





**REQUIEM FOR SINGING
GEESE** | BY **JUDITH
SMITH** | EARLY ON THE
SECOND FRIDAY AFTER
EASTER, THE CITIZENS
OF NUREMBERG,
GERMANY, GATHERED
IN THEIR TOWN SQUARE
TO CELEBRATE THE
MASS FOR THE FESTIVAL
OF THE HOLY LANCE.
THE GATHERINGS
BEGAN IN 1424 AND
WENT ON EVERY YEAR
FOR ALMOST 100 YEARS.
THE CLIMAX OF THE MASS
WAS THE LIFTING UP OF
A MUCH PRIZED RELI-
GIOUS RELIC, THE LANCE
THAT SOME BELIEVED
WAS USED TO PIERCE
THE SIDE OF JESUS AS
HE HUNG ON THE CROSS.
ONE COPY OF THIS
MASS REMAINS. THE
BOOK IS LARGE AND
ELABORATELY ILLUS-
TRATED. IT IS CALLED
THE GEESE BOOK.

the goal

OF THE GEESE BOOK WORK IS
TO PROVIDE A CRITICAL MODEL FOR



IMAGES COURTESY CORINE SCHLEIF



CORINE SCHLEIF (RIGHT) AND ELIZABETH REMAK-HONNEF, CODICOLOGIST FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ.

RE-INTEGRATING THE ARTS AND RE-CONTEXTUALIZING THEM HISTORICALLY.



The book is named for its whimsical picture of a choir of geese and a fox singing from a large chant manuscript. A wolf is their choirmaster. The Geese Book is the focal point of research being conducted by Corine Schleif, an associate professor of art history at Arizona State University. Her colleague on the project is Volker Schier, a musicologist from Germany.

Why would two researchers from two nations study a book that is more than 500 years old, particularly when the only existing copy is in New York City? “I had worked on the art. Volker had worked on the music,” Schleif says. “It occurred to us that you can’t separate the two. The book was meant to be seen and read.” Schier also had arguments with some of Schleif’s scholarship regarding the Geese Book. “So we decided to get together to see how the book functions,” Schleif adds.

The scholars view their project as a model for interdisciplinary research. They also are studying new ways of presenting scholarship. “The goal of the Geese Book work is to provide a critical model for re-integrating the arts and re-contextualizing them historically,” Schleif explains.

“Opening the Geese Book” began as a project in 2000. During the past five years, Schleif and Schier assembled a multi-faceted team to work on a DVD-ROM. They also completed a historic recording of 19 chants. The work includes the Mass formula for the Feast of the Holy Lance. After 500 years, the chants can be heard again.

The recording was made in September 2002 at the Church of St. Georg. The late medieval church in the market town of Wendelstein is located 10 miles south of Nuremberg. Celebrated Budapest-based Schola Hungarica sang the chants under the direction of László Dobszay and Janka Szendrei.

Schleif and Schier have studied the music and art of the Geese Book extensively. However, hearing the chants actually sung for the recording session at St. Georg brought the sacred book to life. “It was a real treat for me,” Schleif says. “I’ve worked on the art of that church for decades. This was the music my artists heard when they were working. Hearing the music made it seem like a completely different place.”

The Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies teamed with HNH International of Hong Kong to make the recording. They are marketing an audio CD worldwide under their well-known Naxos label. The completed DVD-ROM is for students, scholars, or anyone who simply loves liturgical music or medieval art. Simply pop the disc into a computer to see the art in high resolution, or listen to the music and essays read by prominent specialists. “The DVD explains how a medieval manuscript works from social, historical, musical, liturgical, and political viewpoints,” Schier says. “There are many elements to this project.”

The original two-volume book was created by artists and craftsmen in Nuremberg. It was intended to provide the complete liturgy for the choir of young adults and schoolboys as it was sung in the parish of St. Lorenz. The book survived World War II, and came into the hands of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The group’s founders trace their roots back to a patrician family in Nuremberg. The Kress Foundation helped the church rebuild after Nuremberg was bombed. In return, the church presented the Geese Book to the foundation. Eventually, the foundation gave the book to the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. It measures 30 by 50 inches and is the largest book in the library’s collection. The book had to be large. When used in the church five centuries ago, it had to be shared by all the members of the St. Lorenz choir.

“This book is a prominent manuscript,” Schier says. “It is the only surviving complete liturgical book for the Nuremberg Mass liturgy. It is also one of the nicest and best ever made.”

Scholars know that the cleric Friedrich Rosendorn was responsible for the writing. It is thought that Jakob Elsner painted the incredibly detailed illustrations. But scholars still can only guess at the meaning of the whimsical pictures.

Schleif and Schier have invited others to join them in the project. They look for the best scholars in each field of investigation. The Geese Book project has become international as a result. There are participants from North America and several European countries as well as from Asia. Bavarian Radio is a collaborating institution. They have aired programs about the Geese Book. Researchers at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany, recently joined the project. The scientists will do a detailed physical analysis of all the inks and paint used in the book. The results will be compared with those of other books from the 1500s.

In the spring of 2005, Schleif and Schier co-taught a class at ASU on the book. Their students mirrored the disciplines it represents. “We had a musicologist, a media designer, a technical writer, a student of German, and several art historians,” Schier says. The scholars hope that these first students to study the book also will be the first to think about using today’s multimedia technologies in their work.

“We want to animate the students — teach them that there are new ways of publishing their scholarship,” Schleif says. “We want to see how appropriate modern media are for scholarship. It has to connect with the broader world. We can’t be an ivory tower. We shouldn’t try to keep this project, and others, secluded among the scholarly community. This work is for all people who want to learn more.”

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