

**Phase VI brown: the side chapel is abandoned**

In 1272 the Order of St. Lazarus left Meiringen and the church was handed over to the monastery of Interlaken. This is possibly why the side chapel was abandoned. But perhaps it was once again as a result of natural disasters? The walled-up arched entrance into the chapel was fitted with a block altar and thus turned into an altar-niche.

*Visible: southern side altar in painted round-arched niche.*

**Phase VII: renovation of the north wall**

After yet another flood, significant parts of the north wall of the church nave had to be rebuilt. Date: first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century?

*Visible: unrendered upper part of the north wall.*

**Phase VIII purple: Gothic new building**

The masonry of the new north wall was still in its unrendered state when yet another mudslide inundated the church. The material was not removed and subsequent constructions were simply raised to a considerably higher level. The new floors lay on top of 3.5m of debris. The bell in the churchyard, which was cast in 1351, might provide a clue regarding the date of this phase.

*Visible behind glass: thick layer of rubble with the mortar floor represented by a white band on top of it; on the south façade of today's church: upper round-arched windows, walled-up.*



View of the walled-up entrance arch into the side chapel with its block altar (phase VI brown). The small opening in the altar once held relics of the saint to which the church is dedicated.

**Phase IX light green: Late Gothic new building**

A new building was erected in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century; its nave was extended northwards and a Late Gothic choir with polygonal termination was added in the east. Murals from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the other bell in the churchyard, which was cast in 1480, may provide a clue as to the date of this construction phase.

*Visible on the south façade of today's church: upper high windows, walled-up; on the south-western corner: fresco with Michael on the right and Saint Peter on the left.*

**Phase X dark blue: the sermon hall of 1684**

In 1683/84 today's church designed by Abraham Dünz I was built as a three-aisled pseudo-basilica with a painted wooden barrel vault above the central aisle and a three-sided termination replacing the Late Gothic choir.

**Phase XI: Rococo – new design**

Following two floods in 1733 and 1762 the whole church interior had to be renovated. An inscription and a mark above the gallery are impressive witnesses to the catastrophic event which occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1762. More than 3000 m<sup>3</sup> of rubble were removed over a period of only a fortnight. The entire woodwork was repainted at the time, the vault was designed in blue with stars and the columns in imitation marble in various reds. The 1789 organ was built by Johann Jakob Suter.



Remnants of a mural (phase VIII purple) in the south-western corner of the south façade of today's church: fresco showing the church patron Michael as an archangel weighing souls on the right-hand side and on the left probably Saint Peter. Beside the fresco is a walled-up round-arched window. Date: second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**Phase XII: the 1915/16 renovation**

During the Domestic Revival style period, the airy Rococo colours were replaced by a stern black-and-white design with ornamental bands created by Rudolf Mürger (1862–1929). Two new stained-glass windows by Ernst Linck (1874–1935) shone new light into the choir.

**Phase XIII: the 1971–1973 restoration**

The Domestic Revival style painting was removed and the woodwork once again exposed. Only the commandment plaques give an impression of 17<sup>th</sup> century colours, whilst the organ reflects 18<sup>th</sup> century taste.

**Around the church**

**The belfry**

The Romanesque belfry with its round-arched abat-sons was probably built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a free-standing structure beside the church. After several flooding events, it is today surrounded by debris up to a height of at least 5 m.

**The so-called armoury chapel**

In 1486 a two-storey matins chapel with a three-sided termination and a charnel house in the basement was built at the entrance to the churchyard. Desecrated during the Reformation in 1528, it was subsequently used as an armoury, before it was renovated in 1933. The interior has comprehensively overpainted murals from the period around 1500 showing fragments of the Last Judgement and depictions of saints.

**Rectory and prebend barn**

To the south-west across the road: a rendered building, the rectory, with an almost square ground-plan and a half-hipped roof was erected between 1734–1736 to the designs of Niklaus Schildknecht. The prebend barn with its supportless roof truss was built to the west of it in 1763. In 1996 an impressive funeral hall designed by the architects Hanspeter Bysäth and Alois Linke, consisting of a steel and glass cube with a translucent eastern marble termination was built into the church.

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**MEIRINGEN**  
**St. Michael's Church**

**Useful information:** The archaeological basement is accessible to the public during opening hours. Guided tours are available upon request from the Protestant parish of Meiringen.

**Literature:** Robert Durrer und Joseph Zemp, Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in der Kirche von Meiringen. In: Oberhasler 25. und 29.11.1916. – Ferdinand Forrer, Zu den romanischen Chorentdeckungen und Kirchenfresken von Meiringen. In: Anzeiger für Schweizerische Altertumskunde, NF 35, 1933, 187–204, 241–250; NF 36, 1934, 1–27. – Daniel Gutschier, Die Michaelskirche von Meiringen als archäologischer Zeuge früherer Naturkatastrophen. In: Archäologie Bern. Jahrbuch des Archäologischen Dienstes des Kantons Bern 2008. Bern 2008, 133–148. – Eugen Liesegang, Führer zu den Ausgrabungen in der Kirche von Meiringen, o.O. 1916. – Hans Rudolf Sennhauser, Meiringen. In: Friedrich Oswald, Leo Schaefer und Hans Rudolf Sennhauser, Vorromanische Kirchenbauten. München 1966, 201f.

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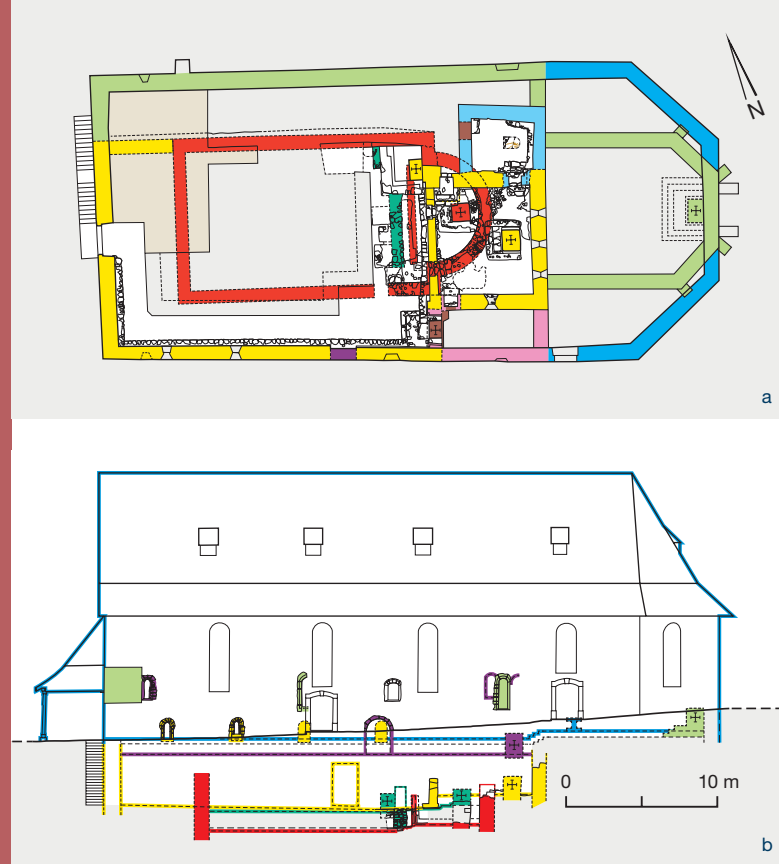
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The parish church of the Haslital Valley has been located on the same site since the Early Middle Ages. It was destroyed and buried several times by devastating floods but rebuilt on site every time, which meant that its ground level was continually raised. The remains of several previous medieval churches can now be viewed some 5 m beneath today's church.

View of the eastern part with the remains of the Late Romanesque church. Phase IV yellow with choir screen and rectangular choir.



The main building phases. a ground-plan; b section through the archaeological basement, above it the view of the south façade. Sc. 1:500.

- I red: early medieval rectangular hall with apse
- III dark green: Romanesque renovation with new choir screen, side altars and the raised main altar
- IV yellow: Late Romanesque new building with rectangular choir
- V a/b light blue/pink: keep and side chapel
- VI brown: the side chapel is abandoned
- VIII purple: Gothic new building on a raised level
- IX light green: Late Gothic new building with a polygonal choir
- X dark blue: today's Baroque sermon hall from 1684

The interior of today's church, built in 1684.



Murals in the south-western corner of today's church interior. Detail showing Noah as a winegrower and Noah's drunkenness. Date: second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (phase Vb).



## A medieval parish church battling against the forces of nature

In the Middle Ages the Protestant Church of Meiringen was dedicated to St. Michael. Until 1722 it remained the only parish church in the Haslital Valley. Between 1234 and 1272 it also served as a conventual church for the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem. The architectural history of the church is a unique reflection of the constant battle against the nearby torrents (Alpbach, Dorfbach and Mühlebach), which repeatedly filled the church with debris, at least seven instances of which are attested to in the archaeological record.

During alteration work carried out in 1915 on the present church, which was built in 1684, the remains of a number of predecessor churches were rediscovered beneath several metres of rubble and made accessible to the public. They have since been under federal and cantonal protection. The remains were neither conserved at the time, nor were they

scientifically documented. In 2005, the parish, thanks to the support of the state and cantonal authorities and with funding from the national lottery, were able to undertake this work together with the Archaeological Service of Canton Bern. An archaeological exhibition can now be seen in the basement of today's church.

Base of the apse arch of the first church (phase I red), with the choir screen and side altar of the Late Romanesque church in front of it (phase IV yellow).



### Phase I red: early medieval rectangular hall

The earliest excavated church may date back to the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible, however, that even earlier remains lie beneath it. The hall with a semicircular apse had a mortar floor. A wooden choir screen separated the laity from the slightly raised choir, which had an antechoir, an apse and an altar. *Visible beneath the visitors' footbridge in the choir: semicircular apse, altar; base of a triumphal arch; in an opening beneath the transverse footbridge: south-eastern corner of the nave with wall plaster, floor.*

### Phase II: first raising

The levels were raised for the first time and the choir screen was rebuilt in stone. Behind it two steps led into the apse. Date: 10<sup>th</sup> century? *Visible in an opening beneath the transverse footbridge: new mortar floor in the nave, steps in the apse, choir screen with plaster.*

### Phase III dark green: Romanesque renovation

After more flooding the floor levels in the nave were raised once again, this time by over a metre. At the same time a new screen wall was constructed with lateral passages and two side altars. The murals on the northern wall and in the apse arch may also date from this phase of construction. Date: 12<sup>th</sup> century? *Visible in the apse: raised altar and steps, mortar floor; in an opening beneath the transverse footbridge: choir screen with side altars; in the apse arch and on the north wall behind glass: murals.*

### Phase IV yellow: Late Romanesque new building

The existing north wall was retained and incorporated into a new nave, which was twice the size of the previous one. A rectangular choir with a block altar was constructed adjacent to it. A new head-high choir screen was built between both

areas with three peepholes, a kneeler, two lateral passages and a side altar on its northern side. Date: around 1200? *Visible: West and south walls, choir screen, rectangular choir with window openings in the east and south walls, floors in the nave and choir, high altar, northern side altar; on the south façade of today's church: lower round-arched windows, walled-up.*

### Phase V a/b light blue/pink: keep and side chapel

In 1234 the church was gifted to the Military Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem. The knights of the order built a keep to the north of the choir and a chapel to the south of it. Date: 13<sup>th</sup> century. *Visible: base of the tower with door and window openings north of the rectangular choir; walled-up arched entrance to the side chapel; in the south-western corner of the present-day church: murals.*