

Reichenau (Germany)

No 974

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Monastic Island of Reichenau in Lake Constance
<i>Location</i>	Land (state) of Baden-Württemberg, Freiburg
<i>State Party</i>	Federal Republic of Germany
<i>Date</i>	28 June 1999

Justification by State Party

The monastic island of Reichenau in Lake Constance represents a masterpiece of human creative genius in so far as the ensemble of the three churches on the monastic island constitutes an exceptional example of an integrated group of medieval churches retaining elements of Carolingian, Othonian, and Salian architecture that are relevant to the history of architecture. The crossing, transepts, and chancel of the Carolingian cruciform basilica of Mittelzell, consecrated in 816, are exceptional both in their size and their excellent state of conservation, and constitute a major example of this particular type of crossing (*ausgeschiedene Vierung*) in Europe. Equally important are the surviving parts of the Carolingian monastery with a heating system modelled on ancient Roman examples. The transepts and apse of the church of St Mark (1048), linked to the Carolingian parts by the nave, are equally important to the history of European architecture. The wall paintings in the apse of the church of St Peter und Paul at Niederzell are of exceptional quality, and constitute one of the earliest depictions of the *Maiestas* surviving north of the Alps. The wall paintings decorating the nave of the church of St George at Oberzell are of the highest order artistically and constitute the only example of a complete and largely preserved set of pre-1000 scenic wall paintings north of the Alps. **Criterion i**

The monastic island of Reichenau bears a unique, or at least exceptional, testimony to a cultural tradition and to a living civilization. The island itself and the three churches, the monastery of Mittelzell, the buildings erected by the monastery for administrative and representative purposes and the structures built for farming purposes, also geared to the monastery's needs, and finally the living traditions of processions and religious festivals, constitute an outstanding

testimony of the monastic tradition that helped to shape Europe. **Criterion iii**

The monastic island of Reichenau is an outstanding example of traditional human settlement and land-use. Owing to the intensive cultivation of crops such as fruit, vegetables, and vines, geared to the monastery's needs and documented as early as the 9th century, large parts of the island have remained free of buildings to the present day. Thus the island of Reichenau is representative of the culture of a monastic island through the centuries, in a manner extending beyond the architectural survivals. **Criterion v**

The monastic island of Reichenau is directly and tangibly associated with events and living traditions, with ideas, with beliefs, and with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. It played an exceptionally important role in the political and cultural affairs of the Carolingian era. The Reichenau abbots were councillors of the Carolingian court, tutors, diplomats in the service of the emperor, and bishops of important dioceses such as Pavia and St Denis. Charlemagne sent his prisoner, the defeated Saxon Duke Widukind, to the Reichenau; the apostles of the Slavs, Kyrillius and Methodius, are known to have visited the island. Between 830 and 840 Walafrid Strabo wrote his instructive poem *De cultura horticorum*, the first European description of horticulture. His celebrated *Visio Wettini* is regarded as a precursor of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Hermann the Lame (1013-54) was a universal genius. He introduced a precise calendar taking into account the years both before and after Christ; he was an astronomer, a musicologist, and a composer who invented a new form of musical notation. On Reichenau the so-called Plan of St Gall was drawn about the year 830, the only surviving building plan of the early Middle Ages. During the 10th and 11th centuries the Reichenau school of artists created splendid works of illumination for patrons all over Europe. **Criterion vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and description

History

For over a thousand years the history of the island of Reichenau, which lies in the northern reaches of Lake Constance, was closely intertwined with that of the monastery.

The deed of foundation of the Benedictine abbey is dated 25 April 724. The first Abbot, Pirmin, probably from Meaux, was given the task of building a monastery in honour of the Virgin Mary and Saints Peter and Paul. Abbot Pirmin no doubt received endowments from the Alaman princes, although tradition established in the 12th century dated the

foundation back to the Carolingian ruler Charles Martel (714-41). Pirmin oversaw the building of the first abbey, a wooden building, at Mittelzell on the northern shore of the island, as well as a three-winged cloister against the north side of the church. The whole building was gradually rebuilt in stone by 746. The single nave of the church was considerably extended by a porch at one end and a rectangular choir at the other. The choir for the monks was separate from that of the laity.

From modest beginnings, the abbey prospered under the authority of abbots who served as counsellors on matters of church and state and as tutors, particularly to the Carolingian emperors Charlemagne (768-814) and Louis the Pious (814-40). The monastery, an ideal staging-post between Germany and Italy, enjoyed the protection of Carolingian and Othonian rulers. It received generous endowments of land and the island, an integral part of the abbey lands, was given over to agriculture. The monastery became a centre for teaching and creativity in literature (poet Walafrid Strabo served as abbot from 838 to 849), science (Hermann the Lame, 1013-54), and the arts (10th-11th century schools of illumination and wall paintings in particular) renowned far and wide.

On his return from a voyage to Byzantium, Abbot Heito had the abbey rebuilt as a cruciform basilica with three aisles in which the square form of the transept crossing is reflected in the whole. The main choir is made up of two apsidal hemicycles and a system of alternating supports was added to the nave. The new building was consecrated in 816. The monastic buildings were redesigned and their new disposition served as the model for the Plan of St Gall, the standard plan of a Benedictine abbey, produced at Reichenau in about 825.

His successor Abbot Erlebold (823-38) extended the church to the west. The arrival in 830 of the relics of St Mark the Evangelist, brought to the abbey by Bishop Ratolf of Verona, sparked a series of acquisitions of other relics and the creation of new altars. Abbot Heito III (888-913) replaced the antechurch with a square choir and a broad western transept flanked by two towers. The new western church was dedicated to St Mark. A round axial chapel of the Holy Cross was built to the east of the main choir which housed the relics of the Precious Blood. Heito's original church was altered around the year 1000, and again in the early 11th century when Abbot Bernon (1008-48) replaced the western portion with the present-day transept opening into an apse lodged within a rectangular tower. The church was consecrated on 24 April 1048, in the presence of the Emperor Henry III. A new nave was built in the 12th century and was given a new roof after a fire in 1235. To the east, a polygonal Gothic choir and a new sacristy replaced the chapel of the Holy Cross (1443-47). Much later, the church acquired a new rood-screen (1742) and a new sacristy (1779).

In the mid 15th century, a wall separated Mittelzell from the dwellings of the farmers, wine-growers, fishermen, and stewards that collected around the abbey. It came under the authority of the Bishops of Constance in 1542 and new monastery buildings were

constructed to the south of the church (around 1605-10).

At the western end of the island of Reichenau, Egino, a former Bishop of Verona, built the first church of St Peter at Niederzell, which was consecrated in 799. The church was twice rebuilt and slightly altered in the 9th-10th century, the apse being made larger and a porch being added to the nave. The monastery buildings lay to the north, fairly near the lake. In the late 11th-early 12th century the church with its three aisles and no transept was rebuilt and its two east towers were completed in the 15th century. Now dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, it became a parish church and was decorated in rococo style in the 18th century.

Abbot Heito III built the church of St George at Oberzell in the eastern part of the island in honour of the relic of the saint's head, which he brought back from a voyage to Rome in 896, the year of the church's consecration. The church was quickly rebuilt with three aisles, a raised crossing, a crypt, and a square choir. A century later the church was decorated with wall paintings and later, between the 10th century and the early 11th century, a large apse was built on the west side with a gateway and porch entrance. Several other changes were made over the centuries that followed: a tower was built over the crossing (1385), which was then given a vaulted roof (around 1435), the two side arms were converted into sacristies, the west apse was redecorated (1708), and the tall windows were enlarged.

In total 25 churches and chapels were built on the island. From the 14th and 15th centuries the island became home to communities of nuns. Most of these buildings, demolished in the 19th century following the secularization of the estate of the Bishop of Constance (1803), survive in the form of archaeological remains. The Abbey's manuscripts and archives were transferred to Karlsruhe and the University of Heidelberg library. The monastery's vineyards and farmland were parcelled out and sold off. Traditional agriculture such as the growing of grapes and peaches continued, while a hundred or so new houses were built between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century. In 1838-39 the island of Reichenau was linked to the mainland by a causeway and from the end of the 19th century it attracted numerous artists and intellectuals. Today the island's around 120 farms are given over primarily to vines, horticulture, and orchards.

Description

The nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List covers the island of Reichenau, the causeway linking the island to the mainland, and the chapel of Kindlebild with its enclosure at the mainland end of the causeway.

The island of Reichenau still possesses the three churches dating from the original monastic foundation. The former abbey of St Mary at Mittelzell features three aisles and opposed transepts. It retains its rectangular west tower decorated with *lésènes* and Lombard arcades, flanked by narrow porches and the

broad west transept dating from the mid 11th century. Beneath this high tower lies the apse, in front of which stands the altar (around 1470). An arcade supported by small columns enlivens the west wall of the transept, whose four polychrome semi-circular diaphragm arches mark the confines of the former choir of St Mark. The 12th century nave with its wooden roof (1236-1237) is separated from the side-aisles by broad arches standing on sturdy pillars. The nave opens out into the east transept whose crossing is defined by four identical broad arches and the liturgical choir of the church dedicated in 816, which are the oldest parts of the church. The flamboyant Gothic choir is flanked by a sacristy and treasury containing, amongst other items, several 14th and 15th century reliquaries.

The three wings of the monastery built early in the 17th century on the southern side of the church now house the town hall and the presbytery. Archaeological excavations have uncovered the foundation walls of the former churches and of the monastic buildings that once stood to the north of the church. The Ergat with the square in which the courts of justice were held and the half-timbered magistrate's house form the centre of the village of Mittelzell, which retains many other traces of the secular community that grew up around the medieval monastery, including the houses of the stewards along the Burgstrasse. Houses once occupied by the wine-growers and fishermen still stand, in isolation or grouped along the roadside, in other parts of the island, whose whole landscape is indelibly marked by the traditional activities of vine-growing and horticulture.

The church of St Peter and St Paul at Niedertzell (late 11th-early 12th century) is a Romanesque structure of three aisles culminating at the eastern end in three hemispherical apses concealed within a central block and flanked by two impressive bell-towers. The five-spanned nave is separated from the side-aisles by columns topped with capitals bearing geometric designs. The central apse retains fine wall paintings dating from between 1104 and 1134 laid out in three rows. A figure of Christ in Majesty in a mandorla is surrounded by symbols of the Evangelists, figures of the patron saints of the church, and cherubim. Above stands a row of Apostles and another of the Prophets. Other fragments of 12th century wall paintings survive, particularly in the north chapel where they represent the Passion Cycle. The arches of the three aisles were decorated in rococo style in the mid 18th century. Archaeological excavations in and around the church have unearthed remains of the first church and the monastic buildings.

In the church of St George at Oberzell a two-storey porch and a western apse dating from the early Romanesque period lead into the Carolingian church consisting of three aisles and a west choir of complex structure topped by a tower. A triumphal arch spans the platform of the choir, which is raised considerably to accommodate a crypt reached via two staircases. An inverted U-shaped corridor ends in a second corridor leading to the small square crypt where four columns support the rib vaulting over the altar. The east wall of

the crypt still shows two representations of Christ on the cross. The walls of the nave are decorated with remarkable early Mediaeval wall paintings depicting the miracles of Christ. Each of the scenes is framed by decorative bands while painted busts feature between the arches of the arcade and figures of the apostles between the windows. The chapel of St. Michael on the first floor of the porch is also decorated with wall paintings depicting the Last Supper.

There are also three manor-houses (Schopfeln, Bürgeln, and Königseck) built in the Middle Ages to accommodate visiting dignitaries and to defend the island. The Kindlebild chapel on the mainland stands on the former burial ground for children born on the island but who died before they could be baptized..

Management and protection

Legal status

Ownership of the religious buildings on the island of Reichenau is shared between a number of institutions. The Abbey of St Mary and the presbytery at Mittelzell belong to the parish of Our Lady, the town hall to the Town Council of Reichenau, the Church of St George to the Catholic Church of St George Fund, and the Church of St Peter and St Paul to the Catholic Church Fund. Most of the other buildings on the island are private property.

The three churches, the monastic buildings, and ten other buildings on the island were designated cultural monuments of outstanding value under the law for the protection of cultural monuments of the *Land of Baden-Württemberg (Denkmalschutzgesetz Baden-Württemberg)* of 25 May 1971, revised on 6 December 1983). The same law protects seventy other properties as designated cultural monuments. Under the terms of the law, any construction project or modification to a cultural monument must be submitted to the Administration for the Protection of Historic Monuments of Baden-Württemberg (Freiburg im Breisgau Division) which is represented at local level by the District of Constance Administration. Cultural monuments of outstanding value enjoy further protection from being listed on the inventory of monuments (*Denkmaltbuch*), which covers any reconstruction or extension of such monuments. In this case approval must be sought for any project affecting the surroundings of a listed monument, if these surroundings are of particular importance to the monument. Protection of property owned by the *Land of Baden-Württemberg* is the responsibility of the *Regierungspräsidium* of Freiburg in conjunction with the Federal Property Administration.

Several sectors of the island of Reichenau (some 230ha out of a total area of 460ha) were designated nature reserves under the Nature Conservation Law of Baden-Württemberg (*Naturschutzgesetz Baden-Württemberg*) of 21 October 1975. In addition, the Federal Nature Conservation Law (*Bundesnaturschutzgesetz*) of 21 September 1998 protects landscapes of historic cultural interest, which

includes the surroundings of listed monuments. The provisions of the Building Law (*Baugesetzbuch* of 27 August 1997) regarding nature conservation and the protection of landscapes and monuments apply to several sensitive sections of the island, while the building regulations of the *Land* of Baden-Württemberg (*Landesbauordnung für Baden-Württemberg* of 8 August 1995) apply to the whole of the island.

The various development plans for the Municipality of Reichenau (1975), the District of Constance (1983), and the Regional Plan 2000 (1998) lay down stringent restrictions on the development of new building, designed to encourage the preservation of the traditional organization of the landscape.

The situation of the island of Reichenau in the middle of the northern reaches of Lake Constance guarantees an adequate buffer zone. In addition, the lake shores at this point (Gnadensee, Zellersee, and Untersee) are protected by both German and Swiss nature conservation and planning permission legislation.

Management

The active and ongoing policy pursued by the administrations responsible for the protection of historic monuments, nature conservation, and planning permission under the terms of the legal provisions in place correspond perfectly to the requirements to be legitimately expected of a prescribed management plan. The policy ensures state control over the conservation of the cultural and natural assets on the island of Reichenau and uninterrupted implementation of the necessary conservation and restoration measures. The State Administration for the Protection of Historic Monuments is staffed by highly competent personnel, guaranteeing the professional level of design and execution of all the necessary conservation measures required for an appropriate management plan.

The publication of recent university research on the cultural and historic resonance of Reichenau and its monuments is a further contribution to the preservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage of the monastic island of Reichenau.

Conservation and authenticity

Conservation history

The state of conservation of the monuments making up the nomination for inscription is very good overall. The medieval paintings, extremely vulnerable by reason of their fragility, have been restored recently using all the latest techniques and materials to guarantee their conservation. This project also provided an opportunity for carrying out research and establishing an exemplary body of documentation.

Authenticity

The issue of the authenticity of the monuments on the island of Reichenau raises the delicate and complex problem of historical monuments in general, that of evaluating the various stages of construction and invasive restoration practices.

Since 20th century art historians and professional conservationists began showing a particular interest in the early phases of construction of the three churches on the island of Reichenau, which date back to the early Middle Ages, the medieval-style reconstructions characteristic of the last century so detrimental to the Renaissance and Baroque additions, have largely been eliminated. The practice has therefore reduced the complex historic stratification of these buildings, particularly their interiors. The architectural surfaces have been entirely renovated and simplified, a fact which therefore does not differentiate the Reichenau churches from the conventional image of medieval church architecture. The authenticity of the remarkable wall paintings to be found in the churches is, however, a very positive element.

As regards the integrity of the island of Reichenau in its entirety (traditional landscape structures, image of the landscape, historic disposition of buildings, etc.), the situation at the time of secularization in the 18th century is of particular significance.

The dispersal of buildings across the island, a legacy of the socio-economic structure of the Middle Ages, has shaped the image of the entire foundation. The clusters of dwellings do not constitute real groups of buildings, a characteristic that persisted even after secularization and the spate of building that followed World War II. The secular architecture is dominated by the new appearance of certain modifications and/or contemporary constructions. Any original structure that survives has been highlighted or is accessible to architectural research. Nature conservation sites designated to separate sectors of recent construction from agricultural land (now given over largely to hothouses) help to give an idea of the original aspect of the island.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Reichenau in February 2000.

Qualities

The remains of the monastic foundation on the island of Reichenau, the result of successive alterations to the monastic structure, bear witness in their variety to an uninterrupted religious, cultural, political, and socio-economic function throughout the pre-Romanesque period. The three churches of St Mary, St Peter and St Paul, and St George illustrate monastic architectural styles of the Carolingian, Othonian, and Salian periods, as do also the wall painting of the 10th-12th centuries. The Monastery of Reichenau is a typical example of the great Benedictine monastery, a centre of art and learning, with its library, scriptorium, and school of wall painting.

Comparative analysis

No significant comparison may be made elsewhere in Europe north of the Alps with the monastic island of Reichenau. On the whole island, which formed part of the monastic estate until 1757, three outstanding

examples of churches in the monastic architectural style of the 9th and 11th centuries, together with secular buildings close to land devoted to agricultural production.

The monastic island of Reichenau was in the 8th-11th centuries one of the cultural and artistic centres of the German Holy Roman Empire, over which it exercised considerable influence. The abbots, men of letters, and artistes who lived at the monastery of Reichenau made considerable contributions to the political, spiritual, and artistic life of the period.

Brief description

The island of Reichenau on Lake Constance preserves the traces of a Benedictine monastery, founded in 724, which exerted a remarkable spiritual, intellectual and influence. The churches of St Mary, St Peter and St Paul, and St George, built between the 9th and 11th centuries, provide a panorama of early medieval monastic architecture in central Europe. The wall paintings with which they are adorned bear witness to formidable artistic activity.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, iv, and vi*:

Criterion iii The remains of the Reichenau foundation bear outstanding witness to the religious and cultural role of a great Benedictine monastery in the early Middle Ages.

Criterion iv The churches on the island of Reichenau retain remarkable elements of several stages of construction and thus offer outstanding examples of monastic architecture in Central Europe from the 9th to the 11th century.

Criterion vi The monastery of Reichenau was a highly significant artistic centre of great significance to the history of art in Europe in the 10th and 11th centuries, as is superbly illustrated by its monumental wall paintings and its illuminations.

ICOMOS, September 2000