Monasterium.net (MOM)
Virtual Archives of Central and Eastern European Monasteries

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INTRODUCTION

Central- and Eastern Europe is very rich of old monasteries still keeping a great cultural heritage in their archives and libraries. These sources are very important for the history and identity of this area and so the main topic of the project MOM (lat. Abbreviation of "monasterium", web: www.monasterium.net) is to enable an open access especially to the medieval charters of these monasteries via internet. In a first step the documents of the Lower Austrian monasteries, in a second those of other parts of Austria and in a third also those of the countries in the neighbourhood, especially Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia are digitised and made available via World Wide Web.

THE PROJECT

MOM is the commonly used abbreviation in medieval charters for the Latin word *monasterium* and became a symbol for a project unique in the field of historical sciences in Austria. Under the patronage of the St. Pölten Diocese Archives the MOM team, consisting of 21 cooperators, has started a very ambitious enterprise. The main target of MOM is making the charters of the monasteries in Lower Austria and Vienna available by means of digitisation. The project started in 2002 with the foundation of the „*Institut zur Erforschung und Erschließung kirchlicher Quellen*" (Institute for exploration and development of ecclesiastical historical sources) and is financed by three main supporting partners: the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, the Departmente of Culture of the Federal Province of Lower Austria (Kulturabteilung des Landes Niederösterreich) and the monasteries and abbeys themselves.

One of the main motivations in the 19th century for publishing the charters of the monasteries was the fact, that an archive is worthless if its stocks are not available and useable. And that is exactly what is the intention of the MOM-project today: to make the charters available to everybody who has access to the word wide web.

In a first step, the charters of the following monasteries have been digitized by MOM: Aggsbach, Altenburg, Ardagger, Baden, Dürnstein, Gaming, Geras, Göttweig, Heiligenkreuz, Herzogenburg, Klosterneuburg, Lilienfeld, Linz, Mariazell in Österreich, Mauerbach, Melk,

Neukloster, Pernegg, Säusenstein, Schottenstift, Seitenstetten, St. Andrä, St. Dorothea, St. Pölten, Wiener Neustadt and Zwettl.

That makes a total of approximately 20.000 charters. Every single piece has been scanned and positioned in the Word Wide Web together with the text of already existing editions of the charter. The user, who can be a scientist, a student or just an interested layman, will be able to use the stored data of 20.000 charters with the help of a searching machine under www.monasterium.net free of charge. An index makes it possible to search for certain villages, personal names or other items and get the proper results within a few seconds. This is the contribution of MOM to what we might call the "democratization of historical sources". From now on everybody who has access to the World Wide Web is enabled to use these historical sources, which in the past were reserved to a few privileged persons only.

ACTIONS

To make the charters available, a procedure of four main steps has to be carried out:

1. Already published texts or summaries of charters have to be scanned and converted by Optical Character recognition (OCR)

2. Charters which are not edited by now are edited newly. This happens at present i.e. for the abbeys of Melk, Zwettl and Klosterneuburg

3. After the results of the OCR had been checked, and marked up with HTML, all texts are integrated into a database.
4. The original charters in the monasteries are scanned and the images are connected with the text in the database.

The publishing of the charter-scans of high solution is offering another advantage. High quality depictions on the web make the using of the original charters in most of the cases obsolete. So, this historical treasures can survive in the archives of the monasteries without facing the dangers of permanent usage.

USE IN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

Medieval charters are important sources for European history and they are also an important part of the European cultural heritage - of a heritage, which belongs not only to a small group of elitist scientists, but all citizens living on this continent. Considering this the world wide web is the best way to provide an open access to these documents. Certainly, these are very important for different disciplines of science, and so the providing of many splitted archives fonds, located in different archives, in one database in the form of scientificly edited texts/summaries and images of the objects themselves will open up many new ways and aspects for scientific research. The texts are written in different languages (Latin, German, Czech, Hungarian, etc.) and Types and can also be used for education in schools and universities. It will be possible to read and to look at the charters very simply at the Computer at home, at school or at any other location. Historical interpretations, translations, graphic studies etc. will be no problem anymore.

At present MOM is about to enlarge a project area that we call *scriptorium*. Here, students, teachers and everybody who is able to read the diplomatic writing is invited to take part and provide the project with new transscriptions of charters, which have not been edited yet. This collaborators have to observe some minimal editing standards. This new created texts will be checked by scientific staff, before they - in case the texts are acceptable - are integrated into the open access data base of Monasterium.

FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

In June 2005 the first step of the *monasterium* project will expire. But still there are a lot of things to do. One very important attempt in order to make the *monasterium* data compatible with other similar projects is to convert the data in XML format, what will be one of the big challenges for the future.

On the other hand MOM will not stop at the borders of Lower Austria, but has much further going visions. The project will not only include all monasteries of Lower Austria, but will try to integrate abbeys in other parts of Austria, too, like in Upper Austria (Oberösterreich) and the Tyrol.

At the same time MOM wants to become part of a central European digital network, including big areas of the former Habsburg monarchy. One attempt to reach this goal is the participation of MOM in the Manuscriptorium project (www.manuscriptorium.com) of the National Library in Prague. On the other hand several cooperations with Hungarian ecclesiastical archives of several dioceses and abbeys (i.e. Pannonhalma, Veszprém or Esztergom) will enlarge the number of charters available oneline.

These international cooperations, which will be improved and extended in the future, are the preconditions for the reanimation of the Central-European networks, that were already existing in the middle ages and are right now supposed to play an important role again to support the efforts of the European integration.

www.monasterium.net