

tive des Richterschen Werks, die Elger immer wieder so deutlich herauspräpariert, hätten auch sein eigenes Unternehmen tragen müssen. Aber vielleicht stand er dazu seinem Gegenstand als ehemaliger Assistent und langjähriger Wegbegleiter des Künstlers einfach zu nahe. Dietmar Elger hätte alle Möglichkeiten und die besten fachlichen Voraussetzungen gehabt, unser Bild von „Europe’s most challenging modern painter“ auf lange Sicht zu formen. Leider hat er sie nicht genutzt.

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Thomas Coomans: L'abbaye de Villers-en-Brabant. Construction, configuration et signification d'une abbaye cistercienne gothique (*Studia et Documenta*, 11); Bruxelles: Éditions Racine und Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses (Brecht) 2000; 622 pp.; ISBN 2-87386-200-9; € 111,43

The Cistercian abbey of Villers in Brabant is probably the most beautiful monastic site in all of Belgium. The majestic ruins of the abbey merge wonderfully into their green setting. It would seem that the monks who built the abbey on this spot could not have chosen a better site. Little does the present-day visitor realize how much work went into creating this landscape, for all is not as natural as it looks. Under the abbey's buildings and grounds is a 273 m long vault containing the river Thyle. In order to create a level terrace for the abbey buildings, in some places the surface had to be heightened by some 2 m 20. In spite of this, its ample supplies of water and its quarry providing building material made this site an ideal location for a Cistercian abbey.

The present location of the abbey of Villers was not the first. In 1146 Villers I was founded on a site provided by Gauthier of Marbais and his mother Judith on the border between the counties of Namur and Brabant. Even though the abbey chronicles, written circa 1330, mention that the new abbey was founded „in loco horroris et vastae solitudinis“, there is enough evidence to suggest this is no more than a ‚topos‘ inspired by the founding history of Clairvaux, the mother abbey of Villers, and that the new abbey was in fact provided with arable lands by its founder.

This first site proved to be inadequate and after a visit by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1147 it was decided to move the abbey to a new location in the vicinity of the present-day ruins. Half a century later, in the early years of the thirteenth century, the abbey was transferred once again and adopted the name Villers-en-Brabant. This move was not so much due to the inadequacies of the site as to political opportunism. By moving into Brabant, relations with the powerful dukes of Brabant could be strengthened, as indeed they were. Henry I showed great generosity towards the new foundation. His son Henry II was an even greater benefactor and his interest in the abbey is clearly expressed by his burial here in 1248.

During the first half of the thirteenth century the abbey thrived and work was started on the building of the great abbey church and the monastic buildings. Although much was altered in later centuries, the abbey is still by and large a thir-

teenth-century complex. Already in the second half of the thirteenth century a gradual decline set in. For one, the number of *conversi* dropped dramatically, and secondly, rather than being benefactors of the abbey, the dukes of Brabant started to exact taxes and levies from the monks. Nevertheless, building continued as planned and the new abbey church was completed in 1287. However, by the fourteenth century the financial situation was strained and in order to generate extra income chapels were built along the north side of the church's nave for the commemoration of private individuals. This was no breach of rule, as in 1256 the ban on private burials inside Cistercian churches had been lifted. On the whole, the fourteenth century was a period of hardship, the monks being struck by both hunger and debts. During the fifteenth century however, things started picking up and the abbey flourished once again. But things were not as they were before. The strict and sober way of life that had been characteristic of the thirteenth-century Cistercians was not how their later successors wished to live. 'Luxuries', unthinkable in the thirteenth century, were gradually introduced into the complex, i. e. chimneys to heat the rooms, private cells and so on. The abbots in particular took on a new life style, a change that is well illustrated by their successive lodgings. The earliest abbots had a small cubicle for themselves, adjacent to the monk's dormitory. In the later Middle Ages the abbots sought a more comfortable living for themselves and built a separate abbot's house. As time progressed the abbot's lodgings grew grander in style and further removed from the living quarters of the monks, the last phase being represented by the eighteenth-century Baroque palace with its grand gardens.

In 1796 the monks were expelled from Villers and the buildings sold. After everything of value had been stripped from the buildings, what was left was allowed to go to ruins. But not for long. The first restorations were carried out between 1893 and 1914, first by E. Coulon (1962–1878) and later by Charles Licot (1843–1903). New restorations were carried out in 1984.

It is to the history and significance of the buildings of this abbey, from their beginnings until the present day, that Thomas Coomans has devoted a splendid book, a real tribute to 750 years of Cistercian life at Villers. Such a study was long overdue, as the basic work of reference on Villers was, up to the publication of Coomans' book, Charles Licot's study of 1877, a book written early on in his career at Villers and therefore presenting but a fraction of his findings during thirty years of continuous research on the site.

Coomans has proven himself to be well up to the task and his book is certainly not run of the mill. His meticulous research, thoroughness, careful reasoning and clear style, that is always to the point, have set a standard that will be difficult to surpass. The beautiful photography, the many scale drawings and plans, in short the enormous wealth of illustrations make this book a feast for the eyes also. The only problem with the book is its sheer weight, i. e. no less than 3,5 kilo, which makes reading it a little uncomfortable. However, this having been said, read it one should as there is much to be enjoyed and much to be learned, not only about Villers, but also about Cistercian architecture throughout the centuries.

Chapter I presents the reader with a discussion of the written and iconographic sources available to a researcher, gradually moving on to modern times and the documentary evidence amassed during the nineteenth and early twentieth-century restorations, including descriptions, restoration plans, scale drawings, a partly-surviving model and photographs. This is followed by a brief discussion of the main works dealing with Villers. The publications, and above all, the unpublished work of C. Licot have proven to be very valuable. Throughout his book Coomans underlines his debt to Licot's research. The chapter also includes a short history of the abbey and a discussion of its site (topography, hydrographic factors and geology). In chapter II Coomans deals with Villers I and Villers II, the two abbey sites preceding the present one. Chapter III is devoted to the abbey church, which, as Coomans has shown, had a fairly complicated building history. After the transfer to the new site, the building of Villers III was started by Abbot Charles (1197–1209) after the model of Clairvaux, i. e. with a square choir, a transept with eastern chapels and a western aisle, a three-aisled nave and a narthex. Coomans names this plan Villers IIIa. Of this plan only the narthex and parts of the foundation walls were completed. The narthex shows that the new abbey church was conceived as a wholly Romanesque building. With the arrival of Abbot Conrad d'Urach in 1209, there was a change of plan. Villers IIIa was given up for a much more ambitious plan, not so much in scale – as the dimensions remained more or less the same (the foundations of Villers IIIa were reused) – as in conception. Conrad's church, Villers IIIb, was to be fully Gothic and vaulted all over. It was built during a continuous campaign from 1209 until 1287. The rectangular choir made way for a polygonal choir termination with a preceding bay, as in Châalis. The nave was widened and as a consequence, the side aisles were narrower than those conceived for Villers IIIa.

Having discussed the general layout of the church, Coomans then describes, evaluates and dates each aspect of Villers' great church (i. e. the burial vaults, the multiplication of chapels along the nave, the bosses with foliate masks), placing each feature not only into its historical context, but also against the background of Cistercian architecture in general.

One of the most intriguing features of this church are the large oculi in the choir and transepts. Although Coomans was not able to decipher their exact meaning, as the stained glass windows they no doubt once contained have been long lost, by comparing them with diagrams in contemporary Cistercian book illumination he has made it quite clear that the oculi did have symbolic significance and that they are by no means the failed architectural experiments that some have taken them to be. Moreover, this symbolism was meant for the choir monks alone, as the oculi are present only in the eastern parts of the church. The magnificent photographs of the light beaming in through these circular apertures (pp. 188–189) underlines their symbolic value as „fenêtres de l'âme“.

Considering its exceptional architecture, Villers IIIb must have had an exceptional architect. Unfortunately, little is known about him. The detailing of the architectural features shows that he was well-acquainted with the architectural scene in

northern France, especially with the workshops of Soissons and Laon. This is probably where he received his training as an architect. Comparison with the few surviving remains of Cistercian abbey churches in Belgium and northern France has borne out that the abbey church of Ter Duinen, that was started in 1214, had a layout that was particularly close to the one at Villers. Ter Duinen is known to have been built by a Master Eustache. Could this be true of Villers also? Although Coomans feels tempted to think so, he admits that there is only circumstantial evidence for such an assumption.

Interesting also is the section dealing with the west end of Villers. After the burial of duke Henry II of Brabant and his wife Sophia, daughter of Elisabeth of Thüringen, the narthex of Villers IIIa was rebuilt into a westwork, a feature that to all intents and purposes did not accord with Cistercian legislation, which prohibited the building of stone towers. The completion of the westwork in 1266 was celebrated by the placing a silver reliquary cross on top, that included relics that were of relevance within the Empire. In 1277 a similar, but this time golden cross, was placed over the crossing. The relics of this cross were related to the abbey itself, the bishopric of Liège and the Cistercian order. Clearly, these two crosses stressed the temporal and spiritual functions of the different spaces in one and the same church. According to Coomans, the westwork had no liturgical relevance, but was clearly intended to underline that here, along the Brabant border, was a ducal burial site of prime importance.

Chapter IV deals with the monastic buildings: the cloisters, the monk's quarters to the east and south of the cloisters and the buildings of the conversi. In chapter V attention is given to the monk's infirmary, the abbot's lodgings, the guest quarters and lay infirmary, the prisons and the subterraneous vaults, the porter's lodge and the abbey mill. In the last chapter (VI) the enclosure wall, the granges and workshops are described as well as the hydraulic system.

All is done in the same systematic and orderly fashion. First the building is described as it appears from the written and iconographic sources, then the building itself is carefully analysed. Irregularities are noted. From what remains of a building when account is taken of later rebuildings and restoration work, Coomans then reconstructs the earliest building phase and dates the building on the basis of its architectural detailing. Every subsequent phase is also described and analysed. The position of doorways, windows, fireplaces and stairs etcetera are then studied in order to unveil to what purpose the building in question may originally have been used, and to what purpose it was put after alterations were made. These matters having been sorted out, the building is then studied in the context of Cistercian typology. Coomans' work shows that the monastery was a living community, with changing needs, needs that were also reflected in the buildings that housed the community. Each adaptation is therefore of interest and needs scrutinizing. And so the abbey's guest house became a brewery, the living quarters of the conversi became the abbot's residence and the brother's lane was incorporated into the cloisters, to name but a few examples of this process of renewal and transformation.

All in all, very few monastic sites have been studied as systematically as Villers and Coomans' book can thus be said to be a ‚model' study. This is how it should be done!

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Barbara Helbling, Magdalena Bless-Grabher, Ines Buhofer (Hrsg.): Bettelorden, Bruderschaften und Beginen in Zürich. Stadtkultur und Seelenheil; Zürich: Verlag Neue Züricher Zeitung 2002; 344 S., ca. 240 Abb.; ISBN 3-85823-970-4; CHF 88,-

Eine Reihe von „glücklichen Zufällen“ hat zur Entstehung des Bandes geführt, und als Leser freut man sich über den Synergieeffekt einer archäologischen Grabung, einer Ausstellung (Ausstellungskatalog: Wenn Bettelmönche bauen: Die Prediger in Zürich; Zürich 1999) und von Forschungsarbeiten zur Handschriftenproduktion. Zahlreiche Wissenschaftler, verschiedene Disziplinen und Institutionen wirken zusammen und zeigen, wie die Bettelordensklöster vom 13. Jahrhundert bis zur Reformation am Leben der Bürgerschaft Zürichs teilhatten. Ein Register erschließt den materialreichen, gut bebilderten Band.

Ein Einführungsartikel beschäftigt sich mit der städtischen Sakraltopographie, den Aufgaben und dem Verhältnis der Bettelorden zur Bevölkerung und der Stadtobergkeit. Ein weiterer Überblicksartikel stellt die „Bettelordensarchitektur in Zürich“ vor dem Hintergrund der städtischen Sakralarchitektur und im Kontext mit der schweizerischen Bettelordensarchitektur vor (Georges Desceudres).

Dann schließen sich thematische Abschnitte zu den einzelnen Orden, zunächst zum Franziskanerorden, an. ERWIN EUGSTER zeigt trotz der dürftigen Quellenüberlieferung die Geschichte des Barfüßerklosters während der Entwicklung der städtischen Autonomie und seine Tätigkeit in der Seelsorge. Interessant zu sehen ist, wie das Kloster umfangreichen Hausbesitz in der näheren Umgebung erwirbt, dort ältere und alleinstehende Frauen ansiedelt und deren Seelsorge übernimmt. Das Kloster prägt so den Charakter eines städtischen Quartiers, in dem sich auch mit den Barfüßern verbundene Beginenhäuser befanden. DÖLF WILD rekonstruiert anhand von Bildquellen und Grabungsbefunden die Gestalt des Barfüßerklosters mit der 1890 brandzerstörten Kirche. Dabei vermißt man allerdings Abbildungen der erhaltenen Partien des Kreuzgangs.

Der zweite Abschnitt behandelt die Augustinereremiten, deren Kloster KATJA HÜRLIMANN vorstellt.

Der Hauptteil des Bandes besteht aus Beiträgen zu den Klöstern der Dominikaner und Dominikanerinnen. Die Baugeschichte des Predigerklosters referiert DÖLF WILD. Das Studium und die Seelsorge im Kloster werden behandelt, ebenso die Spiritualität des Dominikanerordens. CORDULA M. KESSLER und CHRISTINE SAUER be-