



Günter Frank/Axel Lange (eds)

# **Philipp Melancthon**

## **Humanism – Reformation**

Audio Images  
from the Melancthon House Bretten



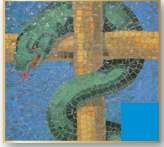
## Contents



1. Façade 7

2. Memorial Hall 14

3. Staircase 30



4. Hall of Cities 33

5. Hall of Theologians 42



6. Hall of Princes 49

7. Hall of Humanists 61

8. The cultural pillars of Europe 67



References 72

Literature 78

Illustrations 80

Acknowledgements 80



## 1. Façade

### **In memory of Melanchthon!**

Nikolaus Müller opens the house

8

### **Late Gothic in red sandstone**

A monument to historicism

9

### **Four architects and a professor**

The construction history of the Melanchthon House

10

### **Gargoyles, mosaics and a university portal**

Architectural quotations

11

### **Reuter-Schwartzertd-Melanchthon**

The family of Bretten's polymath

12

### **Five coats of arms**

The life of Philipp Melanchthon

13



## In memory of Melanchthon!

### Nikolaus Müller opens the house



*“In memory of Melanchthon! Melanchthon, the truest son and brother; the patriot, the loving father of his children, protector and promoter of virtue, this house shall always remind us of him. Melanchthon, the paragon of selflessness, the dedicated university professor; the theologian, reformer and friend of Luther; the man of harmony and unity will live on in the hearts of human-kind.”<sup>1</sup>*

With these words, Nikolaus Müller opened the newly built Melanchthon memorial house on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1903. The dream of this Berlin theology professor with Palatinate roots was finally fulfilled. At the place where the theologian and reformer was born in 1497 in Bretten, there was now an impressive building of red sandstone.

Nikolaus Müller had been pursuing his plan for the building of a Melanchthon museum with strategic foresight for several years. On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1895 he sent a letter to Grand Duke Frederick of Baden in Karlsruhe – to mark the 398<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Philipp Melanchthon’s birthday.<sup>2</sup>

It is justified to hope, Müller writes, that the year 1897, like the commemoration of Luther’s 400<sup>th</sup> birthday, would prove a powerful impulse to Lutheran faith. This is why he was taking the liberty of submitting to his royal highness the plan for the building of a Melanchthon museum in Bretten. Grand Duke Frederick was impressed and soon signalled his support – in “benevolent sympathy”.

With the advocacy of the Grand Duke of Baden, Professor Müller is quickly able to gain further supporters: the Senior Church Council in Karlsruhe and, in Bretten, the Protestant parish, mayor and municipal council. In April 1896 an association was formed in Bretten dedicated to the building of the Melanchthon House. A little later, there is an initial call for donations to “300 persons of rank”.

After acquisition of the site and the demolition of the existing building, by the end of 1896 Professor Müller has achieved his aim. The ground is prepared for the building of the Melanchthon Memorial house. The foundation stone is ceremoniously laid, as planned, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1897 – on the 400<sup>th</sup> birthday of Philipp Melanchthon.

## Late Gothic in red sandstone

### A monument to historicism

How should Philipp Melanchthon be honoured? The blossoming monument culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century offers many possibilities: monumental shrines, stele, sculptures or memorial chapels. An example of how the Reformation was being memorialised on the eve of the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 is the Reformation monument in Worms. It shows Luther in the circle of his religious and secular comrades. It is a place to observe, to linger and engage in contemplation. And, at the same time, it is a testament to Protestant national culture that is inaugurated in June 1868 in the presence of almost all the Protestant princes.<sup>3</sup> In Bretten, Nikolaus Müller takes a different approach. His vision is a house with a ground plan that replicates Melanchthon's birth-house, destroyed in 1689, and blends harmoniously into the Bretten townscape. It is a house with an unusual façade of coloured sandstone, which distinguishes it from the burgher houses on the marketplace. It is many different things in one: museum, research centre, memorial hall and chapel.<sup>4</sup>

In which style should one build such a house? Nikolaus Müller's answer is as simple as it is clear: in the Gothic style because – as he writes – “in 1497, Gothic was still the pre-eminent architectural style in Germany.”<sup>5</sup> Since its rediscovery in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic had been a symbol for Christian piety and solemnity – and also for the golden ages of medieval municipal culture. In the era of historicism, many builders and their patrons want to revive and invigorate the spirit of Gothic in architecture through the design of neo-Gothic churches and town halls.<sup>6</sup>

For Nikolaus Müller, the architectural reference to 1497 – the year of Melanchthon's birth – has another meaning. It is the symbol for the world of the Late Middle Ages from which the young scholar from Bretten sets out. Ultimately he would become Luther's right-hand man in Wittenberg, where they would create something quite new.

