

GERMANY

Luther Memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg

Brief description

These places in Saxony-Anhalt are all associated with the lives of Martin Luther and his fellow-reformer Melanchthon. They include Melanchthon's house in Wittenberg, the houses in Eisleben where Luther was born in 1483 and died in 1546, his room in Wittenberg, the local church and the castle church where, on 31 October 1517, Luther posted his famous '95 Theses', which launched the Reformation and a new era in the religious and political history of the Western world.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1996

Agency responsible for site management

- Land Saxony-Anhalt Ministry of Culture.
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (iv), (vi)

Justification provided by the State Party

According to the definition relevant for the UNESCO World Heritage List the Luther Memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg constitute objects of outstanding universal value, the following criteria applying in particular to them: 'They have exerted considerable influence over a span of timeon subsequent developments. . . . in related. arts and human settlements and they are most importantly associated with the ideas or beliefs with events or with persons of outstanding historical importance or significance.'

As authentic scenes of the Reformation or decisive events in the life of the Reformer Martin Luther the historic Luther memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg have been of outstanding significance far beyond the German borders for the political, cultural and spiritual history of the Occident.

Driven by the desire for eternal salvation, the young student and monk Martin Luther had set about clarifying his most urgent question, that of God's mercy, following the routes shown to him by theology and the Church. Strict observance of the rules and regulations of the Church did not, however, have the hoped-for result. Influenced by the circles of humanists in Erfurt, he embarked on a most intensive study of the Bible, parallel to his conventional religious exercises. In the course of his theological and personal analyses and arguments he restored the doctrine of Justification to the centre of Faith. He realized that God's justice, which he craved for so much, can only be obtained as a present and not through man's merits (according to Roman Letters 1, chapter 17). Faith alone leads man to God and to salvation, everything else depends on God's mercy.

According to his own utterances and other records Luther is said to have arrived at this conclusion in his cell at the Augustinian Monastery in Wittenberg. This is also the reason why the word "tower experience" is used in this context. (cf. chapter: Description of Luther Hall). This may be considered to have been the starting point for Reformation. The conviction gained here was to become the basis and motive for the actions of Luther and his rapidly growing number of supporters.

The unexpectedly vehement and wide reaction to Luther's 95 Propositions published in 1517, sparked off a chain of events, eventually culminating in Luther's famous appearance before Emperor Charles V at the Imperial Diet in Worms.

Luther worked out his ideas in a series of writings, among which special mention should be made of the essay "On the freedom of a Christian" (Ton der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen). In it he deals with the principle of the responsibility of every individual to God and society, which has gone down in history as far more than a theological statement: it has become one of the main pillars of society and culture in the Christian Occident. Luther's importance is, however, not restricted to the academic field. He was strongly committed to the service as a preacher, which he considered to be the supreme office of Christendom. "The greatest divine service is the sermon".

His sermons reflect the development of his thinking. They give evidence of his great rhetorical and educational talent, his closeness with the simple people which can be felt everywhere in his theology. His familiarity with people's beliefs, including late-Middle Age superstitions, gave rise to his criticism of the prevailing conditions and to his reorganisation of the parishes. Luther appealed to his audience to seek for a new kind of piety, to reassess their Christian ideals and their personal practice of Faith and to a way of life resulting from it. Luther's sermons became very famous, attracting many people to Wittenberg who wanted to listen to the Reformer himself. His sermons were recorded and published in thousands of copies.

Although Luther's main achievement was undoubtedly his work as a reformer of the Church. As a consequence and because of a further development of his ideas, a far more universal role is attributed to him. Luther is considered to be the reformer of piety and education, and indeed, his influence upon the system of education, as well as on other sections of culture reach down right into our time. The reforms of the Wittenberg university, which he performed together with Melanchthon, became a model for other European universities. All through his life he was committed to a renewal of school teaching. His appeal to the councillors in all German towns to establish Christian schools with humanitarian teaching principles became famous.

The special merit of a complete translation of the Bible is a decisive contribution towards the development of a uniform German national language. Even though the first complete German Luther Bible was published in 1534, Luther continued his struggle to achieve this goal for the rest of his life. This work was shared and supported to a considerable extent by Luther's friend and co-worker Philipp Melanchthon. Luther's Bible spread very quickly. Even during his lifetime 344 complete and partial editions appeared.

The enormous demand for Luther's writing promoted a number of crafts in Wittenberg, above all the printing craft. Hans Lufft, the printer of Luther's Bible of 1534 became quite famous. For some decades Wittenberg became one of the leading centres of letter-press printing with a great book export. From 1524 onwards a publishing trade began to develop in Wittenberg whose first representatives were the elder Lucas Cranach and Samuel Seltsch. Already in 1559 the first complete edition of Luther's works in 19 volumes was available. Another publication gave evidence of Luther's talent for the arts. His "Spiritual Song Booklet" ("Geistliches Gesangbüchlein") published

in 1524 started the tradition of the Protestant hymn. The majority of those hymns are sung even today. His texts made him the most important religious poet of the time of Reformation, although he himself did not acknowledge this.

Of decisive influence on the course of Reformation was the extremely favourable political situation in Wittenberg. In the early 16th century the Saxon Electorate was one of the most powerful and important German territorial states, on the verge of becoming the leading political power in Germany. The Elector did not only rule the country politically, his influence also covered matters of the Church. With a view to making his country more powerful in every respect the sovereign had also to be interested in the thriving of the Church and in overcoming grievances. This is why the Elector was inclined to the reforms of the existing Church when Luther started to ask for demands. In Frederic the Wise Luther found an educated sovereign who appreciated new movements and who himself cultivated contacts with humanists. In the course of the events of Reformation Frederic became the leading princely opponent of the imperial power in Germany, who openly supported Luther and the initiated changes in his country.

Wittenberg offered excellent conditions for Luther's objectives. Although the town was still small and undeveloped when Luther arrived in 1508, in the following years an immense economic and spiritual potential developed in the Elector's newly chosen seat of court, and therefore capital of the Saxon Electorate. In this process the university played a role that should not be underestimated. The fact that the Elector had not yet established a teaching tradition of its own provided a favourable basis for the development of Luther's ideas. Together with his ally and friend Philipp Melanchthon Luther reformed the university of Wittenberg. The alliance between the Reformer and the younger humanist was to have its consequences for the university. The work these two men accomplished made the Elector's capital famous all over Europe. Although the town of Wittenberg never had more than 2,500 inhabitants in the 16th century, the university in its best times comprised more than 3,000 students who did not only come from Germany. As a matter of fact the intellectual elite of North and East Europe was educated in Wittenberg for almost one century. A special attraction were the lectures given by Philipp Melanchthon. Apart from his important role as a teacher of Greek, his biblical-exegetical lectures should be emphasized, which he always strictly based on the Hebrew and Greek originals. After Luther's death Melanchthon took over the leading

position at the Leucorea, contributing to the further flourishing of the university. Melanchthon is credited with the liberation of the educational system from medieval formalism and with the implementation of humanistic reform far beyond Wittenberg. As an acknowledgement for his achievements in the organisation of general and higher education he was awarded the title of "Praeceptor Germaniae" (teacher of Germany). His concept of a so-called "humanistisches Gymnasium" was of outstanding importance for all Germany, and is still living on in our time.

A highlight in Melanchthon's work for the Reformation was the publication in 1521 of the "Loci communes rerum theologicarum seu hypotyposes theologicae". This work that he continued to revise all through his life contained the first systematic description of Reformation theology and a new theological methodology for his time. His statements in the "Loci communes" enhanced the crisis that had developed for the medieval university life and the Church through Luther's appearance.

Melanchthon may be regarded as Luther's closest co-worker, since he had a decisive share in the academic formulation of Reformation theology. His logically faultless phrasing made a deep impression even on his opponents. His ability to grasp the essence of problems and to deal with them in a comprehensive way made Melanchthon an indispensable representative of the Evangelical side during religious arguments with the Catholic princes and dignitaries. Thus, in 1530 at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg he stepped in for Luther who had remained in the fortress of Coburg for security reasons. In the course of the dispute between the dependants of the Pope and Emperor and the supporters of Reformation Melanchthon drew up the principle declaration of the Evangelical Church, the "Confessio Augustana". It is considered to be Melanchthon's main work. In his writings the scholar strove for reconciliation and mutual understanding. He wanted to establish the reforms in a peaceful manner, preserving the unity of the Christian Occident. However, the hoped-for agreement was not achieved, neither in Augsburg nor during later negotiations. On the contrary, the controversy resulted in a first bloody culmination point in the war of Schmalkalden. Quite apart from his outstanding role as a systematic thinker of Luther's doctrine and as an organiser of education, Philipp Melanchthon must nevertheless be credited with the decisive role of a leader of negotiations in the explosive political-confessional debates of his time.

The houses where Martin Luther was born and where he died in Eisleben, Luther Hall, Melanchthon's House, as well as Town Church and Castle Church in Wittenberg are original scenes of the Reformation events. Thousands of visitors come to these places every year in order to view these first-hand witnesses. Both the original places of work and the church building may be considered to be art monuments of high quality. As a whole, including their furnishings, they convey a vivid picture of an historic era of world and ecclesiastical importance.

The two houses in Eisleben represent the key dates in Martin Luther's life, his birth and his death. Besides, the buildings linked with Luther's personal life constitute vivid monuments to the way of life of the Reformers and their contemporaries, and in this way material evidence of the social and spiritual background of the historic events. Luther Hall in Wittenberg is considered to be the guardian of direct Luther traditions. Within this building Luther's Room is of special significance. In 1825 the artist Johann Gottfried Schadow aptly summarized the aura of this room "Thousands of passers-by from our country and from abroad have visited this room as a place of pilgrimage. It should not be easy to find a place more suitable to bring to our mind Luther's spirit in its personal shape... ". Down to the present Luther's Room has preserved its appearance almost completely, giving the visitor an idea of the life of its former inhabitants.

Schadow's characteristic could also be suitably applied to Melanchthon's House, since it too survived almost unchanged.

Town Church used to be one of the main sites of Luther's activities, which can be gathered from contemporary records. Thus e.g. Luther's sermons can be timed exactly to the hour, and also where he was standing and which subjects he dealt with in his sermons. Far more than half of his over 2,000 preserved sermons were held by him in the Town Church of Wittenberg.

In spite of all destructions and reconstructions Castle Church still houses the unharmed tombs of the two Reformers and the Electors Frederic and John. The Propositions Portal is cherished as the symbolic starting-point of Reformation. The church itself became a national monument to Reformation, with its furnishings from the late 19th century. In so far Castle Church is not only a memorial to Reformation, but also a witness of Wilhehnian ecclesiastical politics, which claims the place as a scenery of its own history.

The authenticity of the living and working places of Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon lend a special quality to Eisleben and Wittenberg as memorial sites. In all of these Luther memorials the "genus loci", that unique aura of historic places, is alive, and visitors from all over the world face the original sites of the great German Reformer with awe, respect and admiration.

In addition to their direct link with events and a movement of Faith of world importance the Luther memorials are at the same time early witnesses of an awareness of monument conservation, of an effort to preserve their original state as far as possible. These efforts started partly soon after Luther's death, aiming at the creation of a memorial to Reformation. The buildings were conserved accordingly, but they were also changed in structure for this purpose. This includes the reverent preservation of Luther's living-room in the Augustinian monastery and the establishment of the "Museum Lutheri" and also the furnishing of the "Splendid Hall" in the house where Luther was born in Eisleben. All buildings have a high value as monuments, both as authentic scenes of history events of world importance and because of their conscious shaping as museums from the 16th to the 20th centuries. Since the introduction of institutionalised monument conservation in Sachsen-Anhalt in the 19th century all measures in and on the Luther memorials have been carried out under conservationist supervision and participation, which ensures the authenticity grown before the 19th century. The chain of historic tradition is unbroken, written records exist.

As early as in the 16th century the important dates connected with Reformation were commemorated. The celebrations held on the anniversaries of Luther's birth and death, the Posting of the Propositions and the publication of the Confession of Augsburg have always been indelibly linked with the commitment to the 'doctrines of Reformation. Since 1617 Reformation Day has been celebrated in Wittenberg and Saxony on October 31st. The Luther memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg have to be included in the category of cultural monuments that are directly connected with the life and work of outstanding personalities in the history of religion and culture.

Their value results from the world-wide dissemination of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and other Christian religious communities which have their origin in Luther's Reformation. All Scandinavian countries, as well as wide parts of East and South Europe have been temporarily or

permanently influenced by the Lutheran Reformation.

Another traditional branch is represented by the countries which came under the formative influence of Jean Calvin's Reform, i.e. Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scotland, since Calvin regarded himself to be a disciple and accomplice of Luther's. Emigrants to the US, Australia and South Africa established large and stable Lutheran communities in those countries, which have formed traditions that are alive to this day. At present an amazing potential of growth can be observed in the Lutheran Churches of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, the latter even including the majority of the population. According to the most recent statistics of 1982 almost 69 million people on all continents belong to Lutheran Churches.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

None of the individual buildings may be considered to possess outstanding universal value as individual works of art. The two Wittenberg churches have a special value, in that they represent the earliest examples of a Protestant approach to the disposition of liturgical space within a place of worship. However, the over-riding and incontestable outstanding universal significance of the group is their association with Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, which was one of the most decisive events in the religious and political history of the world.

A subsidiary, but not negligible, quality of the town houses in particular is the way in which they represent 19th century German Historicism, as applied to monuments of great importance in German history. Most of the leading practitioners of this style are represented: Stüler, Adler, Wanderer, Pozzi, and Schinkel all contributed in various ways.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria iv and vi:

The Luther memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg bear unique testimony to the Protestant Reformation, which was one of the most significant events in the religious and political history of the world, and constitute outstanding examples of 19th century Historicism.

Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1996): ICOMOS informed the Bureau that, since preparing the written evaluation of this nomination, it had received additional information responding to all the issues mentioned in its original evaluation. The Bureau decided to keep the

Melanchthon's House in Wittenberg in the nomination. The Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criteria (iv) and (vi) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value bearing unique testimony to the Protestant Reformation, which was one of the most significant events in the religious and political history of the world and to which the buildings bear exceptional testimony.

Session (1996): The Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criteria (iv) and (vi), considering that it is of outstanding universal value bearing unique testimony to the Protestant Reformation, which was one of the most significant events in the religious and political history of the world and constitutes outstanding examples of 19th century historicism. The Committee congratulated the German authorities on this nomination and considered that its symbolic value clearly justifies inscription under cultural criterion (vi).

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate
- change to buffer zone proposed by State Party

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained/have not been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Land Saxony-Anhalt Law on the Protection of Monuments of 1991, last amended on 17 December 2003 (Land Saxony-Anhalt Gazette of Laws and Ordinances (GVBl), page 352) The law gives detailed description of the protection of monuments as Land law
- Establishment of the Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt (1 September 1997). It embraces the previously municipal museum in the Luther Hall, Melanchthon's house in Wittenberg and Luther's birthplace and the house in which Luther died in Eisleben
- The protection arrangements are considered highly effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Religious use. Museums: paid visitor attraction

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group: inter-ministerial coordination group at Land level which deals with all the needs of the Luther Memorials in its regular meetings. (Scientific Advisory Board only for the museums)
- Formally constituted
- Management system: management under protective legislation
- No site manager
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: public law foundation for the museums, Union of Protestant Churches (Union evangelischer Kirchen) for the Castle Church, Protestant Church of Saxony (Evangelische Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen) for the Town Church
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: January 1998
- Revision: completion in January 2007
- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Saxony-Anhalt Ministry of Culture, Department for Culture; Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt; Land Saxony-Anhalt Office for the Conservation of Monuments and Archaeology (Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt); State Building Office Dessau; Magdeburg Church Construction Office (Kirchliches Bauamt Magdeburg)

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State Budget; foundations for the museums: subsidies from Land Saxony-Anhalt, the Federation, the towns of Wittenberg and Eisleben, Protestant Church of Saxony; revenues
- Project-related funds: Town Church - Land Saxony-Anhalt, Protestant Church of Saxony and own revenue; Castle Church - Land Saxony-Anhalt
- Adequate

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: not provided

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: interpretation
- Good: conservation, management, education, visitor management
- Average: promotion

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Restoration workshop in the Foundation, expertise from the Land Saxony-Anhalt Office for the Conservation of Monuments and Archaeology, Magdeburg Church Construction Office

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 360,000 (churches: estimates 230,000 ; museums: ticket sales 130,000), tendency increasing
- Visitor facilities: museum shops
- Visitor needs: restaurants (museums), visitor centre (churches)

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, archaeological surveys
- Joint transregional marketing through the "Roads to Luther" programme (Wege zu Luther) inter alia with Wartburg Castle in Eisenach
Joint programmes with World Heritage sites in Saxony-Anhalt

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: advertising within and outside the sites with the World Heritage logo
- Web site available
- Local participation

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Numerous conservation and restoration works on related buildings
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- No threats identified

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken: regular monitoring of the interior climate of buildings

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: social; economic
- Strengths of management: Within the Foundation there is a medium-term programme for systematic renewal of the museums and conservation of the monuments. The work on the Luther Hall in Wittenberg has been completed and this is to be followed by work on Luther's birthplace in Eisleben. The restoration of the two churches is being done gradually
- Weaknesses of management: potential damage to the substance caused by a lack of conservation between 1928 and 1990

Future actions:

- Restoration: gradual restoration of the properties in line with monument conservation provisions
- Luther Memorials, Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt
- Timeframe: ongoing