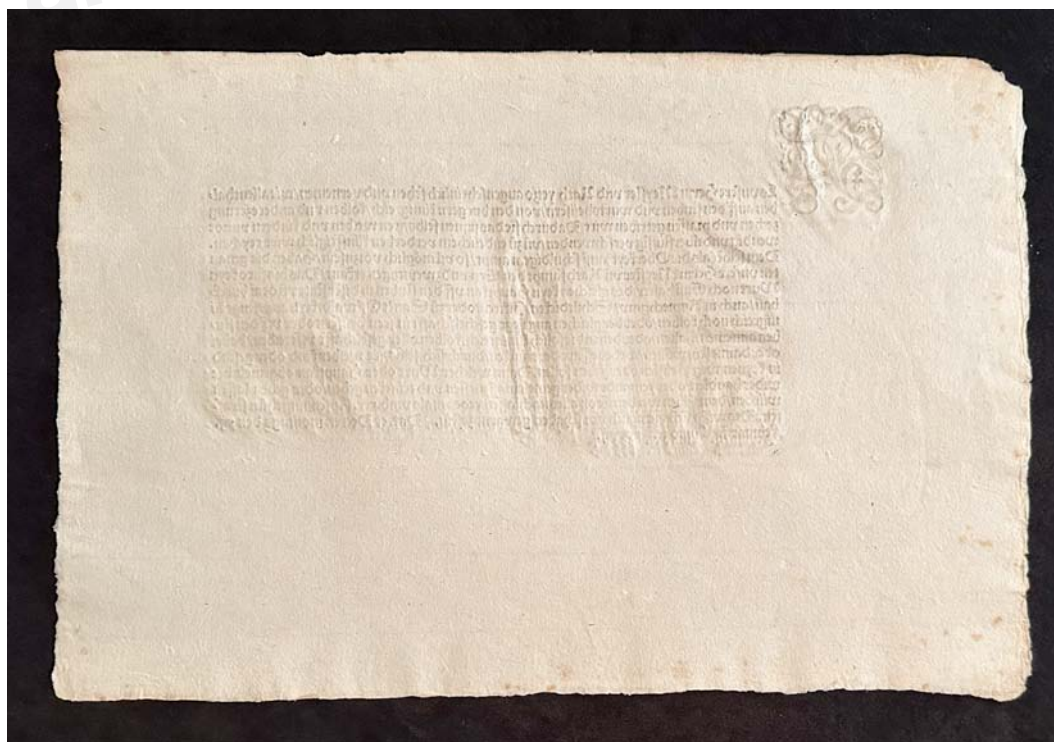
8 The term *Hauptkan* appears, according to Grimm’s *Wörterbuch*, s.v. “Hauptkan”, in various municipal or corporate regulations. In the kingdom of France, around the 16th century, it designated a senior officer of the king’s winery and vineyards. In our document it alludes undoubtedly to the person who manages drinks and meals at public and private celebrations.

9 Some of these neighborhoods, then a couple of miles apart from the center of the town, are now part of the city of Strasbourg.

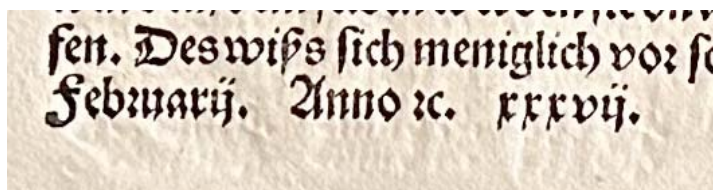
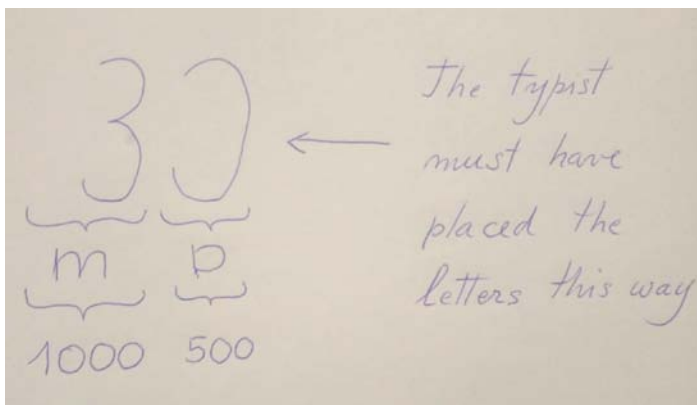
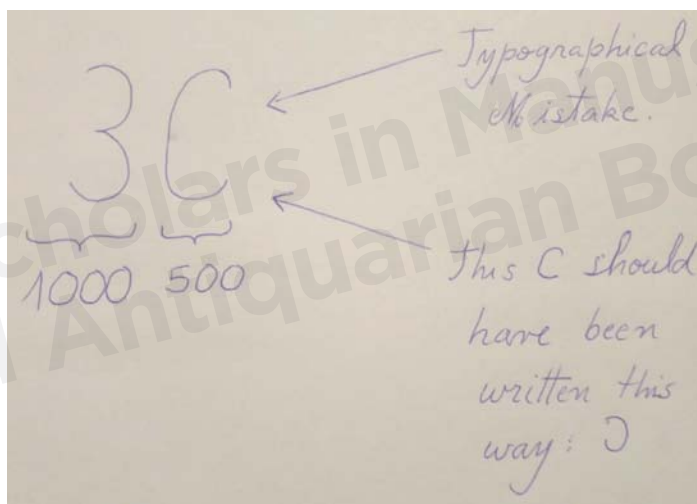
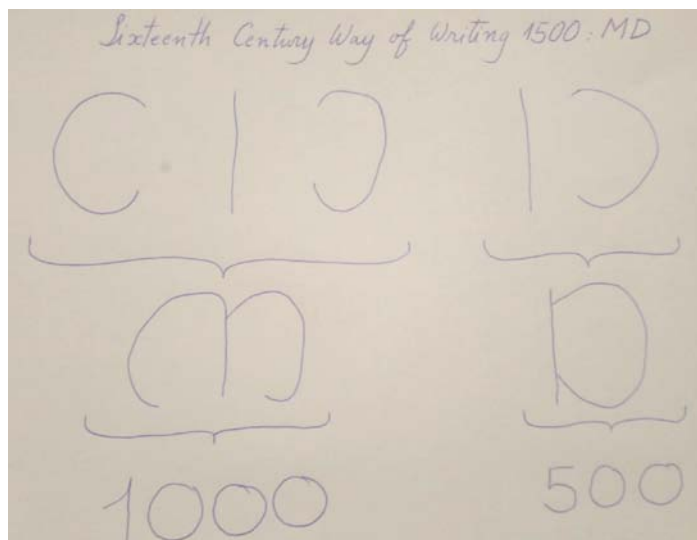
10 This symbol “ß”, which we tentatively translate as *penny*, undoubtedly alludes to a monetary unit, but its precise name and value is beyond this preliminary research. It still requires identification by specialists in economic history of the period.



Recto of the Decree of the City of Strasbourg (1537)



Verso of the Decree of the City of Strasbourg (1537)



A Problem in Writing "1500"