

Birkensteiner Lied (Hymn to Our Lady of Birkenstein)

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(Mary's mantle is large enough to protect all who come to her.)

Schutzfrau im Mantel, du Mutter der Welt,
Laß dich begrüßen im heiligen Zelt.
Alle umschließe dich mütterlich warm,
Alle verstehst du, ob reich oder arm.
Deines Mantels weite Falten
Bergen heilige Gewalten.
Schließe uns in dein Helfen ein,
Hohe Frau auf Birkenstein.

Schutzfrau im Mantel, du Mutter der Zeit,
Göttliches Walten, es wirkt ja so weit:
Hast uns Verlass'nen in Heiliger Nacht
Liebvoll den Heiland der Herzen gebracht.
Deines Mantels weite Falten
Bergen heilige Gewalten.
Schließe uns in dein Sorgen ein,
Hohe Frau auf Birkenstein.

Schutzfrau im Mantel, du Mutter des Herrn,
All deine Bitten erhört er so gern.
Bitte für uns um Verzeihung und Huld,
Bitte um Glauben, um Kraft und Geduld.
Deines Mantels weite Falten
Bergen heilige Gewalten.
Schließe uns in dein Lieben ein,
Hohe Frau auf Birkenstein.

Patroness in the *mantel* (cloak), Mother of the world,
We greet you in your holy *tabernacle* (literally, *tent*).
You enfold everyone in your maternal warmth,
You understand everyone, whether rich or poor.
The broad pleats of your mantel
Hold holy powers.
Enfold us in your succor,
Sublime Lady of Birkenstein.

Patroness in the mantel, Mother of time,
The hand of God indeed, works such wonders:
[t] lovingly brought to us forsaken ones in the Holy Night [Christmas]
the savior of the heart.
The broad pleats of your mantel

Hold holy powers.
Enfold us in your care,
Sublime Lady of Birkenstein.

Patroness in the mantel, Mother of the Lord,
He answers your prayers so gladly.
Pray for us for forgiveness and mercy,
Pray for faith, for strength and for patience.
The broad pleats of your mantel
Hold [but more than just hold, almost as give refuge to] holy powers.
Enfold us in your love,
Sublime Lady of Birkenstein.

This is an interesting text ... actually, quite lovely. It has a little refrain with each verse, and the German poetry is very fine or nuanced. Certain German words are hard to translate into just one word; concept is better.

The word "Zelt" translated here as "tabernacle" for prose reasons, literally means "tent". In the phrase "Laß dich begrüßen im heiligen Zelt" the cloak is likened to the abundant fabric used for a tent. This is not a "tent" in the contemporary sense but rather as described in the Old Testament, e.g., Exodus 26: 1-36, the main tabernacle is called the "tent of meeting" ... the tent which housed the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 40: 1-38). Simply stated, "Zelt" or tabernacle/tent in this phrase refers to a dwelling of the sacred.

The phrase "Deines Mantels weite Falten Bergen heilige Gewalten" is almost like a nut waiting to be cracked. The images given in the German are wonderful. "Mantels weite Falten" brings to mind the pleated cloaks worn by the Benedictines and others on festal days; the abundance of material, finely pleated and pressed, yet plenty of room inside for a family gathering.

The word "weite" does mean "broad" but also "ample," even "capacious" ... definitely denoting expanse or roominess.

"Gewalten" (die Gewalt) is a very interesting choice, as it denotes "power, control, force" or even "violence." Yet, in combination with "heilige" (holy) it denotes "holy power," an "act of God" or even "Providence". It is an interesting word and a very interesting choice in conjunction with a feminine image.

"Bergen" is another such word and when in combination with "heilige Gewalten" it is very illustrative. A derivative of "Berg" or "mountain," this word is often used in prayers and means "to protect, to shelter, or to hide in a place of safety." For a people who live in or near the mountains, it has an evocation, a nuance which is absent in the English understanding. This is similar to our attempt to understand the richness of the "nomadic" or "desert" metaphors used in the Bible.

Significant are the three salutations, which when placed in tandem, “sing” like a litany: Mother of the World, Mother of Time, Mother of the Lord. The word “Zeit” can also mean “of an age” or even a period in history. Again, a bundle of meanings wrapped in one word.

One could spend a great deal of time analyzing this text, its symbolism is very compact and its imagery is very rich.