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DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung
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Gerhard Fuhrmann was a wonderful art teacher at the local Gymnasium in my hometown of Bad Kreuznach. He read Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* to us in class to make us aware of the ideologies underlying popular culture; encouraged us to read Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* in French; told us about the great cultural historian Egon Friedell (who jumped out of the window instead of opening the door when the Gestapo came knocking in Vienna shortly after the *Anschluss*); and made us copy Impressionist paintings to learn about both, oil painting as well as Impressionism.



I was equally fortunate with my very first professor in art history at the university of Mainz. *Privatdozent* Dr. Jörg Gamer was one of those unsung heroes of academia who spent all his energy teaching and advising his students. As a result, he published little, and merely five years after he had finally obtained a professorship in the “History of Open-Air Planning” at the “Institute for Green Planning” at the university in Hannover in 1988 (the history of gardens was one of his greatest passions), he died far too young from a random case of food poisoning.

As part of his introductory course we learned the basic tools of the art-historical trade: how to properly describe a painting or the façade and interior of a church; the importance of memorizing the chronological sequence of ornamental styles (*Rollwerk*, *Beschlagwerk*, *Knorpelwerk*, *Bandelwerk*, etc.); to be aware of the “provincial factor” that should generally be added when trying to date a building based on stylistic criteria in a relatively remote town. It was also Dr. Gamer who told us that the most important iconographic reference book is neither the *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* nor James Hall’s *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*. According to him, when it comes to Christian iconography, nothing surpasses Schnorr von Carolsfeld’s *Bibel in Bildern*, a compendium of 240 wood engravings based on the artist’s drawings that was published between 1852 and 1860.



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794–1872) was one of the foremost proponents of the Nazarene movement. Deeply immersed in the history of art, he had, when the first installments of his *Bibel in Bildern* were ultimately published in 1852, worked on the idea of an illustrated Bible for more than three decades. Between 1818 and 1827, he spent nearly a decade in Rome surrounded by the art of the Renaissance and Baroque. Upon his return to Germany he also made ample use of the “translational prints” that have become one of the leitmotifs of our *Abwechslungen*. The visual archive that these prints provided allowed him to mine compositional solutions artists before him had found for their depictions of biblical stories. Surely even our own, widely secularized and by no means exclusively Christian society might still be familiar with such scenes as Adam and Eve, Moses and the Ten Commandments, the Nativity, or the Crucifixion. Yet the *Bibel in Bildern* proves essential when it comes to the not-so-obvious stories from the biblical narrative. If any of these had ever been depicted in the course of history, chances were that Schnorr was aware of it. Therefore, his own rendering of the scene would provide an echo of whatever pictorial template earlier artists had developed. The art-history student confronted with an obscure biblical scene that she or he needs to identify can therefore in all likelihood find the composition by leafing through Schnorr’s compendium.



One of those rarely depicted stories is that of the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:35–43). Jairus was an *archisynagogus* (the head or leader of a synagogue) in Galilee. His daughter had fallen gravely ill and he asked Jesus for help. When Jesus arrived, the girl had already died and was surrounded by her crying relatives. Jesus spoke to them: “Why all this commotion and wailing. The child is not dead but asleep.” Everyone present was shocked and mocked Jesus, admonishing him to show more respect. Jesus then took the hand of the dead girl and said in Aramaic: “Talitha koum!” (Girl, I tell you, stand up!). Immediately, Jairus’s daughter woke up and Jesus told the relatives to feed her.

Schnorr’s drawing belongs in the final phase of the project [for a summary of its protracted genesis see the link below]. Executed in August of 1857, the wood engraving for which it served as the model was published as part of the 24th installment of the *Bibel in Bildern* in June of 1860. In December of the same year, the monumental undertaking was finally completed—forty years after Schnorr had made his very first drawing intended to illustrate the Bible.

[more on Schnorr's drawing and the \(pre\)history of the Bilderbibel](#)



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