

Plant motifs in Stephanuskirche

In this part of the exhibition we are showing you images of plants in the church. We would also like to inspire you to pay particular attention to the plants and plant motifs in the neighborhood.

Plants can be discovered everywhere in and around Stephanuskirche. You often see them at second glance because they are used as decorative elements. They also have an influence on the overall impression.

Plant symbols can be found in stone, metal, wood, glass and as wall paintings.

In the picture, **almost true-to-life representations are marked in green** and **ornaments derived from plants are marked in blue**.

Representations of plants can be found carved in sandstone on the capitals (ends of columns) and as relief (flat sculpture). They can also be found in wood craft on the side plates of the benches. See the two examples shown on photos. These are also in the kind of more abstract representations.

We discovered over 25 different motifs on the benches.



In the "Kreativ-Workshop Stephanuskirche", prior to the exhibition, we examined the motifs in regard to an interreligious use of the building. It was determined that, in contrast to depictions of people, the plant motifs do not contradict the Islamic regulations for a prayer room.

Plants do not speak different languages. Plants do understand all languages.

(When religious services are celebrated, plant motifs made of fabric may also be present, for example on the antependium, the richly decorated fabric curtain at the front of the base of the altar. Fresh flowers can also be placed, appropriate to the season or in the colors of the church year. At Thanksgiving, crops are lined up, and at Christmas there is a real Christmas tree in the church. Churchgoers can also wear plants as hair accessories or in the form of brooches/belt buckles, ..., on printed/embroidered fabric. And you as an exhibition visitor?)

Plants – What for? – Meaning

meaning

in general: Plants are living beings. They enable further life by providing oxygen and food. They represent nature and beauty, they provide shade and they help to regulate the climate.

religious: Gratitude for the Creation, plant-specific symbolism

Even in ancient times, plants were used to add character to buildings. Variations of plants are used as stylistic elements in many ornaments.

This can also be seen in the arch of the entrance portal. The original ornamental painting can still be seen there. Due to the renovation, the paintings on almost all of the walls in the church were painted over in a single color. (It can be assumed that in its original state the entire, now white, interior of the church was painted. There are no photos available.)



Plants can often be seen in the foyer and in the stairwells of old buildings in the neighborhood (Soldiner Kiez). Nature-based decoration can often be found in the bordures at the top of rooms. Keep an eye out!

In addition to being used as decoration, plant images are also often used as symbols. The meaning depends on the historical era/time, customs/regions. They are often associated with the characteristics of the plants and their use for humans.

On the following posters we have selected seven plants in detail that are often depicted in the church and that are also typical of Berlin-Brandenburg, each with a box summarising their meaning.

The identification of the individual plants was done to the best of our ability on a voluntary basis. Feedback and additional information are welcome.

Ivy

(Herdera)

meaning

in general: Reliability, loyalty, love and strong friendship

religious: Faithfulness, immortality and eternal life

This evergreen creeping plant likes to grow towards the sky. It can live for over 200 years.

Ivy is often growing on old buildings. However, we have not yet spotted it on the outer walls of Stephanuskirche.

Will it grow in the future?

Below there is a photo of a real leaf for comparison: (Darunter parallel zum Vergleich ein echtes Blatt:)

Or look at it this way: (Oder sieh's doch mal so:)

Oak leaves and acorns

(Quercus)

meaning

in general: Symbol of life, love of freedom, pride, power and strength, steadfastness, hope, wood, habitat

religious: Eternal life, eternal salvation, strength of faith

The oak is one of the most important trees in mythology. There are many regional customs associated with it. And it is often found in emblems.

Before Christianization, oaks were revered as sacred objects in Germania.

Oaks can live for over 1000 years.

For humans, the oak forest served as a nutritional forest. In ecology it is called the "crown of biodiversity". An old tree can provide food and habitat for hundreds of insects, mammals, birds, fungi, etc.

Grain, ear

(Granum)

meaning

in general: Food, being supplied, energy

religious: Sowing, growth, harvest as birth, death, rebirth
Bread as the body of Christ at the Lord's Last Supper

The example of the ear of grain shows that some plant depictions are not entirely true to nature, partly due to the sculptural possibilities. For example, the awns (long hairs that are like a beard on the ear) are worked out very thickly, so that the sandstone is holding together well.

<- Mouse barley growing in wild places in Berlin.
Even here in the neighborhood?

Ear of grain under the altar: (Getreideähre unter dem Altar:)

Pine cones and needles

(Pinaceae)

meaning

in general: Evergreen tree, longevity and endurance, fertility, nutritious pine nuts, climbing tree

religious: The tree of life, flower cones as symbols of resurrection and immortality
(The nails with which Jesus was nailed to the cross were carved from pine wood, so the story goes.)

Cedars and Mediterranean pines are also belonging to the pine family. The symbolism was adopted from ancient cults. The cones were sometimes used as decoration on Roman tombs.

In ancient Sumerian civilization, the cedar was considered the sacred tree of the world because of its life-giving powers.

Or look at it this way: (Oder sieh's doch mal so:)

Rose

(Rosa)

meaning

in general: Love, joy of life, happiness, sublimity

religious: The Flower of Paradise, purity (in white), full double flowers (with many petals) secrecy

The use of the rose as a symbol is coming from heraldry. The five-petalled dog rose, or hedge rose, native to Europe, is the model.

This rose also appears schematically in a type of seal that Luther used. It is also called the Luther Rose and is a symbol for the Lutheran Protestant church.

According to a legend, the rose in paradise has no thorns.

Oriental roses have many petals. These can be seen on the angel figures:

(Orientalische Rosen haben viele Blütenblätter. Diese sind an den Engelsfiguren zu sehen:)

Horse chestnut

(Aesculus)

meaning

in general: Medicinal products, wood, popular urban tree in recreational areas, provides shade, material for handcraft

religious: (sweet chestnut) Symbol of goodness, chastity, symbol of resurrection
(After heavy trimming, chestnut trees sprout vigorously again.)

For the sweet chestnut there are historical references of spiritual meaning. This sweet chestnut tree is producing the tasty edible chestnuts. They do also grow in prickly shells. It belongs to the genus *Castanea* and is not related to the horse chestnut.

In Stephanuskirche, horse chestnut leaves and flowers can be seen. Perhaps they were chosen as local decorations.



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Chestnuts give bees and bumblebees color signals with their flowers. Their color is initially yellow, which means there is a lot of nectar. Little by little, as the nectar is decreasing, and the flowers are pollinated, they eventually turn red.

If you look closely, you can see this in the photo.

When fed to horses, the chestnuts helped with respiratory problems, which is why they were called horse chestnuts. People use active ingredients to strengthen veins. The fruits are containing soapy substances, so they can also be used to wash clothes.

Do you sometimes carry chestnuts in your pocket?

Vine leaves and grapes

(Vitis)

meaning

in general: Sweet juice, captivating wine, getting drunk, nutritious raisins, climbing ornament

religious: Wine as the blood of Christ at the Lord's Last Supper, for joy of life, closeness to God; a vine branch as connection (Christ and his believers) (living and dead)

Already in the ancient Greek mythology there was a god of wine, Dionysus.

He represented the grape harvest, wine production, the wine of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy and the theater.



The vine (the wine plant) is used as an illustration in the Bible. It is propagated by branches. The parts taken (cuttings) are producing new plants (vines). This is seen as a representation of the passing on of faith from Christ to his believers. "*I am the vine, you are the branches.*" (John 15:5)

Even though wine-growing is not easy in all regions of Germany, some monasteries have made great efforts to make it possible for symbolic reasons.

Wine, along with grain and olive oil, was part of the daily diet in southern regions.

Real plants on Stephanuskirche

(coloni (Latin: Settlers, colonists, inhabitants))

No way, the church is unused. It is - in the truest sense of the prefix - INhabited.

Living plants have settled in and on it.

And it cannot be ruled out that they will endanger the building in the long term.

Birch and maple trees are growing in the walls. Moss and lichen have settled on the decorative stones.

Although the plants have spread over the building with their fairytale charm, they can also damage the building structure gradually.

Their roots will gradually break through the masonry. Moisture, e.g. from moss, can damage the mortar.

It would be desirable not to see living plants on the building in the future. They could grow luxuriantly around it, including in the spacious garden, and we could care for them, look at them and enjoy them.

Would you join them and us?

Your impressions are welcome

Here you can see all the plants in the sandstone images again.
Please share your impressions with us.

Did you know this plant?

Would you have recognized it in the image?

In which region of the world have you already seen the plant?

Which plant would you include in your personal coat of arms?

What does this plant mean to you?

What do you associate with this plant?

What plant does it look like to you?

Have you already seen it in the neighborhood?