THE EMBLEM BOOK AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA: JOHANN VOGEL’S MEDITATIONES EMBLEMATICAE DE RESTAURATA PACE GERMANIAE OF 1649

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In 1649, the year following the cessation of the Thirty Years’ War, the Nuremberg Lutheran minister Johann Vogel published an emblem book thematizing the fragile new Peace of Westphalia. In a series of twenty-four emblems, Vogel’s fascinating, little known Meditatio­nes emblematicae de restaurata pace Germaniae, or Emblematic Medita­tions on the Restored Peace of Germany, calls upon its audience to recognize the Westphalian agreement as a boon for a war-ravaged Germany and as a treaty that is in accord with the wishes of God. Significantly, however, the author’s intent seems to be more than praise for the virtues of peace. Rather, Vogel’s emblem book is a work of political propaganda that expresses the interests of a Nuremberg city government that believed that it would profit greatly by the international acceptance of the Peace of Westphalia.

During his early life, Vogel developed a connection to the Nurem­berg religious and political establishment that would prepare him to become a persuasive voice for the city towards the end of his life. The son of a weapons maker (Goedeke 111) and/or goldsmith (Zedler 182), Vogel was born in Nuremberg in 1589. Like so many men of letters in Early Modern Germany, Vogel rose above his artisan origins and aban­doned plans for a career as a barber in order to pursue higher education. With the financial support of the city, Vogel first attended the Altdorf Academy near Nuremberg (1608–14), then the University of Jena (1614), and finally the University of Wittenberg (1615–16). During his studies at Altdorf, and apparently through the influence of fellow student and future Socinian theologian Martin Ruarus (Goedeke 111), he became associated with the Socinians, an anti-Trinitarian religious community that denied the divinity of Christ and emphasized “the free will of man, his reasonableness, and his natural knowledge” (Zijpp 565). With Ruarus
(1588–1657), Vogel traveled in 1614 or 1615 to Hungary and Poland, where more established Socinians ceremoniously inducted him as a brother into their religious society.

Notably, Vogel’s rather serious flirtations with Socinianism occurred at a time when Socinian teachings had gained a disturbing currency in Vogel’s home city, Nuremberg, among many students and faculty members of the Altdorf Academy (Dülden 107). In 1616 Wittenberg authorities arrested Vogel at the request of a Nuremberg city council that was evidently irate that a scholar whom it was funding had involved himself in a heresy. Transported to Nuremberg and jailed there, Vogel in 1617 recanted his Socinian leanings before the assembled Altdorf students and faculty in a sermon on the trinity, *De trinitate Christi*. From that point onward, Vogel remained firmly within the ambit of Lutheran orthodoxy. Until his death in 1663, he held positions within the city-supported Lutheran Church. In 1621 he became the rector of the school associated with St. Aegidien Church and in 1634 assumed the position of rector at St. Sebaltdus, where he stayed for the remainder of his career.

During his lifetime, Vogel appears to have enjoyed a solid reputation as a scholar. An accomplished Hebraist and student of Greek, he turned down several academic positions elsewhere before assuming his duties at St. Aegidien (Zedler 183). His contemporaries appear, moreover, to have regarded him as an able poet. Even before his rectorship at St. Aegidien, the noted legal scholar Count Palatine Johann Gabler made him a poet (Zedler 183–84). Furthermore, the Johann Vogel of the *Meditationes* is certainly the “Vogel” whom the Nuremberger Georg Philipp Harsdörf-fer (1607–58)—the influential poetic theorist—lists with the celebrated Weckherlin and Gryphius in his *Specimen philologiae germanicae* of 1646 as among thirty-nine leading German poets of his day (195–96).

Stylistically, Vogel belongs to the generation of poets immediately preceding the widespread acceptance of the German-language poetry reforms set forth by Martin Opitz in his 1624 *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (*Book on German Poetry*). For Vogel, like Julius Wilhelm Zinggref (1591–1635), Vogel’s university friend Martin Ruarus, and other members of this pre-Opitzian group, the alexandrine was the verse form of choice for vernacular poetry (Faber du Faur 42). This is, in fact, the vernacular verse form of the *Meditationes*. Among Vogel’s numerous other publications that also bear witness to his confident but occasionally heavy poetic style are his *Die Psalmen Davids sampt andern heyligen Gesangen in neue teutsche Verse gesetzt . . .* (*Psalms of David with Other Holy Songs Set in New German Verses . . .*) of 1638 and the 1661 *Andacht-