

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

Wartburg Festung bei Eisenach / Wartburg Fortress

Such defiance ordinarily meant death, and that probably would have been Luther's fate also, but Luther's mentor, the Elector Friedrich III of Saxony, ordered his chaplain to spirit Luther away, to a place that not even the Elector should know. The chaplain chose the Wartburg.

The "Luther room" in the castle still is retained. It was there that Luther translated the New Testament, and where, he insists, he threw an inkpot at the devil when the fiend appeared to him.

Luther had a vocabulary as rich as Shakespeare's a remarkable feeling for the German language and a religious fire which enabled him to scale the heights and plumb the depths of the Biblical text. His Bible translation was one of the finest works in the language up until that time. (Much previous writing in Germany had been in Latin.) Indeed, modern High German is based on the Luther Bible.

This association with Luther led the student societies to choose the Wartburg for their meeting in 1817, the 300th anniversary of Luther's nailing of his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg, touching off the Reformation. Though these *Burschenschaften* gained a right wing image in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they were quite the opposite in 1817. The Wartburg gathering was a left wing affair, where bonfires burned allegedly reactionary books and vows were taken to unite Germany through the overthrow of the ruling princes. After that the student societies were banned, though all they really did was go underground, to emerge again during the 1848 revolution.

In the process of the restoration work at the Wartburg, still another link was found with German history. Experts investigating the building material found that some of the marble-like pillars were, in fact, segments of a Roman aqueduct that had brought water from the Eifel Hills into Cologne during the early centuries of the Christian era. About a thousand years later, between 1170 and 1220, the builders of the castle retrieved segments of it and transported them the some 120 miles from Cologne to Eisenach.