THE CHURCH OF ST. APOLLINARIS IN REMAGEN, GERMANY - ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION

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The neogothic Church of St. Apollinaris in Remagen on the Rhine is important for several reasons:

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, a church designed by Zwirner, the architect who completed the cathedral of Cologne, was built on the Apollinaris Mountain. The church was to be a place of pilgrimage.

- Today, this church is the most important religious building in neogothic style along this part of the Rhine. Its significance is derived from its close affinity to the Gothic cathedral of Cologne, and also from the paintings in the interior.

- Since 1985, the Church of St. Apollinaris has benefited from an extensive restoration program financed by the state and the church in a volume of more than 4 million Euro.

The History

As it seems, St. Apollinaris was bishop of Ravenna in about 200 AD. We have little precise knowledge of his life and activities. Most of what we know must be considered legend. Two churches were built in Ravenna in his honor: St. Apollinare Nuovo and St. Apollinare in Classe, the latter erected over his grave. His relics are honored in Remagen (Germany), Gorkum (Netherlands), and in Reims and Dijon (France).

Pilgrimages to Remagen in honor of St. Apollinaris can be traced back as far as the middle of the twelfth century. At that time, Benedictine monks from the abbey of Siegburg built a small church with a crypt and a monastery on a site, where possibly in ancient times, people had worshipped pagan gods and spirits, and where a chapel dedicated to St. Martin had stood since the sixth century. In 1164, Reinhard von Dassel, the archbishop of Cologne, on his way back from Italy, brought the head-relic of St. Apollinaris to the newly erected church. As the legend goes, he chose Remagen, because the boat he was traveling on stopped by itself at this point of the Rhine River.

For the next six hundred years, the Apollinaris Mountain, as the site was called from this time on, was a destination for pious pilgrims living along the Rhine River and in the neighboring regions.

In 1793, the relics were brought to Siegburg on the eastern side of the Rhine to protect them from the invading troops of the French Revolution. The monastery itself was dissolved in 1802. In 1807, the church and the monastery became the property of the Boisserée brothers of Cologne. In 1838, the buildings then came into the possession of Count Franz Egon von Fuerstenberg-Stammheim, a member of the Westphalian Fuerstenberg family, which had brought forth several Catholic bishops in the preceding centuries. He had a big fortune at his disposal and was very interested in art and architecture.

By purchasing the old pilgrim chapel, he hoped to revive the veneration of the ancient relics. Besides, he intended to use the crypt of the chapel as a burial place for himself and his family. Prompted by the Count of Fuerstenberg-Stammheim, Franciscan monks came to the Apollinaris Mountain in 1857, after the completion of the church and the paintings. Their special assignments were preaching and the revival of the veneration of St. Apollinaris. Even today, pilgrimages take place to the Church St. Apollinaris in Remagen.

The New Church

At first, Count Franz Egon von Fuerstenberg-Stammheim intended to have the interior of the still existing old church decorated with religious paintings, and called together a group of painters from Düsseldorf: Ernst Deger, the brothers Andreas and Karl Mueller and Franz Ittenbach. They were all members of the Düsseldorf Art Academy, drawing their inspiration from the early Italian Renaissance. The renovation of the old church came to an end very quickly, when severe static damages were discovered in the foundations. So, Fuerstenberg decided in 1838 to tear down the old church and to build a new and bigger one for the pilgrims. For this purpose, he arranged a competition between Ernst Friedrich Zwirner (1802-1861), the architect responsible for the restoration and the completion of the cathedral of Cologne, and Rudolf Wiegmann (1804-1865), who was an architect and professor in Düsseldorf at the Art Academy and little known at that time.

Ernst Friedrich Zwirner had come to Cologne only a few years before, in 1833. He had studied in Berlin and had been influenced by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, (1781-1841). As a basis for his work of completing the cathedral of Cologne in the tradition of the Middle Ages, he used medieval drawings of the west facade, which had been rediscovered in 1814 and 1816. Due to its importance as a national issue, the completion of the cathedral of Cologne emphasized and helped spread the neogothic style in Germany and the neighboring countries.

Wiegmann planned a small church in neoromanesque style, including details of both the older church and the...