

# THE LANDSHUT WEDDING

Documenting a historical Bavarian event with authentic pageantry.

BY ANNELISE MAKIN • PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY ANNELISE MAKIN





MUSICIANS WITH TRAUSNITZ CASTLE © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

**"H**immel Landshut, Tausend Landshut!" "Heaven Landshut! Thousand Landshut!" throngs of medieval soldiers, towns folks, and decked out nobility shout through the streets of Landshut. The response chorus echoes from thousands of bystanders. The historic wedding has come around again.

Once every four years, next in 2027, Landshut descends into the Middle Ages. On four July weekends, the townspeople roam the streets in period costumes to reenact their grandest historic event: the festivities around the betrothal of Bavarian Duke Georg and Polish Princess Hedwig in 1475. Up to half a million visitors pour into town to partake in this historic event as the town's scenic backdrops become a stage.

Landshut, the capital of Lower Bavaria, is an inviting destination at any time. Situated scenically on the Isar River, its Gothic main street city façade beckons a visit to a restaurant, tavern, or coffee shop. In the heart of town the venerable Cathedral of St. Martin dominates the scene. On the hill above the colorful city backdrop, the medieval Trausnitz Castle frames the horizon. Commissioned in 1204 by Duke Ludwig I of Bavaria (1173–1231), who also cosigned the Bavarian *Reinheitsgebot* (purity law) for beer, the castle expanded with the needs of time and survived the World War II bombardments unscathed.

The year 1204 is also understood to be the founding of Landshut. The name has a practical meaning: *Hut* (hat) for cover or protection, *Ob-hut* (custody), *Vor-hut* (vanguard), and *Nach-hut* (rearguard). *Auf der Hut sein* means to be watchful... for the "land" of Bavaria. Landshut became a Wittelsbach residence in 1231 and a duchy (Lower Bavaria) in 1255 of rulers dubbed "the Rich".

Now a population of about 76,000, Landshut has experienced shifts in political prominence. In the War of Succession, Duke Georg of Bavaria-Landshut (the groom in the Landshut Wedding), in lack of a male heir, installed his daughter Elisabeth as successor in 1503. The Munich dukes contested that move. During a two-year war, many villages around Landshut were destroyed. After Elisabeth passed away in 1505, the Landshut dukedom was merged with the Munich dynasty and lost an important status. Another downgrade came about in 1826 when Landshut's university was transferred to Munich.

Despite its turbulent history, Landshut has put itself on the map. It is easy to reach from Munich's airport—a convenience that has attracted industry greats like BMW, ebm-papst, and Schott electronics. It has also produced many noteworthy personalities: Roman Herzog (former President of Germany), Ludwig Thoma (writer), and Erich Kühnhackl (ice hockey player) are only a few examples. But no industry, prominence, or politics matters when it comes to the Landshut Wedding and the whole town reenacts its glory days.

When I was a child, our father took us to see the parade which was like a fantasy world come true. Noble knights on horses, pretty maidens in wagons, mighty dukes strutting their heavy chains of office, crusty soldiers with halberds and lances, acrobats, jugglers, and flag throwers passed by at arm's length. Flocks of children in medieval outfits followed the march music much like the children of Hamelin followed the Pied Piper. Even back then, you wanted to claim your spot along the Münchner Straße in the Altstadt early and defend it against late comers. Naturally, everybody eagerly awaited the golden coach of the princess. Luckily, the parade





MUSICIANS IN THE PARADE, 2013

circled around twice for a bonus look.

## The History

The seed for the Landshut Wedding pageant was planted in 1875. Back then, the city fathers reconceptualized their city hall in the neo-Gothic style and debated how to decorate the interior of the Prunksaal (Great Hall). Eventually the wedding of Landshut's Duke Georg the Rich was proposed as a theme. The Bavarian Ministry of Cultural Affairs supported the idea and several historical painters were hired between

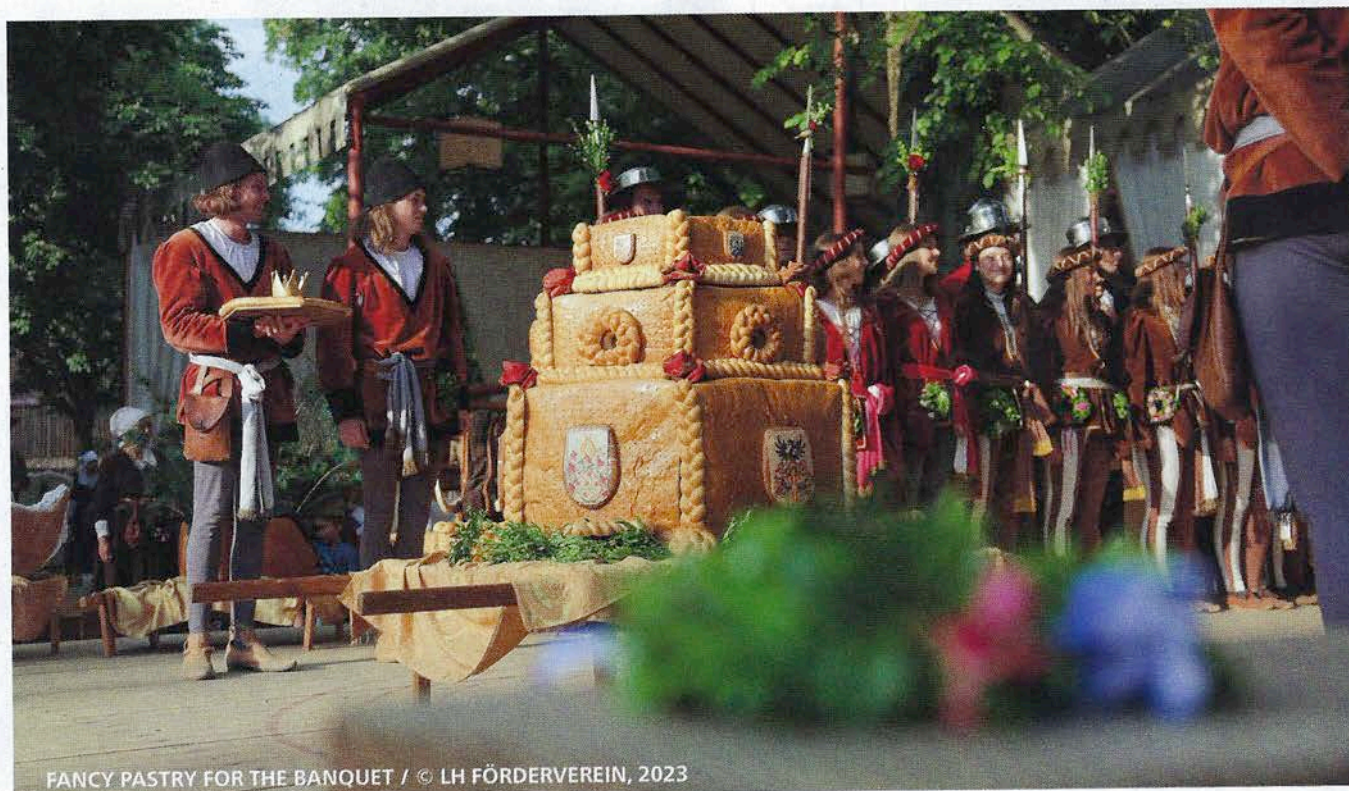
1881 and 1883 to create murals of the glamorous event. Now these murals provide a fantastic backdrop to the Festspiel (Festival Play).

In 1902, fifty founding members (town citizens) of the Förderer (Organizing Society) used their private funds to have 145 costumes tailored for the marching band. Architect Anton Weiß recreated the bridal coach according to the mural image and organizers had to come up with eight matching *Gescheckte* (spotted brewery horses) and the fancy parade tack. Even the Royal Tack- and Riding Outfitters in Munich



PARADE OF CHILDREN, 2013





FANCY PASTRY FOR THE BANQUET / © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

contributed harnesses and saddles to the extravaganza. The minute details of the historic precedent were extracted from the diaries and ledgers of the reporting scribes at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Bavarian State Archives). The almost unfathomable exigencies of this labor of love bonded the town through the citizens' shared enthusiasm. The Landshut Wedding, with exception of World War II (no performance 1935–1950) and the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2023), has been performed passionately without interruptions.

### The Wedding Party

Illustrious nobility from all over Europe attended the wedding of Duke Georg and Princess Hedwig.

Duke Georg (1455–1503) was the son of Duke Ludwig the Rich of Bayern-Landshut and Amalie, daughter of Elector Palatine. At the age of 20, Georg married 18 year old Hedwig Princess of Poland (1457–1502), the daughter of Polish King Kasimir IV and Elisabeth Duchess of Austria. As the couple were closely related, they needed special permission for their marriage from the Pope.

The wedding delegations converged on Landshut with great pomp from all directions. The Polish cavalcade headed by the "old lady of Saxony," Duchess Margarethe, a born Habsburg and grandmother of the groom, brought aside from the bride and granddaughter Christine an entourage of over 300 people. Emperor Frederick III and his son Archduke Maximilian, related to bride and groom via Habsburg, on their return from Cologne to Vienna via Landshut, traveled with a royal household of some 600 noblemen, servants, and musicians. Georg's sister Margarethe, who had married Phillip Elector Palatinate the year before, attended as well. Georg's cousin Duke Otto II of Neumarkt (the son of Georg's father's sister) headed the train towards Wittenberg to meet and escort the bride. Georg's aunt Anna (his mom's sister and wife of Margrave Albrecht Elector Brandenburg) brought 1370 horses, almost the complete household, and an escort of a 100 noble ladies. Georg's uncle Count Ulrich of Würt-

temberg and his son Count Eberhard (Georg's cousin) had 582 horses in their entourage. The Dukes of Bavaria—brothers Albrecht, Christoph, and Wolfgang—were strong tournament athletes and unspoken rivals of the House Landshut. They constituted the honor guard for the grand entry of the bride to the city with 609 horses.

By the time all nobility and clergy had arrived, there were 10,000 horses to be fed and the population of the town had doubled. The city provided coupons for the feed of the horses and free meals for townspeople and guests. The Landshut Duke sent out emissaries to Cologne and Straßburg to buy wedding party favors, and another dispatch to Venice to purchase valuable velvet and silk fabrics in the duke's colors (brown, grey, and white). Butchering animals were requisitioned from as far as Hungary, as well as barrels of fish, crates of cabbages, pots of lard, spices, and wine. Lodging was assigned to the most illustrious guests. Security was ramped up. Anyone not assigned to a lodge had to camp outside town with the rest of their entourage. There was a big rush of excitement all over town as the bridal procession drew near.

### The 1457 Wedding Diary

**Monday, November 13:** The eve before the wedding, groom Duke Georg held an exuberant tournament with friends. It was his stag night.

**Tuesday, November 14:** Bride Hedwig's train got a royal reception by Eching on the Isar with a tournament. Later, as Hedwig's entourage approached Landshut, a top brass delegation received her on the hills outside of town. Emperor Frederick III, groom Duke Georg, Margrave Albrecht of Brandenburg, and several hundred royals, clergy, and horsemen welcomed her. And right on the spot, bride Hedwig was taken to the church St. Martin to change into her bridal gown then led to the altar by the emperor.

"And as she was walked out, she hung her head low, the scarf concealing her eyes, and she cried bitterly," a scribe reported. In the evening, the emperor asked Hedwig for the





first dance in the town hall. At night, Hedwig was laid down on the conjugal bed by select royal witnesses to consummate the union with Duke Georg. "The bed, so I was told, was bedecked with valuable golden lace all over as well as were the blanket, pillows, and cushions" recorded a scribe.

**Wednesday, November 15:** Wedding gifts were exchanged and vows made. Apparently, fears that the dowry would be too low were assuaged. Then a copious wedding meal was served at the customs house. Thereafter another tournament was presented, with the new wife and her maidens watching from a window above what is now the Sparkasse (credit union). The dance at night went on in absence of the bride.

The day after was spent with similar merriment. Interestingly, as the *Schlag nach* brochure points out, some terrible faux pas occurred. Count Eberhard of Württemberg had the impertinence to walk on the right side of the bride, which only the emperor and groom were entitled to do. And imagine, what scandal, the emperor didn't want to give the couple a wedding present. But the Margrave shamed him to buy a *Brosche* (brooch) worth 1000 Gulden yet critical observers only thought the half of it.

It was a good party because Duke Ludwig provided free food and drink for the town and its guests for a week. No innkeeper was allowed to charge. The duke's kitchen also handed out a *Maß* (1 liter of) wine and a loaf bread with each of two full meals.

### Historical Authenticity

"There was a serving counter in one of Landshut's side alleys, gigantic barrels for wine and bread, where every resident could get their fill twice a day," Prof. Dr. Klaus Timmer

explains. Timmer, a born Landshuter and accomplished medical director and emergency physician, serves on the board of the Förderer society. The organization, 8,200 members strong, has seven board members, various specialty advisers and task committees, as well as four permanent staff. The Förderer own and run, among others, a Zeughaus (armory with knight's armor, dresses, wagons, weapons, horse tack etc.). Timmer himself is deeply involved with three committees: music, animals, and safety.

"We have to procure, take care of, and work with 120 horses," Timmer says. "We also have fifteen falcons, two donkeys and a goat in our program." The Förderer line up eight Schecken horses (white with black spots) on loan from breeders in the Bavarian Forest. "We need horses that are capable of keeping their cool when ten thousand jubilant spectators throw stuff in the air," Timmer says. The 30 main acting horses are brought to the Zeughaus horse stables six weeks in advance to train for the parade. They get to pull wagons across town, sometimes with a noisy music band behind them. The volunteer *Rosserer* (horse trainers) take care of them all around. While not 10,000 horses, there is some equine authenticity.

Authenticity at the Landshut Wedding goes to great lengths in the music department. The music committee collects abundant research on reed wind instruments—dulcians, pommers, shepherd's pipes— and special orders valveless natural trumpets for its marching band. The music groups practice continuously even through the off season.

The armory is also period appropriate. For the *Häscher* (guardsmen) lances, some craftsmen from the Förderer board studied the exact make and design of one original 15th century lance tip at the Nationalmuseum in Ingolstadt.





PRINCESS HEDWIG © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

Based on that prototype, they recreated that steel tip for every soldier to a millimeter's precision.

"Since we started the knights' tournament in the 1950s, we needed armor and have collaborated with the most renowned Plattners in Germany to recreate the period styles," Timmer says. Plattners, armorers who make a knight's armor, are hard to find nowadays. The cold metal pounding process is very time-consuming and makes fine armor quite expensive. Landshut was a well-known market for the Plattner industry in the Middle Ages.

The Förderer Society proudly owns a time-tested collection of armored suits. Even in the 15th century, the "shining armor" was quite expensive. "The gift of a suit of armor at a tournament was back then a great sign of reverence," Timmer says. "It has been compared in value to the price tag of a Porsche today."

The authenticity of armor also tracks back to the chronicles. A documented wedding guest, a courtier from Duke Ludwig's staff, Heinrich von Staudach, lay buried at St. Jodok. "During the renovation of the church, the gorgeous sculpted tombstone of 'the Staudacher' again moved into people's consciousness," a 2000 press release announced. "It depicts the knight who passed away in 1483 in life-size, magnificent, full-body armor." From a gum elastic mold, a plaster cast was made and the armor created accordingly: a process which took over a year to make. "At the 1997 wedding parade, 'the Staudacher' once again mounted his steed," the press release said.

Regarding the costumes, some of the Förderer's brocade or silk fabrics are still sourced from Venice. The Zeughaus har-

bors not only the golden bridal gown and more than 2,500 period outfits in all sizes, but also the matching shoes, hats, and other accessories. This costume stock is being curated by two full-time master seamstresses and about 30 volunteer lords- and ladies-in-waiting. The dresses as well have been thoroughly researched from illustrations and paintings of the time. "The whole dress staff stays busy all throughout the off season because the costumes, when in permanent use over four weeks, get stressed or damaged," Timmer says. Innumerable volunteer hours flow into the costumes.

When it comes to food at the Turnierplatz (tournament place), don't expect McDonalds, especially not fries, because potatoes had not reached Europe yet. Much meat is seared on grills or stewed in pots over open fire. Porridge, beans, and kraut are the common staples. Highly refined dishes are served at the *Fürstentafel* (royal banquet). "This is where the nobility dines in view of the 'common' visitors while a long procession of pages carries the delicate fares to the table," says Timmer. These players include the seneschal, the food tester, and many of the young nobility who were honored to serve on such a royal occasion.

### The Pageant

As the Landshuter Hochzeit has received the seal of "Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2016 from the Bavarian government and from the German government in 2018, meticulous care is taken to follow the historic sources. The chronicles become the script for the documentary play. Each party's scribe provided another set of details, be it the decorations on the mighty fine tack of Princess Hedwig's carriage, the





PRINCE AND PRINCESS © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

style of dresses in each delegation, or the style of armor.

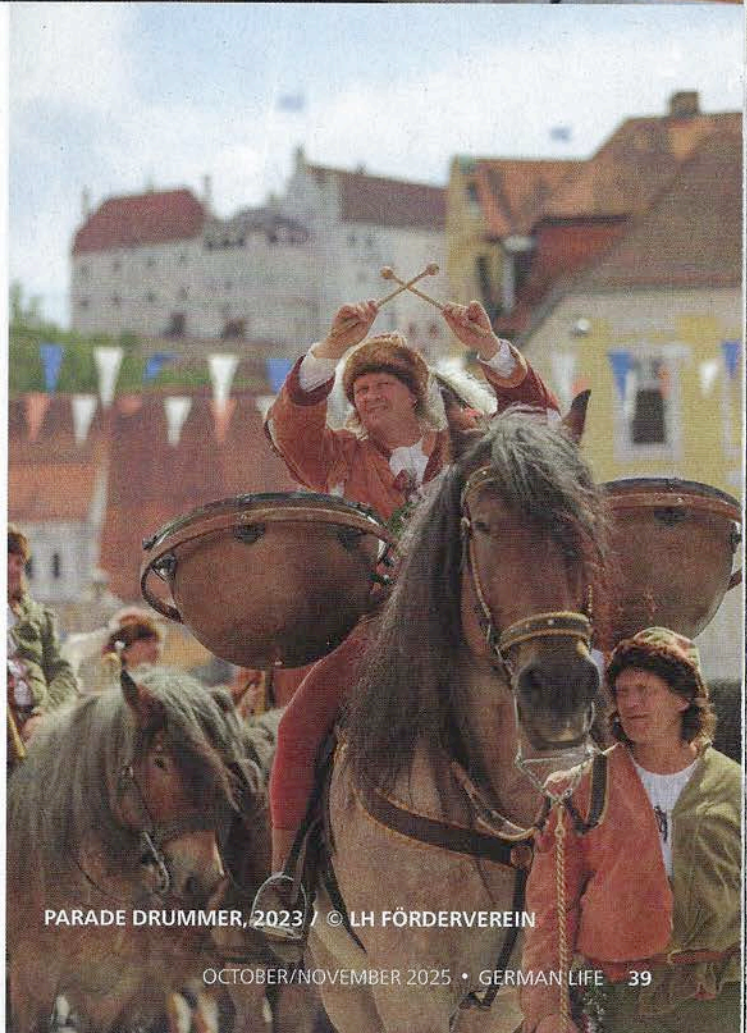
"For no other historic festival will you find so many sources," Timmer says. "It was one of the most extravagant festivals during the Middle Ages. This wedding was also a renewed alliance against the threat of the invading Turks (Fall of Constantinople in 1453) drawing closer to Vienna. But we have also included things that are not in the chronicles. These were added over time as the event grew. We have basically two storylines."

One example for the second storyline, is the choir of the *Reisigen* (mercenaries). "We have 120 *Lansquenets*, or *Reisige*, assembled from all the Landshut choirs, who sing beautifully in four-part harmony," Timmer says. "That is definitely not historic. This is a pickup on the historicism back when the pageant started."

"Like our former board chair, Rudi Wohlgemut used to say, 'We have to convince the experts and enchant the masses,'" Timmer concludes. "This is what binds us and the event together." This mission statement continues to inspire the current organizers and weave the two storylines together. "A weapons expert may be thrilled by our precisely replicated 15th century lance tips, another person may feel shivers down his or her spine listening to the great *Reisigen* Choir at St. Martin," Timmer says.

## The Events

When the wedding happens, all of Landshut becomes a stage. The *Festspiel* and the *Tanzspiel* are performed multiple times at the *Prunksaal* of city hall. During weeknights, the *Mummenschanz*, a masquerade spectacle of witches and



PARADE DRUMMER, 2023 / © LH FÖRDERVEREIN





TOURNAMENT © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023



KNAVES AWAIT THE CALL TO SUIT THE PRINCES IN SPECIAL TOURNAMENT ARMOR WITH A SPECIAL CHEST SHIELD EXTENSION TO MOUNT THE LANCES © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

ghosts, is presented in the Residenz courtyard. Friday evenings and Sunday mornings, a *Fechtschule* (fencing demo) is given on the Trausnitz Castle premises. Saturday nights are filled with music, juggling, and jousting acts at the *Zehrplatz und Lager* (encampment). Every Sunday afternoon, the Wedding Procession jubilates its way twice around town. Thereafter, the Lager entertainment continues with a royal feast. At night, the *Reiter- und Ritterspiele* (knights' tournaments) present various disciplines, one of them *Ringelstechen* (ring riding). And at St. Martin or St. Jodok, you might catch an uplifting concert. Some events, like the parade, are free; while others charge a reasonable admission.

The Landshut Wedding replay is an authentic peek at history, as if you were there in real time with Georg and Hedwig. Every *Hochzeiter* (wedding participant) wears a pretty box wreath on the head or hanging from the belt. The story has it that a girl in the first 1906 performance came up with this idea. Soon the box wreath became the trademark of the event. And this was not without precedence, because at the King of Hungary's wedding in 1476, the bride also "crowned" the groom with a boxwood wreath. To this day, the boxwood corsage serves as a symbol of love, loyalty, and friendship at many German weddings.

At the Landshut Wedding—whether child, knight, handmaid, duke, or nobleman in a costume—everyone must live and fill this role. All players must abide by certain period criteria: no eyeglasses, appropriate hairdo, no cigarettes nor cell phone.

Among the 2,500 players there are 500 children. "So, it takes usually both parents and four grandparents who stand





FLAG THROWERS © LH FÖRDERVEREIN, 2023

behind the child to craft their wreaths and plait their hair," Timmer says. "And to make sure the child shows up on time." A great infrastructure gets the wedding across the stage. All Landshut police, firemen, and first responders are on duty during the wedding events plus additional private security companies. Emergency scenarios are studied on the computer beforehand. Fortunately, all has gone well over the years without mishaps.

"The Landshut Wedding is a spectator festival, not a participation festival," Timmer makes sure to point out. "There are many medieval festivals in Germany, where all medieval enthusiasts are invited to build camp, set up a crafts market, or play a tournament and all celebrate together. This is not the case here in Landshut. We don't try to attract costumed groups from other pageants. To the contrary, they are not even allowed because our concept is designed as a documentary play." In short, only Landshutters get to take on roles at this wedding.

The Landshut Wedding never stops. "After the wedding is before the wedding," goes the old saying in Landshut. In between the four years, at half-time, usually in June, there is a Burgfest held at Trausnitz Castle. Some 500 actors deliver a scaled down medieval festival, just to stay in shape for the grand production. And perhaps they also shout "*Himmel Landshut! Tausend Landshut!*" **GL**

For additional information visit [landshuter-hochzeit.de](http://landshuter-hochzeit.de)



## Landshuter Hochzeit 1475

The Förderer Association has released its bilingual (German/English, 280 pages) coffee table book about the Landshut Wedding 1475. It shows that the reenactment of Duke Georg the Rich's betrothal to Polish Princess Hedwig has lost none of its energy since its inception in 1903.

The book (available on Amazon) starts with a review of the historic importance of Landshut as a seat of Bavarian dynasty and mercantile center. A candid look behind the scenes of the Zeughaus reveals the costume closet, where seamstresses work with "highest level of meticulousness and attention to detail". The association curates 2,500 costumes, as well as matching shoes and accessories. In another chapter, "Sound of 1475", we learn about the instruments (many replicated) and tunes of the times. Through its passionate music workshops, "Landshut has become a microcosm for Early Music embraced across all layers of society."

When it comes to knights in shining armor, the book explains that *Plattners* (armorers) pound sheets of metal into the required shape, one blow at a time. The "heavy metal" suits are fashioned after historic illustrations and epitaphs to recreate authentic field and tournament equipment. Each weapon has its authentic precedents as longsword, one-handed sword, or Lucerne hammer. And to get battle seasoned, the *Fechtschule* at Trausnitz Castle since 2023 trains its combatants in various fighting styles.

Be it weapons, costumes, music, guild insignia, food practices, this dignified Landshut picture book has consulted the contemporary scribes with due respect. Along each chapter, the reader, while entertained, absorbs much interesting information. For example, the Lager doesn't serve potatoes or tomatoes because they hadn't reached Europe yet. Neither had forks been invented. By the way, 10,000 wood poles were used to build the camp site, and it took some 30,000 manhours to create the Lager structures.

It is the mission of the Förderer to "bring history into the present" and with this book they have succeeded. Outstanding photographs of the wedding procession, tournaments, camp life, dramas, music events, or the Tavern jollies draw you in. The reader understands that for three weeks every four years the whole city becomes the fancy wedding of Duke Georg and Princess Hedwig. This book also reflects the *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* (the spirit of belonging). Landshut, a designated "Intangible Cultural Heritage" by the state of Bavaria and the German government, now competes for that same honor with UNESCO. This colorful book and the fact that all levels of society, including some 400 children, support this cultural commitment are good arguments for Landshut to make the UNESCO cut.