

MONASTERIES | ALTENBERG MONASTERY LANDSCAPE TRAIL

Granaries

In addition to pastureland and arable land, the Cistercian monasteries had monastery farms, so-called granaries. These were large agricultural estates spread over the lands of the Order. They could be located in the immediate vicinity of the monastery, such as the Kochshof, or further away, such as Hof Ameln in Titz near Düren. Altenberg Abbey had granaries as far away as the wine-growing regions of the Middle Rhine. The monastery farms produced goods for the supply of Altenberg Abbey as well as surplus goods for trade. For the Order, they therefore played a central role in securing food on the one hand and economic prosperity on the other. The granary system reached its peak in the 12th and 13th centuries, when Altenberg Abbey owned over 100 cultivated farms far beyond the Odenthal region. After that, a tenancy system gradually replaced the network of granaries. Only the kitchen farm within the monastery complex remained under the monks' own management until the secularisation of Altenberg in 1803.

Converts

As a rule, the medieval Cistercian granaries were administered and managed by so-called "converts". As lay brothers, they did not receive ordination, but nevertheless belonged to the monastic community and played a decisive role in the functioning of the abbeys. Converts were responsible in particular for the physical work involved and performed tasks such as agriculture, handicrafts or the monastery gardens. They were supported by simple wage labourers. By relieving the monks of the hard, physical work, they enabled them to lead a life of prayer without having to worry about worldly affairs. In some cases, the skills and merits of converts even enabled them to attain higher positions within the monastery; for example, the head of a granary was the granary master, who was usually a convert. Within the monastery complex, however, converted and ordained monks usually lived separate lives.

City courtyards

In addition to the numerous agricultural estates, Altenberg Abbey also had property in the surrounding towns, especially in the form of houses and house rents. The so-called town farms occupied a special position for the economic activities of the Cistercians. Altenberg Abbey maintained such in the cities of Cologne, Bonn and Koblenz, whereby the undisputed centre of all monastic economic activity was the Cologne city court. This had already existed since the middle of the 12th century and was located in Cologne's Johannisstraße in the immediate vicinity of the Rhine and the ferry connection to Mülheim on the right bank of the Rhine. This was the central transshipment and trading point for the goods produced in the monastery courtyards, the administrative centre of the monastic property and the business centre of Altenberg Abbey. In addition, the Altenberg Stadthof served as a hostel for monastery members and guests and, until 1511, as the residence of the counts and dukes of Berg.

Kochshof

The Kochshof, also called Hof Humboldt or "zum Hofe", was originally a feudal estate of the Counts of Berg. From 1253 it was owned by Altenberg Abbey, where it remained until the secularisation in 1803. A list of the Altenberg monastery's revenues from 1500 lists oats, barley, pigs, chickens and eggs as taxes on the Kochshof. Its area (in 1746) was 133 acres including "Busch", which roughly corresponds to 33 hectares.

The original main building of the farmstead is of half-timbered construction and has been increasingly dilapidated since 1975, when the last tenancy ended. The other buildings of the farmstead – coach house, bakehouse and stable – were also in poor condition. Today, the farm group is the federal headquarters of the "Zugvogel – deutscher Fahrtenbund e. V.", which acquired and renovated the buildings in 1987 with the support of the Odenthal municipality.

Currently, at least two "Hof-Vögte" of the association always manage the farm.