

zu haben – schon allein die Anzahl der benutzten Handschriften beeindruckt. An den Details werden sich zukünftige Forscher abarbeiten, entweder um Interpretationen zu widerlegen oder zu bestätigen. Prozesse und Strukturen von Buchherstellung und Buchhandel zu verschiedenen Zeitpunkten und für verschiedene Textsorten sowie Auftraggeber

haben die Verfasser offengelegt. Hier werden Modelle angeboten, die Lösungsmuster für andere Produktionsstätten bieten können. Gleichzeitig steht zu hoffen, daß der Herstellungsprozeß bei zukünftigen Diskussionen von Text- und Bildprogrammen mehr Berücksichtigung finden wird.

Christine Sauer

Re-inventing the Berswordt Master

Der Bielefelder Marienaltar - Das Retabel in der Neustädter Marienkirche

Religion in der Geschichte: Kirche, Kultur und Gesellschaft, vol. 8., ed. by ALFRED MENZEL. Bielefeld, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte 2001. 153 pp., incl. some b.&w. ills, num. col. pls and one fold-out. ISBN 3-89534-325-0

Der Berswordt-Meister und die Dortmunder Malerei um 1400 - Stadtkultur im Mittelalter, ed. by ANDREA ZUPANCIC and THOMAS SCHILP. *Bielefeld, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte 2002. 341 pp., incl. num. b.&w. ills and col. pls and two fold-outs. ISBN 3-89534-488-5*

The art of the so-called Berswordt Master has hitherto attracted little international interest, and even in Germany he has not received more than sporadic attention. Recently, the survival for 600 years of one of the painter's two extant retables, the Bielefeld Altarpiece, has stimulated civic pride in Bielefeld and consequently encouraged the publication of two handsome volumes. The first book was commissioned by the presbyters of the Neustädter Marienkirche to celebrate the anniversary and also to mark the recent return to the church of three of the painted scenes from the dispersed wings of their altarpiece. Edited by the parish pastor, the book is aimed mainly at his protestant congregation. The second volume is edited in Dortmund, the location of the Berswordt Altarpiece, and acknowledges a more ambitious agenda, in that it seeks to establish the Berswordt Master as a major painter of outstanding ability and originality.

The Bielefeld Altarpiece was a winged retable, decorated originally with 31 painted narratives on the obverse sides: a central, full-length Sacra Conversazione was surrounded by three rows of scenes narrating events from the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise,

the Life of the Virgin and the Passion of Christ, culminating in the Last Judgement. The reverse sides of the wings bear only traces of the original paint. A reliable reading (Ledebur 1824) of a now lost (frame?) inscription allows us to date the work to the year 1400. The retable would appear to have been commissioned for the high altar of the then collegiate church by an unknown donor or donors. The collegiate was dissolved in 1810, and the wings of the altarpiece were removed during 'purifying' (p. 147) restoration of the church around 1840. The central panel (172.7 x 283.5 cm), showing the Sacra Conversazione and 12 narrative scenes, was eventually incorporated into a neogothic altar screen where it has recently been joined by the newly returned Ascension, Pentecost and Last Judgement scenes, as well as that of the Annunciation (on loan). The wing panels had found their way first into the Krüger collection and later, separated into individual scenes, into disparate private and public collections in Germany and abroad (listed pp. 139-140).

The book is efficiently divided into four sections that discuss in turn the history of the collegiate, the iconography of the altarpiece,

art-historical aspects of the work and the restoration of the returned panels. In the initial chapter, Heinrich Rütting guides the reader via the history of the foundation and organisation of the collegiate to evidence that must be considered in connection with the crucial question of patronage for the Bielefeld Altarpiece. His clear exposition is based entirely on the surviving documentary evidence, mainly of a legal nature:

The collegiate was founded in 1293 in the Marienkirche by Count Otto III of Ravensberg and his wife. Rütting points out that apart from the primary consideration of family burial, commemoration and the arrangements for perpetual supplication, the count may also have considered the political and economic advantages entailed in such a foundation. No documentary evidence survives to enlighten us about the rules and liturgical arrangements of the collegiate. From extant documents it can only be deduced that the 12 canons lived independently and, despite the obligation to perform daily services, were by no means all in attendance. While the canons enjoyed considerable independence, the Ravensberg family retained the right of patronage that passed, together with the title, to the Counts (later Dukes) of Jülich and Berg in 1346. By 1398, the Marienkirche was endowed with at least fifteen altars, with benefices under the patronage of members of the Ravensberg family, certain canons, local nobility and two confraternities; the parish altar '*ante chorum*' was endowed by the local council. Another altar, founded according to a letter of 1389 by Margarete von Ravensberg (d. 1394), is not mentioned in later documents.

Rütting plausibly suggests that the undocumented Bielefeld Altarpiece is likely to have been a corporate foundation by the collegiate chapter, endowed at their own expense and therefore without legal documentation. In this connection, Rütting points to the attempts by Wilhelm von Berg (Margarete's son, Count of

Ravensberg 1403), bishop of Paderborn from 1399, to stabilise the collegiate by reforming its liturgy and economy. The canons had not only neglected their spiritual duties, they had also ceased to use a portion of their stipends to support the fabric of the church and to embellish it.

Of considerable interest is also the documented private legacy from a prominent canon that led to the foundation of an altar in 1400. Hermann Crusing came from a powerful local family. He studied in Prague and made a glittering career at the Papal court. An avid collector of lucrative benefices himself, he travelled widely as papal auditor. He died soon after his return to Bielefeld in 1397. In his testament he left provision for an altar dedicated to the Virgin, St. Jerome, the Holy Cross and St. Ursula. This altar is recorded in 1482 as situated next to the parish altar '*ante chorum*'. As usual, the question of altar or altarpiece remains ambiguous. However, Rütting points to the possibility that an altarpiece could have been moved to the high altar later when the choir screen was removed. In that case, saints Jerome and Ursula would have adorned the reverse sides of the wings of the altarpiece.

Later in the book (p. 37), Götz J. Pfeiffer suggests another potential donor, Duke Wilhelm I of Berg. The Duke is mainly recorded for his zealous interest in Berg family foundations in Düsseldorf and Altenberg; Ravensberg was left in turn to his sons Adolf and Wilhelm. However, in a poem of 1408 the Bielefeld scholar and canon Gobelinus Person praised Wilhelm I for enriching the church with ornaments. Moreover, Pfeiffer discovered that the pattern for the Virgin Annunciate in the Berswordt Altarpiece is also used in a window of Altenberg Cathedral that includes the donor figure of Duke Wilhelm I.

Less scholarly than Rütting's contribution is, of necessity, Alfred Menzel's empirical exegesis, as he 'evaluates with critical distance' and 'from the protestant viewpoint' 'the present

day function of the altarpiece' for his congregation (p. 21).

His perceptive observations are interspersed with expositions on the history of the veneration of the Virgin Mary and on her role as 'the instrument through which Christ was able to effect the redemption' from Original Sin. Menzel has clearly studied the altarpiece intensely and with considerable theological knowledge, but perhaps he makes too little allowance for painterly tradition of representation and design. An art historian might assume, for instance, that there are five angels' heads above the throne in the Sacra Conversazione because of the need to distribute them evenly in the available space; Menzel interprets their meaning as three for the Trinity plus two to describe the 'nature of Christ as God and Man' (p. 21). Equally difficult to follow is the notion that in the Expulsion from Paradise the position of the porch and the sword are intended to symbolise the Cross or that diagonal lines for ceiling tiles are capable of indicating the cross of St. Andrew (p. 30). Nor would an art historian agree that Conrad von Soest painted the Petri Altarpiece in Hamburg (p. 25). More contentious is the art-historical contribution. Pfeiffer, who is at present writing a dissertation on the painter under Professor Krohm in Berlin, will no doubt publish the evidence for his various assertions in his thesis. However, his present audience would have been better served with a more generous approach. It is hardly satisfactory to be informed of the 'high painterly quality' (p. 34) of the altarpiece without any reasoning, particularly in view of the fact that individual panels vary considerably in style and quality. A comment on the likely workshop organisation and division of hands is surely indispensable. Looking at the iconography, Pfeiffer lauds the 'theological understanding' of the artist, without discussing the role of learned advisers in deciding the content of medieval altarpieces. Contemporary contracts show clearly that the painters had little say in the choice of subject matter. Moreover, the 'often unusual iconography' of the panels at Bielefeld frequently depends on patterns from other workshops (*pls* 1,2). Pfeiffer's independent artist 'school' in French works of art' (p. 34) actually based his Expulsion from Paradise, for instance, on Master Bertram's Petri design. It is equally well known that the

central Sacra Conversazione depends on a widely diffused pattern that was also used, for instance, for the Carrand Diptych in Florence and a small panel in Philadelphia.

Pfeiffer's catalogue of individual panels is beautifully illustrated in colour. The entries remain largely descriptive, citing some textural sources for the narratives but no pictorial sources for their design. Even then, some of the interpretations appear a little fanciful, such as his reiteration that crossed fingers in the stylised hands symbolise Christ's Cross. Thus, in the initial Paradise scene, where God joins the hands of Adam and Eve in marriage, we are to understand that the inevitably crossed thumbs of the couple signify the Cross. Moreover, the crossed thumbs are apparently shown in front of Adam's right rib to remind us of the 'laceration of Christ's left side'.

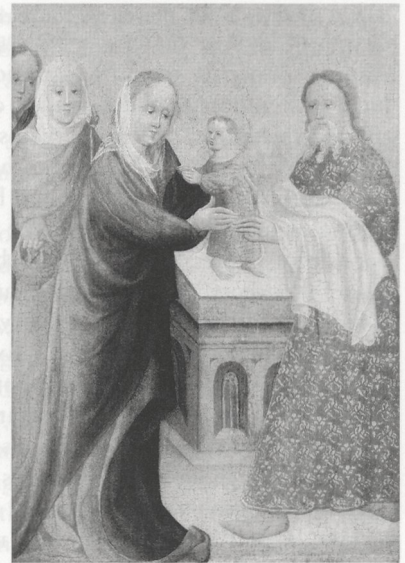
Among the other questionable notions is the assertion that a 'cherub' expels the couple from Paradise. Nor is it easy to accept his interpretation of the central panel as a holy conversation in anticipation of the coming of God, recommended to believers in letters by Peter and Paul, a '*sacra conversatio*'. The painted scene shows a selection of saints in the company of the Virgin and her Child.

In the last section of this book Iris Hegers presents a clear, well organised and illustrated account of the prudent restoration of the newly acquired panels. The production process that became apparent to the restorers does not differ significantly from that of contemporary workshops in the region. The punchwork is modest and the palette quite restricted, with azurite used for the blue hues. A dendrochronological examination of the oak wood suggests a date after 1391 for the altarpiece that fits well with the lost inscription date of 1400.

The second volume under discussion contains eleven essays centred on the eponymous altarpiece by the Berswordt Master in the Marienkirche in Dortmund. The triptych shows a Crucifixion (95 x 147 cm) flanked by



*Abb. 1
Berswordt Master,
Presentation, Bielefeld
Altarpiece. Neustädter
Marienkirche, Bielefeld
(Menzel 2001, p. 64)*



*Abb. 2
Master Bertram,
Presentation, Petri
Altarpiece. Kunsthalle,
Hamburg (H. Platte,
Meister Bertram in der
Hamburger Kunsthalle,
Hamburg 1956, p. 47)*

the Carrying of the Cross and the Deposition, and an Annunciation spanning the reverse sides of the wings. The original frames bear no inscription or date, but display the coat-of-arms of a Dortmund patrician family, the Berswordt.

In the introduction to the Dortmund book, the reader is promised that new questions will be asked and answered about the painter, his works and his environment (p. 10). However, in his initial contribution Thomas Schilp strays far from this intent.

Instead of guiding the reader through the specific historic and social evidence relating to the city of Dortmund (p. 17), he embarks on an idiosyncratic quest to establish medieval cities in general as 'Sakral-gemeinschaften' in which individuals and groups function as 'communities of the living and the dead'. He describes the inhabitants of these cities as social and spiritual equals united in their prime purpose to achieve redemption. His repetitive discourse ponders, amongst others, the Black Death, Purgatory, the meaning of the word 'Öffentlichkeit' (the public), a Münster testament of 1489, guild regulations of weavers of 1525, a Regensburg Altarpiece of 1488, the choir of the Reinoldikirche, a town procession of 1610 (described twice, pp. 47 and 59), and Jan van Eyck's Leal Souvenir. This apparently random selection of 'evidence' is not examined for relevance to time and place. Does it really make sense to discuss endowments

by the example of Chartres, when documents relating to nine altars extant by 1432 in the Marienkirche itself were available to the town archivist Schilp?

More locally focused research might have cautioned the author to consider such facts as the guild revolt of 1400, the city council dominated by patricians, convents reserved for patrician ladies, and the intermarriage among patrician families, before asserting the spiritual and social equality of the citizens of Dortmund. However, even when the author does refer to a local document his interpretation seems difficult to accept. Thus, he deduces from the only known instance of patrician witnesses to a medieval painter's marriage, that of Conrad von Soest in 1394, that city 'painters, goldsmiths, woodcarvers and stonemasons were considered as equals by the patricians' (p. 66). Turning to confraternities, to him merely institutions created to ensure commemoration and redemption, he notes that 'only' 12 male members of the Berswordt family are recorded in the fragmented membership lists of the time that survive from two of the seven known confraternities of Dortmund. Without discussing how many additional males were available or why they could not have joined one of the other five groups, he infers that the 'city elite' did not require commemoration through these 'communities of the living and the dead' (p. 45). And from the fact that the guild regulations of the weavers are written by hand he gathers that the burghers and craftsmen of the city were generally able to write and read (p. 65).

From all this he deduces that donors intended to ensure commemoration and perpetual supplication for the redemption of their sins but were also aware of the enhanced social standing and significance that a public

donation, such as an altarpiece, could engender. All this is hardly new, see for instance Rütting (above).

Andrea Zupancic opens her section with a lucid description of the narrative content of the altarpiece, its pictorial organisation and sacramental function. However, she presents her material here, and throughout her contribution, without acknowledging the authors of her eclectic report. It is only when she deviates from the accepted canon that difficulties arise. Thus she interprets St John's spidery hand that supports the Virgin in the Crucifixion scene not as awkward craftsmanship, but as a special design intended to draw our attention to the white cloak of the Virgin. The use of white, the colour of innocence, persuades Zupancic that John is shown as 'presenting' the Virgin as one of the Righteous (Rev. 7.9-17). Moreover, white veils and a white sleeve lining are said to indicate white gowns (although a grey and a green gown are clearly visible), thus including all women on the 'heaven side' among the Righteous. On the 'earth side' the white belt of Pilate and the white headband of the centurion apparently indicate their 'righteous judgements'(!). Zupancic then speculates that such headbands may indicate a confraternity (this via the pun of Binde = Bund = Bruderschaft). Equally worrying is her assertion that the Berswordt Master introduced brocade garments into 'western German' painting. Such selective evidence ignores the dominant connection between Dortmund and 'eastern' Germany and Bohemia via the Hanseatic trade routes, as well as the possible content of the many lost altarpieces. Moreover, the author later acknowledges that the painter had no followers.

Her discussion of the present condition of the much restored altarpiece seems perfunctory. Lost glazes and a badly damaged gold ground are recognised, but she ignores restoration reports. It is surely significant, for instance, that Hieronymi (1927) had to restore the outlines of figures and the defaced features of Longinus and his neighbours.

However, the documentary evidence relating to endowments of the Crucifixion altar in the Marienkirche is clearly presented and marred only by the fanciful conclusion that the donors of the two benefices attached to the altar were embroiled in a class struggle. In 1385 Heinrich Lemberg made provision for a perpetual mass at the altar. In 1397 Lambert Berswordt initiated an endowment for the altar. However, Lambert's untimely death prevented further action until 'his not fully completed intentions' (*suum propositum ad effectum plenarium non perduxit*) were finally 'followed through' by his nephews in 1431; the right of patronage of the altar was transferred to the Berswordt family at this date. According to a document of 1490 the Berswordt had agreed that a second benefice, separately funded, could continue. In 1437 we hear of a 'newly erected and endowed' altar. Sadly, the appended documents are not presented in transcription or complete translation.

These frequently cited documents should lead to a discussion of the possible date of the altarpiece, but Zupancic keeps the reader in suspense by first digressing with what amounts to a repetition of Schilp's essay, admittedly more succinct and tenable.

Eventually Zupancic asserts that the disputed date of the altarpiece can now be defined with precision as 'around 1386'; for this she cites four flawed reasons:

1. Dress: she assigns the centurion's dagged houppelande to before 1385, claiming in sole evidence an 'accord' at a conference (Bielefeld 2000). Few would agree that complex dagging of appliqué gold braid would have occurred around 1386, even at the French court, and the idea was much disputed at the said conference. Dagging was certainly still applied around 1430.

2. Technique: Despite admitting that the 'solid surface' on the festive side of the altarpiece did not allow a glimpse at preparatory layers below the paintings, she 'gained the impression' that 'novel' method of first stretching canvas over the wood was used only for the

frames. She therefore contends, without demonstrating that all painters used a canvas base after 1400, that the Berswordt Altarpiece must predate the Niederwildungen Altarpiece by Conrad von Soest (1403) which is worked on a canvas ground.

3. Documents: She admits that the documents allow no date before 1431 for Berswordt patronage and concludes that the frames, which bear the Berswordt coat-of-arms and are painted on canvas, 'must have been repainted in 1431' to 'impose' Berswordt patronage on an existing altarpiece. She speculates that the altarpiece was produced in connection with the endowment by Heinrich Lemberg in 1385, although the relevant document does not leave room for such an interpretation.

4. The dendrochronological examination of the altarpiece by Peter Klein resulted in a proposed felling date of 1376 for the wood. Allowing for the usual storage time of around 10 years, Zupancic decides that the early date for the painting is 'proven'. Moreover, the reader is informed (note 145) that, at a 'conference' in Dortmund, Corley's acceptance of the date 1431 was 'thrown out'. Yet at this event, a lecture day for the local 'Conrad von Soest Society', Zupancic was repeatedly warned that the dating of the wood can only imply a date *post quem* for the altarpiece. Wood can be stored for more than ten years. Alternatively, the documentary evidence allows one to consider whether Lambert Berswordt might have purchased the wood for the altarpiece in 1397, initiating the 'incomplete intention' to have an altarpiece painted as part of his endowment for the altar, which was finally 'brought forward' by his nephews in 1431.

Unfortunately, not one of Zupancic's four reasons provides 'the final confirmation of the early date' that she claims proven (p. 223). Nonetheless, she feels able to conclude that the Berswordt Master was not an 'imitator' of Conrad von Soest, but the 'giver' (see pls 5 and

6). With her worrying lack of precision she blames Corley, incorrectly, for the notion of 'imitator' and even 'pupil' (p. 240). She does not define her concept of 'giver'.

Looking at brocade patterns, Annemarie Stauffer supports the early date for the altarpiece. To this purpose she illustrates two patterns of around 1360. Had they been juxtaposed with clear photographs of the painted brocade patterns, it would have become evident that the comparisons are not compelling. In any case, as such patterns 'still survive today' (p. 136) in 'Lübeck, Danzig and Stralsund', Stauffer should only cite them as another date *post quem* for the painting.

At this stage, the book reverts to the historical setting with scholarly essays by Martina Klug and Monika Fehse which should have preceded the technical parts. Next follows a section on the Bielefeld Altarpiece and the three lost panels from Osnabrück in which Zupancic largely repeats the contribution made by Pfeiffer in the first volume. Without any comparative analysis of the two altarpieces, or discussion of the technical inadequacies notable, for instance, in the Bielefeld Deposition (*pl* 3.) and resolved in the Dortmund scene (*pl* 4.), the author concludes that the Bielefeld Altarpiece was painted 15 years after that at Dortmund.

Zupancic then insists that the Berswordt Master, a medieval painter, was able to remain independent from specific indigenous or foreign influences. Equally surprising is her opinion that Master Bertram (first recorded town commissions 1367) 'probably' saw the two altarpieces from the workshop of the Netze Master (both dated by her to c. 1370!) on his travels as a journeyman (p. 228), and that his work is alien to that of the Berswordt Master. Yet, illustrated elsewhere in the book are Master Bertram's Presentation (*pl*. 2) and his Expulsion of 1379, both closely related to the Bielefeld versions in content and in style. Besides, similarities between the Bohemian-influenced painting style of Master Bertram



Abb. 3
Berswordt Master,
Deposition, Bielefeld
Altarpiece. Neustädter
Marienkirche, Bielefeld
(Westf. Amt für Denk-
malpflege)

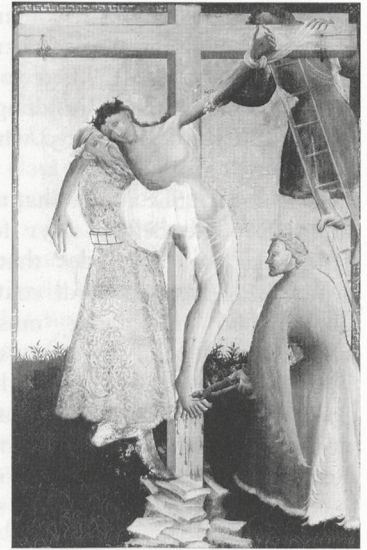


Abb. 4
Berswordt
Master, Deposition,
Bersworth Altarpiece.
Ev. Marienkirche, Dort-
mund (Westf. Amt für
Denkmalpflege)

and that of the Berswordt Master have long been noticed. Looking at the figure canon, Zupancic judges the 'step' from the Netze Altarpiece and the Wiesenkirche predella of 1376 to the 'modern' Berswordt Altarpiece 'immense' (p. 231), but she does not draw the obvious conclusion. Having to acknowledge that the Bielefeld *Sacra Conversazione* depends on a Franco-Flemish design with wide diffusion she contends that it is original in the 'emotion expressed' and therefore superior to the cited works at Florence and Philadelphia. In evidence, she censures the lack of 'sensitivity' in the Philadelphia Margaret who does not turn her head away from the Child in the manner of the Bielefeld version of this figure, and therefore 'presents' 'undisguised' her small cross, the 'symbol of his sacrificial death'. Also, noting that the tiny panel in Philadelphia omits the scroll inscribed with Christ's name, Zupancic laments with derision that 'nothing remains of the Messian self-confession *Ego sum Christus Jhesus*' (p. 238). A less prejudiced observer might have noted that the sitting saints at Bielefeld are copied from the original pattern as isolated figures, whereas the equivalent figures at

Florence and Philadelphia are arranged around the listening Virgin in animate conversation with each other and with the Child. In her ultimate effort to establish the significance of the Berswordt Master, Zupancic sets out to claim that the better known painter Conrad von Soest was indebted to him (see *pls 5 and 6*). Although she cannot quite decide 'whether Conrad was a student of the Berswordt Master' (p. 248), she lists a few trivial correspondences, such as an ordinary shoe buckle or the depiction of a dagged hem, and even likens the image of a soldier with an open visor to that of a bystander who shades his eyes with his hand.

She lauds the Berswordt Master's restrained blue hues without acknowledging that the liberal use of costly ultramarine in Conrad's altarpieces depended as much on the patron's choice as did the 'soft' blue used by the Berswordt Master, the cheaper azurite. As a precedent for the application of red bole under gold leaf she quotes the pinkish ground in the Hildesheim ceiling. For her purpose it is also necessary to deny that Conrad could have seen the work of the Parent Master in Paris. So she cites König's 'decisive' date of '1404' for the *Très Belles Heures de Notre-Dame* (nouv. acq.lat. 3093) ignoring authors who have recognised that the date was added to the manuscript. Moreover, the eponymous Parent de Narbonne can be dated with fair precision to 1375. Later, echoing (unacknowl-



Abb. 5
Berswordt Master,
Resurrection, Bielefeld
Altarpiece. Neustädter
Marienkirche, Bielefeld
(Westf. Amt für Denk-
malpflege)



Abb. 6
Conrad von Soest,
Resurrection,
Niederwildungen Altar-
piece. Stadtkirche, Bad
Wildungen (Westf. Amt
für Denkmalpflege)

edged) several sections of a recent volume that discusses the evidence, she concludes that the French court attracted numerous foreign painters during the last quarter of the 14th century and that significant trade connections would have eased the journey to Paris for a Dortmund painter. Then she demands that someone should ‘finally ask’ about the local influence on Conrad von Soest (for the answer see Corley, 1996, pp. 118-129).

In the next essay, Ingo Sandner examines the underdrawing of the obverse scenes of the Berswordt Altarpiece and exposes an interesting variation: The master used a hard (?; see *pl. 7*) instrument with some brushed correcting lines. A schematic, possibly single brush line, marks some of the drapery folds. However, Sandner notes that the contour lines in the wing panels are freely rendered, with some parallel lines but few pentimenti, whereas the central panel shows a more precise contour-only drawing, with small corrections in Christ’s legs and feet only and no indication for drapery folds. Sandner plausibly deduces that the preliminary workshop drawing for the central panel must have been more detailed than that for the wings. From the Bielefeld Altarpiece, Sandner could only investigate the three returned panels; their underdrawing showed just fragmented con-

tour lines. One hopes that Sandner will continue this work and publish all his excellent infrared reflectographies. A complete examination of the Bielefeld Altarpiece would certainly provide useful evidence about the use of imported patterns and superimposed figures by the workshop (for instance in the Resurrection, *pl. 5*) and, by comparing similar designs in the two altarpieces, advances in draughtsmanship. Sandner extols Conrad von Soest’s creative underdrawing style (*pl. 8*) with hatching lines searching for forms, but proposes that Conrad may be indebted to the Berswordt Master especially also for the ‘rare’ hard tool used in the drawing. However, although few panels have been examined (see Corley, 1996, pp. 57-91) the practice was hardly unusual.

In her final sections in which she even picks up the long discredited notion of a ‘Malerschule’, Zupancic comes to believe that the Berswordt Master was Conrad’s ‘master’ (p. 277). By an astonishing and again eclectic route that results in contradictions and inaccuracies she manages both to credit Conrad von Soest with his considerable influence on art along the Hanseatic trade route and then to deny it. This

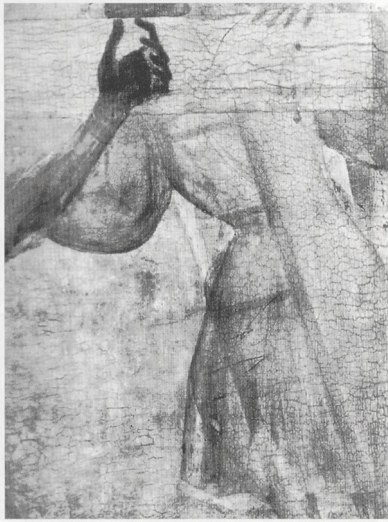


Abb. 7
Berswordt Master,
Underdrawing,
detail from the
Deposition, Pl. 4
(Zupancic/
Schilp 2002, p. 257)



Abb. 8
Conrad von Soest,
Underdrawing,
detail. Niederwildungen
Altarpiece. Stadtkirche,
Bad Wildungen
(Zupancic/Schilp 2002,
p. 259)

allows her to suggest that even the ‘obvious’ similarities between Conrad’s work and that of the Veronica Master could ultimately depend on lost works by the Berswordt Master (p. 284). According to Zupancic it is feasible that the panel showing St Paul and Reinold in Munich, and other ‘early’ works formerly attributed to Conrad von Soest, were designed or even painted by the Berswordt Master. To crown it all, we are informed on the last page that Conrad and the Berswordt Master could even have been related. Using such means, Zupancic really believes that she has established that the Berswordt Master was a truly ‘outstanding artist’ of his time!

Were it not for the fact that the incredibly assertive tone of the two main authors, and the attractive publication with numerous illustrations, might mislead inexperienced students into believing that this is an authoritative text, the Dortmund volume would not have merited a detailed review. The editors’

contributions are driven by a pre-conceived idea which prevented detached research. In consequence, this huge volume lacks the essential elements for a scholarly evaluation of the painter, namely an examination of the production methods of both altarpieces (including the underdrawing of crucial paintings at Bielefeld), a discussion of the likely workshop organisation and the division of hands, a complete restoration report, and an investigation of palette, brushwork and style, coupled with an assessment of differences between the two altarpieces. Moreover, instead of looking at widely diffused single motifs, it would be necessary to compare the technique, style and design with work from contemporary workshops at home and abroad. While this would hardly establish the Berswordt Master as a ‘painter of international rank’, nor of ‘great originality’, it could be demonstrated that this able painter does indeed deserve our attention.

Brigitte Corley