



**SITE ARCHEO-
LOGIQUE**
CATHEDRALE
SAINT-PIERRE
GENEVE

Timeline

PREHISTORY before 3500 BC

After 11000 BC
Palaeolithic: first traces of human presence in the Geneva basin

5000–4000 BC
Neolithic: remains of villages near present-day Geneva

ANTIQUITY 5000 BC–476 AD

3000–2500 BC
First human habitation of the shores of lake Geneva (farmers and herders)

1150 BC
Prehistoric burial mound

800–450 BC
First Age of Iron (Hallstatt) : arrival of the Celts

450–58 BC
Second Age of Iron (La Tène) : contacts with the Roman world

ALLOBROGIAN PERIOD 330–120 BC

2nd cent. BC
Geneva, an Allobrogian fortified town

2nd cent. BC
ca. 120 BC
The name Geneva appears for the first time in Julius Cesar's *On The Gallic War*



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ca. 100 BC

Tomb of an Allobrogian chieftain

Dated at 100 BC, this tomb is located under the choir of several successive buildings; it was probably the grave of an Allobrogian chieftain who was buried at this spot overlooking the lake, the port and the bridge over the Rhone.

ROMAN PERIOD

58 BC–401 AD

58 BC

The Romans arrive gradually. Julius Cesar destroys the bridge over the Rhone and prevents the Helvetii from migrating to Gaul.

40 BC–10 AD

Temple, dwelling, mausoleum

10-40

Roman urbanisation

17

Commemorative building

50-60

A fire destroys the area around the present cathedral

1st century

The 1st-century official building

A large dwelling was built during the latter half of the 1st century on a terrace overlooking the port. It was probably preceded by other buildings belonging to Roman city officials.

2nd century

130-200

Pax Romana

150

Commemorative terrace

Fires are lit on the commemorative terrace overlooking the port in memory of an extraordinary personage who is worshipped as a hero.



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200-275

End of the early Roman Empire

275-350

The civitas, an administrative centre

3rd-4th century

Wheat processing

Even today in northern climates, it is often necessary to dry wheat after harvesting. One of the service areas attached to the residence of an important official of the town may have been used for this purpose as it included a heated room that circulated very dry air, thereby insuring the conservation of cereal crops, which were found in considerable quantities in this area. This building antedates the north cathedral.

313

Edict of Milan: recognition of the Christian religion is accompanied by the reorganisation of social and power structures.

4th century

Church of relics

ca. 350 AD

Christian oratory

PALEOCHRISTIAN PERIOD

315-515

350-380

Birth of the first episcopal complex

4th-6th century

The north cathedral

Unlike ancient temples, Christian churches were meeting places open to the faithful, who gathered in the nave. The north cathedral, the oldest building in the episcopal complex with the baptistery and the church, was extended several times. In its first configuration, around 380, this church, built over the remains of an older Christian oratory, measured approximately 32 m long by 15 m wide. . Later, the apse was shifted eastward, and lateral annexes were added in the 5th century. The screen that closed off the choir, reserved for the clergy, was turned to create a solea, a narrow passageway used for processions.



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4th century

Monks' cells

A courtyard led to several small free-standing, two-storey houses built against the north wall of the cathedral. Their two rooms were heated by a system of pipes under the floor.

4th-6th century

Door of the northern cathedral

Unusually, the Cathedral's main entrance was not in the axis of the building, but rather in the middle of the south lateral wall. This is attested by a threshold and steps. The main doorway was reached through a gallery that was later incorporated into the atrium. Gutters in the floor of the atrium prevented rainwater from flowing into the cathedral, which was on a lower level.

4th-8th century

A succession of baptisteries

The baptistery was a separate building where the faithful received the first of the Christian sacraments: baptism. As such, it was the most important place of Christian worship. The size of the baptismal font was progressively reduced, reflecting changes in the ritual itself: from full immersion in running water to the sprinkling of water still practised today.

4th-11th century

The episcopal group. An architectural complex in constant development

After the Roman Emperor Constantine recognised Christianity, in 313, the spread of the new religion fostered a reorganisation of social and power structures. The layout of Geneva was considerably affected by these changes. From then on, the episcopal centre became a special district within the city walls. At first, it comprised a cathedral to the north, where used for the celebration of communion, a baptistery for conversions, and a chapel, which may have been dedicated to the cult of relics. Around 400 AD, a second cathedral was built to the south, and connected with the first church by an atrium, the galleries of which made it easier to walk between the various buildings. Several meeting rooms, some of them heated and richly decorated, were used for gatherings of the clergy and to receive important visitors. Throughout the years, all these buildings, including the palace and the bishop's private chapel, were frequently reworked, embellished and enlarged. The baptistery was later supplanted by a third cathedral, which eventually gave birth the single large cathedral built around 1000.

5th century

A baptistery and two cathedrals

5th century

The liturgical furnishings of the choir

In the 5th century, the cathedral's choir, which was reserved for ecclesiastics, was closed off by a screen surmounted by columns. Probably in order to facilitate processions, this was prolonged by a solea, a long narrow passageway marked out by screens, which opened onto the nave. A venerated tomb was incorporated into this liturgical layout on the south side.



401

End of Roman domination

443

Geneva is the first capital of the Burgundian kingdom

5th century

The south cathedral: the second cathedral in the episcopal group

The south cathedral, built around 400, was dedicated to teaching and the study of sacred texts. The liturgical furnishings included a solea (passageway) and a polygonal ambo (or pulpit), where the bishop and priests stood to instruct the congregation. The faithful passed first through the arcades of the atrium, then crossed the main portal before entering the nave. There, they were separated into two hierarchical groups by a screen. The bishop had the use of a separate reception hall adjacent to the choir.

5th century

The bishop's reception hall

Adjacent to the south cathedral, built around 400 AD, was the bishop's reception hall, which gave directly onto the choir. The highlight of this richly decorated room was a magnificent mosaic floor. The presence of such a room reflects the many functions of the bishop: not only was he the spiritual head of the diocese, he also played a political, judicial and administrative role, and hosted numerous delegations.

5th century

The mosaic floor

The room in which the bishop received his visitors was comfortable and well decorated, with under-floor heating and a magnificent mosaic pavement. The 45 square panels of this mosaic are laid out in a symmetrical pattern. The original composition shows the influence of traditional Roman themes. Subsequently, the mosaic suffered frequent and often clumsy renovations.

5th–6th century

The water supply of the baptisteries

Water was supplied to the baptistery's main font from a well about 30 m away through pipes made of wood and lead. The water first flowed into a basin; from there, it was fed under pressure into the font, forming a small spout that rained down onto the neophytes as they kneeled before the bishop.



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HIGH MIDDLE AGES
515–1000

5th–6th century

Teaching in the south cathedral

The south cathedral was dedicated to the instruction of the faithful and was associated with the adjoining baptistery. The cathedral choir was connected to the nave by a solea (passageway) which led to a polygonal ambo (a sort of pulpit). The officiating priest stood behind the ambo to read from or comment on the sacred texts.

6th century

Extension of the north cathedral

6th century

Baptism

The neophytes entered the baptistery, accompanied by their families. A richly decorated canopy rose above the font in which they would be baptised. The bishop stood behind the ambo to bless the faithful who had received instruction in the Christian faith. Ecclesiastics watched the once-yearly ceremony from a separate area reserved for their use.

7th–8th century

The east cathedral in the 7th-8th century.

A church dedicated to the worship of relics

A third cathedral was built in line with the baptistery during the 7th–8th century, replacing a church dedicated to the worship of relics. The almost square plan of the cathedral was divided into three naves with an apse and apsidioles. The liturgical furnishings indicate that initially the section reserved for ecclesiastics was small. A highly venerated tomb situated in the choir was the object of a particular devotion. It was flanked by two platforms and surrounded by an ornamented chancel (a low screen) which the faithful had to cross in order to worship before the grave.

9th–10th century

A single cathedral

The 8th-century cathedral is expanded towards the west at the expense of the baptisteries.

10th century

A cloister is built on the location of the north church

LATE MIDDLE AGES
1001–1500

11th century

1032

Emperor Conrad II delegates power to the bishop of Geneva



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11th–12th century

A cathedral on three levels

The most striking feature of the 11th-century cathedral was its monumental scale. Inside the nave, a broad flight of stairs led up to two consecutive levels. A large area reserved for the canons, the ecclesiastics surrounding the bishop, gave onto the choir, where the high altar stood. The choir, located over the crypt, was elevated 4.5 m above the nave.

1160

Construction of Saint-Pierre Cathedral begins

12th century

The Romanesque crypt: a place of worship beneath the Cathedral.

The crypt in Geneva was a place of worship built under the cathedral's elevated choir. It was reached by two entrances on each side from the church's broad side aisles. As shown in this rendition, the crypt's vaulted ceiling was supported by 35 columns.

13th century

Rise of the House of Savoy

13th century

The Gothic cloister

In the 10th century, a cloister was built on the site of the former north cathedral. It was completely rebuilt in the 13th century following the completion of the current cathedral. The sculpted décor and ribbed vaults were remarkable for their artistry. The ground under the cloister arcades contained numerous tombs of both ecclesiastics and laypeople.

14th century

1348–1349

The Great Plague

14th century

Building of the Chapelle des Macchabées

15th century

Mould of the great bell “La Clémence”

This large star-shaped impression, discovered under the cathedral square in front of the portico, is all that remains of the casting of a bell. The diameter of 2.05 m identifies the bell as “La Clémence”, the Cathedral's largest, cast in 1407 thanks to a gift from Robert of Geneva, Pope at Avignon (antipope) under the name Clement VII (1342–94). The bell was cast in a pit into which the mould was lowered and buried, to keep it from exploding under the pressure of the molten metal.



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MODERN PERIOD

1501–1789

1515
Battle of Marignano

1516
Switzerland signs the Treaty of Perpetual Peace with France

1536
The General Council of Geneva adopts the Reformation

1602
Failed attack on Geneva by Charles-Emmanuel of Savoy, known as the “Escalade”

1685
Revocation of the Edict of Nantes

1798
French invasion. Geneva becomes the capital of the Département du Léman.

CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

1803–the present

1813
Restoration of the Republic of Geneva

1815
Geneva joins the Helvetic Confederation

1848
Birth of the Swiss federal state



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1850–1880

Geneva's fortifications are torn down

19th century

First excavations

Architectural and historical studies of Saint-Pierre Cathedral are carried out when floor heating is installed.

1907

Separation of church and state

1976–2006

The excavation of Saint-Pierre Cathedral

Archaeological excavations and studies have been carried out both inside and outside the Cathedral since 1976. Remains of protohistoric and Roman settlements located on the hill, as well as the buildings that followed since the beginning of the Christian era, are now open to the public. The remains presented here span the main periods of Geneva's history. This is where the bishops, after assuming many of the powers of the Roman civil and military administrators, oversaw the building of several places of worship used for religious services, baptisms, funerary rites and the education of the clergy. This journey of discovery begins in the 2nd and 3rd century BC and ends with the construction of the present cathedral, starting in the 12th century.

1986

A first stage of the archaeological site is open to the public

2000

Discovery of the Allobrogian tomb

2006

The archaeological site exhibition is redesigned and a larger area open to the public.