
Reviewed by: Timothy J. Wengert, Philadelphia

"Im Westen nichts Neues," the title of Erich Maria Remarque's remarkable tale about World War I, might well describe Philip Melanchthon’s life in 1542 as reflected in his correspondence. Indeed, the editor of MBW T 11, Christine Mundhenk, says as much in her introduction. The 271 letters, once again edited to the highest standards, seem tame in comparison with those of 1541 and the hubbub surrounding the Colloquy at Regensburg. Nevertheless, a closer reading reveals interesting, if not earthshaking aspects of Melanchthon’s life. For one thing, his days were consumed by the affairs of school (no fewer than forty letters) and church (at least thirty-four letters), causing him to exclaim (with academics of every age) to his best friend, Joachim Camerarius (MBW 3048 [270]), “You would not believe how much of my time is spent with student affairs, to whom letters [of reference] must be given.” To help identify these students and the many other figures that populate Melanchthon’s correspondence, we now have the digests (Regesten) of these letters available on line (http://www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/forschungsstellen/melanchthon/projekt.de.html; last accessed 2 July 2012). Melanchthon also gave specific advice on the reform both of the universities of Leipzig (2894, 3012, 3013, 3105), Königsberg (2956, 3061, 3097, 3108), Rostock (2967–68), and Frankfurt/Oder (3089), and of churches in Naumburg (2879, 2880), ducal Saxony (2911, 2913), Prussia (3108), and Cologne (3114). We also glean from these letters the facts and rumors of Saxon political life, where the correspondence contains reports of Turkish troop movements in Hungary, the rash seizure of Wurzen by Elector John Frederick (despite the better claims of his cousin, Duke Moritz), and the defeat of that “arsonist,” Duke Heinrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel by the elector and Philip of Hesse. Regarding Wurzen, Melanchthon eagerly quoted Sophocles (Ajax 1081–83) on princes (MBW 2896, 2899, 2928), which Richard C. Jebb renders as: “But where there is license to attack others and act at will, do not doubt that such a state, though she has run before a favoring wind, will eventually sink with time into the depths.”

Melanchthon also handled theological issues, including advice for Philip of Hesse regarding Caspar Schwengckfeld (2870, 2885, 2892, 2893, 2906, 2912) and counsel for a variety of people on marriage matters (2887, 2888, 3042, 3052, 3079, 3088, 3100). On specific doctrines, we learn his take on justification (2949), the elevation of the elements during the Lord's Supper (2996), penance as a sacrament (3112), and the validity of baptism with wine (2995, 3111). Some letters stand out: his letter of consolation to Justus Jonas at the death of Jonas's wife (3115), advice on how not to defend Philip of Hesse's bigamy (2923, 2931), the nature of the episcopal office (2882a), Wittenberg's joint reaction to the publication of the Regensburger Buch (2873), a reference to Erasmus's praise of Luther (3070), the publication of Johannes Lang's Epiphanius manuscript (3125), and what to do with the library of a deceased student (3103) and with a drunken deacon (2920). The letter with the most manuscript copies (twenty-nine) was sent to Valentin Viglius and deals with what to do with the leftover communion wine (3119). Not only do the editors perform the yeoman's task of sorting out these copies, but also the text now contains an additional five lines over the version in the Corpus Reformatorum! Another letter (3042), written jointly with Luther, also contains an expanded text over the Weiner Ausgabe of Luther's works, and yet another (3088) is missing from the Weiner altogether! In another case (2932), the MBW editors provide the autograph of a letter edited so strongly by Joachim Camerarius (and again in
the CR) as to cover over his friend's complaints about the Saxon court. Any scholars who ignore the MBW in their research do so at their peril!

It is next to impossible to improve upon what has to be one of the best editions of a sixteenth-century figure every produced. It might have been helpful had Melanchthon's Greek quote of Aristotle citing Plato's Republic indicated (at least according to my versions of the originals; cf. MBW 3099) that the introductory words were only in Aristotle and that the concluding words were only in Plato. Melanchthon's Latin poem appended to MBW 3078 could be in CR 10:578–79, but this is more for scholars to debate than for editors to decide. In any case, Melanchthon's life in 1542 was hardly "all quiet."


Reviewed by: Christine Corretti, Somerville, Massachusetts

Paola Rapelli's Symbols of Power in Art is an extremely useful handbook that begins by examining power's transhistorical and transcultural definition. The author distinguishes between secular and spiritual power, closely defined as sovereignty. Rapelli's first section has a selection of the most common and meaningful historical symbols of power from the Western and Eastern worlds that materialize and contextualize the introductory definition, such as the crown, the scepter, the throne, the sword, and the globe. Rapelli explores each symbol in the form of prominent works of art and considers each object in its proper historical context, paying close attention to the function of the objects as conveyors of meaning. For instance, Rapelli has included the Throne of Tutankhamun (1358–49 BCE, Egyptian Museum, Cairo) as an embodiment of the pharaoh's sovereignty. The throne's painted illustration of the ruler on his majestic seat, which the sun god empowers, points up this carved object's significance as such. A comparable image is the relief of the enthroned and therefore presiding Darius I holding court (National Archaeological Museum, Tehran). That the latter was made nearly a century after the pharaoh's throne testifies to the longevity of the throne's symbolic value. Each of the symbols in Rapelli's book accompanies marginal annotations on the origins of its term, the term's geographical diffusion, concepts that relate to each symbol, and the like. The annotations provide, as the book's illustrations as a whole do, a broad intellectual context that imparts the transcultural and transhistorical significance of the symbols selected.

After the introductory catalogue of symbols Rapelli gives special attention to portraits of the most important Western leaders of antiquity and the early Christian age: Alexander the Great, Caesar, Augustus, Constantine, and Theodosius I the Great. The sovereigns of the first section were imperial rulers. Their place at the start of the text is not only chronologically correct, but also figuratively significant, for antiquity's greatest sovereigns would become the ideal for future European rulers. Here and throughout the rest of the book, large-scale portraits of military battles and other politicized events exemplify and contextualize information given about each ruler's career, while the symbols in the earliest part of the book join new emblems and motifs that are central to Rapelli's discussion. For instance, in a seventeenth-century portrait of Gustavus II Adolphus, king of Sweden, the goddess Victory is about to place a laurel crown, a symbol of glory, upon the ruler's helmet. Together, the two headpieces present Gustavus as a conqueror.

Rapelli dedicates the second section to medieval sovereigns, the third to emperors