

PRESS RELEASE

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HEIDELBERG CASTLE: MECHTHILD VON DER PFALZ

Heidelberg Castle

Born 600 years ago at Heidelberg Palace: Mechthild von der Pfalz

2019 marks the 600th anniversary of her birth. Her story: On March 7, 1419, Mechthild von der Pfalz was born in Heidelberg Palace, the daughter of Prince-Elector Ludwig III, later the wife of two important rulers. She was a highly cultured woman and the center of a "Museum", a court of muses. She was the driving force behind the founding of two of the state's academic institutions, continuing a family tradition, which began with the founding of Heidelberg University by Prince-Elector Ruprecht I in 1386. Her birthday falls the day before International Women's Day, which is celebrated on March 8 — one more reason why the State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Württemberg is commemorating this famous resident of the Electoral Palatinate.

THE ROYAL RESIDENCE 600 YEARS AGO

As the daughter of Prince-Elector Ludwig von der Pfalz and his wife, Countess Matilda von Savoyen-Achaja, Mechthild was born in Heidelberg Palace on March 7, 1419. The castle was still very much a medieval structure, not one of the grandiose palaces that characterize the area today. The Ruprechtsbau structure, commissioned by and named after her grandfather, King Ruprecht I, was not completed until just before Mechthild's birth. It is the oldest surviving residential structure on the castle grounds and is one of the last remnants of the late medieval castle. It is quite possible that Mechthild, as the daughter of the prince-electoral and the electress, was born here, in what was then the most representative part of the castle.

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OUR HERITAGE. YOURS TO ENJOY. The State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Wuerttemberg opens, maintains, connects and markets 60 historic monuments in Southwest Germany. In 2018, more than 4 million people visited these historical sites with distinguished cultural treasures: among them Heidelberg Palace, Schwetzingen Palace and Gardens, Ludwigsburg Residential Palace, Weikersheim Palace and Gardens, World Heritage Site Maulbronn Monastery, Salem Monastery and Palace, as well as the Hohentwiel Fortress Ruins.

YOUR MEDIA CONTACT Press and media service of the State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Wuerttemberg provided by the state gazette agency:
Phone +49(0)711.6 66 01-38, f.t.lang@staatsanzeiger.de

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COUNTESS OF WÜRTTEMBERG

In Mechthild's first year of life, her parents betrothed her to Württemberg's heir to the throne, Ludwig (born 1412). The young countess spent the first 17 years of her life in Heidelberg, until her arranged marriage in Stuttgart in 1436. Mechthild took up residence in Stuttgart's Old Palace until, six years later, the couple relocated to his residence, Urach Palace, the second royal seat of the divided County of Württemberg. Three of Mechthild's and Ludwig's five children were born here, including the heir to the throne, Eberhard V (1445–1496). He was to become the first Duke of Württemberg, known as Eberhard the Bearded. His spectacular wedding to Barbara Gonzaga von Mantua, which was attended by several thousand guests, went down in Urach Palace history.

CAREER JUMP: ARCHDUCHESS OF AUSTRIA

Mechthild's husband, Ludwig, died of the plague in 1450 at the young age of 38. This made Mechthild a widow at 31. She and her five children moved to Böblingen, where a dower house had been provided as part of their marriage contract. This was an attempt to escape the influence of her brother-in-law, Count Ulrich V von Württemberg, who sought to secure guardianship of her five fatherless children. With it, he hoped to combine the divided parts of Württemberg under his rule. An astonishing shift: What sounds like the end of the biography of a late medieval woman was actually just the middle. Just one year later, in 1452, Mechthild married for a second time. This marriage afforded her access to the highest circles of the European ruling class. Her second husband was Archduke Albrecht VI of Austria, making her the sister-in-law of then Roman-German Emperor Friedrich III. The wedding was held in Böblingen; the royal wedding remains one of the city's most historically significant events.

PATRON OF THE ARTS AND EDUCATION

However, her role as Archduchess of Austria was also only temporary. Albrecht VI died only eleven years later. Mechthild was now 44, and again made her way to her contractually provided dower house, this time in Rottenburg am Neckar. Here, she developed her interests in art and science. She invited poets, musicians, artists, and

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scholars to her court. Together with her son Eberhard V, she was one of Southwestern Germany's most important patrons and bibliophiles of the second half of the 15th century. She also supported her son in founding the University of Tübingen, which was established in 1477. 20 years earlier, she had played an important role in her husband Archduke Albrecht's founding of an academic institution in the Further Austrian city of Freiburg im Breisgau: the "Albertina", today the Albert Ludwig University. Mechthild's actions were the continuation of a family tradition. The first German university had been established in her hometown of Heidelberg by Prince-Elector Ruprecht I von der Pfalz in 1386. On August 22, 1482, at the age of 63, Mechthild died in the same place in which she had been born: Heidelberg Palace. She was buried in the Güterstein Charterhouse, next to her first husband Ludwig, who was also interred in the Carthusian monastery. The charterhouse is no longer standing; both coffins and headstones were later moved to the Collegiate Church in Tübingen.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day is celebrated worldwide on March 8. For more than 100 years, its aim has been to bring attention to women's rights and gender equality. In 1910, the socially democratic Clara Zetkin demanded "not special rights, but human rights" for women. One year later, throngs of women in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland first took to the streets in protest. Since then, International Women's Day is celebrated in numerous countries around the world and many nations consider it an official holiday. Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg has long been focused on female protagonists throughout history. Many tours highlight the roles women played in palaces or castles, for example, princesses, ladies of court, or household staff. Our entire selection of tours can be found online at:

<https://www.schloesser-und-gaerten.de/en/events/>

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