Codex Manesse

An early revolutionary: Rudolf Brun

Rudolf Brun (1290s–17 September 1360) was the leader of the Zürich guilds' revolution of 1336, and the city's first independent mayor.

Since 1234, Zürich had been governed by an aristocratic council. One third of the council's members were representatives of the nobility, and two thirds were drawn from the city's patriciate, consisting mainly of influential merchants. The city's mayor was appointed from among these by the abbess of the Fraumünster.
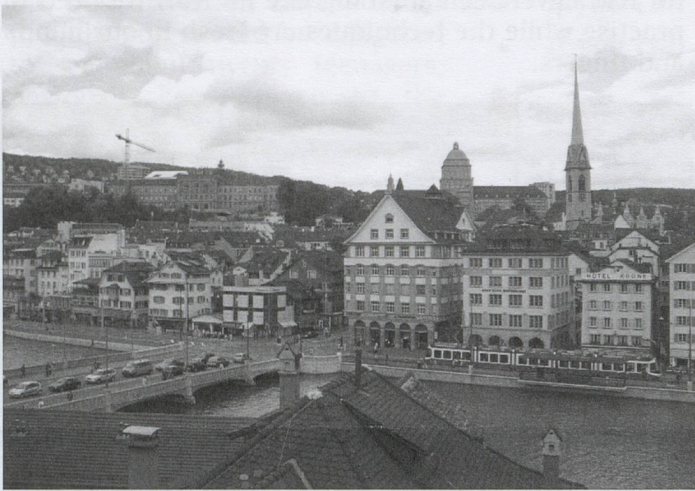
The bridge across the Limmat named after Rudolf Brun

Rudolf Brun, himself a member of the council from 1332 to 1336, overthrew the former city council with the help of the city's craftsmen in June 1336. According to the new constitution, the council was now composed of 26 members, of whom 13 were of the Konstaffel, consisting of the former patriciate. The remaining 13 councillors were the guild masters of the city's 13 guilds (Zünfte). In a sense, Brun's reform was not so much a revolution as the creation of a balance of power between the patriciate and the guilds. Brun reserved for himself the title of mayor for life, and he dominated the council until his death in 1360.

In 1337, Brun defeated his political opponents, who had retreated to Rapperswil. An attempted coup by the aristocratic opposition was forcefully put down in 1350. Zürich under Brun joined the Swiss Confederacy in 1351.

A result of Brun's revolution was also a decrease of the influence of the city's two monasteries, the Grossmünster and the Fraumünster, which had dominated Zürich throughout the Middle Ages. The Fraumünster abbesses, traditionally women of the highest nobility, did retain considerable political influence, however, and the process was only completed with Huldrych Zwingli's reformation in the 1520s, in the course of which the monasteries were shut down.

Christoph Froschauer

Christoph Froschauer (ca. 1490 – 1 April 1564) was the first printer in Zürich. His workshop is the nucleus of the Orell Füssli publishing house.

He learned the printer's trade with his uncle, Hans Froschauer, in Augsburg and came to Zürich in 1515. Working for one Hans Rüegger, he built a printing press. At Rüegger's death in 1517, Froschauer married Rüegger's widow and took over the press, and was given citizenship in 1519. The famous dispute over a "sausage eating" organised by Froschauer in his workshop during lent in 1522 brought about open conflict between Zwingli and the clerical establishment, thus setting off the Reformation in Switzerland.

Froschauer printed the works of Erasmus von Rotterdam, Luther and notably of Zwingli. Between 1520 and 1564, about 700 titles in close to a million copies left Froschauer's four presses. The paper used was produced in the city's paper mill at the Limmat, also operated by Froschauer. Froschauer died of the plague in 1564. His nephew Christoph Froschauer the Younger (1532-1585) took over the shop.

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The Codex Manesse is an illuminated manuscript copied and illustrated between ca. 1304 when the main part was completed, and ca 1340 with the addenda; the codex was produced in Zürich at the request of the Manesse family of Zürich. It is the single most comprehensive source for the texts of love songs in Middle High German, representing 140 poets, several of whom were famous rulers. The term for these poets, Minnesänger, combines the words

for "romantic love" and "singer", reflecting the content of the poetry.

The 137 miniatures are a series of "portraits" depicting each poet. A large number of the nobles are shown in full armour in their heraldic colours and devices taking part in tournament combats. Many designs draw their motifs from the names of the poets or on imagery from their lyrics; Walther von der Vogelweide is shown in a thoughtful pose which exactly matches the description of himself in one of his most famous songs. Since the manuscript was compiled up to 100 years after the poets' death, neither the likeness nor the heraldry can be regarded as authentic.