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INCOMBUSTIBLE LUTHER: THE IMAGE OF THE REFORMER IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY*

This article seeks to bring together a number of themes in early modern German cultural history: how the Reformation changed the "image culture" of the later middle ages, how it reshaped or was itself shaped by the popular "religious culture" it sought to reform, and the nature of the "confessionalism" developed in the wake of the Reformation, all viewed within the long time-span of the period 1520 to c. 1800.

I THE INCOMBUSTIBLE

In 1634 a fire consumed the study of the pastor and dean of Artern, a small town south of Mansfeld. Behind the study door had hung a copper engraved picture of Luther, which was later found buried deep in the ashes, but miraculously unharmed. The pastor sent the picture to the Consistory in Mansfeld, where it was hung in the audience hall, with the inscription: "The image of Luther, miraculously preserved in a fire at Artern, in the year 1634". This was the first "incombustible Luther".¹ It was joined some fifty years later by a second. In 1689 the house in Eisleben where Luther had been born was badly damaged by fire. The lower storey, where the birth was said to have taken place, was unharmed but the upper storey was completely burned out. In the ashes was found a portrait of Luther, wholly untouched by the flames. This portrait was painted on wood, and depicted Luther with the crucified Christ to his left, and to his right his heraldic symbol, the rose with a heart and a cross

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¹ "Effigies Lutheri in incendio Arterensi anno 1634 mirabiliter servata", cited in Christian Juncker, *Das goldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis des Theuren Gottes-Lehrers D. Martini Lutheri* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1706), pp. 260, 271.

set within it. (See Plate 1.) This picture was still hanging in the Eisleben Luther-house in 1827.² It is difficult to verify the historical accuracy of these two incidents. The earliest record of the first "incombustible Luther" dates only from 1706, that of the second from 1717.³ But historical accuracy is in many ways of secondary importance compared to the very rich symbolic associations attached to these two images.

The idea of an "incombustible Luther" did not originate in the seventeenth century. It is first found in 1521, in a pamphlet which describes Luther's trial at Worms in terms of Christ's Passion. At the end of the description Luther is not crucified, but his books are burned instead. With them is placed, however, a picture of Luther on which is written: "This is Martin Luther, a teacher of the Gospel". To its left and right are placed pictures of Hutten and Carlstadt, so that the scene becomes an execution in effigy. Miraculously, according to the account, Luther's picture refuses to burn, until it is placed in a box made of pitch, which then melts into the flames.⁴

The smell of burning was very much in the air at that time. In 1519 Johann Tetzel was said to have lit a pyre on the market in Jüterbog, as a clear threat to Luther that he risked burning by the Inquisition. Luther and Tetzel burned each other's theses, and the bishop of Brandenburg said after the Leipzig debate that he would not rest until Luther was consigned to the flames. In 1520 Eck wanted to have Luther's books burned in Ingolstadt, while the papal legate Alexander tried to have them burned in the major towns of the Empire, although he was successful only in Louvain, Cologne and Mainz. However, Luther's books were burned elsewhere, by the Franciscans

² Justus Schoepfler, *Lutherus non combustus sive enarratio de D. M. Luthero eiusque imagine singulari providentia dei T. O. M. duplici vice ab igne miraculosa conservata* (Wittenberg, 1717), p. 36. I am grateful to Emory University Library for supplying a copy of this work. For the nineteenth-century reference, see Christian G. Berger, *Kurze Beschreibung der Merkwürdigkeiten die sich in Eisleben und in Luthers Haus daselbst besonders auf die Reformation und auf D. Martin Luther beziehen* (Merseburg, 1827). It was still considered worthy of mention a century later: G. Kuitzke, *Aus Luthers Heimat: Vom Erhalten und Erneuern* (Jena, 1914), p. 14.

³ I have been unable to find any record earlier than Juncker, *Goldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis*, whose report was taken over by Schoepfler, *Lutherus non combustus*, who added the second case and the tag "incombustible Luther" (in the German 2nd edn.: *unverbrannter Luther*). Schoepfler was pastor of St. Anna's church in Eisleben, so that he naturally gave prominence to the 1689 incident; indeed it may have come to his attention through local tradition after reading Juncker.

⁴ *Doctor Mar. Lutheri Passio durch Marcellum beschrieben* [Augsburg, 1521], repr. in *Sattlern und Pasquillen aus der Reformationszeit*, ed. O. Schade, 3 vols. (Hanover, 1856), II, pp. 108-13.

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signify the clear, sweet song of the evangelical message. But in 1546 this "prophecy" was given a further twist by Johann Bugenhagen in his funeral sermon for Luther. The Hus saying was now cast in the form: "You may burn a goose, but in a hundred years will come a swan you will not be able to burn". By 1556 it was said to have been uttered by Hus as he went to the stake, and by 1566 it was taken up by Johann Mathesius, in what became the first Luther biography, as one of three authentic prophecies attesting the divine inspiration of Luther's mission.¹⁰

The idea of Luther's "incombustibility" soon entered the realm of satirical religious polemic. A satirical play, published in 1530 as a scurrilous attack on Luther's marriage, depicted the Reformer being burned at the end.¹¹ As early as 1522 there had been a carnivalesque burning of the Reformer in Catholic Altenburg. Instead of the customary expulsion of Winter, a Luther-puppet was brought before a mock court, condemned for heresy and burned on the highest nearby hill.¹² The event was repeated in 1567 by Jesuits in Vienna and c. 1597 in Munich, where a Luther-puppet was tried and condemned to the stake. On the latter occasion there was great jubilation and mockery around the fire, with singing of the *Te deum*, and gibes that such was the swan which Hus had prophesied to be incombustible.¹³

There were grimmer occasions of this kind. The first evangelical martyrs were burned in Brussels in 1523, and the first German martyr was burned in Ditmarschen in 1524. In 1527 a Lutheran martyr burned in the Netherlands had a portrait of Luther affixed to his chest.¹⁴ Another martyr, Leonhard Keyser, parish priest of Waitzenkirchen in the Innviertel, was sent to the stake at Schärding in 1527, on the orders of the dukes of Bavaria. A pamphlet published shortly afterwards related that when Keyser was thrust into the fire his bonds burst asunder, and he stood there untouched by the flames. However, the executioners dismembered him alive, and threw the pieces back onto the pyre, but still the body refused to burn. When the fire had died down, the hangman took the unburned parts of the corpse and

¹⁰ A. Hauffen, "Husz eine Gans — Luther ein Schwan", in *Untersuchungen und Quellen zu germanischer und romanischer Philologie, Johann von Kelle dargebracht* (Prager deutsche Studien, Heft 9, ii, Prague, 1908), pp. 1-28.

¹¹ Johann Hasenberger, *Ludus ludentem ludorum* (n.p., 1530).

¹² E. Kohler, *Martin Luther und der Festbrauch* (Cologne, 1959), p. 56.

¹³ Hauffen, "Husz eine Gans", p. 35.

¹⁴ *Luthers Werke*, xii, pp. 73-80, on the Brussels burning; on Heinrich von Zutphen in Ditmarschen, see *ibid.*, xiv, pp. 241-50. On the Netherlands, see E. G. Leonard, *A History of Protestantism*, 2 vols. (London, 1965-7), ii, p. 77 n.

threw them into the river Inn. The pamphlet concluded that "the holy Leonhard Keyser's old man or flesh was hacked to pieces, burned and drowned, but his spirit lived on".¹⁵

This sentence supplied an impeccable evangelical sentiment for the incident, echoing the thoughts expressed about Luther in 1520-1, but the entire account itself clearly owes much to stock legends of martyr-saints. This was quickly perceived by the Catholic opposition, which tried to defuse such potent propaganda material. Johann von Eck immediately wrote a pamphlet refuting the tale as a falsification.¹⁶ A similar tale was associated with the death of Zwingli, whose remains were found on the battlefield of Kappel and burned by the Catholic victors. In the life of the Swiss Reformer written shortly afterwards, Oswald Myconius claimed to have found Zwingli's heart unburned among the ashes, something he regarded as a miracle. This incident was also squared with Reformation belief, for an account published later in the sixteenth century stated that Myconius had thrown the heart into the Rhine at once, in order to prevent a hated relic cult springing up. Here, too, there was an echo of Hus: his ashes were sprinkled into the Rhine to prevent a cult, and particular care was taken to see that the heart was burned.¹⁷

Such reports show unmistakable traces of the Catholic cult of the saints. Not only were the saints held to be incombustible, but so were their relics. Incombustibility was also a quality of the Communion host and, by sympathy, of the corporal, the cloth on which it rested during Mass. Both host and corporal were effective in stilling fires, being thrust into the heart of the flames to do so. Images of the Virgin and the saints, along with crucifixes, were also impervious to fire and flame.¹⁸ Some of these cultic associations almost certainly passed on to Luther at the very beginning of the Reformation. What is surprising is that they remained until well into the eighteenth century. A description published in 1702 of the numerous attractions of Magde-

¹⁵ *Historia oder das warhafftige geschicht des leydens und sterbens Lienhart Keyzers seligen, etwa Pfarrer vom Weyzenkirchen* (n.p., 1527?), copy at British Library, London (hereafter Brit. Lib.), 4886.e.19. The cited passage: "Also ist des seligen Lenhardt Keyzers alter mensch oder fleyssche zu stucken gehawen worden, entrencket und verbrandt, Seyn geyst aber lebet . . .", fo. B1^r.

¹⁶ Johann von Eck, *Warhafftige handlung, wie es mit herr Lenhart Käser zu Schärding verbrent, ergangen ist* (n.p., 1527).

¹⁷ F. Vetter, "Schweizerische Reformationslegenden", *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Geschichte*, iii (1953), pp. 1-16.

¹⁸ H. Bächtold-Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, 12 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927-42), viii, col. 1559; cf. also *ibid.*, v, col. 637, and i, col. 1287. R. Freudenthal, *Das Feuer im deutschen Glauben und Brauch* (Berlin, 1931).

the latter he relates how the Luther birth-house was preserved from fire, as was the church (St. Peter and St. Paul) in which Luther was baptized, and the pulpit from which he preached his last four sermons. As evidence for the validity of the "wonder" of 1601, when the birth-house was preserved, he cites the local pastor Biering, who testified that apples on the ground nearby were roasted and the lead in the windows melted so that all the panes fell out — but still the house remained untouched.³¹ From his own time Schoepffer mentioned examples of incombustible Luther Bibles, in 1701 and 1710, with another case from 1736 added to the second edition.³²

How seriously Schoepffer regarded his belief in Luther's incombustibility can be seen from his rejection of a *combustible* Luther image. The sixteenth-century Catholic polemicist Bernhard Lutzenberg had written that Luther had been burned in effigy in Rome on 12 June 1521. A painted portrait of the condemned heretic had been pinned to the scaffold and burned along with his books. Schoepffer did not dispute the truth of the report, but argued that it was a *false* image of Luther, just as the proceedings against him had been false!³³

We can round off this catalogue of incombustibility by reference to some Luther folk-tales from the first half of the nineteenth century. In some of these Luther speaks a fire-blessing which preserves a town from fire, for example, Neustadt on the Orla, Pössneck on the Orla and Wertheim in Franconia.³⁴ In the last case the town is said to have been miraculously preserved from fire "from that day to this".³⁵ We can see, then, that when the "incombustible Luther" appeared in its two versions at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it took its place in an established universe of discourse, to whose continuation it no doubt contributed greatly.³⁶

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-6, and vastly expanded in *Unerbrannter Luther*, pp. 99-104; Biering's report on p. 104.

³² *Lutherus non combustus*, pp. 33-8; *Unerbrannter Luther*, p. 95.

³³ *Lutherus non combustus*, p. 40. Lutzenberg's work was his *Catalogus haereticorum* (Cologne, 1523), but for the contemporary report (on 1519), see n. 5 above.

³⁴ H. Gruppe, "Katalog der Luther und Reformationslegenden des 19. Jhs", in W. Brückner (ed.), *Volks Erzählung und Reformations: Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Erzählstoffen und Erzählliteratur im Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 295-324, here nos. 63-6, p. 302.

³⁵ J. Benckert, *Deutsche Luther-Sagen* (Berlin, 1937), p. 117; E. Erfurth, 'Er lebt!': *D. Martin Luther in der Sage* (Leipzig, 1938), p. 63.

³⁶ This discourse was not limited just to Lutheranism, but can also be found in the Calvinist tradition. In the 1580s Agrippa d'Aubigné celebrated two "incombustible Huguenots" burned in Lyons in 1553: Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1969), p. 127 (I am grateful to Philip Ford, Clare College, Cambridge, for this reference). The seal adopted by the Huguenots in the Synod of Vitré (1583) also echoed the theme: (cont. on p. 47)

II

THE "WONDER-MAN"

Let us now examine more closely the matter of Luther images. There is no systematic iconography of Luther images, but thanks to the work of Ficker, Thulin and others the broad lines of development are sufficiently clear to give a brief sketch.³⁷ The earliest images showed considerable continuity with traditional iconography. Luther is depicted as a friar, in Augustinian habit and tonsured; as a Doctor of Theology in his doctor's cap; and as a teacher of the Word, holding the book of the Bible, in which he sometimes indicates a passage.³⁸ Even this last image, which might be thought to be a new creation inspired by the popular biblicism of the reform movements, has traditional features. Haebler has pointed out the similarity between Luther's stance as he holds the open book of the Bible and fifteenth-century depictions of St. Thomas Aquinas.³⁹ One of the most popular images, Luther with the dove attesting divine inspiration, may have been borrowed from the legend of St. Gregory the Great. On St. Gregory's death it was suggested that his works should be burned as heretical. However, one of his closest friends prevented this by testifying that he had seen the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, actually dictating the works into St. Gregory's ear.⁴⁰ Analogously, Luther's works should not be burned, since they too are divinely inspired.

These images all date from 1520-1 and were joined around 1524 by Luther depicted as a prophet, in a broadsheet showing him as a modern Moses leading the faithful out of Egyptian darkness towards the light of the crucified Christ. This image also has traditional features, since Luther is shown as a mediator between Christ and ordinary Christians, both visually and in the accompanying text. The

Moses' burning bush, with the inscription *Uxor non consumor*: S. Mours, *Le Protestantisme en France au xvi^e s.* (Paris, 1959), pp. 4 (plaque), 217.

³⁷ J. Ficker, *Älteste Bildnisse Luthers* (Magdeburg, 1920); J. Ficker, "Die Bildnisse Luthers aus der Zeit seines Lebens", *Luther Jahrbuch* (1934), pp. 103-69; O. Thulin, "Das Luther bild der Gegenwart", *Luther Jahrbuch* (1941), pp. 123-48; M. Scharfe, *Evangelische Andachtsbilder* (Stuttgart, 1968), pp. 181-96; Scribner, *Simple Folk*, pp. 251-8, "Depictions of Luther in the 1520s"; R. Kasner, *Geistlicher Kaufhandel: Form und Funktion der illustrierten Flugblätter zum Reformations-Jubiläum* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1982), pp. 166-225; M. Warnke, *Grammats Luther: Entwürfe für ein Image* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1984).

³⁸ Scribner, *Simple Folk*, ch. 2.

³⁹ H. C. von Haebler, *Das Bild in der Evangelischen Kirche* (Berlin, 1957), p. 141.

⁴⁰ Uwe Westfeling (ed.), *Die Messe Gregors des Grossen: Vision, Kunst, Realität. Katalog und Führer zu einer Ausstellung im Schnüngen Museum Köln* (Cologne, 1982), p. 13.

was a pamphlet of 1523, with illustrated title-page, which related how Luther confronted the devil in his cell, disputed with him and then banished him, an incident which may also have come from the St. Martin legend, who confronted the devil in the same way.⁵² Another woodcut, from the early 1520s, showed Luther defending the faithful in the form of sheep from ravening wolves, the pope and his cardinals. This also recalls St. Martin, for he was the patron saint of shepherds and cattle, and protected both from wolves.⁵³ St. Martin may also have linked Luther to the idea of incombustibility, for he was (alongside others) a favourite "fire-saint", who protected from fire and flame.⁵⁴

There were other parallels between Luther and St. Martin that could be discerned in the Reformer's popular image in the 1520s. St. Martin was a preacher against idolatry and false belief, and called for true repentance. He was especially favourable to the poor and humble, and was chosen as a church leader (as bishop) by popular acclamation.⁵⁵ One pamphlet from 1523 or 1524 claimed that a sequence sung on the feast of St. Martin was actually a prophecy of Luther's attack on the papacy.⁵⁶ After Luther's death, however, more explicit parallels were drawn. In his funeral sermon for Luther, Bugenhagen called attention to the fact that there had been equally great sorrow at the death of St. Martin, and a dispute similar to that at Luther's death about where the body should be laid.⁵⁷

The seventeenth century did not add very much that was new or original to the complex Luther image of the sixteenth. It tended to emphasise Luther as the man of God (*Gottesman*), as a divine instrument (*Gottes Werkzeug*) and as a prophet.⁵⁸ In this form the notion

(n. 51 cont.)

geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg Stuttgart, 1972-84), Karte VIII, la, and *Erläuterung* VIII, la, p. 7.

⁵² *Ein schöner dialog von Martino Luther und der geschickten Botschaft aus der Helle* (Zwickau, 1523); Lecoy de la Marche, *Saint Martin*, pp. 42, 355.

⁵³ Scribner, *Simple Folk*, p. 29, plate 20; Bächtold-Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, v, col. 1710.

⁵⁴ Freudenthal, *Feuer im deutschen Glauben und Brauch*, pp. 337, 396, 442, mentions as the "fire-saints": John, Veit, Ulrich, Michael and Fridolin; St. Florian was also revered as such: L. A. Veit, *Volkesfrommes Brauchum und Kirche im deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1936), p. 8.

⁵⁵ On these features of St. Martin of Tours, see H. Martin, *Saint Martin* (Paris, 1917), pp. 16, 29-30, 32-4, 36-7, 40.

⁵⁶ *Der Bapst, bischoff und Cardinal die rechter Ketzter seint, aus eine alter Prophetey durch die selbst gemacht und von ihm jertlich gesungen und gelesen* (n.p., n.d.), copy at Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, 8° R1 843, where it is attributed to Melchior Lotter's press in either Leipzig or Wittenberg.

⁵⁷ Förstemann, *Denkmale dem D. Martin Luther . . . errichtet*, p. 96 f.

⁵⁸ Cf. Kasner, *Grästlicher Rauffhandel*, pp. 166-266; Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Welt-eitgeschehen*, pp. 254-303.

of Luther's sainthood continued, especially in the view that he was associated with miracles. The link was expressed succinctly by Antonius Probus in 1583, when he stated that God did not send great prophets and doctors of the church unless miracles accompanied them.⁵⁹ It is no surprise, then, to find stories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries about miraculous Luther images. One was reported in 1717, in Schoettgen's history of Würzen. During the Thirty Years' War a Catholic soldier had attempted to put out the eyes of a Luther picture in the cathedral. To do so, he climbed upon a stool, but by divine intervention toppled over and broke his neck. This recalls a story from Wittenberg, retailed in 1706, in which a Spanish soldier from the imperial troops occupying the city in the wake of the Schmalkaldic War attacked a Luther picture in the Cranach altarpiece in the city church. He tried to slash the image's throat and to stab it in the stomach, and the marks were said to be still visible in 1707.⁶⁰ Both of these stories may owe something to a well-reported incident from 1592, in which a crypto-Calvinist deacon in Wittenberg, Paul Salmuth, threw a glass of beer at a picture of Luther, as an expression of his contempt for the Reformer. The glass was hurled with such force that fragments remained stuck in the portrait, including splinters sticking in the eyes.⁶¹

A more direct report of a miraculous Luther image was given in 1753 in Johann Kamprad's *Leisnig Chronicle*. He reported a "remarkable wonder" (*ein sonderliches Wunder*) from Dresden, where an image of Luther could be seen on the wall of the former Castle Church, as one entered the path to the building which replaced it. This image showed Luther "in bust, as if in a painting, depicted as he is in the Small Catechism", and although it had been whitewashed over, it continually remained visible. Kamprad confirmed this story with the testimony of his own eyes, for he had seen it in 1748. In the body of his text he made no miraculous claims for the image, beyond calling it *ein sonderliches Wunder*, but his entry in the Register for the volume was quite unambiguous: "Luther: one sees his image in Dresden, and it is neither painted nor carved, nor chiselled in stone, and was never there".⁶²

⁵⁹ Probus, *Oratio de vocazione et doctrina Martini Lutheri*, fo. L4r.

⁶⁰ C. Schoettgen, *Historie der Chur-Sächsischen Stiffts-Stadt Würzen* (Leipzig, 1717), p. 261; Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 260.

⁶¹ Leonard Hutterus, *Threnologia de obitu D. Aeg. Hunni* (Wittenberg, 1603), p. 36, and then cited by Goetze, *De reliquis Lutheri*, p. 33, and by Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*. Goetze provides the most detailed report.

⁶² J. Kamprad, *Leisnigker chronica oder Beschreibung der sehr alten Stadt Leisnigk* (Leisnig, 1753), pp. 511-12 and Register.

to Lutheran doctrine and as confessors of the true church, who sometimes suffered for their faith.⁶⁸

How do the kind of Luther images we have been discussing here accord with such principles? One distinctive element which adheres to them faithfully is found in most of the Luther images of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, namely, that the images are *commemorative*. This is summed up neatly in the inscription on a tondo portrait of Luther from Jena, commissioned by Duke Johan Wilhelm of Saxony-Weimar in the third quarter of the sixteenth century. It states most explicitly that the purpose of the picture is commemorative, not cultic: *non cultus est, sed memoriae gratia*.⁶⁹

It was the desire to commemorate the mortal features of Luther that led to the taking of a death mask of the Reformer in Eisleben, just before his remains were taken back to Wittenberg for burial, and to the subsequent use of the mask, suitably fitted out with glass eyes, to create a bizarre life-size wax figure of Luther in the Eisleben Luther-house.⁷⁰ This commemorative intention inspired a host of Luther portraits for important Reformation anniversaries, such as those celebrated in 1617 and 1717. The year 1630 was also celebrated as the centenary of the Confession of Augsburg, and it was to mark this anniversary that the Luther image in Artern had been created. Depictions of Luther on such occasions were not, of course, confined to painted images, but appeared in book illustrations, and especially on broadsheets. For the 1617 anniversary alone there appeared at least a dozen broadsheets with an image of Luther.⁷¹

A second function of the Luther images is not unrelated to the commemorative purpose, namely, that they are *symbolic or allegorical*. The favourite image of Luther during the age of Lutheran orthodoxy, from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century, was based on Cranach's depiction of the Reformer in his sixty-third year, wearing

⁶⁸ See C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Chapel Hill, 1979), esp. p. 156; R. W. Scribner, "The Image and the Reformation", in J. Obelkevich, R. Samuel and L. Roper (eds.), *Religion and Society* (London, forthcoming).

⁶⁹ Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 267. This was even accepted in the Calvinist tradition by the late sixteenth century. Theodore Beze, Calvin's successor in Geneva, published in 1580 a collection of *icones* or "true images" of the great and the good who had contributed to the Reformation. He justified the collection with a statement which came close to that offered by Catholics for their use of images of the saints: "I can say for myself that not only in reading the books of such great men, but also in looking on their likenesses, I am moved, I am as drawn to holy thoughts as if I were in their very presence". T. Beza, *Icones id est verae imagines vitiorum doctrina simul et pietate illustratum* (Geneva, 1580), *Prefatio*.

⁷⁰ Lesser, *Besondere Münzen*, p. 456.

⁷¹ Kasinet, *Geistlicher Rauffhandel*, pp. 115-44, 353 ff.

a long Wittenberg preacher's gown, and holding a book signifying the Bible. This depiction was used in churches, town halls, universities and other public buildings, as well as in book illustrations, especially in Bibles and Lutheran instructional literature such as the Catechism, and on broadsheets. (See Plate 2.) The broadsheets usually spelled out the significance of the image for all good Protestants. They related the highlights of his career as a Reformer, and named him as a "man of God" and a prophet. The intention was to present him as a model with whom Protestant readers could identify and whom they could imitate.⁷² The "sweating image" in Oberrossla is described as being of this type, as was the "incombustible Luther" from Eisleben. That from Artern probably belonged to this type as well.

The allegorical purpose of these depictions was often emphasized by including Luther's chosen emblem, an open white rose on a blue field, at the centre of which was a red heart emblazoned with a black cross. Luther himself had adapted the symbol from the arms of the Luther family and in 1530 provided an interpretation which explained it as symbolizing the justification of the sinner through faith in the crucified Christ. The black cross signified death and suffering, the red heart life, the white rose joy, consolation and peace through faith, and the blue field heavenly joy. Two broadsheets from 1617 portrayed the emblem alongside and in the same dimensions as Luther's portrait, and provided a pious exposition of its meaning. It also appeared in the form of a commemorative medal.⁷³

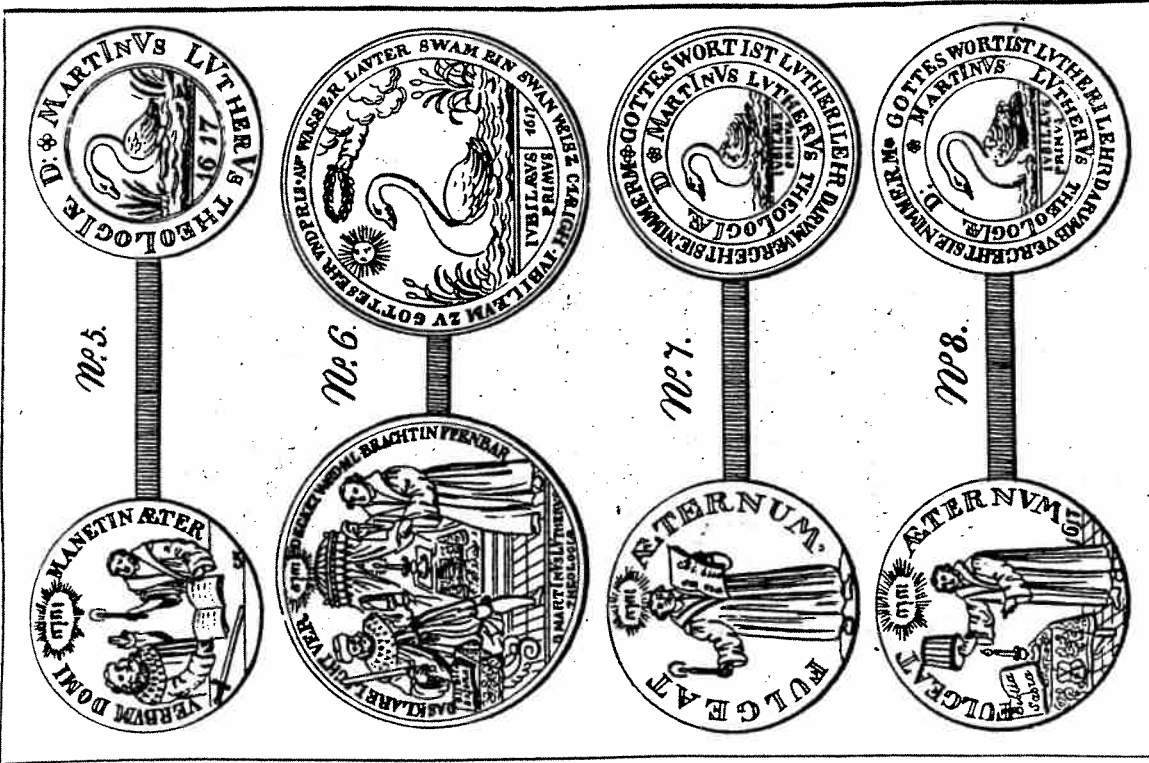
The most striking allegorical images, however, were found on medals. As a Renaissance device to glorify the great and the famous, these had become increasingly popular in Germany from 1518, and found some limited use in the first wave of Luther image-making in the 1520s.⁷⁴ Towards the end of the sixteenth century they were used frequently for religious themes, and the Reformation anniversaries of 1617 and 1717 produced them in large quantity, with over 150 different examples known from the latter date.⁷⁵ In 1617 a commem-

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 166-225.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 183; Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 395.

⁷⁴ Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*; Lesser, *Besondere Münzen* (intended as a supplement to Juncker); H. G. Kreussler, *D. Martin Luthers Andenken in Münzen* (Leipzig, 1818); Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillen*, which is disappointing in being less comprehensive than either Juncker or Kreussler.

⁷⁵ Based on a count of the listing in Kreussler, *D. Martin Luthers Andenken in Münzen*.



3. Commemorative medals for the Reformation Jubilee of 1617, following Heinrich Gottlieb Kreussler, *Luthers Andenken in Jubel-Münzen* (Leipzig, 1818), plate 2.

By courtesy of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart.

idea had first been used as a Reformation theme by Hans Holbein the Younger, in a woodcut showing the flame of the Gospel set on a stand, with Christ showing it to a crowd of common folk, while the papal clergy fled from its light into a dark pit.⁸¹ Some of the commemorative medals of 1617 showed Luther in the role of Christ, holding a burning light or candle and pointing to the Bible. Others showed him removing a pail (representing a bushel measure) covering the candle, or showed the pail already removed, lying on the table or on the floor. In one version Luther and the Elector Frederick the Wise draw back the curtains covering a tabernacle to reveal the light burning within, a neat double allegory about the revelation of the Word of God and the true nature of Christ's real presence in scripture (rather than in the communion host). Sometimes this representation was reduced merely to a burning candle and the discarded pail, showing a condensation of the allegorical message. (See Plates 3-4 for examples.)

There was a whole series of Saxon medals which combined the two themes, showing the burning light on the obverse and the swimming swan on the reverse, while the dual theme also turns up in a 1617 broadsheet.⁸² The allegorical purpose of these images was to symbolize Lutheran doctrine as being as unquenchable as the Word of God. A 1617 medal showing Luther with the light and the Bible summed up in its inscription the general message of the allegory: *Gott zu ehren iz Hundert Jahr steht Luthers Lehr, und wurd durch Gotts Hulff stehn noch mehr* ("To the honour of God, Luther's doctrine has now stood for a hundred years: through God's aid, it will stand longer still").⁸³ The inscription on a Luther portrait in the Lutheran church in Stumpfelbach (Württemberg), painted in 1698 and depicting him with an angel and the swan that had now become his second emblem, showed how such motifs could be linked to an "incombustible Luther": "The angel flies and Luther stands; what he taught remains eternal, but hay and straw are consumed by fire; the swan sings . . ." ⁸⁴ The themes of the light and the unquenchable fire of the

⁸¹ Scribner, *Simple Folk*, p. 46, plate 33. See also a pen-and-ink drawing from 1545 showing the light of the Gospel driving away demons: *Sammlung des Herzog-August-Bibliothek*, ed. Harms, Schilling and Wang, p. 7, no. II, 3.

⁸² For the Saxon medals, see Kreussler, *D. Martin Luther Andenken in Münzen*, and an example in Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillon*, p. 114, no. 1. For the broadsheet, *Christi Soteri veritatis vindici*, see *Sammlung des Herzog-August-Bibliothek*, ed. Harms, Schilling and Wang, p. 219, no. II, 124.

⁸³ Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 558.

⁸⁴ R. Lieske, *Protestantische Frömmigkeit im Spiegel der bildenden Kunst* (Berlin, 1973), p. 120, plate 37.

custom, in which young boys went around on a trick-or-treat circuit singing:

Sankt Johannes sacra
 Muss den Martin Luther braten
 Muss ihn mit Zibeben specken
 Muss ihn dem Teufel schicken

Holy St. John
 We must roast Martin Luther
 Lard him with onions
 And send him to the devil.⁹⁰

An "incombustible Luther" was certainly an adequate reply!

IV

LUTHERANISM AND THAUMATURGY

So far we have considered the image as commemorative, allegorical and polemical; now we must discuss it as *thaumaturgic*. This is a quality rather more difficult to reconcile with Protestant views of the image. One view would be that such wonder-working images as we have discussed here were exceptions to the rule, aberrations. This might seem to be confirmed by the rather small number of them mentioned in extant historical records. Yet we can establish sufficiently strong links to other aspects of early modern Lutheranism to maintain that far from being exceptions, they are central to the development of Lutheran orthodoxy up to the end of the eighteenth century.

Throughout this period there was a strong desire, indeed in times of crisis a desperate psychological need, for Protestants to see their faith as divinely inspired. The strongest confirmation was found in Luther's role as a prophet, and his prophetic status was in turn attested both by prophecies about him, and by his own ability to prophesy.⁹¹ Of the many prophecies about Luther, one concerned a Luther image, and was much repeated after its first mention in a chronicle of the 1560s. According to this, the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, himself a potent figure of prophecy, had found in a monastery in Carinthia an image in the shape of a monk, over whose head was written the word *Lutherus*, thus foretelling the name of the

⁹⁰ A. Birlinger, *Volkstümliches aus Schwaben*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1861-2), ii, p. 99.

⁹¹ The subject of prophecy and Luther's role as prophet from the beginning of the Reformation, and subsequently, has been only briefly treated in the literature to date, and requires a thorough investigation. See R. Preuss, *Martin Luther der Prophet* (Gutersloh, 1933); R. Scribner, "Luther-Legenden des 16. Jahrhunderts", in G. Vogler (ed.), *Martin Luther: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin, 1983), pp. 377-90; Zeeden, *Martin Luther und die Reformation im Urteil des deutschen Luthertums*, i; Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Weithetigeschehen*, pp. 286-305.

future Reformer.⁹² However, the most repeated and most influential of these prophecies of Luther's coming was that attributed to Hus, whose history we have already mentioned.

In a 1562 cycle of sermons on Luther's life, which constituted the first Luther biography, Johann Mathesius made much of Luther's ability to prophesy as evidence of his divine mission.⁹³ Indeed, within six years of Luther's death, his "prophecies" had been collected and published, and five such collections appeared between 1552 and 1559.⁹⁴ That published in 1557 by Peter Glaser, pastor in Dresden, listed 120 of Luther's prophecies, and when Glaser reissued the work in 1574 the number had grown to 200.⁹⁵ The collection published in 1559 by Georg Walther, pastor in Halle in Saxony, was reissued in 1576.⁹⁶ In the same year Johann Lapaeus, pastor of Langenburg near Einbeck, published an extensive list of witnesses attesting Luther's prophetic status, including the testimony of over a dozen major Reformers.⁹⁷ Works enumerating Luther's prophecies continued to appear up to the nineteenth century, with one important collection published in 1718,⁹⁸ and others appearing as late as 1829, 1846 and 1853.⁹⁹ Two of these prophecies merit our attention. First, a prediction that there would be no war of religion in Germany in Luther's lifetime, which was taken to be fulfilled by the outbreak of the Schmalkaldic War immediately after his death. Secondly, he predicted great woe over Germany, which was seen to come to

⁹² Paracelsus, *Chronica und Ursprung dieses Landes Kärntner* (1564), in *Paracelsus: Die Kärntner Schriften*, ed. K. Goldammer (Klagenfurt, 1955), p. 21. Nothing further is known of the source Paracelsus used for this: G. Moro, "Die Kärntner Chronik des Paracelsus", *ibid.*, pp. 327-47.

⁹³ H. Volz, *Die Lutherpredigten des Johann Mathesius* (Leipzig, 1930), p. 75.

⁹⁴ Listed *ibid.*, p. 74, n. 6.

⁹⁵ P. Glaser, *Hundert und zwanzig Prophecyen, oder Weissagung des Ehrwürdigen Vaters Herrn Doctoris Martini Luthers* (Eisleben, 1557), copy at Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart (hereafter WLBSL), Theol. qto. 4308; P. Glaser, *Zwei Hundert Prophecyen oder weissagung des theuren Marns D. Martini Luthers* (Bautzen, 1574), copy at WLBSL, Theol. oct. 11263.

⁹⁶ G. Walther, *Prophezeungen D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1559): I have not been able to locate a copy of this edition; G. Walther, *Prophezeung Doctoris Martini Lutheri* (Frankfurt, 1576), copy at WLBSL, Theol. fol. 1091.

⁹⁷ J. Lapaeus, *Warhafftige Prophezeungen des theuren Propheten und heiligen Mannes Gottes D. Martini Lutheri* (Ursel, 1578), copy at Brit. Lib., 3905 e.126.

⁹⁸ Heinrich Wurtzer, *Luthers Reformator* (Hamburg, 1718), copy at Brit. Lib., 1353 c.4.

⁹⁹ *Merkwürdige Prophezeungen des ehrwürdigen, von Gott erleuchteten Mannes Doctoris Martini Luther . . . herausgegeben von einem Freunde göttlicher Wahrheit* (Stuttgart, 1829); *Prophezeungen des ehrwürdigen Vaters und theuren Mannes Lutheri*. Aus Schriften gezogen von H. B. (Besigheim/Württemberg, 1853). The 1846 publication was a new edition of Lapaeus, issued in Stuttgart by Christian Ludwig Knapp.

This story has traces of animist belief, as does the story of the attempt to put out the eyes of the Luther image in the cases of Paul Salmuth and the soldier in Würzen. Attempts to decapitate a Luther image or to cut its throat suggest the belief in personality immanent in the image which was characteristic of the Catholic cult of the saints. Is it possible that survivals of this cult became attached to Luther in the *longue durée*? We can certainly point to Luther relics, such as those in Magdeburg, or in Eisleben, where a piece of his coat and the cap he allegedly wore as a poor schoolboy were on display in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul up to the nineteenth century.¹¹¹ In 1699 Gottfried Arnold mentioned the practice of cutting splinters from Luther's bed in Eisleben as relics.¹¹² J. G. Seidler, in his preface to the 1703 Halle edition of Luther's works, mentioned an artisan who took away such a splinter, proclaiming it to be a miraculous relic.¹¹³ Indeed, as late as 1841 the same phenomenon could be found in Altenstein in Saxony. A "Luther-beech" regarded locally as a "holy tree" because of its alleged connection with the Reformer, was blown down during a storm in the midst of an eclipse. The pastor from Steinbach had it carried into his church where it was preserved as "holy", and splinters from it were sold to veneration of the "holy wood", the pastor even advertising it in a local newspaper.¹¹⁴ This was not the only "holy tree" associated with Luther, for there were over five hundred such throughout Germany, as well as numerous "Luther springs" which were regarded as having healing waters.¹¹⁵

There is no doubt that we can speak of a Luther-cult in early modern Germany, although the concept of Luther as a saint did not embed itself in Lutheranism in any form strong enough for us to see it as strictly comparable to Catholic saints' cults. However, the danger was always there, and Schoepffer was sufficiently aware of it to argue that God had finally allowed the Luther-house in Eisleben to be

¹¹¹ Berger, *Kurze Beschreibung der Merkwürdigkeiten*, p. 165.

¹¹² G. Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirche- und Ketzer-historie* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1699), pt. II, p. 47.

¹¹³ Cited by Goetze, *De reliquiis Lutheri*, p. 32.

¹¹⁴ See W. Bruckner, "Luther als Gestalt der Sage", in Bruckner (ed.), *Volkszählung und Reformation*, p. 269, although he does not mention the newspaper advertisement; for this, see E. Richter, "Die 'ändächtige Beraubung' geistlicher Toter als volksglaubenskundliches Phänomen", *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* (1960), pp. 95-6, with text of the advertisement.

¹¹⁵ For the trees and springs, see Gruppe, "Katalog der Luther und Reformations-sagen", pp. 307-9, for a small selection; Thulin, "Luther Bild der Gegenwart", p. 124, mentions 547 "Luther-trees" (alongside 105 Luther memorials and 66 memorial stones) as enumerated by the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*.

burned down to prevent it becoming the site of a cult.¹¹⁶ The officially approved variant was a weaker form of the saints' cult, rather parallel to the cults of Counter-Reformation saints. Here Luther was presented as an exemplary model for Christian life and as a man of outstanding spiritual qualities. Yet there was an ambivalence about this position. Whenever an occasion presented itself and it could be used to score a point against the claims of the Catholics, Lutherans had no qualms about falling back on miraculous claims for Luther's sainthood. Incorruptibility was an important quality of the remains of Catholic saints, especially in the Counter-Reformation, and St. Philip Neri's body was said to have been preserved uncorrupted in Rome. As late as 1765 this was repudiated as a fake by the Professor and Dean of the Wittenberg Faculty of Theology Weickhmann, who produced a Lutheran riposte. He claimed to have visited Luther's grave on 26 July that year, and testified that Luther's remains were preserved uncorrupted, evidence of the "remarkable traces of divine Providence" attached to the Reformer over the 219 years since the beginning of his Reformation.¹¹⁷ Weickhmann produced this testimony in support of the "incombustible Luther". Given the thick web of prophecy and the miraculous woven around Luther's person, the notion of a thaumaturgic Luther image was far from unthinkable for pious Protestants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially if it provided so effective a reply to Catholic polemic.

Finally, we must call attention to the most intriguing feature of the "incombustible Luthers". We are not dealing here with "Catholic survivals" rooted in the "ignorance" of a peasant mentality. The mythology of the "incombustible Luther" was produced by the very leaders of the Lutheran church themselves, by educated pastors writing out of pious conviction. Most of the tales of incombustibility, and of the miraculous in general, produced after Luther's death were recorded by Lutheran pastors.¹¹⁸ The 1634 "incombustible Luther" derived its authority from being hung in the audience hall of the Mansfeld Consistory. Schoepffer's 1717 tract was supplied with an approving preface by the Professor and Dean of the Wittenberg Faculty of Theology, and the 1765 edition was edited and introduced by his successor. Whether this occurred out of piety, curiosity or

¹¹⁶ Schoepffer, *Unverbrannter Luther*, pt. 2, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Weickhmann's preface on fol. 14^r.

¹¹⁸ Just to list the most prominent of those cited here: Antonius Hertzberger was preacher in Nordhausen, Peter Glaser was preacher in Dresden, Georg Walther was preacher in Halle in Saxony, Lapaetus was pastor in Langenberg, Probus was pastor in Moritzburg, Georg Goetze was Superintendent in Lübeck.

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