

The collegiate church of St Martin of Colmar

The design of the collegiate church of St Martin is attributed to two architects: Master Humbret (active around 1230 – 1240) for the transept and the nave, and Guillaume de Marbourg (died in 1366) for the choir. The church was built over more than a century, between around 1240 and 1365, and the diversity of its appearance is also reflected in its external decoration. Adorning the tympanum of the St Nicolas door on the south façade, we find an episode from the life of St Nicholas, in which the bishop saved three girls from dishonour when their penniless father was about to prostitute them. On one of the archivolts*, by the figure of a man holding a set square, an inscription states the name of the architect, “Maistres Humbret”. On the soberly decorated west door, above the portal of the *Adoration of the Magi*, is an image of *St Martin*, the patron saint of the church.



Upper Rhine (Colmar?), *Saint Martin*, c. 1300, Vosges sandstone

The originals of this sculpture and the statues that adorned the exterior of the building are now on display in the museum, revealing the scale of the construction project that took place in Colmar, as well as illustrating the influence of the workshops of Strasbourg and Freiburg in Breisgau. The figures of the *Angel of the Annunciation*, Christ as the *Man of Sorrows* and *St Martin* were inspired by the work of the Strasbourg artists who worked on the south door of

the western façade, who in turn were influenced by the sculptors who had worked on Notre-Dame in Paris and above all on Reims Cathedral. The echo is a distant one and the quality is less impressive, but the sculptor who created the figure of *St Martin* still reveals his dexterity. The sculpture is no longer intact, as it lacks the horse's head and the cape, and has also suffered from erosion that has transformed the figure of the beggar, but it still exudes a sense of life. The saint's face shows less modelling and is less expressive than those of the *Angel of Reims* or the *Tempter of Strasbourg*, but the taste for detail (buttons on the tunic, the jewel at the front of the crown) and the dynamic composition of the sculpture prove that there had been an evolution and allow us to date the figure of *St Martin* to around 1300.

The more monumental figures of the *Prophets*, the *King* and the *Queen*, which originally stood under canopies adorning the buttresses* of the choir, reflect the art of the sculptors who worked on the cathedral of Freiburg im Breisgau. These slender figures, with their static, formal poses, show a similar treatment in the drapery, which is characteristic of the mid-14th century. On the other hand, their faces show little expression or modelling, which sets them apart from the series of *Prophets* (c. 1320 – 1330) that adorned the corner buttresses of the German cathedral's tower.



Upper Rhine?, *Tombstone of Philippe Hunolt of Limberg*, c. 1358, Vosges sandstone

The *Tombstone of Philippe Hunolt de Limpere*, a member of an old, influential Colmar family, provides an example of the interior décor of the collegiate church as well as reflecting funerary practices. The sober engraved effigy of the priest is surrounded by an inscription: "In the year of our Lord thirteen hundred/and fifty-eight on the 18th day before the calends of October (14 September) died Lord Philippe Hunolt/of Limpere, chaplain/of this chapel his father and his mother may he rest in peace". Two years before, his father had been part of the committee that approved and supervised the construction of the church's new choir. So it seems logical that the parents of the young chaplain wanted to be able to install a tombstone commemorating their son in one of the church's chapels.



Fermail, Germany, 1st half of the 13th century, silver gilt, clear, green and blue glass paste, filigree (?)



Double cup, Germany, 1st half of the 14th century, partially gilded silver, previously enamelled (?)

In this room devoted to Colmar's largest Catholic parish church, we should not forget that the city also contained a large Jewish community. A *Fermail** dating from the first half of the 13th century and a

Double cup from the first half of the 14th century are linked to this community, as we can infer from the Jewish wedding ring that belonged to the same collection, originally made up of jewellery, around fifty objects in precious metal and over three hundred coins. The treasure was discovered by chance in May 1863 within a wall in a house in the Rue des Juifs, and must have been hidden in 1348 or 1349, due to fears of a pogrom, at a time when the appearance of the Black Death was accompanied by terrible accusations levelled against the Jewish community. The *Colmar Treasure* was partially dispersed by the workmen who found it, whilst the rest was sold in 1923 to the Musée de Cluny, the National Museum of the Middle Ages in Paris.

Archivolts: concentric arches above the portal of a church

Buttresses: architectural elements on the outside of a building that reinforce the wall supporting the roof

Fermail: piece of jewellery in the form of a clasp used to fasten two sides of a garment

