ST DISIBOD AND THE HISTORY OF THE DISIBODENBERG
UP TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 12TH CENTURY*

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Generally, until now, it has been considered that Heinrich Büttner presented in 1934 the authoritative examination of the sources—currently held in Mainz—concerning St Disibod and the early history of the Disibodenberg. According to Büttner, “no sources written prior to the 12th century about the history of the Disibodenberg have come down to us.” It is only with Archbishop Ruthard’s charter of 1108, confirming the house’s transformation into a Benedictine monastery, that the sparse documentary history of the Disibodenberg begins. This meager textual transmission includes a contract of exchange with Mariengraden in 1112, return of property by Archbishop Adalbert, arbitration between Disibodenberg and St Martin in Bingen in 1124, confirmation of a donation of a tithe in 1127, and, of primary importance, Archbishop Adalbert’s great confirmation charter from 1128. These represented for Büttner, and thus remain to the present, the “supporting foundational pillars for the history of the monastery up to the beginning of the 12th century; upon those one must construct the monastery’s early history and within them one must fashion

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3 MzUB, 455.
4 Ibid., 471.
5 Ibid., 523.
6 Ibid., 542.
7 Ibid., 533.
every representation of its fate." The oldest textual witness for Disibod, the *martyrologium* composed by Hrabanus Maurus around 840/850, states only briefly that the death of the holy confessor is celebrated on September 8 in the diocese of Mainz (*in suburbanis M. ecclesiae*). Disibod does not even appear in the popular martyrologies of the early Middle Ages, i.e., those attributed to the Venerable Bede, Florus of Lyon, and Usuardus of St Germain des Prés. He appears by name beginning in the 11th century in the documents from Trier, which Büttner mentions but fails to incorporate. Büttner considers the annals recorded from the mid-12th century at Disibodenberg to be "essentially completely reliable for their own times"; however, for the earlier period they prove to be admittedly unproductive.

For details on this period there remains then only the *Vita sancti Disibodi episcopi*, which Hildegard of Bingen dictated in 1170 based on visions she had received, and which was (therefore) "hitherto constantly discarded as unusable for historical research." Even the archbishop's charters and the monastic annals contain nothing about the saint and his deeds, with the exception of the following few facts: his grave was still venerated even after the monastery that he had founded had fallen into decay; Archbishop Willigis (975–1011) had renewed the buildings as a foundation for (12) canons; and Archbishop Ruthard (1095–1109) had replaced the canons with monks from St Jacob in Mainz and had made donations to the foundation. Willigis's motives, the number of canons, and the benefits granted by the archbishops, from Willigis to Ruthard, first appear in the Adalbert charter of 1128.

Hildegard claims the greatest level of historical truth for her *vita*: it was communicated to her, like her visions, by the Holy Spirit in truthful revelation. Critical historians recognized rather early that the high proportion of biblical references and hagiographic commonplaces contained in the *Vita sancti Disibodi episcopi* require no visions. In any case,

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10 Büttner, SMBO, p. 4: "für die eigene Zeit im wesentlichen völlig zuverlässig."
11 Ibid., p. 4: “bisher stets als unbrauchbar für die historische Forschung verworfen wurde.”
13 *V. Disib.*, AA.SS., 583; PL 197:1095–97; *Two Hagiographies*, pp. 86–91.