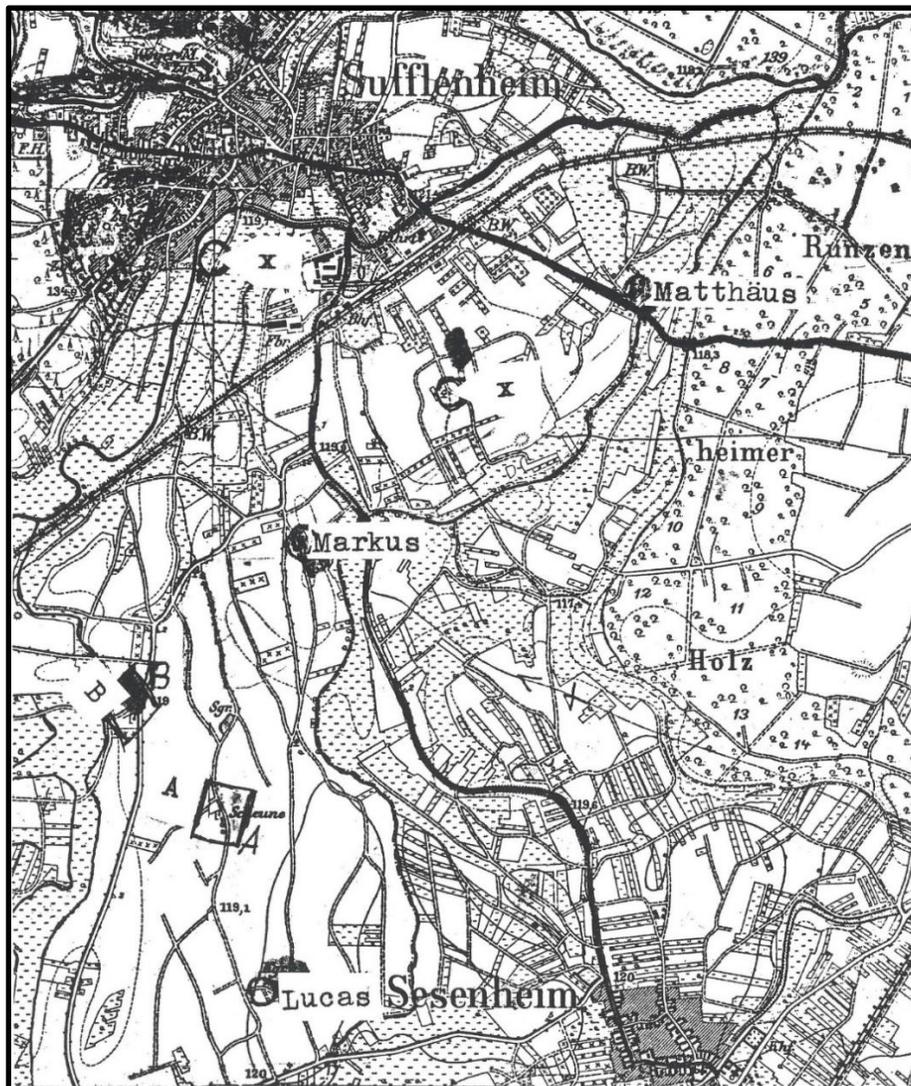


THE "CROSSES OF THE EVANGELISTS" IN THE BANN OF SOUFFLENHEIM

Soufflenheim Genealogy Research and History
www.soufflenheimgenealogy.com

Quite often appears to us that a problem has been first read with the glasses of simplification, and later it must be admitted that this was not true and that more and more questions are raised. This is also the way it happened to me with the question of the rural crosses, as I began (1986) with these and considered them altogether as the Crosses of the Evangelists, which in fact, I had to admit, had been somewhat too early a conclusion.



To begin with, there were not four, but five Crosses, among the four, the oldest bore the year of 1786, and another one erected as late as 1809, which means that where another older one stood, it had fallen as an offering to the Revolution.

As the field crosses in their narrower meaning as well as all other types of pictorial carved stones are not exactly common in the North Alsace Rhine lowlands, those found in Soufflenheim deserve a very special consideration, especially since they fall out of the usual context that is known elsewhere.

Questions

Three of these crosses are clearly devoted to a specific Evangelist, when we can, and must, follow the line order of those, the eastern St. MATTHEW (1809), the southeastern St. MARK, the south ST. LUKAS. Halfway between the first Crosses of the Evangelists is found a cross without inscription (except the date of 1786, same as another one in the southwest direction of the place, between the railroad line and the bridge over the Fallgraben. The exact position of these crosses is noted on the map joined. Concerning their aspect and typology, these four older crosses are the same in their height (about 2.20 m, breadth ca 60 cm = 1 measure or Elle) when we observe their significance, that is their name, outlook and symbols of the Evangelists. So we understand there must have been in an earlier time one Cross dedicated to ST. JOHANNES with the symbolic eagle, which seems the more so probable when we go back to the EZECHIEL verse in Chapter 1, V. 5, and the only place in the New Testament concerning Revelation 4, V. 6-9, remembering the four symbols, that is the four shapes of the "Being".

The map is an extract in 1/25000 dated 1885, which outshines all later reprints in terms of precision. The place where the rural crosses are found is situated in the middle of a marked and numbered circle. One notices that meaningful trees are also entered, some of which are still standing today, such as a lime tree close to No. 2, close to No. 3 a sycamore tree, the tree close to No. 4 has probably disappeared, on this place has now grown a small wood.

The sycamore tree close to St. Mark's cross is about 150 years old, this same type of tree can be found in the "barn" with fountain and on the map, the largest example is found on the right of the road to Drusenheim (square "A" and "B"), also close to the last one is found a fountain name "Ochsenbrunnen", the remains of which could still be seen until nearly 1945. This place consisted of a large building, which served as a shelter in case of thunderstorms or as a place of rest for people and cattle, there was also found usually a fountain out of wood with its pail and the before named sycamore tree. Nobody seems to remember of the second fountain. There were for sure no crosses on any of both places.

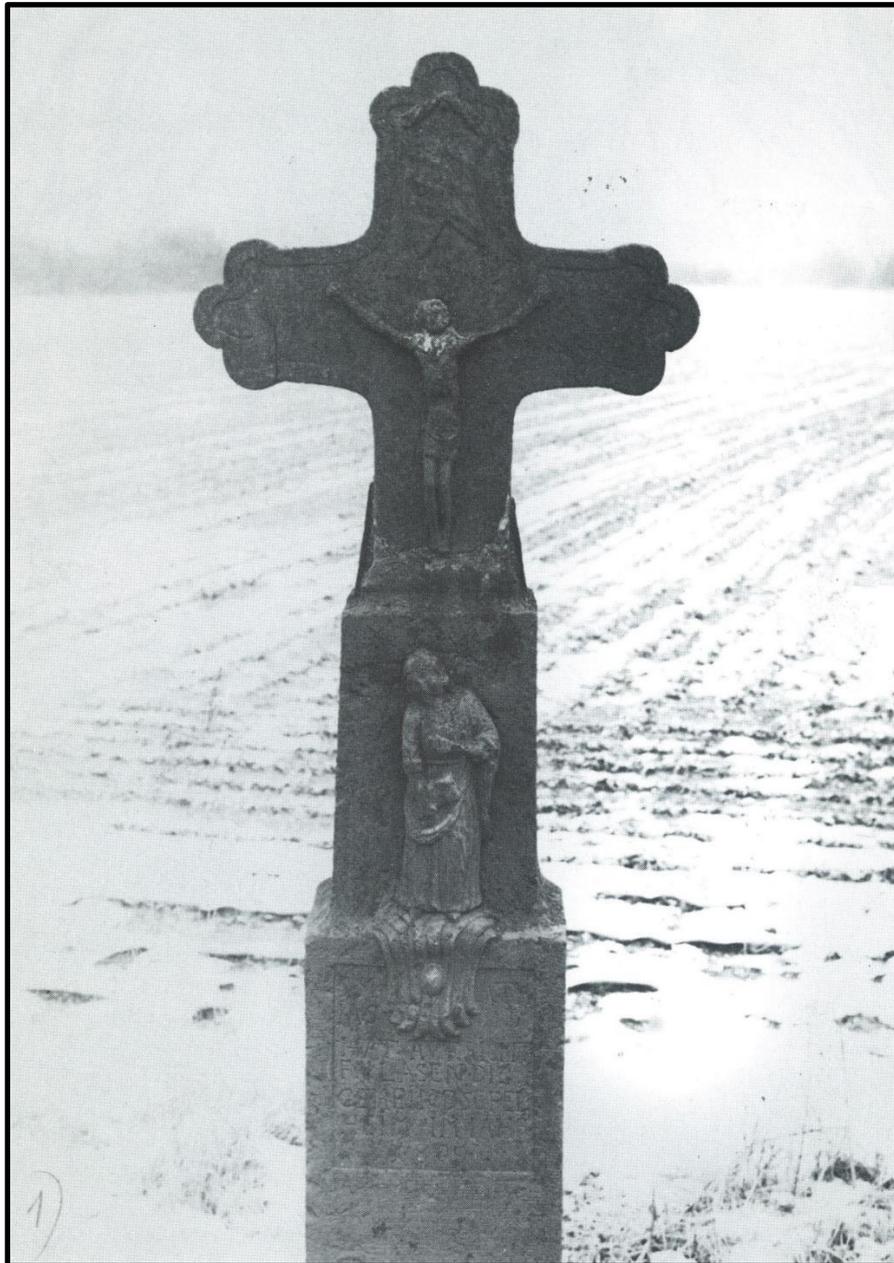
A regular distance between one cross to another seems to have been a rule. Following the Gospel a logical distance between the church and the cross of St. Mathew is about 1.5 km, from there to the "middle cross" about 750 m. and the same distance to St. Mark's cross, so a total of about 1.5 km again from the last one to St. Lukas's cross again 1.5 km and from this last one back to the church about 3 km. We can suppose that the missing cross of St. Johann stood at a place close to a newer cross, which was found near the road to Drusenheim, located at the end of the new district (so again at a distance of 1.5 km).

When looking for the original reason for the selected distances, the metric system, which was unknown in 1786, had to drop out, the French country mile (lieue de terre ou lieue commune = 4,445 km) was also ruled out, although 1.5 km corresponded to about one third of a mile but the intermediate mass (750 m) does not seem to make sense. The old Roman mile is a credible option (milia passum), i.e. the 1000

double steps = between 1470-1480 m for comparison, whereby the 750 m intermediate spaces correspond to half a unit.

In this context, the question must be asked where else are the same distances between crosses or shrines known? In the more recent literature on the question, for instance in "Rural Crosses" by R. ENGEL, 1974, 1983, no answer could be found.

Fritz GEISSERT



Number 1: The cross of St Mathew.

The inscription reads: Has been erected by the community of Soufflenheim in year 1809.



Number 2: The first "middle cross". This one and the following one date back to year 1786.



Number 3: Detail of the same cross



Number 4: St. Mark and the Lion. We can observe the important damages on the whole memorial.



Number 5: St. Lukas' cross. On the left of the Evangelist is the bull's head.



Number 5: The second middle cross (between the disappeared cross of St Johann and the church).
The former body was replaced in later times by a bronze lead one.

The Crosses of the Evangelists Round Soufflenheim

D'Evangelische-Kritzer Um Sufflum

(from 1786 to 1809)

One time on the first of January
I took a walk to where these gentlemen are.
On this day when one goes to meet them,
They sometimes speak with you.

1. Saint Mathew's cross on the road to Rountzenheim

First you reach Saint Mathias,
How cold and wet his cross is to-day !
Hello ! You Old man, I spoke
And asked him how it feels now.
He told me "Wow, the time is no longer beautiful,
No man is hardly no more to see ;
They believe that they would look like monkeys,
If they would come a hundred here".

2. Saint Mark's cross behind the new ward

Over there, in direction of Sessenheim,
You find Saint Mark and his lion.
How are you ? what can I do for you?
He answers earnestly but half laughing too :
"Go to the vicar for any question,
He should one time bring a bunch of flowers,
And for my lion a liver sausage
And a jug of water for his thirst ! "

3. On the outside of the ban the Saint Luke's cross

Oh you, Saint Luke, we never see you,
Without your bull on your side !
He answers : "Why do you mind my bull ?
Is not often a man likes a bull inside his home !
I stay here in the hedges,

And very peaceful in my mind.
No more procession comes here,
Look if any people still live around”

4. On the place, where the cross of Saint Johann was standing

I could not find him, St Johann,
He has disappeared from here a long time ago.
His cross was destroyed by time and war.
They did not make a new one for him !

5. My question to all of them

I asked each of them,
A question that I had already for a long time in my mind :
Should we not bring you back inside the small city ?
For fear that in the end you would be stolen.
As to-day everything can be used,
When you cannot sell it, you can lay low !
Each of them answered : “We are here now,
Happens what will or must be.
And what is a true word is :
We stay here for two hundred years.
We are from yesterday, and all know for sure that :
An old tree cannot be settled elsewhere !”

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