

Wartburg Castle

The Wartburg is a castle situated on a 1230-foot (410 m) precipitous hill to the southwest of Eisenach, overlooking the town in Thuringia, Germany. In 1999, Wartburg Castle was selected to the World Heritage List as an "Outstanding Monument of the Feudal Period in Central Europe" and is linked to "Cultural Values of Universal Significance".

The castle was founded in 1067 by the landgraf Ludwig der Springer. According to myth, the castle (Burg) got its name when its founder first laid eyes on the hill upon which the Wartburg now sits; enamored with the site, he is supposed to have exclaimed, "Warte, Berg -- du sollst mir eine Burg werden!" ("Wait, mountain -- thou shalt become a castle for me!") In addition, he is said to have had clay from his lands transported to the top of the hill, which was not quite within his lands, to be able to swear that the castle is built on his ground.

From May 1521 until March 1522, Martin Luther stayed at the castle, after he had been taken there for his safety at the request of Frederick the Wise, after his excommunication by Pope Leo X and his refusal to recant at the Diet of Worms. It was during this period that he, under the name of Junker Jörg (the Knight George), translated the New Testament into German.

On October 18, 1817 about 450 students, members of the newly founded German Burschenschaften ("fraternities"), came together at the castle to celebrate the German victory over Napoleon two years before and condemn conservatism and call for German unity. Heinrich Hermann Riemann, a veteran of the Lützow Free Corps, philosophy student Ludwig Rödiger, Hans Ferdinand Massmann, a follower of the "father of gymnastics" Ludwig Jahn were some of the leading speakers at the event, which included an autodafé in which symbols of reaction and scraps of parchment with conservative book titles were burned. This event has become known as the Wartburg festival and is considered a seminal moment in the grass roots movement advocating German unity.

The Romanesque Palace (the Palas, Landgrafenhaus, or Great Hall) is the oldest and architecturally most impressive of the buildings. Besides the chapel, it contains the Sängersaal (Hall of the Minstrels), which is in fact Wagner's setting for Act II of *Tannhäuser* and the Festsaal (the Feast or Festival Hall), both of which contain fine frescoes by Moritz von Schwind with the theme of the minstrels' contest in the Sängersaal and frescoes of the triumphs of Christianity in the Festsaal. Part of the Palace consists of the original castle as it was between 1157 and 1170, as an image of power and residence of the Thuringian landgraves.

The castle gate behind the drawbridge is the only access to the Castle, and it has remained exactly as it was throughout the centuries.

Source: -- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]