

# The art of iconoclasm and the afterlife of the English Reformation

Autor(en): **Walsham, Alexandra**

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# The Art of Iconoclasm and the Afterlife of the English Reformation<sup>1</sup>

Alexandra Walsham

This essay investigates a category of Protestant art that appears to be inherently paradoxical: graphic images of acts of iconoclasm. Approaching image-making and image-breaking as intrinsically linked practices, it explores a series of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century depictions of the destruction of idols and analyses their significance for our understanding of reformed visual culture. It asks why Protestants depicted these rites of oblivion and considers the purposes such pictures served in a society that was fraught with anxiety about the dangers of sight as a stimulus to spiritual fornication. In particular, it situates such iconography in a context in which a desire to extinguish all memory of medieval monuments of “superstition” and “idolatry” coexisted with an impulse to preserve mutilated traces of them as a memorial of their defeat and eradication. It argues that they illuminate the evolution of a distinctively Protestant commemorative culture and the process by which the Reformations in England and Europe became embedded in collective memory.

This essay probes an iconographical phenomenon that at first sight seems paradoxical. It investigates visual representations of an act that apparently epitomises Protestantism’s intense allergy and antipathy towards art: iconoclasm. Image-breaking was a critical feature of the Eng-

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is dedicated to the memory of Margaret Aston. I thank the organisers of the Zurich conference for the invitation to deliver a keynote lecture and the members of the audience for their helpful comments. The research underpinning it was undertaken as part of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council project “Remembering the Reformation” (<http://rememberingthereformation.org.uk/>).

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lish Reformation: initially carried out by private individuals acting in defiance of the state, it was later embraced by the Tudor regime as a key engine of religious reform. The limitations and equivocations of the official war against idols not only prompted ongoing initiatives of a more surreptitious and seditious kind; they also created a legacy of discontent that culminated in the renewed spasms of iconoclastic violence that accompanied the Civil Wars of the 1640s. By placing a series of images of image-breaking under the microscope, this essay seeks to deepen our understanding of Protestant visual culture and to illuminate the process by which England's prolonged, contested, idiosyncratic and tangled Reformation came to be entrenched in collective memory. Critically evaluating their significance, function and meaning, it suggests that such pictures offer additional insight into what Daniel Woolf has called "the social circulation of the past." Endlessly reproduced in popular narratives and scholarly monographs, they are used to illustrate events that they themselves have helped to transform into concrete historical facts.

## I

The discussion that follows must be set briefly within two historiographical contexts. The first is the extraordinary surge of sophisticated work on iconoclasm that has occurred over the last few decades. Scholars of symbolic violence in the early modern period increasingly recognise it as a form of theology in action, as behaviour that embodied the belief that statues, pictures and images were dangerous provocations to the sin of spiritual fornication that was idolatry (Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*; Aston, "Iconoclasm in England"; Aston, "Puritans and Iconoclasm"; Aston, *Broken Idols*; Wandel, esp. 23-24). Iconoclasm reflected the conviction that making, praying to and worshipping visual representations of God, Christ and the saints constituted a heinous transgression of the second commandment: it entailed the assumption that people were being led to damnation by worshipping dead stocks and stones and mere lumps of plaster and wood. At the same time, as David Freedberg, Ann Kibbey (esp. ch. 3), Joseph Koerner (esp. 106, 110-13) and other scholars (Jonckheere, *Art* 175) have observed, iconoclasm was fraught with contradiction and ambiguity: the very vehemence with which it was sometimes carried out manifested fear and anxiety about the power of the image and the need to prove that it was in fact lifeless. So too did the ways in which the targets of such attacks were commonly desecrated – by mutilating eyes and noses, heads,

hands, and limbs. Iconoclasm entailed a negative reverence for material objects that made the iconoclasts guilty of a kind of idolatry themselves. The point was obliquely acknowledged by the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer, in the first treatise to be published on the subject in English in 1535, when he argued that idols should be destroyed with force (“yea, & that all to powder”) and not “softly & so tenderly handled” as if they had “mans wyttes & reason” (sig. F8v). Meanwhile, the debates that took place in Lutheran circles about whether re-education should precede or follow the removal of offending images attest to the worry that the destruction of idols might serve to strengthen attachment to them rather than undermine and defuse it (Johnston and Scribner 82-3). They reflect contemporary recognition of the possibility that the shock involved in seeing the defacement of a revered object or icon could engender an even greater empathy with it (Jonckheere, “Power” 147).

This links with another insight that is relevant to the current enquiry: the idea that we must see iconoclasm as a mode of memory. Anticipating Eamon Duffy’s compelling description of it as a “sacrament of forgetfulness” (480), contemporaries themselves understood it as a rite of oblivion, a strategy for effecting the physical erasure of past error, and a mechanism for bringing about a kind of individual and collective amnesia. The ecclesiastical injunctions and visitation articles issued under Edward VI and Elizabeth I were explicit in this respect, insisting that parish officials “utterly extinct and destroy” all “monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and superstition; so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glass windows, or elsewhere within their churches or houses” (Cardwell i. 17, 221). Several bishops even insisted that the tabernacles in which religious statues had stood and which were now “standing void” should be filled up and the vacant places made “plain” lest they act as a reminder of what had gone (Frere and Kennedy iii. 323, no. 30). Some Protestants clearly supposed that total obliteration was the best form of protection against a relapse to popish idolatry. Others, though, thought that broken idols and mutilated remnants should stand as lasting memorials or trophies to the achievement of the Reformation. Their defacement and disfiguration was admonitory and prophylactic: it bore witness to the success of reform and served as a warning of backsliding into the mire of Catholicism once more (Aston, *Broken Idols* 225, 236). In this way, iconoclasm was an agent of the creation as well as annihilation of meaning. Bringing about a form of “sign transformation” to use a phrase coined by Richard Clay (Boldrick and Clay 10; Boldrick, Brubaker and Clay 2), it should be seen as “symmetrical to the iconophilia” against which it is directed (Ford 77). Instead of



seeing it as the opposite and antithesis of art, it may fruitfully be situated on a spectrum with other forms of representation.

The second body of historiography that provides a backdrop for this essay concerns Protestant art. Once the phrase would have seemed like a contradiction in terms. But we have now moved well beyond the notion that early modern England was a society suffering from “severe visual anorexia” (Collinson 119). Important work by Tessa Watt, William Dyrness (esp. ch. 4), Tara Hamling, David Davis (*Seeing Faith; From Icons*) and others (Finney; Hamling and Richards; Hunter; Thomas; Walsham, “Idols”) has not merely underlined the limits of reformed iconophobia, but delineated the distinctive forms of religious iconography that developed in the post-Reformation era. They have underlined the point that John Calvin was not hostile to art per se: as he himself remarked, he was “not . . . so superstitious as to think that all visible representations of every kind are unlawful” (i. 100). The Genevan reformer and his English disciples defended the utility of images that served a civic, didactic and memorial purpose: in particular they approved of pictures that provided a narrative of past events, whether those described in the pages of the bible or those of more recent times. The Cambridge puritan divine William Perkins similarly declared that the “historical use of images” was legitimate: representing “to the eye the acts of histories, whether they be human or divine” was useful and edifying (829-30). The Church of England’s own homily on idolatry differentiated carefully between “dumb” and static three-dimensional images and flat pictures that depicted “the process of a story, painted with the gestures and actions of many persons” (*Certain Sermons* 213). And if they prohibited the erection of icons of God the Father, Christ and the Holy Ghost within the setting of the church, they were willing to admit that they might be permissible in other more neutral locations including the spaces of the printed page and book, where the text in which they were enveloped functioned as a safeguard against the temptation to unlawful veneration (Davis, *Seeing Faith*, esp. ch. 2).

Historians have become more aware of the ways in which a Protestant aesthetic centred on stories from Scripture penetrated the godly household and shaped patterns of interior decoration (Hamling; Wells-Cole). They are also more sensitive to how the anti-Catholic images that proliferated in the early days of the Reformation and which continued to be produced at moments of crisis functioned. As Adam Morton has taught us, many of these pictures were complex emblems designed to engage the intellect rather than the senses and affections. They must be understood as part of a wider culture of shame and ridicule and as an

extension of physical acts of destruction and demystification through visual spectacles – in short, as forms of iconoclasm themselves (chs. 1 and 2, esp. pp. 104-29). In turn, as in the Netherlands, image-breaking catalysed a critical re-evaluation of art and stimulated new modes of creativity (Jonckheere, *Art*; Mochizuki; Vanhaelen).

Such research is progressively breaking down inherited polarities and destabilising the settled assumptions that surround visual representations of image-breaking with an aura of inconsistency. Building on these insights, we must now analyse what compelled contemporaries on both sides of the confessional divide to create pictures that preserved the memory of the rites of oblivion in which Protestants engaged and to consider their place and purpose in a world in which concern about the sense of sight as a stimulus to sin and idolatry remained persistent and profound.

## II

The first set of images of iconoclasm to be examined comprises those depicting Old Testament stories involving the demolition of pagan idols by force or fire. Pictorial representations of passages that enjoined and described acts of holy violence predated the Reformation. They feature in woodcut illustrations of incunable Italian bibles, including one printed in Venice in 1490, which shows the breaking of images and statues called for in Numbers 34 and the reforming zeal against idolatry of King Josiah described in 4 Kings 23 (Aston, *King's Bedpost* 38, and see 37-48 *passim*). The latter scene in which Josiah listens to the law being read to him while idols burn in a pyre on the right also appeared as an illustration in a Vulgate published in Lyons in 1520. But the popularity of these pictorial themes increased in the wake of the Reformation for two reasons. One was the new emphasis on the Decalogue, and especially the first table of the commandments, which Protestants renumbered to elevate the prohibition on making graven images into a separate edict (Aston, *England's Iconoclasts* 371-92). The second was the mandate and precedent that such passages provided for the reformers' attack on the material culture of Catholic Christianity. The image of King Asa, who deposed his mother because of her idolatry and burnt the image she worshipped by the brook Kidron, incorporated in the 1572 Wittenberg bible is particularly telling because here the godly monarch is advised by a priest who bears a distinct resemblance to the portly Martin Luther. He is seen directing an official and public programme of image-



breaking that both corresponds with and acts as an advertisement for the magisterial brand of the Reformation carried out in Saxony (reproduced in Aston, *Broken Idols* 27). Alongside the destruction of the brazen serpent by King Hezekiah in 4 Kings 18: 4, the iconoclastic campaign overseen by Josiah was a powerful prototype for top-down Protestant reform.

It is not surprising that the vernacular bibles sponsored by Henry VIII, including the Coverdale version of 1535 (*Biblia*, sig. nn5v) and the Great Bible of 1539 (*Byble*, sig. I5v) (Figure 1), included visual images of these scenes (Luborksy and Ingram, i. 85-92, 96-103); nor that Josiah's godly crusade against idols appeared in the translation of *Icones*, a picture book with woodcuts by or after Hans Holbein which appeared during the reign of Edward VI as *The Images of the Old Testament*, though in this



Figure 1: King Hezekiah purges images: *The Byble in Enghyshe, that is to saye the Content of all the Holy Scripture*, rev. Miles Coverdale. [Paris: F. Regnault and London]: R. Grafton and E. Whitchurch, 1539, sig. I5v. Trinity College Library C.5.3. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.



Iosias redith the boke of Deuteronomy be-  
fore the peple, He destroyth Idols, and kyl-  
lyth the preysts of Baal.

IIII. R E G V M. XXIII.



Le Roy Iosie au peuple Iudaique,  
Deuteronomie il lit de bout en bout:  
Et son pays purgeant d'erreur inique,  
Il fait brusler les idoles par tout.

H 2

Figure 2: Josiah overseeing the burning of idols by or after Hans Holbein: *The Images of the Old Testament, Lately Expresed, Set Forthe in Ynglishe and Frenche, with a Playn and Brief Exposition*. Lyons: Johan Frellon, 1549. Trinity College Library C.7.30. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.



version the bonfire of idols viewed through the doorway on the right is far less prominent and more allusive in character (sig. H2r) (Figure 2).

Elucidating the text they accompanied, they helped the reader to comprehend and remember compelling stories that supplied a blueprint for the English Reformation. The section of a catechism translated from Dutch published in 1549 is illustrated with a picture of another incident that became synonymous with reformed Protestantism's ardent hostility towards idolatry: the tale of the downfall of Dagon, the great Philistine idol that mysteriously fell down and shattered into pieces when the ark of the Lord was set beside it in 1 Samuel 5.2. Placed on the same page as an exposition of the second commandment, the typological relationship between medieval Catholicism and ancient false religion is underlined in this image by the presence of people kneeling before an image of the resurrected Christ and an altarpiece (van der Heyden sig. B7r).

Protestantism scarcely had a monopoly on this iconography, as its presence in bibles and prints emanating from humanist and Catholic circles in France and the Southern Netherlands in the mid and late sixteenth century reveals. These include Bernard Salomon's *True and lyvely historyke purtreatures of the woll Bible* (1553), the preface to which tellingly defended the depiction of idolatry as a mechanism not to provoke but to "tourne" viewers "cleane awai" from that "abominable deed" by presenting to the eyes of the "weacke and simple" the punishments that befell the children of Israel who committed this sin (sig. A3r-v). Significant here too are a number of engravings by Maarten van Heemskerck, a figure whose career coincided with the *beeldenstorm* that swept through the Low Countries in 1566. A loyal Catholic at his death, he had close connections with the governors of Haarlem, where he lived and worked until the Spanish siege of the city in 1572. Sharing the didactic goals of other humanist inspired scriptural narratives, the several series of Old Testament prints he produced in the 1560s (Veldman, esp. 130) have themselves been seen as commentaries on the contemporary events of which he was an eye or at least ear-witness (Figure 3). As Eleanor Saunders has shown, in these he "violated his customary fidelity" to the biblical text by consistently and conspicuously depicting religious and secular leaders as overseers of the process of purification (77). Prescriptions for the orderly, government-sanctioned removal of church art, his images entailed a subtle critique of the spontaneous and frenzied acts of destruction carried out by self-appointed zealots during the so-called Dutch wonder year.





Figure 3: King Josiah restores the law of the Lord: The destruction of the Temple of Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Milcom. Engraving by Philips Galle, after Maarten van Heemskerck. [The Netherlands, c. 1569]. British Museum 1949,0709.100. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

They may be seen in the same light as Frans Hogenberg's familiar and famous image of iconoclasm and plunder printed in Cologne in 1570, which has recently been reinterpreted by Ramon Voges as a re-action to the ostentatious violence against material representations of the sacred. The impression of objectivity and impartiality it conveys is part of a complex visual rhetoric which encoded a moderate message of the need for controlled reform rather than a violent overthrow of the established social order. It has convincingly been suggested that it was Hogenberg, who had fled temporarily to England to escape persecution in the Netherlands, who produced the woodcut of King Josiah for Matthew Parker's *Bishops' Bible* of 1568 (Aston, *King's Bedpost* 45-47). A clear variation on the versions of this scriptural motif already discussed, here too the king and priest take centre stage, while the vignette of the idol-burning ordained by Josiah is confined to a rectangle in the top left hand corner. The composition of the image is certainly in keeping with



the priorities embodied in Hogenberg's depiction of current events in the Netherlands (*Holie Bible*, 1568, pt II, fo. 109r).

In these pictures of iconoclasm, conceptions of past and present converge and exercise reciprocal influence on each other. They function at once as justifications for the Protestant purge of Catholic idolatry and as pictures that present a selective and sanitised memory of Reformations that were more radical, subversive and violent than many contemporaries were willing to admit. Although capable of more than one reading, they occlude elements that subsequent historians of religious change in England have conveniently contrived to forget. They do not fit with the myth of a *via media* between extremes that became integral to Anglican identity in the nineteenth century, as Diarmaid MacCulloch demonstrated in a seminal essay published in 1991 (see also Aston, *Broken Idols* 14). They eclipse the unruly iconoclastic enthusiasm that characterised its early evangelical phases and that came to seem like a painful and embarrassing aberration to later generations (cf. Pollmann).

### III

From the realm of biblical illustration and scriptural prints, we turn next to the pictures of iconoclasm incorporated in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, first published in 1563, but augmented and reissued several times during the Elizabethan period. Our understanding of the function of the illustrations in Foxe's book of martyrs has been transformed in recent years. No longer are they seen primarily as a means of making his great history of the true Church accessible to the illiterate. Instead, conscious of how much they increased the cost of John Day's printed text, historians now emphasise their role as documentary devices that supplemented and authenticated the revisionist narrative and archive of the Christian past Foxe presented to the educated and erudite (Pettegree, *Reformation* ch. 5; Evenden and Freeman ch. 6; see also Aston and Ingram). Produced in the period before illustration largely disappeared from English history books (Pettegree, "Illustrating the Book"; Knapp ch. 4), they navigate their way around the Protestant theology of images by closely integrating word and image. They are visual monuments that avoid the taint of idolatry by depicting, to repeat the words of the Homily, "the process of a story, painted with the gestures and actions of many persons" (*Certain Sermons* 213). The identity of the craftsmen responsible for producing these woodcuts remains obscure, but plausible candidates include Frans Hogenberg and the Flemish artist Marcus

Gheeraerts. The latter's *Allegory of Iconoclasm* of 1566 depicted a monstrous mountain of diabolically inspired Catholic cultic ritual and corruption in the process of being undermined by Protestants armed with pickaxes, wheelbarrows, hammers and shovels. This takes the shape of a rotting monk's head. Neither artist was in England when the episodes in question occurred: for all their apparent verisimilitude, these images are imaginative reconstructions designed to perform an evidential function (Knapp 142-43). Although discussed in isolation here, they must be assessed as an integral part of a volume that powerfully shaped Protestant memory of the Reformation in subsequent generations through the very accumulation of the visual depictions of symbolic violence and martyrdom that it contained.

The first image of iconoclasm in Foxe requiring comment depicts the hanging of three men arrested for removing the miraculous rood from the parish church of Dovercourt in Essex under cover of night in 1532 and disproving its power by subjecting it to an ordeal by fire (1563 ed. 496) (Figure 4). Possibly influenced by the preaching of Thomas Bil-

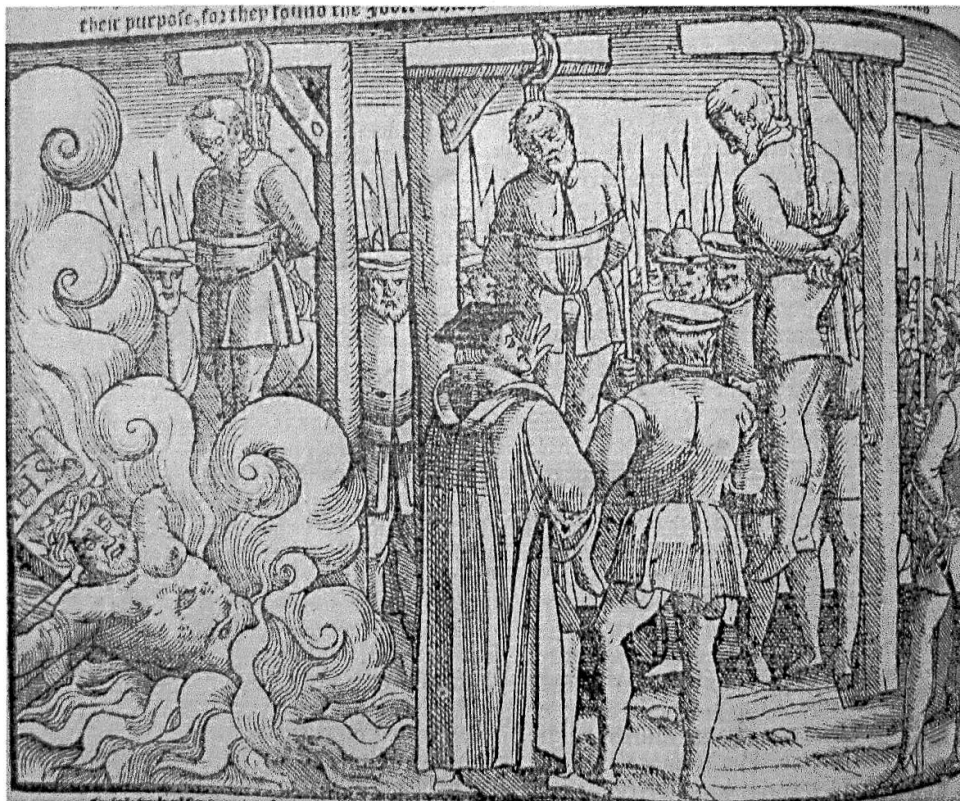


Figure 4: The Dovercourt martyrs: John Foxe. *Actes and Monuments*. London: John Day, 1563 edn, p. 496.

ney, who, in a sermon delivered in London a few years before, had invoked the example of Hezekiah destroying the brazen serpent (Aston, *Broken Idols* 112, 725), the illicit attack carried out by these East Anglian iconoclasts reflects the clandestine phase of image-breaking in the English Reformation. Only a few years later, the sacrilegious outrage for which they were executed became the official policy of the Henrician regime. In the picture, the men appear lifeless, suspended from their gibbets. Beside them on the left is the great crucifix they incinerated, which (in ironic contrast) has the quality of an animated living body. Preserving elements of traditional hagiographical iconography and reinterpreting them for evangelical ends (Cummings 188), this is an image in which events that occurred over a period of months are juxtaposed and collapsed into a single moment in time. It allows the viewer and reader vicariously to witness the rite of demystification and oblivion alongside the martyrdom of those who committed it. It celebrates and commemorates the heroic act of idol destruction they carried out in conformity with their burdened consciences in combination with their own sacrifice in the service of the true religion. This is a graphic depiction of iconoclasm that re-enacts an event intended to obliterate an offensive object precisely in order to cement it in collective memory.

A second relevant picture from Foxe is the large plate that immediately precedes the opening of Book 9, which recounts the achievements of the reign of Edward VI (1570 ed. 1483) (Figure 5). This image depicts the official iconoclasm that accompanied his Reformation, together with the enthroned young king handing out the English bible to his people, and a reformed church interior befitted for worship according to a liturgy centred on the two sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism. The word of God is preached to an attentive congregation seated in neat rows and following the text expounded in the sermon dutifully in the books on their laps. At the top, people stream from a church building while another pulls down an image with rope just outside: this is the “temple well purged” and to its right is a flaming bonfire in which idols burn. The procession of iconoclasts merges with a parade of “papists packing away their Paltry” and transporting their trinkets overseas in a vessel that is labelled the Ship of the Romish Church. This too is a picture that plays temporal and spatial tricks in its effort to create a multi-dimensional visual monument to the young king’s accomplishments. It memorialises an era that later generations of the godly came to remember as the high point of the evangelical drive to restore the gospel in its primitive purity and that is still, perhaps misleadingly, treated as a distinct historical period. Showing “the process of a story, painted with the



gestures and actions,” it glosses over the tensions, conflicts and rebellions that complicated the years between 1547 and 1552 to present an emblem of the exemplary reforms of a youth whose actions imitated those of biblical Josiah with whom he is visually conflated (see also King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* 95-101).

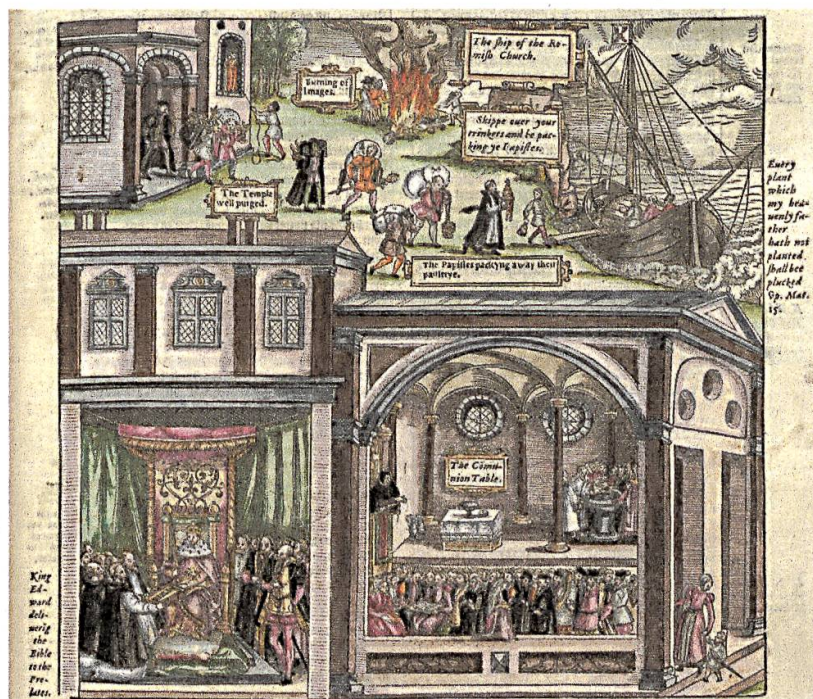


Figure 5: Iconoclasm in the reign of Edward VI: opening of book 9 of Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*. London: John Day, 1570 edn, 1483. Trinity College Library C.17.24-25. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

These images of iconoclasts must be assessed in the context of another famous and much discussed woodcut in Foxe's book: the one showing Henry VIII stamping upon the pope (1570 ed. ii. 1201). This striking snapshot depicts something that never happened: its apparent realism is an illusion and fiction because this image is a symbol of the Royal Supremacy, the legislative development that severed England from Rome, formally reclaimed ecclesiastical jurisdiction as the preserve of its sovereign, and redefined the pontiff as foreign usurper of monarchical power. Iconoclasm is as much its *modus operandi* as its subject: it is a satire designed to break down the pretensions of the papacy, which has displaced God and set itself up as an idol. It shows Henry VIII with his feet on a humiliatingly prostrate pope, whose triple tiara has fallen off and broken. His acolytes react in horror, crying aloud and hiding their heads in their hands, while the king's supporters Cromwell and

Cranmer serenely accept the Word of God from their sword-bearing king. The picture also evokes the established iconography of the wise judge and ruler that was Solomon. A piece of caricature masquerading as a representation of an event in history, the many offspring and variants it engendered are indicative of the extent to which it embedded itself in social memory as a visual shorthand for the political consequences of the Reformation.

Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* is a laboratory in which we can see iconoclasm at work in another and more intriguing respect. In some copies of the book and in detached versions of its constituent woodcuts, certain images have become the subject of defacement and mutilation by contemporary readers. In one in the library of Ohio State University (BR1600. F6 1570, copy 1, sig. 2N2v) the face of the pope whose feet are being kissed by an emperor in an act of obeisance has been gouged in much the same way as statues of medieval saints. Even more notable is the infamous portrait or "counterfeit" of Bishop Bonner scourging a suspected heretic in the orchard of Fulham palace: in some surviving examples, the face of this most notorious of Marian persecutors has been crossed, blacked, or even cut out (King, *Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"* 233), while in another, Foxe's presentation copy to his old college, Magdalen in Oxford, two black ears have been added to complete the picture of a diabolical villain.<sup>2</sup> Symbolic violence was part of the reader response to this volume as well as a key rhetorical and visual strategy deployed by its author and illustrators.

#### IV

The picture of "The Pope Suppressed by K. Henry the eight" is reminiscent of a polemical grisaille painting in the Royal Collection on display at Hampton Court Palace. Known by the title *A Protestant Allegory*, this was the work of the Italian painter Girolamo de Treviso and can be dated to the years 1542-4 when he was employed as a military engineer by Henry VIII (Figure 6). In an inventory of 1547 it is described as "a table of the bushopp of Rome and the four Evangelists casting stones upon him." Frequently deployed to denote a memorial tablet or plaque, the noun chosen here suggests that the painting was explicitly intended

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<sup>2</sup> I owe this information to Mark Rankin. The Magdalen copy has the shelfmark T.13.6-7.





Figure 6: Girolamo de Treviso. *A Protestant Allegory*. c.1538-44. Royal Collection RCIN 405748. Hampton Court Palace. Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.

to function as a monument (*OED*, s.v. “table,” sense 2). One of a number of congratulatory anti-Catholic pictures produced to stroke the ego of the king and celebrate the break with Rome, the painting portrays a scene of ritual punishment in which Matthew, Mark, Luke and John bring down large boulders upon the head of a pope sprawling on the ground together with two female figures labelled Avarice and Lust. A cardinal’s hat and papal bull lie scattered beside them, together with a cooking pan that has extinguished a candle. This contrasts with the one burning above the city of Jerusalem in the top left hand corner, which symbolises the triumph of the Gospel. This too is a picture that telescopes time and typologically relates the Tudor present to the biblical past. Appropriating the pictorial language deployed in woodcuts illustrating the stoning of Old Testament offenders in the Coverdale bible, in both theme and effect it is an iconoclastic image as well as a commemorative one.



Another painting featuring the breaking of idols is “Edward VI and the Pope,” now in the National Portrait Gallery. Long thought to be a piece of propaganda produced during his reign, it was definitively proven to have been produced more than twenty years later in the reign of his sister Elizabeth by Margaret Aston in *The King’s Bedpost*. Indebted to the biblical prints of Maarten van Heemskerck and his imitator Philips Galle for its iconographical schemes, it is less a celebration of the young Josiah’s prowess as godly reformer and as the successor to his father in putting down the “feigned holiness” of the Pope than a visual admonition. Aston presents us with two possibilities: either it was designed to warn Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, that his proposed marriage to Mary Queen of Scots would imperil the conquest of papal idolatry, or it was a pictorial exhortation to Elizabeth underlining her failure to live up to the example of her precocious dead brother and urging her to apply herself more earnestly to the task of purifying her realm of popish impiety and superstition (*King’s Bedpost* esp. 214–18). It acquired its edge as a political picture from the queen’s liturgical conservatism – a conservatism embodied in the silver crucifix and candles she kept in her chapel, despite the best efforts of several clandestine iconoclasts, and in her refusal to take down what zealous Protestants such as Edward Dering regarded as the “gorgeous Idoll” of Cheapside Cross, the monument in the city of London erected by Edward I to the memory of Queen Eleanor and adorned with incriminating Catholic iconography (sig. A2r). The scene of iconoclasm viewed through a window on the right shows a standing cross headed by the image of Christ crucified in the process of being toppled from its pedestal, with a pile of ruins evocative of the fall of the Tower of Babel visible in the background. The picture is both a memorandum of the achievements credited to a boy who was already entering into popular legend, and a hopeful prescription for the future: it is an historical picture that operates simultaneously as a template for further reform. In this respect it turned out to be ineffective, a piece of wishful thinking. But if it failed as a strategy for persuading Elizabeth to mimic King Hezekiah in destroying the brazen serpent, it did help to crystallise an image of the Edwardian past, shaping the historical outlook of the circle of courtiers who saw it, and subsequently of the members of the wider public who have visited it in the royal palace and viewed reproductions of it. Its hidden and ulterior meaning as a private document and memorandum of state has been ob-

scured by the passage of time, but later centuries have seen it become an icon of a critical phase in the early English Reformation.<sup>3</sup>

## V

The next set of images of iconoclasm to be placed under the microscope are the products of Catholic resistance to the rolling Protestant programme of religious purification. They come from the high quality engravings of a series of murals by Circignani in the English College at Rome published by Giovanni Battista de Cavalleriis in a folio volume entitled *Ecclesia Anglicanae Trophaea* in 1584, and from Richard Verstegan's graphic picture book of Calvinist atrocities in England, France and the Netherlands, *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum nostri temporis*, published in Antwerp three years later (Highley; Dillon, *The Construction* chs. 4-5). These publications comprise a gallery of martyrological pictures. The purpose of the frescoes preserved in the pages of the *Trophaea* was to educate seminary priests and inspire them to face the prospect of death in defence of the faith for which they were being trained to reclaim the English people as missionaries; in turn the book stirred the emotions and piety of the Catholics and promoted the cause of this embattled community abroad. As Richard Barrett wrote to Alfonso Agazzari in 1584 in response to it: "The sense of sight which is very keen, by seeing everything most clearly at one view, excites the ardour of devotion, more than if we came to know the same things by ear" (Renold 114).

Verstegan's *Theatrum* was even more emphatically intended as a call for an international crusade to invade England led by Philip II of Spain. As Anne Dillon has convincingly argued, it was a political manifesto demanding intervention to depose a bastard Protestant queen and avenge the death of the cousin and anointed sovereign her regime had beheaded. It must be seen as "an Armada pamphlet" as well as an instrument of the French Catholic League and its principal patrons, the Guise (*The Construction* ch. 5, esp. 275-76). On one level, the two images of the destruction of idols in these expensive publications fit into the category of "visual reports" delineated by Philip Benedict in his recent

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<sup>3</sup> For a similar discussion of wall paintings in Hill Hall, once owned by Sir Thomas Smith, dating from the same period, as an admonitory invocation of Edwardian reform, see Richard Simpson. These depict the destruction of the brazen serpent by King Hezekiah and the breaking down of altars, cutting down of groves and demolition of images as described in 2 Chronicles 31.1.

work on a series of Genevan prints of the sieges, massacres and troubles of the French Wars of Religion: they too aspire to provide a substitute for direct eye-witnessing. But on another, they are pictures that entail an attempt to recreate and manipulate recent history in order to create a pristine vision of Catholic truth and institutional continuity. They occupy “a field of tension between the goals of . . . information and commemoration” (Benedict 98). A pictorial riposte to John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, they engage in forms of remembering but also forgetting. They epitomise Nicholas Sander’s insistence in his *Treatise of the Images of Christ* (1567) that pictures are commendable because they put people in “remembraunces of good, holy and honourable verities” (fol. 9v). But they also invent a compelling image of immediate events in a provocative bid to transform the future.

One of these images appears in both books. This is the “double execution” or “martyrdom” of the Observant Franciscan monk John Forest and the notorious Welsh image Dderfel Gadarn. Forest was burnt as a heretic at Smithfield in May 1538 for denying the Royal Supremacy – a judicial anomaly because most others who committed this crime were condemned for treason. The fuel for his pyre was provided by the great wooden statue that had been the focus of a pilgrimage to Llandderfel in North Wales. Denounced by the bishop of St David’s as one of the “antique gargels of ydolatry” that blighted the land (Wright 208), it was made the subject of a spectacle intended to unmask its reputed power (Dillon, “John Forest”; Peter Marshall; see also Morton 106-7). The image of this event in the *Trophaea* is combined with the hanging and disembowelment of four other victims of the Henrician purges, including three Benedictines and a layman. Confined to the top third of the picture, it quietly replaces the image of Dderfel Gadarn with a carved figure of Christ, which is specifically referred to in the accompanying Latin text (29) (Figure 7). Perhaps reflecting a humanist and Tridentine strand of unease with dubious cults that exposed Catholicism to ridicule as a superstitious religion, this piece of visual sleight of hand also serves to align the death of Forest with that of the redeemer of mankind. It also has something in common with the picture of the Dovercourt iconoclasts in Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, which conspicuously omits Forest from its catalogue of martyrs. Representation of “this ritual wedding of the anti-papal cause with that of radical iconoclasm” (Duffy 404) takes a further twist in Verstegan’s *Theatrum*, where the Dderfel Gadarn is once again displaced by the more respectable Welsh saint, St David, clinging





Figure 7 The execution of John Forrest and the destruction of Dderfel Gadarn: Giovanni Battista de Cavalleriis. *Ecclesia Anglicanae Trophæa*. Rome: Bartholomæi Grassi, 1584, 29. Trinity College Library Grylls 7.127. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

to what appears to be a harp, whose life-like quality contrasts with Forrest's limp corpse (28-29) (Figure 8). The image engages in a form of censorship, altering the past to conform with a new set of ideological imperatives. It deliberately sets out to distort history even as it professes to document it. Dderfel's double oblivion at the hands of Protestants



and Catholics was defied locally by the preservation to this day of the warrior saint's horse and staff (see also Aston, *Broken Idols* 115-17).



Figure 8: Dderfel Gadarn: Richard Verstegan. *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum nostri temporis*. Antwerp: Adrianum Huberti, 1592 edn, 28-9. Trinity College Library Grylls 7.32. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

The other image of iconoclasm appears only in Verstegan's *Theatrum*. It is the opening plate in the section devoted to the cruelties of the English heretics and shows "the first fruits of the new religion" ("*Novi Evangelij fructus*") (22-23) (Figure 9). The scene employs various motifs from biblical prints that are familiar from the Protestant pictures already discussed, but it repurposes them to denounce reformed rites of holy violence as acts of appalling profanation. Here we see a crucifix being dragged down with ropes and its base being severed with a pickaxe; we see iconoclasts at work high up in the rafters of a church and a bonfire into which men are throwing statues and books, including a figurine wearing a bishop's mitre. The image is not one of orderly dismantling but of anarchic destruction by a wild mob. The accompanying text declares that the king was motivated to order these vicious attacks only by "uncontrolled and greedy desire," while the verses below evoke David's lament for the destruction of the sacred altars of the Edomites "by the





Figure 9: “The first fruits of the new religion” (*Novi Evangelij fructus*): Richard Verstegan. *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum nostri temporis*. Antwerp: Adrianum Huberti, 1592 edn, 22-3. Trinity College Library Grylls 7.32. By permission of the Master and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

people” rather than the authorities. They insist that only the heartless will not be horrified by the devastation of churches, sanctuaries and relics by which they are confronted in this picture. But it too entails a re-writing of the chronology of the English Reformation: as Margaret Aston remarks, it inserts “an unhistorical Zwinglian or Calvinist leaf into Henry’s book of sacrilege”, fast forwarding from the Lutheran-style drive against abuses that marked his reign towards the more comprehensive Swiss style reform of religious imagery in churches that occurred under Edward and Elizabeth (*Broken Idols* 778). It is a visual testimony to the scars and wounds wrought by Protestantism consciously designed to provoke the pious viewer to pity and anger. Possession of and meditation on such images may have functioned as a badge of confessional loyalty and belonging to the beleaguered Church of Rome. Like ruined monasteries and mutilated statues such as Our Lady Vulnerata, the Marian Madonna of Cadiz vandalised by the Earl of Essex and his troops in 1596 and preserved in the English College at Valladolid,



they could become focal points for resistance, prayer and hope for the nation's reconversion (Shell 200-7).

There is a danger, though, in applying a single matrix of interpretation to complex images that invite multiple forms of appropriation: in different hands and circumstances, it is at least possible that these same pictures provoked feelings of pride and victory rather than revulsion and stubborn refusal to accept defeat. Their polyvalency in a multiconfessional society should not be underestimated.

## VI

The final group of images of iconoclasm deserving discussion relates to the renewed spasms of symbolic violence that coincided with the outbreak of the Civil War in the early 1640s. A century on from what puritans regarded as England's unfinished Reformation, a new opportunity arose to bring it to completion. Once again official and unofficial initiatives occurred in tandem. The Long Parliament issued edicts and decrees expanding the previous parameters of permitted image-breaking to encompass items and iconographies that had hitherto not been casualties of the war against idols – from medieval angels to new Laudian altar rails – and which were found on the outside of churches and in the wider landscape rather than confined within the walls of ecclesiastical and secular buildings (Spraggon; Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape* ch. 2). It commissioned puritan laymen such as William Dowsing to put this legislation into practice: his journal recording the results of his iconoclastic tour of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk is well known (Dowsing). But image-breaking was also a more spontaneous feature of the febrile years during which the king and his subjects took up arms against each other, carried out by ordinary people and by common soldiers as they traversed the countryside (Walter). And these episodes too were captured in pictorial form.

Two key figures in this enterprise were the godly London printseller Thomas Jenner (see Horden) and John Vicars, schoolmaster of Christ's Hospital, devout Presbyterian, friend of William Prynne, and self-appointed chronicler of the civil wars (see Gasper; Cressy 262). In 1642, Jenner issued a topical and partisan picture book entitled: *All the Memorable & Wonder Strikinge Parliamentary Mercies*. Prefaced by a title-page in which Time and Truth, holding scrolls inscribed with verses from Isaiah and Revelation, flank a pyramid-shaped monument, this publication consists solely of ten captioned plates depicting key events leading to

the outbreak of fighting, beginning with Scottish riots against the Laudian prayer book in 1637-8 in which men and women pelted the archprelate of St Andrews with crickets, stools, sticks and stones. The work of the Bohemian born engraver Wenceslaus Hollar, whose output straddled both the religious and political divide, they reappeared with others in Vicars' *A Sight of the Transactions of these Latter Yeares* (1646), in *True Information of the Beginning and Cause of all our Troubles* (1648), and in two later compilations of Parliamentary proceedings (Vicars, *Former Ages*; Jones 93-96). These publications combine word and image. Two plates show soldiers en route to York "turn[ing] unto reformers" and pulling down Popish pictures and crucifixes, breaking communion rails, and turning altars into tables (Vicars, *Sight 7*) (Figure 10) and the incineration of Catholic images, crucifixes, books on a raging bonfire overseen by men bearing staves, flags and pikes (Vicars, *Sight 23*). What we see in these images is less a magisterial and monarchical Reform-

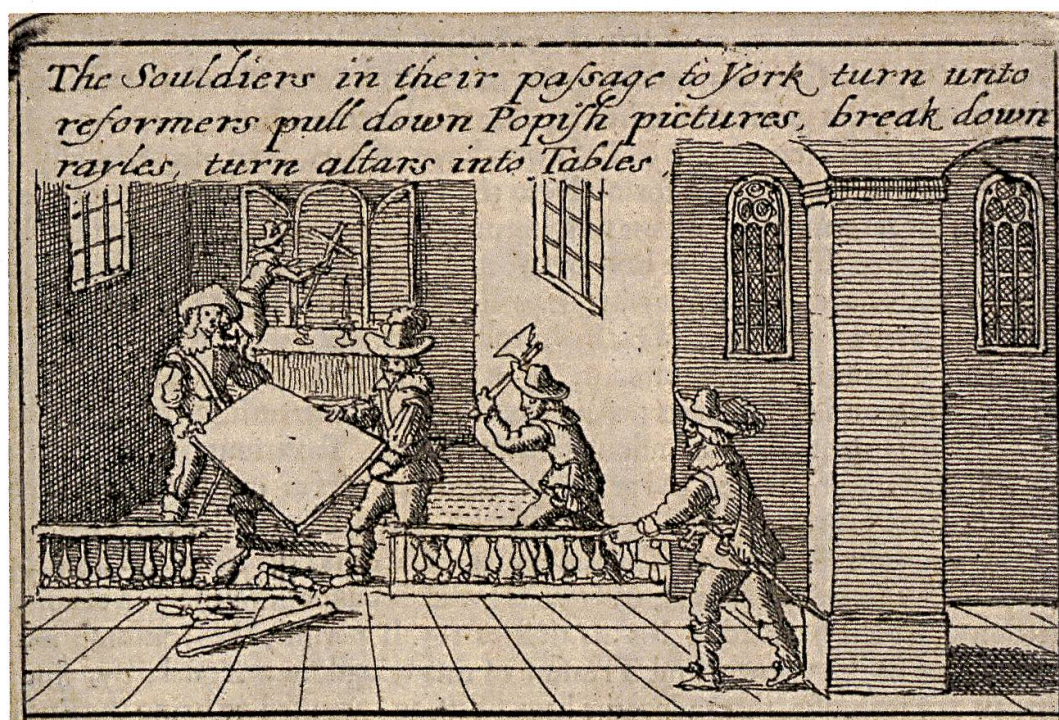


Figure 10: Soldiers "turne unto reformers" and destroy idols: John Vicars. *A Sight of the Transactions of these Latter Yeares Emblemized with Ingraven Plats, which Men May Read without Spectacles*. London: Thomas Jenner, [1646], 7. © British Library Board. E 365 (5).

ation than a parliamentary, military and popular one in which individuals with a fire in their belly step into the shoes of the godly Old Testament rulers Hezekiah and Josiah. Their actions are an oblique and implicit critique of the Caroline regime – of the king and his advisors who have



condoned idolatry and indeed created it in invidious new forms. The third depicts the destruction of Cheapside Cross by a troop of horse and foot soldiers in May 1643 to the joy of the crowd, which threw capes in the air and shouted, but was reputedly so well behaved that no one was hurt. The inscription tells us that “Leaden Popes” were burnt on the spot that it vacated, accompanied by bell ringing and public acclamation, while the engraving below depicts the ritual destruction of the Declaration of Sports by the hangman at the same location eight days later (Vicars, *Sight* 21) (Figure 11). In this instance, iconoclasm served in some sense to sacralise the space hitherto occupied by an abominable idol, which was further consecrated by the burning of a book that sanctioned sabbath-breaking on the next Lord’s Day. Another pamphlet celebrating this event explicitly invoked another favourite biblical precedent: *The downe-fall of Dagon*.

What was the purpose of this iconography and how were contemporaries supposed to read and see these images? These works of pictorial journalism need to be seen in a series of overlapping contexts. The first is signalled by the title of *A Sight of the Transactions*, which describes them as emblems “which men may read without spectacles”: this latter phrase should perhaps be understood both literally and metaphorically. The prefatory epistle says that these “neat and pertinent pictures and figures” are presented for “the better affecting of the sight and sense of the Readers therof, and especially for the full making out of the truth of what is therein delivered” (1). They are devices for discernment and discovery of the mischiefs and mysteries that have brought the English nation and the Protestant religion to crisis and impending ruin. Accordingly they do not require the viewer to engage in the strenuous exercise of decoding them: their meaning is transparently clear.

At the same time they must be conceived of as visual mnemonics, as remembrancers of events that the likes of Vicars and Jenner regarded as momentous. These are pictures that both effect and facilitate a form of witness of history in the making. Material reminders of a process of ritual forgetting, they are designed to perform the same function as the fragments of shattered stained glass windows that the London artisan Nehemiah Wallington gathered up from London churches in 1641 “to keep for a remembrance to show to the generation to come what God hath done for us, to give us such a reformation that our forefathers never saw the like” (qtd. in Seaver 151). Paradoxically, these Protestant relics were collected to preserve the memory of developments that targeted the excesses of Christian materiality.





Figure 11; The destruction of Cheapside Cross and the burning of the Book of Sports, 1643: John Vicars. *A Sight of the Transactions of these Latter Yeares Embleimized with Ingraven Plats, which Men May Read without Spectacles*. London: Thomas Jenner, [1646], 21. © British Library Board. E 365 (5).



Puritans never spoke of “reformation” as a past event; they invariably regarded it as something that would reach its final culmination in the future (Walsham, “History, Memory, and the Reformation” 921). But the images created and disseminated by Vicars, Hollar and Jenner do serve to situate unfolding developments in a chronological timeline. Alongside the reports, letters, and edicts that their publications have preserved for posterity – and these include the Commons’ order for iconoclasm itself (Vicars, *Sight* 22) – they are visual building blocks in canonical narratives that still shape our view of the period. The incentive for such record keeping came from Scripture. Preachers such as Stephen Marshall called their hearers to compile a catalogue of the great things that God had done for his people for subsequent generations (51). The picture books and the plates of iconoclasm they contained must be seen as paper monuments. They are extensions of the genre of broadside memorials of providential deliverances such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the thwarting of the Gunpowder Plot in which Thomas Jenner specialised (Walsham, *Providence* 250-66). Vicars himself contributed to this tradition of two dimensional thankful acknowledgements of divine intervention in the form of his *Englands Remembrancer* (1641). The “panegyric pyramids” constructed entirely of words that adorn the title and opening pages of his *God in the Mount* (1642), an omnibus of four chronicles of the miraculous mercies and victories vouchsafed to the Parliamentary cause, were pictures for true Protestant iconophobes (title-page, sigs A2r, A3r) (Figure 12).

Such images help to delineate the contours of a Protestant visual culture that is far richer and more sophisticated than older caricatures of the antagonistic relationship between the Reformation and art allow. Vicars’ oeuvre embodies its complexities. It contains both a tract denouncing *The Sinfulness and Unlawfulness of . . . Making the Picture of Christ’s Humanity* (1641) and single-sheet prints including a scatological engraving of Dutch origin entitled *Behold Romes Monster* (1643) accompanied by poetic verses – another highly iconoclastic picture which both depends upon and provokes contempt for the pope. His work also illuminates two other processes with which this essay has been concerned: the development of a visual awareness of the distant and recent past and the evolution of consciousness of the Reformation itself as an historic event.

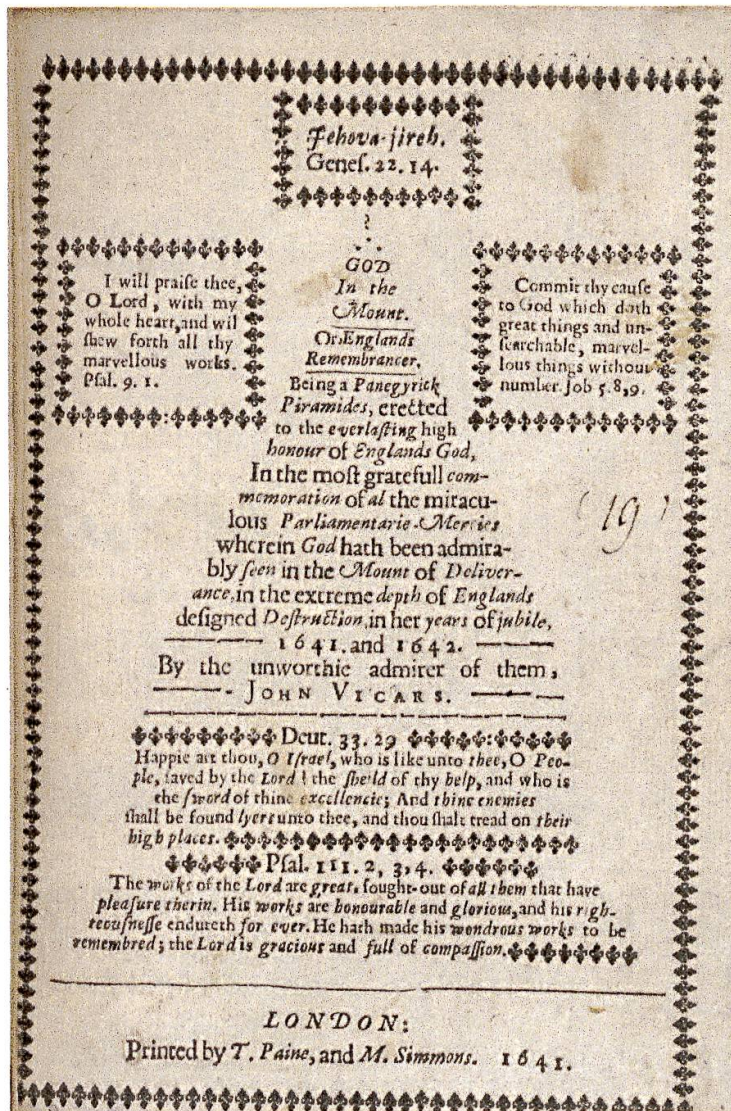


Figure 12: Monuments built out of words: Vicars, John, *God in the Mount. Or Englands Remembrancer*. London: T. Paine and M. Simmons for John Rothwell and Thomas Underhill, 1642. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. Bb.\*10.43 E (19).

By the late seventeenth century, when Bishop Gilbert Burnet published his *History of the Reformation* (1681-3) that idea had been firmly cemented: the visual cues to iconoclasm in the engraved frontispiece index the extent to which symbolic violence against Catholic idols, together with the dissolution of the monasteries, had become synonymous with the birth of the Protestant movement. Combining biblical typology and contemporary testimony, such images are entirely compatible with a visual culture that was fundamentally commemorative in character. Showing “the



process of a story painted with the actions and gestures,” they have conditioned how we see the past and how we periodise it.

The art of iconoclasm analysed in this essay must briefly be situated alongside the medieval art that outlasted the era of image-breaking. The broken idols, slashed missals, censored indulgences, disfigured rood screens, and empty reliquaries that still reside in cathedrals and churches, museums, libraries, and archives testify to the tension between preserving and destroying, remembering and forgetting, that was integral to the process of reform itself. Some are probably still extant because they were kept by Roman Catholics as precious remnants of a world that they continued to hope might be not yet be irrevocably lost. Others may owe their survival to the conviction of some Protestants that mutilated objects were the best safeguard against backsliding towards idolatry once more, or to their impulse to collect trophies of the triumphant process of vanquishing popery. Whatever their provenance and subsequent biographies, attacked and damaged items carry multiple meanings. The historian Jaś Elsner comments that “Like the Roman god Janus, such monuments face in two directions simultaneously” (210). They evoke a past in which they existed intact and they signal the transformations that led to their present altered state. And for us they have an added poignancy because of the way in which they have been attacked: the iconoclasm they have suffered is now part of their aesthetic appeal. Finally, as James Simpson has argued, their migration out of hallowed spaces into secular institutional ones is itself a reflex of the Reformation (ch. 4). The very concept of art has been forged in the crucible of our inherited fear of idolatry (see also Cole and Zorach). As this essay has served to underscore, it is less the inverse of iconoclasm than its inseparable twin.

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