

ALTENBERG CATHEDRAL – ALTENBERG MONASTERY LANDSCAPE TRAIL

1133

On 25 August 1133, Adolf II. Count of Berg founded Altenberg Monastery for a delegation of 12 Cistercian monks, including the Count's brother, Eberhard von Berg. The site of the new monastery was to be the former Berge Castle on the Bülsberg, the abandoned ancestral seat of the Counts of Berg.

1145

Shortly after construction began, the monks moved the monastery complex from the top of the mountain to the more favourably situated Dhünn valley, where a first church was consecrated in 1145.

The decisive factor for the new location of the complex in the valley was in particular the proximity to the watercourse of the Dhünn, which offered far better conditions for the observance of Cistercian building and living regulations than the steeply sloping Bülsberg. The Archbishop of Cologne, Bruno II, another brother of the Count of Berg, endowed the young monastery with lands that extended to the left bank of the Rhine.

1259

On 3 March 1259, Count Adolf IV of Berg laid the foundation stone for the Gothic cathedral still visible today in the presence of the Archbishop of Cologne. At this time, the Cistercian monks already had extensive experience in handling building materials, as knowledge and skills were passed on from mother to daughter monasteries within the order.

The new monastery church was now to replace the Romanesque predecessor building, which was about 100 years older. The choir was consecrated in 1287, but it was not until 1379 that Bishop Wikbold Dobilstein of Kulm, who is buried in the cathedral's high choir, consecrated the entire church on behalf of the Archbishop of Cologne. The large west window – a donation from the Bergisches Haus – was inserted around 1400.

1300

The Cistercian Order spread from France throughout Europe in the course of the 12th century.

Around 1300, the order already had more than 700 branches. Decisive for this rapid and widespread spread of the Cistercians was the so-called filiation (Latin *filia* – daughter), within the framework of which the monasteries were encouraged to found their own daughter monasteries, which as a rule remained closely connected to them. Many daughter monasteries in turn became the starting point for further monastery foundations, so that in the course of time important series of daughters were formed. The mother monastery of Altenberg was the primary abbey of Morimond in Burgundy, France, which was founded from Cîteaux and became Altenberg's ninth daughter. From here the monks in turn founded the daughter monasteries of

Mariental in Lower Saxony (1136/38), Lekno (1143) and Lond (1175) in Poland, Zinna (1170/71) in Brandenburg and Haina (1188) in Hesse.

Local building material from the Bergisches Land

For the construction of the new church, mainly local building material from the quarries in the Bergisches Land was used; additional material, for example from the Siebengebirge, was transported to the Dhünn valley via the existing road connections.

There is evidence of several quarries in the immediate vicinity of the monastery, for example on the Rösberg, on the Priorsberg, on the slope of the Bülberg, below the former Berge castle, below the Porzberg farm and on the Kehrberg. On the edges of the Dhünn, stone was also quarried at ledges. However, the quarried stone on site was susceptible to moisture and frost in the long term and was only suitable as a weather-resistant building material to a limited extent.

However, in addition to local rock from the quarries in the Bergisches Land, the high-quality trachyte in the Siebengebirge – for example at Drachenfels – was also quarried and transported to Altenberg both via the Rhine and overland. This rock of volcanic origin, which has been quarried in the Siebengebirge since Roman times, has found many uses as a building material over the centuries.

For the construction of Altenberg Cathedral and other medieval church buildings, however, in addition to freshly quarried stone, people also reverted to material that had already been used, demolished Roman cities and legion camps and reused the stone. The strong trachyte of the Siebengebirge can be found at Altenberg Cathedral, especially in the foundations and at the entrance portal. At the choir of the cathedral and at St Mark's Chapel, on the other hand, mainly local stone was used, such as brown to reddish quarry stone and light brown to yellow tuff.

The Altenberg Bauhütte had excellent knowledge of the different types of stone and outstanding skills, since high-quality stone in particular, which was needed for ornamental elements, was difficult to work. The skill of the stonemasons can still be seen and felt today on the church façade – the stones have been worked to perfection, have joints of little thickness and have survived the centuries!

CISTERSCAPES – Cistercian landscapes connecting Europe

"Cisterscapes": The project name is a play on words made up of the words "Cistercian" and "landscape" – what is meant is an historically cultivated landscape of Cistercian character.

The monastic landscapes of the Cistercians still display typical elements today. What is special about them is that they are not singular, but can be traced in a similar way throughout Europe.

The reason for this lies above all in the structure of the order and its extremely successful network, which is why the Cistercians are often referred to as the "first Europeans".

The Cisterscapes network, with 17 partners in five countries, is a representative sample of what used to be more than a hundred active Cisterces in Europe.

*The Altenberg monastery landscape is part of this European network.
Altenberg Abbey and the Counts of Berg – an architectural history*