# Gutenberg Castle – 6000 years of history

## Old settlement site

For many millennia already, the rocky knoll rising from the floor of the Rhine Valley, the Gutenberg stronghold at its summit, has been a source of fascination. The oldest artefacts – stone tools from northern Italy and pottery from central Germany – take us back to the Neolithic period (5th millennium BCE). Other historic finds are from the Bronze and Iron Age, when a site for burnt offerings was located at the foot of this striking hill. Ruins of Roman buildings and numerous other objects show that especially in late antiquity (3rd/4th century CE), the population withdrew to the high ground. The Chur-Rhaetian Imperial Register from around 842/843 CE contains a reference to a church situated at the summit of Gutenberg, surrounded by a cemetery. The chapel dedicated to St. Donatus existed until 1780. Expansion into a feudal castle

After the construction of a curtain wall up to 15 metres high completed during the 12th century, with battlements following the curve of the plateau, the cemetery was abandoned and a keep was built. From the mid-13th century, Gutenberg was in the possession of the Barons of Frauenberg from Graubünden. In 1314, the complex was purchased by the Habsburgs, who expanded the structure into a mighty fortification. The castle was pillaged during the Old Zurich War in 1445. The height of the curtain wall was increased during the restoration work, and the battlements were replaced. During the Swabian War, these measures prevented conquest by the Graubünden troops that laid siege to the castle from 10 to 24 April 1499.





1 Relic of the early settlement of the castle hill: round mug with deep engraving from the Rössen culture, c. 4500 BCE

2 Cemetery by the St. Donatus Chapel: documented from the 9th to the 12th century

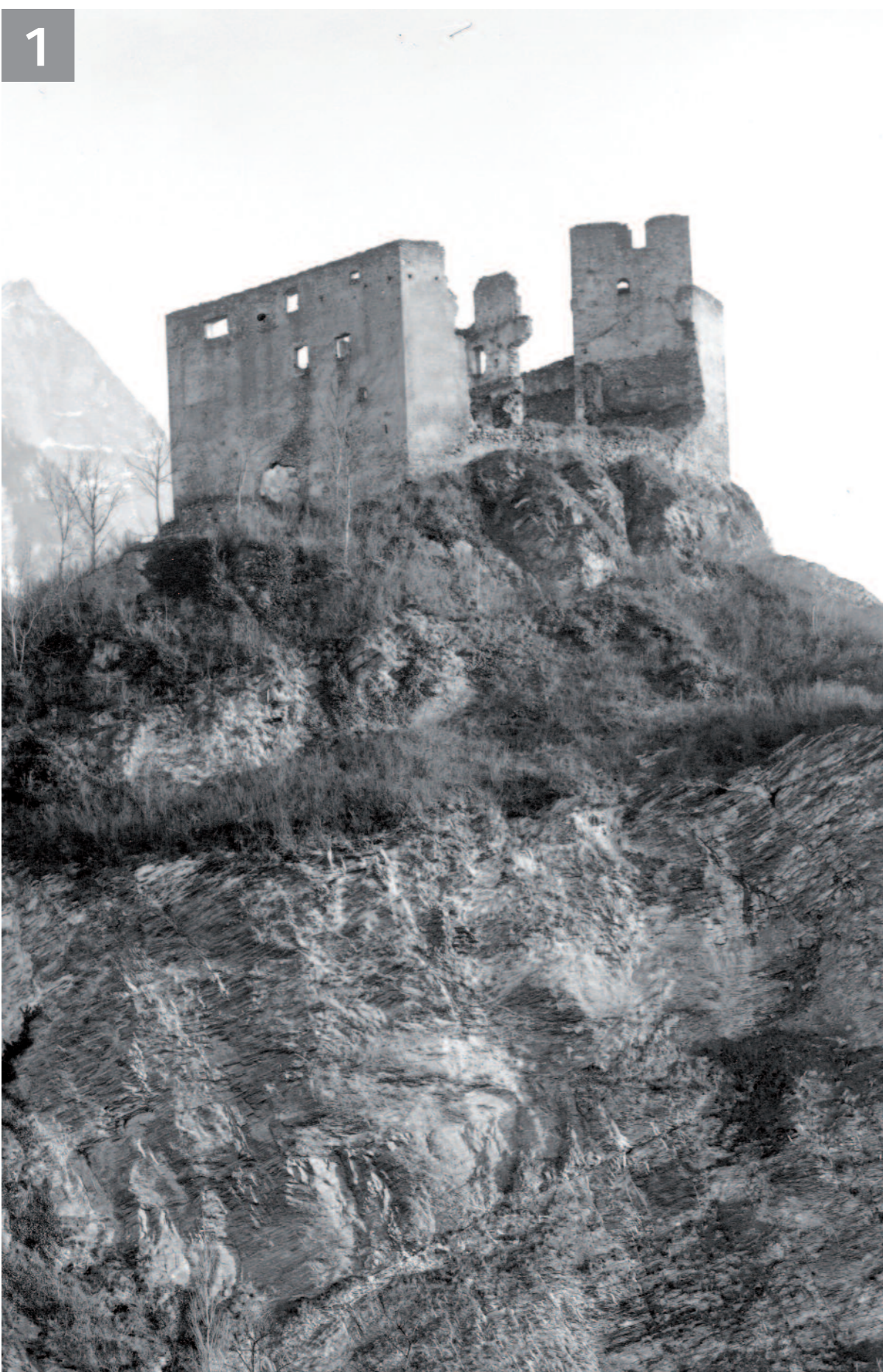3 Probably dedicated to deities: nine bronze statuettes from the time between the 5th and 1st century BCE

1 Entrance to the outer bailey
2 Outer bailey
3 Entrance to the main castle
4 Entrance to the rose garden
5 Rose garden
6 Chapel
7 Chaplain's quarters
8 Dungeon
9 Inner gate
10 Castle courtyard
11 Smithy
12 Keep
13 Taproom
14 Cellar
15 "Swiss Hole"
16 "Marten Tower"
17 Cistern

## From decline to reconstruction in the 20th century

The Habsburgs owned the stronghold until the 18th century. The Lords of Ramschwag served as its castellans. After the death of Franz Karl Ferdinand von Ramschwag (1716), the castle was no longer used, fell rapidly into disrepair, and ultimately became a quarry for the Balzers inhabitants. Around 1780, the St. Donatus Chapel was also torn down. In 1905, the Liechtenstein citizen Egon Rheinberger bought the ruins and within five years used them to build a complex inspired by castle romanticism. The impressive building has been owned by the Principality of Liechtenstein since 1979.
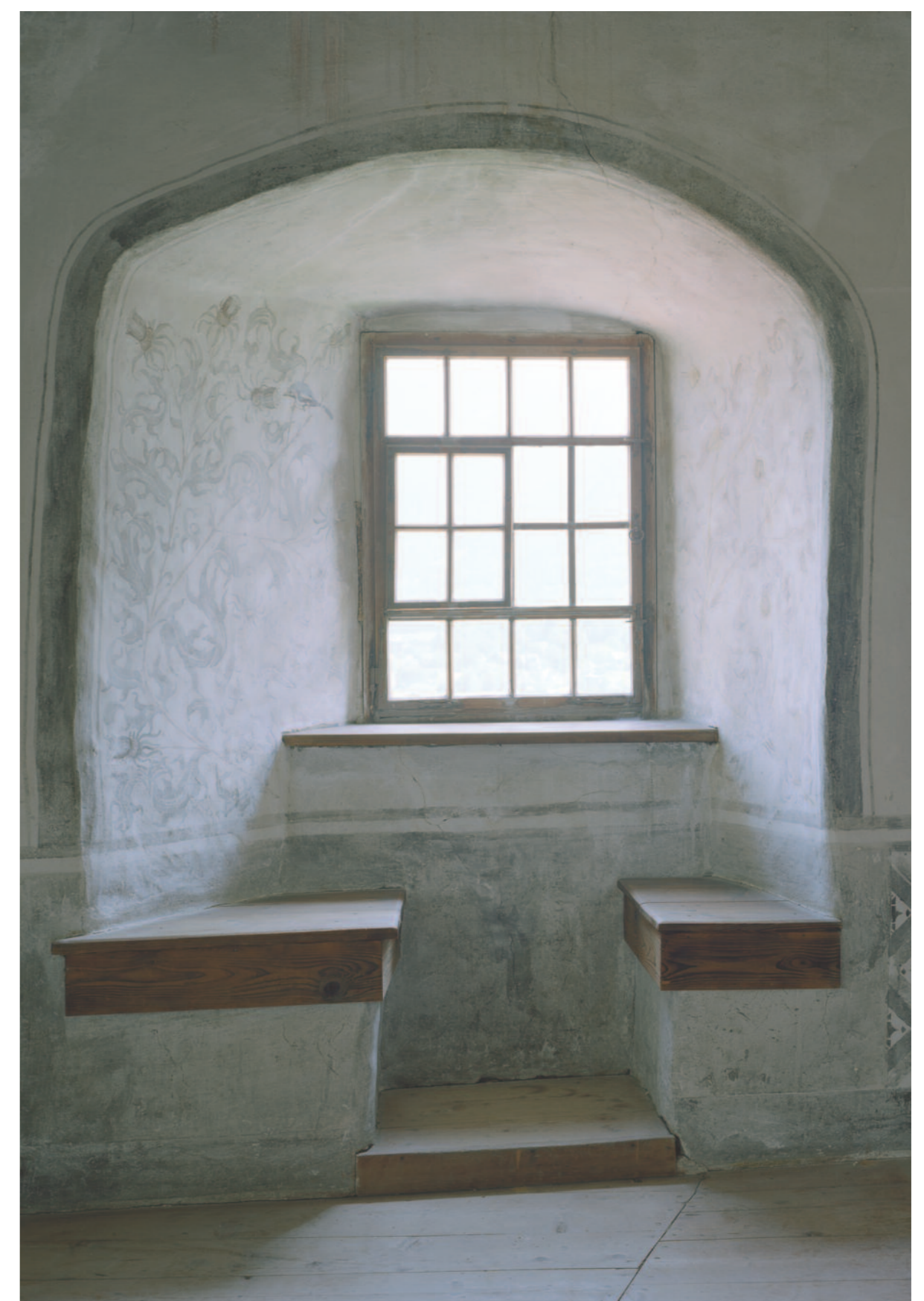




1 In desolate shape: the ruins from the west around 1900

2 Father of the castle renaissance in Liechtenstein: Egon Rheinberger and his wife Maria

3 Reconstruction around 1905: construction work at the keep

4 Concert stage and theatre backdrop: the castle courtyard around 1935

## A total work of art by Egon Rheinberger

Egon Rheinberger from Vaduz (1870–1936) studied sculpture, painting, art history, and architecture in Munich beginning in 1887. In 1899, he gained practical experience during the renovation of the ancestral castle of the Princely Family of Liechtenstein in Maria Enzersdorf (Lower Austria). Rheinberger fulfilled his dream by purchasing Gutenberg in 1905. In the construction and expansion of the ruins, he served as architect, artist, craftsman, and foreman in one. Already at the time, the construction project met with keen interest among experts. Rheinberger and his family spent the summer of 1912 living at the castle. He and his wife opened an inn there in 1920, with concerts, theatre productions, and weddings. After Egon Rheinberger's death in 1936, his family moved to Vaduz.

## Timeline

| | |
|---|---|
| From c. 4500 BCE | The oldest pottery vessel in Liechtenstein – a round mug of the Rössen culture – documents the settlement of Gutenberg during the Neolithic period. Stone tools and clay pots from the following centuries have also been found. |
| 2nd/1st mill. BCE | Artefacts and findings from the Bronze and Iron Age document continuous use and settlement of the hill. |
| 5th–1st cent. BCE | A site for burnt offerings exists at Gutenberg, well-known thanks to nine bronze votive statuettes. |
| 1st–5th cent. CE | In Roman times, the castle hill was used extensively. |
| 9th–12th cent. CE | The St. Donatus Chapel and cemetery are situated at the summit. |
| c. 1200 | Expansion into a medieval castle by the noble family of the Barons of Frauenberg from Graubünden. |
| 1314 | Gutenberg passes to the Habsburgs. The extraterritorial, strategically important base belongs to them until 1824. |
| 1470 | Gutenberg is entrusted as a bailiwick to the Lords of Ramschwag, a dynasty from Vorarlberg, for nearly 300 years. |
| 1780 | The stronghold is no longer inhabited and falls into disrepair. The people of Balzers use it as a quarry. The chapel is torn down. |
| 1824 | The municipality of Balzers buys the castle from Austria. |
| 1854 | Balzers gives the castle hill and the Gutenberg ruins to Princess Franziska de Paula von Liechtenstein. |
| 1886 | Reigning Prince Johann II sells most of the princely property on the castle hill to private individuals and the municipality of Balzers. |
| 1905–1910 | Purchase and reconstruction of the castle ruins by Egon Rheinberger. |
| 1951 | Sale of the castle to Hermine Kindle de Contreras Torres and Miguel de Contreras Torres. |
| 1979 | The Principality of Liechtenstein acquires the castle. |
| 1982–1988 | Archaeological research in the inner courtyard. Installation of a cellar and a floor plate. |
| 1990–1993 | Documentation of construction history and renovation of roofs and façades of the main castle. |
| 2008–2010 | Repairs on the main castle and in the castle courtyard. Archaeological research and restoration of the chapel and rose garden. |











1 Oldest traces: Neolithic pottery fragment of the Lutzengüetle culture from the 4th millennium BCE

2 The peacock, a symbol of immortality: bronze fibula from the 5th/6th century CE

3 Survived in the rubble: bronze Hanse bowl from the 12th/13th century CE

4 Once an imposing noble estate: the ruins of Gutenberg Castle and the "School for Daughters" around 1900

5 Documentation of the new: pen drawing by Egon Rheinberger from 1914

# The castle from the Middle Ages – from new to old!

### From the origins to the quarry

The layout of the main castle as well as the enclosing wall follow the topography of the castle hill. Fortifications and living areas adjoin the inside of the ring wall and enclose the courtyard. The curtain wall was probably built in the 12th century at the latest, but the keep wasn't built until about 200 years later. A cistern for collecting roof water was located on the ground floor. The upper floors, which were reached through an elevated entrance, contained a storeroom and a guardroom. An open battlement platform concluded the building. For centuries, the Gutenberg stronghold was preserved largely in the same form. Plans from the 18th century show that the four-storey northern wing was inhabited. After the demolition of the St. Donatus Chapel in the inner courtyard, the structure started to fall apart in 1780. It was used as a quarry by the people of Balzers.

### Reconstruction

In 1905, the Vaduz architect and sculptor Egon Rheinberger (1870–1936) acquired the castle complex, which he restored according to his own plans. Within five years, he created a small total artwork of the castle renaissance as well as a historical record of cultural heritage preservation. Rheinberger benefited from the experiences he gained from 1899 to 1901 during the reconstruction of the Liechtenstein ancestral castle in Maria Enzersdorf as well as of Kreuzenstein Castle in Leobendorf – both in Lower Austria – and as a member of the building commission for the restoration of Vaduz Castle. While he completely renovated the woodwork and roofs, the layout was hardly changed. His aim was to "strictly adjust the complex to the old existing foundation walls". The building and wall ruins – preserved to varying extents – were expanded; the western wing, which had been torn down to its foundations, had to be rebuilt. To the northeast of the main castle, a new gate structure was built with a dungeon, and a new building complex with a chapel and rose garden was constructed. Rheinberger took great care during his work. Old building materials were used wherever possible. For the interiors, he bought decorations from historical collections. He undertook most of the carvings and ironwork himself, as well as most of the room painting, and the rest was realized according to his designs.







1 Preventing further deterioration: reconstruction and renovation of the southern and western façade around 1905

2 Drawings of views: part of an illustration from 1706

3 Resurrected: the castle courtyard around 1935

# Rheinberger's reconstruction of the chapel

## New rose garden

The complex was restored by Egon Rheinberger between 1905 and 1910. While he built up the main castle using the existing walls, the "Marten Tower", the washhouse, the chapel, and the chaplain's quarters were built to the north of the curtain wall around the newly installed rose garden. Between the gate structure of the main castle and the chaplain's quarters, there is an elongated connecting structure at ground level with wooden pillars and open to the west; above it is the oldest preserved bowling alley in Liechtenstein. The entrance to the rose garden is decorated with the image of a king on horseback – a painting based on the Romanesque ceiling of the St. Martin Chapel in Zillis.

## St. Mamertus as a model

When building the chapel with the characteristic octagonal steeple, Rheinberger looked to the St. Mamertus Chapel in Triesen. The chapel nave is covered by a transverse, deeply recessed gable roof. The interior has a barrel-vaulted wooden ceiling, the cover bars of which are painted colourfully with geometric patterns. The chapel is furnished with simple wooden pews. In 1914, Egon Rheinberger bought the main panel of a Gothic winged altar from a Nuremberg art dealer and set it up in the chancel. The originally three-part altarpiece is probably of Frankish origin and was likely built in the second half of the 15th century. It displays five images of saints in relief below gilded tracery baldachins: on a plinth in the middle, Mary and child; to her left, a saint without attribute (possibly Paul), and St. Barbara above; to the right, St. Stephen, and St. Catherine above. In the finial above the altar, the following inscription is written below a palmette frieze: "AVE • MARIA • GRATIA • PLENA • DOMINUS • TECUM" ("Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee"). The original can be found in the Liechtenstein National Museum and was replaced with an accurate copy during the restoration of the chapel.

## Archaeological remains

The oldest human traces on the castle hill date back more than 6000 years. The prehistoric and Roman remains were heavily disrupted starting in the 8th/9th century: first by the cemetery next to the St. Donatus Chapel, later by the construction of the castle, and after 1905 by Egon Rheinberger's restorations. Nevertheless, signs of the older settlement have been preserved, especially at the edges of the plateau: stone tools from the Neolithic period (4th/3rd millennium BCE), a walking level from the Bronze Age (2nd millennium BCE), and a house from the later Iron Age (3rd to 1st century BCE). The house was probably destroyed by fire. Numerous fragments of pottery and soapstone vessels as well as coins are evidence of extensive use of the hill in late Roman times (3rd/4th century CE). The site to the north of the main castle was secured with a palisade or defensive corridor starting in the 13th century.







1 Rheinberger's reconstruction in the rose garden: chapel, chaplain's quarters, and connecting wing with bowling alley

2 Modest oratory: chapel with late Gothic winged altar

3 Recreated according to the Romanesque model: mural with a king on horseback

4 Imported from northern Italy and the Swiss Plateau: Neolithic stone tools from the 4th/3rd millennium BCE

5 Roman presence against the Germanic tribes: coin with the image of Emperor Gratian (275–283 CE)

# Nearer to God

## St. Donatus Chapel

Gutenberg was a cultic site already in the Iron Age. Celtic or Rhaetian deities were worshiped here with burnt sacrifices. After the Romans, Christianity discovered the site for itself many years later. Christians built a church at the highest crest of Gutenberg. At the latest in the 12th century, the church and a cemetery were enclosed by a wall, standing freely in the inner courtyard of the castle and in use until 1780.

## Patronage

The place of worship on Gutenberg was dedicated to St. Donatus. This patronage is very rare in the region, lending itself to the conclusion that the church was originally Frankish. Donatus was born in 594 as the son of the Frankish duke Waldelenus and Flavia. He entered Luxeuil Abbey as a monk, where he was raised by his godfather Columban. Around 624, Donatus was consecrated as the Bishop of Besançon. There, he worked until his death around 657 as a fervent proponent of monasticism.

## Cemetery

A large cemetery belonged to the St. Donatus Chapel from the 9th to the 12th century. More than 300 graves have been examined by archaeologists. One grave is older, dating back to the 6th century. Children and young people found their last resting place to the west of the chapel. As a rule, the dead were buried without grave goods. A belt buckle and a comb made of bone were discovered in the grave of one man. The mortal remains of a woman were accompanied by a spindle whorl, and another woman was probably wearing a fibula with an enamel inlay. Many graves were destroyed already when the first enclosing wall was built and when the castle was erected in the 13th century.









**1** Frankish forms: richly decorated belt buckle from the 6th century

**2** Tracing history: examining graves from the 9th/10th century

**3** Decorative clasp: ornamented fibulas from the 9th/10th century

**4** Torn down in 1780: poorly preserved ruins of the foundation of the St. Donatus Chapel

# Settlement and burial site for 6000 years

## Natural protection

Gutenberg, approximately 60 metres high, offered people protection from floods and enemies already thousands of years ago. Its location at the foot of St. Luzisteig Pass, where an important road led from the northern Alpine foothills to northern Italy, also made the hill a strategically important base.

Finds indicate that Gutenberg was occupied continually since the Neolithic period in the 5th millennium BCE. During the Late Bronze Age (13th to 9th century BCE), the dead were cremated and buried in urns at the Runda Böchel to the south. They were buried with jewellery as well as food and drink for the afterlife. From the 6th to 3rd century BCE, an autonomous culture developed in the area between the Hinterrhein and Lake Constance. A burial ground and some settlement remains of this "Alpine Rhine Valley Group" were found in Balzers. Jewellery and weapons show that the inhabitants had extensive contact with their neighbours.

## Sanctuary

In all eras, deities stood by people's side, protecting and helping them. In many places, animals were offered to them on altars as burnt sacrifices as signs of gratitude and reverence. The cleansing power of fire played an important role in this regard. In the vicinity, such sites for burnt offerings can be found on St. Luzisteig (Fläsch, Switzerland), on Ochsenberg (Wartau, Switzerland), on the Schneller (Eschen, Liechtenstein), in Altenstadt (Feldkirch, Austria), possibly in the Rietle in Balzers and on Gutenberg. Burnt animal bones, cymbals, glass jewellery, and nine bronze votive statuettes indicate that sacrifices were made to deities here from the 5th to 1st century BCE.

## Part of the Roman Empire

The territory of Liechtenstein was incorporated into the Roman Empire during the Alpine campaign in 15 BCE. The zenith of the Roman settlement in Balzers lasted from the 2nd to the beginning of the 4th century CE. Also during this era, people were continually present on Gutenberg. From the 2nd half of the 4th century onward, they left their buildings in the plain and sought protection on Gutenberg or in the fort in Schaan.

## Cemetery and church

In the 7th/8th century, Alemannic clans buried their dead on the Runda Böchel. In 842/843, the Chur-Rhaetian Imperial Register mentions two churches in Balzers. While one of them was located at the northern edge of the Höfle quarter of today's village, the other was visible from afar at the topmost plateau of Gutenberg. The site dedicated to St. Donatus was integrated into the inner courtyard in the 13th century when the castle complex was built, and it was torn down in 1780. From the 8th to the 12th century, the dead were laid to rest in the cemetery, which was located on the summit of the hill.

## Stronghold

A curtain wall with battlements was erected around the St. Donatus Chapel at the latest in the 12th century; the castle complex gradually rose on the interior side of the wall. In the mid-13th century, the noble estate was in the possession of the Lords of Frauenberg. In the 14th century, the Habsburgs took over the complex and expanded it further. After its bailiffs, the Lords of Ramschwag, gave up the castle in the 18th century, it fell into disrepair. It was resurrected by Egon Rheinberger starting in 1905.



**1** Regionally influenced culture in the Alpine Rhine Valley: pottery vessel from the 6th/5th century BCE

**2** 1500 years of documented history: found coins from the Celtic (2nd/1st century BCE), Roman (1st century BCE until 3rd/4th century CE), and medieval (13th century) periods

**3** Traces of the siege: medieval projectile points

# Castle landscape of the Rhine Valley

The Alpine Valley is rich in castles and fortresses. Most originated in the 13th century, which is considered the apex of the castle era.
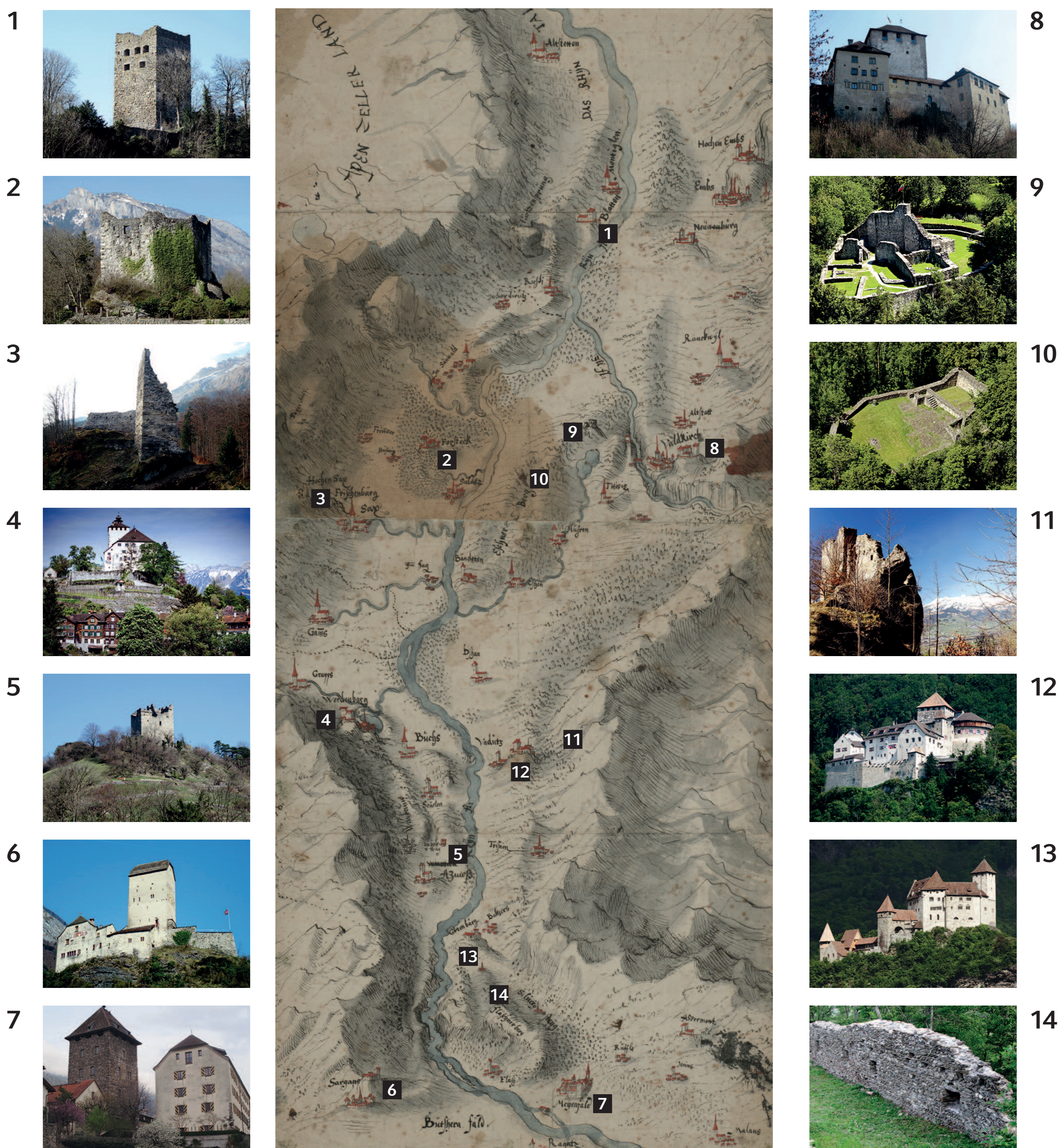
From the 10th century, Rhaetia was in the possession of the Counts of Bregenz. After they died out, the territory was frequently divided from 1152 onward. Lower Rhaetia, which included the territory of what would become the Principality of Liechtenstein, was taken over first by the Montfort dynasty. The dynasty was founded by Hugo I, and his son Rudolf became the progenitor of the Counts of Werdenberg. Rudolf's sons established the main lines of Werdenberg-Heiligenberg and Werdenberg-Sargans. In 1342, the County of Vaduz was established by division. Hartmann III von Werdenberg-Sargans was the first to reside at Vaduz Castle. When the Vaduz branch died out in 1416, the Barons of Brandis, who came from Emmental, acquired not only its county but also – in two stages – the Lordship of Schellenberg. They thus unified the territory of today's Principality of Liechtenstein. In the following centuries, that territory changed owners several times.

The House of Liechtenstein was elevated to the hereditary rank of territorial prince in 1608. In order to join the Imperial Council of Princes, Prince Johann Adam Andreas needed territory with imperial immediacy. For that reason, he acquired the Lordship of Schellenberg in 1699 and the County of Vaduz in 1712. In 1719, Emperor Charles VI designated the two territories as the Imperial Principality of Liechtenstein.

Castles on both sides of the Rhine: oldest map of the Upper Rhine Valley, drawn by Hans Conrad Gyger around 1615/1622

1 Blatten Castle, Oberriet, Switzerland
2 Forstegg Castle, Sennwald, Switzerland
3 Hohensax Castle, Sennwald, Switzerland
4 Werdenberg Castle, Switzerland
5 Wartau Castle, Switzerland
6 Sargans Castle, Switzerland
7 Brandis Castle, Maienfeld, Switzerland
8 Schattenburg, Feldkirch, Austria
9 Upper Castle, Schellenberg, Liechtenstein
10 Lower Castle, Schellenberg, Liechtenstein
11 Schalun Castle – Wildschloss, Vaduz, Liechtenstein
12 Vaduz Castle, Liechtenstein
13 Gutenberg Castle, Balzers, Liechtenstein
14 Grafenberg Castle – Mörderburg, Fläsch, Switzerland



Original map in the St. Gallen State Archives

# Balzers – Gutenberg Castle

Freestanding on all sides and mystical, like something out of a fairy tale, Gutenberg Castle stands on a 60-metre high rocky knoll in the middle of the Rhine Valley floor. Traces of prehistoric and Roman-era presence as well as the ruins of Early Medieval churches and fortifications and defensive structures can be found on the hill. Today's castle bears the stamp of Egon Rheinberger, constituting a total artwork of the castle renaissance.

Gutenberg Castle was mentioned for the first time in 1263. From the mid-13th century, it belonged to the Barons of Frauenberg. In 1314, it passed to the Dukes of Austria and was then in the possession of the Habsburgs for more than 500 years. In 1824, the municipality of Balzers purchased the derelict castle and its goods. 30 years later, it passed to the Princely House of Liechtenstein. The artist and sculptor Egon Rheinberger from Vaduz acquired the ruins in 1905 and expanded them into today's castle according to his own plans. For several years, an inn was operated here during the summer months.

Amt für Kultur
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## Visit and Use

Since 1979, the complex – protected as a historical monument – has been owned by the Principality of Liechtenstein. Parts of it have been restored in recent years. Some areas have been used for cultural and social events since 2000.

The outer bailey (outer courtyard) is accessible all year. The Gutenberg Castle complex is available for tours and events by appointment from 1 May to 31 October. The rose garden and the castle chapel are open Sundays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Toilets are open only during official events. Smoking and fires are prohibited throughout the entire castle site.

The main castle itself is not open to the public. By appointment, guided tours and limited usage for events in the rose garden with its chapel and ancillary buildings are possible. The municipality of Balzers is responsible for administering events.

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**1** Sustainably restored: Gutenberg Castle after completion of the 2010 renovation

**2** Left to decay for more than 120 years: Gutenberg Castle around 1905

**3** Combative competition rider and romantic minstrel: Heinrich von Frauenberg (1257–1314) on a miniature of the Great Heidelberg Song Manuscript