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Luther's Lost Books and the Myth of the Memory Cult

C. Scott Dixon

On the morning of 18 February 1546, in his birthplace of Eisleben, Martin Luther died of heart failure. Just as Johann Friedrich, Elector of Saxony, had feared, and Luther himself had prophesied, his trip to the duchy of Mansfeld to settle a jurisdictional dispute had proven too much. Despite the efforts of the people gathered at his bedside, who included two of his sons, the two pastors Justus Jonas and Michael Caelius, two local doctors, and the count and countess of Mansfeld, Luther passed away peacefully. Indeed, the fact that Luther's death was a good death was immediately turned into a matter of public record in the report sent by Jonas to the Elector in Torgau. Arriving before daybreak, the report was read to the Elector and his response, in the hands of the same messenger, arrived back in Eisleben with an unambiguous command: *bring me the body*.¹ These words were directed at the counts of Mansfeld, who, as they had explained in their own letter to the Elector, were hoping to keep Luther's body in the duchy to 'honour' the fatherland of his birth. But Johann Friedrich insisted it be returned to Wittenberg, and even ordered that they accompany the corpse to the borders of Saxony. Accordingly, the next day the counts joined a three-day long funeral procession that passed through Halle and Bitterfeld before ending in Wittenberg with the burial of Luther's body in the Castle Church. Following funeral sermons by the Wittenberg reformers Johannes Bugenhagen and Philipp Melancthon, Luther's coffin was lowered – to a greater depth than that of a normal grave – into the earth beneath the floor of the church.

Electoral Johann Friedrich's command that Luther's body be brought back to Wittenberg so that it might be properly honoured can be viewed as one of the first acts of memorialisation that took hold in the Lutheran lands of early modern Germany. After the reformer's death, which occurred at a particularly testing time for the Protestant powers, the Lutheran clergy immediately set to work securing Luther's legacy and making sure that both his memory and his teaching were properly preserved (the two things being closely related). Fabricating and preserving the memory of the church quickly became modalities of Lutheran self-expression, used in a variety of ways to defend, legitimate, and consolidate the fledgling church in the face of the Tridentine resurgence. In addition to their well-known facility with printed media, from books and pamphlets to broadsheets and woodcuts, Lutherans made use of other forms of expression. Images remained an important medium, as did sermons, songs, and public performance. The plastic arts also played a role, particularly in this budding age of material culture. And there were the anniversaries and commemorations as well, though these did not become a regular feature until the seventeenth century.²

At the heart of this culture of memorialisation was the imposing figure of Martin Luther. Partly due to his own efforts of media management and self-promotion, all of which served the higher calling of his faith, and partly due to the need for the newly created Lutheran churches of Germany to establish a common sense of identity and legitimacy, Luther became the most famous man in Germany. Historians speak of a Luther cult, comprehensive enough to encompass both the literate and the illiterate, multifaceted enough to span the entire early modern period, and marked out by a persistent tendency 'to adapt the traditional rites of the Catholic veneration of saints'.³ All of this follows naturally enough from Johann Friedrich's initial gesture, and it

makes perfect sense in theory, for Lutheranism's rapid rise to historical self-awareness, with its bubbling stew of political, religious, and ethno-historical identities, its evolving spheres of textual, visual, and aural mediality, and its ability to shape both the private and the public memory, had all the foundations in place to support such a cult.⁴ But is there enough evidence to bear it out? Was there a Luther cult in early modern Germany? Was there a public and persistent reverence of the reformer? If so, are these acts of memorialisation indices of a continued fascination with the man among Lutherans at large? Had it tapped into medieval instincts and created the cult of a quasi-saint, replete with his own relics?

The following essay will consider these questions. The purpose of the study is to examine the historical foundations of the idea, particularly with reference to the question of timing. For while it is clear that Luther was held in high esteem by the church at the beginning and venerated as the founding father of the Reformation, celebrated in word, print, and images, there are good reasons to re-examine both the longevity of this veneration and precisely when it was translated into a culture of active memorialisation at a more general level. If we use as our markers the components that go into the making of social memory, such as shared experience, public discourse within an imagined community, the formation of a socially diverse mnemonic network, objects and places that serve as signifiers, and mutual modes of historical recall, the idea of a Luther cult is not so straightforward as it seems.⁵ It is the working premise of this essay that there is little evidence to support the notion of a widespread, self-aware, actively cultivated Luther cult spanning the confessional age in Germany, by which is meant the period reaching from the reformer's death to the late-seventeenth century (1546 to circa 1675). On the contrary, the culture of memorialisation we associate with

the notion of a Luther cult was primarily a development of the later-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and subsequently attributed to the confessional period.

In order to bear out this argument, I will make my case in three stages: the first will explore the history of memorialisation during the confessional age and examine whether there are grounds for speaking of a Luther cult that in effect treated the reformer like a pseudo-saint; the second part will examine the early history of the material *memoria*, the relics and remains; and the final section will move from the confessional age to the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and trace the origins of a movement we might meaningfully associate with the idea of a memory cult.

Lutherus Thaumaturgus

A useful place to start a study of Luther's status in Lutheran culture during the confessional era is with a look at the histories of his life. Most of the early works were written by former colleagues, men who had personally witnessed Luther in the struggle against Rome. These are the men who likened him to a prophet, a wonder-worker, the angel of the apocalypse, and a latter-day apostle. It is clear that the sheer power of his personality left a deep mark on this generation of men. Justus Jonas continued to converse with him after his death and dream of him at night.⁶ As a consequence, the first biographies of Luther are run-through with the traces of his charisma. Two of the most important in this mode were Philipp Melanchthon's *Vita Lutheri* (1546), first published as a preface in the Wittenberg edition of Luther's works, and a life of Luther written by the Joachimsthal pastor Johannes Mathesius, a one-time colleague and house guest, which first took shape as a sermon cycle (1562-64). Both works set the tone for

subsequent efforts, Melanchthon providing the providential framework while Mathesius added the details and the anecdotes. And both works were written in the key of the funeral orations, referring to Luther as a prophet, an angel, a *Wundermann*, an instrument of God, and even the third Elias.⁷ Over time, however, these fellow freedom-fighters passed away, and this left later biographers faced with a more distant relationship to the reformer. While Mathesius could draw on personal recollections, second-generation historians such as Nikolas Selnecker could only recall childhood encounters or later accounts from participants, while Valerius Herberger, who published his life of Luther in 1608, had to begin a personal anecdote with the claim that ‘I once knew an old preacher, who had often seen and heard Luther...’.⁸ And historical circumstances changed as well. Faced by theological infighting and the revitalisation of Catholicism, Lutherans needed to entrust the legitimacy of the church to more than the status of one man. This led to a steady demythologisation of the reformer.

Even in the heat of theological battle, most Philippists and Gnesio-Lutherans stressed Luther’s unique authority. More than forty years after his death Cyriakus Spangenberg still referred to him as ‘the great prophet and third Elijah, the superior man of God and enlightened teacher,’ and other Gnesio-Lutherans spoke in similar terms, a state of affairs that has prompted historians to liken his standing to a type of ‘quasi-papalisation’.⁹ Over time, however, as the confessionalisation process gathered momentum and Lutherans began to assemble a theological canon, it became necessary to look beyond Luther to find a common foundation for the faith, particularly as not all theologians viewed his works in the same light. The solution was to look for a higher authority in Scripture and confessional creeds such as the *Augsburg Confession* or the *Book of Concord*. Doing this, however, also had the effect of reducing the authority of

his works and downplaying the earlier discourse about Luther the prophet, apostle, and miracle-man.

Eventually the reformer was downgraded to the status of a witness, an inspired interpreter of Scripture, or at most a prophet in the secondary sense as someone who belongs to a long line of divinely inspired preachers of the Word. The notion that Luther was a direct agent of the divine or ‘completely enlightened’ at the moment of conversion gradually lost its credibility. On the contrary, although he may have been ‘awoken’ by God, Luther’s path to the truth had been gradual and not without error, it had occurred over stages, and it was only possible because he had discovered ‘this new and unheard-of manner of teaching’, by which was meant his turn to Scripture. Although exceptional in his grasp of God’s Word, and clearly part of God’s great plan (as evidenced by the prophecies), Luther was a man like any other. No longer the oracle of the early years, his works became a supplement to a view of Lutheran self-understanding that drew its primary sense of legitimacy and continuity from Scripture and the early church.¹⁰ By 1617 this ‘domestication’ of the eschatological and miraculous aspects of the Luther discourse reached the stage where the Ulm superintendent Konrad Dietrich, on the occasion of the centenary celebrations no less, could claim that Luther was ‘not the one who instituted our evangelical teaching but the one who reinstated it, not the one who introduced it but the one who reintroduced it, not the one who authored it but the one who restored it, not its promulgator, but the one who purged it, not its innovator but its renovator’.¹¹

Needless to say, Reformed Protestants went even further in underscoring Luther’s all-too human side. Would a real prophet have been so aggressive in his tone, asked the Reformed theologian Zacharias Ursinus, or preached so many Catholic errors at the start

of his career?¹² But it was the Jesuits who were the most ruthless and relentless in their dissections of Luther's life, completely dismissive of any suggestion that he should be remembered as a holy man or revered as a saint. In their sharp tongues and use of earthy language, Jesuit polemicists were a match for anything offered up by the Protestants. Conrad Vetter, for instance, writing in response to the suggestion that Luther was the prophet of God, asked his readers to imagine 'that God would allow the Holy Spirit to take refuge in such a foul pool and stinking manure pit, much less settle there or reside. And this is not even to mention that the Spirit should have spoken through this malodorous Pilate and vile-smelling pig's snout'.¹³

There were two Lutheran responses to these *ad hominem* attacks. One strategy was to reconfirm Luther's 'holy authority' by recycling the early discourse about prophecies, miracles, and the third Elijah. This was a common approach in the centenary sermons of 1617.¹⁴ Another strategy, and one that came to dominate by the mid-seventeenth century, was to meet the Jesuit claims that Lutherans idolised the reformer in the manner of a cult by rejecting the supernatural aspects altogether and focussing on the *historical* evidence of his authority and special status. The emphasis was placed on the earth-bound proofs of his legitimacy, which is why biographers and apologists went into such detail tracing Luther's progress from student, monk, scholar, preacher, to reformer and justified his career with reference to his degrees, his confirmation, or the statutes of Wittenberg University. In these works Luther the *Wundermann* is eclipsed by Luther the preacher, teacher, and extraordinary scholar, all of which was legitimised by historical facts. As Georg Nuber put it: 'Although we must concede that Doctor Luther should not be numbered among the prophets and the

apostles, nevertheless we hold him to be a unique, glorious, and distinguished teacher of God's Church'.¹⁵

Over time these shifts of perspective did much to demythologise Luther, but they were still testimony to a lively concern with his legacy among the literate elite. The laity, however, seem to have been less engaged. Many of the biographies, collected editions, and topical works begin with concerns that knowledge of the reformer was simply passing out of mind. Initially the fear was that his teachings would be lost in the cacophony of ideas being brought forth by the 'sectaries,' which is why Johannes Aurifaber opened the preface of the Eisleben edition of Luther's works with an appeal to the secular authorities to remain vigilant, for just as Joseph was not known in Egypt, so too could Luther become a stranger to the land.¹⁶ Later biographers were more direct in their language and less concerned with Anabaptists, Antinomians, Osiandrists, and Schwenckfelders (as Aurifaber was). The main problem was the very parishioners in their midst. Mathesius, for instance, began his sermon cycle voicing his distress that people no longer knew very much about the early Reformation or Luther's heroic struggles against the papacy. Anton Probus hit the same note, fearing that people had become fed up with Luther's teaching and did not even like to hear mention of his name. Matthias Hoë von Hoënegg singled out the young people for their disregard, claiming that they knew little about the early Reformation, and this was also the experience of the pastor-historian Johannes Letzner, who maintained that the young people in his birthplace of Hardegsen knew nothing about the time under the papacy or how Luther had brought the gospel to light. Cyriakus Spangenberg was less specific about the age category but more precise with the numbers: out of any one-thousand

parishioners, he reckoned, scarcely twenty showed any interest in the teaching or the history of Luther.¹⁷

Of course, much of this was rhetoric: clergymen made a living by pointing out how much the world fell short of expectations. And there are traces of Gnesio-Lutheranism sour grapes at work here as well, for this faction was particularly interested in keeping Luther's memory alive. But these caveats notwithstanding, the clerical refrains about disinterest are common enough to suggest there was some substance to their concerns, and indeed their own tendency to downplay Luther's singular importance in the broader context of the providential Reformation contributed to the problem. Neither one of these developments adds much support to the idea that the intense veneration of Luther outlived the first- and second-generation reformers, let alone that there was a consistent and consolidated Luther cult marked out by 'unmistakable traces of the Catholic cult of the saints,' replete with relics and holy places.¹⁸ The second part of this essay will explore whether there is sufficient material evidence to speak of a culture of Lutheran memorialisation during this period. Before turning to the details, however, I would like to say a few words about the broader context of the cult idea.

Luther was not the only figure in northern Europe venerated after his death in a manner close to worship. Erasmus enjoyed a similar post-mortem fame, which included a fascination with his personal possessions, many of which ended up in the Amerbach cabinet of curiosities, as well as sites of memory, such as his reputed birth house and the statue erected in the Rotterdam Grote Markt, which had appeared in various versions – the first in place by 1547 – until a final version was made by Hendrick de Kayser in 1622.¹⁹ A similar type of reverence was paid to the artist Albrecht Dürer. Indeed, if

anything, Dürer enjoyed greater veneration than either Luther or Erasmus, for his art continued to evoke and inspire down the centuries, whereas the legacy of the reformer and the humanist ossified over time. But he too aroused the base instincts of memorialisation. Three days after his death his body was exhumed in order to make plaster casts of his face and his hands. These relics stood in for Dürer's mortal remains, which were 'treated with a veneration bordering on hagiolatry,' and even more so the lock of hair cut from his head, which was gifted to his friend and former journeyman Hans Baldung Grien. After Grien's death, in the manner of a treasured relic, the lock of hair, along with the hand-written documents attesting to its authenticity, was passed down through a series of owners until it ended up in the Vienna Academy of Art, where it remains to this day, preserved in a silver box.²⁰ Throughout the history of its transit from one custodian to the next, the lock of hair was able to arouse a range of responses, some properly reverential or spiritual, some just uncanny or profane.

When dealing with visceral encounters of this kind, it is difficult to make clear distinctions between sacral relics and mundane things. Neither Erasmus nor Dürer was the leader of a religious movement or spoken of as the Third Elias or the Angel of the Apocalypse as Luther was, and yet both men, and the material remains of both men, were subject to veneration. No doubt a similar spectrum of responses was evoked by Molière's chair, Wolsey's hat, Galileo's mummified middle finger, perhaps even the preserved skeleton of Petrarch's cat. In truth there was nothing unusual about investing historical objects with a unique ontological status, even in Protestant lands after the Reformation.²¹ There may have been a change in the theological language used to describe the efficacy of the object, but it was only in the minds of reformers such as Zwingli and Calvin, and subsequently in the theories of modern historians, that the

religious world of early modern Europe was somehow divested of the ancient belief in the special ontological status of relics and remains. In practice the sort of devotion or reverence directed at the so-called Luther relics was a very human commonplace; there was nothing particularly medieval, recidivist, or cultic about it. If a distinction between the medieval Catholic and the early modern Lutheran response to such objects did emerge to the point where we should be speaking of 'authentically Protestant phenomena' rather than just the vestiges of the sacramental worldview, it is doubtful we will find it during the age of Reformation.²²

It is true, of course, that the reformers launched a relentless attack on the sacramental theology of medieval Catholicism. Protestants were quite clear about this: Catholic theories of sacramentality had no basis in reality. The age of miracles had passed, and that is why Orthodox Lutherans were so quick to discredit any sort of suggestion that Luther himself should be thought of as a wonder-worker along the lines of a medieval saint. Although, as we have seen, the first generation of memorialists spoke of him as a prophet and a miracle worker, the man whose prayers had the power to shape history or heal the sick (at least in the case of Friedrich Myconius), this sort of talk cooled over time. By the late sixteenth century, while still recognising his prophetic role, most Lutheran thinkers were only willing to credit one *miraculum Lutheri*, namely that he alone had been able to stand steadfast against the papacy and turn the nation's thoughts back to God.²³ Protestant saints did not work miracles; they were exemplars of right belief and their only legitimate power was to point the pious in the direction of the Word.²⁴

Historical reality, however, was different to doctrine in this regard. Despite the reformers' campaign against Catholic sacramentalism, in practice most Lutheran

parishioners continued to inhabit the same world of wonder workers, relics, miracles, and localised harbours of the sacred as their medieval predecessors. Parishioners continued to pray to images, trust in the sacramentals, and conjure the power of blessed water or use the host in order to effect magic. They continued to hold that certain places and certain things could have inherent power, whether a well, a tree, a book, a bell, a rolled up scrap of Scripture, a fragment of the gallows, or the shinbone of a medieval saint.²⁵ Thus to believe, as they did, that splinters of wood from Luther's deathbed in Eisleben might cure a toothache, that a particle from his rooms in Wittenberg or Worms might protect against illness, that a portrait of the reformer in the church of Oberroßla or Apolda had been seen sweating tears, or that his image had survived the fires of Eisleben, was perfectly consistent with the mindset of the age. Luther had achieved the sort of fame that invested the history of his life, and the objects and places associated with his life, with a mystique that bordered on the miraculous, but the same holds true for Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Johann Georg Faust, Huldrych Zwingli, Paracelsus, and even notorious criminals and heretics.²⁶ Indeed, Luther's famous incombustibility paled in comparison with the tales of wonder associated with Johann Arndt's devotional book *Paradiesgärtlein*. Finding copies of Arndt's text unscathed in the smouldering remains of burnt-out houses and barns became such a commonplace the clergyman Christoph Heym drew together and later published a *Wunder-Geschichte* of notable episodes.²⁷

The point to make here is not that it is mistaken to compare the popular veneration of Luther to a medieval cult of the saints, but rather that this type of thinking was such a commonplace of the age – even in Protestant lands – it makes it difficult to group the activity around the notion of a circumscribed cult in any meaningful way. At the level of

popular culture, which is where these images and objects had their main currency, such veneration would have blurred into the background of parish beliefs. Relic-hunters at the Wartburg made no distinction between a splinter from Luther's desk and a splinter from the bed of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Any relic would do.²⁸ At the level of clerical culture, in contrast, where we find the custodians of Luther's public memory, there was a progressive aversion to the notion of cults, relics, or the misuse of Luther's image. Rather paradoxically, however, as we will see, it was the very efforts made by these later Lutheran memorialists to discredit this type of veneration that did the most to preserve Luther's material remains, for up to that point very little had been done.

Relics and Remains

Although the number of objects once in Luther's possession was fairly modest, there were enough to provide the nucleus of a relic collection, and these were supplemented through the years. To adopt the terminology of Catholic classification, while there were no first-class Luther relics in circulation (by which is meant his physical remains), there were second-class or contact relics to choose from, including rings, mugs, beer steins, goblets and glasses, medallions and precious coins, chairs, tables, books, and beds, and his cassock. More remotely related items, what we might compare with third-class relics, included his pulpit, the rooms where he had stayed through the years, furniture or clothing he may have owned, and even objects or places charged by proximity to the reformer, such as the Luther spring in Wittenberg. People started to cherish these objects soon after this death. Johann Albrecht, for instance, *Stadtvogt* of Eisleben, who lived in the house where Luther died, carefully preserved

Luther's deathbed together with his mug and would show them to good friends.²⁹ But we should not mistake this appreciation for the worship of the medieval cults. As both Lyndal Roper and Stefan Laube have observed, although there is good reason to speak of Luther relics, and indeed Protestant relics in general, they should not be confused with Catholic relics. The power of these objects was primarily emotive or sentimental rather than sacramental. They were material things with the odour of history. In the words of Roper, their main power was to serve as 'a badge of identity and a vehicle for forging an emotional relationship with the reformer'.³⁰

Once we take into account the nature of a Protestant relic, the number of potential objects could climb quite high. Anything associated with Luther's life, from a pulpit in Leipzig to a squashed flea in a book, might fit the description. Historians can only speculate about the numbers, however, because there is so little evidence in the sources. Moreover, what evidence there is does not really support the idea that the relics were at the heart of a Luther cult, if by cult we take in the meaning of dictionary keywords such as 'collective obsession' or 'parts of a belief system,' all of which implies broad awareness, communal participation, and public display. This raises an interesting question about the social reality of the cult idea. How much devotion is required for a relic to be a relic?

In the case of the Luther relics, very few can be traced back to the sixteenth century with any certainty, and fewer still can be located in a time or a place where they were the objects of reverence, or even interest, beyond a very small circle of people. There was no critical mass of public awareness. Most were family heirlooms, locked away in desk drawers, chests, and cabinets, passed down from generation to generation. Unsurprisingly, the Luther family had preserved quite a few pieces, from goblets and

rings to the staff Luther brought back from Rome, his desk clock, and his burial shroud.³¹ But even private owners treated these objects as family heirlooms and did not display or circulate them in any public sense. To give one example: a travel spoon, allegedly gifted to Johann Caspar Aquila by Luther himself, passed through the hands of the Aquilas until, through a grandchild, it became the property of the Heumann family, watched over by the oldest member of the clan. There was a momentary break in the chain when Christian August Heumann, the Göttingen polyhistorian, entrusted it to the Hannover librarian for safe-keeping; but it soon returned to the family when the next in line showed up with the proper papers and reclaimed the spoon.³² As we will see, when eighteenth-century historians started to recover the relics, the majority were in private hands, unknown to, and unseen by, the rest of the Lutheran world.

Another type of Luther relic were books with handwritten inscriptions. Writing personal dedications was a common practice at the time, though something of a Wittenberg speciality, and like many other reformers Luther is known to have inscribed numerous books, particularly in the final decade of his life. After the reformer's death these became highly valued objects. Ulinka Rublack has termed them 'grapho-relics,' suggesting that they were charged by a distinctly Lutheran notion of the salvific power of the Word and 'circulated God's word as a new sacred medium'.³³ There is plenty of evidence to suggest that these objects were held in high regard, but as with the contact relics discussed above, it is difficult to determine to what extent these relics 'circulated' in any meaningful sense. Some were sold or given away as gifts, but just as many seem to have stayed in one place, either as a family heirloom, the property of a local church, or as a type of *album amicorum* (indeed, it was not unusual for Luther's writing to be surrounded by verse in later hands). Until they were rediscovered in the eighteenth

century, they were not known beyond an immediate circle of family or acquaintances, and no doubt many would have suffered the same fate as the famous postil once owned by Eisleben's Johannes Albrecht, thought to bear Luther's last inscription: passed down from one family member to the next, it was eventually gifted to a clergyman in Nordhausen, where it remained until consumed by the great fire of 1712.³⁴

On this topic of books, it is interesting to note how little was done to preserve what must be considered the most valuable particles in the Lutheran reliquary: his library. Despite the obvious value of this collection, which must have included autograph manuscripts and annotated texts, very few steps were taken to safeguard it after his death. The elector commissioned Matthäus Ratzeberger to draw up an inventory, but the books were never gathered, catalogued, or preserved in any systematic way. Some of the material ended up in the possession of colleagues, friends, and fellow reformers; some of it ended up in smaller holdings, such as the collections of Georg Rörer, Stefan Roth, Johannes Aurifaber, Veit Dietrich, Andreas Poach, and Valentin Beyer; and some of it was inherited by family members, which was certainly the case in 1554 when the remaining collection was divided up between Luther's three sons, who gave away some of the inscribed books as gifts. But the bulk of the library was unceremoniously dispersed. Aurifaber claimed to know of up to forty locations where autograph materials could be found.³⁵

A few later attempts were made by the Saxon princes to relocate the more valuable items. In 1553 Elector Johann Friedrich, busy gathering the men and materials for the Jena edition of Luther's works, began to inquire about the collection and contacted Luther's sons with a view to having material delivered to Weimar (which Johannes seems to have done); in the mid 1570s Elector August, interested in acquiring

the books for his own collection, supported Paul Luther in his efforts to reassemble the remaining library, the latter conceding that ‘in my youth I paid little attention to the books and manuscripts of my father of blessed memory’; and in 1594 Elector Joachim Friedrich of Brandenburg purchased a number of valuable texts and autograph manuscripts from Luther’s grandsons, including a Hebrew Bible with the reformer’s marginalia.³⁶ But these were just a few of the more valuable pieces in a collection that must have once numbered in the thousands. Admittedly, this was not yet the age of national trusts or museum collections, and yet the efforts made to preserve the personal libraries of Hartmann Schedel, Regiomontanus, and Erasmus would suggest it was not a completely alien concept; and in any case, to return to the idea of a Luther cult, these were not just books but second-class relics, with some pieces ‘more valuable than gold’.³⁷

On those occasions when we catch a glimpse of stray letters, manuscripts, or books, the striking thing from the modern perspective is how little care was taken to collate or preserve them. The correspondence, of course, was everywhere, scattered throughout Germany. Despite the efforts of Luther’s colleagues to gather his letters after his death, and in particular Aurifaber’s work collating, compiling and publishing a chronological selection (which came to an end after two volumes due to poor sales), there was no substantial attempt to assemble and publish Luther’s correspondence until the 1660s.³⁸ Until then Luther’s unpublished letters remained in private hands, kept as family heirlooms, passed down from pastor to pastor, or locked away in town archives and scholars’ desks. No doubt a Luther letter was a highly prized artefact, but the truth is a large amount of the correspondence disappeared during the confessional period, and much of it through simple neglect and disregard. Even the redactors working on the

Jena edition remarked on how letters went missing after they had consulted them – some succumbing to the chaos of Caspar Güttel’s library in Eisleben, for instance – and a few of the early histories of Luther, such as the sermon cycle by Mathesius, make reference to letters that no longer exist. Reformation scholars of the eighteenth century deplored this lack of care. David Richter, author of the *Genealogia Lutherorum*, estimated that over two-thirds of the correspondence had gone missing as a result. In the view of the eighteenth-century Luther biographer Johann Gottlob Walter, this negligence was not only a great shame and a spot on the honour of the Lutheran church but the cause of an irreplaceable loss for the history of the Reformation.³⁹

The approach to Luther manuscripts tells a similar story. These too were scattered throughout Germany, kept in private holdings, shared between scholars, or occasionally passed on as gifts. Some of the caches contained very substantial, and very valuable, material, particularly those pieced together by close colleagues and fellow reformers. Johannes Aurifaber gathered a huge amount of material, both texts and manuscripts, copies and autograph, and passed it on to his wife. As late as 1575, the year of his death, Aurifaber informed Paul Luther that he still had original documents that had hitherto ‘never been published and were not to be found on any other theologian or in any other land’.⁴⁰ And yet, until the emergence of the editors and collators of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there seems to have been very little interest in recovering or preserving this type of material in any systematic way.⁴¹ The largest single repository of *Lutherana*, for instance, was the thirty-five volume Georg Rörer collection in Jena, used for both the Wittenberg and the Jena editions. Despite its obvious value, the collection suffered serious losses in the sixteenth century, even while Rörer was alive (indeed, Rörer was not averse to cutting out whole sections and sending them to Aurifaber). Well

into the seventeenth century librarians would send off individual manuscripts on loan, some of which were never returned. When not in use, the collection was stored in a cabinet with other manuscripts in the library, prey to the continual damp, numerous fires, and the plagues of Thuringian mice, eventually filed away among the papers of the Jena historian Johann Andreas Bose. Although consulted by scholars on occasion, little substantial use was made of the collection until it was 'rediscovered' in the nineteenth century by scholars working on the Weimar edition.⁴²

Treatment of the so-called sites of memory suggests a similar scale of nonchalance. We know from later testimony, and not least from disapproving comments by clergymen such as Gottfried Arnold, that it was common practice at the time for parishioners to take splinters from Luther's rooms in the belief that these were special places. It was also common for visitors to ask to see these rooms mindful of the history behind them. Luther's birth and death houses in Eisleben were known attractions, for instance, as well as his study in the Wartburg and the Black Cloister (or Augusteum) in Wittenberg, where visitors scratched graffiti on the walls. But aside from the occasional reference to passing travellers or the superstitions associated with the Luther relics, there does not seem to be evidence in the archives to suggest that any official steps were taken by church or state before the late seventeenth century to preserve these places and turn them into what we would consider historical monuments.⁴³

Admittedly, Luther's portrait was placed above the door of his birthhouse in Eisleben, possibly at the instigation of the town council, and at some stage it was joined by a sandstone portal with a Luther rose. But by the seventeenth century, still in private hands, the house had fallen into disrepair, its windows stuffed with straw. The death house became something of a local attraction while inhabited by the *Stadtvogt* Johann

Albrecht, but in 1563 it was sold to the Mansfeld counts and used as a chancery, and in the 1570s it was razed altogether (though the original furniture was preserved). At the Wartburg, after the reformer's famous stay in 1521, Luther's study was used as a living quarters and a lockup, and it was also repainted on a number of occasions, thus perhaps not only covering up any original words he may have scribbled on the wall but also the memorial verse rendered by the Eisenach Generalsuperintendent Nicholas Rebhan (there was no mention yet of the famous ink stain). Luther's room in Coburg fell prey to similar renovations, including a whitewashing of the walls, which would have obscured the famous verse Luther penned on the wall along with Ratzeberger's handwritten response.⁴⁴

Even in Wittenberg, to judge by recent research, there is very little evidence to suggest there was a deliberate policy of preservation or memorialisation at work. In 1564 the Luther family sold the cloister to the university and the elector began a reconstruction project the following year. A new staircase resulted in the destruction of part of Luther's former living space, and later archaeological excavations would suggest that household objects were simply thrown on the rubbish tip.⁴⁵ The residence was converted into a college, which included a mensa, lodgings for the stipendiary students, and administrative rooms. Although the cloister remained an attraction for passing visitors, there is no clear evidence to suggest that Luther's former rooms were somehow cordoned off from the college or put on display. On the contrary, we know that the bursar (*Oekonomen*) used the *Lutherstube* to store bags of grain as late as the eighteenth century, and it is unlikely the rooms and their contents survived the reconstruction and the new college life completely intact. Only in 1655 do we find reference to a *Museum Lutheri*, but even this is ambiguous, for at the time the word *museum* could also mean a

pastor's study or music room, so it could just as likely be a reference to Luther's *Studierstube*.⁴⁶ If there was a plan of preservation during this period, historians have yet to find it in the documentary record.

Indeed, even historians closer to the age came up short in their efforts. In his attempt to find out more about the Luther spring, for instance, the eighteenth-century antiquarian Johann Christian Crell wrote directly to the Wittenberg council, only to learn that there was nothing at all about the spring in the town's archives. Indifference of this kind was a shock to men of Crell's generation, and something of an embarrassment as well, for as one of Crell's contemporaries remarked, if the Catholics had a spring so closely associated with one of their saints – say Francis or Loyola – they would certainly pay it much more respect.⁴⁷ Disinterest was an insult to the memory of Luther and his church, and it needed to be put to right.

The Origins of the Luther Cult

If the Saxon antiquarian Johann Georg Leuckfeld can be believed, at some stage in the late seventeenth century he was walking through Quedlinburg when he came across a clutch of old papers in the street. Picking them up, he realised that among the leaves were letters from Martin Luther, one to Philipp Melancthon, the other to Justus Jonas. Recognising the importance of the find, he showed the letters to his rector, who immediately had them archived in the castle library, where they were kept in storage and later transcribed and published.⁴⁸ For the modern historian this seems scarcely credible, and indeed it may well have been pure invention, but it captures a truth about the era nevertheless. For Leuckfeld's generation of scholars, it seemed like the age of

Luther research had just begun. After years of neglect and seeming indifference, they were recovering and restoring Martin Luther and the Reformation to their rightful place in history.

It was this generation of scholars that first began to track down the so-called Luther relics and relate the tales of their wonder-working powers. Particularly important in this regard was Georg Heinrich Goetz's *De Reliquiis Lutheri* (1703), which was the first substantial stocktaking of the places and objects associated with Luther's memory. Careful to distinguish between Catholic superstition and Protestant recollection, Goetz embarked on a survey of the material memoria – places where Luther had stayed, his personal possessions, books with his marginalia – beginning with the sites in Magdeburg, Erfurt, Worms, and Wittenberg and then turning to the rings, mugs, goblets, and books.⁴⁹ Goetz was not the first to show interest in the relics, but as Wilhelm Ernst Tenzel remarked, the appearance of *De Reliquiis Lutheri* worked as a clarion call for a general recovery project.

Notices started to appear in regional journals about other relics in private hands. Mention was made in a Hamburg journal of a 'trustworthy man' who knew of a silver chalice in Greifswald, for instance, another in the *Nova Litteraria* of the crystal beaker owned by the Nesen family in Zittau.⁵⁰ Scholars began to dig around in private collections and city archives. It was due to the efforts of Johann Melchior Krafft that Luther's own Hebrew Psalter, filed away and forgotten on library shelves in Frankfurt, was once again recovered, properly preserved, and made the subject of research.⁵¹ Tenzel himself travelled through Germany taking notes. He had seen 'several pieces' in the collection of Johann Andreas Gleich, and he had also spoken with the custodian of the Dresden *Wunderkabinett* about the various relics in their collection. Tenzel viewed

these objects with a critical eye, sensitive to the historical context. He realised, for instance, that the view once enjoyed by Luther and his colleagues at the famous Wittenberg spring had long since been reshaped by the Elbe.⁵² But he was an eager relic-hunter nevertheless, and it was because of the work of Tentzel, Goetz, Krafft, Christian Juncker, and other like-minded scholars of the early eighteenth century that Lutherans began to recover these objects and think of them as part of their heritage.⁵³

The same care was taken to locate the remnants of Luther's library. Goetz recognised that the majority of manuscripts were in fact copies by amanuenses, and there was a persistent rumour, reaching back to the sixteenth century, that Luther's books had been transported to Rome.⁵⁴ At this stage, however, there were already enough scattered references to books and manuscripts in Luther's hand to challenge these assumptions, and once scholars and antiquarians began to chase up these references it became possible to draft provisional lists. Goetz and Richter included surveys in their studies of *Lutherana*, and these were followed by scholarly inventories in the work of Johann Gottlob Walter and Johann Georg Walch. Walch recognised the difficulty of the reconstruction project due to the paucity of historical clues, while Tentzel remarked more generally that it was becoming increasingly difficult over time, for archival materials would not last forever 'and the people who can read such old works are decreasing rather than increasing in number'.⁵⁵ This sense of urgency was amplified by the knowledge that portions had already been lost in previous centuries, as when the plundering of Zeitz by imperial troops led to the destruction of 'rarities' and 'relics', while some of it was showing up at auctions only to disappear once again into private hands.⁵⁶ Despite these difficulties, by the mid-eighteenth century Walter and Walch were able to publish extensive lists of manuscripts and books presumed to have

once been the property of Luther. Much of the material was still in private homes, but many collectors were starting to think like the pastor of Laublingen, who sold some valuable papers to the Count of Stolberg-Wernigerode in 1753 because he thought they were 'too good' to keep in his library.⁵⁷

There was a similar change of attitude with reference to the manuscripts. Of course, there had always been men who treasured Luther's personal papers. Pride of place must go to colleagues and amensuenses, but there were also 'private' collectors from the earliest days, such as Thomas Rehdiger and Ludwig Camerarius, who sought out Luther manuscripts for their collections. We know as well that his original papers sometimes passed from hand to hand as valued gifts.⁵⁸ But in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century there are clearly signs of a heightened interest. The evidence can be pieced together through correspondence, published prefaces, references and bibliographies, auction catalogues, and the ongoing exchange of views and materials in the newly founded journals, such as Löscher's *Unschuldige Nachrichten*.⁵⁹ By the early eighteenth century the list of people with original materials or rare copies had become very long, and it represented a range of interested parties, from self-perceived guardians of Lutheranism such as Löscher, Cyprian, and Johann Friedrich Mayer, historians and professors such as Johann Franz Buddeus and Hermann von der Hardt, to bibliophiles such as Johann Friedrich Hermann von Uffenbach and Adam Rudolph Solger. Libraries started to get in on the act as well, as when Gotha purchased autograph papers from the Leipzig bookseller David Fritsch in 1718, while others, such as Wolfenbüttel, Berlin, and Nuremberg, started to call attention to the material they already had, storing them in special containers and showing them to passing visitors.⁶⁰

Equally as impressive were the attempts made to recover the remaining letters. It began with Johann Christfried Sagittarius. In the course of preparing the Altenburg edition of Luther's works (1661-4), Sagittarius grew convinced of the need for an up-to-date version of the correspondence, but he was unable to bring it to completion due to the flood of references to source materials sent to him by a network of scholars busy searching through archives and private collections. After his death, his research notes passed into the possession of the orthodox man-of-letters Johann Friedrich Mayer, who planned to publish an edition of Luther's works, letters included. But Mayer also died before he could see through the project, and his massive library was sold off. Around this time, Tenzel also started work on a new collection of correspondence. He tapped into an even bigger network of source-minded scholars, pastors, and antiquarians, many of whom provided him with references to valuable collections.⁶¹ Tenzel's colleague Ernst Salomon Cyprian did the same thing, locating letters from the Mayer collection in Uffenbach's library, as did the Helmstedt professor Johann Andreas Schmid, who had also been in touch with Uffenbach and others (including Cyprian, Valentin Ernst Löscher, and August Hermann Francke) with the intention of preparing a new edition. At this stage it became something of a race to the finish as references and copies of letters criss-crossed the academic networks of Germany while scholars and publishers sounded each other out about likely dates of completion. The Wittenberg professor Gottlieb Wernsdorff, who was also gathering and editing, wrote to Löscher for news on Schmid's progress, all the while relying on the same circle of scholars and informants.⁶²

All these men were 'professional' Lutherans in one sense or another, by which is meant they worked in the service of church and state. But some memorialisation efforts were closer to home. The Luther family itself did much to preserve and recover the

reformer's legacy, particularly the line descending from Paul Luther. When Paul's son Johann Ernst became a canon in Zeitz he took with him his own assortment of Luther materials, including the core grouping of documents later turned into a family archive by his son Johann Martin. This became the so-called *Acta Lutherorum*, an assemblage of miscellanea relating to Luther and the family, from autograph letters and original chancellery documents to contracts and Cranach portraits.⁶³ During the lifetime of the senior canon Johann Martin Luther II, the last of the line, Zeitz became a type of research hub for Luther research overseen by the jurist Johann Christian Grubner, Johann Martin's son-in-law through his first marriage, who became in effect the custodian of the Luther family archive. We can see traces of Grubner's efforts in his personal papers, which still exist in the Zeitz Stiftsbibliothek. He seems to have collected anything to do with the Luther family, from anniversaries to death notices, and he kept a close eye on the facts. Grubner had a proof copy of David Richter's *Genealogia Lutherorum* and pencilled corrections throughout the text, whether relating to names and dates or the proper arch of Johann Martin's eyebrows. In his view, 'Luther's children and descendants are the best treasures and relics'.⁶⁴

Taken together, this wave of research and recovery in the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century represents the most important phase of Lutheran memorialisation since the days of Melancthon and Mathesius. For ease of apprehension, we might think of it as the first Luther renaissance, a fundamentally important period in the history of Lutheran self-perception, when the narrative started taking on its modern form, the source collections grew in scope and critical awareness, and Luther and his age became the subject of admiration and nostalgia.

Why were these scholars so interested in recovering the Reformation past? One of the main reasons was the shift in intellectual trends. This is precisely the period when historiographical and hermeneutical innovation started to take hold in the German lands, when theologians and historians began to write source-based critical analyses of history. These developments were themselves the culmination of intellectual developments reaching back to the Renaissance, a stage when, as Anthony Grafton has remarked, history emerged 'as a comprehensive discipline that ranged across space and time, and as a critical discipline based on the distinction between primary and secondary sources'.⁶⁵ Historical testimony had to have dates that collated with other sources, technical and linguistic characteristics appropriate to the author and the age, a clear and present internal consistency, and viable horizons of expectation. Moreover, history had to be built upon facts rather than custom or recollection. It thus followed that the duty of the historian was to uncover as many documents as possible, for history had to be impartial, and this required massing source upon source until the truth was revealed. As a result of this historiographical turn, scholars began to scrutinize the foundations of the Reformation narrative. The ongoing quest to collect and collate the remaining sources exposed the limitations of the original source-base and this in turn encouraged scholars to draw on other materials in order to create a more complete picture of the past. This is when the full spectrum of historical testimony began to surface, long since buried in princely and civic archives, church chests, scholars' studies, pastors' homes, and cabinets of curiosity.⁶⁶

Applying these new approaches to the Reformation past, while simultaneously engaged in an extended campaign of research and recovery, scholars of the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth century transformed the history of Luther and

the Reformation and laid the foundations for the narratives of the modern day. Paramount in importance in this regard was the appearance of Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff's *Commentarius historicus et apologeticus de Lutheranism* (1688), better known in English as the *History of Lutheranism*. Seckendorff spent years with the archival holdings in Weimar and Gotha as well as additional material loaned to him in 'pacquets,' some of which was posted to his residence in Meuselwitz by scholars and well-wishers, including rare manuscripts.⁶⁷ Work also resumed on the source editions of Luther's works. Johann Christfried Sagittarius saw through the Altenburg edition (1661-64), which contained new translations and additional material, and this was supplemented and expanded in 1702 by a Halle version, also with new material. Both were then surpassed by the Leipzig edition (1719-34/40) and finally the 24-volume collection by the Jena professor Johann Georg Walch.

In addition to the new collected works there were now sophisticated compilations of Reformation source materials in multi-volume folio publications. Prominent Lutheran churchmen such as Ernst Salomon Cyprian, Valentin Ernst Löscher, and Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel, who moonlighted as relic-collectors and manuscript hunters, collected, collated, and published massive collections of Reformation documentation. And there were theme-specific compilations as well, such as the bibliographical anthology in the *Centifolium Lutheranium*, assembled by the polyhistorian Johann Albrecht Fabricius, which ordered the material around loci relating to Luther's life.⁶⁸ Any potential Luther biographer of the eighteenth century could now draw on rich veins of research. All of the stages of Luther's personal history were subject to new treatments, from his birth, upbringing, and family genealogy to his career as a reformer and his later illnesses,

death, and burial.⁶⁹ By mid-century, scholars had a unprecedented range of primary materials and secondary works at their disposal.

At the heart of these academic projects, as well as the campaigns of research and recovery discussed above, was a strong spirit of memorialisation. And at the heart of the memorialisation impulse was the figure of Luther. In addition to the rooms of shelf space now being filled with the scholarly editions of Luther's works, new source-based histories of the Reformation, both regional and national in scale, and monographs devoted to specific aspects of Luther's personal history, there were detailed studies of his life and legacy with titles such as *Incombustible Luther*, *Immortal Luther*, *Luther Reborn*, and *Lutherus Thaumaturgus*. Many of these authors thought they were recovering Luther's memory and finally giving the reformer the honour he deserved, a conceit neatly conveyed in the frontispiece of Christian Juncker's work *Das Guldene und Silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis Deß Theuren Gottes-Lehrers D. Martini Lutheri* (1706), where a muse is seen scratching out a still incomplete epitaph on Luther's tomb (Illustration I).

The same spirit was behind the recovery and restoration of the objects and sites. It now became possible to take stock of the so-called Luther relics, write books about them, and plot the mental landscape of a tourist trail. Admittedly, all of the Luther relics came with a warning label: they were not sacral objects but historical markers for reflection and thanksgiving. And the same held true for the incombustible images: the miracle did not inhere in the image itself but rather in the realisation of God's providential favour.⁷⁰ But they made up the component parts of a emerging culture of memorialisation nevertheless, and we might legitimately speak of it along the lines of a cult. By the early eighteenth century there is solid evidence in the source materials that

the Luther rooms in Wittenberg were being exhibited in the modern sense, with some of his personal objects and manuscripts on display behind glass. The clergy continued to admonish that these things should not be confused with objects of worship, but as the Danish bishop Erik Pontoppidan noted on his own tour of Luther sites, the reverence being paid came 'quite close' to outright adoration.⁷¹

Perhaps the biggest stage of all for the push towards memorialisation was provided by Lutheranism's new-found fascination with anniversaries. For most of the confessional era, days of special importance, such as Luther's birth and death dates, the submission of the *Confession of Augsburg*, or the reputed introduction of the faith in a particular town or territory had been celebrated piecemeal throughout Germany at the local level. Admittedly, the centenary celebrations of 1617 provided the opportunity for a common commemoration, but the lack of Protestant unity meant that celebrations soon reverted back to the localised forms, while the outbreak of the Thirty Years War left little opportunity for celebrations of any kind. It was only in 1667, many years after the War, that the Elector of Saxony decreed that the Reformation date should be observed on an annual basis. From that point forward there was a synchronized culture of public observance in Lutheran lands, culminating in the bicentennial celebrations of 1717, which gave rise to a flood of books, sermons, and souvenirs (illustrations, medallions, stove tiles, cups, badges) as well as a coordinated round of sermons and services, much of which was recorded by local pastors and drawn together in Cyprian's *Hilaria Evangelica* (1718), a massive compendium of events.⁷² By the eighteenth century the Lutheran tendency to observe special dates, anniversaries, and jubilees has reached the stage where even Catholics could poke fun at it. Writing in response to the round of celebrations in Strasbourg on the occasion of the 1730 bicentennial of the

Confession of Augsburg, the Jesuit Johann Weislinger remarked on the ceaseless ‘cheer and rejoicing in every Lutheran land, city, village, cottage, and spinning room; cheer and rejoicing in the universities, from the pulpits, dance floors and river-side laundry banks; from every preacher, labourer, odd-jobber, horse-doctor, bathhouse-attendant, and sow-gelder there is nothing else to see, hear, or talk about than cheer and rejoicing’.⁷³

It would be difficult to reduce the reasons for this first Luther Renaissance to any one thing. As we have seen, the study of history itself had been transformed by the hermeneutics of the early Enlightenment, and there is no doubt this played a role, and there was also the heightened sense of fear and fatality common to Lutheran cultures in this period, now not only threatened by Catholics and Calvinists but also the rising tides of scepticism, separatism, unchecked enthusiasm, and simple indifference (*Indifferentismus*), which so concerned the Orthodox elite.⁷⁴ Faced by these perceived threats, and finally recovering from the desolation of the Thirty Years War, Lutheran scholars embarked on an intense period of research and reflection, the end product being a culture of memorialisation crowned by a fascination with Luther’s life and teachings that had many features of a cult. It was not the only phase of memorialisation, of course, and it is clear that subsequent developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did more to shape the modern view of the Reformation than the work of men such as Tenzel or Walch. As one recent historian has remarked, there never was a continuous Luther cult; it has always been ‘a later reinvention...in which collective ‘memory,’ having been lost, was rewritten...’ – which in the nineteenth century became the vision of Luther as a man of the people.⁷⁵ But the phase of memorialisation reaching from the late-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century was just as important in other respects,

though it is often overlooked. The scholars active during this period were the first to recognise that Luther's history had to be actively cultivated in order to ensure it did not fall out of mind, and thus they were the men who set out to recover the historical remains and provide them with the proper forms of memorialisation. In the absence of a culture that paid due reverence to Luther's legacy and its material remains, they simply invented it.

¹ Karl Eduard Förstemann, *Denkmale, dem D. Martin Luther von der Hochachtung und Liebe seiner Zeitgenossen errichtet* (Nordhausen, 1846), 24-5; Christof Schubart, *Die Berichte über Luthers Tod und Begräbnis* (Weimar, 1917), 16-17.

² Thomas Kaufmann, *Konfession und Kultur* (Tübingen, 2006), 13-26; Wolfgang Flügel, *Konfession und Jubiläum* (Leipzig, 2005), 26-84; Joachim Eibach and Marcus Sandl (eds), *Protestantische Identität und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003); Wolfgang Flügel, 'Zeitkonstrukte im Reformationsjubiläum', in Winfried Müller (ed), *Das historische Jubiläum* (Münster, 2004), 77-99; Stefan Laube and Karl-Heinz Fix (eds), *Lutherinszenierung und Reformationserinnerung* (Leipzig, 2002); Thomas Kaufmann, 'Reformationsgedenken in der Frühen Neuzeit. Bemerkungen zum 16. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 107 (2010), 285-324.

³ Martin Steffens, *Luthergedenkstätten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg, 2008), 41; R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 351: 'There is no doubt that we can speak of a Luther cult in early modern Germany...'. See now the collection of essays, images, and documents in Hole Rößler (ed.), *Luthermania* (Wolfenbüttel, 2017); on Luther's use of media, see Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther* (New York, 2016).

⁴ See the discussion in Judith Pollmann and Erika Kiujpers, 'Introduction. On the Early Modernity of Modern Memory', in Erika Kiujpers et. al. (eds), *Memory before Modernity* (Leiden, 2013), 1-26.

⁵ There are good discussions of recent theories of social memory in Gerhard Echterhoff and Martin Saar (eds), *Kontexte und Kulturen des Erinnerns* (Constance, 2002).

⁶ Inge Mager, ‘Justus Jonas an Luthers Sterbebett. Zur Entstehung der Totenmaske’, *Luther* 3 (2006), 169.

⁷ Irena Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), 1-12; Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, Hero* (Grand Rapids, 1999), 17-38; Hans Volz, *Die Lutherpredigten des Johannes Mathesius* (Leipzig, 1930), 6-30.

⁸ Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des Ehrwürdigen in Gott seligen thewren Manns Gottes, Doctoris Martini Luthers, Anfang, Lehr, Leben und Sterben* (Nuremberg, 1567), fols. cxlii^r, cliiii^r; Nikolaus Selnecker, *Historica Oratio vom Leben und Wandel...Martini Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1576), fols. 14^v, 33^r; Valerius Herberger, *Gloria Lutheri et Evangelicorum* (Leipzig, 1608), 31.

⁹ Eike Wolgast, ‘Biographie als Autoritätsstiftung: die ersten evangelischen Lutherbiographien’, in Walter Berschin (ed.), *Biographie zwischen Renaissance und Barock* (Heidelberg, 1993), 43; Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 49.

¹⁰ Selnecker, *Historica Oratio*, fol. 8^v; Paul Seidel, *Historia und Geschicht des Ehrwürdigen unsers in Gott lieben Vaters, Herrn Doctoris Martini Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1581), 31-2; Matthias Hoë von Hoënegg, *Martinalia Sacra Pragensia* (Leipzig, 1613), 26-7; Georg Nuber, *Lutherus Redivivus* (Stuttgart, 1658), 135; Johann Müller, *Defensio Lutheri Defensi* (Frankfurt am Main, 1684) 54-6 (evoking early arguments). To quote Robert Kolb: ‘Luther’s contribution to the teaching of the church, to its dogmatic tradition, was a historical datum [by 1617], not an ongoing function by which he through his writings would continue to exercise authority within the church’. See Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 133.

¹¹ Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 134.

¹² Irene Dingel, 'Ablehnung und Abneigung. Die Bewertung der Autorität Martin Luthers in den Auseinandersetzungen um die Konkordienformel', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 105 (1994), 46-7.

¹³ Conrad Vetter, *Sauber Praesent und Verehrung* (Ingolstadt, 1602), preface, biii^v-biv^r.

¹⁴ Hans-Jürgen Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Weltheilsgeschehen und Gottes Werkzeug* (Wiesbaden, 1978), 254-303.

¹⁵ Nuber, *Lutherus Redivivus*, fol. (a)2^v; Andreas Kesler, *Lutherthum* (Coburg, 1630), passim; Johann Mueller, *Lutherus Defensus* (Hamburg, 1634) passim; Georg Mylius, *Parentatio Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1592), fol. A4^v; Schönstädt, *Antichrist, Weltheilsgeschehen und Gottes Werkzeug*, 286-303.

¹⁶ Johannes Aurifaber, *Der Erste Theil, Der Buecher, Schrifften, vnd Predigten des Ehrwürdigen Herrn, D. Martin Luthers deren viel weder in den Wittenbergischen noch Jhenischen Tomis zufinden* (Eisleben, 1564), preface.

¹⁷ Mathesius, *Historien*, fol. Aii^v; Anton Probus, *Renovalia Lutheri* (Jena, 1590), fol. Qi^r; Matthias Hoë von Hoënegg, *Christliches Geburt und Lobgedächtnis des [...] D. Martini Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1604), fol. Biiii^r; C. Scott Dixon, 'The Sense of the Past in Reformation Germany', *German History*, 30, 2 (2012), 183; Cyriakus Spangenberg, *Die achte Predigt* (Erfurt, 1566), fol. Biiii^v.

¹⁸ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 302-2, 323-53, here 328.

¹⁹ On Erasmus and literary fame, see Arnoud Visser, *In de gloria. Literaire roem in de Renaissance* (De Haag, 2013). Visser speaks of Rotterdam as a literary 'pelgrimsoord'.

²⁰ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, 1993), 249-50; an account of the provenance of Dürer's hair is in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 9 (1874), 321-2.

²¹ Indeed, what should we make of the fascination with Friedrich Schiller's skull, recovered from a common grave twenty-six years after his death in 1805? Once it had been identified and set apart from the other twenty-three detached skulls in the tomb, it was cleaned up and put on display in the Weimar library in the manner of a 'holy relic' (to cite a phrase used by contemporaries). It even spent some time in the home of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who kept it safe under a bell jar atop a blue velvet cushion. Goethe referred to it as a 'relic' and a 'mysterious vessel,' and it stirred enough wonder and emotion to inspire his work *Lines on Seeing Schiller's Skull*. As a historian of this episode has remarked, there is enough reverence and veneration here to compare it to the worship of saints and relics in the late-medieval age, even though this happened in the heartland of Lutheran Germany after a century of Enlightenment. See Albrecht Schöne, *Schillers Schädel* (Munich, 2002), 21-2.

²² Alexandra Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', in Alexandra Walsham (ed.), *Relics and Remains* (Oxford, 2010), 23.

²³ In the words of Johannes Mathesius: 'Weil nun Doctor kein new lehre, sondern der alten Patriarchen, Propheten, und Apostel bestettigte lehr herfür bracht, hat dis gegründte und bekreffte wort keiner neuen wunderzeichen bedürfft'. See Mathesius, *Historien*, fol. CXCIV^v. Similar views and references to the *miraculum Lutheri* in Seidel, *Historia und Geschicht*, 99; Georg Glocker, *Wahrhafftige Historia* (Strasbourg, 1586), F5^v; Georg Mylius, *Parentatio Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1592), C^v; Herberger, *Gloria Lutheri et Evangelicorum*, 84.

²⁴ Thomas Fuchs, 'Protestantische Heiligen-memoria im 16. Jahrhundert', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 267 (1998), 587-614.

²⁵ R. W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400-1800)* (Leiden, 2001), 172-94; C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society* (Cambridge, 1996), 162-202; Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore, 1978), 247-99.

²⁶ Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli (ed.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin, 1987), vol. 1, 23; vol. 2, 1269-73; vol. 9, 978-9; *Nachträge*, 59-64.

²⁷ Gottfried Tentzel, *Hierà Grammata akausa* (Arnstadt, 1723), 19-34; Johann Heinrich Pratje, *Die Herzogthümer Bremen und Verden* (Bremen, 1757), vol. 1, 105-8; I have not been able to consult Christoph Heym's *Eilf Wunder-Geschichte, von Arndts Paradiß-Gärtlein* (Leipzig, 1713). Justus Schöpffer's *Unverbrannter Luther* (Wittenberg, 1718) provides a list of other incombustible objects before turning to Luther's portrait (75-6).

²⁸ Rößler (ed.), *Luthermania*, 110.

²⁹ Steffens, *Luthergedenkstätten*, 95.

³⁰ Lyndal Roper, 'Luther Relics', in Jennifer Spinks and Dagmar Eichberger (eds), *Religion, the Supernatural and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2015), 330-53, here 349; Stefan Laube, *Von der Reliquie zum Ding* (Berlin, 2011), 197-264; Mirko Gutjahr, 'Non cultus est, sed memoriae gratia – Hinterlassenschaften Luthers zwischen Reliquien und Relikten,' in Harald Meller (ed.), *Fundsache Luther* (Stuttgart, 2008), 100-05.

³¹ Johannes Ficker, 'Lutherorum Acta', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 107 (1936), 21-23; Richter, *Genealogia Lutherorum*, 630-42; Roper, 'Luther Relics,' 337.

³² Johann Gottlob Samuel Schwabe, *Historische Nachricht von den zahlreichen im Großherzogthum Sachsen Weimar Eisenach befindlichen Monimenten und Reliquien D. Martin Luthers* (Weimar, 1817), 104-6. Some historians claimed the last of the Aquilas

passed it to the Heumanns on the condition that it remain in the family. The spoon is presently in the Wartburg.

³³ Ulinka Rublack, 'Grapho-Relics: Lutheranism and the Materialization of the World', in Walsingham (ed.), *Relics and Remains*, 144-66, here 155; Werner Wilhelm Schnabel, *Das Stammbuch* (Tübingen, 2003), 247.

³⁴ *D Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar, 1883-1993) (hereafter WA), vol. 48, 9, 11-12, 20, 44, 116, 134-5, 142, 161-2; Johan Heinrich Kindervater, *Nordhusa Illustris* (Wolfenbüttel, 1715), 71.

³⁵ WA, vol. 60, 240-57, 236-7, 192-200; WA, vol. 56, xi-xv; WA, vol. 54, 102, no. 4; on the likely extent of the collection, see Holger Flachmann, *Luther und das Buch* (Tübingen, 1996), 30-5.

³⁶ Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar, Reg O 778, fols. 1^r-2^v; Georg Berbig, 'Ein Schreiben des Kurfürsten Johann Friedrich des Grossmütigen an Luthers Söhne Martin and Paul', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 27 (1906), 207-9; Dixon, 'Sense of the Past', (Part 1), 1; *Archiv für sächsische Geschichte* 4 (1866), 118-20; Johannes Bachmann, *Alttestamentische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1894), 103-9; Ficker, 'Lutherorum Acta', 31-4.

³⁷ Bachmann, *Alttestamentische Untersuchungen*, v; for some early modern efforts to preserve notable collections, see Heinrich Kramm, *Deutsche Bibilotheken unter dem Einfluß von Humanismus und Reformation* (Leipzig, 1938), 47-73. Kramm notes that attempts to recover Luther's library have offered up little more than 'einige Steinchen aus dem Trümmerhaufen von Luthers Bucherei' (57). Melancthon's library suffered a similar fate. See Stefan Rhein, 'Melancthons Bücherschrank', in Enno Bünz, Thomas Fuchs, and Stefan Rhein (eds), *Buch und Reformation* (Leipzig, 2014), 213-40.

³⁸ Gustav Kawerau, ‘Die Bemühungen in 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhundert, Luthers Briefe zu sammeln und herauszugeben’, in *Lutherstudien zur 4. Jahrhundertfeier der Reformation* (Weimar, 1917), 1-23.

³⁹ Eike Wolgast, *Die Wittenberger Luther-Ausgabe* (Nieuwkoop, 1971), 56, no. 294; Volz, *Die Lutherpredigten des Johannes Mathesius*, 111-13; Richter, *Genealogia Lutherorum*, 31; Johann Gottlob Walter, *Ergänzte und verbesserte Nachrichten von den Letzten Thaten und Lebensgeschichten des seligen D. Luthers* (Jena, 1750), part 1, section 2, 94.

⁴⁰ Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Bestand 10024, Loc 7208/31, fol. 15^r.

⁴¹ Ernst Thiele, ‘Die Originalhandschriften Luthers’, in *Lutherstudien*, 233-60. The origin and eventual fate of many of these collections are painstakingly retraced in Hans Volz and Eike Wolgast, *Beschreibendes Handschriftenverzeichnis zur Korrespondenz D. Martin Luthers und seiner Zeitgenossen* (Weimar, 1970), 10-174. This originally appeared in WA, Briefwechsel (hereafter Br), vol. 14.

⁴² WA, Br, vol. 14, 175-26; Georg Karpe, ‘Nachreformatorsche Gründungsperiode. Die Fürstliche Sächsische Bibliothek Jena 1549-1650’, in *Geschichte der Universitätsbibliothek Jena 1549-1945* (Weimar, 1958), 25-76, 105-10; Irmgard Kratzsch, ‘Quellenmaterial zu Martin Luthers Leben und Werk in der Universitätsbibliothek Jena’, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität*, 1/2 (1983), 229-48. One register of the relative laissez-faire approach to Luther manuscripts in the early modern period is the sheer amount of material discovered (or rediscovered) by the Weimar historians in the nineteenth century. As Gustav Kawerau remarked, ‘Niemand ahnte im Jahre 1883, wieviel noch ungehobene handschriftliche Schätze, zum Teil Schätze allerersten Ranges, in Bibliotheken

verborgen lagen...'. (Cited in Thiele, 'Die Originalhandschriften,' 233). A comprehensive history of the fate of Luther's books and manuscripts would require a thorough study of the *Weimarer Ausgabe*, beginning, of course, with their own efforts at collation (WA, Br, vol. 14).

⁴³ Steffens, *Luthergedenkstätten*, 37-42; Stefan Laube, *Das Lutherhaus Wittenberg* (Leipzig, 2003), 94; J. D. Jordan, 'Zur Geschichte des Lutherhauses nach 1564', *Lutherjahrbuch*, 2/3 (1920/21), 112-13. Both Steffens and Laube suggest that there must have been some sort of memorialisation effort at the time, even if (to cite Steffens) the proofs 'nicht in allen Fällen durch Quellen nachzuweisen sind' (42) or (to cite Laube) it must be assumed '[a]uch ohne dokumentarische Beleg' (94). Both authors reach this conclusion based on their readings of later sources. More recently Stefan Rhein has claimed that the two Eisleben houses were the subjects of memorialisation 'in Kontinuität' after Luther's death while the *Lutherstube* in the Wartburg was 'konserviert' and the Wittenberg equivalent 'mit seiner Ausstattung weitgehend unverändert blieb', but Rhein does not provide any substantial archival evidence to support these claims. See Stefan Rhein, 'Luther im Museum: Kult, Gedenken and Erkenntnis,' in Heinz Schilling (ed.), *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017* (Berlin, 2015), 252-3.

⁴⁴ Steffens, *Luthergedenkstätten*, 161-9; Christian Juncker, *Eines Anonymi Staat des Fürstenthums Eisenach* (Eisenach, 1710), 175; Christian Juncker, *Das Guldene und Silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis Deß Theuren Gottes-Lehrers D. Martini Lutheri* (Frankfurt, 1706), 104-5; Goetz, *De Reliquiis Lutheri*, 16-17. Martin Steffens has described the early approach to the Luther sites as follows: 'Die erste Phase der Wahrnehmung von Luthergedenkstätten war nach dem Tod des Reformators in der Regel von

Weiternutzung geprägt, ohne dass eine denkmalhafte Aufwertung erfolgte.’ See Rößler (ed.), *Luthermania*, 110.

⁴⁵ Roper, ‘Luther Relics’, 335.

⁴⁶ Jordan, ‘Zur Geschichte des Lutherhauses’, 117; there is an example of the use of the word in this sense in David Gugerli, *Zwischen Pfrund und Predigt* (Zurich, 1988), 270: ‘Bey der Visitation in dem Pfarrhaus soll er [der Dekan] sich mit dem Pfarer in sein Musaeum verfuegen, und sich da vorzeigen lassen, was der Pfarer neben der H. Schrift, fuer gute und nuetzlichen Buecher lese...’. *Studirstube* is the word used in Merian’s *Topographia Superioris Saxoniae Thuringiae* (Frankfurt, 1650), and Zedler’s *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* defines Museum in the same sense, as does Goetz, *De Reliquiis Lutheri*, 15-16, 19.

⁴⁷ Johann Christian Crell, *Sächsisches Curiositäten Cabinet* (Dresden, 1731), Part 1, 170; Christian Friedrich Kranewitter, *Commentatio de fonte Lutheri* (Wittenberg, 1754), xiii.

⁴⁸ Johann Georg Leuckfeld, *Chronologia Abbatum Bosaugiensium* (Naumburg, 1731), (2^e; they were subsequently published in Tobias Eckhard, *Codices Manuscripti Quedlinburgenses* (Quedlinburg, 1723), 89-92.

⁴⁹ Georg Heinrich Goetz, *De Reliquiis Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1703), 3-8

⁵⁰ Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel, *Curieuse Bibliothec, oder Forsetzung der Monatlichen Unterredungen einiger guten Freunde* (Frankfurt, 1703), 380-82.

⁵¹ Johann Melchior Krafft, *Das hundert-jährige Jubel-Jahr der evangelischen Kirche* (Hamburg, 1717), 55-6.

⁵² Tentzel, *Curieuse Bibliothec*, 377.

⁵³ Juncker, *Das Guldene und Silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis*, 269-88; Johann Georg Walch, *D. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften* (Halle, 1750), vol. 24, 281-310. No doubt having a Luther relic was a status symbol for libraries and universities, and perhaps a source of pride as well, which seems to be the thinking behind the Helmstedt professor Hermann von der Hardt's remark that 'sie dürfen zu Wittenberg nicht trotzen auf die Reliquien Luthers, da sie zu Helmstedt mehrere hätten.' Quoted in Theodor Wotschke, 'Niedersächsische Mitarbeiter an den "Unschuldigen Nachrichten",' *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte*, 31 (1926), 92, no. 1.

⁵⁴ Goetz, *De Reliquiis Lutheri*, 25.

⁵⁵ Walch, *D. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. 24, 297-310, here 297; Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel, *Monatliche Unterredungen einiger guten Freunde von allerhand Büchern und andern annemlichen Geschichten* (1692), 278; Walter, *Ergänzte und verbesserte Nachrichten*, part 1, section 3, 198-208; Goetz, *De Reliquiis Lutheri*, 7 no. d, 25-31; Juncker, *Das Guldene und Silberne Ehren-Gedächtnis*, 289-98.

⁵⁶ Richter, *Genealogia Lutherorum*, 564.

⁵⁷ Thiele, 'Die Originalhandschriften,' 250, no. 1.

⁵⁸ Thiele, 'Die Originalhandschriften,' 241-2.

⁵⁹ There are some fascinating details about the research efforts in Wotschke, 'Niedersächsische Mitarbeiter,' 73-112.

⁶⁰ Rößler (ed.), *Luthermania*, 69-90.

⁶¹ Tentzel published transcriptions of some of the letters in the possession of Johann Andreas Gleich. See *Curieuse Bibliothec* (1704), 392-402

⁶² Theodor Wotschke, 'Von den Bemühungen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert, Luthers Briefe zu sammeln', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 25 (1928), 271-310; Kawerau, 'Die Bemühungen im 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhundert,' 1-23; WA, Br, Vol. 14, 451-537.

⁶³ Thomas Fuchs, 'Die "Acta Lutherorum"', *Leipziger Jahrbuch für Buchgeschichte* 20 (2011/12), 13-34; Ficker, 'Lutherorum Acta', 1-45.

⁶⁴ Stiftsbibliothek Zeitz, Cat. Pag. 51, no. 7; no. 8; no. 17; no. 16, no. 17a; the quote is scribbled on the cover of the 'Anmerckungen und Historische Beschreibung' in Cat. Pag. 51, no. 7. As the last patriarch of the Paul Luther line, Johann Martin Luther II did much to encourage genealogical research and seek the patronage of high-profile intellectuals. On learning of the arrival of Johann Friedrich Mayer in Leipzig in 1706, for instance, he sent Mayer a note praising his work in defence of Luther's legacy and hoping that this might extend to 'Conservation des Geschlechts und Nachkommen des Seel. M. Lutheri,' as the family had fallen on hard times. Johann Martin Luther asked whether Mayer might intercede with the King of Sweden to help him with his debts. See Johann Carl Dähnert, *Pommersche Bibliothek* (Greifswald, 1754), vol. 3, 57.

⁶⁵ Anthony Grafton, *What was History?* (Cambridge, 2007), 33; Thomas Fuchs, 'Das Ringen mit der Tradition. Die Kritik an Kirche und Religion in der Historiographie der Aufklärungsepoche', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 55, (2003), 121-37; Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), 2-21.

⁶⁶ On the relationship between notions of historical interpretation and archival materials, see Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt des Archivs* (Munich, 2013).

⁶⁷ Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Martin Luther und die Reformation im Urteil des deutschen Luthertums* (Freiburg, 1950), 113-41.

⁶⁸ Gustav Wolf, *Quellenkunde der deutschen Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 2, part 1, *Kirchliche Reformationsgeschichte* (Gotha, 1916), 167-8.

⁶⁹ The main publications through the years are listed in Ernst Gustav Vogel, *Bibliotheca Biographica Lutherana* (Halle, 1851).

⁷⁰ Laube, *Von der Reliquie zum Ding*, 197-264. In discussions of the Luther cult, scholars have often overlooked the fact that the accounts of the incombustible images in Schöpffer's *Unverbrannter Luther* make up a very small portion of the work and are not the only incombustible objects mentioned. In fact, as even the unsympathetic *Journal des sçavans* reviewer recognised in 1718, Schöpffer's main aim was to use the metaphor of fire as a means of framing Luther's life story. When dealing specifically with the images in the final chapter, the emphasis is placed on how they are signs of God's greater providence (as any so-called wonder might be) and Schöpffer makes it quite clear that they are not to be thought of as objects with any inherent power. In the words of the Wittenberg professor Martin Chladni, whose unease with the theme runs through his preface: 'Doch darff sich niemand einbilden: als wollten wir Lutherum unter die Heiligen setzen, dessen Bildniß anbeten, und folglich die Schuld einer unverantwortlichen Abgötterey auf uns laden'.

⁷¹ Laube, *Von der Reliquie zum Ding*, 197-264, here 221; Laube, *Das Lutherhaus Wittenberg*, 87-99.

⁷² Thomas Albert Howard, *Remembering the Reformation* (Oxford, 2016), 11-34.

⁷³ Johann Nicholas Weislinger, *Huttenus Delarvatus* (Constance, 1730), 29-30

⁷⁴ Martin Greschat, *Zwischen Tradition und neuem Anfang* (Witten, 1971), 20-75.

⁷⁵ Roper, 'Luther Relics,' 335; Hartmut Lehmann, *Luthergedächtnis 1817 bis 2017* (Göttingen, 2012), 17-34.