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# HELVE<sup>TI</sup>A

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## Zürcher Sechseläuten

The Sechseläuten (Sächsilüüte) is a traditional spring holiday in the Swiss city of Zürich celebrated in its current form since 1904.

Following the parade of the Zünfte, the climax of the holiday is the burning of Winter in effigy, in the form of the Böögg, a figure of a snowman prepared with explosives. The custom of burning a rag-doll called Böögg predates the Sechseläuten. A Böögg (cognate to bogey) was originally a masked character doing mischief and frightening children during the carnival season.

The roots of the festival go back to medieval times when the first day of summer working hours was celebrated in the guildhalls across the city. City ordinances strictly regulated the length of the working day in that era. During the winter semester the workday in all workshops lasted as long as there was daylight, but during the summer semester the law proclaimed that work must cease when the church bells tolled at six o'clock. Changing to summer working hours traditionally was a joyous occasion because it marked the beginning of the season where people had some non-working daylight hours.

Popular tradition has it that the time between the lighting of the pyre and the explosion of the Böögg's head is indicative of the coming summer: a quick explosion promises a warm, sunny summer, a drawn-out burning a cold and rainy one. The shortest time on record is 5:07 minutes in 1974, and the longest in 2001 with 26:23. The latest explosion of the Böögg's head (on 16 April 2007) took place 12:09



minutes after the pyre was lit, promising a medium warm summer.

Additional events of the holiday nowadays also include a 'Kinderumzug' (children's parade) in historic and folkloristic costumes on the Sunday preceding the Sechseläuten, a very colorful afternoon parade of the 26 guilds in their historic dress costumes, each with its own band, most with a sizable mounted 'Reitergruppe', and horse drawn floats, to the 'Sechseläutenplatz' at the lakeshore where the Böögg is burnt, a ceremonial galloping of the mounted units of the guilds around the bonfire, lunch and dinner banquets for the guild members and their guests.

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