

- Vidimus - <http://vidimus.org> -

## Books

Posted By [ltempest](#) On December 15, 2014 @ 8:09 pm In | [Comments Disabled](#)

### **Mylène Ruoss and Barbara Giesicke, *Die Glasgemälde im Gotischen Haus zu Wörlitz, Berlin, 2012. Volume 4 of the series *Wissenschaftliche Bestandskataloge der Kulturstiftung Dessau Wörlitz*, ed. Rüdiger Becksmann, €68.***

This handsome two-volume publication is an introduction to and catalogue of the extensive collection of medieval and Renaissance stained glass from Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and France assembled by Prince Leopold III Friedrich Franz in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for his so-called Gothic House in Wörlitz, Germany [Fig. 1].

The collection comprises some very fine panels from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the majority coming from the last two centuries, and the book will be of great interest to students of the stained glass. Many of the panels are provided with a provenance, and the authors show how and when the glass was removed from its original location and brought to Wörlitz. The work is also an important source of information for those interested in the history of collections of stained glass, particularly in relation to England, as the prince was much influenced by Strawberry Hill, which he visited in 1763. Lord Walpole was assembling there a pioneering collection of imported stained glass, mainly of sixteenth-century date, to decorate the windows of his celebrated house built in the Gothic style. The influence of Strawberry Hill and other houses that the prince visited in England went further than stimulating his passion for collecting glass: it provided him with architectural models for his own Gothic House at Wörlitz, which he constantly extended and renewed. All this is described and explained in great detail by the authors, who have carried out much original research in a number of areas. The book was edited by Rüdiger Becksmann, who played an important part in promoting and facilitating the work necessary for its completion. It was the last contribution he made to the study of stained glass before his untimely death. In one of the four prefaces Becksmann explains why it has taken nearly two hundred years to produce a complete publication of the glass. These reasons include art historians' neglect, until comparatively recently, of the medium of stained glass; a lack of interest in neo-Gothic architecture; and the fact that until 1989 Wörlitz was in the German Democratic Republic.

The work is in two boxed volumes with continuous pagination, the first containing an extended introduction and appendices, the second the catalogue. After the usual preliminaries, the introduction begins with a brief outline of the fairly meagre historiography of the collection. A long section of particular interest to English readers describes the career Prince Leopold Franz von Anhalt-Dessau. After brief military service, he turned in 1758 to the administration and development of his diminutive principality, strongly influenced by his many foreign journeys, the major European monuments he saw, and the large collection of antique and modern art that he assembled. His first journey was in 1763–64, when he visited England and the Netherlands, followed by a grand tour in 1765 on the English model. In the following year, he was in the south of France, and it may have been here, or possibly on his first visit to England, that he became interested in old glass-painting. On his second visit to England, he studied country houses and landscape gardens in particular, and on his third in 1775, when he was accompanied by his wife,



Fig. 1. The Gothic House, Wörlitz, Germany.

she expressed her admiration of the stained-glass collection at Stourhead. They also saw a glass kiln at Bristol, then a glass-making centre, and visited Windsor, where the buildings associated with the Order of the Garter were to have a profound influence on the prince's conception for his Gothic House. A final visit to England was made in 1785.

There is discussion of the importance of the English country estate, as developed between 1715 and 1760, as a symbol of the 'liberal world concept' – seen as an answer to the Baroque absolutist estate of seventeenth-century France and influenced by Palladian architecture – with the conclusion that Prince Franz was the first person in Germany to make use of the harmonious combination of Palladian architecture, landscaped garden, and mixed styles. The country house of Stourhead, built in 1721 for Henry Hoare, provided a model for Wörlitz, as did the Temple to Flora at Stowe. The Prince lived at Wörlitz like an English lord, who withdrew for a time from the affairs of state to enjoy country life with his family. The core of the Gothic House was built in 1772–73, after the completion of two garden monuments and the classicizing country house. Further extensions were added in about 1780–81 and 1785–86.

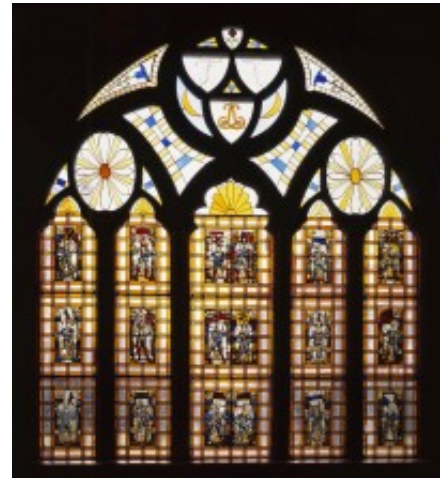


Fig. 2. Window in the knights' hall, Wörlitz, with the flag-bearers of the Swiss cantons.

Another important English influence for the prince was St George's Chapel, Windsor, on which the *Rittersaal* (knights' hall) at Wörlitz was modelled [Fig. 2]. The restoration of the west window at Windsor in 1767, which partly reused old glass, would have shown the prince the possibility of reusing and restoring old glass in an ornamental setting. A large late-medieval panel depicting St George was installed in the prince's study, and was displayed here because of his connection with the Order of the Garter [Fig. 3]. The prince modelled the league of princes he founded in 1783 to stand against the Habsburgs and Prussia on the Order, and just as the English Knights of the Garter met in St George's Chapel, so it was intended that members of the league of princes should meet in the *Rittersaal*.

The introductory volume also includes a very useful discussion on the early history of collecting of stained glass in England, of both native and foreign glass, noting the glazing at Stowe brought from Warwick priory, the importation of Flemish glass in 1753, followed by the first auction of Flemish glass in 1761. Further building work at Wörlitz between 1789 and 1813 was partly prompted by the increasing supply of collectable stained glass in Europe.

One of the key encounters of the prince's life was with Johan Caspar Lavater (1741–1802). He was born into the civic elite of Zürich and became a priest there, but was also an important figure in the intellectual and artistic life of his city and beyond, having many leading members of the Enlightenment in his circle of friends and being a great lover and collector of art. The city was a favourite destination for visitors in the eighteenth century, and many were welcomed and helped by Lavater, including Prince Franz. Although the prince's first visit to Zürich took place in 1770, his first meeting with Lavater did not occur until 1782, by which time Lavater had been interested in stained glass himself for some time and may have started his own collection. Lavater and the prince visited Strasbourg and Königsfelden in the summer of 1782, and in the following year the prince visited Lavater again in Zürich and purchased a large amount of stained glass, including eight Apostle panels from Maur. He also almost certainly acquired some of the glazing of the *Schützenhaus* (headquarters of the civic militia) in Zürich, which was sold at this time, and in 1784 the twenty-part flag-bearer series from there was carefully removed and sent off to Wörlitz, where it is now one of the most treasured items in the collection.

In the same year the Prince became aware of the glass at the inn at Knonau. His offer for the glass was initially refused, but he was later able to acquire it, including the large *Schwurscheibe* by Jos Murer, now at Wörlitz in the *Kriegerisches Kabinett* (a room decorated on military themes). This was paired with the *Geistliches Kabinett*, which was decorated on religious themes [Fig. 4]. Lavater's collaboration with the prince continued until 1796. In 1799, Lavater was wounded in the French attack on Zürich, and died two years later. After Lavater's death, the prince indulged his passion for collecting further, using other intermediaries, such as Friedrich Weinbrenner (1766–1826), city architect for Karlsruhe, through whom six Upper Rhenish panels

were obtained.

After this lengthy and comprehensive discussion of the prince's development of the Wörlitz estate, the original contexts of some of the more important parts of his collection of stained glass are discussed. This begins with the eight figures of Apostles with Creed scrolls from the parish church at Maur near Zürich installed in the nave there in the first decade of the sixteenth century. The principal donor was Barbara Krafft, who lived in the castle in Maur with her husband Georg Grebel. Barbara came from Ulm in Germany, and her family connections there made her a suitable patron for the Maur glazing; her donorship is confirmed by the presence in the glass of her patron saint Barbara. The original position of the series is reconstructed and related to the donors and the seating arrangements. Six of the windows are ascribed to Lux Zeiner, and two other artists were also involved; all were aware of the Apostle series painted by South German artists since the mid-fifteenth century.



Fig. 3. Wörlitz, study: panel depicting St George.

Two of the Wörlitz panels are among the latest known post-Reformation glass-paintings in Zürich. They are from the provost's house next to the Grossmünster, where Ulrich Zwingli, the city's leading reformer, was made the main priest in 1519. His influence had led to the destruction of religious images in the churches of Zürich and its environs, but not of the windows, with the exception of those at Zollikon. In 1540, Felix Frey, who had been provost since 1518, donated the first of the two panels; it depicted a new subject – not just Charlemagne, as an earlier panel of 1519 from the Grossmünster does – but the foundation and history of the church up to the Middle Ages. Charlemagne is shown standing with Duke Rupert of France, the first founder, holding a model of the Grossmünster; between them are the arms of Felix Frey. This image derives from an illustration in Johannes Müller's writings of a donor portrait of Charlemagne holding a model of the church, made after an old painting in the provost's house in Zürich. The subject is seen in glass-painting for over 60 years. The second panel dates from 1600 and shows Charlemagne holding the church with the *maior domus*, the administrator of the canons attached to the church.

The old *Schützenhaus* on the square outside Zürich, on a spur of land between the Limmat and Sihl rivers, was rebuilt in 1571 on the foundations of an older wooden building. A twenty-part flag-bearer series – donated by individuals, families and civic officials and depicting the flag-bearers of the thirteen-canton confederation, later members of the confederation, and places allied to the confederation – was installed here. All except two are now installed in the *Rittersaal* of the Gothic House [Fig. 5]. They date from 1572–75 and each contains a figure of a man in armour standing in an elaborate Renaissance niche and holding a banner with the arms of a canton or allied place; above are scenes from Swiss history. The development of this type of panel is discussed with examples from other media. Other panels with historical scenes, views, allegories and shields were painted for the *Schützenhaus*. Worthy of note are two of the panels that came to Wörlitz depicting the oath taken on the meadow at Rütli, a key moment in the history of the Swiss confederation. Apart from the windows from churches and public buildings already noted, glass was also often provided for private houses, especially in the seventeenth century. The main evidence for this appears in pictures, which are discussed and illustrated.



Fig. 4. Wörlitz, the 'Geistliches Kabinett'.

The first volume is completed by two appendices, the first consisting of documents relating to the collection. The second is extremely useful, as it consists of a topographical-chronological overview of the Wörlitz collection of glass-paintings, with black



and white photographs of the panels, arranged in order of country of origin and date. The panels are illustrated again in colour in the catalogue that makes up volume two, but the complete overview in the appendix makes it easy for the user to see what the collection covers and find any particular area of interest. By far the greater number of panels is from Switzerland, with glass from c.1470 to the second half of the seventeenth century, although the survey begins with panels of c.1480–85 to 1601 from Strasbourg. The glass from Southern Germany ranges in date from c.1510–20 to the end of the seventeenth century, and several panels from Nuremberg (dating to c.1530 to 1692) include some by various members of the Hirsvogel workshop. There are further panels from Augsburg (dating to c.1480–90 to 1530). Lesser quantities come from the Netherlands (c.1520–1635), and there are a few fine pieces from France of c.1510 ascribed here to Paris or Burgundy.

The second volume is larger and comprises the catalogue. This is constructed according to a slightly simplified and adapted version of the CVMA guidelines, with colour photos, descriptions, restoration diagrams, measurements, and sections on donors, inscriptions, heraldry, technique, condition, photographic credits and bibliography where appropriate, but no separate headings for iconography, colour or style, although these are discussed in the descriptions where relevant. This system fully meets the requirements of the material covered and is consistently applied throughout. Included also are a large number of comparative illustrations of glass and other media and photographs of the various buildings at Wörlitz that house painted glass. Many drawings, prints, engravings and designs in other media that served as models for the panels are illustrated, for example for the series of six panels with scenes from the parable of the Prodigal Son made in Zürich in 1590/1611 and ascribed to Christoph Murer, now in window XXVII at Wörlitz. In this case the discussion of the iconographical sources also refers to the influence of post-Reformation Protestant drama in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. This is typical of the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the catalogue, which contains much information not discussed in the first volume. There is sometimes a danger that not enough attention is paid to catalogue volumes in such works, with the focus being on the narrative introduction. That is not the case here. The introductory volume here is certainly full of interest, but it focuses on the fascinating process of establishing the buildings and the collection, confining detailed discussion of glass to certain major items; the bulk of the information on the glass is to be found in the catalogue volume.



Fig. 5. Wörlitz, knights' hall, flag-bearer of a Swiss canton, originally in the 'Schützenhaus', Zürich.

These volumes are characterized by a high standard of scholarship in many diverse areas, including the glass of several different countries, with important new information on the history of the collection of stained glass. Production values are high, with very generous illustrations of excellent quality.

David King

---

Article printed from Vidimus: <http://vidimus.org>

URL to article: <http://vidimus.org/issues/issue-86/books/>

Copyright © 2011 Vidimus. All rights reserved.