

Saxon sandstone from the banks of the Elbe

Some one hundred million years ago the area of the Elbe valley was a huge sea where deposits from the nearby mountains were settled. This is how a system of layers of 400 meters in size was formed. Due to weathering, the system has characteristic variety of forms prevailing south-east Pirna, called "Saxon Switzerland" is nowadays famous worldwide not only as an area of walks and climbing.

This particular rock world fascinated and inspired man who wanted to use the sandstone for their needs. Cliffs and walls in the valleys emerged from the world of nature, a rectangular system of cracks and horizontal layers provided raw rock blocks almost ready to be machined. That is why the use of the sandstone from the area of the Elbe began relatively early, i.e. when Slavs settled the region in the 7th century A.D.

The demand for sandstone as a form of building material was growing together with construction of churches, priories, castles and dwelling settlements. As late as in the 14th century, together with the development of river transport, naturally, due to huge demand for the material, excavation of stone covered the areas around Posta, Wehlen, Rathen, Kichleithe, Königstein and Postelwitz.

Sandstone building industry had its first absolute period of glamour in the Baroque epoch when numerous buildings were made from the sandstone from the area of the Elbe. Those were Zwinger, Frauenkirche and Hofkirche of such outstanding architects as M. Pöppelmann, G. Chiaverie, George Bähr and others. Almost at the same time (1744) G. W. v. Knobelsdorff built the Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam to the order of Frederic the Great.

The sandstone from the area of the Elbe reached then many other European countries. It was sought as grindstone and millstone, and was exported to Russia, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia.

In the late 19th century, there were approximately 500 quarries in the region. After World War II, in the 1950's there were merely 20 quarries. One of the few companies which survived the Great war and World War II was Fleck & Ilmert KG in Pirna. Due to the then valid laws, in 1945 half of the company was controlled by the state, and then state-owned. In 1972, the company joined the VEB Elbenaturstein association.

On July 1st, 1990, the VEB Elbenaturstein was transformed into a company limited to liabilities. On the same day, the company of Sächsische Sandsteinwerke GmbH left the partnership and began to run their activities on their own. Following the successful privatization, the company was returned to the shareholders of Fleck & Ilmert KG.

Sächsische Sandsteinwerke (Saxon Sandstone Company) based in Pirna excavate three different types of sandstone in 6 quarries:

- Cottaer sandstone,
- Reinhardsdorfer sandstone,
- Postaer sandstone.

For petrographic characteristics of these three types of sandstone, see further part of this website.