Portal der Pflanzen des Mittelalters
Medieval Plant Survey

The longterm goal of this project is to build an open access repository and online workspace for medieval plant lore studies. All collected data (texts, images, research- and metadata) will be available for processing for international researchers of all disciplines involved in and committed to medieval plant studies. The project relys on advanced web technologies to ensure highest interoperability and to allow users constant and unrestricted access.

Problem description

In the Middle Ages plants

- and their lore are an integral part of everyday life. Plant references can be found in all historical sources. Medieval people had an active store of knowledge to decode the information conveyed by the use of these ‚signs'. – Knowldge about plants was general knowledge. This has changed significantly: For the modern recipient medieval culture and society are strange and mysterious, and plants have long moved from the center of interest in our daily life.

    Additionally the modern scholar has to deal with a field of research that covers several disciplines: medieval plant lore is not only medico-pharmaceutical and botanical but also religious and symbolical knowledge. Researchers of any field have to be able to describe and decode historical sources. This problem can only be solved with joint effort – the Medieval Plant Survey intends to provide the means for this work.

What is ...?

Medieval plant lore

- is based to a predominant extent on Ancient medical and botanical treatises which were handed down in Latin and Greek. These sources also include transaltions of Arabic texts.
- During the Middle Ages only a very small amount of empirical knowledge was added by select authorities.
- The volume of the *materia medica* does not vary significantly, however, plants unknown to Ancient scholars – mostly Western and Northern European plants – were added during the course of time.
- Additionally, medieval plant lore is also strongly influenced by Christian symbolism.

Who and how ...?

Medieval plant knowlege concerns:

- archaeology: paleoethnobotany (analysing plant remains, pollenanalysis)
- art history: plant images, sculptures (styles, schools, symbolism)
- botany: identification of plant depictions, plant descriptions
- classical philology: study of ancient and medieval written sources
- folklore studies: use of plants in daily life, plant symbolism
- history: political and economic history, demographical analyses
- history of handcrafts: argriculture, gardening, cooking
- linguistics: plant name studies, language development, etymology
- literary studies: study of written medieval vernacular sources
- medical and pharmaceutical history: historical development of medical treatments, medicinal use of plants
- theology: development and formation of plant symbolism

Diachronic development of the mandrake legend.
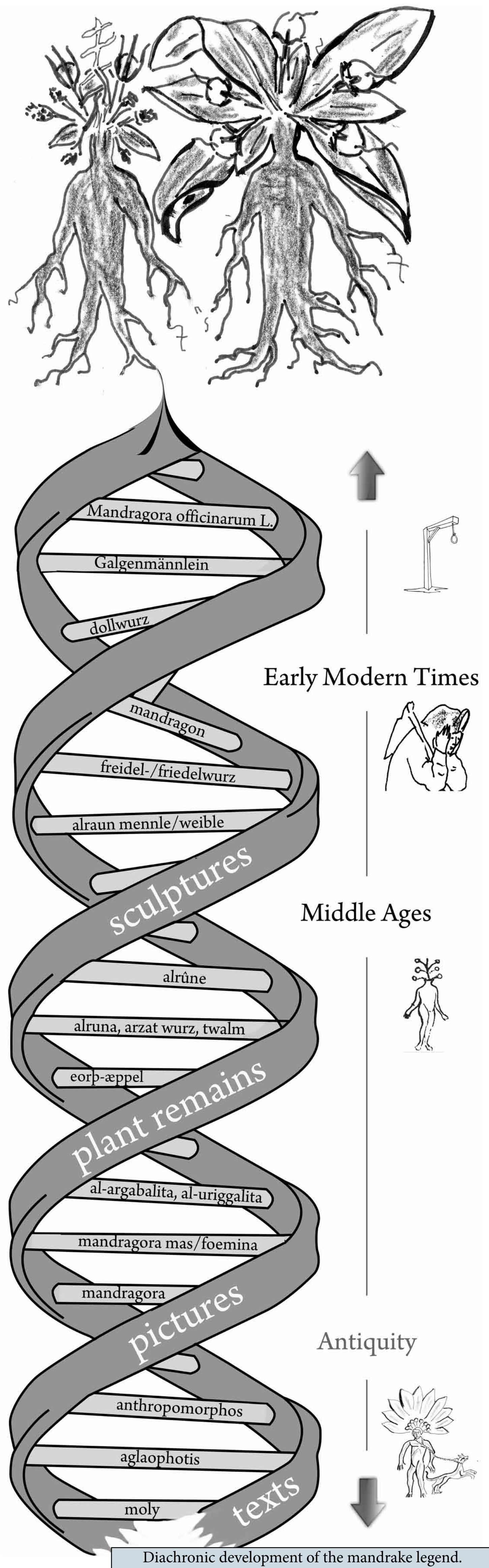
When and where ...?

General parameters:

- The timeframe of interest is c. AD 500 to AD 1500 (source texts should not be younger than humanist and Renaissance sources).
- Including older texts to outline diachronic development of plant lore is absolutely necessary.
- The geographical area of research is the Mediterranean region and the Medieval West.

Research strategies

Basic research rules

- Plant names denominate the individual subject of study.
- Plant names have synonyms in contemporary and historical language variants and can therefore be interconnnected.
- Historic plant names are representatives for a distinct language level.
- A plant name denotes a single plant (or sometimes more than one plant) at a given time and place.
- Historical sources are linked to the respective plant names and accordingly are linked to historical language variants.
- Therefore plant names are the linchpin for (historical) sources in different disciplines.

Research objectives:

- Plant names of a single language are recorded in distinct index-lists. Synonymous plant names are linked within an index list and across indices.
- Source material is collected and linked to the respective plant names.
- This strategy allows diachronic, multilingual interconnection of historical plant knowledge.

Research goals:

- illustrate the diachronic evolution of a plant in a distinct language area
- illustrate the syncronic evolution of a plant in different language areas
- interactive plant monographs that incorporate and interpret all collected sources and research data

Technical strategies

Data organisation

- WordPress multisite based web software
- relational SQL database
- integration of complex search strings and comprehensive full-text search
- visual presentation of data dependencies to demonstrate relations with regards to content
- diachronic as well as synchronic data navigation

Conceptual design

Target groups (i.e. user roles)

- international researchersfrom different disciplines
- students (self-acting or supervised)
- general public

Overall goals

- collection of relevant source materials
- collection of relevant research data
- transparent, open access workflow and data reopsitory
- international and interdisciplinary research
- building a theme-based scientific network
- making expertise available on demand
- provide open data, open data formats
- publicly available plant monographs

Guidelines

- Open Access, Creative Commons
- TEI, ...

PPM / MPS - frontend

PPM / MPS - backend
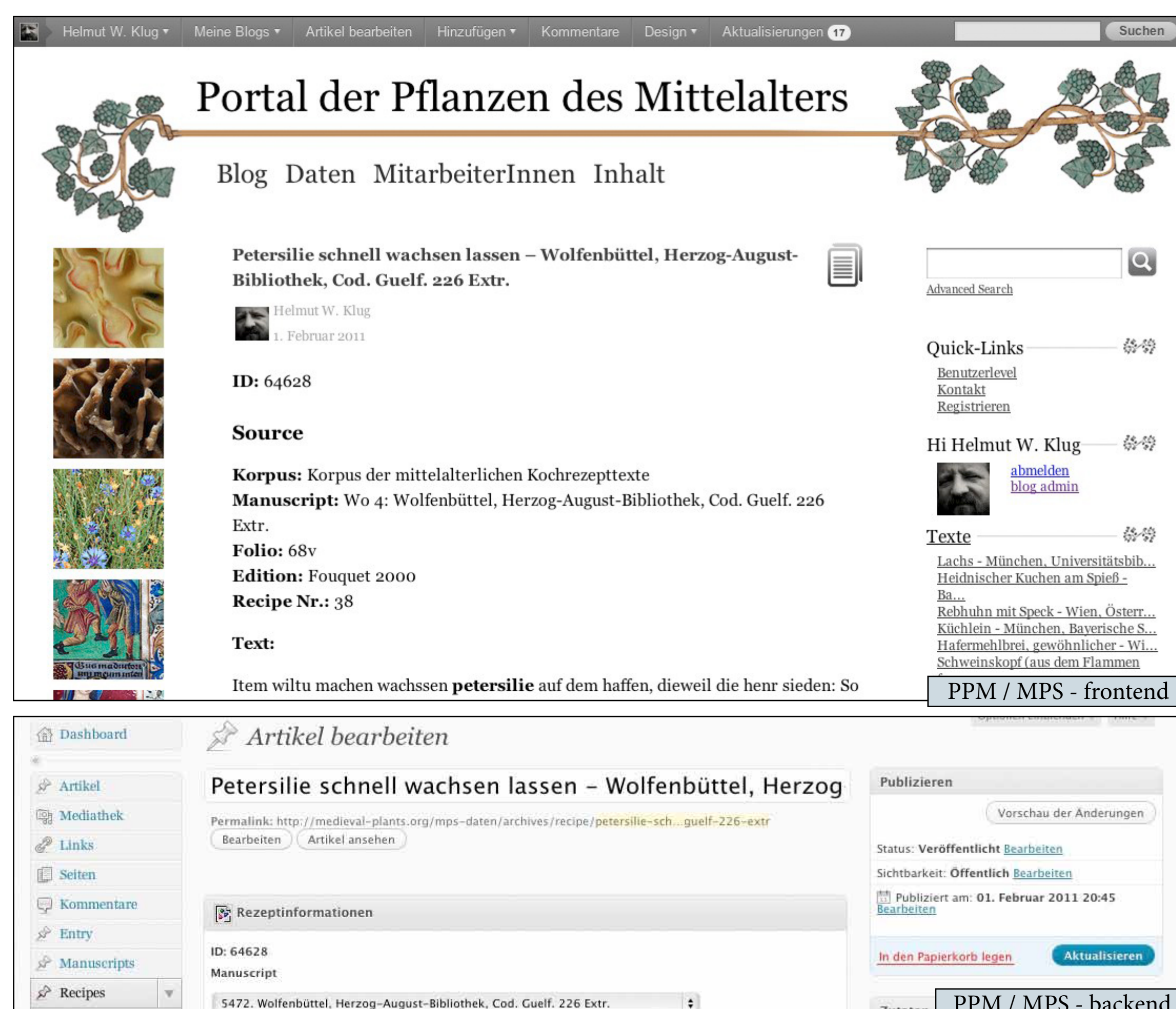
General rules

- academic language is English
- website interface mulilingual (German, English, etc.)
- decentralised organisation, independant funding
- project website and data available accrding to user roles

Services

- data pool and communication: science to science
- (datapool and communication): science to public
- online workspace for (meta-)data generation
- loose data structure provides better working conditions für interdisciplinary collaboration

Demands on software (i.e. Word Press)

- stable system requiring very little maintenance
- easily expandable and upgradable, simply customisable
- open source
- support for open interfaces
- standard CMS functionality

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