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Profane Hazard or Divine Judgement? Coping with Urban Fire in the 17th Century

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Abstract: »Zufall oder Gottesstrafe? Zur Wahrnehmung, Deutung und Verarbeitung von Stadtbränden im 17. Jahrhundert«. Urban Fires rather than floods, earthquakes or thunderstorms were the greatest threat to early modern cities. Open fireplaces in households and workshops, unsafe construction of buildings and poorly developed methods of fire prevention and fire fighting led to frequent outbursts of urban fires that could, once they had been sparked, hardly be restricted, and in many cases destroyed the greater part of the cities. Once a town was destroyed by fire, the first imperative was to tend the homeless and organise reconstruction measures. But next to resolving the material damage people also had to cope with the disaster psychologically. Similar to epidemics, famines, war, and other disasters, urban fires were regarded as a punishment, inflicted by God to castigate humans for their sinful and impenitent behaviour. Beside the religious patterns of interpretation, rather secular ways of coping with the incident were widespread. The aim of this study is to reveal various patterns of interpretation and agency that were available to the individuals concerned. It will be asked, if different explanations and coping strategies were attractive to different people and if the different models were perceived as compatible or mutually exclusive by the contemporaries.

On the 11th of August 1677, a fire broke out in the hanseatic city of Rostock. Within two days large parts of the town centre were reduced to rubble. A few days later, Pastor Christoph Stahlius gave a sermon in the church of St. Nicolai (STAHLIUS 1677), in which he explained the event to his congregation: The fire had come upon them as divine punishment, to castigate the sinful and im-

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penitent Rostock citizens for their unchristian lifestyle. Consequently, the only way to extinguish such a fire was to plead to God for mercy and forgiveness of sins. Stahlus reckoned:

*Nothing on earth can be stronger /
Than the sighs of pious Christians /
As often a terrible fire's glow /
Extinguishes the dear prayer.*¹

Twenty years later, in the same town of Rostock, a treatise was published that recommended a radically different method of extinguishing a fire (BESELIN 1692): Its author, the mathematician Lucas Beselin, praised the *concentrated fire-extinguisher* with the promise that *in case of danger / the more fire-hoses available / the greater the chances of rescue will be.*² The palpable discrepancy between the measures recommended in fighting fires and the underlying assumptions as to the causes of such hazards motivated the following study. It focuses on different ways of perception and interpretation of and dealing with urban fires in the 17th century.³

The British historian Christopher Friedrichs states that urban fire rather than floods, earth quakes or thunderstorms were the greatest threat to early modern cities.⁴ Open fireplaces in households and workshops, unsafe construction of buildings and poorly developed methods of fire prevention and fire fighting led to frequent outbursts of urban fires that could, once they had been sparked, hardly be restricted, and in many cases destroyed the greater part of the cities. Statistical studies on the frequency of urban fires show that barely one European city survived the early modern period without having fallen victim to a blast caused by war, arson, recklessness or lightning.⁵

It is true that the number of people perishing in an urban fire was usually much smaller than that in a flood disaster, earthquake or during an epidemic. Nevertheless, the damage inflicted by a fire was often of disastrous consequences. The inhabitants of the burnt-down town lost – in most cases – all their belongings. Many official buildings and whole quarters were destroyed by the flames. Although the number of casualties was relatively low, the number of inhabitants shrank considerably in the aftermath of the event, as many people left the town due to the following economic upheaval. The constant danger of a major fire with its grave demographic and economic consequences that could only be overcome after an extended period of time and often only through

¹ *Nichts staercker mag auff Erden seyn / Als frommer Christen Seufferlein / Denn oft ein schreckliche Feuers=Gluht / Das liebe Gebet außleschen thut.* (STAHLIUS 1677, p. 24).

² *[...] dass in Feuers=Gefahr / je mehr Spruetzen alsdann vorhanden / auch die Rettung desto kraefftiger* (BESELIN 1692, p. 4).

³ Cf. ALLEMEYER 2003; ALLEMEYER 2007.

⁴ “Yet of all the elements it was not earth, water or air that most persistently threatened the well-being of the early modern city. The most dangerous element was fire.” (FRIEDRICHS 1995, p. 276). Cf. MASSARD-GUILBAUD 2002.

⁵ Cf. ALLEMEYER 2003; ALLEMEYER 2007.

outside support, made urban fires one of the greatest threats of the early modern city.

Once a town was destroyed by fire, the first imperative was to tend the homeless and organise reconstruction measures. But next to resolving the material damage, people also had to cope with the disaster⁶ psychologically. Due to the fire, numerous inhabitants lost the basis of their economic existence. In addition, the destruction threatened the social order of the affected areas. Coming to terms with the consequences of a fire was made even more difficult by the fact, that the causes of the disaster were difficult to establish. Even though – unlike with floodings or diseases – it was often possible to establish the direct cause of a fire (in almost all reports, the source of the fire is localised), there was no answer as to the spiritual causes of the disaster and the subsequent suffering. For those concerned, such an answer was crucial, as in their eyes the tragedy could only be overcome if it could be explained.

The need for interpretation and explanation, which an urban fire brought in its wake,⁷ allows us a rare glimpse into early modern patterns of thought. With all the suffering that it inflicted on the inhabitants of a town, a fire provides – like other disasters – something of a lucky chance for the historian. Numerous documents were produced in its aftermath: official acts, broadsides, chronicles, testimonies, sermons and ego-documents. However, neither the exact chronologies of individual urban fires, nor the scope of the destruction they caused or the reconstruction of the town will be in the centre of this study. Instead, following Christian Rohrs suggestion of a mentality-oriented disaster research (“mentalitätsbezogene Katastrophenforschung”), the aim of this study is to reveal the contemporaries’ “mental maps”. They draw the lines along which early modern men and women perceived and interpreted the disaster. They provide the framework to cope with loss and suffering and allow people to take steps to prevent it in future. They show us the possibilities, and also the impossibilities of thinking and acting in an early modern society (ROHR 2001, pp. 16 et seq.).

In the following, I will enquire about the various patterns of interpretation that were available to the individuals concerned in order to cope with the incident, and I will ask what made different explanations attractive to different people and if there were vested interests of the parties concerned. Finally, I want to investigate, if the different models of explanation were perceived as compatible or mutually exclusive by the contemporaries.

⁶ Urban fires can be regarded as “natural disasters”, as Martin Körner proposes in the introduction of his anthology (KÖRNER 1999, pp. 9, 12).

⁷ Hans-Ferdinand Angel speaks of an actual “Weltdeutungszwang” (need to interpret the world) forcing man to orientate himself constantly in space and time – especially when dealing with disasters (ANGEL 1996, p. 652).

The Urban Fire as a Divine Punishment

The parish priests, who interpreted the urban fire in their sermons held a few days after the event, placed the disaster in a larger context of interpretation. Helvicus Garthius, Superintendent of Meißen, published two *Christliche Predigten Von Fewrsbrunsten (Christian sermons on fire blasts)* in 1604. In these, he explained to his readers how to understand fire blasts and the way they emerge and how they can be extinguished or prevented (GARTHIUS 1604). In their contents and intentions, Garthius' deliberations are paradigmatic for fire sermons in the 17th century. They all aimed to provide consolation to the people affected by the fire, but at the same time, they strived to convey the "right" – that is the Christian – reading of the incident. Accordingly, an urban fire, similar to epidemics, famines, war, and other disasters, had to be regarded as a punishment, inflicted by God to castigate humans for their sinful and impenitent behaviour (LEUBE 1924, pp. 148-152). Garthius, too, points out to his audience that fire blasts occur *not arbitrarily and without God's will and fate / but because of God's order and providence*.⁸ In addition, they do hit humans *not without a rightful and just cause/ but as a vengeance and a well-deserved punishment of the godless because of our evil nature*.⁹

Through this reading the fire incident became an event that the people concerned could understand. According to the explanation given, it was a fair punishment of their unchristian attitudes. In this way, the inflictions that they suffered did in no way question the assumed world order. To the opposite, the affected could reassure themselves, as they recognised the calamity that had hit them as part of the righteous world order created by God. Thus, the interpretation offered by the pastors provided guidance and orientation in a situation marked by suffering and loss.

But the fire sermons did not stop there. By advising the audience to discard their sinful behaviour in order to evade possible future punishment, the parish priests were eager to give guidelines, which – next to providing structure and perspective to the life of the afflicted – also served as a basis for their Christian instruction. The hope, that the prevention of further punishment was possible by leading a life agreeable to God, attenuated the experience of powerlessness that was made when meeting the fire. At the same time, it motivated the parishioners to lead a more pious life.

In this context, the listing of sins that might have been responsible for the wrath of God was an important component. For the priests, the fire sermon provided an opportunity to highlight these sins, to demonstrate their disastrous

⁸ [...] *nicht ungefehr und ohne Gottes willen und verhengnus / sondern durch Goettliche verordnung und vorsehung [...]*. (GARTHIUS 1604, Die Ander Predigt (unpaginated)).

⁹ [...] *nicht ohne rechtmessige billiche ursachen / sondern zur rache und wolverdienter straffe ueber die Gottlosen umb unseres boesen wesens willen [...]*. (IBID.).

consequences and to call upon the audience with great vigour, to desist from them. A sermon by Eilhard Thalen, composed after the great fire of Oldenburg in 1676 (THALEN 1678), paints a dazzling picture of all the condemnable sins he saw rampant in his town. To him, haughtiness takes the first place of the sins that have caused the urban fire, even before prodigality, blasphemy, swearing, unchastity and desecration of the Sabbath. The catalogue of sins in the fire sermon of the protestant Rostock priest Rembertus Sandhagen (SANDHAGEN 1677) is equally impressive. His most serious accusation is the turning of the Rostock citizens against the natural order of the three estates.¹⁰

Of course it is not especially remarkable that parish priests interpreted the disaster as a part of the world order created by God. It was certainly part of their professional duty to provide consolation to the people afflicted by the incident in their penitential sermons. But the religious interpretation of the urban fire was not limited to fire sermons. It also manifested itself in the frequent penance days, which were prescribed by the authorities. On these days, insight and penitence were supposed to be exerted in an exceptional ceremony of praying and repentance that dominated all the day's work and affairs. These days were supposed to remind men and women of the penitent fire inflicted by God, and through this admonish them to a more repentant behaviour. In this way, the penance days were seen as an effective – if not the only effective – countermeasure to further divine punishment. One year after the disastrous fire in Rostock of 1677, the territorial ruler enacted a mandate that declared August 11th – the day of the outbreak of the fire – to be a general day of penance.¹¹ Even fifty years after the fire, on the penance day of the year 1727, the commemorative as well as the preventive meaning of the fire day remained evident, as the members of the community were called upon to prayer and repentance and cautioned against *contempt of the divine word and the preachers*.¹²

In addition, the interpretation of the fire as an expression of the will of God is reflected in the reinterpretation of earlier prodigies that can be found in numerous sources. A comet that could be seen several weeks before the Rostock fire was now related to the disaster. The council minutes state that *in the year 1677 when there was the terrible fire in Rostock / a comet-star and fiery rain-*

¹⁰ In his book on Rostock clergy, Jonathan Strom deals with this sermon and quotes it as a pungent example of criticism from the side of the clergy of violation of the doctrine of the three estates. "While none of the Rostock clergy articulated a sophisticated understanding of the doctrine of the three estates, it is nevertheless presupposed in much of their writings and necessary for understanding their notion of the office of ministry. In a penitential sermon on the great fire in Rostock in 1677, Rembert Sandhagen described the three estates to which Christians are called [...]. Here the Dreiständelehre was a principle for ordering society." (STROM 1999, pp. 71 et seq.; STROM 1993).

¹¹ ROSTOCK, Stadtarchiv, Geistliches Ministerium: 1.1.17. XII, fol. 457; ROSTOCK, Stadtarchiv, Geistliches Ministerium, Convento Extraordinario IX. Trinit. Ao 83: 1.1.17. XXIII, fol. 135.

¹² *Verachtung göttlichen Worts und der Prediger*. (ROSTOCK, Stadtarchiv, Geistliches Ministerium, Convento ord. 1 Aug.: 1.1.17. XXIV, fol. 42).

bow could be seen. About the meaning of the comet, it is stated laconically: *The meaning is known to God.*¹³ The Rostock student Johann Augustin Lichtwer, who gave a fire speech on the occasion of a memorial ceremony, also calls the comet a prodigy, which, however, had fatally not been recognised by the Rostock citizens (LICHTWER [n.y.]). Lichtwer comments the stubbornness of the Rostock citizens with a reproachful *but you did not want*¹⁴ to know, and thus resumes the assignment of guilt to sinful and unrepentant people which had been phrased by the pastors before.

If people interpreted a natural event that happened ahead of the urban fire as an announcement of a punitive fire, then – in the framework of this pattern of interpretation – the fire cannot have happened accidentally, but has to be understood as an expression of divine providence. In this way, punitive fire and prodigy are connected in a self-referential relation: Because the fire happened after an unusual incident, this incident is seen as a prodigy announcing the following disaster. Consequently, the integration of the urban fire into a context of premonition and consequent disaster proves its meaning as a punishment that God has inflicted – not without an announcement – on men.

Next to the documents already presented here, the same metaphysical interpretation can also be found in some writings which can be allocated to the category of ego-documents.¹⁵ Matthias Priestaff, Rostock councillor and witness to the great urban fire of 1677, described the incident and particularly his own part in the fight against the fire, in his diary. Priestaff also considers the fire to be a divine punishment. Without alleging that he may have mentioned this interpretation merely for tactical reasons, the religious reading served to clear him of any personal responsibilities. Such allegations could possibly have been directed against him as a member of the authorities who were obviously blamed not to have taken sufficient precautions for the prevention and fighting of the fire. He writes: *Admittedly there is uneven talk as if there were no real precautions and instruments to extinguish at hand.* But, he claims, these allegations are unfounded, as the fire was *not an ordinary* but a *fire of wrath*, and under these circumstances, all extinguishing tools and fire protection measures could not have had an effect anyway.¹⁶ Consequently, neither he nor anybody

¹³ *In dem 1677. Jahr da der starcke brandt in Rostock gewesen, hat sich ein Comet=Stern und feuriger Regen=Bogen sehen lassen [...] die Deutung ist Gott bekandt.* (ROSTOCK, Stadtarchiv, Rostocker Sammelbände, Gruppe “Stadtbrand 1677”: 1.1.3).

¹⁴ *[...] sed noluiti (but you didn't want to).* (LICHTWER [n.y.], p. A 4 verso).

¹⁵ Ego-documents (“Selbstzeugnisse”) are seen as texts authored by an explicit self where the main issue is deliberately the self or/and his or her own life (see VON KRUSENSTJERN 1994).

¹⁶ *Es sind zwahr davon ungleiche Reden, alß wann alhie keine rechtmäßige Anstalt, und Instrumenten zu löschen beyhanden gewesen, so ist solches alles nichtes den dieses war kein ordinair, sondern ein zorn=feuer [...].* (ROSTOCK, Stadtarchiv, Rostocker Sammelbände, Gruppe “Stadtbrand 1677”, Abschrift von Aufzeichnungen des Bürgermeisters Matthias Priestaff aus seinem Tagebuch 1677: 1.1.3.0).

else in the administration carried the blame, for, as he resumes: *In consequence, when God's wrath rises, who is the one to resist it?*¹⁷

For Matthias Priestaff, the Christian interpretation of the fire was a component of his argument to prove his own (personal and institutional) innocence. Instead of confronting possible accusations or describe the measures actually taken by the authorities, it seemed completely sufficient to him, and possibly rather more convincing, to interpret the fire as a *fire of wrath* and thus place it outside the area of responsibility of the authorities. This strategy to rebut eventual accusations against him can, however, only have a convincing effect in a society in which the metaphysical interpretation of the urban fire is prevalent or at least perceived as plausible.

Another category of documents where the religious reading of the urban fire can be found is constituted by texts describing the event with the purpose of soliciting support from other towns or private persons. When a fire had destroyed a town it was in most cases not able to accomplish its reconstruction out of its own means. Therefore, the town council sent petitions to other towns. In addition, individuals could be authorised to collect private donations. For this purpose, they were issued so-called Beggars' Patents that served to bestow some legitimacy to those mandated with the collection of money and arouse the sympathy of the people they approached. Such a Beggar's Patent serving to collect alms for the mountain town Zellerfeld, which was destroyed by a fire in 1672, can be seen in the rectory archive of Clausthal.¹⁸ The blast, as the patent reports, had been inflicted by the *righteous God in his inexplicable judgement and will [...] over the ancient Princely Mountain=Town Zellerfeld*.¹⁹ The alms, which are imploringly pleaded for, would be rewarded by *God the almighty in abundance to everybody through his blessings*.²⁰

In a Beggar's Patent issued by the city of Oldenburg, the urban fire there is explained by *a strong thunderstorm which hit three places of the town at the same time. This was interpreted as punishment from God, because of our manifold sins*.²¹ In a petition of the town of Pegau to the council of Goslar, the fire

¹⁷ *In Summa wan Gottes Zorn aufgehet, wer ist den, der vor ihm bestehet?* (IBID.).

¹⁸ The Patent is part of a Collector-Book into which the donor could have entered himself and the amount of money donated (CLAUSTHAL, Pfarrarchiv, Kirchenchronik 1672: Bestand V. Sonstige Handschriften, H. 1).

¹⁹ *[Die Strafe wurde vom] gerechten Gott nach seinem unerforschlichen Gerichte und Willen [...] über die uhralte Fürstl. Berg=Stadt Zellerfeld [...] verhängt.* (IBID.).

²⁰ *Gott der allerhöchste [wird] mitt seinen mildten Segen Einem jeden reichligst vergelten.* (IBID.).

²¹ *[Durch ein] starck entstanden- und zugleich an dreyen örthern der Stadt eingeschlagen [...] donnerwetter [...] [als] strafe von Gott, wegen unserer vielfältigen Sünden.* (Bettelpatent der Stadt Oldenburg, 1676 (quoted from WACHTENDORF 1992, p. 497)).

that occurred in the city some time ago was described as *doom by the highest God*, by which God *had punished us without doubt for our sins*.²²

The interpretation of the urban fire as a divine punishment is not missing in any of the texts analysed here. It was obviously supposed to incite compassion by the persons and towns asked for support. From today's perspective this might seem rather strange, as a town, which has been punished by God with a fire, should be held responsible for its own calamities. However, the examples show that the people of the 17th century did not reach the same conclusion, when they interpret the fire that struck them explicitly as a punitive fire. In the eyes of the authors of such documents, the catastrophic dimensions of an urban fire that had been afflicted by God as a punitive measure rather warranted the unconditional help and support of their neighbours.

... to prevent Urban Fire. Fire Fighting as a Public Task and Challenge

The sources analysed here show clearly that the interpretation of the urban fire as a punitive fire imposed by God can be found in various contexts throughout the entire 17th century. A simple secular understanding had not yet superseded the religious interpretation, which was still the most accessible explanation at hand. But underneath this dominant interpretation a slow shift was taking place, which eventually produced an entirely new attitude to urban fires. Fire prevention and fire fighting became ever more professional and institutionalised even while the religious framework remained intact.

Among the numerous written sources that originate in the context of urban fires, fire orders issued by the authorities, stand out. In the 16th century they were increasingly found as annexes to city laws, but in the 17th century they virtually spread explosively. Authored and issued by the territorial as well as by the urban authorities, they were frequently re-written, added to and reissued several times within the century,²³ often running to more than thirty pages. To make sure that all inhabitants were aware of the current fire orders, they were regularly exhibited and read out at public places.²⁴ In many cases citizens were not only expected to follow the orders set out for them, but also had to keep a

²² [...] *verhangniß des allerhöchsten, [der uns] sonders zweifels Umb Unserer sünde willen, [...] dermasten gestrafet hat.* (GOSLAR, Stadtarchiv, Bittgesuche abgebrannter und/oder geplünderter Orte, 1649-1700: B 4614).

²³ In many cases, a fire was taken as an occasion to rework a fire order or to set up such an order in the first place.

²⁴ In Münster, already since 1554, the fire order was read publicly by the city secretary at the yearly assembly of the citizens in the city hall (cf. HORSTKÖTTER [1941], p. 12).

printed copy at home, which was to be presented upon request.²⁵ The purpose of the fire orders was to prevent – if possible – outbreaks of fire and to make the fire fighting more effective. Sometimes more than fifty individual regulations instructed the citizens and especially the guilds on how to participate in fire prevention and fire fighting. Next to more general admonitions to be careful when handling fire, fire orders issued special precautions to the high-risk trades and regulated the way buildings were constructed to minimise possible fire hazards. The measures to be taken in case of fire were spelled out in detail and organised in an almost military way.²⁶ Finally the orders chastise those who disregard the directives, and in some cases even detail the punishment the offenders had to face.²⁷

The fire orders are closely connected to technical treatises that were increasingly published in the 17th century. They described the advances and developments of mechanical approaches to fire fighting. There is no doubt that the history of fire fighting begins far earlier than the 17th century. The town of Augsburg owned a movable fire extinguisher as early as 1518. Handheld fire-extinguisher made of brass can be traced back to the 14th century, and the Archimedic screw – the principle on which all these appliances worked – points to the Ancient World rather than to modern times as their origin. Nevertheless the development of fire extinguishers received a strong boost by the technicians of the 17th century who occupied themselves intensely with the construction and enhancement of fire fighting machinery. Already in the *Theatrum Machinarum*, published in 1607 by Heinrich Zeising, two cylinder pressure extinguishers can be found (ZEISING 1607, fig. 22, 23) which were more and more improved in later editions. Lucas Beselin, mentioned above, describes the life-saving effect of these instruments in his treatise. An anticipation of the water sprinkler installed in many buildings today can be found in the *Wasser=Schatz zur Rettung in Feuers=Gefahr (Water=Treasure to ward off Fire=Danger)* that was published as early as 1671. In this work, the Jena mathematician Erhard Weigel recommended a water-filled basin to be put on every roof, out of which the necessary water could be poured on the house below or on neighbouring houses within seconds (WEIGEL 1671). Other than the fire extinguishers of his time, Weigel's idea was not pursued until much later.

Next to the increasing centralisation and improvement of fire fighting, there is a third development that took place in the course of the 17th century, which marked an important step forward in the way fire damages were dealt with: Fire insurances. After some tentative first steps they spread with remarkable

²⁵ See for example the introduction of the Rostock Fire Order issued 1678 (E.E. Hochweisen Rahts Der Stadt Rostock Revidirte Mit Consens der Ehrlieb=Hundert Männer publicirte und zum Druck befoderte Feuer=Ordnung, 1678).

²⁶ Cf. Verneuerte Feuer-Ordnung / Eines Hoch Edlen Hochweisen Rathes allhie zu Nürnberg, 1698.

²⁷ Cf. E. E. Hochweisen Rahts der Stadt Rostock Revidirte [...] Feuer=Ordnung, 1678; Brand-Ordnung der Stadt Clausthal 1682.

speed at the beginning of the 18th century. Their origins are usually traced back to the medieval guilds of protection,²⁸ whose purpose it was to supply mutual support against any case of damage, regardless if caused by disease, robbery or by fire. Specialised fire guilds developed out of these general support associations, with the sole purpose to provide material aid to guild brothers who were affected by fire. While the fire guilds were geared towards the protection of their individual members, the later fire insurance funds, introduced by territorial authorities in the 18th century, were targeted at the prevention of economic losses, caused by the ruin of subjects (or taxpayers) due to a fire. Regardless of these differences, the main aim of these associations was to reduce the impact on the affected individual by spreading the burden across its wider membership.

The Polycarpus-Gilde,²⁹ founded in Delmenhorst at the beginning of the 15th century, was one of the first medieval guilds of protection, the statutes of which contained, among other things, the instruction for mutual support in case of fire. Its members were obliged to provide assistance to affected members and *contribute in every regard according to capacity with help and support to the reconstruction of his little dwelling*.³⁰ A contract, which was signed between two guilds in 1650, provides a similar model. In this alliance, the guilds commit themselves to mutual aid *whenever one or the other of the undersigned persons suffers fire damage at his house – what God the Almighty may graciously avert*.³¹ The fire-assurance contract *Alles mit Bedacht (All with Prudence)*, signed in 1664 in Hamburg, already shows the first signs of the modern form of contributions paid in advance. Here, a member paid ten *Reichstaler* into a fund when entering the association, from which members affected by a fire would receive a thousand *Reichstaler* towards the rebuilding of their homes.³²

Fire orders, technical treatises and insurances all strive to limit the danger and damage which humans suffer from an urban fire as much as possible. But the authors could only put their hope in the success of their measures, if the urban fire and its consequences were in fact a disaster that could be controlled

²⁸ See relevant works on the history of insurances: ARPS 1965; SCHMITT-LERMANN 1954; HELMER 1925; SCHAEFER 1911; DURSTHOFF 1904.

²⁹ Scholars see the Polycarpus-Gilde as the oldest known association with the purpose of mutual support in case of fire (cf. DURSTHOFF 1904, p. 12).

³⁰ *[...] nach Vermögen mit Hilfe und Beysteuer zu Wiederaufbauung seines Hütteleins allen möglichen Vorschub [zu] leisten.* (Statuten der Polycarpus-Gilde (quotes from: IBID., p. 12)).

³¹ *[...] wann etwa einem Oder Andern vnter nachgesetzten Personen An seinen Wohnhauss Fewer Schade : / : welches Godt der Allmechtige gnädig verhüten wolle : / : Wiederfahren sollte [...].* (Kontrakt der Sommerlander Gilde und der Kammerlander Gilde von 1650. Die Sommerlander Gilde betreffende Aufzeichnungen aus dem 17. Jahrhundert (quoted from: SCHAEFER 1911, vol. 1, p. 38 et seq.).

³² Feuer-Versicherungs-Contract *Alles mit Bedacht* (quoted from: IBID., pp. 171 et seq. and 210).

by human agency. This idea was clearly different from the earlier religious reading of the urban fire.

However, next to adhering to a rational and pragmatic concept of fire, what all three categories of source material have in common is that they do not turn against the religious reading of the fire. In fact, quite often they explicitly incorporate it. In the fire orders of the 17th century, fire is still understood to be the unquestionable expression of the wrath of God – the divine omnipotence is never disputed. Even the events of the Thirty Years' War do not evoke any change.³³ The interpretation of the fire as a divine and righteous punishment for the sinful and unrepentant attitude remained unchanged in fire orders issued before and after the war.³⁴ Even in the documents of technicians recommending their inventions for protection against fire, the religious interpretation of the urban fire can be found. In the foreword of his treatise, Lucas Beselin addresses a plea to God, he may *hereinafter gracefully protect this town of fire=danger / and other disasters according to his Holy Will*.³⁵ This acknowledgment of divine power, however, did in no way limit his confidence in the effectiveness of technical fire fighting measures. The same can be said about fire insurances, which often interpret the urban fire as a divine punishment, while taking measures to reduce the damages at the very same time.

³³ Michael Frank (FRANK 2001) proposes a different view. According to his findings, the Thirty Years' War causes a clear change in the interpretation of fire, leading to the replacement of the religious by a secular pattern of interpretation. Frank supports this assumption by comparing two fire orders of the years 1573 (Council of the City of Breslau) and 1770 (Fire Order of the Territorial Authorities for the Hochstift and the city of Münster). However, in an analysis of additional fire orders of the 17th century, this development postulated by Frank could not be confirmed.

³⁴ Examples of fire orders containing metaphysical interpretations of urban fire: New auffgerichtete unnd vormehrte Feuerordnung der Stadt Breslau, 1586; Verneuerte Feuer-Ordnung der Stadt Nürnberg, 1698; Brand Ordnung Der Stadt Embden Im Jahre 1584 Auffgerichtet / Folgentz Im Jahre 1614 Vermehret / Und nun abermahll Revidiret und dieser zeit gelegenheit nach gebessert / Resolutum Embdae in Curiae den 4ten Decembris Anno 1665; Feuerordnung der Stadt Passau, 1620; Eines E. Rathes der Stadt Braunschweig vernewerte und vermehrte Feuer=Ordnung, 1647; Clausthalische Feuer-Ordnung, 1687. The Rostock Fire Order of 1573 prescribes fire fighting measures without losing a word about a divine influence on the fire. This shows, on the other hand, that not all orders of early 17th or even late 16th century necessarily bear reference to divine authorship. Accordingly, a missing reference to God's almightiness can not be seen as proof of an increasing secular interpretation. (Cf. Für Ordeninge Eines Erbarh Rades der Stadt Rostock, 1573).

³⁵ [...] *hinfuehro diese Stadt fuer Feuers=Gefahr / und andern Unglueck nach seinem Heil. Willen / gnaedigst beschirmen*. (BESELIN 1692, p. 5).

To Pray or to Fight? Contrary Positions on how to Deal with Urban Fires

The improved and institutionalised methods of fire fighting that developed during the 17th century highlight a growing pragmatism in dealing with urban fires. However, this new pragmatism did not necessarily cause the dominant and omnipresent religious interpretation to be questioned. The efforts by the authorities, by technicians and mutual associations, to prevent or reduce potential or actual fire damage remained closely linked to a society where fire is still seen as a divine punishment for the sinful life of men. While the coexistence of religious interpretation and secular fire fighting measures is evident in the simultaneous production of sermons and construction drawings, both positions can be found in a single source as well. From today's perspective, the coexistence of metaphysical explanations and rational action is seen as highly irregular. It would be wrong, however, to suppose that people in the 17th century felt the same. This becomes rather obvious, when the available sources are questioned as to whether the different patterns of interpretation and action were experienced as compatible or not. One area where a possible confrontation of a religious and a secular approach should become visible is the debate about the most effective measures to combat the urban fire. However, the contemporary records offer almost no evidence that a refusal of or a delimitation from the respective "other" method of combating fire was felt to be necessary. Instead, the majority of sources available are marked by a peaceful coexistence of different patterns of interpretation and action, which was obviously not seen as conflicting. The recommendation of one method of extinguishing did not necessarily mean that others were seen as ineffective, and the commitment to one pattern of interpretation did not necessarily mean the condemnation of the other.

Pray first, then Extinguish

While such eclecticism of methods marks the majority of the sources, some documents can nevertheless be found where one method of extinguishing is confronted with the other and endorsed with claims of greater effectiveness. In these cases priests and technicians on one side and technocrats on the other side, confronting each other over their views of the cause of the fire and how to combat it, represented opposing positions. Sometimes referring directly to each other, sometimes staging a dispute with fictitious adversaries, they negotiated the priorities of fire fighting measures. Their criticism and condemnation of the respective other side point to a limited area of conflict where a contest between the two guiding maxims "praying" and "extinguishing" was carried out.

The Meissen Superintendent Helvicus Garthius who had already taken an extreme position in regard to the interpretation of fire causes, also represented a radical view when it came to the differentiation between the “right” and “wrong” way to deal with the fire: He called upon men to recognise the fire as a punishing measure and *to interfere with God’s pulled out rod only by praying*.³⁶ His description and condemnation of human action shows that, in his view, the members of his parish had, so far, not followed the directives of Christian conduct: Although he claimed that it was *certain now that fire blasts come and emerge mainly from God* and only prayers could possibly contribute to their prevention, he still witnessed that *these teachings are observed by very few*. Indeed, he complains, it is very common that whenever a fire blast emerges, everybody asks for *external means* and cries for water, instead of calling upon God to plead for mercy, which he considered to be the right line of action.³⁷ The same experience was made by the Halle court preacher Arnold Mengerling who, in his Pentecostal Sermon *Soteria Altenburgensis* (MENGERLING 1637) complained about the careless and self-confident attitude of men: With the exception of very few pious men who recognised the true meaning of the fire, most of them were not impressed by God’s premonition. Also, very few would recognise that it is only for God to decide, if and when an urban fire could be put out. *The ruffian worldly crowd*, however, would attribute this *to their own diligence and sweat* without being grateful to God for his mercy.³⁸

Their demand to better call for divine support instead of water and to attribute the recent rescue to God’s grace and not to human achievement pointedly proclaims a concept of “first pray, then extinguish”.³⁹

³⁶ [...] mit dem Gebet in die gezuckte Rute [zu] fallen [...]. (GARTHUS 1604, Die Ander Predigt).

³⁷ Die weil nun mehr gewis / das die Fewersbrunst fuernemlich von Gott herkommen und entstehen / [...] / werden wir auch geleret / [um] Fewersbrunst zu verhueten / fuer allen dingen [...] / Gott den Herrn fuernemlich [...] zu ersuchen [...]. Es wird aber diese lehr auch von sehr wenigen in acht genommen. Entstehen Fewersnoeten und brunsten / wird in schrecken gemeinlich mehr nach den eusserlichen mitteln gefragt, und hoeret man bey nahe nichts anders / als Wasser her / Wasser her / da billich jedermann zuzorderst zu Gott schreien und ruffen sollte. (GARTHUS 1604, Die Erste Predigt).

³⁸ Der rohe Welthauße schreibets ihrem Fleiß und Schweiß zu. (MENGERLING 1637, p. 14.)

³⁹ A similar constellation can be observed in connection with the interpretation and understanding of storm tides and the damages that they cause: While specialists in the art of dike building saw the cause of disastrous flood damages in dikes that were insufficiently built or maintained, this sober and practical view was criticised from the theological side and denounced as missing reverence towards God (cf. ALLEMEYER 2006 a, p. 325-329, 344-383; ALLEMEYER 2006 b; JAKUBOWSKI-TIESSEN 1992).

Extinguish first, then Pray

The opposite position is expressed for example in the 1687 published fire order of Clausthal, which obviously prefers the water bucket to the prayer. Although, prayer and repentance also appear as recommended actions, they are clearly subordinated to the more secular measures. The order includes 61 paragraphs containing various directives for fire prevention and fire fighting. According to their occupation and the location of their residence, all of the town's citizens are allocated specific tasks in case of a fire. Only in paragraph 56 – just before the obligation to return the towns leather water buckets – praying is finally mentioned. When the danger is passed, every head of household, with his children and servants, was supposed to thank God for his *fatherly rescue* and plead to God to spare the community of any similar dangers in the future.⁴⁰

This last minute mentioning of the grateful prayer – at the very end of the fire fighting routine – points to the insignificance attributed to prayers during the actual combat of a fire blast. While prayer was still listed, the fire order clearly relegated it to a background position in the chain of action to be taken.

It is a matter of speculation, which motives led the authors of the Clausthal fire order to recommend prayer only after troubles were passed. It is possible that the authors of the Clausthal fire order applied a strategy of double safeguarding; recommending prayer after all other activities had been completed, because it would do no harm and might help to prevent further disasters. Such an outright easy-going attitude seems possible from today's point of view, but cannot easily be transferred into the 17th century. More likely, the town authorities included the paragraph 56 in order to legitimise their actions: Considering the long list of secular fire fighting measures, the explicit commitment to Christian faith could have been included, to ward off criticism from people who were thinking more along the lines of the Meissen superintendent Garthius.

To Pray *and* to Extinguish

The fire order of the town of Nordhausen from the year 1668 offers an almost Solomonian solution. Praying and extinguishing are described as two compatible methods – each effective in certain aspects of the fire – that should both be employed in a kind of division of labour: While the grown population was to fight the fire with mundane means, *little boys and girls and other unable per-*

⁴⁰ *Wann die Gefahr vortbey / soll ein jeder Hauß=Wirth / mit seinen Kindern und Gesinde / dem Allerhoechsten fuer die Vaeterliche Rettung dancken / und die Goettliche Majstaet bitten / daß sie die gantze Commun fuer derogleichen Gefahr gnaediglich behueten wolle.* (Clausthalische Feuer-Ordnung, 1687).

sons should aid them by pleading to God *to avert the deserved punishment*, while clergymen whose parishes were too far away from the fire to help directly should collect the *young rabble* and *spend the time with praying and singing in this time of deplorable misery*.⁴¹

This model of “as well as” was not only applied by pragmatic urban authorities, but could also meet the consent of the clergyman: In a funeral sermon held by Gregor Strigenitz in 1602 in honour of a baker’s wife who had perished in a fire, the priest explains that the *outwardly and physically extinguishing does not help much or nothing, if the fire of God’s wrath had not been extinguished before* (STRIGENITZ 1602). But after God has been asked for help and forgiveness, it would be necessary to fetch water, ladders, fire hooks and other useful instruments. Then, everybody could and should pour the water *confidently into the fire*, engage in the fire fighting process and help according to his abilities.⁴²

Who is to blame?

Closely related to the dispute over fire fighting measures is the question to what extent man can be held responsible for a fire outbreak. The accusation of “bad governance” on the side of the administration has already been mentioned in the case of the Rostock councillor Matthias Prieststaff. While in this case such an accusation can only be deducted from Prieststaff’s eager attempts to justify his actions, many documents explicitly blame the town authorities for the outbreak of a fire.

Andreas Gryphius, who was an eyewitness of the great fire of Freystadt in Silesia in 1637, noted in his memorial (GRYPHIUS 1637)⁴³, that he believed the city authorities to be responsible for the disaster. He meticulously lists the numerous mistakes and deficits in the administration’s Fire Policy that resulted in the outbreak and rapid spread of the flames. In his view the town council is

⁴¹ *Den Knaben und Maegdlein und andern untauglichen Persohnen / wird Zeit=wahrender Feuers=Brunst auch Arbeit zu verschaffen seyn / wenn sie nemlich zum Gebet um Abwendung der gerechten Straffe / mit Fleiß angemahnet werden. Es wuerde auch der zornige Gott desto eher zu Gnaden bewogen werden / wenn die Geistlichen und Kirchen=Diener, in den von der Gefahr entlegenen Kirchen, mit dem jungen Poebel sich zusammen thaeten, und allda mit Beten und Singen die Zeit in solcher jaemmerlichen Noth zubringen wuerden.* (Nordhaeusener Feuer=Ordnung, § 18).

⁴² *Wenn das Feuer Goettlichen Zorns nicht zuvor außgeleschet ist / durch ein inbruenstiges Gebet / seuffzen unnd threnen zu Gott / so hilfft das eusserliche und leibliche leschen nichts oder wenig. Wenn man aber Gott umb huelffe und errettung angeruffen hat / als denn ist auch von noethen / daß man ordentliche mittel / Wasser zutrage / Leitern und Feuerhacken / und andere Instrument / die dazu dienlich / und daß man getrost ins Feuer hinein giesse / und ein jeder zugreiffe und leschen helffe / nach vermuegen.* (STRIGENITZ 1602, p. E iii).

⁴³ About this little recognised document by Andreas Gryphius, see NIEFANGER 2000; SZYROCKI 1970.

to blame for insufficient surveillance of the town at night. The careless and badly controlled guards had slept and neither discovered the fire nor raised alarm, which in turn made them responsible as well (GRYPHIUS 1637, p. 37). Even more severe than the negligence of the guards is the *lack of real order / water and pumps*,⁴⁴ which prevented those who had rushed to the outbreak to fight the fire. To substantiate his accusations, he quotes an eye-witnesses report, stating that the fire could have been nipped in the bud if sufficient aides and water had been available.⁴⁵ Worse still, the Freystadt authorities had failed to allow the city gates to be opened, which had prevented the surrounding villagers to come to their aid. Gryphius reported that *a countless number of people demanded for a long time to open the gates, which would have saved no small part of the town*.⁴⁶

A closer look at the people and institutions that Gryphius held responsible, reveals that the accused were without exception of Catholic faith. Taking this and Gryphius' own political-denominational background into account, it seems that his accusations against the town council were at least partly guided by his confessional convictions.⁴⁷ Gryphius' memorial therefore provides an example for a possible exploit of the question of guilt. His argument however, presupposes a certain pattern of interpretation: The authorities can only be accused to carry part of the blame, if the fire is seen as a disaster, which can be caused or prevented at least partly by human action. Gryphius' exploitation of the accusation of guilt in a political and denominational conflict indicates that human agency as a possible cause for fire disasters was not beyond the imagination of his readers.

The treatment of arsonists is another area where different concepts of blame for the outbreak of a fire met. The question if and how far human beings can be held to account for the outbreak of a fire, touches the fundamental debate on the relation of God, the devil and his human "helpers". It was only possible to accuse certain individuals of arson and to prosecute and convict them if it was generally believed that the emergence of a fire could be attributed to individual and intentional action. It is well known that the accusation of arson was often

⁴⁴ [...] *mangel richtiger Ordnung / Wasser und Hocken [...]. [...] mangel der Hacken / und darzu dienlicher Instrumente [...]. [...] fehlete es doch / wie an andern orten / an Ordnung / Leytern und Wasser* (GRYPHIUS 1637, pp. 40, 50, 71).

⁴⁵ Gryphius' fire report is based on his own experiences as well as on testimonies by nine witnesses who were interrogated in court about the outbreak and course of the fire (cf. STIEFF 1737, p. 805).

⁴⁶ [...] *unangesehen unzehlich viel Volcks / mit grossem Geschrey selbige zu oeffnen laengst begehret / durch welcher mitwuercken man baldt erstlich nicht wenig hette erhalten moegen [...]*. (GRYPHIUS 1637, p. 41).

⁴⁷ Gryphius, who himself originated from a dynasty of protestants pastors, composed the *Fewrige Freystadt* amidst confessional conflicts, during which the principality of Glogau – to which Freystadt belonged – increasingly came under Catholic influence. While Lutheran sermons were still allowed in open air at first, they were banned in 1637 (cf. MACHILEK 1990; SZYROCKI 1970, p. 108).

directed against social scapegoats, such as Jews, Gypsies, vagabonds or other people on the margins of early modern society. Such accusations were often motivated by the same desires that led to the contemporary witch-hunts.⁴⁸ The suspicion, prosecution and conviction of arsonists constituted a coherent system, which successfully managed to punish the assumed arsonist for his evil act. The concept at its core – that a fire was started by human agency – was difficult to reconcile with the belief in the almighty power of God, which was often proclaimed at the same time. The Magdeburg pastor Reinhard Bake was acutely aware of the potential inconsistencies, which arose, when arsonists were punished for a crime in which they were – according to Christian reading – only instruments used by God to execute his divine will (BAKE 1614). On one hand, he regarded it as correct that arsonists were *properly taken to punishment by the dear authorities*, but on the other side, he demanded that, *in such a case, God's advice, righteous judgement, hand, will and providence, should be taken into account*.⁴⁹ While the exact consequences of this *taking into account* remained painfully unclear, Brake made the same demand to reconcile secular punishment with the acknowledgement and observance of the divine authorship when it came to the treatment of persons who had caused a fire by carelessness. He reasoned that the careless were guilty of inflicting damage to their fellow men, but stressed that God's will also had to be taken into account, for without this *such a miserable and deplorable damage could not have been inflicted to this good town*.⁵⁰ The conflict which we perceive today in Brakes appeal to regard the secular punishment of the arsonist as legitimate, without disputing, that the real cause behind the disaster was God's will, was obviously not apparent for the author and his audience.

⁴⁸ Penny Roberts states: "Jews, lepers, witches, vagrants, the poor, heretics and foreigners were all targeted as scapegoats at various points in the medieval and early modern periods" (ROBERTS 1997, p. 20), and also draws attention to structural similarities between witch hunts and suspicion against arsonists: "The pursuit of arsonists [...] can be seen as a further manifestation of the collective anxiety that has been identified with the prosecution of witches, plague-spreaders and other supposed enemies of society in the early modern period." (IBID., p. 10). The prosecution and punishment of the alleged malefactors also served to stabilise society in both cases: "An important social function was served by the provision of an explanation for the tragedy that had occurred and the identification, capture and punishment of the supposed culprits [...] as a result of which collective anxieties were assuaged." (IBID., p. 20). Robert Scribner reaches a similar conclusion in regard to the role of the arsonist-scapegoats in society of early modern times: "The desire to find scapegoats was a means of assigning responsibility for the uncontrollability of the world." (SCRIBNER 1988, p. 48).

⁴⁹ [*Sie sollen*] *von der lieben Obrigkeit gebuerlich zur Straff gezogen werden. [Es ist] in solchem fall / auch auff Gottes Rath / gerechtes Gericht / Hand / Willen und Versehung [zu] gedenken.* (BAKE 1614, p. 12).

⁵⁰ [*...*] *ohne welche / ein so klaeglicher und erbaermlicher Schaden dieser guten Stadt nicht hette zustehen koennen.* (IBID.).

The Question of Legitimacy

Next to the question to which degree a human being could be held responsible for fire that served as God's punishment, there was also the question of whether and by what means men had the right to protect them against such divine wrath. One area where such debates arose was the emerging fire-insurances business. The idea, that taking out a fire-insurance could be seen as counteracting the divine plan of punishment – very plausible from today's point of view – can be found in a letter of the Count Anton Günther of Oldenburg, written in early 17th century. In 1609, a Hamburg citizen by the name of Wilhem Stiell submitted to the Count a proposal for the foundation of a fire-insurance that is recognised today as a blueprint for a governmental fire protection system. The proposal suggested to tax the value of all houses of the Counts subjects and to impose a yearly contribution of one *Taler* per one hundred *Taler* taxed. In case of a fire, the Count would compensate the loss according to the taxed value. Stiell's model was never put into practice, as the Count had doubts about such an institution. Anton Günther feared to damage his good name and commit a sin by instituting a system, which he saw as being directed against God's will. The Count asked his advisor, Eberhard von Weihe, to comment if the proposal could not actually be regarded as blasphemy and if it could result in *bad libel and slander* from the side of neighbours as well as in *damage to the county name and state*, or if it really served the *unquestionable salvation of the subjects* and was to his own advantage.⁵¹ Von Weihe advised the Count against the realisation of Stiell's proposal, mainly drawing on economic reasons. The Count should not burden himself with such things. The fire insurance would not bring money into the country and would possibly encourage fraud.⁵² Von Weihe does not mention the feared danger of blasphemy and the proposal was finally disapproved as not being economically viable (DURSTHOFF 1904, pp. 12 et seq.; SCHAEFER 1911, vol. 2, pp. 103-107; SCHMITT-LERMANN 1954, pp. 19-23).

Wilhelm Stiell can be regarded as a pioneer of insurance science. His doubtlessly innovative proposal can actually be seen as an anticipation of governmental fire insurance policies, which only emerged a hundred years later. However, concerning the question raised here, the reaction of the Count is revealing. His reservations do, however, constitute the only verifiable case,

⁵¹ *Ob Ihrs gewisslich dafür haltet, das obverstandene Invention ohne Versuchung Gottes, böse Verleumbdung vnd nachrede der benachbarten, diminution Vnsers Gräfflichen namens und Standes, zu vnzweifflichem heil der Vntertanen auch mit Vnserm Vortheil, ehrlicher, vnverweislicher vnd rechtmessiger weise angestellet vnd vortgesetzt werden konne.* (Brief Anton Günthers an Eberhard von Weihe (quoted from SCHAEFER 1911, Vol. 2, pp. 115-118)).

⁵² Report of Eberhard von Weihe on Stiells proposal (quoted from: IBID., p. 118-128).

where religious doubts concerning the legitimacy of fire-insurance are expressed in the documents consulted for this study.

Conclusion

The results of the documentary evidence analysed here can be resumed as follows: During the entire 17th century, the perception of urban fire was invariably dominated by a religious interpretation of the events. The pattern of interpretation provided by the pastors was extremely attractive to the people affected by the fire. The Christian reading of the urban fire allowed them to make sense of the troubles they endured, to assure themselves of justice ruling on earth and to follow simple directives which could provide hope and guide their future actions. Therefore the fire did not lead to a destabilisation of the Christian world view, but rather served to confirm the divine omnipotence. To the parish priest, the fire sermon offered the opportunity to influence the attitudes of his audience, to demonstrate the consistency of his religious teachings, and to give emphasis to his demand for a life agreeable to God. While the religious interpretation of the urban fire remained dominant and unchanged throughout the 17th century, a second and increasingly pragmatic approach to fire fighting and prevention developed. Fire orders, fire fighting machinery and fire insurances were based on the assumption that people could protect themselves by secular measures from the damages an urban fire caused.

Potential areas of conflict can be recognised between the pragmatic handling of the fire and its religious interpretation. Some parish priests participated in the debate on the most effective method of fire prevention and condemned their flock's readiness *to put their trust in worldly means*.⁵³ The majority of the affected, however, seems to have experienced a peaceful coexistence of religious interpretation and secular action. Various ways to deal with fire disasters, that today seem contradictory and incompatible, can be found alongside each other in many documents. The authors of fire orders, technical treatises and fire insurances regularly follow the traditional interpretation of the urban fire as divine punitive fire, while assuming at the same time, that men can defend themselves with the aid of secular measures. The early modern "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" (Ernst Bloch) seems to be a leitmotif in people's attitudes and actions towards urban fires not only on the social but also on the individual level.

⁵³ [...] *gemeinlich mehr nach den eusserlichen mitteln [greifen]*. (GARTHIUS 1604, Die Erste Predigt).

Lived Faith. Appendix

I will close with a rather curious method to deal with the problems discussed here, which – from today’s point of view – possibly provides the most convincing synthesis between worldly and religious fire fighting. It can be found in an annex that Erhard Weigel, already mentioned above, added to the second edition of his treatise on the invention of a *Wasser-Schatz* (*Water=Treasure*) (WEIGEL 1671). In this annex he recommends to connect the basin on the attic of a house to a system of water pipes. His ingenious system would provide for water to be channelled into the different rooms below, while at the same time allowing water to be pumped into the storage basin with the help of a hand pump on the ground floor. This way the basin could be refilled without problems and ensure its great effectiveness in fire fighting. To avoid the necessary pumping effort, Weigel suggests to connect the pump mechanism with the doors of central and highly frequented buildings, so that the pump would get an impulse each time a door opens or closes. By connecting this construction to the doors of city halls, churches and other places, *the unidle youth, when looking for something sensible to play*, would give an impulse to the pump each time they open and close a door and thus keep the basin filled with water at all times.⁵⁴ As not only playing children, but also each churchgoer would have pumped water into the *Water=Treasure*, the peoples religiosity would have contributed extremely effectively to worldly fire fighting.

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⁵⁴ *So koennte man auch an gemeinen Orten / als an den Rathhaeusern / Kirchenthuern und andern / eine stetswehrende doch ungefaehrliche Tschaufl oder einen Schwengel machen / dahin die unmueffige Jugend / wenn sie ohne das zu spielen suchet / sich begeben und solchen Schwengel / mit Lust treiben koente / daß also durch blosses zulaessiges Spielen der Jugend / (welches auf gewisse Maß einzuschrenken were / damit kein Excess dabey vorgeinge) ein gemeines Werck getrieben [...] werden koente. [...] Welches die wenigsten Unkosten erfordern würde.* (WEIGEL 1672, pp. 14 et seq.).

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