

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

“Luther Country” in Germany marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation

While Birkenmeier and his team are reasonably certain which rooms Luther occupied at the Luther House in Eisenach, it is the reformer’s relationship to the Bible that forms the focal point of the museum. Displays explain the rarity of Bibles in Luther’s youth — Luther himself never saw a Bible until entering seminary. And multimedia presentations offer insight into the painstaking processes Luther employed in translating the Bible into German. But the museum also discusses frankly the anti-Semitic views of Luther and some of his followers.

“It’s clear that Martin Luther himself was an anti-Semite by the end of his life,” says Birkenmeier, adding that many of Luther’s writings were used to justify the actions of the Third Reich. “We can’t deny this side of Martin Luther, nor do we want to.”

Luther translated his German New Testament some 1,300 feet above Eisenach, at the imposing Wartburg Castle, billed as the most visited Luther site in the world. This medieval castle, whose oldest portions date to 1067, was Luther’s refuge after being declared a heretic and an outlaw for refusing to recant Protestant beliefs at the Diet of Worms, a meeting of Holy Roman Empire bigwigs in the German town of Worms in 1521. Within the castle, Luther found not only safety, but peace and quiet. The solitude suited him. After nearly a year in hiding, he left the castle, newly translated New Testament in hand.

The castle’s Luther Room, where the reformer undertook his translation effort, has always held a certain sanctity for Protestants. It’s outfitted simply with rough wood paneling, a desk and chair, and curiously, a whale vertebra used by Luther as a footstool. It’s said that Luther’s original desk disappeared sliver by sliver, secreted away by Protestant devotees. It’s also said that while Luther worked on his translation, he was pestered continuously by the devil until finally, in a fit of rage, Luther flung an ink bottle at him. We’ll never know if either story is true. But after 500 years, the legend seem likely to remain.



WARTBURG CASTLE

Luther Bible

Martin Luther (1483-1546) started the Protestant Reformation by nailing his “Ninety-Five Theses” to the church door in Wittenberg. Luther also made an enormous impact on the German language through his translation of the Bible into German.



Martin Luther (1529) by Lucas Cranach the Elder