

CULTIVATED LANDSCAPE |

ALTENBERG MONASTERY LANDSCAPE TRAIL

Cultivated landscape

Today's landscape in the Bergisch region is the result of centuries of cultivation and intensive human use over generations.

The landscape itself already exists without human intervention, cultivation in turn – from the Latin *colere* – is a characteristic of human actions and ideas. For centuries, mankind has been influencing the surrounding nature, changing and permanently shaping it. At the same time, the cultivation of the landscape is always a construct of the respective time: Each generation understands it differently, sets its own priorities and leaves its own traces.

When people change their environment, create ponds, clear arable land and use forests, they also change the flora and fauna there. To some extent, the consequences of human use can be revised over time, and nature is also reclaiming its spaces.

Other changes, on the other hand, are permanent; nature conquers new habitats as a result. When a landscape is used and cultivated by humans, it is called a "cultivated landscape". Their traces can be discovered and experienced everywhere in nature.

The Cistercians optimised this cultivation of the landscape, the *colere*. Although it is known today that the friars took care to settle an already rudimentarily cultivated area when choosing their monastery sites, they knew how to optimise the conditions on site. They used what they found: fertile soil, water, rock deposits and forests. To this end, buildings were erected and roads laid out; trade, commerce and traffic gradually shaped the landscape.

Monastic landscape

Among the historical cultivated landscapes, the monastery landscapes, such as here in Altenberg, occupy a special position. Initially, they developed in a limited area, from which they expanded over time. The core of any monastic landscape was the convent with at least one church and the immediate architecture for accommodation and supplies, surrounded by a monastery wall – the *intra muros* area. In addition, there was the *extra muros* area, i.e. the landscape surrounding the monastery with waters, paths, farmland and courtyards close to the monastery.

The third level was formed by the spatial relationships of the monastery complex to its surroundings. Altenberg Abbey, for example, had monastery farms as far away as the Eifel and scattered estates as far as the wine-growing areas on the Middle Rhine.

The last level was formed by the regional and supra-regional networking of the monastery complexes among themselves. Through the branching principle, the monasteries of the Cistercian Order in particular were well networked; techniques, ideas and experiences were exchanged among themselves. The Cistercian monastery network extended over large parts of Europe. Communication within this system usually took place through correspondence, but visits and personal exchanges in particular also led to significant intellectual and ideological connections.

Viticulture

The cultivation of wine played a central role for the Cistercians. Although the monks themselves were only supposed to consume it in moderation, it was frequently used as mass wine, for nursing the sick and for entertaining guests.

The wine-growing areas of the Altenberg monastery were located outside what is now North Rhine-Westphalia on the Middle Rhine. The first vineyards already came into their possession when Altenberg Abbey was founded, such as the Petersackerhof in Oberdiebach in Rhineland-Palatinate, which was given to the young monastery by Archbishop Bruno II of Cologne. Soon the Cistercian monks distinguished themselves by their skills in cultivating vines and the quality of the wine they produced.

Trade in the wine they produced was also an important source of income for the Altenberg monastery. In the 13th century, for example, it is documented as far away as Flanders and Antwerp. The steadily growing trading city of Cologne also offered a nearby and large sales market.