

**MELK BENEDICTINE ABBEY**

**Melk Abbey** is a **Benedictine abbey** above the town of **Melk, Lower Austria, Austria**, on a rocky outcrop overlooking the **Danube** river, adjoining the **Dachau** valley

The abbey contains the remains of several members of the House of Babenberg, Austria's first ruling dynasty. Today's Baroque abbey was built between 1702 and 1736.

Particularly noteworthy are the abbey church with frescos and the library with countless medieval manuscripts.





































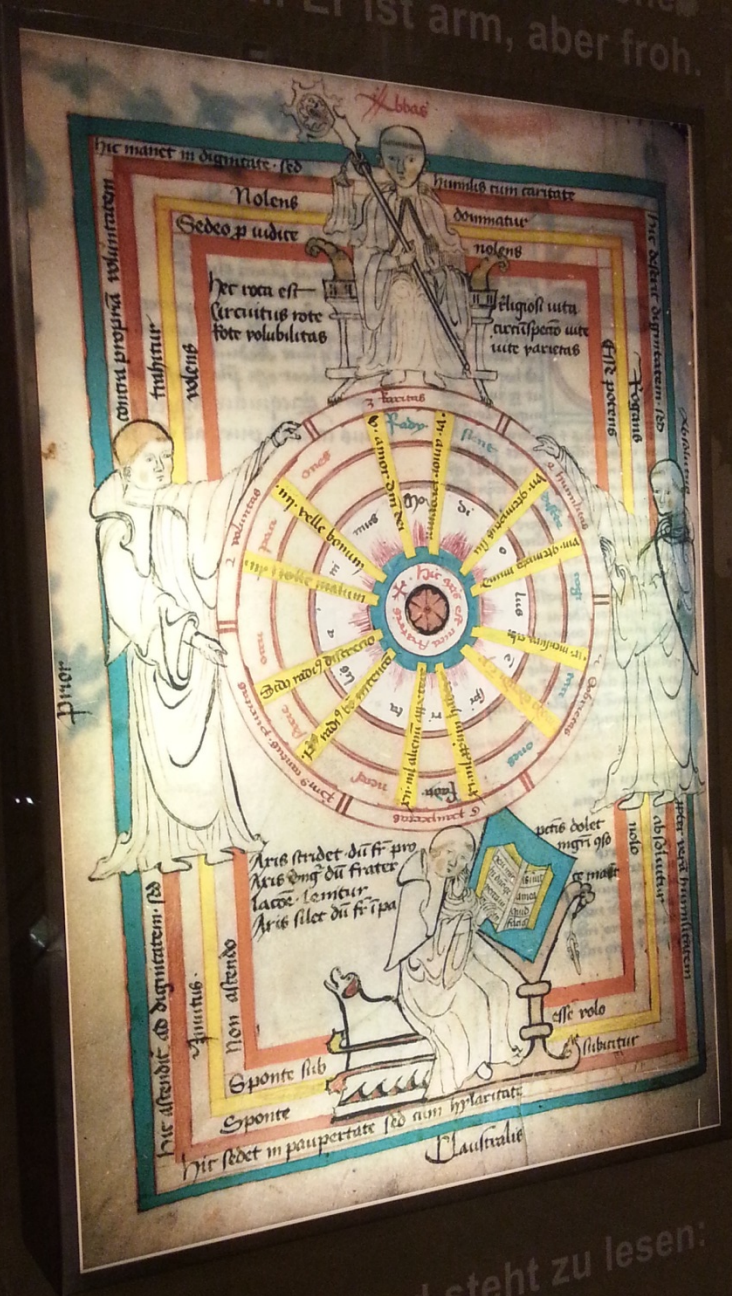












Unter dem Rad steht zu lesen:  
Die Achse (axis) knarrt,  
der wegen seiner







## H E A V E N       O N       E A R T H

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Austrian Church was once again strong. Only in this way was it able to thwart the great Turkish threat (siege of Vienna 1683). A very lively faith had brought strength and was able to develop after having proved itself. The people of this time were happy to know the proximity of their God. Since they also knew about human suffering and had to endure it, they assailed God with their prayers: an almost physical piety sought God's blessing and assistance and redemption for one's transgressions (brotherhoods of prayer, veneration of relics, pilgrimages). Man had something he could hold on to.

Monasteries had become important crystallization points of spiritual, cultural and church life: science and art flourished. An art form developed that on the one hand was very human: it showed joy in splendor, in large forms, in color, in everything that was simply beautiful and good. On the other hand this art wanted to glorify and be like that which was the living center of the lives of these men.

## T H E   W H O L E   P E R S O N

Once again one-sidedness, in this case the emphasis on human reason, was to start processes which were intended to separate something integral. There are so many aspects to human beings that are all important. Faithful inwardness gave way to a well-organized devoutness, which, however, could not stand up to an increasingly atheistic and secularized world. These thoughts penetrated deeply into Austria's monasteries, which, contrary to German developments, had not all been dissolved. The number of monasteries was reduced, but many continued to exist.

In Austria's monasteries the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a deeply liberal position; monks had become "Sirs" of the monastery. New life was able to come into the monasteries only slowly and with great difficulty. It became clear that living faith fulfills the reason and heart of man, that institution must be supported by inwardness, that the whole human being is more important than individual aspects. This whole person in his ups and downs lives from faith, fulfills his duties, is culturally effective, and sees his economic and social relationships. He knows his limits, knows he has not yet achieved his goal, but perceives himself as on the way to this goal. He is open to his God.

In 11 steps, the nearly complete image of a human body appears gradually in this room. The 12<sup>th</sup> step, which is man in his entirety, is the visitor himself.



## THE PATH TO THE FUTURE

In the revelation of the Old and New Testaments it became clear that there is a God who is **there**, who lives, who is with man on his journey. Through Jesus Christ it became clear that this God is a merciful God, who guides man on his way, is near him in joy and sorrow, who always gives a new beginning. The church has spread this joyous message through the centuries. **There have been right and wrong ways, times of well-being and disaster. Yet again and again we realize: God is a God of life, a God who wants human well-being, who is with him on his way, who walks with him.**

Jörg Breu (1502) and Arnulf Rainer (1966): the Middle Ages and the present, today and tomorrow.

**In this way the Benedictine community in Melk has continued on its way for 900 years. In this way they move down the path that the Lord shows them. It is the path of faith, that searches for God in everyday life, and through which this community has sought to live for over 900 years.**

## THE CITY ON THE MOUNTAIN

Benedict of Nursia built a monastery in Monte Cassino in 529 - on a mountain: the city on the mountain, which cannot remain hidden. He states in his rule that the monastic community should live in a fixed place, clearly defined and fenced off. The Benedictines have their own vow, that of "stabilitas loci", constancy of location.

These monasteries with churches, libraries, guest wings, and working and living quarters for the monks soon became artistically highly valuable buildings through the monks' work.

Instead of the castle there was soon a Romanesque building, which was then replaced by a Gothic monastery. Then Abbot Berthold Dietmayr (1700-1739) began with the current Baroque building. The abbot worked towards his goal with great cleverness. In this way he was able to build the entire monastery in a uniform style. All earlier buildings were brutally destroyed, in exchange for which the new uniformly Baroque building came into being.

Work began with a plan to alter the church in Baroque style, but soon the decision was made to completely rebuild (reconstruction plan). When the frame of the church was finished they began to rebuild the entire monastery step by step (from 1711) following a new monastery sketch plan. As the crowning final touch the interior design of the church was carried out.

Jakob Prandtauer and, after his death, Joseph Munggenast were the leading architects, but for the interior design of the church Antonio Beduzzi definitely was involved in the planning.

The total concept monastery - park as artistic and natural counterparts was not possible until the construction of the monastery had been completed, but today creates a wonderful unity.



## TO GLORIFY GOD IN EVERYTHING

In the chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict about the monastery's manual workers (RB 57) the following sentence can be read: Everything in the monastery should happen in such a way that it is all for the glorification of God, even the worldly concerns.

On March 21, 1089 Benedictine life in prayer and work (*ora et labora*) began in Melk. The Babenbergers had established a monastery in the castle, the burial site of their ancestors, and given it an economic basis: Land and property, feudal rule.

In the ups and downs of history there have been high points in the monastery's economy, but there have also been stark declines. It is conspicuous that in times of active spiritual life the economy flourished, whereas in times of a decline in monastic life the economy stagnated as well.

Initially the monastery lived from the proceeds of feudalism and only in a limited way from their own land. After the reforms ending feudalism in 1848 the economy had to be restructured: Interest from the buildings in Vienna and increased use of the monastery's own property provided the necessary means. In the last decades the proceeds from forestry and agriculture have steadily decreased. Now the monastery lives primarily from the income from tourism.

Proceeds from the work on the monastery's property are used to maintain the secondary school, but also to maintain the building itself, carry out necessary restoration work in the 23 parishes, and enable the fulfillment of other duties. Jobs are provided for many workers in the various areas.