



DOM ZUMINDEN

Discover history



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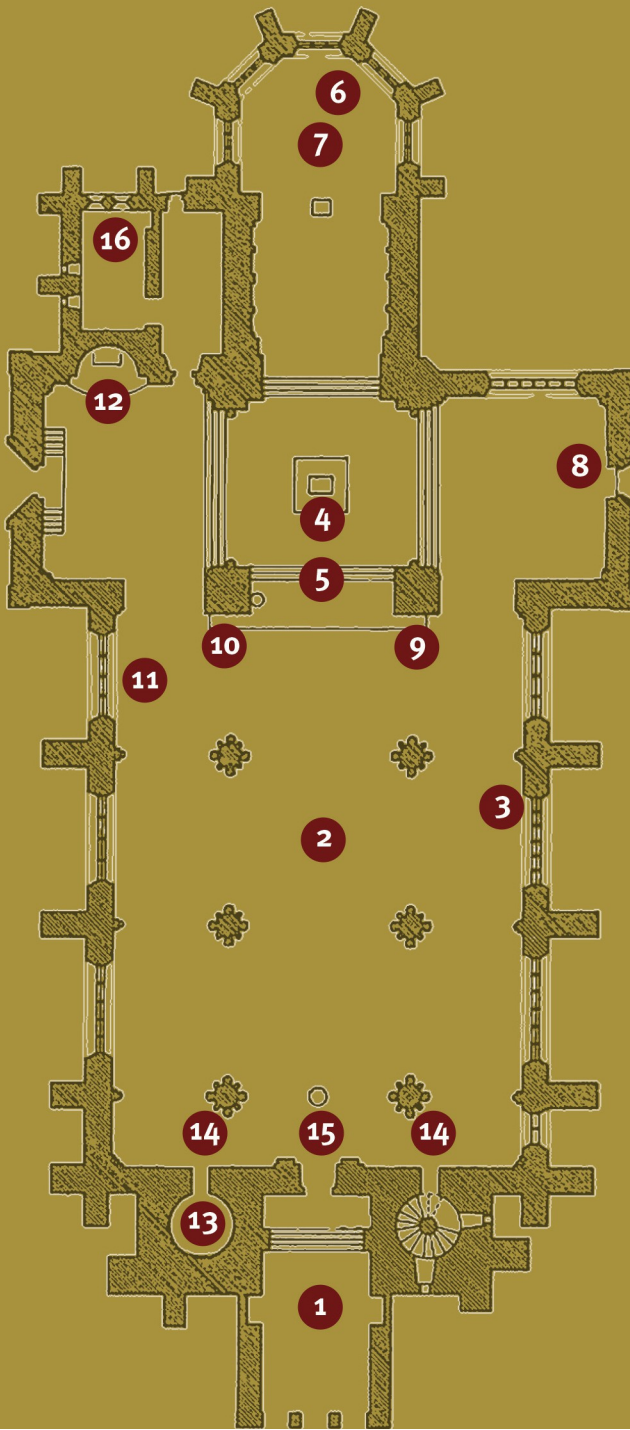
Minden Cathedral is one of the most beautiful early Gothic hall churches in Germany.

After construction was completed in 1350, the cathedral remained largely unchanged for 600 years until it was almost completely destroyed on 28 March 1945 during the bombing of Minden by Allied forces.

The cathedral was reconsecrated in 1957.

However, it was not until the crossing tower was also rebuilt in 2011 that the reconstruction work was finally completed.

Located just a few metres from the cathedral, Minden Cathedral Treasury displays examples of Christian art from eleven centuries. These include the famous Minden Cross from 1120 (a copy of which can be seen in the crossing of the cathedral), reliquaries and liturgical objects.



TOUR

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FLOOR PLAN

Art history refers to Minden Cathedral as an "early Gothic hall church".

Early Gothic replaced Romanesque architecture in the mid-12th century and spread throughout Christian Europe within a few decades, starting in France. It is characterised by the development of pointed arches and ribbed vaults, which made it possible to build taller and larger churches than was possible in the Romanesque style.

The churches appear majestic and inviting, not ambitious and skyward-reaching like the cathedrals of the High Gothic period in the 14th century. Since the side aisles of a hall church are as high as the central nave, a uniform, enclosed space is created. This type of building is typical of early Gothic architecture in Germany.

West building (Saxon transverse beam)

Churches are usually built in an east-west direction. The sun rises in the east: "Ex oriente lux" = "Light comes from the east". Light is the symbol of Jesus Christ, who says of himself: "I am the light of the world." That is why the altar is located in the east of the church, where the service takes place and where the bishop or service leader sits.

The sun sets in the west. Night and darkness are associated with evil, which must be warded off and from which protection can be found inside the church. Hence the entrance in the west and the massive construction of the west façade. In the past, there was a chapel here dedicated to the Archangel Michael. This champion of God and the church was supposed to protect people from the forces of evil, which, according to the beliefs of the time, always came from the west, from the darkness.

However, the west building also had a practical significance: In times of war, the people of Minden fled to this building to seek shelter.

Cathedral with church flags during Easter. The mourning ribbon was hung after the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday 2025.

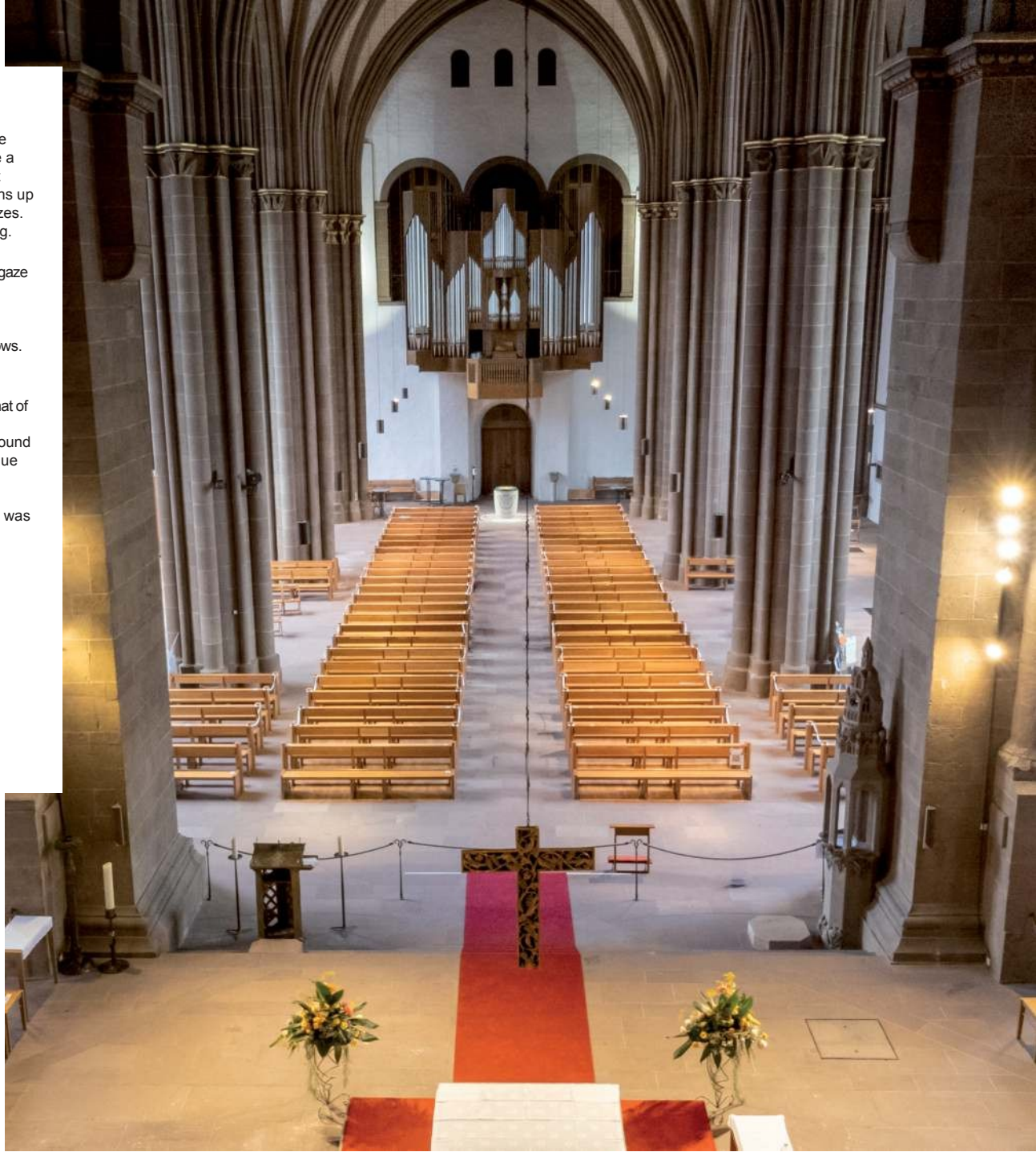


Nave

After passing through the massive west building, which appears like a bulwark, visitors enter a different architectural world: the nave opens up in harmony and clarity that amazes. It is both inviting and awe-inspiring.

Two rows of columns guide the gaze forward to the altar without being distracted by figures. Warm light floods into the all-encompassing space through the coloured windows.

Less than 150 years separate the construction of the west end from that of the nave. While the west end of Minden Cathedral dates from around 1150 and follows the Romanesque style, the nave, which was built between 1267 and 1290, can be attributed to the Gothic style that was emerging at the time.



Tracery windows

One of the most impressive elements of Minden Cathedral are the tracery windows.

The filigree stonework of the six windows in the main nave are among the highlights of European sacred architecture.

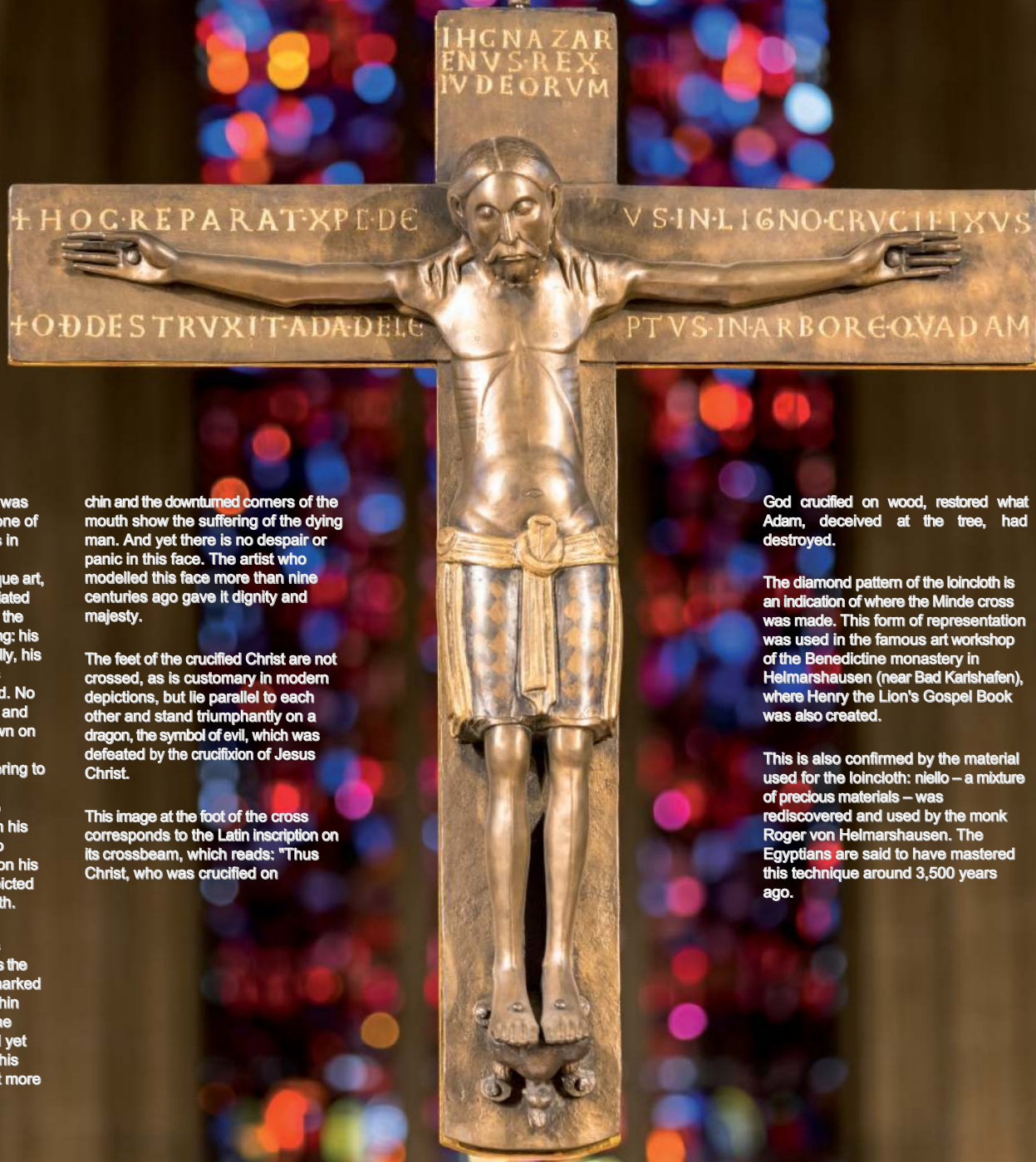
This type of construction, which brings light – a symbol of God – into the interior, was developed around 1140 in Saint Denis. The architects of the cathedral being built in France competed to create the most beautiful church in the country.

Initially, such windows were still very simple, but only a few decades later, from 1270 to 1290, the cathedral builders in Minden perfected this form of window design.

Each of the windows in Minden Cathedral has a different structure: four to six adjacent panels – known as lancet windows – are decorated with differently designed rings that shine like roses from the inside.

To truly appreciate the outstanding artistic achievement of the tracery windows, we recommend viewing them from the Kreuzhof courtyard on the south side of the cathedral.





Minden Cross

The 1.19-metre-high bronze cross was probably made in 1120 and is one of the oldest large bronze crosses in history. As in art

As was customary in Romanesque art, Christ is not depicted as a humiliated figure of suffering – the Christ of the Minden Cross triumphs in suffering: his arms are stretched out horizontally, his hair and beard, which fall to his shoulders, are carefully combed. No side wound disfigures his body and no crown of thorns presses down on his head – this is how Christ is depicted in transition from suffering to resurrection.

his shoulders, and his beard are carefully combed. No wound on his side disfigures his body, and no crown of thorns presses down on his head – this is how Christ is depicted in the transition from life to death.

The head of the crucified man is slightly tilted and turned towards the viewer. His facial expression is marked by death – his eyes, receding chin and downturned mouth show the suffering of the dying man. And yet there is no despair or panic in this face. The artist who modelled it more than nine centuries ago

chin and the downturned corners of the mouth show the suffering of the dying man. And yet there is no despair or panic in this face. The artist who modelled this face more than nine centuries ago gave it dignity and majesty.

The feet of the crucified Christ are not crossed, as is customary in modern depictions, but lie parallel to each other and stand triumphantly on a dragon, the symbol of evil, which was defeated by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

This image at the foot of the cross corresponds to the Latin inscription on its crossbeam, which reads: "Thus Christ, who was crucified on

God crucified on wood, restored what Adam, deceived at the tree, had destroyed.

The diamond pattern of the loincloth is an indication of where the Minde cross was made. This form of representation was used in the famous art workshop of the Benedictine monastery in Helmarshausen (near Bad Karlshafen), where Henry the Lion's Gospel Book was also created.

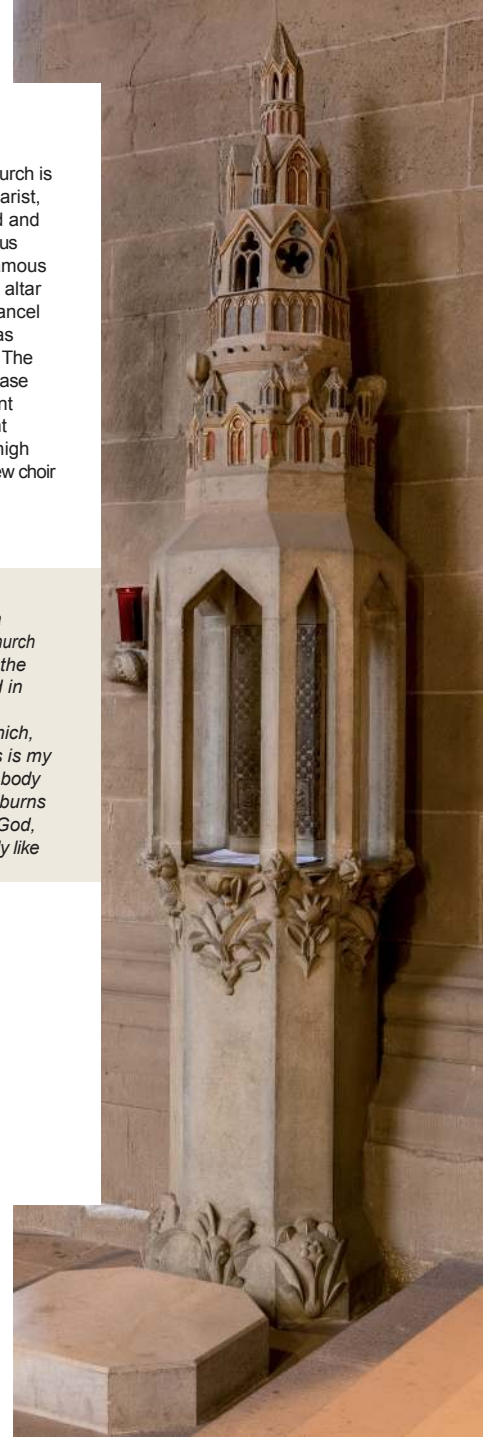
This is also confirmed by the material used for the loincloth: niello – a mixture of precious materials – was rediscovered and used by the monk Roger von Helmarshausen. The Egyptians are said to have mastered this technique around 3,500 years ago.



Chancel and high choir

The centre of every Catholic church is the altar. This is where the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, is celebrated and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is commemorated. The famous Minden Cross hangs above the altar (pp. 16/17). To the east, the chancel adjoins the high choir, which was completely redesigned in 2025. The Golden Table was given a new base with a niche for the shrine of Saint Sophia of Minden – the ice saint "Cold Sophie". In addition, the high choir was supplemented with new choir stalls and a new baptismal font.

In front of the left pillar stands a tabernacle in the form of a small church building, which was created from the ruins of the cathedral destroyed in the Second World War. It is the repository for the holy hosts, which, according to Jesus' words "This is my body," are understood to be the body of Christ. The "eternal light" that burns here indicates the presence of God, which is why believers particularly like to pray here.



Golden panel

This winged altar is a replica of the medieval carved altar from the early 15th century. The original, now on display in the Bode Museum in Berlin, stood for 450 years in the apse, the semicircular extension at the eastern end of the cathedral. It was not until 1656 that the cathedral parish, probably inspired by the Baroque trend of the time, replaced this Romanesque-Gothic

altar with a "contemporary" Baroque altar. As this was destroyed by bombs in March 1945, the idea arose in 1999, when the 1200th anniversary of the former diocese of Minden was celebrated, to have the old altar – known as the "Golden Altar" because of its golden frame "Golden Table" – by sculptors from South Tyrol.

In the round mandorla of the carved altar, Mary and her son Christ sit side by side on

a bank. Christ has placed a crown on his mother's head. The wreath features choirs of angels with medieval musical instruments, which are very detailed.

The coronation of Mary was a common artistic motif in the Middle Ages. This scene was intended to express man's goal of perfection in God and his royal dignity.

The predella on which the winged altar is mounted was created around 1220. The box-like structure has been altered several times and probably had the shape of a reliquary. Many of the original small figures are no longer present and have been recreated by South Tyrolean sculptors. Among other things, they are said to represent the bishops of the Diocese of Minden since the 9th century.



Saint Sophia

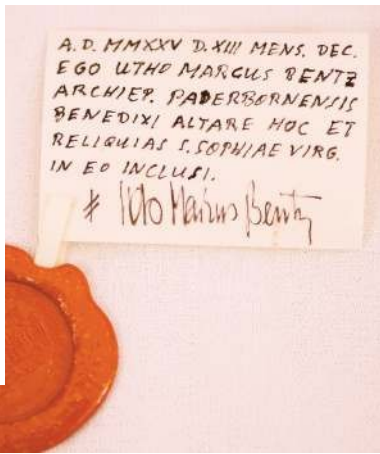
Sophia of Minden (presumably identical with Sophia of Rome) was an early Christian martyr born around 304 who died in the fourth century, probably during the Diocletian persecution of Christians. The exact nature and time of her martyrdom can no longer be determined.

The relics were transferred to Minden at the beginning of the 9th century during the reign of Charlemagne. Here she is venerated as a martyr for Christ. Her feast day is celebrated on 3 September.

St. Sophia, also known as "Cold Sophie", is invoked against late frosts and for the prosperity of crops, as she is one of the five Ice Saints. She is the last in the series of Ice Saints on 15 May. According to a farmer's rule ("Never plant before Cold Sophie"), the mild spring weather only stabilises after "Cold Sophie" has passed.

The bones of St. Sophia, some of which are wrapped in colourful fabrics, are said to have been found in the ruins of a church in Rome. Sophia will be kept in a shrine designed by Nettetal architect Ines Gruß in 2025, located in the substructure of the Golden Table.

The shrine was crafted by the goldsmiths of the long-established Minden-based company Juwelier Laufer.



Frieze of the Apostles

Fourteen figures are depicted in a long row – Christ and Mary in the centre, then the apostles and, on the far right, Gorgonius, the patron saint of Minden Cathedral.

Next to Christ and Mary sit the Apostle Peter (recognisable by the key in his hand) and the bald Apostle Paul on thrones, while the other ten apostles (Judas is missing!) are depicted standing and walking.

Their posture and footing show that they are setting out: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," it says.

in the Gospel of Mark. This mission is symbolised by each of the apostles holding a Bible in his hand.

The artistic treatment of the frieze depicting the apostles is remarkable: some of the figures turn to the right, others to the left, each holds the Bible differently, and the figures differ in their facial expressions, hairstyles and the drapery of their robes.

All this creates a sense of movement in the viewer. It is to the credit of the unknown artist



artist that the relief figures are by no means frozen in place, but seem to be alive.

The figures used to be colourfully painted. Ornate canopies arch above them as an expression of their holiness.

In the Middle Ages, the Apostle Frieze was part of the "rood screen" that ran between the two front crossing pillars and separated the chancel, i.e. the area of the priests from that of the faithful.

After this partition was removed (1833), this remarkable work of art was initially placed in the vestibule (paradise) of the cathedral. Today, the frieze can be seen above the entrance in the southern transept.





Fresco

The frescoes from around 1280 on the right crossing pillar are noteworthy: an image of Mary and depictions of eight saints significant to the Diocese of Minden, including one of the oldest depictions of St. Francis of Assisi (died 1226) north of the Alps.

As with all fresco painting, the colours were applied to fresh plaster (fresco = fresh), causing them to bond indissolubly with the masonry. The fresco is the oldest and largest church fresco in Westphalia and served as an altarpiece.



Grape Madonna

On the left crossing pillar, an expressive statue of the Madonna stands out against a colourful carpet ornament painted on the pillar. The Gothic statue of Mary from the end of the 15th century was originally the centrepiece of a Marian altar, which was largely destroyed in the fire that ravaged the cathedral in 1945.

Following restoration, the statue, known as the Crescent Moon Madonna or Grape Madonna, now shines in blue splendour. The grape in her hand can be interpreted as a reference to the Eucharist.



Emerentia Group

This sculpture, created around 1520, is a rarity because it depicts not only three generations (Anna herself), which is often found in art history, but four. This is intended to express the passing on of faith. not only three generations (Anna Selbdritt), which is often found in art history, but four. This is intended to express the passing on of faith.

In addition to the infant Jesus, who was sadly lost in the 19th century, the Virgin Mary and the grandmother Anna, Anna's mother Emerentia is also depicted. The group of figures takes its name from her, the legendary great-grandmother of Jesus.

Mary is depicted with her hair uncovered due to her virginity, while the other two women wear headscarves. Mother Anna holds an open book in her hand, from which she has read to the child.

The remarkable sculpture, carved from lime wood and still retaining its original colouring, brings the four generations together as one with the lavish folds of their clothes.

The gaze of the three women is directed with concern towards the child, who formed the centre of the scene.



Schorlemer Altar or Holy Spirit Altar

This altar in the northern transept is an early Baroque altar, partly still in the Renaissance style, designed by Adam Stenelt and his circle and made of Baumberger sandstone. It was conceived as an epitaph for Johann von Schorlemer, provost of the cathedral from 1612 to 1622.

The main relief in alabaster depicts the birth of Christ, above which is the Pentecost event with the gilded dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The images are flanked below by the four evangelists Matthew, John, Luke and Mark, and above by the four Latin Church Fathers Augustine, Gregory the Great, Jerome and Ambrose.

At the top left is Mary with the baby Jesus, on the right is Anna with Mary in her arms, and in the centre – elevated – is Christ with the Easter victory flag.

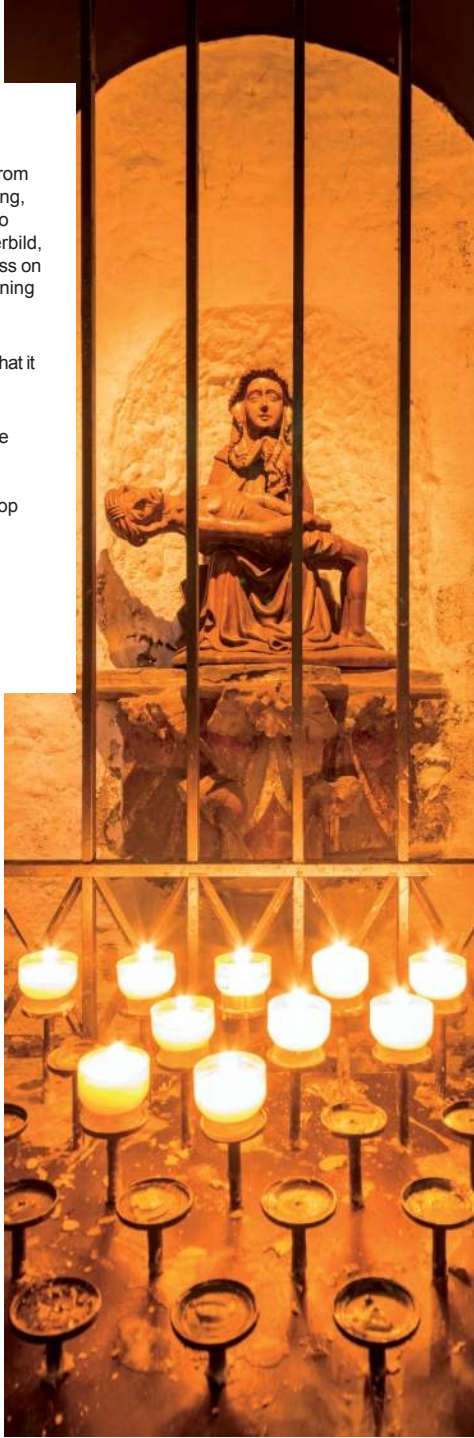


Pieta

The name of this sculpture comes from the Latin word "pietatis" = suffering, compassion. That is why it is also called Mary in Suffering or Vesperbild, because the descent from the cross on Good Friday took place in the evening (the time of vespers).

The candles burning here show that it is a favourite place for prayer.

The Pietà in the Lady Chapel in the northern west tower of the cathedral was created around 1420 from oak wood in a workshop in Minden.



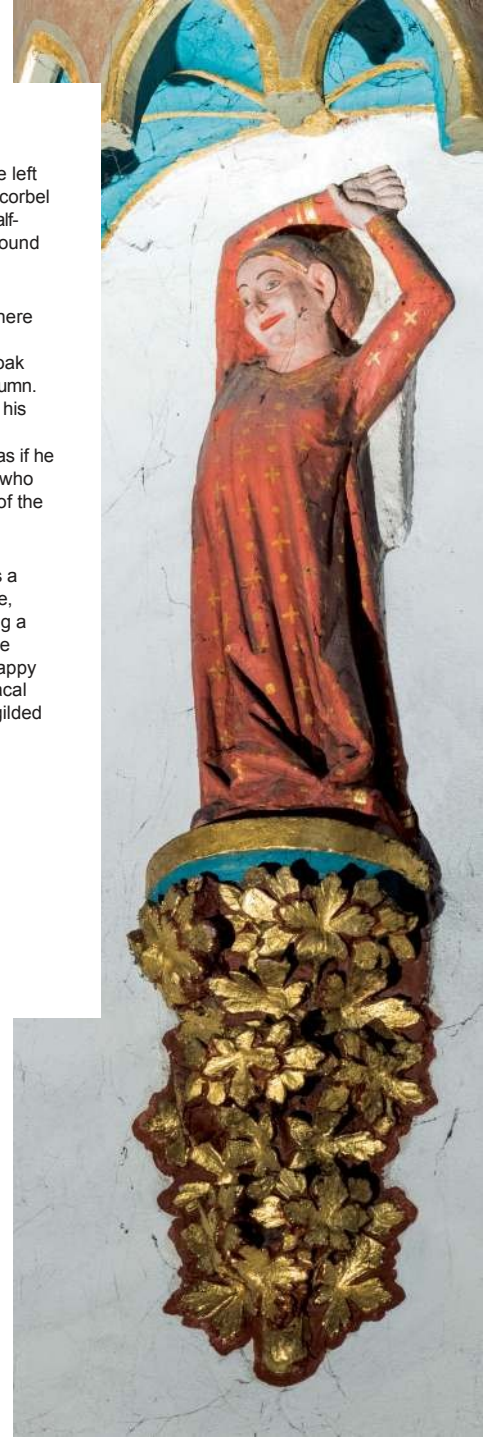


Console figures

On the west wall, high up on the left and right next to the organ, two corbel figures can be seen under the half-columns, which were created around 1260.

On the left, on the south side, there is a human being who is almost crushed by the structure of the oak and acanthus leaves on the column. He can no longer stand upright, his mouth is open as if to scream, his brow furrowed, and he seems as if he wants to flee. A desperate man who can no longer bear the burden of the column or of life.

On the right, on the other hand, is a young girl, a child, standing alone, almost dancing, smiling, wearing a red robe studded with stars. She represents the redeemed, the happy person in the midst of a paradisiacal world, as indicated by the rich gilded foliage.



Organ

Until its destruction in the spring of 1945, the cathedral had organs by renowned organ builders (Scherer, Klais), but after its reconstruction, it had to make do for almost four decades with an instrument installed in the northern aisle and on the rear wall of the gallery (Kaiserloge), which very quickly proved to be inadequate in terms of sound and technology. It was not until shortly before Christmas 1996 that the congregation was able to celebrate the inauguration of a new organ

, the construction of which was made possible financially by the Minden Cathedral Building Association.

In order to make the opulent instrument, which was praised by all sides, as slim and elegant as possible, the swell section, the horizontal trumpets (chamades) and the large pedal were placed in the free space of the imperial box, while the main section, consisting of five sections with 62 sounding registers (4388 pipes), as slim and elegant as possible, the swell, the horizontal trumpets (chamades) and the large pedal were housed in the free space of the imperial box, while the main and upper works and the small pedal

by means of a three-part concrete cantilever construction in front of the west wall, resting, as it were, on the pillars of the main portal.

The tonal concept was based on the desire for an organ modelled on the romantic symphonic organ type of French origin and taking into account the cathedral-like acoustics of the dome.

It is the task of an organ to enhance the splendour of church ceremonies through its sound

and lift hearts to God – as stated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

In the early Church, all instrumental music was forbidden, as is still the case in the Orthodox Eastern Churches today. The first organ in a Catholic church is documented in Aachen in 812. The oldest documented mention of an organ in Minden Cathedral dates back to 1274.

The extensive music video project "MINDEN CATHEDRAL" offers a special view of the main organ and Minden Cathedral. project "MINDEN CATHEDRAL" by the Minden Cathedral Building Association. The videos are available at www.minden-cathedral.de and on YouTube at www.youtube.com/@MindenCathedral.



Chapel of Adoration

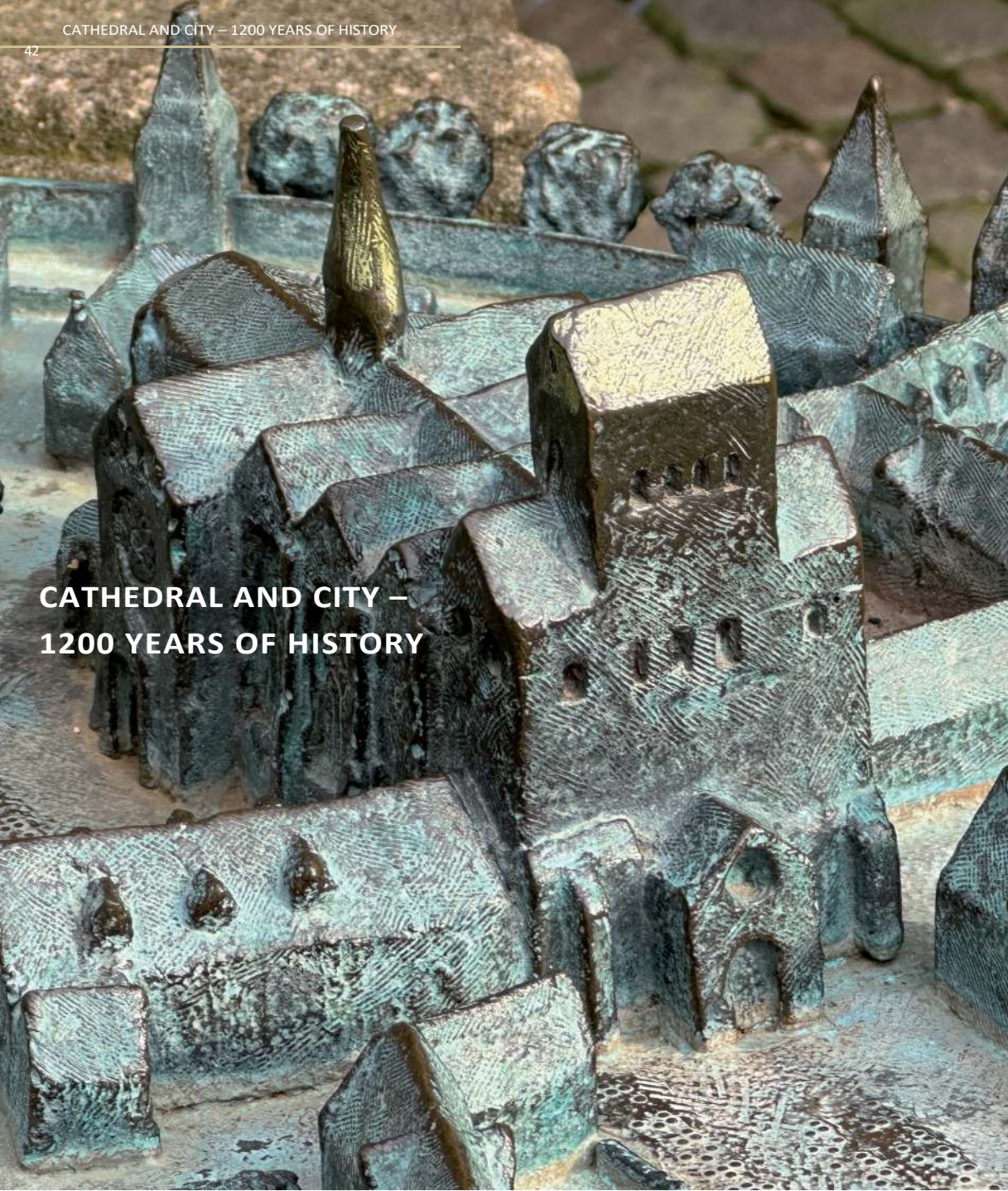
The Chapel of Adoration in Minden Cathedral was established in December 2009 in the former sacristy of the cathedral. It was consecrated as a sacrament chapel.

The new altar contains relics of Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt, founder the "Sisters of Christian Charity", who was born in Minden, and the Blessed Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen. Von Galen became known above all for his public opposition to the "destruction of life unworthy of life" during the Nazi era.

The chapel serves as a spatial enclave for Eucharistic adoration. It was created to enable prayer, silence and personal devotion – away from the liturgical centre of the main altar in the crossing of the cathedral. With its peaceful atmosphere, the chapel is intended to emphasise the real presence of Christ in the Host. and promote Eucharistic worship in a focused setting. The atmosphere befits Minden Cathedral's reputation as the "most devout cathedral" in Westphalia.

Relics and reliquary stele in which the relics found in the cathedral are kept. Open tabernacle containing the monstrance with the host (right).





CATHEDRAL AND CITY – 1200 YEARS OF HISTORY

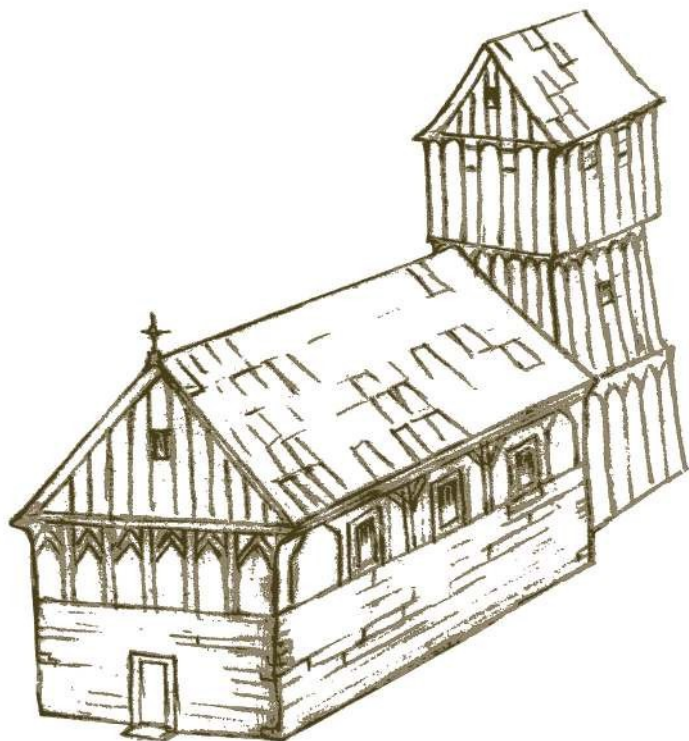
The history of Minden and the history of the cathedral are inextricably linked. Minden was first mentioned in 798 as the place where Emperor Charlemagne camped with his army.

When the Saxon Wars of Charlemagne came to an end with the baptism of Duke Widu-kind in 785, Charlemagne had missionary churches built at strategically important locations, from which bishoprics were established around 800. In Minden, where a fishing settlement is said to have already existed at the Weser ford and the intersection of important trade and military roads, it was Erkanbert, a monk from Fulda, who built a church here – later to become a cathedral. Erkanbert (Herkumbert) is considered the first bishop of the diocese of Minden.

Until the Thirty Years' War, the city and diocese of Minden experienced an upward trend, albeit an eventful history with a total of 60 bishops.

The Diocese of Minden became predominantly Protestant as a result of the Reformation (Catholics now make up around ten percent of the population). It had no bishop since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and was dissolved in 1821. Although it is no longer a cathedral, i.e. a bishop's church, the Catholic cathedral has remained the heart of the city.

The Carolingian cathedral (803-947)



When Pope Leo III travelled to Paderborn in 799 to meet the Frankish king Charlemagne of the Carolingian dynasty, one of the most far-reaching developments in history was set in motion.

With the support of the Catholic Church, the charismatic Charlemagne (748-814) united and pacified a Europe that was torn apart at the time.

Europe became a Christian continent, whereby the positive view of humanity in the Bible – regardless of all the errors of later history – could become a core theme of European culture.

Charlemagne established bishoprics to spread the faith.

Minden was one such bishopric. From the very beginning, the cathedral formed its centre. Its altar was erected over a sealed well. According to tradition, this was a pagan sanctuary.

CHRONICLE

799_Foundation of the Diocese of Minden. The oldest mention of the settlement dates back to 798.

Around 800_Construction of a mission church in the form of a wooden hall church.

25 December 800_Coronation of Charlemagne as emperor in Rome.

803-813_Bishop Erkanbert of Fulda lays the organisational foundations of the Diocese of Minden, which was to remain in existence until 1648.

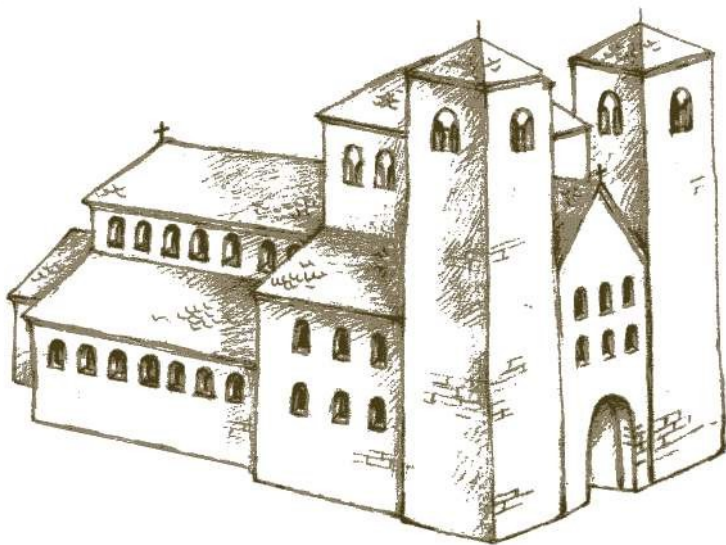
843_In the "Treaty of Verdun", Charlemagne's empire is divided among his three grandsons, leading to the emergence of Germany and France in the High Middle Ages.

Around 860_The first stone cathedral, Minden Cathedral, was probably built during this period.

919_Henry the Fowler was elected King of East Francia, establishing the Ottonian dynasty.

947_Minden Cathedral was probably destroyed by fire. Reconstruction took only five years. In 952, Bishop Helmward reconsecrated the cathedral.

The Ottonian cathedral (952-1062)



During these years, when the cathedral was the heart of Minden, the city developed into an important political, spiritual and cultural centre.

Until 1024, the German imperial throne was occupied by the ruling house of the Ottonians, who exercised their power more than ever before. They relied on the Church, which strengthened the legal position of many bishops and abbots.

This also meant an enormous gain in influence and power for the bishops of Minden. They were granted the legal status of princes and exercised jurisdiction in the city and diocese.

In 977, Minden was granted market, coinage and customs rights. This marked the beginning of Minden's economic rise.

CHRONICLE

936-973_Emporer Otto the Great organises the empire with the help of the church ("imperial church system").

952_St. Gorgonius becomes the patron saint of the newly consecrated cathedral.

961_Otto the Great grants Bishop Landward of Minden immunity (freedom from all foreign jurisdiction).

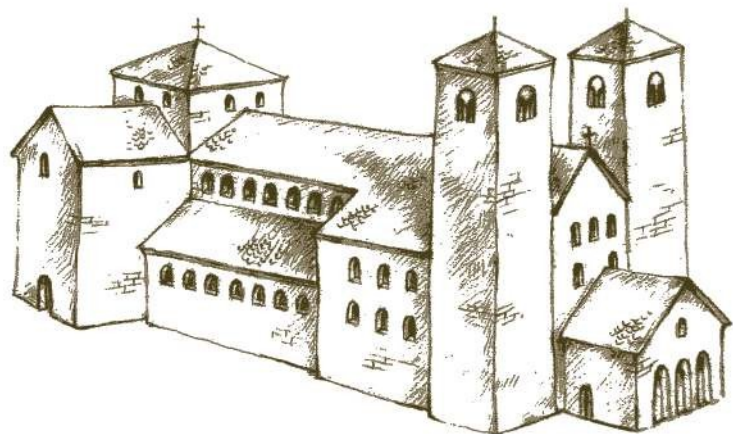
Around 1000_The reform in the monastery of Cluny was directed against the secularisation of the clergy, which soon also called into question the imperial church system.

1024_Emporer Conrad II visits Minden and celebrates Christmas here. The emperor makes further visits in 1030 and 1033.

1039-1056_Emporer Henry III visits the city – three times, in fact.

1062_The Ottonian cathedral is destroyed by fire.

The Salian and Staufian cathedral (1072-1230)



During the period when the Salian dynasty sat on the imperial throne, the Western Church reached its zenith, which also enriched cultural life in the diocese of Minden. Some of the most precious works of art – now

on display in the nearby Minden Cathedral Treasury – were created during this period: the Minden Cross, the reliquary of St. Peter and the arm reliquary of St. Margaret.

Two fundamental issues dominated political life: the Investiture Controversy, the conflict in the Middle Ages between ecclesiastical power, the Church, and secular power, the emperors and kings, was sparked by the question of whether the emperor had the right to appoint bishops and abbots, and forever shook the unity of ecclesiastical and secular power.

The second topic was the mass phenomenon of the Crusades: at the behest of the Pope, Europe's elites embarked on an adventurous journey to the Holy Land. Ultimately, these Crusades were wars sanctioned by the Church and motivated by strategic, religious and economic factors.

CHRONICLE

1062_Henry IV celebrates Pentecost in Minden, during which a fire breaks out, destroying the city and the cathedral.

1071_Consecration of the rebuilt and enlarged cathedral by Bishop Eilbert.

1077_Henry IV's walk to Canossa and the climax of the Investiture Controversy. A dispute between the Salian dynasty and the reformist papacy over the relationship between spiritual and secular power.

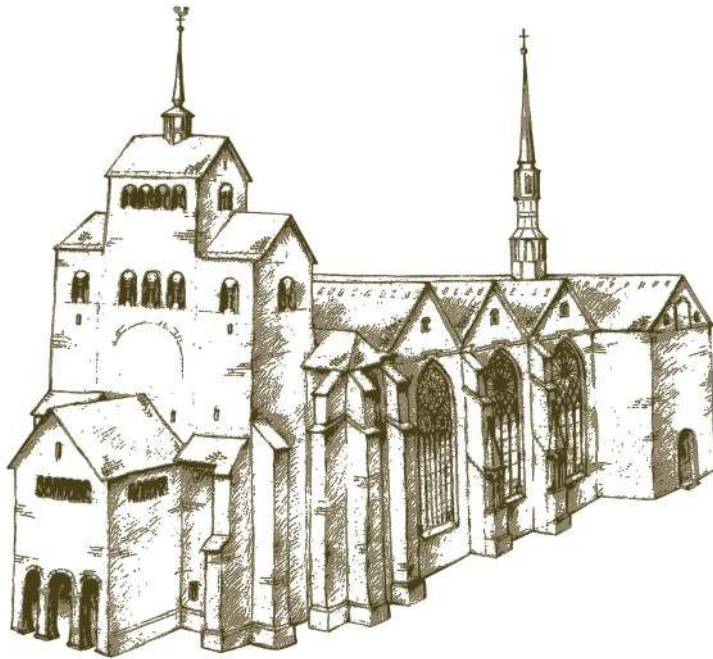
1095_Crusade sermon by Pope Urban II.

1140_The churches of St. Mary and St. Martin in Minden are built with vaulted central naves and transepts.

1122_The Concordat of Worms brings about at least a partial settlement of the dispute between the Pope and the Emperor.

1150_The west end of the cathedral is built in its present form, with the central section between the two towers being raised.

The Romanesque-Gothic cathedral (1230/70-1656)



The prestige of the Church in the 12th and 13th centuries was manifested in the Gothic architectural style.

Developed by French master builders, the cities of Europe pooled all their resources and erected Gothic cathedrals, often in construction projects that lasted for generations.

Around 1230, renovation work began on the Romanesque basilica in Minden when the new architectural style became popular. From around 1267 onwards, the nave of Minden Cathedral was converted into an early Gothic hall church. The design was so innovative, for example in the design of the tracery windows, that Minden became a model for other early Gothic churches in Germany. Even today, Minden Cathedral is still considered one of the most beautiful early Gothic hall churches in Germany.

The 14th and 15th centuries were marked by the secularisation of the Catholic Church, which meant that it lost at least part of its cultural leadership role in Minden and throughout Europe. The consequences were the Reformation and 30 years of religious war.

CHRONICLE

1230_Construction begins on the late Romanesque cathedral with apse, square choir and transept.

1250_After a construction freeze, work continued in the new Gothic architectural style.

1270-1290_Construction of the early Gothic hall of the cathedral.

1350-1370_The Romanesque choir was replaced by a high Gothic octagonal structure, but the Romanesque west building was left standing, probably for economic reasons.

1484_A devastating plague rages in Minden – from a contemporary perspective, a punishment from God for the moral decline of the Church.

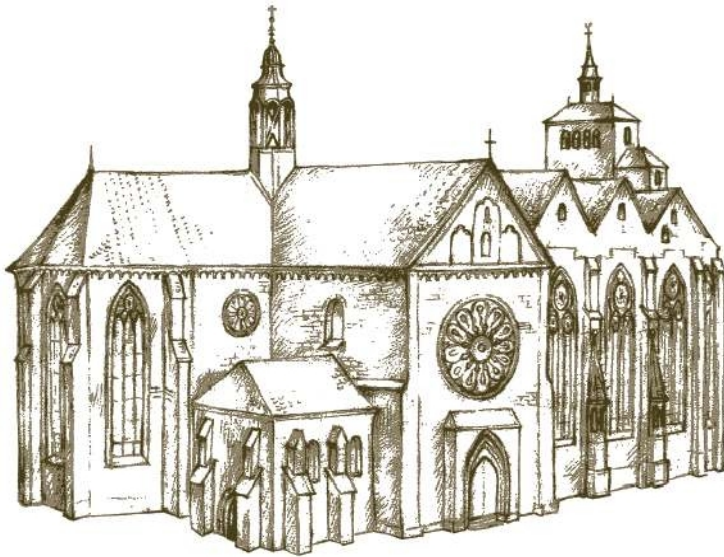
1517_Luther's posting of his theses triggers the Reformation, and after twelve years, the spark of new thinking reaches Minden.

1618-1648_Thirty Years' War.

1634_The Protestant Swedes conquer the city.

1648_In the Peace of Westphalia, signed in Münster and Osnabrück, the Bishopric of Minden is ceded to Prussia. The last bishop leaves Minden, and the diocese continues to be administered by the mixed-denomination cathedral chapter.

The Baroque cathedral (1648/70-1945)



As with the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church succeeded in creating a new architectural style with the Baroque. This was the second attempt to create a pan-European architectural style: beautiful Baroque churches were built in southern Germany in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the style was at least partially adapted in the Protestant north.

While the churches were still fighting for the "pure" faith, the philosophy of the Enlightenment spread in the 18th century. The power of reason enabled the rise of science and the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. However, it also led to a dramatic decline in church attendance and the secularisation of society, which paved the way for the mass ideologies of the 20th century: communism and National Socialism.

CHRONICLE

1648_ Although Minden had become a Protestant city, the cathedral chapter was not dissolved in the Peace of Westphalia. It consisted of Catholic and Protestant canons.

1656_ The Romanesque-Gothic Minden altar – known as the "Golden Table" – was replaced by a Baroque altar, which formed the choir screen until its destruction in 1945.

1806_ During the Napoleonic Wars, the French occupied the city. St. Simeon became a hospital, while St. Mauritius and St. Johannes became magazines.

1810_ Abolition of the cathedral chapter.

1821_ Pope Pius VII incorporates the former Bishopric of Minden into the Diocese of Paderborn. The bishop's throne is removed from the cathedral. The diocese of Minden is now dissolved.

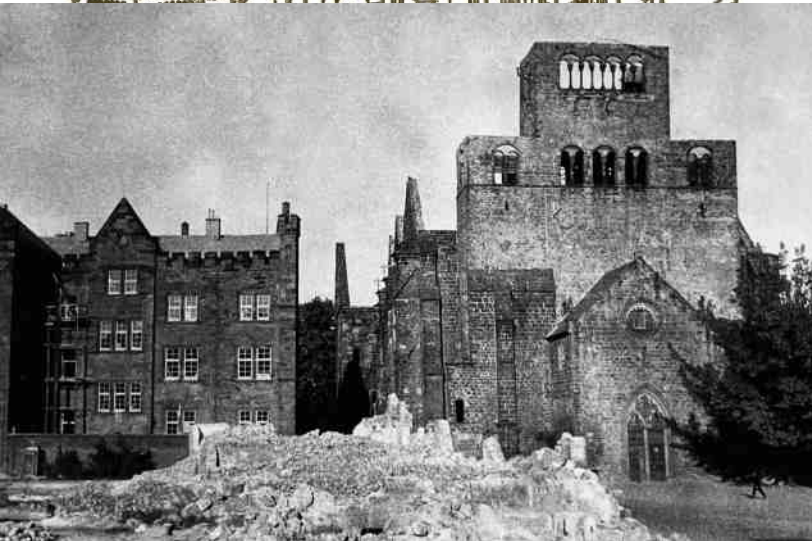
1847_ Opening of the Cologne-Minden railway line. The transport link is followed by the industrialisation of the surrounding area.

13 May 1859_ Pope Pius IX elevates Minden Cathedral to the status of provost church.

1892-1896_ Construction of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial at Porta Westfalica.

1939-1945_ Second World War. Destruction of large parts of the city and the cathedral by Allied forces shortly before the end of the war.

Destruction and reconstruction (1945-1957)



As early as December 1944, the Allied forces had carried out a major bombing raid on Minden, causing extensive destruction. On 28 March 1945, the last bombing raid took place, initially targeting the waterway junction. However, the bombs mainly fell on the lower part of the old town. The historic town hall and cathedral were almost completely destroyed. In view of this devastation, it was difficult to believe in a new beginning.

But soon afterwards, the order of the day was to quickly initiate reconstruction. This led to the town hall and cathedral being rebuilt from the ruins. The work was completed in 1957 with the reconsecration of the cathedral.

The "new" cathedral was designed as a replica of the early Gothic hall church from 1270/1290, with numerous stylistic corrections made by Berlin architect Werner March, who was living in Minden at the time.

CHRONICLE

28 March 1945_A particularly heavy bombing raid on Minden's city centre leads to the destruction of the cathedral, the historic town hall and numerous other buildings, just five days before Allied troops reach the city.

1946_The Minden Cathedral Building Association is founded as an interdenominational support association whose task is to provide financial support for the reconstruction of the cathedral. Today, the Cathedral Building Association continues to work under the motto "Minden Cathedral and Cathedral Treasure – Preserve. Design. Promote."

1948_Five new bells are cast from the salvaged bronze material of the destroyed bells.

1950_Topping-out ceremony for the restored west wing and consecration of the bells.

1953_Topping-out ceremony for the restored nave.

1954_Discovery of valuable 13th-century frescoes on the front right crossing pillar. The upper part of the fresco had already been uncovered in 1939.

Continued on next page

Werner March

After the bombing in March 1945, Minden was reduced to rubble. The historic town hall on the market square and the more than 1000-year-old cathedral were also destroyed. After the end of the Second World War, the city became part of the British occupation zone.

The people of Minden were particularly keen to rebuild their town hall and cathedral. At that time, there was a man living in Minden who, alongside Albert Speer, was one of Adolf Hitler's most important architects: Werner March, born in 1894. His most famous building is the Olympic Stadium in Berlin.

March started his own architectural practice in 1925. One of his first major successes was the award-winning competition design for the "German Sports Forum", which he carried out in a number of individual construction phases from 1927 onwards.

From 1933 onwards, the German Sports Forum was incorporated into the concept of the Reich Sports Field with the Olympic Stadium, on which Werner March collaborated with Albert Speer. March also designed the Berlin Olympic Village and residences for high-ranking

National Socialist leaders. In 1933, for example, he designed the Carinhall estate in the Schorfheide forest north of Berlin for Hermann Göring.

On 1 May 1933, he joined the NSDAP and became a member of the organising committee for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. In the Olympic year of 1936, March was awarded the title of professor by Adolf Hitler and appointed a member of the Academies of Arts in Berlin and Munich.

After the war, Werner March initially lived and worked in Minden. His house and studio in Berlin had been destroyed. He oversaw the reconstruction of Minden Cathedral and the historic Minden Town Hall. He campaigned for the cathedral, which had most recently been furnished in Baroque style, to be restored to its original early Gothic appearance. Towards the end of his time in the city on the Weser, March is said to have fallen out with the city authorities.

In 1973, the city of Minden awarded him the Ring of Honour. March died in Berlin-Dahlem in 1976.

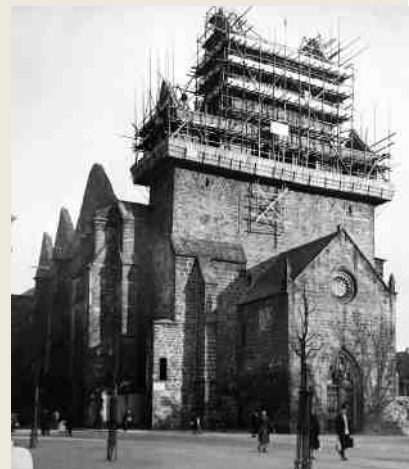


Werner March



1957_ Installation of the windows designed by Professor Vinzenz Pieper and Professor Anton Wendling.

29 June 1957_ On the feast day of Peter and Paul, the cathedral is reconsecrated by the then Archbishop Dr Lorenz Jaeger.



The cathedral (1957- present)



The reconstruction was by no means complete with the consecration of the cathedral in 1957.

Until the 1990s, people had to make do with a makeshift bell and an inferior organ.

In addition, due to a lack of funds, the crossing tower, which had been part of the cathedral and city skyline from 1270 to 1945, had been omitted.

At the end of 2011, the congregation's long-awaited wish for a new Gothic crossing tower was fulfilled.

CHRONICLE

1962-1965_The Second Vatican Council reorganises the liturgy of Holy Mass.

1972_Redesign of the altar area in accordance with the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council: the altar was moved to the crossing, bringing the priest closer to the congregation and facing the faithful when celebrating Mass.

1987_Start of a ten-year restoration of the exterior of the cathedral.

1994_Eight new bells are hung in the west wing of the cathedral.

1994_Redesign of the priest's seat with decorative grille in the crossing and establishment of a weekday church in the high choir.

1996_Installation of a new organ by the Swiss company Kuhn with 62 stops in front of the so-called imperial box.

2002_The replica of the Golden Table is installed in the high choir.

2009_Consecration of the chapel of worship in the old sacristy.

2011_Construction of the new crossing tower with five additional bells. With a total of 13 bells, Minden Cathedral now has the most extensive peal of bells in North Rhine-Westphalia.

2025_Redesign of the high choir with new choir stalls, granite base for the Golden Table with the shrine of St. Sophie (the fifth ice saint) and a baptismal font.

Crossing tower

It was an extreme challenge for engineers and construction workers alike.

The project "Crossing tower with bells", which began in September 2011 in the roof truss of Minden Cathedral, was unparalleled in Germany. Almost six decades after the cathedral was reconsecrated, the wish of the cathedral community was fulfilled and the cathedral was now complete again with the crossing tower.

The state of North Rhine-Westphalia was responsible for rebuilding the crossing tower. The state holds the patronage of the cathedral and is therefore responsible for its maintenance as well as for projects such as this special construction project. Until the cathedral was destroyed by Allied bombers in March 1945, this tower above the dome at the intersection of the nave and transept had been an integral part of the mighty church building for centuries.

The tower rises 24 metres above the roof ridge and is just as high at its peak as the ridge turret on the west wing. The entire steel structure, with its copper cladding and five bells, weighs almost 110 tonnes.

In a tangle of roof struts, the construction workers had to install the substructure for the crossing tower in a very confined space.

The construction experts made numerous calculations to determine the load-bearing capacity of the cathedral's walls and pillars, the effect of the swinging bells and how the mighty steel framework, which was placed on bridge bearings at four points, could be installed in the tower. A masterful achievement by all involved.

Once the substructure with its four spider legs had been installed under extremely difficult conditions, a protective cross-shaped trough was placed on top to catch any falling debris in the event of a fire and thus protect the cathedral. This could prevent a catastrophe such as the one that occurred in Paris in April 2019, when the 19th-century crossing tower of Notre Dame Cathedral collapsed into the nave of the nine-century-old church during a major fire, almost completely destroying it.

At the end of 2011, the crossing tower was completed and the five bells that ring in it were consecrated.



Bells

Together with a large part of the building fabric of Minden Cathedral, the medieval bells from the 13th and 14th century peal, which consisted of ten bells and was considered one of the most beautiful in Germany, fell victim to the bombs of the Second World War.

After its reconstruction, the cathedral was initially given a temporary peal of five bells. From 1994 onwards, eight new bells, equivalent to the medieval peal, were manufactured by the Mark bell foundry in Brockscheid, were consecrated and hung in the west wing of the cathedral.

The heaviest bell, weighing 5.5 tonnes, was named "Peace of Christ", while the others are called "Mary", "Peter", "Gorgonius", "Magdalena", "Herkumbert", "Francis" and "Pauline" (from Mallinckrodt). Contemporary artists designed the bells with reliefs and inscriptions.

After the crossing tower was rebuilt in 2011, five additional bells were consecrated and installed there. They were also manufactured by Mark and bear the names of saints and blessed figures from more recent times: "Rupert Mayer" (1876-1945), "Maria Faustyna Kowalska" (1905-1938), "Nikolaus Groß" (1898-1945), "Adolf Kolping" (1813-1865) and "Edith Stein" (1891-1942).

With the eight bells in the west tower, Minden Cathedral now has 13 bells, making it the most extensive peal in North Rhine-Westphalia.



A church cross above the city

When Minden, founded around 800 AD, grew and the cathedral was no longer large enough to accommodate all the faithful, the cathedral clergy initiated the construction of additional churches.

In the two centuries from 1000 to 1200 AD in particular AD, the city planners – who in the Middle Ages were the bishops – realised the idea of building additional churches in such a way that they formed a cross.

The cathedral stood and still stands at the centre of the "church cross" – symbolised by the Minden Cross. All other church buildings radiated out from the cathedral [1].

- The western crossbeam is formed by St. Martin's Church [2], which Bishop Sigebert founded in 1029.
- The eastern crossbeam points to St. John's Church,

[3] which was built between 1185 and 1206 by Bishop Thietmar.

- The northern crossbeam points to St. Mary's Church [4]. In the 12th century, it was home to Benedictine nuns.
- The southern crossbeam points to St. Simeon's Church [5], which was founded in 1207 by a cathedral dean from Trier

and dedicated to St. Simeon, who died a martyr in Trier.

The cathedral is undoubtedly the heart of the city of Minden and the building with the greatest art-historical significance. But it is worth going on a discovery tour. The other churches in Minden are also open at peak times.



[5]

[2]

[1]

[4]

[3]

St. Mauritius Monastery and Church

In 1042, St. Bruno of Waldeck (Bruno of Minden) from the House of Merseburg founded the Benedictine monastery of St. Mauritius on an island in the River Weser (roughly level with today's Minden railway station) to secure the ford across the river. It was one of the earliest settlements on the right bank of the Weser and served as the nucleus of today's district of "Rechtes Weserufer" (Right Bank of the Weser). At that time, the monastery was also responsible for the ferry service on the Weser.

Bruno had previously been ordained as a priest by Bishop Godehard of Hildesheim. He was a canon in Magdeburg, court chaplain to Conrad II, and was consecrated bishop in 1037 outside Milan by Hermann II, Archbishop of Cologne, to whose ecclesiastical province the diocese of Minden belonged at that time.

From around 1353, the monks extracted clay from the monastery grounds for brick production – one of the earliest evidence

urban brick production in the region. As the original location was unsafe due to flooding and raids, particularly by the Prince of Schaumburg, the monastery complex was relocated in 1434 to higher ground belonging to the bishop, directly adjacent to St. Simeon's Church. St. Simeonis was founded in 1214 as a branch church of St. Martini. The church served as both a parish and monastery church at times.

From 1464 onwards, an independent monastery church was built on this site: St. Mauritius Church was consecrated in 1475, and the following year the remains of Bishop Bruno were transferred there in a solemn procession.

Between 1450 and 1520, St. Mauritius Monastery underwent a period of reform and spiritual revival after joining the Bursfelde Congregation. Nevertheless, the monastery and church were threatened several times during the Reformation: monks fled to Rinteln in around 1529, returning

later, but had to leave again in 1572. In 1697, the monastery was transferred to the Benedictine monastery of Huysburg near Halberstadt, remained known as a priory and existed until its final dissolution in 1810 by decree of King Jérôme.

After its abolition, the church was secularised. For around 140 years, it served as a stable, military hospital and soldiers' magazine.

At the end of the Second World War, Minden Cathedral lay in ruins. The Catholic community, reinforced by returnees and displaced persons, initially used St. Simeon's Church. Due to a lack of space, the state leased the former monastery church to the cathedral parish in 1950. From 1950 onwards, regular Catholic services were held there. In 1958, St. Mauritius was elevated to a parish vicariate, and in 1967 it was sold to the cathedral parish.

The Catholic St. Mauritius Church forms, together with the Protestant

Simeoniskirche is an almost unique double church complex. The bells of Simeoniskirche also ring for services at St. Mauritius. St. Simeonis, the only parish church taken over by the monastery, granted hospitality to Catholics around 500 years later.

The church is a two-nave church with a long choir, whose Romanesque-Gothic architecture is reminiscent of the Minden monastery built around 1475.

The entire site is grouped around Pauline-von-Mal-linckrodt-Platz, named after the founder of the "Sisters of Christian Charity", who was born in Minden and beatified in 1985.

Since 2018, the cloister of the church has housed a columbarium for urn burials.

Since 2025, St. Mauritius Church has been used by a Greek Orthodox congregation.



Minden Cathedral Treasury

Discover Christian art treasures from eleven centuries – this is the title of the exhibition organised by Minden Cathedral Treasury, which can be viewed at Kleiner Domhof 24. Since 2017, the exhibits, which renowned art historians describe as one of the most important collections of sacred art in Germany, have been on display in an area covering around 450 square metres. Most of the Minden Cathedral Treasury has been documented since the mid-17th century.

Two renowned museum architects were commissioned to design the building, adding special architectural accents to the Minden Cathedral Treasury. The result is a modern, three-storey building just a few metres from the more than 1000-year-old cathedral, which arouses curiosity about what is hidden inside.

Three large windows on the first upper floor of the exhibition offer a view of the Kleiner Domhof with the town hall from the 1970s and the imposing church building. In addition, the wide openings create visual connections between the exhibits on display and their places of discovery, such as the miniature chalice with paten from



the 11th century, which were discovered in a bishop's tomb in the cathedral during excavations.

At the same time, the windows in the bright aluminium façade reveal the view from the cathedral courtyard into the interior of the treasury to the golden Madonna and Child on a throne from the 13th century. And if you look closely, you will also discover the famous Minden Cross, which was created around 1120 in the artistic smithy workshop of the monk Rogerus in the Helmarshausen monastery near Bad Karlshafen. Believers and art history enthusiasts from all over the world travel to Minden to view this bronze crucifix.

While a copy of this Romanesque cross hangs in the crossing of Minden Cathedral, the original is displayed in its own "room within a room" in the cathedral treasury. Gazing upon Christ, visitors have the opportunity to reflect. They look upon a Jesus who is depicted as alive and victorious over evil, symbolised by a dragon. The crucifix, the most famous object in the collection, thus forms the central point of this exhibition area, which is dedicated to the significance of relics.

1 *Minden Cross*

2 *Petrirschrein*

3 *Lion aquamaniles*



quien and reliquaries, as well as crosses and Marian devotions. The selection of exhibits for the redesigned cathedral treasure was made in collaboration with internationally renowned art historians, with 14 precious objects were rated as "outstanding". When presented correctly, the Minden Cathedral Treasury will be on a par with treasuries such as those of Halberstadt Cathedral or the World Heritage Site of St. Servatius' Collegiate Church in Quedlinburg, the art historians were convinced. art historians are convinced.

The Minden Cathedral Parish as the building owner and the interdenominational support association Dombau-Ver- and Minden as financier followed the recommendation for the realisation of the new treasury.

The exhibition in the first main area focuses on these treasures and gives them the space they need so that visitors can take in the exhibits in their entirety. A decision that guests in

. The focus is the 11th-century Petri shrine and the lion aquamanile, which Henry the Lion brought with him to Minden Cathedral in 1168 as a gift for the bishop on the occasion of his marriage to Matilda of England.

Among other things, special space is also given here to the



Hedwig's glass from the 12th century, which is of Fatimid origin and was made in Syria or Egypt. Saint Hedwig, the patron saint of Poland and Silesia, who cared for the poor and founded around 1200 monasteries and churches, is said to have drunk from this glass.

Of particular significance in this part of the exhibition is the "talking reliquary", the arm reliquary of Saint Margaret, which, due to its shape, refers to the type of relic and is already mentioned in a document from 1071

. The so-called "Staufian plates" from the early 13th century are believed to have been part of a throne or lectern. These unique carved oak cabinet elements depict a figurative battle scene, floral patterns and ribbon ornaments.

On the second floor – modelled on a sacristy – visitors first encounter a 16th-century processional cross featuring a 1st-century Roman cameo

- 4 *Madonna Enthroned*
- 5 *Hedwig's glass*
- 6 *Missal Minden Missal*
- 7 *Bust of St. Peter*
- 8 *Sun monstrance*

bearing the image of Emperor Nero. Chalice and patens from the 14th to the 18th century showcase the artistic craftsmanship of the workshops where they were made. The chalice is one of the oldest and most important items used in the Eucharist. Even today, some of these vessels are still used by priests of the cathedral parish during services on special church holidays.

Two chasuble crosses from the late 15th century also dominate the room. These crosses are adorned with particularly impressive figures designed in high relief embroidery. They were sewn onto the back of the priest's robe and their images told stories about the crucifixion of Christ, among other things.

800 by Charlemagne

After the Christianisation of Saxons, the important diocese of Minden was the seat of the bishop until 1648. Numerous fires and looting in the Middle Ages and the almost complete destruction of the cathedral by a bombing raid at the end of the

The events of the Second World War meant that there were virtually no episcopal insignia left in the former diocesan town. This changed with the donation by the Auxiliary Bishop of Paderborn, Dr. Paul Nordhues



9 Relic statue of St. Lawrence

10 Magdalene bust

11 Book cover of the Gospel book
Ivory

12 Arm reliquary of St. Margaret

in 1990, who was closely associated with the cathedral parish and bequeathed his insignia to it. The Minden Cathedral Treasury displays part of this bishop's regalia in a separate exhibition area, including the bishop's crozier, the pectoral cross, the bishop's ring and the council ring, which Pope Paul VI presented to Auxiliary Bishop Nordhues, who was a participant in the Second Vatican Council, at the end of the council in 1965.

The dark period of the Second World War comes to life in the darkened room at the end of the exhibition. Here, objects are displayed that survived the fire in the cathedral, where the cathedral treasure was stored during the war, severely damaged after a bombing raid in March 1945. These include the 15th-century book cover with an ivory panel from the Carolingian period (around 860) and the 9th-century parchment Gospel book.

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Information and booking of guided tours:

Telephone: (05 71) 9 41 99-000

Email: besucherservice@domschatz-minden.de

www.domschatz-minden.de

The Minden Cathedral Treasury is accessible to all.

Store

"Sum quod eram, nec eram quod sum" ["I am who I was, but I was not who I am" | Bishop Sigward]

Pilgrimage on the Sigwardsweg

Since 2009, the tourist and spiritual hiking route "Sigwardsweg" has been inviting pilgrims to visit. Named after the Minden bishop Sigward von Minden, the circular route covers ten stages and around 170 kilometres through the area of the old diocese of Minden in the Minden and Schaumburg region.

From cathedral schoolboy to bishop and imperial advisor. This is how the life of Bishop Sigward can be briefly summarised. He was the 25th Bishop of Minden and held office from 1120 to 1140.

Sigward came from a distinguished Saxon noble family. His family was related to the Counts of Schaumburg-Holstein and owned land west of Minden between the Weser and Leine rivers. The estate also included the Idensen farmstead in the Deister foothills south of Lake Steinhude.

Sigwardsweg is not a historically documented travel route taken by the bishop. The exact route he took to his summer residence in Idensen is unknown.

However, there are some assumptions: he probably combined the journey to Idensen and back with visits to parishes and influential figures in the diocese. And the choice of route will have depended on the weather.

Today's pilgrimage route runs along the region's most important historical sites. There are two special places that can be reached as destinations.

Both places are connected by the thinking and work of Bishop Sigward, who was of decisive importance for the former diocese of Minden. He lived and worked at the former bishop's seat in Minden.

Minden Cathedral is the ideal starting point for the pilgrimage route. In 1134, Bishop Sigward built a private church and burial church in the small village of Idensen, just outside Hanover, and decorated it with the most precious medieval frescoes to be found in Central Europe today.



The Sigwardsweg can be walked as a circular hiking trail. Alternatively, it can be divided into a 78-kilometre southern route (Minden – Bückeburg – Porta Westfalica – Bad Nenndorf – Idensen) and a 90-kilometre northern route (Idensen – Loccum – Stolzenau – Petershagen – Minden).

The northern route runs mainly through the flat Weser Valley. The southern route is more mountainous and leads mostly through the low mountain ranges of the Wiehengebirge, Wesergebirge and Bückeberge.

The "Sigwardsweg Pilgrim's Guide", available from the pilgrim's office in the Minden Cathedral Treasury, provides detailed information about the route, practical tips and fascinating background information on the most important



Sigwardsweg Pilgrims' Office in the Minden Cathedral Treasury
Kleiner Domhof 24 | 32423 Minden
Telephone: (05 71) 9 41 99-001
Email: pilgerbuero@domschatz-minden.de

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Website:

- www.muehlenkreis.de/Erleben-Entdecken/Bewegen/Sigwardsweg/
- www.domschatz-minden.de/pilgerbuero

The Sigwardsweg Pilgrimage Office is run by the interdenominational association Dombau-Verein Minden e.V. in close cooperation with the district of Minden-Lübbecke and the Protestant church district of Minden.

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