# Saint Michael's church in Luxembourg

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In the heart of the old town, on the eastern side of the Fish-market, rises the Church of St. Michael. Since 1682 its onion-shaped baroque tower has been a distinctive feature of the thousand-year-old town's characteristic skyline. To this day, the former Dominican church along with its architecture and church furnishings, displays some important aspects of the city's religious and cultural life.

Situated at a short distance from the remains of the fortified castle that belonged to the counts of the House of Luxembourg on the Bock Rock, St. Michael's church dates back to the time of Count Sigfroy. After the castle was erected in 963 Sigfroy had two chapels built, one within the castle's precincts serving as a castle chapel and a second one, initially dedicated to the Most Holy Saviour, that served the local residents. The present single-nave building, which dates back to 1519, owes its distinctive appearance to the form of its typically late gothic vaulting. The previous building had been destroyed by fire in 1509.

In 1627 the Dominicans settled on the Fish Market next to St. Michael's church and in 1633 they assumed responsibility for the pastoral care of the parish. Between 1639 and 1643 they extended the building to the west, i.e. towards the town centre. However this extension, along with the new tower, was reduced to ashes in a fire in 1679. The chancel was destroyed during the siege of the fortress of the City of Luxembourg by the French troops in 1683. The church was rebuilt between 1687 and 1688 with the assistance of Louis XIV, the Sun King; in his memory the fleur-de-lis, the coat of arms of the Bourbons, adorned the church portal until 1796. When the restoration work was carried out, the original chancel was not rebuilt so that the eastern side of the church was shortened. At this time, the present gallery was constructed and the new portal, which gave access to the interior of the church, was redesigned in the baroque style by the local sculptor Nicolas Koenen.

The French Revolution marked a significant turning point in the life of St. Michael's Church on the Fish Market. The Dominicans had to leave the church and the adjoining monastery and abandon the parish. St Michael's church was transformed into a "temple décadaire" (1) in 1798 and the furniture was auctioned off or destroyed.
In 1803, after St. Michael's was returned to the Roman Catholic Church, the parishioners were able to move back into the abandoned church. Ever since, it has served as the parish church for the Fish Market area in the heart of the old part of town. The last changes to the appearance of the building were made in 1834, when the former refectory of the Dominican monastery was incorporated into the nave as a side aisle in the southern part of the church.

Despite its turbulent history, which all too often had a detrimental effect on the building, St. Michael's church continues to be a focal point for the religious life and sacred heritage of the Grand Duchy up to the present day.

In fact, since the destruction in 1778 of the old parish church of St. Nicholas, which had been situated on what is now the Marché-aux-herbes, and the regrettable

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(1) « Temple décadaire » : During the French Revolution and the dechristianisation of the country, a ten-day-week was introduced ; every tenth day was a day of rest on which non-religious services were held as an alternative to the former religious church services. Certain church buildings were used for this purpose and were referred to as « temples décadaires ».

destruction of the Franciscan convent on the « Knuedler » (Place Guillaume) in 1823, the Dominican church on the Fish Market can be considered to be the oldest sacred monument in the city. The most recent renovation work that was done between 1962 and 1964 sought to restore the original aspect of the church's architecture and the artistic quality of its furnishings, which had been restocked from 1803 onwards thanks to favourable circumstances, the generosity of the local parishioners and the foresight and commitment of the Parish Council.

In fact it would be true to say that St Michael's has become a refuge for Christian art. Over the years, the church on the Fish Market, that attracts many admiring visitors, has amassed within its walls a number of artefacts and furnishings from former churches or convents in the city of Luxembourg that were suppressed during the French Revolution.

For example, in St. Michael's Church today we can find some of the church furniture from the old parish church of St. Nicholas (Marché-aux-Herbes), the Franciscan convent on the Knuedler, the collegiate church of the Jesuits, the congregational convent of Our Lady of the Canonesses of St Augustine and the parish church of St. Ulrich in Stadtgrund.

A number of objects that were specifically created for St. Michael's and which escaped secularization can also be found in the church. They include works by renowned Luxembourgish artists of the baroque period such as Nicolas Anciaux, Bartholomé Namur and Nicolas Koenen. They not only reflect the predilection for baroque art and the style of the catholic counter-reformation, but also popular forms of devotion, deeply engrained in the religious practices of the 17th and 18th centuries.

As a centre for the propagation of the veneration of Our Lady of the Rosary in Luxembourg, St. Michael's is one of the oldest and most important sites of Marian devotion.

For many centuries, St. Michael's church has been the spiritual home for the parish of the Fish Market district, the Dominican convent, the craftsmen's guilds and their religious associations as well as for the military parish.

It is thus undeniable that St Michael's has played a unique part in the turbulent history of the thousand-year-old city. Its spiritual and artistic charisma continues to shine to this day.

**Stained glass windows tell the history**

Near the entrance, below  the gallery, the visitor discovers a stained glass window presenting some striking facts from the history of his sanctuary. All the stained glass windows were replaced during the restoration work in 1962-1964, in order to take into account the religious character of the church and to highlight its historical importance as the oldest sanctuary in the upper town.

The history of the church and the history of the city seem to overlap exactly. Due to its central location, near the castle, it has witnessed all the events of a city, only a few

years its eldest. How many times, victim of its advanced and exposed situation, has it not been bombed, burned, looted and still rebuilt !

On the territory of the parish was the seat of all the institutions: the county castle, residence of our first rulers; the seat of the Governor (the later Palace of Justice) after the loss of our independence; the Provincial Council, the highest judicial authority in the country (at the site of the Fish Market); the town hall (from the end of the 16th to the end of the 19th century), the current Grand Ducal Palace. Today, it is still the seat of the constitutional powers of the State: the Grand Ducke's Palace, the Chamber of Deputies and the State Council ( the Palace of Justice has moved to the Plateau du St Esprit ). The proximity of all these institutions explains, why the church dedicated to Archangel Michael was so closely linked to the events of his time, the most striking of which are illustrated in the stained glass window under the gallery ( from top to bottom and from left to right ) :



1 - Consecration of the first castle church by Egbert, Archbishop of Trier, on 5 November 987. - *Later on, this church of the counts, established on the territory of the former parish of Hollerich, dedicated  originally to the Holy Savior, would become the church of St Michael and would also detach itself from the mother church to become an independent parish. Thus, on May 21, 1312, King Henry VII, about to be crowned in Rome, gave the convent of Marienthal, into which his sister Marguerite and his daughter Marie had entered, the right of patronage of the parish church that had become independent. We can therefore understand the growing importance of the church and the interest shown in it by the sovereigns. On March 13, 1354, at the Diet of Metz, Charles IV raised the county of Luxembourg to the rank of duchy. His half-brother, count Wenceslas I, became the first Duke.*

2 - In 1354 Wenceslas I, Duke of Luxembourg, swears at the altar of St. Michael's church in Luxembourg, in the presence of the nobles of the country, to uphold the

freedoms of the city of Luxembourg. - *This independence came to an abrupt end when Philippe of Burgundy' troops captured the city with treacherous helping hand and set fire to the church.*

3 - On June 30, 1509, a fire destroys St Michael's Church and 180 surrounding houses. The reconstruction of the houses should last for years, finally the church was rebuilt in 1519, as shown by a keystone in the vault bearing this date. - *In 1542-43, the church was again severely damaged during the takeover of Luxembourg by François Ier, King of France.*

4 – On 29 October 1549, the governor, Count Peter-Ernst Mansfeld, promises before the "Etats" (the assembly of the nobility, the religious orders and the bourgeoisie) gathered in council in St. Michael's Church that the future sovereign, the infant Philippe, would maintain the rights, privileges, customs and freedoms of the Duchy of Luxembourg and the County of Chiny. - *Only after he had sworn this oath, the States, jealous of Luxembourg's particularism, also swor loyalty to the future monarch.*

5 - In 1628 Barbe de Housse, prioress of the convent of noble ladies in Marienthal, confers the right of patronage of St. Michael's church to the Dominicans of Luxembourg. In 1633 the Dominicans take possession of the church.- *Next to the church, they undertook the construction of their convent, the former St. Francis hospital. By tradition, the church owes its name still used in our days : "zu Dominikaner". A new fire destroyed in 1679 the western part and the roof of the sanctuary, which was immediately rebuilt. The characteristic shape of the tower dates from this period. As soon as the repairs were completed, the French invaded the country. The terrible Christmas bombing in 1683 caused serious damage to the sanctuary. The cannonball which is still embedded at the top of the tower is a reminder of this event. The siege and the subsequent takeover of the city by Vauban did nothing to improve the deplorable situation of the church.*

6 - In 1687 Louis XIV, the Sun King, of France visits the Dominican church, which had been severely damaged during the siege of 1683, and donates 4000 thalers for its reconstruction. - *The capture of the city in 1796 by the troops of revolutionary France marked the end of the Ancien Régime. The possessions of the nobility and clergy were confiscated and sold as national property. The Dominicans were expelled, and their buildings were used first by the army. In 1798, the revolutionaries turned the church into a decade-temple and a theatre. Only the statue of Saint Michael above the entrance (since 1952 it has been placed in the niche next to the entrance) had found grace in front of their ardour. It is said that the soldiers would have spared it, because the statue of the Saint slaying the dragon symbolized the victory of freedom over tyranny and they saw in the headgear of the Archangel Michael a phrygian cap, symbol of the french revolution. The concordat concluded between Pope Pius VII and the first consul Napoleon Bonaparte brought calm, and religious buildings were restored to worship.*

7 - In 1803 Mayor Servais hands over the keys of St. Michael's church to H.H. Krantz, who had been appointed the new parish priest, thus returning the building to the Roman Catholic Church from which it had been alienated for eight years.

## Corporations and brotherhoods

The population of the city was always closely linked to the St-Michael church. Many religious brotherhoods had their headquarters there and craft corporations regularly held their religious services there. Their emblems are recalled in the new stained glass windows.

Even today, many craft organizations still gather in St-Michael for religious commemorations. St-Michael was also a garrison church and a military parish. In the 1980s the gendarmerie and later the grand-ducal police adopted St Michael as their saint patron, in a ceremony celebrated, as it should be, in the venerable church consecrated under the name of the Archange.

Under the old regime, crafts and trade were dominated by corporate organization. A corporation is an association of persons exercising the same profession in a locality and bound together by a certain number of rights and duties. To be able to exercise a profession of craftsman or merchant, it was necessary to be a member of a corporation and to renounce to practice any other profession. Access to the profession was subject to a long preparation and a thorough practicum. Before becoming a qualified master to practice a trade on your own, you had to have been an apprentice and journeyperson for a certain period of time and have completed your masterpiece and paid certain entrance fees. Each corporation had its own regulations, approved by the higher authority, which related in particular to the quality of production. The corporation exercised professional jurisdiction over its members. A number of elected masters, called jurors because they took the oath, were responsible for ensuring that the corporation's internal rules were observed, and for manufacturing and selling the products.

In Luxembourg, there were 13 corporations, the oldest being St Eloi's. Its origins date back to 1266, only a few years after the city received the letters of freedom. Each corporation elected a master. All the "thirteen masters" represented the "civic community" and participated in its administration. The complete economic life of the capital was under their control. However, despite the definite influence of this body, it should not be compared to the powerful flemish guilds. Indeed, Luxembourg's corporations reflected the country's backward economy. The work is done in small workshops, strict regulations, although avoiding any competition, prevent from all progress. Only the merciers own a corporation house, the others meet outdoors or in a convent in the city.

The corporations also beared religious brotherhoods. They were obliged to observe certain feasts, to practice good, choose a saint as their patron, had their own special meetings and feasts and enjoyed the protection of the Church.

The Thirteen corporations and their patrons :
- the drapers and hatters (saints Antoine,
  Servais, Barbe);
- the bakers (St Roch);
- the butchers (St Barthélemy);
- the shoemakers and tanners (St Crépin,
  St Crépinien);
- the coopers (St Urbain);
- the blacksmiths,nailsmiths, saddlers,
  cutlers, foundrymen, gunsmiths,
  furlers, cartwrights, boilermakers,
  tailors,   watchmakers, goldsmiths and
  all  those  who work with metals (St
  Eloi) ;
- the grocers (St Michael);
- the tailors (Ste Anne);
- the bricklayers, carpenters, slate roofers,
  potters, glaziers, turners and other
  construction trades (St Thibaud);
- the weavers (St. Peter of Milan);
- the fishermen (St Peter);
- the day labourers (St Nicolas);
- the « rôtisseurs » and cooks (St
  Laurent).

The first stained glass window in the nave to the left of the entrance shows the patrons and corporate signs of the trades whose religious festivities were celebrated in St. Michael's church.

There are from top to bottom :

St Urban, represented as pope, a barrel at his feet. The crest bears the corporate signs of the coopers of whom he is the boss. St. Urban, born in Rome, was pope from 222-230. In 1750, the coopers had an altar erected in his honour in the church, which also houses a statue probably from this altar. This statue represents the saint wearing the tiara, carrying a bunch of vines, a barrel at his feet. In fact, the patron saint of the vineyards and coopers was St Urbain, the 6th bishop of Langres, who was supplanted in our regions by his more famous namesake, Pope Urban I.

St. Peter, an apostle, holding in his right hand the keys of the kingdom. Two fishes appear in the badge as corporate signs of the fishermen  - St. Peter, himself a fisherman, had his altar in the church.

St. Peter of Milan, patron saint of weavers as indicated by the 3 shuttles, insignia of the corporation. Peter of Milan was prior of Como. Inquisitor General of Milan, he was

killed by his opponents with knives, which explains the attributes of the saint: dagger in the chest and knife in a gaping wound on the head. It is used against headaches, epilepsy, phisis, childhood diseases and tuberculosis. The weavers celebrated their annual festivities with a mass at the Dominican church. The cult of St Peter was introduced to us by the convent of Marienthal, who, let us remember, exercised the right of patronage over the church of St Michael from 1312 to 1628. No event in his life put him in touch with the weavers especially. J. Malget ("Die Verehrung des Heiligen Petrus von Mailand im Luxemburgischen") admits the influence of the Dominicans established in Luxembourg when forming corporations. The friars preachers are said to have designated one of their most important patrons, St. Peter Martyr, as the patron saint of weavers.

St Thibaud, patron of construction trades, is more particularly represented as patron of the potters, who attended a mass every Easter Monday (Eimaischen) in St-Michael. Here St Thibaud is shown as a bishop, so it is Thibaud de Vienne (Dauphiné), archbishop (930-1001). However, there is also Saint Thibaud de Provins, who had the healthy bishop as his great-great uncle. St Thibaud de Provins, according to legend, lived as a hermit in the Ardennes, in Pettingen/Mersch, and in Italy. As hermit, he would often have helped the villagers in their manual work, masonry, carpentry... which explains his patronage of the building trades. This confusion existed for a long time. Already on the portable corporate emblems of the 18th century, he is represented as a bishop.

The emblem of the « Gesellenverein », founded in 1864, continues the religious traditions of the former corporations. The parish priest and dean of St. Michael , Bernard Haal was one of its pillars. The « Gesellenverein » had its headquarters in the « Côte d'Eich » until 1940.

Saint Michael, patron of the grocers, the only corporation to own a house (the current Masonic Lodge in the rue de la Loge). St Michael, according to an ancient Christian tradition, received the souls of the dead to lead them to their destination. His statue in the church shows him, a balance in his left hand, weighing souls. The scales, symbol of honesty, made him become the patron of the grocers.

Some professions were established in well-defined areas of the city. In the vicinity of the church, we know the butchers, who had their stalls ("Fleischschieren") in the rue de la Boucherie ("Fleschiergaass"), as well as the bakers in the rue de l'Eau, formerly called "Wastelergasse", which gave rise to corruption "Wassergasse" (wastel = gastel, cake).

The second stained glass window refers to the religious brotherhoods in relation to the church.

There are among others :

The Brotherhood of the Rosary, dear to the Dominicans. The annual procession of the Rosary used to start at St Michael's Church and then cross the suburbs of Clausen and Pfaffenthal, formerly belonging to St. Michael's parish.
The Brotherhood of the Blessed Sacrament had its headquarters in the church from 1399-1630.

The brotherhood of St. Sebastian, celebrating its annual Mass in the Dominican Church. St. Sebastian, a roman soldier, commander of the 1st cohort, was martyred with arrows. By virtue of his condition and martyrdom, he is the patron of the harquebusiers.
Other window-themes represent the lords of both, temporal and spiritual power, as well as the benefactors of the sanctuary, priests and ecclesiastical superiors. The richly decorated glass painting illustrates the religious influence of the sanctuary and its role in the history of the city, a role it still plays today in the life of the capital.



# The organ of the Church of St. Michael

According to ancient sources, Saint-Michael's church already had an organ in 1609, which was auctioned off as a public good during the french Revolution.

The date of construction of the actual organin St. Michael's church, can be located around 1662, when the Franciscans transformed their church, located in the actual Place Guilleaume - "Knuedler", and which was abandoned after the french revoluion, a fate reserved for most objects related to the religious cult.

According to the plans of the central administration, the franciscan church was to become the seat of the Temple of the Decade and the National Theatre; the organ, considered as the best organ in the city at the time, therefore remained in the church to embellish the republican festivities. However, the military refused to evacuate the monastery buildings and the Decade temple was moved to St Michael. The organ however stayed in the „Knuedler"-church until 1803. After the conclusion of the Concordat (15 July 1801; legally binding from 18 April 1802), the Church-ouncil of Saint Michael turned to the Prefect Lacoste on 11 February 1803 and asked him "to

keep the organ of the abandoned franciscan church for Saint Michael's church, as their instrument had been sold at auction for the benefit of the Republic". The prefect then donated the old franciscan organ from 1662 to Saint-Michael's church.

As the vaults of St-Michael were lower than those of the franciscan church, the magnificently carved organ cabinet seems to have been somewhat crushed in the church of St-Michael, as there were most probably still sculptures originally above the turrets which obviously could not take place in St-Michael.

In fact, when the organ was installed at St. Michael's church after the french Revolution, it underwent a major transformation. Originally, the two facades, main organ and positive organ were superimposed and placed in the balustrade of the gallery railing, with keyboards at the back according to the Mosan and the Brabant tradition. When the organ was moved to St-Michael, the entire buffet was compressed by moving down the facade of the main organ. This has led to cuts in the decoration, especially under the angel's head which carries the large central turret.

Unfortunately, the transformations of the 19th century left nothing of the original pipework, so that during the great restoration in 1969 by Georg Westenfelder of the „Manufacture d'orgues luxembourgeoise de Lintgen", a reconstruction in the original dutch style was considered, according to the study conducted by the dutch organ expert J.J. van der Harst from Utrecht.



The organ was rebuilt around 1894 by Dalstein and Haerpfer of Boulay (France) and after 1934 by the „Manufacture d'orgue luxembourgeoise Haupt" in Lintgen. In 1959, the organ was listed as "historical monument". Following the complete restoration of the church in 1963, efforts were made to restore the organ.

As the old pipework was apparently no longer usable, Georg Westenfelder of the „Manufacture d'orgues luxembourgeoise de Lintgen" built a complete new organ with mechanical action, in 1969, strictly according to the principles of old french construction, while keeping the old 17th century buffet. To reconstruct the facade of the main organ, despite the lack of height of the vaults, it was decided to separate the two facades and to place the positive piping in a dorsal positive. As a result, the keyboard is now "french-style" set between the positive and the main organ. This enabeled to place a third half Echo keyboard, with a „Cornet"-register, according to the ancient practice.

In 1987, the buffet was redesigned with minor modifications  ( in particular the „Clairon"-register in the main organ was replaced by a „Vox humana" 8').

Comité Alstad 2019

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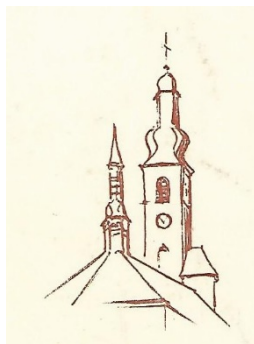
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