

APOCALYPSE AT HAND: Apocalyptic Imagery in Media during the Thirty Years' War

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This article compares the worldviews that informed depictions of the Thirty Years' War (1618—1648) in print mass media, specifically focusing on the contrast in style and content between Continental and English sources. It identifies the prevalence of apocalyptic symbolism particular to areas within the Holy Roman Empire and argues that this phenomenon in war ravaged German-speaking Europe is distinct from the sensationalist and religious media published about the conflict in non-combatant England. Drawing on a number of contemporary pamphlets, broadsheets and illustrations from across both sides of the Channel throughout the duration of the war, this essay contends that the particular obsession with prophecy, conspiracy and end-times imagery evident in German publications was the result of a particular confluence of deep-seated religious tradition, emerging but still rudimentary communication technology and one of the most brutal wars in European history.

Introduction

The Thirty Years' War (1618—1648), indisputably an inflection point in European history, began as a relatively limited confrontation over royal prerogative and religious freedom and spiraled into a continent—spanning decade—long conflict that devastated and depopulated vast swathes of territory and fundamentally changed the nature of institutional power forever. This particular conflict was also marked by an unprecedented explosion in the publication of pamphlets, broadsheets and popular print that presents a trove of written documents expressing to the increasingly literate masses¹ sentiments that both reflected and shaped views held by common people about the state of the world around them. In examining such documents, and particularly in comparing those from the war—torn Holy Roman Empire to those published in the non—belligerent England, an evident distinction can be drawn; where the early English newsletter provided the interested public with (relatively) facts—oriented wartime reporting of events abroad, German publications consistently turned to themes of conspiracy and apocalypse, lending credence to prophecy and mystic conjecture. The horror and brutality of that particular conflict, when laid upon the religious and social foundations that undergirded Early Modern Europe, shaped the apocalyptic worldview that informed these publications and had far—reaching implications into the later 17th and 18th centuries.

While historical scholarship surrounding the war has explored many facets relating to this topic, this paper aims at a more complete synthesis of disparate areas of historical interest. German occultism and zealotry, the accuracy of published

¹ P.H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2011), 824.

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sources in reflecting wartime attitudes, and English news periodicals are all areas that have some consideration in the scholarly literature covering this time period, but a comparative analysis of these areas allows for a better comprehensive understanding of the worldviews and mindsets created by the Thirty Years' War. This paper will draw directly upon contemporary writing and artwork to (in some cases literally) illustrate the apocalyptic hysteria gripping Germany, while also considering related topics in scholarship and their effect on its central thesis.

Literature Review

In the literature surrounding the Thirty Years' War there are a number of important debates, some of which—the historiographical delineation of different phases for example—are to be expected but others which may come as a surprise to casual readers. One of these latter is explored in John Theibault's "Rhetoric of Death and Destruction" (1993)² which is an answer to a school of thought represented by Robert Ergang's "Myth of All—Destructive Fury" (1956)³ that makes the provocative assertion that descriptions of brutality and extent of damage from the Thirty Years' War time frame are wildly exaggerated and that the extent of destruction was far less than commonly believed.⁴ Theibault rejects this assertion, and drawing on internal church documents shows evidence that even without any sort of material motivation⁵ accounts of the horrors and devastation visited upon communities throughout the HRE remain consistent. In fact, "Death and Destruction" goes so far as to argue that the usage of alarmist language at the beginning of the conflict undermines historical appreciation for the truly appalling situations later in the war which could not be linguistically emphasized more than previous events and became better understood—if not more palatable—in the minds of victims⁶⁷. In a paper that claims to offer analysis of worldview based on material conditions, it is a critical necessity to first establish what said conditions were—something the very basis of which is challenged by the 'exaggerated destruction' camp. Ergang's justification that the Thirty Years' War took place in an "age enthusiastically given to exaggeration"⁸ allows for nearly any

² John Theibault, "The Rhetoric of Death and Destruction in the Thirty Years War," *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 271—90.

³ Robert Reinhold Ergang, *The Myth of the All—destructive Fury of the Thirty Years' War* (Pocono Pines: The Craftsmen, 1956).

⁴ Ergang's paper was written in response to the prevailing historical scholarship of his time, namely late 19th century German nationalist literature which was written with a vested interest in characterizing the devastation of the war as the chief retarding agent in what they believed to be the natural development of an ascendant German power. It is understandable that Ergang sought to question the fundamental historical claims made by figures such as Dietrich Schäfer—a diehard revanchist who was a hero to the National Socialists and simultaneously one of the leading authorities on German history—but his arguments ignore mountains of hard evidence.

⁵ Theibault makes reference to two papers—one by Steinberg and one by Benecke—in the 'exaggerated destruction' camp which imply that accounts of devastation are inflated because of material gains from tax reductions and the general class interest of those with the means to chronicle events. Theibault, "Rhetoric of Death," 271—74.

⁶ Theibault, "Rhetoric of Death," 278—80. Anecdotally this is supported by two diary entries in Helfrich's book. She calls attention to the contraposition of the same village raid in the diaries of an attacking soldier and a resident farmer, the latter dedicating a significant section to the harrowing experience and the former taking passing note of the local wildlife.

⁷ Tryntje Helfferich, *The Thirty Years War: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 274—325.

⁸ Ergang, *The Myth of the All—destructive Fury*, 4.

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interpretation of historical documents, and Steinberg's⁹ basic contention that Prussian historiography is alone responsible for the portrayal of the war as a uniquely devastating conflict is an agenda driven generalization where a legitimate grievance with Prussian (and later German) anti—Habsburg bias lead to overreaching denials of basic historical fact¹⁰. As such, the analysis offered by authorities such as Wilson that promotes a tempered historical skepticism while recognizing the enormity of the conflict, seems by far the best approach to this question.¹¹

In dealing with scholarship on religious symbolism and significance in the early modern period, it can be difficult to quantify or contextualize the extent to which religion permeated every aspect of early modern European society. Historians will bicker about how or whether to delineate religion from other aspects of life, and a great deal of ink has been expended on the confessional nature of the war and how it changes over time.¹² As such, articles about religious symbolism, like Gilly's "The 'Midnight Lion'"¹³ or those about the Rosicrucians,¹⁴ like to focus on the most clear motifs that can be established and then related to some greater trend. Because religion is so deeply interwoven into all early modern discourse, it is difficult to make any claim about world perceptions apart from a religious lense and even more challenging to draw important distinctions between mindsets without falling into the trap of thinking about some sources as 'more' or 'less' religious than others. Nevertheless, this is precisely the kind of distinction that this paper tries to make between English and Holy Roman documents as they relate to the war, and keeping the inseparable nature of confession from political considerations in mind is critical for constructing a nuanced understanding of such differences.

The Thirty Years' War also witnessed an explosion of print media, and marked an important era in the development of the newspaper and mass media more broadly. Scholarly study of this aspect rests on understanding the extent to which documents like newsletters, broadsheets and pamphlets—invaluable to historians because of their permanent record—actually reflected the attitudes and information space available to different contemporary groups. King's exploration of "The Manuscript Newsletter"¹⁵ contends that handwritten letter form news periodicals had a greater role in the information environment of the time than commonly credited, but in any case concurs with Wilson in highlighting the rapidly developing network of frontline correspondence that brought reports of ravages in Germany to news—hungry audiences across Christendom.¹⁶ Here again, careful consideration must be given to the accuracy of such reports—the interests of those producing them specifically and the broader social interest of the kinds of people that seek out such information.

⁹ S. H. Steinberg, *The Thirty Years' War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600—1660* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), 1—128.

¹⁰ Theibault, "Rhetoric of Death," 272.

¹¹ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 779—821.

¹² Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 25—48, 207—239.

¹³ Carlos Gilly, "'THE 'MIDNIGHT LION' THE 'EAGLE' AND THE 'ANTICHRIST': Political, religious and chiliastic propaganda in the pamphlets, illustrated broadsheets, and ballads of the Thirty Years War,'" *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History* 80, no. 1 (2000): 46—77.

¹⁴ Wm. Bradford Smith, "Resisting the Rosicrucians: Theories on the Occult Origins of the Thirty Years' War," *Church History and Religious Culture*, no. 4 (2014): 413—43.

¹⁵ Rachael Scarborough King, "The Manuscript Newsletter and the Rise of the Newspaper, 1665—1715," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79, no. 3: (2016), 411—37.

¹⁶ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 824—27.

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Körber's analysis of "The Thirty Years' War as a Media Event"¹⁷ proves incredibly useful in granting a balanced understanding of these particular issues, and the most effective ways to translate contemporary discourse into something more relatable to a modern media environment. Comprehension of this kind is critical for this paper in its attempt to delineate between 'normal' confessional & political bias (these being inexorably linked) found in almost all writing of the time and the particular characteristics of the apocalyptic furor gripping the Empire.

Primary Sources

It is important to note the primary sources consulted for this paper reflect the unfortunate limitations of extant material available for research in the English language. The Thirty Years' War took place across the breadth of a European continent even more heterogeneous and decentralized than today, without any clear relationship between language and political cohesion.^{18,19} Each of the dozen or so major languages contained often mutually unintelligible regional dialects, and issues arise from translation by both contemporary and modern writers. Mass media was still in its adolescence, and the lack of strict measures for quality control was compounded by the technical limitations of existing printing technologies.²⁰ Relevant documents were printed on paper or cut into wood plates, not particularly durable materials, and the ravages of war were (regardless of what Steinberg might think) incredibly detrimental to contemporary archival efforts. Therefore, of the documents which survived the war, and were preserved for posterity through archives or some other means, only some have been studied by Germanspeaking historians, and only a very few of these have been translated for English speaking audiences. This may seem incredibly negative for any Anglophone study of the conflict, but there is quite a bit of relevant and revealing information to be gleaned from those documents that are available in English as long as the reader holds in mind that they necessarily cannot alone paint a full picture of the conflict. In particular, this essay will rely heavily on two compilations of German documents by German—speaking Anglophone historians, Tryntje Helffrich's "A Documentary History"²¹ and Elmer Beller's "Propaganda in Germany"²² both providing standalone translations of relevant historical documents, with some small editorial commentary introducing each piece of media. Both do a thorough job of highlighting a great number of perspectives on the conflict, but the editorial control exercised by each cannot be ignored as a factor. Helffrich attempts at a holistic approach to the conflict, focusing on the major agreements and official justifications that defined the media presence of major powers along with examples of everyday life and relatively minor documents which she feels reflect some larger trend. Beller is far more focused and consistent in his approach, focusing entirely on woodcuts and broadsheets in their role as propaganda mouthpieces for the various belligerents. Both approach the war chronologically, although Helffrich is far more

¹⁷ Körber, Esther—Beate. "The Thirty Years' War as a European Media Event." European History Online, Leibniz Institute of European History, November 28, 2017.

¹⁸ Helffrich, introduction to *The Thirty Years War A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), ix, xxii.

¹⁹ Wilson, introduction to *Thirty Years War*, xxiii.

²⁰ Körber, "European Media Event," 4—10.

²¹ Tryntje Helffrich, *The Thirty Years War: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009).

²² Elmer A. Beller, *Propaganda in Germany during the Thirty Years War* (London: Princeton University Press, 1940).

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prone to focus the general tone of the documents chosen to fit a certain narrative theme.²³

The sources concerning the conflict published originally in English on the other hand suffer from a much different drawback, one identified also by Beller in his note on “Contemporary English Printed Sources.”²⁴ For the English audience the Thirty Years' War was an entirely peripheral event. As such the limits on available material are created not so much by the ravages of war and time (although like with all areas of historical research those have taken their toll) but by the relative lack of demand in England for accounts of the war. This is not to say that there is any great scarcity of contemporary accounts of the war published in England, but rather that the accounts that exist were created for a very niche market and must be viewed with an understanding of the built in slant that comes with this dynamic.²² The “Weekly Newes” series published in London from 1622—1624 is typical of English publications in its travelog style and blatant Evangelicalism, while remaining markedly aloof from the personal investment found on the Continent.²⁵

Elements of Apocalypticism

The printing press, introduced to Europe by Johannes Gutenberg in 1436, has been one of the most powerful individual forces for change in history. The ability to quickly and cost effectively reproduce documents on a massive scale shifted the scope of what was possible in terms of mass social mobilization. Luther and his followers' effective use of the printing press enabled the Reformation to spread like wildfire throughout Europe,²⁶ and its effectiveness as both a diplomatic and political tool was quickly recognized by the powers of the Empire, with the advent of censorship laws and court publishers.^{27,28} The continent—wide conflict that erupted out of the Bohemian affair led to an explosion in print all around Europe that saw a flurry of pamphlets, broadsheets and periodicals that represent the first regularly reported journalistic coverage of war.^{29,30} Leaders on both sides felt the obligation to issue long official legal justifications for their actions,³¹ while independent publishers issued politically and confessionally charged prints without official sanction or subsidy.³² It is this latter group that produced the outlandish and provocative images that define the popular imagination of seventeenth century propaganda, and this group that more poignantly felt the pressures of the war.

Wartime broadsides were characterized by their extensive use of meticulously labeled imagery paired with long explanations, often in verse form, used to taunt the enemy or galvanize moral outrage. An excellent example from early in the conflict is “The Prince of Transylvania's Wares,”³³ published in Bohemia to celebrate the exploits of Bethlen Gabor, which in image and scathing verse details the torture and

²³ Something Helfferich readily explains in her introduction. Helfferich, introduction to *Documentary History*, xxii.

²⁴ Elmer A. Beller, “Contemporary English Printed Sources for the Thirty Years' War,” *The American Historical Review* 32, no. 2 (1927): 276—82.

²² King, “The Manuscript Newsletter,” 411—12.

²⁵ Beller, *English Sources*, 276.

²⁶ Beller, *Propaganda*, 3.

²⁷ Beller, *English Sources*, 276

²⁸ Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, 27—35.

²⁹ Körber, “European Media Event,” 1—3.

³⁰ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 824—27.

³¹ Helfferich 20—46, 91—103, and 227—32 provide a few such examples.

³² Helfferich 56—58, 82—86 and all of Beller's *Propaganda* provide examples of the latter.

³³ Plate III in the Appendix.

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castration of Catholic clergy perpetrated by the Transylvanian leader. The image shows a chronological story, the same people presented multiple times from left to right implying their passage through time, while the poetic inscription levels squarely the accusation of adulterous liaison on the priests and monks of the Catholic church.³⁴ This case fulfills many of the basic goals of a political pamphlet: it celebrates the victory of a daring hero (Gabor's army represented by a pikeman triumphant), it denigrates the enemy population (presenting the Catholic man as a cuckold and wife as unfaithful) while placing the blame on a core confessional disagreement (Evangelical theology permitted priestly marriage precisely as an answer to the perceived issue of priestly in—celibacy). Critically, it also spoke to a deeper undercurrent of conspiracist thinking in the German speaking world by targeting the Jesuit order for special blame as the architects of “mischief everywhere.”³⁵

The Jesuits were the unceasing targets of suspicion and accusation by Protestant media, both in common pamphlets and broadsides as well as the official pronouncements of princes and electors.³⁶ Viewed as a nearly all—powerful collective and responsible for any and all alleged wrongdoing under the sun, the secretive Society of Jesus functioned as a sort of catch—all boogeyman to Lutheran and Reformed authors. Depictions of the Jesuits as conniving infiltrators are rife in Protestant publications, and usually are accompanied by a scene of comeuppance or gleeful revenge against the ‘foreign instigators’ of war, rebellion and religious strife.³⁷ This perception of a shadowy Jesuit conspiracy greatly influencing the world is something so universally prevalent throughout Protestant documents of this era that its role in causing and influence in expanding the initially localized Bohemian conflict is well recognized.³⁸ The idea that popular distrust and conspiracism on the subject of the Jesuits does not truly reflect the worldview of key figures in the conflict bears some consideration. The use of a popular scapegoat in mass media and public documents, however noteworthy in its ubiquity, does not necessarily automatically equate to a worldview where the public, and especially sober minded leaders actually believe in the power of secretive cabals to shape world affairs.³⁹ In this case however, the targeting of Jesuits in print corresponded to their real treatment by Protestant forces throughout the war, showing the strong belief of the population in their power and ill intent.⁴⁰ That this conspiracist belief extended even into the upper strata of Evangelical nobility is demonstrated by Christian von Anhalt's attempts at a secret network of radical Calvinists,⁴¹ as a sort of counterweight—an idea that only makes

³⁴ Beller, *Propaganda*, 22.

³⁵ Beller, *Propaganda*, 22.

³⁶ Helfferich 21, 32—33, 37, are all examples of direct attacks on the Jesuit order by the leaders of the rebel cause in their official justifications. An example of the former is evident in Plates VI and XIX (see Appendix).

³⁷ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 39—41.

³⁸ Helfferich 32—33 shows that—at least publicly—Frederick of the Palatinate viewed the corrupting influence of the Jesuit Order as an important factor in his decision to accept the Bohemian Crown.

³⁹ It is here important to note that although much of the propaganda early in the war focuses on the Jesuits more prominently, they are never forgotten and remain targets both in official pronouncements and propaganda images even late into the so—called ‘French Phase’ of the war. See “Plate XIX” in the Appendix.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 485. This illustrates the kind of punitive measures that Protestant forces took when they were actually in a position to do something about Jesuits, and the special attention paid to the issue, even during a relatively later section of the war, shows the priority assigned to the group in the public imagination.

⁴¹ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 262.

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sense in a worldview that embraces the idea that such conspiracies can affect real change.

This kind of conspiracism was rampant in the Holy Roman Empire throughout the conflict, and it expressed itself not only in fears about the Jesuits but in a myriad of other ways as well. The international commotion that accompanied the publication of the Rosicrucian manifestos, claiming to represent a secret order seeking to usher in an age of scientific progress and humanism,⁴² showed again the willingness of readers to believe in such influential cliques operating behind the scenes. Both sides accused the other of occultism, especially the practice of astrology which certainly existed and had some influence both in common practice and for major figures.⁴³ Figures like Nostradamus and Paracelsus blended the scientific and the mystical, encouraging a belief in prophecy, alchemy and astrology that expressed itself in the shared consciousness of those on the continent.^{44,45} It is to the latter that the ‘prophecy’ behind the iconic image of the “Midnight Lion” is credited, the idea of a savior from the north who would win great victories against the ‘eagle’ of Hapsburg domination, one used to great effect first by Frederick of the Palatinate⁴⁶ and later by Gustavus Adolphus⁴⁷ as each claimed the mantle of prophesied messiah. It is not only this willingness to believe in preternatural influences on world affairs that makes conspiracism so striking and important, but the prevalence of belief in it on both sides even to the highest echelons.⁴⁸

Such beliefs in astrology and mysticism may seem to the modern reader as antithetical to the overwhelmingly Christian character of both sides in the conflict, but this is a misreading of the nature of religion in early modern Europe. To put religion in contrast with any social element in the time period and area affected by the Thirty Years’ War is a fundamental misunderstanding of the inexorable interweaving of life and religious practice. Religious symbolism, allusion and allegory are on every page of every document intended for mass audiences, and contemporary publishers did not shy away from being very direct in their use of religion to convey their message.⁴⁹ The idea of a Europe united in Christendom is one not yet extinguished during this time, and the shared fundamentally Christian roots of all belligerents along with the confessional issues at the heart of the war make faith—based appeals the most potent and widespread. Much of the content of documents relating to the conflict is lost without a serious understanding of Christian theology and religious tradition.⁵⁰ Instead

⁴² Lyke de Viers, *Reformation, Revolution, Renovation: The Roots and Reception of the Rosicrucian Call for General Reform* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 102—64.

⁴³ Wallenstein is most famously accused of believing in astrology, and as much as Mortimer’s biography tries to obscure and downplay this facet of his life, the fact that he paid considerable sums for horoscopes shows that at least some credence to the field was lent by one of the most powerful men in European history. Mortimer, *Wallenstein*, 52—67.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Resisting the Rosicrucians* 414—19.

⁴⁵ Gilly, “‘MIDNIGHT LION,’” 49—54.

⁴⁶ Gilly, “‘MIDNIGHT LION,’” 52—54.

⁴⁷ Paas, *The German Political Broadsheet 1600—1700: Volume 11: 1683—1685* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 215—17.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 262. While Christian von Anhalt may have been a uniquely conspiratorial figure, his outsized role in instigating the broader conflict warrants him significant attention.

⁴⁹ One Pro—Imperial woodcut (Plate I in the Appendix) features God himself standing next to the throne of Emperor Ferdinand with a rod used to beat rebels. A more direct religious call to action is difficult to imagine.

⁵⁰ Not least of all humor. One woodcut (Figure VI in the Appendix) in particular that parodies Christ’s temptation in the desert by substituting him for the defeated Fredrick Palatine contains

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of conflicting with Christianity, conspiracism was—like everything else—interwoven into the wider religious context of society. The Paracelsian 'prophecy of the Midnight Lion' for example was rooted in application of Biblical prophecy contained in the book of Ezra,⁵¹ and would have been viewed not as a twisting or changing of scripture but its natural interpretation by legitimate supernatural means. A religious concept, advocating for the supremacy of Protestant belief, the use of "Midnight Lion" to draw support to the Swedish invasion underscores the level of integration between the political and religious elements of early modern European society. The inherent religiosity of the early modern world then provided the necessary incubator for strong belief in conspiracism to seamlessly pair with the insatiable zealotry shown with respect to confessional issues.

The catalyst then that brings about the expression of this religiously informed conspiratorial worldview through apocalyptic imagery in media is the wholesale devastation and destruction wrought by the war in the Empire and surrounding polities, which significantly affected the lives of nearly all Europeans. This characterization of the devastation wrought by the war as a uniquely devastating is historically controversial,⁵² but nevertheless, is an important facet of the overall argument made in this paper. Steinberg's objections to such characterization of the war are grounded in a healthy skepticism of an obviously biased and skewed historical tradition, and his supporting evidence shows that there are cases where the record does not match the actual extent of damage done.⁵³ This being said, the tendency to overcorrect for historiographical error is obviously at play, and Wilson's choice to dedicate a chapter of his magnum opus to directly answering this particular question provides a wealth of evidence for a rational and well sourced measurement of destruction based in actual historical evidence rather than historiographical bickering. The reflection of the extent to which contemporary media portrayed the destruction caused by the conflict is best exemplified by "The Beast of War"⁵⁴—a horrific scene of death, decimation and wholesale plunder by a monstrous Beast representing war which has afflicted the land, and an accompanying non—confessional inscription crying out for peace through piety and repentance. It seems no discussion of the brutality of the war is complete without at least a mention of Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*⁵⁵ treatment with the author, the fairly conclusive understanding that the work reflects the social concerns of a common foot soldier.⁵⁶

Thus, three elements are combined in the territories of the belligerent polities of the Holy Roman Empire that (to borrow a turn of phrase from Wilson) "made apocalypticism respectable"⁵⁷ in the pamphlets and leaflets of the German speaking territories. Conspiracism inspired fear and a belief in preternatural forces that shaped the views of populations and the actions of sovereigns. The religious undergirding of

such gems as "If thou be the son of an Elector, command the Bohemian stone that it may be made bread (...) And he answered saying 'they cannot live by bread alone, rather they must have cloister—soup, bishoprics and churches.'"

⁵¹ Gilly, "MIDNIGHT LION," 52—54.

⁵² Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 779—821. See discussion in Literature Review section.

⁵³ Steinberg, *Conflict for European Hegemony*, 1—128.

⁵⁴ Beller, "Propaganda", 47. See Plate XXII in Appendix.

⁵⁵ von Grimmelshausen, Hans Jakob Christoffel. *Simplicius Simplicissimus: The account of the life of an odd vagrant named Melchior Sternfels von Fuchshaim: namely where and in what manner he came into this world, what he saw, learned, experienced, and endured therein; also why he again left it of his own free will.* Translated by M. Mitchell, Sawtry: Dedalus, 1999.

⁵⁶ Beller, "Propaganda", 65. This idea also being reflected in the famous woodcut (Plate XXII) of the Soldier riding the Peasant like a donkey—complete with spurs and stirrup.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 262.

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Christendom provided a context for belief in the power and potency of prophecy, and an overriding sense of holy purpose that raised the stakes of each cause. Crucially, the all—destructive brutality of the war visited on the denizens of the Empire caused the expression of the previous two factors in the media environment of the time. The best example of this ‘German Apocalypticism’ is a pair of pamphlets depicting the events surrounding the city of Augsburg over the course of the war.⁵⁸ The first, depicting the year 1629, shows the city in the grips of two hideous monsters—one a seven headed dragon representing the papacy, the other a gigantic lamb—like beast spewing Jesuit cardinals from its mouth. Herein, all three Apocalypticist elements are found: the Jesuit order is singled out as the core issue and in league directly with the devil,⁵⁹ the religious implications of painting the papacy as the beasts of Revelation is clear,⁶⁰ and the ruin and destruction to befall the Evangelical population of Augsburg raises the stakes of the affair to end—times extremes. The second plate depicts a city saved—a victorious Gustavus Adolphus stands over the corpses of the beasts while the inscription interprets verses of Revelation to match the context of historical events. Here two the prophecy of the Midnight Lion is fulfilled,⁶¹ while the marriage of Revelation text to wartime affairs shows the inexorable relationship between these elements in shaping the worldview that helped to sustain the war.

The English Anti—Thesis

The above outlined model idea of ‘German Apocalypticism’, in reference to the specific trend of publications produced in the Holy Roman Empire during the course of the Thirty Years’ War to reflect apocalyptic visions and worldviews, cannot exist in a vacuum. If the concept has any validity as a unique phenomenon it must be compared to trends observed in contemporary non—belligerent nations and be found meaningfully distinct. It is in this interest that the paper must now embark on a brief exploration of documents relating to the conflict in the Empire which originated in England. The English language market for ‘Newes’ of conflict on the Continent reflected a relatively smaller proportion of the population than those targeted by pamphlets and broadsides in the Empire, mostly “Merchants and Gentlemen”⁶² with either financial or confessional ties on the continent. Indeed, a good deal of this information was filtered through the lens of England’s relationship with the nascent Dutch Republic. The Dutch were one of the most effective states in utilizing the printing press, and shared deep political, confessional and economic ties with England, so perhaps it is not so surprising that much of the media about the conflict in the Empire was initially only translated versions of periodicals compiled and published in the United Netherlands.⁶³

Eventually, English language publications sprung up in London, on the basis of the Dutch model, and began to publish accounts of the events across Europe, providing the consistent periodical updates on the progress of the conflict. This was constructed first on the basis of a manuscript newsletter system, in which handwritten letters provided continuous updates, later on weekly print newsletters and towards the

⁵⁸ Beller, “Propaganda”, 42—43 (Plates XIX and XX in the Appendix).

⁵⁹ Beller, “Propaganda”, 42. “The sect and society, which first arising in this era, took the name of the Lamb (Jesu) (...) acts in the fashion of the Antichrist.”

⁶⁰ The motif of Papacy as the seven headed dragon of Revelation is a common one in Protestant literature because of the belief that the seven heads of the dragon represented the famous seven hills of Rome.

⁶¹ Gilly, “MIDNIGHT LION,” 54.

⁶² King, “The Manuscript Newsletter,” 411—13, 415—17.

⁶³ Beller, “Propaganda”, 42.

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end of the conflict newsbooks that developed into the modern newspaper.⁶⁴ The differences between these stages of development in the newspaper, while interesting, fall outside of the scope of this paper. What is important is that the content remained relatively fixed: confessionally & politically biased reporting of the best available information available at the time. English publications generally claim to some form of having reported “the True and Last Newes”⁶⁵ of events happening abroad and the claims made are based either on direct eyewitness accounts or are clearly delineated as rumor and hearsay.⁶⁶ This gives English documents a much more detached and journalistic air, with all of the bias of German language pamphlets but none of the fervor or apocalyptic language.

This is by no means a contention that English language sources are free of confessional influence, quite the opposite in fact. The all-encompassing influence of religion on early modern discourse is just as obviously prevalent in English sources as their German counterparts, and indeed the expression of such confessional bias is evident, even in the subjects which receive coverage in English periodicals. Instead the lack of the other two major elements explains the totally distinct reactions to the same news. Mysticism and occultism existed in England just as in Germany, but although certain elements of Elizabethan society received official sanction for such work the ascension of pious James I & VI to the throne put an effective damper on such thinking.⁶⁷ The summary expulsion of Jesuits from England in 1606, combined with the very real Gunpowder plot conspiracy, meant a much more serious approach to such lines of thinking than the fantastical ideas of Christian von Anhalt. War would not touch the British Isles until confessional and constitutional issues of their own kicked off the British Civil War in the 1640s, a conflict in which both sides viewed the German wartime experience as something to consciously avoid^{68,69}—a view shaped by their own media perception of the brutality of the conflict in the Empire. Perhaps the best example of English wartime media in this context is Dr. Vincent Theol’s “Lamentations of Germany,”⁷⁰ which provides a lurid account of the depravity and destitution that has befallen the Empire. The work provides detailed eyewitness descriptions of every imaginable form of torture and suffering endured by the people of Germany, and engages in a fair bit of moralizing and Biblical allusion without ever accusing any shadowy group or preternatural influence besides the will of God. Nor is there any significant allegorical imagery, instead the descriptions are accompanied by simple, realistic drawings of everyday people enduring the worst hardships imaginable.⁷¹ This distinction in depiction from the trend seen in Germany underscores the unique effect that the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War had on the media landscape.

⁶⁴ Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, 27—35.

⁶⁵ Gainsford, *Coranto Relating Divers Particulars Concerning the Newes out of Italy Spaine Turkey* (London: Butter Borne & Shefford, 1622). From the Seventeenth— and Eighteenth—Century Burney Newspapers Collection.

⁶⁶ Beller, “Propaganda”, 42.

⁶⁷ Smith, “Resisting the Rosicrucians,” 114—17, 138.

⁶⁸ I Roy, ‘England turned Germany? The aftermath of the Civil War in its European Context,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28, no. 5 (1978): 127—44.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Thirty Years War*, 779.

⁷⁰ Vincent, Phillip. *Treares of Germany*. Illustration. London: F.G., 1638, From the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁷¹ Some of the most shocking drawings have the most mundane captions. “3 women killing and after eatinge each other” or “twisted out there eyes! ' are exactly what they purport to be. Vincent, Phillip. *Treares of Germany*, pg. a2r, 9, 44 (Illustrations I & II in the Appendix).

APOCALYPSE AT HAND

Conclusion

The Thirty Years' War, though today understudied, has historically played an important role in the German national consciousness. The perception of this momentous moment in European history has largely been shaped by the media produced contemporaneously, one of the first major European events to have a mass media aspect, and the tendency of said media to portray the conflict in apocalyptic terms has had a marked effect of the way the war is understood historically. By recognizing the trend of 'German Apocalypticism,' identifying its key elements, considering the extent to which it accurately reflects contemporary attitudes and contrasting it against closely related media landscapes this paper aims to advance the scholarly understanding of the Thirty Years' War's impact on the German—speaking print world and the subsequent relationship between such publications and the collective understanding of the nature of the conflict.

APOCALYPSE AT HAND

Plate III

Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Fol. Hist. Germ. un. VIII, 82, 82. Size of original print 15" x 11", Beller *Propaganda* 23.

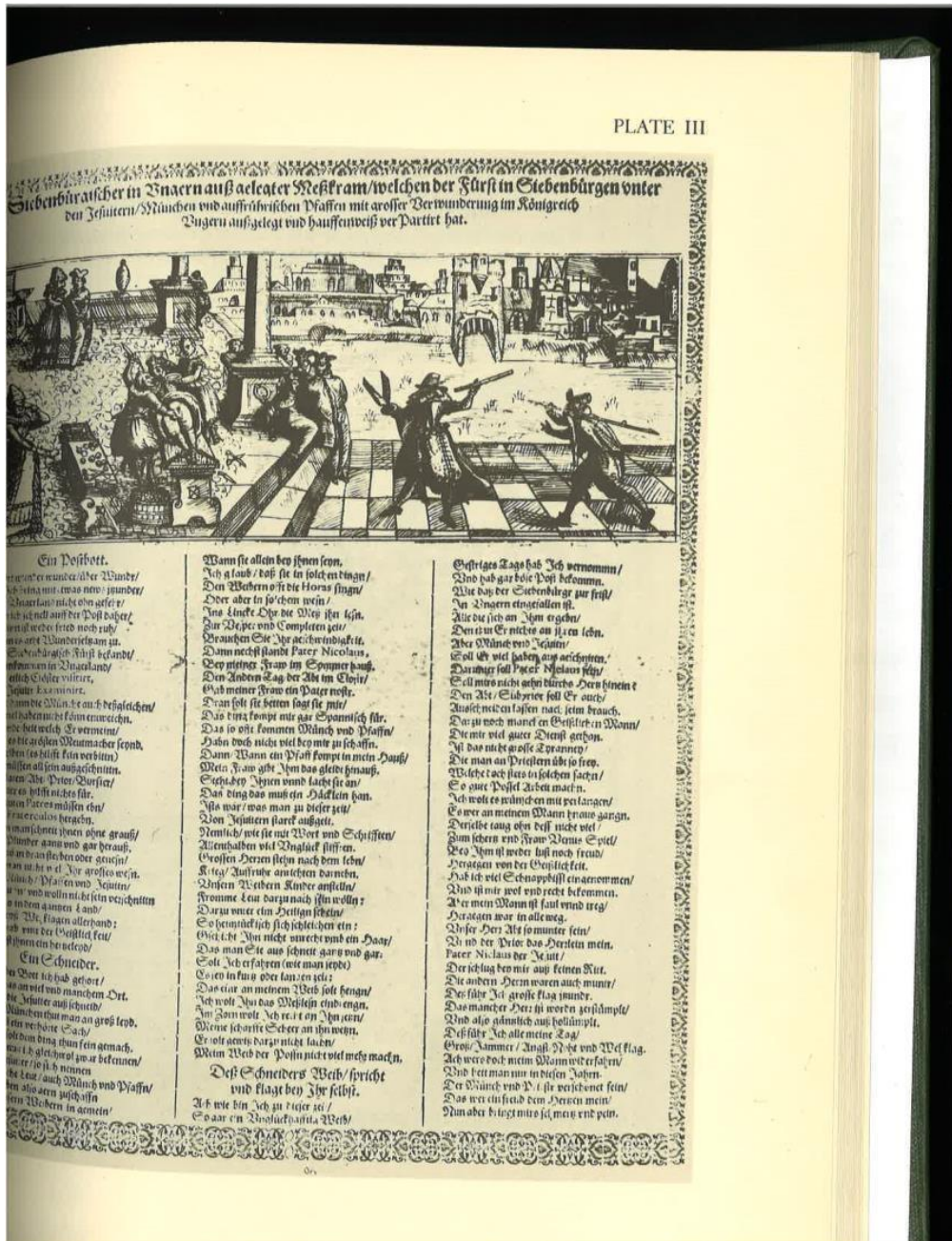


Plate VI

Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin. Size of original print, 14 1/4 x 6 3/8, Beller Propaganda 24.

PLATE VI

Nder: es ward der Pfalsgraf geführt in die Gals
amliche Wasser nahm dem heftigen Guff, auff daß er vom Fe
und verthan better, darnach hungers ih. Das die Verfluch
trat zu ihm vmb sprach: Dystu ans Churfürsten Sohn / so
sprich daß die Bohemische Stain zu Brot werden / daß vnter Kinder zu leben
können sie leben / sonder sie müssen die Klostertuppen / Guff vnd Gottesdiner
dargu haben. Danam ihu der Scullerus sein Hofpredicant mit ihm in die
große Stadt Prag / vnd löchete ihu in den Tempel hinauff / in die Schloßkir
chen / vnd sprach zu ihm: Dystu ein Bohemischer König / so fürst die Wölder
vnd Hiltvundt hinauf / dann es ist geschrieben / Der von Thum hoch seinen Oels
vorn bringen / auff daß sie mit etwan an die Stein verlegt werden. Da sprach
der Pfalsgraf vnd erwid: Es steht bey Caluino geschrieben / Wir sollens vers
uchen vnd er löchete hinab fähren. Abermal nahm ihu der Graf von Thurn
mit ihm auff den Borsberg / vnd sagte ihm alle Nach der Welt kampfs ihre
Herzligkeit vnd sprach: Das alles soll ich dir geben / wo du niedersteigst / vnd
Caluinum abbettest / Da stie er nieder / vnd ließ sein Hofknecht dahinden. Da
verließen sich die Taufel / vnd stie die Engländer wollten ihu ummich die
nen darumb tratt er zu den Holländern vnd wohnt bey den iriden Thieren
sonst stie er nicht zu sein.

Des Pfalsgrafen Versuchung.



APOCALYPSE AT HAND

Plate XIX

Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Fol. Hist. Germ. un. VIII, 82, 12. Size of original print 15 5/8" x 12", Beller *Propaganda* 43.

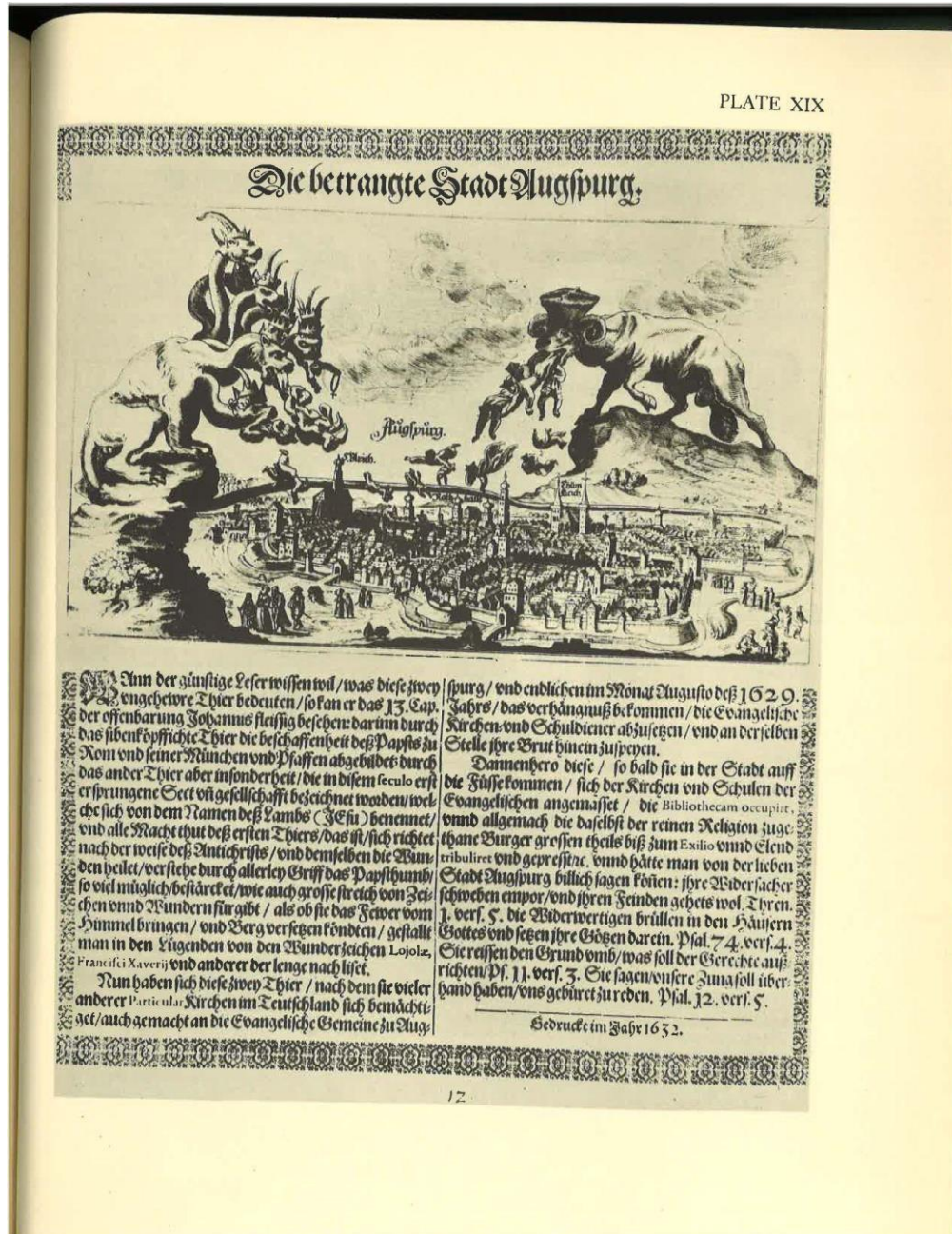


Plate XX

Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, Fol. Hist. Germ. un. VIII, 82, 13. Size of original print 15 5/8" x 11 5/8", Beller Propaganda 44.

PLATE XX



Nach dem die zwey Antichristliche Thier (wie gegen
 6. und folgendes zu finden lauten also: Sie sprachen wer ist dem Thier
 gleich? und wer kan mit ihm kriegen? und es ward ihm gegeben (oder
 verhängt) dem Mund zu reden grosse Ding und ward ihm gegeben (das
 es mit ihm wehrete 42. Wochen lang. Und es that seinen Mund auff
 zur Lästerung gegen Gott, zu lästern seinen Namen, sein Wort, die hei-
 lig E. Schrift) und seine Hütten (die waare Evangelische Kirch) und die
 im Himmel wohnen (das ist / die heiligen Engel und Auferwehleten /
 theils mit Andichtung fremder Ehr / als ob sie begerten und die him-
 melische Hülff angeruffen zu seyn / theils mit Verberung und Verham-
 mung der in waarem Glauben abgeschiedenen Evangelischen Con-
 fessorn). Und es ward ihm gegeben zu stehen mit den Heiligen und sie zu
 überwinden. Und ihm ward gegeben die Macht über alle (oder allerley)
 Geschlechter vñ Sprachen vñ Heiden, und alle die auff Erden wohnen /
 beten es an, nemlich alle di. jenige deren Namen nicht geschrieben sind
 in dem lebendigen Buch des Lammes / das erwidert ist von Anfang der
 Welt. Hat jemand Ehren, der höret (versiehe wie Gott endlich die Ver-
 folger bezahlet werde. So jemand in das Gefängniß fihret, der wird
 ins Gefängniß gehen. So jemand mit dem Schwerdt tödtet, der muß
 mit dem Schwerdt getödtet werden: Hi ist Gedult und Glaub der Hei-
 ligen. Bis hieher S. Johannes.

Die Wort aber, so in der Offenbarung Johannis / Cap. 17. v. 6. 5.
 6. und folgendes zu finden lauten also: Sie sprachen wer ist dem Thier
 gleich? und wer kan mit ihm kriegen? und es ward ihm gegeben (oder
 verhängt) dem Mund zu reden grosse Ding und ward ihm gegeben (das
 es mit ihm wehrete 42. Wochen lang. Und es that seinen Mund auff
 zur Lästerung gegen Gott, zu lästern seinen Namen, sein Wort, die hei-
 lig E. Schrift) und seine Hütten (die waare Evangelische Kirch) und die
 im Himmel wohnen (das ist / die heiligen Engel und Auferwehleten /
 theils mit Andichtung fremder Ehr / als ob sie begerten und die him-
 melische Hülff angeruffen zu seyn / theils mit Verberung und Verham-
 mung der in waarem Glauben abgeschiedenen Evangelischen Con-
 fessorn). Und es ward ihm gegeben zu stehen mit den Heiligen und sie zu
 überwinden. Und ihm ward gegeben die Macht über alle (oder allerley)
 Geschlechter vñ Sprachen vñ Heiden, und alle die auff Erden wohnen /
 beten es an, nemlich alle di. jenige deren Namen nicht geschrieben sind
 in dem lebendigen Buch des Lammes / das erwidert ist von Anfang der
 Welt. Hat jemand Ehren, der höret (versiehe wie Gott endlich die Ver-
 folger bezahlet werde. So jemand in das Gefängniß fihret, der wird
 ins Gefängniß gehen. So jemand mit dem Schwerdt tödtet, der muß
 mit dem Schwerdt getödtet werden: Hi ist Gedult und Glaub der Hei-
 ligen. Bis hieher S. Johannes.

Gott heist, daß wie seine Gnade und augenscheinlich erzeigte Hülff
 danckbarlich erkennen die vorige Mängel verbessern und ja flehlich uns
 halten, damit nicht ein wideriges verursacht und die erweisene Hülff ver-
 hindert werde.

Dn. Dn. S. S. R. A. d. d.

Gedruckt / Im Jahr 1632.

Demnachdem das ander Thier (der Jesuitische Orden) so erst zu
 unserer Verfaher Zeiten auffkommen und das Pabstumb allenthal-
 ben einzuführen sich unterstanden) das gerechte Verhängniß Gottes
 über die Sünden der Evangelischen zu seinen Vortheil und eussersten
 Nachtheil an ein geraume Zeit gewendet: So hat Gott endlich deren
 die durch waare Ketze und Lust mit glaubigen eiffrigen Geleit zu ihm
 sich bekehret, väterlich widerumb angenommen, die Verfolger mit
 gleicher Mühh bezahlet / ihnen ihr trosten und pochen darnder ablegt
 und kräftiglich erwiesen, daß die Gedult und Glaub der heiligen nicht
 vergeblich gewesen.

APOCALYPSE AT HAND

Plate XXII

Germanische Museum, Kupferstichkabinett, Nürnberg, H. B. 16439. Size of original print, 13 7/8" x 8", Beller *Propaganda* 45.

PLATE XXII

Neue Bauren-Klag

Über die Unbarmherzige Bauren Keütter dieser zeit

Lieber Leser tritt herbei
Beschaw die seltsam Keütereij

Die diser zeit in der Welt
Von den soldaten angefaßt.



Es auch jezt wol ein Mensch in dieser welt zu finden/
Der jedermann beachtet an hant und haar zu schänden?
So fonde wir Dämonen / wir fene die künften zeit?
Dann unfer rich und pferd / feind der soldaten deut.
Was nur der Bauer hat, das wird gleich pferd gegöben/
Der Weiber weis ist / Der gar über vnser leben/
Die Klüster feind verbrant / die Kirchen feind zerfört/
Die dörffer feind verheert / der Dorff ist verheert/
Man hat die Linder trost die großen Eider verheeren/
Die Herrschafft des länds mag feiner mehr erkennen/
Durch Krieg, raub, mord und brand wird es zur Wüsteney/
Das freye Römisch Reich wird jezt zur Barbaren/
Klar schon der adel frucht und meyen wir zu schänden/
So dörffen wir nicht hin, und müssen solches leiden/
Das wir nit mehr gefür, weil ihm noch mehr gebüet.
Wie werden auff das hant und marck ganz außgelogen/
Da gar ist auff die hant, ganz nachend außgelogen/
Es geht auß / auß und mach nit für die dem ichen auff/
Es verheert vber uns der mehr als Dörffer hauff/
Das Schwerdt frucht weis und find, nach dem diez ferd geloten/
Und nichts mehr übrig ist, das die soldaten beuten/
Es mag der arme Bauer ö vberwältig sein!
Der einum manß gedult, das wir und sel kan/
Der Keütere zummel jeh, aber ihm die fchwarze freyen/
Mein wann er nicht so reiner hat die fuch verlor/
Er treibe ihn hin und her / wohin er nur begehrt/
Mit ihn viel blutet als ein vuerpländig pferd.

Dann wan die pferde müß, so laßt man sie raufen/
Sie haben badern aug, wir aber müssen saffen/
Wißt und die Got außgebt, wir haben keine ruh/
Und können wir nit fort, so geht die flüß darzu/
Wie fagen aber das, und wollen es betennen/
Der Mars und beiter macher, das die so reumt rennen/
Dazu gang grausamlich, mehr als ein ägel blut/
Aufgangen vnser blut, und rauben vnser gut/
Das wirt die langzeitung, muß einen Drauffrost geben/
Und in dem fischen sein, die fischen künftlich reuen/
Wann auch der löwe, feind sein wir verweub/
Und man die Wüchsen schiff, zum fischen all verweub/
Es wird ja mancher Knecht, bevorab solch gellen/
Die sein Landweert gieren, auch nit nichts lernen wöllen/
Sich zu uns müssen hin, und ein flüchten brod/
Es geht große arbeit thun, und wann sie kan in noth/
Es werden wir auch geniß der schmach und schidig gebeten/
Und feiner vber uns, das lang, geborene schinden/
Die Instrumente feind uns allen noch bekant/
Din was der ihu jeh, gibt selber an die lant/
Wir haben zucht genug / auch tollere, haften schickel/
Die gaben feind gar gut, die harte Zerschier pfegel/
Dardurch wird manche hant, gar müd und kein geschlach/
Und thut viel besser gut, als einer hier gedacht/
Die Keütere beuch daran, und löst er nicht schanden!
Es laß in wir den jeh, auch desto eher schanden/
Wer sich nicht warnen ist, und kriegt darüber flüß/
Der fye vber sich, und feinen andern böß.

Vertriebt Im Jahr 1642.

APOCALYPSE AT HAND

Illustration I

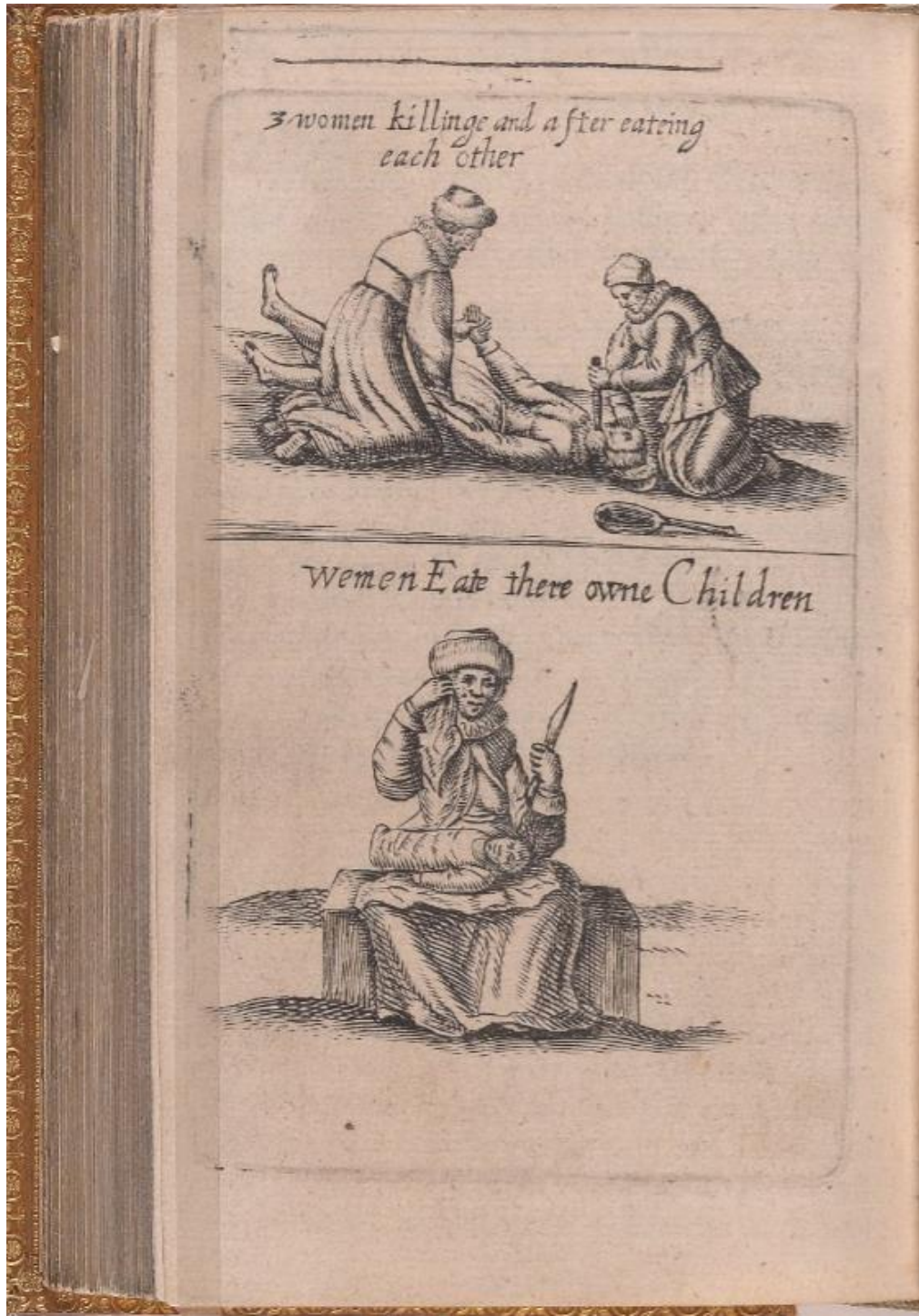
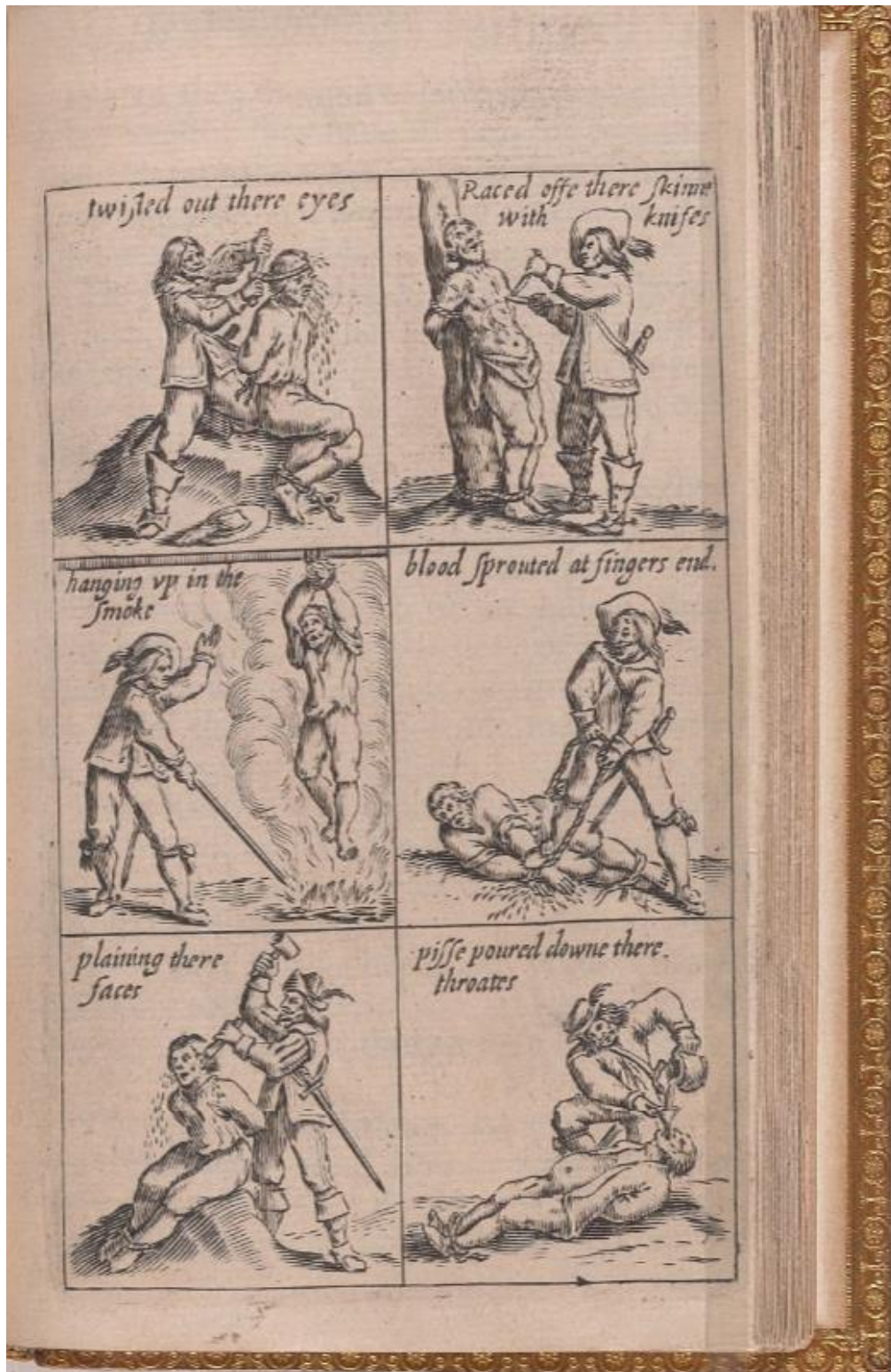


Illustration II



APOCALYPSE AT HAND

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