The Reformation in Upper Lusatia: Pragmatism and Toleration, c. 1520-1635

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The Reformation is widely seen as one of the central events of the sixteenth century. In many cases it led to violence and religious conflict. Not in Upper Lusatia. Here the Reformation was dominated by cross-confessional exchange and peaceful coexistence. The Catholic Johan Leisentrit, for example, published a hymn book with many Lutheran songs.

My research is based on extensive archival work and considers theological treatises, letters, town records and visual and architectural sources.

Future research will highlight how other religious groups, for example followers of Caspar Schwenckfeld, fitted into the Reformation in Upper Lusatia. Another focus will be a comparison with other parts of East-Central Europe, such as Silesia.

Upper Lusatia was part of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Today it is largely part of Saxony and forms the easternmost part of Germany. There is hardly any research on Upper Lusatia in English, and no recent study of the Reformation there.

My research so far points to religious negotiation through contracts between Lutherans and Catholics and highly pragmatic arrangements for church use, for example the use of a single church by Lutherans and Catholics (Simultankirche).

One of the first maps of Saxony and Lusatia, made by Bartholomeus Scultetus in the late sixteenth century

Faces of the Upper Lusatian Reformation (from left): Johann Leisentrit, Jakob Böhme, Caspar Peucer, Philip Melanchthon, Caspar Schwenckfeld