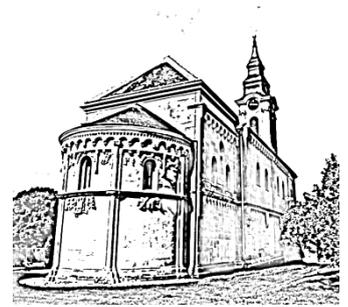


# THE ROMANESQUE CHURCH OF SCHÖNGRABERN – THE „STONE BIBLE“

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION

The parish of Schöngrabern holds a sacral monument of art which is unique in Europe. Between 1200 and 1230 a Romanesque Church was built which was to become world famous because of its rich sculptural adornment.



In the Dark Ages: There is no document of its genesis and no written evidence about the origin of this church. We do not know the owner, nor the artist or the motive. It is possible that it was one of the powerful Kuenringers who gave the order to erect a votive building. The architects and their design were influenced by several cultural trends.

For a long time the church was forgotten by the public. People did not realize the contents any longer. It was not before the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Schöngrabern was rediscovered. Since then it has become a matter of many different interpretations.

## THE „STONE BIBLE“

On the outer wall of the apse, a semi-circle behind the altar room, a stone bible, a sculptured sermon with an abundance of figures, was formed. It is divided into three sections with a window in each and two main departments. The basic idea: *the fight of the good and the evil*

### The southern section

below: By the fall of Adam and Eve sin has come into the world. Eve is still holding the apple in her left hand, but with the right one she is covering her nakedness already. Adam is reaching for the fruit with his right hand, but he is also pressing his stomach as if he had eaten from this forbidden fruit already. A devil is clinging to Eve with his tail and claws, a second devil is rushing towards Adam to get him.

above: Holy Trinity as the Superior Judge – Archangel Michael with the scales for the souls on Doomsday.

### The eastern section

below: The main group is about the sacrifice offered by Cain and Abel. Enthroned in the centre almighty God with his sceptre is blessing mankind. To his right we can see Cain kneeling with a sheaf, to his left there is Abel with a lamb, a prototype of the sacrifice of him. Beneath the throne of God a serpent is twisting. It has captured the souls of the two brothers. But especially in this case the interpretations differ widely. Which of them will be able to escape?

above: Men enthralled by the evil – Samsons struggle against the lion.

### The northern section

below: The representation of a man fighting against a lion. The hunter represents mankind, always struggling against evil. The two dogs are helpers, they represent good deeds, alertness, soberness, prayers, sacraments, virtues, etc.

above: Man and his good qualities.

In Romanesque simplicity and sternness, full of dynamic nature, the three-dimensional beauty of these pictures tells us of the constant human fight against the evil and of man's defeat and constancy. Finally the conquest of all evil by Christ, who delivered and redeemed mankind as a second Adam, is observably depicted. The pictures serve as a device to warn us that the fight will always go on; we have to decide – even today.

On the southern outer wall near the previous side entrance there are two reliefs to be seen, depicting the month December and January.

Down at the outside staircase you can see a modern pieta sculptured by the artist Franz A. Coufal. The pieta was erected on June 21<sup>st</sup> 1964.

## THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

The restoration of the interior was finished on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1978. By this the original impression of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century aisle could be restored.

The baroque altar, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was removed and sent to the church of Oberhofen near Innsbruck. The romanesque mensa was uncovered and solemnly consecrated on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1976.

To the left and to the right from the altar: two sacrament niches. The stone pavement in the apse (two thirds were still existing) was completed to convey the optic impression of the original view. The cross is the casting of an original Romanesque cross which has been kept in the monastery of Melk for some time. The original costal arches and the keystone of the groin, which has been found in the rubble of former restoration works, were put in their original place. The vault was secured by a ferro-concrete structure in the roof truss. 4 Columns in the apse, each of them showing the symbolic figures of the evangelists, are quite remarkable:

Matthew: Man      John: Eagle      Luke: Bull      Mark: Lion

The keystone of the vault has 4 heads in its cross, similar to the 4 evangelists, which – symbolically – show the four universal empires. The Holy Scripture is supposed to be the main column of the world.

Excavations in 1976 gave proof to the thesis that the church has never had a crypt. Only some skeletons of priests were found in the apse.

A huge representation of St. Christopher adorns the northern inner wall. The saint is wearing the hat of a margrave and the ermine coat of a duke. Most likely it is a picture of St. Leopold (after 1359).

The southern wall of the aisle shows an interesting charcoal drawing from the time of the Reformation: a small monkey-like devil with a wooden leg is holding out a parchment to a big devil who writes something with a quill.

The southern wall of the apse is adorned with a fresco from the time around 1330: „Schutzengelmadonna“ (Mary as a guarding angel), St. Catherine, Margaret, King Oswald and Bishop Wolfgang.

The pipe organ was built at Klosterneuburg in 1816.

There is an information and meditation room („Lapidarium“) just opposite the local authority with photographs made for a well-known book by Hofrat Prof. Dr. Rupert Feuchtmüller, with a copy of the keystone and several other subjects.

For guided tours, audio guides and further information you may ask the local authority:

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**Museum opening hours:** Saturday, Sunday and Holidays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm  
from Easter to the end of October

We would be grateful for your donation as the maintenance of the church is very expensive. Thank you!

Parish office Schöngrabern