



Museum of Christian art and  
the history of the church of Bremen  
www.dommuseum-bremen.de

## WELCOME TO THE DOM-MUSEUM!



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### Highlights

- Historical textiles (mitre etc.)
- Crook of Limoges
- Bremen – „Rome of the North“
- Voluntary commitment as a living tradition
- Painting „Man of Sorrows“ by Lucas Cranach

The Bremen Dom-Museum is the conclusion of the large restoration of the Cathedral, in the course of which extensive excavations led to new findings concerning the 1200-year-old history of the Cathedral and to the discovery of medieval tombs with precious appurtenances. Annexes dating back to the 14th and 15th century offered the necessary rooms for establishing the museum.

In former times the so-called "Tresekammer", the treasure-vault with the then treasure of the Cathedral, was situated here beside the chancel; Under the "Tresekammer" was a St. Mary's Chapel (late Romanesque, frescos from early 15th century); the adjoining room in Decorated Gothic style contained the library of the Cathedral. After the Reformation these rooms served for profane purposes, the storage of coal and chalk. From 1823 the so-called "Bleikeller" was housed here. (It is now below the former cloisters; entrance outside the Cathedral—worth seeing).

**1** Entering the Dom-Museum the visitor, still on the wooden foot bridge, is surprised to catch sight of the semicircular foundations of an apse. Its direct prolongation joins the outer wall, moved far to the east, of the East Crypt of the Cathedral built by

Adalbert (two semicircular windows and a round one, Romanesque, second half of the 11th century, partly restored).

Now we are in a Romanesque room of the 13th century. The **fresco painting** was discovered under dirty plaster layers during the last reconstructions. After careful uncovering, consolidation and restoration four pictures can be recognized among rich ornaments of tendrils and inserted heads of angels. In the entrance bay Christ's Baptism in the Jordan; in the center, on opposite sides, in fragments only, the soldiers quarreling for the coat, and the Descent from the Cross; on the narrower wall of the room the presentation of Christ in the mandorla, called *Maiestas Domini*. The altar was situated here in the former St. Mary's Chapel.

**2** Stone fragments from the Cathedral are exhibited here: early and late Romanesque capitals, bases and ornaments. They were removed during reconstructions in the 19th century and are now presented here. In front of the large window in room 2 the course of 1200 years of building history is shown.

This room, lined with red brick groins, includes a few but beautiful remnants of sculpture, which were abundant in earlier times. (From 1561 to 1638 the Cathedral was closed and neglected). Presentations of the Last Supper (beginning of the 15th century), a relief with scenes from the lives of the holy doctors Cosmas and Damian and - at the bottom, in front of the stairs - Saint Anne with Mary and the Infant Jesus (around 1500) are particularly worth noticing.

The staircase leads to the upper rooms of Dom-Museum. Our visitors are invited to halt on the steps and throw a glance at two fragments of very early reliefs: Samson tearing the lion and the Fenris wolf, both dating back to the second half of the 11th century, probably from the former west facade of the Cathedral planned by Adalbert and Liemar. In a showcase in the wall of the staircase you can see medieval coats of arms of members of the cathedral clergy.

**3** The front-room of the first floor is dedicated to the history and significance of the Bremen bishopric from its foundation in 787 to its disintegration in 1648. As a matter of course, only some selected items could be emphasized e.g. Bremen bishops as missionaries and saints (Willehad, Ansgar, Rimbert and Unni); Adalbert as a politician and Archbishop; Bremen as a center of mission for Northern Europe ("**Rome of the North**"); music of the early Middle Ages in Bremen; documents and seals of Bremen bishops; history of the Cathedral parish after the Reformation.

It is understandable that the attention of the visitors is attracted by the silver goods exhibited in the center; they are magnificent samples of the silver altar implements from 1400 to about 1850.

**4** The climax of the collection, however, will be found in the next room to the left, some steps downstairs. It is strongly dimmed because the finds from six episcopal tombs from the eleventh to the 15th century are preserved here in show-cases protected from light. A wooden bishop's figure in front of the steps to the air-conditioned room from around 1410-1420 illustrates how the garments were once worn. Among the numerous valuables special notice should be taken of the **crook of Limoges**. It shows a great miracle taking place: an angel comes to Mary to tell her that she will receive the Son of God. The Christmas miracle of the Incarnation of God begins (middle of 13th century, tomb 18).

Just as impressive are the parts of the **vestments** shown here. These finds from the tombs were cleaned, preserved and restored in the "Riksantikvarieämbetet" at Stockholm, Department for Historical Textiles. From the abundance of the textile valuables a **mitre** from the 13th century should be given prominence. Its backside shows St. Peter and St. Paul, the front shows a rare depiction of a heavenly intercession (Deesis): Christ as Judge of the World between Mary and John the Baptist.

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In spring 1995 the Bremen Dom-Museum was considerably extended to include the works of art that had been stored in the magazine during the great restoration of the Cathedral. The extended museum was also able to offer rooms for exhibiting a large number of textiles found in medieval graves which had come back from Stockholm where they had been expertly conserved.

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From the room containing the silverware the visitor goes down a little staircase to the new rooms. A fine old iron chest, which is now used as a collecting-box, is the first specimen of further discoveries. The visitor will turn to the right and a lightened picture- wall draws his attention to medieval manuscripts. The photos give him an impression of the former collection of the Cathedral library, of its illuminated manuscripts written on parchment from the 11th to the 15th century.

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**6** The first picture which catches the visitor's eyes in these rooms is the "**Man of Sorrows**" by **Lucas Cranach** dated ca. 1537. The painting represents Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected, with his stigmata. This type of picture can be traced back to the late middle ages. Historic altar implements and hymn books, gifts on loan from the Catholic parish of St. John, have been placed in a dark-lined glass case on the wall next to the Cranach painting. Thus the ecumenical nature of the museum becomes clear.

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**5** In a small room behind the Cranach painting are other paintings showing Jesus at the scourging and carrying of the cross. The depiction of these pictorial themes has changed considerably over the course of time. You can also see a large representation of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian.

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**6** In the southern wing of the extended museum another large-sized painting, the "Zinsgroschen" (tribute-money) is exhibited. It is a copy of the homonymous work of the famous Flemish painter P. P.

Rubens (1577-1640). Its original is at San Francisco, another copy at the Louvre. If compared with these two paintings the Bremen version is a mirror image, so it was obviously produced from an engraving.

**Voluntary commitment** has a long tradition in Bremen. The glass case on the side-wall contains some loaned gifts from three very old Bremen communities: St. Peter's Cathedral Deaconry (founded in 1638) St. Anne Brotherhood (1327) and St. James Brotherhood (established as early as in the 13th century in order to support the pilgrims on their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela). The works of art exhibited here: a wooden statue of St. James and a "Schauer", a vessel for preparing and presenting spiced wine, they give evidence of the rich traditions of those communities.

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**7** The five wooden altar figures, once on the high altar of the Cathedral, now in the adjoining little room, were created in the 19th century. They are fine copies of the figures on the famous medieval Sebaldus' tomb at Nuremberg. They are the apostles Paul, Thomas, John, and Matthew, joined by Saint Peter, the patron saint of the Cathedral. Two sketches show "The Lamentation of Christ" and "The Adoration of the Three Kings" by the Bremen painter Arthur Fitger (1840-1909). The finished paintings can be seen in a side chapel of the cathedral. Beside it the brass slab of the tomb of the Provost of the Cathedral Johann Rode (who died in 1477) shows us the great abilities of the medieval artistic handicraftsmen. By this slab the vestment of a clergyman in the Middle Ages can be well demonstrated, because the dead priest was - according to the tradition of that time - represented in full regalia.

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**8** With this work of art before his mind's eye, the visitor will enter the adjacent **second room of textiles** which is especially worth seeing. In this room, which must also be dimmed and air-conditioned because of the sensitivity of the exhibits, the finds of grave 7 are displayed in two glass cases. The archbishop was clothed in three large vestments, which are called tunic, dalmatic, and chasuble.

The **dalmatic**, in particular, is very remarkable because it shows the visitor a marvelous pattern of ornaments of plants and a trimming above the seam, into which the words "the all-powerful sultan" are woven in Arabic letters. According to the examinations of the Stockholm textile workshop the dalmatic was produced in Moorish Spain in the 13th century. The fact that it made its way to Bremen gives proof of the significance of the Archbishopric of Bremen.

Apart from these large vestments there are various small exhibits in the glass cases: beside the chasuble the mitre made of yellowish silk, on the left beside the dalmatic two parures of an alb (robe of white linen, which has not preserved itself). On them patterns of double-eagles, gazelles, falcons, and palmettes are to be seen. Above the wings of the double-eagles there is a ribbon, which consists of a text again in Arabic: "Success will come from God". Some smaller finds and textiles from the graves have been placed above the two parures: two octagonal pieces of silk-embroidery for gloves with the Holy Lamb in the middle, two cuffs for gloves also ornamented with embroidery, parts of a cross of a pall, a simple small case made of taffeta for a little lead plate with the name of the dead person (unfortunately lost), and two bronze belt-buckles. In the drawers conserved textiles are expertly kept for research and for special exhibitions.

When leaving the "new rooms", the visitor should not forget to have a look at the photo wall "**Ein deutsches Requiem**" von **Johannes Brahms** - Uraufführung im Bremer Dom" („A German Requiem" by Johannes Brahms, world premiere in Bremen Cathedral). That event of the year 1868 is well illustrated by texts and photos from those days.

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