



CISTERSCAPES

connecting Europe



INFOCENTRE
in the Ebrach Orangery



CISTERSCAPES

connecting Europe

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WELCOME TO THE ORANGERY OF EBRACH ABBEY!



Illustrations by Johann Christoph Volkamer: Nürnbergische Hesperides, Nürnberg, 1708 [Bavarian State Library Munich VD18 14760916-001], pp. 51, 38.

Orangeries

Anyone who was anyone in the Baroque period needed an orangery in their garden. Great effort was made to cultivate exotic plants and display their fruits.

In order to overwinter them here, they needed a frost-free and bright location. Special buildings called orangeries were built for this purpose.



Ricciardo Meacci, Garden of the Hesperides 1894.

'Hesperidia'

Citrus trees were particularly popular. They were not only an exciting addition to the baroque table, they also appear in ancient heroic epics and were therefore a welcome reference to the classical education of their keepers. Citrus fruits were named 'Hesperides' after nymphs in Greek mythology who guarded the tree with golden apples in their garden.



Citrus plants are also simply a feast for the senses! They bear both flowers and fruit between their evergreen foliage. Their fragrance is said to revitalise the spirit and lift the mood.

In our information centre in the former Ebrach Orangery you can discover old citrus varieties again today.

We wish you an enjoyable visit!

The European Heritage Label

is awarded to cultural sites with
a specifically European character.

Since April 2024, Cisterscapes are been one of 67 such
sites of European identity



These sites ...

- ... embody the diversity of European cultural heritage
- ... convey knowledge about the history of Europe
- ... shed light on the development of the Union's common values
- ... have a cross-border character



CISTERCIAN LANDSCAPES CONNECT EUROPE

The Cistercians combined religious ideals with up to date science and agricultural practice. They developed cultural landscapes across the continent, spreading technical and cultural innovations.

Today, 17 monastic landscapes from 5 countries work together as the Cisterscapes network.

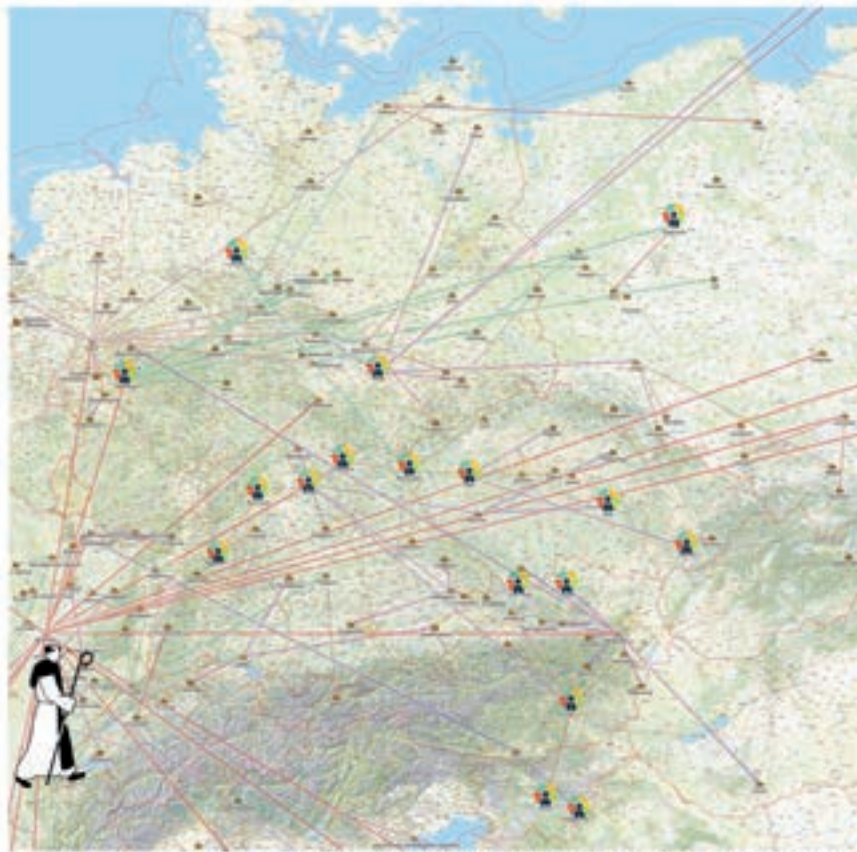


Here is an interactive map of all current sites:





A European network in the High Middle Ages?



Illustrations - Title: Cistercians found new monasteries. Expositio in Apocalypsin 1271, Cambridge University Library Ms. mm 5.31 fol. 113.
Map: Monasteries of the Morimond Filiation in Europe (excerpt), BEV, Bergles at 2008, 2015 GIS processing; Gurnzelmann/Kerthmler, BUID; processing 2024: Karl

Daughter & mother abbeys

The Cistercians (* 1098) spread quickly throughout Europe. By 1300 there were already 742 abbeys!

Each Cistercian monastery founds new daughters (filiation). This creates a network of related monasteries that visit each other regularly (visitation).

They exchange knowledge, experts, technical innovations and even plants. All Cistercians monasteries descend from a common 'mother', the primary abbey of Morimond.

Originally, all abbots met once a year in the order's original monastery in Cîteaux.

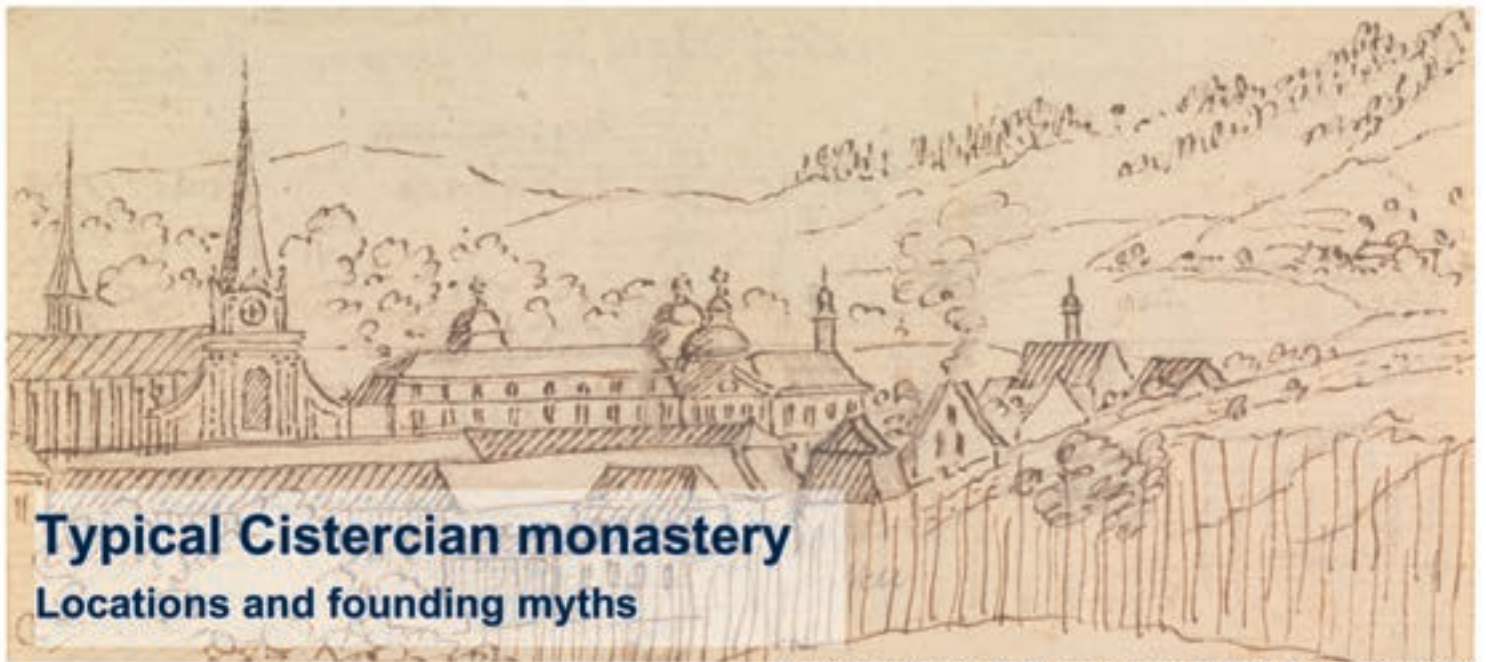
THE CISTERCIAN WAY

A new European long-distance hiking trail follows in the footsteps of the monks. It connects the 17 Cistercianscapes landscapes on three main routes totaling almost 6,500 km and continues into Burgundy in France.



Discover our Cistercian hikes online!





View from Frankenthaler Weg to Langheim Monastery. Sketch by Konrad Geiger 1792
Bamberg State Library (IP 82h), photo: Gerald Raab, edited by R. Karl

Typical Cistercian monastery

Locations and founding myths

The Cistercians describe the sites they chose for their foundations uniformly as 'places of horror and desolate loneliness'.

Founding legends reinforce the myth of the untouched, inhospitable wilderness that the monks turn into a flourishing landscape.



Monasteries may not be built in cities, fortified towns and villages

The monasteries were located in the middle of large forests. It was not uncommon for the monks to create this 'forest solitude' themselves after existing settlements had been desettled.

The myth of wilderness also includes the typical representation as a woodcutting order wielding axes.



The monasteries were located in the valley floor. These were waterlogged, difficult locations. Hydraulic engineering transformed this disadvantage into a valuable resource through canals, mills and ponds.

Cistercian monasteries were often located on territorial borders and never too far from central trade routes. In the surrounding settlement centres, the abbeys maintained town farms for the marketing of the surpluses from the monasteries' own economy.





Illustration:
Q-Initial, Dijon Municipal
Library, MS 170, 75v.



As a reform order, the Cistercians refer to the Rule of St. Benedict. They interpret his instruction, "Pray and work!" particularly strictly. They understand it as a commandment of self-sufficiency. The abbeys had to produce everything they needed themselves.

To run this economy they were dependent on lay monks who took over the heavy physical work from the choir monks.

Hydraulic engineering

City courts

Canals & Mills,

Path networks

Pond farming

Pilgrimages

Monasteries & Official seats

Forests

Quarries & Brickworks

Agriculture in granges (specialized large farms)

Hop cultivation & breweries

Fruit-, Vegetable- and viticulture



Ebrach Monastic Landscape

How did the Cistercians come from France to Franconia?

To establish a monastery, one needed not only the goodwill of the responsible bishop, but also local nobility who donated land. Morimond was staffed with monks from the German (high) nobility. It is obvious that the early foundations turned to where the monks had connections. Ebrach was founded in 1127 - the 'mother' Morimond was 10 years old - as the first Cistercian monastery to the right of the Rhine. The Cistercians had excellent connections with the secular and spiritual nobility. The founding abbot of Ebrach, Adam, was in contact with Bernard of Clairvaux, the most famous and influential of all Cistercians.



Wilderness or what?



Coming from Morimond, Adam and his twelve brothers travelled through the impassable forest and rested in the valley of the Ebrach when suddenly a huge boar burst out of the undergrowth, snatched the abbot's staff from Adam and disappeared into the forest. The monks immediately set out to pursue it, whereupon the wild boar dropped the staff at a lively stream. The monks took this event as a divine sign and decided to build the monastery on this spot.



In the valley of the Middle Ebrach, Adam and his monks found themselves not only in the 'wild' Steigerwald, but also in the midst of the tension between two dioceses.

Since the founding of Bamberg in 1007, Würzburg was entitled to compensation. In this context, the King transferred the game ban over the Steigerwald to Würzburg in 1023.

Cistercian monasteries are often located on the borders of territories. They are apt to settle them.

The monastery grounds were donated by a nobleman named Berno, together with his siblings Richwin and Bertrade. Often, donors entered 'their' monastery as lay brothers. Numerous donations and acquisitions soon expanded the area of Ebrach Abbey into its own territory with 'Mönchgau' and 'Möncheigen'.

In any case, it was not a "wild, deserted region, indeed [...] a den of robbers", as Abbot Söllner put it in the 18th century.

Ebrach Monastic Landscape

The location of the monastery was well chosen - whether through the divinely inspired boar, through the wise abbot Adam or through regional and national networks...

The valley of the middle Ebrach has a large water catchment area. In addition to all direct uses, water was the most important source of energy well into modern times. Wherever a lot of power was needed, mills were built.

Important traffic arteries ran in the immediate vicinity (for example the Hohe Straße from Würzburg to Bamberg). There were rich stone deposits and forests right next to the monastery construction site. Several settlements in the area were part of the donation.

In short: building materials, workers and good transport links were available in the ascetic, lonely valley location.



Villages to granges

In the area around Ebrach, there are several settlements that were described as abandoned after the arrival of the monks. For example, Bergtheim, Rombach, Kaltenklingen or Horbei. These deserted areas were sometimes replaced by the monastery's granges. One example of this is the Winkelhof, which emerged from Winkele settlement.

Whether such desettlements were carried out systematically, in the sense of a 'farmers' displacement', cannot be determined from the sources. What is striking, however, is the frequency of such occurrences in the vicinity of Cistercian land.



Innovations in agriculture

With the Cistercians, cultural techniques such as the wheeled plough and three-field farming also spread.

Agricultural activities are also often portrayed. They are part of the order's self-image.



The monastery as capital

Beginnings

We do not know whether the endowment of the nobleman Berno included buildings or how the first monks lived while they were building the Abbey. There was probably a small wooden church during the founding phase. As early as 1137, seven years after the monastery was founded, the first stone church was consecrated by the Bishop of Würzburg.

Construction of St. Michael's Chapel, which still stands today, began in 1200. It had a cruciform floor plan and an impressive size, but was nonetheless intended as a temporary solution.

The foundation stones of today's monastery church were laid in the same year. St. Michael's Chapel was consecrated in 1207. The large Gothic basilica was completed in 1285.



The church is certainly the most important building in a monastery, but a Cistercian monastery was a self-sufficient community. It was therefore simultaneously a spiritual center, an agricultural and craft production facility, an administrative center and a trading office. All of these functions are reflected in the buildings of a monastery. Here you will find barns, workshops, sheds, warehouses as well as a library, dormitory, kitchen, refectory and cloister. We only know the medieval monastery from a few images of dubious accuracy.



The Abbot as lord?

The monastery's property grows through donations and purchases. Largely closed territories are formed in which the abbey concentrates as many rights as possible. Regional administrative centers, the official seats, are established to exercise this rule.

Representatives of the monastery are present at those seats. The subjects pay their due there. They are also seats of justice.

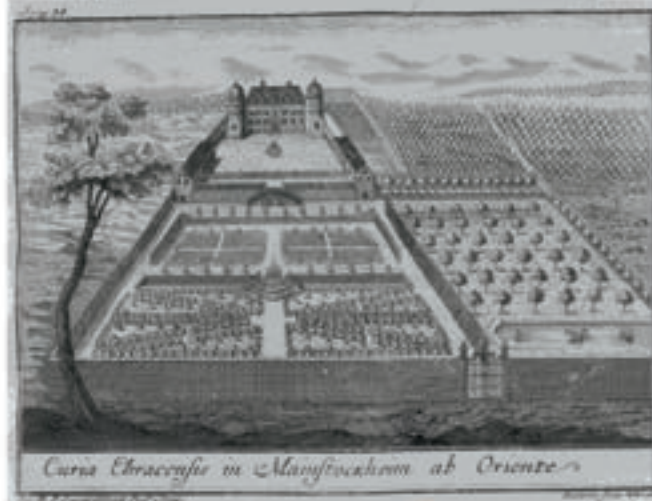
To the east of Ebrach in the direction of Bamberg, for example, this was *Mönchherrnsdorf* (roughly translating as *Monch-lord-place*) until the official seat was moved to the important pilgrimage site of Burgwindheim. Together with the town courts, the official seats are the most important representations of the monastery. Today, people mostly talk about official palaces. It quickly becomes clear why when you look at the architecture.

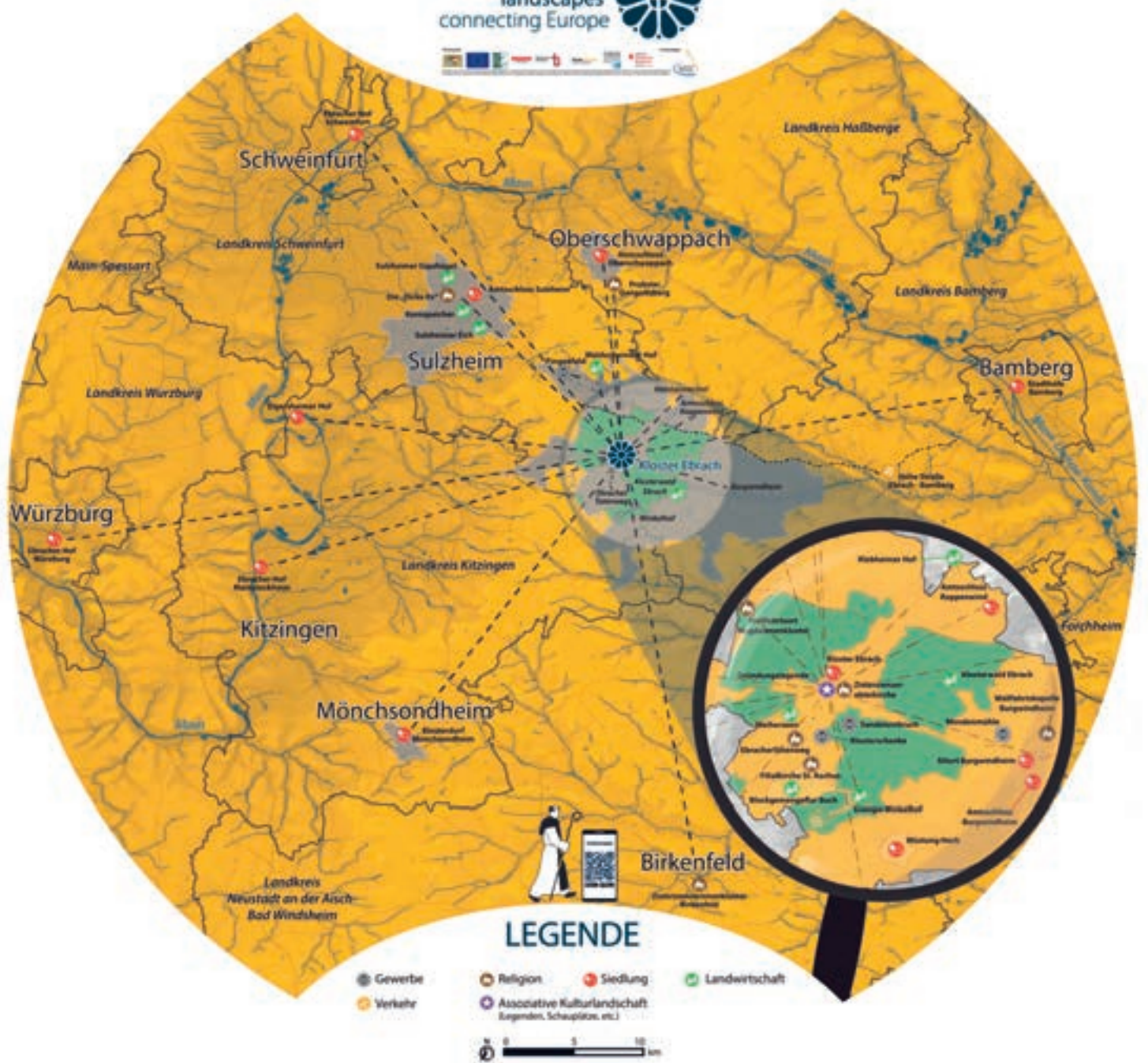
Around 1700, not only the main town of Ebrach and the monastery complex were refashioned by the most renowned Baroque architects, but all of the official courts were also converted into representative Baroque palaces with corresponding gardens.

All of this was not done for aesthetic reasons alone. Rather, the buildings and the copperplate engravings made of them served as evidence of the de facto existence of the legally desired imperial immediacy of the abbey.

It was not for nothing that the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg, Friedrich Karl von Schönborn, who was the official overlord of Ebrach, had Abbot Söllner's "Short History of Ebrach Abbey", which also contained the copperplate engravings, publicly burned in Würzburg.

Söllner's description of the Ebrach site as pure 'wilderness' and 'den of thieves' until the monks took over the area is not only a projection of the Cistercian wilderness myth. It also deliberately conceals older rights and structures.





Want to discover more of the monastic Landscape of Ebrach?

Just download our FREE app and find information about its central sites. By the way: The map above has augmented reality elements if you activate it with our app. See the central buildings and structures in 3D.

Or discover our local rounds and hiking tours

