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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DER TOTENTANZ ***

DER TOTENTANZ

Vierzig Holzschnitte von Hans Holbein dem Jüngeren. Faksimile-Nachbildungen der ersten Ausgabe mit einer Einleitung von Hans Ganz



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12. *Der Mönch.*
13. *Der Arzt.*
14. *Der Kaiser.*
15. *Der König.*
16. *Der Herzog.*
17. *Der Richter.*
18. *Der Fürsprech.*
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40. *Das Wappen des Todes.*

Begleitwort

Wo die Menschen bedrückt oder gequält werden, da antworten sie mit Hilferufen oder mit Taten. Die Totentänze, welche im Mittelalter an Friedhofsmauern und Kreuzgängen im Deutschen Reiche gemalt standen, waren die Hilferufe eines geknechteten Volkes, dessen weltliche Klassen unter dem harten Drucke Roms an Geld und Geist erpreßt wurden. Oft schon hatte der Papst den Bann gegen den Kaiser geschleudert, worauf die Gotteshäuser verstummten, der Segen der Sakramente aufhörte und jede Seelsorge dahinfiel. Aber auch Krieg, Erdbeben, Hungersnot und Seuche durchkreuzten das Land. Die Kirche selbst, welche die so erschütterten Menschen hätte aufrichten und festigen sollen, war innerlich zerfallen durch die allgemeine Sittenverderbnis der Geistlichkeit. In solch dumpfer Lebensluft, welche dem erfrischenden Gewitter der Reformation voranging, konnte kein seelischer Halt gedeihen und die Gedanken schienen sich im Anblick der Vergänglichkeit alles Irdischen zu sonnen und zu beruhigen, wenn dies die Furcht vor dem letzten Gerichte zuließ. Denn der Tod bedeutete für die Guten ein Ender und Erlöser elender Zustände, für die moralisch versinkenden aber eine fürchterliche Ungewißheit, die man durch Wohlleben zu betäuben suchte.

Verschiedene Niederschriften bürgen dafür, daß dem gemalten Todesreigen zeitlich die Schauspiele vorausgegangen sind. In Deutschland und Frankreich entstehend, drang die Dichtung nach Spanien, England und Italien ein und wurde unter der Regie der Prediger aufgeführt, welche die lebendigste Darstellungskunst dazu benutzten, das »Memento mori« jedermann eindringlich vor Augen zu halten und so die schwächeren Naturen zu beherrschen. Allmählich aber verschwinden diese Spiele, und im XV. Jahrhundert üben an ihrer Statt die Totentanzbilder ihre Wirkungen aus. Berühmt waren die Todesreigen von Paris (Danse macabre), von La Chaise-Dieu, von Lübeck, von Berlin und weithin bekannt auch diejenigen von Basel, welche die Mauern des Klosters Klingental und des Predigerstiftes schmückten. Nikolaus Manuel aber hatte als Erster in Bern einen Todesreigen geschaffen, in welchem stadtbekannte Bürger ihr eigenes Antlitz erkannten.

Nicht genug tun konnten sich die Künstler in ihren Vergänglichkeitsgefühlen, und ihre Phantasie, meist mit herber Ironie durchsetzt, entzündete sich unaufhörlich am Dunkel der Zukunft nach dem Tode. Ein Schrei nach Erschaffung neuen Lebens, ein zitterndes Bangen nach dem undenkbareren Jenseits strömte in der Volksseele, und den Künstlern, welche zu allen Zeiten die berufenen Träger des Gefühls sind, war es vorbehalten, dieser psychischen Massenexpansion durch ihre Werke Raum und Luft zu schenken.

Allgemein trägt die Erscheinung des Todes die Kraft in sich, die menschlichen Triebe aufs Tiefste zu erwecken, weshalb wir die Kultur eines Volkes darnach messen dürfen, wie es sich in Religion, Wissenschaft und Kunst zum Problem der Vergänglichkeit gestellt hat. Ebenso ist für einen Künstler die Auffassung des Todes gleichsam der Spiegel seines eigenen Wertes, seiner schöpferischen Kraft, welche sich aus dem Kampf des täglichen Lebens, aus dem Streben und Werden der Umgebung, zu den ewigen Gedanken Bahn bricht, bis er von diesen getragen die gerechte Gelegenheit zu höheren Meisterwerken errungen hat.

In dieser Kraft entstanden die Schöpfungen Hans Holbeins. Dreimal hat er den Totentanz gezeichnet; einmal als Entwurf zu einer Dolchscheide, dann als xylographisches Alphabet, und zuletzt schuf er die vorliegende Folge von Holzschnitten, welche man oft als den großen Totentanz bezeichnet. Wohl hatten auch Meister wie Albrecht Dürer, Hans Baldung, Burckmair und Scheuffelin die Nähe des Todes dargestellt, doch meist so, daß dieser seine Opfer unter den Sündern und Verworfenen suchte, während Holbein in umfassender Weise den Reigen an die Stätten führte, wo der Bürger seinem Berufe oder alltäglichen Neigungen nachging. Wie bei Manuel finden sich auch hier bekannte Gesichter vor, so trägt der Kaiser die Züge Maximilians, der König das Antlitz Franz I. von Frankreich, und zu Seiten des Todeswappens stehen der Künstler und sein Weib.

Die erste datierte Ausgabe der Todesbildung kam bei den Brüdern Trechsel im Jahre 1538 zu Lyon heraus und trug den Titel »Simulachres de la mort« oder »Imagines mortis«. Die Entstehungszeit dieser Folge aber fällt in die Jahre 1524-25, wo Holbein in Basel weilte. Probedrucke der Originalstöcke befinden sich im dortigen Museum. Hans Lützelburger, welcher schon 1526 starb, hatte das Schneiden in Holz besorgt.

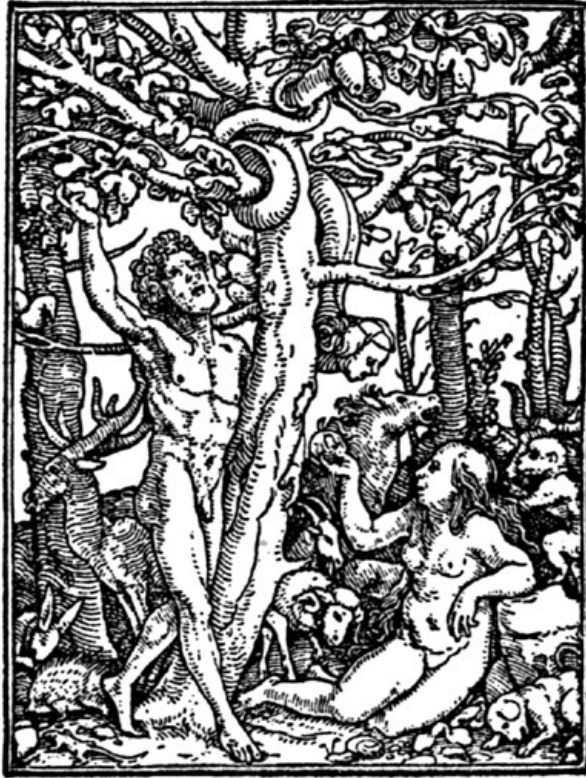
Dem nüchternen Sinn, mit welcher er die Natur zu betrachten gewohnt war, und seiner reichen Gestaltungskraft hatte Hans Holbein zu danken, daß er sich aus der zeitlichen Tendenz und ihren wechselnden Affekten zur Schöpfung eines freien Kunstwerkes durchringen konnte, das in vollendeter Zucht die Tragödie der menschlichen Vergänglichkeit schildert und daher ein Beweis dafür bleiben wird, daß der gesunde Geist den Tod lebendig überwindet.

Hans Ganz.

Die Schöpfung aller ding.



Adam Eva im Paradyß.



Vßtribung Ade Eue.



Adam bauet die erden.



Der Papst.



Der Cardinal.



Der Bischoff.



Der Thümbherr.



Der Apt.



Der Pfarrherr.



Der Predicant.



Der Münch.



Der Artzet.



Der Keyser.



Der König.



Der Hertzog.



Der Richter.



Der Furspräch.



Der Groff.



Der Ritter.



Der Edelman.



Der Ratsherr.



Der Rych man.



Der Kauffman.



Der Krämer.



Der Schiffman.



Der Ackerman.



Der Alt man.



Die Keyserinn.



Die Königin.



Die Hertzogin.



Die Greffman.



Die Edelfray.



Die Aptsinn.



Die Nunne.



Daß Altweyb.



Daß Jungkint.



Gebeyn aller menschen.



Daß iüngst gericht.



Die wäpen des Thotß.



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