

Frankenstein – the monster’s home?

Nowadays Frankenstein Castle is often presented by the media as the “real home of the monster”. It is said, that there are relations between the castle and the famous hero of Mary Shelley’s novel “Frankenstein”. The author is said to have seen the ruins when visiting the river Rhine in 1814 and even visited the castle. Moreover it is believed that the scientist Konrad Dippel did some alchemistic experiments at the castle and therefore he served as an example of the hero Victor Frankenstein. But are these assertions founded? In the following text this will be challenged.

The “real home of the monster”-assertion

The “real home of the monster”-assertion is greatly spread. It is often found in newspapers and books; even TV- documentaries deal with this issue. In German-speaking areas authors, such as university professors, public authorities, journalists and film producers, rely on the argumentation of only one book: “Castle Frankenstein. Myth, truth, legend” by Walter Scheele. In English-speaking areas nearly all authors trust Radu Florescus: “In search of Frankenstein”



Frankenstein Castle nowadays

No castle in the book

But what is the exact meaning of this predicate “real home of the monster”? Is the novel set in Hesse or is it least in a castle? To find an answer you must read Mary Shelley’s text “Frankenstein – the modern Prometheus” first published in 1818. The novel deals with the young Swiss student Victor Frankenstein who succeeds in creating a human being consisting of pieces from dead bodies and bringing it to life . But the result of this experiment is so horrible, that Viktor flees to Geneva, his parents’ home – followed by the nameless creature. Suffering from loneliness the creature finds Frankenstein and asks him to create a girlfriend for him. The scientist does so, but destroys the artificial woman finally. Witnessing this deed, the creature gets furious and kills Frankenstein’s bride and father. Frankenstein hunts the monster up to the Arctic, where he gets killed by it. The monster disappears on an ice floe ready to kill himself.

After reading the novel, four points are extremely remarkable: 1) The creature is nameless; only the scientist's name is Frankenstein. 2) The creature is hardly called "monster"; mostly "creature", "wretch" or "figure". 3) The story is not set in Hesse. 4) A castle is never mentioned.



View from Gernsheim/Rhine to Bergstrasse (approximately 16 km). "Mary Shelley has seen a giant rock. That was Frankenstein." Such a statement was made by a telecast. But you can hardly find the castle with the naked eye; even by daylight. And Mary Shelley travelled by night.



An enlargement of the photo lets show the light colour of the present restaurant's walls.



Simulation of light conditions at September 2nd 1814, 11:00 pm.

Mary Shelley could not see the castle when being at river Rhine

If there is no castle in the novel, one may ask, why one should even establish a connection to Frankenstein Castle. It is said that the English author had been inspired to give this name to her hero after seeing Frankenstein Castle. Had Mary Shelley ever been there before writing her novel? According to her diary she was on a river Rhine trip in 1814 together with her sister and Percy Shelley, her later husband. In the morning of September 2nd she arrived at Mannheim. After having breakfast there and a following sightseeing tour she continued her journey. The wind was not favourable; so the skipper docked near Gernsheim in the evening, waiting for better weather conditions. During this time Mary and Percy had a three hours walk. At 11.00 p.m. the ship cast off again. Maybe both of them immediately fell asleep, for it was on the next morning they noticed that the skipper had docked on an island in the middle of the river Rhine. They reached Mainz on September 3rd

So Mary Shelley arrived at Gernsheim in the darkness. But even by daylight she would not have seen the castle. Discovering the castle from such a distance is very difficult. Recently the telecast "Galileo Mystery" has reported: "*The castle is a striking ruin on a long mountain ridge...*" But that is untrue. Sceptics might say that in those days Frankenstein Castle was much higher than the surrounding forest. But an examination reveals, that only one year before Mary Shelley arrived at Gernsheim, a picture of the castle had been painted by Carl Philipp Fohr. The trees had been as tall as the outer protection wall. However, the towers had no upper floors and no roofs. These were erected approximately in 1850. Nowadays only these two towers can be seen from Gernsheim. From this viewpoint one can only assume that this is Frankenstein Castle. At the time when Mary Shelley wrote her novel, the castle could hardly be seen from so far away – and not at all by night!



Frankenstein Castle 1813, The picture, painted by Carl Philipp Fohr, shows the castle. Both the towers were half-dilapidated. They could not be visible from Gernsheim, not even by day.

Did the author Mary Shelley pay a visit to the castle?

Frankenstein Castle could not have been discovered by Mary Shelley during her river Rhine trip. But what if someone else had given her some information about the castle? Would Mary and her fellow travellers have taken the opportunity to visit the castle? This is always claimed. Firstly one can say, that the conditions for such a short excursion really were very bad. The tourists arrived at Gernsheim only in the late evening after a very exhausting day. The previous night had been spent on the boat. In the morning they had been on an excursion to Mannheim and then they had had a very troubled boat trip. They were told that a short time before another boat had capsized, and all the 15 passengers had died. Maybe Mary was not well because of first symptoms of pregnancy. Six months later she gave birth prematurely. Moreover a nocturnal excursion to the hinterland would have seemed a risk because of their poor German. And finally they had to adapt to the needs of the other passengers. So they could not plan their own activities. The diary entries show that the tourist party had only a couple of hours at Gernsheim. They had a three hours walk. But this time would have been too short to walk all the way up to the castle; a distance about 23 km – and back again! Even a carriage would not have managed such an adventure in the dark on bad roads and steep slopes!

In one of author Walter Scheele's books you can read that there is some information about an overnight stay of an English tourist party at Eberstadt near the castle hill. To prove those assertions Scheele claims that the Shelleys as well as Claire Clairmont have faked their diaries to cover up any private details of the Frankenstein inspiration. As further evidence the author even tells his readers about registrations in Eberstadt's parish register. But such registrations do not exist! Additionally the author cites a so-called secret diary excerpt, according to which Mary Shelley has visited the castle. *"The authentic and unabridged diary of Mary Shelley from this time has been discovered. It is in possession of a Swiss banker's family, as Professor Florescu has found out. The family let nobody see the diary and don't want to publish any in-*

formation about the past But at my (the author's) imploring request I was allowed to cite an extract from 1814. At last this will cease the long speculation about Mary's visit to Frankenstein – has she or hasn't she been there? *The Frankenstein castle: a monumental building, full of darkness; broken walls, mystical-mighty(?) in the sobering Novembermist(?)". (This last sentence is cited in English by Walter Scheele.)



This is really an unknown text for literature. The chronological representation is wrong. You can read “Novembermist” in the quotation of the author’s English text, but the Shelleys docked at Gernsheim already at the beginning of September, and in the middle of September they were back again in England. That’s true. Furthermore the English quotation in the German text has surely never been written by an English author (Mary Shelley). The author was no native speaker. And Walter Scheele does not mention the quotation’s bibliography; so it is not a scientific reference.

Historical map out of the year 1801 shows the Rhine river before its regulation

Assertion without any evidence

Another important clue for links between Frankenstein Castle and the famous novel should be a letter of Jakob Grimm. Mary Shelley was probably told about the castle on the Bergstrasse by her stepmother Mary Jane Clairmont who was in close contact with the Grimm brothers as she was a translator of Grimm’s Tales. Mary Jane Clairmont could have told Mary Shelley a horror story about Frankenstein Castle, which might have been her inspiration for the Frankenstein novel.

“.....for Mary Jane Clairmont knew a lot about the tales of the Grimm brothers. She translated their anthology of folk tales, which had been published since 1812 in Germany A letter of Jakob Grimm written to Mary Jane, dated 1813, is in British private possession and must not be seen by the public. Donald E. Glut saw this letter. 25 years later, only I, myself (Walter Scheele) was allowed to see the letter again; but I was requested not to quote directly. Yet the heirs who did not want to be named, allowed me to publish a synopsis (of the letter). Grimm tells us about a horror story which was never published in his tales And this is the proof that the ruin near Darmstadt is in fact the “real Home of the Monster”, the origin of the Frankenstein myth.”

This is a quotation from Walter Scheele’s book “Burg Frankenstein. Mythos, Wahrheit, Legende“and he even names a witness: Donald F.Glut. In his edition „The Frankenstein Archive: Essays on the Monster, the Myth, the Movies and More“, he notes that there is no proof of Mary Shelley’s visit to the castle or any knowledge about the castle. Additionally he responded to a written inquiry that he, (Glut) did not know anything about the Jakob Grimm’s letter and he repeats that there is no proof of Mary Shelley’s visit to the castle. The important reference to the assertion about links between our castle and the novel is totally unknown by the witness. And also the literary research has not any knowledge about such a correspondence. In summer 2006 the Grimm-Internet forum was inquired about this theme. Berthold

Friemel, a Grimm-expert, said: “You can see a list of the whole Grimm-correspondence on the Internet <http://www.grimmnetz.de/by>; but there is no correspondence between Jakob Grimm and Mary Jane Clairmont.” Another author cites:

“It is a very dubious trick to combine Frankenstein Castle near Darmstadt with the Grimm brothers and Mary Shelley’s (1797-1851) famous monster figure. There are no facts whether Mary Shelley’s stepmother Mary Jane Clairmont, who is said to have translated the Grimm’s Fairy Tales into English language, had any correspondence with Jacob Grimm about this “legend “ in 1813. Nothing is proven. Therefore the creators of this new myth write about a suspicious private anthology; only the writers have ever seen, and the anthology’s owners do not allow any further information.”

Walter Scheele later changed his statement and claimed that the Bodleian Library, Oxford, had this Grimm’s letter. Inquiries have been made, but such a letter is unknown and would definitely been discovered. Berthold Friemel says: “A story with a specific statement of place (landscape, village, town) would rather be listed in the “German Legends” than in “Children’s Tales”. The Grimm- Society does not know anything about Grimmtranslations by Mary Jane Clairmont and neither do the libraries. Even the inhabitants of Eberstadt (Southern part of Darmstadt) and the village Nieder-Beerbach in the surrounding close to the Frankenstein do not know this horror story. However, the Grimm brothers surely knew anything about Frankenstein Castle. Their anthology of legends contains in chapter 219 “The lindworm at the well” with a knight of Frankenstein. But he does not have anything to do with Mary Shelley’s monster figure.



The two towers of castle Frankenstein

Author Mary Shelley did not know Frankenstein Castle

According to Walter Scheele Mary Shelley was very impressed when seeing the river Rhine valley between Mannheim and Mainz. But in her Frankenstein novel she claims the opposite: *“The landscape downstream of Mainz to the next is much more picturesque than before.”* In a later publication she mentions another journey from Frankfurt to Schaffhausen in 1840, but this time by land. She started at Frankfurt on July 4th and took a rest at Darmstadt the same

day. She gave a detailed description of the landscape and the castles. But Frankenstein Castle was not mentioned. She summarized the trip from Darmstadt to Heidelberg as follows. “*Driving on this road was very pleasant and the hilly landscape to our left got more and more picturesque. You could have nice excursions between the hills, but we continued the journey straight ahead as we had planned and could not waste our time with strolling. We turned to the hills when approaching Heidelberg.*”

So nothing is said about the Frankenstein! She even considered the excursions to the hills as “irrelevant strolls”. Would she have written such a sentence, if she had found out the similarity between the name of the castle and her great successful novel? Especially because she was accompanied by her son. Everything points to the fact that Mary Shelley did not notice the castle at all and did not even know about its existence.

Has Konrad Dippel been a role model for the hero Victor Frankenstein?

The assertion that the historic person Konrad Dippel was the literary model of Mary Shelley’s novel is always widespread. But what are the facts: first Konrad Dippel was theologian, chemist, physician and alchemist. He was born at Frankenstein Castle in 1673 where his parents had fled of the cruelties of the Palatinate civil war. He died at Wittgenstein Castle in 1734.



*Johann Conrad Dippel 1673 – 1734
A model of Shelley’s Frankenstein ?*

It is said that Dippel had been in possession of a title of nobility by calling himself “Johann Konrad Dippel von Frankenstein”. But that is not correct. Sometimes Dippel added “Frankensteinensis” to his name, which is Latin grammar and simply means his place of birth; it’s not part of the surname. Yet a contract concept from 1732 could really have served as the example for a horror novel: He claims the reign over Frankenstein as a reward for the handing over of a mysterious elixir! The Landgraf denied this demand. Instead he offered a big sum of money. But until Dippel’s death in 1734 this deal was never made. However, the draft of the “contract” was the subject of much speculations. Surely Dippel did know about the castle’s value. A letter from 1856 says that Dippel was a well-known man in this region. Yet, it is very unlikely that Dippel had a laboratory at the castle. Water was short and the delivery of food and all kinds of goods was difficult. And finally the building was rather dilapidated.

One of Dippel’s documents shows that he bought a glass factory in one of the surrounding valleys.

Some military documents out of the time between 1690 and 1745 (state archives Darmstadt) certify that Dippel did not work at the castle. There are different correspondences of leases and building works at the castle and lots of petitions of the inhabitants to the Landgraf. If Dippel had needed some space for a laboratory or if he had blasted some parts of the building (as the author Scheele says) by doing experiments, this would have led to written complaints. But since such documents do not exist it is highly untruly that Dippel worked at the castle during this time. These military documents date back to the year 1690, when Dippel was aged 18 and he began his studies at Giessen. It is hard to imagine that he did alchemical experiments before his enrolment at university.

How did the author Mary Shelley come to choose the name “Frankenstein”?

A big number of English-speaking natural scientists are considered to be the role model of Victor of Frankenstein. All of them dealt with anatomical and electrical experiments, and lived in the 18th and 19th century. There are some speculations that Mary Shelley chose the name of one of these persons. Benjamin Franklin could be a role made into this case. But Mary Shelley could also have been inspired by a chance acquaintance. The surname “Frankenstein” is not rare. Mary Shelley would have had lots of opportunities to hear the name; a name which sounded strange or „Gothic“ to her. On the one hand it could mean the term “Franconia”. On the other hand it could mean or derive from the word “Frank”. The encyclopaedia of German palaces and castles lists five other castles Frankenstein, situated in Silesia, Palatinate, Thuringia, Carinthia and Lower Austria. Hence, there are numerous sources of inspiration for the novel’s title.

The picture shows Frankenstein Castle in Carintia (Austria). There are lots of castles or places called



“Frankenstein” in other german territories Palatinate, Thuringia, Saxony and Silesia. The name “Frankenstein” or the surname “Frankenstein” is not rare.

Summary

Is it a disadvantage, to falsify the history of Frankenstein Castle? On the one hand it is good for the local economy, because lots of visitors come there to look for the monster. Yet the way, the media has spread unproven information is alarming.

Nobody has checked, whether the castle can be seen from Gernsheim. University professors retell stories of an “international famous ghost hunter” Walter Scheele’s “stories” are shown periodically on TV, and the author himself gives some information, too. It’s very alarming, that you can hardly watch a TV report about the real history of the castle. The Monster Festival is more lucrative! Some local teachers have even added the “real home of the monster-assertion” to their curriculum.

But the following points are proven for sure:

- 1) There is no castle in the novel “Frankenstein – or the modern Prometheus” by Mary Shelley. The creature’s name is not “Frankenstein”; its creator is Victor Frankenstein. The mere knowledge of the novel does not allow any links to Frankenstein Castle on the Bergstrasse.
- 2) When Mary Shelley was on her way to Gernsheim, she could not see the castle in the moonlight. She was a stranger, she was too far away, and the time for an excursion to the castle was too short.

- 3) Konrad Dippel's biography may be read as a sinister story, because he was theologian, chemist and alchemist; but there is no proof, whether Mary Shelley had any knowledge about this biography. Dippel surely did no experiments at the castle. There are no relations to other natural scientists of the 18th and 19th century.
- 4) Documents supporting the "real home of the monster-assertion" do not exist. Nobody can inspect Mary Shelley's description of the castle, the correspondence between Jakob Grimm and her stepmother Mary Jane Clairmont or registration in the parish register of Eberstadt. It all seems to be completely fictitious.
- 5) The author of the "real home of the monster-assertion" is not credible. He only takes financial interest in being author and guide, assisting the Monster Festival and acting as a ghost hunter on the TV channel "YouTube".

One cannot prove that Mary Shelley had no relation to the castle; she was close to the castle twice, but there are no links to the "real home of the monster-assertion". Scheele presents dubious documents and fictitious events. His books have no bibliography and his texts show small literary knowledge.

©Text published by Geschichtsverein Eberstadt/Frankenstein, 2010

Author: Michael Mueller

Translation: Evelyn Schenkelberg