

GERMANY

St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim

Brief description

St Michael's Church was built between 1010 and 1020 on a symmetrical plan with two apses that was characteristic of Ottonian Romanesque art in Old Saxony. Its interior, in particular the wooden ceiling and painted stucco-work, its famous bronze doors and the Bernward bronze column, are – together with the treasures of St Mary's Cathedral – of exceptional interest as examples of the Romanesque churches of the Holy Roman Empire.

1. Introduction

Year of Inscription 1985

Agency responsible for site management

- Land Lower Saxony
Niedersächsisches Ministerium
für Wissenschaft und Kultur
Leibnizufer 93
D - 0169 Hannover
website: www.mwk.niedersachsen.de

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i), (ii), (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

The former abbey of St. Michael's with the bronze casting, which once formed part of the original structure and is now preserved in the Cathedral, constitutes a zenith of early 11th century art in Germany. It is closely linked with the figure of St. Bernward, canonized in 1193, who was of great importance as the tutor of Otto III, as Bishop of Hildesheim, as a patron of the arts and perhaps as an artist himself.

St. Michael's is one of the rare major constructions in Europe around the turn of the millennium which still conveys a unified impression of artistry, without having undergone any substantial mutilations or decisive transformations in detailed and basic structures. The harmony of the interior structure and of the solid exterior is an exceptional achievement in architecture of the period. The geometrically manifest structure of the horizontal

and vertical proportions and the rhythmic composition of all the various sections of the construction form a harmonious unit. This basis serves as the origin for the "singled-cut crossing", a highly successful innovation, and the "metrical system" of alternating columns and piers. The convincing frontality conveyed by the exterior and the inclusion of a system of cushion capitals in the interior derive from the same artistic desire to create a harmonious and coherent unity. The significance of this creation was first expressed in detail by Paul Francke in 1926 and has been stressed again since its destruction of the Second World War by Eberhard Hempel, Nicolaus Pevsner and Kenneth John Conant. All the assets referred to have survived in authentic material form. Reconstructions and additions which have been made to improve the visual impact of the building and its use are very limited in quantity and warrantable in quality.

The monumental painting on the flat wooden deck portraying the tree of Jesse and dating from the second quarter of the 13th century, though to be seen in a different context and contributing only in part to the value of the interior, is, after the loss of similar works, unique in Europe.

The bronze doors and column testify with equal magnificence to the technical perfection of the period after the turn of the millennium and constitute zeniths in European monumental sculpture. Whereas the doors are part of a solid tradition, the form of the triumphal column derives its inspiration from Antiquity.

In conclusion, inclusion is justified by the historical significance of St. Bernward, the artistic and architectural importance of the works linked with his name, the exemplary character of these works for German art between 1000 and 1025 and in their qualitative importance in European art of this period.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

May 1982: Taking into account that St. Michael of Hildesheim has undergone a radical restoration following the severe destructions of World War II and that the Committee of the World Heritage Convention, at the time of its meeting in Sydney (1981), asked both ICOMOS and IUCN to be more restrictive in their evaluations, the board of ICOMOS has decided to recommend the rejection of the request for inscription, in its present form.

July 1985: The Church of St. Michael and the Cathedral contain an exceptional series of elements of interior decoration that together are quite unique for the perception and knowledge of dispositions used during the Romanesque era.

First of all come the bronze doors dating back to 1015, retracing the events from the book of Genesis and the life of Christ and the bronze column, ca. 1020 whose spiral decor, inspired by the Column of Trajan, depicts scenes from the New Testament. These two exceptional castings, the first of this size since Antiquity, were commissioned by Bishop Bernward for St. Michael's. They are now preserved in the Cathedral.

Next, only remarking the most important, come the corona of light of Bishop Hezilon (1054-1079) and the baptismal fonts of gold-plated bronze of Bishop Conrad (ca. 1225-1230) in the Cathedral.

Lastly, at St. Michael's, come the painted stuccos of the choir screen and especially the amazing ceiling, 27.6m long and 8.7m wide depicting the Tree of Jesse, covering the nave. These two works were carried out after the canonization of St. Bernward in 1192, the stuccos at the very end of the 12th century and the ceiling ca. 1130. The ceiling with its 1300 pieces of wood is the only remaining example, along with that of Zillis, of an extremely vulnerable structure. It was saved thanks to its removal in 1943.

ICOMOS, which after having, in 1982, voiced serious reservations as to the form of the proposal for the inclusion of Hildesheim on the World Heritage List, expresses its unmitigated agreement with the new nomination.

St. Michael's and St. Mary's of Hildesheim deserve to be included on the World Heritage List for various reasons:

-criterion I: "represent a unique artistic achievement" (this criterion is especially valid for the Bernward bronzes and the ceiling)

-criterion II: "have exerted great influence (...) on developments in architecture", this criterion being especially valid for St. Michael's

-criterion III: "bear an exceptional testimony to a civilization which has disappeared". These two edifices and their artistic treasures afford better overall and more immediate understanding than any other decoration in Romanesque churches in the Christian West.

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- Further work needed

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- No special legislation or administrative arrangements
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction, religious use

Management /Administrative Body

- No steering group
- Overall management system: management under protective legislation
- No site manager/coordinator
- Site manager/coordinator needed but not plans made
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional; local; Hildesheim Cathedral Chapter, Amt für Bau- und Kunstdenkmalpflege der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Landeskirche Hannover
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- No management plan

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Federal Republic of Germany, Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Hannover
Land Lower Saxony, Hildesheim Cathedral Chapter, Hanover Monastery Chamber

(Klosterkammer Hannover), various foundations in Hildesheim and Lower Saxony, Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz State Budget; etc.

- Sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 0

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

- Good: conservation, management, interpretation, education
- Average: promotion, visitor management

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

- Hildesheim Technical University (Fachhochschule Hildesheim); Lower Saxony Office for the Conservation of Monuments (Niedersächsisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege); Braunschweig Technical University (Technische Universität Braunschweig)

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 200,000 (Number of visitors to the cloister), 2003. Trend: steady
- Visitor facilities: tour of the cloister with entry fee, tour of the cathedral free, cathedral museum with entry fee; visitor information centre; cathedral museum with an exhibition of the cathedral treasures, works of art from the Diocese of Hildesheim and special exhibitions

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to values of the site, condition survey, archaeological surveys
- The studies are part of the conservation and maintenance work of the site

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- No signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem not used on publications
- No adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities

- Measures needed: general information, specific publications, establishment of a visitor centre
- No heritage days

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- St Mary: maintenance work; larger-scale renovation planned from 2005
- St Michael: 2004 - 2007: complete renovation
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- No issues mentioned

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, public awareness
- Weaknesses of management: lack of coordination
- Future actions: not provided