

Monastic Island of Reichenau

Reichenau Island lies in Lake Constance in southern Germany. It lies between the Gnadensee and the Untersee, almost due west of the city of Konstanz.

It was declared a World Heritage Site in 2000 because of its monastery, the Abbey of Reichenau. The abbey's Münster is dedicated to the Virgin and St Mark. Two further churches were built on the island consecrated to St Georg, and to Sts Peter and Paul. The famous artworks of Reichenau include the Ottonian murals of miracles of Christ in St Georg, unique survivals of the 10th century. The abbey's bailiff was housed in a two-storey stone building that was raised by two more storeys of half-timbered construction in the 14th century, one of the oldest half-timbered buildings in south Germany.

Among the Abbey's far-flung landholdings was Reichenau, a village in the municipality of Tamins in the canton of Graubünden, named for the Abbey.

The Alemannic name of the island was Sindleozaesauua, but it was also simply known as Ow, Auua, 'island' (Latinized as Augia, later also Augia felix or Augia dives, hence Richenow, Reichenau). The Benedictine Abbey of Reichenau was founded in 724 by the itinerant Saint Pirmin, who is said to have fled Spain ahead of the Moorish invaders, with patronage that included Charles Martel, and, more locally, Count Berthold of the Ahalolfinger and the Alemannian Duke Santfrid I (Nebi). Pirmin's conflict with his local patron resulted in his leaving Reichenau in 727. Under his successor Hatto, a kinsman of the Count of Hohenzollern, the monastery began to flourish. It gained influence in the Carolingian empire, under Abbot Waldo of Reichenau (740–814), by educating the clerks who staffed Imperial and ducal chanceries. Abbot Walahfrid Strabo (842–849) was renowned as a poet and Latin scholar.

The Abbey stood along a main north–south highway between Germany and Italy, where the lake passage eased the arduous route. The Abbey of Reichenau housed a school, and a scriptorium and artists' workshop, that has a claim to having been the largest and artistically most influential center for producing lavishly illuminated manuscripts in Europe during the late 10th and early 11th centuries, when this part of Switzerland belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. An example of the scriptorium's production is the Pericopes of Henry II, made for the Emperor, now in Munich. Reichenau has preserved its precious relics, which include the pitcher from the wedding at Cana. The Abbey reached its apex under Abbot Berno of Reichenau (1008–48). During his time, important scholars, such as Hermannus Contractus, lived and worked in Reichenau. In the second half of the 11th century, the cultural importance of the Abbey started to wane, due to the restrictive reforms of Pope Gregory VII, and also due to rivalry with the nearby St. Gall; in 1540, the Bishop of Constance, an old rival of the Reichenau abbots, became lord of Reichenau, and, under the control of the succeeding bishops, the abbey's significance dwindled.

Source: -- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]