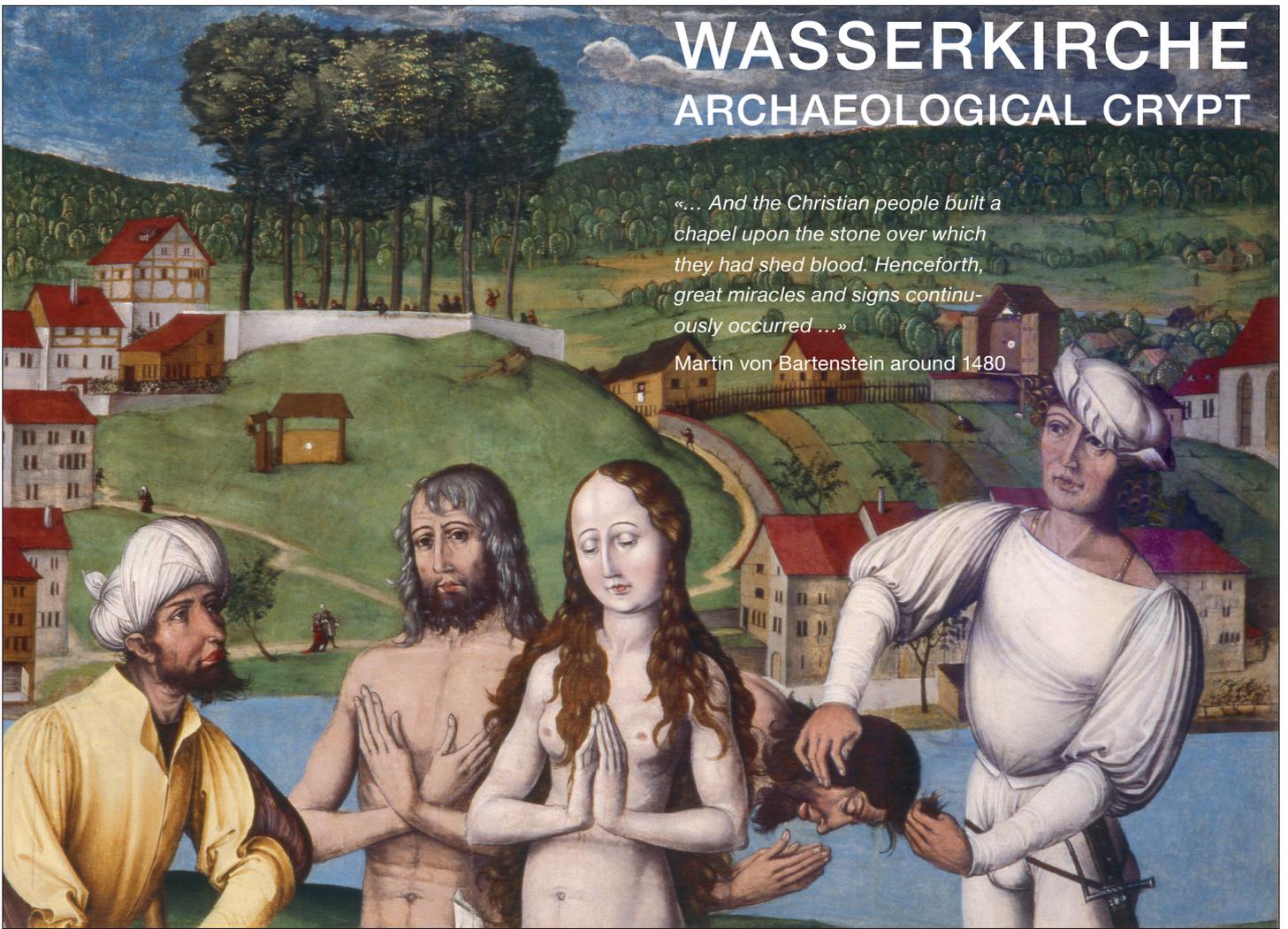


WASSERKIRCHE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRYPT

«... And the Christian people built a chapel upon the stone over which they had shed blood. Henceforth, great miracles and signs continuously occurred ...»

Martin von Bartenstein around 1480



Felix, Regula and Exuperantius before their execution by Decius' henchmen. Detail from the altarpiece by Hans Leu the Elder, around 1500.

The Wasserkirche (Water Church) stands on the site venerated in the Middle Ages as the place of execution of the two Patron Saints of the city, Felix and Regula. Archaeological excavations were carried out here in 1940/41, and since then have been open to the public. Besides providing a view of the martyrs' stone, they also hint at the rich history behind this unique site.

Citizens' library as the centre of Zurich erudition

In 1632 the first public library was installed in the Wasserkirche Church. Its elaborate 1639 gateway inside the Wasserkirche can still be seen today. The interior was redesigned in the Baroque style in 1717. This Bibliotheca civica insulae Tigurinae – the citizens' or city library – became the centre of Zurich learnedness. The Helmhaus annex, added in its present-day form in 1791/93 was also part of this complex.

The Patron Saints Felix and Regula

Legend has it that the siblings Felix and Regula were members of the Theban Legion, a Roman military unit from Thebes in Egypt. Around AD 300, it is said, the legion and their leader Maurice refused to take part in the persecution of Christians in the Valais, which is why all 6600 of them were martyred. Felix and Regula were said to have escaped and fled to Turicum, Roman Zurich, where they were also martyred. According to legend, they picked up their decapitated heads and walked up the hill to the place where they wished to be buried. The Grossmünster Church is said to have been erected on the burial site. In the 13th century, the 'servant' Exuperantius was added to the legend who, it was said, served the now 'genteel' siblings Felix and Regula. With the beginnings of the reformation in 1524, the veneration of the city's Patron Saints came to an end. Their relics are now kept in the village church of Andermatt.



Wasserkirche church shortly after the 1524 Reformation. 3D reconstruction Mathys Partner, Technopark Zurich



View of the citizens' library. Engraving by Johann Melchior Füssli, Neujahrsblatt der Burgerbibliothek (Annual Review of the Citizen's Library), 1719.

Protestant church and Augusto Giacometti's glass windows

On 28th June 1914, a national referendum ratified the foundation of the central library and the citizens' library was moved into this new building in 1917.

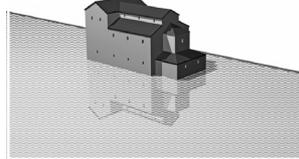
In 1940/41 the Baroque style interior was removed from the unoccupied Wasserkirche, which was turned into a church hall. Besides the Late Gothic tracery vault, the colourful choir windows created by Augusto Giacometti in 1942 became the main decorative element. The central window depicts the life of Christ, while the two lateral windows show the life of an ordinary contemporary man from cradle to grave. Left window from the bottom: birth, childhood, youth, confirmation, basic military training (artillery) and at the top his wedding. Right window from the top: honeymoon (in a red sports car), military service (anti aircraft unit), christening of his child, Sunday church service, working the land, old folk sitting in the garden, sickbed and burial. The windows were manufactured by the St. Gall stained-glass artist Ludwig Jaeger.

Rich architectural history

It has repeatedly been assumed that the Wasserkirche Church was built on the site of a prehistoric river sanctuary. However, concrete evidence for this has not yet been found.

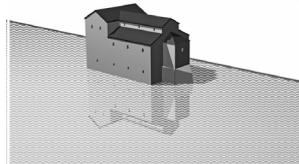
Building phase I – first church, 10th century AD

A north-south oriented church with a large lower church and a three-nave hall crypt with rectangular pillars. The choir of the crypt contained the erratic block venerated as the place of execution.



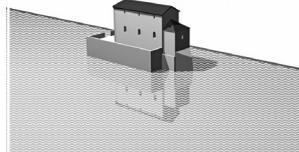
Building phase IA – first alteration of the church, 11th/12th centuries

The choir area was reduced and fitted with a large breakwater. The floor of the crypt was raised and the martyrs' stone was now accessible via a shaft in the ground. The crypt was turned into the burial vault of a noble family.



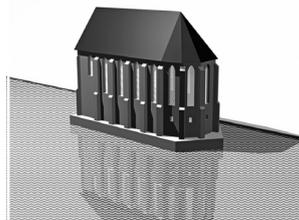
Building phase IB – second alteration of the church around 1230/40

The floor was raised further. The upper church was probably reduced to the central nave and an apse was added at its northern end.



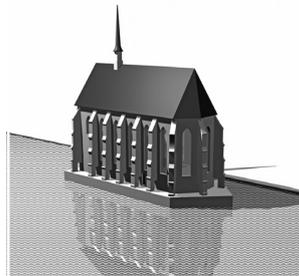
Building phase II – new building in High Gothic style, consecrated in 1288

Entirely new construction of the church. The first ever Zurich building erected entirely in the Gothic style.



Building phase III – Late Gothic new building of 1479–1487

Construction of the present-day church by Hans Felder the Elder, who was from Southern Germany and became naturalised in Zurich. As in the case of its predecessors, the focal point of this church was the crypt, which was raised very high at this stage and still contained the shaft to the martyrs' stone.



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