

Albrecht Dürer (and workshop?)

Saint George Killing the Dragon, 1501–1505

Woodcut

Minneapolis Institute of Art, gift of Miss Tessie Jones in memory of her parents,
Mr. and Mrs. Herschel V. Jones P.13,770

George was the patron saint of Mansfeld. The local church where Martin Luther served as an altar boy was dedicated to Saint George, and the familiar scene of the mounted knight slaying a dragon would have appeared on the church as well as on any official buildings in the community. By killing the dragon, George saved a princess about to be sacrificed to the beast; since he protected himself with the sign of the cross, he persuaded pagans to convert to Christianity. Luther later disregarded the role of saints as heavenly go-betweens interceding with God on behalf of humans, but this story of Saint George remained meaningful to him. When he was in hiding, he assumed the identity of George the Knight, a portrayal associated with Luther long after his death.

Central German workshop

Pulpit of Luther's last sermon, 1518

Oak, linden, pine, paper, iron, paint, gilding

Evangelische Kirchengemeinde St. Andreas-Petri-Nicolai, Lutherstadt Eisleben

Standing in this pulpit on February 15, 1546, Luther closed his final sermon with the words, “. . . I am too weak, so we want to leave it at that.” Three days later, he passed away. For centuries pilgrims have traveled to stand before this pulpit, a monument of Protestantism in Saint Andrew's Church in Eisleben.

During recent repair work a chalk inscription came to light, revealing the date of the pulpit's construction: 1518. It can now be identified as one of the first pulpits installed during the time when Luther elevated the role of sermons in church services.

The radiant Virgin Mary presides as Queen of Heaven, crowned by angels beneath a starry night sky. Sometime after 1525 and probably before 1600, the pulpit was repainted with images of Saints Catherine, Martin, Andrew, and John the Evangelist. The first two may be nods to Luther and his wife, Katharina, while Andrew stands for the church itself and John for the evangelical words preached from the pulpit.

The use of Catholic saints to honor Luther and Katharina seems surprising. Yet such blurring of religious lines was more common than we might imagine. Count Hoyer VI of Mansfeld, whose bronze tomb effigy is in this exhibition, demanded that his subjects get along, whether Protestant or Catholic. He even required that both sects share Saint Andrew's Church. The images on the pulpit may be an instance of such accommodation.

After Lucas Cranach the Elder

Martin Luther on His Deathbed, after 1600

Oil on oak

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin

Two artists rushed to Luther's deathbed to record his likeness for the last time. Lucas Cranach the Elder was not at his friend's side at this time but used one of the other artist's sketches to paint Luther as a dead or dying man. Cranach's painting proved so popular that copies such as this one were produced for decades afterward, an indication of the continuing theological significance and discussion of Luther's life and death.

The close-up view shows Luther passing away gently, resting on white cushions resembling heavenly clouds. Such depictions reinforce eyewitness accounts of his passing. Together they refute Catholic propaganda that Luther struggled with the devil or went to hell after his death. The peaceful expression on Luther's face alludes to his conviction that a firm belief in God and salvation is all a Christian needs to prepare for a peaceful death. This was important because plague, disease, war, and famine raised fears that death could come to anyone without warning.

Unknown German artist, based on a model from the Cranach workshop

Portraits Commemorating Luther's Death, 1546

Woodcut, colored, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Inscription above Katharina von Bora: Portrait of Katharina Dr. Martin Luther's surviving widow in mourning

Inscription above Luther: The venerable Doctor Martin Luther's Christian passing from this world. 1546

These two portrait prints commemorating the death of Martin Luther appeared the year he died. The text next to the portrait of Luther describes his peaceful death, to refute his opponents' claim that he died in agony. Luther's wife, Katharina von Bora, holds a small book and wears a long, fur-trimmed cape over her dress. Her white cap trimmed with a floor-length ribbon was typical mourning attire. The ribbon draped over her mouth signals her mourning in silent contemplation. The verses beside her image are based on the Proverbs of Solomon and recite the merits of a good and pious wife, the bond between two spouses, and the mourning over the loss when one of the two is called home by God.

Lucas Cranach the Younger and workshop

Martin Luther, c. 1560–1580

Print assembled from eleven separate woodcuts

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

This monumental portrait of Martin Luther is composed of eleven separate woodcut prints. The reformer holds a book, the traditional attribute of scholars but in this case also an obvious reference to his own writings, especially the translation of the Bible into German. About half a dozen of these woodcut prints survive today, but they must originally have been much more numerous, especially as they are known to have been reprinted in the 1580s.

The elaborate architectural frame resembles contemporary triumphal arches, and the honored parties are easily identified. Near the top of the columns we see the Saxon coat of arms and Luther's rose seal.

Unknown artist

“Unburned Luther,” 1583

Oil on wood

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

This modest portrait was painted in the second half of the 1500s for the front of Luther’s birthplace in Eisleben and remained there until 1680. Shortly after it was removed, fire raged through the town and destroyed the building. The owner of the house remarked that it might still be standing if only the image had been left in place. She clearly assigned some kind of protective power to the picture. As the years passed, a legend grew about the painting: the picture had miraculously withstood the raging flames, which had been unable to harm it.

Jacob Johann Marchand

Debate lectern, after 1685

Wood, carved, painted, and leaf gilded

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

This lectern was the site of important debates at Wittenberg University for nearly 150 years. It was an appropriate monument to Martin Luther, who had originally intended his Ninety-Five Theses to open a scholarly debate about indulgences. Those who used this podium followed the example of Luther as a seeker of truth.

Along with Luther's motto, *Verbo solo* (through the word alone), the front wall shows the crests of the university's three classical studies faculties: medicine, law, and philosophy. The second wall alludes to the founding of the university. In the center is a portrait of Martin Pollich, the first rector. To his left is the "new" seal of the university (adopted in 1514), featuring a portrait of Elector Frederick the Wise. To the right is the "old" seal from 1502 showing Saint Augustine, who continued to represent the faculty of theology. The rear wall contains a portrait of Luther positioned so that he looked over the shoulder of the presiding officer at every debate. Above Luther is a Crucifixion scene with the words *Fide sola* (faith alone), meaning that humankind obtains eternal life through faith alone. At the very top we see God's name in golden Hebrew script—literally the word of God.

Unknown artist

Luther Writing His Theses on the Door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg—the Dream Which Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony Had in Schweinitz in

1517, 1617

Woodcut, typographic printing

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

In 1617, many treatises, broadsides, and medals marked the hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, triggered by Luther's reputed nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517. This broadside illustrates a dream that Elector Frederick the Wise supposedly had over and over in the nights leading up to that fateful day.

The dream is presented as divine inspiration to Frederick: "... thus God bade me to permit the monk to write something on my Castle Church in Wittenberg, which I should not regret." Frederick recalled that in the dream the monk at the Castle Church door "... wielded a quill of such length that its rear end extended even to Rome, where it went into the ear of a lion which lay there and out on the other side, where it extended further until it struck the triple crown of his Holiness the Pope so hard that it began to wobble and appeared to fall off the head of his Holiness."

Floral verdure with exotic birds

Flemish, presumably Bruges, c. 1530

Linen (warp); wool, dyed (weft); woven

Stiftung Dome und Schlösser in Sachsen-Anhalt, Kunstmuseum Moritzburg
Halle (Saale)

This fragmentary wall hanging is a rare surviving example of the precious Gobelin tapestries frequently imported from Flanders to central Germany. Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg imported large quantities of these sumptuous luxury goods, which were prized throughout Europe. The fragment here was probably reused to decorate a church altar.

The stylized flowers have been identified as carnations, poppies, and South American alstroemeria. Exotic birds (rose-ringed parakeets and a sunbird from western Asia) and a white butterfly flutter among the plants.

Veit Thiem

Epitaph for the Heidelberg Family, 1561

Tempera and oil on wood

Lutherstadt Eisleben (on loan to Luther's birthplace in Eisleben)

In the foreground of this epitaph (memorial painting), dated 1561, we see the family of the councilman and mining entrepreneur Jacob Heidelberg. This painting was displayed in Eisleben's cemetery, which opened in 1533 and had niches to protect paintings like this. Such paintings were unique to Eisleben and are closely associated with Luther and his teachings. Frequent themes of these works include Jesus' life and resurrection, and confessions of faith. In many cases, they depict complex theological subjects.

Beyond the Heidelberg family, we see scenes of resurrection from the Bible: the vision of Ezekiel, Jesus reviving Lazarus, and Jesus risen from his tomb. Jesus overpowers a beast, the Antichrist, using a staff bearing a banner that reads, "Christ's death is the sinner's justice." Jesus' right leg stands on a skeleton, the symbol of death.

Unknown sculptor, after Lucas Cranach the Elder

Wooden model for Luther's tombstone, 1548

Linden, painted

Evangelische Andreaskirche Erfurt

This is the oldest known Luther monument. It is the model for a bronze plate intended to cover Luther's grave in the Castle Church of Wittenberg. Elector John Frederick honored Luther by allowing him to be buried near the royal family. He also ordered a bronze plate with a life-size full-length portrait, a type usually reserved for rulers. The figure is based on the design used for a 1546 memorial woodcut of Luther, also displayed in this room.

The bronze was cast by a bell maker in the city of Erfurt, but due to John Frederick's loss of territory after his capture at the Battle of Mühlberg, the plate never reached Luther's grave. This wooden model remained in Erfurt, where it has been on public display since 1727. The lower inscription was cut out and remounted for upright display.

Weapons of the Peasants' Revolt

Morning star

Holy Roman Empire, 16th century

Wood, iron

Fishing spear

Holy Roman Empire, 16th–18th centuries

Wood, iron

Large knife (“Bauernwehr”)

Holy Roman Empire, c. 1500

Iron

Morning star with grappling hook

Holy Roman Empire, 16th century

Wood, iron

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin

Starting at the end of the 1400s, the Holy Roman Empire was repeatedly shaken by peasants' uprisings. Yet another outbreak occurred in the summer of 1524, but this time it began simultaneously in several locations and started to spread over large parts of the empire. Bands of several thousand peasants stormed and destroyed castles and monasteries, the perceived headquarters of their oppressors. The German nobility took months to organize an effective reaction, but when they did, the nobles were ruthless.

Though the peasants outnumbered the nobles' professional armies, they were largely untrained and inexperienced, resulting in miserable defeats. In some cases, the peasants seized guns and cannons, turning them on their enemies, but mostly they had to rely on improvised weapons like the ones you see here, often adapted from everyday tools. Ultimately, the peasants never fully unified around a common goal that might have turned their rebellion into a true revolution.

Unknown artist

**Birth of a Deformed Calf in Freiberg in the Year 1522
(Monk Calf), c. 1522**

Colored woodcut, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Inscription below: This strange animal was born from a cow at Freiberg in Meissen / on Thursday after the feast of the Conception of Mary in the year 1522 A.D., actual / depiction. The animal is not rough, but smooth, with no hair.

In December 1522, a deformed calf was born in Freiberg, Saxony, whose appearance attracted such attention that broadsheets were printed about it. This is one of them. The animal's hair was blotchy and exposed a bald patch with two boils on the back of the head resembling a monk's tonsure (partially shaved head). On its back was a pointy fold of skin, giving it the appearance of wearing a hooded monk's habit.

This calf would develop into one of the most successful images of the Reformation period: the "monk calf." It was initially used by Luther's opponents to ridicule him, but Luther put a new spin on the image. He transformed the calf into a potent weapon against the old church as a satire ridiculing those who remained monks.

Attributed to Matthias Gerung

German, c. 1500–1570

Devil Selling Indulgences, c. 1520

Woodcut

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

The devil squats on a letter of indulgence. It holds a bishop's staff and clutches a strongbox to hold the profits from the sale of indulgences. It soaks its foot in a pail of holy water. Five clerics sitting around a table occupy its gaping mouth. On the top of its head, a purgatory fire burns, with a cauldron hanging over it from a branch. Humanoid creatures with birdlike heads inhabit this fiery realm. Two smaller demons approach in flight: the upper one holds a cleric, the lower one the pope.

This broadsheet clearly decries the sale of indulgences by the clergy, accusing them of consorting with the devil.

Martin Luther

Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder (illustrations)

German, 1472–1553

Eight antipapal satires, 1545

Woodcuts, handwritten inscriptions

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

In March 1545, Pope Paul III announced the Council of Trent, a meeting of high church officials and expert theologians. Their goal was to address the challenges of the Reformation. Luther saw that it was time again to summarize his accusations and renew his criticism of the pope. The eight woodcuts seen here are trial proofs of images intended to illustrate a series of leaflets. Luther composed the inscriptions, which initially were handwritten and later printed.

The Birth of the Pope and the Cardinals (Sheet 1)

Caption: Here the Antichrist is born; his wet nurse is Megera, and his nanny Alecto, while Tisiphone leads him on

A monstrous, squatting fury (a goddess of vengeance) squeezes the figures of the pope and five cardinals out of her behind. One of the cardinals resembles Luther's enemy Albert of Brandenburg. Meanwhile, three smaller furies attend to young popes, all wearing tiaras: Alecto, the fury of anger, rocks a baby pope in his cradle; Megera, the fury of jealousy, nurses an infant pope; and Tisiphone, the fury of retribution, teaches a toddler pope to walk.

In a letter to one of his allies, Luther explained his intentions behind this caricature. He stated his opinion that the pope and his cardinals were creatures of the devil, who had bestowed upon them as a birthright all of his envy, hate, and greed, along with all other evils.

The Papal Ass, a Monstrosity Found in the Tiber at Rome in 1496 (Sheet 2)

Caption: How God himself thinks of the papacy is shown by the terrible image displayed here, which should cause all men to recoil in horror, if they would only take it to their hearts

In January of 1496, receding floodwaters left a monstrosity on the banks of Rome's Tiber River. It was described as a woman with the head of a donkey and animal extremities. It quickly inspired satirical portrayals of the pope, and the Cranach workshop cartoonists recycled the motif here nearly fifty years later. A naked, scaly female figure with a donkey's head stands on the banks of the Tiber. Above the castle across the Tiber waves a papal flag bearing the crossed keys of Saint Peter.

The Pope's Feet About to Be Kissed (Sheet 3)

Caption: Do not, Pope, attempt to scare us with your ban, and be not such an angry man, lest we turn to take up the fight, by showing you a pretty sight

Under a canopy decorated with the lilies of his Farnese family crest, Pope Paul III sits on his throne, flanked by two cardinals. The one to his left is Albert of Brandenburg, Luther's foe. The pope holds a papal bull, which spews flames, rocks, and rays where ribbons and seals would normally hang. This document was meant to announce the Council of Trent. Luther was strictly opposed to the council because it targeted the Reformation.

The pope presents his left foot, as if expecting it to be kissed in submission. The two figures before him, however, have turned their backs and mock him. They have dropped their trousers to release unmistakable clouds of gas.

The Pope: Doctor of Theology and Master of the Faith (Sheet 4)

Caption: The pope alone can construe scripture and eradicate all untruth, just as the donkey alone can play the pipes and hit every single note just right

A donkey wearing a tiara and a cloak sits enthroned beneath a canopy, playing bagpipes with the help of his front hooves. The Farnese family lily on the tiara identifies this donkey as Pope Paul III, and Luther's caption brazenly questions the pope's ability to interpret the Gospel.

The Adoration of the Pope as God on Earth (Sheet 5)

Caption: The pope has done with the kingdom of Christ as his tiara is being treated here . . .

Three men, possibly peasants or mercenaries, use the papal tiara as a toilet. As a young man relieves himself, his older companions wait their turns. The pedestal is ornamented with a large coat of arms displaying the two crossed keys of Saint Peter, symbolizing the papacy, but in this case their ends have been altered to resemble lock picks or thieves' hooks.

The Pope Granting a Council to Germany (Sheet 6)

Caption: Sow, you will have to let yourself be ridden and be spurred on both sides if you want a council. In that case you will have to accept my dung

The pope rides a sow (a female pig). His right hand offers blessing while his left offers a pile of steaming excrement to the swine, which eagerly sniffs the fumes. The scene refers to an incident in the spring of 1545: the sow symbolizes the representatives of the imperial and Christian German Nation who had been invited by Pope Paul III to the Council of Trent. The pope allegedly threatened Emperor Charles V, saying, “We will teach you and your German sows better than to demand a council of the Holy Roman See.”

The Pope Repaying the Temporal Rulers Their Manifold Kindness (Sheet 7)

Caption: Much kindness have the emperors shown to the pope (but this was badly misplaced), for which the pope has given them thanks, just as this image shows you in truth

The pope, acting as an executioner, wears a tiara topped by a small devil within a halo of rays. He raises the sword to deliver the fatal blow to his victim, a king who kneels in prayer.

The Just Reward for the Satanic Pope and His Cardinals (Sheet 8)

Caption: If the pope and his cardinals were to receive an earthly punishment in our time, their blasphemous tongues would truly deserve the fate you see depicted here

The tone of the series suddenly turns serious in this final image. Four people are seen hanging from a gallows. Their tongues have been cut out and nailed to the beams by the executioner, who finishes the job as demons carry off the souls of the dead.

The cardinal on the left is Albert of Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther bore a particular grudge against him, commenting, “. . . no lord has ever replied to me so kindly and condescendingly as Bishop Albert. I truly believed him to be an angel, but he is possessed by master of a devil, who, while he appeared most pleasing on the outside, spoke against us Lutheran knaves under this cover, and omitted nothing in his power in acting against our teaching. I verily believe I have been duped in my deep faith in this evil man. But, no matter, what is gone is gone, and he himself must go that way too.”

Attributed to Erhard Schön

German, c. 1491–1542

The Devil's Bagpipe, c. 1530–1535

Colored woodcut, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Inscription: In times past I would blow here and there /
On pipes like these and more, without a care / Much
fable, dream, and fantasy / Is now asunder, no more to
see / This hard news brings me sorrow and grief / But I
hope it will be brief / Because the world is so enamored /
With sin, treachery, and a malicious manner.

The devil plays a bagpipe shaped like the head of a monk. The mouthpiece through which the demon blows is attached to the monk's ear; thus, the devil delivers his cunning tricks and evil directly into the minds of the clergy.

The verses in the lower right corner voice the devil's lament that the days of piping his lies are over—this thanks to the new reforms. Still, the devil hopes that the world will soon return to its sinful ways, a warning to Luther's followers not to stray.

Sebald Beham

German, 1500–1550

Protestant Satire on the Eucharist, early 1520s

Ink on paper

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

A goat in priestly garb enters a room where three men surround a table. The goat carries a plate heaped with food. The man in the foreground turns to him, wielding a pair of shears. The figure behind him points to the third man, whose left hand is raised, perhaps signaling rejection of the offering.

The image seems to focus on one of Luther's detractors, Hieronymus Emser (1477–1527), whose family crest featured the bust of a goat. Emser and Luther battled each other in print. Luther taunted his foe as “Bock Emser”—Emser the goat—and assigned him a beard, snout, and horns.

Luther wrote that Emser's writings were lies and poison, which may be the point of this drawing. One man wants the goat to pass him by and, alarmed by what the goat has to offer, the other raises his hand to refuse. The shears could lay bare the goat and his lies.

Abraham Nagel

Active c. 1572–1591

The Heresy Tree, 1589

Woodcut

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Inscription above: Delineation of the evil Lutheran tree: this is the true make-up and conception of the evil and unfruitful Luther or Heresy Tree. . . .

The roots of the Heresy Tree are made up of earlier heretics, including Jan Hus, the Czech reformer excommunicated in 1409 and burned at the stake in 1415 for refusing to recant his criticism of the Catholic Church. The devil uses his garden fork to cultivate the tree. The tree's many branches sprout from a seven-headed Luther, a reuse of the imagery in the 1529 woodcut (shown nearby). The branches lead to division, confusion, and violent conflict. Above Luther is a portrait of Philip Melanchthon, Luther's colleague and collaborator, accompanied by a scroll with the words "SOROR MEA SPONSA" (my sister, my bride). This refers to the medieval imagery of the Virgin Mary seated in her fenced-in paradise, but here Melanchthon is portrayed as Luther's bride amid the thorns of chaos.

Unknown artist

Luther Triumphant, after 1568

Etching

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The broadside *Luther Triumphant* responds to Catholic attacks on Protestant disunity. To the right are the pope with his supporters, on the left Luther's collaborator Philip Melanchthon and other prominent Protestants. Catholic priests hold relics and other symbols of a false way to God according to Luther. Dominican monks carry torches and swords used to torture victims of their inquisitions. A Jesuit dips his pen into the rear of a demonic beast, making clear the source of his theology.

On the other side, Melanchthon raises his pen, symbolizing the power of Protestant teaching. Luther, both legs firmly planted on the ground, holds the Bible in his hands. By contrast, Pope Leo X has tossed aside authoritative books, and the papal insignia—the key to heaven and the double-edged sword that protects the helpless and punishes heretics—crumbles in his hands. The pope's throne wobbles precariously; only the long forks of the Jesuits prop it up. According to this image, the pope and his church are doomed.

Unknown German artist

Fool and Trickster, c. 1525

Colored woodcut, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Here we see a topsy-turvy creature whose two heads are connected so that they share a mouth. Turned one way, it looks like a man wearing a red cardinal's hat. Turned the other way, it looks like a jester in a colorful dunce cap with donkey ears and jingle bells. In this direction, the label says "Narr" (fool). But when the cardinal's hat is right-side up, the other label does not say "cardinal" as we might expect. Instead it reads "Uoppart" (teaser). The cardinal is presented as a fraud, as a trickster.

Hans Brosamer

German, c. 1500–1552

Duke George of Saxony, called the Bearded, after 1534 Woodcut, colored

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Duke George of Saxony was a cousin of Frederick the Wise. Like Frederick, George was a member of the elite Order of the Golden Fleece; we can glimpse the order's gold collar in the lower corners of the portrait. Unlike Frederick, George was a bitter enemy of Luther's teachings and Luther himself. He outlawed Luther's writings and ideas. He cracked down on the peasant uprisings and blamed them on Luther. Upon learning in the last years of his life that his younger brother and intended successor had become a Lutheran, George sought to have his realm pass to the Habsburg family, something prevented only by his unexpected death in 1539.

Attributed to Erhard Schön

German, c. 1491–1542

Hans Guldenmund (printer)

Cardinal Matthew Lang of Wellenburg, Archbishop of Salzburg, c. 1534

Woodcut, colored, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Matthew (Matthäus) Lang came from a poor but upper-class family. He studied theology and law, then rose to become secretary to King Maximilian I, the future Holy Roman emperor. He frequently traveled all over Europe as a political envoy. He also climbed the career ladder in the church, eventually being elevated to cardinal by Pope Julius II in 1511 and becoming Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg in 1519.

Lang was one of the few high church officials who recognized the magnitude and implications of Lutheran teachings. He strove to thwart them in his own domains by instituting reforms, and he quickly put down peasant uprisings. In the final years of his life, the cardinal attempted to improve territorial government. His primary goal, however, was to forcibly suppress Reformation beliefs, which had spread swiftly throughout the Salzburg region.

Virgil Solis

German, 1514–1562

Defeat and Capture of Elector John Frederick I the Magnanimous of Saxony at Mühlberg, c. 1547

Woodcut printed from two blocks

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The decisive battle between imperial Spanish troops under Emperor Charles V and Protestant troops of the Schmalkaldic League led by Elector John Frederick was fought at Mühlberg on April 24, 1547. The elector and his troops were taken by surprise and suffered a crushing defeat. Despite resisting valiantly and being wounded, John Frederick was captured, brought before Emperor Charles V, and imprisoned.

This bird's-eye view of Mühlberg gives details of the battle. Individual troops advance toward each other in combat in the central field. At the upper left, we see the skirmish where John Frederick is taken prisoner; nearby, the Spanish Duke of Alba kneels before Charles V to deliver the news of victory. Mühlberg and the Elbe River are seen to the right. Protestant soldiers defend the city as Spanish troops approach, some of them swimming across the river.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Judith Dining with Holofernes; The Death of Holofernes, 1531

Mixed techniques on lime wood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The Old Testament book of Judith tells of the conqueror Holofernes, who laid siege to the Jewish city of Bethulia. The elders were close to surrendering the town, but the beautiful widow Judith took matters into her own hands and went to Holofernes' camp, accompanied by her maid. Blinded by her beauty, Holofernes held a feast in order to get closer to her. This is the scene we see in the first painting, where Judith and Holofernes sit at a table.

In the second painting the partygoers enjoy themselves by playing dice, while Holofernes, filled with lust, takes Judith into his tent. Drunk from wine, however, he drifts off to sleep, whereupon Judith cuts off his head and, with the help of her maid, places it in a sack. Judith's heroic act saves Bethulia.

Cranach the Elder portrayed himself on the left of the first picture, next to the apple tree. He painted these pictures to urge Protestant leaders to show courage and cunning, as Judith had.

Unknown German artist

Elector John Frederick I the Magnanimous,

Duke of Saxony, c. 1548

Woodcut, colored, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Inscription: By the grace of God John Frederick Duke of Saxony the Holy Roman Empire's Grand Marshal / and Elector / Landgrave in Thuringia Margrave of Meissen / and Burgrave of Magdeburg, etc.

This print seems to be a last-ditch effort to restore the reputation and position of John Frederick, who had been defeated and captured in the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547. After Charles V's troops had taken him prisoner, his title and much of his territory were transferred to his cousin Maurice in Dresden. John Frederick spent five years in captivity before being released in 1552, two years before his death.

Boot of Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous, before 1547 Leather

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This boot is a war trophy—twice over. It is a souvenir of Emperor Charles V’s capture of Elector John Frederick of Saxony at the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547. Imperial troops seized John Frederick’s boots, which eventually wound up in treasure vaults in Munich. Visitors wondered at the incredible width of the boots, so big “that a boy of four or five years could crawl in.”

A century later, John Frederick’s great-grandsons fought on the side of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in the Thirty Years’ War. Following victories in Bavaria in 1632, the young dukes of Saxe-Weimar received a significant share of treasure plundered from the vaults of the Munich palace, including the boots worn by John Frederick of Saxony. They were passed down through the dukes’ family until they came to Castle Friedenstein in Gotha, their home to this day.

Unknown Flemish artist

John Frederick the Magnanimous and a Spanish Captain Playing Chess, 1548/49

Oil on oak

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

John Frederick the Magnanimous commissioned this painting during his captivity in Brussels (1548–1550). Artist Lucas Cranach the Elder refused John Frederick's requests to follow him into captivity; so the former elector turned to a local artist.

The painting shows John Frederick and another man playing chess. Despite his defeat at the Battle of Mühlberg, John Frederick confidently looks out at the observer. The scar on his left cheek resulted from an injury during the battle. His unidentified opponent in this gentler contest, dressed in Spanish costume, makes a move with one hand while clutching his sword with the other.

After Jacob Lucius

Hungarian, c. 1530–1597

Baptism of Jesus with the Family of Elector John

Frederick and Luther, second half of the 16th century

Woodcut

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

John Frederick of Saxony, the former elector, kneels with family on a riverbank before the Wittenberg skyline. His face bears the scar he received in the Battle of Mühlberg. Standing behind him is Martin Luther, with his right hand on the elector's shoulder and his left hand pointing to the baptism of Jesus at the hands of John the Baptist. The Saxon landscape blends with the biblical scene: the Elbe River becomes the River Jordan, and Wittenberg becomes Jerusalem. The dove of the Holy Spirit hovers over Jesus' head, and God sits enthroned in the clouds above.

The message is that those depicted, like Jesus, are children of God. Luther's presence identifies the noble family as belonging to the Lutheran faith, for which John Frederick risked and lost his electoral office and significant territories, including Wittenberg.

Pancratius Kempff

German, active 1533–1570

Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word, 1547–1549

Colored woodcut

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

This is a broadside, essentially a poster, whose text and image are tightly integrated. The image is divided horizontally into the heavenly and earthly spheres. Above are God the Father, Jesus as Judge of the World, and the dove of the Holy Spirit. The three prayers pasted to the bottom of the sheet relate to these heavenly figures. In the earthly realm are, at left, Luther and male sympathizers, past and present. In the middle, Jesus sends the enemies of Luther into hell. The elegantly dressed women at right bless two children, reflecting the peaceful spirit of the dove.

Luther wrote the song directly below the image and called it a “battle song.” In it he asks God to protect Christendom and to bring death upon its enemies, specifically the Turks (which meant Muslims in general) and the pope.

Enea Vico

Italian, 1523–1567

**The Army of Emperor Charles V Crosses the River
Elbe before the Battle of Mühlberg, 1551**

Engraving

C. G. Boerner, New York

This engraving is the only fruit of an abandoned project to produce a series of prints celebrating the life and victorious battles of Emperor Charles V. The artist, Enea Vico, devised the plan and received support from Cosimo de' Medici, the Duke of Florence. Vico's friend Pietro Aretino enabled the artist to meet the emperor in person in 1550. Vico completed the engraving devoted to the Battle of Mühlberg in 1551, but the project was dropped soon afterward.

The image emphasizes the event's drama and offers less of the historical narrative than Virgil Solis's woodcut shown nearby.

Unknown artist

View of Wittenberg, 1536–1546

Woodcut from three blocks

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Wittenberg developed rapidly after 1485, when it became the residence of Elector Frederick the Wise. His palace, at the west end of town (to the left), included the Castle Church, which also served as the university's church. Luther is said to have nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to its door.

At the center of town, Saint Mary's Church towers over the other buildings. Luther and his friend Johannes Bugenhagen preached there. This is also where Mass was first celebrated in German rather than in Latin and is the first place the bread and wine were given to the entire congregation.

The big building on the east end (the right) of the page is Luther's house, formerly a monastery where Luther lived when he was a monk.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Martin Luther, 1525

Oil on parchment/paper on wood

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Lucas Cranach the Elder painted portraits of Luther and Katharina von Bora as a gift for their wedding on June 13, 1525. The following year, Cranach and his workshop produced many copies of these portraits, small, round ones to be held by Luther's closest friends and larger rectangular ones for display by Luther's followers.

This fine example is from the hand of Cranach himself. It was originally hinged to another small, round likeness of Katharina, such that his gaze would have been directed toward her. The portrait pairing anticipates the Luthers' close partnership, with Katharina running the household and estate, including various farmlands and a brewery, as well as managing the many students drawn to Luther's side.

Lucas Cranach the Elder, workshop

German, 1472–1553

Portraits of Martin Luther (1528) and Katharina von Bora (1528 or later)

Oil on copper beech

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

As early as 1520, Luther called for abolishing the requirement of priestly celibacy (no marriage or sexual relations). Suddenly priests started to marry in increasing numbers. In 1525, Luther himself—a former Augustinian monk—married the former nun Katharina von Bora. Lucas Cranach the Elder, who had sheltered Katharina, witnessed the wedding. Recognizing the political side of this private event, he and his workshop immediately began to turn out portraits of the married couple.

The portraits testify to the couple's public and political role: Luther's marriage to an escaped nun was a clear statement against the doctrine of celibacy. The paintings were mass produced as propaganda. Sent to new Protestant communities, they promoted priestly marriage and publicized the Luthers' status as a Protestant married couple.

Lucas Cranach the Elder, workshop

German, 1472–1553

Portraits of Martin Luther and

Katharina von Bora, 1529

Oil on copper beech

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

Portraits of the Luthers appeared in many variations, but from 1529 on there were certain essential features. Luther appears with a biretta (a square cap with three flat projections on top, usually associated with Catholic priests) and an ordinary black coat that became more identified with him than the long gown of a pastor. Katharina von Bora wears a hairnet and fur collar. She gazes at him, and he addresses the public.

The inscriptions focus on the public roles of the couple. The Latin inscription above Luther, “In silence and hope shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15), stresses trust in God’s grace as a principle of Protestantism. The one above Katharina, “[But] women will be saved through childbearing” (Timothy 2:15), stresses her role as a mother, even though her actual role included management of their finances and of the large household.

Hans Brosamer, after Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, c. 1500–1552

Portraits of Martin Luther and

Katharina von Bora, 1530

Hand-colored woodcut, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Like many of his works, these two woodcuts by Hans Brosamer are heavily influenced by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Here he looked to Cranach's 1529 pair of portraits of Martin Luther and his wife, Katharina von Bora (seen nearby). These prints satisfied increasing demand for images that were cheaper than painted portraits. The multiplicity and ready circulation of these printed images made them ideal tools for swaying public opinion in favor of the controversial marriage of clergy.

The inscription above Katharina identifies her as “Martin's married wife.” Unconventionally, Katharina is on the left side and her husband on the right, the result of image reversal inherent to the printing process. Brosamer could have traced the images in reverse, but he didn't bother.

Hans Brosamer

German, c. 1500–1552

Hans Guldenmund (publisher)

Martin Luther, c. 1530–1540

Hand-colored woodcut, typographic text

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

Inscription: “In silence and hope shall be your strength. ...” (Isaiah 30:15)

This vivid woodcut is one of many portraits of Luther based on Lucas Cranach the Elder’s firsthand observations. The portrait demonstrates how quickly information is lost—though produced in Luther’s lifetime, the print shows the reformer with blue eyes, rather than the brown found in Cranach’s paintings.

Door from the Luther Room, 16th century

Pine, iron, chalk, glass

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The doors bear some of the most intricate carvings in the Luther Room. The upper arches, with their carved palmettes and the curved iron hinges ending in dragon heads, are typical of Renaissance-era ornamentation. Luther and all his early associates must have passed through it.

On the back is a chalk inscription: the name “Peter” in Russian. Russian czar Peter the Great visited the Luther Room in 1712 and reportedly added his own name to the many chalk inscriptions that he saw there. His signature was soon protected by a covering. Peter’s name must have been traced over during the last three hundred years, but the story of his visit reminds us of the widespread and enduring desire for connection with Luther.

Table from the Luther Room, 16th century,
19th-century additions
Pine and birch

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The heavy table is the most prominent piece of furniture in the Luther Room and is associated with Luther's famous gatherings and table talks. The table's form and design are typical of German Renaissance furniture. The retractable top covers compartments for drawers, which have since been lost. The two baseboards lying on the legs are later additions, probably because of wear to the originals. Some chalk graffiti has survived on the sides and the interior of the cabinet, but most was cleaned off when the Luther Room was made into a museum in the 1800s. The table surface shows signs of earlier visitors to the museum who took home slivers of Luther's furniture as souvenirs—something Mia's visitors would never think of doing.

Window seat from the Luther Room, 16th century,
19th-century modifications
Pine

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The window seat was presumably located elsewhere in the Luther House and only moved to its current position when the room was transformed into a museum. This is indicated by its dimensions, which do not match the much broader bays of the Luther Room. The double seat with a backrest on the right served as a place to work by the window, and take advantage of the sunlight. Its side compartments allowed for the storage of small household objects, possibly supplies for needlework, which required good lighting.

Albrecht Dürer

German, 1471–1528

Portrait of Philip Melanchthon, 1526

Engraving

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) was one of the leading figures of the Reformation alongside Martin Luther. Starting in 1518, he taught Greek at the University of Wittenberg. Melanchthon advised Luther on his biblical translations, systematized Lutheran doctrine, and reorganized Lutheran churches in Saxony. Melanchthon's reforms of the educational system gave rise to his nickname, "Germany's teacher."

Albrecht Dürer's engraving is more than just a realistic portrait of the gaunt scholar. The high forehead suggests the brilliant intellect of the sitter. The inscription expresses Dürer's high respect for Melanchthon: "With a skilled hand, Dürer was able to draw Philip's features, but not his spirit."

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Johannes Bugenhagen, 1537

Oil on copper beech

Wittenberg Seminary, Lutherstadt Wittenberg

Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) was an elder of the Protestant movement and longtime associate of Luther. After studying theology on his own, he embraced Luther's ideals and resettled in Wittenberg in order to study directly with Luther. Witty, eloquent, and prolific, Bugenhagen became a popular minister, a highly esteemed university instructor, and an organizer of Protestant churches in central Germany.

Bugenhagen was close friends with Luther. He performed Luther's wedding, baptized his children, and preached the sermon at his funeral. The friendship was playful. Luther could needle his talkative pal, once commenting, "Every priest has to have his personal sacrifice. [Bugenhagen] sacrifices his listeners through his long sermons. That is to say, we are his sacrifices. And today he sacrificed us inordinately."

Heinrich Aldegrever

German, 1502–c. 1558

Martin Luther, 1540

Engraving

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

Inscribed at top: Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

Inscribed at bottom: Luther protected the divine word Christ and restored the faith of those oppressed by cult customs. This portrait describes his face while he is absent; were he here, no one could see him better.

Martin Luther 1540

Like many portraits of Luther, Heinrich Aldegrever's appears to be based on one by Lucas Cranach from about 1528, perhaps by way of the Hans Brosamer woodcut shown in this gallery. This print shows a bust-length three-quarter view of the sitter behind a stone tablet similar to Albrecht Dürer's portrait of Philip Melanchthon also shown here. The inscription on the stone tablet attests to the veracity of the likeness, which was already about twelve years out of date.

Lucas Cranach the Elder and workshop

German, 1472–1553

Portraits of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon,

1540

Oil on copper beech

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

These two small portraits of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon originally may have been a diptych, a hinged pair that could be folded together for traveling. The pair shown here belongs to a series that the workshop began turning out in 1539, giving the sitters a more mature appearance. These would have been seen as old-age portraits. Luther, bare-headed with thin graying hair, holds a closed book. Melanchthon holds a scroll. Although the two friends worked closely together and signaled their unbreakable alliance through the physical attachment of the diptych, Luther's placement on the left section clearly indicates his greater importance according to customs of the time.

Lucas Cranach the Elder and workshop

German, 1472–1553

Martin Luther, c. 1541

Oil on copper beech

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The Cranach workshop offered portraits of Luther in various sizes and degrees of finish. This version would have been appropriate for a wealthy household. Here Luther knits his brows, giving him a sense of concentration and determination. The stubble of his beard adds to the sense that he has been hard at work.

Daniel Hopfer

German, about 1470–1536

Illustrations to Proverbs II: The Hoarders of Grain,

1534, reprinted 1684

Etching

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Inscription above: PROVERBS CHAPTER XII /
PEOPLE CURSE THE ONE WHO HOARDS
GRAIN / BUT THEY PRAY GOD'S BLESSING ON
THE ONE WHO IS WILLING TO SELL /
M DXXXIIII)

The food supply could be precarious in Luther's time, and there was fear of market manipulation. This political cartoon shows a good and a bad grain merchant. At left, a fat merchant sits on his sacks of grain, surrounded by demons, hoarding rather than selling. Angry men from all stations of life implore him to sell. Many believed that profiteers could be driven out only by scaring off the demons.

The good merchant, on the right side of the image, leaves his sacks open in the marketplace. In return, he is blessed by the dove of the Holy Spirit and the hand of God. Instead of hunger and strife, there is plenty.

Furniture from the Luther Room

Since Luther's time, the Luther Room, located on the upper floor of the Luther House in Wittenberg, has been a major attraction for visitors from all over the world because it offers an opportunity to come as close as possible to Luther's world. While the rest of the building has undergone various alterations, this room and its furnishings have been left largely unchanged for centuries as a memorial. The present room decor dates back to the early 1600s; in Luther's time, the wood paneling was likely still unpainted.

The furniture of the Luther Room has been in its current configuration since at least the early 1800s, although items may originally have been in different parts of the house.

Stove tile depicting the Last Judgment

Wittenberg, Arsenalplatz, end of the 16th century

Glazed earthenware

State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt,
State Museum of Prehistory

A Protestant depiction of the Last Judgment (when God assigns the human race its final destiny) adorns this large tile. At the center, Jesus sits enthroned on a rainbow, in his role as ultimate authority of the world. His right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing. Near his head are the lily of mercy and the sword of justice. The Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist kneel prayerfully, and two angels blow their trumpets.

Below, Saint Peter (identified by his keys) admits a woman to paradise, while the devil uses a fork to torment the pope—identified by his tiara. Surrounded by flames, the pope raises his arms, futilely begging for help.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Law and Grace, 1529

Mixed techniques on limewood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This painting summarizes Luther's theology. Divided into two halves by a half-barren and half-blooming tree, *Law and Grace* compares the Old and New Testaments. For Luther, the rule-based theology of the Old Testament led to hell, because sinful mankind could not perfectly comply with the Ten Commandments. He argued instead that salvation and entry into heaven could come only through the grace of God as revealed through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

The painting shown here served as the prototype for many more depictions of this theme. You can explore the complex symbolism of Law and Grace in the infographic to your right.

Albrecht Dürer

German, 1471–1528

The Last Supper, 1523

Woodcut

Private collection, Minneapolis

Was the body and blood of Jesus physically as well as spiritually present in the bread and wine served in the Eucharist, as Roman Catholic theology instructed? Was the Eucharist a sacrament (a ritual) or a sacrifice? Should the wine be reserved for the clergy or made available to the laity? The true nature of the Eucharist provoked infighting among Luther's followers, and Albrecht Dürer—Germany's greatest artist—took notice. In this version of the Last Supper, he placed a bread basket and a wine jug in the foreground, seemingly within reach of the viewer. The plate that held lamb lies empty in the foreground—the physical body is absent, as if to emphasize the Eucharist as a symbolic sacrament, not an actual sacrifice.

Cranach circle

Luther and Hus Giving Communion, c. 1554

Woodcut

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

The woodcut depicts Martin Luther and Jan Hus giving Communion to the princes of the House of Saxony. The movement led by Hus, who had demanded the Eucharist for the laity, was considered a forerunner of the Reformation. In front of the altar, Luther hands the chalice to John the Steadfast, while Frederick the Wise receives Communion from Hus. John Frederick the Magnanimous and his family watch the action.

On the altar is a fountain crowned with a crucifix. The fountain flows with the soul-saving blood from the wounds of the crucified Jesus.

Lucas Cranach the Younger

German, 1515–1586

Christ on the Cross, 1571

Oil on canvas

Wittenberg Seminary, Lutherstadt Wittenberg

Luther saw the Crucifixion as comfort because it expressed God's love of mankind and offered the promise of eternal life. Lucas Cranach the Younger staged the scene to minimize the gore. In contrast to earlier depictions, Jesus' blood is barely visible. He is still alive. His mouth is open, and he speaks. His words are inscribed on the plaques that hang from the cross. In the text on the left, Jesus calls upon us to examine the scene closely so that we can understand the Passion (the last hours of Jesus' life leading up to his crucifixion). The right plaque tells the story of Jesus' death, enabling us to internalize and empathize with Jesus' suffering.

Written and visual representations of the Passion are constant fixtures of Protestant religious observance dating back to Luther and especially to his fellow reformer Philip Melanchthon. They are meant to remind the faithful of their own sins and of the suffering of Jesus.

Heinrich Göding the Elder

German 1531–1606

Luther as Junker Jörg, 1598

Etching

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

After Luther had been officially condemned for failing to retract his writings, Frederick the Wise sheltered him in Wartburg Castle. There, Luther disguised himself as “Junker Jörg” (Knight George), a reference to the dragon-slaying patron saint of his hometown, Mansfeld. Luther used his time in hiding to work on his German translation of the New Testament.

The city in the background is Worms, where Luther stood before Emperor Charles V and other officials and refused to recant his beliefs. The books in the foreground refer to his work on the Bible. The inscription “In Pathmo” likens Luther to Saint John the Evangelist, who wrote the Book of Revelations while isolated in exile on the island of Patmos.

Heinrich Göding made this commemorative portrait in 1598, by which time Luther’s followers had romanticized his life.

Monogrammist W. S. (Wolfgang Stuber)

German, active 1587–1597

Luther as Saint Jerome in His Study, c. 1580

Engraving

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Engraver Wolfgang Stuber took this composition from one of Albrecht Dürer's most famous prints, *Saint Jerome in His Study*, made in 1514. Stuber cast Luther as Saint Jerome, who more than a thousand years earlier had translated the Bible into Latin, a widely spoken language at the time. Luther similarly launched a new church by translating the Bible into German, the leading language of his time and place.

Luther objected to portraits that depicted him as a saint. Stuber half-respected Luther's modesty by eliminating the halo that Dürer put around Jerome's head.

Heinrich Füllmaurer, workshop

German, c. 1505–1546

Gotha Altar, 1539–41

Mixed media on fir panel

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The Gotha Altar presents the most extensive cycle of Reformation-era imagery. On fourteen hinged wings and a stationary center panel, it comprises three scenes from the Old Testament's description of the Creation of the Earth and 157 panels with scenes from the life of Jesus.

The individual scenes are arranged in chronological order from top left to bottom right. Attention is always focused on Jesus, and the narrative climaxes on the final panel with Jesus' arrest, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Contemporary clothing, the absence of halos on the saints, and the charged arguments against the pope all reflect the current affairs of Luther's time.

This "altar" was probably not originally intended for use in a church and can be understood as a deluxe picture-book Bible for the instruction of young Protestant nobles. The upper third of every single panel is filled by a gold-framed passage from the German New Testament that describes the scene depicted. Luther explicitly encouraged the use of images for instructional purposes.

The Gotha Altar is named for its present-day home, in central Germany, where it was mentioned for the first time in 1648.

Albrcht Dürer

German 1471-1528

Saint Jerome in His Study, 1514

Engraving

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Bequest of Herschel V. Jones P.68.145

Albrecht Dürer's prints were rich sources of ideas for other artists. Sixty-five years after Dürer made this print, it inspired the engraving shown to your right, with Luther in the role of Saint Jerome.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

The Virgin and Child Adored by Frederick the Wise of Saxony, c. 1512–1515

Woodcut

Minneapolis Institute of Art, bequest of Herschel V. Jones P.68.136

The superb quality of the design and carving of this woodcut makes it clear that Lucas Cranach knew the importance of the Virgin Mary to Elector Frederick the Wise, his main patron. In 1509, Frederick dedicated his new and enlarged Wittenberg Castle Church complex to Mary and all the saints. It was here that he displayed his fabulous collection of relics, the alleged remnants of saints' bodies, often housed in exquisite containers.

Unlike many of Cranach's woodcuts, this one was not reprinted in later years. Once Frederick became Luther's most powerful ally, it would have been inappropriate to display images of him adoring the Virgin Mary, because Reformation teaching discounted the role of the Virgin and other saints as God's intermediaries. Signaling his change of heart, he closed his relic display in 1522.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Martin Luther as an Augustinian Monk with a Doctor's Cap, 1521

Engraving

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

Lucas Cranach was a friend of Martin Luther, and he engraved this portrait of him—wearing his habit, or monk's clothing—as a doctor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. The inscription reads, “This mortal figure of Luther is Cranach's work, he himself fashioned the eternal portrait of his spirit.”

But there is more to it than that. Ancient coins inspired a revival of profile portraiture during the Renaissance (1300s to 1600s). This is the first appearance of the profile in German engraving, and the only time that Cranach employed it. Profile portraits usually depicted kings and other high-ranking officials, so Cranach is projecting extraordinary political power onto a university professor. Luther was becoming an influential public figure.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Martin Luther as an Augustinian Monk, 1520

Engraving

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

This engraving is the earliest surviving portrait of Martin Luther and includes the inscription, “Luther himself creates an eternal image of his spirit, his mortal features are but the wax of Lucas.” Lucas Cranach made it in 1520, when Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses had already made him famous far beyond Wittenberg. That same year, the pope issued his bull (papal decree) threatening Luther with expulsion from the Catholic Church and demanding that he retract the theses. This was also the year in which Luther started a major publishing campaign with his primary Reformation writings.

Cranach literally shows us the head of the Reformation. The simple composition focuses on Luther’s somber facial features, tonsure (monk’s haircut), and simple robe, identifying him as an Augustinian monk. We don’t know who commissioned the portrait, but it may have been intended as propaganda in advance of the official assembly in the town of Worms, where the Emperor Charles V publicly demanded that Luther retract his Reformation writings. Luther refused.

Unknown artist
After Lucas Cranach the Elder

Martin Luther as an Augustinian Monk, 1520
Woodcut

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

In 1520–1521, Lucas Cranach the Elder produced three engravings with slight variations depicting Luther as an Augustinian monk in three-quarter profile. Of these, the one showing the monk in front of an alcove with a book in his hand became especially popular. Instantly and repeatedly copied, as here, it became the principal way to depict Luther.

Hans Baldung Grien

German, 1484/85–1545

Martin Luther with a Dove, 1521

Woodcut

Thrivent Financial Collection of Religious Art

Hans Baldung Grien took an engraving by Lucas Cranach as his point of departure for this portrait of Martin Luther. But unlike other copyists, he turned Cranach's portrait into a visionary image. Instead of standing before a niche, as Cranach had shown him, Luther is now the focal point of a brilliant halo, and the dove of the Holy Spirit descends upon him. He has become a saint!

Catholics were utterly unsettled by the depiction of Luther as a saint and by his adherents' near-worship of his image. A papal representative reported that Luther's followers purchased such portraits for personal use, kissed them, and carried them around. After Luther was expelled from the church and condemned by the emperor, he disappeared into hiding. This caused many to believe that he had been killed and elevated his stature to that of a martyr (someone killed for religious beliefs). It was an ironic but enduring fate for a man opposed to the worship of images of saints.

**Nuremberg goldsmith's work,
Paul Müllner the Elder (attributed to)**

Small scepters of Wittenberg University, 1502
Silver, partially fire-gilt

Large scepters of Wittenberg University, 1509
Silver, partially fire-gilt
Silver, partially fire-gilt, engraved

Zentrale Kustodie der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

The University of Wittenberg's scepters, representing academic authority, are among the most treasured art objects in the possession of Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg and have always been prominent in the university's insignia. Officers of the university carried the scepters at every major public event. Students taking exams had to place two fingers on a scepter when swearing their oaths.

The existence of two pairs of scepters is unique to the University of Wittenberg. Founder Frederick the Wise donated both pairs, likely presenting the smaller ones on October 18, 1502, the day the university opened. He commissioned the larger scepters in 1508, when he had the university statutes put down in writing.

Hans Burgkmair the Elder (designer)

German, 1473–1531

David de Negker (woodblock cutter and printer)

German, c. 1551–1585

The Imperial Eagle with the Coats of Arms of the Electors and Quaternions, before 1564 Colored woodcut and typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The double-headed eagle was the most important symbol of the Holy Roman Empire. The crucifix on its breast symbolizes Christian rule. The coats of arms on its wings represent the rulers and territories of the empire, a kind of organizational chart of the realm. The eight large shields symbolize eight electors—the powerful men who elected the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire—though in fact there were only seven. The extra elector is the “Prefect of Rome”—the pope—who wasn’t an elector but crowned the emperor.

Unknown German artist

Mass of Saint Gregory, Thuringia, third quarter
of the 15th century
Mixed techniques on wood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

For Catholics, Mass has the potential to bring salvation. During Mass, bread and wine are blessed and then consumed by the worshipper as the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) reported that Jesus himself once appeared to him on the altar during Mass, a story that became one of the most popular subjects in art of the late Middle Ages (c. 1300–1500).

The painting is full of symbols that retell the story of Christ's Passion—the trials, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Jesus, covered with bleeding wounds, leans on the lid of his tomb and embraces the cross. His betrayal by Judas is seen at the upper left. We see one of Jesus' tormentors and a reminder of Pilate washing his hands of the unjust affair, along with the hammer and nails of the Crucifixion and other weapons used to torture Christ. Gregory wears the papal tiara and is flanked by a cardinal and a bishop—an image of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church to reinforce the church's role as the conduit to God.

Leipzig workshop (?)

Altarpiece Wings with the Four Archangels, 1516 Tempera and gold on wood

Vereinigte Domstifter zu Merseburg und Naumburg und des Kollegiatstifts Zeitz,
Bequest of Carl von Bose

Four prominent angels are represented in these altar wings. Michael, the spiritual warrior, wields a sword to fight the devil and weighs a human soul to determine its worthiness to enter heaven. Uriel swings a censer, a metal incense burner, to mix sweet smoke with the prayers of worshippers. At the upper right, Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will bear the son of God appears on a scroll. Raphael carries a fish, symbolic of his adventure as guardian of Tobias, in which the fish is the source of miraculous potions.

Possibly Pancratius Grueber

German, active 1499–1517

Kämmeritz Altarpiece (center shrine) with Three Female Saints (Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary, unidentified saint), c. 1500

Limewood, polychrome, gilded and silvered

Stiftung Moritzburg Halle (Saale), Kunstmuseum des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt

The Catholic faithful prayed to saints and martyrs depicted on altarpieces in the belief that they would communicate with God on their behalf. The center shrine of this altar holds a figure of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus. To the left is Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia, a countess made a saint because of her charity and religious devotion. She holds a wine jug and a plate with food for the poor. Her thin cheeks and the more distinct wrinkles around her eyes suggest that she is older than the other women. To the right is a youthful saint no longer known to us. These women have graceful S-curve postures that embody the medieval ideal of beauty and are attired aristocratically with pointy-toed shoes and sumptuous garments.

Workshop of Franz Geringswalde

Altarpiece from the Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Naumburg, Altenburg, c. 1510 Conifer wood, carved, polychrome, and gilded

Vereinigte Domstifter zu Merseburg und Naumburg und des Kollegiatstifts Zeitz,
Naumburg Cathedral

Behind the doors of this altarpiece is a vision of heaven. The Virgin Mary presides as Queen amid the rich and fanciful architecture, gold-brocade wall hanging, and starry sky. She holds the baby Jesus while standing on a crescent moon (one of her symbols) and is crowned by two angels. She is accompanied by two virgin saints, Catherine on the left and Barbara on the right. Catherine once held a spiked wheel, a symbol of how she died, but it has gone missing. Barbara holds a goblet and the tower in which she was imprisoned. They in turn are flanked by the twelve apostles, the first followers of Jesus. The sense of a heavenly court is underscored by the women's then-fashionable attire, such as the slashed sleeves of Catherine's cloak.

Daniel Hopper

German, about 1470–1536

The Last Judgment, 1520s (printed in the 17th century) Etching

Minneapolis Institute of Art, The William M. Ladd Collection,
gift of Herschel V. Jones P.112

In Luther's time, churches frequently displayed images of God's ultimate judgment of human souls. The rise of printmaking in the 1400s enabled such images to circulate widely in Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Daniel Hopper, the first artist to specialize in etching printing plates, crammed his version with countless figures, giving the impression that every person who ever lived would be judged. At the upper center, Jesus appears as the King of Heaven with Mary, John the Baptist, and the twelve apostles at his feet. At the bottom are empty graves from which the masses flanking the image have risen. To the left, standing peacefully among clouds, are the saved; to the right, the damned. Given the presence of saints among the saved, and church officials among the damned, Hopper appears to value much of Catholic tradition while recognizing the corruption of its earthly hierarchy.

Unknown artist

Double Pietà, first half of the 16th century

Wood

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Mary, the Mother of God, enthroned on swirling clouds, cradles the lifeless body of Jesus on her lap. Remarkably, the motif is repeated on the reverse side, allowing contemplation of the image from two different positions. But in order to fit the reverse image into the sculpted outline, it had to be mirrored. This means that Mary gazes to the left on one side and to the right on the other, supporting the body either on her left or right knee. In a clear breach of artistic—but not biblical—convention, the sculptor took this mirroring so seriously that he also placed Christ's abdominal wound on the left side in the reverse version. This sculpture must have been intended for freestanding display, perhaps atop a choir screen to enable the clergy and congregation to contemplate it simultaneously.

Wittenberg executioner's sword,

15th and early 16th century

Iron

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Städtische Sammlungen

The Wittenberg executioner's sword was made in the 1400s and modified in the early 1500s. The changes included shortening the blade and rounding its tip.

When not in use, the sword was kept in the possession of the city council. Luther considered this sword a symbol of political authority.

Hans Burgkmair the Elder (designer)

German, 1473–1531

David de Negker (woodblock cutter and printer)

German, c. 1551–1585

The Imperial Eagle with the Coats of Arms of the Electors and Quaternions, before 1564 Colored woodcut and typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

The double-headed eagle was the most important symbol of the Holy Roman Empire. The crucifix on its breast symbolizes Christian rule. The coats of arms on its wings represent the rulers and territories of the empire, a kind of organizational chart of the realm. The eight large shields symbolize eight electors—the powerful men who elected the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire—though in fact there were only seven. The extra elector is the “Prefect of Rome”—the pope—who wasn’t an elector but crowned the emperor.

Lucas van Leyden

Netherlandish, c. 1494–1533

Emperor Maximilian I, 1520

Engraving and etching

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of Herschel V. Jones P.10,913

Emperor Maximilian I held the highest secular office in Germany during Martin Luther's student years. He was still in power when Luther published his controversial Ninety-Five Theses against the Catholic use of indulgences (paying a fee to avoid punishment in the afterlife). Indeed, the emperor was a master of propaganda, and his use of the printing press to spread ideas and images was an example to Luther and his supporters. Maximilian's awareness of symbols of power is clear in this image. He wears the elaborate chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece, founded in 1430 to unite and elevate the rulers of far-flung territories. The cloth of honor draped before him bears the double-headed eagle of the House of Habsburg, the dominant family in German-speaking lands. His hat badge shows the Madonna and Child, a proclamation of his religious devotion. In his hand is a small scroll, suggesting the importance of his proclamations.

Hans Springinkle

German, c. 1495–1540

**Saint George as the Emperor Maximilian's
Patron Saint**, around 1516–1518 (printed 1799)

Woodcut

Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of Herschel V. Jones P.10,954

This woodcut was part of Emperor Maximilian I's sustained campaign of printed propaganda. We do not know of any examples printed in the 1500s that exist today, but the block was reprinted in Vienna in 1799. The emperor kneels before Saint George, who stands over the dragon he killed, holding his lance as a pole for his banner. Over his armor, Maximilian wears a spectacular brocaded and bejeweled cape with a clasp bearing George's arms. Maximilian appears to present to George a chapel that is decorated with the flint-and-steel emblem of the elite Order of the Golden Fleece.

Augustin Hirschvogel

German, 1503–1553

Emperor Charles V, c. 1549

Etching

Minneapolis Institute of Art, bequest of Herschel V. Jones P.68.175

Charles V was the most powerful man in Europe during most of Martin Luther's public career. Following the death of his grandfather Maximilian I, Charles was elected Holy Roman emperor in 1519. In 1530, Pope Clement VII crowned him, confirming church approval of his imperial status. The artist's selection of a profile view similar to an ancient Roman imperial coin is no accident. In 1521, Charles faced Luther at an official assembly called a Diet, in the town of Worms. Charles commanded Luther to recant his controversial writings against the Catholic Church. Luther refused. This was an almost unimaginable act, to stare down an incredibly powerful ruler whose dominion reached across the farthest seas.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Frederick the Wise, 1525–1527

Oil on ash

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

During his reign, from 1486 until his death in 1525, Frederick the Wise endeavored to shift power from the emperor to the regional nobility in the Holy Roman Empire. He supported Charles V's election as emperor but compelled him to cede rights to the nobles. Frederick also resisted financial demands made by the pope and his representatives. This political calculation played into the elector's decision to support Martin Luther's reforms, which were triggered by the Catholic practice of indulgences (allowing people to pay to avoid punishment after death). Frederick not only appointed Luther to a position at the University of Wittenberg, he gave him refuge at Wartburg Castle following the 1521 Edict of Worms, which branded Luther an outlaw. Throughout his reign, Frederick continued to support Luther. Displaying memorial portraits such as this showed support for the Reformation.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

John the Steadfast, after 1532

Oil on copper beech

Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

This portrait of John the Steadfast was made not long after his death in 1532. The text below the portrait proclaims his legitimacy and importance. It begins, “Following the demise of my dear brother,” in order to highlight John’s right to assume the electorate. This was in rebuttal to Emperor Charles V’s refusal to grant him control over his territory due to John’s support of Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Elector John the Steadfast, Duke of Saxony,

c. 1532/33

Woodcut, colored, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This portrait of John the Steadfast was made after his death as part of a propaganda campaign launched by his son, John Frederick. The son's mission was to promote the legitimacy of his father's position as Elector of Saxony, and hence his own. With just seven electors choosing the Holy Roman emperor, they were the elite of the elite. Woodcuts like this were cheaper than paintings (which John Frederick also ordered) and could be shared widely.

A true believer in the Reformation, John the Steadfast stood up to Emperor Charles V's pressure and aggression against reformers like Martin Luther. Charles V retaliated by refusing to recognize him as the rightful inheritor of the position of elector after the death of his brother, a disagreement that eventually erupted into war.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Hercules and Omphale, c. 1537

Mixed techniques on beech wood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This painting depicts the ancient Greek myth of Hercules and Omphale. When the powerful warrior Hercules fell in love with Omphale, she and her servants made him do women's work, like spinning wool into yarn. The notion of wily women stealing men's power was a popular theme in Renaissance art. Martin Luther was familiar with an earlier version of this painting and had it in mind in 1534 as he wrote an interpretation of Psalm 101, which describes the kinds of people to avoid (arrogant and deceitful) and the ones to seek out (faithful). Luther dedicated this interpretation to John Frederick the Magnanimous, Elector of Saxony. Luther used the psalm and the ancient myth to warn John of the dangers posed by surrounding oneself with flattering courtiers.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

Fragment with the head of John the Baptist, c. 1530

Mixed techniques on fir wood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This fragment consists of the lower section of a painting showing the Bible story of Salome with the head of John the Baptist. An art dealer sawed up the painting to more easily sell the coy depiction of the beautiful Salome.

The severed head of the Baptist is presented to the viewer in a silver bowl, an image meant to evoke fear and revulsion. The gruesome fate of John the Baptist is described in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. He was taken prisoner after he criticized the marriage of Herod and Herodias because the couple had committed adultery. Enchanted by the dance of his wife's daughter Salome, Herod was prepared to grant the girl's every wish. Herodias convinced her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Salome's story was a popular subject for court artists such as Cranach and was a cautionary tale about the bewitching power of women.

Lucas Cranach the Younger

German, 1515–1586

The Judgment of Paris, c. 1540–1546

Mixed media on limewood panel

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

Lucas Cranach the Younger carried on his father's multifaceted art workshop in Wittenberg, which was run like a fashion label today: clients could buy custom-made objects while the workshop also mass-produced "off-the-rack" wares for less well-to-do buyers. Among the workshop's repertoire were scenes from Greek mythology. The Judgment of Paris was an especially popular theme, probably because it allowed the artist to portray the sensuality of the female body under the guise of a moralizing tale.

The story of the Judgment of Paris comes from Homer's *Iliad*. Paris, son of the King of Troy, is abandoned as an infant because a prophecy foretells that he would bring disaster upon Troy. Paris leads a simple shepherd's life until Hermes, messenger of the gods, appoints him judge of a special competition: he must decide which of three goddesses—Hera, Aphrodite, or Athena—is the most beautiful. Hera holds out the prospect of power and Athena the gift of wisdom, while Aphrodite promises him the hand of beautiful Helen. Paris opts for love—a tragic error of judgment: Helen is already married, and her abduction sets off the Trojan War, bringing about the prophesied fall of Troy.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

The First Tournament, 1506

Woodcut

Minneapolis Institute of Art, bequest of Herschel V. Jones P.68.139

Electors Frederick the Wise staged jousting tournaments on the Wittenberg town square. More than entertainment, these staged conflicts—by then, outdated remnants of an earlier age—were opportunities for elite families to interact and display their wealth.

This woodcut of 1506 shows a seeming free-for-all within a heavy wooden barricade. Using pronged lances, combatants attempt to unseat their opponents. The horses' flowing coverings are decorated with symbols such as lamps, pierced hearts, horns, and monograms. The elite look on from a late-medieval luxury sky box supported by twisting Gothic brackets and decorated with a tapestry bearing Frederick's arms.

Lucas Cranach the Elder

German, 1472–1553

The Second Tournament, 1509

Woodcut

Minneapolis Institute of Art, bequest of Herschel V. Jones P.68.140

This forcibly drawn scene from 1509 shows a festival that took place in Wittenberg on November 15 and 16, 1508. Perhaps Martin Luther saw this public spectacle. The level of extravagance seems greater than in the earlier image seen nearby, and the aesthetic has moved from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. The architecture has become simpler. Helmets have sprouted ostrich plumes in abundance, and horses are heavily armored with decorated plates of steel. The emblems on the horses have grown more complex. If townspeople attended this event, Cranach does not show them. All attention is on the court and its pageantry.

Heinrich Aldegrever

German, 1502–c. 1558

Wedding Dancers, 1538

Set of 12 engravings

Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt

Pageantry has always been an important means of projecting status and power. Processions provided the opportunity to display wealth and connections—familial, marital, political, and social. This celebration appears to be a generic representation of a lavish wedding rather than a reference to any specific historical event.

A master of ceremonies leads the parading aristocrats. The men wear chic attire, with slits that allow onlookers to see multiple layers of sumptuous fabrics. The women wear full drapery over their abdomens, causing speculation about whether they are pregnant. The combination of fashion and high pregnancy rates of the time may require us to leave the question unanswered.

The betrothed appear in plate 4. The bride wears a bejeweled crown and a heavy gold chain. She and the groom wear fur, hers on the border of her cloak and his on the collar of his coat. They are the only couple in the procession with an obvious display of fur, and the tufts on hers and specks on his suggest ermine, a species traditionally reserved for royalty.

Heinrich Aldegrever

German, 1502–c. 1558

Design for a dagger sheath with a nude couple, 1536

Engraving

Private collection, Minneapolis

Elaborate dagger sheaths signified high social status in Germany in the 1500s. Few survive because of the precious metals used to make them. Sheaths like this held three implements: a full-size dagger in the central slot, and a knife and a pricker (two-pronged straight fork) in the two small side compartments. Several men in the wedding procession at left wear daggers like this as stylish accessories.

Unknown Artist (attributed to Jakob Elsner)

Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, in Commemoration of Frederick the Wise's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1493, after 1503

Oil and tempera on canvas-laminated spruce wood

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

This bird's-eye view of the Holy Land features tiny scenes from the Bible as well as pilgrims at various holy sites. In the left foreground, Frederick the Wise kneels in prayer. The elector made his way to Palestine in 1493 with a large entourage to visit biblical sites. The right side of the painting shows the ship that took the pilgrims to Jaffa. In the background are other sites holy to Christians, including Bethlehem, the Jordan River, Mount Sinai, and the Mount of Olives.

Hans Vischer, workshop (?)

Tomb of Count Hoyer VI of Mansfeld-Vorderort, 1541
Brass

Evangelische Kirchengemeinde St. Andreas-Nicolai-Petri, Eisleben

Count Hoyer of Mansfeld-Vorderort ruled Eisleben and Mansfeld, where Martin Luther grew up. He was the last of the Mansfeld counts to support the Catholic Church—after he died, the region became Lutheran. His grave is in St. Andrew's Church in Eisleben, where Luther gave some of his final sermons. Indeed, the tomb was right in the middle of the church at the time, a stark reminder of the beliefs that Luther opposed.

Sebald Beham

The Big Church Festival, 1535

Woodcut from four blocks

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

In the Middle Ages (c. 400s–1400s), communities held large annual fairs to celebrate the dedication of their church, and in rural areas this often became a full-scale village festival. This woodcut suggests that by the 1500s the religious aspects of such events had faded into the background. The image cannot be taken in at once. Rather, its considerable detail invites closer inspection, and those who look carefully will be rewarded with discoveries by turns amusing, surprising, and frightening.

This depiction of a church festival is a vivid and authentic representation of small-town life in the 1500s. Luther would later conclude, “... Church consecration festivals should be eliminated entirely since they are nothing but taverns, fairs, and gambling dens, existing only to dishonor God and increase the damnation of souls.”

Gargoyle in the form of a dragon, likely 16th century
Copper, wrought, polychrome, and gilded

Lutherstadt Eisleben, Städtische Sammlungen

The wide-open mouth of this gargoyle, revealing a jagged tongue, once served as a rainwater drain. It likely came from Seeburg Castle, an impressive structure on Süßer See (Sweet Lake), about five miles from Martin Luther's birthplace of Eisleben. The Romanesque fortress was built in 1287 by the counts of Mansfeld, who expanded the fortress in the 1400s and 1500s using mining revenue.

Sebald Beham

The Saxon Mine, c. 1528

Colored woodcut, typographic text

Foundation Schloss Friedenstein Gotha

As the son of a prosperous mining entrepreneur, Martin Luther grew up in a house where mining was part of daily life. The many steps of copper extraction and processing are illustrated on this broadside. The text protests new mining techniques, usually employed by big operators, which threatened the way of life of miners and mine owners who used older business models and methods of extraction. The anonymous author warns against “evil innovations” and asserts that the ability to successfully extract metals comes from God alone.