

SAINT VERENA OF ZURZACH



Approaching a women from early Christianity

The earliest form of the Verena Legend reaches back to the time of the Karl III. (839–888). He was the owner of the Benedictine monastery of Zurzach. The work was written in the monastery at Reichenau as an uplifting book for Karls' out-cast spouse Richardis. The author of this old "vita prior" is probably the abbot Hatto III. (888–913), who based his account on versions that were passed down from earlier times. Very likely the more popular, expanded "vita posterior" goes back to a Zurzach monk. It includes all the popular details which appear in the later Verena accounts, such as the miracles and the blossoming pilgrimage to the grave of the saint.

The journey through life is the purpose

According to the legend Saint Verena lived around 300 A.D., in the time of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian. She came from a good family in the upper Egyptian town of Thebes, which, at that time was already Christian. With a procession of Christian legionaries and her dependents, the young woman reached Milan, where she stayed for a long time under the protection of an old saintly man named Maximus. In Milan she learned the news of the martyrdom of the Christian legionaries and their commander Mauritius in Agaunum (St. Maurice) in Wallis. She hurried to the place of the massacre, for amongst the dead was her fiancé Victor.

From St. Maurice she arrived at Solothurn and led a pious ascetic life in a cave. She brought up young girls, led them to a Christian way of life and converted heathen country people from the surrounding area (in the words of the Legend: she healed the blind). She was put into prison by the heathen town commander Hirtacus, where she experienced a vision of Mauritius and his legionaries, who were lit up in a heavenly light. Hirtacus, who had fallen ill, was cured thanks to the intercession of Verena.

He let Verena go free. She continued her journey down the Aare towards Koblenz on a millstone. She stayed for a while on an island in the Rhine and, through her prayers, drove away snakes and worms, the symbols of faithlessness. She continued her journey and finally arrived at Zurzach. She attended to the housekeeping of the priest of the Church of the Blessed Saint Mary (Verena is the patron saint of housekeepers). She looked after the sick and infirm and spent her days in a life of sacrifice in a small cell. This would have been in the year 344 A.D. Today the Verena Minster rises above her grave.



Legends as timeless signposts

"Legends can be read as signposts, that can lead us on the search towards our own history. However, these signposts are not only directed towards the past; they also show our present day. For a long time Saint Verena, an immigrant has been revered, who lives her Christian faith in a strange country where she devotes her time to the sick and the poor, and she finds her home in this alien country, because she can connect with people who share her faith."

Hildegard König, Legend – Signposts in History 2009

Anchored in history

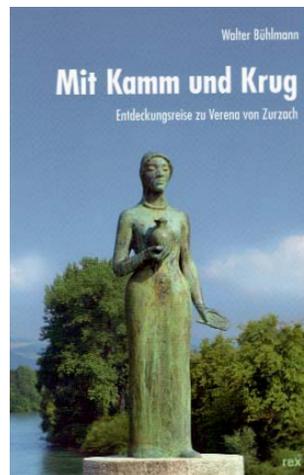


Nowadays the validity of the Verena legend has been strengthened through the support of archaeology and general historical research over the last decades. The excavation of a baptistery from the fifth century proves the existence of an early Christian community. On the erstwhile Roman road, directly under the present Verena Minster, a vast Roman burial ground was discovered. This could confirm the Legend's reference to the burial of the Saint on the Roman road outside the settlement at that time. The tradition of a first pilgrimage church over the grave of the saint also has historical roots. That a Benedictine monastery has already been proven to exist in the eighth century, shows the growing significance of a place of pilgrimage, to which even the emperor Karl III and the Queen Agnes from Hungary paid homage. The fundamental construction components originate in the Middle Ages. The Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture was given a gothic imprint after the blaze of 1294 and in the 18th century it was redesigned in baroque style. After the state decreed abolishment of the monastery in 1876 the Minster became the parish church of Zurzach.

“Mit Kamm und Krug” “With comb and jug” A new publication to Saint Verena

Walter Bühlmann wrote this “Journey of discovery to Verena of Zurzach”, and the Bible scholar and priest expresses himself about his work in this way: “Saint Verena is, actually a very modern woman when carried over to the present day. This courageous and amiable woman has always impressed me.”

“With comb and jug” must be without a doubt the most current, comprehensive and readable book about the saint of Zurzach. It traces the historical, folkloristic, cultural and theological steps in a descriptive vivid language. The wealth of colourful illustrations interspersed throughout is also of great value.



“With comb and jug” has been published 2009 by Rex publishing house and can be obtained in any book shop, especially the local book shop Hübscher, at a price of CHF 34.80. ISBN 978-3-7252-08685

The St. Verena Trust introduces itself

The institution was founded in 2005. Its wish is to cultivate and deepen the memory of Verena as a local saint in a contemporary way. The trust organises and supports activities that serve this purpose. **For 2010/11 the largest commitment is the forthcoming inner restoration of the Verena Minster.** As a pilgrimage centre this impressive ecclesiastical architecture should gleam again in its original resplendence.

The trust is thankful if they can count on the active help from all areas of the population. The church community itself is not in the position to finance the costly renovation work alone. They hope, with the St. Verena Trust, to be able to gain as many people as possible for donations and contributions from benefactors.

Thank you when you are also inspired into doing something for this good deed.

Further information can be found on this website: www.st-verena.ch or directly through our St. Verena Trust, Roman-Catholic Parish Office, Hauptstrasse 42, 5330 Bad Zurzach, Tel. 0041 56 269 75 50, E-Mail: sekretariat@st-verena.ch; Raiffeisenbank Aare-Rhein, PC-Konto 50-4467-0, CH67 8070 1000 0064 0547 2