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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”.<sup>1</sup> 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

\* This essay originated as a commemorative lecture to mark the Luther quincenten-ary of 1983. It was first delivered to a seminar of the Warburg Institute, University of London, and subsequently to audiences at the Universities of Bristol; Durham; Kent; King’s College, London; Newcastle; Sydney; Melbourne; and Perth. I am grateful for the numerous helpful comments and suggestions received on those occasions, although the faults of the essay remain the responsibility of the author.

<sup>1</sup> “Effigies Lutheri in incendio Arterensi anno 1634 mirabiliter servata”, cited in Christian Juncker, *Das goldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

The smell of burning was very much in the air at that time. In 1519 Johann Tetzl 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 Tetzl 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 Aleander 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

<sup>2</sup> Justus Schoepffer, *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. Kuitze, *Aus Luthers Heimat: Vom Erhalten und Erneuern* (Jena, 1914), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> I have been unable to find any record earlier than Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, whose report was taken over by Schoepffer, *Lutherus non combustus*, who added the second case and the tag “incombustible Luther” (in the German 2nd edn.: *unverbrannter Luther*). Schoepffer 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.

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



1. The "Incombustible Luther" of 1689, following Justus Schoeffer, *Unverbrannter Luther* (Wittenberg, 1765), facing p. 104.  
By courtesy of Edinburgh University Library.

in Cottbus, in Halberstadt, in Merseburg and in Meissen (“whole wagon-loads”). Luther had been burned in effigy in Rome in 1519, and there was a general fear among his supporters that his appearance in Worms might lead him to the same fate as John Hus.<sup>5</sup>

This may be alluded to in inscriptions on some Luther portraits of 1520-1, that Luther may be mortal, but his message would not die.<sup>6</sup> There was also a medallion struck in these years, showing Luther’s portrait on the obverse and on the reverse a phoenix rising from the ashes.<sup>7</sup> In 1521 Luther’s portrait (it seems to have been a painting, from the report) was burned at Worms,<sup>8</sup> and this may have suggested the idea of an “incombustible Luther” used in the 1521 pamphlet. By 1522 literary fiction had become historical “fact”: it was said that when Luther’s books were burned in Thorn in Prussia during that year, a portrait of Luther placed with them refused to burn.<sup>9</sup>

By 1531 many of these disparate notions about incombustibility had solidified into the more powerful form of a prophecy. Two separate statements by Hus and Jerome of Prague were conflated, either by Luther himself or by someone in his circle with Bohemian connections. From his prison cell Hus had said that he might be a weak goose (in Czech Hus means goose), but more powerful and clear-sighted birds, eagles and falcons, would come after him. Quite independently of this, Jerome of Prague stated that he would wish to see what would be made of his own condemnation in a hundred years. Luther merged both statements into a single prophetic saying from Hus: that they may roast a goose in 1415, but in a hundred years a swan would sing to whom they would be forced to listen. Luther seems to have applied the image of the swan to himself to

<sup>5</sup> On Tetzl in Juterbog, and Luther and Tetzl, see *Friedrich Myconius’ Geschichte der Reformation*, ed. O. Clemen (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 21-2. On Johann Scultetus, bishop of Brandenburg, see M. Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 60 vols. (Weimar, 1883-1983 and continuing), *Briefwechsel*, i, p. 514 (3 Oct. 1519). On Eck in Ingolstadt, *ibid.*, ii, p. 36 (8 Feb. 1520). On Aleander, *ibid.*, p. 221 (4 Dec. 1520). On Cottbus and Halberstadt, *ibid.*, p. 236 (15 Dec. 1520). On Merseburg and Meissen, *ibid.*, p. 270 (27 Feb. 1521). On the burning in Rome, which probably suggested the scene in the *Passio*, *ibid.*, i, p. 409 n. 6.

<sup>6</sup> R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 15-19.

<sup>7</sup> H. Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillon* (Munich, 1983), p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> *Deutsche Reichstagskten: Jüngere Reihe* (Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ii, Munich, 1896), p. 935.

<sup>9</sup> R. Brohm, “Die kirchliche Zustände in Thorn, 1520-1557”, *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*, xxxix (1869), p. 606, citing no source, however. The earliest record I can find is Christian Hartknoch, *Preussische Kirchen-Historia* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1686), p. 865, who gives as his source a MS. from Thorn.

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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup> 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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Hasenberg, *Ludus ludentem luderum* (n.p., 1530).

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

<sup>13</sup> Hauffen, "Husz eine Gans", p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> *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".<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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-

<sup>15</sup> *Historia oder das warhafftig 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 fleysche zu stucken gehawen worden, ertrencket und verbrandt, Seyn geyst aber lebet . . .", fo. Bi'.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> H. Bächthold-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).

burg mentioned the Augustinian monastery where Luther had spent some time. It claimed that one could still see Luther's cell and bunk, and that both had "in wondrous fashion" survived the burning down of the town in 1631.<sup>19</sup> Another work of 1706 mentioned a Luther Bible, which in 1701 had been preserved from the flames in a fire in the house of the pastor and general superintendent of Moritzburg in Saxony.<sup>20</sup>

The story of the incombustible Luther-bed in Magdeburg also turned up in a 1703 work written by Georg Goetze, superintendent in Lübeck, significantly entitled *De reliquiis Lutheri*.<sup>21</sup> He mentioned a more famous case of incombustibility, that the Luther-house in Eisleben was immune to fire. We can trace the historical development of this story more closely than that of the "incombustible Luther" of 1634. In 1569, when the parish register of St. Andreas in Eisleben was commenced, it noted under the date 17 February that a fire had burned on the common grazing land on the eve of the anniversary of Luther's death. This reminded the recorder that 23 years before (namely 1546) a fire had begun in the house in which Luther had died. Under 10 May 1569 it was noted that there was a severe outbreak of fire in the town, through which 36 houses in St. Andreas parish were destroyed, and 33 other houses along with 28 barns. The chimney of the house in which Luther had died had begun to smoulder, but did not catch fire.<sup>22</sup>

By 1601 there was a more spectacular story to tell. On 18 April 253 houses were burned down, but the city chronicle noted that:

the small house in which the blessed man Dr Martin Luther was born, the church in which he was baptised and the house in which he died were all preserved, regardless of how violently the flames raged in and around them; and without doubt this was through God's goodness and as a great sign [*Andeutung*] for us.<sup>23</sup>

On 8 June 1671 there was another fire in which 30 houses and 19 barns were destroyed, but Luther's birthplace survived intact, although the fire had started just behind it.<sup>24</sup> Such good signs could not last forever. On 9 August 1689, 127 houses burned down in Eisleben, the Luther-house among them. This time the chronicle

<sup>19</sup> Johann Vulpius, *Magnificentia parthenopolitana, das ist der uralten, welt-berühmter Haupt- und Handelstadt Magdeburg Sonderbare Herrlichkeit* (Magdeburg, 1702), p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 289, citing "Müller, Sächs. Annales, fol. 120", a work I have not been able to trace.

<sup>21</sup> Georg H. Goetze, *De reliquiis Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1703).

<sup>22</sup> *Chronicon Islebiense: Eisleber Stadtchronik aus den Jahren 1520-1738*, ed. H. Grössler and F. Sommer (Eisleben, 1882), pp. 33-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6, 76.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238 n.

noted the fact drily, adding, “previously it had always been spared from fire”.<sup>25</sup> There was no mention of the “incombustible Luther” which was to continue the tradition, but the incombustible Luther-house had already become a legend on its own. As early as 1583 the pastor of St. Nikolaus in Eisleben had listed it as one of the *miracula et prophetia Lutheri*.<sup>26</sup>

By the early eighteenth century there were enough tales of Luther’s incombustibility for the Eisleben pastor Justus Schoepffer to produce a tract on them, published in 1717, with an expanded second edition published posthumously in 1765.<sup>27</sup> Schoepffer was inspired by the “incombustible Luther” in the Eisleben birth-house, which he regarded as “miraculously preserved” (*miraculose conservata*), but he set out to prove in his tract that throughout his entire life Luther had been incombustible! The very first sign of this mark of special providence he saw in the fact that Savonarola had been burned in the year of Luther’s birth (1483). Like Hus, one forerunner of the Reformer had been burned, but Luther was divinely chosen to survive (the false dating — Savonarola was burned in 1498 — was not corrected in the second edition).<sup>28</sup> More directly, Luther’s family village Mohra was burned down around the time of Luther’s birth, but happily his parents had left there for Eisleben just before. Other examples cited by Schoepffer included lightning which struck the roof of the choir in the Erfurt Augustinian church in 1505, so turning Luther from the study of law to theology; and the lightning which struck down his friend Alexis during a storm, which led Luther to enter monastic life.<sup>29</sup>

Some of Schoepffer’s examples are merely allegorical: Luther endured the “fire of poverty” as a child, or the fires of tortured conscience.<sup>30</sup> But he also relates in detail much of the corpus of incombustibility from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> Antonius Probus, *Oratio de vocatione et doctrina Martini Lutheri doctoris magni et prophetae Germaniae coelestis et divina* (Leipzig, 1583), copy at Brit. Lib., 3906.bb.77 (4), fos. L4<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>27</sup> For the 1717 edition, see n. 2 above. The second edition: *Unverbrannter Luther, oder historische Erzählung von D. Martin Lutheri und dessen im Feuer erhaltenen Bildnissen* (Wittenberg, 2 pts. in 1 vol., 1765-6).

<sup>28</sup> The error about Savonarola’s death goes back to a commemorative sermon of 1618: see H. J. Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Weltheilsgeschehen und Gottes Werkzeug: Römische Kirche, Reformation und Luther im Spiegel des Reformation Jubiläums 1617* (Wiesbaden, 1978), p. 299.

<sup>29</sup> Schoepffer, *Lutherus non combustus*, pp. 4-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6, 17.

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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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!<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> In the last case the town is said to have been miraculously preserved from fire “from that day to this”.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-6, and vastly expanded in *Unverbrannter Luther*, pp. 99-104; Biering’s report on p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Lutherus non combustus*, pp. 33-8; *Unverbrannter Luther*, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> *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.

<sup>34</sup> H. Gruppe, “Katalog der Luther und Reformationssagen des 19. Jhts”, in W. Brückner (ed.), *Volkserzählung und Reformation: Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Erzählstoffen und Erzählliteratur im Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 295-324, here nos. 63-6, p. 302.

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

<sup>36</sup> 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 Vitry (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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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

(n. 36 cont.)

Moses' burning bush, with the inscription *Uror non consumor*: S. Mours, *Le Protestantisme en France au xvi<sup>e</sup> s.* (Paris, 1959), pp. 4 (plate), 217.

<sup>37</sup> 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. Kastner, *Geistlicher Rauffhandel: Form und Funktion der illustrierten Flugblätter zum Reformations-Jubiläum* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1982), pp. 166-225; M. Warnke, *Cranachs Luther: Entwürfe für ein Image* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Scribner, *Simple Folk*, ch. 2.

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

<sup>40</sup> Uwe Westfehling (ed.), *Die Messe Gregors des Grossen: Vision, Kunst, Realität. Katalog und Fuhrer zu einer Ausstellung im Schnütgen Museum Köln* (Cologne, 1982), p. 13.

latter praises God, "that you, O Lord, have saved us, through Martin Luther, with your Word".<sup>41</sup> Luther is also represented as the proponent of true belief against its enemies, such as monks, the Roman clergy, the pope, the devil and the Antichrist. There are a number of humanist images, such as Luther as Hercules or as the "patron of liberty", and those of the bearded Luther as Juncker Jörg.<sup>42</sup> Most of these are images of the 1520s, and they are joined by a new set of images in the 1540s and 1550s, in what can be called the second major phase of Luther iconography.

Here we find Luther as preacher of the Word (in his Wittenberg gown); Luther as an apostle, evangelist and church father; and increasingly Luther as a prophet, often with apocalyptic overtones.<sup>43</sup> The images of the 1520s were largely popular images, appearing as broadsheets, or as illustrations to small pamphlets. The new set of images in the second phase are as much a matter of church art as of popular printing.<sup>44</sup> Luther is still shown as divinely inspired, though not as explicitly as in the 1520s. There Luther was shown with the nimbus of sainthood and the Holy Spirit hovering over his head in the form of a dove. The images of the second phase were more subtle: the dove hovers near, not over his head, and the nimbus appears less frequently. There was only one engraving produced after Luther's death showing him with a nimbus, as well as two broadsheets in 1623, depicting Luther and Hus, which supplied a halo for Luther but not for his forerunner.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For analysis of the visual message, see Scribner, *Simple Folk*, pp. 27-30; the text cited: "Wir sagen auch, o Jesu Christ/ . . . Mit dankbarkeit, lob, preys und eer/ das du uns hast (o mylter her)/ Erlöset von der hellen port/ Durch Martin Luther, mit deym Wort." See W. L. Strauss, *The German Illustrated Broadsheet, 1500-1550*, 4 vols. (New York, 1975), iii, p. 861.

<sup>42</sup> Scribner, *Simple Folk*, pp. 30-36. Scharfe, *Evangelische Andachtsbilder*, p. 183, suggests indirectly that this humanist image of the powerful, larger-than-life Luther as Hercules may have contributed to the development of the "hero cult" around the Reformer.

<sup>43</sup> Scribner, *Simple Folk*, pp. 200-28; F. Stopp, "Der religiös-polemische Einblattdruck 'Ecclesia Militans' (1569) des Johannes Nas und seine Vorgänger", *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, xxxix (1965), pp. 588-638.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. O. Thulin, *Cranachaltäre der Reformation* (Berlin, 1956); F. Bucholz, *Protestantismus und Kunst im 16. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1928), p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> Here I exclude group depictions, such as the 1574 Rheinsberg altar, which showed Luther and other Reformers as Apostles at the Last Supper, all with haloes: Buchholz, *Protestantismus und Kunst*, p. 68. The engraving is mentioned in Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 266. For Luther with Hus, see *Waare und Klare Bildnuss, der zweyen theuren Männer Gottes, Als Herren Johann Hussen . . . und denn D. M. Luther* (1623), copy at Brit. Lib., 1870.d.1/158; and a second version in *Die Sammlung des Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel*, ed. W. Harms, M. Schill-  
(cont. on p. 49)

There were other indirect ways of indicating Luther's sainthood. In a depiction of the Baptism of Christ before Wittenberg, the duke of Saxony and his family kneel as witnesses to the divine event. Luther stands behind the duke and his spouse, in the characteristic position of a patron saint, resting a protective hand on the duke's shoulder.<sup>46</sup> In the city church in Weimar a winged retable altarpiece features the Crucifixion in its central panel. The artist, Lucas Cranach the Elder, has depicted himself as a figure representing mankind, on whom a stream of saving blood flows from the wounds of the crucified Christ. To one side of him stands John the Baptist, to the other Luther, as if protective patron saints.<sup>47</sup> Indeed Luther was compared to John the Baptist in the popular literature of the sixteenth century, as someone who had proclaimed the coming of Christ, and called a "second John the Baptist".<sup>48</sup> Another altarpiece created in Weimar c. 1572 shows in its three panels the three stages of Luther's career as a Reformer: Luther as tonsured friar to the left; as Juncker Jörg and so as Bible translator to the right; and as church father in the centre. This resembles nothing so much as a Catholic devotional altarpiece depicting a saint's life.<sup>49</sup>

Luther was most closely associated with one saint in particular, with St. Martin. The nimbus he is given as an attribute in the early portraits, peculiar for someone yet living, may have been borrowed from the legend of St. Martin of Tours, who was said to have been surrounded by a nimbus when the Holy Spirit descended upon him.<sup>50</sup> Most of the depictions of Luther with the nimbus came from Strassburg, where St. Martin was a particularly favourite saint, especially the most explicit depiction of Luther with a large nimbus by Hans Baldung Grien. Indeed St. Martin was one of the most popular church patrons overall in south Germany and had experienced a revival of interest there in the fifteenth century.<sup>51</sup> There

(n. 45 cont.)

ing and A. Wang (Deutsche Illustrierte Flugblätter des 16. u. 17. Jhts., Munich, 1980), II, no. II, 200, p. 355.

<sup>46</sup> Scribner, *Simple Folk*, p. 224, plate 178.

<sup>47</sup> Thulin, *Cranachaltäre der Reformation*, p. 54.

<sup>48</sup> For example, in Michael Colius' funeral sermon on Luther's death in 1546: K. E. Förstemann, *Denkmale dem D. Martin Luther . . . errichtet* (Nordhausen, 1846), p. 96-7. On the theme in general, see E. W. Zeeden, *Martin Luther und die Reformation im Urteil des deutschen Luthertums*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1950-2), i, pp. 27 ff., 57.

<sup>49</sup> Mentioned by Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 263.

<sup>50</sup> A. Lecoy de la Marche, *Saint Martin* (Tours, 1881), pp. 208-9, 370 (plate).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 684; Scribner, *Simple Folk*, p. 253, no. 12a. On St. Martin as church patron in south Germany, *Historischer Atlas für Baden-Württemberg* (Kommission für

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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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.<sup>58</sup> In this form the notion

(n. 51 cont.)

geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg Stuttgart, 1972-84), Karte VIII, 1a, and *Erläuterung* VIII, 1a, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ain schöner dialogue von Martino Luther und der geschickten Botschafft auss der Helle* (Zwickau, 1523); Lecoy de la Marche, *Saint Martin*, pp. 42, 355.

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

<sup>54</sup> 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 Brauchtum und Kirche im deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1936), p. 8.

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

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

<sup>57</sup> Förstemann, *Denkmäle dem D. Martin Luther . . . errichtet*, p. 96 f.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Kastner, *Geistlicher Rauffhandel*, pp. 166-266; Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Weltsgeschehen*, 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

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".<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Probus, *Oratio de vocatione et doctrina Martini Lutheri*, fo. L4<sup>r</sup>.

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

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

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

The most famous Luther image of all, as well as the best documented in the period under discussion, was the “sweating Luther image” of Oberrossla, a town at the south-eastern foot of the Harz mountains. The earliest record of this image I can trace dates from 1685, in an anonymous Thuringian chronicle. It relates how the preacher at Oberrossla in 1651 was preaching a sermon on the horrors of devastation experienced in his age. He cited two Luther passages, one from Luther’s preface to the prophet Haggai, and as he did so blood dripped from the Luther portrait hanging above the pulpit, falling onto both the pastor himself and his book.<sup>63</sup> A second account from 1685, in the news magazine *Theatrum Europaeum*, dated the incident to 16/26 November (Old/New Style), and mentioned that the second text was from Luther’s exposition of Psalm 127. In this account the portrait sweats not blood, but only water “not dissimilar to tears”. The report has the tone of a broadsheet about it, and it mentioned that people at the time thought that the water might be rain, except that the wall on which the portrait hung was quite dry, as was the dusty surface on which the drops fell.<sup>64</sup>

Several writers mentioned this incident around the turn of the century, by which time the Luther image was said to have sweated on two further occasions, in 1681 and in 1705.<sup>65</sup> The 1681 case seems to be a misreporting of that in 1651, since the same date (the 25th Sunday after Trinity) is given, as well as the fact that the preacher was said to be citing the same two Luther passages at the time. It is also strange that the 1685 reports should not have mentioned the more recent occurrence, so that the 1681 case must be regarded as false, perhaps a misreading of similar dates. However, this was overlooked by the contemporary accounts, and 1681 was taken to be another example of the miraculous image breaking into a sweat.

The incident in 1705 was attested by a report on 30 March in a local newspaper, the *Weimarische Ordinari Post Zeitung*, and it took place on 27 March, a day of general prayer and fasting in the land. The portrait sweated from the morning sermon until evening, both

<sup>63</sup> *Merkwürdige und auserlesene Geschichte von der berühmten Langgrafschaft Thüringen* (n.p., 1685), copy at Brit. Lib., 10261.cc.12, p. 377.

<sup>64</sup> *Theatrum Europaeum*, 21 vols. (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1662, 1664-1738), vii/1 (1651-3), p. 136.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 268; Heinrich August Ziegler, *Historisches Labyrinth der Zeit*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1701-18), i, p. 1098; Friedrich Christian Lesser, *Besondere Müntzen welche sowohl auf Gelehrte Gesellschaften . . . als auf gelehrte Leute . . . geprägt worden* (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1739), p. 458, cites Romanus Teller, *Secularisches Denkmal der gottlichen Güte* (1701).

on the face and on the hand holding the Bible. When the sweat was wiped away the drops formed again, as large as peas, although the rest of the picture remained dry. This aroused such interest that a commemorative medal was struck to record it.<sup>66</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the image had acquired an enlarged reputation and an expanded history. It was said to have come to Oberrossla from Weimar in 1608 as a gift from the court preacher Meiss. In 1613 it had sweated three times on the day before a great flood. During the Thirty Years' War an enemy soldier had cut the top from the picture and either thrown it away or carried it off to Erfurt. The two parts were found by chance, and it was restored to Oberrossla. In 1713, exactly a hundred years after its earliest manifestation, it was said to have sweated during a time in which all Europe suffered from severe weather.<sup>67</sup>

Thus we see that the "incombustible Luther" belonged to a second universe of discourse, one whose language was that of saintly and miraculous images. I now want to turn to some reflections about what "incombustible Luther" suggests about perceptions of images in early modern Lutheran Germany.

### III

#### FUNCTIONS OF THE IMAGE

The attitudes of Luther and Lutheranism towards images is well known. First, there were very few inhibitions about the use of images for propaganda or for secular purposes. Secondly, Luther was in favour of continuing the best of pre-Reformation traditions in religious art, so that Lutheranism was not opposed to the use of images in a religious context, so long as "popish abuses and superstitions" were avoided: images were to be reformed, not abolished. What this meant in practice was a stronger sense of decorum in religious art, the use of images for the purposes of instruction, and in what was portrayed the application of a strict standard of fidelity to the "Word of God". Thirdly, depictions of leading personalities in the Lutheran church were designed to show them as examples of faith, as witnesses

<sup>66</sup> The report given verbatim by Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 270.

<sup>67</sup> Christian August Vulpius, *Curiositäten der physisch-, literarisch-, artistisch-, historisch-, Vor- und Mitweltz*, 10 vols. (Weimar, 1811-23), x, pp. 114-16, with a depiction of the medal on plate 4, no. 2; *Thuringia* (1841), p. 75; Gruppe, "Katalog der Luther und Reformationssagen", no. 118, p. 309, cites the further folklore literature from the nineteenth century.

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

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*.<sup>69</sup>

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.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup>

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

<sup>68</sup> 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).

<sup>69</sup> Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 267. This was even accepted in the Calvinist tradition by the late sixteenth century. Theodore Bezé, 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 virorum doctrina simul et pietate illustrium* (Geneva, 1580), *Prefatio*.

<sup>70</sup> Lesser, *Besondere Müntzen*, p. 456.

<sup>71</sup> Kastner, *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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> In 1617 a commem-

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-225.

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

<sup>74</sup> Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*; Lesser, *Besondere Münzen in Münzen* (Leipzig, 1818); Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillon*, which is disappointing in being less comprehensive than either Juncker or Kreussler.

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



2. Luther aged c. 63, by Lucas Cranach (the Younger?).  
*By courtesy of the Warburg Institute.*

orative medal was distributed in Nuremberg to all city officials and clergymen, as well as to all schoolchildren in the city and its surrounding territories. These were of gold, and varied in value according to the social status of the recipients.<sup>76</sup>

The Reformation themes on such medals were numerous. Luther's portrait was probably the most common, but they also had themes such as Luther as Samson slaying a lion (doubtless to signify Leo X), Luther with the Elector of Saxony, Luther with the angel of the Apocalypse who proclaims the fall of Babylon or Luther as a farmer sowing the seed of the Word of God.<sup>77</sup> Two specific themes merit attention in terms of our present discussion. The first shows a swimming swan, sometimes with a hand in the heavens above it holding a wreath or a cross. (See Plate 3.) The swan was first used on a medal in 1601, struck by Gottfried Rabe, a former monk from Prague, to commemorate his conversion to Lutheranism in Wittenberg. It showed on the obverse a goose, a swan and a raven (*Rabe* means raven), and on the reverse the lines "1414 in Constance the goose was roasted; 1521 the swan came to Worms; 1601 God saved the raven in Wittenberg".<sup>78</sup> This seems to have been the earliest pictorial use of the swan motif, which first occurs in a 1603 Luther portrait in St. Peter's church in Hamburg.<sup>79</sup> The motif was used many times on the commemorative medals of 1617 and 1717, although only twice was there any explicit reference to the Hus prophecy. By then it was so well known that the swan alone was an adequate emblematic allusion.<sup>80</sup>

The second motif was derived from Matthew 5.14-16: "You are the light of the world . . . Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." The

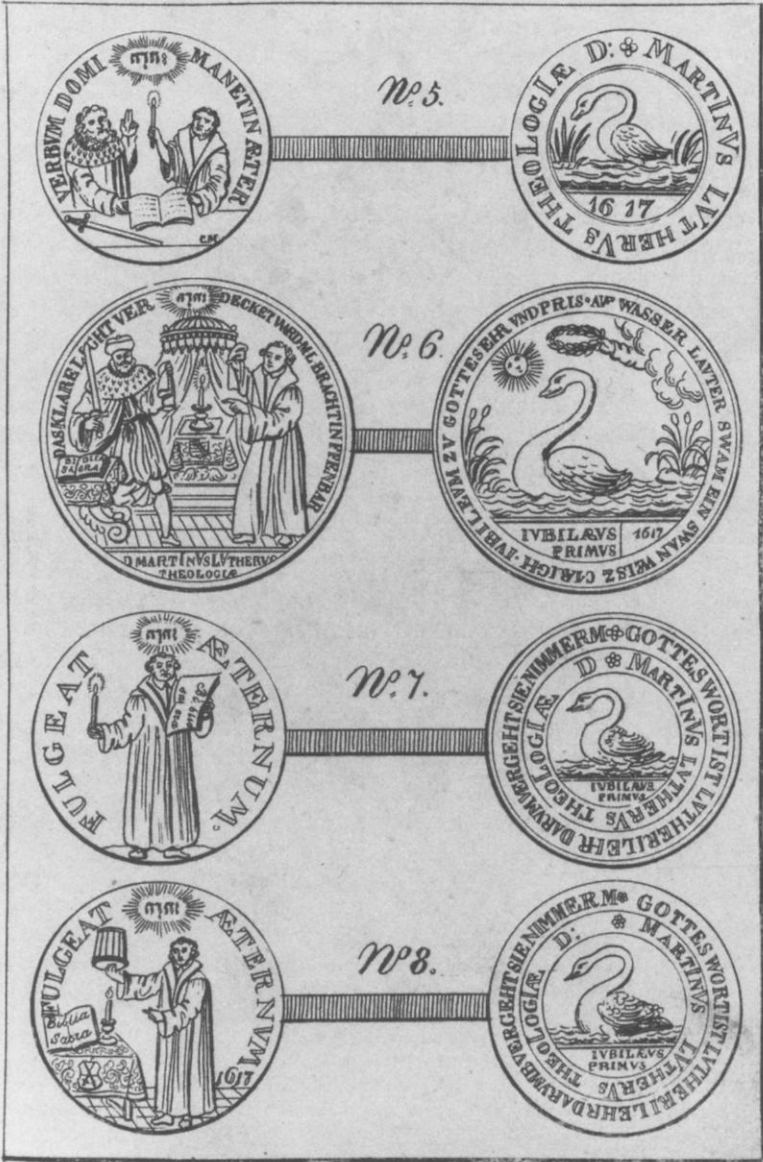
<sup>76</sup> Kastner, *Geistlicher Rauffhandel*, p. 146.

<sup>77</sup> Luther as Samson (a Prussian medal): Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 397; Luther with the Elector: Schnell, *Martin Luther und die Reformation auf Münzen und Medaillon*, p. 137, no. 54; Luther with angel: *ibid.*, p. 121, no. 18; Luther as farmer (a unique theme): Lesser, *Besondere Münzen*, p. 570.

<sup>78</sup> Hauffen, "Husz eine Gans", p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> T. Knolle, "Der Prototyp des Lutherbildes mit dem Schwan", in *Forschungen zur Kirchengeschichte und zu christlicher Kunst: Festgabe für Johannes Ficker* (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 222-42.

<sup>80</sup> See further M. Warnke, "Ein Kruzifix und eine Luther-Statue in der Lorentiuskirche zu Trebus", *Jahrbuch der hessischen Kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung*, xix (1968), pp. 177-88; and Scharfe, *Evangelische Andachtsbilder*, p. 189 f. Scharfe suggests that there may have been a link to the phoenix motif from the 1520s, but there is no direct evidence of such a link. The phoenix motif does not recur, and Hauffen's arguments (to which Scharfe does not refer) seem conclusive on the development of the swan motif.



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.<sup>81</sup> 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.)

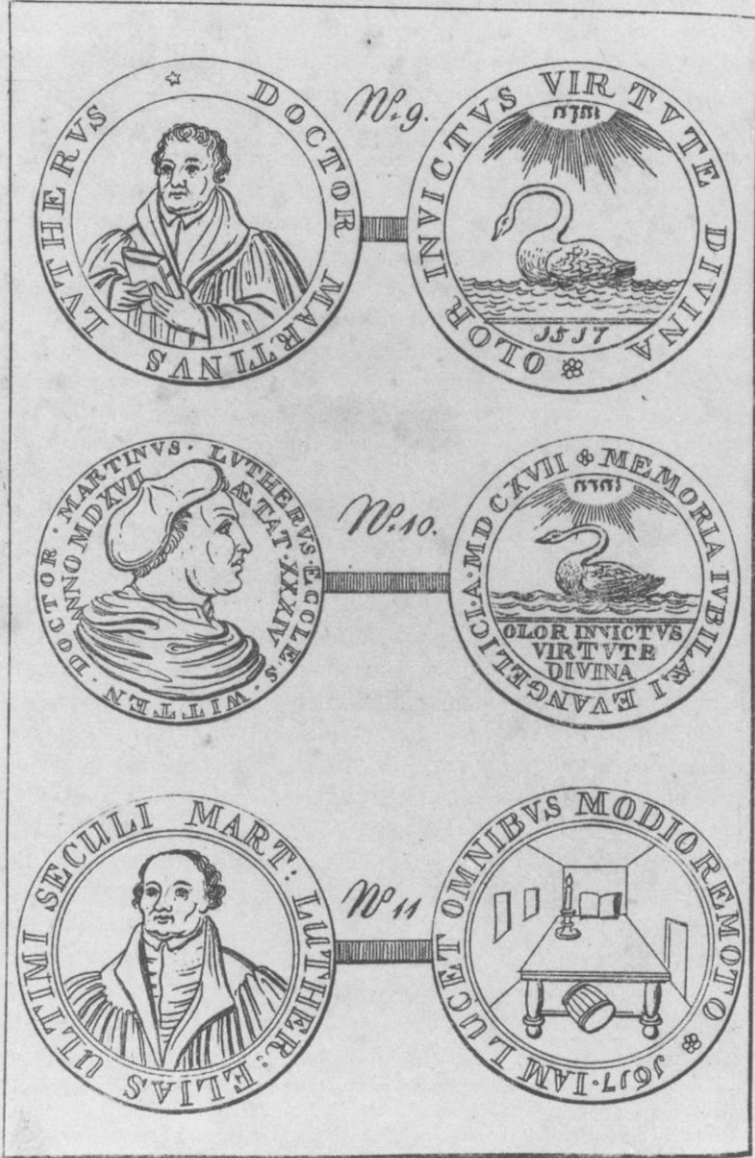
There was a whole series of Saxon medals which combined the two themes, showing the burning light on the obverse and the swimming swan on the reverse, while the dual theme also turns up in a 1617 broadsheet.<sup>82</sup> The allegorical purpose of these images was to symbolize Lutheran doctrine as being 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 itz 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").<sup>83</sup> 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 . . .".<sup>84</sup> The themes of the light and the unquenchable fire of the

<sup>81</sup> 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.

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> Juncker, *Guldene und silberne Ehren-Gedächtniss*, p. 558.

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



4. Commemorative medals for the Reformation Jubilee of 1617, following Kreussler, *Luthers Andenken*, plate 3.  
By courtesy of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart.

Gospel, and of a Luther who could not be burned merged into one. The same thought was neatly summed up in the verses said to be attached to the "incombustible Luther" of Artern, that flames could not remove what Luther had taught.<sup>85</sup>

The use of the image to allegorize doctrine is close to another of its uses, for *confessional polemic*. The heightened confessional tension of the first half of the seventeenth century produced an abundance of polemical images, and Luther's image was used in satirical and purely polemical broadsheets to counter similar products from the Catholic opposition. They showed him as a prophet, as the angel of the Apocalypse and as the conqueror of the apocalyptic beast.<sup>86</sup> It is no coincidence that some of the legendary Luther images mentioned in eighteenth-century works derived their reputations from incidents said to have occurred during the Thirty Years' War, for example, those of Würzen and Wittenberg. The Oberrossla portrait was removed, decapitated and rediscovered in this period, while the Luther cell and bed in Magdeburg proved their incombustibility when that city was burned down during the infamous sack of 1631.

Seen in this light, the "incombustible Luthers" were part of a continuing tradition of Protestant and Catholic polemic. A painting from the second half of the sixteenth century, which was still hanging in the Eisleben Luther-house at the beginning of the nineteenth, shows the polemical potential of the theme. It showed Luther's appearance before the emperor at Worms in the form of Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to adore a pagan idol (which has the features of the emperor!). In the background, Luther and two companions are depicted in the fiery furnace, protected from its flames by an angel.<sup>87</sup> We have already seen the beginnings of a Catholic polemical tradition of burnings of Luther in effigy in 1522. This tradition continued until the nineteenth century. In Tyrol Luther and Katherina von Bora were burned on St. John's day in an interesting adaptation of the St. John's day fire (was this a Catholic version of the "Reformation of popular culture"?).<sup>88</sup> In the lower Inn valley, boys made a "Lotter" from straw and rags, trundled him around the village in a cart and then burned him like a guy.<sup>89</sup> In Rottenburg on the Neckar, in Catholic Swabia, there was a similar St. John's day

<sup>85</sup> Schoepffer, *Lutherus non combustus*, p. 38.

<sup>86</sup> Kastner, *Geistlicher Rauffhandel*, pp. 307-33, esp. plates 14-15 on pp. 308, 320.

<sup>87</sup> Berger, *Kurze Beschreibung der Merkwürdigkeiten*, pp. 22-8.

<sup>88</sup> J. V. Zingele, *Sitten, Bräuche und Meinungen des Tiroler Volkes* (Innsbrück, 1871), p. 159.

<sup>89</sup> Ludwig von Hörmann, *Tiroler Volksleben* (Stuttgart, 1909), p. 119.

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

Sankt Johannes sacrata	Holy St. John
Muss den Martin Luther braten	We must roast Martin Luther
Muss ihn mit Zibeben specken	Lard him with onions
Muss ihn dem Teufel schicken	And send him to the devil. <sup>90</sup>

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.<sup>91</sup> 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

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

<sup>91</sup> 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, Weisheitsgeschehen*, pp. 286-305.

future Reformer.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, within six years of Luther's death, his "prophecies" had been collected and published, and five such collections appeared between 1552 and 1559.<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup> The collection published in 1559 by Georg Walther, pastor in Halle in Saxony, was reissued in 1576.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> Works enumerating Luther's prophecies continued to appear up to the nineteenth century, with one important collection published in 1718,<sup>98</sup> and others appearing as late as 1829, 1846 and 1853.<sup>99</sup> 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

<sup>92</sup> 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.

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

<sup>94</sup> Listed *ibid.*, p. 74, n. 6.

<sup>95</sup> P. Glaser, *Hundert und zwanzig Prophecyunge, oder Weissagung des Ehrwürdigen Vaters Herrn Doctoris Martini Luthers* (Eisleben, 1557), copy at Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart (hereafter WLBS.), Theol. qto. 4308; P. Glaser, *Zwei Hundert Prophecyunge oder weissagung des tewren Manns D. Martini Luthers* (Bautzen, 1574), copy at WLBS., Theol. oct. 11263.

<sup>96</sup> G. Walther, *Prophezeiungen D. Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1559): I have not been able to locate a copy of this edition; G. Walther, *Prophezeyung Doctoris Martini Lutheri* (Frankfurt, 1576), copy at WLBS., Theol. fol. 1091.

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

<sup>98</sup> Heinrich Wurtzer, *Lutherus Reformator* (Hamburg, 1718), copy at Brit. Lib., 1353.c.4.

<sup>99</sup> *Merkwürdige Prophezeiungen des ehrwürdigen, von Gott erleuchteten Mannes Doctoris Martini Luther . . . herausgegeben von einem Freunde gottlicher Wahrheit* (Stuttgart, 1829); *Prophezeiungen 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.

fulfilment in that second great war of religion in the seventeenth century.<sup>100</sup>

It is in the context of such prophecies that we must set the sweating image of Oberrossla. When the image began to sweat in 1651, the preacher had been citing a passage from Luther's preface to the prophet Haggai. Haggai was the first prophet sent to the people of Israel after their captivity in Babylon, and he was charged with restoring the temple and true worship in Jerusalem. The parallel with Luther is obvious, the more so since the occasion of the sermon was the Sunday following Luther's birthday (10 November).<sup>101</sup> Luther's preface points out that the people of Israel would not help rebuild the temple, but selfishly devoted themselves to their own needs. For this reason they were plagued with dearth and hunger, showing how God punished those who would not support his Word or his servants. (Luther's exposition of Psalm 127 had a similar theme.) This passage clearly had a prophetic ring to it, mentioned in a sermon on the horrors of devastation Germany had just experienced in a war of religion. It echoes the view of a work published to mark Luther's death in 1546, which stressed that he often prophesied God's anger and heavy rod over his people.<sup>102</sup>

The link between prophecy and miracle in early Lutheranism was direct and unabashed. I have already cited the view of Antonius Probus from 1583 that God did not send great prophets unless miracles accompanied them. Some seven years before, Johann Lapaueus had produced not only a list of Luther's prophecies, but also the first direct evidence of his miracles.<sup>103</sup> It became a stock topos of

<sup>100</sup> Probus, *Oratio de vocatione*, fol. 44<sup>v</sup>; Philippus Schmidt, *Geistreiche Prophetische Weissagungen* (Wittenberg, 1620), p. 60. From the middle years of the sixteenth century, Luther seems to have been established as a prophet of woe, rather than of joy (as he was seen in the 1520s): see Antonius Otto Hertzberger, *Etliche Propheceyspruche D. Martini Lutheri, des dritten Elias* (n.p., 1552), copy at WLBS., Theol. qto. Kaps. 338, whose introductory epistle emphasized that "Luther hat Micha Geist im weissagen" ("Luther has Micha's spirit of prophecy"). The same tone is echoed in two poems published to mourn Luther's death: *Ein Neues Lied von dem heiligen man Gottes unserm lieben Vater Doctor Martin Luther in Gott verschieden Anno 1546* (s.d. & l.), copy at Brit. Lib., 11522.de.24, fol. A3<sup>v</sup>: "Vil ubels ist nu verhanden/Warnt uns der heylig man". For the second poem, see n. 102 below.

<sup>101</sup> *Merkwürdige und auserlesene Geschichte* (1685), p. 377.

<sup>102</sup> *Luthers Werke, Deutsche Bibel* ii/2, p. 320; for Psalm 127, *Luthers Werke*, xv, pp. 360-78; *Epitaphium Des Ehrwürdigen Herrn und Vaters Martini Luthers* (Wittenberg, 1546), copy at Brit. Lib., 3905.bb.92, fol. A4<sup>v</sup>: "Auch Gottes Zorn und schwere Ruth/Offt angesagt, dem Volck zu gut." In the context it is also unnecessary to emphasize the social control function involved in the use of such material.

<sup>103</sup> Lapaueus, *Warhafftige Prophezeiungen des thewren Prophetan und heiligen Mannes Gottes D. Martini Lutheri*, fol. 5<sup>f</sup>., arguing that Luther "durch sein kreffttige Gebet  
(cont. on p. 65)

Lutheran literature, from then until well into the eighteenth century, to speak of Luther's miracles (*Wunderwerke*).<sup>104</sup> The trend was no doubt reinforced by the constant challenge from Catholics: if Luther was a prophet, where were his miracles? This charge was hurled at the Lutherans afresh in 1622, in a pamphlet entitled *Lutheri Manes* (*Luther's Spirit*), which mocked the recent jubilee of 1617, and especially praise of him as a "man of God", an apostle, another Paul, another John the Baptist, a Moses and a prophet. Where, it demanded, was Luther mentioned in the Bible, and when had he produced any miracles?<sup>105</sup>

Moreover Catholics could always produce fresh miracles to support their claim to hold the true belief. Several turned up during the Thirty Years' War, including a crucifix which proved to be incombustible when Swedish soldiers tried to burn it in 1634.<sup>106</sup> That this is the same date as the first "incombustible Luther" is probably coincidental. However, it established a tradition in its parish (in Saulgau in Swabia), where the miracle was commemorated in 1734 by a special procession and the commissioning of a depiction of the event.<sup>107</sup> Other Catholic stories concerned images of the saints which returned to their places after they had been discarded by parish communities which had turned Lutheran.<sup>108</sup> These were echoed rather feebly by the return of the decapitated Luther image of Oberrossla. Another Catholic tale told of a Swede who cut off the right hand of an image of the Virgin in Ellwangen, and found that his own right hand gradually began to rot.<sup>109</sup> This kind of divine justice for a blasphemous attack on a holy image has a structural parallel in a tale of another Luther image, this time in Strasbourg. In 1657 a butcher's apprentice was said to have thrown a knife in anger at a portrait of Luther, aiming to put out the eye of the image, but the knife rebounded and pierced his own eye.<sup>110</sup>

(n. 103 cont.)

Wunderzeichen habe thun können" ("through his powerful prayers, he was able to work miracles"), citing the evidence of the Gotha Reformer, Friedrich Myconius, who was healed of a terminal illness through Luther's prayers.

<sup>104</sup> On Luther's *Wunderwerke*, see especially G. Glöccerus, *Warhafftige Historia und grundlicher summarischer Bericht von der Lehr, Leben und Beruff und seligen Abschied des Doctor Martini Lutheri* (Strasbourg, 1586), copy at Brit. Lib., 4888.a.20, fol. 15<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>105</sup> *Lutheri Manes, das ist D. Martin Luthers abgeleitbter Geist, Anno 1617 und 1618* (n.p., 1622), copy at Brit. Lib., 1347.d.32.

<sup>106</sup> Birlinger, *Volkstümliches aus Schwaben*, ii, p. 425, no. 650.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 421, 422 n.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>110</sup> A. Stöber, *Die Sagen des Elsasses* (St. Gallen, 1858), p. 421.

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.<sup>111</sup> In 1699 Gottfried Arnold mentioned the practice of cutting splinters from Luther's bed in Eisleben as relics.<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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 venerators of the "holy wood", the pastor even advertising it in a local newspaper.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup>

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

<sup>111</sup> Berger, *Kurze Beschreibung der Merkwürdigkeiten*, p. 165.

<sup>112</sup> G. Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirche-und Ketzter-historie* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1699), pt. II, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> Cited by Goetze, *De reliquiss Lutheri*, p. 32.

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

<sup>115</sup> 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 Pfarrerberblatt*.

burned down to prevent it becoming the site of a cult.<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup> 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

<sup>116</sup> Schoepffer, *Unverbrannter Luther*, pt. 2, p. 80.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, Weickhmann's preface on fol. i4<sup>r</sup>.

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

incredulity, the result was the same: church leaders effectively created a cult of Saint Luther, which they popularized for over three centuries, until well into the nineteenth century.

Gerald Strauss suggested a few years ago that we should re-evaluate the presumed success of the Reformation at the grass roots, arguing that it seemed to have made little real impact among the masses.<sup>119</sup> That a need was felt to promote piety, confessional solidarity and self-confidence through the use of material such as the “incombustible Luther” suggests that Lutheran churchmen were aware of this as well. Indeed, at the level of the Lutheran ministry we are justified in speaking of a syncretism with Catholic forms, which occurred in the use of images and of elements from pre-Reformation religious culture. We should not be surprised to find it occurring to even greater measure at a popular level, among the broad mass of lay people. Our study of “incombustible Luther” suggests that the Reformation was neither as radical nor as successful a break with the past as traditional Reformation historiography has led us to believe. There is an entirely new field of research to be explored, the nature of popular Lutheranism.<sup>120</sup> As we have seen from this preliminary dip into the subject, the results could be quite surprising.

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<sup>119</sup> Gerald Strauss, “Success and Failure in the German Reformation”, *Past and Present*, no. 67 (May 1975), pp. 30-63; at greater length in *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore, 1978), and Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, “Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany”, *Past and Present*, no. 104 (Aug. 1984), pp. 31-55.

<sup>120</sup> So far there has been little by way of follow-up to the work of E. W. Zeeden, *Martin Luther und die Reformation im Urteil*, and his *Katholische Überlieferungen in den lutherischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Münster, 1959), although the valuable collection edited by Brückner, *Volkserzählung und Reformation*, shows the range and variety of the sources.