

St. Gallen embroidery

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Huldrych Zwingli

Huldrych (or Ulrich) Zwingli (1 January 1484 - 11 October 1531) was a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland. Born during a time of emerging Swiss patriotism and increasing criticism of the Swiss mercenary system, he attended the University of Vienna and the University of Basel, a scholarly centre of humanism. He continued his studies while he served as a pastor in Glarus. He perfected his Greek and took up the study of Hebrew. His library contained over three hundred volumes from which he was able to draw upon classical, patristic, and scholastic works. He exchanged scholarly letters with a circle of Swiss humanists and began to study the writings of Erasmus. Zwingli's turn to relative pacifism and his focus on preaching can be traced to the influence of Erasmus.

In 1518, Zwingli became the pastor of the Grossmünster in Zurich where he began to preach ideas on reforming the Catholic Church. Zwingli's theological stance was gradually revealed through his sermons. He attacked moral corruption and in the process he named individuals who were the targets of his denunciations. Monks were accused of indolence and high living. In 1519, Zwingli specifically rejected the veneration of saints and called for the need to distinguish between their true and fictional accounts. He cast doubts on hellfire, asserted that unbaptised children were not damned, and questioned the power of excommunication.

In August 1519, Zurich was struck by an outbreak of the plague during which at least one in four persons died. All of those who could afford it left the city, but Zwingli remained and continued his pastoral duties. In September, he caught the disease and nearly died.

In his first public controversy in 1522, he attacked the custom of fasting during Lent. In his publications, he noted corruption in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, promoted clerical marriage, and attacked the use of images in places of worship. In 1525, Zwingli introduced a new communion liturgy to replace the mass. Zwingli also clashed with the Anabaptists, which resulted in their persecution.

The Reformation spread to other parts of the Swiss Confederation, but several cantons resisted, preferring to remain Catholic. Zwingli formed an alliance of Reformed cantons which divided the Confederation along religious lines. In 1529, a war between the two sides was averted at the last moment. Meanwhile, Zwingli's ideas came to the attention of Martin Luther and other reformers. They met at the Marburg Colloquy and although they agreed on many points of doctrine, they could not reach an accord on the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the eucharist.

Zwingli was killed in the Second Kappel War at the age of 47. His legacy lives on in the Reformed churches of today.

St. Gallen Embroidery

The St Gallen region was once the largest and most important export area for embroidery. Around 1910 the embroidery production was the largest export branch of the Swiss economy with 18% of the overall export value. More than 50% of the world production came from St. Gallen.



In the years after 1860, the demand for embroidery products rose sharply. Many farmers, artisans and former weavers had an embroidery machine installed at home. Embroidery soon became an important Heimarbeit industry and offered a welcome addition to the income of the peasants and craftsmen, mainly in winter. The embroiderers also appreciated the unlimited use of child labour at home, especially since the introduction of the federal factory labour law in 1877 didn't allow young people under the age of 14 to work in factories. In the period from 1872 to 1890, the number of embroidery machines tripled. The value of goods exported to the Americas alone reached over 21 million Swiss francs in 1880. Representatives of overseas trading companies visited St. Gallen regularly to select patterns and to place new orders.

The decline of the embroidery industry began in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War. The demand for luxury products - and embroidery counted among these - collapsed suddenly, and from 1910 to 1930 the population of St Gallen fell markedly. Although embroidery exports rose again immediately after the war, the 1920s brought another crisis. Between 1920 and 1937, the number of embroidery machines was reduced from about 13,000 to less than 2,000, and the number of people employed declined by 65%.