

Spiritual Materiality or Material Spirituality. Cistercian Inventories of the Late Middle Ages¹

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Some years ago Brian Patrick McGuire dealt with the problem of "Material and Spiritual Life in the Middle Ages" and asked if there was a contradiction between them.² Particularly through the analysis of medieval sources from Danish Cistercian houses he could offer the following statement as conclusion: "There was no contradiction between spiritual life and its material basis. As so often in the Middle Ages, we cannot find one without the other."³

With regard to this connection between the spiritual and the material in the Cistercian communities of the late Middle Ages we can use a number of different source corpora: the normative side, like statutes of the Order, the General chapter or individual monasteries; we can base our research on account books – or we can deal with inventories of the monasteries, as I would like to do in this paper.

Monastic inventories have often been used for the research into problems of economic history of the houses, of the material culture or of the everyday material life. From a general point of view their contents represent the economic but not only the economic basis for the life in the communities. Their creation was a necessity; it was based on the rule of St. Benedict, chapter 32, ordering that the abbot should give all the necessary things to the monks and should make inventories of them to know

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² Brian Patrick McGuire, 'Spiritual Life and Material Life in the Middle Ages: a Contradiction (The Example of Cistercians in Northern Europe)', *Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit. Leben – Alltag – Kultur* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 285–313 (*Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* 13 = *Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse* 568).

³ *Ibid.*, 313.

what he had given and what he had held back.⁴ Particularly at the time of the election of new abbots the status of the monastery in mobile goods should be put down: "status monasterii ... in actu electionis ...", as the inventory of the Lower Austrian community of Lilienfeld said in 1497.⁵ In 1329 the General Chapter ordered that "in nova creatione abbatum", an inventory had to be put down carefully for the father abbot ("de domus statu diligenter inquirant, quid et quantum habeant in mobilibus, seu debeant, ...").⁶ One year later, in 1330, the General Chapter gave the statute that whenever an abbot died, resigned or moved to another monastery one should make "plenum ac lucidum inventarium" "... de bonis monasterii mobilibus, iocalibus, pecunia, utensilibus, et aliis quibuscunque", to be given to the following abbot, particularly to provide "salus animarum" and to avoid any dangers ("monasteriorum Ordinis vacantium ... pericula").⁷

By creating inventories the material basis of monastic life should be continuously checked and guaranteed. This should be done by the most responsible members of the community, "prior, cellerarius, supprior, cum tribus aut quatuor senioribus domus".⁸ Therefore, it is obvious that the creation of inventories was not a business to be attended by everybody in the community and thereby possibly arousing avarice – but an affair for the few responsible offices and elders.

Particular emphasis has to be put on the term "material basis". A continuous and open consideration of any kind of not proper "material wealth" might, however, have lead to "superfluitas". Particularly in the thirteenth century the General Chapter dealt quite often with that problem. In 1231, there was a statute against the possession and use of precious objects ("... novitates et superfluitates in picturis, in sculpturis, in aedificiis, in vestibis pretiosis et aliis similibus, quae deformant antiquam Ordinis honestatem

⁴ Cf. *Regula Benedicti. Die Benedictusregel lateinisch/deutsch* (Beuron: Beuroner Kunstverlag, 1992), 156 sq.

⁵ Cf. Gerhard Winner, ed., *Die Urkunden des Zisterzienserstiftes Lilienfeld 1111–1892* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974), 451 (= *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* II, 81).

⁶ Josephus-Maria Canivez, ed., *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis*, III (Louvain: Bureau de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, 1935), 385 (1329,4) (= *Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 11).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 389 sq. (1330,4).

⁸ *Ibid.*

..."). They should be removed.⁹ Similar statutes of 1250, 1290 and 1294 again did not allow precious metal objects, vessels, beakers and spoons.¹⁰ One should observe "simplicitas" and keep "honestas paupertatis".¹¹ "Regnum Dei non est esca et potus", as the General Chapter said in another connection in 1294, "sed pax et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto".¹²

The treatment of such dangers did not mention inventories generally; only concerning a specific kind of inventories we get information: the "calendaria pitanciae", the lists of pittances, of extra food to be served to the community. There was this well-known bad example of the French abbey of Barbery in Normandy in 1330 where they had openly painted a list ("calendarium depictum") of all the pittances to be held during the year in the Chapter House. This was not only to be removed from there but also prohibited by the General Chapter for any house of the Order. Such open "insolitae et indebitae novitates" that referred to "gastrimargia", had to be avoided. The General Chapter ordered that those lists should only be written either in a "martyrologio" or a "libro Regulae".¹³ We, e.g., got such a fourteenth century list from a late medieval Austrian monastery, from Zwettl in Lower Austria,¹⁴ showing that not the fact of existing pittances themselves seems to have been a problem, as it certainly would have been for the Carthusians,¹⁵ but the continuous open discussion about and dealing with them. This list of pittances from Lower Austrian Zwettl contained the mentioning and 'inventory' of 98 days when extra white bread, eggs, fish, doughnuts or wine were to be given to the community.¹⁶

⁹ Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium*, II, 93 (1231,8).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 347 (1250,6); Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium*, III, 246 (1290,4) and 269 (1294,7).

¹¹ Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium*, II, 347 (1250,6).

¹² Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium*, III, 269 (1294,9).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 391 sq. (1330,11).

¹⁴ Johann von Frast, 'Urkunden und geschichtliche Notizen, die sich in den Handschriften des Stiftes Zwettl finden', *Archiv für Kunde Österreichischer Geschichtsquellen*, 2 (1849, reprint Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964), 371–376.

¹⁵ Cf. Gerhard Jaritz, 'Zur Sachkultur in niederösterreichischen Kartausen im späten Mittelalter', *Die Kartäuser in Österreich*, 3 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981), 24 sq. (*Analecta Cartusiana*, 83).

¹⁶ Frast, 'Notizen', 371–376; cf. Gerhard Jaritz, 'Zur Sachkultur österreichischer Klöster des Spätmittelalters', *Klösterliche Sachkultur des Spätmittelalters* (Vienna: Verlag der

However, it is not only the material life that inventories reflect but also Cistercian spirituality and the material help needed for its performance.

Those medieval inventories that have survived from the Austrian houses of the Order are mainly from the late Middle Ages, particularly from the fifteenth century. As was already generally mentioned, they were written down at the occasion of the entering upon office of new abbots, as we find it in the survived sources of Wiener Neustadt, Heiligenkreuz and Lilienfeld,¹⁷ "iuxta formam nostri ordinis de novo pastore proviso".¹⁸

With regard to the mentioned objects, it need not only have been the mentioned objects and their value that counted, but it might also have been the connection with and the memory of the donors of them. When we, e. g., look at the inventory of Heiligenkreuz of 1516, we can find a number of chasubles named after their donors, like "casula Vulpis dicta, ornatus qui dicitur Hawg, ornatus Scheiblwisner" or "ornatus Beatrix cum omnibus utensilibus", named after the donating Austrian duchess Beatrix of the end of the fourteenth century, or the "ciphus fundatoris".¹⁹ In the inventory of Lilienfeld of 1497 we find the same way of describing valuable secular vessels, "pecaria", by adding the names of their donors.²⁰ Thus, an inventory was not only the evidence of the possession of different kinds of movables that also might have been recognised and found by their descriptions or their names (= the names of donors) but also a means to assist the commemoration of those benefactors.

Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 154 (*Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs* 3 = *Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse* 367); for Heiligenkreuz cf. Hermann Watzl, 'Über Pitzen und Reichenisse für den Konvent des Klosters Heiligenkreuz 1431', *Analecta Cisterciensia* XXXIV (1978), 40-147.

¹⁷ Cf. Heinrich Mayer, ed., *Die Urkunden des Neuklosters zu Wiener Neustadt* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 51-54 (*Fontes Rerum Austriacarum*, II, 86) (1446 April 19); Hermann Watzl, 'Die zwei ältesten Inventare der Cisterce Heiligenkreuz von 1470 und 1516', in idem, "... in loco, qui nunc ad Sanctam Crucem vocatur ...". *Quellen und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des Stiftes Heiligenkreuz* (Heiligenkreuz: Heiligenkreuzer Verlag, 1987), 467 sq. and 471 (1470 July 2 and 1516 May 21); Winner, *Urkunden Lilienfeld*, 451 sq. (1497 May 16)

¹⁸ Mayer, *Urkunden Wiener Neustadt*, 52.

¹⁹ Watzl, 'Die zwei ältesten Inventare', 471.

²⁰ Winner, *Urkunden Lilienfeld*, 451 sq.

Of interest is also the order in which the objects were mentioned and put down in the inventories, "in ... utensilibus divinis ac etiam humanis usibus aptis ...", as it was said the Wiener Neustadt inventory of 1446.²¹ The "divinus usus" regularly took the first rank. The objects which were mentioned first and on the top of most inventories were the liturgical vessels and vestments that played their important role in the religious service and its 'ornamentum'. Only besides, they also were expensive objects to be used in the secular world. In the sixteenth century they often were utilised in the latter function as material help, for instance to be sold for the wars against the Turks.

As said, the usual order of the inventories was to draw up the chalices, the monstrances, the chasubles, the dalmatics, the candelabres etc. first, followed by those things that represented the 'human needs', to put it this way, like, e. g., valuable vessels "in domo abbatis", followed by the dishes for the refectory etc. etc. This kind of generally separating order into divine and human follows much more spiritual components than material ones. Characteristic for the inventories were the objects for the material life of the abbot and the monks following the liturgical parts. We find the "domus abbatis" or "mensa abbatis" and their expensive objects, from silver beakers to the well-known gilded ostrich-eggs which were mainly used when the abbot received guests.²² Also the movable goods of the refectory of the monks at the end with the still worthwhile to mention vessels and plates made out of pewter do not seem to have to do anything more with the liturgical parts at the beginning of the sources but still show the necessity of a proper combination of objects of different use to make monastic life possible and adequate. Concerning those secular vessels and dishes one can prove a decisive development from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Those kinds of objects having been forbidden by the General Chapter in the already mentioned statutes of the thirteenth century had developed into such which were in general use in the fifteenth century, as the contents of the inventories can show. The "superfluitas", the "simplicitas" and the

²¹ Mayer, *Urkunden Wiener Neustadt*, 52.

²² Cf. inventory of Lilienfeld 1497: "item pro mensa abbatis: item ciphus argenteus deauratus magnus; item ciphus argenteus magnus; item strucionis ovum in argento deaurato; item duo ciphi argentei deaurati; ..." (Winner, *Urkunden Lilienfeld*, 451).

"honestas paupertatis" had changed their value and meaning and concerned now other types of objects.

Beside the before mentioned order of things into divine and human use, we can also trace a kind of a human social order of things with regard to their different rank and value, if we compare the valuable objects of the "domus abbatis" and those cheaper ones of the refectory or the refectory's kitchen. In the 1446 Wiener Neustadt inventory we, e.g., find in the "domo abbatis", among others, five silver beakers, thirteen silver spoons, thirteen wooden spoons with silver handles and seven brass bowls, while in the refectory we are confronted with 27 pewter jugs and 50 pewter bowls.²³

Moreover, we have to consider a certain level of existing objects not worth of being mentioned or described in detail in the inventories, as we can find it generally in this kind of sources, a level that starts in our case with dishes below the material, id est value of pewter. There we find also things about which just rather general, inaccurate information was offered. This is, e.g., true with regard to food in the Heiligenkreuz inventory of 1470 ("De blado, vino, avena, caseis, sagimine, oleo, sale satis habebunt usque ad nova"),²⁴ or concerning household utensils: Pewter dishes and vessels they had sufficient ("In caldariis, cantris, scultellis staneis et aliis utensilibus variis pro domo abbatis, conventu et bursaria atque aliis officinis competens habebatur sufficientia").²⁵ There also objects have to be mentioned whose fate had been influenced by "discrimina patrie", as we again find it in the Heiligenkreuz inventory of 1470. Out of that situation, the number of numerous small objects out of precious metal was not known because they had to be hidden in Vienna ("Item unum plenarium et alia clenodia minora plura, quorum rectus numerus non habebatur, quia in Vienna propter discrimina patrie erant abscondita").²⁶

We might conclude by emphasising again that such sources like inventories of Cistercian monasteries are to be seen as much more than mere evidence of economic circumstances, of material prosperity or decline of communities, or of lifestyle and the standard of living. On the one hand the mentioned objects were "utensilia divinis et etiam humanis usibus apta",

²³ Mayer, *Urkunden Wiener Neustadt*, 53 and 54.

²⁴ Watzl, 'Die zwei ältesten Inventare', 468.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

on the other hand and moreover those “humanis usibus apta” represented, to quote again Brian Patrick McGuire, a kind of “maintenance mentality”, being the “secular base” providing the monks with proper spiritual life,²⁷ “cura corporis” for obtaining “cura animae”.²⁸ One depended on the other. The inventories of monasteries are, therefore, in the same way sources of material life and care as they are, at least indirectly, evidence of various levels of the spiritual way of living and the spiritual care. By that, monastic inventories might confront us also with one of the many medieval quasi-ambivalences which we are used to in our research. Not only by mediating us “real”, material goods but also in their language of symbols and signs they might offer to recognise that each object or group of objects could bear or receive in themselves and at the same time their material, social or spiritual ranks, values or connotations.

²⁷ McGuire, ‘Spiritual and Material Life’, 290.

²⁸ Cf. Gerd Zimmermann, *Ordensleben und Lebensstandard. Die Cura corporis in den Ordensvorschriften des abendländischen Hochmittelalters* (Münster/W.: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1973) (= *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens*, 32).

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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

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Vorwort

Durch den tragischen Tod von Harry Kühnel im August dieses Jahres hat nicht nur *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* seinen Präsidenten verloren, sondern auch die Erforschung von Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters einen ihren herausragendsten Vertreter. Harry Kühnel hat in seinen wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten sowohl in methodologischer als auch in inhaltlicher Hinsicht Bedeutendes geleistet und als Direktor des *Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften vieles zur Intensivierung der Erforschung mittelalterlichen Alltagslebens beigetragen. Wir werden ihm ein ehrendes Andenken bewahren.

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* bietet unterschiedliche Beiträge aus unserem Forschungsbereich, die von Mitgliedern und Freunden der Gesellschaft angeboten wurden. Das nächste Heft wird als Sonderband IV im März erscheinen und unter dem Titel "Quotidianum Estonicum" unter der Herausgeberschaft von Jüri Kivimäe und Juhan Krem (Tallinn) Beiträge aus der Estnischen Alltagsgeschichtsforschung des Mittelalters beinhalten. Ein zweiter Sonderband des Jahres 1996 wird sich unter der Herausgeberschaft von Dorothe Rippmann (Basel) Schwerpunkten Schweizer Forschung widmen. Zwei weitere Hefte werden unterschiedliche Beiträge unserer Mitglieder und Freunde beinhalten, mit manchen Schwerpunkten auf alltagshistorisch relevanten Papieren, die bei den Mittelalterkonferenzen von Kalamazoo und Leeds 1996 vorgelegt werden.

Wir wünschen Ihnen ein privat und wissenschaftlich erfolgreiches Jahr 1996!

Gerhard Jaritz, Herausgeber