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Das Benediktinerreichsstift Irsee und die Churbayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Schwabenakademie Irsee; Kommission für Bayerische Landesgeschichte bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 09.11.2013-10.11.2013.

Reviewed by Markwart Herzog

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Das Benediktinerreichsstift Irsee und die Churbayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften

Not so long ago, monastic foundations such as Irsee were hubs of education, research and of an enlightened approach to what we now like to call the natural sciences: basically mathematics, physics and the life sciences. During the eighteenth century these fields of scientific investigation became to be seen as separate from the so-called humanities, thus academia embarked on a process which divides to this day hard science with its measurable results and economic success from what has on occasion been described as âmerely decorativeâ cultural, historical and social studies.

A recent conference organised by the Schwabenakademie Irsee in collaboration with the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, endeavoured to trace the multiple connections between monasteries like Irsee and KremsmÃ¼nster, universities such as Salzburg and Ingolstadt and the newly founded Academy of Sciences in Munich during the second half of the eighteenth century. The conference also aimed to set monasteries, scholars and the Academy against the background of an Enlightenment in Catholic Europe which has all too often been neglected or even denied by historians.

The very term of Enlightenment came under considerable scrutiny in the first session with papers by HANNELORE PUTZ (Munich) and STEPHAN DEUTINGER (Munich), since on the one hand traditional historiography has tended to see enlightened ideas to be mainly influenced by Protestantism, while the more recent, increasingly fashionable approach has been to speak of a Catholic Enlightenment the effects of which benefited southern Germany, Austria and parts of northern Italy. Nonetheless, it is most difficult to make a clear division along confessional borders; as had already happened in the days of Protestant Reform and Catholic Counterreform, intellectuals on either side were ready to build theoretical and scientific frameworks based as far as possible on the laws of nature and of natural philosophy. In fact, the second session explored the relationship between the Academy of Sciences and Benedictine monasteries such as Irsee. Papers by CLAUDIUS STEIN (Munich) and JOHANN PÄRNBACHER (Munich) provided the background in which a considerable part of the scientific research of the eighteenth century was conducted.

At Irsee three mathematicians and natural philosophers were particularly active and well-known during the eighteenth century: Ulrich Weiss, Eugen Dobler and Candidus Werle were among those responsible for lending academic tone to their monastery. A public lecture by ALOIS SCHMID (Munich) presented the work of P. Ulrich Weiss at Irsee and his (not always easy) relationship with the new Academy of Sciences of which he became a founding member in 1759. Teaching at their own institution, they were occasionally sent abroad and helped with the foundation of schools as well as with the necessary reforms that were going to introduce a far more varied curriculum to growing numbers of students in central Europe. Since their own expertise lay in the fields of mathematics, astronomy and the life sciences, these were the subjects that also influenced the choice of book acquisi-

tions as well as the collections of scientific instruments and ânaturaliaâ, for example stuffed birds, amassed at Benedictine foundations.

Not every monastery was as blessed with funds as was KremsmÃ¼nster to allow the patres to make the necessary purchases of collectibles and for a display that would present the objects as much as possible as they appeared in their natural habitat. The quest for knowledge based on empirical methods and close observation was going to lead towards cabinets which recreated a Creation that was continuously probed by scientists and left less and less to imagination and wonder. P. AMAND KRAML OSB (KremsmÃ¼nster) explored the life of P. Eugen Dobler between KremsmÃ¼nster and Irsee, while CLAUDIA SCHWAAB (Munich) carefully brought together the scarce information available for P. Candidus Werle whose career as a teacher and member of the academy is particularly hard to trace. Weiss, Dobler and Werle had to pick their difficult ways towards research that allowed them to unite the scientific rules of natural philosophy with the rigours of religious dogma, as much as they wished to avoid scholasticism or the kind of rationalistic world view eventually laying the foundations of the French Revolution. Often caught between what they may have regarded as a rock and a hard place and beset by financial hardship, it is amazing that they managed to continue with their scholarly work and to acquire a certain fame for themselves and for their monastic institution among their peers.

In any event the monastic contribution to scientific progress was such that at one point there were even plans of founding a Catholic Academy of the Sciences. Although this did not happen, patres were represented in the Electoral Bavarian Academy, founded in 1759, in substantial numbers. There was a bias towards the Benedictines and against the Jesuits who were regarded as too old-fashioned and bigot in their approach to research and teaching. Empiricism was the new keyword and lectures during which experiments were performed drew large audiences. The âVenustransitâ of 1761 thus became an âeventâ, similar to the solar eclipse in August 1999 (advertised on the internet as âEclipse 99â), which was eagerly observed by people from Landâs End to Romania.

The scholarly level may not always have been as high as might have been wished for, in particular as compared to international standards. Nonetheless, this conferenceâs presentations were well able to show how during the second half of the eighteenth century an important swerve occurred in scientific investigation and methodology. The papers also traced the fate of collections of material culture, both in terms of teaching / research material and of the monastic libraries often kept in close proximity to the collections. While HELMUT ZEDELMAIER (Munich) particularly investigated the collections of ânaturaliaâ and âscientificaâ at Kloster Irsee in comparison to other monastic collections in Southern Germany, STEPHAN KELLNER (Munich) presented the libraries at Irsee and gave a detailed analysis of the books acquired and the scientific themes preferred in the second half of the eighteenth century. Both examined new forms of display adopted by the monastic foundations as well as at newly-founded universities before and after the secularisation of 1803. The existence of a Bavarian Academy of Sciences, for all that its members may not always have applied themselves with the greatest diligence, nonetheless provided a forum of exchange within the âRes Publica Letterariaâ. Occasional accusations of mismanagement and infighting during the Academyâs early history were obviously founded in the difficult situation of many of its members and the personal ambitions of its secretaries. The final paper by CHRISTOF PAULUS (Munich) certainly made clear how well-connected the Abbey of Irsee and its leading scholars were with the cultural innovations of the late eighteenth century. By means of letters, lectures and publications, and with the support of the Academy, they managed to keep the scholarly debate alive and diversified.

In sum, the conference made an important contribution to the history of science during the Age of Enlightenment. The papers attested to the fact that an interdisciplinary approach is most useful for this kind of investigation and that regional history can have international scope at the same time. After all, the observation of the âVenustransitâ of 1761 caused such a stir in the scholarly community that the next transit in 1769 prompted the first voyage of Captain James Cook on the HMS Endeavour. This expedition was commissioned by the Royal Navy and by the Royal Society and its most tangible result was the discovery of Australia. Scientists in central Europe were engaged in similar research to that pursued by the Fellows of the Royal Society at London. The exchange between diverse geographical regions as well as between diverse cultural, religious and national entities had become fast, rich and fruitful. Therefore, rather than emphasising that Catholic Europe had its own Enlightenment, an inter-confessional view of the developments taking place in academia (in the widest possible sense) as a foil against which to set the somewhat narrow Catholic historiography was in my view the only desideratum in

an otherwise highly informative event.

Conference Overview:

Markwart Herzog (Director of Schwabenakademie Irsee) / Alois Schmid (Kommission fÃ¼r Bayerische Landesgeschichte bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, MÃ¼nchen), Welcome and introduction

1st session: Enlightenment

Hannelore Putz (Ludwig-Maximilians-UniversitÃ¤t MÃ¼nchen), Katholische AufklÃ¤rung

Stephan Deutinger (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, MÃ¼nchen), Die Naturwissenschaften im Zeitalter der AufklÃ¤rung

2nd session: Monasteries in the Age of Enlightenment

Claudius Stein (Ludwig-Maximilians-UniversitÃ¤t MÃ¼nchen), Die Akademie und die KlÃ¶ster

Johann PÃ¶rnbacher (Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv MÃ¼nchen), Das Reichsstift Irsee im 18. Jahrhundert

Evening lecture

JÃ¼rgen Reichert (BezirkstagprÃ¤sident von Schwaben, Vorsitzender der Schwabenakademie Irsee), Welcome

Alois Schmid (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, MÃ¼nchen), Pater Ulrich Weiss OSB von Irsee. BenediktinermÃ¶nch â Philosoph â Naturwissenschaftler

3rd session: Monastic Scholars of the Enlightenment and Founding Members of the Academy

P Amand Kraml OSB (Observatory KremsmÃ¼nster), Pater Eugen Dobler OSB

Claudia Schwaab (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, MÃ¼nchen), Pater Candidus Werle OSB

4th session: Collections and their Publics

Helmut Zedelmaier (Ludwig-Maximilians-UniversitÃ¤t MÃ¼nchen), Die wissenschaftlichen Sammlungen des Klosters Irsee: Naturalien, Instrumente, GemÃ¤lde

Stephan Kellner (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MÃ¼nchen), Die Bibliothek des Klosters Irsee

Christof Paulus (Ludwig-Maximilians-UniversitÃ¤t MÃ¼nchen), Das Reichsstift Irsee und die âres publica litterariaâ des spÃ¤ten 18. Jahrhunderts

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