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## Finding Faces: Reconstructing Liturgical Identity in the Medieval West Choir Windows at Naumburg Cathedral, Germany

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### *Die Entdeckung der Gesichter: Rekonstruktion der liturgischen Identität in den mittelalterlichen Westchorfenstern des Naumburger Doms – Zusammenfassung*

Während der zwei Restaurierungsphasen in den 1940er und 1960er Jahren wurden acht eigenschaftslose "Wolkenköpfe" in die fünf monumentalen Figurenfenster des frühgotischen Westchors des Naumburger Doms in Sachsen-Anhalt eingeführt.

Da es keine genauen Hinweise auf die verlorenen mittelalterlichen Köpfe gab, sollten die Lücken in den Figuren sympathisch gefüllt werden, ohne Täuschung oder Vermutungen über das ursprüngliche Aussehen. Die widersprüchlichen Standpunkte, die diese

### *Finding Faces: Reconstructing Liturgical Identity in the Medieval West Choir Windows at Naumburg Cathedral, Germany – Abstract*

During two restoration phases in the 1940s and 1960s, eight featureless "Cloud Heads" were installed in the five monumental stained-glass windows in the early Gothic west choir of Naumburg Cathedral in Saxony-Anhalt.

Since no precise evidence of the lost medieval heads was available, this approach was intended to fill gaps in the figures sympathetically, without deception or conjecture about the original appearance.

The contradictory viewpoints surrounding the subsequent iconographic voids, however, prompted a re-

ikonographischen Lücken umgeben, veranlassten jedoch zu einer erneuten Untersuchung des ästhetischen, spirituellen und gemeinschaftlichen Wertes eines der bemerkenswertesten mittelalterlichen Verglasungsschemas Deutschlands. Im Rahmen der 2017 begonnenen Konservierung des Doms wurden die acht fehlenden Gesichter anhand der technischen und stilistischen Zeugnisse der Fenster rekonstruiert. In diesem Beitrag wird der Prozess als Fallstudie zur Erforschung von Identität und Integrität bei der Restaurierung von Glasmalereien vorgestellt, insbesondere wenn keine Originalzeichnungen oder Archivbelege vorhanden sind.

examination of the aesthetic, spiritual and communal value of the windows.

As part of the conservation of the cathedral's stained glass, which began in 2017, the eight missing faces were reconstructed after extensive consideration and discussion by an international expert advisory committee, using the technical and stylistic evidence remaining in the medieval windows.

This paper presents the process as a case study for the exploration of identity and integrity in stained glass conservation, especially where no original cartoon or archival evidence exists.

## Introduction

The conservation of stained-glass windows today often involves the treatment of past restorative interventions. In some cases, the decisions made and measures implemented during previous restorations no longer align with current thinking in terms of ethics and the assignment of cultural values.

In the early Gothic west choir of Naumburg Cathedral in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, eight lost faces from the monumental figurative window scheme were replaced with featureless neutrally toned infills as a result of two conservation campaigns carried out in the 1940s and 1960s. By the time this approach was used in Naumburg, neutral infills had already been implemented by restorers across Europe for over a hundred years. The development of the technique is particularly associated with the pioneering English stained glass historian Charles Winston in the mid-19th century.<sup>1</sup>

Where no evidence of an original cartoon exists, a neutrally toned insertion may provide a minimally interventive solution to a number of complex ethical and technical complications. Nonetheless, the application of the concept in Naumburg's west choir failed to satisfy all stakeholders in subsequent years. The iconographical voids created by the so called 'Cloud Heads' resulted in conflicting viewpoints and prompted a deeper examination of significance in one of Germany's most remarkable medieval glazing schemes.

<sup>1</sup> A.C. SEWTER, "The place of Charles Winston in the Victorian Revival of the art of stained glass", *Journal of the British Archaeological Society*, XXIV, 1961, p. 85.

## Naumburg's West Choir

The building of Naumburg Cathedral began in 1028 after the relocation of the formerly catholic diocese of Naumburg-Zeitz.<sup>2</sup> Most of the current building dates from the mid-13th century and was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status in July 2018 as a landmark of the German late Romanesque and early Gothic styles. The current cathedral has two choirs, east and west, each divided from the nave by a rood screen. The west rood screen is an extremely important work of early gothic sculpture by the workshop of the anonymous 'Naumburger Meister'. The twelve donor portrait statues of the cathedral founders standing life size around the west choir are also attributed to his workshop. The representation of lay people in such an important part of the church and the incredible character and realism portrayed in the founder statues makes them unique in European sculpture from the 13th century.<sup>3</sup>

The west choir is a synthesis of artworks that together form a single 'Gesamtkunstwerk' which is now recognised as one of the most significant early Gothic monuments in Germany. The five stained-glass windows in the choir were glazed as part of this complete artwork and retain much of the original painted glass. The two outer windows show full individual standing figures of saints which often mirror the Naumburger Meister's sculpted figures in position and gesture. The three central windows show virtues overcoming vices and apostles standing in triumph over the enemies of the church.

## Restoration Phases and the 'Wolkenköpfe'

Naumburg's west choir windows have seen numerous interventions in their 750 year history. One of the most significant campaigns was carried out between 1875 and 1877 by the workshop of Wilhelm Franke under the artistic direction of architect Karl Memminger. The windows had already suffered considerable damage and loss in previous years to an extent which necessitated the installation of two entirely new windows in positions swll and wl. Alongside the new windows, the restoration involved the addition of many painted infills, including several heads, within the remaining medieval lancets. The exact number of 19th-century replacements is unknown due to two subsequent restorations in the mid-20th century where many of these additions were removed.

Unfortunately, Franke's infills suffered from extreme paint loss over a relatively short period of time, succumbing to the widespread phenomenon seen in contemporary painted glass across Europe. Several of the replacement heads had lost almost all of their detail by the time they were photographed in 1930 and the problem likely contributed to their eventual replacement.

The conservation work in the late 1930s and early 1940s was led by stained glass artist and teacher Josef Oberberger. As a precaution during the Second World War, the medieval windows were removed from the choir. Amongst numerous interventive measures, including extensive lead removal, cleaning with hydrofluoric acid and the complete re-creation of several damaged panels, it was discovered during our inspection that the first of the 'Wolkenköpfe' or 'Cloud Heads' was also made by Oberberger's team in 1941. The war eventually put a stop to the work and the unfinished windows remained in pieces in storage for the next 17 years until the workshop of Erfurt glass painter Heinz Hajna took over in 1959.

Between 1959 and 1967, seven more heads were replaced with neutral infills.

It is unclear if Oberberger's neutral head in the figure of St Matthew, signed and dated in 1941, was part of a test panel for a solution which may have later been abandoned or if he would have treated all of Memminger and Franke's additions in this way had the war not interrupted the work. Nonetheless, it is evident that concerns about integrity, honesty and falsification directed Heinz Hajna's approach, as seven more neutrally toned heads, along with numerous undetailed inserts in place of hands, drapery and other elements, were inserted across the medieval windows north west II and III, and south west III between 1959 and 1967 (fig.1). The effect this had on the iconographic readability and aesthetic appearance of the windows was devastating.

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<sup>2</sup> Mattias LUDWIG, *Der Dom zu Naumburg*, Edition Logika, München, 2013, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> LUDWIG 2013, p. 48-67.



Fig. 1. Naumburg, Cathedral, nwll: 'Cloud Heads' in panels 7a, 8a, 7b and 8b, 1250/1941/1967. © Holger Kupfer.

### Our Concept

The guidelines expressed in The Venice Charter of 1964 indicate that stopping restorative intervention at the point where conjecture begins was at the forefront of conservation thinking when Naumburg's cloud heads were installed.<sup>4</sup> Maintaining integrity and authenticity continues to inform all aspects of stained glass conservation today.<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, in many circumstances, a neutrally toned infill can provide a sensitive and successful repair. However, no approach to infills is guaranteed, decisive or universal. Each infill requires individual treatment and the consideration of all of its values within its surrounding panel, window and wider scheme.

As the building has maintained its original function, the visual disturbances and voids in iconographical context caused by the neutral inserts in Naumburg's west choir have been problematic for the church, its parishioners and its visitors for over 50 years. The question of maintaining authenticity is today explored through addressing cultural values holistically and understanding the importance of identity and recognition as part of community interaction.<sup>6</sup>

The concept for the current project was formed through an open dialogue with the cathedral directors and an international expert advisory committee over several years in preparation for the work. The possibilities surrounding the reconstruction of aesthetic and iconographic uniformity were examined in depth before the final approach was established. The practicability of printed detail was explored and extensive experimentation with cold paints and plating was carried out. Unfortunately, the density of the matting on the neutral infills greatly affected the visibility and legibility of any new details added through these methods. Ultimately, despite the lack of archival evidence rendering an archaeological reconstruction impossible, the predicted public benefit outweighed any possible harm to the cathedral's

<sup>4</sup> ICOMOS, *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter)*, Venice, 1964, Article 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ivo RAUCH, "Handle with Care: Ethics, Approaches and Best Practice in Stained Glass Conservation Today", in M.B. SHEPHARD (dir.), *The Art of Collaboration: Stained Glass Conservation in the Twenty-First Century*, London, 2010, p. 47; ICOMOS, *The Nara Document on Authenticity*, Nara, 1994, §10.

<sup>6</sup> Jukka JOKILEHTO, *What is Modern Conservation?*, 2013, <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/archaeology/documents/taughtpostgraduates/conservation/Modern%20Conservation%20Jokilehto%202013.pdf>.

current values, and the decision was made to replace the neutral infills, where necessary, with newly painted additions.<sup>7</sup>

In this special case, the aim was to introduce iconographically accurate and stylistically corresponding faces based directly on the remaining medieval material in the windows. Guided by the principles established by the Corpus Vitrearum in 2004, neutral hands were only replaced where essential for the clarity of the figure and all other neutral inserts within drapery or elsewhere were not replaced. All infills removed from previous restorations were retained in the cathedral's archive and can therefore be re-inserted at any time.<sup>8</sup>

### Finding the Naumburg Style

The 'Zackenstil' or 'Jagged Style' of the figurative panels represents a transitional style between Romanesque and Gothic which reached its crossing point in central Germany. The original glazier is unknown although the obvious direction of the Naumberger Meister has resulted in a unique "Naumburg Jagged style" which can be seen across all of the surviving medieval figures.<sup>9</sup> These recognisable characteristics made it possible to create infills according to a certain set of stylistic rules. Despite the lack of an original cartoon, authenticity could still be retained by discovering, understanding and adhering to the Naumburg style.

In order to replicate it, the patterns and similarities in the surviving faces were closely examined. It was discovered that the distances between the eyes, the length of the nose and width of the mouth all tended to fall within a certain range, roughly corresponding to a template. The eyes conformed to a certain shape and line style and the eyebrows were almost always the same width, thickness and line weight. This made it possible to re-imagine the lost faces according to a specific set of rules (fig. 2). The reconstructions cannot decisively predict the exact appearance or placement of lost features, but they can give an informed impression of how a head painted for the original Naumburg scheme may have looked. Furthermore, each new infill remains fully reversible.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 2. Naumburg, Cathedral, nwIII: the 'Naumburg Style', St Elizabeth and St Demetrius, 2018. © Vereinigte Domstifter.

<sup>7</sup> HISTORIC ENGLAND, *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*, English Heritage, London, 2008, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> CORPUS VITREARUM, *Corpus Vitrearum Guidelines for the Conservation and Restoration of Stained Glass*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Nuremberg, 2004, §4.4.1.

<sup>9</sup> LUDWIG 2013, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> CV GUIDELINES 2004, §4.4.1.

### Case Study: St Mauritius. Portraying Ethnicity

The sculpture of St Mauritius at Magdeburg Cathedral, around 100 miles north of Naumburg and dating from around the same time as the west choir, sensitively and accurately depicts the physical characteristics of the third century martyr according to his ethnic origin. Historical research conducted early in the project suggested that St Mauritius was born in Thebes in Egypt but was probably of Sudanese descent. Accordingly, he has been portrayed as such in art since the 12th century.

It was possible to conclude through the examination of the original material in window nwIII, that the ethnicity of St Mauritius was considered when glass for the figure was selected. The surviving hands show that the medieval painter was extremely sensitive to variations in skin tone, especially between the outside of the hand and the palm. These subtle tonal changes, as well as the differences between this figure and others of European descent, were reflected in the chosen glass. After establishing that St Mauritius was almost certainly depicted accurately according to his ethnic origin, the question of his features still remained.

A photograph from 1930 showed the head of the saint had not suffered from paint loss although it was also clear from the image that the execution did not correspond to Memminger's *vidimus* nor the painting style or quality of Franke's work. It is therefore likely that this was an undocumented infill by an unknown glazing workshop. A rather more successful head was in the panel when it was photographed again in 1960. This was possibly a trial piece painted during Josef Oberberger's restoration. It is not possible to know without specific documentation, if the painter had any evidence for his design which has since been lost, or if he used a similar approach of interpreting and replicating the characteristic elements seen elsewhere in the windows. Nonetheless, this head had been replaced with a neutral infill by 1967.

In order to stay in line with our concept and to maintain our aim of providing sensitive reconstructions in the 'Naumburg Style', the new head of St Mauritius was developed in accordance with our model. The glass colour for the figure was matched as accurately as possible to the surviving medieval material but no attempt was made to differentiate the facial characteristics from the stylistic rules we had already established (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Naumburg, Cathedral, nwIII: St Mauritius (with new head) and St Catherine, 1250/2018. © P. Hildebrand.

### Case Study: St Elizabeth. Adapting to Spatial Constraints

The head of the figure of St Elizabeth of Thuringia was the only one of the eight neutral infills to have any kind of intentionally painted detail. Relatively wide linear applications of cold paint had been added to define the head shape within a larger space. This suggested that more than the facial features were missing in this case. In Memminger's vidimus for nwIII, St Elizabeth appears wearing a nun's wimple and veil. As an important saint in the region, there was plenty of evidence to draw upon for how she may have been portrayed in 1250. Notably, a sculpture of St Elizabeth stands in a chapel dedicated to her in Naumburg Cathedral. Valuable information was also gained from the narrative window at St Elizabeth's Church in Marburg.

The photographs of nwIII from 1930 indicate that the head of St Elizabeth had also been replaced in an undocumented restoration prior to its removal by Heinz Hajna. The face of the figure at that time was poorly executed with exaggerated features and it was certainly not based on Memminger's vidimus as the head did not feature a wimple. The wide neck area was instead left open and hair was painted within the voids either side. This configuration did not fit well into the surrounding space and was therefore visually disturbing. The known details of St Elizabeth's life and the numerous contemporaneous depictions of her supported the theory that she was most likely wearing a wimple in the original Naumburg scheme. Importantly, this was the only arrangement that satisfactorily matched the shape of the void. Furthermore, capturing the folds and movement in the wimple provided another opportunity to explore the Naumburg Zackenstil and how it could be represented through the new additions.

After the research phase, and following the same process as the other infills, the flesh tint was matched, and test samples produced on single pieces of glass. It was quickly apparent, despite the addition of washes, that the glass colour was unsuitable for the wimple. The pink tone was not iconographically accurate nor was it aesthetically pleasing. Through further discussion with the advisory committee it was concluded that to maintain historical accuracy in technique and appearance, the wimple should be made from separate pieces of white glass. Accordingly, the infill was separated into three parts, divided by two lead comes. Each part was treated as an individual infill and appropriately signed and dated.

### Case Study: St Vincent. A Balancing Act

The final case study posed some ethical and practical questions about the blending in of infills into heavily corroded or discoloured surroundings. The lengths we go to in modelling new infills to imitate age or corrosion can often divide opinion. Is it acceptable to add imitation corrosion and under what circumstances? In every case, points of view do not always correspond. Fundamentally, a balance must be achieved in order to avoid visual disturbances.<sup>11</sup>

In Naumburg it was necessary to adjust the opacity of the new additions to maintain visual harmony. This was especially important when consideration is given to the overall aim of the intervention. Significantly though, the head of St Vincent required much more modelling than any of the others. This was due to a combination of factors which affected the south side of the choir much more than the north. As part of the development of the Jakobi plating process by Richard Jakobi at the Doerner Institute, extensive tests were carried out on the medieval glass from swIII. Much of the glass was heavily cleaned with hydrofluoric acid and consolidated with layers of acrylate. As high temperatures are often reached on the south side of the choir, the acrylate softened, attracted dirt and deteriorated. The accumulation of pollutants in the unventilated protective glazing system may have further exacerbated this damage and contributed to the dark and patchy appearance of the panels. This is especially evident in the surviving medieval faces in swIII.

In addition, the upper half of the figure of St Vincent was fully reconstructed by Josef Oberberger in 1941. The entire panel had been re-made once before by Wilhelm Franke but suffered advanced paint deterioration along with most of the 19th-century additions. Oberberger's panel exhibits artificial corrosion across both the interior and exterior surfaces. The effect has been achieved using glass paint in combination with a widespread application of opaque cold paint which has resulted in the panel appearing very dark. This situation reinforced the need for individual consideration and prompted a re-examination of the values we were attempting to preserve and re-introduce.

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<sup>11</sup> HISTORIC ENGLAND 2008, *Conservation Principles*, p. 58.

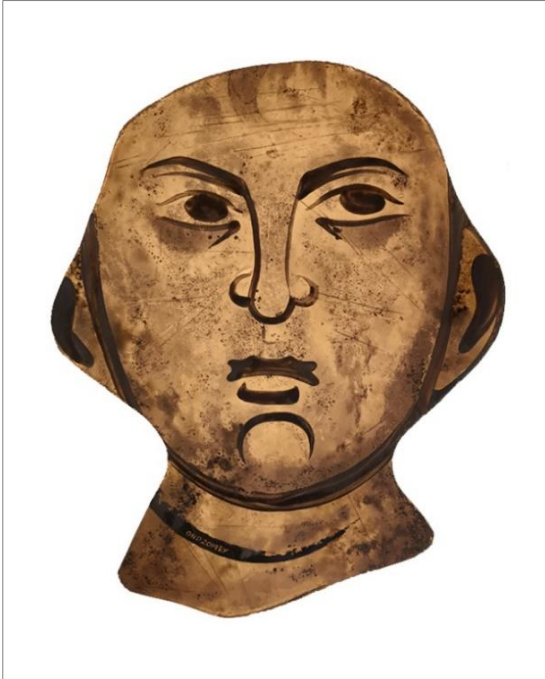


Fig. 4. Naumburg, Cathedral, swill: development of head for St Vincent, 2018.  
© Vereinigte Domstifter.

In order to maintain the aesthetic value of swill, to reinstitute liturgical context and to avoid the same visual disturbances caused by the neutral infill, additional modelling of the new head was necessary to achieve a level closer to its immediate surroundings (fig. 4). By adding shading layer by layer until a satisfactory level was reached, the intention was to balance the appearance of the new head within its surrounding panel, along with the rest of the figures in window swill and the entirety of the wider scheme.

### Conclusion

The case in Naumburg highlights the often complex issues related to the replacement of lost detail where no original cartoon or archival evidence exists. A total of eight new heads were created for the west choir according to the 'Naumburg Style' which was interpreted through the evidence remaining in the original fabric. The new faces are fully reversible and were introduced as part of a concept intended to reestablish iconographical and liturgical uniformity, aesthetic and communal value and stylistic integrity in Naumburg Cathedral's west choir. Each infill posed interesting and sometimes unique problems and

highlighted the need for discussion, flexibility and a continually open dialogue when trying to retrieve or re-create missing information from stained-glass windows.

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