

JOHANNES MÜLLER

Universiteit Leiden

Exile and Displacement in the Spiritual Poetry of Sigmund von Birken

This article examines religious interpretations of exile and forced migration in the poetry of Sigmund von Birken (1626–1681). Birken, who experienced exile as a child, when his parents were expelled from Bohemia, addresses the episode of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt in the context of the doctrine of incarnation. Based on Johann Michael Dilherr's and Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg's exegeses of Matthew 2, Birken depicts Christ's incarnation as an act of participation in human exile from paradise. This article situates Birken's poems on "Jesus the refugee" in the context of his autobiographical writings and his self-fashioning as a religious exile. In doing so, it shows how migrant identities were cultivated in urban literary cultures of early modern Germany. Birken played a central role in Nuremberg's cultural life, and his case illustrates that belonging to the heart of the urban community was not incompatible with his self-fashioning as a newcomer and his identification with a persecuted (Lutheran) minority.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exile and forced migration shaped the lives of hundreds of thousands of Europeans. Sephardic Jews, Protestants, and Mennonites from Catholic or re-Catholicized regions fled religious persecution; Catholics from the Dutch Republic or England went to Flanders, Brabant, and the Rhineland; and the military devastations of the Thirty Years' War caused large waves of internal migration within the Holy Roman Empire (Terpstra, *Refugees* 2–4). Among those migrants were many who wrote poems, songs, or plays on expulsion and the threat of violence, including canonical authors such as Andreas Gryphius, Joost van den Vondel, Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, and Sigmund von Birken. Combined with older motifs and traditions, exile became a literary theme with its own repertoire of rhetorical tropes and topoi. Migrants and exiles often referred to classical and biblical commonplaces and mirrored the present in narratives such as that of Abraham's departure from Ur, Israel's exodus from Egypt, or the Babylonian captivity of Judah's elites. Another motif that was sometimes used by exiled authors was that of Jesus Christ as a refugee. Especially in pastoral-theological tracts and sermons, Christ's participation in the exiles' fate was a recurring theme. As John Calvin put it in one of his

tracts, Christ was present among persecuted believers “as a fugitive himself” (Oberman, “Initia Calvini” 128).¹ Others, especially exiled Protestant preachers and scholars from Bohemia, Silesia and Austria, sometimes made reference to Jesus’s flight to Egypt as an infant, as described in Matthew 2.²

Nuremberg poet Sigmund von Birken, born to Protestant parents in Bohemia who were exiled when he was two, referred to Jesus as a refugee in eight poems and songs that were included in volumes by Nuremberg preacher Johann Michael Dilherr and Birken’s close friend Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg.³ These poems were written in the context of rather abstract theological discourses on the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation, and they present the episode of the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt as a form of divine participation in human suffering and affliction. However, the texts do not only touch on theological issues; they also refer to the situation of strangers and exiles in the present.

This article examines the depiction of exile and forced migration in these poems and situates them in the social environment of the author and in relation to his self-fashioning as a religious exile. A comparison with his unpublished autobiography and his texts on exiled friends shows that Birken uses the same motifs and textual strategies as employed in his spiritual poetry. As I argue, individuals such as Birken, who was a well-established Nuremberg citizen and played a central role in the town’s literary and cultural life, were able to combine local and translocal identities. The term *translocal* was coined by sociologists of migration to describe multiple belongings of contemporary migrants—for example, Mexicans living in the Southwest of the United States (Smith 181). Even though seventeenth-century urban communities can hardly be compared to modern nation-states and their highly institutionalized regulations of citizenship, a sense of belonging “both *here* and *there*” was also the situation of many early modern migrants and refugees.⁴ As the president of Nuremberg’s literary society *Pegnesischer Blumenorden*, Birken could be the figurehead of an urban cultural community and at the same fashion himself as member of a persecuted religious minority. While scholarship on early modern communal identities often departs from a dichotomy between closed urban communities and translocal networks of strangers and refugees, such hybrid constructions of identity shed new light on the situation of newcomers to southern Germany’s free imperial cities and show how multiple belongings could be combined.

Scholars in the field of early modern German literature have seldom addressed exile and migration as literary themes or socio-historical conditions of writing. The marginalization of this topic is even more surprising given that many of the most-studied writers of this period

were exiles who addressed the theme in their works or correspondence. Werner Wilhelm Schnabel suggests that this scholarly lacuna might be caused by an ecumenically motivated neglect of early modern religious antagonism and its legacies (Schnabel, “Exulantenlieder” 318). Indeed, students of German Baroque literature often tend to stress irenic humanist strains of seventeenth-century culture, while confessionalism and religious hatred are more typically studied by historians. Only recently have literary scholars started to pay attention to the rich source material that addresses early modern religious persecution and exile.

Alexander Schunka and Werner Wilhelm Schnabel have widened our knowledge of popular songs and pamphlets on exile, even though studies on canonical authors are still virtually absent.⁵ To fill this scholarly gap, this article situates Sigmund von Birken’s poetry in the context of popular writings on exile and migration.

In historical scholarship, religious exile is often treated as a catalyst of confessional identity and identification with exclusive minority groups (Pettegree; Schilling, “Peregrini und Schiffchen Gottes” 167–68). Scholars in the field of early modern religious history have tried to attribute forms of “exile theology” to specific confessional groups, most notably Calvinists. As Heiko Oberman and Heinz Schilling have argued, Calvinists cultivated religious discourses that fashioned their collective image “as uprooted wayfarers who had signed up for the hazardous trek to the eternal city,” while German Lutherans subscribed to local and parochial cultures, in which exiles and strangers were perceived as “intruders and troublemakers” (Oberman, “Europa afflicta” 103; Schilling, “Christliche und jüdische Minderheitengemeinden” 436). Peter Blickle has characterized the political and social organization of early modern Swiss and southern German towns as “communalist” and shaped by ideals of local self-organization and resistance against interferences from outside (Blickle 5–9). In this context, it is not surprising that the position of strangers and foreigners had to be negotiated and that they were often excluded from public offices and important positions in the urban community. As local studies have shown, even birth in neighboring communities could lead one to be labeled as a “foreigner” (see Isenmann and Vogler). Despite Nuremberg’s rigid oligarchical structure and its exclusion of most of the urban population from political power, references to local descent were the foundation of the rule of patrician families. As the sixteenth-century humanist Christoph Scheurl wrote, political power in Nuremberg should be in the hands of those “so man geschlechter nennet, das sein nu soliche leut, dero anen und uranen vor langer zeit her auch im regiment gewest und über uns geherscht haben” (Hegel 791). Strangers were to be excluded from political offices and “niemand in rath gesetzt, des eltern nicht auch zuvor in unser stat regiert haben” (791).

Blickle's concept of early modern communalism was applied to other urbanized regions in Europe and led to new insights into the social order and the self-understanding of urban communities in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, especially in the Low Countries (Prak 20). As a result, scholars have emphasized the exclusive nature of early modern urban citizenship and the limited possibility of participating in local politics brought about by the exclusive practices of established citizen circles. As Leo Lucassen has convincingly argued, urban immigration policies often resembled those of modern nation-states (Lucassen 220). Even towns that relied on labor migration from abroad drew a semantic line between *natives* and *strangers* (De Munck and Winter 16). Therefore, one would intuitively expect that newcomers would avoid referring to themselves as migrants and exiles. However, we should not forget that urban identities and ideals were often multifaceted and hybrid. Groups and individuals identified with entities that transcended the local community—for example, religious networks or even transnational diasporas. While cities cultivated ideals of heterogeneity and uniformity, the condition of being situated “both here and there” shaped the lives of early modern migrants in a similar way to how it does today (Smith 181). As the examples of Birken, Dilherr, Greiffenberg, and others show, successful newcomers did not necessarily hide their “foreign” descent. As central figures in Nuremberg's cultural life who had managed to attain key positions in religious and cultural institutions, they were able to identify with both the urban body politic *and* with an “imagined community” of persecuted believers (Terpstra, “Imagined Communities”).

The way in which Birken addresses religious exile from a theological perspective sheds new light on the assumed dichotomy between communalist urban culture and diaspora identities that relied on a distinct “theology of exile.” It shows that discourses of religious exile could be incorporated into urban literary cultures and that fleeing for the sake of religion was regarded an exemplary act of faith. To show how migrant identities were negotiated in Nuremberg's urban culture, I will first situate Birken and his works in this communal context and discuss the role of Nuremberg as a center for early modern refugees from various parts of Europe. Then I will address Birken's self-fashioning as a religious exile and the parallels between his poems on Jesus as a refugee and his autobiographical texts. Third, I will investigate the way in which theological discourses on Christ's incarnation served to make sense of exile and at the same time legitimize the position of exiles and strangers in a local community. As texts by other Nuremberg poets indicate, this positive reevaluation of migration was accepted by local authors and incorporated into communal narratives on the town's literary and cultural life. These observations suggest that Birken's writings on Jesus as

a refugee not only functioned within specific theological discourses but also served to redefine and negotiate the status of exiles and migrants in southern Germany's urban communities.

Nuremberg as a Hub of Religious Refugees

The imperial city of Nuremberg had become a destination for religious refugees around the middle of the sixteenth century. During the persecution of heretics in the Low Countries under Philipp II and the Duke of Alva, Protestants, especially from the southern Netherlands, sought refuge in this southern German town. In the late 1560s, the Nuremberg magistracy even started to recruit potential migrants from Wallonia and Flanders (Grell 143). These migrants, often adhering to Reformed Protestantism, were not allowed to worship within the city walls and had to travel to neighboring villages or castles of Calvinist noblemen with Reformed chaplains.⁶ Despite the rather restrictive religious policies, the town continued to attract non-Lutheran Protestants, especially Reformed refugees from the Upper Palatinate, who began to flee the territory when it was re-Catholicized in the mid-1620s. Only as late as the early eighteenth century was Reformed worship formally tolerated within Nuremberg's city walls (Waldau 30).

Reformed refugees were only one of Nuremberg's migrant groups. Between the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War and the eighteenth-century persecution of Austrian Protestants, the town was the destination of large numbers of Lutheran exiles from Bohemia, Silesia, Salzburg, and other central European Habsburg territories (Strohmeier 188; Schnabel, *Österreichische Exulanten* 40). Sigmund von Birken belonged to this group: his father, Daniel Betulius, a Lutheran cleric from Wildstein, in Bohemia, was expelled from his parish by Habsburg authorities. In 1629, the family resettled in Nuremberg, where Sigmund, who called himself "von Birken" after his nobilitation in 1646, grew up (Stauffer xviii). Birken studied in Jena but was unable to complete his education due to lack of financial means and returned to Nuremberg, where he stayed his entire life, with the exception of his brief appointment at the court of Wolfenbüttel in 1645 and 1646.⁷ A member of the prestigious *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* and, from 1662 on, president of the local literary society *Pegnesischer Blumenorden*, he played a central role in Nuremberg's urban literary culture. Alexander Schunka has characterized Birken as an "Integrationsfigur" between the city's established cultural circles and newcomers who tried to participate in local literary life (Schunka, "Gäste die bleiben" 27). As president of the *Blumenorden*, he was responsible for the introduction of

migrants and exiles such as Martin Kempe, Friedrich Hofmann, and Ferdinand Adam Pernauer von Perney (Jürgensen, “Melos conspirant” 273, 387, 508).

As Birken’s diaries and letters reveal, his network of personal contacts consisted of many migrants and newcomers to Nuremberg. Among his friends and acquaintances were Adam Volkmann from Bohemia, various members of the Sandrart family, Walloon refugees who had settled in Frankfurt a generation earlier, and the Greiffenberg family from Austria, especially the poet Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, with whom Birken corresponded frequently (see *Briefwechsel Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg et al.*). Other migrants in his network were Georg Friedrich Codomann, Johann Wolfgang Sextus, Carl Kirchmayr, Johann Klaj, the Seeling family from Bohemia, Martin Kempe from Silesia, and the exiled Stubenberg, Ragknitz, and Praunfalck families from Austria (Jürgensen, “Melos conspirant” 72).

Even though Birken’s parents were exiled during his early childhood and he probably had no personal memories of leaving Bohemia, he often referred to himself as a refugee—for example, when he described Nuremberg as his “nurse,” who had nourished him as a stranger, or as a “mother” to the exiled Protestant “orphans” from Bohemia.⁸ In several passages of his autobiography, Birken draws parallels between his own experience with the life of Jesus, especially in the context of afflictions and hardship. After opening the text with a description of his father’s Bohemian background, he continues with an account of his exile from Wildstein as a young child:

Anno Χριστογονιας, supra millesimum sexcentesium vigesimo nono, vix trimo mihi, à Mundo prima Afflictio, et christianulo eadem cum Christo Jesulo meo sors, contigit, nempe EXILIUM, quod, ob sinceram Evangelij confessionem subire, orbis AntiChristianus, me cum Parentibus coëgit.

[In the year 1629 after Christ’s birth—I was hardly three years old—I experienced the first earthly affliction. As a little Christian infant, I shared the same fate as Jesus Christ during his childhood: exile from home, brought upon me and my parents by the Anti-Christ, because of our steadfast confession of the Gospel.]
(*Prosapia/Biographia* 16)

Comparing the fate of contemporary exiles with the flight of Jesus to Egypt was also a recurring motif in Birken’s lyrical work, and he spoke in similar ways of fellow migrants in Nuremberg. When his friend Adam Volkmann died, in 1664, Birken wrote the following epitaph:

Noch unmündig ein Exul Christi,
wollte er lieber des Irdischen als himmlischen Vaterlands entbären,
er fände zwar ein Vaterland außer dem Vaterland,
wohnte aber mit Ungemach in des Leibs herberge.
(*Briefwechsel Margaretha Magdalena von Birken et al.* 409)

Like Birken, Volkmann descended from a Bohemian family. His father was mayor of the small town of Schönbach, close to Birken's birthplace of Wildstein. Volkmann's family was not forced to leave—only Protestant clerics and schoolteachers were expelled from this region in the late 1620s—but his parents wished a Protestant education for their son and sent him to Nuremberg as a young child (*Briefwechsel Margaretha Magdalena von Birken et al.*, XXVIII). Still, Birken deemed “Exul Christi” an appropriate characterization of Volkmann: even minors and little children could participate in “Christian” exile if confessional factors were involved. Birken presents his and Volkmann's biographies as shaped by the experience of forced migration. Not only does exile mark the transition between two geographical spaces; as a theme, it also serves as a topical heading for an existential understanding of Christian life. Like Christ, who escaped Herod's massacre of the innocents, fleeing Bohemia brought Birken and Volkmann to another “Egypt,” which was Nuremberg (*Prosapia/Biographia* 16). However, in the context of the Exodus narrative and its various typological readings, Egypt is also marked as a space of serfdom and alienation. Thus, the two exiles found a “Vaterland außer dem Vaterland” but remained in the earthly realm of separation from their true and heavenly patria. Their bodies are only a temporal “Herberge”—and one in which Volkmann lived with “Ungemach.” As Birken's autobiography and his epitaph for his friend show, the topic of exile has two dimensions: besides addressing the social reality of early modern refugees, the author understands forced migration in a theological frame and links it metaphorically to man's existential exile from paradise and to the imagery of Christian life as a pilgrimage toward eternity.

Descending Jacob's Ladder: Christ's Participation in Human Life

Birken's most detailed engagement with the topic of exile can be found in Johann Michael Dilherr's *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise / Oder Emblematische Haus- und Reise-Postill*, a collection of devotional texts for each Sunday of the liturgical year accompanied by emblematic illustrations. Dilherr, a prolific Lutheran cleric and author of devotional literature, collaborated with Birken in several of his works. In *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise*, Dilherr chose a Bible passage for each Sunday and provided a pastoral-theological exegesis while Birken

added poems and songs to the work. Dilherr had a family background similar to Birken's: his mother was an exile from the bishopric of Würzburg, which had reconverted to Catholicism under Julius Echter von Mespelbrunn (Jürgensen, *Bibliotheca Norica* 253). In *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise*, especially in the passages for the second Sunday of the year 1660, the two authors reflect on the experience of exile, focusing especially on Matthew 2:13–23 and the episode of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. As they discuss the matter of fleeing for the sake of faith, Dilherr and Birken address the topic of exile in a wider, more complex theological framework.

Many early modern migrants from Bohemia and Silesia referred to themselves as *exules Christi*, using the discourse of pilgrimage toward a celestial home as a means to describe their exile status (see Urbánek 170). Dilherr and Birken expanded this motif and used the imagery of exile to address the nature of Christ's participation in the mortal realm. In their reading of Matthew 2, they situate the narrative of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt in a history of revelation that progresses from the time of the patriarchs toward the first coming of Christ. Dilherr's sermons on Matthew look to Old Testament passages that were thought to prefigure Christ's incarnation and the connection of divine and human nature. Two of those central prefigurations are the vision of Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28) and the episode of the burning bush in the desert (Exodus 3). Linking these motifs to the incarnation was no idiosyncratic invention of Dilherr; rather, it was an outgrowth of exegetical and iconographic traditions that had their roots in the New Testament.⁹ Both the vision of Jacob's ladder, which connected heaven and earth, and the burning bush, through which God spoke to Moses, are presented as moments of close but temporary contact between the divine and the human. The eventual completion of connection is the incarnation: Christ is the "Durchbrecher" between heaven and earth, uniting divine fire and human substance (*Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* 118–19). While humanity is in an existential state of exile from paradise, Christ joins this state of banishment by descending to earth and experiencing displacement from his "true home."

In the context of exile, the motif of the burning bush echoes another interpretative tradition as well. With the intensification of religious persecutions in the second half of the sixteenth century, the burning bush in the desert came to be closely associated with the persecuted church. In his commentary on the book of Acts, John Calvin linked the image to the "fire of persecution" (277), and in the 1580s, French Reformed Churches turned the burning-bush image into an emblem, pairing it with the motto "Flagror non consumer" [I am burned but not consumed]. This allegorical understanding of the burning bush was not a typically Calvinist phenomenon, and Martin Luther interpreted this motif in a similar way,

describing the fire as the suffering and persecution of Christ and the green branches as his innocence (Wolff 336).

Neither Dillherr nor Birken explicitly refers to the interpretation of the bush as the persecuted church. However, the divine presence in the burning bush, as in Christ's incarnation, is presented in terms of exile. Descending from heaven and incarnating in a human body, Christ partakes not only in humanity's exile from paradise but also in human suffering and physical persecution. Consequently, he becomes an exile in a twofold sense: as a wayfarer on a journey from and toward eternity and as a refugee subjected to violent persecution by earthly tyrants. Even though Birken makes no clear or consistent distinction between exile and flight, banishment is associated with the existential state of Christ as a human on earth, while fleeing and seeking refuge refer to the situation of escaping from immediate threats of physical violence. In *Jesus der Exulant*, the third poem of Sunday 1 in *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise*, these two aspects of Birken's exile discourse are linked to each other in a dynamic relationship: as a stranger on earth, Christ becomes humanity's companion, and as a victim of persecution, he experiences the same fate as religious refugees in the present.

Jesu, du wirst ausgebannt,
ein verfolgter Exulant:
meinen Elendsstand zu weihen.
Du, du ziehest vor mir her;
Daß dein meyn Beyspiel wär,
wann ich auch muß an den Reihen.
Wer war lieber Ihm als Du?
dannoch Gott ließe es zu,
daß man seinen Sohn verjaget.
Christen müssen Christe dir,
folgen, du bist Ihr Panier.
Ey, so es dann gewaget!

Muß ich seyn ausgebannt,
du weißt ein Egyptenland,
das mir noch wird herberg gönnen.
Es ist ja die Erde dein:
du wirst noch ein Räumelein,
Vater, deinem Kind benennen.
Solt ja keines in der Welt
Mir zur Wohnung seyn bestellt,
in dem Himmel sind viel Hütten,
der mein rechtes Vaterland.
Dorten bringe mich zu stand,
alles Leids mich zu entschütten. (128)

While fleeing Herod's massacre of the innocents, Christ is a "herzliche[r] Bruder" (*Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* 125) to the afflicted believers. As a predecessor of contemporary refugees, he "sanctifies" ("weiht") the miserable state of his followers by joining them in their suffering. The dual meanings of exile that underlie Birken's poems on this topic are intertwined here: the possibility of fleeing to "another Egypt"—or a refuge from persecution on earth—is only a preparation for reaching the "true fatherland." By linking the social reality of early modern exile to the existential state of Christians in this world, Birken is able to address both migrants and non-migrants. All mankind is in "exile" and is now joined by Christ in this existential state; and as a refugee to Egypt, Jesus shares the fate of those who flee for their lives on account of their convictions. This unifying discourse, in which all Christians are presented as homeless and on their way to eternity, allows the reader to identify with the story of Christ's exile on a personal level while at the same time confronting non-migrants with the possibility of future persecution: there might come a time when they are banished as well, at which point they will also share Jesus's fate (128).

Making Sense of Exile

Early modern experiences of religious exile required theological explanation and, more specifically, an answer to the question of why God did not protect those who suffered for their faith. Believers also struggled with the question of whether expulsion might be a form of divine punishment. As Nicholas Terpstra puts it, the "burning question for any exile or refugee was this: what is God up to? What have we done?" (*Refugees* 290) Sermons and pastoral-theological writings had been concerned with this problem ever since European territories began to banish and persecute religious minorities on a large scale. The problem of persecution and forced migration became a particularly urgent challenge for early modern publicists as they sought to refute doubts about individuals' confessional choices and grappled with the question of whether one was suffering for the right cause. Luther and others responded to this challenge by declaring that the Gospel could only be spread through tribulations and that persecution was one of the signs of the "true church" (Cameron 147). Others, especially Calvinist and Mennonite writers, proclaimed that the elect could be recognized by their afflictions, such as banishment from their homes (Müller 46–47).

Birken's poems on Jesus as an exile echo such rhetorical strategies as they proclaim that believers should not doubt God's benevolence. If God allowed "that they banish His own son," Christians should not regard exile as a sign of God's wrath on them but, rather, as a fate

that allowed them to share in Christ's suffering on earth (*Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* 128). However, Birken's poems do not only provide an explanation for God's reasons to allow persecution; they also aim at a discursive inversion of weakness and power by evoking an eschatological expectation of triumph over earthly tyrants. In the poem that accompanies an emblem depicting the flight to Egypt in Greiffenberg's *Betrachtungen von allerheiligster Menschwerdung*, Jesus appears as a kinglet (*regulus*), which is chased by a hawk.

Feind Herodes! wen verfolgst du mit dem krummen Schnabel-Schwert,
mit den Blut betriefften Klauen?
Sagt dir, Bluthund, nicht dein Satan, daß der Himmel ietzt auf Erd,
daß Gott selbst im Fleisch zu schauen?
Du verfolgst nit deine Söhne: dieser hier ist Gottes Sohn,
den du nicht, wie sie, kanst würgen.
Scheint er kleine: Denk, sein Name
ihm verspricht die größte kron,
diesem unsres Heiles Bürgen.
Wilst du, der dir gab das Leben, tödten, der vom ew'gen Tod
dich wolt lösen und befreyen?
Tob, du toller Jdumeer, den Gesalbten stürz in Noht:
Gott verlacht dein listigs dreuen.
Er wird, den du mördlich suchest, in Egypten sicher seyn:
du kanst deinen Gott nicht töden.
Aber, Wütrich, auf dich selber
flieget schon der Pfeil herein,
der dich gibt den Todes-Nöten.
Jesus stürzt vom Thron Tyrannen, sezt sich ewig selbst darauf,
da er tausend-groß muß werden.
Laßt die Fittich-Riesen trotzen: bald wird seyn der stolze Hauf
ganz vertilget von der Erden. (734)

At first sight, the kinglet seems powerless against the hawk, but in the end it “overthrows the thrones of tyrants.” In a slightly different form, the motif of the brave and courageous kinglet can also be found in Aristotle and Pliny, who mention a natural enmity between the wren and the eagle. In order to become king of the birds, the eagle tries to show that he can fly the highest, but he is tricked by a little wren hidden in his crest feathers. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the wren was changed into a kinglet (see Geiler von Kaysersberg 153). As a *regulus*, a “small king,” the bird was now also a more appropriate symbol for Christ, especially as the prophesied infant child that Herod sought to kill. In order to apply this motif convincingly to Herod and Jesus, Birken turns the eagle into a hawk, thus undermining Herod's status as a legitimate king of Israel. By calling him an Edomite (“Jdumeer”), Birken identifies Herod as a descendant of a foreign and hostile people with no legitimate right to

Israel's throne, whereas Christ is announced by the magi as the new "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:4).

The poem thus inverts notions of power and weakness, contrasting Herod's temporary and illegitimate power with Christ's eternal reign. As in *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise*, exile is addressed within the topical frame of Christ's incarnation. Even though the entirety of *Betrachtungen von allerheiligster Menschwerdung* centers on the theme of the incarnation, the chapter on the Holy Family's flight to Egypt places particular emphasis on the participation in human suffering. Both Christ and his persecuted followers or imitators are not victims but emerge triumphant over earthly tyrants. Small and powerless like a little kinglet, they have to flee tyranny, but in the end they "outfly" their persecutors. Fleeing is not a sign of weakness but a legitimate and even heroic act of resistance. As scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, seventeenth-century German literature portrayed martyrdom as a powerful model of resistance and contrasted the tyrant's temporal reign with the eternal crown of the martyr.¹⁰ In Birken's poem, this martyrological notion of triumph over tyranny is transferred to the discursive field of exile. Receiving the eternal crown is not explicitly linked to Christ's redemptive suffering on the cross but, instead, to his flight, in which he overpowers his persecutor.

In *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* Dilherr and Birken address the question of why Jesus did not actively fight Herod:

Hätte denn das Jesu-Kindlein, dem bey seiner Geburt die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen aufgewartet hatte, und welches von einem himmlischen Gesandten für einen Heilandt der gantzen Welt war ausgerufen worden, diesem Tyrannen nicht Widerstand thun, und die Flucht verhüten können?" (121)

Choosing exile instead of violent resistance serves to show how Christians should live in this world: as patient strangers and sojourners on their way to heaven. Trying to escape one's persecutors is thus not cowardice but a way to resist tyranny and even an act of obedience to God. Dilherr refers to a number of biblical examples in which individuals were forewarned by God and urged to flee their persecutors—for example, Joseph, who received a warning of Herod's coming infanticide in a dream, or king David, who prudently managed to escape the circle of conspirators around his son, Absalom (120). As Alexander Schunka has argued in the context of early modern pastoral texts on exile, the choice to flee could be interpreted as a triumphant act of self-determination in a Neo-Stoic ethical framework ("Constantia" 199). Even though the impact of Neo-Stoic thought on early modern exiles is a point of debate, a

reevaluation of migration for the sake of faith belonged to the narrative strategies of early modern authors and publicists.¹¹ Clerics who fled their homes sometimes referred to godly commands to leave or even claimed that angels had warned them of violent persecution (Müller 28). Referring to biblical examples such as Abraham or Joseph allowed for an interpretation of exile as a form of obedience to God's command and, at the same time, as a triumphant escape from tyrannical violence and persecution.

Notwithstanding the dominance of martyrological discourses in all early modern confessions, flight and exile could offer an alternative model of Christian steadfastness in the face of persecution. While the commemoration of martyrs was a vital feature of religious memorial cultures, remembering the *confessores*, those who had left their homes and goods for the sake of the Gospel, became increasingly important in the course of the seventeenth century.¹² Framing exile in this discourse, Birken depicts flight from one's home as an act of obedience to God and as a triumph over tyrannical power.

Newcomers and Communal Culture

Referring to Jesus as an exile and refugee, Birken's poems reevaluate the status of contemporary migrants. As texts by other Nuremberg authors show, this discursive strategy was not at odds with panegyric celebrations of Nuremberg's urban identity and pride. Two years after Birken's death, in 1681, members of the *Pegnesischer Blumenorden* published a book on the author's life, entitled *Die betrübtte Pegnesis*. This work repeats both Birken's characteristic self-fashioning as an exile and the theological commonplaces from his poems on Jesus as a refugee. His life is presented as a continuous peregrination ("Wanderschaft") that brought him through the earthly desert toward his eternal home. At the same time, his biography, especially his expulsion from Bohemia, is again linked to the life of Jesus:

Hierdurch trate unser seelige[sic] Floridan (unterredete Dafnis) in die Jesu-Gesellschaft, welcher auch in seinem zarten Alter das Elend bauen müssen. Man könnte ihn demnach (setzte Damon hinzu) wie diesen, die frühgejagte Hindin nennen: weil er schon im Alter-Morgen von Wildstein, als seinem Geburtsstall, auf und ausgetrieben worden. (67)

Despite the text's emphasis on Birken's status as a refugee from abroad, *Die betrübtte Pegnesis* depicts Nuremberg's urban community in mourning over the loss of "its" poet. In several poems on Birken's life, Nuremberg is praised as a generous host who nursed the author like Rome did to Romulus and Remus (76). The motif of the town as a mother or nurse

of exiles had already been employed by Birken himself. Celebrating “Noris-burg’s” hospitality toward persecuted strangers, discourses of exile are inscribed into narratives of communal identity and civic pride. By integrating this hospitality into the rhetoric of the *laus urbis*, the rift between newcomers and established citizens is closed.

As his posthumous reception shows, Birken’s self-fashioning as a Nuremberger *and* as an exile was successful. Not only was he able to attain a respected social position and exert a substantial influence on Nuremberg’s cultural and literary life; the narratives he told about himself were also retold by others and helped to shape discourses that combined local and translocal identities. While urban citizenship in early modern Europe often depended on descent and while political and cultural institutions did not easily welcome newcomers, the foundation of urban identity here has different criteria. The town is not envisioned as a closed *unum corpus* of long-established natives but, rather, as a voluntary community of those who seek safety and are willing to participate in urban affairs.

During Birken’s presidency, the *Pegnesischer Blumenorden* was transformed from a purely civic literary society into a transregional one, accepting more and more members from other cities (Jürgensen, “Melos conspirant” XV). However, Nuremberg remained its idealized center and continued to provide its collective identity, even at a time when many of its members lived outside Nuremberg. The works produced by the *Blumenorden*’s members continued to refer to the town and its idealized surrounding landscape, especially to the river Pegnitz, from which the *Pegnesischer Blumenorden* derived its name. While the *Blumenorden*’s transformation from a civic to a transregional society cannot be solely ascribed to Birken, his reconceptualization of belonging to the urban community and his self-fashioning as an exile fit into this turn.

As the comparison between Birken’s works on Jesus as a refugee and his autobiographical writings shows, the episode of the flight to Egypt does not only refer to a specific theological discourse; it also serves to (re)define the status of fugitives and newcomers in the urban community. The Holy Family’s exile in Egypt mirrors man’s existential exile from paradise and reveals Christ’s participation in human affliction. As a contributor to the local panegyric literature of the *Blumenorden*, Birken fashioned his identity as a “new” Nuremberger with a refugee heritage. His migrant roots were not concealed but celebrated and commemorated by Nuremberg poets after his death. Contrary to Oberman and Schilling’s dichotomy between Lutheran parochial culture, which distrusted strangers as “intruders and troublemakers,” and Calvinist “pilgrim mentality,” Nuremberg’s urban literary culture was able to incorporate migrant voices and narratives.

The idea of the southern German free and imperial cities as closed collectives in which the urban community was an exclusive corpus of long-established families should thus be nuanced. As Birken's case shows, newcomers were able to negotiate their status in local communities, and narratives about suffering and "Christian exile" could be useful for this purpose. This observation sheds new light on early modern urban literature, which could function as a medium that not only allowed migrants to participate in civic culture but also enabled them to negotiate and reshape discourses of communal identity and urban citizenship. However, we should not forget that social and cultural inclusion had clear limits: while the *Blumenorden* was not a strictly confessionalized society and also had Catholic members, non-Christian members were denied access. After the expulsion of Nuremberg Jews in 1498, Jewish cultural life ceased to exist for centuries. While early modern Nuremberg's anti-Semitic policies were particularly drastic, Jewish participation in urban literary societies was virtually non-existent in Central and Western Europe. Even though Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam founded their own rhetorician's society, the *Academia de los Floridos*, no Jews can be found among the members of other Dutch or German societies. Even if discourses on exile and pilgrimage could redefine the social and cultural status of newcomers, only Christian migrants could benefit from this transformation. This fact illustrates once again that early modern practices of toleration should not be equated with religious indifference and that religious tolerance was seldom able to transcend the distinction between Christians and non-Christians.

¹ Philipp Melanchthon used this motif in a similar way. See Schnabel, "Exulantenlieder" 332.

² In one of Sigmund Scherertz's pastoral-theological works on exile, titled *Patientia sanctorum*, the title page includes a woodcut of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. See Scherertz.

³ Seven songs and poems on Jesus as an exile or refugee can be found in *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* 127–29. The song *Der Exulant Jesus* is part of an emblematic series on the youth of Jesus and was incorporated into Greiffenberg (734). As Christine Pumplun shows, it is unclear whether the poems should be understood as songs. Only Birken's first text on exile in Dilherr's *Hertz- und Seelen-Speise* is clearly marked as a song. The other poems, including the one in Greiffenberg's volume, lack any singing instructions and were likely intended as reading texts. See Pumplun 25.

⁴ See Smith 181. As a concept, *translocality* was used to address migration and migrant identities from a perspective that transcended monolithic constructions of national identities. In a period before the nation-state, the term *translocal* has different implications, but it is suitable to describe the conditions of living *between* various communal and cultural settings.

⁵ Schunka "Constantia im Martyrium"; Schnabel "Exulantenlieder." For a modern edition of early modern emigrants' songs, see Dittrich.

⁶ On the early modern practice of *Auslauf*, see Kaplan 161–71. On migrants in Nuremberg and their role in cultural exchange with other European regions, see Jürgensen, "Norimberga" 446–47.

⁷ For Birken's biography, see Van Ingen, and Paas.

⁸ See Birken, *Briefwechsel Dilherr* 292; Birken, *Todten-Andenken* 562. Addressing the host town as a nurse or mother is a topos that can be found in many early modern writings on exile and migration. See, for example, Müller 112–14.

⁹ In John 1:53, Jesus is quoted as referring to Jacob's vision of the ladder between heaven and earth. On christological interpretations of Jacob's ladder in patristic and medieval literature, see Gahbauer 256, 264.

¹⁰ For a recent discussion of early modern literary interpretations of martyrdom as an act of resistance, see Davis.

¹¹ For attempts to situate texts and artworks of early modern exiles, especially of the works of Justus Lipsius, in the context of Neo-Stoic ideas, see Papenbrock. For a critical discussion of this work, see Büttner.

¹² Especially after Thirty Years' War, religious exiles were designated as "confessors," or "Bekenner." In 1725, Johannes Lehnemann, the chronicler of the exiled Netherlandish Lutheran congregation in Frankfurt mentioned that his fellow believers commemorated both their martyrs and their "confessors" in an annual service (Lehnemann, unpaginated foreword).

Works Cited

Birken, Sigmund von. *Werke und Korrespondenz: Der Briefwechsel zwischen Sigmund von Birken und Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg*. Edited by Dietrich Jöns and Ralf Schuster, Niemeyer, 2005.

Birken, Sigmund von. *Werke und Korrespondenz. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Sigmund von Birken und Johann Michael Dilherr, Daniel Wülfer and Caspar von Lilien*. Edited by Almut Laufhütte and Hartmut Laufhütte, De Gruyter, 2015.

Birken, Sigmund von. *Werke und Korrespondenz. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Sigmund von Birken und Margaretha Magdalena von Birken und Adam Volkmann*. Edited by Harmut Laufhütte and Ralf Schuster, Niemeyer, 2010.

Birken, Sigmund von. *Werke und Korrespondenz. Prosapia / Biographia*. Edited by Harmut Laufhütte and Johann Anselm Steiger, Niemeyer, 1988.

Birken, Sigmund von. *Werke und Korrespondenz. Todten-Andenken und Himmels-Gedanken oder Gottes- und Todes-Gedanken*. Edited by Johann Anselm Steiger, De Gruyter, 2009.

Blickle, Peter. *Kommunalismus. Skizzen einer gesellschaftlichen Organisationsform: Kommunalismus, vol. 1, Oberdeutschland*. Oldenburg, 2000.

Büttner, Nils. "Landschaften des Exils? Anmerkungen zu Gillis van Coninxloo und zur Geschichte der flämischen Waldlandschaft aus Anlaß einer Neuerscheinung." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 66, 2003, pp. 546–80.

Calvin, John. *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, translated by John Beveridge, Calvin Translation Society, 1844.

Cameron, Euan. *The European Reformation*, Oxford UP, 1991.

Davis, Benjamin. "Female Masculinity and Strategies of Resistance in Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein's Epicharis and Cleopatra." *Neophilologus*, vol. 100.2, January 2016, pp. 257–74.

De Munck, Bert, and Anne Winter. "Regulating Migration into Early Modern Cities: An Introduction." *Gated communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities*, edited by Bert de Munck and Anne Winter, Asghate, 2012, pp. 1–22.

Dilherr, Johann Michael. *J. M. Dilherrns Hertz- und Seelen-Speise/ Oder Emblematische Haus- und Reise-Postill: in welcher Alle Sonn- und Festtägliche Evangelia gründlich erkläret*. Endter, 1663.

Dittrich, Raymond. *Die Lieder der Salzburger Emigranten von 1731/32. Edition nach zeitgenössischen Textdrucken*. Francke, 2008.

Gahbauer, Ferdinand R. "Die Jakobsleiter, ein aussagenreiches Motiv der Väterliteratur." *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity*, vol. 9.2, 2006, pp. 247–78.

Geiler von Kaysersberg, Johannes. *Das Evangelibuch mit Predig und Ußlegungen*. Grieninger, 1515.

- Greiffenberg, Catharina Regina von. *Der Allerheiligsten Menschwerdung, Geburt und Jugend Jesu Christi Zwölf andächtige Betrachtungen*. Hofmann 1678.
- Grell, Ole Peter. *Brethren in Christ. A Calvinist Network in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Hegel, Karl, ed. *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte vom 14. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert. Vol. 5, Nürnberg*. Hirzl, 1874.
- Ingen, Ferdinand van. "Sigmund von Birken. Ein Autor in Deutschlands Mitte." *Der Franken Rom – Nürnbergs Blütezeit in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Edited by John Roger Paas, Harrassowitz, 1995, pp. 257–75.
- Isenmann, Eberhard. "Die städtische Gemeinde im oberdeutsch-schweizerischen Raum." *Landgemeinde und Stadtgemeinde in Mitteleuropa: Ein struktureller Vergleich (1300-1800)*, edited by Peter Blickle, Oldenbourg, 1991, pp. 191–62.
- Jürgensen, Renate. "*Bibliotheca Norica*." *Patrizier und Gelehrtenbibliotheken in Nürnberg zwischen Mittelalter und Aufklärung*. Harrassowitz, 2002.
- Jürgensen, Renate. "*Melos conspirant singoli in unum*." *Repertorium bio-bibliographicum zur Geschichte des Pegnesischen Blumenordens in Nürnberg (1644–1744)*. Harrassowitz, 2006.
- Jürgensen, Renate. "Norimberga Literata." *Stadt und Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum der Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Klaus Garber, Niemeyer, 1998, pp. 425–90.
- Jürgensen, Renate. *Utile cum dulci: mit Nutzen erfreulich. Die Blütezeit des Pegnesischen Blumenordens (1644–1744)*. Harrassowitz, 1994.
- Kaplan, Benjamin J. *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*. Harvard UP, 2007.
- Limburger, Martin, et al. *Die betübte Pegnesis, den Leben- Kunst- und Tugend-Wandel des seelig-edlen Floridans*. Sandrart, 1683.
- Lucassen, Leo, "Cities, States and Migration Control in Western Europe: Comparing then and now." *Gated communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities*, edited by Bert de Munck and Anne Winter, Asghate, 2012, pp. 217–40.
- Müller, Johannes. *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora, 1550–1750*. Brill, 2016.
- Oberman, Heiko A. "*Europa afflicta*: The Reformation of the Refugees." *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 83, 1992, pp. 91–111.
- Oberman, Heiko A. "*Initia Calvini*: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation." Heiko A. Oberman. *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees*. Librairie Droz, 2009, pp.89–130.
- Paas, John Roger. "Sigmund von Birken." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 64, *German Baroque Writers, 1580–1660*, edited by John Hardin, Gale, 1996, pp. 50–63.
- Papenbrock, Martin. *Landschaften des Exils. Gillis van Coninxloo und die Frankenthaler Maler*. Böhlau, 2001.
- Paul, Markus, *Reichsstadt und Schauspiel: Theatrale Kunst im Nürnberg des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Niemeyer, 2002.
- Pettegree, Andrew. *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism*. Oxford UP, 1992.
- Prak, Maarten "Kommunalismus en de steden in de Noordelijke Nederlanden ten tijde van de Republiek." *Noordbrabants Historisch Jaarboek*, vols. 17–18, 2000–2001, pp. 10–44.
- Pumplun, Christina M. *Begriff des Unbegreiflichen. Funktion und Bedeutung der Metaphorik in den Geburtsbetrachtungen der Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg (1633–1694)*. Rodopi, 1995.

Scherertz, Sigismund. *Patientia Sanctorum Id est Pia Meditationes Pro Confessoribus Et Exulibus Christi*. Heinrich Meyer, 1626.

Schilling, Heinz. "Christliche und jüdische Minderheitengemeinden im Vergleich. Calvinistische Exulanten und westliche Diaspora der Sephardim im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert." *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, vol. 36.3, 2009, pp. 407–44.

Schilling, Heinz. "Peregrini und Schiffchen Gottes. Flüchtlingserfahrung und Exulantentheologie des frühneuzeitlichen Calvinismus." *Calvinismus. Die Reformierten in Deutschland und Europa. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums Berlin und der Johannes-a-Lasco-Bibliothek Emden*, edited by Ansgar Reiss and Sabine Witt. Sandstein, 2009, pp. 160–68.

Schnabel, Werner Wilhelm. "Exulantenlieder. Über Konstituierung und Verfestigung von Selbst- und Fremdbildern mit literarischen Mitteln." *Frühneuzeitliche Stereotype. Zur Produktivität und Restriktivität sozialer Vorstellungsmuster. V. Jahrestagung der Internationalen Andreas Gryphius Gesellschaft Wrocław 8. bis 11. Oktober 2008*, edited by Mirosława Czarnecka, Thomas Borgstedt, and Tomasz Jabłocki, Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 317–54.

Schnabel, Werner Wilhelm. "Fremd ist der Fremde nur in der Fremde. Zur Integration österreichischer Konfessionsmigranten und der Entwicklung eines exulanten Traditionsbewusstseins in Franken." *Fremde in Franken. Migration und Kulturtransfer*, edited by Andrea Kluxen, Julia Krieger, and Andrea May, Bezirk Mittelfranken, 2015, pp. 127–56.

Schnabel, Werner Wilhelm. *Österreichische Exulanten in oberdeutschen Reichsstädten. Zur Migration von Führungsschichten im 17. Jahrhundert*. C.H. Beck, 1992.

Schunka, Alexander. "Constantia im Martyrium. Zur Exilliteratur des 17. Jahrhunderts zwischen Humanismus und Barock." *Frühneuzeitliche Konfessionskulturen*, edited by Thomas Kaufmann, Anselm Schubert, and Kaspar von Greyerz, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008, pp. 175–200.

Schunka, Alexander. *Gäste, die bleiben: Zuwanderer in Kursachsen und der Oberlausitz im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert*. LIT Verlag, 2006.

Smith, Michael Peter. "Translocality: A Critical Reflection." *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, edited by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 181–98.

Stauffer, Hermann. *Sigmund von Birken (1626–1681): Morphologie seines Werkes*, vol. 1, Niemeyer, 2007.
Strohmeier, Arno. "Religionspolitik in Oberösterreich im konfessionellen Zeitalter (circa 1520–1650)." *Renaissance und Reformation*, edited by Karl Vocelka, Rudolf Leeb, and Andrea Scheichl, Trauner, 2010, pp. 219–34.

Terpstra, Nicholas. "Imagined Communities of the Reformation." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 40.1, Special Fortieth Anniversary Issue, Spring 2009, pp. 222–25.

Terpstra, Nicholas. *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World. An Alternative History of the Reformation*. Cambridge UP, 2015.

Urbánek, Vladimír. "Displaced Intellectuals and Rebuilt Networks: The Protestant Exiles from the Lands of the Bohemian Crown." *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Kroeker, Charles H. Parker, and Jonathan Ray, Pickering & Chatto, 2014, pp. 167–80.

Vogler, Günter. "Dorfgemeinde und Stadtgemeinde zwischen Feudalismus und Kapitalismus." *Landgemeinde und Stadtgemeinde in Mitteleuropa: Ein struktureller Vergleich (1300–1800)*, edited by Peter Blickle, Oldenbourg, 1991, pp. 39–64.

Waldau, Georg Ernst. *Kirchengeschichte der evangelisch-reformierten Gemeinde zu Nürnberg*. Waldau, 1783.

Wolff, Jens. *Metapher und Kreuz: Studien zu Luthers Christusbild*. Mohr Siebeck, 2005.