

The History of St. Mary in Bergen

After the victory at Arkona In 1168 the Christian belief could be introduced to the people of Ruegen. Shortly thereafter the foundation for St. Mary was laid, the first red brick church on Ruegen. Presumably constructed by local bricklayers under guidance of Danish architects. Previously all construction on the island had been in half-timbered mud style. The church was named after Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. In 1193 the builder of the church and the first Christian Prince of Ruegen, Jaromar I, founded a nunnery nearby. At first guided by the rules of the Benedictines it later followed the rules of the Cistercian nuns. This foundation still exists today to the South of the church The church was constructed as a Romanesque basilica with a tall, flat-roofed nave and two lower side aisles In the East there were three round apses and a mighty tower in the West. This may have served as access to the princely residence.

In 1217 the builder of the church was buried there but it is unknown whether the church was already completed then.

The major ornaments of the church are the early paintings on the eastern walls. Around the turn of the last century these were uncovered and touched up to a great extent, as well as completed freehandedly. Around 1300 the entire church was vaulted and completed in Gothic style, with large windows and tall pillars. Around 1380 the convent church also became parish church for the small market town of Bergen. The old parish church located on the Rugard had previously been dismantled by the nuns.

In 1359 church services were also held in the chapel on the upper floor of the tower. Brotherhoods and trade associations donated their own altars to the church and paid the priests. Two further chapels were added to the sides, the Bamekow Chapel and the Chapel of the Holy Cross. The nave had its own altar, most likely consecrated to the Most Sacred Trinity.

The great fire of 1445 destroyed the convent but apparently left the church intact.

In 1539 the convent was converted to a Protestant foundation for unmarried ladies, Ever since Protestant services have been held at the church. In 1730 the old altar was replaced by the current high altar. The pulpit was carved by Jacob Freese of Stralsund in 1775 The two so-called confessionals which actually were boxes for the prioresses of the foundation dating back to 1730 were originally located near the altar. The baptismal font is said to have been taken from the dismantled church on the Rugard.

Between 1896 and 1902 the entire church was restored to its present state. Old gravestones found in the floor are now displayed in the western antechurch Among them the gravestone of the abbess Elisabeth (died in 1473), the sister of a Pomeranian duke.

The largest of the three bells in the tower dates back to 1445, the year of the great fire. The other two are dated 1849 and 1859, respectively One of the old relics of the church is the so-called „Jaromar Cup”, a Romanesque communion cup from around 1270/1280, with beautiful filigree work studded with gems, as well as an embroidered linen cloth (dated around 1300) depicting 12 scenes of the epic poem „Willehalm von Orlens” by Rudolf von Ems from around 1235.