

DUKE CHRISTOPH'S STONE



Duke Christoph's Stone

This stone, perhaps the oldest traditional stone in Germany best demonstrates the history of stone lifting and Teutonic strength within the country. In addition, it's size and shape as well as history, mirroring the more famous Celtic and Norse lifting stones, shows how inclusive the art of stone lifting was in ancient times within Europe.

Situated within the city centre of the Bavarian capital of Munich, the Munich Residenz (Munchner Residenz) or Munich Palace was commissioned by Maximilian I(1597 – 1651) and became the permanent home of the Bavarian Royalty and today is a major tourist attraction within the city. The Palace is also home to the Duke Christoph's stone.

When after Christ's birth the date was

Fourteen hundred and ninety years.

Did Duke Christoph nobly born

A chosen hero in Bavaria.

This stone uplift from the flat earth

And fling far off without exertion

It weighs three hundred four and sixty pounds.

Situated in the passageway that leads to the Fountain Courtyard of the Residenz, the stone sits solemnly at the side of a wall and a plaque with the above text gives the visitor some brief history of the stone.

The feats of strength of Duke Christoph (son of Albert III) are legendary but the story of the stone actually takes place in Ludwigs Burg. The Duke, a well respected and extremely strong man fell in love with a beautiful local woman whom had two other suitors. It was decided that a competition would be held and the winner would have the hand of the lady. Two events were prescribed, throwing the heavy stone and leaping.

Above the stone near to the poem explaining the story are three nails. Each nail represents the height each competitor reached in the leaping contest. The bold Duke won both events with a man called Phillip Stringer coming third in the competition.

Another version of the story has poor Phillip Springer as a servant of Duke Christoph. Phillip fell head over heels in love with Gertraud who was the beautiful daughter of a local wood cutter. Phillip unfortunately had some stiff competition for the affection of Gertraud as a wealthy merchant called Kunrath, and a prominent local politician named Florian Hundertphund both of whom had also fallen in love with her.

As with all men of honour, the good Duke represented his man servant and in a stone throwing contest to win over Gertraud he managed to throw this massive glacial stone further than her suitors.

At the end of the poem on display at the Residenz the German poet Gorres concludes with the following lines;

And may the dear Lord to each one

Of all our rulers loan

Skill to leap out of every ill

And strength for every stone.

Little is known about the general lifting of the stone but in 1855, a strong Barvarian woman raised the stone six inches clear from the ground.

There are three known lifts of the stone prior to 1836. In September of that year a correspondent residing in a Munich hotel writes in "Letters from Germany and Belgium" published in 1839 by Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London. -

"A striking proof of English muscular strength was accidentally brought under my notice here, in the case of a young officer residing in the same hotel as ourselves. A huge stone of probably not less than three to four hundred pounds in weight, which is chained in the Palace yard as a memento of the personal strength of some ancient Bavarian Duke who had proved himself equal to its weight, was twice lifted from the ground by our compatriot, to the infinite surprise of the valets-de-place who witnessed the feat.

The only other persons, who according to their authority, are known in later times to have succeeded in lifting this stone, are stated to have been a native of the Tyrol, and an English East India Captain."



The above text clearly states that the stone was lifted but was chained. One can only suggest that the chain was considerably longer than it is today for the likelihood of a successful lift.

In the early 1860's the stone was visited by the American traveller and author W Pembroke Fetrige. In his travel guide to Europe "Harpers Handbook for travellers in Europe" published by Harper Brothers, New York in 1869, Pembroke states in page 524 that the stone is "fastened by a chain". Although the exact year of his tour is unknown, it can be reasonably established that the stone was shackled between 1855 and 1861 and it has remained so since.

Unbeknown to Fetrige at the time, during his tour and as mentioned in page 47 of his book, he complements the quaint cottage occupied by a Mr Auld beside the Burns monument in Ayr. Almost 130 years later, the original drafts of "Of Stones and Strength" were being written by the late PB Martin in the very same cottage.

In 15th Century Germany it was known that Knights competed at various events situated throughout the country. These competitions involved many aspects of skill and strength but centred around the traditions of the mythical contest between Brunhild and Siegfried (Norse/Germanic mythical characters) involving running, leaping and throwing the heavy stone.

At a competition at Augsburg in 1470 , a special golden ring was prepared for the person who could throw furthest a 45 lb stone. Competitors were permitted three throws with their best effort counting and although Duke Christoph was in attendance, the event and the ring was secured by a Knight called Wilhelm Zaunreid. Christoph took the prize for leaping at this competition.

As for the bold Duke Christoph, legend states that he once slayed a dragon and near Freising in Upper Bavaria there was once a monument to Graf von Avenberg who was killed in single combat by Duke Christoph in 1455.

With similarities to Celtic storytelling, there are a number of stories in Germany that involve the use of the heavy stone to defeat the devil. Legend states that the people of Rothenburg were threatened by the Devil who lifted a large stone and intended to throw it on to the local Chapel. An old woman approached the Devil and began to taunt him by questioning his strength or rather lack of it. The Devil so annoyed, threw the stone a full two miles beyond the Chapel. Ashamed that he had been tricked by an old woman the Devil promptly disappeared, never to return and the stone is apparently still within the woods nearby and can be seen to this day.

The Devil tried this very same trick in attempting to destroy the church of St Boniface in Fife, Scotland but he overshot his mark by only one mile, and again the stone, known as the Puddock Stone still remains.

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