

The Picturesque Castle Ruin of Kallmünz

Lambent flames leap from the castle windows. The roof of the great hall collapses with a crackling sound. Embers and fire are everywhere. The people of Kallmünz look up to the castle hill in despair. It must have been a terrible sight they saw back then in 1641.

It was the year when the Swedes passed through Kallmünz during the Thirty Years' War. They plundered the village and burned down the castle, putting an end to a fortress with a history of more than 3000 years.

The site was highly contested: Kallmünz Castle is strategically located on a rocky crag shielded by steep slopes and flanked by the rivers Vils and Naab, which merge directly in front of the hill.

People had already recognized the advantage of this special location in prehistoric times and had settled on the hill around 1900 years before Christ. This allowed them to use and presumably control the early trade routes along and on the Naab and Vils. Finds from the Bronze Age prove the existence of this early settlement. Traces from Celtic times are also present, as are ramparts from the early Middle Ages, when the castle hill was probably used as a refuge from marauding Hungarian hordes.

The first castle lord to be recorded by name appears in the late 13th century: Hugo von Kallmünz. He was a ministerialis watching over the castle and village of Kallmünz on behalf of his feudal lord. A considerable medieval fortress had already been built on the castle hill at the time, and it was to be extended over the following decades.

By 1329, the Wittelsbach dynasty had become lords of the strategically situated castle. But the favorable location was also its undoing. Kallmünz Castle was conquered, plundered, set on fire and then rebuilt a number of times.

When the Swedes eventually destroyed it during the Thirty Years' War, the castle hill was abandoned by its lords. From then on, the castle ruins served only as a quarry for the people of Kallmünz.

Perhaps it was precisely the romantic appeal of the ruins that attracted eminent artists to this tranquil town to immerse themselves completely in art and nature, far away from the large metropolises.

The famous painter Wassily Kandinsky chose Kallmünz as a venue for his painting school in the summer of 1903. This is where he met the nowadays equally famous painter Gabriele Münter. They

fell in love and became engaged here – although they had to keep their engagement a secret. After all, Kandinsky was already married to someone else at the time...

And what became of the castle? People are still awed to come here today and marvel at the picturesque ruin, which has become the motif of numerous paintings and photos.