

Following mediaeval ecclesiastic architecture - Chancel vaulting at St Mary's Church



Stained glass painting from the
Christ's window "Moses hits water"
in its previous shape

Shape after restoration
(Photos: restoration team of St
Mary's Church)



Head console
(Photo: Rudolf Hartmetz)



Restoration workshop in the
Martyr chancel of St Mary's Church
(Photo: Klaus Baldauf)

The mediaeval stained glass

The stained glass windows, formerly looted, now returned from the Eremitage in St. Petersburg in June 2002, present the most important and largest coherent collection of mediaeval stained glass in the State of Brandenburg. Until their removal during the Second World War the 111 preserved panels of stained glass were installed in the three chancel windows of St Mary's Church in Frankfurt (Oder).

The stained glass in the apex window of the chancel, produced by an unknown artist around 1367, shows Christ's Life and Sufferings, the left stained glass the Creation and the right one a unique number of paintings of the Antichrist.

Approximately eighty percent of the original stock of stained glass remained. Since the latest extensive repairs to the church in the 19th century the stained glass has been neither touched nor restored.

In January 2003 a team of three restorers started its work in a workshop, especially established for this purpose in the Martyr chancel of St Mary's church. Four stained glass panels are shown in the permanent exhibition and visitors can get some information on the actual state of the restoration there.

The stained glass needs extensive restoration. Numerous hair-lines have to be stuck together and retouched. Missing sections are to be replaced by new stained-glass panels. The restoration of the Christ's Window will be finished with its re-installation in the chapel's axis and the re-opening on 28th May, 2005.

Through the re-vaulting of the ambulatory and the chancel nave, the earlier conditions were re-created so that the stained glass could shine again in its mediaeval surrounding with the corresponding spatial relationship and lighting effect.

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Chancel ruin in 1981





Reconstructed chancel vault

Brick masonry of the vault covers



Dear guests and citizens of Frankfurt, welcome!

The return of the medieval stained glass windows was appreciated with great delight. It mobilised enormous amounts of energy among official bodies, concerned authorities, experts and municipal representatives as well as citizens. Corporately they have initiated not only the necessary restoration of the precious panels, but also the required preparatory work within the church - prearrangement of the gothic windows' frame and the re-vaulting of the chancel in particular as the appropriate setting for the "illustrated bible".

During last months' work interesting details were discovered. Even specialists were surprised at the extend of the colourfulness and decoration on rib vaults, piers and walls.

The re-vaulting of the chancel and the ambulatory – a highly complex venture and in Germany besides in Frankfurt (Oder) only performed at St Nicolai's Church in Wismar – requires specialised skills and great experience to rebuild and restore the variety of different rib vaults. Dating from the 14th century and due to their complete destruction after the war the work include prior investigation of their previous profiles and sections from older drawings and historical blueprints. Therefore, I am glad to underline that we managed to find architects, engineers, experts of ecclesiastical architecture and preservation specialists as well as construction firms in our town who meet the challenge to conduct this sensitive work .

I am very pleased to inform you about the current state of work and the results of recent research and investigations.

I would like to emphasise that all activities and work in order to restore the building and the stained glass windows were financed with substantial subsidies from the European Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, the State of Brandenburg and the Town of Frankfurt (Oder). In particular, donations and contributions from local and regional citizens, commerce and industry as well as from visitors and guests made it feasible to restore our precious glass windows. However, to accomplish the residual work at St Mary's Church we are reliant on your persistent and generous support.

Enjoy your visit!

Yours sincerely,
Martin Patzelt,
Mayor of the Town of Frankfurt (Oder)

The re-vaulting of the chancel

After the preservation of the monumental ruin in the 1980's, the chancel roof was rebuilt in its original shape in 1995/96 to protect the historical building stock. Apart from the north belfry, the chancel with its impressive height of 39.5m – where the 111 stained glass windows shall regain their historical place – is visible for many miles, also beyond the river Oder. The return of the paintings was the crucial factor in the decision to reconstruct the chancel vault, to reproduce its spatial dynamics and authenticity from the time of the creation of the stained glass.

First the chancel walls, the piers, the remaining vaults and the bases of the destroyed vaults had to be measured by modern means. On this basis the historical geometry and statics for all the 89 ribs could be reconstructed. Most of the ribs are composed of two and more radii, which had to be defined precisely for reconstruction later.

Then room scaffolding with a height of 12m was erected, providing a working basis for the drawing of the arches at their original height and for the construction of a temporary wooden rack. On this wooden arch the bricks of the ribs were brought up later.

The covers between the ribs were built freehand, demanding great craftsmanship, without any leeway by using appropriately manufactured material – bricks and mortar.

At the same time colour restoration examinations, carried out upon the walls and vaults of the chancel and transept revealed new findings about the original colouring from 1367. The mapped colour concept is based on it and shows a surprising arrangement and variety of colours.

When the mediaeval stained glass windows are built in again and their original colourfulness is restored step by step over the coming years, our most important religious building will be outstanding and should attract even more than the 89,000 visitors who came last year.

The conversion into a sociocultural centre includes the creation of an information area, the modernisation of the sanitary facilities and an update of the fire protection requirements – necessarily to allow performance of the planned events.



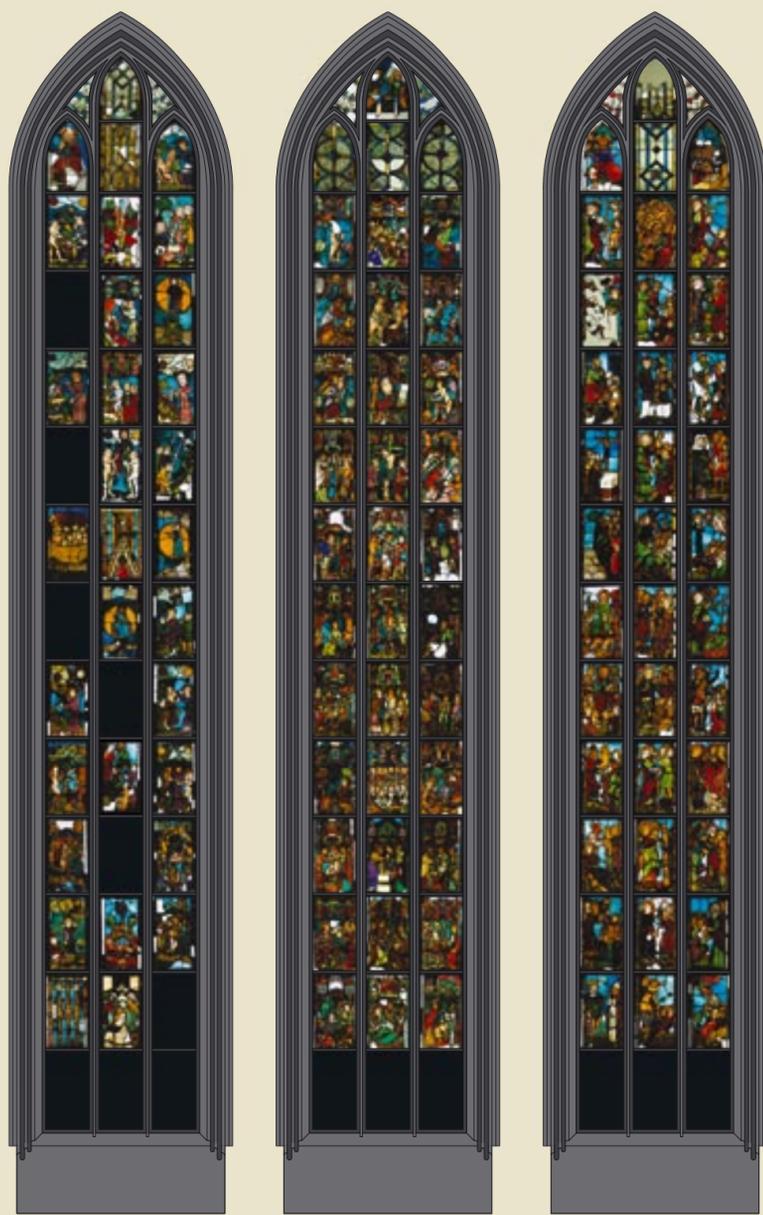
Restoring work on the ambulatory vault (Photo: Winfried Mansolf)



Restoring work on the pillars of the ambulatory vault



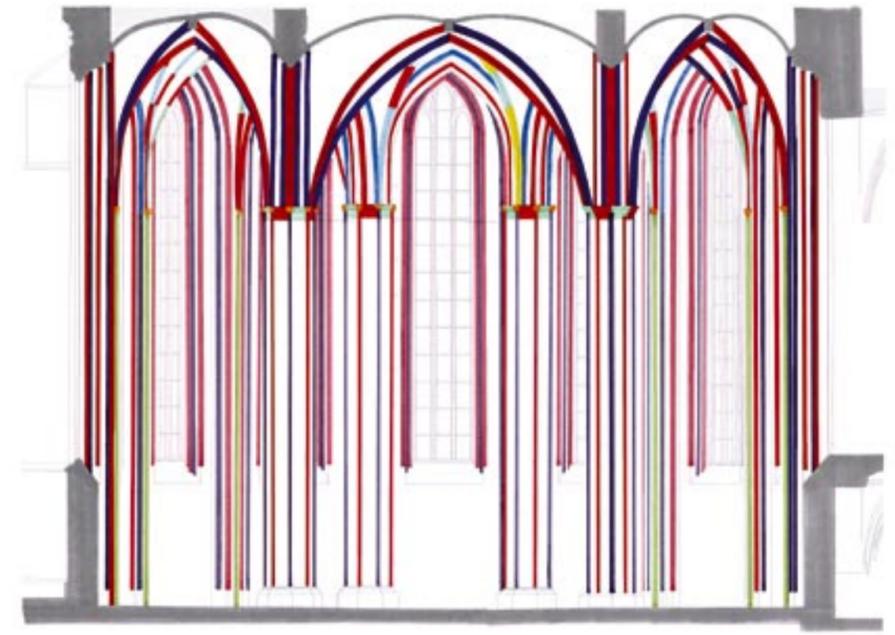
Building of the temporary arches on working scaffolding of 12m height



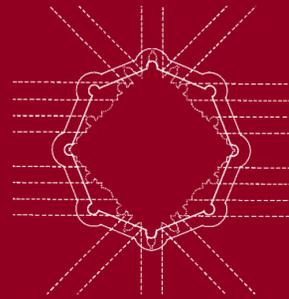
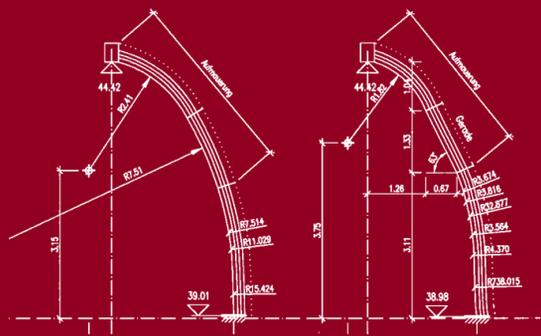
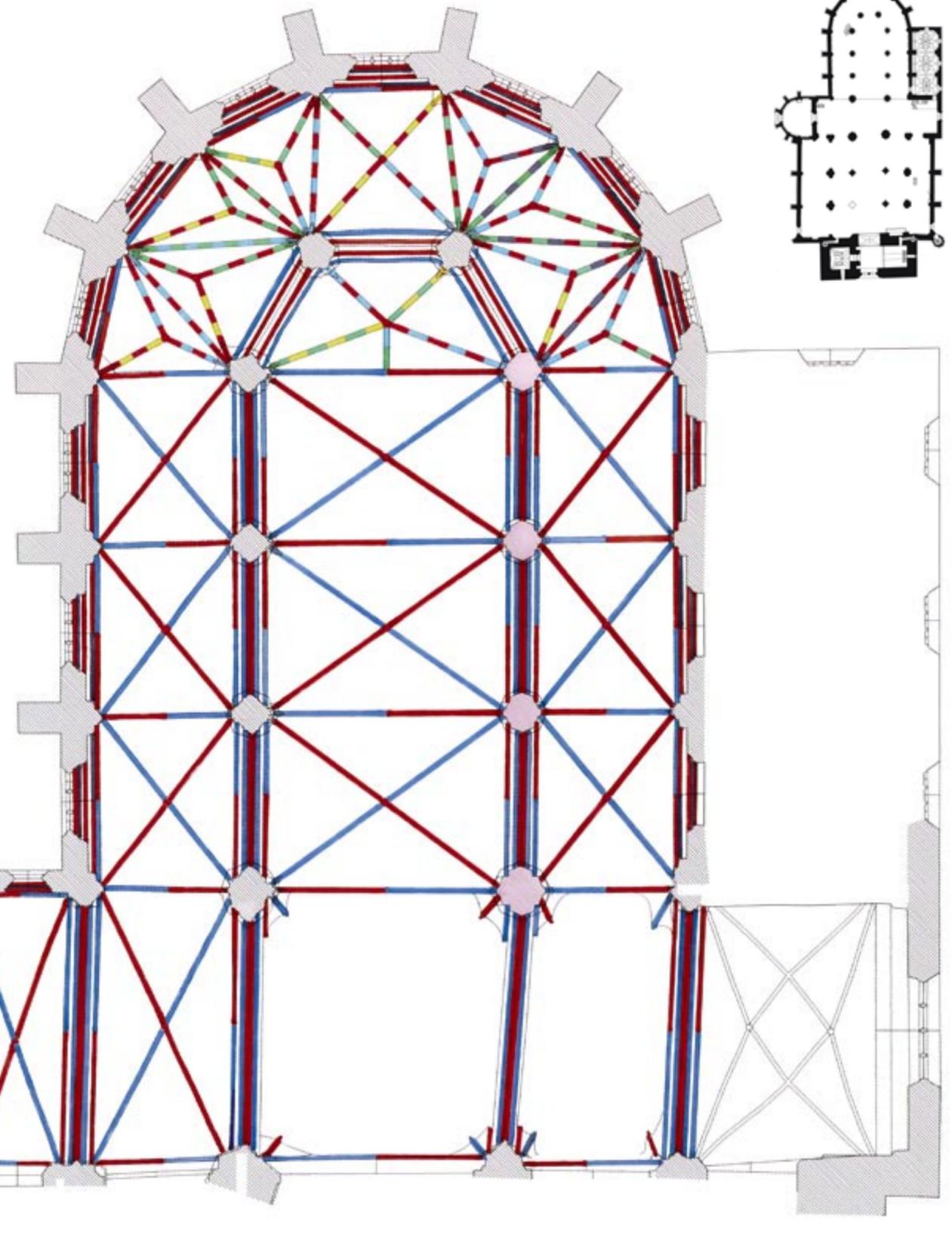
The 111 remaining stained glass window panels in the three chancel windows

Left to right:
Creation window n II
Christ's window I
Antichrist's window s II

View of the chancel apex



Vault plan with the original colours



Blueprint of the vault ribs

Cross-section of a pillar

Colour restoration research on the mediaeval coloration of the chapel, main focus vault

A major discovery is the difference between the chancel and the choir polygon. In the main chapel the colours of red, black and dark blue dominate. The effect of dark blue results from a black priming – the typical mediaeval use of the blue pigment azurite. In the choir polygon further colours like malachite green and light blue are added. They are applied alternately, imitating stone. The effect is a heightening of the coloration of the eastern – and therefore liturgically most important – parts of the church. The dominating colour of the walls was white, the colour of the window screens alternating between red, black and white; the window ornamentation in the whole chancel was white. It seems like the colourfulness of the vault had a counterpart in the basic area of the surrounding walls – this shows the colour findings at the wall piers, probably the remains of a curtain painting with a textile pattern on green ground.