

PATH

THE ROMAN ART

GUEBWILLER REGION



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE
DIRE

1. Capital of the porch of the collegiate church of Lautenbach.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

2. The Choir of the old abbey church of Murbach.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. The church Saint-Léger of Guebwiller.

Carte postale, Collection Michel Ruh.

4. The greyhound, symbol of the princes-abbots of Murbach, carved on the door of the abbey.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

5. Fox eating a bunch of grapes on the capital of a portal of the abbey of Murbach.

Photo CCRG-Pah.



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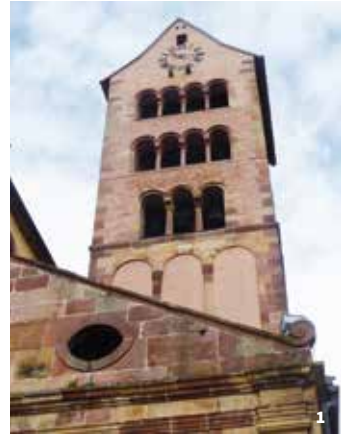
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ROMAN ART

IN ALSACE

THE ALSACIAN ROMAN ART IS SINGULARIZED IN PARTICULAR BY THE USE OF THE SANDSTONE OF THE VOSGES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCULPIED DECOR OF MULTIPLE INFLUENCES.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN ART IN ALSACE

Roman Art was developed in Alsace from the 11th to the 13th centuries. It is based on a christianization already well established, supported by the bishops of Strasbourg and Basel as well as by the great abbeyes such as Murbach and Marmoutier.

Alsace was then a flagship of the Germanic Empire. The prosperity of the cities and the great ecclesiastical and secular lords contributed to this fever of building despite the stopping due to the quarrel of the Investitures from 1075 to 1122.

In the region of Guebwiller, Romanesque buildings were erected under the impulse of the princes-abbots of Murbach, the chapter of Lautenbach and the convent of the Schwarzenhann.

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

The sandstone of the Vosges and the limestone are two stones present on the Alsatian territory. The first got the preference of the stone cutters for the variation of its colors from the white to the pink-red and its texture adapted to the sculpture.

The quarries of pink sandstone of the Vosges

were largely exploited for the realization of the Roman buildings of the Region of Guebwiller, only separated from a few kilometers.

The material remains unchanged from the 11th to the end of the 12th century, but the construction techniques evolve transforming the forms and appearance of the buildings.

In the 11th century, the first Roman Art was defined by the search for architectural forms. The basilical or Latin cross plan is the most common from this period. Form taken from the civil basilica of Antiquity, it is composed of three vessels and ends with one to three semicircular apses. This plan can be seen on the foundations of the church of the convent of Schwarzenhann in Soultzmatt-Wintzfelden. The walls are then constructed of rubble stones, that is to say, in small irregular stones. The beautiful and large cut stones are reserved for the chaining of angle and the frames of the openings. The capitals of the columns are cubic, left bare, without sculptures.

In the twelfth century, forms diversified over three periods. From 1100 to 1140, the basilica plan with carved ceilings and rubble walls are always used but they are punctuated by the



1. Roman tower of the church of Sultztmatt built in rubble.
Photo CCRG-Pah.

2. Marmouset in round of the Saint-Léger church of Guebwiller.
Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. The facade of the church of Saint-Léger de Guebwiller influenced by the art of Bourgogne and Ile-de-France.
Photo CCRG-Pah.

aternance of the pillar-column supports. From 1140 to 1190, the alternation of the supports is diversified by the variation of their increasingly complex structure. The ogive windows replace the framework of the nave. From 1190, gothic architectural elements were introduced. Roses pierce the walls and the broken arches rub shoulders with the semi-circular arches as in the Saint-Léger church of Guebwiller. The openings in the nave multiply creating lighting effects.

The most striking architectural feature of the 12th century is the construction of the towers: unique, sometimes double above the porch or crowning the crossing of the transept.

The region of Guebwiller is endowed with several of these spectacular Roman towers.

In the 12th century, the buildings were also covered with sculptures. The use of cut stone is generalized allowing the development of lesenes, friezes of arches and geometric and figurative decors.

The capitals, facades and doors are particularly well cared for. The carved motifs are rich and diversified of geometric, plant, animal, human and even fantastic inspirations.

These decors are first treated in flat, low relief or semi-flat and then, from the second third of the twelfth century, in medium relief or high

relief. These techniques bring more and more depth and relief to the sculpture. The round-bump, sculpture completely disengaged from its support, appears only in the third quarter of the twelfth century.

AN ART UNDER INFLUENCES

The Rhine current is rich in different influences: Île-de-France, Bourgogne, Lombardie and even Near East for the decor. The cathedral of Basel then became a model for the south of Alsace.

The sculptors find their inspiration near the interlacing and foliage created by the carolingian ivory and bronze workers and silks imported from the Byzantine Empire to wrap the relics..

The iconographic and theological program was marked by early Christian influence until the middle of the 12th century. Ancient inspiration is also predominant in the image of thorn shooters and mermaids.

FROM A PLACE TO ANOTHER

THE ROMAN ROAD GOES BY THE GUEBWILLER REGION, GUARDIAN OF MAGNIFICENT WITNESSES OF THIS MEDIEVAL ART: TOWERS, CHURCHES AND SCULPTURES.



THE SAINT-LÉGER ABBATIAL CHURCH OF MURBACH

The abbey of Murbach, located at the bottom of a valley, was founded in 728 by Saint Pirmin thanks to the gift of Count Eberhard.

It became one of the four largest abbeys of the Holy Roman Empire. The abbots even got the title of princes in 1228 and chose the greyhound as their emblem. This symbol is found in all the communes of their principality. Thanks to the numerous privileges, the influx of gifts and the income of its vast territory, the monastic community quickly developed. A high and imposing abbey church is built in the 12th century, symbol of the spiritual and temporal power of the abbey.

EVOLUTION OF THE ABBEY

Today, only the front door of the abbey and the flat choin chair of the abbey church allow visitors to imagine the size of the site.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the monks launched a vast renovation project. The nave is demolished in order to rebuild the church according to the tastes of the time: the Baroque. Unfortunately, the work will be stopped because of lack of credit. Unable to live properly in the abbey, the monks settle in Guebwiller. They obtained

their secularization in 1759.

In addition to the nave, one must also imagine a complex of conventual buildings organized around the abbey church.

SCULPTURES

The sobriety of the architecture of the abbey church contrasts with the abundance and originality of the sculptures. The church being oriented and the access to the abbey being limited by the form of the valley, the first element seen by the visitors and the pilgrims is the choin. This particularity explains the care taken to its sculptures reminiscent of the decorations traditionally developed on the facade.

All the levels are thus covered with lesenes, veneered bands connected together by small arches. The semicircular arches of the six open bays and the sixteen blind arcades are highlighted by colored plays between pink sandstone and yellow sandstone.

The originality of the blind gallery is the diversity of the seventeen capitals, columns and barrels. The columns are in relief or simply suggested by checkerboards or carved bands. The decors of the barrels and capitals are very varied: geometric shapes, masks,



1. View of the abbey church in the 18th century.

Coll. et fotogr.
BNU de Strasbourg.

2. Sculptures of east end.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. Lions portal.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

vines or even a tree. Additional sculptures nest under the arches. They present abstract motifs, plants and animals caricaturing Men. Most of these works are carved in low relief, in a shallow way.

In the upper part, the triangular gable is decorated with several carved stones. Two sculptures, situated on either side of the bay, represent respectively scenes of confession and Eucharist. Three other carved stones in low relief still decorate the gable. They represent two interwoven dragons, two lions and a plant motif.

The lion gate on the south arm of the transept completes the iconographic program. It takes its name from the two sculptured lions on the tympanum. They are considered the protectors of the sanctuary. This scene would also represent justice and divine mercy, the lions passing to spare their adversary.

These two figures are surrounded by broad bands of palmettes and bunches of grapes, alluding to the blood of Christ for the initiates.

In contrast to the exterior, the interior of the choir is very sober. No sculpted element breaks the impression of verticality.

The carved furniture brings diversity in this architectural sobriety. Next to the altar,

the tomb of the monks massacred by the Hungarians in 926 exhibits one of the oldest Roman sculptures. A gothic lying figure represents the secular founder of the abbey, Count Eberhardt. Traces of polychromy are still visible on this 13th century sculpture.

MURBACH ABBEY LIBRARY REMAINS

Two catalogs of the ninth century, transcribed in the 15th century, already prove to the richness of the library of the abbey of Murbach. It contained 346 manuscripts of sacred authors and Roman antiquity. Today, only 12 manuscripts of the library of the Carolingian period remain, consequences of fires and looting. Following the French Revolution, they were scattered away and are now preserved in the libraries of Colmar, Strasbourg, Basel, Berlin or Oxford.

The high chapels of the choir hosted the library in the 18th century.



1. View of the church before its renovation in the 19th century.
Lithography J.-B. Jung.
 Bibliothèque municipale de Mulhouse.

2. Romanesque porch vaulted with ogives.
 Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. Friezes of the portal representing the sin of adultery.
 Photo CCRG-Pah.

4. Frieze telling the battle of Samson against the lion.
 Photo CCRG-Pah.

THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF LAUTENBACH

According to tradition, the Abbey of Lautenbach is founded in the eighth century by Irish monks from Honau Abbey, north of Strasbourg. At this period Lautenbach was under the authority of the powerful bishop of Strasbourg. As early as 1050, the abbey became a chapter of the Augustinian Canons, which secularized and abandoned life in community in 1150. Their individual houses then settled around the collegiate church of St. Michael and St. Gangolph.

Manegold de Lautenbach's position in the Inquisition quarrel in favor of Pope Gregory VII attracts attention on the chapter for the first time. In 1080, the collegiate church was devastated by the emperor Henri IV, in retaliation.

The twelfth century was a prosperous era for the chapter which benefited from the construction of a new church, under the impetus of the attorney Werner of Habsburg.

A HETEROGENOUS CONSTRUCTION

Several stages of construction have succeeded each other: the nave and its Stone-setting in rubble stones date from the 11th century, the transept of the 12th century and the choir of

the 13th century. The latter was covered with ribbed vault **further** to a fire in 1475.

The upper part of the porch also had to be restored. The Roman porch is then crowned with a central tower. It is replaced by two towers of different height in the 19th century. A vast renovation project, under the influence of the ideas of the architect Viollet-le-Duc, then tried to restore the building to its Roman appearance by adding leseness and modifying the facade.

In the 18th century, the canons also refurbished the nave according to the tastes of the time: the Baroque. In 1920, the moldings and sculptures were removed in order to recover the Roman style. Only the baroque furniture has been preserved: pulpit, organ, confessionals and altarpieces are still visibles.

The porch, whose lower floors have been preserved in their Roman style, is the most remarkable part of the building. Composed of three aisles, it is particularly developed. This triple opening, symbolizing the passage between the secular and sacred world, is framed by two rooms, one of which would have served as a baptistery. An impression



of lightness and height is transmitted thanks to the long pillars and columns that support the vaults. This impulse towards the sky is further accentuated by the use of thin columns and arches framing the portal.

Sculpture also helps to convey this symbolic message of the passage to the sacred world.

THE SCULPTURES, A MESSAGE FOR THE FAITHFUL

The sculptures of the porch, and in particular of the portal, often play a role in encouraging penance. The friezes of the impost present the human weaknesses and the punishments to which the faithful expose themselves. Thus, the left frieze illustrates the sin of adultery. From the inside to the outside are depicted a man who seduces a woman holding a child, a couple hugging, the husband hustling his wife and finally the divine punishment figured by a snake enclosing a child and a naked man opening the mouth of a monster. On the right frieze, hell is symbolized by a man holding in each hand a child, one enclosed by a serpent and the second bitten by a pig.

These sculptures recall the concept of purgatory where, after death, souls are

oriented to heaven or hell. They thus support the priest's sermons.

The tympanum is unfortunately hammered but traces reveal a Christ in his mandorla between Saint Gangolph in arms and St Michael and the dragon.

A carved frieze also animates the wall of the southern aisle of the nave. A monolithic lintel is divided into three arcades adorned with lions. In the center, Samson fights the lion trying to tear his jaws. Unlike the guardian lions of the divine of the abbey of Murbach, the animal here represents the devil ready to leap on man to devour his soul.

This lintel is certainly a re-use of the anterior edifice. This saving of carved stones is repeatedly found on the wall.





1. Portal with sculpted side wall and tympanum.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

2. Tower of Merxheim.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. Bell tower of Buhl before its renovation at the end of the 19th century, according to Georg Osterwald.

Cabinet of Prints and Drawings of Strasbourg. Photo Museums of Strasbourg, M. Bertola.

THE SAINT-LÉGER CHURCH OF GUEBWILLER

The church of Saint-Léger was built between 1182 and 1230-1235, under the impulse of the princes-abbots of Murbach, lords of Guebwiller. It is thus under the same patronage as the abbey church.

Despite a construction in several stages, a homogeneity emanates from the building. The east end was, in fact, modified in the 14th century and a second aisle was added in the 16th century.

Numerous influences can be read on its architecture: from Bourgogne, Ile-de-France, the cathedral of Basel or the church of Sainte-Foy de Sélestat.

A LATE ROMAN BUILDING

In late Roman style combine the Roman and Gothic architectural elements: semicircular arches and gothic arches and high and massive towers.

Saint-Léger welcomes the faithful with its highly developed western massif, a veritable church-porch, characteristic of the Rhine churches. Overcome by two towers and open on all three sides, it allows the transition between the profane world and the sacred world. The magnificent polygonal tower

located at the crossing of the transept completes the silhouette of the building, which can be recognizable in several kilometers.

A NEAT EXTERIOR SCULPTURE

The sculpture in the nave remains sober. Only the cornerstones and claws of the pillars are carved. A rabbit and a ram are hiding in there! The sculptures of the facades are particularly developed. Lesenes connected by small arches animate the whole building. At the foot of the polygonal tower, you can see marmosets, small characters representing the man and his weaknesses, treated in the round. Geometric motifs develop on the facade of the porch and on its towers: omega frieze, billets, pearls and vegetable ornaments. The portal is particularly decorated. The vousoir crowning the door, called arches, are decorated with carved motifs, very diversified from geometric drawings to plant and figurative decors. It is crowned by a tympanum representing the blessing Christ surrounded by two figures: Saint Leger holding a phylactery and the crowned Virgin or, according to another hypothesis, Count Eberhard, lay founder of the abbey of Murbach.



THE ROMAN TOWERS

Numerous Roman bell towers mark the landscape of the Guebwiller Region. They are sometimes the last vestiges of Roman churches disappeared following the construction of new buildings respecting the evolution of the tastes. Thus the base of Buhl's tower, the tower of Wintzfelden, Merxheim and Soultzmatt still remain. They are protected by the Historic Monuments.

THE CHURCH OF MERXHEIM

The history of the church of St. Peter and St. Paul is not well known until the 18th century time, when it was rebuilt. Only remains of the Roman building is the belfry-porch. Probably built at the end of the 11th century, it is representative of the search for verticality and height by medieval architects. Constructed of rubble stones, the corner chain in cut stone and the lesenes amplify this impression of verticality. Classical Roman openings, two levels of triple bays animate the four sides of the upper floors.

THE CHURCH OF SOULTZMATT

The church of St. Sebastian was modified in the 15th and 18th centuries. From the Roman period only the bell-tower and the north aisle survive ; the large arcades are the characteristic elements. The bell-tower dating from the second quarter of the 12th century is constructed of rubble covered in plaster on the first level. Only the stones of the corner chain and the lesenes of the north wall are visible giving this impression of height. The upper level is pierced by semicircular bays on three levels.

THE CHURCH OF WINTZFELDEN

The St-Odile church is still endowed with its Roman tower certainly dating from the second half of the 12th century. Constructed of rubble stones, only the ground floor and the corner chain are endowed with cut stone whose alternation of red and white sandstone forms a decoration remaining the play of color of the abbey of Murbach. Semicircular bays, typical of Roman Art, animate the last level.

Like the bell-tower of Soultzmatt and the original tower of the church of Buhl, the tower is crowned by a two-sided roof.



1. Convent reconstruction.

Model made by Les Amis de Schwarzenhann.

2. Sarcophagus cleared along the north wall of the church.

Photo CCRG-Pah.

3. Extract from the universal calendar of the *Codex Guta-Sintram*.

Grand Séminaire de Strasbourg Library.
Photo CCRG-Pah.

THE CONVENT OF SCHWARZENTHANN, AN UNKNOWN SITE

In 1089, Burkhard of Gueberschwihr founded a monastery of regular canons at Marbach with canon Manegold of Lautenbach. According to legend, his wife would also have set up a community of nuns. It would have established itself from 1117, at the bottom of the valley of Wintzfelden on a land donated by a certain Beatrix. Linked to the monastery of Marbach, the community of women canonesses follows its customary (its rules of life). These women come especially from the middle and lower layers of the nobility.

The convent remains in its entire history under the tutelage of the Abbot of Marbach, who delegates a canon prior, assisted by a few clerics to assure services and confession. A mother superior lead the community, assisted by a prioress.

Their activities are divided between prayer, religious offices, copy of manuscripts, embroidery and other manualcrafts, the welcoming of pilgrims and indigents, and the exploitation of land and vineyards.

THE CONVENT

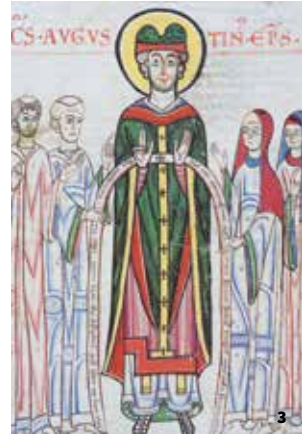
The convent buildings and the oratory dedicated to the Virgin were consecrated by Bishop Berthold of Basel in 1124.

The apogee of the convent stretches from 1117 to 1254, the date of its first destruction. Donations flocked during this period allowing the community to replace the oratory with a church. Its choir is consecrated in 1214 and can accommodate about forty canonesses.

At that time, the site covers more than 3 hectares including convent buildings, cemetery, church, farm and hospice.

Alsace belonging to the Holy Roman Empire is touched by the conflicts of the Great Interregnum which led to the first destruction of the convent in 1254. The reconstructions and the sackings succeeded each other for two centuries. Out of material resources, the community finally extinguished and the Abbey of Marbach recovers its possessions.

In 1484, Count William of Ribeaupierre installed eight Augustinian nuns who remained barely nine years. Beginning in 1495, the Augustines of Petite-Lucelle occupied the site. The convent was plundered and ruined during the Peasants' War in 1525. It was finally abandoned by the nuns in 1531.



Soultzmatt bought the site in 1539 for use as a quarry. The stones were used for constructions many nearby. This last use explains the present state of the convent. Reading of the site is permitted thanks to the discoveries of 1969, supplemented by the conservation and development works of the association *Les Amis de Schwarzenhann*, supported by the municipality of Soultzmatt-Wintzfelden.

THE LAPIDARIUM

Located next to the church of Wintzfelden since 1986, it contains the sarcophagus which collected the remains of three nuns and the five funeral slabs cleared along the northern wall of the church of the convent.

The lid of the sarcophagus is decorated with Latin inscriptions recalling the name and dates of death of two of them. A frieze composed of buds, flowers and grapes symbolizing life adorns the sides.

The funeral slabs are decorated with medieval symbols of the four elements.

THE CODEx GUTA-SINTRAM

This major work of the school of Marbach-Schwarzenhann is a manuscript of 163

sheets of parchment. It is considered a final of the roman illumination since the disappearance of the *Hortus Deliciarum* of the abbess Herrade during the fire of the Temple Neuf in Strasbourg in 1870.

The *Codex Guta-Sintram* is the joint work of canoness Guta of the Schwarzenhann Convent who performed the calligraphy of the text and the canon Sintram of Marbach who took care of the decors, illustrations and dropped capital.

Completed in 1154, it is used to organize the life of the community. Property charts, Augustine's rule and daily liturgical readings are grouped in this book. The illustrated universal calendar of the work of each month and hygiene precepts also gives an idea of the daily life of the nuns. The obituary finally identifies the name and the anniversary of the death of nearly 4,000 benefactors and donors in order to carry out the mass of the deceased in their memory.

This codex is now preserved in the library of the *Grand Séminaire de Strasbourg*.





- 1** Convent of Schwarzenhann - Klosterain
7°11'7"E 47°58'15"N
- 2** Lapidarium of Wintzfelden - 7 rue Principale
7°11'49"E 47°58'32"N
- 3** Saint Odile's Church - 7 rue Principale
7°14'15"E 47°57'36"N
- 4** Saint Sebastian's Church - Place Frédéric Kessler
7°14'15"E 47°57'36"N
- 5** Saint Peter and Saint Paul's Church - Rue de Guebwiller
7°17'31"E 47°54'41"N
- 6** Saint Leger's Church- Place Saint-Léger
7°12'35"E 47°54'42"N
- 7** Saint Jean Baptiste's Church
7°10'59"E 47°55'38"N
- 8** Abbey of Murbach - Rue de l'Église
7°9'30"E 47°55'24"N
- 9** Collegiate Church of Lautenbach - 49 rue Principale
7°9'35"E 47°56'28"N

MERXHEIM

5

« PASSING THIS PORCH WE STAY AS RIVETED IMPRESSED BY THE SPECTACULAR OF THE UNEXPECTED SIGHTS WHICH SURPRISES YOU AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS WILD VALLEY. »

Discovering the vestiges of the abbey church of Murbach.
Charles Bourcart, Visit of the Florival, 1878-1882

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