

The Forerunner of Hand- and Volleyball

Before the bridge leading to the Dwarf Garden, two humpbacked Pallone players recount a piece of sports history: Pallone (“large ball”) originated in the Middle Ages and was first described in Italy in 1555. Two opposing teams with two to 40 players per team try to prevent the ball from touching ground. Pallone developed into handball and volleyball.

The ball was the size of a modern football (soccer) and weighed up to 1.2 kilos (football = 400 grams). It consisted of three layers of leather wrapped around the bladder of a pig or a bovine species, which often needed to be inflated because it lost air and thus made the ball rather difficult to handle.

The game was played with the forearm, which was protected from bruises and contusions by the so-called “bracciale”, a wooden cylinder about 20 centimeters long and weighing 700 grams. It was made from hardwood and was free of knots to prevent it from splitting when





it was struck. The bracciale had a handgrip, so the arm could not slip, and was covered with spikes, which were used by good players to spin the ball. Pallone, due to its evident expensive equipment, became the cultural sport of the well-off aristocracy who even sponsored “Pro Teams”. Their games, played on the squares of Italian cities, attracted up to 5,000 spectators.

In the 17th century, Pallone lost its popularity to tennis. Prince-Archbishop Paris Lodron built the so-called “Ball House” for this game on a site where the Landestheater is presently located. Prince-Archbishop Colloredo, apparently ignorant of its value, remodeled it later into a theater. Both Pallone players display a remarkable expression of psychological bravado. One can almost hear their provocative discourse. The player without a ball: “Well, come on then, you blockhead!” The player with the ball and a pot on his head: “Oh, shut your mouth, you’re not capable of receiving my ball anyway”. This type of psychological behavior originates in the Antiquity. Competing athletes or soldiers would vilify each other and try to unnerve or intimidate one another with taunting words.

There are no Dwarfs in the Dwarf Garden

Today, children play in an area below the city wall known as the Bastion Garden, although the name is incorrect. In 1691/92, a garden was developed here on a piece of land measuring 5,000 square meters. It included 12 flowerbeds, a large fountain in the center and four smaller ones in the corners.

Twenty-four “dwarfs” carved from Untersberg marble—not always accurately portrayed—were placed in this garden in 1715 by Prince-Archbishop Harrach. The spirit of the time showed special interest in the peculiar or the ugly as contrast to the sublime and the beautiful seen in the ancient gods of Mirabell Park. It was common for castle lords to collect unusual and rare objects and for Italian comedy plays to base their gags on “dwarfs, silly masks” and harlequins.

The exhibition of stunted, physically malformed figures was not considered disdainful and, in fact, these people were greatly valued at court for their diligence, loyalty and their ability to amuse. The “princely



These were the only type of artificial limbs available to invalids 300 years ago.



court-dwarf Franz Meichelböck”, for instance, was handsomely paid and served three prince-archbishops during 35 years. Court dwarfs escaped from the penetrating curiosity or the mockery of fellow human beings, and the misery of being spurned.

Before this garden square became known as the “Dwarf Garden” around 1765, it was actually called the Pygmy Garden, or as the locals referred to it: “Pyglgarten”. The term pygmy is a measurement of length (35 centimeters) used in Antiquity and lent its name to the pygmies that were discovered in Africa in the 16th century and who were no bigger than a “12-year-old boy”.

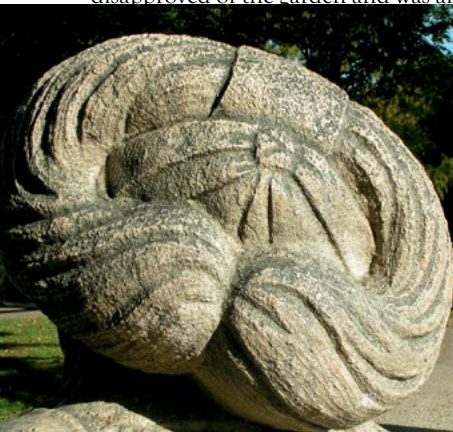
The name “Dwarf Garden” is actually misleading. Our mental picture of a dwarf originates mainly from Nordic mythology: they are small of stature, bearded, clever, magical, and cunning, live in mountains, know where to find gold, safeguard treasures and are skillful craftspeople. Occasionally, at night, they secretly help hard-pressed people and are, in general, the opposite of a nasty gnome. Their pointed caps are magical camouflages, which is why no one has never seen one—except as cute little replicas in people’s gardens.

The Untersberg (mountain) dwarfs play an important role for Salzburg. They guard over Charlemagne in a marble hall who sleeps continuously until the day that he can break forth from the mountain with his army of dwarfs to fight his most decisive battle against his evil enemies at a field near Salzburg known as “Walser Feld”.

Another legend tells the story of the Venetian dwarfs (called nani). Their small stature made them inconspicuous, so they were sent by the Doges into the Alps to search for gold and other minerals that were needed for the production of the precious Murano glass. They were seen from time to time by the locals from the region of the Tauern Alps, dressed in black velvet using their mountain mirrors to search for treasures. The “nani” in Venice became rich and respected. Seventeen statues of these noble treasure hunters were placed in the garden of the Villa Almarana Ai Nani in Vicenza in the 17th century. The proprietor chose to do this for his dwarf-like daughter so she would not feel dejected in a world of larger people.

The original Dwarf Garden was located nearly three meters below the main garden and was often subject to floods from the Salzach before it was regulated, which is why the dwarfs were placed on pedestals. With time, however, the garden grew wild. The 24-year-old Bavarian Crown Prince and governor, Ludwig, who resided in Mirabell Palace, disapproved of the garden and was afraid that his pregnant wife would

be frightened by the “deformed figures”. In 1815, he closed it down and sold off the 24 “repulsive dwarfs” for 35 Euros (2010 monetary value) a piece. The Beautification Society of Salzburg, founded in 1862 for the pro-





Is the woodcutter in the Dwarf Garden tired or angry?

tection of cultural objects and greatly valued today as the “Stadtverein”, set out to find these figures after the First World War. By 1921, nine figures had been collected and were placed, two years later, in an unused area known as the “Wasserbastei”—the present location of the Dwarf Garden. By 1931, this garden had already become one of Salzburg’s major attractions.

The “Stadtverein” held a press conference in 1978 regarding the dwarfs, which aroused international interest. The number of sculptures increased to 15, eight of them are privately owned, and only one has never been recovered. If one studies these dwarfs more carefully, the significant intention of the “Pygmy Garden” is revealed. On the one hand, the figures offer an amusing guessing game over their professions, and on the other, they challenge a person’s knowledge: Allegory of which month? Which comedian figure? Or are they just acting the fool, telling the beholder: “You are a lot more ridiculous than we are.”