

Frank Braun
Wismar Façades Telling History

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Dedicated to Frido and Marta

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Foreword

The historical centre of the Hanseatic town of Wismar has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2002, together with the historical centre of the Hanseatic town of Stralsund. In comparison to many other northern German cities, Wismar suffered less 20th-century war destruction and therefore still serves as an impressive testimony to eight centuries of urban building culture on the southern Baltic coast.

Wismar's building history was effectively determined in the first two centuries after the town was founded in the first half of the 13th century. Not only were the network of streets and squares and the locations of churches and monasteries laid out, but also the basic patterns of the plots and the structure of the building blocks were regulated. Changes in subsequent centuries took place within this framework.

Extensive construction activity in the context of urban renewal after reunification in October 1990 accounts for countless repairs and modernisation in historical buildings and the new and redesigned public streets and squares. In the course of preparing these measures, many architectural-historical and restorative investigations were performed, which made it possible to reconstruct the history of many buildings in detail. These investigations were an important basis for this publication.

At the same time, Wismar's historical centre has offered and still offers an ideal field of study for a university located right "at the gates" to pursue project-related training and research

in heritage conservation. Numerous student projects and theses in the master programmes of architecture and civil engineering since 1996, as well as various building history research projects from 1996 to 2013, have contributed a great deal of information to this publication.

The book is aimed at all those interested in the building and urban development history of the Hanseatic town of Wismar. It does not focus on the large ecclesiastical and public buildings that tend to characterise the silhouette of the town: this book is primarily concerned with “everyday architecture”, i.e., the residential and commercial buildings of Wismar’s inhabitants that still define the streets of the historical centre today. As these buildings are usually not accessible inside (or only in part), the focus is on the street façades. This is by no means limited to just the “stylistics” of the design elements and decorative forms, because façades provide us with much more information: Which houses were used for what purposes? What materials and types of construction were preferred? Are there indications of owners or occupants? The location of a property or building also provides important information on the economic and social topography.

After a general introduction to Wismar’s urban development and building history from the founding of the town to the present day, a total of 34 façades from the period between the 14th century and the 1950s are discussed in short texts and shown in current and historical photographs and sections of historical maps. All the façades are visible from the street or freely accessible car parks. A specific tour route is deliberately not recommended. The map on the inside of the back cover contains the locations of the presented façades and makes it possible to plan an individual route and spontaneously discover the places.

I would like to thank Dr. Nils Jörn (Archive of the Hanseatic Town of Wismar) for his forthcoming support of research of all kinds and for the release of historical photographs and maps for printing. Christiane Bens (Hansestadt Wismar, Bauamt, Abteilung Sanierung und Denkmalschutz) was always available for professional discussion on the building history of the selected façades and provided insight into numerous studies of building history and restoration. The building authority of the Hanseatic town of Wismar provided scans of some of the building application drawings. I owe a debt of gratitude to Ingo Hopfeldt for many comments and suggestions. Finally, great thanks are due to the association “Freunde und Förderer des Archivs der Hansestadt Wismar e. V.” for including this volume in its series of publications and for cofunding the printing.

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Frank Braun