The Life, Times and Death of “Inhumation 700” from the Holy Trinity Church Konstanz, Germany

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Abstract: In the late 1990s it was discovered that the medieval Holy Trinity Church (Dreifaltigkeitskirche) on the Rosgartenstrasse, one of the main shopping streets in the centre of the City of Konstanz, South-West Germany, was leaning alarmingly to the north, threatening to collapse, bury and crush the shops and other buildings along the Bahnhofstraße immediately to the north of the church. In order to stop the subsidence, the church foundations were underpinned by reinforced concrete injected into small trenches dug and refilled successively along the foundations both outside and inside the church, it being too dangerous to open up a larger part of the foundation at one time. Each trench was recorded archaeologically so that a complete picture of the structure of the original church foundations grew as the project developed.

Especially interesting was the discovery in the trench immediately inside today’s main church portal: a medieval grave covered by a partially inscribed gravestone containing four individuals. For one of the men it has been possible to build a plausible profile, including social standing, activities during his lifetime, possible (probable) place time and cause of death. It is also possible to postulate a reason as to why he – or maybe all four as a family – were buried specifically at this spot just inside the portal of the church and not elsewhere.

Keywords: excavation, stratigraphy, anthropology, warfare, historical research

Position
During the stabilization building work in the year 2000 in and on the Holy Trinity Church / Augustine Cloister Church in south part of the old town of Konstanz (fig.1) a grave covered by a partially preserved, inscribed, massive sandstone grave slab (fig. 2) and containing four inhumations in three wooden coffins was discovered, immediately inside the main entrance of the church.
Fig. 1 – View south-east toward the Augustine Church during building work in the year 2000

Fig. 2 – The sandstone grave slab in freshly uncovered state. Inscription clearly visible
Each of the skeletons is lying on its back with arms crossed across the lower torso (fig. 3). There were two individuals in one of the coffins. There were no finds. Abutting the grave slab was a tiled floor overlying a burned rubble destruction layer which, in turn, was cut by the grave pit. The grave fill does not allow a convincing stratigraphic distinction between the individual burials. Clear though, is that the central inhumation, known as “inhumation 700”, was the last to be laid there.

In all likelihood the internments took place after 1398, the year of a disastrous fire, which destroyed much of Konstanz including the Augustine Monastery. The fact that the grave pit cuts the thick layer of burnt destruction rubble, as already mentioned, provides sufficient stratigraphic proof. The position of the grave tells us that the interred were benefactors of the church who had paid for this privileged position and had maybe helped to finance the reconstruction after fire (fig. 4). Even if rich enough to buy this position, they were not high nobility or hugely rich. Those of more elevated position would have paid for burial plots in churches of higher standing.
Fig. 4 – Phase-plan of the Augustine Church based on the excavations of 2000. The position of the sandstone grave slab and grave containing inhumation 700 marked by red arrow.

The epigraphic style of Gravestone – a combination of majuscule uncial letters in Latin is a less than fashionable style for the beginning of the 15th century.\(^1\) The inscription

\[
\text{(ANNO D(OMI)NI). M. CCCC.}
\]
\[
\text{TE/RCIO. X(III). DIE. MENS(IS).}//
\]
\[
\text{--- MICH. HIC. SEPU[LTUS]} ---
\]

includes the year 1403 - most likely dating the central inhumation (inhumation 700). The grave slab bears two crests (fig. 5). The Mill Wheel on the right points to family names such as Mölln, Milner, Molitor, Miller, Müller or variations thereof. The crest on the left may be the remnants of a Maltese cross. This combination of mill wheel and Maltese cross opens the possibility of a connection between these Augustine Church-

\(^1\) Pers. comm. PD Dr. Harald Rainer Derschke, Dept. of History and Sociology, University of Konstanz.

\(^2\) In the year of Our Lord 1403, on 14th day of the Month (---) Mich(ael?) is buried here (here is the grave of).
inhumations in Konstanz and the last patriarch of a branch of the Mülner family, Rudolf of Küsnacht, who
died in Zürich in 1406 and was a Knight of St John. ³

Fig. 5 – Detail of crests on the sandstone grave slab, right: millwheel, left: Maltese cross?

Life
Inhumation 700 was a man of around 40 at the time of his death. He had been around 168 – 170 cm tall,
right handed and displayed markedly few degenerative defects for his age. Marked muscle relief and arthritic
features in the breast and spine indicate strong physical demand on that area. There is inflammation around
the Poirier’s facet at the top of the left femur. He has a particularly narrow nose and a markedly and
asymmetrically pointed chin (fig. 6). He suffered moderate intravital tooth loss. Of those teeth remaining, 11
were carious but unusually lightly worn in relation to the age at death. His teeth also display enamel
hyperplasia – formed at around the age of two years and indicating stress – maybe originating from when his
access to human milk stopped? (fig.7).

³ Pers. comm. PD Dr. Harald Rainer Derschke, Dept. of History and Sociology, University of Konstanz.
Although long skulls are not unusual in Southern Germany in the late Middle Ages, his was particularly long. As an adult he experienced at least one serious accident resulting in trauma and fractures of the spine, the right shoulder the left foot and the left fibula. Such injuries would be in line with those resulting from a fall from a horse. The anthropological evidence confirms the impression of a higher social standing given by the position and gestalt of the grave.

Fig. 6 – Mandibila of inhumation 700. The long asymmetrical chin is clearly visible
Death

Inhumation 700 did not die a natural death. The Skull shows marked traces of blunt and sharp blows with no traces of healing. There are ten anomalies, mostly flat and on the back of the head, apparently inflicted through a helmet or other form of head protection. An injury 4 cm above the left ear opening, possibly a blow from a crossbow bolt or a lance point, maybe parried by a helmet or other form of head protection is especially clear (fig. 8). The head was unprotected when it received a sword blow to the back (fig. 9). The first six neck vertebrae show five defects. The sword cuts in the top two are especially clear (fig. 10).
Fig. 8 – Injury 4 cm above the left ear opening of inhumation 700 cause by a sharp projectile, the full force of which was reduced by head protection.

Fig. 9 – Result of a sword blow to the back of the head of inhumation 700.
Fig.10 – Cervical vertebrae of inhumation 700 displaying five defects

Where do these injuries come from? Their character and the number of the defects point toward military action. What and where could that have been?
**War**

There is a strong case for looking toward the so called “Appenzell Wars” – a series of uprisings of the inhabitants of the Swiss Canton of Appenzell to try to force independence from the then ruler, the bishop of St Gallen. They started in 1401 and went on into the third decade of 15th century. In his attempts to crush the uprisings the bishop was supported amongst others by the “Federation of Lake Cities”\(^4\) of which Konstanz was one. One of the most important battles soon after the inception of the Appenzell Wars was the so called Letzischlacht (battle of the wooden fence) in May 1403 near Vögelinsegg to the south of Lake Konstanz between Appenzell town and St Gallen. A large and well equipped St Gallen/Konstanz Army set out from St Gallen to Appenzell town to attack the rebels in their capital. Vastly outnumbering the enemy, they rode and marched on with confidence (we presume) until they were ambushed at Vögelinsegg near Speicher (fig. 11).

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\(^4\) Bündnis der Bodenseestädte or Städte des Bunds um den See at the beginning of 15th Century a federation of seven cities on or near Lake Constance including Konstanz and Lindau.
The naked statistics of the battle are as follows:

Date: Mai 1403
Place: Ca. 1 km northwest of the Vögelinsegg Pass near Speicher, Canton Appenzell Ausserroden
Opposing Parties: Coalition 1: Royal Abbey Saint Gallen, Bishopric of Konstanz & other Lake Constance cities, (large cavalry section) 4000 strong
Coalition 2: Appenzell, rebel peasant army (clubs, axes etc.) & soldiers from Schwyz (swords and pikes, possibly some crossbows), 300 strong
Outcome: Vanquished: St.Gallen/Konstanz, losses >400
Victorious: Appenzell Rebel Army, losses 8

This is what happened:
The route from St. Gallen to Appenzell lead through a steep sided valley at the Vögelinsegg ("little bird corner") near the hamlet of Speicher. The Appenzeller erected a wooden fence or "Letzi" ⁵ at the entrance to the ravine. The coalition broke through this defensive line with no problem, opening only a small hole in the fence. The defenders retreated and the coalition army forced its way through the narrow opening in the fence into the confined space of the gorge. At which point the Appenzell peasants, bearing rocks, agricultural implements, pikes, axes and clubs and supported by swordsmen from the confederated canton of Schwyz, who were also acting as military advisors, pounced on the coalition troops from the valley sides (fig. 12). What followed was described as a "bloody whipping" by the Konstanz chronist Christoph Schultheiß who was an eye Witness (fig. 13).

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⁵ Letzi Swiss German term for a wattle fence. Name-giving for the battle - Letzischlacht (Schlacht = battle)
Fig. 12 – Battle plan of the Letzischlact, the Battle of Vögelinsegg. St. Gallen/Konstanz forces, white. Appenzell/Schwyz forces black. (BISCHOFSBERGER, 2004)
Fig. 13 – The Letzischlacht or Schlacht bei Vögelinsegg of 1403 as depicted in the Spiezer Chronik of Diebold Schilling, 1465. Clearly visible are the Letzi and the village of Speicher in the background. In the foreground the Appenzeller irregulars attack the retreating mounted St. Gallen/Konstanz forces with pikes and halberds

(https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlacht_bei_V%C3%B6gelinsegg#/media/File:Schilling_Schlacht_bei_Voeglinsegg_1403.jpg)

The Army was chased by the peasants right up to the town walls of St Gallen. Of the 400 dead, 90 for sure are known to have been inhabitants of Konstanz – members of many guilds, noble families. One of those
dead may have been inhumation 700 from the Augustinian Church in Konstanz. An almost contemporary illustration from the Tschachtlan-Chronik shows how he might have died (fig. 14). Blood is dripping down from below the helmet of the figure lying with his back to the viewer in the middle of the picture and the figure in the leather body armor at the bottom right of the scene is hacking at the neck of the figure lying helmetless and prostrate in the foreground.

Fig. 14 – Battle scene from the Tschachtlan-Chronik, Berne first half 15th Century (MUSCHG Walter; GESSLER E.A., 1941. Detail from fig. 36)

Synopsis

How does all this information fit together? Who was the inhumation 700? What were his life and times – and death?

It might have been like this (fig. 15):

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* Berne, first half 15th century.
Fig. 15 - Postulated thumbnail scheme of the life, times and death of inhumation 700.

- Born: around 1360
- Into a socially privileged but not overly powerful family
- His name might have been Michael Müller, Mölln, Mollitor or some variation on that
- He was weaned at the age of around two years
- He may have had an unexplained family relationship with a member of the Knights of St John in Zürich
- As an adult he was just under 1.70 m tall with a long head and a narrow nose and face and with a markedly pointed chin. The physical form and condition of his skeleton and teeth confirm his higher social status
- Sometime between 1480 and at least a year before his death he had an accident - or a series of accidents - falls from some height – maybe from a horse, resulting in serious but fully healed injuries
- 1398 he witnessed the fire which destroyed the Augustine Cloister Church and contributed to its rebuilding by buying a prominent grave plot just inside the entrance
- By the beginning of the 15th century he was a member of the St. Gallen/Konstanz army raised to put down the Appenzell revolt and took part in the expedition to teach the Peasants a lesson at the beginning of 1403. Why not? It didn't seem dangerous. The Coalition troops were better armed and vastly outnumbered the rebels – and „being there“ would very likely be useful in advancing his position in the social hierarchy – at which point, we postulate, it all went terribly wrong and he met a violent end behind the Letzi at the Battle by Vögelinsegg early in 1403 at the age of around 40
- His penultimate resting place at the beginning of 15th century was his purchased family grave in the Augustine Church in Konstanz
- Until the grave slab lifted at the end of 20th century and he was transferred to a Federal State of Baden-Württemberg standard cardboard bone-box – where he has been lying ever after.

Some of this story is true. Maybe all of it is. Who knows?
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