



Ground Plan

According to documents the south wing, with refectory and large cellar underneath, was built first, followed by the east wing. But what remains today suggests the reverse. In any case, the abbots Sigebodo (1138-1161) and Thioter (1161-1176) were responsible for the original construction. Excavations on the south wall of the abbey show that the south wing was built in several stages. Another argument for a previously longer east wing can be found in the ground plan. The south cross-beams in the kitchen have been shortened, so they must have previously extended further to the south.

During restoration work since 2000, it has been possible to investigate the roof truss of the refectory more closely. Dendrochronological methods show that it dates back to 1796. It can be assumed that the roof truss was also built at that time.

It is likely that the abbey buildings were constructed in the following order: The east wing was built first because the capitals there are simpler and less sculptured. Some of the column shafts show vertical fluting. The 19th century lithograph by Puttrich depicts mainly columns with round shafts in the chapter house, their capitals decorated with palm ornaments, although a few square capitals with half-shields can also be discerned. The latter are also in the corner room of the east wing (warming room or kitchen). These decorations are clear evidence of a later construction of the south wing, where the column ornamentation in the refectory points to the 2nd half of the 12th century. These art-historical arguments were recently supported by excavations on the south wall in 2003: the south wing was longer than today, as proved by the excavated remains of a wall to the south.

The Chapter House

Today the chapter house is divided into two rooms: when the dividing wall was constructed, the existing pillars with half-columns (known as compound pillars) were simply included as decoration. The monks' dormitory was on the upper floor. This was directly connected to the church by a special entrance to make it easier to attend services in the night.

The Refectory

The refectory was the monks' dining hall. A particularly valuable feature here is the abundance of columns and capitals in both wings. The shafts of the twelve columns in the refectory are decorated with lozenges, zigzag stripes or twisted ropes. The capitals are largely covered with palm fans. These are reminiscent of the exemplary columns in the cloister of Königsutter and point to a possible relationship with Lombardy.

The original 12th century plaster floor is still partly in place, missing parts having been added to match the original floor.

The under-floor heating which has now been exposed, particularly under the refectory, shows that Ilseburg abbey in the height of the Middle Ages was among the technologically advanced and wealthy monasteries.

Refectory

Careful observation in front of the east side of the abbey will reveal ruins in the ground. These are the scant remains of a Lady Chapel. Is the Lady Chapel perhaps also older than the abbey, as in the case of Paulinzella? More excavations will be needed.

The Lady Chapel

Here again what is still recognisable today as the beginnings of the vaults at the east wall of the abbey can give important clues. Like other Lady Chapels of Benedictine monasteries, the first floor of the original 2-storey building probably housed the library and scriptorium.



The Library

It was the scientific diligence of abbots like Herrand, Martin and Sigebodo, which made it possible, with the help of numerous wealthy sponsors, for Ilseburg Abbey, founded in the early

11th century, to acquire an extensive library or to produce books in their own scriptorium. Monasteries were places not just of worship but also of intellect, knowledge, culture and book production.

Concerning the remains of the library, we have, according to Eduard Jacobs, a catalogue (Catalogus Librorum) of 244 items, of which 156 are manuscripts and 87 printed works, only one item could not be categorised. The catalogue had been compiled in 1574 on the instruction of the abbey administrator, Count Christoph of Stolberg-Wernigerode. It contained Bible texts, writings of the church fathers and exegetical, ascetical, and liturgical writings, particularly sermons.

Especially important are a further 13 documents on the law for use by the abbey administration. A contemporary, the reformer Winnigstadt (died 1569) knew the original size of the Ilseburg library and certified to Abbot Herrand, whom he also counted among the foremost ecclesiastical writers, that “he had established a good school for all kinds of free arts and a magnificent library ...at great expense”. The library remained until the Peasant War (1525) and was then pillaged and destroyed. The subsequent history of books and records reads like an adventure.



Remains of the Library

Among the library remains already mentioned, there are four works still in existence today which are of interest, two of them manuscripts in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbuttel:

A chronicle by Hrabanus Maurus, an early mediaeval scholar (around 784-856), entitled “Praeceptor Germaniae” (Cod. Guelf. 656 Helm).

A manuscript from Ilseburg Abbey “Gesta thebeorum... Item historia treverorum ecclesiastica” (Cod. Augusteus in 4°, 19.27).

Figure 5:

The king with crown and sword as judge: picture of a king or judge from Ilsenburg Abbey. On the back of sheet 1 of "Gesta Thebeorum", one of the few remaining manuscripts from the abbey. Source: Herzog August Library Wolfenbüttel in Cod. Augusteus in 4°, 19.27.

The most important work from the Ilsenburg Abbey library, and an example of its book production, is a large Latin Bible manuscript from the 12th century. This manuscript is in private hands and was shown in 2003 at a Bible exhibition in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel. It consists of 139 sheets in a strong pigskin cover from the 16th century (around 1560/1580). It contains the texts of the Books of the Prophets and the New Testament, written by several hands in Carolingian minuscule. The manuscript was intended for liturgical use, as suggested by a list of pericopes from the Gospels for Sundays and Holy Days.

Between the texts of the Old and New Testaments is an empty sheet which was used by a similar hand of the time to copy documents referring to Ilsenburg Abbey. These are the gift of Bishop Reinhard of 4th May 1114, which mentions Abbot Martin of Ilsenburg; Abbot Heinrich of Ilsenburg's guarantee of an enfeoffment of a certain Reinward over Thiederzingerode of 1st February 1131; and the beginning of an acknowledgement by Pope Innocent II of the land and privileges of the abbey of 2nd January 1136. Written in widely spaced capitals at the end of the Old Testament books is: Explicit Malachias Propheta, followed in elongated letters of documental script by: Abbas Martinus . me fieri iussit . Wulferammus me scripsit . et Herimannus me fecit. (Abbot Martin ordered me to be made, Wolfram wrote me, and Hermann made me). Wulferammus was therefore working as scribe and Herimannus as scribe and editor (me fecit?). The scribe of the Gospels is not mentioned. It may be assumed that the copy was made in Ilsenburg Abbey at the time of Abbot Martin, who was elected by the Conventuals on 30th June 1105 and died on 20th May 1129. The manuscript must therefore have been written between 1105 and 1129. With the help of the Greek and Latin margin notes in the Bible, Jacobs proved that there was some knowledge of the Greek language at the beginning of the 12th century in Ilsenburg Abbey.

The individual texts begin with the initials characteristic of Romanesque book ornamentation. The clearly drawn colourful letters, 48 in number, are surrounded by tendrils and tubers.

Further proof of early book production in Ilseburg is provided by the fragment written by Rocho, a Brother at this abbey, on the life of Bishop Heimo of Halberstadt. Proof that this manuscript, which was found in Hildesheim, was written at Ilseburg lies in the signature: *Explicit historica Rochi in Ylsenb. de vita Haymo. Episcopi.*

Research into further remnants of the library at Ilseburg Abbey is ongoing. This may include other libraries such as the Catholic School in New York, the University Library in Halle, the State Archive in Magdeburg and parts of the Hecht Collection in the Pattensen branch of the Principal State Archive in Hannover.

Other research into the history of Ilseburg Abbey involves the surviving reliefs and the excavations around the former cloister.