CHAPTER TWELVE

LITURGY AND PERFORMANCE IN NORTHERN GERMANY:
TWO EASTER PLAYS FROM WIENHAUSEN

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Wienhausen belongs to the group of Lüneburg convents that, in the decades between the reform movement of the 15th century and the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation, developed a lively activity in the field of manuscript production (→ Hascher-Burger, Schlotheuber, Lühnemann). Texts from the preceding period have survived in noticeably smaller numbers, although tapestries, stained glass windows, wall paintings and other pictorial decoration are clear evidence of a broad spectrum of literary knowledge on the part of the nuns.\(^1\) This only enhances the importance of the texts that, together with a host of small objects, came to light when the floorboards of the nuns choir were lifted in 1953. The find included rivet spectacles, small devotional images and various everyday objects, and numerous small books which provide at least some indication of how diverse the literature in the convent must have been. The equally numerous devotional images furnish evidence for the considerable knowledge of iconography and the influence of mysticism in Wienhausen (→ Schlotheuber). This is confirmed by the most recent, equally unusual, discovery of fragments of text, found when the garments for the wooden sculptures were restored. The hems had been reinforced with strips of parchment. Some had been taken from a Middle Low German manuscript of the *Sachsenspiegel*; others from a hitherto unknown Middle Low German Passion treatise that reshapes extracts from the Middle Low German *Bordesholmer Marienklage*, a 14th-century Passion play, into a dialogue with Christ. The finds from the nuns’ choir include two small (note)books with dramatized versions of the Easter story. The fragment of an Easter

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\(^1\) Bibliography on Wienhausen on www.cistopedia.org/index.php?id=2274; surveys in English in the works by June Mecham listed there.
play in a mixture of languages has attracted enduring scholarly interest.\textsuperscript{2} By contrast, the manuscript containing a Latin Easter ceremonial which must also have been composed at the turn of the 14th to the 15th century is less well known.\textsuperscript{3} It is a rare stroke of luck that two Easter celebrations from a northern German convent have been preserved. The documents are obviously independent of each other and hence demonstrate not only the particular status of this celebration but also the coexistence of different text traditions.

At the heart of Easter ceremonials and of Easter plays is the visit to Christ’s sepulchre by the Three Marys, the *Visitatio sepulchri*, which developed out of the trope *Quem queritis in sepulchro* (“Whom do you seek in the sepulchre?”) that forms part of Matins on Easter Day (→ Lähnemann) and can be traced back to the 10th century. These texts, highly significant from both a literary and theological point of view, were found throughout Europe, and were particularly popular in northern German women’s convents, as shown by discoveries in recent decades, especially in Medingen and Gernrode.\textsuperscript{4} A considerable amount of visual evidence, above all the paintings for which Wienhausen is famous—namely those which cover the whole of the Gothic nuns’ choir—demonstrates the particular significance of the Easter festival for the nuns’ particular devotional culture. Nonetheless, the German-Latin Easter Play (ms. Wie36) and the Latin Easter Ceremonial (ms. Wie80) have not been studied in context. Hence the following contribution will present the largely unknown Latin *Visitatio sepulchri* through a comparison with the mixed-language version, highlighting their potential (and diverse) functions within the Wienhausen convent, the spiritual life of the Lüneburg women’s convents, and their specific form of devotion and mysticism.

\textsuperscript{2} Klosterarchiv Wienhausen, Hs. 36 (formerly M 7 and Hs. D), fol. 1r–6r. Mentioned briefly in Sievers, *Das Wienhäuser Liederbuch* (1954), 22; also Linke, “Wienhäuser Osterspiel (Fragment)” (1999); first edition with facsimile and commentary by Lipphardt, “Die Visitatio sepulchri in Zisterzienserkloster der Lüneburger Heide” (1972).

\textsuperscript{3} Klosterarchiv Wienhausen, Hs. 80 (formerly Hs. C), 1r–11v; see also Sievers, *Das Wienhäuser Liederbuch*, 22; Hascher-Burger, *Verborgene Klänge* (2008), 123; Koldau, “Liturgie und Andacht: Passion und Ostern in den musikalischen Quellen der Lüneburger Klöster” (2010), 308; Lipphardt dates Wie36 to the “end of the fourteenth century” (”Die Visitatio Sepulchri,” 126), Bockmann to the “turn of the fourteenth to the fifteenth century” (”Bemerkungen zum ‘Wienhäuser Osterspielfragment’” (2010), 82).