

Did you know that an emperor is buried in St. George's Cathedral? In 1519, Emperor Maximilian I. was laid to rest here. Only his heart is in Bruges, 1,200 km away, in the sarcophagus of his beloved wife Mary of Burgundy.

## CONSTRUCTION

St. George's Cathedral is a late Gothic, three-nave hall church and was built between 1440 and 1460 by Peter of Pusica. Eight 90 cm thick columns support the ceiling. On the keystones of the vault are the coats of arms of the House of Austria.

Due to the peculiar layout of the church above the main entrance of the castle, the transept and the presbytery are missing.

The church was originally called the Chapel of the Virgin Mary or the Chapel of Our Lady. Only when Frederick III moved the Order of St. George's Knights, which he founded in Millstatt in 1468, to Wr. Neustadt in 1479 and Pope Sixtus IV elevated Wr. Neustadt to a diocese, was it given the name St. George's Church.

## FINAL RESTING PLACE OF MAXIMILIAN I.

On 12 January 1519 Maximilian I, Head of the Habsburg Family and Roman-German Emperor, died in Wels Castle on his journey from Innsbruck to the Diet in Linz.

Like other kings and emperors of the Middle Ages, Maximilian staged his death. Having always carried his coffin with him on his travels for four years, he now presented himself as an extraordinarily humble and guilt-ridden sinner and penitent. He ordered that he not be embalmed after his death, but instead that his body be scourged and that his hair be shorn and his teeth broken out.

True to his will, Maximilian I was buried in his baptismal church, St George's Chapel at the castle in Wiener Neustadt, under the steps of what was then the Gothic high altar. According to his wishes, the priest should step on his chest when he went to the altar. Maximilian's heart was buried separately. It is buried in the Church of Our Lady in Bruges in the sarcophagus of his first wife, Mary of Burgundy.

Maximilian's famous tomb with numerous bronze figures, which he had commissioned during his lifetime for St George's Chapel in Wiener Neustadt, remained unfinished. It was only his

grandson Ferdinand I who had it erected in the Court Church in Innsbruck, which was built especially for the purpose between 1553 and 1563.

## EQUIPMENT

In the centre of the church is the reliquary of Frederick III, which was removed in 1770 because it took up too much space. In 1990, the reliquary was reinstalled in St. George's Cathedral after restoration.

In the rear part of the church is the dodecagonal baptismal font from Adneter Rotscheck, a work from the 15th century, which was probably used for the baptism of Maximilian I in 1459.



► Baptismal font and reliquary

In addition to the tomb of Maximilian I., there is also a crypt in St. George's Church. At the front in the right aisle, the choir bishop of Cologne, Provost Wolfgang Georg, a brother of Empress Eleonore [wife of Leopold I] was buried in 1683. He had died here on the return journey from Rome. The cover plate of his tomb bears the inscription: "Tell me, dumb stone, whose bones you hold? Look around you and read the name in the ore on the right!"

Since 2019, the Military Academy is presenting the exhibition "From the Imperial Residence to the Officer's Forge". The life and work of Maximilian I. plays a central role in this exhibition. In order to make the tomb of Maximilian I. more accessible to visitors, the interior of the church was modified after a competition of five designs. The iurv. in which the military bishop Werner

Freistetter was also represented, chose the design by the Tyrolean artists Martin and Werner Feiersinger. Among other things, they created a new altar.



► The new altar

## ALTAR RETABLE

The winged retable designed by the Altenburg art historian Andreas Gamerith in 2018 is an attempt to reconstruct the earlier retable, which had fallen victim to baroqueisation.

Related to the scene of the baptism of Jesus Christ in the River Jordan depicted in the central window, the feast side of the shrine shows the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. The wings of the feast side show the coat of arms of Maximilian I: Austria and Burgundy on the Roman double-headed eagle.

The Sunday side shows the soldiers under the cross of Jesus Christ and makes special reference to the officers trained here and their instruction to protect and help, not to blind obedience or cruelty.

The weekday side shows Moses and Elijah as representatives of law and prophecy in the Old Testament, also here with a view to prospective officers who have to find their way between legal foundations and independent action.



Attached to the retable is a bronze statue of St. George, a work from the 15th century, supposedly by the court foundryman Maximilian I.

## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The glass windows are also a work from the 15th century. However, the original windows [from 1479] were partially destroyed during the siege of Matthias Corvinus in 1485 and by fires in 1494 and 1496. During the restoration in the years 1500 to 1520 by the Dutchman Joris van Delft, however, some changes were made, so that although Frederick's AEIOU appears on the windows more often, he himself no longer appears. The side and rear windows used to have stained glass as well, but they were later replaced by normal glass under the Academy Commander Count Kinsky, in order to make the church brighter and to better supervise the cadets who used to sleep during the daily early mass. During the Second World War, the glass windows were stored well packed in the old salt mine near Hallein and survived the chaos of the war undamaged.

## DESTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

In 1945 the church was almost completely destroyed, the reconstruction was done with sandstone from St. Margarethen and Loretto in Burgenland. The only column that was preserved in the original is the front right-hand column. On it you can see a fresco, which Frederick III probably had put up for his wife Eleonora of Portugal. Nine pictures show motives from the life of Jesus Christ.





- Fresco on the only original column

## BISHOP'S CHURCH

In 1784 the bishop's see of the diocese of Lower Austria was moved from Wr. Neustadt to St. Pölten. Since 1963, however, St. George's Church has again been the bishop's church. Through the taking possession by the military bishop Kosteletzky on June 1, 1987, it finally became a cathedral for the Austrian military bishop.