

Christoph Pitz, Das Würzburger Jahrtausend. Die Zeit des Mittelalters in Geschichte und Geschichten, Würzburg (Echter-Verlag) 2018, 352 S., zahlr. s/w Abb., ISBN 978-3-429-04476-3, EUR 19,90.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Joseph P. Huffman, Mechanicsburg, PA

Many are the *Sachbücher* that have been published with pretensions to be *Fachbücher*, and this has nowhere been more evident than in the field of history. Such books are most often written by those engaged in the fields of art or literature, and so the fabric of history woven in their pages tends to be trimmed neatly into samples of cultural glory or used as window dressing for adventure novels¹.

Christoph Pitz has produced just such a book here. After studying German art history and philology at university, he spent many years as a media marketing and investment manager while also assisting authors of historical novels and *Sachbücher* with background research. For the past four years he has also maintained an Internet website dedicated to all things cultural in Würzburg, whose title articulates well the intended audience for the articles, video tours, and tourist tips on the site: »Würzburg für Anfänger und Fortgeschrittene mit Interesse an Geschichte, Kultur und Kunst!«

Pitz has made thorough use of his combination of art historical knowledge and marketing expertise in the design and production of his book. Though 341 pages provided him much more room to cover Würzburg's medieval millennium than his website's 15-minute »kompakter Überblick zu 1300 Jahren Würzburg« video, the book follows the same packaging as the website. Indeed, the book reads just like the website, with a series of modules that either tell dramatic short stories from Würzburg's history or describe great works of church art and architecture.

The publisher's blurb on the book's back cover affirms this approach and markets it eagerly to an urban middle-class audience: »Christoph Pitz lässt diese Geschichte lebendig werden, indem er nicht nur die großen Ereignisse dieser Zeit beschreibt, sondern Geschichten aus der Geschichte erzählt, von frommen Missionaren, aufrechten Kaufleuten und Handwerkern und auch von üblen Beutelschneidern und intriganten Machthabern.«

The chapters as a result are comprised of short, discrete snippets from the first millennium of Würzburg's history, with inevitable imbalances of content based on the rhetorical purposes of the book and the expertise of the author. Chapters on Charlemagne (six pages), Bishop Burkard and the founding of the bishopric of Würzburg (twelve pages), the Salian bishop Bruno (eight pages), the Investiture Struggle

¹ Echter Verlag, the publisher of this book, is named after the controversial Prince-Bishop of Würzburg, Julius Echter von Mespelbrunn (1545–1617). As such, it publishes historical novels and regional literature about Franconia alongside its primary lists in Catholic spirituality, theology, and *Lebenskunst*.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris | publiée
par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

(ten pages), the Staufen dynasty (ten pages) are brief narratives which serve to provide a very broad historical context for the main chapters. The book's primary content appears in more detailed chapters on the cathedral (ten pages), the Main bridge »als Weltwunder« (16 pages), the pomp and locale of Barbarossa's imperial wedding (ten pages), pogroms (ten pages) and an additional chapter on »Raserei, Pogrom und Lüge« (16 pages), a »Bürgerkirche« (ten pages), and a general chapter on »Auseinandersetzung und Kampf« (ten pages) that is more of an architectural tour of churches than a study of feuding between the bishop and burghers.

Thus, the reader never learns much at all about the historical development of Würzburg as a city, and even less about the actual people who inhabited it for a thousand years. Opportunities to connect Würzburg with a larger European context, let alone a broader German-speaking context, are missed at every turn. For example, simply mentioning that Würzburg's first bishop was not only a missionary monk but also an Anglo-Saxon would have opened avenues of exploration beyond the city's art and architecture. Now the English king Richard I the Lionheart rates a ten-page chapter, oddly enough, even though he never set foot in Würzburg (he merely passed through nearby Ochsenfurt as a prisoner *en route* from Dürnstein Castle to Speyer when Duke Leopold of Austria delivered him up to Emperor Henry VI).

The only apparent reason Richard I has been inserted in this volume is the inclusion on the chapter's title page of the infamous image of the English monarch kissing the feet of Henry VI once becoming the emperor's vassal. Of course, any medieval historian knows that this image was manufactured several years after Richard I's captivity and for a southern Italian panegyric poem, »Liber ad honorem Augusti«, composed by monk and Staufen court poet Peter of Eboli². The image itself was not widely known in medieval Europe, nor do any German sources confirm the poem's legendary account, yet Pitz has incorrectly assumed that it represents an actual historical narrative (rather than a courtier's political spin) and published it as such to the contemporary reading public without comment or attribution³.

The book's prose is often overburdened with artificially turgid prose given its intended audience, though this may have been an attempt to add a patina of scholarly bearing⁴. And the prose itself is regularly interrupted with random inserted Gray boxes containing definitions and explanations of terms, which themselves are often tautologies (»Nach

² Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis*. Codex 120 II der Burgerbibliothek Bern. Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit, hg. von Theo Kölzer und Marlis Stähli. Textrevision und Übersetzung von Gereon Becht-Jördens, Sigmaringen 1994, p. 245.

³ John Gillingham, *Cœur de Lion in Captivity*, in: *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* (2013), p. 59–83. Some research into the most recent historical scholarship based on primary source evidence would have avoided the erroneous depiction which appears in the book.

⁴ For example, on page 96: »Der als Investiturstreit in die Geschichte eingegangene Konflikt zwischen dem deutschen König und dem Papsttum mit seinem ersten großen Höhepunkt in dem berühmten Gang nach Canossa 1077 begann bereits sechs Jahre zuvor und interessanterweise nur kurz nach dem gescheiterten Scheidungsansinnen des Königs, als es bei der Besetzung des Erzbistums von Mailand zu einem Eklat gekommen war.«



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris | publiée
par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

dem Niederreißen der »Alten Mauer« wurde das Areal der ehemaligen Stadtmauer neu bebaut. Von daher: Neubaustraße.«) or only beg further explanation: »Der Begriff »Gallia« geht auf Julius Caesar und sein Werk »De bello Gallico« zurück.« Surely Julius Caesar did not invent the name, as he himself noted that this was a Roman name though the »Gauls« referred to themselves as the *Celtae*. These Gray boxes would have been better placed in an appendix or as footnotes rather than arbitrarily interrupting the body of the text with ancillary information.

Finally, and perhaps most disturbing for research historians, the book contains no index for locating material nor any footnotes or bibliography citing the historical secondary sources from which the author drew for his own text. There is merely a »weiterführende Literatur« addendum listing 13 publications, but which did the author himself use? Instead of tending to ethical if not scholarly standards in this regard, more effort was put into a second addendum entitled, »Das Würzburgische Mittelalter in der Romanliteratur« (p. 349–350), one entry of which the author himself perhaps has used for his own book's format: Roman Rausch's historical novel »Die Brücke über den Main« (Reinbek 2017). »In 10 Ausschnitten beziehungsweise Episoden der Stadtgeschichte Würzburgs schildert der Roman den Fortgang der Zeit und darin eine sehr besonders getroffene Auswahl an Momenten dieser Stadt. Viel Liebe zum Detail und auch viel Kreativität stecken darin. Was Sie hier in diesem Buch zur Geschichte Würzburgs erfahren haben, lesen Sie dort im literarisch eingebetteten Roman.«

At best this book is a sort of *Kunstführer* or perhaps a *Stadtführer* with some historical narrative as its framing, though it was not designed to serve as a history of medieval Würzburg – either as *Sachbuch* or *Fachbuch*. Readers interested in medieval Würzburg are much better served by the first of the three magisterial volumes edited by Ulrich Wagner, »Geschichte der Stadt Würzburg« (Stuttgart 2001–2007) or by the *Taschenbuch* volumes of Dieter Schäfer, »Geschichte Würzburgs. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart« (Munich 2003); Joachim Fildhaut, »Würzburg. Eine kleine Stadtgeschichte« (Würzburg 2004); Hans Steidle, Christine Weisner, »Würzburg. Streifzüge durch 13 Jahrhunderte Stadtgeschichte« (Würzburg 1999); and Werner Dettelbacher, »Würzburg – ein Gang durch seine Vergangenheit« (Würzburg 1984). For the history of Würzburg's art and architecture one should turn to Stefan Kummer, »Kunstgeschichte der Stadt Würzburg, 800–1945« (Regensburg 2011).



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris | publiée
par l'Institut historique allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)