

JERG RATGEB AND THE HERRENBERG ALTARPIECE - A PROJECT OF INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCUMENTATION OF HISTORY AS A CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Based on the Multimedia CD "In den Wirren des Bauernkrieges - Jerg Ratgeb und der Herrenberger Altar", this article shall outline ideas, how a subject can be approached, using thoughts and viewpoints of some diverse scientific disciplines and introduce some thoughts on the aesthetic and didactic virtue of historical reconstruction and representation as well as their value for historical research.

The project as a whole was initiated by the Artentity foundation.¹ It started with some conceptional ideas in the mid 90's and is not expected to be finished for some years to come. Besides the Historical Institute - Department of Local History - at the University of Stuttgart, the Archive of Herrenberg, the Bauernkriegsmuseum Böblingen, the Fraunhofer Institut für Arbeitswirtschaft und Organisation and the Wilhelm Schickard Institute for computer science and graphical-interactive systems at the University of Tübingen were involved in the project.

The main objective was using the possibilities of the New Media for an integral vision of art and history. The multiple connections of Jerg Ratgebs altarpiece to the contemporary art- and cultural history form the main focus on it.

During a 3 year project a group of students under the scientific lead of Dr. Gerhard Faix were able to produce a CD Rom based encyclopaedia over 2 CD Roms (Burgbacher and Faix 2000). These CDs content as topics the Herrenberg Altar by Jerg Ratgeb, the "Gesamtkunstwerk Chorraum", the choir stalls of the collegiate church at Herrenberg, the building history of the collegiate church at Herrenberg, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Twelve Articles of the peasants and the Peasants War in Württemberg.

Beneath this historical and arthistorical analysis the possibilities of the multimedia applications for the arts became a focus of attention: the structural possibilities of hypertext, the reconstruction of complex spatial structures the visualization of dynamic processes an the use of audio and video sequences. The CDs were created using the ToolBook software and contain about 1000 pages of code.

The CDs were awarded the Prix Möbius Germany 2001 in the category Science and Communication and had a special mention at the world final in Peking. It was also awarded the seal of quality by the Europrix 2002 in the category knowledge, discovery and culture.

In the following some contents of the CD Roms will be presented.

The first CD Rom is dedicated to the altarpiece and is original location, the Choir of the collegiate church at Herrenberg. The second CD Rom allows an insight into the events of the Peasant War in the duchy Württemberg - located in the south-western part of Germany - and presents Jerg Ratgebs disastrous part in it. The history of the "collegiate church at Herrenberg" are illustrated by the representations of the different phases of the building process during the 800 year history of the churchbuilding. Apart from such static 2dimensional pictures the CD also contains some three dimensional reconstructions.

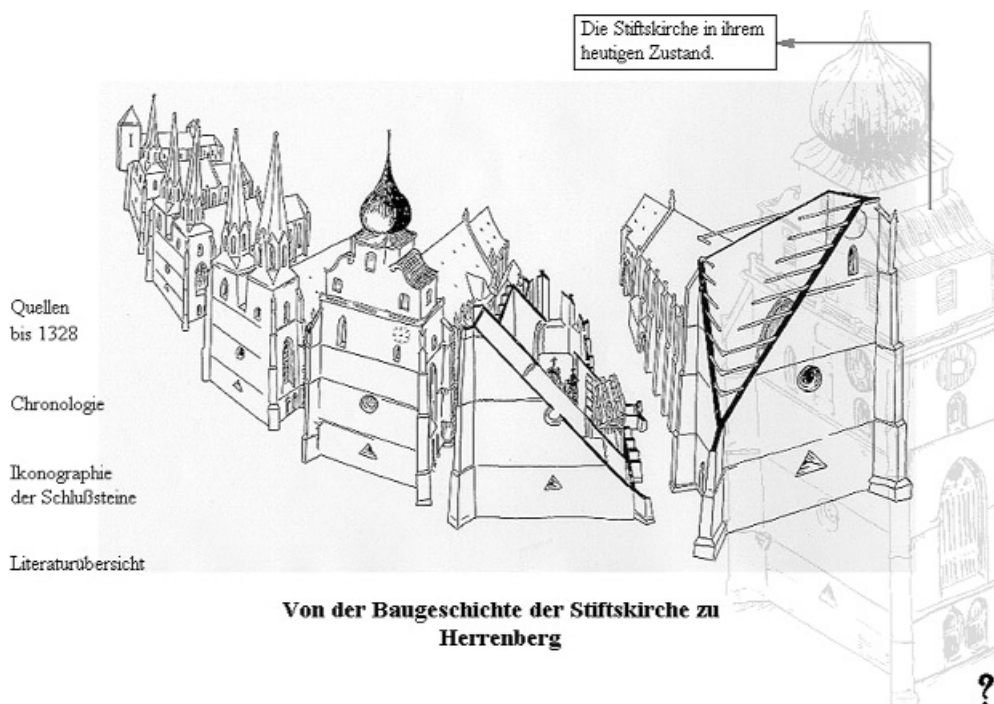


Figure 1 The representations of the different phases of the collegia church building

In an animation the user can see a reconstruction of the inside of the "collegiate church at Herrenberg" as it was at the beginning of the 16th century. This animation was generated using a so called CAVE based at the Fraunhofer Institut für Arbeitswirtschaft und Organisation. CAVE stands for Computer Aided Virtual Environment and is a three dimensional projection space. The user can enter this space and can navigate the projection and interact with it using a Joystick. This way it is possible to move freely through the inside of the church and explore it. As well it is possible to explore the architecture in Jerg Ratgebs altarpiece, during a virtual Walk through them. The the paintings were created in the late 15th century by Jerg Ratgeb and can only be seen today at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, wich is out of its original context.

The CD provides multiple options to position the altar tables in relation to each other and compare them. This way an onlooker is better able to understand Jerg Ratgebs "pictorial agenda". Furthermore the CD gives one the ability to precisely observe the various pictures via a zoom function.



Figure 2 Homepage of the pictorial agenda of the altarpiece by Jerg Ratgeb

The relationship between the altar and the choir benches as it was planned by the "Brethren of the common life" is presented in another animation.

These Animations and reconstructions are didactic as much as artistic elements, designed to lead to onlooker from the visual reality towards the historical questions.

On the CD Roms another focus was given on the altars wide relationship to the culture and art history of the period. The contemporary social movements in the 15th and 16th century and the rapid expansion of the art of printing marks a time of upheaval which has been methodically consolidated and presented.

One of the most important expressions of the time line between Middle Ages and the early Modern Times in Europe is the Peasants' War in the German speaking regions of the year 1525. This, in the modern historical research called "Revolution of the Common Man" (Blickle 1993), was intended by the growing dissatisfaction about the social, economical and religious changes through the whole society.

To show the reasons and the development of the peasants campaign in the duchy of Württemberg a interactive map was designed. The user is given the possibility to explore this in different levels, more or less detailed. (Fig.3)

Beginning with summary the user gets short information about every important place or station during the march of the peasants through the duchy. In further levels the user can go in to greater detail about the locations, the separate occasions or the exact way, the peasants marched in April and may 1525 shown in an animation in a three dimensional topographical model of Württemberg.

To secure these information in a scientific way the CDs are not only designed to simply impart such knowledge but also to enable the user to reflect on the historical events and draw his own conclusions. The contemporary sources used in the production of the CDs were scanned and embedded in order to empower the user to question our interpretations. In order to facilitate navigating the sources a system of footnotes was designed.

Finally some words to the experiences made during this project. The most exciting examination for historians with the possibilities of New Media is to overcome the deep gap

between the "Old School", which widely refuses using it, and the needs of modern education. During our work we discovered the advantages in the presentation of the results of our research. Nevertheless the project would not desert the way of scientific historical work, which is reading and interpreting sources of all origin. The big memory capacity gives the possibility to show all the originals at the place where they are needed together with the transcription and with the interpretation. Here we are able to show the original historical research.

The foundation of this work was a very large amount of data which made it impossible to rely on written sources alone. Especially the analysis of pictures and the architectural her-

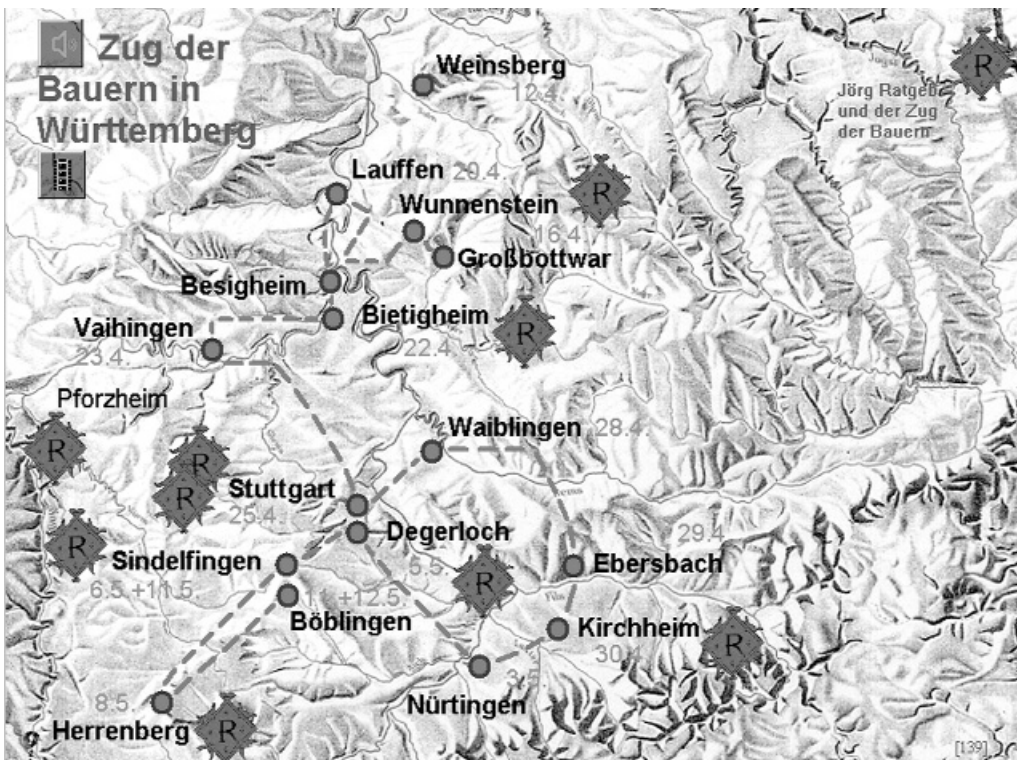


Figure 3 Interactive map of the peasants campaign through the duchy of Württemberg

itage as well as on site visits were important for our research. The cooperation between the various scientific disciplines, such as history of art, history, architecture, geography and IT was essential. The representation had to conform to high standards of precision, especially in regard to the publication on CD.

Naturally the making of these CDs required a lot of thought. Not all of the required detail is provided by historic sources. Even with a maximum of effort not all factors and their consequences could be included. Furthermore is the labour need for a project of this magnitude prohibitively costly. 16 people

nists, this in turn will raise new questions.

It is this aspects of the perspective of the protagonists that is of most importance to the historian, because it makes some actions more accessible in its course and result.

In future we hope to embed the model into the CAVE system supplanting it with further data and ultimately link it to a database.

This project in a whole is an experiment to display the variety of our cultural heritage across the borders of scientific disciplines.

¹For further information about the "Artenity" foundation pleas contact: <http://www.transimagine.de/ratgeb>.

REFERENCES

BURGBACHER, K. and FAIX, G., 2000. In den Wirren des Bauernkriegs - Jerg Ratgeb und der Herrenberger Altar. Stuttgart.

BLICKLE, P., 1993. Die Revolution von 1525. München:289-320.

worked 3 years to produce these CDs. This makes projects like this unrealistic in a commercial environment. It is also imperative to solve the question of the copyright of pictures in a scientific and multi media publishing context. The project would not have been possible if it had not been for the waiving of the license fees by the government of Baden-Württemberg.

In summary it may honestly be said that the aim of presenting the historic material for didactic use was reached. The three dimensional reconstructions as well as the topographical model of Württemberg may prove of value to research, as they enable the user to see the perspective of the protagon-