

The Virgin, the Church and the Heathens. The Innsbruck *Ludus de assumptione beatae Mariae virginis*

In 1391 an otherwise unknown scribe who calls himself “Johannes” has completed a manuscript, copied from some unknown middle German sources, which by 1445 finally found its way into the library of the Monastery of Neustift.¹ The manuscript (today University Library Innsbruck, Cod. 960)² is one of the most frequently treated manuscripts of early German religious drama.³ It contains three play texts, each of them being the earliest extant complete work of its kind in Germany: a dramatisation of the Assumption of the Virgin, an Easter play, and a Corpus Christi play.

The first and longest of these three dramatic texts, the *Ludus de assumptione beatae Mariae virginis*, has found much less interest in scholarship than the other two plays, even though it is a most remarkable play. Besides the *Amorbacher Marienhimmelfahrtsspiel* (an early 14th century fragment of less than 150 lines), it is the only known theatrical representation of the Assumption of the Virgin in German language, and it is also the oldest dramatisation of the destruction of Jerusalem in Germany. While earlier scholarship had regarded the siege of Jerusalem at the end of the *Ludus de assumptione* as a detached add-on to the play,⁴ Stephen WRIGHT has convincingly argued that the last part of the drama should not be seen separate.⁵ His arguments are based on iconographic traditions and on the liturgical calendar that tie the Assumption of Mary and the sack of Jerusalem to each other. WRIGHT sees a major connecting link between the end and the beginning of the play, which depicts the apostles’ missionary work, in the “heathen king’s” (i.e. the Roman Emperor’s) conversion to Christianity before he attacks the Holy City.

A frequently criticised aspect of the play is its open ending or fragmentary character. The destruction of Jerusalem itself is not carried out; the drama ends with the king’s provoking words to his soldiers:⁶

¹ Bernd NEUMANN, “Das ‘Innsbrucker Spiel von Mariae Himmelfahrt’. Gedanken zu einer Neuedition.” *Neue Beiträge zur Germanistik* 1 (2002), pp. 191–206, p. 193.

² *Die Neustifter-Innsbrucker Spielhandschrift von 1391 (Cod. 960 der Universitätsbibliothek Innsbruck)*, facsimile ed. by Eugen Thurnher and Walter Neuhauser, with a bibliography by Walter NEUHAUSER and Sieglinde SEPP. Göttingen 1975 (Litterae 40).

³ Stephen WRIGHT, “Scribal Errors and Textual Integrity: The Case of Innsbruck Universitätsbibliothek Cod. 960.” *Studies in Bibliography* 36 (1986), pp. 79–92, p. 79.

⁴ David BRETT-EVANS, *Von Hrotsvit bis Folz und Gengenbach. Eine Geschichte des mittelalterlichen deutschen Dramas*. Berlin 1975, vol. II, p. 25.

⁵ Stephen WRIGHT, *The Vengeance of our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Toronto 1989 (Studies and Texts, 89), pp. 52–61.

⁶ All quotations are taken from: “Innsbrucker Spiel von Mariae Himmelfahrt.” *Altteutsche Schauspiele*, ed. by Franz Joseph MONE. Quedlinburg/Leipzig 1841 (Bibl. der ges. dt. Nat.-Lit. 21), pp. 20–106. My corrections of MONE’s text (M), which are based on the facsimile, are remarked in the footnotes. A new critical edition of the text is in preparation by Bernd NEUMANN and Dieter TRAUDEN.

... und ryt wir sý an, ir ritter czart,
 ez taug uns lenger nicht gespart. *Et cetera.*
Explicit ludus de assumptione. est completum anno dom. M^o.CCC^o. nonagesimo primo.
sabbato die⁷ post Batholomæi (ll. 3167–68b.)

(... and let us ride against them, dear knights, we may not hesitate any longer. *Et cetera.*

Here ends the Assumption play. It was completed in 1391, on the first Saturday after the feast of St. Bartholomew.)

The finishing phrase ‘*et cetera*’ has been regarded as a hint to an omission of text by the scribe;⁸ while the following lines which indicate that the play was complete were used as an argument that the source Johannes copied from had already finished in the same way. “Since neither Johannes, nor his precursor, nor any of the later users of the manuscript seem to have doubted the structural or thematic integrity of the work, modern readers might be well advised to consider the Assumption play in terms of its own carefully plotted musical and dramatic symmetries before dismissing it out of hand as a tedious and hopelessly truncated fragment.”⁹ The ‘*et cetera*’ could possibly imply that the final battle scene should be presented as a pantomime.¹⁰ If it were so, however, NEUMANN demands, the fact that the play is lacking an epilogue, still needed to be explained.¹¹

The question about the completeness of the play cannot be solved as a separate problem. It is linked to questions about the sense of the last scene, about the intention of the whole play, its structure and the connections that are drawn between the figure of the Virgin and the destruction of Jerusalem. The following analysis of the play will focus on these questions and on the particular receptive attitude that is recommended to the audience throughout the play.

At the very beginning of the play there is a procession of five groups of actors: Christ and the angels, Mary and her maidens, the Apostles, the Jews and the heathen king (*paganissimus rex*) and his soldiers. Each group enters a *burg*, i.e. a *locus* on the simultaneous stage. Later on we are told that the Apostles when leaving their place and spreading over several others, *recedunt dividentes se in circulum* (l. 68a). This is why we may assume that the *loci* were arranged in a circle.

According to these five *loci* the early editor MONE has structured the play in five acts,¹² each of which could be subdivided into three or more scenes, according to the

⁷ die] dic M.

⁸ BRETT-EVANS, II, 25–26: “Man kann sich freilich des Eindrucks nicht ganz erwehren, daß der Kopist eher das Interesse an seiner Aufgabe verloren hatte als daß ihm die fehlenden Verse nicht vorlagen.”

⁹ WRIGHT (1986), p. 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87; NEUMANN (2001), p. 197.

¹¹ NEUMANN (2001), p. 196.

¹² Act I: „Die Teilung der Apostel“, ll. 45–766; act II: „Tod Mariä“, ll. 767–1562; act III: „Begräbnis Mariä“, ll. 1563–2022; act IV: „Himmelfahrt Mariä“, ll. 2023–2513; act V: „Zerstörung Jerusalems“, ll. 2514–3168. MONE, p. 20. Cf. Bernd NEUMANN, “Innsbrucker (thüringer) Spiel von Mariae Himmelfahrt”. *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 4. Berlin ²1983, col. 403–06, col. 404.

actors entering or leaving the respective *burg*. In other words, MONE tried to structure a play designed for a simultaneous stage according to criteria derived from the classical theatre. The text, however, suggests a different structure. Twice a *praecursor* or *praedicator* addresses the audience. At the second instance the stage direction comments his speech with the words: *Prædicator surgens intimat ludum* (l. 766b). Thus, anything before the “opening of the play” in ll. 767–880 has to be regarded as a prelude. Both the prelude and the play itself are divided into smaller units by addresses of angels to the audience. The angels call for silence and attention and point at the most important subject matters that are about to be presented in the next scene. By these angelic interventions, which equate to short prologues, the play is structured as follows:

Prelude, introduced by the *praecursor* and the entering procession (ll. 1–44)

- ll. 45–268 The Apostles’ decision to start their missionary work.
- ll. 269–766 The Apostles as missionaries among heathens and Jews.

Main part of the play, introduced by the *praedicator*’s prologue (ll. 767–880)

- ll. 881–1609 The death of the Virgin.
- ll. 1610–2022 The burial of Mary’s corpse.
- ll. 2023–2456 The Assumption of the Virgin.
- ll. 2457–2622 The Apostles’ further missionary work, the baptism of the Roman king.
- ll. 2623–3168 The conflict between Jews and Romans.

The prelude gives the audience a picture of the early Church as confronted with Jews and heathens. The two non-Christian communities, however, are clearly distinct from each other. During the opening procession of the actors, the herald does not give any assessing commentary about the heathens; the Jews, however, are introduced as a clearly negative faction. The *praecursor* calls them those:

dý di czwelf boten und Marian zcart
wolden also vahen
und dar noch zcû tode erschlan. (V. 32–34)

(... who intended to capture the Apostles and the graceful Virgin and also to kill them.)

The prelude assures that the audience should find itself on the side of Mary and the Apostles, not on that of the Jews. Peter opens the play by recalling the words of Christ:

her sprach, »ir schult nicht lenger sparen,
ir schult aller creature
kristen glouben predigen hûre.« (V. 60–62)

(He said: “you should not hesitate any longer. Today you should go and preach to all creatures; teach them the Cristian article of faith.”)

Christ’s dismissal of the Apostles (Mt 28:19, Mc 16:15) is well familiar to the audience, since it is part of the Easter liturgy, where it is pronounced as a mission commanded to all Christians. Peter in the following lines formulates the Creed, and all the Apostles join in it. By this the audience ought to be drawn into this confession of the faith which it

shares with the Apostles. It will accept the Apostle's matters as theirs. The Apostles, however, do not immediately leave for their missionary duty; at first they move towards Mary. They greet her with words that reflect the *Ave Maria* (ll. 179–81), which again the audience is well accustomed with; it is so to say the normal way the audience would address the Virgin. The Apostles, with whom the audience is supposed to identify, ask Mary for a leave. She seems to be the centre of the Church; only with her blessing (ll. 265–68) the Christians may fulfil their duty.

The Apostles now move out to the *loci* of the heathens and Jews and start preaching the Christian faith. As soon as the heathens hear that Christ has died for the salvation of man, they ask for forgiveness for their former ignorance,

wir han alle al h̄y gelebit,
 alz eyn v̄y in unvornunft strebit,
 daz wir gotes n̄y geruchten
 noch siner gnade n̄y gesuchten.
 wir han ouch n̄y zu zc̄u keyner frist
 von gotes sone nicht gew̄yst,
 wan iz ist uns alrerst an deser stunt
 von dinem munt worden kunt,
 so bit wir dich dorch den selben got,
 daz d̄u uns touffest an sp̄ot (ll. 327–36).

(Up to this moment we all have lived like an animal that lingers around in ignorance, since we have never thought about God and never asked for his mercy. We also had never known anything about God's son. It has now been through you that we have heard about him for the first time. Thus we ask you by this very God to baptise us immediately.)

The immediate conversion of the heathens is presented twice, with Peter and Andrew preaching. Soon it is confronted with Matthew's experience, who delivers a sermon to the Jews. In order to be better understood by the Jews, Matthew tries to meet their pre-knowledge and argues on the basis of the prophecies that are given in the Old Testament. As soon as Matthew stops speaking, we hear a song of the *synagoga* (ll. 572a) in Hebrew language, not understandable for the audience. The song stresses the difference in language and thereby symbolizes the impossibility of a communication between Christians and Jews. The Jews are far from being convinced by the Apostle's words; they immediately gather to discuss how they could punish the Apostles' violation of their religious rules and convictions (ll. 573–664). They heat up their hatred against Jesus, his mother and all their supporters – including the spectators as far as they identify with the Apostles – and finally plan to take “revenge”:

Ir hirn, n̄u wir uns rechen wullen,
 so wil ich uch raten onverhollen,
 sint s̄o sprechen uffenbar,
 daz Jhesum eyn reyne mayt gebar,
 s̄o beyte wir, bis daz s̄y gesterbit,
 d̄y uns bis hy hat geerbeyt,
 d̄y Jhesum trug den ongehure:
 s̄o wullen wir s̄y vorbornen in eyne f̄ure
 und iren reynen lychnam (ll. 619–27)

(Dear companions, now that we plan to take revenge, I will frankly give you the following advice: Since they openly proclaim that Jesus was born by a chaste virgin, we shall wait until she dies, who has troubled us all the time, who had carried the wicked in her womb. We will then burn her and her spotless body in a fire.)

The Jews expect to earn *ere*, honour, from such a deed (l. 632), and to complete their “revenge” they plan to kill the Apostles as well in order to stop them preaching and to punish them for their disobedience to the Jewish law (ll. 633–40). The enormous aggression of the Jews, which is to be understood as an aggression against all Christianity, born out of stubbornness and a deliberately broken communication, is immediately contrasted with another positive depiction of the heathens: We now see Simon preaching to the heathens, who gladly accept the baptism. With their praise to the Lord the prelude ends.

Before the main part of the play begins, the lines of conflict are clearly marked: The Easter mission that the Resurrected has given to the Apostles, who represent all Christians, i.e. the mission to spread the Word, appears to be the central topic of the play. The Christian creed is well and gladly accepted by the heathens, while the Jews don’t want to hear the Word and react to it with aggression. Their animosity is not only directed towards the Apostles, but primarily towards the Virgin, who is represented as the core of the Christian community; the Jews hate her especially since she is the visible proof of the miracle of the Incarnation. It is their principal aim to burn Mary’s body. By this they expect to be able to destroy the whole Church. Even though there is no explicit reference to the traditional interpretation of Mary as an allegory of the Church, it is indirectly suggested to the audience to understand the figure of the Virgin in this way.

The main part of the play begins with the *praedicator*’s prologue that is later referred to as a “sermon” (l. 886). It gives the *argumentum* for the following scenes up to Mary’s Assumption and her reception in heaven. Finally, the *praedicator* stresses the Virgin’s role as *mediatrix*. An angel repeats:

Ir framen lute, nũ merket lyse,
man sal mit desem spile wisen,
wý Maria uff erden hat
gebeten vor unser missetat (ll. 881–84)

(devout people, listen and watch carefully. The play will show you how Mary during her life has plead for the forgiveness of our sins.)

MONE conjects *uwer* instead of *unser* in line 884. I would, however, claim that *unser* is the correct reading. There is no intention to express a distinction between the sinless angel and the defective men, but the actor representing the angel speaks to his fellow-men and to the congregation which he is a part of. The audience is called in to join the group of believers who are about to experience the miracle of Mary’s role as a *mediatrix* i.e. to see the importance of the Virgin for their own lives.

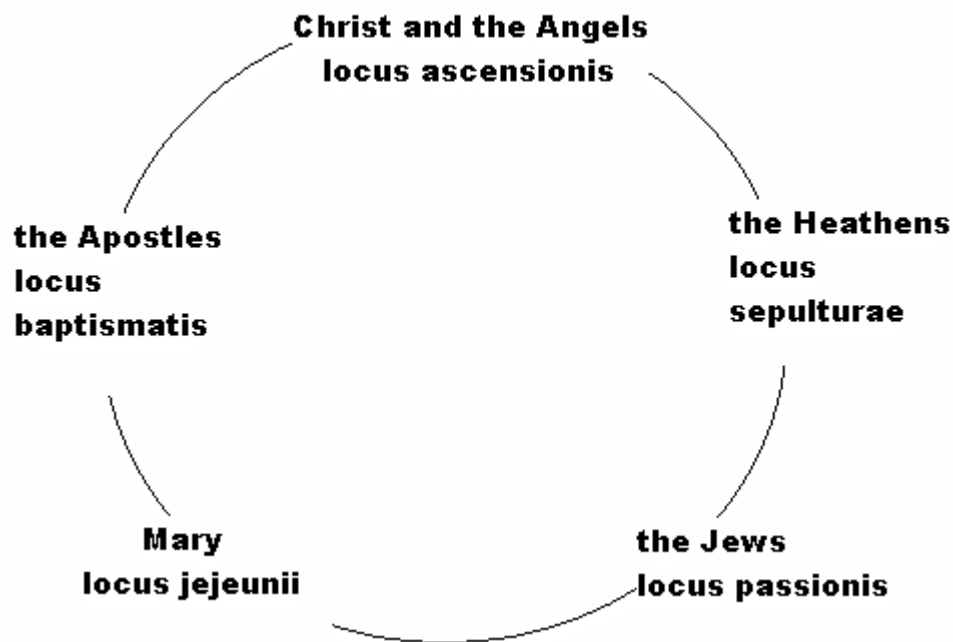
In the following scene Mary is presented as an example for man living in the time between Christ’s Ascension and the Last Judgement: The arrival of the Messiah is a historic fact, but the Salvation of man is still to come at a time unknown. Each day Mary

speaks her prayers at the canonical hours by visiting five *loci*¹³ presenting the most important stations of Christ's official life and Passion: the *locum baptismatis* (l. 920a), the *locum jejunii* (l. 931a), the *locum passionis* (l. 939a), the *locum sepulturae* (l. 955a) and the *locum ascensionis* (l. 965a). On the stage Mary goes round from one station to the other and prays a variation of the rosary prayer. The audience is familiar to the practise of station prayers, which is especially common on pilgrimages. The basic idea of such a prayer is that a past event can easier be recalled if it is meditated upon at the place where the event had occurred (or at a place symbolizing the true location), i.e. if the believer overcomes the distance of space, it is more likely that divine grace will (momentarily) abolish the distance of time.¹⁴ When the spectators now follow the actor representing Mary from one station to the other on the stage, they join in the Virgin's prayer and are given an instruction for proper meditation. At the same time they are told how to receive the play. The play as such is to be understood as a station prayer.

The five *loci* Mary visits are most probably associated to the five *loci* used in the play. The place of Christ's Ascension is likely to be re-used later for the Assumption of the Virgin, and it would be reasonable to place it close to the *burg* of Christ and the angels; the location of Christ's Passion could be close to the *locus* of the Jews. The grave will most probably be placed in between these two, and it will possibly be used again in the burial scene as the grave of the Virgin. In the burial scene we are told that it was necessary to pass the place of the Jews (l. 1623b) on the way from Mary's house to her grave. We are also told that Mary goes (*vadit*, l. 920a) to the place of baptism, returns (*recedit*, l. 931a) to the place of fasting and then continues from there (*procedit*, l. 939a, 955a, 965a) to the other three places one after the other. Thus, we may reconstruct the stage setting as sketched below:

¹³ She (l. 904) and the *praedicator* (l. 781) mention six hours, but only five places are put on stage.

¹⁴ Cf. VAN DER LEEUW, *Phänomenologie der Religion*. Tübingen ⁴1977, p. 455: „An der heiligen Stätte lebt die Macht“.



By going round and praying at each memorial place Mary finally succeeds in calling back her beloved son and in turning the past into the future: the archangel Gabriel reveals to her that she is about to become her son's bride. Thus, the meditation has reached its highest end, the structure of time is abolished, and the unification with God is about to take place. From now on the picture of the bride is often taken up, in reference to the *Cantica Canticorum* and the *Apocalypse*. Mary becomes an example for the praying soul as well as a leading figure for the whole Church.

Gabriel also refers to her importance for the missionary Church as it was visible in the prelude. He greets the Virgin with the words:

von dir ist geboren daz wort,
daz in aller werlde ist gehort (ll. 1028–29)

(By you the Word was born, which is now being heard all over the world.)

The word that is being spread by the Apostles is identified with the Word in John 1; it is a metaphor of the Lord. Mary who has given birth to the Word, is not only the mother of Christ, she is also the mother of Christianity and of the Church. As the bride of the Last Day she also is an allegory of the Church. At the same time she is an example for the Church and its members, example of proper piety and an example for the individual soul who loves the Lord and will be unified with him. The spectator who is expected to identify with the Apostles and to accept their duty to spread the Word as his own, will recognise that Mary has to be the centre of his life as well and that she can give him advice for a perfect life, a perfect meditation that will lead him to the Lord. When he in the following scenes revisits the *loci* he ought to meditate both on the respective scene in

Christ's life and on the scene presented in the play and to call them both into the presence of his own life.

The identification of the location of baptism with the house of the Apostles is rather unproblematic since the Apostles have been shown in the prelude as preaching to the heathens and baptizing them. Thus, when the action of the *Ludus* moves to the Apostles, the audience should meditate on the sacrament of baptism that has freed them as well as the heathens from sin and has turned the spectators into members of the Church.

Mary's house, as we have seen, is placed at or close to the *locus jejeunii*. While Christ had fasted 40 days in the desert before the Passion, Mary has spent, as she says, 44 years praying each day and longing for her son (l. 1117) before she will now die and be resurrected on the third day. Her life thus reflects a perfect imitation of Christ. It is remarkable that neither the *Legenda Aurea* nor the *Transitus Mariae*, which can clearly be identified as the sources of the *Ludus de assumptione*,¹⁵ report about these 44 years. In these sources the Virgin is reckoned to have lived either two¹⁶ or twenty-two years after Christ's Ascension.¹⁷ The playwright has obviously chosen the number on purpose, most probably to stress the parallelism between Christ's lent and Mary's later life and thus the life of the Church in expectation of the Last Day. There is, however, another association that is awoken in the audience by this date. It is a frequently treated motif in medieval literature¹⁸ and a key date in medieval historiography that Titus and Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem around 70 AD and thus fulfilled the prophecy spoken by Christ:

et ut adpropinquavit videns civitatem flevit super illam dicens / quia si cognovisses et tu et quidem in hac die tua quae ad pacem tibi nunc abscondita sunt ab oculis tuis / quia venient dies in te et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo et circumdabunt te et coangustabunt te undique / ad terram prosternent te et filios qui in te sunt et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuae (Lk 19:41–44)¹⁹

(And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, / Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. / For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, / And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.)²⁰

Dramatic representations of the fall of Jerusalem – in the 14th century not yet common in Germany, but in France – understood themselves as depictions of the triumph of Ecclesia

¹⁵ NEUMANN (1983), col. 404.

¹⁶ *Transitus Mariae* B,ii. *Apocalypses Apocryphiae*, ed. by Konstantin von Tischendorf. Leipzig 1866, repr. Hildesheim 1966, pp. 124–136.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, variant MB; *Legenda Aurea* 119, 21. *Die Elsässische Legenda Aurea*, ed. Ulla WILLIAMS and Werner WILLIAMS-KRAPP. Tübingen 1980 (Texte und Textgeschichte, 3), vol. I, pp. 526–35.

¹⁸ A collection of medieval Dutch texts on this topic has been published in 1992: *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems in der mittelniederländischen Literatur (1100–1600)*, ed. Wolfgang BUNTE. Frankfurt/Bern/ New York 1992 (Judentum und Umwelt, 33). A comparable overview over the large number of German texts is not yet available.

¹⁹ *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. Roger Gryson. Stuttgart 1994.

²⁰ Translation: King James Version.

over Synagoga.²¹ If Mary according to what is said in the *Ludus de assumptione* lived 44 years after Christ's death, she died in 77 AD. Since a connection between Marian and Anti-Jewish motifs was nothing uncommon in medieval art and literature,²² the audience when being given this date may well expect the play to depict or at least to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, which could be a just consequence of the Jews' evil behaviour as it was presented in the prelude.

When Gabriel announces her death to Mary, the Virgin's strongest concern is about her forthcoming confrontation with Satan:

gar flyzglichen bit ich abir m ,
 daz myner sele icht gesche,
 daz ir der bose valant
 czû sehen icht werde bekant. (ll. 1055–58)

(Moreover I ask you fervently that nothing should happen to my soul and that my soul should not meet evil Satan.)

When Mary in the following, parallel structured scene talks to John about her forthcoming death, it is not any more Satan, but the Jews she fears most:

ich bevelle dir sundirn alleyne
 minen lichnam, son suße,
 daz her den Juden icht werde muße,
 sy han gesprochen alle gar,
 so wullen vorbornen uffenbar. (ll. 1287–90)

(My dear son, I especially command to you personally my body. It should not fall into the hands of the Jews, who all have said that they will publicly burn it.)

The Virgin's fear for her soul and her fear for her body are corresponding to each other. The danger arising in this world from the Jews equals the danger arising from Satan in the otherworld. As powerless, however, as Satan is – Gabriel reminds Mary of the fact that she has already subdued him (l. 1069) –, as forceless are the Jews.

The next scene presents the burial of the Virgin. During the procession the Apostles sing Ps 113, „*in exitu Israel de Aegypto* (l. 1623b). Hearing the familiar psalm used in the Easter liturgy, the audience should meditate upon Christ's death and resurrection, his victory over Satan. Now the procession stops in front of the *palacium Judæorum* (l. 1623c), i.e. at the place that was earlier attributed as the *locum passionis*. The Jews immediately realise that the time they had waited for has come: the time for revenge for all the trouble that Jesus had caused to them, as they say. Now they want to complete their destructive work, which had begun with the Passion of Christ: They try to destroy the corpse of Mary and to kill the Apostles. As soon, however, as one of the Jews touches the bier of the Virgin, his hand is dried and fixed to it, while all the other Jews are struck down by a blow from heaven and are blinded – a physical expression of their spiritual blindness. The scene is taken from the legendary sources mentioned above. In

²¹ WRIGHT (1989), p. 6.

²² Cf. *Maria – Tochter Sion? Mariologie, Marienfrömmigkeit und Judenfeindschaft*, ed. Johannes HEIL and Rainer KAMPLING. Paderborn 2001.

the legends the miracle at the Virgin's bier leads to the conversion of the Jews. In the *Ludus de assumptione*, however, only some of the Jews are convinced and convert to Christianity, while some others are convinced that they were blinded by black magic (ll. 1996) and, therefore, cannot see any reason why they should desert their Jewish faith:

Neyn czwar, frunt, dez sit bericht,
wir wullen in uwern glouben nicht;
wer wir noch eyns blint worden,
doch wullen wir halden unsern *Judeschen*²³ orden.
went ir, daz ir uns *müget*²⁴ getoren?
wen sint wir blint, so mußen wir doch horen,
solde wir an eynen trugen glouben? (ll. 1981–87)

(No, truly, friends, let me tell you that we don't want to assent in your faith. Even though we are blinded, we will stay loyal to our Jewish faith. Do you think that you could fool us? Though we are blind, we still can hear; why should we believe in a deception?)

The *locus passionis* is not a place where the audience should experience the Jews' willingness to convert, it is rather the locality where to recognise the evil character and stubbornness of those who are responsible for the crucifixion of the Lord, of those who equal Satan whom Christ has defeated in the Harrowing of Hell and the bad spirits that Mary was afraid of, even though she has already overthrown them. The Jews become visible as the powerless enemies of the Church.

Now that the procession of the body of the Virgin has reached the grave – the place where the audience earlier on was supposed to follow Mary in meditating upon Christ's death and resurrection –, a second procession starts from the opposite side: Christ and the angels appear and slowly guide Mary to her heavenly wedding with Christ. On the way every single choir of angels welcomes the bride, with texts largely taken from the *Cantica Canticorum*. At the end there is a dance of the angels in heaven. The scene is a musical and choreographic masterpiece. Its splendour correlates with its central position in the play's structure; it is obviously the core piece of the *Ludus de assumptione*.²⁵ The audience convincingly experiences that Mary is the bride of the *Apocalypse* and the bride of the *Cantica Canticorum*, she is the allegory of the Church. Her assumption and the Ascension of Christ are to be seen as related to each other. Lost in meditation upon these two events, the spectator could recognise the presence of the Salvation in his own life and reach at a preview of the general resurrection and assumption of man. On the height of her triumph, Mary, the allegory of the Church assures the audience that she will care for their salvation:

Nû merket liblich myne wort,
ir sunder in der werlde dort,
frouwet uch und gehabit uch wol,
kûmmet alle czû mir, ich bin gnaden vol,

²³ *Judeschen*] deleted M (für metrical reasons).

²⁴ *mu^eget*] *mo^eget* M.

²⁵ For an analysis of the scene cf. Theo MAIER, *die Gestalt Marias im geistlichen Schauspiel des deutschen Mittelalters*. Berlin 1959 (Philologische Studien und Quellen), pp. 110–113 (note: page 111 and 112 are numbered and bound in reverse order).

komet alle czû mir here,
 ich wil uch helfen ane swere,
 ich wil vortriben uwir smercze
 und wil enczunde uwer hercze
 mit den geistlichen funcken, ...
 und wil uch von den sunden bade
 mit dem wasser myner gnade (ll. 2376–84, 2398–99)

(Now listen carefully to my words, all you sinners down there in the world: Rejoice and be happy, approach me, I am full of grace. You all, come up to me, I will comfort you in your sorrows, I will chase away your pain, I will inflame your hearts with the sparkles of the Holy Spirit. ... I will wash you clean from your sins with the water of my mercy.)

After the Assumption of the Virgin the Apostles remind each other of their duty to preach the Christian faith (ll. 2480–81), now including the Assumption of Mary, and they continue their missionary work as it was portrayed in the prelude. Again they spread over the whole stage, until they are called to the heathen king who wishes to learn about their faith. His interest into Christianity turns the heathens into a sharp opposite of the Jews. Quickly the king and his wife receive baptism.

There is no other *locus* left on the stage for the heathen king's place as the *locus sepulturae*, which, however, in Mary's station prayers, had had the meaning of the place of resurrection. In fact, it is the hope for eternal life that drives the heathen king and his wife to conversion:

dez bit ich dich inneglichen hûte,
 daz wir uns beyde laßen touffen,
 so magen wir unser sele czû hymmel kouffen. (ll. 2543–45)

(I ask you fervently today that we both may receive baptism. By this we can secure a place in heaven for souls.)

The more important association with the place of resurrection, however, is that by the conversion of the Romans the Church reaches a new state; there is now a powerful king who has sworn to defend Christianity, as St. Paul had demanded it from him:

er konig her, is sult von rechte
 stetlich vor cristen glouben vechte (ll. 2611–12)

(Your Excellence, you should now see it as your duty to constantly fight for the Christian faith.)

The Christianisation of Rome stands for the global triumph of the Church. At the place where Christ has prevailed over death, the audience now expects the Church, which has reached a new power, to defeat its enemies, the Jews. When the Roman king is told that the Jews planned to burn the Virgin's body, he decides to punish them (ll. 2635–44). Thus, the reason for the Roman attack against Jerusalem is neither the historical reason (i.e. the revolt of the Jews) nor is it the reason usually named in medieval literature, a revenge for the crucifixion of Christ. The Jews' aggression against Mary (that is to be understood as an aggression against the Church) causes the king to react according to his pledge, which he interprets as an obligation,

... daz wir ubir alle lant
 machen gnade und fride (ll. 2744–45)

(... that we should bring bliss and peace to all the countries in the world)

The new Christianity that is not any more the religion of a handful of missionaries, but the religion of a powerful empire, is now explained by the king as based on a codex of knightly virtues. He claims:

ich bin eyn konig und habe den mût,
daz ich lib und gut
wage dorch dye gerechtickeyt (ll. 2759–61)

(I am a king and am willing to risk my life and my possessions for justice).

The king's words are to be understood as a quotation of a famous passage from Hartmann von Aue's narrative *Der arme Heinrich*, which has come down to us in collections of didactic and religious (including Marian) literature.²⁶ In the narrative a young girl willing to give her blood for her landlord's cure, an act that she understands as an *imitatio Christi*, and for which she expects to be rewarded with the love of Christ who will accept her as his queen (ll. 811–12),²⁷ proclaims:

ich bin ein maget und hân den muot,
ê ich in sehe verderben,
ich will ê für in sterben (ll. 562–64)

(I am a virgin and I am willing to die for him before I see him dying.)

An audience who knows Hartmann's narrative will understand the king's words as a most sincere declaration of self-denial. For him in his actual role this is the adequate way to imitate the self-sacrifice of Christ and the self-denial of the Virgin. The audience might by these words be moved to consider which form of an *imitatio Christi* could be adequate for them in their position.

The king calls those, *wer von geburt daz adel treyt* (l. 2763), who possess an in-born nobility (which has to be understood as the willingness to die for the Lord and for Christianity) to the accolade. It has correctly been observed that the following scene is influenced by courtly literature,²⁸ the main point of reference, however, is the idea of the *militia Christi* as expressed in St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians*:

propterea accipite armaturam Dei ut possitis resistere in die malo et omnibus perfectis stare / state ergo succincti lumbos vestros in **veritate** et induti lorica **iustitiae** / et calciati pedes in praeparatione evangelii pacis / in omnibus sumentes scutum **fidei** in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere. (Eph 6:13–16)

(Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. / Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; / And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; / Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.)

²⁶ UB Heidelberg, Cpg 341; Cologny-Genf, Bibl. Bodmeriana, Cod. Bodmer 72 (previously Cathedral Library, Kalocza)

²⁷ Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich*, ed. Hermann Paul. Tübingen ¹⁶2001 (Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 3).

²⁸ WRIGHT (1989), p. 51.

The three primary virtues that are mentioned at the beginning of Paul's description of a *miles Christi* (to be understood as someone who defends the Christian faith as well as his own soul in the fights against devil), *veritas*, *iustitia*, and *fides*, are those which the Roman King advises his knights to keep in the first place: *gerechtigkeyt* (l. 2771), *trüwe und warheit* (l. 2795). His lament that at the present time these virtues are driven out of society (ll. 2795–2801) is thought as an appeal to the spectators to consider their own attitude towards truth, justice and loyalty. Now that the audience's self-reflection is initiated, the king starts the ceremony of the investiture of the "true knights". He adorns them with red coats representing *ritters namen* (l. 2876), that is with the right to bear the honour of a knight. The "name of a knight" is based on the beforehand named virtues. Who ever calls them his own, will be given the following weapons: a sword for to fight the evil and its temptations (l. 2890), a robe of conscience and patience (l. 2904–07), a helmet, which stands for *werdicheit und gûte* (l. 2924), i.e. dignity and benevolence, and a shield that symbolizes generosity and firmness (ll. 2942, 2950). The interpretation of the single pieces of the armour differs from Paul's letter, the idea of the *militia Christi*, however, is the same: These allegorical weapons are not only the weapons of soldiers fighting in a Holy War – the *Letter to the Ephesians* had been interpreted in this way during the time of the crusades –, but they are the weapons that every proper Christian should wear and use against devil, and they are the weapons by which Christ's mission to spread the Word could be realized, they are the weapons by which the final battle against the Antichrist will be won.

At this point the spectators of the *Ludus* should finally recognise their own role within the eschatology. They are all missionaries of the Word and they are all *milites Christi*. The Roman King is a perfect example of self-sacrifice in the *imitatio Christi*, in his lead they all should be willing to fight the last battle against Satan, which will finally lead to the Celestial Reign to come, which has already started with the wedding of Mary, the allegory of the Church, with Christ. It is now up to the spectators to reach the highest end of meditation in this "station prayer" and to overcome the limits of time by turning the future, apocalyptic unification with God into presence.

In the play the Romans now start their crusade against Jerusalem, which, throughout the play, has been portrayed as the base of the enemies of the Church. The hatred against the Jews has gradually been heated up in the previous scenes, now the soldiers express it openly. At this moment the audience, knowing that the play is set in the year 77 AD, might expect to see the just triumph of Christianity on stage. While the Romans besiege the town, however, they realize that they have not got enough troops for such a battle. They decide to return to Rome and come back another day, with a larger number of soldiers:

so wullen wir denne *komen*²⁹ mit großer macht
und gewynnen daz huz, dez habe ich mich bedach. (ll. 3043–44)

²⁹ *kumen*] deleted M (for metrical reasons).

(We will then return with strong forces and conquer the town. This is what I have decided to do.)

Obviously, the time for the Last Battle has not yet come. There are still possible supporters lacking in the Christian army. Is it the audience who has not yet joined the troops? – The Jews, however, attack the Romans on their retreat. By doing so, they again prove their malice. Immediately the Romans turn round for a counter strike: *wendet uch kegen den Juden alle* (l. 3163), „attack all the Jews“, the king encourages his knights, and he ends with the above quoted sentence: *ryt wir sy an, ir ritter czart, / ez taug uns lenger nicht gespart* (ll. 3167–68).

At the very beginning of the prelude Peter has said to the Apostles: *ir sult nicht lenger sparen* (l. 60), now the Roman king tells his knights, they should not hesitate any longer. Obviously the end points back to the beginning phrase – which was to be understood as an appeal not only to the Apostles, but also to the audience. The Roman King's appeal should be understood in the same way. The audience who should understand itself as *militia Christi* is reminded of their duty to defend Christianity and to finally join the troops they belong to – especially at a moment when the enemy of the Church attacks from behind and when any available help is of urgent need.

Scholarship has doubted that a play could end in this moment; WRIGHT assumes that a pantomime had shown the destruction of Jerusalem.³⁰ A pantomime at the end, however, would loosen the connection between the opening and the closing words in so far as the ending words would lose their appealing character, if the duty expressed in them would be presented as fulfilled, without the audience's assistance. NEUMANN misses an epilogue to the play.³¹ If, however, we understand the closing words of the king not only as spoken to his soldiers, but as an appeal given to all Christians, i.e. spoken to the audience, there is no further need for an epilogue.

Propagandistic dramas of later times know this kind of open endings, an ending that appeals to the audience to continue and fulfil the action outside the theatre. Jacob Locher, for example, a *poeta laureatus* in the service of Maximilian I. and a teacher of rhetoric and poetry at the University of Ingolstadt, in 1502 staged a Latin drama depicting a fictive crusade of all the European kings under the lead of Maximilian against the Turks (*Spectaculum tragico more effigiatum* or *Spectaculum de regibus et proceribus christianis*).³² Such a crusade had for long time been the plan of Maximilian, but had been counteracted by the German nobility as well as by the European rulers. The drama depicts a quick referendum of the rulers; they all consent in the war, and it concludes at the end of the fourth act with the opening of the war. The *capitaneus* addresses the audience:

³⁰ WRIGHT (1986), p. 87.

³¹ NEUMANN (2001), p. 196.

³² Jacob Locher, *Spectaculum more tragico effigiatum: In quo christianissimi Reges aduersum truculentissimos Thurcos consilium ineunt, expeditionemque bellicam instituunt; inibi salubris pro fide tuenda exhortatio*. Augsburg: Hans Froschauer, 1502 (microfiche, Bibliotheca Palatina, E2052)

En phræam manibus vibro. quam bellicus ardor
 Postulat. en sursum martia signa levo.
 En age rumpe moras liticen. dent classica vastos
 Armorum strepitus. buccina seva crepet. |
 Bombardis sonitum pedites nunc edite grandem.
 Ut metuant thurci corda severa trucis.
 Concurrant proceres. totus quoque protinus orbis
 Lectis militibus ad pia bella ruat (b4^{r-v}, V. 290–297).

(Look, I shake the spear in my hand, driven by my burning desire to fight. Look, I raise the standard as a sign for attack. Go, don't hesitate any more! The bugles may let their horrifying sounds ring out. The swords may be clattered, the battle horns may sound! Soldiers, let us hear the great blast of your canons, so that the Turks learn to fear the boundless audacity of the furious army! May the heroes come together, all the lots of brilliant knights, hasten to join the Holy War!)

From the other works Locher has written it is obvious that he planned his play as a propagandistic support for Maximilian's crusading plans; the author tried to appeal to his audience to translate the fifth act, the battle, into action, and to defeat the Turks, so that the play could justly be called *tragico more effigiatum*: A tragedy in Locher's view implied the fall of a tyrant (i.e. the sultan).³³

Though it might be tempting to find a political context the *Ludus des assumptione* might refer to – WRIGHT assumes that the spectators were knights of the Teutonic Order³⁴ –, such assumptions have to be speculative, especially since it is not known when the original version of the play was designed.³⁵ Similar methods of activating the audience do not have to correspond with similar aims of the activation. The clearly visible aim of the *Ludus* is to remind its audience of its duty to generally take an active role in Christianity's battle against Satan and to recognize Mary, the allegory of the Church, as the centre of their life. Her assumption and her coronation, which build the centre of the play, are the guarantee for the New Jerusalem to come.

³³ For further discussion of Locher's political dramas cf. Bernhard COPPEL, „Jakob Locher und seine in Freiburg aufgeführten Dramen“, *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Amstelodamensis*, ed. by P. TUYNMAN. München 1979 (Humanistische Bibliothek, Abh. 26), pp. 258–272, and my forthcoming book: *Jacob Lochers Dramen und die frühe Humanistenbühne im süddeutschen Raum*. Berlin [2005?].

³⁴ WRIGHT (1989), pp. 62–65.

³⁵ WRIGHT (1986), p. 81.