

Pressemeldung

Library of Admont Monastery renovated

AUSTRIA. In June 2008 the monastic library of Admont was reopened to the public after a four-year renovation. The Benedictine monastery in the Alpine mountains on the banks of the river Enns, a tributary of the Danube, is visited by more than 70,000 people annually.

The monastery, founded in 1074 by the Archbishop of Salzburg, became a religious center of the Austrian province of Steiermark during the Middle Ages. Shortly after its consecration Admont received several books as donations, and during the 12th century its scriptorium, where the monks copied texts and created colourfully illuminated manuscripts, enjoyed a high reputation. Furthermore, its library was enriched by donations and purchases. In 1380 the collection, stored in trunks or placed on desks and secured by chains, numbered about 800 manuscripts.

In the middle of the 15th century a first library was built above the chapel. During the 17th and 18th century Admont was one of the richest monasteries in Austria. Thanks to the large revenues derived from its territorial possessions, building activities increased. In 1770 the abbot commissioned a new library building for then 35,000 volumes held in stock. The architect Josef Hueber created a longitudinal hall measuring 72 by 14 meters. Typical of Baroque libraries, the wooden bookshelves, coloured in white and gold, are lining the walls and the ceiling is decorated with large frescoes. Daylight floods through 60 windows into the spacious and festive room. When the edifice was finished in 1776, it was the largest monastic library hall of the world and then considered an “eighth world wonder.”

In 1865 a fire destroyed the major part of the monastery, but fortunately the library remained almost untouched. Reconstruction set in immediately, and until the turn of the century the collection increased to ca. 90,000 volumes. The world economic crisis in the early 1930's led to fiscal restrictions and even necessitated the sale of several valuable tomes. During the years of the Nazi regime the monastery was dissolved and its possessions confiscated. After the war the edifice as well as its art and book collections were returned to the Benedictine monks.

Today the library stock exceeds 200,000 volumes, including 1,400 valuable manuscripts and 950 incunabula. About 70,000 volumes are shelved in the Baroque Hall. After the renovation, which cost about 6 million Euro, the palatial room and its valuable collection are shining in their original splendour.

www.stiftadmont.at