In 1817, the German inventor Karl von Drais presented this predecessor of the bicycle ("the running machine"). He advertised as an alternative to horses, which might indicate that the scarcity of horse fodder in 1816 had increased the appeal of ideas that Drais—who had first presented a four-wheel machine in 1813—had been promoting for some time. It is difficult, however, to make such a connection between the biophysical impact of the eruption and Drais’s invention with any certainty. The dearth and food scarcity induced by the climatic changes following the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora and the well-known “year without a summer” (1816) could have influenced technological innovation, or at least accelerated processes that were already going on. Drais’s invention was not very successful, though, and considered more of a curiosity—as its English name “dandy horse” suggests. The inventor died a ridiculed alcoholic in 1851, still in possession of one of his “running machines,” which had only briefly been popular. Whether or not this important step in the history of mobility was indeed caused by short-term climatic crisis remains a topic for future research.

Remembering the Great Famine for Centuries: Memorial stone from Schmidtstedt

In the year of the Lord 1316 here were buried 100 x 60, 33 x 60, and 5 humans, who have died in the years of dearness. God have mercy on them.

Between ca. 1315–1321, people perished all over Europe from famine and hunger-related diseases. The so called Great Famine—caused mainly by abnormally cold, wet summers—went down in history as the most widespread, weather-induced famine of the last millennium. In remembrance of the 7,985 (100x60+33x60+5) victims from the town of Erfurt in Thuringia, this memorial stone was installed close to the site where the dead had been buried in mass graves in the nearby village of Schmidtstedt. For centuries—from at least 1341 until as late as 1923—memorial processions to this now deserted place on the outskirts of Erfurt commemorated the famine victims. The memorial stone thus serves not only as a physical reminder of the disaster but also represents how the memory of a medieval climate-related disaster was preserved in local popular history well into modern times, for a total of almost 600 years.


[Translated inscription] In the year of the Lord 1316 here were buried 100 x 60, 33 x 60, and 5 humans, who have died in the years of dearness. God have mercy on them.
**Title**

Drowned in a Millennium Flood: Reliquary Cross from St. Alban’s Church

**Artist/Author**

Uncertain (Hans the Goldsmith?)

**Place of origin/date**

Göttingen, Germany (mid 14th century – after 1342)

**Place of exposition | Inv.-No.**

Church St. Alban, Göttingen, Germany: Inv.-No. 2305

### Description

[Translated inscription] In the year, 1342 Hermann the goldsmith drowned in the big flood of Saint Margaret’s day.

In the mid 1350s, the wealthy citizen Hans from the central German city of Göttingen dedicated this reliquary cross to the memory of his father Hermann. The flood event of July 1342, presumably the largest inundation of Central Europe during the last millennium, hit an area between the Rhône River and Hungary, from the Alps to the lower mountain ranges in central Germany. Torrential rains resulted when a so-called Genoa low, packed with humidity from the Mediterranean, turned north over Eastern Central Europe. As a result, the Danube, Rhine, Main and Elbe, and many of their tributaries rose above their banks and inundated huge swaths of Central Europe, causing soil erosion, harvest loss, dearth, and the destruction of infrastructure. It was an event stretching over several weeks, but it is mostly remembered as the Flood of St Mary Magdalene’s Day (22 July) — not St. Margaret’s Day (13 July) as in the case of the memorial cross for the drowned goldsmith. He is the only individual we know by name, one of many casualties of this flood in the early decades of the Little Ice Age.


### Source

Picture courtesy of Lutheran parish of St. Alban, Göttingen (https://stalbani.wir-e.de)

### Researcher

Name: Dr. Martin Bauch  
Institution: GWZO Leibniz - Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa  
Research Field: Environmental and Climate History of the Pre-Modern period  
Homepage: https://www.leibniz-gwzo.de/de/institut/team/martin-bauch