

“Bei uns ist immer was los!” Feste in Rheinland

„FASCHING IN MÜNCHEN“ / „CARNIVAL SEASON IN MUNICH“

Ursprung und Geschichte (origin and history)

Forty days before Easter, however, gets you to the Tuesday before the sixth Sunday before Easter. This is the Sunday called *Invocavit* in the church calendar but was known as *Funkensonntag*, the “Sunday of Sparks” by the peasantry. Originally the Monday after that Sunday was *Fastnacht* – the night before the beginning of Lent on Tuesday. In 1091, the Church decided to exclude all Sundays from the Lenten Fast, but in order to still have a Forty-day Fast, the Church also pushed the beginnings of Lent back by six days to the Wednesday that had heretofore preceded the *Fastnacht*. In order to enforce a verifiable compliance with the new order of Lent, the Church also decreed that on that Wednesday all people, clerics as well as laymen, should receive an ashen mark on their foreheads – thus Ash Wednesday.

The historical origins of Carnival are actually very old and quite obscure. It probably began as a pagan festival celebrating the beginning of the new year and the rebirth of Nature. During the Roman occupation this then became linked with the riotous *Saturnalia* festival, and in the Christian era the celebrations were integrated into the new religion as a last bout of eating, drinking and dancing before the deprivations of Lent.

Considering its long history, it's not surprising that Fasching has carved such a place in the hearts of Bavarians.

The first official recognition of Fasching came from the city council in 1537, but the celebration goes back at least two centuries. It was first mentioned in German writings in 1359.

Early festivals featured sleigh rides, tournaments called “*Iubigestach*,” in which knights jostled wearing small wooden barrels on their heads instead of helmets, and the first “Fast Night” dances in a special hall built by the council.

Masquerade balls began to bloom at the beginning of the 19th century. The bulletin of St. Peter's church mentions a ball in 1828 which attracted 5,000 costumed Bavarians. King Ludwig I was among those who attended the festivities.

Fasching activities which have become traditions continued to be added: in 1894 the well-organized balls began, the first Fasching prince was enthroned and the first big Fasching parade was initiated, its floats bouncing through the decorated streets of the city. In 1908 the first Munich Fasching society, the “*Narrhalla*” was founded with the aim to maintain the artistic standards of the event.

All these traditions and all this history come together beginning 11 minutes after 11 P. M. on the 11th day of the 11th month; don't go into high gear until January and reach a climax the day before Lent.

Traditions die hard, however, and many of the peasants continued to celebrate the beginning of Lent on the traditional day, leading to two dates and the divergent use of the terms to denote the event, especially in the Alpine region. While the nobility and Church had their *Fastnacht*, the peasantry had their Fasching. The *Herrenfastnacht* or *Grosse Fastnacht* was observed by the authorities on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday and the *Bauernfasching* of the peasantry, sometimes derisively called *Pfaffenfastnacht* to indicate that it was celebrated by the ecclesiastical authorities, six days later on the Monday after the Sunday after “*Invocavit*.” Despite all attempts by the authorities to eradicate the “old” *Fastnacht*, it is even today observed in parts of Switzerland and in Baden. One expression of this clinging to, and the survival of, this “old” *Fastnacht* is the “*Funkensonntag*,” the ceremonial burning of the *Fastnacht* on *Invocavit*. Once a visible expression of the end of *Fastnacht*, a burning of the spirit of *Fastnacht*, its continued existence also in parts of Eastern France, Luxemburg, Switzerland, the Vorarlberg, and the Tyrol, is also an expression of peasant resistance to ecclesiastical authority.

Having been forced to accept the existence of a *Fastnacht*, the Church tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to eradicate the pagan manifestations of the customs, which not only had survived into the Middle Ages but, since the thirteenth century, further and further expanded into the weeks before Ash Wednesday. Accepting the inevitable, the church eventually designated the weeks from 6 January, the Feast Day of the Three Wise Men at the end of the Twelve Nights of Christmas, to Ash Wednesday as the season of carnival.