

GERMANY

Pilgrimage Church of Wies

Brief description

Miraculously preserved in the beautiful setting of an Alpine valley, the Church of Wies (1745–54), the work of architect Dominikus Zimmermann, is a masterpiece of Bavarian Rococo – exuberant, colourful and joyful.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1983

Agency responsible for site management

- Bavarian State Ministry for Science, Research and Art
Salvatorstr. 2
D - 80327 München
- State Construction Office Weilheim
Pollingerstr. 8
D - 82362 Weilheim

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i), (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

(1) A unique feature is the harmony between art and the countryside. In this sparsely settled area, in complete solitude, it was possible for a religious and architectural idea to be realized unhindered.

(2) Wies church was and is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in southern Germany, also attracting pilgrims from the neighbouring countries. It is therefore of outstanding significance for cultural and religious history as well as ethnology.

(3) In the long and impressive list of magnificent baroque and rococo churches in southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland, Wies church constitutes the most mature and sophisticated achievement and the culmination of the artistic principles of rococo style: "The objective of this kind of architecture is to erase from memory everything architecture used to be: solid materials, definite form, separation of interior and exterior." (Professor Hermann Bauer, -Munich 1973)

(4) All art forms and techniques used - architecture, sculpture, painting, stucco work, carving, ironwork, etc. - were welded by the architect into a perfect, pervasive whole, in order to create a diaphanous spatial structure of light and form: "The forms, materials, light and colours form a whole which has seldom been achieved to this degree in the history of art, and lead to the sublimation of the architecture and its transformation into colourful brilliance." (Professor Bauer)

(5) This structure, however, is only the expression of a complicated theological iconography, only "the structural image of a certain theme rooted in the image of the Saviour: the passion as the redeeming sacrifice for the sins of man. In the choir fresco the instruments of suffering borne by Christ constitute a pledge of redemption by God the Father: the fruits of His sacrifice are shun in the frescoes in the choir ambulatory (the miraculous healing of body and soul). In the ambulatory of the main building there are depictions of penitent sinners from the New Testament. The large fresco in the main building depicts the Last Judgement, which has not yet begun: Mary, Michael, the trumpeting angels and the Apostles are already assembled, and the books of life and death, have been opened. But the judge's throne is empty, Christ appears on the symbol of the covenant, the rainbow - there is still time! Thus this optimistic whole is revealed as an architectural and painted vision of the forthcoming judgement, as an appeal to the pilgrim to repent in the face of the Scourged Saviour." (Professor Hermann Bauer, Munich 1973)

As provided in ICOMOS/IUCN evaluation

The prodigious stucco decoration is the work of Dominikus Zimmermann, assisted by his brother Johann Baptist, who was the painter of the Elector of Bavaria, Max-Emmanuel from 1720. The lively colors of the paintings bring out the sculpted detail and, in the upper zones, the frescoes and stuccowork interpenetrate to produce a light and living decor of an unprecedented richness and refinement, The abundance of motifs and of figures, the movement of the lines, the skilful opening of surfaces and the "lights" continually offer the observer fresh surprises.

The ceilings, painted as trompe-l'oeil, appear to open on an iridescent sky, across which angles fly; these, too, contribute to the lightness of the whole. Moreover, the preservation is perfect: the colors have retained all of their freshness and nothing is lacking in the rococo whole which is Wies: with its splendid asymmetrical ironwork of the choir, its pews of sculpted wood for the faithful, its pulpit, and

its elegant and amply modelled saints which inhabit the architecture.

The sanctuary of Wies, pilgrimage church constructed in the open country side, a perfect masterpiece of rococo art, responds fully to two of the criteria necessary for inscription on the World Heritage List: Criterion I (masterpiece of creative genius) and criterion III (exceptional testimony to a civilization which has disappeared).

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No change required

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- With a view to guaranteeing the protection and maintenance of the value of the Pilgrimage Church of Wies, the Bavarian State Ministry for Science, Research and Art together with the State Construction Office Weilheim, the Steingaden municipality, the Weilheim-Schongau Country District Commissioner, Schongau branch, the Land Office for the Conservation of Monuments and the Pilgrimage Priest all agreed upon establishing a buffer zone in 2005/2006 which can be defined in a statute

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Law on the Protection of Monuments: prohibition of change pursuant to Article 6; Land Use Plan: definition of the area surrounding the Pilgrimage Church of Wies as agricultural land
- The protection arrangements are considered highly effective

Actions proposed:

- Definition of a bufferzone: there are moves to establish a buffer zone in 2005. This is to be defined in a local statute of Steingaden municipality to prevent also the construction of agricultural buildings which could impinge upon the harmony between the Pilgrimage Church

and the surrounding landscape. Timeframe: 2005

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Religious use

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group: Pilgrimage Church Foundation (Wallfahrtskuratiekirchenstiftung) St Joseph Wies/Pilgrimage Church of Wies Tours; General administration (with the exception of construction issues) – Tours by the tourism association or other institutions have to be registered with and authorized by the priest. Construction issues are dealt with by the State Construction Office Weilheim in coordination with the steering group
- Overall management system: management by the State Party; management under protective legislation; consensual management; priest and his staff
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional; local; Land Office for the Conservation of Monuments, State Construction Office Weilheim
- The current management system is highly effective

5. Management Plan

- No management plan
- Management plan to be completed by January 2006

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State Budget (Ministry of Culture for building work); funding from the church congregation if surpluses are available; financing of the church congregation for management
- Sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 7

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: management, interpretation, education, visitor management
- Good: conservation, promotion

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Training from the Supreme Building Authority in the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior; Specialist associations (i.e. church painters); Courses offered by the Diocese of Augsburg on how to conduct church tours

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 800,000 in 2003, increased in 2004 (250th anniversary of Wies)
- Visitor facilities: car-park, restaurant, kiosk, church services, pilgrimages, tours, concerts
- Visitor needs: larger car-park; pilgrims room for lectures; a monastery shop
- Tourism/visitor management plan for site

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, visitor management
- Studies used for following issues: overflight interdiction issued for the Pilgrimage Church of Wies and low-flying aircrafts re-routed; regular building controls by the State Construction Office Weilheim; Condition surveys - implementation of results when carrying out restoration work

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: road signs with UNESCO and World Heritage emblem (talks to this end will be held in 2005/2006)
- Exhibitions
- Web site available: www.wieskirche.de
- Local participation

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Restoration of the interior and parts of the exterior; first restoration of the entire Pilgrimage Church carried in 1903 to 1907
- Present state of conservation: very good

Threats and Risks to site

- Visitor/tourism pressure
- Specific issues: large numbers of visitors bring dirt, dampness and heat into the church
- Emergency measures taken: Visitor guidance - planned actions to be outlined in management plan (timeframe: 2006)

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken: regular building controls

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social, economic, management
- Strengths of management: restoration of the interior and maintenance of part of the exterior of the Pilgrimage Church between 1985 and 1991. The church is in a perfect state of repair
- Future actions not provided